



Developing and promoting a highland community livelihood for sustainable tourism: The case of Kg. Bundutuhan, Ranau, Sabah

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Abstract

Located right at the foot of Mt. Kinabalu but 1,200 m above sea-level the challenge of developing and promoting sustainable tourism in Kg. Bundu Tuhan is formidable. The most crucial is identifying existing tourism assets (both tangible and non-tangible) and converting them into profitable business which are aggravated by a glaring lack of knowledge and skills in business management and marketing strategy. This study seeks to determine existing viable tourism assets of village and to establish a conceptual framework on how to develop these assets. The study employs qualitative approaches, such as the use of case studies and surveys. This paper outlines the findings of the ground investigation, which are: (i) the identification of existing tourism assets; (ii) the establishment of preferred mechanisms in turning the assets into business; and (iii) the development of conceptual model for capacity building for the community based on the items identified in (i) and (ii). This paper concludes the study by recommending that a successful implementation of the outcome of the capacity building (the actual execution of the projects) that could lead to the equitable distribution of benefits and opportunities among stakeholders and could improve the well-being of the local community.

Keywords: capacity building, Kg. Bundu Tuhan, livelihood, sustainable tourism, tourism development, well-being

Introduction

Tourism is defined as activities of a person travelling to and staying in places that are outside of their location for business, vacation and other purposes not related to an activity from and within the place visited which not more than one consecutive year (Page, 2009). Nowadays, tourism has become a significant key growth engine in Malaysia, which is one of the core economic sectors of the 12 National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs) in order to transform Malaysia into a high-income nation by 2020 and to boost the economy.

The then Ministry of Tourism Development, Environment, Science and Technology (1996) indicated that nature tourism is the main area to focus within the tourism policy of the Sabah State. Nature tourism is preferred as it is aimed to protect and conserve natural resources while providing a stable employment in the tourism industry. The issue of development and promotion of the Kg. Bundu Tuhan highland community livelihood needed to be geared in a sustainable manner through the development in nature tourism.

However, this idea presented some key challenges in developing and promoting sustainable tourism as the community has the inability to identify existing tourism assets (both tangible and non-tangible) and to convert them into profitable business. These are largely due to the lack of essential knowledge and skills of those related to business management and marketing strategy. Therefore, it is important to fill in

the gap of their capacity by assisting them to determine the viable existing tourism assets and establish a conceptual framework on how to develop these assets.

Bundu Tuhan Village

Kg. Bundu Tuhan, Ranau, Sabah is one of the remote highland's villages, which is located right at the foot of Mt. Kinabalu of about 1,200 m above sea-level. Cool air and peaceful atmosphere are the main characteristics of this village. The villagers are from the Dusun tribe and majority of them are farmers.

Bundu Tuhan Graduates Association is a non-profit organization with ROSⁱ registration No: 1203-10-SBH. It is officially registered on the 18th of May 2010 and their memberships are open to any university graduates who are originally come from Kg. Bundu Tuhan. The association is also accepting associate membership from university graduates outside of Kg. Bundu Tuhan if they aspire and support the objectives of the association.

The objectives of the establishment of the association are to work together with the Jawatankuasa Kemajuan dan Keselamatan Kampung (JKKK– Village Development and Security Committee) of Kg. Bundu Tuhan, Ranau to (i) enhance the education and skills of the people (Bundu Tuhan) through capacity building programs and activities such as education, motivation, counseling (personal & career), seminar, workshop and awareness campaign; (ii) enhance and strengthen the understanding and interest towards preservation of culture, language and beliefs from enculturation among the villagers through research activities, dissemination of information, publication, training, seminar, workshop and awareness campaign; (iii) promote a balanced economy among the villagers through capacity building programs and activities; (iv) promote, enhance and strengthen the economics of the people (in Bundu Tuhan) especially business activities which are based on “rural-tourism” through capacity building program and activities; (vi) promote healthier life styles and cohesion among the people through recreational and sport activities including the revival and promotion of traditional games and sports; (vii) promote environmental cleanliness and conservation through activities such as collaborative research (with NGOsⁱⁱ, government agencies, universities), public discourse and training to enhance the awareness of the people on the importance of environmental conservation and its sustainability.

This study focuses on the process of identifying the current tourism assets in Kg. Bundu Tuhan and developing the strategy to develop these current assets into tourism business through capacity building and research survey in order to achieve the sustainable. The study feeds into the development program strategy for sustainable tourism of the Kg. Bundu Tuhan.

Research survey and capacity building

The research survey started with developing essential profiles of Kg. Bundu Tuhan. Socio-economic profile and tourism information are emphasized on field survey at the the village in order to establish the understanding the people, culture and environment. This exercise also served as the assets and capacities audit, which are an important input to the proposed development program.

Tourism information can be used to determine the viable tourism assets of the village by highlighting the strength of the village and turning weaknesses into strenghts in venturing the idea of rural based tourism as a sustainable livelihood alternative.

A livelihood information survey seeks relevant information in the village capabilities, assets and activities required for means of living. For a livelihood to be sustainable, the villagers' capacities to generate and maintain their means of living such as capabilities, assets and activities have to be focused in order to enhance their well-being (Chambers & Conway, 1992). The sustainable livelihoods development approach link the connection between people and the overall enabling environment that influences the outcomes of livelihood strategies, which are inherent potential of people in terms of their skills, social

networks, access to physical and financial resources, and ability to influence core institutions (Serrat, 2008).

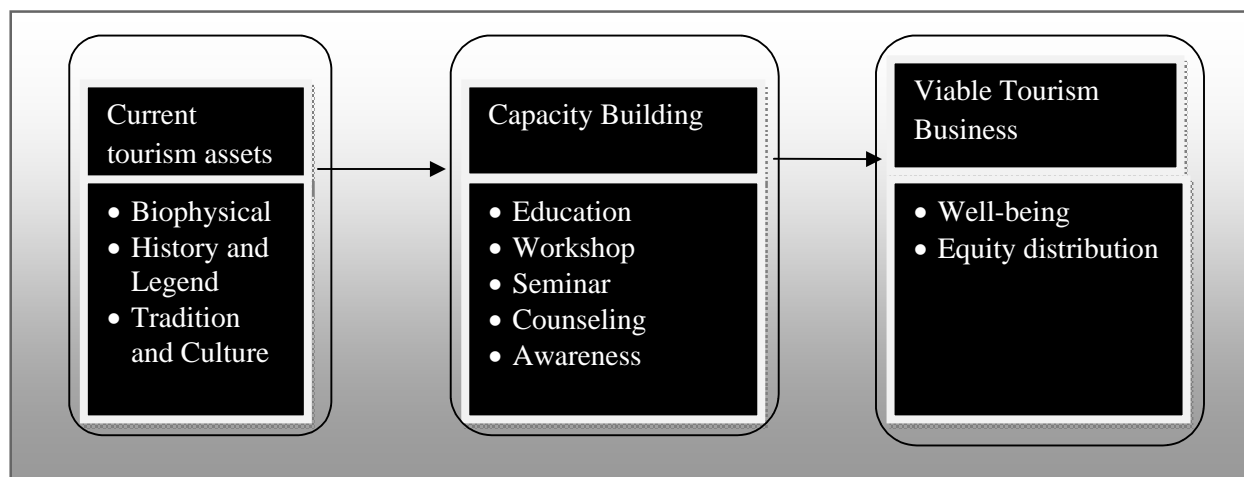
Capacity building is also geared to achieve a sustainable development. The definition of capacity building is broad. In general, it can be regarded as building abilities, relationships and values that will enable organizations, groups and individuals to improve their performance and achieve their development objectives, which include strengthening the process, systems and rules that influence collective and individual behavior and performance in all development endeavors (UNEP, 2002). Therefore, capacity building programmes is thought to be able to enhance the awareness of the local communities, general public and international tourists on the importance of conserving and preserving the natural assets such as the environment and cultural heritage for sustainable tourism (UNESCAP, n.d). In addition, it is also able to strengthen the capacity of the local communities to manage their current tourism assets and thus, enhancing their tourism business in tourism industry through developing their tourism assets with the action plan of capacity building programmes. Capacity building activities does promote sharing of experiences and good practices in enhancing the contribution of tourism in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

In order to promote the success of tourism economic activities as a sustainable livelihood for the people of Kg. Bundu Tuhan, it is equally important to build the capacity of the people first and this can help them to face the business challenges ahead. Capacity building is also enabled the villagers to make collective decision in determining the current tourism assets in village, building the awareness of tourism business and enhancing their skills and expertise for the benefit of the whole village. This study notes this importance and therefore the identification of tourist attractions such as natural attractions and historical and cultural sites; and cultural significance has been carried out in a survey.

Proposed methodology

Qualitative approach was used to achieve the objective of the study. Kg. Bundu Tuhan was chosen as case study in this research based on the requirement of the funder for development project. Mapping, observation and semi-structured group interviews were employed to collect the required data. The study's respondents are the participants from village (voluntary), the Bundu Tuhan Graduates Association, and Village Development and Security Committee for Kg. Bundu Tuhan.

The research framework is outlined as in Figure 1. The framework proposed a mechanism that enables sustainable tourism business to be developed. The survey was conducted with semi structured group interviews and the mappings were used to identify and determine the current assets in Kg. Bundu Tuhan. In addition, qualitative observation method that requires researcher to be among participants was conducted to triangulate the primary data. These observations were made at the workshops and seminars with the villagers. There were 85 participants as respondents including those who are from the association and the JKKK.



Result and discussion

The tourism assets in Kg. Bundu Tuhan can be divided into three [3] categories, which 1) tradition and culture; 2) biophysical and; 3) history and legend. In the tradition and culture category, the participants identified their assets as being *Kinoring, pakaian tradisi, makanan tradisi, seni, Batu Kokohiton, cerita pohon bundu, Gua Semerling, Rumah Panjang* and *Balai Budaya*. In terms of biophysical category, the participants identified their assets as being *hutan simpan, kebun organik, Gua Semerling (Lokasi)* and *Sungai Diidan*. History and legend category see assets such as *Tugu Mat Salleh, Jalan British, Gunting*

Table 1. Current tourism assets vs. developing tourism business

Tourism Assets	Category	How to use these assets in developing tourism business?
<i>Hutan Simpan</i>	Biophysical	Set up a jungle trek. Tourists can trek in the jungle trekking while to enjoying the nature and views scenery. Access fee will be charged.
<i>Gua Semerling</i>	History and Legend	Introduce the history and legend to tourists. Access fee will be charged. Villagers also can make postcards as souvenirs item and sell to the tourists.
<i>Labot Segindai</i>	History and Legend	Introduce the history and legend to tourists. Access fee will be charged.
<i>Sungai Diidan</i>	History and Legend	Introduce the history and legend to tourists. Access fee will be charged.
<i>Tugu Mat Salleh</i>	History and Legend	Introduce the history and legend to tourists. Access fee will be charged.
<i>Jalan British</i>	History and Legend	Introduce the history and legend to tourists. Access fee will be charged.
<i>Kinoring</i>	Tradition and Culture	Introduce and brief tourists on the story of human skulls. Entrance fee will be charged.
<i>Balai Budaya</i>	Tradition and Culture	To be as one-stop tourist centre where tourists can watch shows related to the local history, culture and traditions such as singing, dancing, clothes making, food and drink. Entrance fee will be charged.
<i>Lagenda Pampang di Poyop</i>	History and Legend	Introduce the legends of Bundu Tuhan such as <i>Lagenda Pampang Di Poyop / Cerita Lagenda lain</i> .
<i>Kebun organik</i>	Biophysical	Sell organic vegetables to tourists. Besides that, they can also build traditional houses which tourists can stay and buy the vegetables to cook.
<i>Pakaian tradisi</i>	Tradition and Culture	Tourists can visit and watch how villagers make their traditional clothes. Access fee will be charged and tourists also can buy directly from the villagers.
<i>Seni (Pertunjukkan Palu Gong rentak Kg. Bundu Tuhan)</i>	Tradition and Culture	Access fees will be charged. Tourists can watch cultural shows performed by the villagers.
<i>Batu Kokohiton</i>	Tradition and Culture	Talk about the traditions of <i>Batu Kokohiton</i> in Kg. Bundu Tuhan. However, this is considered a sacred place.
<i>Makanan tradisi</i>	Tradition and Culture	Shows on how to cook and prepare traditional food. Access fee will be charged.
<i>Rumah Panjang</i>	Tradition and Culture	Set up a museum and show the uniqueness of <i>Rumah Panjang Tanpa Paku</i> . Exhibition of artifacts from the villagers' ancestors in the museum. Access fee will be charged.
<i>Gunting Lagadan</i>	History and Legend	Introduce the history and background of <i>Gunting Lagadan</i> to tourists.

Lagadan, Lagenda Pampamg di Poyop and *Labot Segindai* identified by the participants. The results also showed that the participants have identified sustainable development strategy on these assets in developing their tourism business (Table 1).

In addition to the proposed development strategies, the participants also ranked the strategies based on its priorities into a top six [6] strategies (Table 2). This is to establish the specific icons that would represent Kg. Bundu Tuhan for the it's tourism business. The result of the survey suggested that (1) Tradition and Culture (2) History and Legend are very important to the villagers.

Table 2. Top six ranking on tourism assets, Kg. Bundu Tuhan

Category	Tourism Assets	No
Biophysical	<i>Hutan Simpan</i>	
	<i>Kebun organik</i>	
Tradition and Culture	<i>Kinoring</i>	5
	<i>Pakaian tradisi</i>	
	<i>Makanan tradisi</i>	
	<i>Seni (Pertunjukkan Palu Gong rentak Kg. Bundu Tuhan)</i>	
	<i>Batu Kokohiton</i>	
	<i>Cerita pohon bundu</i>	
	<i>Rumah Panjang</i>	
	<i>Balai Budaya</i>	
History and Legend	<i>Tugu Mat Salleh</i>	
	<i>Gua Semerling (lagenda)</i>	1
	<i>Jalan British</i>	2
	<i>Gunting Lagadan</i>	6
	<i>Labot Segindai</i>	4
	<i>Lagenda Pampamg di Poyop</i>	3
	<i>Sungai Diidan</i>	

The results showed that Kg. Bundu Tuhan had its own special and unique history and legend and also the village's tradition and culture also could attract tourists to visit the area. These results suggest a strong indication of which asset that could be developed for the tourism activities and incorporate this into the development programme. For instance, to emphasize on tradition and culture as the icons that representing Kg. Bundu Tuhan, it is suggested that there should be a one-stop centre at Tinompok area and this should be operated by the villagers. Some information packages could also be provided in that one-stop center. These packages would include cultures and traditions of Bundu Tuhan and also the history and legend of Bundu Tuhan, which should entice the tourists to visit these places and stays at the area. Other proposal includes where tourists could choose to stay with villagers in homestay arrangement and join all activities organized by villagers. The substance of the homestay experience can be enhanced by organized shows and exhibitions. Apart from this, an equitable distribution of benefits and opportunities among stakeholders should be ensured to improve the well-being of the local community. It is also proposed that the tourism activities are to be promoted through current social media network such as Facebook or Twitter and websites. Promotional brochures are also suggested to be made available in every hotel so that any potential tourists could have access to the information on the village tourism activities.

Finally, the villagers suggested that they could also enhance their skills in parallel of the development of the tourism business. The development of tourism will provide the opportunity for the villagers to develop and enhance their traditional skills in making local handicraft and preparing traditional food and drink. This is also an opportunity for the preservation and conservation of the local culture, which is considered unique. With this opportunity, future generations in this village could also learn and inherit their local heritage skills and sustain it.

Conclusion

The study has achieved its objectives where the tourism assets in Kg. Bundu Tuhan were identified and categorised and outline the development strategies to develop these current assets into tourism business through the collective voice of the villagers. This feeds to the next development program strategy for sustainable tourism of the Kg. Bundu Tuhan. A successful implementation of the study predicted to lead an equitable distribution of benefits and opportunities among the villagers and improve their well-being. Distribution of benefits and economic opportunities from sustainable tourism is expected to achieve two primary goals which are 1) to serve as incentives for stakeholders to conserve local resources (environment, history and culture); and 2) to improve the well-being and provide livelihood opportunities of the local peoples in an equitable way. In long term, it is suggested that technical assistance such as skills and technology (online marketing, specialized training etc.) should be made available to the villagers to further develop and promote tourism bearing eco concept and community-based concept and its success can be replicated to other highland communities.

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