

**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

The Perception and Challenges in Community-based Ecotourism (CBE) Development: Insight from Kampong Rasuna, Tenghilan, Tuaran Sabah

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ABSTRACT - Ecotourism is often associated with nature and is environmentally friendly. Community-based ecotourism (CBE) is a tourism activity involving communities or residents. The first objective of this research is to study the local community's perception of the development of community-based ecotourism in Kampong Rasuna, Tenghilan. The second objective is to identify the local community's challenges in carrying out ecotourism activities in Tenghilan. This study uses convenience sampling to determine the sample size, and a total of 100 respondents were selected during data collection. For the perception of CBE development, the highest mean score is 4.42, where the majority of the respondents agree that Rasuna is developed to become a tourist centre. The respondents agree that the tourism activities in their village would improve their income, employment, and business opportunities. For the challenges, the highest mean score was recorded for the shortage of capital. The respondents revealed that although the village has clean water and electric facilities, other tourism-related infrastructures are limited, thus becoming a hurdle to further boosting the ecotourism activities in the area.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism is defined as the activity of an individual traveling to a place outside of the original environment and staying there for not more than a year for leisure, business etc. [1]. Over the year, people are more concerned about the environment, including when traveling. In order to meet tourist's preferences, various types of tourism have been introduced. Hence, sustainable tourism has been presented with the principles of nature conservation and the involvement of local people in tourism development. Ecotourism or nature-based tourism is one of the concepts of sustainable tourism. The trend to spend more time in nature, visit rural areas, slow life, and authentic tourism has boosted nature tourism [2]. In Malaysia, the tourism is the third most important sector after manufacturing and petroleum. Malaysia was recognized as one of the mega diversity countries in Southeast Asia, housing about 20 per cent of global flora and fauna species [3] hence, has a great potential in expanding its nature-based tourism industry.

The success story of tourism industry in Malaysia had left the aspect of local involvement due to limited power over implementing tourism projects. According to [4], the local community only has control over small things such as transportation, light work, and less-needed services. Despite the government's approach of using tourism as a platform to alleviate poverty, community-based tourism has shown a slow development. To overcome this problem, the government has focused on providing and encouraging locals' involvement in doing business and promoting their culture to be marketed to tourists. One of the alternative way for social engagement in tourism is through Community-based Ecotourism (CBE). Through CBE, the local community is given full responsibility in every tourism management activity, including decision-making, planning, and monitoring [5]. For the past few years, CBE has shown a continuous contribution to the livelihood of local communities living nearby the ecotourism area. It even

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has been recognized as one of the economic contributors to developing countries. Therefore, efforts to encourage local community participation are crucial. This study was conducted to examine the local community's perceptions about CBE development considering the challenges that communities may face in creating CBE destinations at their areas.

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Rasuna, Tenghilan, Tuaran Sabah (6° 15' 51" N latitude, 116° 21' 5" E longitude), which consists of three villages, named Kampung Rani, Kampung Suromboton and Kampung Napitas. Rasuna is located about 50km from Kota Kinabalu, Sabah and covers an area of 1.9 km². The site has an excellent potential to be developed as a new CBE destination. These villages are surrounded by natural attractions such as forests, waterfall, rivers, and paddy fields. The data collection was conducted using three methods: observation, interview, and questionnaires. According to the village headman, the number of populations in Rasuna is estimated at 1500. The respondent's sample size was determined with a 90% degree of confidence using the Yamane formula [11], resulting in 100 respondents.

The questionnaires were drawn up in four sections, Part A (Sociodemographic Information, Part B (Potential for CBE), Part C (Local Community Perception towards CBE), and Part D (Challenges in CBE Development). A Likert scale (1-5) was used to measure the local community perception and the challenges faced in developing CBE in the study area. The respondents' responses were categorized in 5 levels; scale 1 for response 'totally disagree', 2 for 'disagree', 3 for 'neutral', 4 for 'agree' and 5 for 'totally agree'. The questionnaires were written in Malay and English languages and distributed to respondents in August and September 2018. The data obtained were then analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and Microsoft Office Excel. The descriptive analysis was carried out to analyze the sociodemographic information, perception of the local community, and the challenges that the locals may face when establishing CBE in the area. Meanwhile, correlation analysis was used to assess the relationship between the local community's perception and challenges with their sociodemographic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Information of Respondents

The demographic information about the respondents involved in this study is presented in Table 1. Generally, it provides information such as gender, age, marital status, education level, job, income, and residential status. This information is essential in understanding the findings on the local community's perceptions and the types of challenges they faced in developing CBE.

Perception of Local Community

The local community's perception on development in an area is vital as it will influence the public attitudes and involvement in the future [6, 7]. Therefore, to examine the villager's perception of CBE, 10 statements based on a five-point scale were used. Based on the results of this study, it is found that respondents have an overall satisfaction perception of CBE development, where the mean score for statements number one to seven ranges between 4.13 to 4.42 (Table 2). The highest mean score is 4.42, which shows the local community would accept if the village were developed to become a tourist center. This indicates that the majority of the respondents support CBE development in Rasuna. Furthermore, the respondents have excellent perceptions that community-based ecotourism would greatly benefit the villagers regarding employment opportunities and household economy.

Table 1. Respondents' Demographic Information

Variables	Categories	No. of Respondents
Gender	Male	41
	Female	59
Age	18 – 20	25
	21 – 30	23
	31 - 40	12
	41-50	16
	> 50	24
Education Level	No formal education	2
	Primary School	4
	Secondary School	53
	Tertiary education	36
	Others	5
Job	Government	18
	Private sector	7
	Student	35
	Self-employed	16
	Housewives	16
	Others	8
Residential status	Local	88
	Resident from other places	12

Women and responders without a stable job are more receptive to the establishment of CBE in this study. This is so because they are more aware of the circumstances and opportunities in Rasuna village. They would profit from a tourism hub in the area since it would create jobs and business opportunities. According to [8], CBE can help local people raise their economy and income if they agree to participate in such tourism activities. Furthermore, it also benefits the youth in the nearby area by providing new employment and enterprise opportunities. According to [9], locals who know about an ecotourism project will be more prepared and willing to participate in the project. In addition, cooperation between locals and the tourism industry will also facilitate the work of managing tourism.

Table 2. Perception of local community towards Community-based Ecotourism

No.	Statements	Mean Score
1	Local community accept if the village to become tourist center.	4.42
2	The opening of tourism area provides employment opportunities.	4.27
3	Local community can accept the presence of tourists to the village.	4.26
4	The tourism activities would improve the economy of villagers.	4.23
5	The tourism activities would greatly benefit the villagers.	4.20
6	Local community are interested to engage in tourism activities.	4.17
7	Tourism sector could attract youth to work in the village.	4.13
8	Villagers aware of the concept Community-based Ecotourism (CBE).	3.77
9	Local community are ready to face the negative impacts of tourism.	3.39
10	Villagers should change their lifestyle to attract more tourists.	3.38

Challenges in Ecotourism Development

According to Table 3, around 40% of the statements receive an average mean score value greater than 3, while the other claims receive a mean score below 3, indicating that the majority of respondents do not

agree with the given statement. The absence of funding to begin ecotourism-related activities received the statement with the highest mean score, number 1, with a mean of 3.98. The majority of respondents claimed that substantial resources are required to build out amenities like homestays and stores that aid in luring travelers if the area is to be transformed into a tourism hub. The fact that the majority of respondents are housewives, students, and self-employed individuals with unstable finances may have an impact on this outcome. Furthermore, a lot of the respondents have a low income of less than RM500 a month. They also agreed that their village does not have the complete public infrastructure, such as the lack of public toilets, resting places, etc. This limitation could hinder the tourism progress of an area as poor infrastructure and facilities might leave a negative impression on the visitors. This statement is supported by [10], who said that the facilities available in a tourist center would make visitors' journey more manageable and comfortable, thus providing a more relaxing and enjoyable experience.

Table 3. Challenges faced by local community

No.	Statements	Mean Score
1	Villagers face capital shortage to start ecotourism related activities.	3.98
2	Lack of infrastructure in relation to tourism.	3.93
3	Many potential areas have been explored and destroyed.	3.27
4	Shortage of young labour force.	3.09
5	The village does not have much of tourist attractions.	2.77
6	Lack of knowledge about tourism related activities.	2.57
7	Poor guarantee of security such as theft or property damage.	2.49
8	Local community have problems communicating with tourists.	2.48
9	The village does not have sufficient basic facilities such as clean water and electrical facilities.	2.23
10	Village areas are often threatened by wildlife.	1.81

Another issue Rasuna village faces is a lack of new workers because the younger generation prefers to reside in cities because rural activities are perceived as being less lucrative. The community hasn't realised that activities like rice farming and rubber tapping may be marketed as tourist attractions because they haven't had much exposure to community-based ecotourism activities. Government and non-government organisations ought to work together to spread the word about community tourism. By actively engaging in ecotourism, communities can reduce poverty and preserve the environment.

CONCLUSION

Rasuna Village has an excellent potential to be developed as an ecotourism destination. Therefore, knowing the perceptions of the community towards a specific development is important to avoid any misunderstanding and dissatisfaction in the future. This could also help stakeholders in tourism planning and management. This study found that the local community in Rasuna Village has positive perceptions of CBE development. The majority of the respondents agree that their village was developed into a CBE destination. The respondents agree that establishing a tourist center in the village would greatly benefit the villagers in terms of income, employment, and enterprise opportunities. However, the respondents also revealed that financial problems could be the significant challenges in initiating CBE as some tourism facilities like accommodation would cost a lot. This could be solved by providing them financial aid or improving the tourism-related infrastructure in the three villages; Kampong Rani, Kampong Suromboton, and Kampong Napitas.

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