

ECOTOURISM AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN THE HOMESTAY PROGRAMME OF SUKAU VILLAGE: LONG-TERM OR LIMITED BENEFITS?

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Abstract

The homestay programme first launched in 1995 in Temerloh in Pahang as part of a drive to promote ecotourism with community participation has since taken root in many other states. This study examines the impact of the homestay programme in the village of Sukau, 134 km from the city of Sandakan. The homestay programme was launched officially by the Sabah Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment on 9 September 2000 to promote ecotourism and to provide support for rural community development. The programme was introduced in Sukau village in the same year but the participants were only active and ready to receive visitors in 2002. The findings of the research show that a majority of the respondents agree that ecotourism development could offer the villagers economic benefits such as new job opportunities, improved family income, and to some extent an improved standard of living. The findings, however, also indicate that these economic benefits are limited because the vast majority of local people are still not involved in the programme.

1. Introduction

In Malaysia, the homestay programme was originally launched nationwide in 1995 at Temerloh in Pahang and was later followed by other states including Sabah and Sarawak. The main objectives of the homestay development policy in Malaysia are to utilise the available resources at the *kampung* (village) level, to conserve and maintain the local socio-cultural life, arts and customs of the village as well as to highlight the uniqueness of village life. The Sabah State Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment have defined homestay as "accommodation where visitors stay with the host families that have registered in the programme, to experience the daily life of the local community" (Sabah-Homestay.com, 2004). Besides enjoying the experiences of the daily life of local people, the visitors would also be able to participate in other activities such as mountain climbing, jungle trekking, cultural dances, wildlife viewing, historical or archaeological sites visiting and the like.

One of the private tour companies is Borneo Native Homestay Sendirian Berhad which promotes the homestay programme in Sabah, including Miso Walai Homestay. The advertisement on the Internet says:

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Our homestay destinations...are situated far from the busy and hectic life of the city. At our homes you will be experiencing the unique yet peace-of-mind traditional lifestyle of the native village folks of Sabah. That's why there is "social immersion" in the lifestyle of the natives of Sabah, at nature's best. Not only that, our homestay destinations are in the proximity icons of world class tourism sites; which means not only you will get the experience of staying with native people of Sabah but also explore the wonders of nature's gifts¹.

The broader question which arises is whether the real situation is similar to that which has been promoted. Do the local people really benefit from this programme? Why are the villagers of Sukau Village willing to participate in this programme and how have they benefited?

2. The Concept of Community in (Eco)Tourism Studies

The definition of the term community in tourism commonly emphasises the "geographical area" as one of the important characteristics of the concept (Singh, Timothy and Dowling, 2003: 7). For instance, Williams and Lawson, (2001:271) defined community as "a group of people living in the same geographical area who share a common goal or opinions".

Murphy (1985), for example, has suggested the "ecological community approach" to understand tourism studies. Murphy observed that tourism fits into an ecosystem because it involves destination areas, where visitors interact with local living (hosts, services) and non-living (landscape) parts to experience (consume) a tourism product. There is interdependence in the system because neither can succeed without the other (Murphy, 1985: 167). The balance relationship between the various components and scales of tourism development, such as natural resources, the local community and the tourism industry is vital because, firstly, the natural resources of the community needs industry involvement to transport and accommodate visitors; the industry needs social support from the destination community to fulfill its hospitality function. If the interaction between these components is properly managed, it can lead to the creation of a renewable resource industry (Murphy, 1985: 167).

Secondly, an ecological community is a group or a few or many species living together in a locality. When tourism development takes place in the destination area, positive or negative signs represent situations where a component is undeveloped or over-developed with regard to the community's tourism carrying capacity. Local issues include the site impact of tourism development and the wishes of local residents, and whether they are interested in participating or not become a crucial element to achieve a balanced tourism development. This is because the unbalanced development of a community's major attractions such as public goods like the landscape, cultural heritage, and community facilities can lead to a welcoming euphoria or antagonistic reaction by local community toward the visitors (Murphy, 1985: 169). Thus, the move from centralised tourism planning (top-down management approach) to community tourism planning (bottom-up management approach) through "public participation" is practical and necessary, particularly in tourism development at a local level. Thirdly, tourism development is a local issue because that is the level where public participation as a form of political action takes places. Past experience with public participation in past tourism planning (emphasis on the business and physical orientation tourism planning) has shown

that participation on a mass scale is not practical. Moreover, a political culture with a tradition of elitism dominant is impractical and unnecessary to represent democracy at local level (O'Riordan, 1978: 153). Thus, current public participation in tourism planning has modified existing institutions and planning procedures to effect social change and environmental preservation, so its extension to tourism (an activity so interwoven with community life) becomes inevitable (Murphy, 1985: 172).

Following on from Murphy, tourism academics have generally referred to community or communities as locals, residents, natives, indigenous people and hosts. Therefore the term "local community or host community or destination community" in this research is taken to mean a group of people living in the specific boundaries of the (eco)tourism destination area, together with natural and cultural elements, where the tourist experience takes place, and its tourist product is produced, and who are potentially affected, both positively and negatively, by the impacts of (eco)tourism development.

2.1. The Concept of Ecotourism

The Malaysia' Ecotourism Master Plan (1996) adopted the official definition of ecotourism produced by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), of which Malaysia is a member. Ecotourism is:

Environmentally responsible travel and visits to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features, both past and present), that promote conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local population (Ceballos-Luscurain, 1996).

There are two types of ecotourism (Cater, 1997). The first is 'a deep form of ecotourism,' commonly represented by small, specialist-guided groups with highly responsible behaviour towards the natural environment. The second is 'a shallow form of ecotourism,' those who visit a destination area for a few days, unlikely ever to return to the same place because they may be more interested in their travel experience and behave less responsibly towards the natural environment (Cater, 1997). This second group of ecotourists can possibly create adverse effects on the environment and the socio-cultural life of local communities in the destination areas if their presence is not controlled or managed carefully.

3. Community Participation in (Eco)tourism Development Perspectives

In general, the discussion of the concept of community development in tourism is explored in terms of participation, empowerment, partnership, community capacity and community change (Telfer, 2003: 155). The question that arises is: why is local community participation or involvement important in ecotourism? Murphy (1985) has mentioned that public participation in tourism planning and management is essential because whenever development and planning do not fit in with local aspiration and capacities, resistance and hostility can increase the cost of business or destroy the industry's potential together. Therefore, if tourism is to become successful, it needs to be planned and managed as a renewable resource industry, based on local capacities and community decision-making. To achieve these objectives will require a more balanced approach to planning and

management than has existed in the past (Murphy, 1985: 153). Two major authors have developed a participation typology, which is frequently cited and applied in tourism community participation literature (Mowforth and Munt, 1998; Scheyvens, 2002; Mason, 2003; Telfer, 2003). These are:

Arnstein's participation typology

In a classic, often cited article, Arnstein (1971) is regarded as one of the most important scholars in participatory studies. Arnstein (1971: 71-73) has developed a ladder or typology of *citizen participation* with eight levels. Starting from the bottom, these levels of participation are:

i. Non-Participation levels: The two rungs of the ladder are: *first, manipulation* and *second, therapy*. Arnstein (1971) and Telfer, (2003) argue, these two levels of non-participation have been contrived by some substitute for genuine participation because their real objective is not to enable people to participate in the development or planning process but to enable those in power to educate or cure the participants.

ii. Tokenism levels: The *third* rung of the ladder is *informing* and the *fourth* is *consultation*. At these two levels the participants have the opportunity to speak and their voice may be heard. However, under this tokenism condition, they lack power to insure that their message will be heeded by the powerful. Commonly in this context, the community just follows the plan and they have no power to change the status quo. The *fifth* level is *placation*, which is a higher level in tokenism because the community is allowed to have ground rules, but the power or right to decide still belongs in the hands of the elites (Arnstein, 1971: 73; Telfer, 2003: 164).

iii. Citizen Power levels: Three levels of the ladder have increasing levels of citizen control. The *sixth* level is *partnership* that allows citizens to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with those in power. At the *seventh* level of *delegated power* and the *eight*, level of *citizen control*, citizens have the majority of the decision-making seats or they have full managerial control (Arnstein, 1971; Telfer, 2003: 164).

Hence, the main strength of Arnstein's (1971) citizen participation typology is that it reflects almost all possible forms of community participation in decision-making and the development process. To some extent, however, Arnstein's approach has been clarified further by Pretty's participation typology.

Pretty's participation typology

Pretty (1994 and 1995) also claims that participation can mean different things to different people. Therefore, Pretty (1995) developed a typology of how people participate in development programmes. He identifies seven levels of participation, with manipulative participation at one end of the spectrum and self-mobilisation at the other. Pretty also included a critique of each form of participation as shown (in Table 1). In other words, participation ranges from passive participation where local people are told what development project is proceeding to self-mobilisation where people take initiatives that are independent of external institutions (Telfer, 2003: 164; Scheyvens, 2002: 56). This typology can be interpreted as a passive versus active participation dichotomy. It begins

with manipulative participation to functional participation, all the power and control over development or proposals lie with people or groups outside the local community. However, for local people, involvement in the decision-making process is a feature of only the interactive participation and self-mobilisation types, while in the functional participation type most of the major decisions have been made before they are taken to the local community (Mowforth and Munt, 1998: 240). Pretty's typology successfully emphasises the importance of the power relationships involved in any tourism development project.

Table 1: Pretty's Typology of Participation

Typology	Characteristic of each type
1. Manipulative Participation	Participation is simply a pretence: 'people' representatives on official boards, but they are unelected and have no power
2. Passive Participation	People participate by being told what has been decided or has already happened: involves unilateral announcements by project management without any listening to people responses: information shared belongs only to external professionals
3. Participation by consultation	People participate by being consulted or by answering questions: external agents define problems and information-gathering processes, and so control analysis: process does not concede any share in decision-making: professionals under no obligation to account for people's views
4. Participation for material incentives	People participate by contributing resources (e.g. labour) in return for food, cash or other material incentive: farmer may provide fields and labour but are not involved in testing or the process of learning: this is commonly called participation, yet people have no stake in prolonging technologies or practices when the incentives end
5. Functional Participation	Participation seen by external agencies as a means to achieve project goal, especially reduced costs: people may participate by forming groups to meet project objectives: involvement may be interactive and involve shared decision-making, but tends to arise only after major decisions have already been made by external agents: at worst, local people may still only be co-opted to serve external goals
6. Interactive Participation	People participate in joint analysis, development of action plans and strengthening of local institutions: participation is seen as a right, not just the means to achieve project goals: the process involves interdisciplinary methodologies that seek multiple perspectives and use systematic and structured learning process. As groups take control of local decisions and determine how available resources are used, so they have a stake in maintaining structures and practices
7. Self-mobilisation	People participate by taking initiatives independently of external institutions to change system: they develop contacts with external institutions for resources and technical advice they need, but retain control over resource use: self-mobilisation can spread if governments and NGOs provide an enabling framework of support. Self-mobilisation may or may not challenge existing distributions of wealth and power

Source: Pretty, 1995 cited in Mason, (2003: 119).

4. A Profile of Mukim Sukau and the Villagers: A Brief Overview

The *Mukim* or sub-district of Sukau (commonly known as Sukau village) is located on Kinabatangan river 40 km upstream from Abai village, 134 km by road from the city of Sandakan and 50 km from Kota Kinabatangan town centre. This meant the visitors, on riverboats or by car from Sandakan town, can reach the village. There is a 40 km gravel road from the Sukau junction of the Sandakan-Lahad Datu motorway. The area of the village is 5.5 square km (Malaysia, 2000: 1). Mukim Sukau geographically can be divided into three main parts; Upper Sukau, Middle Sukau and Lower Sukau². The main economic activities for the villagers of the upper Sukau are small-scale oil palm plantations, and subsistence farming. Most of the villagers actually originated from the middle and lower Sukau, but migrated to upper Sukau to concentrate in the new scheme of cash crop agriculture from the 1980s. The local residents in the middle and lower Sukau traditionally are fisherman, subsistence farmers, hunters and gatherers. Compared with the residents from the upper Sukau, however, the majority of the local residents in these parts (middle and lower Sukau) have been actively involved in ecotourism activities in this area. Thus, the observation part of the study is focused more on these parts of Sukau Village but for face-to-face interviews with local residents, the sample covered the entire village including upper Sukau.

The population of Sukau village, according to WWF statistics is about 2,000, of which the majority of young people have migrated to the main towns and cities in Sabah such as Sandakan, Tawau and Kota Kinabalu. The Ministry of Rural Development (Malaysia, 2000), however, estimates that the population of Sukau village is less than that, only about 1426 people of whom the number of houses is 103, and the number of families 116³. Recently, the majority of the villagers still sustain themselves through subsistence farming (e.g. tending home gardens or hill rice cultivation), hunting and fishing, cash crop agriculture, short term work (e.g. forest clearing, building village infrastructure, contracted rattan collections, boat hire to tourists, oil palm plantation work, and contracted work for conservation projects of NGOs), small scale trading and businesses and so on (Payne, 1989; Azmi, 1996: 5).

5. Community Participation in the Homestay Programme of Sukau Village

The homestay programme was launched officially by the Sabah Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment⁴ on 9 September 2000 in order to promote ecotourism and support for rural community development. The programme was also introduced in Sukau village in the same year but the participants were only active and ready to receive visitors in 2002. In the beginning, there were only five families involved. The Homestay Coordinator of Sukau commented on this development: "At the earliest stage, only five families became involved. Within a month, we received five more participants. There would have been even more, but to be eligible for certification, there had to be suitable toilet facilities. This was an expense for the residents because the cost of installing [flush] toilets is high⁵.

This is the same programme as was introduced by the Sabah government in Batu Puteh village and later also implemented in Sukau. The homestay coordinator of Sukau has elaborated the fundamental requirement for the villager to be able to join the homestay programme as follows:

It must be a family; they won't accept those living alone. There must be a special room set aside for visitors. The house must have at least two rooms. In one room, there must be two mattresses. The toilet must be standard, and "toilet" in the river is not acceptable. There must be a flush toilet with tank and proper plumbing. There must be an enclosed bathroom. The house must be clean; it can't look dirty. That's all⁶.

During this research, there was no commercial promotion of this programme because the homestay management and participants do not have any cooperation with tour operators in Sabah. Most of the participants received the visitors from the Ministry directly or from other specific sources such as local university students. In year 2002, the homestay participants of Sukau had a large group of students from Japan. The Ministry also fixed the homestay package in Sukau. For instance the price for one night, and three meals is RM\$40.00. From that, RM\$5.00 goes into the village homestay fund. Thus, the family will gain RM\$35.00 whereas fares for boat transport, wildlife viewing, fishing and other activities provided by the homestay participants are charged separately⁷. Similarly to Batu Puteh, all the homestay participants of Sukau village were also obliged to attend homestay courses conducted by the Ministry before they began the programme.

In principle, visitors, who want to stay in a homestay, must follow the lifestyle and culture of the village. For instance, the visitors must take off their shoes when entering a house, and have no alcoholic drinks while they are there. The head of each household, however, only gives these guidelines orally. Every family gets only four visitors. It is stipulated that homestay participants receive visitors only twice a month. Visitor statistics provided by the homestay committee show that 34 international and 15 domestic visitors stayed at Sukau's homestay facilities in 2002, providing a total revenue of RM5, 810 (see Table 2). In the following year, 15 domestic visitors stayed in participant houses, and were charged for boat services with a total revenue of RM2,710 (see Table 3).

Table 2: Number of Visitors and Total Revenue Received by Homestay Participants in Sukau, 2002.

Homestay Participant	Number of Domestic Visitors	Total Income (RM\$)	Number of International Visitors	Total Revenue (RM\$)
1. Muhimah	7	530.00	9	1,090.00
2. Indal	3	210.00	5	550.00
3. Sh Fatimah	3	210.00	4	560.00
4. Awang Damit	3	210.00	4	440.00
5. Arijah	3	210.00	4	500.00
6. Suhaili	3	210.00	4	440.00
7. Sharifah	3	210.00	4	440.00
Total	25	1,790.00	34	4,020.00
Total Revenue	1,790.00 + 4,020.00 = 5,810.00			

Source: Data provided by the Homestay Committee of Sukau, 2003

Table 3: Number of Visitors and Total Revenue Received by Homestay Participants of Sukau until 29.5.2003.

Homestay Participant	Number of Domestic Visitors	Total Income (RM\$)	Boat Service Providers	Total Revenue (RM\$)
1. Muhimah	4	480.00	Muhimah	110.00
	1	70.00		
2. Maria	4	480.00	Indal	250.00
3. Sarina	4	480.00	Sh Fatimah	190.00
4. Sh Fatimah	3	360.00	Arijah	250.00
			Sariha	40.00
Total	16	1870.00		840.00
Total Revenue		1,870.00 + 840.00 = 2,710.00		

Source: Data provided by the Homestay Committee of Sukau, 2003

Although the homestay participants claimed that they gained benefits from the programme, it represented only a small proportion of side incomes. This, however, is the main motivation for some of the villagers to be involved in this programme. One homestay participant said: "For me, the homestay programme is an opportunity for the villagers to have a side income together with fishing. Moreover, I feel proud if the tourists come into the village to experience our traditional way of life..."⁸ A homestay coordinator added: "The homestay concept is of course like that [homestay is not a full time income].... If there were a large number of tourists, who knows, maybe it would be enough. The concept is that a family must carry on with their usual way of life, so that the tourists can experience this and even become involved in their activities. It's not supposed to be like a hotel"⁹. Sabah Homestay Director, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment, Ms Joana Kiskey said the program enabled the local community to earn some additional income and benefited the whole village:

In principle, the aim of this programme is to involve the local community in the tourism industry where they can get an opportunity for side income. In the past, the villagers just watched the tourist buses enter their village; for instance in Sukau, the villagers don't get anything, but the outsiders who built the resorts get the benefits... I think at this moment, the villagers are ready. This is only about changing their mindset. Of course it takes time to succeed because they need guidance. But once you do it, the homestay programme can increase their level of income, uplift their status of life and preserve their culture, for instance handicrafts, because the tourists appreciate it, and they are motivated to do it again...So, it was not only homestay participants who were involved and benefited but the whole village¹⁰.

6. The Limitations of Local Community Participation in the Homestay Programme of Sukau Village

At the same time however, there were also the "limitations" or challenges, which could become barriers to implementing smoothly the homestay programme in Sukau village. The problems actually were quite similar to those faced by the villagers of Batu Puteh when they participated in the homestay programme as described below:

i. Lack of capital resources and financial assistants: Many of the participants lacked the financial resources necessary to set up homestay facilities such as renovating houses, building new toilets, bathrooms and bedrooms, buying new mattresses and so on, in order to fulfil the minimum requirement set by the Ministry. The Ministry actually did not have any special budget or allocation to support the participants financially but relied on the State Homestay Committee. The membership of this committee included the Kinabatangan District Office, the Ministry of Rural Development of Malaysia, and the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment of Sabah¹¹. Red tape and bureaucracy, which limits the power of individual members, reduces the effectiveness of the committee, which functions poorly in providing financial assistance. Moreover, they have also given less priority to the homestay programme because it was an "experimental programme" in the state rural development agenda. This means that the financial problems faced by the participants continue and have not been resolved systematically. The Sukau homestay coordinator has commented on this situation:

It is difficult for the programme to run smoothly because there has been no proper supervision [at the Ministry level]. When WWF and the Ministry launched this programme, they appointed someone to head it. But after that, it has been a bit confused. For instance, at the grand launch of the programme in Kota Kinabalu, it was mistakenly announced that someone else would head it. This has led to conflict. The original person said, "it wasn't my name so I don't want it". So there was no one to run the programme and it became "stuck". So, recently, when we called back the originally intended person to head it, he said he wasn't interested anymore. However, his wife then became involved and this has made things easier...¹².

ii. Ineffectiveness of homestay management at the village level. The homestay programme in Sukau village only began in 2002. Thus, the management is not yet totally effective because it is still in the process of development. Moreover, the role of individual committee members is not very well structured. Among the members themselves there has not been much cooperation. For instance, at one meeting, the researcher observed that the filing system of the committee was not in order, and it became a subject of jokes by one of the members present¹³. Moreover, there were always long arguments between some members of the committee and the chairwoman, particularly regarding the distribution of visitors between the participants. At other times, gender issues, such as exploitation, also arose whenever female participants felt that male participants gave them more tasks, workload and responsibility for running this programme.

iii. Lack of marketing. The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment of Sabah claimed that there were 14 private tour operators interested in promoting the homestay programme in Sabah. But none of them, including Sabah Tourism Board, were ready to

promote the programme because most of them were still doubtful about its quality or as an ecotourist product in the lower Kinabatangan area. As a Sabah Tourism Board officer comments:

... homestay programme introduced by the Ministry and we are one of the homestay committee members... [but] before homestay in Batu Puteh is launched officially, we won't say we are going to have it...we won't promote it because at that moment I think they will have a problem in getting a licence from the federal government. We don't want to take a risk by promoting products that have no licence. We are a government agency; we must take care of it...last year [2002] however, we officially launched and produced a list of homestays in the brochures and directories... we contributed this as a sharing committee member of homestay... we cannot promote for one specific place instantly... If they want some help...they will have to write in...and we will see what their purpose is, and their product..."¹⁴.

For that reason, many homestay participants depend much on the contribution and initiatives of the Ministry Officer or their coordinator to promote the programme or to get a group of tourists to occupy their homestays. This is because the participants have no idea about how to promote or market their product whether at national or global level. The villagers who have participated in the homestay programme in Sukau village actually were passive participants.

iv. Barrier to language communication. Similarly to the homestay programme in Batu Puteh, the language barrier was the main problem faced by the homestay participants of Sukau. Most of the visitors want to know more about participants' families and cultural information, but many homestay participants do not know how to communicate, either in basic English or Japanese. Thus, the interaction between the host and guest in the house is very limited. In many circumstances, it was done through "sign language". The Sabah Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment did not provide any assistance or language courses for homestay participants to minimise this language communication problem. The responsibility was given to the NGOs like KOCP to initiate English courses. As the homestay coordinator of Sukau comments about this issue: "At the moment communication is still mostly in Malay. But we have arranged classes... we are not all that proficient, but of course we use English only in our classes"¹⁵.

v. Lack of continued support and consultation from government agencies: The homestay programme in Sukau village was considered to be a top-down approach to development planning. The tourism policy maker introduced this programme at the early stage, but unfortunately there was no continuing support whether in relation to financial assistance, development consultation, or advance training. The data from the face-to-face interview survey showed that only 4.5% of the respondents claimed that the Ministry consulted the villagers before and after ecotourism was implemented (see Table 4). In comparison, 50.5% of the respondents claimed that the WWF consulted the villagers before and after, 7.5% of the respondent claimed that they were consulted by KOCP, 6.5% claimed they were consulted by the resort owners, 4.5% claimed that other tourism agencies consulted the villagers, and 26.5% of the respondents claimed that they did not know who actually consulted the villagers.

Table 4: Official Agencies Consulting Local Community Before and After Ecotourism Project Implemented (N=200)

Official Agency	Frequency	Percent (%)
• WWF	101	50.5
• KOCP	15	7.5
• Ministry of Tourism	9	4.5
• Tourism-related agency	9	4.5
• Resort owner and management	13	6.5
• I do not know	53	26.5
Total	200	100.0

Source: Data from the fieldwork, 2003

The above result, significantly, means that the villagers of Sukau perceived that the NGOs, particularly WWF, played an important role as major consultant agencies from the beginning of ecotourism development. This role, however, was only intended to increase the level of consciousness of local people regarding wildlife or nature environmental conservation through ecotourism and nothing more. As a result, WWF could not take further effective action, for instance in providing financial assistance to the community to improve their participation in the homestay programme. For that reason, the villagers saw WWF as an official body that made many promises in the early phase of ecotourism development, but after they introduced ecotourism in the village, "a lot of their work has been suspended or left incomplete"¹⁶.

Therefore, the related question was asked of the respondents in this research: "Who should lead the ecotourism development process in Sukau village and Lower Kinabatangan area?". The result showed that 35.0% of the respondents thought that a joint venture between local people and the government agency should lead ecotourism development in this area (see Table 5). 17.5% preferred only the government institutions to lead the ecotourism development process in the village. 15.8% of the respondents said that a local people and private company joint venture should lead the development process, and 13.9% wanted a local people and NGO joint venture. This means the intention of the villagers to involve and support ecotourism development in the village is high, but unfortunately it was not very clear in the villagers' minds which official bodies could lead this ecotourism development process the most effectively. Thus, many local participation-related problems remain unsolved, which could mean that "sustainable local community participation" in ecotourism or the homestay project is will be an uncertain condition in the near future.

**Table 5: The Institution that Should Lead the Ecotourism Development Process in Sukau Village (N=200)
(Respondents can choose more than one option)**

Type of Institution	Frequency	Percent (%)
Government institutions	64	17.8
Private tour operators	11	3.1
Government and private joint venture	30	8.3
Local people and government joint venture	126	35.0
Local people and private company joint venture	57	15.8
Local people and NGO joint venture	50	13.9
Local people only	9	2.5
Don't know	13	3.6
Total	360	100.0

Source: Data from the fieldwork 2003

Moreover, there was also a *lack of relevant continuing training* for the local community. The Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment of Sabah provided a week-long homestay course for interested participants, particularly for certification purposes. After that, there was no follow-up training conducted by this Ministry. The majority of the respondents in this research, however, were very interested in having further training in order to increase their skills and knowledge in ecotourism or homestay related-activities (see Table 6). The research shows that 12.9% of the respondents were interested in attending courses or a training programme related to small business management. 11.4% were interested in tourist-guide related courses, and 11.3% in attending further courses or a training programme related to homestay management. Other courses needed by the respondents included agriculture (11.3%), handicrafts (11.1%), cooking (9.6%), aquaculture (7.8%), farm breeding (7.1%), traditional art and culture performance (6.8%), sewing (6.5%) etc. The problem, however, was that none of these courses were offered by any government agency in order to improve local community skills and knowledge, which later on could be used in ecotourism or homestay-related activities, particularly for the younger generation in the village.

Table 6: Types of Course or Training Programme Preferred by the Respondents (N=200)
(Respondents can choose more than one option)

Type of courses/training programmes	Frequency	Percent (%)
Handicraft	79	11.1
Sewing	46	6.5
Cooking	68	9.6
Small business	92	12.9
Homestay management	80	11.3
Tourist guide	81	11.4
Agriculture	80	11.3
Farm breeding	50	7.1
Aquaculture	55	7.8
Traditional art and culture performance	48	6.8
English language	5	0.7
Computer skills	2	0.3
Conservation awareness	5	0.7
Other	18	2.5
Total	709	100.0

Source: Data from the fieldwork, 2003

Conclusion

The findings of the research show that a majority of the respondents agree that ecotourism development could offer the villagers economic benefits such as new job opportunities, improved family income, and to some extent an improved standard of living. The findings, however, indicate that these economic benefits are actually limited because the vast majority of local people are still not involved. The reasons why the majority of local people are not involved are: first, some felt that ecotourism is urban-oriented, and therefore totally different from village-based-economy or agricultural activities; second, some were not interested at all in being involved in ecotourism; and third, some do not have enough capital to invest, and feel that they do not have the capability to be involved in a risky investment such as ecotourism businesses.

Tosun (2000) conceptualised the above situation as *cultural limitations* where the vast majority of the people in the less developed world, particularly people in the remote ecotourism areas, are poor. This applies to Sukau. The villagers have difficulty in meeting basic needs, which limits their ability to get involved in community-based ecotourism (i.e. the homestay programme in Sukau). The fact is that most of the villagers still live at the mercy of government administrators (Tosun, 2000: 625). Although the majority of the respondents of Sukau favour ecotourism development and gaining some economic benefits from it, in day-to-day practice, their participation is still limited to the role of tokenist or manipulated participants (Arnstein, 1971). Pretty (1995) classified this type of limitation as participation for material incentives where people participate by contributing resources (e.g. labour) in return for food, cash or other material incentives and for a short period of time only.

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Notes

- 1 Source: <http://www.borneonativehomestay.com/Homestay/index.htm> (access on 28 Sept. 2005)
- 2 Interview with *Pak Cik Indal*, homestay participants, 20 April 2003.
- 3 *Kementerian Pembangunan Luar Bandar, Malaysia*, (Malaysia, Ministry of Rural Development), 2000 .
- 4 The name of this Ministry since 1999-2003 has been Ministry of Tourism Development, Environment, Science and Technology of Sabah.
- 5 Interview with Homestay Coordinator of Sukau, Dr Isabelle, 19 April 2003.
- 6 Interview with Dr Isabelle, 19 April 2003.
- 7 Interview with one of the homestay participants of Sukau, 8 May 2003.
- 8 Interview with Puan Fatimah, homestay participant of Sukau, 8 May 2003.
- 9 Interview with Dr Isabelle, Homestay Coordinator of Sukau, 19 April 2003.
- 10 Interview with Sabah Homestay Director, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment, Ms Joana Kiskey, 16 June.2003.
- 11 Interview with Ms Joana Kiskey, 16 June.2003.
- 12 Interview with Dr Isabelle, 19 April 2003.
- 13 Sukau Homestay Participants Meeting- researcher's direct observation, 8 May 2003.
- 14 Interview with Sabah Tourism Board Officer, Mr Allen, 16 June.2003.
- 15 Interview with Homestay Coordinator of Sukau, Dr Isabelle, 19 April 2003.
- 16 Interview with Mr Pastor, 18 April.2003.