

Community-Based Ecotourism (CBET) activities in Abai Village, lower Kinabatangan area of Sabah, east Malaysia

Abstract

Ecotourism related activities such as river boating, wild life viewing, jungle trekking, fire fly watching, trees planting and homestay programme have been introduced in Abai Village, Lower Kinabatangan, Sabah since 2005. Majority of the local communities are willing to participate in ecotourism activities because they believe ecotourism and homestay programmes can provide them with extra income for their livelihoods. This village can be reached by boat in about 2 hours from Sandakan Town. Even though local communities at Abai are willing to participate in ecotourism activities, there are a few challenges faced by them in order to gain real benefits from ecotourism development. The study was carried out in September until November 2014 to observe local participation in ecotourism activities. Indepth interviews were conducted with various participants such as homestay operators and management of Community Abai Project (CAP). The findings have revealed that ecotourism activities in Abai such as the Habitat Forest Restoration Project and Homestay Programme are managed by the local people. Although the local community are supporting the ecotourism activities in Abai, they are still facing some challenges such as (1) lack of capital resources, (2) out migration of youths, (3) lack of public facilities, (4) leadership, local capacity and communication issues, and (5) threats to wild life animals makes the local participation in ecotourism development unclear