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SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY BASED ECOTOURISM DEVELOPEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism is an alternative form of tourism and is usually confused with natural and cultural tourism. CBET is fast becoming a popular biodiversity conservation tool that develops and benefits the local community. Based on the context of conservation theory and practice, Community-Based Ecotourism (CBET) is a form of community-based natural resource management. However, a sustainable CBET development through Community Capacity Building (CCB)programs is not something that it easily achievable. Local community's capacity varies from one culture to another. It takes a high level of community participation, in order for it to come to a level where the community members themselves are motivated to participate and contribute to the development of the program. This fully qualitative research involved 15 respondents from the community of Kg. Selai, Bekok in Johor, Malaysia. The result show there are five factors that sustained the ecotourism development based for Orang Asli Community in Kg. Selai, namely, existing CBET development, past CBET development, local community participation in planning stage of tourism, local participation in implementation stage of tourism and participation in nature conservation.

INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is an alternative form of tourism and is usually confused with natural and cultural tourism. According to Weaver (2005) and Zaitonet al., (2013), ecotourism was summarized as activities that involved restoration and conservation efforts, community and sustainable tourism visits. The International Ecotourism Society (2015) similarly defined ecotourism as a responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people and involves interpretation and education. Ecotourism is developing much more rapidly than other forms of tourism (Zaiton et al., 2013). Community-Based

Ecotourism (CBET) is a form of ecotourism that is developed, operated, managed and ultimately beneficial to the local community (Ibrahim &Razzaq, 2010). CBET's degrees of participation may be interpreted from regular consultations of the local community, ensuring local community involvements in the operation of the ecotourism program, to partial or full community ownership of whole ecotourism enterprises (Kiss, 2004).

CBET is fast becoming a popular biodiversity conservation tool that develops and benefits the local community. Based on the context of conservation theory and practice, CBET is a form of community-based natural resource management (Salafsky, 2001). There is a need for Community Capacity Building (CCB), in order to include the local community participation in CBET or any other form of community development. In a simpler term, community capacity can be defined as the "essence of development" as coined by Smith et al. (2001), and building that capacity is a necessary condition for development (Goodman et al., 1998). With their capacity for the development built, the local community can sustainably operate and manage CBET in their area, thus, securing the economy of the local community, increasing conservation of the natural environment and empowering the local community (Razzaq et al., 2011).

BACKGROUND RESEARCH

Although quite rare, there are successful examples of using CCB as a catalyst to develop CBET such as The Miso Walai homestay program (Abdul Rasid et al., 2011), which was reported to use CCB programs and approaches in order to develop and establish a CBET site at Kinabatangan, Sabah. The effort is still operated sustainably by the local community of Kg. BatuPuteh and the surrounding villages. The people had combined their effort and established *KoperasiPelancongan (KOPEL)*, in order to manage and operate ecotourism in the area. Packages are currently still available for as low as RM70 per person per night and can be booked via their website (www.mescot.org).

However, a sustainable CBET development through CCB programs is not something that it easily achievable. Local community's capacity varies from one culture to another. It takes a high level of community participation (Arnstein, 1969), in order for it to come to a level where the community members themselves are motivated to participate and contribute to the development of the program. The World Bank reported that many CCB attempts failed in developing countries because of the lack of participation (World Bank, 1993). In order to make CBET development a success, there is a need for a research on the CCB program which is suitable to a certain local community to ensure that there is enough capacity for higher level of participation, thus, giving the CBET development a winning chance to be truly self-sustainable in the future. The purpose of this research is to explore and understand the development and participation of stakeholders in CBET development in the area and identify

the CCB level and dimensions required towards sustaining CBET development relevant to the research area and its Orang Asli community.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Community Based Tourism (CBT) is an alternative form of tourism, where local community has control over its development and management, and most of the benefits go back to the local community (WWF International, 2001). Scheyvens, (2002) points out that the ultimate goal of CBT is to empower the local community at four levels – economic, psychological, social, and political. CBT has been promoted for over three decades as a mean of development whereby the social, environmental and economic needs of the local communities are met by offering tourism product (Goodwin &Santilli 2009). It is a method of development that is participatory-based and a product of the failure of "top-down" approaches to both conservation and development. It typically, links environmental conservation and socio-economic development, most notably in and around the protected areas (Goodwin &Santilli 2009).

CBET is a form of CBT that is typically used as a tool for biodiversity conservation, whilst benefitting the local community. Given the premise that ecotourism depends on maintaining attractive natural attractions, thus, helping the local community earn money from ecotourism that provides both funds for conservation and an alternative economic income to destructive activities (Kiss, 2004). The term community-based in this sense implies more than just actively involving the local community. Participation ranges from regular inputs from the local communities, to making sure that individuals within the community are involved in the tourism related activities, to partial or full ownership of the whole ecotourism enterprises. (Wunder, 2000). In the context of conservation, CBET is a form of Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM), a popular choice of activities in an enterprise-based strategy for biodiversity (Salafsky, conservation 2001). Goodwin andSantilli(2009).stated that CBNRM has been recognized as a significant part of conservation strategies since the 70s, mainly, due to the fact that conservation of protected areas could not be achieved without the support of local communities. Zebu & Bush (1990) added that tourism formed part of the management strategies in 75% area of the national park.Private community partnership and joint ventures are typically used in a sustainable CBET development. It involves a private sector partner that brings in the capital, business and marketing know-how. It also involves the community partner that usually brings in land, labor and local knowledge and lastly, the government or an external donor that provide basic infrastructure or other necessities, strengthening community capacity and sometimes, becomes the mediator for negotiations between the party involve (Kiss, 2004).

Sustainability Models

There have been many evolutions and newer interpretations of the sustainability models and concepts ever since the first prevalent three-sector model of sustainability was introduced in the 1987 Brundtland Report. The first 'Triple Bottom Line' model was the pioneer model for sustainability, followed by the 'Nested Diagram' model, 'Four Pillars of Sustainability' model and the 'Social Ecology' model.

'Triple Bottom Line' Model

The 'Triple Bottom Line' Model it suggests that there is a need for considerations of the environment and the social impacts within the economic development, thus, creating an overlapping of the 3 domains in order to be sustainable in the process of development. This model suggests that economic development must not only satisfy its own goals, but must at least be cost-neutral on its environmental and social impacts (Mulligan, 2015). However, this original model is largely dominated by conventional economic thinking (Giddings et al., 2002; Frank & smith, 1999). Such focus on human economics system is preventing us from understanding the measure of our development within a non-human ecological system (Mulligan, 2015).

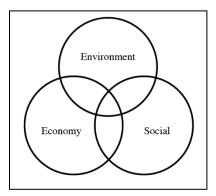


Figure 1: 'Triple Bottom Line' model (Frank & Smith, 1999)

'Nested Diagram' Model

Giddings et al. (2002) suggested a different take on the 3 domains and applied a more reflecting diagram to which our development is within the domain of social that exists in the environmental domain itself. The 'Nested Diagram' has more depth in relationships between the 3 domains and puts into consideration the importance of the environment and social

domains. Nonetheless, the model has the potential of the unwanted effect of which the economic development is the starting point for other considerations to take place. Furthermore, the linear relationship of the domain suggests a rather hierarchical and inflexible model of sustainability (Mulligan, 2015)

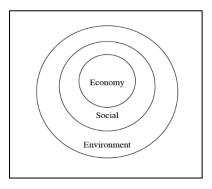


Figure 2: 'Nested Diagram' model (Giddings et al., 2002)

'Four Pillars of Sustainability' Model

One problem about the three-sector model is that it can be rather confusing to know what is included and excluded from the diverse 'social' domain (Mulligan, 2015). Some proposed, that there is a need for a fourth domain (Hawkes, 2006). Hawkes suggested adding 'cultural vitality' as the fourth domain in his 'Four Pillars of Sustainability' Model. The model is widely accepted and is currently adopted by the government bodies in New Zealand, Canada and some parts of Europe (Mulligan, 2015).

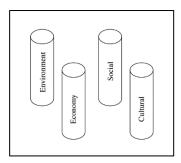


Figure 3: 'Four Pillars of Sustainability' Model (Hawkes, 2006)

'Social Ecology' Model

The 'Social Ecology' model of sustainability, which was suggested by Hawkes (2006), folds the economic domain into the social domain with the

assumption that economic development should be geared towards social well-being. Moreover, the model introduces a new focus on 'personal' dimensions of sustainability (Mulligan, 2015). The model dismisses the notion that sustainability is the matter for experts, governments and authorities (Mulligan, 2015), further suggesting that the personal impact of the individual has a large impact on the social and environmental domains. This personal focus shares the burden of sustainability with societies and individuals, without losing sight of the global picture for sustainable developments.

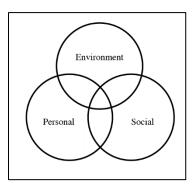


Figure 4: 'Social Ecology' model (Hill, 1990)

Hawkes (2006) argued that sustainability has to go beyond a narrow perspective of efficiency or substitutions. Instead, the focus should be on redesigning unsustainable aspects and systems in life. One can start thinking of what to do personally to redesign personal practices such as learning new skills to adapt a more sustainable life. Furthermore, one can participate in wider community efforts towards sustainability (Mulligan, 2015), and collaborate with the government and so on to the highest level of order.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was chosen for this research because it involved a lot of variables from multiple parties and the topic needed to be explored in depth (Norazmi et al., 2020). An exploratory single case-study design, (Yin, 2003) dictated the framework of this research. It was found suitable and the rationale for choosing the design was discussed in this chapter. The details of the data collection procedure and the reasons for choosing semi-structured interview as the only source of evidence were also explained (Zaid et al., 2020).

Other specifics pertaining the research sites in Kg. Selai, Bekok was further discussed in this chapter. The rationale for participant sampling was clarified through a table showing details of selected participants. Finally, ethic consideration for this research was reviewed. This study involved 15 respondents.

FINDINGS

CBET Developments and Participation in Tourism Development

Before the research could proceed any further exploring on the use of CCB to develop a sustainable CBET in the area, there was a need to understand the past effort towards CBET or the type of tourism in the research area. Additionally, the research would also like to know any past participation from the stakeholders to gauge their past effort and exposure into tourism in the past. By having some ideas on the past tourism development, the research could proceed towards probing into other questions related to the study.

Existing CBET Development

The participants reported in their interviews that currently there was not much development towards tourism, let alone CBET. Most tourism activities were confined within TNJER Selai area, which was fully under PTNJ's management. Ratu Survival operated in the area mostly as a logistic service, transporting tourists in and out of TNJER Selai. Tours and packages were offered by PTNJ at their office in Bekok, where the tourists were registered, picked-up and driven pass-by Kg. Selai, into the national park. P02, P05 and P11, who were the community members suggested that the tourist traffic should be diverted to stop by Kg. Selai, so the community had the chance to develop tourism operation. This showed that even the community could see the huge potential for tourism within their area, and they realized the possibility of a better version from this existing tourism development in the area.

The CCB program "Alamak!Oh! My Tourism English!" was a monthly program conducted by Johor City and Nature Guide Association (JCNTGA), in which volunteers from the association held a 2-day 1-night class, focusing on teaching the young community members about communicating in English. The program was centered on Tourism English comprising language, vocabulary and subject matter pertaining to tourism to enhance their knowledge capacity and expose them to tourism. It is a long-term program with the aim of creating a generation, more competently to develop a sustainable CBET in the future.

"Aahh, prepare these Orang Asli for communication, so more or less it will give them confident. So when they're confident, they can bring the tourists in" (P10).

Past CBET Development in Kg. Selai

According to the answers given by the participants, it could be said that there was no past development on any type of tourism in the research area;

"Never if in tourism la, actually never la" (P01)

"Never've been done" (P07)

"As far as I know never've been done yet." (P12)

"So far I've heard this program... a program from..thisAlamak Oh My English la kan? Haa" (P14)

Ten of the 15 participants acknowledged that there was no such program or development that had been taken towards any type of tourism in the area involving Orang Asli Hulu (Jakun) community of Kg. Selai. A stakeholder from the government department and agency related to tourism side of participant mentioned that sometimes tourism activities and development were done and held in the neighboring Kg. Tamok. When asked why it was not done in Kg. Selai, the participant responded that it was easier to deal with '*TokBatin*' in Kg. Tamok. Upon further inductive research on the matter, another participant reported that the '*TokBatin*' in Kg. Tamok had his own personal tourism operation there. Though it had been a good economic income for him, it did little benefits to the community there. There were however, indications that other types of programs and development, not related to tourism that had been done before in the area, as mentioned by the community members.

"..before this like what. The health department. They went in because of ..." (P06)

"Ha after that was JAKIM, they went in, ha that was not thing bring us towards..." (P04)

"After that, the second one Maxis, they did telesport activities..." (P01)

The governing bodies and agency related to the tourism interview reported that they had done development and programs related to tourism for the community development, however, they were not in Kg. Selai. Programs involving homestay development at Tg.Piai and Mersing as well as other tourism programs such as the Johor Sumpit Challenge and Aboriginal Festival in Kg. Peta the previous year was just some of the developments that were mentioned.

Local Community Participation in Planning Stage of Tourism

The former 'TokBatin' was consulted sometime in the 80s by the former Director of TNJER Peta at that time. Permission was asked by the local community, through the 'TokBatin', to show their support in order to open TNJER Selai. Initially 'TokBatin' insisted, however, later agreed on

certain terms with the promise that the governing body of the new National Park would help with the illegal logging and hunting issues that had been running rampant in the area as well as to look into the building and maintenance of the main road into Kg. Selai. Therefore, the local community's welfare, education and health would be secured with a well-maintained entrance road. Though some parts of the promises were kept, PTNJ was not able to uphold most of the terms set by the local community when they first opened the park. The community's views within the data showed that though they participated and voiced out their terms initially, it was duly ignored and not kept up. Therefore, there was a lack of local community participation in the planning stage of tourism in the area. These points were taken from the interview with P03 who was the 'TokBatin's assistant which was later, confirmed by P11 who was the 'TokBatin' himself. Both were elders within the local community.

Even when TNJER entrance was within Kg.Selai area, and a few of the community members were hired as tourist guides by TNJER, indicators showed that there was low participation in the planning stage of tourism by the Orang Asli Hulu (Jakun) community in Kg. Selai. Neither governing bodies nor related agencies had yet taken the effort to develop the community members into a tourism community. Vice versa, the local community was visibly lacking in exposure on tourism; therefore, they did not have the capacity to develop tourism on their own. From the findings of the interview, it seemed that the participation of the local community in the area was only within the nonparticipation, based on Arnstein (1969) ladder of citizen participation, which was at the lowest point of the model. It was either due to the lack in support and trust by the related agencies or by the community's own deficient of capacity to fully partake in tourism, other programs not related to tourism took place in Kg.Selai and was well accepted by the Orang Asli community there, but the tourism development was still new for the community. This showed that the current 'top-down' management and tourism development were not effective and did not contribute to a sustainable CBET in the area.

Local Participation in Implementation Stage of Tourism

It was critical for the community to come together with other stakeholders for the development of a sustainable tourism, from planning to the implementation stage. Though the local community there was the closest human resource to TNJER Selai, they however, were minimally involved within the current implementation stage of tourism in the area. The local community was either hired as low-ranking staffs in the national park, or as a part-timer on call basis nature guides. Participant 2 and 11 also reported a dwindling number of villagers becoming nature guides, not that it began with a big number.

It seemed that the participation of the local community in the implementation stage of tourism in the area was also within the non-participant level based on Arnstein (1969) ladder of citizen participation. The participation of the local community in the implementation was vital, moreover in CBET, where the community was the biggest stakeholder and played the utmost important roles. Participant 12, who was a prominent

representative from the governing bodies and agency related to tourism, agreed wholeheartedly to the importance of a more 'bottom-up' approach, which in turn, empowered the community, promoted participation and finally, achieved self-sustainability.

Participation in Nature Conservation

The local community was currently working negatively towards nature conservation because of their current modern practice of clearing up forestlands for palm oil plantation. The participants admitted during the interview that they understood the negative effect of forest destruction and living by being dependent on the forest since the time of their ancestors. They felt sad deep in their hearts. However, they were left with no choice as their traditional way of life by relying on forest resources was not enough to make ends meet. They felt stuck in between their good conscience and the pressure to develop. Even then, they were reportedly very open to any new viable source of income that could help them preserve, conserve and maintain their ancestral forest. On the other hand, conservation was also a big topic for stakeholders for the tourism related governing bodies and agency. However, they were confined within their boundaries and jurisdictions.

DISCUSSION

In the case of the Orang Asli Hulu (Jakun) community in Kg.Selai, it was quite obvious and noticeable that they had been left behind from any type of tourism development within the area. Unfortunately, minimal attention towards the Orang Asli community there did not only apply to tourism but other aspects as well. This made the development hard for them and refrained them geographically from the rest of the progress happening around the area, making them a more rural community. Though they were given the basic essentials to survive such as education for the young and palm oil plantations to upkeep their livelihood, they still relied heavily on the forest resources to support them, economically, whilst tourism development opportunity was literally right behind their back yard.

This lack of involvement by the local community did not contribute greatly for the overall development towards any type of tourism for the in the area. One cause might be due to the lack of capacity for the local community member to participate as suggested from the point of view of governing body and related agency. With the local community's incapability to participate, there was only so much that the governing bodies and related agencies could do in order to have a sustainable CBET development in the area. However, slight effort towards approaching the community for a tourism development in the area significantly impacted the community's chance to participate, thus, negatively affecting their overall participation, resulting in very low participation in the implementation and the more crucial, planning stage. The levels revealed from the data fell under the 'non-participation' level of the Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969), which was the lowest level on the scale.

A much higher level of participation was needed in order for the local community to develop themselves and migrate from their conventional and traditional way of life, to a more sustainable one by living a balanced life between a consistent economical income from conserving the nature and educating tourists about the importance of protecting our nature. The aim was for a stable social well-being amongst the community based on the 'Triple Bottom Line' sustainability model (Brundtland, 1987).

The current 'Top-Down' approach on tourism development and management in the area did little to encourage any participation by the local community. In addition, the lack of participation in the planning stage of tourism development resulted in the lack of sense of belonging of the local community in a tourism aspect. On the other hand, a more 'Bottom – Up' approach for tourism development such as the CCB program could ensure active participation of the local community in the earliest stage and create a higher impact on the sense of belonging, thus, making the tourism development more likely to be sustainable in the future.

Based on the findings, CCB was proven to have a positive impact on participation from both sides of the stakeholders. By increasing the community's capacity towards understanding tourism, it would be easier for the community members to participate in tourism. The governing bodies and related agencies also had the chance to 'come down' and understand what was needed by the community in order for them to find a middle ground to work together towards a sustainable CBET development, at the same time exposing the governing bodies and related agencies to what the community could offer towards tourism development in the area. The CCB program, which was aimed towards increasing knowledge capacity, innately also, increased other capacities such as participation, leadership and uniquely their exposure towards tourism. This happened because the Orang Asli community was known to be very hard to be exposed, as they were culturally different and naturally reclusive and humble. The findings showed that CCB was an appropriate tool to develop a sustainable CBET in Kg. Selai.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In conclusion, the data collection was a success in reaching for information towards answering the main and sub research questions. By interviewing both sides of the parties, the research was able to acquire rich data and cross check the data from the two sides to be able to find similarities and differences. Working alongside the CCB program, "Alamak! Oh! My Tourism English!" made the data collected more current for the research and simpler for the participants to relate to the questions given in the interview, thus, enhancing the validity of this research. Certain sub-questions pertaining to a more academic matter sometimes resulted in a confusion and misunderstanding. Nonetheless, the researcher was able to extract and define their answers into a working data through the manual coding process. This research has established a general level of community capacity for the local community in Kg. Selai. Future research can use this information to gauge any positive or negative changes in the

community capacity. The researcher suggests future research to focus on the five CCB dimensions pointed out in this research. As these are the CCB dimensions that play the most important part in creating a successful community development.

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