

# **Making A Living: Pro Poor Tourism in Hot Spring Recreational Park of Sungai Klah, Sungkai, Perak, Malaysia**

*Mencari Nafkah: Pelancongan Pro Poor  
di Taman Rekreasi Kolam Air Panas Sungai Klah, Sungkai, Perak*

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## **Abstract**

*Poverty is perceived as something unending in most poor and developing countries and it still occurs in areas including which have become tourist attraction centres. Tourism is an economic sector that is increasingly growing in importance to most poor and developing countries especially in rural areas and in the interior. Tourism activities have the ability to stimulate regional development rapidly which in turn benefits the locals. However, there is also a situation whereby its development is not equally beneficial to the government, investors and locals despite the rapidly developing tourism activities in that area. Pro Poor Tourism (PPT) is a mechanism that is able to benefit the poor at tourism centres; several strategies and approaches were identified as capable of increasing the cooperative bonding between the government, private sectors and local population as well as providing benefits to all three parties without ignoring the locals in the area. This study aims to present the PPT situation at a hot spring pool in Sungkai, Perak, Malaysia as to whether it has successfully fulfilled the PPT aspirations. By means of interviews and questionnaires conducted on 50 local respondents living around the hot spring, the results showed that on the average the hot spring benefited the locals but at a medium rate. It was found that the tourism development benefited the entrepreneurs (investors) more than the locals who are mostly on collective ownership. A number of recommendations to increase the participation of the locals in the current tourism development at the centre were put forward so as to realize the aspirations of the PPT.*

**Keywords** *Poverty; Pro Poor Tourism (PPT); Hot Spring; Regional Development*

## **Abstrak**

*Kemiskinan masih dilihat sebagai satu isu kerana di kebanyakan negara mundur dan negara sedang membangun, ia masih berlaku termasuklah di kawasan yang menjadi*

*tumpuan pelancong. Pelancongan pula dalam masa yang sama dilihat sebagai satu sektor yang semakin berkembang dan penting kepada kebanyakan negara sedang membangun dan negara mundur namun malangnya ia tidak dapat dimanfaatkan secara saksama. Memandangkan Pro Poor Tourism (PPT merupakan mekanisme yang mampu memberi sumbangan kepada golongan miskin di kawasan pelancongan maka beberapa strategi dan pendekatan telah dikenal pasti mampu meningkatkan jalinan kerjasama antara kerajaan, swasta dan penduduk tempatan dan seterusnya memberikan faedah kepada ketiga-tiga pihak tersebut tanpa meminggirkan penduduk tempatan di kawasan yang menjadi tarikan pelancong. Artikel ini bertujuan membentangkan situasi PPT di sebuah taman rekreasi kolam air panas di Sungkai, Perak sama ada ia berjaya memenuhi aspirasi PPT atau sebaliknya. Dengan menggunakan teknik temu bual dan borang soal selidik ke atas 50 orang responden yang terdiri daripada pekerja dan penduduk tempatan yang berkunjung ke taman rekreasi ini didapati secara puratanya memang kewujudan kolam air panas di lokasi memberi banyak manfaat terhadap penduduk tetapi dalam momentum yang agak sederhana. Ia dilihat bahawa keuntungan pembangunan pelancongan lebih memihak kepada usahawan (pelabur) lebih daripada penduduk tempatan yang kebanyakannya menikmati pemilikan secara kolektif. Beberapa cadangan untuk meningkatkan penyertaan penduduk tempatan dalam pembangunan pelancongan semasa di lokasi turut dikemukakan ke arah membantu dalam merealisasikan aspirasi PPT.*

**Kata kunci** Kemiskinan, Pro Poor Tourism (PPT), Kolam Air Panas, Pembangunan Wilayah

## **Introduction**

The development of the tourism industry in Malaysia is perceived as has just started (Badaruddin, 2010). In the early 1970s, the government began to show interest in developing the country through tourism by setting up a Tourism Development Corporation (TDC). Before 1970s, the government focused more on the exports of primary commodities instead of the tourism sector to boost the economic growth. In the early 1980s, the occurrence of the global economic downturn forced the government to look for economic sectors that are considered immune of the international economic upheaval. Based on the experience of several countries in the world, the tourism industry is characterized as 'invincible' and the government began to provide impetus and emphasis on the development of this industry. A number of provisions are devoted to the development and promotion to enhance the development of the tourism sector especially in tourism activities at the village level.

Generally, tourism activities in the country will be able to increase the economic growth, provide jobs, increase foreign exchange rate, enhance the integrity of cultures and international relations as well as reduce imbalance. The tourism industry has been given more attention by the government since in the Fourth Malaysia Plan (1981-1985) because of its potential in reducing the imbalance of payments as well as its ability to create employment opportunities for the community. Based on the Ninth Malaysia Plan and during the Eighth Malaysia Plan Malaysia's tourism sector has accounted for 18.1 billion of the country's income and is considered to be the second most important sector in Malaysia.

## Literature Review

Tourism development is often discussed because its role is considered dominant in encouraging changes in the status of a region. The status change would be more meaningful when it benefits the community involved in the tourism development activities especially in the context of equality in the allocation of resources as well as allowing maximum involvement of the community members in the planned project (Ashley, Boyd and Goodwin, 2000; Goodwin, 2005). This approach is known as *pro-poor tourism* (PPT), which is a strategy to help low-income earners and the poor living in rural areas. PPT concept is often associated with the extent to which tourism activities are carried out on site involving the local community, particularly in the context of providing jobs, creating a neighborhood community, increasing land ownership, food production, manufacturing, handicrafts and various infrastructures and resources in tourism activities carried out in the vicinity where they live (Ashley, Boyd and Goodwin, 2000; Goodwin, 2005). This participation is aimed to improve the quality of life that encompasses the economic status, social status and environment that will ensure comfort of living as rapidly as the tourism sector has proven to stimulate economic growth and the development of a place. In other words, the involvement of the local communities in tourism activities which are primarily based on the advantages of the place will be able to overcome the problem of poverty suffered for a long time.

### The Definition of *Pro Poor Tourism*

PPT tourism can be defined as a tourism that produces net benefits for the poor. It is not a specific sector nor does it involve certain products. Interest earned may be in the form of economic, social, environmental or cultural development (Ashley and Roe, 2002). In other words, *pro poor tourism* is a strategy that enhances the benefits to the poor through tourism development in their place. According to Ashley and Roe (2002) there are four (4) matters related to PPT, namely: (a) although there are commercial constraints, many can be utilized to increase the contribution of tourism in reducing poverty and assisting the PPT to achieve its goal, (b) all parties such as government agencies, local businesses and policy makers should unite to accomplish the aspirations of PPT, (c) a variety of impacts on the poor need to be restructured and improved, and (4) although PPT is quite difficult to be fully achieved, but it remains relevant in the economic development because it produces a challenge to transform the economic and political perspective of the people in that place.

*Pro Poor Tourism* (PPT) strategies can be roughly grouped into three categories: improving access of the poor to benefit from the economic development, including expanding existing businesses. Measures used in this case study is by increasing the direct participation of the poor in decision making by means of: (1) directly involve the poor as a shareholder in the investment so that they can become active participants, (2) enhance the voice of the tourism sector operators consisting from the poor to the policy level through the organization they lead and (3) facilitate the participation of poor planning at the local level (Ashley and Roe, 2002). On average, PPT is a perspective that emphasizes and tries to uphold the issue of poverty clearly. Therefore, various

measures need to be enhanced to strengthen the PPT strategy and increase tourism's overall contribution to reducing poverty in rural areas.

Ashley (2002) explains that the *Pro Poor Tourism* (PPT) is tourism that generate benefits to the poor. Over the years, tourism has been more beneficial to the government, hoteliers and the like, but in case study of *Pro Poor Tourism* (PPT), she examines how *Pro Poor Tourism* (PPT) benefits the local people involved in either direct financial benefits in terms of economic or the life of the community (social).

Ashley, Boyd and Goodwin (2000), Goodwin (2005) defines *Pro Poor Tourism* (PPT) as tourism that benefits the poor. This concept does not depend on the specific product or sector but across all items. In general, the PPT is not focused on a specific product or niche specific in a tourism activity, but it is the approach in the development and management of tourism in an area (<http://www.propoortourism.org.uk/>). PPT is also not a new form of tourism, but more importantly it is seen as being an approach to ensure that residents benefit from tourism activities carried out in their area (Ashley, Boyd and Goodwin, 2000; Goodwin, 2005). In other words, the local residents' involvement in PPT as an 'active player' rather than as an 'observers' and enjoy the impact of tourism development, particularly as a contributor to their main source of income.

The survey on the definition of the meaning of the PPT is almost the same that benefit the poor through tourism. PPT aims to improve relations between the poor and the tourism sector and thus reduce poverty through greater participation in the development of tourism products. This relationship can exist through employment opportunities, neighbourhood communities, land ownership, food production, handicraft makers and various infrastructure and resources. Therefore, the PPT can be summarized as an approach 'linking' between the tourism sector and the local population, which aims to benefit the population as a result of the development of tourism in their area rather than acting as an observer.

At international level, the approach of PPT is adopted by many underdeveloped and developing countries because the tourism sector is seen as expanding rapidly due to the utilization of existing natural resources and the fact that their foreign exchange values are still considered low. However, the current scenario finds that the current approach is not able to provide direct benefits to the local population (usually poor). Even though an area may receive a lot of tourists, but the locals do not benefit from the tourists coming to their place. Profits are usually scooped by capitalists who simply ignore the 'gain points' in which proceeds should be shared. Studies conducted in poor countries like Zambia and South Africa demonstrate that such scenario occurs (<http://www.propoortourism.org.uk/>). Sustainable tourism debate begins by accentuating on the mainstream destination as a priority, which may include some of the slums. This is one of the social issues that often become a fear because it can affect the environment.

In terms of implementation, there are some examples that can be discussed; one of these is the implementation of the PPT approach in Kenya. In Kenya, through the PPT approach, a project called "Youth Unemployment in Kenya Reduction Through The use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) Strategic and Tourism as Tools for Development" is conducted. A coordinating centre for this project has been created. Information and communication technology is used as a 'tool' as the most effective

way to reduce the rate of youth unemployment in the country. The project has placed tourism as a sector that is able to reduce unemployment rate among the youth. Through this project, the internet is turned into a medium for job seekers looking for employment opportunities in the tourism sector and employers looking for workers in the same sector. However, at present, most of the 100 institutes that train workers in the tourism sector in Kenya, train mostly for administrative work and not to train young people to find work (job hunting skills). The centres train the youths to provide a database that contains resumes of potentially unemployed youths to work in the tourism sector in Kenya. By using this method, these teens are not only able to gain employments in the tourism sector in Kenya but also outside Kenya (<http://www.propoortourism-usa.org/>).

### **PPT and strategies to reduce poverty in underdeveloped regions**

There are obvious reasons for linking tourism's role in poverty reduction strategies, particularly in tourist areas in underdeveloped countries and developing countries. For example, the tourism sector in South Africa is very significant because of the development and size of large operations in this sector and should provide benefits to the people of Africa who are basically poor. However, unfortunately studies show that the development of the tourism sector in South Africa still makes its original inhabitants poor and living in poverty. The people are supposed to be able to take advantage of the tourism sector growth and reduce poverty in South Africa. This is because the characteristics of certain tourism activities can be very conducive as PPT strategy because it is labour oriented, including the use of many women's labour, based on the natural and cultural assets of the poor and suitable for the rural poor with few options for economic growth. No doubt, the development of tourism in locations detrimental to the poor might result in inequality and social disorder. While the goal of tourism development is to take advantage of the poor socio economic growth by making the most of the locals increasing participation in tourism activities, by the same time it should also be able to reduce the negative impact on the poor. The second reason is that there are unfortunate conditions that caused the poor to miss the chance to go through the process of change.

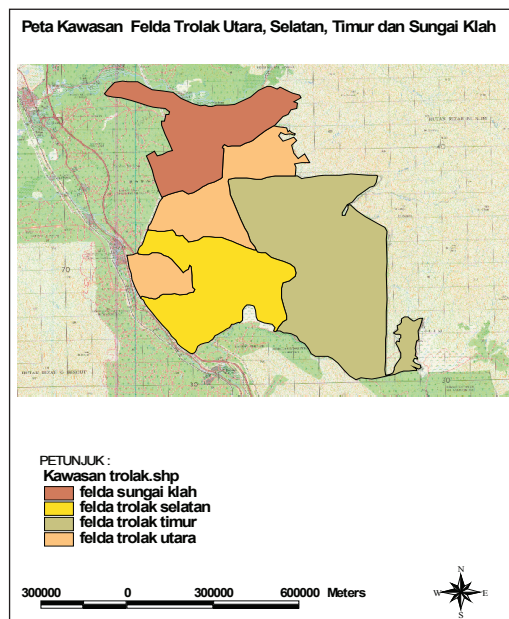
### **The Goals of Study**

Taking into consideration of Hot Spring Recreational Park of Sungai Klah, a natural resource-based tourism destination, the discussion in the following sections attempts to explore the extent to which the concept of *pro-poor tourism* is able to overcome the poverty of settlers in a palm oil estate whose source of income is from the employments associated with tourism activities carried out around the location where they live.

### **The Study Area**

Hot Springs Recreational Park of Sungai Klah, a natural resource-based tourism destination which is located in Sungai Klah, one of FELDA land schemes in Trolak

cluster was opened to the public since 2003 (Map 1). The setting was based on the garden village concept consisting of durian trees which provide shades plus a variety of herbs definitely reminds us of our home. Guests are definitely struck by the beauty of the nature and once they step into the bath pool of natural hot spring water, which originates from the Titiwangsa Mountain range some 65 meters above sea level, they will be refreshed. This newly opened FELDA recreational facility is an exciting family recreation centre. It contains hot springs and volcanic water pools for suitable for bathing. It is also surrounded by creeks which produce steam that is turned into a sauna when one is in the huts built on the streams. Interestingly, the park which was formerly known as Sungai Klah Hot Spring Park has more than 100 natural hot springs with water of low sulphur content of about 0.005 ppm. What most visitors are attracted to is that the garden is surrounded by virgin tropical rain forest rich in flora and fauna, while all along the road to the facility is surrounded by oil palms.



**Figure 1** Location of Felda Sungai Klah in the Trolak Cluster

## Research Methodology

This study involved observation and in-depth interviews with the people who live in the vicinity of Hot Spring Recreational Park of Sungai Klah. A total of 50 respondents were studied and interviewed. Interviews responses and findings from the questionnaires are presented as brief descriptive analysis to provide a realistic representation of PPT as means to reduce poverty.



## ***Pro Poor Tourism (PPT) in Hot Spring Recreational Park of Sungai Klah, Sungkai***

A hot spring can be defined as a pool of unique underground water which has a temperature higher than the ambient temperature and the temperature of the human body (The American Heritage Dictionary, 2000). This definition is supported by Pentocost *et al* (2003), saying that the hot springs pool refer to water temperature above 50°C. This indicates that the temperature is one of the important criteria for defining the hot springs. Photo 1 shows an example of the hot spring in the study area that can be used by tourists with a variety of external disease treatment purposes.



**Photo 1** An example of a hot spring in the study area

Generally, the main occupation for most people in the Hot Spring Recreational Park of Sungai Klah, Sungkai, is engaging in the oil palm sector as a source of income. At the same time in the study area is also a tourist attraction centre offering health tourism. The hot spring attracts visitors more during the weekends or public holidays.

PPT-based tourism is recommended to be implemented at Hot Spring Recreational Park of Sungai Klah, Sungkai, because this approach is expected to be able to generate incomes for the locals who are generally poor. Benefits may not be in the form of products, but it may range from economic, social, environmental or cultural activities without compromising their livelihood. PPT is an approach that highlights poverty issues clearly and its strategy aims to strengthen and increase the contribution of tourism in reducing poverty. In order to make the tourism sector more meaningful, PPT focuses on efforts to create job opportunities for the poor in tourism, rather than expanding the overall size of the tourism sector itself. The PPT strategies in Hot Spring Recreational Park of Sungai Klah can be grouped roughly into three categories:

- a. Improving the access to economic benefits for the poor. This includes establishing more open space, extensive businesses and employment opportunities for the poor, providing training so that they are in a position to take this opportunity and encouraging high income individuals to help low income communities. For example, in the Hot Spring Recreational Park of

Sungai Klah there are several food stalls along the main access road developed by locals to take advantage of the positive effects of tourism development in their area. Unfortunately, the stalls attract only a small number of customers. (Photo 2).



**Photo 2** A stall at the entrance to the Hot Spring Recreational Park of Sungai Klah

- b. Addressing the negative effects of social and environmental issues often associated with tourism (as in the case of land loss, coastal areas and other resources, and disruption of ecosystems or over exploitation) by focusing on the policies, processes and partnerships. However, observations carried out at the study site showed that the practice of parallel tourism development continue to capitalize excessively on existing resources. As a result various measures such as capacity control and limiting the number of tourists using a facility at a time are carried out in order to prevent the excessive use of resources and space.
- c. PPT strategies may seek to create a policy framework that removes barriers to the poor to participate in an organized program as well as promote participation of the poor in the planning process of tourism. This in turn will promote cooperation between the private sectors and the poor in developing new tourism products.

Although PPT overlaps with other approaches, including the concept of sustainable tourism development, the main distinctive feature of the PPT tourism is trying to uphold the rights of the poor and poverty as the main agenda. In the tourism sector, poverty is still seen as an issue as in most of the underdeveloped and developing countries, it still occurs in most areas including tourist destinations. Tourism, at the same time is seen as a sector that is growing and important to many developing countries and underdeveloped countries. The PPT strategies and approaches, as a mechanism that would contribute to the poor in the tourist area, have been proven to foster cooperation between the government, private sector and local people and thus provide benefits to all three parties without alienating the local population in areas that attract tourists.

The PPT strategies and approaches can be divided into two categories; strategies that focus on economic returns and strategy that does not focus on economic returns



(to benefit the lives of the local population). In general, strategies that focus on the economic returns are as follow;

- a. Expand employment opportunities and encourage the locals to apply for the jobs. Provide training opportunities to engage the local population in the tourism industry.
- b. To provide opportunities for the locals to become involved in the business sector; local people can be given the opportunity to venture into jobs such as food traders, craftsman or tourist guide.
- c. Develop a community-fund income that may be obtained as dividends, entrance fees, donations and distribution of profits. These funds are collected and used for the development of the local community. This strategy can be achieved through a close collaboration between the people as the operators and the authorities.

In the strategy that does not focus on economic returns (to benefit the lives of the local population), several approaches can be taken as follows:

- a. Reduce the social and cultural impact due to tourism activities.
- b. Improve access to facilities and infrastructure such as health facilities, roads, public transport, water supply, electricity and others.
- c. Preparation of action plans to reduce the environmental impact caused by tourism activities.

The main goal of this strategy is to reduce the negative impact of tourism on the population. All issues arising should be dealt with positively and at the same time, infrastructures related to the facilities should be provided to the residents because this provision will contribute to improving the quality of life among residents. Besides, the strategy that focuses on policies, processes and involvement of locals can also be implemented. The strategies are:

- a. Preparation of policies and planning of framework for the participation of the poor in tourism.
- b. Increase the participation of the locals in decision-making. For example, residents are adequately briefed before developing tourism activities in their area. Therefore, the population (particularly the poor) is able to understand more about the opportunities and benefits as well as the potential impact they could receive and earn.
- c. Partnerships with the private sector.

Nevertheless, to ensure that all the strategies are successful and well, the commitment of all parties is crucial. This is because not only does it involve some changes in policy but also a well-defined cooperation and a strong understanding of the three parties, namely the government, the private sector and the population.

## **Findings and Discussion**

In the context of the study area, the Hot Springs Recreational Park of Sungai Klah in Sungkai, Perak is seen a major attraction for tourism activity based on recreation and health care. As the study area lies within the FELDA settlements, large number of the population should be involved in tourism activities to ensure that they also benefit from the tourism activities. Several approaches such as expanding the PPT employment to the local population and providing more employment opportunities to the local versus outsider visits can be implemented if the PPT approach is carried out in the study area. However, what actually happened at the Hot Springs Recreation Park of Sungai Klah was that employment opportunities and efforts to employ the locals do exist but selective in nature and only taken advantage by a small group of residents of the FELDA Sungai Klah. Jobs and other employment opportunities involving the local population at the Hot Springs Recreational Park of Sungai Klah, such as masseurs, food delivery, maintenance and other jobs of low wage category earn them low income. The fact is, charges and entrance fees to the recreation park are quite high but the incomes to the locals employed in the facility do not commensurate. For instance, the income of masseurs is significantly higher when the services are offered at their residences as compared to incomes for similar services carried out as employees of the facility. Therefore, the involvement of FELDA in tourism products in actual fact benefited the organization more as manager of the services as compared to those who are 'permanent residents' living in the surrounding area.

This section discusses the results of the analysis of PPT approaches applied to the development and expansion of the Hot Springs Recreational Park of Sungai Klah. The analysis is general in nature and requires further study to determine the amount and the actual contribution of tourism activities carried out in the study area to the local community. The yardstick to which the development of the Hot Springs Recreational Park of Sungai Klah is beneficial to the improvement of the economy and social status of the locals is only if the activities benefit the 'host' rather than the developers. The elements of PPT that can be formulated are:

- a. The existence of the Hot Springs Recreational Park of Sungai Klah and infrastructure development should help the local population. Employment opportunities involving locals as either employees or the management is a good starting point taking into consideration fair distribution of resources and opportunities. However, the jobs offered are limited, too exclusive, no certainty and focussed mainly on young people. As a result, not many of the locals living close to the facility enjoy the benefits of the development of the hot spring. Furthermore, the existence of eateries, booths and stalls along the main road to the Hot Springs Recreational Park of Sungai Klah are steadily increasing as the population around the area also wanted to take advantage of the tourism there.
- b. Visitors need to pay admission fee to enter the park. The charge is considered quite high so some people may find it unaffordable. Apart from that, a number of locals who have massaging skills opened massage centres in the hot spring

park with certain amount of rentals. Basically, this type of centre diversifies the products offered on site. Unfortunately, the returns earned by these locals are meagre because the visitors are charged entrance fee and most of them felt unattached to get a service there at a higher price compared to massage services offered outside the recreation area.

The development goal of PPT that is to provide economic returns to the locals is not happening at the Hot Springs Recreational Park of Sungai Klah. Therefore, the goal of this development should be expanded so that it will benefit the majority of people in the Sungai. Klah FELDA settlement. This is because the resources provided by nature at this FELDA scheme are basically outstanding and unique when compared to what is available in the other FELDA clusters. Comparative advantages should be developed as much as possible by the developers and the local people as 'active participants'.

## Conclusion

Poverty reduction is not the case as a whole in the tourism agenda in Hot Spring Recreational Park of Sungai Klah, Sungkai. The PPT strategies conducted only offer economic and social benefits from a number of terms on a medium scale. Future strategies should be expanded to increase the effectiveness of the existing initiatives of PPT to disseminate the PPT thinking to be in line with the industry's 'mainstream'. There are some potential for evaluating the structure of tourism growth in favour of the poor. However, changes are limited due to trade and capacity constraints. Therefore, in the context of the Hot Spring Recreational Park of Sungai Klah, Sungkai, commitment from the government and investors to capitalize on tourism for development as well as the potential to expand tourism functionality of PPT should be evaluated and exploited as it should be.

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