

# Local perspectives of ecotourism development in the Terengganu State of Malaysia

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**Abstract** | This paper identifies the local communities' perception of ecotourism development in the Terengganu state of Malaysia. The study attempts to measure the intention and attitude on ecotourism development based on three dimensions- preservation of cultural traditions, sustainable community development, and ecotourism planning and management. Using a structured questionnaire, the study interviewed a total of 310 respondents from the local communities of two study sites in Terengganu. A purposive sampling technique based on a non-probability convenience sampling design has been adopted to identify the respondents and collect primary data. Results revealed that a significant association is sustained between the attitude and intention regarding the preservation of cultural tradition, and ecotourism planning and management dimensions. The relationship between attitude and intention in the case of sustainable community development found insignificant. Overall positive yet homogeneous attitudes and intentions by the respondents also observed in the study, which implies that the local people are supporting ecotourism development. However, proper learning and motivational activities should be initiated to increase the intention and attitude towards sustainable community development through ecotourism in the study area. Government authorities must be prepared to work closely with private enterprises in a long-term partnership for economic development. The policymakers, local authorities, and tourism stakeholders should initiate activities for ensuring sustainable ecotourism development which ensures local benefits as well as effective communities' participation in the study area.

**Keywords** | Attitude, ecotourism, intention, local communities, Terengganu

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## 1. Introduction

Ecotourism is an idea of nature-based tourism to contribute to environmental and social benefits (Surjanti et al., 2020). It is a form of alternative tourism, that contributes to environmental conservation, economic, social, and cultural development as well as local community well-being (Das & Chatterjee, 2015a). It is a weapon for local development, community well-being, nature conservation, and community capital (Lima & d'Hauterres, 2011). The involvement of local people in ecotourism activities can ensure the preservation of the natural environment (Stone, 2015). Again, ecotourism is helpful for the communities for economic and environmental well-being (Bhuiyan et al., 2012a). Ecotourism creates opportunities for knowledge gathering and learning for the local communities and tourists as well as all related stakeholders (Mondino & Beery, 2018).

The successful operation of ecotourism depends on the support and understanding of local communities toward tourism activities (Vodouhê et al., 2010) and their positive participation is to be encouraged in ecotourism enhancement (Lai & Nepal, 2006). Ecotourism is considered an alternative weapon for the livelihood of local communities in an area (Tang, 2015). Eshetu (2014) argued that ecotourism can ensure livelihood diversification for the local communities and sustainable management of natural resources. Again, Liu et al. (2014) pointed out that economic benefits influence the local communities to support ecotourism activities. Ecotourism activities bring economic benefits to the local communities like economic activities (Jalani, 2012), local businesses and entrepreneurship scopes (Ahmad et al., 2016), engage in tourism-related services (Reimer & Walter, 2013). Ecotourism can empower the local communities through their participation and access to tourism activities (Sutawa, 2012). Porter and Cruz (2012) observed that ecotourism and cultural tourism diversification of tourism mar-

ket impacted to overcome the economic resilience shock in the coastal EU regions.

Properly understanding the attitude and intentions of local communities is necessary for tourism development in an area. The success of ecotourism development and management depends on the local perspectives of an area (Holladay & Ormsby, 2011). Local communities may be interested in tourism development due to its positive contributions. Their positive perception creates a hospitable environment for tourists and makes a satisfactory tourist experience (Jimura, 2011). Cui and Ryan (2011) argued that economic dependency on tourism is the most considerable factor to measure the local people's perception of tourism development. Moreover, other studies (Khoshkam et al., 2016; Chen & Qiu, 2017) pointed out that local communities showed positive intention toward pre-tourism development and their positive attitude is helpful in the early stages of tourism development. The findings were revealed from the studies on the Anzali wetland (Khoshkam et al., 2016) and Fujian Wuyishan National Nature Reserve (Chen & Qiu, 2017).

Long (2012) addressed that residents' positive intention is fundamental for sustainable tourism development in an area. Local livelihood and socio-economic aspects are the main determinants for local communities to show their positive intention toward ecotourism development (Bennett & Dearden, 2014; Clements et al., 2014). Local communities have concerned to gather benefits from biodiversity through conservation activities. The support and positive intention of relevant stakeholders on conservation activities depend on the equal distribution of social costs (Bennett, 2016). Das and Chatterjee (2015b) argued that ecotourism can create employment opportunities and participation scopes in tourism activities for the local communities. However, Widodo et al. (2012) found in Bali, Indonesia, that national cultural background of tourists who are visiting ecotourism sites has an influence on ecotourism

service quality, customer satisfaction, crowding, past and behavioral intention.

Terengganu is one of the states on the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia. Tourism is the second most important economic sector of this state after petroleum, which contributes significantly to the state's GDP. Terengganu has numerous natural attractions including hills, forest reserves, lakes, waterways, recreational forests, waterfall, forest, spring, and coastal beaches. All of these attractions are suitable for ecotourism development in this state. Moreover, ecotourism can ensure sustainable tourism development in this state with environmental well-being (Terengganu, 2008). Among the ecotourism sites, Sekayu Recreation Forest and Lake Kenyir are attractive to tourists for their potential tourism activities. Sekayu is the largest recreational forest in Terengganu, which is well facilitated with shelters, changing rooms, chalets, and rest houses for the visitors' convenience. Lake Kenyir is one of the famous marine ecotourism sites for natural beauties, recreational facilities, and tourist attractions. Both of these ecotourism attractions are situated in the district of Hulu Terengganu. This district is relatively backward in Terengganu in terms of poverty rate, monthly income, and the number of poor households (ECER, 2007). Ecotourism development in Lake Kenyir and Sekayu Recreational Forest can ensure socio-economic development in the Terengganu state as well as local people's well-being. The study identifies the local communities' perception of ecotourism development in the Terengganu state of Malaysia. The study also examines the relationship between community attitude and intention for ecotourism development.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Figure 1 highlights the three dimensions of local perspectives for ecotourism development in an area namely preservation of cultural tradition, sustainable community development, and ecotourism planning and management. Ecotourism gives several benefits to the local communities such as social cohesion, gender equity, and protection of local cultural tradition (Rodriguez-Piñeros & Lewis, 2013). Trang (2015) revealed that social contexts and cultural factors are influencing tourism development in an area. Bhuiyan et al. (2012b) addressed through their study on the east coast economic region in Malaysia that ecotourism is respectful to local customs and culture, and ensures cultural education opportunities for local communities. Adom (2016) identified that ecotourism is respectful of local cultural practices to protect and conserve the tourist sites in an area.

Das and Chatterjee (2015a) addressed that ecotourism ensures community development through gathering several benefits such as economic enhancement, conservation of natural resources, and community sustainability. Again, ecotourism development can reduce the dependency of local people on natural resources in an area and they also participate in the conservation activities of natural resources (Nyaupane & Poudel, 2011; Pegas et al., 2013). On the other hand, Oldekop et al. (2016) pointed out that ecotourism can ensure socio-economic benefits and positive biodiversity conservation for the local communities. Moreover, ecotourism is helpful for forest and wildlife conservation (Das & Chatterjee, 2015b), ensure economic benefits for locals (Rodriguez-Piñeros & Lewis, 2013), improve incomes (Nathan & Philip, 2014), and living standard (Lopes et al., 2015), conservation of biodiversity (Regmi & Walter, 2016), and create business and employment opportunities for local communities (Jalani, 2012).

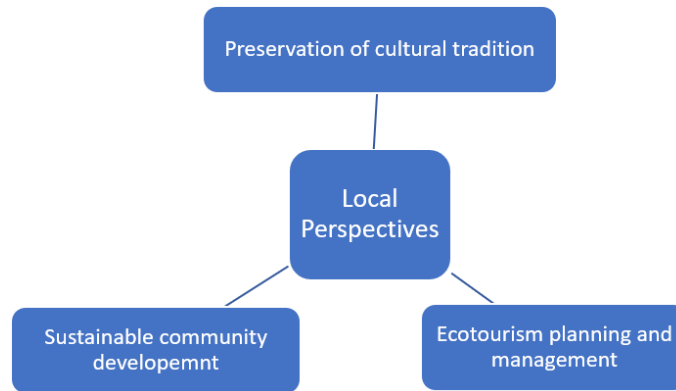


Figure 1 | Local perspectives of ecotourism development

Some challenges remain for ecotourism planning and management in an area such as tourism resource management (Chen & Nakama, 2013), economic and social infrastructure (Ezequias, 2020), local community participation (Zhou & Grumbine, 2011), and support from the local communities (Zhu et al., 2014). The local government can arrange training initiatives and administrative support for the local communities so that they can properly participate in ecotourism planning and management (Chen & Qiu, 2017). The success of ecotourism development depends on the active participation of relevant stakeholders and considers the views in decision-making (Adom, 2017). Again, Nault and Stapleton (2011) pointed to inputs of external stakeholders along with local communities in ecotourism planning and management which ensure effective benefits for locals. Local communities show their negative views on ecotourism development due to poor institutional structure, failure in socio-economic outcomes, and limited scope in participation (Turner et al., 2016). Moreover, Thondhlana et al. (2015) revealed through their study in South Africa that lack of participation in natural resource management and limited involvement in decision-making is the main obstacle for local communities in ecotourism development.

Several studies (Jaafar et al., 2015a; Fong et al., 2017; Hanafiah et al., 2021) in Malay-

sia emphasize community development, preservation of cultural tradition, and ecotourism planning and management for successful ecotourism development. The success of tourism development depends on community participation and their involvement in tourism activities can improve living quality and ensure economic development in the Lenggong Cultural Heritage Site of Malaysia (Jaafar et al., 2015a). Regmi and Walter (2016) argued that ecotourism activities assist managers in preventing illegal activities and developing a linkage between local people and conservation activities. The study of Jaafar et al. (2015b) on Langkawi Island in Malaysia urged that community participation help to reduce negative socio-cultural impacts due to tourism development and creates opportunities to work with governments for planning and resource management. The study of Fong et al. (2017) on tourism development in rural areas of Sarawak in Malaysia revealed that community participation can be ensured through various initiatives such as community movement, knowledge gathering, motivation, self-esteem, and self-efficiency. Kayat and Zainuddin (2016) identified that local communities' engagement in tourism activities is increasing the tourist arrivals in Malaysia. Nejati et al. (2014) revealed that local people are concerned about positive impacts in social, economic, and environmental aspects due to the tourism development of island areas in Malay-

sia.

Through a study on Port Dickson in Malaysia, Hanafiah et al. (2021) revealed that community participation in tourism activities can reduce negative impacts, ensure opportunities in tourism planning and development, and maintain sustainability. Ibrahim et al. (2021) emphasized local community engagement with tourism authorities for their better empowerment through a study on Langkawi Geopark in Malaysia. Ng et al. (2017) pointed to several aspects of community perspective based on a study on Tioman Island in Malaysia like tourism income, employment opportunity, preserving natural resources, and balanced outcomes from tourism activities. Jaafar et al. (2015a) pointed to the involvement of local communities in local cultural activities for providing a better experience to

tourists. Moghavvemi et al. (2017) argued that community participation in tourism development and planning is crucial for their positive perception. Another study by Moghavvemi et al. (2020) on Malaysia pointed out that several involvements influence the local communities to contribute to tourism development like a sense of ownership, decision-making opportunities, creating awareness, and participation in the management process. The study of Darda and Bhuiyan (2022) on Terengganu in Malaysia revealed that ecotourism should be maximized the benefits for local communities to accelerate the local well-being and need to reduce negative impacts. Table 1 highlights the local perspectives in three dimensions with related attributes on attitude and intention.

**Table 1** | The dimensions of local perspectives of ecotourism development

Dimension	Attributes	Indicators	References
Preservation of cultural tradition	Attitude	Diverse cultural experiences	Trang, 2015; Jaafar et al., 2015a
		Cultural exchange opportunities	Bhuiyan et al., 2012b; Das & Chatterjee, 2015a
		Loss of traditional culture	Jaafar et al., 2015b; Adom, 2016
	Intention	Natural and cultural heritage	Eshetu, 2014
		Include the traditional events	Rodriguez-Piñeros & Lewis, 2013
		Natural and humanistic experiences	Lima & d'Hauteserre, 2011; Jaafar et al., 2015a
Sustainable community development	Attitude	Residents' environmental consciousness	Surjanti et al., 2020; Moghavvemi et al., 2020
		Economic contribution to conservation	Bennett, 2016; Regmi & Walter, 2016
		Employment to local people	Jalani, 2012; Ng et al., 2017
	Intention	Education of the local people	Bhuiyan et al., 2012b; Mondino & Beery, 2018
		Encourage tourism investment	Ahmad et al., 2016; Ng et al., 2017
		Environmental education opportunities	Fong et al., 2017; Mondino & Beery, 2018;
Ecotourism planning and management	Attitude	Resource management and planning	Chen & Nakama, 2013; Ng et al., 2017
		Distribution of tourism revenue	Nathan & Philip, 2014; Nejati et al., 2014
		Improve regional construction	Chen & Qiu, 2017; Fong et al., 2017
	Intention	Prevent illegal activities	Regmi & Walter, 2016
		Regulation for tourism development	Turner et al., 2016; Hanafiah et al., 2021
		Communication with local communities	Thondhlana et al., 2015; Ibrahim et al., 2021

### 3. Methods and Materials

#### 3.1. Study Sites

The study has chosen two sites for data col-

lection and observation to attain the objectives. In this connection, the study has selected two distinct locations with distinct features but similar socioeconomic scenarios - one recreational forest area and one man-made lake in Terengganu. The

forest area is Sekayu Recreational Forest and the man-made lake is Tasik Kenyir.

### 3.2. Sekayu Recreational Forest

Sekayu, the largest recreational forest in Terengganu is famous to the visitors for its natural beauty. It was established in 1974 and officially launched for visitors' in 1985. Sekayu is located within the Hulu Terengganu forest reserve at Kuala Berang of Terengganu. The land area of this recreational forest is 30 hectares (Bhuiyan et al., 2012a).

### 3.3. Lake Kenyir

Lake Kenyir is the largest man-made lake in Malaysia as well as South East Asia. The lake is situated in the eastern part of Terengganu having Kelantan in its west and Pahang in the south. The total area of the lake is 260,000 hectares and it is one of the gateways to the National Park. The lake area covers 340 islands. Some hilltops and highlands, more than 14 waterfalls, numerous rapids, and rivers are the attractions of tourists. This attraction also has forest reserves, forest recreation areas, mountain ranges, wildlife, and natural landscapes (ECER, 2007).

### 3.4. Sampling Techniques

Non-probability convenience sampling design is adopted in this research and a purposive sampling technique has been used to collect the primary data from the respondents. This technique is helpful heavily in calculating personal judgments and researchers utilize their perceptions and knowledge to determine the sample size. It is the flexible and best way to interact and communicate with people. The chief advantage of this technique is the conve-

nient way of conducting the questionnaire survey. Researchers have the freedom to choose a sample size from the large universe.

### 3.5 Data Attainment

The study interviewed a total of 310 respondents from the local communities of study areas for primary data collection. Among the respondents, 150 were selected from Lake Kenyir and the rest from Sekayu. A structured questionnaire used to collect the data consists of a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither disagree nor agree, 4= agree, 5=strongly agree. The questionnaire is organized in such a way that it contains several statements that reflects various dimensions of local perspectives as described in figure 1. Moreover, the statements were selected based on the selected literature review described in table 1. In Sekayu Recreational Forest, a field survey has been conducted in August 2019. The field survey in Lake Kenyir has been completed in October 2019. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software has been used to analyze the data and measure the local perspective of ecotourism development.

### 3.6 Methods

Lai and Nepal (2006) used an attitude and intention measurement scale for four dimensions, namely conservation of natural resources, preservation of cultural tradition, sustainable community development, and participation in ecotourism planning and management to identify residents' perception of ecotourism development in Tawushan Nature Reserve of Taiwan. Their study used 20 statements for each scale to measure residents' attitudes and intentions regarding ecotourism development in the study area. The study used descriptive statistics and applied correlation analysis

to explore the relationship between the attitude and intentions of the residents.

To investigate the perceptions of local communities for ecotourism development in Sekayu recreational forest and Lake Kenyir, the present study uses two scales, i.e. intention and attitude. Each of the scales contains three dimensions to measure the perceptions of respondents. The comprised dimensions are the preservation of cultural tradition, sustainable community development, and ecotourism planning and management. Three statements related to ecotourism are included in each dimension. The statements are reflectors of ecotourism guidelines so that it is possible to analyze local perspectives of ecotourism development. Aggregated mean scores of the dimensions have been used in this study to identify the intention and attitude of local communities on ecotourism development in the study areas. The relationship between intention and attitude based on three dimensions has been studied through correlation analysis (Spearman- $\rho$  test).

#### 4. Results and Discussion

Table 2 shows the demographic profile of respondents from local people. The distribution of the sample is 46% self-employment, 29% business 9% student, and 15% job in terms of occupation. Among the respondents, 56% are male and the rest of the others (44%) is female. 77% of respondents are married while 23% are unmarried. Most of the local respondents have a secondary education (46%) followed by primary education (32%). Only 15% have a college education and 7% have a university education. Most of the respondents (98%) are from the Malay ethnic group and others (2%) are Chinese. The demographic profile shows that the maximum respondents are less educated and they engaged in tourism-related employment and business for their livelihood.

Table 3 highlights the responses of the respondents on the attitude scale under the three dimensions of ecotourism development. The respondents show their high concern for the dimension of 'preservation of cultural tradition' through their positive responses. Maximum respondents (99%) articulated their high-level positive perception towards two statements 'diverse cultural experiences' and 'cultural exchange opportunities' of this dimension. The majority of respondents (91%) indicated their unfavorable feelings about "ecotourism is causing loss of traditional culture". Bhuiyan et al. (2012b) have revealed that ecotourism creates opportunities for diverse cultural exchanges and is respectful of local traditional culture and customs.

Table 2 | Demographic profile of respondents

Variable	Categories	Percentage (%)
Occupation	Self-employment	46.67%
	Business	28.89%
	Job	15.56%
	Student	8.88%
Sex	Male	55.56%
	Female	44.44%
Marital Status	Married	76.67%
	Single	23.33%
Education	Primary	32.22%
	Secondary	45.56%
	College	15.56%
	University	6.66%
Ethnicity	Malay	97.78%
	Chinese	2.22%

The sustainable community development dimension highlights a high positive level of responses to all statements from the respondents. Maximum respondents (>93%) believe that ecotourism provides positive contributions to community development through improving environmental consciousness, contributing to conservation, and creating employment for local communities (Table 3). Bennett (2016) identified that ecotourism development is helpful for conservation activities and improves the consciousness of residents toward the environment. Again, the study of Tessema

et al. (2010) revealed that ecotourism development increases employment opportunities for the local communities in wildlife and protected areas of Ethiopia.

Moreover, the ecotourism planning and management dimension reveals the favorable perception of respondents to the three statements. Maximum respondents (>87%) show their positive support for planning and managing activities of ecotourism in the study areas. The local communities partici-

pate in the managing and planning of tourism resources. The communities distribute tourism revenue among them and also spend on regional construction (Table 3). Turner et al. (2016) revealed that local communities show a negative attitude towards ecotourism development in an area due to their less participation scopes in tourism resource management, and lower contribution of ecotourism in local development and benefit-sharing.

**Table 3** | Local people's attitude toward ecotourism development

Statements	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)
<b>Dimension: Preservation of cultural tradition</b>			
Ecotourism provides diverse cultural experiences	1.10	0.00	98.90
Ecotourism provides cultural exchange opportunities	0.00	1.10	98.90
Causing loss of traditional culture	91.10	1.10	7.80
<b>Dimension: Sustainable community development</b>			
Ecotourism improves residents' environmental consciousness	2.20	0.00	97.80
Ecotourism making economic contribution to conservation	3.30	2.20	94.40
Most of the tourism-related employment will be local people	0.00	6.70	93.40
<b>Dimension: Ecotourism planning and management</b>			
Residents participate in tourism resource management \& planning	12.20	0.00	87.80
The community has shared in the distribution of tourism revenue	1.10	0.00	98.90
Ecotourism improving regional construction	1.10	1.10	97.80

Table 4 shows the intention of local people toward ecotourism development in the three dimensions. The statements under the three dimensions are showing a high level of positive agreement (>87%) for ecotourism development in the study areas. All of the three statements on the preservation of cultural tradition dimension reveal the highest level of agreement (>98%) toward ecotourism. The respondents feel that ecotourism development gives them learning opportunity regarding natural and cultural heritage, and provide experiences in nature and humanities. Shuifa et al. (2011) revealed through their study on forest parks in China that ecotourism is helpful to focus on local cultural heritage and traditional events. Again, Trang (2015) identified that natural experi-

ences are attracting tourists to an ecotourism site. They perceive that ecotourism includes local traditional events to attract tourists.

The respondents expressed their high positive (>92%) perceptions of the three statements on the sustainable community development dimension. According to them, ecotourism development enhances outside investment and provides opportunities for environmental education. Again, ecotourism should be responsible for the local flora and fauna (Table 4). Das and Chatterjee (2015a) revealed that ecotourism is helpful for community development by protecting the rare flora and fauna, encouraging economic benefits, and ensuring sustainability.

Moreover, positive perceptions (>87%) were



also revealed in the statements on ecotourism planning & management. The respondents are willing to help the tourism authorities to prevent illegal activities in the study areas. They want to participate in tourism regulation implementation and increase communication with local government (Table 4). The study findings of Chen and Qiu (2017) pointed out through a study in nature reserves in

China that proper participation of local communities can ensure communication opportunities and assist to prevent illegal activities. Moreover, Nault and Stapleton (2011) revealed through their study in Mongolia that ecotourism is ensuring local participation to implement tourism regulations with other stakeholders.

**Table 4 | Local people's intention toward ecotourism development**

Statements	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)
<b>Dimension: Preservation of cultural tradition</b>			
Learning about the natural and cultural heritage of the area	0.00	1.10	98.90
Suggesting the local govt. to include traditional events to attract tourists	0.00	1.10	98.90
Providing excellent natural and humanistic experiences	1.10	0.00	98.80
<b>Dimension: Sustainable community development</b>			
Educating Local people not to buy/sell products made of rare animals/plants	1.10	3.30	95.50
Encouraging the local govt. to maximize non-local tourism investment	4.40	3.30	92.20
Ecotourism provides residents with environmental education opportunities	4.40	0.00	95.60
<b>Dimension: Ecotourism planning and management</b>			
Assisting the manager to prevent illegal activities	7.80	4.4	87.80
Encouraging to implement of regulations for tourism development	0.00	2.20	97.80
Encouraging the local govt. to increase communication with local communities	0.00	1.10	98.90

Table 5 shows the results of correlation tests between local people's attitudes and intentions. The table highlights the aggregated mean scores of two scales based on the three dimensions. In the attitude scale, the mean scores are higher in two dimensions namely 'community development (4.02) and 'ecotourism planning & management (3.97) compare to a lower mean score in 'preservation of cultural tradition' (3.34). On the other hand, mean scores are overall higher ( $> 3.98$ ) in intentions toward three dimensions.

The correlation test (Spearman  $\rho$ ) reveals a sig-

nificant positive result between intention and attitude on two dimensions. The positively correlated dimensions are 'preservation of cultural tradition (Spearman  $\rho = 0.150$ ,  $p < 0.05$ )' and 'ecotourism planning & management (Spearman  $\rho = 0.147$ ,  $p < 0.05$ )'. Moreover, an insignificant correlation between the two scales (intention and attitude) on the 'community development' dimension was also observed in this study. The study reveals positive perceptions of local people toward ecotourism development in terms of intention and attitude on the three dimensions.

**Table 5 | Results of correlation tests between local people's attitudes and intentions**

Dimension	Mean Score		Spearman $\rho$	p-value
	Attitude	Intention		
Preservation of cultural tradition	3.34	4.10	0.150	0.014*
Sustainable community development	4.02	3.99	0.057	0.348
Ecotourism planning & management	3.97	3.99	0.147	0.016*

\*Significant at 5% level

## 5. Findings

The main objective of the study is to investigate the relationship between intention and attitude towards ecotourism development. Study results positively supported the relationship and positive associations between the two scales- intention and attitude have been outlined. Two dimensions namely 'preservation of cultural tradition' and 'ecotourism planning and management' are occurring with significant correlations in the case of intention and attitude. This finding indicates that local people are concerned about the preservation of cultural tradition and have the intention to preserve it. Accordingly, respondents are showing their positive intention and attitude toward ecotourism development. The local people are participating in the planning and management activities of ecotourism development and they feel that ecotourism development is responsible to preserve the cultural tradition in the study area. On the other hand, a statistically insignificant correlation is found between respondent intention and attitude for the dimension of 'sustainable community development'. But the local people are showing their positive perception on the two scales - intention and attitude. The positive intention and attitude of local people are showing that they are favorable towards the ecotourism development in the study area.

Results indicate that respondents are positive on three dimensions of ecotourism development. The positive attitudes of local people toward sustainable community development (mean= 4.02), participation in ecotourism planning and management (mean= 3.97), and preservation of cultural tradition (mean= 3.34) have been observed in the study. Obtained results stay in parallel with some previous studies (Vodouhê et al., 2010; Jimura, 2011; Khoshkam et al., 2016; Chen & Qiu, 2017) which revealed that ecotourism development should be maintained an environmentally, economically, and socially responsible manner for the

community development. Moreover, ecotourism creates opportunities for active participation of local communities in tourism planning which ensure their positive attitude towards ecotourism development. The study findings of Khoshkam et al. (2016) on the Anzali wetland and Chen and Qiu (2017) on Fujian Wuyishan National Nature Reserve highlighted that the positive attitude of local communities is helpful for tourism development in an area. Again, Vodouhê et al. (2010) and Jimura (2011) have addressed that local communities show a positive attitude toward ecotourism development due to positive contributions and proper understanding. The outcomes revealed from the study findings on protected areas in Bennin (Vodouhê et al., 2010) and World Heritage sites in Japan (Jimura, 2011).

Moreover, the study also identified higher mean scores (> 3.98) and positive intentions toward sustainable community development, participation in ecotourism planning and management, and preservation of cultural tradition dimensions. The study shows that ecotourism development enhances the environmental, socio-cultural, and economic benefits of local communities in the long term. Several researchers (Holladay & Ormsby, 2011; Long, 2012; Bennett & Dearden, 2014; Clements et al., 2014) have supported such findings. The study findings of Holladay and Ormsby (2011) on national parks in Belie and Long (2012) on Ha Long Bay in Vietnam revealed that positive intentions of local communities are necessary for ecotourism development. Moreover, Bennett and Dearden (2014) and Clements et al. (2014) addressed that local communities show their positive intention toward ecotourism development due to the socio-economic benefits gathered from tourism activities. They identified these findings through the study of marine protected areas in Thailand (Bennett & Dearden, 2014) and protected areas in Cambodia (Clements et al., 2014).

The theoretical framework of this study emphasized that the local perspective of ecotourism deve-

lopment depends on the dimensions namely preservation of cultural tradition, sustainable community development, and ecotourism planning and management. The framework postulates the significant positive correlation of attitude and intention related to the considered dimensions. Based on the findings of the study, local communities are showing their positive perception towards the indicators of two attributes namely attitude and intention. The communities are showing a positive attitude toward several indicators due to ecotourism development such as cultural experience and exchange opportunities, preserve traditional culture, environmental consciousness, contribution to conservation and local employment, participation scopes in ecotourism planning and development, distribution of tourism revenue, and improve regional construction. Again, the communities also show their positive intention toward several indicators which will be occurring due to ecotourism development. The indicators are learning and experiences gathering opportunities from heritages, attracting the tourists through traditional events, environmental education opportunities for the stakeholders, disagree to sell the local rare animal and sensitive products, encouraging non-local tourism investment, assisting to prevent illegal activities, and government initiatives for implementing regulation and communication with local communities. The positive attitude and intention of local communities towards the indicators of ecotourism indicates that the local perspectives of the study area are suitable for tourism development. Moreover, the positive perception of local communities also revealing toward the three dimensions of ecotourism development in the study area.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Ecotourism development in an area is ensuring local communities' participation in tourism

activities as well as benefits gathering for the locals. The local communities' positive perception is essential for ecotourism development in an area. Many ecotourism attractions are failure to attract tourists due to the negative perception of local communities toward tourism development. The present study is identifying the community perceptions toward ecotourism development in terms of attitude and intention with three dimensions. The study has revealed positive perceptions of local communities on the maximum indicators under the three dimensions. The positive attitude and intention of local communities are representing their support regarding ecotourism development in the study area. Moreover, high aggregated mean scores are indicating a positive perception of local communities toward three dimensions of ecotourism development in the study area.

Perhaps the positive perception toward maximum indicators of ecotourism, the local communities express their lower attitude regarding the preservation of cultural tradition due to ecotourism development in the study area. The local communities feel that ecotourism development is not suitable for diverse cultural experiences and cultural exchange opportunities between hosts and guests. Moreover, they express that ecotourism development is causing the loss of traditional culture in the study area. To overcome these shortcomings and enhance the opportunity for preservation of cultural tradition, formulation of necessary regulation of ecotourism development, and increasing the communication between government and local communities are essential. Furthermore, several initiatives may help to ensure a positive local perspective for ecotourism development in the study area. Firstly, ensure the social well-being of local communities that will be encouraging them to participate in conservation activities. Secondly, encourage community participation in decision-making and planning activities which can ensure their effective involvement in ecotourism activities. Thirdly, public and private level

entrepreneurship should be encouraged for suitable ecotourism development. Government authorities must be prepared to work closely with private enterprises in a long-term partnership for economic development. The policymakers, local authorities, and tourism stakeholders can follow the initiatives for ensuring sustainable ecotourism development which ensures local benefits as well as effective communities' participation in the study area.

The study provides an initiative to identify the local perspectives for ecotourism development in remote and rural areas based on natural tourism attractions. The study revealed some indicators that are influencing successful ecotourism development in an area and identifies the perception of local communities toward attitude and intention for ecotourism. These findings may have a significant contribution to science for future studies on ecotourism development as well as local well-being through tourism activities.

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