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Community Development Strategies for Tourism Development in Langkawi Islands, Malaysia

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Abstract

Community capacity building is widely acknowledged as a crucial tool to foster the process of tourism development. In Langkawi, rapid transformation of the island leads to the marginalisation of the rural economy. As a result, various strategies and tools have been attempted to empower local community participation in tourism activities. This article aims to examine the existing strategies adopted by related stakeholders in Langkawi to work with local communities. For this purpose, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted among 20 local stakeholders including government and non-governmental agencies, community leaders, and tourism business operators. Results of the interviews indicated that the existing strategies and tools of capacity building approach include (1) education and training, (2) small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) projects, (3) environmental conservation strategies, and (4) partnership building. In conclusion, related authorities and tourism planners need to consider local residents' opinions into the implementation process to ensure positive outcomes from the community development strategies.

Keywords: capacity building, tourism stakeholders, local community, Langkawi Islands, Malaysia

1. Introduction

Tourism and economic growth have been determined to be strongly and positively related [1] when tourism is seen as a local resource by the local community [2]. According to [3], tourism has been identified as an important factor in many contemporary island economies, and in most developing countries, it has become a double-edged sword [4]. Economically, tourism is an option for enhancing rural lifestyles and inducing positive changes in the distribution of income

in underprivileged regions [5]. By enhancing local involvement in the tourism sector, local communities will have a high degree of control over the activities taking place, and a significant proportion of the material benefits would accrue to them [5].

However, there are also many hidden negative impacts from rapid tourism development. Benefits of tourism to local residents have been perceived as being very limited [6], and the negatives included substantial environmental damage, cultural erosion, and community conflicts. For example, Langkawi Island in Malaysia is currently facing an oversupply of hotel rooms and chalets due to over projected data, creating unnecessary competition among the resort operators, with some eventually abandoning the islands, leaving unwanted scars to the landscape [7]. These issues arise due to the limited involvement of the private sector and local community in tourism planning, since public involvement in the planning (without consideration of the design) process in Langkawi has been very limited [8]. By reviewing Malaysia's regulations and policies implemented by the Federal Government, for example, in the 10th Malaysia Plan period (2011–2015), one of the key agendas was the empowerment of local community, especially women, to enable them to utilise their full potential to participate in economic and social activities effectively [9].

Furthermore, consistent with the Malaysia Five Year Plan, the Langkawi Tourism Blueprint 2011–2015 was prepared by the Federal Government and the Langkawi Development Authority (LADA), aiming to redevelop Langkawi Island into one of the 10 best island destinations in the world tourism map. Among the three themes in the blueprint which included 'Products', 'Infrastructure', and 'Enablers,' the last theme was focused on efforts toward local community capacity building. For instance, one of the initiatives was to establish the Langkawi Tourism Academy in order to produce more graduates to enter the tourism industry and cope with the issue of talent shortages in Langkawi. In order to place more emphasis on local participation in tourism development, community capacity building strategies may be a good start for the tourism industry in Langkawi towards sustainable tourism development as it allows more community engagement in the management and control over their resources [10]. Under the circumstances, monopoly of power in the local tourism businesses can be reduced via the capacity building approach to help the underdeveloped communities to improve their ability to participate in the tourism decision-making processes [11]. Ultimately, this approach can lead the local communities' move towards sustainable tourism.

2. Community capacity building in tourism development

In the tourism development context, building capacity among local communities is seen as a 'win-win approach' that describes 'community' effort, time, resources, leadership, and commitment directed towards 'community' identified goals and change [12, p. 7]. This approach is the essence of 'community development' that helps local community to improve their ability to participate in tourism decision making and increase their influence as well as enhance local knowledge to access external resources [13, p. 31, 14]. Community development occurs at multiple levels, including individual, organisational, and community, and all levels

can overlap during the empowerment process to strengthen their unexplored skills [15]. Over a period of time, each level will have the ability to manage their own affairs to meet their development priorities [11]. The ability of all individuals, organisations and communities to manage change to incorporate tourism development and to work collectively can foster and sustain actions for strengthening community benefits and welfare [16, p. 33]. Initially, community capacity building at the micro level approach focuses on the individual component and is the target group concerned with programme for education, skills, job training, and social well-being [17]. At the organisational level, community capacity building refers to the resources, knowledge, and processes associated with local workers, technology, management programmes, networks, and financial resources aimed to improve performance and achieve sustainable goals [17]. At the macro level, community-based empowerment refers to comprehensive capacities of indicators of natural resources, people, socio-cultural factors, budgets, policy, political system, education, and socio welfare in tourism activities [17]. Several tools and strategies were introduced to facilitate community capacity building process, which include community leadership, ecotourism partnerships, community-based entrepreneurship (CBE), training and education, and external support.

Community capacity building has emphasised the importance of community leadership [18], partnerships through collaboration between government agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the private sector, and local people [19–21]. Leadership can be used as a strategy to increase capacity when the leaders can ensure active involvement of a diverse network of community members, thus enabling those with disparate interests to take collective action by forming a unit of solution [22]. One of the best mechanisms used towards capacity building is through community-based ecotourism partnership [23]. In fact, the partnership of multi-stakeholder at all levels can determine the kind of tourism that a community wants without causing negative impacts [24]. Three ecotourism partnerships have been suggested that can be either community-NGO partnership, community-private company partnership, or federation-private company partnership [25]. A true partnership can therefore be an effective mechanism to transfer ownership entirely to local communities and obtain mutual material benefits through the joined resources and skills to develop ecotourism [26].

Furthermore, CBE has been considered as one of the successful approaches in benefiting the community. As the small entrepreneurship became an essential characteristic of the tourism industry across the world, this approach was adopted to empower local community [27]. The involvement of the local entrepreneurs from new enterprises that operate within the local community is vital for short-term and long-term benefits [28]. In addition, education and training programmes are needed in the tourism industry to educate residents about the impacts on their community [29]. According to [30], this strategy is able to increase the community's understanding on tourism development, establishing foundation for local tourism leadership, and most importantly, create tourism knowledge awareness. Education and training programmes are best introduced at the early stage of community capacity building as it helps to create tourism knowledge and awareness [30, p. 76]. For example, some of the training programmes can provide exposure for participants to understand some of the concerns a tourist might have [30].

According to [15], external support for community capacity development can take different forms including provision of financial resources, technical expertise, training, information, political negotiation, and facilitation of capacity development processes. The approach emphasises on the transfer of knowledge, assistance by small private and community investors with product innovation, assistance with access to markets among the local community; creates spaces and social networks for local people to communicate; provides information on markets, marketing, and technology; and assists local authorities to develop support mechanisms to small tourism related businesses in the destination [31]. Therefore, capacity building strategy is crucial for Langkawi communities because it allows them to have the right to control over resources such as property, money, skills, natural resources, and knowledge in tourism development. This approach can also encourage them to recognise their strengths, values, and local knowledge that will enable them to contribute to sustainable tourism.

3. Research approach

The qualitative research approach was used and Langkawi Island selected as the case study; data collection was conducted from 7th January 2014 until 16th January 2014. Time frame for primary data collection was 10 days with a total of 20 respondents that were asked open-ended questions. Each interview was individually tailored to draw out information from which interviewees could freely express their ideas [32] and make comments regarding community capacity strategies in Langkawi Island. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling were used to identify respondents in the data collection process. Through qualitative interviews, data were collected with four different categories of stakeholders encompassing government officials, local leaders, NGOs, and private companies in order to obtain 'representative characterization' [33]. The semi-structured interviews were recorded and analysed with the framework techniques. All recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and categorised into keywords, followed by indexing, coding, and classifying by themes. Data coding commenced at the beginning of the fieldwork and categorisation of the data into themes was conducted repeatedly and frequently during the analysis phase [34].

4. Existing strategies and tools of capacity building in Langkawi

While analysing the data, several mechanisms were adopted by related stakeholders to work with communities in Langkawi currently. These mechanisms relate to education and training programmes, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) project, environmental conservation activities and partnership building, all of which could contribute to achieve sustainability of local communities in Langkawi.

4.1 Education and training programmes as capacity building tools

Although review of literature showed that community leadership is the main ingredient that makes community capacity building happen [35, 36], yet, findings showed that community

leadership is difficult to be realised in the Langkawi environment because local communities may not be equipped with adequate capacities to make a difference. All respondents suggested that in order to be able to work together with local residents effectively, leaders need to equip themselves with sufficient knowledge and skills. The findings support [29] that implied education and training programs were needed in the tourism industry to educate residents about the impact tourism is having on their community. Education and training are the most common forms of strategies in tourism development. The Langkawi Tourism Academy is an educational institution funded by the Ministry of Education combined with Taylor's College in a joint venture to produce more human resources and stimulate workforce preparation in hospitality programs. '*We make efforts to encourage local communities to attend courses and obtain certificates to upgrade themselves within 16 months*', said a directory officer from Langkawi Tourism Academy (Respondent 3). She added, '*Compared to those without certificates, students with certificates will have higher salaries…Four and Five-Star hotels require employees with maximum educated background today*'. The college is intended to prepare local people to work in the tourism line by offering four courses covering Certificate in Culinary Arts (CCA), Certificate in Food and Beverages (CFB), Certificate in Rooms Division (CRD), and Certificate in Tourism. '*After 16 months of full-time courses all graduates will have to attend practical training arranged by college*,' explained the directory officer (respondent 3).

In addition, short courses such as Basic Pastry and Culinary Art, Marketing Strategy, Computer and Language courses are offered for local communities with age ranging from 12 to 70 years old. This was further explained by respondent 3 from the college, '*Sometimes volunteer lecturers here will go outdoors to teach in rural areas upon local request.*' Before allowing more local communities to step into the tourism industry, education and training remain fundamental mechanisms to create ethical awareness as well as to avoid exploitation. Basic English and Chinese classes were also conducted by LADA Tourism Division for Homestay operators and other small and medium scale entrepreneurs to improve their communication skills and certificates awarded to all attendees. For the homestay industry, education and training are seen as mechanisms that are closely linked to the success of the homestay business, because operators need skills on management courses and basic marketing strategies for their products. Respondent 9 disclosed that '*for those who want to apply for license, the Ministry of Tourism provides a 5 day course called "Kursus Asas Pengurusan Homestay" at the beginning stage and the purpose is to instil the right concept about Homestay. At the next stage are courses related to tourism such as "Think Tourism" and "Act Tourism", and eventually continue with English language classes.*'

Hence, better education and training provided by the government and relevant agencies are essential tools for rural villagers to ensure the sustainability of homestay businesses. To improve language capabilities, several plans, and programs have been implemented by NGOs to help their members. For example, for KPSP in Tanjung Rhu, English training classes have been organised since 2008 to improve communication skills of local fishermen to help them to become part-time boatmen. Respondent 13 remarked that '*seasonally we invite school teachers to come to our village and give all boatmen a one-week English course…so that they can provide explanation to tourists while conducting mangrove tours.*' Another NGO such as Hock Kean Hoay Kuan Association also put efforts to encourage their members from the younger generations to learn

Mandarin and '*special rewards are given to those who perform well in Mandarin*', said the secretary from the society (respondent 14). For the Langkawi Tour Guides Association (LTGA), tour guides including nature guides and city guides are required to undergo 1200 credit hours of CTRE (Continual Tourism Related Education) courses to qualify as licensed tour guides. '*Once the tour guides pass the oral tests and practical exams, they must sign on as members of LTGA. To empower all tour guides, role play sessions have been conducted under the guidance of senior guides and the aim is to increase their understanding in cross cultural divides and teach them how to handle challenges while dealing with different customers,*' explained respondent 11.

Numerous hotels and private companies are using the top-down approach by providing internal training for staff or knowledge transfer sessions from the executive level staff to save training costs. According to respondent 15, the Underwater World Langkawi (UWL), '*this year, some animal-care takers were sent to Singapore for training sessions on animal-care management courses regularly. For example, penguins care management. Once they complete their courses, they are required to come back and pass on what they had learnt to their subordinates.*' Respondent 19 explained further that '*they initiate knowledge transfer programs and English training for our staff, but it is for front line staffs only.*' Companies like Langkawi Orchid Farm, Langkawi Frangipani Resort, and UWL, although profit-oriented, also function as knowledge hubs for local communities. For example, '*by involving in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), the UWL functions as a center for research and development in the fields of zoology, botany and marine biology to provide training for students from local universities*' (respondent 16).

In addition, the Langkawi Orchid Farm also opened the farm to provide edu-tourism for local students by organising camping activities at camp sites, and '*it is also a place where visitors can go to appreciate the peacefulness and beauty of our farm,*' said respondent 15. Results revealed that the education and training are important tools to increase local people's exposure to tourism development. Several respondents explained briefly about the capacity building tools and strategies adopted by them, which included hospitality courses in Langkawi Tourism Academy, Homestay program courses funded by the Ministry of Tourism, English training classes, tour guides training, internal staff training from private companies and also local entrepreneurs' workshop and environmental conservation campaign conducted by LADA. All the educational projects allow the local communities, especially inexperienced youngsters, to increase their employability in the tourism industry.

4.2 Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) projects

The development of small entrepreneurship should be supported because it has potential to have a larger multiplier effect in stimulating the local economy, according to [27]. Several SMEs projects have been developed by LADA for entrepreneurship development among local communities. '*20 local entrepreneurs are expected to be produced based on Key Performance Indicators (KPI) through the 'Pasar Malam Transformation' program…help them to discover what kind of potential business that bring profit, assist them in promotion and marketing*' (respondent 1). A Langkawi Committee Board was also set up by LADA to involve local people as committee members, with its function as a consulting team to plan and assess the needs of communities. Through the committee board, '*programs such as "Jom Niaga Belia" and "Pemimpin bersama*

Rakyat" which targets young entrepreneurs were carried out while "YB Corner" is for those interested to start their own business such as food stalls' (respondent 6).

Initiatives to develop homestay programs are one of the effective ways of enabling local communities in SME projects. As part of government initiatives to boost local economy, a homestay program is a form of family business operated by some certified homestay operators approved by the Ministry of Tourism. Initiatives of developing small scale enterprises that are locally owned by families or village communities will be able to promote product creativity and innovation in tourism services [37]. Homestay operators were trained and granted licenses after a series of courses. Licenses would only be issued after inspections by the Ministry of Health on cleanliness and safety of bathroom, kitchen, and rooms. Subsequently, for infrastructure aid, '*the government gives subsidies by building activity halls for special activities with guests,*' claimed a community leader from Homestay Sungai Itau (respondent 7). Respondent 9 also added that '*they helped us to build extra washrooms for guests*'. Through proper planning and management, homestay programs would be able to help local communities to achieve sustainable development.

In order to strengthen entrepreneurial and develop tourism capacities of fishing communities in Kilim and Tanjung Rhu, local people also carry out complementary activities to tourism and catering business. Local fishermen can supplement their regular income by selling their catches to tourists. Chairman of *Komuniti Pengurusan Ekosistem Perikanan (KPSP) Tanjung Rhu* (respondent 13) explained that '*we conduct other businesses related to fishing activities such as project "Bela Siput" to have more seafood products to sell to tourists in the local seafood restaurants*'. Also, members from NGOs are encouraged to create more tourist-orientated products to fulfil the needs and expectations of tourism destination.

In addition, Secretary of Hock Kean Hoay Kuan Association (respondent 14) also agreed with the view by saying that '*locals need to sell unique products that tourists cannot get in other states in Malaysia or other places; we cannot just keep importing products from Thailand or else Langkawi will lose its own identity eventually*'. An orchid farmer shared his view that the existence of orchid farms can generate a new tourism product—Agro-tourism by '*bringing new life for Langkawi tourism…enhance the attractiveness and provide a memorable farm experience for visitors, as a new form of tourism to help locals economically and increase employment rate*' (respondent 15). In response to the development of the new and innovative tourism product in Langkawi, respondent 11 has different views compared to other respondents, when she opined that, '*the existing tourism products are adequate to cover tourists' demand and requirement currently, the local community just needs to focus on proper maintenance and periodic improvement of tourism products and destinations.*' Respondent 19 also gave his view by stating that '*instead of focusing on first-class infrastructure, the local government needs to improve livelihoods of locals by providing more basic infrastructure to fulfil the needs of tourists such as public toilets, parking lots and signages*'.

Capacity building in terms of bringing innovation in tourism will enable the introduction of new products to the market, or open up new markets through combining strategic orientation with innovative behaviour and process: new products, new services, opening new markets, new sources of supply, and new ways of management practice [38]. Therefore, for the purpose of strengthening community capacity in tourism activities, related stakeholders such as

government officials, NGOs, community leaders, and private companies have been increasingly putting efforts into entrepreneurship development and tourism products innovation to spur the local economy and fostering a healthier entrepreneurship climate in Langkawi.

4.3 Environmental conservation programmes towards sustainable tourism

According to [39], Langkawi Island has been acknowledged as the 52nd Global Geopark under the auspices of UNESCO's Global Geoparks Network. The geopark gave emphasis to local community involvement in conservation efforts [40] and LADA Geopark Division plays an important role to promote the involvement of local communities in environment conservation. Several awareness projects were designed in collaboration with villagers, students, and other NGOs. For example, activity *Gotong-royong* was held to overcome soil erosion and to stop the habit of littering the rivers. Respondent 5 said that '*We also try to organise Geo-tours or educational based talks to explain the importance of sustainable socioeconomic development and increase appreciation of our geological heritage resources*.' Initiatives for the integration of green practices into business management are able to maintain profitability while encouraging communities to be committed in environmental conservation.

One of the strategies implemented by the government relate to the 3R (recycle, reuse, reduce) practices that were designed to encourage local communities to produce handicrafts made from recycled materials, '*LADA will then help them to repackage and promote the handicrafts*' (respondent 6). The stakeholders' interviews also revealed that respondents from the private sector such as Langkawi Orchid Farm, the Frangipani Langkawi Resort and Spa, and the UWL are all environmentally responsible companies. These companies practice management imbued with the principles of responsible tourism, with due consideration to their workers, customers, and local communities. Furthermore, the farm owner (respondent 15), resort operator (respondent 16), and manager of UWL (respondent 17), were serious in wanting to raise awareness about issues linked to environment and climate change. For example, '*we make efforts to reduce water, energy usage, recycle waste and planting organic food, and we want our staffs to remember the principles of reuse, reduce and recycle*,' said respondent 16 from the Frangipani resort.

According to respondent 12, conservation and sustainable tourism need to be prioritised by the government because '*Langkawi is supposed to be a nature-based island with full of greenery and beaches, not just luxury resorts and hotels*.' One of the members from *Koperasi Komuniti Kampung Kilim* (respondent 13) raised his concern on the environment conservation in order to ensure sustainability for the sake of future generation, noting that '*we realize that everyone needs to manage the place for the betterment of our community and bearing in mind that natural resources is our treasure, not just for Langkawi people, but all Malaysian*'. In short, local residents need to be educated in order to be aware of the fragility of natural resources and to be more responsive to environmental issues.

4.4 Langkawi Tourism Blueprint 2011–2015

The government, at all levels, the private sector, entrepreneurs, and the local populace have played essential roles as catalysts in the island's progression, with the federal government notably being the chief player from the very beginning [41]. For instance, the launching of the Langkawi Tourism Blueprint 2011–2015 should be a further catalyst to increase community capacity building strategies. Respondent 1 revealed that '*since the launch of Langkawi Tourism Blueprint 2011-2015, we are setting up a series of community development strategies that are imple‐ mented by the Community Development Unit (UPK)*'. In line with the blueprint, '*we are currently drafting a Management Proposal for Langkawi Geopark and one of the elements called "SEMANGAT-KAWI" which is to encourage local involvement in tourism industry*', as proposed by respondent 5 from LADA Geopark Division. The implementation of the blueprint is seen as a tool to boost the local economy and bring in more tourists to Langkawi. Respondent 18 further said, '*The RM5 billion worth of investments unveiled by the government to boost the economy of Langkawi is something everybody is excited about especially businessmen like us…several investors have already committed to build hotels and resorts.*' To the contrary, however, some respondents from NGOs and private companies have raised their concerns upon the implementation of the blueprint, about the issues of private control on free open beaches. Respondent 14 expressed the problem faced by local people when LADA came out with the blueprint:

> '*LADA promised us that the Chenang Beach will be properly managed, but now what we see is environ‐ mental degradation by removing all of the trees and over-building of those hard-ware buildings. The developer just focuses on self-interest, big corporates are invited to Langkawi to set-up businesses, some of them build their properties on agricultural land, forcing out the rural communities who eventually lose their land. A lot of businesses are not going through proper channels; developers merely want to conduct their projects through fast track.*'

Respondent 14 agreed with this view, noting that, '*now we have various people from various countries and states working here and the local culture will slowly lose its identity.*' The various points of view showed that many decisions made by the developers and foreign investors do not fully consider the local interests and result in negative impacts that may eventually affect the local community's livelihoods. In some developing nations, balancing national and local priorities are always challenging in the present competitive economic and political circumstances [42]. Respondent 15 indicated his concern that '*although the top authorities who implement the blueprint have the right to have vision, with plans for Langkawi, but all the planning and strategies are decided by top-level authorities without involving local communities*'. Further concern was added by respondent 16 noting that '*before the launch of the Blueprint, LADA invited all the local communities to attend a talk whereby all the communities were asked to give suggestions and comments on the blueprint. However, issues we raised about the blueprint and questions we asked about public beaches were all not addressed*'.

Relating to the vision of the blueprint, a head of department (respondent 6) explained, '*We expect poverty and rate of illiteracy to be reduced to 0% by year 2015…we consider our programs to be very successful because you will hardly find poor people in Langkawi as there are a lot of employment opportunities. We are facing shortage of manpower because of the high economic growth.*' However, respondents 15 and 16 argued that '*there are still a lot of dropouts after Form 3 in Langkawi and they are hardly involved in the tourism industry.*' Respondent 11 stated that, '*for the blueprint, I*

think that not all the community are ready to accept the changes and transformation, and overdevelopment might cause UNESCO to revoke Langkawi Geopark's World Heritage Status when it faces the second audit by UNESCO in the coming 2015'. Moreover, respondent 14 rightly stated that, '*the blueprint prints a good picture but it is too idealistic, it shows the best picture but still on the paper only. The blueprint needs to take account the local view, not just political view.'* Thus, local communities in Langkawi hope that '*this iconic blueprint will not degenerate into "white elephant projects" because of its poor design and ill-defined criteria of success'*, as opined by respondent 14.

The perspectives of related stakeholders imply that the implementation of Langkawi Tourism Blueprint 2011–2015 may not fully meet the policymakers' expectations. Evidences can be traced from the feedback of some respondents regarding the negative impacts of the Langkawi blueprint which need to be properly considered. Since 1957, Malaysia has been maintaining a top-down system of governance until today. Most of the time, the decision making processes can be dominated by external consultants, government staffs, and development or aid agency personnel, whose knowledge of both the proposed development and of the decision-making process gives them an advantage over the local residents [43]. For instance, top-down governance with one-way communication will only result in the local communities bearing the negative consequences brought about by the over-development in Langkawi.

4.5 Partnership programmes

Partnerships between government agencies, non-governmental agencies, private companies, and local residents can become a tool for the integration and facilitation of tourism development and sustainability. Based on the findings, partnerships such as public–private partnership (PandP), public–public partnership, community-NGO partnership, and private-NGO partnership have been able to bring the various parties together to address challenges and provide solutions on tourism impacts. Referring to the theme of 'Enabler' in the Langkawi Blueprint, one of the initiatives realised was the Langkawi Tourism Academy formed via a public and private collaboration (PandP) with Taylor's College. The purpose is to initiate a new curriculum by adapting Taylor's hospitality courses into LTA tourism courses. The directory officer (respondent 3) remarked that '*as we know, Taylor's College offers the best hospitality courses in Malaysia; they play their role as academic advisor by monitoring syllabus and sharing their knowledge and technologies'.*

Taylor's College has also formed partnerships with a total of 75 four- to five-star hotels in Langkawi to allow students to participate in practical apprenticeship programs for skills training in their chosen field of work. '*Through the apprenticeship program, students will be the "anak angkat" of the hotels and they will be paid a monthly allowance,'* said respondent 3. Also, public and private partnership (PandP) was formed between LADA and Frangipani Resort to contribute to the tourism industry. Respondent 16 explained that '*we are currently building partnerships with LADA and more than 30 local schools to increase local awareness on environmental issues'.* Further, Sandy Beach Resort has an established partnership with LADA to organise the Water Festival event in Chenang Beach, the main purpose of which is '*to have more interaction with the tourists through water sports activities and to enhance our reputation'* (respondent 19). In 2012, the UWL signed a Memorandum of Understanding with two Malaysian universities,

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), with '*its mission to establish marine and wildlife research and education centre*' (respondent 17).

Public-public partnerships were formed between LADA and other government agencies such as TEKUN, MARA, Bank Pertanian, MARDI, PELADANG, and PERIKANAN to provide financial support for the local communities to be involved in small and medium industries (SMI). According to respondent 6 from Community Development Unit, the main purpose of building these partnerships is to give opportunities for local people to do business. He explained that '*LADA is a moderator between people and the related agencies, we give consultation for locals to improve their business…improve their products through marketing and promotion strategies. While government is helping the locals, we also develop tourism products*'. In addition, partnerships between private companies with several NGOs were formed, for example, respondent 16 explained that Frangipani Resort has collaborated with *MareCet* group in marine mammals' conservation, and *Ecoknights* in environmental education. '*The sea is polluted and all the stakeholders should cooperate and solve the problem,*' said respondent 16. For partnerships between NGOs and NGOs, the LTGA has collaborated with Kilim NGOs and '*every year on 1st of February which is the National Tourists Guide Day, the LTGA provides free tours to local students to encourage more youngsters to be involved in the tour guide industry,*' explained respondent 11. At the same time, partnership between *Komuniti Pengurusan Ekosistem Perikanan (KPSP) Tanjung Rhu* and Koperasi Orang Muda (Komuda) was formed with the aim to '*solve the issues faced by our communities in resource management*', stated the chairman of KPSP (respondent 13).

In order to ensure effective communication between all levels of stakeholders, a strong partnership is crucial as a mechanism to gain trust among communities. Communities' trust is significant for policy and project implementation as it refers to 'confidence that political institutions will not misuse power' [44, p. 478]. Once trust is established, partners are willing to commit more time and resources to develop the relationship and thereby reduce conflicts in the planning and development processes [45].

5. Conclusion

In the case of Langkawi Island, there is an increased movement towards community development by local government, entrepreneurs, and practitioners as the various parties begin to understand the importance of community capacity building in tourism planning and development. Local government agencies such as LADA have been working with related stakeholders encompassing community leaders, NGOs and private companies to implement community development strategies such as partnerships, education, and training programmes as capacity building tools, to implement the Langkawi Tourism Blueprint 2011–2015, to promote SMEs projects to spur entrepreneurism and also to introduce environmental conservation activities towards sustainable tourism. Based on the findings as provided by respondents, the strategies constitute the facilitating mechanisms to improve the living standards of the local communities. However, the findings also revealed that although the tools and strategies were implemented, not all were effective as both public and private institutions

relied on the traditional 'top-down' approach. The findings further indicate that community development projects need continuous dialogue between government officials and local residents as a strategy to strengthen capacity building among local residents, and that all levels of stakeholders' involvement would invariably increase the effectiveness of community capacity building approaches. Undoubtedly, the Langkawi tourism environment requires more professionals and skilful workers who are equipped with managerial and entrepreneurial skills to reduce the over-reliance on foreign workers as well as to increase productivity in tourism product development. Local communities that are equipped with sufficient knowledge will tend to be more supportive and cooperative of capacity building strategies implemented by public and private institutions and all levels of organisations. Collaborative endeavours between all stakeholders in tourism planning process will be instrumental in producing a comprehensive development plan as the foundation of sustainable tourism.

Acknowledgements

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