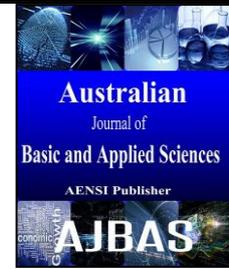




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### Indigenous People, Conservation and Sustainable Tourism at Lower Kinabatangan, Sabah: SWOT Analysis

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#### ABSTRACT

This paper will focus on SWOT analysis approach to observe the participation of indigenous people on conservation and tourism. As studies on indigenous peoples, its interrelation with tourism and conservation in Lower Kinabatangan Sabah (LKS) were limited, this study utilized the beginning of researches conducted in LKS to the recent (1996 to 2014). In this case, a SWOT analysis was used to critically compare the studies in order to realize pertinent issues and challenges in LKS area. SWOT analysis examines the strengths and weaknesses (internal factors of the community, what the community has control over, including community members not directly involved with tourism/conservation area management) and the opportunities and threats (external factors, e.g. non-community stakeholders such as park authorities, local and national governments, donors, as well as factors over which the community has no control, such as the dengue epidemic) at the country level. These findings can be applied to formulate integrative and sustainable approaches for local tourism improvement as well as effective guidelines for future conservation works.

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#### INTRODUCTION

There have been numerous studies conducted on indigenous community involvement in tourism, however many of these studies are carried out in west Malaysia with different landscapes and lifestyles. In Sabah (east Malaysia), the culture and demographic backgrounds of indigenous people are varied at different district (e.g., Kudat, Sandakan and Kinabatangan), thus specific and reliable information are needed to understand how these people participate in a sustainable tourism at particular areas. In addition to varying location effect, the increase exploitation of natural resources by oil palm plantation and agricultural owners has caused extinction of wild species, soil erosion and water pollution. Hence, this calls for in-depth study to measure the extent of natural resource destructions and impacts on the local livelihoods. Currently, socio-economic development in Sabah is still lagging behind many other states in Malaysia. Indeed, Sabah has the highest poverty rate of all states in Malaysia. Despite rapid advances in Sabah's development, the mean of monthly household income in Sabah is still lower than the national average. The Sabahan peoples living in urban districts predictably enjoy higher levels of income. The efforts toward

eradicating poverty in Sabah are particularly challenging because of the demographic and geographic conditions of the state. Most of the poor population particularly indigenous people live in rural areas in Sabah, whereby many communities remain trapped in poverty as most of them are employed in low-productivity activities.

**Literature Review:**

SWOT analysis is a strategic planning method used to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats involved in a project or in a business venture. SWOT analysis involves specifying the objective of the business venture or project and identifying the internal and external factors that are favorable and unfavorable to achieve that objective (Albert, H., 1960).

- i. **(S)** - Strengths: characteristics of the business or team that give it an advantage over others in the industry.
- ii. **(W)** - Weaknesses: are characteristics that place the firm at a disadvantage relative to others.
- iii. **(O)** - Opportunities: *external* chances to make greater sales or profits in the environment.
- iv. **(T)** - Threats: *external* elements in the environment that could cause trouble for the business.

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According to (Saaty, R.W., 1987), SWOT analysis has its origins in the 1960s which is a simple yet useful planning tool to understand the 'Strengths', 'Weaknesses', 'Opportunities' and 'Threats' as part of a strategic planning process. In that planning process various factors influencing the operational environment are diagnosed in details (Kotler, P., 1994). Following that, strategic alternatives are selected in the light of the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities of the organization as determined through internal and external environment analysis (Yuksel, I. And M. Dagdeviren, 2007). According to Saaty (1987), SWOT analysis is intended to maximize strengths and opportunities, minimize external threats, and transform weaknesses into strengths and to take advantage of opportunities along with minimizing both internal weaknesses and external threats. It is useful especially in preparing for future scenarios and is economically justifiable in that losses can be minimized. Thus, SWOT analysis is needed by maximising the internal strength and external opportunities to curb against the internal weaknesses and to counter against external threats. SWOT is also useful in addressing management issues before they becomes a threat. SWOT analysis is often employed when monitoring or evaluating a specific program, service, product or industry and exploring improvement measures (Harrison, S.R., 2002). Some of the applications of SWOT analysis are included in the private sector as well as in public administration, professional associations and academia (Suh, J. And F.E. Nick, 2005). For example, Dillan (1988)

conducted SWOT analysis to evaluate the Australian profession of agricultural economics while Coetzee and Middelman (Dillan, J., 1988) investigated the SWOT of the fynbos cut flower industry in South Africa. The FAO (1999) also formally recognized the SWOT analysis technique as an important participatory assessment tool to be used in gathering, synthesis and analysis of information for community forestry development. The advantages of SWOT analysis are that it is simple and cost efficient. Beside it could generate many ideas which could be useful in summarizing key countermeasures as outcome; 'strength' could be maximized to overcome weaknesses. Similarly, opportunities are maximised and threats minimised.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A limited number of studies were found addressing tourism problems, local indigenous peoples, conservation, stakeholders and sustainability in LKS area (Fletcher, P., 1996; Payne, J., 1996; Majail, J. and D.A. Webber, 2006; Ancrenaz, M., 2007; Husin, R. and A.P. Mat Som, 2008; Latip, N.A. and N. Badarulzaman, 2014). Based on those previous studies, the present study focuses on pertinent problems that are still occurring despite many attempts made to overcome the conservation and tourism dilemmas at Kinabatangan floodplain. This study pinpoints the strength, weakness, opportunity and threat (SWOT) of tourism in LKS district (Table 1).

**Table 1:** SWOT analysis of indigenous tourism and conservation at Kinabatangan floodplain.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abundance of natural resources</li> <li>• Authentic and unique cultural</li> <li>• Offer varying packages of tourism adventures</li> <li>• Tourism is related to indigenous peoples</li> <li>• Conservation is supported by both government and private sectors</li> <li>• Wild landscapes for tourists to experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social and security issues</li> <li>• Prices of goods and services have increased</li> <li>• Threats of overdevelopment</li> <li>• Poor responsible tourism management</li> <li>• Uncompetitive behaviour</li> <li>• Poor tourism marketing in certain LKS areas</li> <li>• Access difficulties to Kinabatangan floodplain</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional product development</li> <li>• Niche markets for selling indigenous products</li> <li>• Cultural shows and campaign</li> <li>• Training and up-skilling in tourism for River peoples</li> <li>• Utilize online marketing for wider "tourists attractions"</li> <li>• Tourism investment in low income areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economic factors such as global environment, national performance</li> <li>• Competition from other destinations</li> <li>• IT and travelling costs</li> <li>• Competing land uses and ownership</li> <li>• Increasing of fragmented lands</li> </ul>

This analysis shows that LKS is blessed with abundance wildlife species and wild landscapes. This particular strength attracts many local and international tourists to visit LKS - to experience authentic flora and fauna at its natural habitat. The tourism activities are greatly influenced by local government and private sectors (e.g. WWF-Malaysia and Malaysian Nature Society). Previously, the River peoples at middle and lower Kinabatangan traditionally work as fisherman, hunters and farmers. Besides traditional lifestyles, they have been actively involved in ecotourism. Subsequently, more River

peoples migrate to upper LKS area for a better job offers in cash-crop agriculture (Husin, R. and A.P. Mat Som, 2008).

At the beginning of tourism exposure in 1980s, only few of these indigenous peoples are involved in tourism activities. As their ways of traditional living are very much related to LKS natural resources, they are inextricably connected to their lands. Their knowledge on tourism is limited and tourism is carried out at a small-scale (Payne, J., 1996). Nowadays, more LKS peoples keen in learning tourism skills. Several good opportunities, namely

developing traditional products (made from rattan) and broadening market sale will help to boost their monthly income. However, several weaknesses and threats hinder the conservation and tourism development at LKS area. To date, several villages in Kinabatangan floodplain are difficult to reach. As concrete roads are absent in certain LKS areas, the only option to reach this area is using boat. Moreover, the price hikes in goods and services will eventually draw tourists away (Spenceley, A., 2005).

Since 1996, efforts were focused on improving tourism while working extensively on preserving the wildlife species and primary forests at LKS. For instance, on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2002, Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary has been gazetted by the Chief Minister of Sabah, Datuk Chong Kah Kiat and placed under the jurisdiction of the Sabah Wildlife Department (Malim, T.P., 2002). Various activities have been carried out by WWF-Malaysia for and together with the local community, namely homestay programme, home cultivation scheme, environmental education and capacity building programme to enhance and develop their skills in tourism industry (Majail, J. and D.A. Webber, 2006). Subsequently, Kinabatangan Orangutan conservation project was carried out to protect the Orangutan in LKS forest (Ancrenaz, M., 2007). Despite many efforts conducted at LKS, the objectives of tourism as a tool to empower the indigenous economy as well as conserving the wildlife species are not fully achieved – many threats are still occurring and are increasing. In 1996, poor integration among stakeholders (government, private sectors and local indigenous peoples) and communication contribute to the failures of tourism and conservation works. Similarly, in 2007, some villagers show resistance towards Orangutan conservation project and they viewed Orang-utan as well as crop-raiding elephants as pests (Ancrenaz, M., 2007).

#### **Conclusion:**

Overall, through SWOT analysis shows that there are several strengths and weaknesses of participation indigenous people in the conservation and tourism. From internal factors of the community, what the community has control over, including community members not directly involved with tourism and conservation management and process. Besides, from external factors, e.g. non-community stakeholders such as park authorities, local and national governments, donors, as well as factors over which the community has no control at the country level. Because of that, the conservation and tourism management and process must include all stakeholders in order to achieving the sustainable tourism and effective conservation approach.

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