

LOCAL COMMUNITIES READINESS AND WILLINGNESS IN TURTLE-BASED ECOTOURISM: CASE STUDY OF TURTLE CONSERVATION AREA IN MELAKA MALAYSIA

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Abstract: The developments of the tourism industry in coastal area are very aggressive. However, the development of tourism in Melaka generally has affected the conservation initiatives on the ecosystem of Hawksbill Turtle. Hawksbill turtle is one of the species that nearing extinction. In response to this crisis, governments, communities, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are forming new partnerships to increase protection for sea turtles. Ecotourism has been defined as a form of nature-based tourism in the marketplace, it is also a responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the wellbeing of local people. Hence, this research aims to look forward into engaging the local community as community ecotourism business leaders and environmental stewards in the turtle-based ecotourism. This research constructed based on three main objectives: (i) to identify the awareness level of the local community on issues related to turtle conservation and tourism industry; (ii) to discover the local community willingness and readiness to involve in turtle-based ecotourism and conservation; and (iii) to determine the alternative resources of income that are tied to conservation for the benefit of local people that suitable in turtle-based ecotourism. Kampung Padang Kemunting has been chosen as the case study area since its location closed to the turtle landing area. By applying qualitative method of in-depth interview with the local community and related organization that involve directly and indirectly, it would gain a comprehensive understanding of turtle-based ecotourism, the awareness and motivation factors level of community, as well as the challenges while promoting ecotourism. Overall, a significant level of involvement in ecotourism activities is demonstrated by the local community. The findings are themed into three categories; (i) awareness of the impacts, (ii) potential resources for ecotourism and (iii) motivational factors and empowerment.

Keywords: Local Community Participation, Turtle-based Ecotourism, Turtle Conservation, Readiness and Willingness and Community Empowerment

Introduction

The consequence of community participation in tourism planning has become increasingly prominent. According to Lin & Simmons, (2017) public participation can be considered as a cornerstone of sustainable tourism planning. Tourism industry has become one of the agents of transformation in every destination. Tourism also becomes the symbol to support the communities especially in changing the economics atmosphere. This is because the ability of the tourism industry to generate income, currency exchanges as well as provides the employment opportunity. (Hanafiah, Jamaluddin & Zulkifly, 2013). According to Prabhakaran, Nair & Ramachandran (2014), tourism has the prospective to mark a positive economic influence. Many communities, particularly in the developing world, are unaware of the costs and difficulties associated with this rapid transformation of development. As a result, engaging locals in taking part with tourism development and planning are one of the specific solutions (Beaumont, 2001).

The successful of local community engagement can be seen based from some previous study such as the emergence of pro-poor tourism, Community Based Tourism and ecotourism that set to benefit the local communities through tourism (Ching, Hamzah, & Khalifah, 2010). In the case of turtle-based ecotourism, local community involvement is needed through the effort of conservation relay on the attitude of people surrounding the area. Frazier, (1999) stated that community-focused conservation initiatives that rely on participatory involvement of local citizens may not only offer substitute activities (alternatives) to sea turtle exploitation but might also have the added benefit of promoting positive environmental attitudes towards sea turtle conservation and the resulting voluntary compliance with existing.

In Fisheries Act of 1985, the government emphasizes the conservation of turtles and its objectives, management and development, also prohibits all types of harassments towards turtles, including illegal poaching and trading, capturing and killing, disturbance while nesting, and usage of detrimental fishing gears. However, open turtle egg trading and consumption are still rampant. Consumption of eggs is still allowed, which encourages trading and demand to raise, both in public or in the black market. Not every state law is necessarily strict and centralized, especially with the Federal Law to ban the consumption of turtle eggs.

The locals' perception on the importance of turtle conservation needs to be highlighted as it shows that locals are unperturbed by the declining number of total population in recent years; locals are not aware of the importance of turtle in the marine ecosystem and locals could not differentiate between marine turtles with freshwater turtles. Although many young respondents stated that education has increased their awareness on the importance of turtle conservation, it is still lacking among older respondents. (Abd Mutalib, Fadzly & Foo, 2013)

Threats to sea turtle populations are growing, especially because of human activities and these underline the importance of finding an economic rationale to conserve the remaining species. Economic benefits from turtle-based tourism can provide such a rationale. However, such tourism must manage appropriately if it is to be sustained. This study seeks to investigate the readiness of community participation in turtle conservation, which implies that conducting a case study at the community level is an appropriate research strategy. The strength of this study is that it brings together perspectives from key tourism stakeholders (ordinary members of the community, decision-makers within the community, tourism businesses and NGOs) at the micro level, where little tourism research on this topic has been done (Muganda, 2009).

This research constructed based on three main objectives: (i) to identify the awareness level of the local community on issues related to turtle conservation and tourism industry; (ii) to discover the local community willingness and readiness to involve in turtle-based ecotourism and conservation; and (iii) to determine the alternative resources of income that are tied to conservation for the benefit of local people that suitable in turtle-based ecotourism.

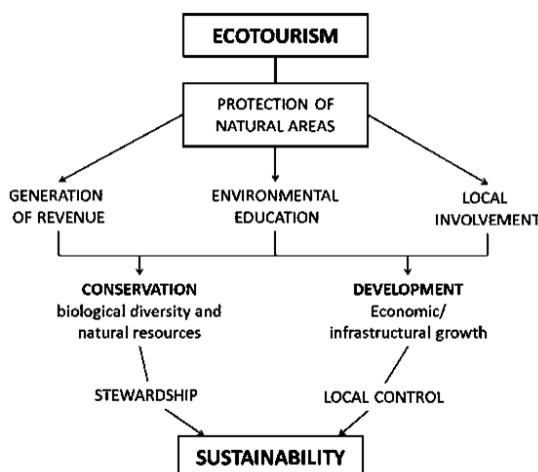
Literature Review

Community Participation in Turtle-based Ecotourism

In ecotourism, natural areas and local populations are unite in a symbiotic relationship through the introduction of tourism. The turtle watching can be as an example on turtle-based ecotourism, consisting to facilitate viewing and interaction with tourists (Tisdell & Wilson, 2005). This activity consists of three programs that include; watching the turtle laying eggs, which usually takes time at night where the turtle usually lands. The second program is watching the eggs being transfer into the hatcheries. The third program is watching the hatchlings released to the sea. (WWF,2016)

Turtle-based ecotourism can generate income, provide employment, and at the same time support the conservation efforts of sea turtles (Tisdell & Wilson, 2001). The experience also will lead to the educational and this can assist in preserving and conserving sea turtles for future generations. Turtle viewing can be one of the alternative to increase the public awareness of the threats facing by sea turtles and their habitats (Gampell, 1999). Furthermore, Wilson and Tisdell (2001) state that sustainable sea turtle-based ecotourism becomes even more valuable and important considering the increasing threats to sea turtles during the last few decades. These have contributed to a sharp decline in populations of turtles worldwide. However, turtle-based ecotourism need education and involvement of local people to make it success (Aref, 2011).

Figure 1: The relationship between local community and conservation



Source: Ross & Wall (1999)

The following figure is congruent with the above definitions. Ecotourism is view as a means of protecting natural areas through the generation of revenues, environmental education and the involvement of local people, which is in both decisions regarding appropriate developments and associated benefits. In such ways, both conservation and development will promote in a sustainable form (Ross & Wall, 1999)

From the figure, the local involvement is one of the factors that contribute or effect the conservation of the biological diversity and natural resources. It can be achieved through the stewardship. According to the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, (2015) stewardship is a process by which local communities, governmental agencies, NGOs, and the tourism industry takes a multi-stakeholder approach to maintain the environmental, cultural, economic, and aesthetic integrity of the area. Vargas-Sanchez (2014) supported that, all municipalities or governments are the exact parties that need to invest and develop tourism products in certain area as well as the contribution of the local communities.

The involvement of neighboring communities is a prerequisite to increasing realization for conservation to succeed, (Borrini-Feyerabend, Pimbert, Farvar, Kothari, & Renard, 2004). Furthermore, the relationship between local community and conservation refer to ecotourism concept. According to World Conservation Unions (IUCN), ecotourism can be defined as environmentally responsible travel. It is also visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas that will make the visitor enjoy and appreciate nature to promotes conservation. Ecotourism also will have low visitor impact and provides for beneficially active socioeconomic involvement of local populations.

The engagement of human recreational with wildlife is not purposefully removed or permanently affected the focal organism. Developing wildlife tourism attractions will help to secure the long-term conservation of wildlife and their habitats. Tremblay (2001) have mention that wildlife-viewing has been described as non-consumptive. Non-Consumptive Wildlife Tourism (NCWT) experiences were perceived to be more engaging, exciting, memorable and transformative than captive wildlife viewing experience (Packer & Ballantyne, 2012).

Based from the case study of turtle conservation in Malaysia by Mutalib, Fadzly & Foo (2013), locals' perception on the importance of turtle conservation needs to be highlighted as it shows that locals are still by the declining number of total population in recent years. This was stated by youngsters that education has increased their awareness on the importance of turtle conservation, however it is still lacking among elderly (Abd Mutalib et al. 2013). Threats to sea turtle populations are growing, especially because of human activities and these underlines the importance of finding an economic rationale to conserve the remaining species. Economic benefits from turtle-based ecotourism can provide such a rationale. However, such tourism must manage appropriately if it is to be sustain (Kline & Slocum, 2015).

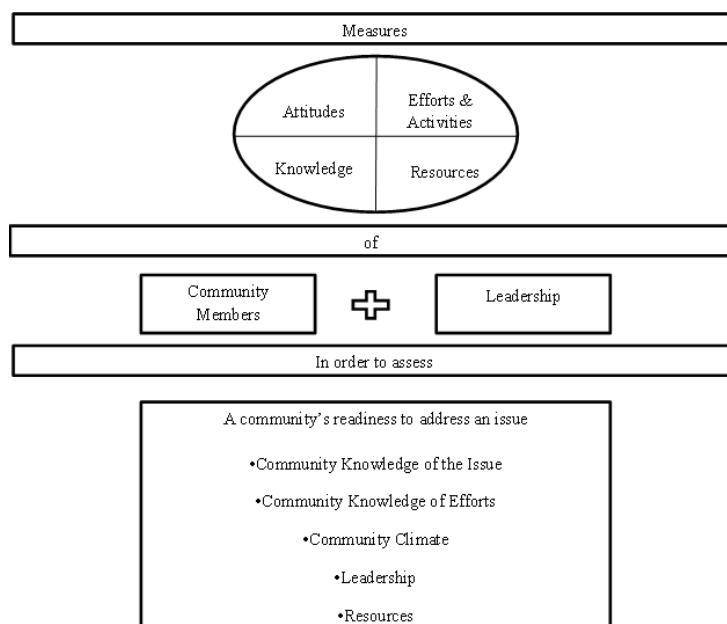
The initiatives to safeguard and protect the sea turtles not led only by the respective states and government departments, but also by concerned non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like the WWF and other wildlife and nature societies. In Malaysia, sea turtle sanctuaries and hatcheries had helped to revive and grow, albeit slowly, the dwindling sea turtle population in the country over the year. There is better hope and confidence that the number of sea turtles and their species found in the country will slowly rise again (Malaysia Wildlife and Nature, 2009). The Fisheries Department of Malaysia mostly manages the turtle's sanctuaries and hatcheries that involve local community. One of the sanctuaries that involve local community in turtle-based ecotourism was Community based Turtle Conservation in Ma' Daerah (WWF,2009).

Community Readiness and Awareness Theory

The community readiness theory is based on the premise that communities, using a systematic method, can be moved through a series of stages to develop and implement effective programs (Khatun, Heywood, Ray, Bhuiya & Lian, 2016). The first step is to form a responsible local team and prepare that team to use the readiness model. The next step for the team is to determine their community's stage of readiness for the problem involved (Thurman, 2000). The level of readiness holds great importance in that specific intervention exist appropriate to each stage of readiness. According to Khatun et. al, (2016), there are four elements that needed to be highlighted to identify the readiness of local community towards a program. The elements are; i) core readiness; ii) technological readiness; iii) human recourse; and iv) motivational readiness.

According Plested, Edwards, and Thurman, (2006), Community Readiness Model (CRM) is a model for community change that integrates a community's culture, resources, and level of readiness to more effectively address an issue. It allows communities to define issues and strategies in their own contexts.

Figure 2: The Community Readiness Model (CRM)



Sources: Oetting, Plested, Edwards, Thurman, Kelly, & Beauvis (1995)

In the figure, it shows 5 dimensions of readiness are the key factors that influence the community's preparedness to act on an issue. The five dimensions identified and measured in the Community Readiness Model are very comprehensive in nature. The dimensions are; i) Community knowledge of the issue; ii) community knowledge of efforts; iii) community climate; iv) leadership; and v) resources (Khatun, et, al. 2016). They are an excellent tool for diagnosing your community's needs and for developing strategies that meet those needs. This model will help in identify the level of awareness for community in facing an issue. (Plested et al, 2006)

The awareness levels for an issue can increase and decrease. If a community is at a lower stage of readiness for intervention, higher-level interventions will likely meet with failure. (Plested, Smitham, Thurman, Oetting, Edwards, 2001). Community members assist in identifying and

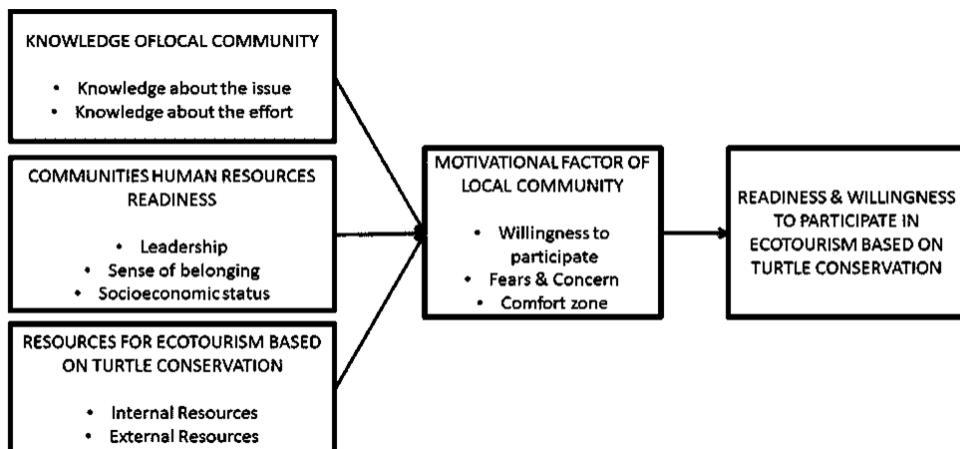
owning the problem, identifying potential barriers in their own language and context, and collaborating in the development of interventions that are culturally consistent with their populations and their stage of readiness.

As mentioned by Plested et, al. (2001) there are 9 stages of readiness and awareness which are; i) no awareness; ii) denial; iii) vague awareness; iv) pre-planning; v) preparation; vi) initiation; vii) stabilization; viii) confirmation; ix) professionalization. These 9 stages provide only the highlights of the level of awareness (Plested et, al., 2001). It should be noted that an important aspect of using the community readiness model for intervention and program planning is continuous assessment of progress and introduction of efforts that are culturally relevant to the community (Han, Cao & Anton, 2014). Sometimes a community working group will find that it is not making progress. When that happens, it indicates that one of the two things may have happened.

Motivational Factor for Local Community Readiness Model

A new model has been developed based from the Community Readiness Model by Oetting, et al (2006), community readiness theory by Khatun, et al (2016) and the relationship between local community and conservation framework by Ross & Wall (1999). That will be the baseline for this research. From the readiness element, we can identify whether the local community will participate in the Ecotourism Based on Turtle Conservation or not.

Figure 3: Motivational Factor for Local Community Readiness Model



Based on the model, the research will investigate three variables. The first variable is the knowledge of the local community. This variable will investigate two elements. The first element was the knowledge about the issue. The element will focus on the local community knowledge about the causes of the issue, the consequences of the issue and the impact of the issue, towards the communities. Second element was the knowledge of effort. This will look whether the community have a knowledge about the effort that been done in the area to prevent the issue. It will investigate the effectiveness of programs and the accessibility of the programs.

Second variable was the communities human resources readiness. In this variable, there are three elements that will look into. First element was leadership. This element will look into the influence of the leader to lead community to participate. The role of leader was very important to motivate

community. Second element was the sense of belonging. Local community will be asking about the attitude of them and the responsible regarding to the issue. Third element was the socioeconomic status of local communities. The socioeconomic of local community will show on how much does local community ready for the ecotourism development.

The third variable was the resources for Ecotourism Based on Turtle Conservation. In this variable, we will look into two element which are internal and external resources. Internal resources refer to the resources and product that been develop by local communities that can be develop as ecotourism resources. For the external factor, we will look into the involvement of other agencies and also the stewardship will be provided for the local community.

This research project is enriching using both secondary data and primary data. Primary data are the new data or original data generated by this research, whereas secondary data are existing data or information collected for a purpose other than that of the researcher (Finn et al, 2000). Various techniques of data collection were employing to gather both primary data and secondary data.

To address the research questions, the research required some secondary data collection. The main purpose was to understand the background of key issues the research is trying to examine. As argued by Veal (1997), secondary data, though meant for another purpose, is consider useful in providing the basis for the research project. Secondary data used in this research, which is mostly quantitative in nature collected for administrative records or management data, was obtain from various sources including the village local government office and the community-based tourism organization office available in the study area. Other sources of secondary data were from newspapers. Government publications also formed an important source of secondary data

Primary data collected by using four major techniques of data collection. These were in-depth semi-structured interviews, community readiness surveys, field observation and document analysis. While each of these techniques is discuss in detail in the subsequent sections, document analysis also served as a source of secondary data.

Data for this study was collect through in-depth semi-structured one-to-one interviews with various tourism stakeholders available in the study area. These people being choose because of their extensive knowledge, experience, expertise, and involvement with the tourism sector in the study area. In other words, they were selected based on their ability to contribute to the overall research objectives.

Turtle-based Ecotourism Program in Kampung Padang Kemunting Melaka

Melaka is one of the last strongholds in Malaysia for Hawksbill Turtle which is the critically endangered species of sea turtles. Annually, 400 – 450 nesting's are recorded in Melaka making this the biggest nesting population in Peninsular Malaysia. Kampung Padang Kemunting is known as one of the main landings for hawksbills, with an average annual landing of 100 nests, which contributes to 20-25 % of the total number of nesting in Melaka (WWF, 2016). However, the location was identified as one of the destination in the Recreational Tourism Corridor (Beach) which will affect the ecosystem of turtle in the Area.

Based from the observation, it has been shown that the amount of turtle landed in Melaka was decrease year by year. The tourism activities that happen along the seaside have affected the

amount of turtle landed in Melaka. Besides that, the local communities also have exploited the turtle's egg by eating and selling them. This exploitation happens because of lack of awareness about turtle conservation among the local community in the area about the turtle conservation. As for that, this study will help in preventing the decrease number of Hawksbill turtle in Kampung Padang Kemunting.

Analysis and Result

Awareness level of the local community

The level awareness and readiness of local community is in stage number 6, which is initiation. At this stage of awareness, most community members have at least basic knowledge of local efforts. The leadership plays a key role in planning, developing and/or implementing new, modified, or increased efforts. Some of the community has shown the responsibilities, and some community members are involved in addressing the issue. Community members already have basic knowledge about the issue and are aware that the issue occurs locally. The resources have been obtained or allocated to support further efforts to address this issue.

The leader in the community should conduct public forums. It will help to develop the awareness level of community from the grassroots level. Not only that, the leaders need to influential people by speak to groups and participate in local radio and television shows to increase more awareness among the communities and other people. The communities were ready to participate and have awareness about the turtle conservation.

As stated by Plested et al., (2014), enough information is available to justify efforts. An activity or action has been started and is underway, but it is still viewed as a new effort. Staffs are in training or have just finished training. There is great eagerness among the leaders because of limitations and problems have not yet been experienced. The improvement on attitude in community climate is reflected by modest involvement of community members in the efforts.

Local community willingness and readiness to involve in turtle-based ecotourism and conservation

The willingness of the locals to participate are highly crucial factors to consider. Their ability to develop practical and logical options also one of the factors. The communities need to decide together the form and function of tourism developments and they will have full control over any tourism schemes in their location. However, residents often lack the experience, resources, empowerment and hence even interest, needed to establish successful tourism ventures. All these factors, particularly the last one, were clearly the case in the empirical study of this research.

The residents' uninterested and passive attitudes towards participation in Kampung Padang Kemunting are dependent on the beach and turtle which have occurred long before tourism was introduced to the place. The historical circumstances play a decisive role in this issue, regarding their mentality and vulnerability. Thus, one must take their background and their social context into consideration.

The local community in Kampung Padang Kemunting, they are willing to participate and willing to involve to the tourism based on turtle conservation as they are well guided from start and being supported time to time. Although not everyone in community agreed to participate, it's a good sign as the existing community can motivate the others. As stated by Khatun et.al (2016),

the willingness to participate is one of the motivational readiness elements that important. The willingness to participate will give effect on the development of the project.

For the human resources readiness, local people did admit that their leaders are involved. The leaders agreed that they were involved on behalf of the village in many decision-making bodies which often include officials from various government authorities and professions depending on the matter to be decided on. In addition, the leaders claimed that they also involve local people not only in tourism related decisions but also in decisions related to other sectors in which the village is involved. This shows that the leadership will play a big role in developing the village.

For the socioeconomic status of local communities, it shows that they are ready to involve in the development. The development could be particularly helpful for the communities. Local people in the study area also considered involvement in the sharing of tourism benefits as a suitable way to involve the local community in tourism development. Both private and public tourism businesses operating in the study area have schemes that favourably benefit local people through approaches such as employing locally, building local capacity, and contributions to village development initiatives.

However, the sense of belonging among the communities shows that they are not ready to participate. This is because; some of them are still wanted to exploit the turtle's egg. They still cannot accept the turtle as part of their families. At this point, the leadership should play a big role in increase the awareness and develop the sense of belonging in local communities to have a successful ecotourism development. The local communities must love and have a sense of belonging, so they will protect the turtle.

Resources for turtle-based ecotourism development

Regarding resources for turtle-based ecotourism, it shows that the turtle conservation program in Kampung Padang Kemunting was well supported. The community are willing to engage themselves in turtle-based ecotourism development. However, they did not realize the opportunities that they have. They need to be approach by someone else that can introduce the concept of tourism and helped them facilitate the arrival of increased visitor and foreigners in their community. These actions made them not only aware of the possible consequences of tourism, but community-based tourism ventures initiate and created.

The local communities need to protect the first resources of tourism that they have, which is their land. The communities need to be more unified, active and engaged to fight for their rights. It has made them more concerned of how to preserve what they have; their nature, environment, culture and community. Clearly, the village consists of beach; Malay community and location for Hawksbill Turtle landed that will be the main resources for develop the Ecotourism Based on Turtle Conservation. The involvement of governmental authorities, several NGO's through meetings and other community projects can help the communities to make the development successful.

As for the product development, the local communities need to commercialize their product. Rather than being sold toward each other, the communities can produce the product and sell it towards the tourist and visitor that come to Kampung Padang Kemunting. The development of kiosk will help the community. As for the turtle conservation-based tourism, TIC with collaboration of WWF-Malaysia and local community can develop a conservation program that can be a package for a group.

Some of the revenue generated from tourism can be used for conservation purposes, not only to carry out further research, but also to bring more beaches under full protection and to address the threats that are facing sea turtles. For example, the revenue generated can be used to reduce populations of introduced predators such as foxes and feral pigs that are a major threat to turtle eggs and hatchlings. In addition, the money is used to fund other conservation activities such as habitat improvement (WWF,2016)

Promoting the non-consumptive economic potential of turtles can also be used as a lever to reduce various threats faced by turtles. Non-consumptive economic values show the opportunity costs of current consumptive practices which appear to be unsustainable. Tourism economic values of turtles can be used as an argument to provide alternative sources of fresh meat and eggs for those communities who are dependent on turtles to meet these requirements. As for the result, many resources can be developing as tourism product. However, the local community really needs encouragement and guided so that they can empower their resources. This will help communities in generate income and produce the tourism industry that turtle friendly. As stated by Barrow and Murphree, (2001), community participation in conservation is sometimes present as a continuum of power sharing between the two parties such as government and community. A community-based wildlife conservation aims at the conservation of natural resources or biodiversity protection by, for and with the local people.

Conclusion

Communities' in Kampung Padang Kemunting portrayed positive perception towards the economic and social impact of turtle-based ecotourism. Communities also wish to be involved in the sharing of tourism benefits. The importance of gaining local community support for the turtle-based ecotourism development as vital components in achieving successful tourism. On the other hand, residence should actively participate in conservation activities as well support ecotourism and community development. Kampung Padang Kemunting need to make some improvement on accessibility, prices of goods and services, employment, entrepreneurial training, income-generating projects, household incomes and the general quality of life though the extent of the contribution varies from one aspect to another to develop the tourism industry especially based on turtle conservation. This indicates that the overall participation of local community towards tourism development in the study area is contributing positively towards poverty alleviation.

According to Kepe (2004), local communities must have the sense to help their community to ensure they can achieve the positive benefit from tourism development. As suggested from previous research, the participation of communities must work closely with the government organizations involvement to educate people about turtle-based ecotourism development impact. That was the same effort need to be done by the communities in Kampung Padang Kemunting to gain the benefit from the development and at the same time, conserve the Hawksbill turtle from extinct and become the tourism resources in the area.

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