

Local Community Participation in Homestay Program Development in Malaysia

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The tourism industry is the second largest economic contributor in Malaysia, following the manufacturing sector. In 2008, recorded tourist arrivals reached 22.05 million and resulted in RM49.6 billion (USD13.4 billion) in revenue. The government has recognized the tourism industry in Malaysia as an engine for economic, social, political and ecological development, especially in rural areas. The Homestay Program is actively promoted by the Ministry of Tourism as a type of community based tourism in Malaysia. It is realized by the government as a catalyst for rural community development, particularly from a socio-economic perspective. The benefits of community based tourism can be further developed through the participation of women, youth and retired people. To realize the potential of the Homestay Program, the Malaysian Rural Tourism Master Plan 2001 was formulated. In the Malaysian Plan (2006-2010), one of the points of focus by the government is on community development; rural tourism is one of the mechanisms. By June 2009, there had been 3,264 participants in 140 Homestays. Recently, the Ministry of Tourism has given the Homestay Program special emphasis. Under the 9th Malaysia Plan, a total of RM40 million was allocated to the ministry for upgrading infrastructure and facilities in participating villages. Developing the capabilities of local communities is an important component in ensuring the tourism development project benefits them; without supporting the communities in their endeavors, the physical development means nothing to them. If local communities are not equipped to actively participate, third parties could easily manipulate them, resulting in external domination of tourism development. Therefore, this descriptive study explores the motivation of local communities involved in the Homestay Program and the readiness among the local communities, as well as the appropriateness of training provided by government agencies aimed towards empowering local communities. Sixty-two respondents from local communities actively involved in operating the Homestay Program participated in this study. Respondents were from the district of Muar, Johore, Malaysia (Homestay Kg. Parit Bugis, Homestay Kg. Sarang Buaya, and Homestay Kg. Melayu Baharu, Bt 28 Lenga).

Keywords: community participation, homestay program, community development

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Introduction

As noted in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation [APEC] Tourism Charter, Community Based Tourism (CBT) is able to create direct employment opportunities as well as increasing income levels and reducing the level of poverty in rural communities. CBT is a platform to support this mission. Realizing the potential of CBT in Malaysia, The Rural Tourism Master Plan was formulated in 2001 (Malaysia, 2001). In the 9th Malaysia Plan (2006-2010), the government focused on the development of rural communities through two strategies; to reduce income imbalance between the rural and urban areas, and between the less developed and more developed states. The modernization and creation of new economic activities in rural areas, particularly through the program of “One District One Industry”, provides greater opportunities for rural households to be gainfully employed in high productivity sectors (Malaysia, 2006).

Towards that agenda, the government has identified rural tourism, especially through CBT, as a catalyst for rural community development. One specific form of community based tourism that is being aggressively promoted by the Malaysian government is the Homestay Program. Communities in rural areas throughout the country organize this program. The program was included under the Rural Tourism Master Plan. Homestay is considered as a new segment of the tourism industry, because there is a trend towards an increased specialization among tourists and an increasing concern about the environment. As a result, the government has been giving the Homestay Program special emphasis through the 9th Malaysia Plan, resulting in a total of RM40 million being allocated to the ministry for upgrading infrastructure and facilities in participating villages. As stated by a previous researcher Yahaya (2004), millions of dollars have been spent for the development of infrastructure, super-structure, transportation facilities and services, as well as training personnel to support the development of the program.

History and the Development of Homestay Program

The roots of the Homestay Program in Malaysia can be traced back to the early 1970s. The program started in the “drifter enclave” of Kampung Cherating Lama in Pahang when a local lady named Mak Long Teh took in long staying “drifters”, or hippies, and provided breakfast, dinner and a space to sleep in her humble kampung house (Hamzah & Ismail, 2003). At the beginning, most of the pioneers’ Homestays were located along the beach. By the late 1980s, the Homestay concept took on another dimension with the arrival of Japanese youths in exchange programs. The current president of The Homestay Association of Malaysia, Mr. Shariman, was the pioneer of a program in which Japanese youths stayed with adopted families and participated in communal activities related to the rural and often pastoral way of life. Since then the Ministry of Agriculture has used the Homestay Program as a catalyst for rural development.

In 1993, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Tourism [MOCAT] formed a special unit to oversee the growth of the Homestay Program which was officially launched on December 3rd, 1995 by MOCAT. The official definition of the Homestay Program, according to MOCAT (currently the Ministry of Tourism or MOTOUR), is: “...Where tourists stay with the host’s family and experience the everyday way of life of the family in both a direct and indirect manner” (MOCAT, 1995).

The core component in the Malaysian Homestay Program, which differs from Homestays in other countries, is the element of staying together with host families, or namely, “adopted” families. This element involves the guests eating, cooking, and doing many activities together with their adopted families, allowing

two parties with different cultural backgrounds to interact and learn from each other. Unlike regular bed and breakfast establishments, the Homestay Program in Malaysia allows guests to participate in the host's daily activities. Indeed, this is an important strength of this particular tourism product; no other tourism product in Malaysia offers a similar view of the culture of Malaysian rural societies as is made possible by the Homestay Program (Kayat, 2009). By June 2009, there were about 140 Homestays in 227 villages throughout country, with a total of 3,264 houses participating in the program. Table 1 shows statistics related to the Homestay Program in Malaysia.

Table 1

Homestay Program (Village) and Operators (June 2009)

State	No. of homestays	No. of villages	No. of participants	No. of rooms
Perlis	3	3	55	64
Kedah	7	7	116	175
Langkawi	6	11	152	215
Pulau Pinang	9	9	200	227
Perak	6	30	178	248
Selangor	15	18	581	819
Melaka	5	5	111	144
N.Sembilan	8	26	233	385
Johor	15	18	471	772
Kelantan	8	10	106	163
Terengganu	6	6	149	108
Pahang	12	21	375	412
Sarawak	19	21	233	243
Sabah	18	39	225	413
Labuan	3	3	65	75
Total	140	227	3,264	4,463

Note. Source: Ministry of Tourism, Malaysia (2009).

Table 2 specifically shows the statistics of Homestay operators in Johore State, one of the most active states in Malaysia participating in the Homestay Program. Seven districts participate in the Homestay Program in Johore, with a total of 550 participants. In the district of Muar (location of the study), there are three villages registered for the Homestay Program. This information is shown in detail in Table 2.

According to Kayat (2009), Homestay Programs failed because of a lack of local participation, local leadership, knowledge and skills, poor planning, community structure, etc.. As argued by Hall, Kirkpatrick, and Mitchell (2005), limited skills and knowledge of tourism can contribute to false expectations about the benefits of tourism and a lack of preparedness for the change associated with tourism, and limits opportunities. As mentioned by Rashid, Hadi, Mustafa, Hamzah, and Khalifah (2010), community capacity building is an essential aspect that must be addressed by the stakeholder to ensure that the community based tourism really benefits the communities themselves. Community participation is one of the domains of community capacity building. It is one of the mechanisms used to empower people to take part in community development. Community participation is an essential part of community development and one of the most important factors in the community based tourism development process, which allows involvement of people in the different

stages of decision making (Aref & Ma'rof, 2008; Bozlul, 1994). In community based tourism development, many researchers have looked at community participation as a way of equitable distribution of the benefits of tourism development to the local communities (Bozlul, 1994). This means involving local people in the tourism development process. Murphy (1985) mentioned that public participation in tourism planning and management is essential because when development and planning do not fit with local aspirations and capacities, resistance and hostility can increase the cost of business or destroy the industry's potential altogether. Therefore, the study of motivational factors and the readiness of the local communities, as well as the program provided to enhance the communities' participation are very important in the development of the Homestay Program.

Table 2

Homestay Statistics in Johor State, 2009 (Till June, 2009)

District	Villages	No. of participants	No. of rooms
Pontian	Tanjung Piai	54	85
	Kg. Permatang Sepam, Benut	15	31
	Kg. Puteri Menangis, Benut	22	36
Batu Pahat	Kg. Parit Tengah, Mukim 12, Sri Merlong	26	45
Muar	Kg. Sarang Buaya	10	22
	Kg. Parit Bugis	54	111
	Kg. Baru Melayu, Bt. 28, Lenga.	30	60
Kota Tinggi	Felda Semenchu	110	117
	Kg. Temenin	28	40
	Kg. Lukut	20	35
Mersing	Kg. Air Papan	32	48
Johor Bahru	Kg. Sinaran Baru	60	59
	Kg. Perigi Acheh	7	9
Kulai Jaya	Kg. Seri Paya, Kulai	41	41
	Kg. Seri Gunung Pulai	41	51
Total		550	790

Note. Source: Johor State Tourism Action Council (2009).

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to identify local participation in the Homestay Program. This objective is broken into three specific objectives, as stated below:

- (1) Identify the motivational factors among local communities that contribute towards their participation in the Homestay Program;
- (2) Identify the readiness among local communities from the aspect of knowledge, attitude and skills towards participation in the Homestay Program;
- (3) Identify the appropriateness of training provided by the government agencies towards enhancing participation in local communities.

Literature Review

Neo populists are most likely to suggest forms of tourism that can enhance the well-being of local communities. Such sentiments are expressed by Brohman (1996):

Communities based tourism development would seek to strengthen institutions designed to enhance local participation and promote the economic, social, and cultural well-being of the popular majority. It would also seek to strike a balanced and harmonious approach to development that would stress considerations such as the compatibility of various forms of tourism with other components of the local economy; the quality of development, both culturally and environmentally; and the divergent needs, interest, and potentials of the community and its inhabitants.

Neopopulist theory suggests that local communities should be central to tourism planning and management, and it encourages the voices of those most affected by tourism to be heard. This may be achieved by formalized systems of local level planning which actively involve local communities, or at the other extreme, protests by community groups dissatisfied with the way tourism is impacting their societies and environments (Scheyvens, 2002). Local involvement is a critical element of successful community based tourism. It has become critical in dialogue concerning community involvement in tourism planning or tourism ventures. The debate is currently not one of whether local communities should be involved in the development of tourism to their areas, but how they should be involved and whether involvement means control (Cater, 1995). Without community participation, there are no partnerships, no developments and no program (Aref, 2009). Furthermore, lack of community participation in decision-making for tourism development leads to a failure in empowering the local communities (Miranda, 2007). Pretty (1995) posed a useful tool for ascertaining the nature of participation in tourism ventures which identified ladders of participation as a spectrum from passive to active involvement (Ashley & Roe, 1998). Meanwhile, some scholars have provided a typology of participation. However, none deal directly with tourism development (Leksakundilok, 2006). Table 3 below describes Pretty's typology of participation.

Table 3

Typology of Participation

Levels	Types	Characteristics
Genuine participation (active)	Empowerment	Local people may directly contact explorer tourists and develop tourism by themselves; Local people have control over all development without any external force or influence.
Symbolic participation (towards active)	Partnership	There are some degrees of local influence in the tourism development process.
	Interaction	People have greater involvement in this level. The rights of local people are recognized and accepted in practice at the local level (Pretty, 1995).
	Consultation	People are consulted in several ways through meetings, seminars etc.. Developers may accept some contribution from the locals (Arnstein, 1969).
Non-participation (passive)	Informing	People are told about tourism development programs that have been already decided by community. The developers run the projects without getting any feedback from local communities.
	Manipulation	Tourism development is generally developed by powerful individuals, governments, or outsiders without any discussion with the local communities (Arnstein, 1969).

Note. Source: Adapted from Leksakundilok (2006).

The above spectrum indicates that communities benefit most from community based tourism when they are actively involved in the development at the community level. According to Moscardo (2008), community capacity building is a prerequisite for community empowerment. Without proper planning in community capacity building, tourism development at the community level has negative outcomes. The lack of tourism knowledge is a critical barrier that not only directly limits locals' participation in the development of tourism,

but also contributes to further obstacles—a lack of local tourism leadership and domination by external agents. The capacity building of local communities must be parallel with the community based tourism planning. Figure 1 shows the connection community capacity building, local participation and unsustainable tourism development.

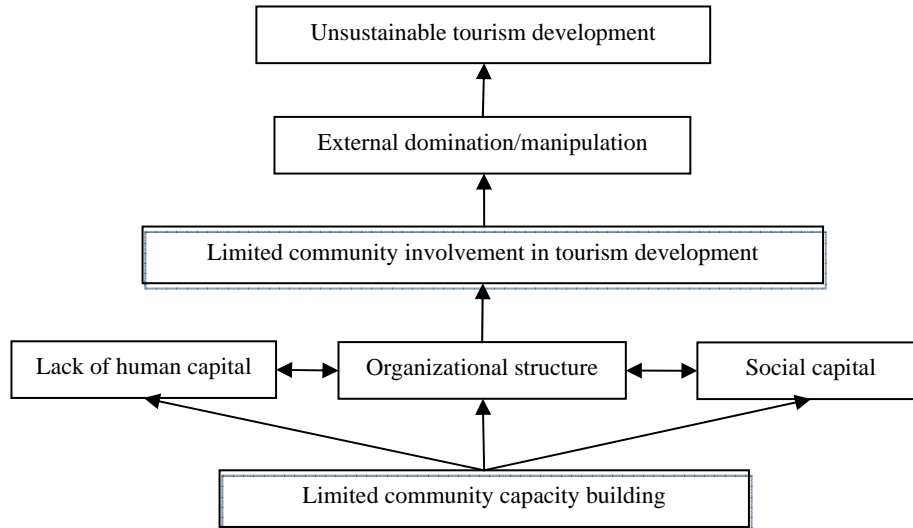


Figure 1. Community capacity building & community participation, external domination and unsustainable tourism development. Source: Moscardo (2008).

Research Methodology

This is the descriptive study, whereby the questionnaire was an instrument of the study. The respondents for this research were local communities who participated in the Homestay Program. The location of the study was in the district of Muar in the following villages: Homestay Kg. Parit Bugis, Homestay Kg. Sarang Buaya, and Homestay Kg. Melayu Baharu, Bt 28 Lenga. 62 homestay operators participated in this study. The selection of host families and local communities was done using the highest criteria for a best-fit host, as stated by Johor State Tourism Action Council. Using the council’s guidelines, only local communities or homestay operators who have shown a good performance in operating the program were considered. The three villages from the district of Muar were chosen for this study not only because of their involvement in the Homestay Program, but also due to the activeness of the operators in receiving and actively engaging with the tourists. The questionnaire was divided into three sections, sections A, B, and C. Section A focuses on the demography of the respondents’ details and the motivating factors of program involvement. Section B consists of questions regarding the readiness among local communities from the aspect of knowledge, attitudes, and skills towards participation in the Homestay Program. Lastly, section C consists of questions on the appropriateness of the training program provided by the government aimed at enhancing local participation in community tourism development. To assess the readiness of local communities towards participating in the Homestay Program, the Likert scale was used. It starts with a very extreme score of 1, representing the lowest score of readiness among communities. A score of 4 indicates the highest level of readiness among the local communities towards participation in the Homestay Program. The details of the scale and interpretation of the score are shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4

An Interpretation of Likert-Scale for the Readiness Among Local Communities Towards Participating in the Homestay Program

Evaluation	Interpretation
1	Very low
2	Low
3	High
4	Very high

Table 5 shows the Likert scale for the effectiveness of the training program provided by government agencies. A score of 1 means the respondents strongly disagree with the statement given to them, followed by a score of 2, meaning they disagree with the statement. A score of 3 and 4 indicate they agree or strongly agree with the statements related to the effectiveness of the training programs provided to them.

Table 5

An Interpretation of Likert-Scales for the Effectiveness of Training Program Provided by Government Agencies

Evaluation	Interpretation
1	Strongly disagree
2	Disagree
3	Agree
4	Strongly agree

Findings of the Study

Finding 1: Gender, Age, Income, and Motivation Factors

Table 6 demonstrates the profile of the respondents that have participated in the Homestay Program. The findings describe the population of operators by gender, age, income level, and motivational factors.

Gender. The data show that 36 respondents from the local communities who participated in the Homestay Program are female and the rest are male. Thus, the data show females in local communities are more highly motivated to be involved in the Homestay Program than men. Indirectly, the results show that mainly women run the program.

Age. The results show that most community members who participated in the program are aged 42 and above. This is most likely because most of them are living on their own, without kids or any companionship. Youth participation in the Homestay Program was low, comprising only 4.8% of the participants. This area needs to be addressed by stakeholders. To ensure that the program will be sustained, youth participation is a crucial component. They should be encouraged to become involved in the Homestay Program. Good roles for young people are tour guides, cultural performances, boat and transportation services, and other service components. According to Yahaya and Rasid (2010), youth participation is an important part that needs to be developed in the Homestay Program; they represent a major portion of rural populations. Based on the figure from the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development in 2009, there were 4.18 million of teenagers aged 15-39 in rural areas. This represents around 41% of the total rural population.

Income 1 and Income 2. There were changes in the income levels of communities before and after participating in the Homestay Program. Before joining the program, most of the operators earned an income in

the range of RM500-RM1,000. After participating in the Homestay Program, incomes increased. The data show that 46 operators, or 74.2% of participants earned an income of RM1,000-RM1,500.

Motivation factors. The result has shown that the main motivational factor to participate in the Homestay Program was the income. Participants found that the program created an opportunity for additional income. Almost 54% of respondents said that they joined due to the income factor. In addition, most participants indicated that the program leaders in their communities played an important role in convincing them to become involved in the program. Meanwhile, 34% of the participants responded that they joined the program because of the environmental factor. Through this program, a sense of community, a sense of belonging and social capital can be developed.

Table 6

Shows Gender, Age, Income, Family Members, Duration, Motivation Factors, and Education Level

General information	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	26	41.9
Female	36	58.1
Total	62	100.0
Age		
25-30	3	4.8
31-36	4	6.5
37-42	20	32.2
> 42	35	56.5
Total	62	100.0
Income1 (previously)		
RM300-RM500	24	38.7
RM500-RM1,000	37	59.7
RM1,500-RM2,000	1	1.6
Total	62	100.0
Income2 (current)		
RM1,000-RM1,500	46	74.2
RM1,500-RM2,000	12	19.4
RM2,000-RM2,500	4	6.4
Total	62	100.0
Family members		
1-5	43	69.4
6-10	19	30.6
Total	62	100.0
Training experience		
Yes	62	100.0
No	0	0.00
Total	62	100.0
Duration of participation		
1-2	9	14.5
3-4	23	37.1
5-6	20	32.3
> 6	10	16.1
Total	62	100.0

(Table 6 continued)

Motivation factors		
Income	33	53.2
Hobby	2	3.2
Image	2	3.2
Environment	21	33.9
Family encouragement	4	6.5
Total	62	100.0
Education level		
SPM	25	40.4
Diploma	3	4.8
Skills certificate	3	4.8
Others	31	50.0
Total	62	100.0

Finding 2: The Readiness From the Aspect of Knowledge, Attitude and Skills Among Local Communities

This section focuses on the readiness of the homestay operators. The respondents were asked about their knowledge of planning and operating the Homestay Program, the skills that they acquired to run the program and also their attitudes towards the program. Each component consisted of 10 questions. The finding showed a moderate level for each component. Table 7 below depicts the results of the operators' readiness.

Table 7

The Readiness of the Homestay Operators From the Aspect of Knowledge, Attitude and Skills

The readiness among local communities towards participating in Homestay Program	No.	Mean	Std. deviation	Interpretation
Knowledge				
(1) I have knowledge about the tourism industry.	62	2.0968	0.82402	Moderate
(2) I have knowledge about managing and operating the Homestay Program.	62	2.0968	0.82402	Moderate
(3) I have knowledge about local products and attractions.	62	2.1452	0.74320	Moderate
(4) I know tourists' expectations for the Homestay Program and I work towards that.	62	2.1129	0.81190	Moderate
(5) I have knowledge about customer service and marketing.	62	2.1290	0.81951	Moderate
(6) I have knowledge about business and entrepreneurship.	62	1.9194	0.73101	Low
(7) I have knowledge about foreign culture.	62	1.9355	0.59701	Low
(8) I am aware that the Homestay Program can help develop the socio economic situation of a community.	62	2.3226	0.88288	Moderate
(9) I understand the importance of rural development towards economic development.	62	2.1290	0.83928	Moderate
(10) I am aware that the Homestay Program contributes to the national income.	62	2.1774	0.89670	Moderate
Total Mean Score	62	2.1065	-	Moderate
Attitude				
(11) I am really motivated to compete.	62	2.1613	0.83359	Moderate
(12) I am motivated to innovate.	62	2.2903	0.85674	Moderate
(13) I have strength to succeed.	62	2.2258	0.83802	Moderate
(14) I have a good relationship with my community.	62	2.1935	0.84618	Moderate

(Table 7 continued)

(15) I have a positive perception of tourists.	62	2.2581	0.86717	Moderate
(16) I am always motivated to participate in homestay activities.	62	2.2903	0.81758	Moderate
(17) I have responsibility to ensure the program succeeds.	62	2.2903	0.91234	Moderate
(18) I am always sensitive to tourists' needs.	62	2.3226	0.93693	Moderate
(19) I always treat tourists as family members.	62	2.2581	1.00711	Moderate
(20) Through program participation, my sense of belonging to my community increased.	62	2.2903	1.03047	Moderate
Total mean score	62	2.2581	-	Moderate
Skills				
(21) I have English communication skills.	62	1.7581	0.69390	Low
(22) I have customer service skills.	62	2.1290	0.79926	Moderate
(23) I have skills in maintaining and developing relationships in society.	62	2.0968	0.71768	Moderate
(24) Safety and first aids skills.	62	2.0806	0.70823	Moderate
(25) Financial and accounting/book keeping.	62	2.0645	0.67438	Moderate
(26) Food service skills.	62	2.3387	0.65144	Moderate
(27) I have food preparation skills.	62	2.2581	0.67594	Moderate
(28) I have skills in interpreting local tourist products.	62	2.2742	0.68159	Moderate
(29) I have skills in preparing tourism packages.	62	1.7581	0.78271	Low
(30) I have computer and internet skills.	62	1.6613	0.74534	Low
Total mean score	62	2.042	-	Moderate

The results of the study showed that the overall score of required knowledge was at a moderate level, with a total mean score of 2.1065. This demonstrates that the operators have an overall knowledge to manage and run the Homestay Program, but also shows space for improvement in the future as the market becomes more competitive. Knowledge of developing packages regarding foreign culture needs to be addressed in community capacity building programs. Attitude also resulted in an overall moderate mean score (2.2581). Government and community committees need to plan suitable community capacity building program to strengthen the attitudes of local communities, especially in terms of providing a sense of belonging, a sense of community, a sense of tourist needs, etc.. Attitude is quite difficult to measure from a quantitative approach, but nevertheless, this scale provides a good starting point for stakeholders to begin planning to address the issues. The findings also showed that the operators' skills are at a moderate level, earning an overall mean score of 2.042. Overall, most skills need to be improved in the future, but English communication skills, safety and first aid knowledge are crucial and need immediate action from stakeholders. Tourists are very particular about communication, because they want to get as much experience as possible from the host community. Communication between hosts and tourists enhance the interaction. Safety and first aid are also top priorities for tourists. Therefore, homestay operators must gain adequate skills in those areas.

Findings: Results of the Appropriateness of Training Provided From the Perspectives of Local Communities

This section focuses on the appropriateness of the training program and its effectiveness in enhancing the capacity of the homestay operators. Research was divided into four main components, namely duration, training organizers, training frequency and also information sources. The overall mean score for this set of

questions was also at a moderate level, scoring 2.0363. The stakeholders, especially the government agencies that are involved in the training program, should emphasize training planning and management, and also make informational resources more easily available to the participants. Table 8 illustrates the results of the research.

Table 8

The Appropriateness of Training Provided

The appropriateness of training provided from the perspective of local communities	No.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Appropriateness in terms of duration of training	62	2.8548	1.45812	Moderate
Appropriateness in terms of the training organizer	62	1.4516	1.38703	Low
Appropriateness in terms of training frequency per year	62	2.6774	0.98803	Moderate
Appropriateness in terms of information resources	62	1.1613	0.60581	Low
Total average score mean		2.0363	-	Moderate

Conclusions

This study shows the socio-economic impact on the Homestay Program has had the communities involved. The participation of more youth must be addressed in order for the program to be sustained. Stakeholders must think through strategies and programs to encourage youth to participate in the Homestay Program. Since the influence of the local leaders plays an important role in the communities, the leaders should look towards the youth to strengthen the program. Income and environment are main motivational factors in becoming a homestay operator in the program. Proper and long-term planning is a crucial component that stakeholders need to focus on in order to sustain the program and empower the communities. Critical success indicators of community capacity building include local participation, knowledge and skills of the local community, leadership, community structure, a sense of community, and external partnership. Success in these areas will result in more effective development of the Homestay Program in Malaysia.

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