

Local Stakeholders Participation In Developing Sustainable Community Based Rural Tourism (CBRT): The Case Of Three Villages In The East Coast Of Malaysia

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This paper firstly, discusses the concept of stakeholders participation in developing sustainable community based rural tourism (CBRT) with respect to types of community participation, strengths, motivations and barriers to participation in sustainable CBRT. Secondly, a discussion on the survey of local stakeholders via questionnaires, which were, carried out in three CBRT sites in the East Coast of Malaysia. This survey was conducted to identify main reasons for local participation in CBRT, followed by an analysis of likelihood of local stakeholders to be included in sustainable CBRT's decision-making process. 78% of the respondents (a total of 85) indicated that the likelihood of them being included in decision-making process has improved. The paper also indicated two major influential factors for greater participation of local stakeholders in the decision-making process i.e. good and workable CBRT organisations and presence of strong leadership. This paper concludes by commenting on the proposed process to enhance participation of local stakeholders in developing and sustaining sustainable CBRT.

Key words: community based, leadership, participation, rural tourism, sustainable

Introduction

Gearing a sustainable community based rural tourism (CBRT) programme into practice is essentially dependent on strong participation from host communities and their stakeholders. As United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 2005 in Graci and Dodds, 2010: 185) point out:

“Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building.”

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The above statement suggested that sustainable tourism (and CBRT in this context) may not be successfully implemented without continuous support and participation of all relevant stakeholders. Therefore, determining the host communities and their stakeholders' perception and support towards sustainable CBRT development is the first crucial step in planning for sustained the tourism activities. To further address this matter, this paper will, firstly, discusses the concept of stakeholders participation in sustainable CBRT with respect to types of community participation, strengths, motivations and barriers to participation. Secondly, a discussion on the survey of local stakeholders, which were, carried out in three CBRT sites in the East Coast of Malaysia to assess the likelihood of local stakeholders to be included in sustainable CBRT's decision-making process. This paper concludes by commenting on the proposed process to enhance participation of local stakeholders in developing and sustaining sustainable CBRT.

Local Stakeholders Participation in Sustainable CBRT

Increased interest by various groups within rural communities towards sustainable CBRT programmes has led to some conflicting issues; for example, who should be involved and who should make the decisions with regards to planning and future development of sustainable CBRT? Authors such as Graci and Dodds (2010); Sebele (2009) and Hassan *et al.* (2006) agreed that the CBRT development process should include local communities as principal stakeholders and decision-makers. This is because local communities play significant roles in shaping the rural environment, utilising most of the rural resources for economic gain and are responsible for creating the local culture which becomes the main product in selling and marketing the CBRT programmes. Therefore, any attempt to exclude the "owners of their culture" could to some extent, result in serious negative impacts not only on the viability of CBRT programmes, but also on community life as a whole.

Cornell (1997:250) defines participation as "not only about achieving the more efficient and more equitable distribution of material resources: it is also about the sharing of knowledge and the transformation of the process of learning itself in the service of people's self-development". Others, such as Ashley and Roe (1998 in Aref and Redzuan, 2008:937) have described community participation as "a spectrum from passive to active involvement to full participation where there is active community participation and venture ownership". From the perspective of tourism planning, community participation can be defined as "a process of involving all [stakeholders] (local government officials, local citizens, architects, developers, business people and planners) in such way that decision-making is shared" (Haywood, 1988 in Okazaki, 2008:511).

The process in gathering people from several disciplines together with each of them participating by sharing ideas and knowledge, according to Arnstein (1969 in Okazaki 2008:511) could "expand the power redistribution, thereby enabling society to fairly redistribute benefits and costs". From the tourism point of view, Brohman (1996 in Aref and Redzuan, 2008:937) advocated community participation as "a tool to solve major problems of tourism through local participation and functional stakeholders involvement in tourism activities – which will achieve more equal distribution of the benefits, discourage undemocratic decision-making and will meet the community needs of local communities in different ways".

Types of Participation

Leksakundilok (2006 in Aref and Redzuan, 2008:937) has established a typology of community participation in tourism development with a modification on Arnstein's model for ladder of citizen participation, and each type of participation is described in Table 1.

Table 1: Types of stakeholders participation in tourism development

Types	
Self-mobilization	Local people may directly contact explorer tourists and develop tourism service by themselves. Some programs may be supported by NGOs that are not involved in the decision-making of the local community.
Empowerment	Empowerment is the highest rung of community participation, in which local people have control over all development without any external force or influence. The benefits are fully distributed in the community.
Partnership	Conciliation between developers and local people is developed in the participatory process. Local organizations elect the leaders to convey their opinion and negotiate with external developers. There are some degrees of local influence in the development process. The benefits may be distributed to the community in the form of collective benefits and jobs and income to the people.
Interaction	People have greater involvement in this level. The rights of local people are recognized and accepted in practice at local level. Tourism is organized by community organization, however, receives limited support from government agencies.
Consultation	People are consulted in several ways, e.g. involved in community's meeting or even public hearing. Developers may accept some contribution from the locals that benefit their projects, e.g. surveying, local transportation and goods.
Informing	People are told about tourism development program, which have been decided already, in the community. The developers run the projects without any listening to local people's opinions.
Manipulation	Tourism development projects are generally developed by some powerful individuals, or government, without any discussion with the people or community leaders. The benefits go to some elite persons; the lower classes may not get any benefits. This level applies to most conventional community tourism areas

Source: Leksakundilok (2006 in Aref and Redzuan, 2008:937).

From Table 1, the highest level of participation is when communities achieve self-mobilization, which allows community members to establish their own tourism operations without assistance from other ventures, especially from government or foreign business bodies. In certain cases, however, especially when communities and their stakeholders feel that they are not capable or not ready to manage the potential risks from CBRT development, maintaining a certain level of partnership and empowerment, without pushing themselves to the top of the participation ladder has gained more favour.

As the tourism activities develop in their areas, communities come to realise the importance of the tourism network and its influences on the development of local tourism products. Furthermore, tourism is a vulnerable sector and very sensitive to any global or national changes (Hamzah, 2004). Global economic downturn or the effects of diseases such as the Influenza A (Swine flu) pandemic recently, has significantly influenced global and national travel patterns. If such events continue, they will not only decrease the number of in-coming international and local tourists, which will result in lower revenue and income to local operators; in the long term, they could jeopardise the survival of sustainable CBRT itself. Due to the vulnerability of local tourism to external changes, some CBRT operators in Malaysia have found it is safer to maintain their partnership with other investors or agencies, whereby communities could enjoy tourism's benefits, although they have to bear potential costs or risks from global changes that could occur in the future (TPRG, 2009).

While some authors agree that community participation can be a positive force towards achieving sustainable CBRT development (Okazaki, 2008; Aref and Redzuan, 2008; Hassan et al., 2006), others seemed to differ (Sebele, 2009; Liu, 2006; Taylor, 1995 in Okazaki, 2008:511; Rattanasuwongchai, 2001). A community and stakeholders' participation approach may, according to George (2004) and Njoh (2002), sometimes fail to identify the influences of elites within the communities in the participation process. For many areas such as in Africa (Sebele, 2009), in Thailand (Rattanasuwongchai, 2001) and in Malaysia (Liu, 2006), tourism projects in rural areas are driven by foreign ownership or the private sector or even by powerful and wealthy individuals within the community and do not contribute much to the community itself. Community and stakeholders' participation are only discussed in superficial terms but the primary goal is to make a profit for such commercial entities, and for a few powerful individuals and families within the community (Sebele, 2009; Yaman and Muhd, 2004). Indeed, it causes displacement, increased costs, economic leakages, loss of access to resources and socio-cultural disruption among the locals.

Strengths of Participation

Despite all the criticisms that have been described above, there is still a growing interest and awareness among social scientists to implement a community participation approach in planning and development of sustainable CBRT. Okazaki (2008:512), in summary, has listed four strengths of a community participation approach (Table 2).

Table 2: Strengths of community participation.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. <i>Local issues</i> – have a direct influence on the tourist experience: a backlash by the local's results in hostile behaviour towards tourists (Pearce, 1994). Thus, tourists environments should be created in harmony with the social climate, where residents will benefit from tourism and not become the victims (Wahab and Pigram, 1997).2. <i>Local assets</i> – the image of tourism is based on the assets of the local community, including not only the local people but also the natural environment, infrastructure, facilities and special events or festivals; therefore, the cooperation of the host community is essential to access and develop these assets appropriately (Murphy, 1995).3. <i>Local driving force</i> – public involvement functions as a driving force to protect the community's natural environment and culture as tourism products, while |
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simultaneously encouraging greater tourism-related income (Felstead, 2000).

4. ***Tourism vulnerability*** – because the tourism industry is sensitive both to internal and external forces, many tourism development plans are often only partially implemented or not at all (Bovy, 1982). Moreover, even those that are fully implemented are not always sustainable. Thus, to increase the feasibility and longevity of projects, all plans should be linked with the overall socioeconomic development of the community.

Source: adapted from Okazaki (2008: 512)

To encourage a greater level of participation among local communities and their stakeholders in sustainable CBRT planning and decision-making process, Smith (1984 in George, 2004:58) presents four prerequisites: 1) the legal right and opportunity to participate; 2) access to information; 3) provision of enough resources for people or groups to get involved; and 4) genuinely public – broad rather than selected (sometimes elite) involvement. Besides factors which directly related with locals, Yaman and Muhd (2004) have suggested that sustainable CBRT planning and development must be strengthened through education for local host populations, industry and visitors as well as respect for the quality of natural environment, resources and sustainable use of energy and investment in alternative modes of transport (Yaman and Muhd, 2004).

Motivation for Taking Part in Sustainable CBRT

Dunn (2007) in community-based tourism (CBT) research in Thailand and Sebele (2009) in CBT research in Botswana have identified that one of the many motivations to get involved in tourism is because the members of a community wanted to help with conservation of the environment and improve their management skills. They were also interested in meeting new people both in their community and outside their community. Some members of the community, especially women, stated their motivations were driven by interest to learn English and improve their skills mainly in language for communication (Dunn, 2007).

Another motivating factor is earning supplementary income from local tourism activities, especially when their current jobs offer flexible time which enables them to participate in SCBRT activities (Dunn, 2007) and it is applicable for tourism projects in seasonal areas (Logar, 2009) (refer to Figure 1).

Barriers to Participation

This section discusses barriers to sustainable CBRT participation under two different points of view; that is from those of the host communities and the government. The identification and organisation of these barriers are based on review of the literature and by examine previous research works by Dukeshire and Thurlow (2002), Krank *et al.* (2010) and Stone and Stone (2011). However, such barriers are unique to particular CBRT sites including those in Malaysia and most of the barriers have been eliminated through well-planned, well-developed and good management of CBRT programmes accompanied by experienced and motivated host communities. Nevertheless, these list of barriers may be useful in understand common issues surrounding the communities participation in sustainable CBRT programmes in general.

There are seven main barriers to host communities' participation of sustainable CBRT identified: lack of understanding, lack of resources, reliance on volunteers, lack to access to information, absence of representation in decision-making process, the negative perceptions among government representatives towards local communities and finally, tourism policy timeline restrictions (Figure 1).

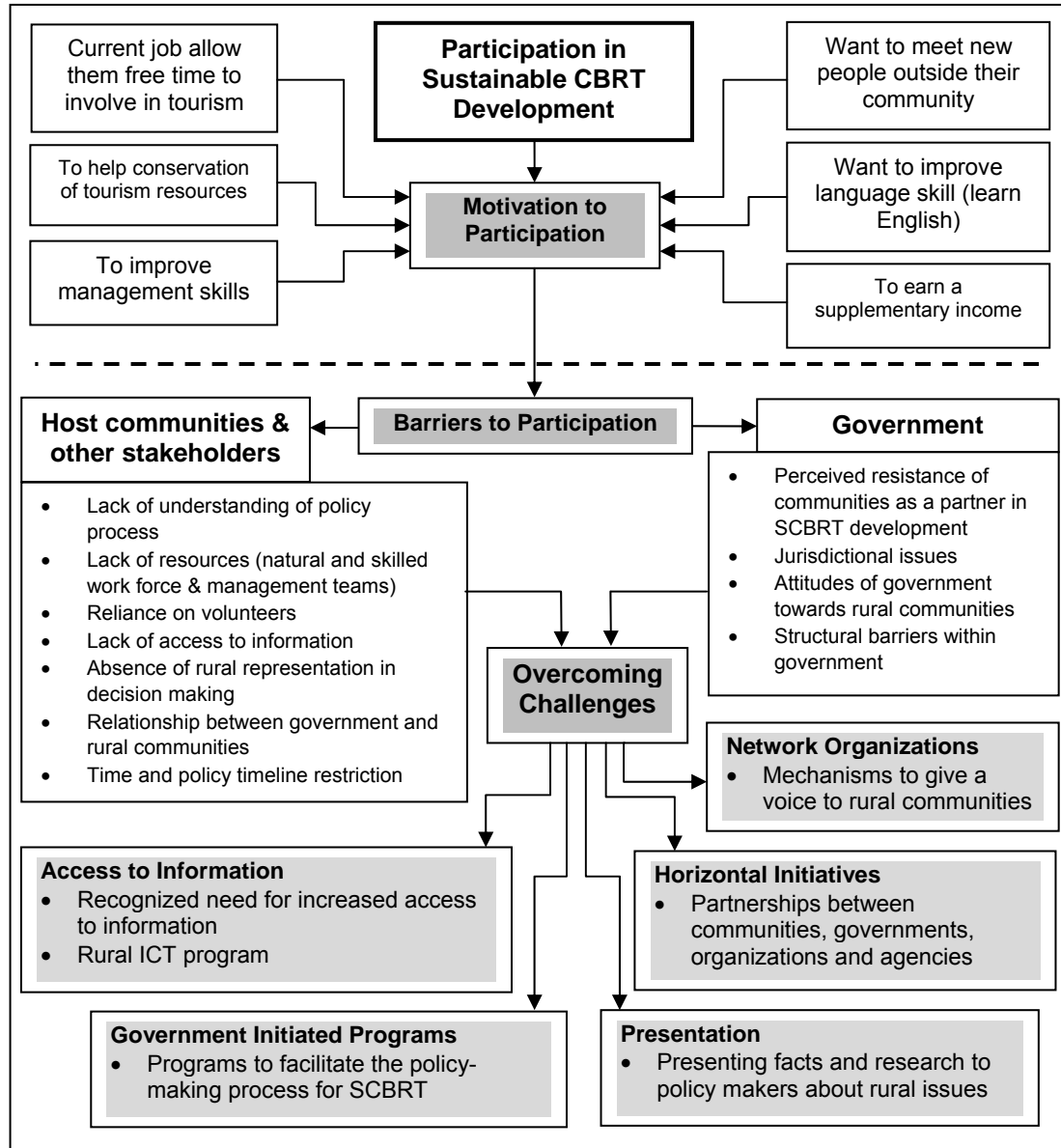


Figure 1: Motivation, barriers and overcoming challenges in local participation and stakeholder's involvement. Source: adapted from Aref and Redzuan (2008); Dunn (2007); Dukeshire and Thurlow (2002)

Survey of Local Stakeholders and Presentation of Result

This section describes the background of the CBRT sites selected for this study, i.e. Kuala Medang village in Pahang; Teluk Ketapang in Terengganu and; Seterpa in Kelantan (Figure 2), followed by presentation of results from survey of local stakeholders. The information regarding sustainable CBRT for every site is derived from the survey of local stakeholders using questionnaires, and interviews with CBRT coordinators (during site visits in October until December 2009 and during an

extended field survey visit in October 2010) as well as from unpublished village's annual reports, TPRG's consultancy project reports on Kampungstay and Homestay programmes (2009) and other additional materials provided in the MOTOUR and MRRD websites. During the survey, 85 respondents took part, i.e. 58 CBRT participants and 27 non-participants.

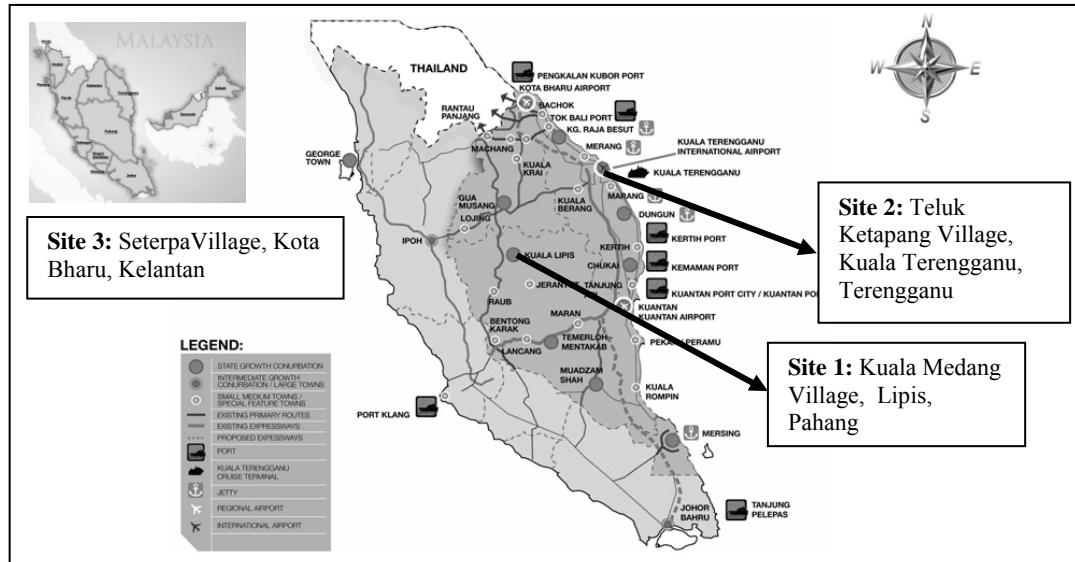


Figure 2: Locations of the three villages in the East Coast of Malaysia. Source: adapted from ECERDC (2008)

Principal Reasons for Participating in Tourism Activities

The interviews (using open-ended questions) were carried out to identify, from the economic and entrepreneurship, socio-cultural and leadership, and environmental point of view, reasons why respondents participated in the local tourism activities (Table 3). As suggested by literature reviews in earlier section, the participation of local stakeholders is very important since many tourism activities have various impacts (direct and indirect) on the local community wellbeing. The respondents' reasons for participating in tourism activities are very important in this research as this helps to identify if there were any specific needs and, maybe, levels of tolerance regarding certain aspects of local tourism activities, which might affect their lives when tourism activities are further developed in their village.

As shown in Table 3, the main economic reason for participation is “to earn extra income” (43%), followed by “to improve the living conditions” (21%). This result was quite similar to findings from literature review whereby respondents are attracted by stable incomes offered by jobs in tourism activities, and with the sort of income that could enable them to improve their living standards. For businesspeople, participation in tourism activities helps to market their products and services through tourism road shows and exhibitions held at local and international level (17%). As for tourism coordinators, their active engagement in tourism planning and development (via local CBRT organisers) at the local level is crucial, as their performance has been the subject for a regular monitoring by the government agencies (8%). Based on the information provided by the local organisers, the government agencies can determine any future needs for improving and enhancing the development of tourism products including training, promotional and marketing, financial aid, etc. (Research fieldwork in 2010). Other economic reasons are to increase personal savings (7%) followed by

the need for income from tourism activities to pay business loans and as a means to support their family members (2% in both cases).

Table 3: Respondents principal reasons for participating in tourism activities (all villages)

	Freq. (n=)	%
<i>Economic and entrepreneurship reasons</i>		
▪ To earn extra income	25	43.0
▪ To enjoy a better living condition (stable jobs)	12	21.0
▪ To increase market opportunity for their products	10	17.0
▪ As a part of requirement by aid agencies	5	8.0
▪ To increase savings	4	7.0
▪ To pay the business loans	1	2.0
▪ To contribute more money to the family or parents	1	2.0
Total	58	100.0
<i>Social-cultural and leadership reasons</i>		
▪ To promote local and traditional cultures	26	45.0
▪ To build self-esteem and co-operation between member of the community and with tourists	11	19.0
▪ As a vital part of youth development – to become the future leaders	9	16.0
▪ As a spare time activities	7	12.0
▪ To increase the opportunities to be included in tourism continuous training and workshops	5	9.0
Total	58	100.0
<i>Environmental reasons</i>		
▪ To help keeping the village clean and beautiful	30	52.0
▪ To increase awareness of and to learn more about environmental and natural resources conservation	17	29.0
▪ Increasing the practice of waste handling (recycle, reuse and reduce)	11	19.0
Total	58	100.0

Source: Research fieldwork in 2010

As for socio-cultural and leadership reasons, 45% of the respondents perceived their involvements were “to promote local and traditional cultures” followed by the need “to build self-esteem and co-operation between members of the community and tourists” (19%). Based on information derived from CBRT reports, each village has a designated committee which is in charge of promoting local culture and customs. For example, in Teluk Ketapang, the CBRT committee has divided local traditional cultures into four main activities namely; traditional games, traditional dances and performance, traditional cuisines and traditional arts. The groups interacted with other community members to educate them about their cultural attributes, which then helps them in communicating with the tourists. In addition, respondents who are involved in tourism have also explained that they were motivated by the need to develop future leadership, especially among young people in the community (16%). If local tourism can be developed and offer a better future for the younger generation, they are more likely stay (Research fieldwork in 2010). The findings have also suggested that the respondents were motivated to become involved

in tourism as their “spare time activities” (12%) as well as to increase their opportunities to be included in tourism training and workshops (9%).

From the environmental point of view, more than 50% of the respondents indicated they are driven by the need “to help in keeping the village clean and beautiful”, and the other 29% suggested the notion, “to increase awareness and understanding of environmental and natural resources conservation”. These findings have suggested that there is a positive change in attitude. During an interview, the CBRT coordinator of Kuala Medang said that it took more than five years for the CBRT committee just to educate local people not to litter. Meanwhile, the remaining 19% have indicated “to increase the practice of waste handling (reduce, reuse and recycle)” as one of their reasons.

Assessment of Likelihood To Be Included in Decision-Making Process

The greater engagement of local community and stakeholders in the decision making process is a critical element for tourism to become sustainable (Graci and Dodds, 2010). The survey also explored the likelihood of respondents to be included in decision-making process and the result was presented in Figure 3. A majority of respondents felt that the likelihood of their being included in the decision-making process is improving (78%). However, 5% believed that their likelihood is declining, while the other 17% remained unsure.

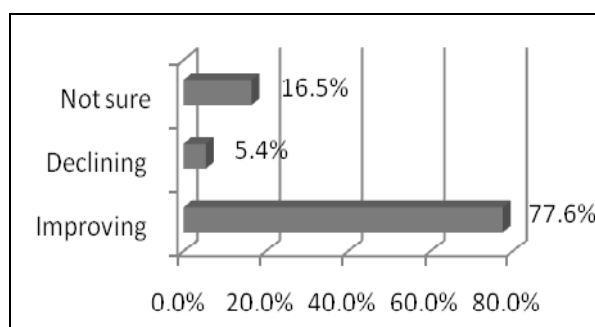


Figure 3: Respondents perceptions of likelihood of being included in decision-making process (n=85). Source: Research fieldwork in 2010.

Based on the data collected during the extended fieldwork (2010), continuous support support and participation from the communities and their stakeholders (related with result in Figure 3) are influenced by two major factors:

- i. The presence of strong local leaders who command respect and are capable of inspiring a sense of ownership among the local community on CBRT programmes. As evidence in all three villages, the CBRT leader of Kuala Medang is seen to be a dedicated senior district officer who volunteers to initiate sustainable CBRT programmes. As for Teluk Ketapang, the leader is a local primary school teacher who has been appointed by the village committee. The leader of Seterpa is a lecturer who is a self-appointed spokesperson for the community. Although the local leaders, as identified, are people of different professions and backgrounds, they share, however, the same qualities, i.e. they accepted their appointments as part of their responsibilities towards the local communities and not for recognition (Research fieldwork in 2010).
- ii. Having a good and efficient CBRT organisation to carry out planning, operation, monitoring and promotion of the programmes as another key strengths. The

organisation should include every section of the community, especially youth and women's groups. In all three villages, their local organisations were initially made up of talented and dedicated individuals from within the community, with active participation by every section of the community including women and young people (Research fieldwork in 2010).

Conclusion

The scope or context of CBRT is very broad, involving multi-dimensional inputs, and many stakeholders (with various interests) need to be involved. As a response to these variety of needs, the participation of relevant stakeholders in decision-making process, as presented in the survey of respondents of three villages could coordinate discussion on raising issues in local tourism, and to protect local interest and increase stakeholders voices/shares over certain issues of interest. Furthermore, the community is the party, who often receives direct impacts from any policies or planning outcome, as imposed by other parties (especially government agencies and private investors).

The study also discovered that an active engagement with decision-making process could expand the host communities and stakeholders' learning curve through: (1) Receiving direct exposure to organisational leadership and training programmes provided by government agencies (especially by the Institute for Rural Advancement, INFRA); (2) Enhancing the stakeholders' understanding on the sustainable CBRT concept by working closely with government agencies through training and educational programmes such as discussion forum and experience sharing, motivational talks, exhibitions and educational trip visits (Research fieldwork in 2010). This new knowledge could potentially enhance the stakeholders' understanding of sustainable tourism including in CBRT development and its implementation in the local context.

As demonstrated by this study, participation is important to maintain stakeholders' continuous support towards local tourism programmes. Furthermore, with their likelihood for being included in decision-making, the local communities could share their skills and local knowledge –considered as inputs and provide direction needed to carry out planning for tourism.

Engaging the host communities in the development process, however, is not without challenges. Information on communities' perception towards their participation in sustainable CBRT and identification of enabling and constraint factors for participation are essential as the starting point of CBRT programmes. Further studies are required to determine whether the communities, especially their committees and participants are ready to carry out the full implementation of the programme (i.e. whether they possess the knowledge, skill and good leadership for the process). Similar considerations are also applicable to other CBRT sites that might share (or not) the same circumstances as these three villages.

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