Case study

Challenges of community-based homestay programme in Sabah, Malaysia: Hopeful or hopeless?

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Abstract
This paper explores the challenges faced by the participants of community-based homestay programme in Dagat Village of Lower Kinabatangan-Segama Wetlands of Sabah, Malaysia. Primary data were gathered through field observation and in-depth interviews conducted with the participants in September 2015 and March 2016. The results of this study revealed that the tourism activities based on homestay programme in Dagat Village have the potential to be developed because of its vast natural resources but it was found that the local community faced many challenges during their homestay operation at the study site, which include lack of infrastructure development, poor promotional activity, lack of trained human resource, safety and security issues, poor local leadership, and lack of tourism management experiences that cause the homestay programme operation to be unsustainable. Therefore, this study recommends the importance of collaboration and partnerships among tourism stakeholders in order to achieve a successful ecotourism development.

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1. Introduction

Community-based tourism (CBT) has been proved to provide multiple benefits to the host destination communities and to act as a development tool (Mbaiwa, 2005). However, some literature claimed that CBT’s contributions to the developmental issues; especially issue related to community development is still questionable (Blackstock, 2005). Blackstock describes CBT as ‘naive and unrealistic’ with the justification of three core elements: (a) being too focused on industry development compared to community empowerment, (b) ignoring the internal dynamics of communities, and (c) ignoring the external barriers such as inequality between developers and community members that affect the degree of local control (Johnson, 2010: 151). However, CBT role as a community development approach and its potential are still acknowledged (Moscardo, 2008; Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2014; Stone & Stone, 2011). For instance, Stone and Stone (2011) argued that despite the problems involving the community members faced by the community-based tourism enterprise in Botswana, the arrivals of tourists actually increased and profits were made. As a result, CBT has brought economic benefits to the local community, and “therefore be premature to say that CBT is not useful for rural communities and unfair to generalise that CBT projects are a failure” (Stone & Stone, 2011: 111). For developing countries such as Malaysia, CBT projects have been regarded as development tool for rural communities and as a platform towards infrastructure development in the country (Hussin, 2006).

In order to enjoy the benefits provided by CBT, it is important to note that rural community is often faced with a number of problems or challenges in their daily operation (Mohd Nor & Kayat, 2010; Pusiran & Xiao, 2013). CBT challenges can be divided into two components, namely internal (mental considerations) and external (physical considerations) challenges (Kunjuraman, Hussin, & Yasir, 2015) that act as a barrier or limit the community to actively takes part in any CBT projects in the developing countries. Substantial amount of tourism literature indicates that local community is often faced with many challenges or problems in order to embark on any CBT projects within their destination (Bhan & Singh, 2014; Dukeshire & Thurlow, 2002; Hussin, 2008; Johnson, 2010; Kim, Park, & Phandanouvong, 2014; Kunjuraman et al., 2015; Lukhele & Mears, 2013; Mustapha, Azman, & Ibrahim, 2013).

Despite the rich body literature on CBT, some concerns regarding the need for further study have been taken into consideration in order to sought out the barriers and challenges faced by the local community, especially the community-based homestay programme (Pusiran & Xiao, 2013). Pusiran and Xiao (2013: 7) expressed that “there are many challenges affecting the effectiveness of the homestay programme and each one could be different from one community to another and research needs to address the challenges found from previous studies and explore other challenges that may influence the success or failures of homestay operations”. Hence, to respond to this expression and fill the gap of the literature, a study was carried out to explore the challenges faced by the homestay programme of local community in Dagat Village, Lower Kinabatangan-
Segama, Sabah. By recognising the potential and value of CBT as a community development tool, this study could contribute to the current body of knowledge related to community-based tourism development in the context of developing countries.

2. Community participation in tourism development and their limitations: An overview

As mentioned earlier, local community is often faced with many challenges to actively participate in community-based tourism projects, thus this situation has contributed to an unsustainable development (Butler, 1992). Hence, hindering factors should be identified and managed in order to associate and facilitate the local community participation in tourism development (Kim et al., 2014). However, most of the cases involving the lack of participation of rural community are caused by several reasons. In the context of developing countries, Tosun (2000) state that the limitations of community participation in tourism development process can be divided into three main components: (1) operational limitations, (2) structural limitations, and (3) cultural limitations. Such limitations for operational components include the centralisation of public administration of tourism and lack of co-ordination as well as information. For structural limitations, a few items that limit the community participation in tourism development such as attitudes of professionals, lack of expertise, elite domination, lack of appropriate legal system, lack of trained human resources, relatively high cost of community participation, and lack of financial resources were identified. Finally, cultural limitations items which include limited capacity of poor people as well as apathy and low level of awareness possess by the local community in the tourism destination. Most of the three limitations presented occur in developing countries, but they do not exist in every tourist destination (Mustapha et al., 2013: 106). Therefore, Tosun’s idea of community barriers in tourism development is applicable and relevant for this study. The applicability of Tosun’s (2000) idea of limitations was observed by previous literature in other developing countries. For instance, Bhan and Singh’s (2014) study in India concluded that tourism activities conducted through homestay programme face several challenges such as poor infrastructural facilities, lack of skilled human resource, lack of proper legal regulations, poor marketing and promotional activities, poor coordination, less awareness regarding conservation and cultural resources, improper management of natural resources, poor maintenance of peace, and security and chaos situations. Aref (2011) indicates that financial constraints are considered as a key element contributing to poor tourism management which limits the community participation in tourism development in Shiraz, Iran. In addition, Dogra and Gupta (2012) studied the barrier of community participation in tourism development in Sudmahadev tourist destination of Jammu and Kashmir, India, and it was confirmed that structural limitation is the main hurdle for community participation. They also further identified the limitations that create serious trouble in the process of community participation which also weaken the touristic destination development process.

Using the qualitative research approach, Kim et al. (2014) studied the barriers of local community participation in community-based tourism in Houay Kaeng Village, Laos. Based on the study’s findings, the five key barriers that were identified include: (1) low education levels and lack of knowledge about tourism, (2) poor living conditions and lack of financial support, (3) busy daily routine tasks and lack of time for tourism participation, (4) local community’s perception of tourism as a seasonal business with low income, and (5) power disparities, institutional disincentives, and local’s distrust in authorities. It was also warned that if no serious actions are taken by the relevant authorities, the community-based ecotourism project in the study site might fail and it may impose low level of willingness for future participation in tourism-related decision making process. Finally, Stone and Stone (2011) indicated that local community participation in Khama Rhino Sanctuary Trust, a community-based tourism enterprise in Botswana was at the dissatisfactory stage. Several challenges were identified as the obstacles, namely lack of communal sense of ownership, inadequate employment creation and dependence on external funding, lack of information, loss of benefits, and an imbalance in board representation.

In Malaysia, several studies pertaining to rural community participation in tourism development have been carried out by local researchers in different geographical locations. First, a study carried out by Mustapha et al. (2013) indicated that there are internal (culture) and external barriers (operational and structural) that hinder the local community participation in tourism development at Tioman Island, Malaysia. Interestingly, the study also found that weather condition at the island is an external barrier which hinders the local community to be actively involved in tourism development process. In Sabah, Hussin (2008) studied the local community participation in homestay programme at Lower Kinabatangan, and it was concluded that several limitations such as lack of capital resources and financial assistance, ineffectiveness of homestay management at village level, lack of marketing, barrier to language communication, and lack of continued support and consultation from government agencies are the barriers to enhance the active participation of the locals. Similar findings obtained by Mohd Nor and Kayat (2010) have confirmed that method of payment, passive community, leadership problems, and conflict in the community are the limitations faced by the local community engagement in homestay development in three homestay villages located in Langkawi Island, Kedah, and Selangor.

Another study was conducted by Kunjuraman et al. (2015) on community participation in homestay tourism development in Bum Bum Island, Semporna, Sabah. The findings revealed that the local community faces a few problems and challenges in their homestay programme operation such as lack of capital resources and financial assistance, language barriers, lack of skills and knowledge in the management of homestay, and lack of electricity and clean water supply. In order to solve these limitations and come up with proactive solutions, the local community cannot be left to stand alone without the help of relevant stakeholders. If the possible measures are taken into consideration and CBT is properly managed, Giampiccoli and Kalis (2012:183) believe that ‘it can provide a range of development benefits to communities, especially in poor and disadvantaged areas’.

3. Safety and security in tourism

Batra (2008) reviewed the Manual on Assistance to Tourists by Bruinink and Slump (1997) found that the main impact on the foreign tourists’ general feeling was their psychosocial effects. He found that when the tourist experienced crimes during their holidays in different locations, he or she may encounter 4 types of psychosocial effects namely a feeling of helplessness, a feeling of being unsafe, vulnerability and loss of control and damage to his or her trust in others. In the context of tourism, studies pertaining to the safety and security of tourists have gain attention of many scholars with different setting (Barker & Page, 2002; Batra, 2008; Boakye, 2012; George, 2002; Page & Hall, 2002; Pearce, 1988; Ryan, 1993). Pearce (1988) identified that an element of personal security is the main important factor for tourist to make choices for travelling to different locations and has been influencing their travel behaviour. If the tourist encounters any crime during their stay most likely they will have bad impression towards that specific tourist destination. Study about tourist’s perception towards safety and security in tourist destination has been carried out by George in 2002 in Cape Town, South Africa, and he revealed that respondents has positive perceptions of safety and security while staying in Cape Town. However, study also confirmed that respondents felt unsafe going out after dark and using the city’s public transport. Thus, safety and security in tourist destination are difficult to manage properly unless serious proactive measures are taken.

In addition, another study done by Boakye (2012) indicates that tourists who travelled to Ghana felt unsafe at tourist attraction sites as
compared to accommodation and in open spaces. The study also observed that the tourists will feel safe when there is evidence of uniformed security operatives. As compared to other country, Batra (2008) has revealed that most of the tourists who travel to Bangkok have expressed their positive perception towards safety and security issue. However, some expressed their concern of being attacked or robbed or even having something stolen. Thus, the author suggested that serious protection measures by the state and relevant authorities are vital in order to strengthen the safety and security issue in tourism industry of the country. It is worth to note that most of the above literature of tourists’ safety and security issue in tourism have been paid focus on the urban areas of the country and it was observed that tourism activities in rural areas especially community-based homestay programme are less studied. In Malaysia, community-based homestay programme is popular among foreign tourists as well as local where it provides unique experience of village stay and the local community daily lives. Safety and security issue in the context of community-based homestay programme is scarce in Malaysia and this is the time for local tourism researchers to pay attention on this issue. This is vital because tourists’ safety and security issue is the major factor for tourists’ decision making process when it comes to travelling (Pearce, 1988). In such situations, it is particularly important to document the outcomes from the perspectives of local community who engaged with community-based homestay programme in Malaysia.

4. Study context: a profile of Dagat Village and villagers

This study was conducted in Dagat Village (see Fig. 1), located in Lower Kinabatangan Area of Sabah, Malaysia. Dagat Village is situated along the Dagat River—a tributary of Tabin River at Lower Kinabatangan-Segama area of Sabah (Fig. 2). Travellers could reach to Dagat Village by road transportation from Kota Kinabalu Town which takes approximately 11 h of journey. If the travellers prefer to watch the natural scenery around the Lower Kinabatangan, they should consider taking the riverboat from Lahad Datu Town or City of Sandakan. There are a few transport services provided by the local tour operators as well as by local fishing communities whom come from the nearby villages of Lower Kinabatangan. The transport charges differ according to the services provided by each tour operators. For low cost or budget travelling, it is recommended to seek for the service provided by local village boatman. Dagat Village is geographically divided into two parts: (1) Old Dagat Village (Kampung Dagat Lama) and (2) New Dagat Village (Kampung Dagat Sinar Baru). In terms of population, the New Dagat Village has higher population compared to the Old Dagat Village. The New Dagat Village was established due to high intensity of flooding as well as the disturbance of wildlife animals that occurred in the Old Dagat Village. Wildlife animals like elephants and monkeys often eat local’s subsistence resources such as fruits and vegetables. Hence, due to these reasons, the local government has initiated and assisted the victims with the new housing scheme called Program Perumahan Rakyat Termiskin (PPRT) located in the new village situated nearby the Old Dagat Village. The total residents of both villages are approximately 195 people according to the Kinabatangan District Office. Majority of the residents belong to Sungai and Tidong ethnic groups and they are all Muslims. It was revealed that majority of the residents of both villages originated from a neighbouring village known as Tidong Village. The migration of the residents from Tidong Village to Dagat Village was due to the richness and abundance amount of natural resources in the Dagat Village area. It is worth to note that both residents in Dagat and Tidong Villages are related by blood. The main economic activity for the villagers of the Old and New Dagat Village is fishing. Some villagers are involved in subsistence farming nearby their housing areas. The main source of income comes from the fishing activities, and the additional income is obtained from

Source: Sabah Forestry Department, 2016
Note: Kg Dagat Baru refers to New Dagat Village and Kg Dagat Lama refers to Old Dagat Village
and local tourism management officials to cater to the needs of the people. The idea of the homestay programme was deeply welcomed by the local villagers because they believe that such tourism development could bring some side income to sustain their live. The main objective of the homestay development in Dagat Village according to the management committee was to provide additional income to the villagers. In relation to this, the NGO that introduced the homestay programme in Dagat Village believed that the abundance amount of natural resources could bring benefits to the local as well as acting as a good platform to introduce tourism related activities, especially the homestay programme. Prior to the introduction of homestay programme in year 2003, a total of 7 households participated in the programme. During the early stage, these homestay operators were not registered under the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment Sabah, but now they are officially registered as operators.

In terms of products offered in the homestay programme, the informants shared that almost all the products are based on the environment around the village area. Homestay products such as river boating, night cruise, evening cruise, jungle trekking, watching wildlife animals like Proboscis monkey and crocodiles and others. These products as they believed could attract the tourist all around the world to make a visit to the Dagat Village. In addition, fishing and prawn-catching activity are popular among the tourist especially Japanese. Thus, the main objective the homestay programme despite economic benefits is to conserve the forest for environmental sustainability. The forest restoration programme is the other popular activity among tourists. Through this activity, the tourists are given opportunity to plant a tree nearby to the village arranged by the homestay operators. This activity is directly enhancing the level of environmental ethics and awareness among the tourist to preserve and conserve the forest. In fact, the homestay operators are aware of and realised the importance of forest conservation until they put this activity as the other main tourist product in the homestay programme. The products offered by the Dagat homestay are unique, and the number of tourist arrivals to the homestay programme at Dagat Village is good in year 2011 and 2012. It was found that around 100–150 tourists both from overseas and local visited the homestay programme in those particular years. Nonetheless, this was not sustained due to the identified challenges as indicated in the findings of this article.

In the present time, however, the homestay programme is faced with many challenges. As a result, the participation of the local community in the programme is slowly demising due to the problems that affect their daily homestay operation. Therefore, the discussion of this paper focuses on the challenges faced by the community in the homestay tourism development that caused them to be in the demise stage. However, the future or sustainability of the homestay programme lies at the community’s participation and other stakeholders’ support to overcome the identified challenges, whether it could be hopeful or hopeless for the livelihoods of the villagers.

6. Research methodology

Using the case study approach introduced by Yin (2003), this study aims to identify the factors contributing to the demise of homestay programme and challenges faced by the homestay operators in the implementation of homestay programme. In order to achieve this objective, data collected from primary and secondary sources were obtained in between September 2015 and March 2016. Primary data collections such as in-depth interviews with key stakeholders and field observation were adopted. Despite relying on primary data collections alone, this study also utilised secondary data resources such as journals, published academic books, unpublished reports from the local management committee and local tourism organisation, government policy documents, and the internet to gather information on CBT in the context of homestay tourism development.

During the interview session, the data collected was mainly on the background of the development of homestay programme and the
challenges faced by the homestay operators in their daily homestay operation that is slowly approaching the demise stage. The informants selected for the interviews were chosen based on purposive sampling technique (Sekaran, 1992), especially those who are experienced in the homestay operation. An informal face-to-face interview was held with the homestay management committee (Homestay Coordinator and his deputy), 3 homestay operators, and the head of Village Development and Security Committee (JKKK). The main purpose of these interviews was to obtain more information on how and why the homestay programme was set up, the daily operation of the homestay programme, the offered attractions and products, the involvement of homestay operators, and finally the challenges faced by the homestay operators in the programme. The informants were identified with the help of the Head of JKKK prior to the actual fieldwork because his knowledge on tourism development in the Dagat Village is considered vast. He was actively involved since the early stage of the programme until the present time. His willingness to help the researchers in this study is highly appreciated and hoped to bring success. The interviews were mostly conducted at the interviewee’s homes where they feel comfortable to cooperate with the researchers. The interviews lasted between 45 min and 1 h. The interviewees preferred to speak in Malay as it is a common language spoken in their daily lives. In addition, the themes of the interviews were created by the researchers and they were generally the same. The responses obtained from the interviews were translated into English and verified by the language instructor for internal consistency. Next, the transcriptions were ready for the process of data analysis. The interview data were analysed using thematic analysis technique (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis technique suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) involves six stages, namely familiarisation, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming each theme, and writing reports. For this research, data were classified into themes according to the responses given by the informants. The findings were categorised into ‘internal challenges’ and ‘external challenges’ for further discussions.

7. Results and discussion

7.1. Internal challenges

7.1.1. Lack of trained human resource

The deputy homestay coordinator revealed the first challenge which is the lack of trained human resource in the homestay programme. During the in-depth interview, it was mentioned that they are currently facing unskilled tourist guide to promote the homestay programme to tourists. Tourist guide position is vital in any tourism activities including the homestay programme because they are the one who can clearly describe and share knowledge about the tourism products offered. However, the three youths in the village had participated in a short course organised by KOPEL at Sukau, Kinabatangan. The short course covered some tourism management related activities such as homestay administration, hospitality, reception, marketing and promotion, and finally the knowledge on natural resources such as flora and fauna at the Lower Kinabatangan region. However, the real benefits gained from the short course could not be seen because majority of the local youths who participated have very weak basic education attainment and some were even dropped out. The deputy homestay coordinator was also one of the participants who joined this programme and he has tried his level best to teach some tourism management issues to the local youths. The observation also indicates that majority of the homestay operators still have some confusion and lack of experience related to homestay management. For instance, the homestay operator is not experienced with book keeping record about the tourist arrivals at their homestays. Hence, it can be concluded that skills and knowledge about the homestay programme are vital to realise the sustainability of the programme in the village. Continuous support and training of homestay management programmes should be organised by relevant stakeholders to ensure the homestay operators are well trained to let them run the homestay programme independently.

7.1.2. Lack of leadership

Lack of leadership has been identified as one of the challenges in the implementation of homestay programme in Dagat Village. The head of the village poorly communicates with the local community because he rarely visits the village. Based on the study’s finding, he stays in Lahad Datu/Sandakan town and only pays a visit to the village once a month. However, to some extent, local leadership is very vital to overcome several problems that occur in the village, especially the implementation of the homestay programme. The homestay operators always refer to the head of village for any activities conducted in the village. The authors’ observation data also revealed that the head of village is being less responsible in the Dagat Village development as well as the community-based homestay programme.

7.1.3. Lack of financial resources and capital

Almost every informant in this study revealed that lack of financial resources and capital remains a big challenge for them to set up homestay programme in line with the minimum requirement set by the Ministry. All the informants faced the similar problems such as incomplete basic homestay facilities. For instance, majority of the homestays failed to adhere to the minimum number of bedrooms, clean toilets, bathrooms and others. The informants also claimed that they could not afford to buy additional facilities or renovate their homestays due to financial limitation and capital. The homestay operators were not provided with any financial assistance from outside investor to help develop their homestays as expected by the villagers. It was also revealed that the homestay operators expected to receive some assistance from the development agencies in the form of training, capital, and proper supervision or monitoring system. Due to Tanduo’s security crisis in 2013, the income gained from the homestays operations were badly low and tourists’ visit to Dagat Village suddenly stopped.

7.2. External challenges

7.2.1. Safety and security threats

Security issues have been identified as major challenges in the implementation of homestay programme development in Dagat Village, Lower Kinabatangan-Segama. Majority members of the homestay programme agreed that security issues around Kuala Maruup have been considered the main obstacle to improve Dagat’s homestay programme survival. All the recent threats received at the village around the Lower Kinabatangan river and Kuala Maruup were caused by the invasion case in Tanduo, Sabah. The Lahad Datu invasion crisis began in early February 2013, when armed soldiers of the Sultanate of Sulu Philippine who called themselves the Royal Sultanate of Sulu arrived in Lahad Datu and occupied the village for several weeks. They were sent by Jamalul Kiram III, a student of the Sultanate of Sulu throne with the aim of asserting territorial claims of the Philippines in the east as part of North Borneo dispute (Anom, Kee, & Zawawi, 2014). This incident had brought negative impacts to the visits of tourist in Sabah. At the same time, Dagat Village was also affected by the negative impact on tourist arrivals to the homestays in their village. Sabah is very popular with many tourist attractions; therefore, a few concerns and views from the state are vital to be addressed in this study. The state’s concern on the tourism development in Sabah can be seen in the event that happened on 21–22 March 2013, where the Minister of Tourism and Culture Malaysia and Minister of Tourism, Culture and Environment Sabah were on a 2-day working trip to the incident sites. According to the report published by KePKAS in their website, it was indicated that the main purpose of their trip was to observe the current situation and the level of security at the sites. As a result, the minister claimed that the security situation was under control and safe for tourist activities at the tourist destinations (KePKAS’s website, 2016).
The impact of Lahad Datu invasion incidence has been considered as a serious problem to the homestay programme at Dagat Village. The notable impact was the declining number of tourist arrivals at the homestays. According to the deputy homestay coordinator, the arrivals of tourists especially the Japanese group tourists were decreasing and stopped immediately after the incident that occurred at Tanduo Village, Lahad Datu. He claimed that this incident was a major challenge to the success of the homestay programme implementation. After the incident, the homestay programme in the village failed to receive any guests and negatively affected the side incomes of the homestay operators. The security issues at the tourist destination are considered as an important element to be sought because the tourists highly demanded comfort and safety. This has been a shocking news to the homestay operators. Commonly, they always welcomed the tourists happily but it is assumed that the situation would not be the same in the future. In relation to this, the economic benefits gained through the homestay programme would not be able to sustain the tourism development (Butler, 1992). The homestay operators also shared their views and stated that without the presence of the tourists, they will miss the potential economic benefits from the homestay programme operation.

7.2.2. Lack of basic infrastructure development

Based on the results from this study, lack of basic infrastructure development in Dagat Village is considered as a form of challenges in the homestay operation. Its location in the remote geographical areas contributed to the lack of basic infrastructures that the community has to face until now. The study findings indicated that the lack of basic infrastructure development at the study site include: (1) lack of 24-h electricity supply, (2) lack of clean water supply, (3) poor telecommunications facilities, (4) lack of healthcare centres such as hospitals and clinics, (5) poor security systems, (6) gravel road, (7) does not have mosque or adequate prayers halls, (8) low standard of accommodation, and (9) do not have secondary schools. Rural communities in developing countries like Malaysia are still faced with many challenges in terms of their livelihoods, in which they are still not entitled for basic infrastructure development (Ibrahim, 2007). This is proven in the context of Dagat Village, Lower Kinabatangan-Segama. The visitors have to take four-wheel vehicles to access the village by road which is not even built with asphalt and many holes can be seen along the way to the village. Alternatively, the community members commonly use the boats to get to the nearest town to buy groceries. To some extent, the tourists also prefer to use the boats service to observe the richness of natural scenery and beautiful environment. In terms of vehicle ownership among the community members, it was identified that only four households own the four-wheel vehicles. The rest of the community members normally seek help from these car owners to buy home groceries and for some emergency cases.

Second, the lack of 24-h electricity supply in the village becomes the barrier for a successful homestay programme. Homestay programmes are expected to fulfil visitor's needs and demands; hence, the facilities at the homestay should be adequate including the electricity supply. The informant shared his views on this issue by stating that the local community has been living without electricity for many years. Therefore, it can be said that local government is not working effectively towards developing the village basic infrastructure due to insufficient budget. Consequently, the villagers are also not able to enjoy the basic infrastructure facilities like other communities in Malaysia. Hence, to overcome this challenge, the local community came up with their own ideas and efforts whereby every household depend on electricity generator to survive. The light generator could be seen at the back of each house in the village. Moreover, it was observed that some of the households have to share their generators with other fellow households who could not afford to buy the generator. This clearly shows that the social ties and bonding social capital play a significant role in their daily lives (Putnam, 1993). The fact that the oil price is high and expensive, thus the local residents only use the generator for 6 h, starting from 11 pm to 5 am every day.

The study also identified the absence of clean water supply in the village for many years, similar to the case of electricity. As for the cleaning purposes, the villagers use the rain water and many water tanks own by every household. On the other hand, during the drought seasons, the villagers use water from the well nearest to their village. For drinking purposes, the villagers normally buy mineral water at the nearest town and have them stored for a week. According to the informant, the tourists are used to the current situation because there were no obvious complaints from the tourists regarding clean water and electrical supplies. However, the homestay operators and local leaders always try their level best to solve these problems and still waiting for local government's attention. There have been many appeals and complaints sent to the local government, but so far there is still no news and solution to address these problems.

In addition, poor telecommunications networks in the village remains as a challenge for homestay programme operation. The only telecommunications available in the village is Digi service provider and the line is very slow due to the remoteness of the village. The informant also claimed that sometimes it was very difficult to contact the people who stayed outside the village to promote the homestay programme due to the poor telecommunication networks. This problem has remained the same for the past few decades. However, serious solution has been identified by the local leaders. For instance, in order to get proper telecommunications network in the village, they asked for assistance from the stakeholders to contact the telecommunication partners. Moreover, informant also claimed that they missed a few significant information regarding homestay development programmes conducted by the ministry or the NGOs due to the poor telecommunication service. Previously, letter writing was the tool for communication among the villagers. However, this method is no longer efficient for a good two way communications. In the context of tourism, telecommunication has played an important role for the tourists in sharing their experiences with fellow members and providing good review regarding the pleasant experience at the tourist destination. Therefore, the telecommunication problem faced by the villagers in Dagat Village should be overcome as soon as possible with good measures by the tourism stakeholders.

The research findings indicated that low standard of homestay accommodation has been identified as a forms of challenge in the homestay operation in Dagat Village. In other words, the number of rooms and facilities provided by the homestay operators does not meet the homestay guidelines provided by Tourism Malaysia. The basic facilities such as fan, tables, and some others are not provided. Moreover, some homestays only provide single room for guests and the room is too small. This could affect the visitor’s expectation and satisfaction towards the service provided by the hosts. Hence, the authors stayed a couple of days at the homestays to experience the homestay services, and they felt uncomfortable during their whole stay at the homestay. It can be concluded that the weather is too hot both in the afternoon and at night. The homestay operators could not afford to buy electronic devices because they are poor. This situation limits their interest to fulfil the visitor’s demands on good hospitality services for the homestay programme. Study by Siwar (2013) indicates that poor standards of quality of the homestay accommodations act as an internal challenge in the homestay operation because they are not able to attract more international tourists to the country. Therefore, suitable and appropriate initiatives should be taken to avoid the possible negative impacts to the homestay programme in Malaysia.

7.2.3. Lack of monitoring system from the ministry and the state

The homestay programme in Dagat Village is considered a poor community-based homestay initiative due to the absence of proper and effective homestay programme operation. It was observed that there was a lack of proper monitoring system from the ministry and the state development agencies towards the homestay programme in
Dagat Village. This could be considered as a form of challenge for successful tourism development in the village because tourism stakeholders only play little role in monitoring the effectiveness of the homestay programme. According to the informant, the government officers never visited the village to monitor the homestay programme for a long time. The reluctance of the officers from both the local district office and state tourism ministry has caused the local community to be unable to actively participate in the homestay operation at their village. The observation data show that the homestay operators are being reluctant to seriously participate because there was no guidance and monitoring activities conducted by the authorities. This issue should be given immediate appropriate attentions by the related agencies. Poor monitoring system from the development agencies may lead to poor homestay management at the village level (Nor, Awang, Ismail, & SFD and few police officers). For instance, the current research was unable to actively participate in the homestay operation at their village.

7.2.5. Lack of marketing and promotional activities

The study managed to identify the informal organisational structure as a challenge to the homestay programme, and there was lack of initiative to solve this issue. The lack of formal organisational structure in Dagat's homestay association has made the homestay operation to be weakly handled. The observation data revealed that there was no legal working committee to conduct weekly meetings regarding the homestay programme in the village. This study also indicated that basic tourism management skills among the homestay operators and local leaders are very weak and low. It was also noted that the homestay operators in the village completely rely on the Chairman of Dagat's homestay. This situation could lead or contribute to the over-reliance among the homestay operators towards their chief. On the other hand, tourist arrival data at the homestay in the village was not properly recorded. The lack of skills and knowledge regarding the homestay operation among the homestay operators can lead to ineffective management system. Basically, the homestay committee informally records the tourist arrival data. In fact, no one actually takes care of them and teach them the best method to solve this management problem. In addition, there were also no proper records about adequate statistics on incomes previously received by homestay operators. This situation could have a huge impact on the safety and security of the guests who visited the homestays. For instance, if the tourists were missing, the homestay operator would not have any idea on how to identify and help the tourists due to the lack of personnel data recorded. This situation could negatively affect the homestay operation as well as damage the image of tourist destination. Therefore, informal organisational structure characteristics of the homestay programme in Dagat Village are a serious issue that should be solved accordingly with drastic measures.

7.2.4. Informal organisational structure

The study managed to identify the informal organisational structure as a challenge to the homestay programme, and there was lack of initiative to solve this issue. The lack of formal organisational structure in Dagat's homestay association has made the homestay operation to be weakly handled. The observation data revealed that there was no legal working committee to conduct weekly meetings regarding the homestay programme in the village. This study also indicated that basic tourism management skills among the homestay operators and local leaders are very weak and low. It was also noted that the homestay operators in the village completely rely on the Chairman of Dagat's homestay. This situation could lead or contribute to the over-reliance among the homestay operators towards their chief. On the other hand, tourist arrival data at the homestay in the village was not properly recorded. The lack of skills and knowledge regarding the homestay operation among the homestay operators can lead to ineffective management system. Basically, the homestay committee informally records the tourist arrival data. In fact, no one actually takes care of them and teach them the best method to solve this management problem. In addition, there were also no proper records about adequate statistics on incomes previously received by homestay operators. This situation could have a huge impact on the safety and security of the guests who visited the homestays. For instance, if the tourists were missing, the homestay operator would not have any idea on how to identify and help the tourists due to the lack of personnel data recorded. This situation could negatively affect the homestay operation as well as damage the image of tourist destination. Therefore, informal organisational structure characteristics of the homestay programme in Dagat Village are a serious issue that should be solved accordingly with drastic measures.

8. Discussion and conclusion

The present study has identified the internal challenges (lack of trained human resource, leadership problems, lack of financial resources and capital) and external challenges (safety and security threats, lack of basic infrastructure development, lack of monitoring system from the ministry and the state government, homestay's informal organisational structure, lack of marketing and promotional activities) that restrict the community participation in homestay programme at Dagat Village. As a result, all these challenges have contributed to the gradual demise of the homestay operation programme. Presently, the homestay programme receives less number of visitors that leads to a serious impact to the local community livelihoods, especially low level of side incomes. The research findings such as lack of trained human resource and lack of financial resources and capital are the main challenges that limit the local community participation in the tourism development. These findings are consistent with the findings found in the previous studies by Hussin (2008) and Aref (2011). According to Tosun (2000), the above mentioned challenges include the structural limitation that is in line with the findings of this study. Based on the results, the leadership problems and informal organisational structure are noticeable elements which caused the community participation in homestay programme to be unclear and less effective. These findings are supported by the previous study of Mohd Nor and Kayat (2010) that states that these challenges could affect the success of the tourism development in rural areas of Malaysia. However, a study by Iorio and Corsale (2014) acknowledged that the role of the local leader in community-based tourism in Visri, Romania is significant but not consistent with the results of this study. Previous study conducted by Mustapha et al. (2013) claimed that lack of financial resources is the minor barrier indicated by the local community. However, the authors still acknowledged that financial resources was still a barrier that restrict the community to be involved in tourism development in Tioman Island, Malaysia. Therefore, lack of financial resources and capital faced by the local community in Dagat Village have resulted in their inability to expand the homestay programme with good facilities which directly lead to capacity limitation in tourism development (Tosun, 2000).

Moreover, lack of basic infrastructure and promotional activities are some of the challenges that affect the active participation of the community in tourism development. These are evident in this study and consistent with the previous studies conducted by Bhan and Singh (2014) and Kunjuraman et al. (2015). These scenarios could be different from other destinations where proper management of community-based tourism
projects has given benefit to the local community and increase their level of involvement. For example, study by Afenyo and Amuquandoh (2014) claimed that 75% of the local community who engaged with Tafi Atome Monkey Sanctuary in Ghana said that they received benefits from the community-based tourism activities. These benefits also involved the infrastructure development. It was indicated that community-based tourism activities could provide benefits to the local community if it is properly managed and implemented (Mohd Nor & Kayat, 2010).

From the theoretical perspectives, this study has utilised the concept of community-based tourism in the context of homestay programme in developing countries such as Malaysia. However, lack of research has been conducted in developing countries on the ineffectiveness of community-based homestay tourism and its challenges (Pusiran & Xiao, 2013). This study has contributed to the body of knowledge on CBT in the case of Sabah, Malaysia. In addition, it is worth to note that safety and security issue is the missing link in CBT, and this study has identified it as one of the challenges for the community to engage in CBT where the low number of tourists arrivals has made the community to be less interested which lead to demise of the programme.

From the planning and policy perspective, a number of lessons can be drawn from the case of CBT in Dagat Village. First, the local community is unable to solve the challenges identified in this study due to the limited capacity (Tosun, 2000). Hence, the stakeholders government, private, and NGOs) participation is vital (Jamal & Getz, 1999) to overcome those challenges. Second, local leadership talents should be strengthened. Local leader can be considered as ‘local actor’ to listen to those problems faced by the community (in the context of homestay operator) and other project participants. This study observed that the head of JKKK in Dagat Village has played a significant role to help out the homestay operators in CBT operation as well as providing some advice. He also mentioned that he will work together with other stakeholders to solve the challenges and ensure the homestay programme to be sustainable for the long run. The question that should be addressed in this study would be ‘is there any hope for the homestay programme in Dagat Village to be sustained? Or would it be hopeless?’ Based on the findings from the study, it was indicated that the local community especially homestay operators and head of JKKK share the common views that the operation of the homestay programme will be continued regardless of any challenges. They believed that serious proactive measures are required to be taken to combat those challenges, and they deeply need the stakeholders’ support especially from the government development agencies. Finally, a proper monitoring system from the Sabah Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Environment is vital in order to identify future potential problems and ensure that the project is sustainable. Tosun (2000) argued that the community-based tourism projects in developing countries need more attention in terms of their operation and the KKKK programme during this stage of study should be continued as a part of this research.

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