

Potentials And Challenges Of Involving Indigenous Communities In Ecotourism In Belum-Temenggor Forest Complex, Perak, Malaysia

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Ecotourism is usually regarded as responsible travel to nature-based areas with the aims to enjoy nature while at the same time to contribute towards the protection and conservation of nature as well as to the welfare of local communities in that area. Most significantly, ecotourism should provide opportunity for the locals to participate and gain benefit from its development. Belum Temenggor forest is among the most promising ecotourism destinations in Malaysia. Furthermore, this area is currently widely being promoted up to international level due to its complex ecosystem and rich wildlife diversity. Not only blessed with rich and flourishing flora and fauna, this area also shelters the indigenous orang asli communities made up of Jahai and Temiar together with their unique cultures. However, the main research questions explored in this paper are: Are these 'shy' indigenous communities prepared to delve into the fast developing ecotourism sector? How are they involved in ecotourism and do they benefit from it? This paper examines how the orang asli perceive ecotourism and its development, and how ecotourism in turn affects them. The main research instrument used is qualitative techniques based on interviews with key informants. Results indicate that the BTFC is facing increasing threats, and tourism development is threatening its natural heritage. The results also show that ecotourism has great potentials but the orang asli community enjoys little of the tourism benefits. Instead, orang asli cultures are eroded, their natural habitat on which they rely on for their subsistence increasingly destroyed, and their villages encroached upon. Ecotourism needs to find a balance between economics, environment and social equity, viz. where the orang asli community is involved and enjoys equally the benefits to ensure its sustainability in BTFC.

Key words: ecotourism, indigenous community, protected area, culture

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Introduction

In most countries, ecotourism is closely related to not only its natural attributes/attractions but also its indigenous peoples (Suriati et. al, 2006). Ecotourism cannot possibly be detached from indigenous peoples as the latter is part and parcel of the tourism package as an added value attraction in itself. However, while tourism and ecotourism have received a great deal of attention in many countries and is seen as a tool to stimulate economic growth and promote environmental conservation, sadly the same cannot be said about the indigenous peoples. There have been too many cases of marginalisation of indigenous peoples in the tourism development literature (Chan, 2004a). Ecotourism development has been taking place in the forests of Malaysia since independence in 1954. However, the involvement of local indigenous community has been marginal and the benefits of the industry to locals are small. Lim et al (2006) has found that a small number of *Orang Asli* is engaged in the tourism industry, but mostly working as unskilled workers in hotels, waiters in restaurants, sales persons selling souvenirs and other odd jobs. The local community could contribute to the development of ecotourism development by playing a more active role. They have good knowledge of the tropical forests, their flora and fauna. They make use of the forest resources for generations and thus are able share their knowledge and experience with tourists from within and outside the country.

According to Ceballos-Lascuráin (1996), ecotourism is defined as “environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features- both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low negative impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations”. The Malaysian government in the National Ecotourism Plan 1996 has adopted this definition. This definition succinctly means ecotourism depends on destinations rich in natural areas that are considered natural heritage coupled with unique local cultures that are attractions (Chan, 2004b; Clifton, 2004).

Azreen et. al (2011) documents that Malaysia is endowed with vast amount of biological diversity, beautiful landscapes, unique cultures and lush ecosystems as and is considered one of the 17 megadiverse countries in the world that houses many endemic species (Latiff et. al., 1995). Badaruddin Mohamed (2002) has documented Malaysia’s immense potentials as an ecotourism destination. The Belum Temengor forest complex (BTFC) (Figure 1) is considered one of the rich biodiverse natural areas that have great potentials for ecotourism (Ang and Chan, 2009). In the National Ecotourism Plan (MOCAT, 1996), the Malaysian Government has earmarked the BTFC as one of the potential ecotourism sites to be fully developed. The Malaysian Government is of the view that important natural assets combining flora and fauna together with unique natural landscapes should be enjoyed by both its citizens and the world. Hence the attributes of BTFC must be conserved, protected and kept thriving in healthy numbers in order to ensure that the country’s national ecotourism plan be realized. Hence, lots of developments have been carried out or are planned for the BTFC and other natural areas. However, one must not lose sight that natural areas are not solely the ownership of ecotourism. Far from it, natural areas serve a great variety of purposes and functions such as water catchments, wildlife sanctuaries, biodiversity reservoir, forestry, research, habitat of flora and fauna (and also of indigenous forest people such as the *orang asli* in BTFC), and even climate change control. Unfortunately, over-zealous development at break-neck speed without proper planning and consideration have given rise to threats and negative effects on these

pristine areas (Chan, 2010). Others have also warned about the rampant poaching, uncontrolled logging activities, and mis-management issues are among some of the threats that could destroy the potentials of this area from becoming one of the internationally-known ecotourism destinations in Malaysia. Of great concern is that fact that rapid development in tourism and other developments have encroached upon the forested land which the *orang asli* call home (Tan, 2011). Badaruddin Mohamed (2002) has found that although ecotourism stresses the importance of strong community involvement in the tourist business, locals continue to be mere ‘objects’ or ‘products’ to be gazed by the visitors. For example, in the case of Taman Negara Malaysia (Malaysia National Park), visiting aboriginal villages and observing their lifestyle have been prominent features in the tourism activities in the park. Locals, much less indigenous peoples, become owners of tour businesses or run businesses related to tourism. This paper examines some of the negative effects of tourism development and threats on the *orang asli* in the BTFC and provides suggestions and recommendations in ensuring that the livelihood of *orang asli* is not endangered and their cultures not destroyed. The paper takes the middle approach of sustainable development whereby ecotourism development should be well balanced between economic gains and environmental conservation and social (*orang asli*) equity.

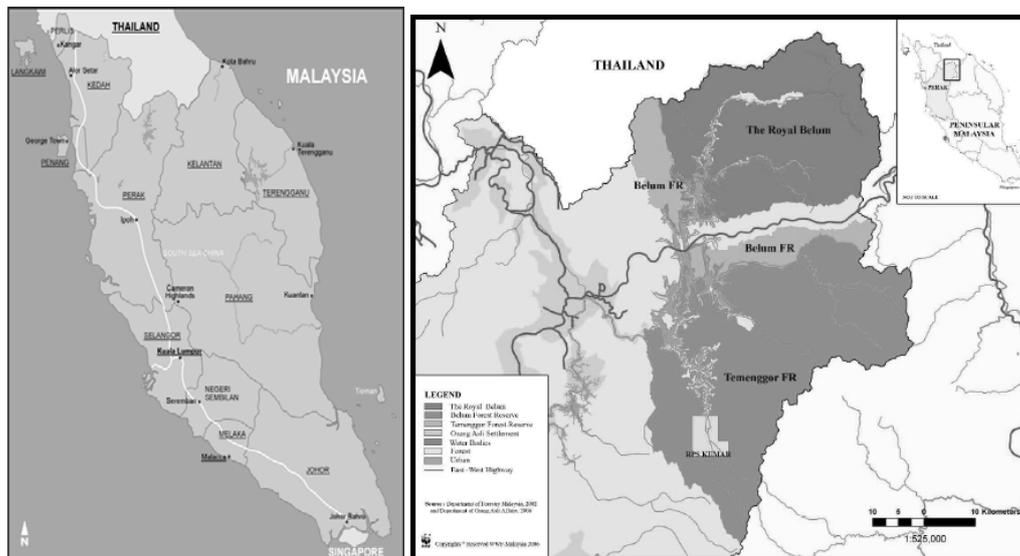


Figure 1: Location of Peninsular Malaysia and BTFC (source: WWF Malaysia website).

Research Methodology

The research methodology is largely based on a quantitative survey and qualitative in-depth interviews with key respondents. A total of 150 *orang asli* were surveyed in the quantitative survey whereas a total of 10 key informants were interviewed. The research methodology also includes a review of existing literature.

Threats to Orang Asli Communities in BTFC

BTFC is not a totally protected area. Only the Royal Belum in the northern part is gazetted and protected. The Temenggor Forest Reserve in the south is an actively logged area. Between the two, the East-West Highway runs through and along the highway there are lots of developments. A substantial portion of the forest in BTFC

has been modified by human activities in relatively recent times. Many parts of the BTFC forests have been previously logged. Active logging is still going on in the Temenggor Forest reserve. Hence, there are huge areas of secondary forests in the BTFC. In the logged areas, there is both a scarcity of flora and fauna, leaving the *orang asli* inadequate resources for collection and hunting activities. The Temenggor Lake and the rivers that feed the lake are rich with fishes. The *orang asli* communities as well as nearby local Malay communities also depend on these aquatic ecosystems for food. However, over-fishing and sport fishing together with water pollution have threatened the fishery sources. There are countless other threats to the ecosystem, environment and the *orang asli*.

As with most development that comes to a pristine forest, there are bound to be negative effects and other threats. In the case of BTFC, some of the threats include illegal logging, poaching, over-commercialisation of the destination, pollution, over-harvesting of forest products, and last but not least the marginalisation of the indigenous *orang asli* and the erosion of their way of life and culture. According to Tan (2010) and Tan (2011), logging and poaching are emptying the Belum-Temenggor forests of its wild resources, and the *orang asli* are suffering as the forest, which feeds them, is no longer as rich as before. According to Azrina Abdullah (2011), encroachment by both locals and foreigners into BTFC is not uncommon. These intruders get into BTFC in northern Perak to log, hunt for animals, fish and collect forest products such as bamboo, rotan (or rattan), *gaharu* (or incense wood), medicinal plants (e.g. *Kacip Fatimah* and *Tongkat Ali*). These illegal activities are depriving the *orang asli* of food and livelihood. This has resulted in the *orang asli* resorting to collect and sell *gaharu*, rattan, honey, rafflesia buds and medicinal plants such as *tongkat ali*, *kacip fatimah* and *gajah beranak* to tourists or “middlemen” to sustain themselves. *Orang asli* also commonly hunted birds, monkeys, gaurs, pangolins, barking deer, deer, soft-shelled terrapins, wild boar, fish and frogs for food. Depletion of these food sources has “forced” a number of *orang asli* to resort to hunting endangered and totally protected rhinoceros, young elephant, bear and tiger, but these are seldom reported and there is no data on this.

Poaching for wild animals such as tigers, tapirs, deer, wild boars, monkeys, and others is a very serious activity in BTFC. Azreen et. al. (2011) found that the building of the East-West Highway (also known as the Gerik-Jeli Highway), opened in 1982, improved communications between the east and west coasts of Peninsular Malaysia and has led to increasing economic growth at the east coast and encouraged economic exchange between east coast and west coast regions. However, in the process of linking these two forests, the highway has dissected the BTFC and impacted upon the *orang asli* and their livelihood. In a way, the highway offers a simpler route for “intruders” to enter BTFC for various illegal activities in much faster way, as well as to get out at any point along the highway. Based on surveys done by the WWF Wildlife Protection Unit (WPU) in 2009, at least 37 entry points along the highway were identified. The WWF Wildlife Protection Unit (WPU) also found evidence of illegal poaching such as 102 snares and aided the authorities in arresting 10 illegal hunters and traders. Azreen et. al. (2011) found that among the most poached animals were tigers, elephants, rhinoceros, pangolins, sambar deer and barking deer. Pangolins is a popular animal that is poached in BTFC as it is sought after for its medicinal properties for healing rheumatic pains and its aphrodisiac properties. A pangolin can fetch as much as RM150 per kg or RM500 per animal in the black market. Collectors also “steal” agarwood (sought for its aromatic, religious and medicinal purposes) which is considered one of the most expensive woods in the

world as the price of high quality agarwood can reach up to RM 1 million for a kilo (Konsesi Utama, 2010). Poaching affects *orang asli* as it depletes the number of animals and plants. This will ultimately reduce the amount of food resources available to the *orang asli*. New laws have also reduced food sources of the *orang asli* as under the new Wildlife Conservation Act 2010, the *orang asli* can only hunt 10 species for their own consumption including wild boar, sambar deer, lesser mousedeer, pig-tailed macaque, silver leaf monkey, dusky leaf monkey, Malayan porcupine, brush-tailed porcupine, white-breasted waterhen and emerald dove (Tan, 2011). In the past, under the old legislation, *orang asli* pretty much could hunt anything except for totally protected species (which includes endangered species such as the tiger, elephant and rhinoceros).

Unsustainable tourism development is another threat to the *orang asli*. Although the Perak State government has plans to log the area, especially the Temenggor Forest Reserve, it has also earmarked Royal Belum and parts of Temenggor Forest Reserve as ecotourism sites. Tourism development at Pulau Banting involved building a jetty, a resort hotel, a research centre and various other structures. Various other small scale floating hotels, sport fishing operators, floating restaurants, speed boats and tourist boats, fishing boats, jungle trekking operators, and tour operators are also impacting upon the BTFC. Many tour operators also use the *orang asli* villages as a “must see” site in their tour itinerary. This results in tourists visiting the *orang asli* villages. Although this is not necessarily a bad thing, too many tourists coming can be disturbing for the peace-loving *orang asli*. Visitors and tourists often disturb the peace, get in the way of *orang asli* activities, and worse of all give token of money and other “handouts” to *orang asli*. This is no good as it creates an alien culture of begging amongst the *orang asli* children.

Illegal logging is another huge threat in BTFC. BTFC has good timber much sought after by the market. Malaysia is considered one of the top five International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO) tropical log producers in the world (Figure 2). Yeap et. al. (2009) documented that on the 3rd May 2007, the Perak State Government gazetted the northern portion of Belum Forest Reserve as the Royal Belum State Park. This means the gazetted part of BTFC is now legally protected. However, Yeap et. al. (2009) are of the opinion that the battle to conserve BTFC is only half won as the ungazetted parts (which is larger than Royal Belum) continues to be affected by timber extraction, poaching, illegal extraction of forest products and threats of conversion to other forms of landuse (e.g. agriculture, mono-plantations) and infrastructure development. The BTFC also serves as a water catchment for the northern states in Peninsular Malaysia. The BTFC forests are important with unique flora such as *Shorea lumutensis*, *Johannesteijmannia perakensis*, *Rafflesia* spp, salt licks and archaeological artefacts. Logging will threaten these attributes as well. The Perak state government had actually pledged that logging in areas surrounding Temenggor Lake and Banding island would be banned from 2008 (NST - Aug 1, 2006). However, Azreen et. al. (2011) reasoned that such a pledge would not save the area from logging but exacerbate it as companies which have been awarded logging concessions in these areas would probably be given other areas deeper in the 147,000 hectares Temenggor forest reserve. This will mean deeper penetration into virgin forests where most of the wild animals hide and eventually open more trails along logging tracks made simple for poachers to invade the area. It would also encroach upon and affect *orang asli* villages as well as their livelihood.

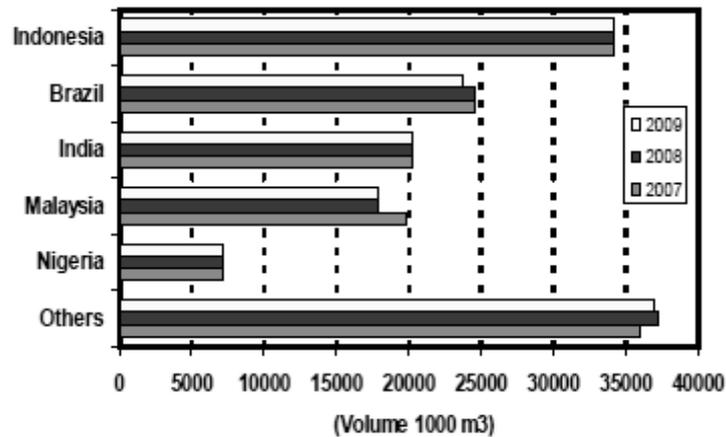


Figure 2: Major tropical timber producers (Source: ITTO, 2009)

BTFC is located on the central forest spine (CFS) of Malaysia, and is considered a High Conservation Value Forest (HCVF) because of its high environmental, biodiversity, socio-economic, and landscape values. BTFC is also recognised in the National Physical Plan Malaysia (NPP) as an Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) Rank 1, and this category means it should not be subject to development, agricultural or logging activities as only low impact nature-based tourism, educational and research activities can be allowed (Yeap et. al., 2009). Surprisingly, the Perak state government has categorised Temengor Forest as ESA Rank II which indicates sustainable logging could be carried out in the forest. Insufficient manpower (only two rangers are in charged in patrolling the vast Royal Belum area) has led to ineffective detection and law enforcement on poachers and illegal loggers.

Ineffective management not considering *orang asli* welfare sufficiently is another threat faced by the indigenous communities. Interviews with *orang asli* in BTFC indicate that they are almost never consulted in any development. Yeap et. al. (2009) found that management of BTFC is ineffective as it is complicated by the lack of integrated planning and management of BTFC as it involves various Federal and State government sectoral agencies.

Temengor lake is also facing pollution and over-fishing as it is an attraction for sport-fishing. This has led to a declining population of freshwater fish. There is no regulation on sport fishing as anglers can catch as many fishes of whatever sizes as they can. Plus, there is no limitation on numbers of tourists to enter BTFC (excluding Royal Belum as only 30 persons could get in per entry). Aquaculture is booming in the area and this has led to threats such as water pollution and over-breeding of the tilapia fish. According to Azreen et. al. (2011), the Tilapia is a non-indigenous, invasive fish in the Temengor lake and the escaped tilapia (from cages) might be hazardous to the indigenous fish species there. Such invasive species pose risks to native species through competition for food, niche displacement, hybridization, introgression, predation and eventually lead to local species extinction (Mooney and Cleland, 2001). There is also a threat of biological pollution as Temengor lake is threatened by the invasion of *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) bacteria. Untreated solid wastes from lakeside hotels, the jetty, floating hotels, camping sites and *orang asli* villages all combine to increase untreated sewage discharges into the aquatic ecosystem. *E. coli* can cause serious water and food poisoning in *orang asli* communities as these communities use water directly from the rivers and lakes without treatment.

Results and Discussion

This study gave good insights into what was previously undocumented. Results showed that the age of the 150 Orang Asli surveyed ranged from 17 to 78, with the majority from the 21-45 age group (108 respondents or 72 %). Amongst the respondents, 81 respondents (54.0 %) were males and 69 respondents (46.0 %) were females. In terms of education, the orang asli were poorly educated with nearly half of them (72 respondents or 48.0 %) never having attended school, while 33 respondents (22.0 %) had primary education, 30 respondents (20.0 %) had lower secondary education and only 15 respondents (10.0 %) having higher secondary education. There was none who had a college (diploma) or tertiary/university education (Table 1). Interestingly, although there was no significant difference between males and females in educational achievement (the majority of both genders have never attended school and at most had a primary education), it appears that the females had a higher achievement in the secondary school level. This may perhaps be due to the fact that teenage orang asli boys needed to go into the forest with their fathers to learn how to hunt and gather food, while the teenage girls who stayed at home to help their mothers had a better opportunity to attend school (in Malaysia, students attend school only for half a day, either in the morning or afternoon sessions). In terms of those without any schooling, the majority are from the older respondents of age 40 and above. In contrast, the younger respondents (e.g. teenagers) generally have the opportunity to attend school as primary and secondary education is provided free by the Malaysian Government. The poor level of educational achievement of the orang asli in BTFC is in stark contrast to the much higher educational levels attained by the other major communities in Malaysia, such as the Malays, the Chinese and the Indians (Suriati Ghazali et. al., 2006). The results confirmed the findings of previous researches on Orang Asli that concludes that Orang Asli are placed at the margin of development and are often excluded from the mainstream of the socio-economic development (Nicholas 1993, 2000).

Table 1: Educational Achievements of Orang Asli By Gender in BTFC

Levels of education	Male		Female		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Never attended school	44	54.3	28	40.6	72	48.0
Primary education	18	22.2	15	21.7	33	22.0
Lower secondary education	12	14.8	18	26.1	30	20.0
Upper secondary education	7	8.7	8	11.6	15	10.0
College, polytechnic and university	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	81	100.0	69	100.0	150	100.0

In terms of their work, it was found that the *Orang Asli* in BTFC were engaged in various types of occupation. The majority of them are “unemployed” but professed to make a living through hunting and gathering from the jungle/forest. Very few of them worked in the professional, technical, administrative and managerial categories as their educational achievements were low, but a large number of them worked as unskilled labourers and as agricultural workers or farmers (Table 2). There was no significant difference between the type of jobs employed by the males and the females, although a slightly higher percentage of females worked in the top three categories as professional, managerial and clerical workers when compared to the men.

Table 2: Occupation of Orang Asli By Gender in BTFC

Occupation category	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Professional and technical workers	1	1.2	1	1.4	2	1.3
Administration and Managerial Workers	2	2.4	3	4.3	5	3.3
Clerical, Sales & Service Workers	5	6.2	6	8.7	11	7.3
Skilled Workers	5	6.2	3	4.3	8	5.3
Agricultural Workers or Farmers	16	19.8	10	14.5	26	17.3
Unskilled Labourers & Odd Jobs	21	25.9	18	26.1	39	26.0
Unemployed (Hunters & Gatherers)	31	38.3	28	40.7	59	39.5
Total	81	100.0	69	100.0	150	100.0

These findings above showed that *orang asli* in BTFC are still very low in terms of educational achievement and this has prevented them from getting better jobs. Despite the rapid development in ecotourism in the area, these indigenous peoples have actually not benefited much. They are still largely hunters and gatherers, although modernisation has brought some of them into mainstream development. Hence, they are still very much dependent on the land, rivers and forest as their main sources of livelihood, but development has brought threats that are gradually destroying these sources of livelihood. These findings appear similar to other findings elsewhere which indicate that while tourism development has brought positive economic impacts to an area due to income generation and employment opportunities from the infrastructure development such as tarred roads, hotels, lodges and resorts (Suriati et. al., 2006), it has still a long way to go in terms of benefiting the orang asli. Interestingly, ecotourism can offer viable economic alternatives and self-improvement opportunities to the Orang Asli to allow them to escape from hunting and gathering, and to abandon shifting cultivation and allowing forests to regenerate. Ecotourism can be used as a tool to balance development, environmental conservation (maintaining ecosystem integrity) and achieving social equity.

While ecotourism in the BTFC is thriving with tour operators making good money, the extent to which the Orang Asli are able to reap the economic benefits from the ecotourism industry is small. The average monthly income of orang asli households in this study is a reflection of the negligible benefits that this local indigenous community has reaped from ecotourism (Table 3). Since 59 respondents (39.3 %) are not employed, they have no income. They survive on food gathered and hunted from the forests. No household has an income above RM3000 which is the income level below which the Malaysian Government considered to qualify for the 1Malaysia People's Aid (BR1M) handed out by the Government. Hence, all orang asli households in this study qualified for this aid. Based on Malaysia's average national poverty line of RM800 per household monthly income, it can be seen that 140 households (93.3 %) are classified poor as their monthly household incomes fall below the poverty line.

Table 3: Average Monthly Income of Orang Asli Households in BTFC

Monthly Income Category	Total	
	Count	%
No Income	59	39.3
RM1 - RM300	35	23.3
RM301- RM600	31	20.7
RM601-RM900	15	10.0
RM901-RM1200	7	4.7
RM1201-RM3000	3	2.0
RM3001 and Above	0	0.0
Total	150	100.0

Ecotourism can then be a tool to raise the income levels of the *orang asli* households. In this study, it was found that orang asli who are employed in jobs directly related to ecotourism (e.g. maintenance workers and labourers in the hotels, tourist guides, waiters and sales assistants), earn between RM601 to RM900 per month. Only 3 respondents (2.0 %) managed an income between RM1201 and RM3000. All three were employed in services industry related to the tourism sector. These findings are similar to the findings by Chan (2006), Suriati et. al. (2006) and Ashley and Roe (2002) which indicate that ecotourism offers a wide range of jobs to many poorly educated indigenous peoples. According to Suraiti et. al (2006), although the income level is still rather low, what little they obtain is important to the livelihood of the local people, especially at a time when ready money is becoming increasingly important to pay for necessities such as food, services and education. Hence, the majority of Orang Asli view ecotourism positively as something that can help them improve their livelihoods.

In terms of perceptions on economic and socio-cultural impact of ecotourism, the orang asli communities in BTFC have shown positive views. Often, locals are not happy when tourists intrude into their lives. In this study, respondents were asked on how they feel with the influx of tourists to BTFC and to their villages. The results indicate that the majority of 133 respondents (88.7 %) were happy and excited with the inflow of tourists into BTFC although a small percentage of 10.0 % (15 respondents) were unhappy, or felt irritated and disturbed with the tourists' influx. Another 1.3 % (2 respondents) did not comment. In terms of gender, a higher percentage of women view the tourists' influx negatively as they were uncomfortable with the arrival of tourists in comparison to the men. There were many reasons given for their positive and negative perceptions (Table 4). It can be seen that women are more likely to have negative perceptions about tourists as they see them as a disturbance. The grievances and irritation due to tourists' behaviour have been reported by other research on the perceptions of host communities (Ransom 2005; Suriati 2004). The women are generally shy and were concerned about tourists taking photographs of them and looking at them. Similarly the women complained about the inappropriate attire of the tourists that showed a lack of respect for the locals. In contrast, however, the *orang asli* men see tourists positively they look at the economic aspects, new experience and opportunities.

Table 4: Positive and Negative Reasons for Tourists' Influx into BTFC

	Male		Female		Total	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Positive Reasons						
Increase of Household Income	15	18.5	9	13.0	24	16.0
New Experience	22	27.2	8	11.6	30	20.0
Increase in Development	21	25.9	9	13.0	30	20.0
Negative Reasons						
Tourists are impolite, noisy and rude. They disturb the peace.	12	14.8	20	29.0	32	21.3
Tourists bring bad influence – beer, tobacco, drugs, pornography, etc	1	1.2	18	26.1	19	12.7
No Comments	10	12.4	5	7.3	15	10.0
Total	81	100.0	69	100.0	150	100.0

Based on the above discussion and results, there is no doubt that the BTFC has great potentials for ecotourism. The main challenge now is how to integrate the Orang Asli community into ecotourism and pass on some of the benefits to them. This could be implemented at several levels in BTFC. In the jetty area that has been built-up with hotels and resorts which is along the highway, an “Orang Asli Information Centre” could be established. Such a centre could provide basic information on the Orang Asli community in BTFC. This centre can serve as an education centre for both local and foreign tourists, and be run by *orang asli* themselves. The Department of Orang Asli can be the funder and advisor of the centre, but should not run the centre. After visiting the centre, tour groups could then be arranged to visit selected orang asli villages together with other destinations of interests such as waterfalls, rivers, rafflesia spots, caves and others. At the village level, a homestay programme and village-stay programme could be an added attraction. At these levels, the Orang Asli could be trained to become tourist guides in show-casing the archaeological and historical sites, architectural types of houses in different villages, *orang asli* cultures (e.g. dancing and food), socio-economic activities, hill padi farming areas, trapping and fishing methods, animal trails and plant/tree identification. They can also lead the tourists in non-timber product harvesting trips.

The active involvement of Orang Asli's in ecotourism can be achieved via a smart-partnership between Government, private sector and NGO. Government can initially pump in the investment in putting up basic facilities. The private sector such as MK Land (a developer who has invested interests in the area) can provide funding as part of the company's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) commitment. The NGOs (e.g. WWF Malaysia and Malaysian Nature Society) could provide proper training to the Orang Asli. The private sector such as tour operators and hotels can also assist by bringing the tourists to Orang Asli Information Centre and villages. The Orang Asli have to learn English and acquire communication skills besides having a sense of time management and commitment. In terms of becoming a good tourist guide, the acquirement of additional knowledge on flora and fauna is essential. The WWF Malaysia and Malaysian Nature Society, or Universiti Sains Malaysia which has research in the area, can help train the orang asli in these aspects. Active involvement in ecotourism development in BTFC is expected to uplift their living standards with better income and better living conditions.

Threats affecting BTFC need to be reduced or eliminated. Poaching and illegal logging are the most common threats that pose serious problems to the natural

resources in BTFC. Stringent penalties need to be imposed on the culprits found guilty of committing these illegal activities. Currently, there are only two rangers in charge of patrolling the BTFC. According to Yeap et. al. (2009), in order to counter the lack of man-power, the management of the park should open applications to the public especially to the local people, tour guides and tourists. This is an alternative way of tourism called as volunteer tourism where the tourists will be the eyes and ears by informing the authority any poaching or illegal logging activities. Other threats like overexploitation of fish resources through overfishing and illegal fishing methods need to be curbed. Once the fishes are gone, the tourists who come to fish will also disappear. This will destroy the tourism industry of BTFC. Regulations must be put in place to control and regulate fishing activities, be it fishing for food or sport fishing.

Conclusion

The *orang asli* is now a minority group, despite the fact that they are legally the “original” people who first set foot in the country. They are now largely marginalised and are classified as the “poorest of the poor” in a country that is blessed with rich resources. Malaysia is rapidly developing into a developed nation, but the *orang asli* has not kept pace and is left behind. They were once known to be talented hunters and gatherers, but even those skills are gradually eroded as many of the young *Orang Asli* today have lost their traditional skills. In this study, although 39.5 % of the respondents claimed that they are still gatherers and hunters, the stark reality is that they do this by the fringe and periphery of the forest. That too they do it during the day without spending the night in the forest. They no longer have the ability to go deep into the forests and spend weeks on one hunting trip as the majority of them possess little skills in survival in the deep forests. The majority of them have also admitted that they have no ability or talent to live in the forests compared to their grandparents or ancestors. In a way, bringing them into the mainstream of development has improved their education and livelihood, but has also led to the demise of their traditional skills. These skills that remain with some of the elders need to be passed on and this is where training needs to be facilitated by government and NGOs. These skills can be used effectively in ecotourism. The *orang asli* knows the BTFC forests like the back of their hands. With added traditional skills, they can be the best tourists guides in ecotourism in the forests. In relation to this, BTFC largely depends on the rich natural heritage to lure in tourists. BTFC has the vast potentials to be recognised as a world class ecotourism destination that combines economic development with environmental conservation and social equity. This can be done with proper planning and execution via a smart-partnership between government, private sector and NGOs. However, this study has shown that the perils and threats posed by poaching, uncontrolled logging and mis-management issues (incoherent policies between state and federal government, inadequate numbers of rangers to guard and patrol BTFC, overfishing, invasive species, water contamination etc) are the threats and dangers that need to be addressed before BTFC can move towards sustainable tourism that leads eventually to sustainable development. Stakeholders need to work together. The Temenggor Forest reserve needs greater protection and there is no other greater protection than to gazette it into a National or State Park like Royal Belum. The results of this study show that ecotourism has great potentials but the *orang asli* community enjoys very little of the tourism benefits. Instead, *orang asli* cultures are eroded, their natural habitat on which they rely on for their subsistence increasingly destroyed, and their villages encroached upon. Ecotourism needs to find

a balance between economics, environment and social equity, viz. where the orang asli community is involved and enjoys equally the benefits to ensure its sustainability in BTFC.

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