

THEME: Sustaining Global Development Goals
Through Languages, Education, and
Tourism

18th –19th October 2019 Kulliyyah of Languages and Management, IIUM Pagoh

CONFERENCE

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KULIYYAH OF LANGUAGES AND MANAGEMENT
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA PAGOH CAMPUS



SUSTAINING GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS
THROUGH
LANGUAGES, EDUCATION, AND TOURISM

PROCEEDING OF ILTC 2019 (TOURISM)

INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE AND TOURISM CONFERENCE 2019

Sustaining Global Development Goals Through Languages, Education, and Tourism

FIRST PUBLISHED 2019

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ISBN:978-967-467-015-3



ORGANIZED BY:

Kulliyyah of Languages and Management, International Islamic University Malaysia, Pagoh Campus

PUBLISHED BY:

Kulliyyah of Languages and Management, International Islamic University Malaysia, Pagoh Campus

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Proceedings of the 3rd International Language & Tourism Conference 2019
Sustaining Global Development Goals through
Language, Education and Tourism
Kulliyyah of Languages and Management, International Islamic University
Malaysia, Pagoh Edu Hub, Malaysia 18th-19th October 2019

AYER HITAM COMMUNITY PARTICIPATIONS IN CONSERVATION: A CONCEPTUAL PAPER

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ABSTRACT

Peat swamp forest (PSF) has high potential in delivering wide range of economic and social benefits through developing ecotourism to conservation. However it is rarely to be optimised due to poor performance and involvement of locals as they are been viewed to simply gain benefits from tourism development rather than having cooperation in the process of achieving such development. Therefore, this conceptual paper aimed to explore the concept of community participations to conserve peat swamp forest (PSF) in Ayer Hitam Johor. In such, local participation is vital to ensure the availability of natural resources are well managed purposely to maximise the benefits, minimise the cost and reduce negative impacts resulted from conservation. This conceptual paper is solely based on secondary data in which gathered from journal, articles, research project and manual.

Keywords: Local Benefits; Local Community Participation, Peat Swamp Forest; Sustainable Development;

1. INTRODUCTION

Large numbers of peat swamp forest (PSF) in worldwide mainly in Malaysia provide multiple range of benefits purposely to satisfy human needs and for life resources which turns the locals to involve into conservation. Ecotourism for instance has represents to strive for maximizing social and economic benefits and act as a development tool which also helps to maintain the ecosystem, minimizing the negative impacts while increasing the use of local resources. As mentioned by Teressa (2015), ecotourism considered as a crucial element which claimed as a fastest growing segment of tourism industry and become an accessibility of global economy growth. While receiving continuously goods and benefits by the locals from PSF, these forests however have already remained under threat with loss of biodiversity and resources resulted by lack of systematic land use planning, developing more tourism facilities that relies from tourism demand (Kipkeu et al., 2014). Simply, these particular forests are rarely to be optimised due to poor performance and involvement of locals as they are been viewed to simply gain benefits from tourism development rather than having cooperation in the process of achieving such development.

Due to that, the significant values of PSF have been recognised by the local and authorities to pursue with conservation activities as well as improving the livelihood of the locals. As such, through emphasizing the importance of local involvement is considered to be vital in order to receive goods and achieve sustainability in ecotourism. Kipkeu et al. (2014) stated that the local cooperation is crucial by performing a proper incentives and planning on the land use management which particularly subjected to a multiplicity uses of resources for the locals and wildlife, purposely to achieve the ecotourism conservation. This is because the ecotourism has encourages community to protect the forest and wildlife by offering the locals an opportunity to enhance their well-being and help to receive direct and indirect values such as employment, gaining income, sources of food, water supply for agriculture and many more (Nath et al., 2017).

The development of ecotourism is also considered as a main opportunity that promised to deliver wide range of beneficial and economic growth to the both locals and countries as a result from the form of tourism itself towards practicing sustainable manner in conservation (Tisca et al., 2016). Aiming to successfully achieve ecotourism sustainability of economic efficiency, social value and environmental sustainability in PSF as well are not easy without considering the importance of role of the stakeholders and participation of local people in proper planning and management process. Whereby they need to actively involved in establishing more alternatives to conserved PSF effectively. Thus, this will help to ensure that the locals received the adequate goods socially and economically in return and maintaining the biodiversity at the same time resulted from their efforts on optimising PSF in a good way.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 AYER HITAM PEAT SWAMP FOREST (PSF)

Ayer Hitam Forest Reserve (AHFR) was located in Muar district, Johor and it was the largest and last remaining peat swamp forest (PSF) in Johor. Currently, the particular forest is surrounded by the oil palm estates, profit agriculture crop and settlements area for plantations (Aisah et al., 2016). According to United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Malaysia (2006), "Peat swamp forests are an important component of the world's wetlands providing linkage between land and water, zone of transition happened when water, nutrients and sun energy are combined together and produce a unique ecosystem of hydro-logical, soils and vegetation. Peat swamp forests provide direct and indirect benefits in the form of forestry and fisheries products i.e. source of food, energy, flood mitigation, water supply and groundwater recharge." In short, PSF actually can deliver wide range of benefits towards both local and environment through the biological and hydrological balance as such it helps to improve local living standard which relies on the availability of natural resources as well as able to protect the wildlife and the forest itself. PSF is not just unique with its biological process, but also provide the ecosystem with availability of unique flora and fauna that can be found rarely in Malaysia (Page and Rieley, 2016).

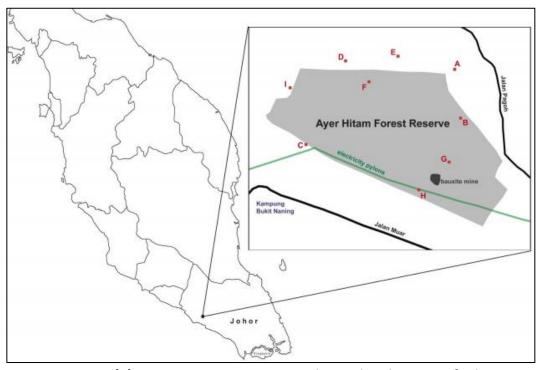


Figure 2.1 (a): Ayer Hitam Forest Reserve located in the state of Johor (Source: Faunistic Studies in South-East Asian and Pacific Island Odonata, 2013)



Figure 2.1 (b): Peat Swamp Forest (Source: ResearchGate. net)



Figure 2.1 (c): Peat Swamp Forest (Source: ResearchGate.net)

2.2 LOCAL COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND CONTRIBUTION ON PSF

Local community generally were considered to have a better understanding and well-acknowledge about their particular area or residency in which they probably know and have consideration on the potential impacts and current situation of the place resulted from the development of tourism activities. Ecotourism for instance has been recognised to become main economic booster but unfortunately the locals does not seen its values and benefits. Apart from that, in order to increase awareness and promoting the benefits of ecotourism mainly PSF through conservation, encouraging the local communities to involve in planning and management is necessary due to achieve sustainable ecotourism. This is because the local participation can significantly affect the destination's quality image and its development as such their participation is vital in developing tourism activities as well as protecting the environment, purposely to reduce negative impacts, maximise the local benefits and minimise cost respectively (Kenchana & Martha, 2014).

According to Timothy (1999) as cited by Kenchana and Martha (2014), participation of local community can be viewed in terms of their planning and management or decision making process and also gaining benefits by the locals from ecotourism development. Simply, the locals were encouraged to empower by having a control in optimizing the resources from PSF efficiently and able to make proper decision in establishing alternatives to conserve the forest as it will directly affect and improve the local livelihood. With the availability of resources from ecotourism itself in the particular area, the local community has right and role to be involved and controlled on the development and management in order for them to received major benefits resulted from the conservation actions (Giriwati et al., 2019).

The significant values covered in PSF has promised the locals with its benefits, diversity of social and economic values, offering its ecosystem with unique flora and fauna particularly having biological and hydrological in balance. However, these forest has become under threat, potentially to be easily destroyed with loss of biodiversity by irresponsible human activities such as deforestation, improper land use planning, unsustainable logging practices, overdevelopment of infrastructure for tourism and many more (Kipkeu et al. 2014; Nath et al., 2017). Besides, the destruction of PSF not only affects the biodiversity but also caused to socio economic problems in which the communities who living within the PSF area and only relies on the available resources provided by PSF (Nath et al., 2017). This is actually due to the local communities who does not play their major role in conserving the forest, rarely to be optimised the availability resources in a proper way as they are been triggered with valuable benefits that gained solely from tourism development. Simply, they have been viewed to easily receive the benefits through tourism activities rather than having cooperation or involve in the process of achieving such proper ecotourism sustainability development. According to Page and Baird (2016) as cited by Nath et al. (2017), PSF delivers wide

range of benefits but often undervalued by people on its ecosystem services and seen to be not beneficial.

Therefore, community contribution is essential by establishing strong linkage towards conserving PSF to ensure the impacts are well-optimised, benefits are been maximized and cost can be reduced. If local people are able to commit and involve in both ecotourism management and for economic benefits, then there will be "win-win situation" whereby the ecosystem itself will be protected and the locals can improve their living standard at the same time (Kipkeu et al., 2014). Generally, some initiatives that can be done to protect the forest include land protection, reduce deforestation and having strong engagement with agencies or other concerned stakeholders. According to Giriwati et al. (2019), there is an approach mainly for ecotourism that involving the local communities is Community-based ecotourism (CBE) purposely to encourage them to conserve the forest and can locally controlled the resources for both socioeconomic and environmental beneficial. Higging - Desbiolles (2009) as cited by Mehedi et al. (2017) also stated that CBE plays the role that focusing on achieving sustainability. The concept of CBE as well is the needs of local participation in conservation activities and help to raise environmental awareness among communities. The establishment of CBE has made the locals cooperate, formulating strategies to achieve their goals to improve locals' welfare and promoting ecotourism conservation. Appointing groups to take part in forest protection activities the area such as patrolling and fire prevention and trained the farmers on tree nursery raising are some effective ways to conserve the forest and produce experience workers who specialized in agriculture to enhance PSF. Other alternatives that can also be done by the locals to protect PSF mainly through education in which involving students or residents to participate in conservation activities such as tree planting, introducing environmental knowledge by creating awareness on the importance of PSF and their role of protection for future generations (Nath et al., 2017).

2.3 VALUES RECEIVED BY LOCAL FROM PSF CONSERVATION

Nath et al. (2017) mentioned that some of the local communities are dependent on PSF for their livelihoods. Therefore, community contribution is essential by establishing strong linkage towards conserving PSF to ensure the impacts are well-optimised, benefits are been maximized and cost can be reduced by the locals. Raising the community awareness can help to control in optimizing the availability natural resources for the locals and also protect the PSF at the same time. From PSF, the local communities may tend to receive the values in form such as materials which direct and indirect benefits (Nath et al., 2017). Besides, the more benefits received from PSF, the higher the consideration taken by the locals to take actions on conserving the forest and the locals may give supports and contribute in the forest protection activities.

Direct benefits are simply the values that comes directly in which they receive the material physically and in form of tangible product such as sources of food, water supply, herbs and plants that can be used purposely for medication and handicraft. These products somehow will help to enhance their living standard whereby not just becoming their daily supply but also to create and sell for profitability. According to Ninan and Inoue (2013) as cited by Nath et al. (2017), the water supply comes from peat swamp can provide hydrological services whereby it can generate power energy, supplying water for domestic and industrial consumption which actually can save their cost and gain profitability respectively. On the other hand, indirect benefit can be seen in the form of environmental values that include the flood prevention, biodiversity conservation which provide habitat for wildlife and able to release fresh air from the trees. Other indirect benefits are PSF is the place for tourism purposes such as relaxation and leisure, enjoying the beauty of sightseeing and agro tourism. Besides, if the locals are been exposed to these such direct and indirect benefits from PSF, they will tend to increase the awareness of the need of the protection and well-optimise the availability natural resources for the local uses (Aceres, 2015).

3. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this paper is to acknowledge and explore the concept of local participation in conserving peat swamp forest (PSF) to attain ecotourism sustainability development. As a result from conservation, the locals able to receive direct and indirect benefits which help them to enhance their living standard. This conceptual paper is solely based on secondary data which gathered from several articles, journals, research project that related to local participation in conservation mainly in ecotourism. There are several methods used to collect the data and analyse the literature based on previous research.

The research from journal and articles based on the topic was been searched through Google scholars, science direct and other search engine. The terms such as "local participations" was been mainly conducted by previous researchers in any potential tourism area while the research based on the term "peat swamp forest", focusing on ecotourism is less to be found. One of the helpful research article that can be reviewed was Wetlands paper on the topic "Local's People Appreciation and Contribution to Conservation of PSF in Malaysia" which contained the detail results of survey that collected data from local's people opinion on their participations in conservation purposely to gain benefits from PSF. In the same paper stated Focus Group Discussion (FGD) among public and stakeholders plays significant role in terms of creating support and awareness towards conservations in ecotourism.

This conceptual paper has its limitation which it only relies on previous data collection that has been collected by other researches because of the inability to conduct the particular research on our own and all the data analysis and literatures based on the topic was not totally explored due to constraint of times.

4. CONCLUSION

The involvement of local community can highly affect to the ecotourism sustainability In which turn the locals to participate more into conservation activities due to gain social and economic benefits from PSF. It can be seen that local participation in conservation is essential when it comes to planning as well as on sustainable natural resources management of PSF. PSF seems to be viewed as an important resources and need to be maintained as the locals within the area may fully rely on the availability natural resources for their daily living and at the same time they can protect the biodiversity. In order to conserve the forest, some of initiatives can be done by the locals such as through educating communities by create environmental awareness on the importance of PSF and planting trees. Establishing CBE and having collaboration with any concerned stakeholders is also necessary to involve the locals to participate in promoting the ecotourism conservation and increasing awareness among the communities as it will create more welcoming, peaceful environment and improving destination image as well. As a result, there will be more benefits gained by the locals from the tourism development and the tourist arrival to the particular area.

Strong engagement of local communities would also make them locally controlled as such empower them to effectively taking part in management of PSF. High participation in conservation on PSF will able to meet the local needs which help them to reduce their cost by using local and natural resources solely. Simply, PSF delivers wide range of direct and indirect benefits to the locals and wildlife as well. Direct benefits are physically received by the locals such as sources of food and water supply, herbs and plants for medication and handicraft for their living. Meanwhile, indirect benefits of PSF can be in the form of environmental values such as provide habitat for wildlife, flood prevention and also for leisure purposes such as people able to enjoy sightseeing, relaxation or joining agro tourism activities. As if the locals are being exposed to the benefits gained from PSF, they will actually take into consideration on the need of environmental protection on natural resources and striving for ecotourism sustainability.

Nonetheless, the role of local communities as initiator to tourism projects have to be seen as significant implication to ensure participation and support towards conservation. Thus, it is recommended that future research should embark on willingness and readiness of the local communities around Peat Swamp Forest specifically in Ayer Hitam Johor. Nevertheless, the conjectures have yet to be further investigated.

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