

THE ROLE OF ECOTOURISM FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN EAST COAST ECONOMIC REGION (ECER), MALAYSIA

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Abstract: Sustainable development is high potential for any community within economic, social, cultural, ecologic and physical constraints. Tourism can be sustainable if development meets the needs of tourists and local residents while protecting future opportunities. Ecotourism offers benefits for local residents, conservation, development and educational experiences. The East Coast Economic Region (ECER) holds over 51% of forest areas in the Peninsular Malaysia and a high proportion of environmentally sensitive areas. The present study discusses the potentialities of sustainable development in ECER through ecotourism. The aim of the study is identified the strengths and weakness of sustainable development in this region as well as ecotourism. Secondary data have used to address the objectives in this study. The study reveals that the main potentialities of sustainable development in ECER through ecotourism are increase per capita income, ecological and conservational benefit, improve the life condition, reduce poverty, respectful to local culture, positive attitude of local community, employment opportunity and regional growth. There are some obstacles also remaining in ECER for sustainable development. These are lack of integrated planning, improper entrepreneurship, inadequate infrastructure, poor community participation and inequitable development. The study has given emphasize on human development, social cohesion, environmental benefit, technological change, proper planning, infrastructure development and proper

community involvement for sustainable development through ecotourism in ECER. Finally, if collective efforts can be taken for ecotourism activities in ECER, it will ensure the sustainable development in this region.

Keywords: ECER; Ecotourism; Regional development; Sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

The term 'sustainable development' has been used, with multiple meanings, in very different fields. The term 'sustainable development' has expressed in the so-called Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987). According to this report "Sustainable development is meet the present needs without compromising the future generations ability to meet their own needs". Economists define the term of sustainable development as a pathway of rising per capita well-being for people. Here well-being has concentrated on the capital mechanisms of total wealth. These are human capital, environmental and natural capital, man-made capital and social capital (Pearce, 2007). According to Pearce (2007), Sustainable development implies not only that total wealth increases through time, but also technological change according to population growth. Sustainable development has involved the concept collecting all issues which related with environment to human development (Dovers and Handmer, 1993). Sustainable development is a socio-environmental

development system with a high potential continuity. It is keeping within social, economic, cultural, ecologic and physical constraints of an area (Graaf et al., 1996).

The term 'sustainable tourism' was used officially in the literature before the concept of sustainable development (Hardy et al., 2002). The concept of sustainable tourism have mutual focus with sustainable development and it has own tourism-related agenda (Wall, 1997). Clarke (1997) has described the relationship between the sustainable tourism and the tourism industry.

He states that sustainable tourism is the opposition position to mass tourism, where sustainable tourism is operating in a small-scale. On the other hand, mass tourism operated on an unsustainable large- scale. Twining-Ward (1999) mentioned that sustainable tourism is related with some areas of tourism and its impacts. Jafari (1990) addressed the attitudes towards tourism development in a historical context. He has introduced four- platform framework for the tourism development. The first platform is "advocacy" which considered tourism's economic contribution is widely. The second one is "cautionary". It discussed the negative aspects of tourism. The third platform-adaptancy is developing the alternatives to mass tourism, for example rural tourism, green tourism and ecotourism. The fourth one is "knowledge-based platform". It can be comparing and related with the 'sustainable development' concept.

Again, some international organizations such as WTO have not agreed with the definition of sustainable tourism. They describe this as a destination based concept and should be defined on the basis of case-by-case (Manning, 1999).

Three tiers of sustainable development- economy, society and environment are essential to discuss the issue of sustainability. Tourism revenue can help the destination economically in both direct and indirect way. Socially, tourism development has created employment opportunities for the communities. Environmentally, tourism can be enhancing the infrastructure development such as road, hotels, resorts, power plants in the destination area (Shaalán, 2005). Tosun (2001) has addressed some principles for sustainable tourism development (STD). These are contribution satisfaction in basic needs, reducing the inequality and poverty, help the host communities to improve life conditions, faster national economic growth, increase regional and local economic growth and the development for future generations.

Ecotourism has focused on the experience of natural resources and the flourishing of environmental and cultural enjoyment, understanding and appreciation (Ecotourism Australia, 2011). Ecotourism has offered

local people benefits, conservation support, and local development, encourage low numbers of visitors and increase educational experiences (Nepal, 2002). On the basis of sustainable development, sustainable tourism meets the needs of tourists and local people for protecting the future opportunities. Again, many ecotourism destinations are becoming hazardous and destructive for the lack of proper monitoring, insufficient audits and environmental assessments (Tsaour et al., 2006).

The East Coast Economic Region (ECER) consists of three states of Malaysia- Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang and District of Mersing in Johor. The ECER has a population of about 3.95 million (2005) representing 14.8% of the population of Malaysia. The total area of the region is 66,736 sq km or 51% of the Peninsular Malaysia. The region remains the least urbanized at 41.3%, compared to other regions in Peninsular Malaysia. The region holds over 51% of forest areas in the Peninsula and a high proportion of environmentally sensitive areas including highlands, islands, wetlands, turtle landing sites and water catchment areas. These attractions are suitable for ecotourism development in this region. The Malaysian government tries to develop ecotourism for ensuring sustainable development in ECER. Local authorities and private investors also take initiatives in this regard. The present study discusses the potentialities of sustainable development in ECER through ecotourism. The aim of the study is identified the strengths and weakness of sustainable development in this region as well as ecotourism.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Ecotourism may be a means for sustainable development of an area. Different indicators are commonly used to take decision-making in ecotourism development in any place. The indicators like gross domestic product, population growth rate, literacy rate and trade balance are commonly used as national or regional success for development (Wenjun Li, 2004). Sustainable management for ecotourism development is essential in order to preserve conservation and maintain the biological resources of the area as well as economic benefits of the local people (Bunruamkaew and Murayama, 2011). Ecotourism should maintain several criteria such as conservation of biological and cultural diversities through ecosystem preservation and ensuring of sustainable use of biodiversity with minimum impact on the environment (Ryngnga, 2008).

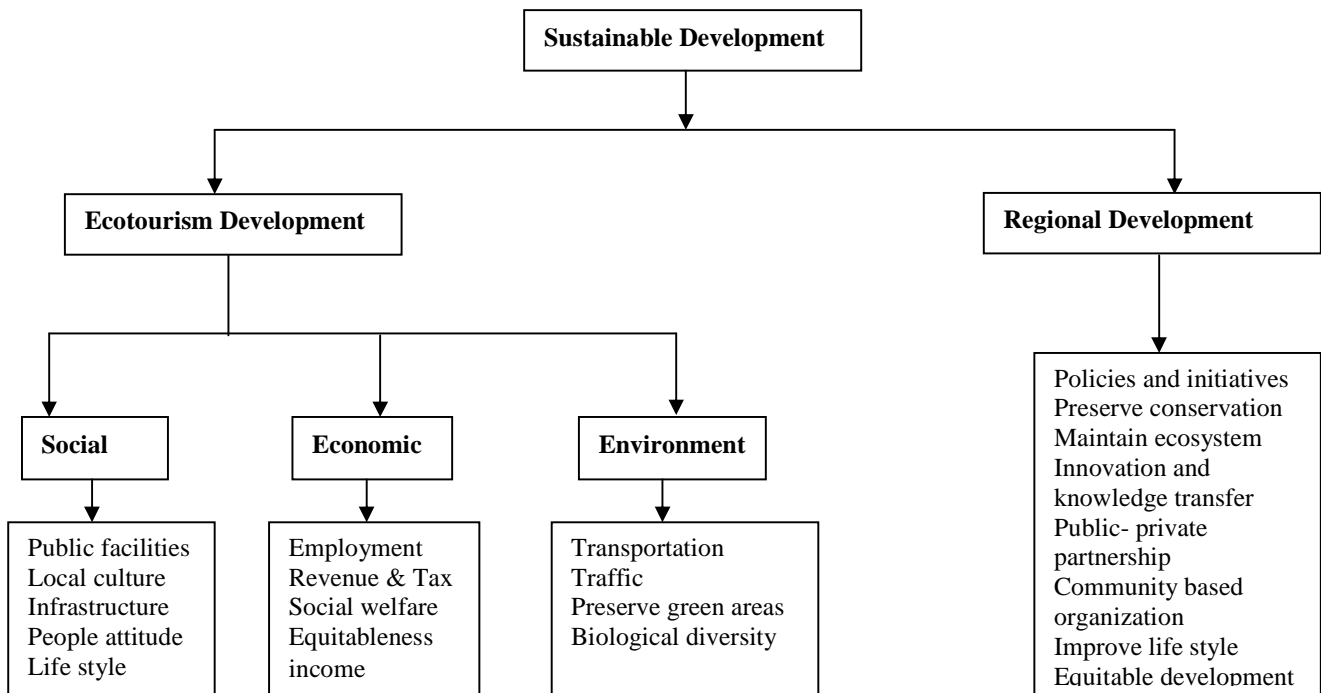


Figure 1: Sustainable development through ecotourism

Source: Compiled by the author

Regional development of an area depends on the sustainable uses of local resources and ensuring the development in the whole aspects. Potts (2010) has mentioned some criteria for the regional development. These are policies and initiatives for ecological development; cleaner production in the industry; conservation of natural resources and maintenance of ecosystem; proper innovations and knowledge transfer; partnership between public and private organizations; and community based development.

Sustainable development through ecotourism is a concerning issue in the world today. Many countries have ensured their regional development by this concept. In this concept, sustainable development may be occurred by the ecotourism and regional development simultaneously in an area. Dimensions of ecotourism development refer to the environmental, economic, and social aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance between these dimensions must be established to maintain its

long-term sustainability. There are some indicators involves with these dimensions. Sustainable ecotourism development depends highly on these indicators. Social dimension related with public facilities, local culture, infrastructure development, local people attitude towards ecotourism and life style of local people. The economic indicators are employment, revenue & tax, social welfare and equitable income distribution. On the other hand, transportation system, Traffic condition, preserve green areas and biological diversity are included in environmental dimension. Regional development also depends on some dimensions.

These are Policies and initiatives for development, preserve conservation, maintain ecosystem, innovation and knowledge transfer, public-private partnership, community based organization, improve life style and equitable development (Figure 1).

Table 1: Population of the ECER

	1991	2000	2005	2010
ECER	3,097,388	3,500,215	3,949,000	4,360,000
Kelantan	1,207,648	1,313,014	1,505,500	1,670,000
Terengganu	808,556	898,825	1,016,500	1,120,000
Pahang	1,081,148	1,288,376	1,427,000	1,570,000

Source: Ninth Malaysian Plan

Table 2: Average Annual Growth Rate (AAGR) of Population in ECER

	1991-2000	2000-2005	1991-2005
ECER	1.4	2.5	1.8
Kelantan	0.9	2.8	1.6
Terengganu	1.2	2.5	1.6
Pahang	2.0	2.1	2.0

Source: Ninth Malaysian Plan

Table 3: Labor Force and Employment for ECER

	Labor Force	Employment Rate
Kelantan	458,000	34.9%
Pahang	542,000	39.2%
Terengganu	354,000	25.9%

Source: Ninth Malaysian Plan

Table 4: GDP in the ECER, 2005-2010

	GDP in 2005 RM(billion)	GDP in 2010 RM(billion)	GDP growth rate (%) 2005-2010
Terengganu	7.64	10.10	5.7
Pahang	9.50	12.68	5.9
Kelantan	6.00	7.75	5.3
ECER	23.14	30.54	5.7

Source: Ninth Malaysian Plan

Table 5: In- migration, Out-migration and Net migration rates of ECER, 2003

	In-migration rate	Out-migration rate	Net migration rate
Terengganu	11.1	12.7	-1.6
Pahang	17.5	17.6	-0.1
Kelantan	17.5	15.8	1.7

Source: Migration Survey Report, 2003, DOS

Table 6: Overall Poverty and Hardcore Poverty of ECER, 2004

State	Overall Poverty	Hardcore Poverty
Kelantan	10.6	1.3
Terengganu	15.4	4.4
Pahang	4.0	1.0

Source: Ninth Malaysian Plan

METHODS

The study is empirical in nature. Secondary data have used to address the objectives in this study. Required data from secondary source have collected through document analysis. For this purpose a through literature survey has been conducted. In order to obtain the reliable secondary data various acts, regulations, policies of ECER, different journals, books, annual reports, papers of different agencies have consulted carefully. In this study secondary data for different years on ECER have been used. These are total population, average annual growth rate of population, labor force and employment, GDP, migration and poverty related data.

RESULTS

The total population of ECER in 1991 was 3.09 million. In the year, 2000 and 2005 the population was 3.50 million and 3.95 million respectively. The population reached in 4.36 million on the year 2010. Among the three states of ECER, highest population was Kelantan and lowest in Terengganu. The total population on the year 2010 was 1.67 million, 1.12 million and 1.57 million in Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang respectively (Table 1). The average annual growth rate (AAGR) of ECER was 1.4 during the 1991-2000 period and 2.5 during the 2000-2005 periods. The AAGR was 1.8 during the 1991-2005 periods. The AAGR is high in Pahang among the three states of ECER. During the periods 1991-2005, AAGR was 2.0 in Pahang. On the other hand, AAGR was 1.6 in Terengganu and Kelantan (Table 2).

The labor force is high in Kelantan and low in Pahang among the three states in ECER. The labor force is 4.5 million, 5.4 million and 3.5 million in Kelantan, Pahang and Terengganu respectively. The employment rate is high in Pahang and low in Terengganu among the states of ECER. The employment rate is 34.9%, 39.2% and 25.9% in Kelantan, Pahang and Terengganu respectively (Table 3). The GDP of ECER was 23.14 billion and 30.64 billion in 2005 and 2010 respectively. In this period, the growth rate of GDP was 5.7%. The GDP in Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan was 9.50 billion, 7.64 billion and 6.00 billion respectively in 2005. In 2010, GDP in Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan was 12.68 billion, 10.10 billion and 7.75 billion respectively. The growth rate for Pahang, Terengganu and Kelantan was 5.9%, 5.7% and 5.3% respectively (Table 4).

A total of 57,210 people migrated out of the ECER in 2003, and a total of 58,330 migrated into the states, resulting in a net positive migration of 1,120. In Kelantan, there was a positive net migration of 2,510.

Pahang experienced a positive but very low net migration of 50. Terengganu had a negative net migration of 1,440. In the 2000-2003 periods, the 3 ECER states had different migration patterns from year to year. In 2000 and 2001, Kelantan and Pahang experienced negative net migration rates. Terengganu, on the other hand, experienced a positive net migration rate. In 2002, no ECER states experienced a negative net migration. The rates for Kelantan and Terengganu stood close to zero, while Pahang recorded a positive net migration (ECER Master Plan, 2007). In 2003, Kelantan was a positive net migration rate of 1.7%. On the other hand, Pahang and Terengganu was negative migration rate. In-migration rate of Kelantan, Pahang and Terengganu was 17.5, 17.5 and 11.1 respectively in 2003. Again, out-migration rate of Kelantan, Pahang and Terengganu was 15.8, 17.6 and 12.7 respectively in 2003 (Table 5).

The current national definition of poor households in Peninsular Malaysia as stipulated in the 9MP are those earning a monthly gross income of RM661 and below. This was the official Poverty Line Income (PLI) for Peninsular Malaysia in 2004. For Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang, the PLIs for overall poverty were set at RM675, RM734 and RM609 respectively. The PLI for hardcore poverty for Peninsular Malaysia was set at RM398 in 2004. For Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang, the PLIs for hardcore poverty were set at RM438, RM469 and RM392 respectively. The overall poverty rate of Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang is 10.6%, 15.4% and 4% respectively. On the other hand, hardcore poverty rate of Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang is 1.3%, 4.4% and 1% respectively (Table 6).

DISCUSSION

The East Coast Economic Region (ECER) is full of natural beauties. There are a lot of tourism assets are available in this region. Ecotourism can be developed in the tourism oriented areas of ECER. It should be ensured the sustainable development of this region. The main potentialities of sustainable development in ECER through ecotourism are as follows;

Per capita income

Per capita income in ECER is lower than Malaysia as a whole. The gap between urban and rural income in the ECER states indicates the relatively low income in this region. Ecotourism development in this region can increase the per capita income of people. It also keeps the balance of income with in this region and other parts of Malaysia.

Ecological and conservational benefit

Ecotourism is helpful to preserve local ecosystem and biodiversity conservation. The green areas of a region are preserving by the ecotourism development. It will ensure the environmental sustainability in ECER.

Improve the life condition

Ecotourism is economically and socially sustainable for ECER. It can improve the life condition of local community which ensures the sustainable development.

Reduce poverty

The overall poverty and hardcore poverty of ECER is higher than Peninsular Malaysia as whole. Ecotourism can increase the economic involvement of people, which reduce the poverty of this region. Social sustainability can ensure in this region by reducing poverty.

Local culture

Ecotourism is respectful to the local culture and customs. Ecotourism development in ECER will be helpful to the local culture.

Local community attitude

Local people's positive attitudes are necessary for ecotourism development in an area. Most of the rural people of ECER can play a vital role for sustainable development as well as ecotourism.

Employment opportunity

The employment rate in ECER is lower than Malaysia as a whole. Ecotourism can create employment opportunities for the local people in this region.

Revenue and tax

Ecotourism development in ECER will generate the revenues and tax for the government. It can be ensured the equitable income for the local people in this region.

Regional growth

The Malaysian federal and state governments have spent sufficient allocation for the development of ECER. Ecotourism can develop the transportation and traffic system in the region. The regional development has ensured the enhancing of ecotourism in this region as well as sustainable development.

There are some obstacles also remaining in ECER for sustainable development.

Lack of integrated planning

An integrated planning has not remaining in ECER for sustainable development. Without proper

planning, ecotourism development in this region is quite impossible.

Improper entrepreneurship

Local entrepreneurs in ECER have limited capital. They haven't can operate ecotourism business easily by their limited capital.

Inadequate infrastructure

Infrastructure development is one of the key elements for ecotourism. The infrastructural efficiency in ECER is not suitable for flourishing ecotourism.

Community participation

Community participation is must for sustainable ecotourism development in an area. Without proper community involvement, ecotourism cannot play role for sustainable development.

In equitability

Equitable development of tourism resources is necessary for ensuring sustainability in ECER. But this initiative is not present in this region. As a result sustainable development through ecotourism is not enhancing here.

Ecotourism has limited negative impacts. Ecotourism is helpful for preserving the natural environment as well as biodiversity conservation. To ensuring the sustainable development in ECER through ecotourism, the following steps have been taken;

Human development

Human development is necessary for ecotourism development in ECER. Institutional, vocational and capacity building training may be arranged for the tourism professionals in the region. Tourism related education and research activities also increase in the universities of this region.

Social cohesion

The community is interested in developing sustainable ecotourism through ensuring social cohesion. Co-operative formation and community organization for conservation activities between local communities should be encourage in ECER. For sustainable development in ECER, must be ensured social cohesion among the communities.

Environmental benefit

The attractiveness of ecotourism depends on its' environmental well-being. Ecosystem, biodiversity, local flora and fauna are the considerable factors for ecotourism development in an area. These resources must be kept and well arranged for sustainable

ecotourism as well as sustainable development in ECER.

Technological change

Modern communication technologies are related with tourism business now. Many countries have developed their tourism industry by using the technological advantages. So, proper technological change can be ensure in ecotourism industry of ECER for sustainable development in this region.

Proper planning

Integrated guidelines for sustainable ecotourism development in ECER have been drawn up in the National Ecotourism Plan. These guidelines are giving proper instructions to develop ecotourism for sustainable development in this region.

Infrastructure development

Upgraded infrastructure facilities are necessary for boosting the ecotourism activities. The government spent a lot of allocation for infrastructure and communication development in ECER which ensures ecotourism development in this region.

Community involvement

Local communities are vital stakeholders for ecotourism in any region. The sustainable ecotourism depends on successful participation of local people in ecotourism activities. They can contribute to maintain pollution free tourism activities and income generation for sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

Ecotourism is one of the potential tourism segmentation in the world today. It is social and environment friendly as well as economically profitable. The development experts have emphasized on ecotourism for the sustainable development in an area. ECER is full of natural resources and beauties in Malaysia. The Malaysian government has given sufficient allocation for ecotourism development in this region. There are some activities such as develop infrastructure facilities, conserving the environment, nurturing skilled human resources, set up special economic zone, campaign and prompt advertisement have been taken for sustainable ecotourism development in this region. Ecotourism can be ensured social, economic and environmental benefits of local people in ECER. Government policy should promote local community participation and provide the necessary financial support to local investors for ecotourism development. If collective efforts can be

taken for ecotourism activities in ECER, it will ensure the sustainable development in this region.

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