

## Community Participation and Barriers in Rural Tourism: A Case Study in Kiulu, Sabah

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**Abstract.** The paper presents an investigation on local community participation and barriers in rural tourism. It identifies two sides of community participation in tourism as identified by Timothy [5], which are; the benefits point of view and from the decision making process perspective. It also identifies the communities' barriers in engaging in tourism and uses Tosun's [18] approach in examining the barriers. A total of eighty-three questionnaire forms were completed by respondents from seven villages in Kiulu, Sabah, Malaysia. Respondents involved in tourism were mainly engaged as river guides, homestay operators and Tagal participants. Their involvement in the decision making process were limited to attending meetings and giving ideas and opinions only. The main barriers to participate in tourism were related to their limited knowledge about tourism, lack of capital, unable to communicate well in English, lack of information about tourism development in Kiulu, and limited incentives or support from the government for tourism development. The findings have significant implication to community participation in tourism especially in rural settings. More efforts should be made to ensure many more communities participate in tourism so as to share the benefits of tourism.

### 1 Introduction

Rural tourism is associated to destinations located at rural areas that is developed and promoted as a tourism product. Rural tourism is also characterised with local community participation as they present much of the rural tourism experiences. Local communities played a vital role in tourism development as they provide essential services to the visitors [1]. Local communities' participation ranges from tourist guides to homestay operators, craftsmen to souvenir retailers, as well as providing vital inputs in the tourism development decision making process.

Local residents' participation in tourism development has been widely discussed. However works on their roles and nature of participation together with the barriers that prevents their participation especially in rural areas are quite limited. This paper therefore seeks to examine the local community's participation and barriers in a rural tourism setting and the site for this research work is in Kiulu, Sabah, Malaysia. Kiulu is a small area in the District of Tuaran, Sabah and with a population of over 20,000 people [2]. Its name (Kiulu) was derived from a plant that is called *Tulu* which is a small bamboo that commonly grows on the river banks. Originally Kiulu does not have a name, but since there are so many Tulu trees, local people began to associate Kiulu with *Kitulu* which means areas that have this type of trees. Over time the term *Kitulu* gradually transformed into Kiulu and became the official name for Kiulu town [3]. Located 60 kilometres from Kota Kinabalu,

this beautiful place is popular for its river rafting, zip-line activity, homestay and the Kiulu 4M Challenge – a unique local adventure sport incorporating four activities; *Manangkus* (running), *Mamangkar* (bamboo rafting), *Manampatau* (paddling on a bamboo pole) and *Mamarampanau* (walking on bamboo stilts).

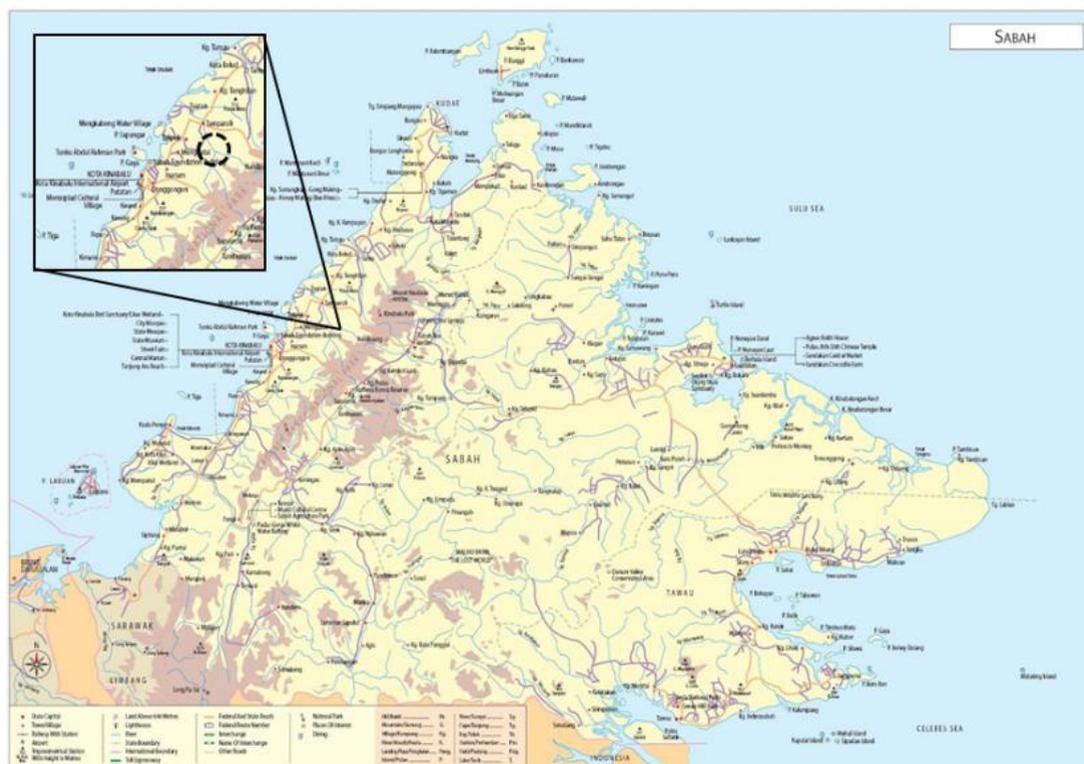


Figure 1. Map of Kiulu, Sabah

## 2 Literature review

Rural tourism refers to visits to countryside destinations. Rural tourism development has been receiving much attention in recent years as a means of income and employment generation especially for the local community. It is also being used as an avenue of diversification of local economies [4]. In Malaysia, rural tourism is often characterised with homestay, agrotourism and visiting specific features such as wildlife, forest, and the local communities. In Sabah, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment Sabah is responsible to develop and promote its rural tourism.

Local community participation in tourism can be viewed in two ways; from the decision making process perspective, and from benefits gained from tourism [5]. Communities' participation in decision making process is important, however in many instances their participation is likely to be limited to voicing their opinions on matters related to tourism development at their destination. This process is what refers to as community tourism. A term used to describe an approach to tourism in which the needs and views of local residents are incorporated in the planning and development process [4].

Community participation often means the involvement of local people or community with the government in planning for development. Without participation, there is obviously no partnership, no development and no program. Hence lack of community participation in decision making to implement tourism development can lead to failure in the community development [6]. Community

participation increases people's sense of control over issues that affect their lives and also promotes self-confidence and self-awareness [7]. Community participation as the creation of a democratic system and procedure to enable community members to become actively involved and to take responsibility for their own development, to share equally in the fruits of community development and to improve their decision-making power [8]. Community participation provides a sense of community to take responsibility for oneself and others, and a readiness to share and interact [9-10].

Community participation in tourism is not without any barriers. There are several constraints to community participation in tourism activities [11-16]. Community participation can be seen as a process whereby the residents of a community are given a voice and a choice to participate in issues affecting their lives. Whether a community participates or not is determined by a variety of factors. One of the factors that limit their participation is lack of trust between members. Community participation can thus be enhanced by addressing barriers to participation while at the same time taking the necessary steps to promote the principles of sustainable participation [14].

The constraints where it include the following which are lack of community participation in development policy, lack of knowledge and awareness, power imbalances between governments and local communities, segmented and complex institutional arrangements and lack of financial resource [15]. Two arguments why the involvement of local communities in tourism development is often difficult [13]. The first is that communities are heterogeneous Blackstock [17]. A community consists of many different kinds of people, often with unequal positions and different aspirations. This leads to an unequal opportunity of community members to participate in tourism activities. Community members with a higher status are more likely to participate in tourism development, and will not always act in the best interest of other community members. The question that thus remains is who and how many people in the local community should participate [18]. The second difficulty identified is that communities frequently lack information, resources and power [13]. This makes it especially difficult to reach the market or potential visitors. The community is thus dependent on other stakeholders, and therefore vulnerable.

Based on a research of tourism ventures in South Africa, Koch [11] identifies the same and two other constraints to the participation, which are applicable to multiple settings. Communities often do not have ownership over the natural resources and land. Thus when land is owned by outsiders, locals are limited by the owners. Another constraint is that most poor communities have difficulties with attracting capital or resources to build the facilities and infrastructure that is necessary for tourism development. In another study on community participation at Thailand, Breugel [16] states that few barriers are identified why the community do not participate are lack of basic knowledge about tourism industry, they do not speak English thus making it difficult for the foreign visitors to understand, the remoteness of the location in combination with small size of village, no public transport to get into the village, miscommunication between the community and outsiders as well as lack of use and knowledge of using computer and internet to promote the tourism product.

Tosun [12] proposed a detailed analysis of the limitations to community participation in tourism by identifying three general categories of limitations which are operational level, structural and cultural limitations. The operational limitations refers to the centralization of tourism administration which makes it too difficult for the locals to become involved, as well as a lack of coordination due to fragmentation in the tourism industry. Structural limitations includes the attitudes of professionals who are frequently unwilling to negotiate with locals, or locals are not in the position to negotiate with them properly and there frequently does not exist a legal system in developing countries to protect the rights of local communities. Other structural limitations include lack of human and financial resources and the dominance of the elite in tourism development. The final constraints are the cultural limitations, which relate to the low level of awareness of the local community concerning the social-cultural, economic and political consequences of tourism development. Thus the incentive for participation is relatively low. Mustapha, Azman and Ibrahim [19] applied Tosun's community participation barriers framework at Tekek Village, Tioman Island, Malaysia and identified all the three types of barriers for local community participation, which are operational, structural and cultural limitations. The operational barriers were unwillingness of

shareholders towards sharing of power, centralization of public administration and lack of information while for structural barriers, the presence of elite domination, lack of financial resources, attitude of professionals and lack of appropriate legal systems. Cultural barriers were related to limited capacity and low level of awareness amongst the local community to participate in tourism.

### 3 Methodology

This study applied descriptive research design and used a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was adopted from previous studies and was pre- tested. The questionnaire is divided into three sections; (a) respondents' demographic profile, (b) community participation, and (c) barriers of participation. Using stratified and convenience sampling techniques, a total of 83 responses were sought from the respondents from seven different villages in Kiulu (Kampung Tombongan, Kampung Talungan, Pekan Kiulu, Kampung Rumindako, Kampung Poturidong, Kampung Pukak and Kampung Tulung) in May to June 2014. The data was analysed using descriptive analyses.

## 4 Results and discussion

### 4.1 Demographic profile

Over 54 percent of the respondents are male, whereas females accounted for 45.8 percent. More than half of the respondents are under 41 years old and in terms of their academic qualifications, almost half have had at least a SRP (*Sijil Rendah Pelajaran*) and about 24 percent had pursued for their tertiary education. Farmers (57.8%) make the largest group in this sample.

**Table 1.** Demographic Profile of Respondents

	N	%
Gender		
Male	45	54.2
Female	38	45.8
Age		
< 21	7	8.4
21 – 30	15	18.1
31 – 40	26	31.3
41 – 50	19	22.9
> 50	16	19.3
Academic qualification		
SRP	39	47.0
SPM	24	28.9
STPM	10	12.0
Diploma	5	6.0
Bachelor Degree	5	6.0
Main occupation		
Government servant	11	13.3
Private	4	4.8
Student	5	6.0
Farmer	48	57.8
Pensioner	3	3.6
Have own business	10	12.0
Currently not employed	2	2.4

## 4.2 Community participation

Only 41 percent of the respondents are involved in any tourism activities in Kiulu and their involvement are as river guides (15.7%), participants in Tagal (an approach to conserve the fish population in rivers by the locals) (13.3%), homestay operator (10.8%) and an operator for a camping site (1.2%) (see Table 2). Most of the respondents involved in tourism are employed on a part-time (82.3%) basis and only six (17.6%) are involved on a full-time basis. Those working on part-time would usually toil on their farm when they are free. Meanwhile, 12 percent of the respondents have been in the industry for more than 5 years and over 14 percent have been in this industry for over 2 years. The reasons for their involvement in tourism are related to their hobbies (14.5%), as an additional income (13.3%), interest in tourism (10.8%) and as their main income (2.4%).

**Table 2.** Community Participation in Tourism

	N	%
Involvement in tourism		
Yes	34	41.0
No	49	59.0
Type of tourism involved		
Homestay	9	10.8
Rafting (river guide)	13	15.7
Participants in <i>Tagal</i>	11	13.3
Camping site	1	1.2
Involvement in tourism		
Full-time	6	17.6
Part-time	28	82.3
Years involved in tourism		
< 1 year	6	7.2
1 – 2 years	6	7.2
2 – 3 years	10	12.0
4 – 5 years	2	2.4
> 5 years	10	12.0
Reason involved in tourism		
Main income	2	2.4
Hobby	12	14.5
Interest in tourism business	9	10.8
As side income	11	13.3

Only 36.1 percent of the respondents reported to have participated in meetings to discuss about tourism in Kiulu and their contribution is mainly in giving ideas and opinions. Majority (95.2%) of the respondents are of the opinion that local community has the right to be involved in tourism development in their area. Respondents also foresee that elite groups have more opportunities getting involved in any tourism development in Kiulu.

## 4.3 Barriers to involve in tourism

Table 3 shows the main barriers for respondents to get involved in the tourism industry. Almost all of them (96.4%) stated that they have little knowledge about tourism. Other significant barriers noted by the respondents are lack of capital (86.7%), unable to communicate well in English (86.7%), information about tourism development in Kiulu is lacking (85.5%) and limited incentives or support from the government (72%) to help the villagers to pursue in the tourism. In addition, having minimal

control over development in their area (59%), the difficulty in finding a job in tourism (53%) and having generally poor infrastructure and facilities (48%) are also seen as hampering the respondents to get involve in the tourism.

**Table 3.** Barriers to Involve in the Tourism Industry

	N	%
Lack of knowledge about tourism	80	96.4
Lack of capital	72	86.7
Poor command in English	72	86.7
Lack of information about tourism development in their area	71	85.5
Incentives from the government are scarce	60	72.3
Little control over development in their area	49	59.0
Difficult to secure employment	44	53.0
Poor infrastructure and facilities	40	48.2

Rural communities in Sabah are closely associated with farming activities. The introduction of tourism in rural areas has provided new opportunities for the local community to get involved. Local communities in Kiulu believe that tourism can be a source of employment and an opportunity to earn income whether on full-time or part-time basis. This is what Timothy [5] refers as community participation from the benefits point of view. However, in Kiulu, most of the locals involve in tourism are engaged on part-time basis. Interestingly, most of them choose to get involved in tourism because it is related to their hobby. This could be explained by the presence of the scenic Kiulu river as well as the farming activities in that area. In Kiulu, some of the community are also involved in the decision making process. Nevertheless, their involvement is generally confined to attending meetings with tourism stakeholders. Therefore, their contribution would normally be limited to giving ideas and opinions. On the other hand, elite local individuals or groups will have better chance to get involved in any tourism development in Kiulu. These elite groups are usually characterised of having knowledge about tourism and sound resources.

## 5 Conclusion

Tourism in Kiulu started to grow after the introduction of Kiulu 4M Challenge and the river rafting activity way back in the late 1990s. The growth was then supported with other activities and programs such as the introduction of Zipline (a.k.a. flying fox) and homestay. Interestingly, despite the tourism growth, only a small number of locals are involved in tourism activities in Kiulu. Like any other businesses, tourism also requires resources, relevant information and support from stakeholders to develop and grow, and this is what is lacking in Kiulu. Many of the communities are not acquainted with tourism as well as are lacking in capital and communication skills. These barriers are similar to the three categories of communities' limitations in tourism identified by Tosun [12], that is, operational (i.e. lack of information about tourism development in their area), structural (i.e. lack of capital and little control over development in their area) and cultural limitations (i.e. lack of knowledge about tourism). In order for the community participate in tourism in Kiulu, stakeholders will have to address these barriers. Local communities' participation would result a successful tourism development.

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