



THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE GOVERNANCE OF THE RAMBU SOLO' CEREMONY IN TANA TORAJA

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ABSTRACT

The Rambu Solo' ceremony is a funeral tradition that is a major attraction of cultural tourism in Tana Toraja. However, the increase in tourist visits poses challenges in preserving indigenous cultural values while still providing economic benefits to the local community. This study aims to analyze the importance of implementing the concept of sustainable tourism in the management of the Rambu Solo' ceremony in Tana Toraja, identify challenges faced in cultural tourism management, and formulate sustainable strategies to maintain cultural authenticity. The study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method through analysis of journal articles, books, and scientific publications relevant to sustainable tourism and Toraja cultural tourism. The results show that the implementation of sustainable tourism in the Rambu Solo' ceremony can be achieved through three main pillars: cultural preservation by involving traditional leaders in decision-making, economic empowerment of local communities through training local guides and developing craft products, and responsible environmental management by limiting the number of tourists and educating about tourism ethics. The implementation of sustainable tourism requires collaboration between the government, indigenous communities, and tourism stakeholders to maintain a balance between cultural preservation and sustainable economic development.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, Rambu Solo', cultural tourism, Tana Toraja, cultural preservation

1. Introduction

Indonesia, as an archipelagic nation with extraordinary cultural diversity, has great potential for developing cultural tourism. One destination with a unique cultural appeal is Tana Toraja in South Sulawesi. Tana Toraja is widely known for its funeral ceremony tradition, known as Rambu Solo', which has become a major draw for both domestic and international tourists (Volkman & Caldwell, 1980).

The Rambu Solo' ceremony is not just an ordinary death ritual, but rather a complex celebration involving the entire community and requiring extensive preparation, sometimes even years. This ceremony reflects the Aluk To Dolo belief system that has been rooted in Torajan society for centuries (Crystal, 1989). However, Tana Toraja's popularity as a cultural tourism destination has presented various challenges in maintaining cultural authenticity while developing the tourism sector.

According to data from the Tana Toraja Regency Statistics Agency (BPS), the number of foreign tourist visits to Toraja has increased year by year. In 2017, 25.452 foreign tourists visited Tana Toraja (BPS Tana Toraja Regency, 2018).

Negara Asal	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Austria	-	-	49	216	98	80	83	133	283
Belanda	512	658	410	2 543	1 418	1 481	902	861	1 899
Belgia	372	357	135	551	522	12	16	18	19
Denmark	52	85	-	-	8	43	43	31	26
Perancis	1 234	1 702	1 737	5 449	5 432	6 738	5 007	6 544	7 571
Jerman	502	549	572	1 689	2 272	4 402	2 898	4 601	5 788
Inggris	67	95	18	93	111	171	99	113	169
Italia	470	361	168	466	322	249	237	226	209
Norwegia	9	4	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Spanyol	1 103	787	253	1 065	1 296	1 264	304	348	307
Swedia	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Swiss	47	78	59	293	275	25	12	28	27
Eropa Lainnya	421	-	46	-	263	169	169	100	100
USA	112	180	55	258	386	473	240	368	510
Kanada	60	-	35	181	110	51	6	15	20
Cina	12	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
India	27	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Jepang	217	244	30	94	35	96	35	32	19
Malaysia	25	-	7	25	120	7	6	-	-
Singapura	37	-	-	48	90	10	10	-	1
Australia	152	180	21	329	193	83	84	92	283
Selandia Baru	23	22	5	5	-	-	-	-	-
Lainnya	122	311	74	227	6 372	4 813	5 580	6 761	8 221
Jumlah	5 579	5 627	3 674	13 532	19 324	20 167	15 731	20 271	25 452

Figure 1. Number of foreign tourists visiting Tana Toraja in the period 2009 - 2017

For domestic tourists, a year-over-year upward trend was also evident before the pandemic, with the peak occurring in 2018, when 1.355.283 domestic tourists visited Tana Toraja. A significant decline in tourist arrivals occurred during the pandemic. However, starting in 2022, the upward trend was again observed. In 2024, 495.590 domestic tourists visited Tana Toraja (BPS Tana Toraja Regency, 2025). This increase has certainly had a positive impact on the local economy, but it has also raised concerns regarding the preservation of cultural values and the impact on the environment.

Table 1. Development of the Number of Domestic Tourist Visits to Tana Toraja (2010 – 2024)

Year	Tourist	Growth (%)
2010	12.631	-
2011	15.867	25,62%
2012	20.836	31,32%
2013	42.319	103,11%
2014	60.069	41,94%
2015	82.673	37,63%
2016	1.056.592	1.178%
2017	1.173.183	11,03%
2018	1.355.283	15,52%
2019	1.030.821	-23,95%
2020	93.545	-90,92%
2021	78.193	-16,41%
2022	480.631	514,67%
2023	487.461	1,42%
2024	495.590	1,67%

Source: BPS of Tana Toraja Regency (2025)

The concept of sustainable tourism is highly relevant in this context. Sustainable tourism is defined as tourism that meets the current needs of tourists and destinations while protecting and enhancing

opportunities for the future (World Tourism Organization, 1998). This concept emphasizes a balance between economic, socio-cultural, and environmental aspects.

This research aims to analyze the importance of implementing the concept of sustainable tourism in the management of the Rambu Solo' ceremony in Toraja. Specifically, this research will explore the cultural, economic, and environmental aspects that can ensure sustainable tourism in Tana Toraja. The research will identify challenges faced in managing cultural tourism in Tana Toraja, analyze the impact of tourism on the Rambu Solo' ceremony, and formulate sustainable tourism strategies that can be implemented to maintain cultural authenticity while providing economic benefits to the local community. The formulated strategy will involve several stakeholders, such as the government, indigenous communities, and the tourism industry. The research flow will be illustrated in Figure 2 below.

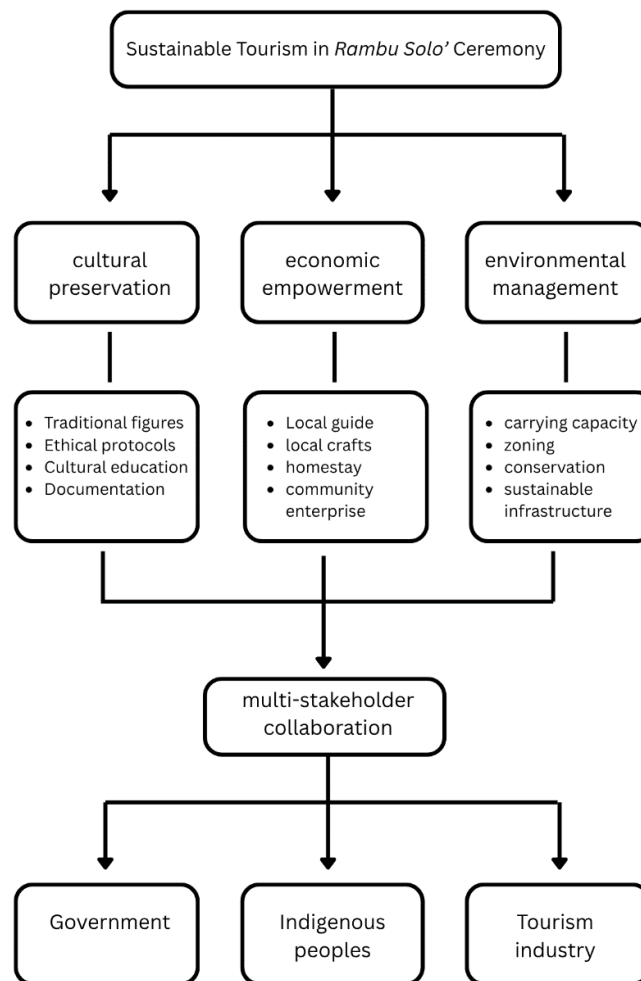


Figure 2. Conceptual framework of the research

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Concept of Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism is a concept that has developed since the 1980s in response to the negative impacts of mass tourism. According to Butler (1999), sustainable tourism is tourism developed and managed in a manner that remains economically viable in the long term without damaging the natural, man-made, cultural, and social resources that rely on it.

The World Tourism Organization (2004) identifies three main pillars of sustainable tourism:

- a. Economic sustainability: ensuring tourism activities are economically viable and provide equitable distribution of benefits.

- b. Sociocultural sustainability: respecting the cultural values of communities and maintaining cultural integrity.
- c. Environmental sustainability: using natural resources sustainably and minimizing negative impacts on the environment.

In the context of cultural tourism, Hall & Zeppel (1990) emphasize that sustainable tourism must protect and preserve cultural heritage while providing authentic experiences for tourists. This concept is highly relevant to the Rambu Solo' ceremony, a valuable intangible cultural heritage.

2.2. *Cultural Tourism and Authenticity*

Cohen (1988) defines cultural tourism as a form of tourism that focuses on cultural experiences, including the history, art, architecture, and lifestyles of local communities. In cultural tourism, the issue of authenticity is crucial as tourists seek experiences perceived as authentic and uncontaminated by modernization.

MacCannell (1999) introduced the concept of “staged authenticity”, which describes how tourist attractions are often presented in a modified form to meet tourist expectations. This creates a dilemma between maintaining cultural authenticity and the need to package culture to appeal to tourists.

In the Toraja context, Adams (2006) analyzes how tourism has changed the meaning and practice of the Rambu Solo' ceremony. Although the ceremony remains performed according to tradition, the presence of tourists has altered social dynamics and raised questions about cultural commodification.

2.3. *The Rambu Solo' Ceremony as a Cultural Heritage*

Rambu Solo' is a Torajan term meaning "smoke descending downwards," referring to the complex funeral rituals of the Aluk To Dolo tradition. Waterson (2009) explains that this ceremony serves not only as a religious ritual but also as a mechanism for economic redistribution and strengthening social ties within the community.

The Rambu Solo' ceremony has various levels depending on the social status and economic capacity of the family holding it. Volkman & Caldwell (1980) identified that this ceremony can last from several days to several weeks, involve thousands of people, and require enormous costs. The buffalo and pigs slaughtered in this ceremony serve not only as offerings but also as symbols of social status and a means of redistributing wealth.

Bigalke (2005) emphasizes that the Rambu Solo' ceremony is a manifestation of the complex Torajan cosmology, where death is viewed as a transition to the spirit world. A deep understanding of the spiritual and social significance of this ceremony is crucial for developing a tourism model that respects local cultural values.

2.4. *The Impact of Tourism on Local Culture*

Cultural tourism can have both positive and negative impacts on local communities. On the positive side, Kreag (2001) identified that tourism can increase cultural pride, strengthen local identity, and provide economic incentives for cultural preservation. However, on the negative side, tourism can also lead to the commodification of culture, the loss of the spiritual meaning of rituals, and undesirable social changes.

Stronza (2001) examined the impact of tourism on indigenous communities and found that the economic benefits of tourism are often unequally distributed, while the sociocultural impacts can affect entire communities. This emphasizes the importance of a participatory approach in cultural tourism development.

3. **Research Methods**

This research used a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach is a research method that focuses on discovering and understanding the meaning or nature of a social phenomenon, using words and

language (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). A qualitative approach was chosen because it aligns with the research objectives, which sought to understand the complex phenomena related to sustainable tourism and Torajan culture in depth and comprehensively.

Data analysis was conducted through a literature review. A literature review involves selecting available documents on a topic, containing information, ideas, data, and evidence written from a particular perspective to express a particular view of the nature of the topic and how it will be investigated (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The literature review was conducted through searching and analyzing relevant literature sources, including scientific journal articles, books, research reports, and official publications from related organizations. The inclusion criteria for literature sources were:

- a. Publications discussing sustainable tourism, cultural tourism, or Torajan culture
- b. Peer-reviewed journal articles
- c. Academic books from reputable publishers
- d. Official reports from international organizations such as the WTO
- e. Publications between 1985 and 2025.

The data analysis process was conducted through content analysis, identifying key themes, analyzing arguments and findings from various sources, and synthesizing them to generate a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

4. Results and Findings

4.1. Challenges in Managing Cultural Tourism in Toraja

Based on literature analysis, there are several key challenges in managing cultural tourism in Tana Toraja, particularly related to the Rambu Solo' ceremony:

Table 2. Identification of Challenges in Managing Cultural Tourism in Toraja

No	Challenge Categories	Descriptions	Impacts	Sources
1	Cultural Commodification	The Rambu Solo' ceremony is seen as a tourism product	Degradation of spiritual meaning	(Adams, 2006)
2	Economic Disparity	Uneven distribution of economic benefits	Social inequality	(Crystal, 1989)
3	Environmental Pressure	Site crashes due to excessive volume of visits	Degradation of cultural landscape	(Waterson, 2009)

4.1.1. Cultural commodification

Adams (2006) identified that one of the main challenges is the commodification of culture, where the Rambu Solo' ceremony has begun to be viewed as a tourist product rather than a sacred ritual. This is evident in the ceremonies being deliberately scheduled to accommodate tourists' schedules, even though these ceremonies traditionally have very specific timings based on customary calculations.

This commodification process has sparked debate within the Torajan community. On the one hand, some believe that tourists' involvement in the ceremonies can provide economic benefits and help preserve culture. On the other hand, there are concerns that the spiritual meaning of the ceremonies will be degraded if they are treated as spectacles.

4.1.2. Economic Disparity

Although tourism has provided economic benefits to Tana Toraja, the distribution of these benefits is uneven. Crystal (1989) points out that the economic benefits from tourism tend to be concentrated among a small number of people with access to the tourism industry, while indigenous communities, who are the owners of the culture, often do not receive significant benefits.

This creates socioeconomic inequality that can affect social cohesion within the community. Families who can afford large-scale Rambu Solo' ceremonies involving tourists experience greater economic benefits, while families who hold simpler ceremonies do not.

4.1.3. Environmental Pressure

The increase in tourist numbers also puts pressure on the physical environment of Tana Toraja. Waterson (2009) noted that several traditional ceremony sites have suffered damage due to the high volume of tourist visits. Furthermore, the rapidly expanding tourism infrastructure is also putting pressure on the Toraja cultural landscape, which should be protected.

4.2. *The Impact of Tourism on the Rambu Solo' Ceremony*

4.2.1. Changes in Meaning and Practice

Volkman & Caldwell (1980) analyzed how the presence of tourists has changed the dynamics of the Rambu Solo' ceremony. In traditional settings, this ceremony is a highly sacred and private moment for grieving families. However, with the presence of tourists, the ceremony begins to take on a performative dimension that was previously absent. This change is evident in various aspects:

- a. The timing of the ceremony is adjusted to suit tourists' schedules
- b. The addition of elements deemed interesting to tourists
- c. The use of simpler language in explaining rituals to facilitate tourists' understanding
- d. Modifications to the spatial layout to accommodate tourists

4.2.2. Local Community Response

Bigalke (2005) noted that the Torajan community's response to tourist involvement in the Rambu Solo' ceremony varies widely. Some welcome it openly for economic reasons, others accept it with certain conditions, and still others reject it entirely.

Those who accept it are generally those directly involved in the tourism industry or those who directly benefit economically. Meanwhile, those who reject it are generally traditional leaders who are concerned about the degradation of the ceremony's spiritual and social values.

4.3. *Sustainable Tourism Strategies for the Rambu Solo Ceremony*

Based on an analysis of various literature and best practices from other destinations, this study identifies several sustainable tourism strategies that can be applied to the management of the Rambu Solo ceremony. These strategies emphasize three areas that can ensure sustainable tourism in Tana Toraja and are integrated with the Triple Bottom Line Model.

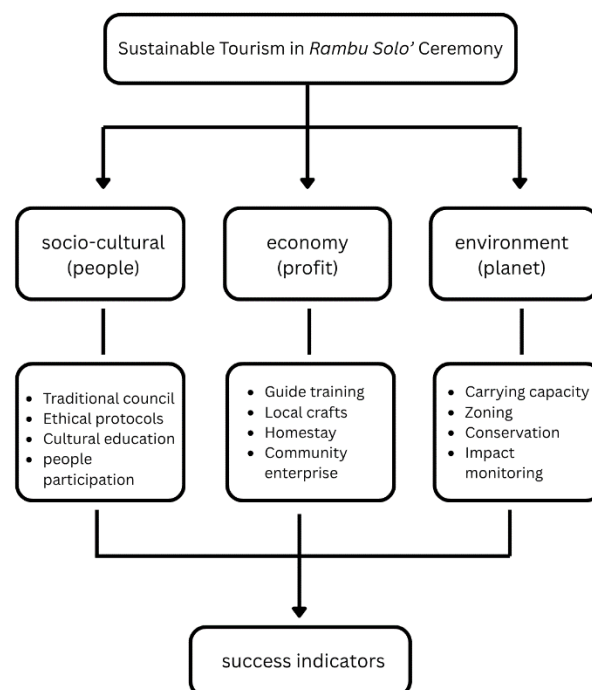


Figure 3. Sustainable Tourism Strategy for the Rambu Solo' Ceremony in Tana Toraja

4.3.1. Cultural Preservation Strategy

Cultural preservation strategies must begin with strengthening the role of traditional leaders in decision-making regarding tourist involvement in ceremonies. Hall & Zeppel (1990) emphasize the importance of community-based tourism management in cultural tourism. Concrete steps that can be implemented:

- a. Establishment of a traditional tourism council: establish an institution consisting of traditional leaders, local government officials, and tourism industry representatives to regulate policies related to tourists attending traditional ceremonies.
- b. Establishment of ethical protocols: develop clear ethical guidelines for tourists wishing to attend the Rambu Solo' ceremony, including dress code, acceptable behavior, and accessible areas.
- c. Cultural education program: develop a comprehensive educational program for tourists before attending the ceremony, so they understand the spiritual and social significance of the rituals they witness.
- d. Community participation: ensure active community participation so that traditional practices are not lost due to adaptation to tourism.

4.3.2. Economic Empowerment Strategy

Butler (1999) emphasizes that sustainable tourism must provide equitable distribution of economic benefits to local communities. In the Torajan context, this can be achieved through:

- f. Local guide training: developing training programs for Torajan youth to become competent tour guides, enabling them to explain their own culture with a deep understanding.
- g. Craft product development: facilitating the development of a local craft industry inspired by Torajan motifs and cultural philosophies, such as woodcarving, traditional weaving, and jewelry.
- h. Homestays and local cuisine: developing a homestay system that allows tourists to stay with Torajan families and experience daily life, while providing additional income for the community.
- i. Community tourism enterprise: developing community-owned and managed tourism enterprises, so that profits return directly to the community.

4.3.3. Environmental Management Strategy

The environmental aspect of sustainable tourism encompasses not only the physical environment but also the cultural environment. Kreag (2001) identified carrying capacity as a key concept in environmental tourism management. Possible environmental management strategies include:

- a. Tourist number limitation: setting a maximum limit on the number of tourists who can attend each ceremony, taking into account the physical capacity of the location and the socio-cultural impact.
- b. Tourist access zoning: establish clear zoning between areas accessible to tourists and areas that must remain private for families and indigenous communities.
- c. Conservation program: develop a conservation program to protect historical sites and traditional buildings associated with the Rambu Solo ceremony.
- d. Impact monitoring: ensure the effectiveness of environmentally friendly sustainable tourism implementation based on established indicators.

4.4. Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration Model

Implementing sustainable tourism in the Rambu Solo ceremony requires close collaboration between various stakeholders. Stronza (2001) emphasizes that a participatory approach is key to the success of sustainable tourism. Collaboration models that can be implemented include:

4.4.1. Role of Government

Local governments have a crucial role in:

- a. Providing a regulatory framework that supports sustainable tourism;
- b. Facilitating dialogue between various stakeholders;
- c. Providing necessary basic infrastructure;
- d. Monitoring and evaluating tourism impacts.

4.4.2. Role of Indigenous Communities

Indigenous communities, as cultural owners, have a central role in:

- Determining boundaries and rules for tourist involvement;
- Maintaining the authenticity and spiritual meaning of the ceremony;
- Actively participating in the tourism industry;
- Transmitting culture to the younger generation.

4.4.3. Role of the Tourism Industry

Tour operators and tourism industry players are responsible for:

- Implementing the principles of responsible tourism
- Providing education to tourists prior to their visit
- Ensuring that the tourism products offered respect local culture
- Contributing to cultural and environmental preservation programs

4.5. Sustainable Tourism Success Indicators

To ensure the effectiveness of sustainable tourism implementation, indicators that can be measured regularly are needed. The World Tourism Organization (2004) recommends using indicators that encompass economic, socio-cultural, and environmental aspects.

Table 3. Sustainable Tourism Success Indicators in the Rambu Solo Ceremony

No	Dimensions	Indicators	Measurement Methods	Targets
1	Economy	Percentage of local income	Annual economic survey	$\geq 60\%$ of total revenue
		Number of local jobs	Employment data	$\geq 80\%$ local workers
		Level of economic satisfaction	Public satisfaction survey	Score $\geq 4/5$
		Diversification of tourism products	Product inventory	≥ 10 local products
2	Socio-cultural	Participation of traditional figures	Frequency of meetings	≥ 4 times/year
		Ceremony without tourists	Documentation of the ceremony	$\geq 50\%$ of the total ceremony
		Understanding of the younger generation	Cultural knowledge test	Score $\geq 75\%$
		Level of cultural satisfaction	Indigenous community survey	Score $\geq 4/5$
3	Environment	Case of ethical violation	Monitoring report	≤ 5 cases/year
		Condition of cultural sites	Physical condition audit	Condition score $\geq 80\%$
		Environmental quality	Parameter measurement	According to standards
		Level of damage	Periodic inspection	$\leq 10\%$ affected areas
		Zoning compliance	Access monitoring	Compliance level $\geq 90\%$
		Waste management	Managed waste volume	$\geq 95\%$ managed waste

Source: Adapted from the World Tourism Organization (2004) and adapted to the Toraja context.

Indicators that can be applied in the context of the Rambu Solo' ceremony:

4.5.1. Economic indicators

- Percentage of tourism revenue received directly by the local community
- Number of jobs created for the local community
- Level of community economic satisfaction with tourism

4.5.2. Sociocultural Indicators

- Level of indigenous community participation in tourism decision-making
- Frequency of traditional ceremonies without tourist involvement
- Level of understanding of traditional culture by the younger generation

4.5.3. Environmental Indicators

- Physical condition of historical and cultural sites.

- b. Environmental quality in tourist areas
- c. Level of damage caused by tourism activities

These indicators can be used as a basis for conducting an evaluation using the following cycle:

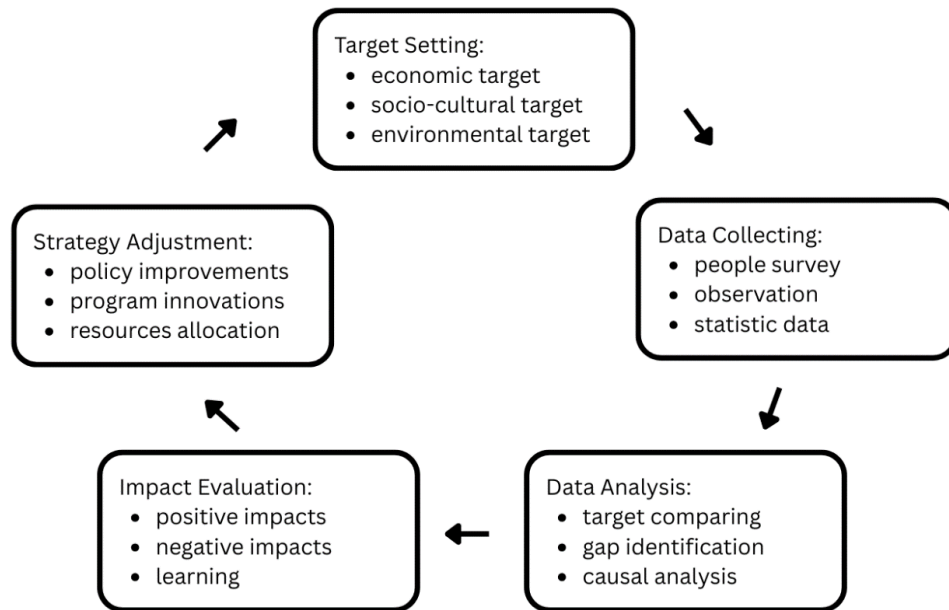


Figure 4. Monitoring and evaluation cycle of sustainable tourism in Tana Toraja

5. Conclusion

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that implementing sustainable tourism in the management of the Rambu Solo' ceremony in Toraja is essential to maintain a balance between cultural preservation and economic development. The Rambu Solo' ceremony, as a valuable intangible cultural heritage, requires a careful and comprehensive management approach. The three main pillars of sustainable tourism—cultural preservation, economic empowerment, and environmental management—must be implemented in an integrated manner. Cultural preservation can be achieved through strengthening the role of traditional leaders, establishing ethical protocols, and developing cultural education programs. Economic empowerment can be realized through training local guides, developing craft products, and establishing community tourism enterprises. Meanwhile, environmental management can be achieved through limiting the number of tourists, zoning access, and conservation programs.

The successful implementation of sustainable tourism depends heavily on effective collaboration between the government, indigenous communities, and the tourism industry. Each stakeholder has a specific role and responsibility in maintaining a balance between economic interests and cultural preservation. This research also identifies the importance of regularly measurable success indicators to ensure that sustainable tourism implementation is achieving its intended goals. Continuous monitoring and evaluation will assist in adjusting strategies according to evolving conditions on the ground. Recommendations for further research include conducting field research to validate the findings of this literature review and developing a more specific implementation model tailored to local conditions in Tana Toraja. Furthermore, comparative studies with other cultural tourism destinations that have successfully implemented sustainable tourism are also needed.

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