

Socio Economy Gap Analysis of Local Communities in District of Bentong, Pahang

Kamal Kenny, PhD, El Sheila Kanavathi

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJAREMS/v5-i3/2247>

DOI:10.6007/IJAREMS/v5-i3/2247

Published Online: 09 January 2016

Abstract

Over the years, the infusion of private and public entity roles in the context of the socio-economic development of Malaysia is deemed viable as reinforced by the need to address the socio-economic gaps and demands of the local community. These undertakings will more likely provide several important ideas that would suffice related and relevant literatures, which will be used for the creation of better socio-economic growth in Malaysia. The passage from under-development to development means that several inter-related processes occur simultaneously. In an economic sense, development entails the transformation of simple subsistence economies into complex monetary economies. In the process, an increase in the proportion of products that is sold or exchanged and a decline in the proportion of consumption may take place concurrently. The study was carried out to determine the socio-economic demands and gaps of the local population and suggest assistance and interventions required. The overall results of this study reveal the challenges faced at the community level in the District of Bentong in the context of social and economy. This study was carried out via a structured survey throughout the district involving 300 respondents and also complemented with a Focus Group Discussion carried out with key stakeholders. The study findings were also supported with secondary data compilation of journals, articles and speeches.

Keywords: Socio-economy, Rural Development, Urbanisation, Empowering, Interventions, Knowledge Management, Viability

Introduction

The changes that occurred in Malaysia have impacted governance and leadership in its political setting. As underscored by Siddiquee (2007), these refer to the political and economic changes, which are often demonstrated by reform and innovation drives. The shifts caused by these factors rendered a major impact on the roles supported by both the private and public sectors—with the former as the “fundamental engine for growth and development,” while the latter is regarded to play “indirect and supportive roles” (Siddiquee, 2007, p.83). With these changes, it is envisaged that more local communities with the right infrastructures in place will be able to benefit the seeds of development.

The passage from under-development to development means that several inter-related processes occur simultaneously. The decline in the proportion of agricultural labour force is characteristically accompanied by an increase in the proportion of labour force engaged in

various non-agricultural activities such as manufacturing, trade and services. The expansion of these activities is concomitant to the process of urbanization. Although in most instances, the expansion of the manufacturing industry may be more beneficial to the foreign market, however, in places where the population consists of young, productive individuals, this may be a good source of labour force.

The Rural Transformation Programme (RTP), which was introduced in the 2012 Budget, is an initiative under the National Transformation Programme (NTP) to transform the country into a high-income and developed nation. The RTP aspired to attract investment, create economics and employment activities as well as provide opportunities for the younger generation to return and live and work in rural areas (Economic Report 2012/2013). This opportunity, however, must also be met with incentives for further development such as training programmes and challenging opportunities such as eco-tourism.

Tourism involving Homestay activity is one of the Malaysian government's key efforts to diversify its cultural tourism product (Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism, 2011). It creates an opportunity for visitors to get closer to the rural world, to its culture and heritage and to the notion of the countryside, to peacefulness and to spiritual rejuvenation (Peterson, 2004). Some of the challenges that have been identified for Homestay accommodation operators are lack of training to manage and maintain a high standard of hygiene and safety. Difficulty to comply with these standards may lead to good and bad experience of the tourists (Akhbar et al., 2002). The uniqueness of accommodation operators lies in the fact that service is its product and this has to be met.

Skills-based programmes ensure that the community is equipped with the knowledge and ability to perform jobs that require skills. Following the success of its KerJaya Ecer programme, the East Coast Economic Development Council (ECERDDC) introduced another human capital development initiative known as "empower" in Bentong, Pahang. Empower ECER (East Coast Economic Region) Bentong is a twin-pronged human capital development initiative of ECERDC which focuses on two areas. Firstly, the Skills and Entrepreneurship Training which is targeted for the unemployed, school leavers, fresh graduates and singles parents. The Academic Training is for primary and secondary school students who will be sitting for major school examinations in Bentong. The main objective of empower Bentong is to increase household income of Bentong residents via education and entrepreneurship skills training as well as reduce the poverty level in the area. The challenge remains to ensure that courses introduced and taught in this programme are relevant to the work market and that the participants are able to sustain their businesses in the long run.

Once these problems will be taken to the end of meeting and providing solutions, the overall aim of this study as depicted through the recommendations would best be served.

Study Objectives

The key objectives of the study are primarily

- 1) To gather information via participatory quantitative surveys on primary data, on the characteristics of the affected community.
- 2) To identify and analyse the socio-economic demands and gaps of the local population which include availability to local resources and business and industry opportunities.
- 3) To explore the key nature of interventions and assistance required by candidates.

The researchers of the study believe that the increasing importance of knowledge sharing opens another essential dimension for the socio economic development of communities in

the context of leadership and governance. The culture of the communities is also deemed to be essential in the formation of the knowledge sharing behaviour, although there is a need to identify how it can be developed. More so, community culture can have a positive or negative implication in acknowledge sharing within an organization, depending on the kind of culture which is apparent within a specific community (Suppiah & Sandhu, 2011). Hence it is also important to determine if the relationship between stakeholders' roles and knowledge sharing behaviour is mediated by community culture.

Significance of Study

The intention of this study is generally to enable the researcher to provide an analysis of how socio-economy status has a great impact on communities. The existing local businesses may not be flourishing due to the lack of modern technology, infrastructure and knowledge transfer in place. Therefore, this study sees these variables as key roles in the development of the community in the context of local businesses and social economic status. With this intention, it can therefore be said that this study is significant basically because it will attempt to investigate how it would be possible for transfer of technology and knowledge sharing to be present within the intervention framework for the community. This is in accordance with the perception that knowledge sharing is of strategic significance basically because it does not only enable them to be engaged in a favorable performance, but it also allows them to achieve competitive advantage (Information Resources Management Association, 2012). Upon publishing the study, it is expected that the researcher will be able to fill this current gap within the available knowledge on the research topic. This will make it possible for future researchers to have an additional reference if they decide to do a study which is of similar nature of investigation.

The study will also be significant for leaders in the various agencies. This is basically because the discussions which will be provided will allow them to have a more comprehensive knowledge on the current socio-economic condition of the community being studied, the gaps and challenges that may occur and windows of opportunities to work together for the development of the particular community. Additionally, the study will also be significant for others who have an interest, although not necessarily belonging, to the public or private sector. Academically, the study will also be significant in the provision of knowledge to people in the academic field who are interested in the researcher's field of study. To be more specific, this study will significantly contribute to empower ECER and all other government agencies that will gain practical knowledge and insights, specifically in the planning and implementation of future projects.

Overview of Bentong, Pahang

Bentong is both a town and a district situated in the west side of Pahang Darul Makmur, Malaysia. It is situated about 48 kilometres from Kuala Lumpur. The district offers many fine examples of pre-war architecture along its street. In the beginning, Bentong sub-district was under the administration of the district of Raub. The administration was separated in 1919 due to the large size of the district of Raub. The original main street going into Bentong town had been modified to a dual carriageway. As of 2010, Bentong had a population of 114,397 (Source: *Department of Statistics Malaysia*). The district is administered by Bentong Municipal Council.

Socio-economic Demographics of the Population in Bentong

In year 2010, the total population in Bentong, Pahang was 114,397 with the majority being Malays, followed by Chinese, Indian, non-Malaysian citizens, other bumiputeras and others. The following table depicts the population by ethnic group in 2010:

Table 1

Total population by ethnic group 2010

Total	Malaysian citizens							Non-Malaysian citizens
	Total	Bumiputera			Chinese	Indians	Others	
		Total	Malay	Other Bumiputera				
114,397	107,940	61,822	58,585	3,237	35,987	9,770	361	6,457

Note: The above figure have not been adjusted for under-enumeration

(Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia)

Out of the 114, 397 population in Bentong, 21% (24,501) were made up of those between 20-29 years old and those 60 and above made up only 9% (10,710) of the total population. In short, the community in Bentong is not an ageing community and consists of many young people who are at a productive age. The total number of people who had received some form of formal education was 98,343. Although about 9,666 of the population completed their pre-university, only a total of 2006 obtained their degree or advanced diploma. In terms of marital status, out of a total of 85,004 people who were 15 years and above, approximately 62% (52,870) were married and a total of 399 people were divorced. Most of the divorcees were female, between the ages of 30-44.

In the aspect of employment of the Bentong population, particularly between the ages of 15-64, the majority of the population (26%) were involved in wholesale and grocery businesses, car and motorcycle workshops followed by farming, forestry and fisheries (16%) and manufacturing (12%). Industries such as education and social work reported a participation of almost 50% more of the female population compared to the male. In total, it was reported that there were 52,653 of people in Bentong who were employed in the year 2010 (*Department of Statistics, Malaysia*).

The Forests of Pahang and Bentong

The total land area in Pahang is 3,596,585 ha. As of Dec 2005, there were 1,981,185 ha (55.1 %) of forested land and 1,615,400 ha (44.9 %) of non-forested land. Under the forested land category, a total of 1,409,978 ha are currently under the Permanent Reserve Forest (PRF) classification. This consists of various forest types and ecosystems ranging from mangroves, coastal vegetation to hill and montane forest. In addition, there were 571,207 ha classed as other forest lands which include reserves established by the Department of Wildlife and National Park (DWNP). Bentong and Cameron Highlands have the smallest areas of PRF totalling 83,074 ha and 39,358 ha, respectively (*Pahang Forestry Department*). The forest in Bentong, Pahang are used for many new business such as Eco-tourism and Homestay.

Eco-tourism in Bentong

Despite its small area, Bentong has a few attractive spots that play a role in drawing people here. Kechara Forest Retreat is one of such places. Those who would like to escape from the hustle and bustle of city life usually find themselves drawn to places as quiet and serene as

this, surrounded by nature. Lentang Forest Recreational Park and Eco Dusun Resort are some of the places currently used for get-away trips and team building activities against the background of nature. This is a great opportunity for the growth of eco-tourism in the district. Places like Eco Dusun Resort offers activities like jungle trekking, flying fox, water rafting and other exciting activities. Young people, particularly, use these sites for their annual camps and teambuilding programmes. With the right trainings in place for the operators of such resorts, more people can be made aware of such packages and this will certainly be an opportunity to reach out to a larger market such as corporation who plan their annual Family Day or Teambuilding programmes away from the city.

Infrastructures in Bentong

For a start, several basic infrastructure projects are already up and rolling such as the opening of a new RM12.9mil health clinic in Chemomoi, upgrading of the RM8mil bridge in Ketari, expansion of the Bentong Hospital as well as Karak, Telemong and Pelangai government clinics and construction of a new specialist hospital in Kampung Cinta Manis. The improved medical facilities will pave the way for Bentong residents to lead in terms of greater healthcare awareness and prevention of diseases through an active participation in health campaigns such as 10,000 steps a day.

To further promote a healthy lifestyle, a new recreational park was in the offing to replace the ageing Sultan Abu Bakar Park, in addition to a mixed industrial park project for small and medium industries while sensitive areas such as Bukit Tinggi and Janda Baik will be preserved for agriculture and tourism-related products to raise the income of locals (The Star Online, 2013).

East Coast Economic Region (ECER)

The government of Malaysia has come out with various initiatives to accelerate the country's economic growth and heighten the nation's income level. One of the government's initiatives is the East Coast Economic Region (ECER). The East Coast Economic Region (ECER) covers the states of Kelantan, Terengganu and Pahang, as well as the district of Mersing in Johor.

A Master Plan was developed and will be the basis for guiding the development of this region over the next 12 years. The main objective of the ECER Master Plan is to correct the regional imbalance by accelerating the growth of ECER through a viable, equitable and sustainable manner and via programmes and projects to raise incomes and reduce poverty. This is done by expanding employment prospects and entrepreneurship through the high impact projects to spur development in the region (Dato' Jebasingam, 2011). The Master Plan also details measures to eradicate poverty and improve incomes and distribution in a sustainable manner for ECER.

The ECER Region and key development areas consists 6 nodes namely ECER Special Economic Zone, Cross Border Development, KTCC-Kenyir-Dungun Triangle, Mersing-Rompin KDA, Gua Musang-K Lipis KDA and Bentong-Raub KDA. Pahang, which covers an area of 35,960 sq. km is the largest state in Peninsular Malaysia. The state will also become ECER's automotive manufacturing, assembly and distribution hub, as well as the development of design activities with the support of educational institutions (*Official port: Pahang State Government*)

Study Methodology

The researcher had used an exploratory design in this study to comprehend the socio economy gaps of the District of Bentong. The researcher believes that an exploratory study approach was necessary in this study because, though were some facts known in regards to

this study, but more information was required to develop a more comprehensive framework of intervention in this area of study. The researcher had carried the research process through two techniques: questionnaire administration and focus group discussion (FGD).

Though, this study is quantitative by nature, the researcher felt the inclusion of FGD which is a qualitative technique was necessary to streamline the study to specific dimensions taking into consideration that this is an exploratory study looking at the gaps of socio economic in the Bentong District. The main purpose of the FGD was to draw upon stakeholders' perceptions, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way which would not be feasible using other methods.

Population & Sampling Procedure

The total population of District of Bentong is 114,397 (Department of Statistics Malaysia-Web). Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula was used as a guide to get the appropriate sample size as it provides identical sample sizes in all cases; either continuous or categorical data (Bartlett, Kotrlik & Higgins, 2001). The selection of respondents was done using the purposive sampling technique where enumerators were engaged to interview the 300 respondents from various categories. The respondents will be categorized as per the table 2 below

Table 2

Category of Respondents

No.	Target Group	Number of respondents
1.	Existing EMPOWER ECER participants	50
2.	Unemployed graduates	50
3.	Unemployed youth (non-graduate)	50
4.	Low Income Working Adults	50
5.	Single mothers	50
6.	Poverty Group	50

As for the FGD, a total of 10 stakeholders from various agencies were interviewed.

Survey Findings

Socio demographic background

In this study, a total of 300 respondents were recruited and the demographic background of the respondents is as depicted in Table 3. The mean age of the sample is 25.3 ± 8.1 years ranging from 19 years to 59 years old. In terms of the age distribution, majority (29.7%) were between the age of 25 and 30 years, and this is followed by 21.0% of them between 31 and 35 years old. It is noted that 14.0% falls in the age region of 36 to 40 years while another 15.0% were between the age of 41 and 50 years. Youth age between 18 and 24 years made

up of 13.7% of the total sample while those aged 51 and above had the least number with 6.7% only.

The sample selected for this study comprised of slightly more females than males. As presented in Table 3, of 300 respondents in this study, 159 (53.0%) respondents are female and the remaining 141 (47.0%) are male. Furthermore, looking at the distribution of ethnic groups, majority (59.3%) were Malay while Chinese (26.0%) made up the second largest group. Indians made up of 9.7% of the sample population while other ethnic groups made up the remaining 5.0%. Majority were Muslim (59.3%) followed by Buddhists (15.8%) and Christians (14.3%). The distribution according to their marital status noted that majority (57.6%) were married while another 25.7% were still single. About 16.7% were separated or divorced from their spouses or widowed.

The community sampled was largely made up of those who had at most secondary education with 64.1% while about 7.3% had no formal education. Only about one in four (24.3%) had some forms of tertiary education including diploma, degree or postgraduate degree. Unemployment was high among the community sampled with 34.3% claimed that they were not working at all during the data collection. On the other hand, 37.0% were engaged in full-time job as employees while only about 10.7% were self-employed. A small group of them (2.7%) had retired from their respective careers. When asked about their income, slightly more than half (51.3%) earned between RM1001.00 and RM2000.00 monthly. About twenty of them claimed that they had no income at all while another 18.7% earned below RM1000.00. The mean income was RM1380.00 ($SD = RM2394.86$) with a range between RM0.00 and RM7500.00.

Majority (74.0%) felt that they were in excellent health status while another 22.3% had some form of health issues. People with physical disability made up of 3.7% of the total sample. Most of them (71.7%) had their own modes of transportation. Given the limited public transport services in the township, it is expected that most of them would have some forms of transport to travel around places.

Table 3

Demographic background of respondents (n = 300)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age (years)		
18 to 24	41	13.7
25 to 30	89	29.7
31 to 35	63	21.0
36 to 40	42	14.0
41 to 50	45	15.0
> 51	20	6.7
Mean \pm S.D.	25.3 \pm 8.1	
Minimum – Maximum	19 - 59	
Sex		
Male	141	47.0
Female	159	53.0
Malay	178	59.3
Chinese	78	26.0

Indian	29	9.7
Others	15	5.0
Religion		
Islam	178	59.3
Buddhism	47	15.8
Hinduism	22	7.3
Christianity	43	14.3
Others	10	3.3
Marital status		
Single	77	25.7
Married	173	57.6
Separated/Divorced	29	9.7
Widow/Widower	21	7.0
Level of Education		
No formal education	22	7.3
Primary	70	23.3
Secondary	122	40.8
Pre-University	13	4.3
Tertiary	73	24.3
Current employment status		
In full-time employment (as an employee)	111	37.0
Working full-time (self-employed)	32	10.7
In part-time employment (as an employee)	39	13.0
Casual/part-time (self-employed)	7	2.3
Unemployed and not working at all	103	34.3
Retired	8	2.7
Income (RM)		
No income	20	6.7
<1000.00	56	18.7
1001.00 to 2000.00	154	51.3
2001.00 to 3000.00	26	8.7
3001.00 to 4000.00	22	7.3
4001.00 to 5000.00	14	4.7
>5000.00	8	2.7
Mean \pm S.D.	1380.00 \pm 2394.86	
Minimum – Maximum	0.00 – 7500.00	
Health status		
Excellent	222	74.0
Have some health problems	67	22.3
Physical disability	11	3.7
Own transport?		
Yes	215	71.7
No	85	28.3

Perception towards socio economic status

Their perceptions towards socio economic status were asked to determine their level of agreement with various aspects of the availability of infrastructures and other facilities.

Overall, an overwhelming response were skewed towards the needs for stronger support from the government agencies as well as better infrastructure and training facilities to enable career advancement and business growth. Majority (76.0%) either agree or strongly agree that cost is a hindrance to their career or business development. Besides that, they also felt that it is difficult for them to find funders to expand their career/business (91.0%).

Table 4

Perception towards socio economic status (n=300)

No.	Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	Cost is a hindrance to my career/business development.	30 (10.0)	42 (14.0)	167 (55.7)	61 (20.3)
2	Difficult to find a funder to expand my career/business.	7 (2.3)	20 (6.7)	34 (11.3)	239 (79.7)
3	I know where to obtain information regarding career/business.	93 (31.0)	72 (24.0)	85 (28.3)	50 (16.7)
4	Assistance from authorities will enable me to increase my career/business.	20 (6.7)	76 (25.3)	119 (39.7)	85 (28.3)
5	I am currently receiving assistance from authorities to enable me to increase my career/business.	73 (24.3)	44 (14.7)	113 (37.7)	70 (23.3)
6	I believe that the training and knowledge transfer from the authorities will help me in my career/business.	17 (5.7)	35 (11.7)	99 (33.0)	149 (49.7)
7	I believe that interest plays an important role in my career/business development.	7 (2.3)	38 (12.7)	137 (45.7)	118 (39.3)
8	Many programmes proposed by the government have not been implemented at the grassroots level.	40 (13.3)	50 (16.7)	167 (55.7)	43 (14.3)
9	An integrated career and business programme will benefit the community.	0 (0.0)	14 (4.7)	97 (32.3)	189 (63.0)

With the existence of ECER in the Bentong township, almost half (45.0%) claimed that they know where to obtain information regarding career or business development. When asked whether assistance from authorities would help their career or business, most of them (68.0%) agreed or strongly agreed that it would certainly improve their chances of career advancement or better business growth.

Sixty one percent had received some forms of assistance from the authorities. They were also strong believers of the fact that training and knowledge transfer would help their career or business development (82.7%) and interest in their career plays an important role (85.0%).

However, when asked about the implementation components of the government's plan, majority felt that most of the strategies were not implemented as planned (70.0%) with the desired outcomes. There was an overwhelming support (95.3%) for an integrated career and

business programme with the view that such programme would greatly benefit the community.

In short, the Bentong urban community's collective voices called for a stronger skill enhancement, capacity building, soft skills training and community enhancement initiatives given the availability of new infrastructures. With stronger programme, it is believed that the potential of current facilities and infrastructures can be maximized. Furthermore, Bentong's economic landscape showed much potential for re-development and better growth in line to support the relatively young community.

Recommendations for career/business development

When the respondents were asked to provide feasible recommendations for career or business development at the community level, the scopes of the recommendations hovers around skill building and availability of financial schemes. As high as 62.0% of the total respondents would like to have more technical training courses for rural areas which include mechanical repair, administrative works et cetera. Besides that, about half (51.0%) suggested skill building workshops to enrich the potential employees and business owners to create higher capacity to perform. Surprisingly, English language proficiency courses were also mentioned by 44.0% which felt that certain level of English language proficiency would certainly help them to get better employment opportunities and career advancement.

Table 5

Top ten recommendations for career/business development at the community level (n=300)

Recommendations	%
More technical training courses for rural areas	62.0
Skill building workshops	51.0
English language proficiency	44.0
Financial management courses	43.0
Availability of soft loan and other financial infrastructures	39.3
Small business development centres	24.0
On-the-job training courses and facilities	21.0
Employment opportunities centres	20.7
Better infrastructures for business support	18.0
Integrated public transport system	16.7

Financial management and support were also highlighted by about slightly more than a third of the respondents. The suggestions came with the perception that the availability of less burdening financial schemes would definitely help to heighten their business growth in such a time that the performance of the economic has slowed in the wake of depreciating exchange rates. On-the-job training and employment opportunities centres were also highlighted by the respondents. Such demands arise due to the ever-challenging and dynamic work environment whereby changes have been constant and require the employees to keep up their paces.

The respondents also called for better infrastructures for business support in the forms of Business Park or business clusters to further enhance marketability of their products and services. Last but not least, the respondents (16.7%) also desired an integrated public

transport system to provide better access to business areas to increase local demands while maintaining the supply for exports.

Recommendations for Types of Training

The respondents provided various forms of desired trainings for the relevant authorities to consider. Among them, information and communication technology (ICT) training topped the list with (79.0%) vouching for the authorities to undertake such training courses in the local community. This is in line with the dynamic technological industries that require business owners and employees to equip themselves with the latest skills in order to function well and up-to-date. Apart from that, cooking courses, sewing and fashion design, and baking courses as offered under the entrepreneurship programme by ECER were also repeatedly mentioned highlighting the fact that these training courses were very much desired by some of them. Business administration and accounting courses were also mentioned by approximately 40.7% and 27.7% respectively indicating the desire to enhance their employability as well as business management. Training in new agricultural techniques and activities were also mentioned by about 19.7% of them indicating those in agricultural are looking for new ways of increasing yields and methods with higher efficiency and cost effective.

Findings of FGD

To obtain the information from the stakeholders of this study, the researcher had conducted a focus group discussion with government officials from the District Office, Labour Department, Welfare Department and Bentong District Education Office. Information obtained from these interviews provided a general overview on the socio-economic landscape of the community and the available employability and business assistance. Gaps and challenges were also discussed. This provides a better understanding of the community identified in this project. A summary of the outcome of these interviews are listed below:

Table 6
Summary of FGD Outcome

Question	Feedback received
Significant Progress in the last 5 years	<p>“There is a decrease in the number of people listed in the e-kasih list. E-Kasih system is a needy family’s database system established at the national level to support the planning, implementing and monitoring of the poverty program. A decrease in the number of people in this list indicates that the number of needy people in the community has reduced. This shows that there is a certain amount of socio-economic growth happening in the district.” (Assistant District Officer Bentong)</p> <p>The occurrence of new recreational, environmental and health promoting activities such as Recycling Campaigns, Exercise Sessions for Senior Citizens, recreational facilities and just an overall physical development of the district which reflects its growing economy and priority towards the well-being of its local community.</p>
Comparison between then and now	<p>Based on the information gathered from the Bentong Labour Department, there has been an increase in the number of people seeking employment elsewhere and moving away from this district. However, there are still people who remain working in Bentong.</p>

Success Factors	<p>The success of an individual depends largely on themselves. It was indicated during the interview that there are cases of recipients of financial aids who discontinue with the business once they are faced with challenges. On the other hand, there are recipients of the same aid who meet every challenge and have since opened up stalls. The strong support of family members, too, play an important role in determining the success of a business. The Assistant District Officer in Bentong shared that individuals with strong family support tend to flourish in their businesses.</p> <p>In terms of wanting to seek employment, the representative from the Labour Department noted that the economy of the country now encourages young people, particularly children of the FELDA settlement to seek for jobs and no longer depend on their parents. A better access to information regarding employment opportunities and the availability of transportation to the Career Day venues encourages more people to come out and seek employment.</p>
Future Community Development Plans	<p>In the context of employment, future plans will focus on being more inclusive. Talks and skills training programmes like “Pastry Making” will be extended to recovering drug-users of AADK (Agensi Anti Dadah Kebangsaan) and prison residents. This can play a role as part of the community re-integration programme for the isolated members of the community. A community is, after all, only as strong as its weakest member. Therefore, an inclusive programme is vital.</p>
Funds	<p>Mostly sufficient because programmes and aids are given based on yearly allocated funds. However, it was noted that additional programmes and aids may be offered should there be</p>
Business and employability status	<p>There are many job opportunities available both in Bentong and outside of Bentong. However, in most cases, the information does not reach the appropriate target group. As such, it is recommended that programs are carried out for unemployed youth to match them accordingly to the jobs available.</p> <p>The list of businesses is also available at the District Office. However, not many businesses promote themselves well.</p>
Gaps Identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Lack of awareness on employability and entrepreneurships. (ii) Lack of funds allocated by the government. (iii) Lack of infrastructures and facilities specifically for those in the rural areas. (iv) Poor access to information for the rural community. (v) Poor publicity of businesses. There are 250 over businesses registered. However, not many of these businessmen/women are standing out from the crowd. (vi) Lack of employability knowledge and skills amongst young people.

	(vii) For the application of HALAL certificate, the application process was reported to be very tedious.
Role of Private Entities	Support needed in the form of participation during “Career and Open Interview Day” and mobilizing interested parties from rural areas to attend the interview sessions. At the district school level, the involvement of private entities in developing schools and educational programmes are welcomed. Students, particularly those who will be entering the workforce in the near future should be given the opportunity to interact and have an open discussion with professionals from their area of interest. Private entities are also said to be needed to assist local manufacturers promote and market their products.
Recommendations by Stakeholders	(i) A more accurate and holistic community development planning via feedbacks from the community. (ii) Upscale of the knowledge and skills of teachers in presentation skills and new ideas. (iii) Inclusion of other related training programmes during skills training. Amongst those that were suggested are Confidence Building Programmes and Packaging. (iv) The local community must also play a big role in ensuring the success of a good, local product.

Recommendations

The study reveals that the socio-economic growth of a community is not contributed by one but many factors. It is not only due to the internal factors such as interest and self-motivation but also the external factors like the roles of various private and public agencies, family and community support. The researcher believes that in order to understand the socio-economic growth of a community, it is important to look at the unique factors that influence their work and life choices.

Influencing Factors of Socio-economic growth

The following chart depicts some of the influencing factors of socio-economic growth as perceived by the stakeholders and the identified local community in Bentong, Pahang:

Table 7

Influencing Factors for Socio-economic Growth in Bentong, Pahang

Demand Factors	External Enablers	Internal Factors
(i) Timber : One of the core components of growth. (ii) Eco-tourism : In high demand now and Bentong is filled with nature. (iii) Homestay: Increasingly becoming a choice of accommodation.	(i) Community Portal called “Maju Bentong” (ii) Government agencies like Labour Department, District Office and District Education Office.	(i) Self-motivation (ii) Change in attitude <i>“There is a change in attitude amongst the community particularly children of FELDA workers. Because of the challenging economic situation, many</i>

(iv) Copper Wire	(ii) FELDA (Lembaga	<i>have now started to look for jobs. It was different before” representative from the Bentong Labour Department</i>
(v) Ginger: Poor Man’s Ginseng	<i>Kemajuan Tanah Persekutuan)</i>	
(vi) Durians : Musang King and D24	(iii) Empower Bentong (v) Local Personality	

Resources

In the context of resources, the assistance given can be divided into 4 components; people, assets, material and capital. The following components have been identified in the case of Bentong

PEOPLE

- Bentong consists of a young population.
- 86% of the total population has received some form of formal education.
- Majority of the population are involved in business.

ASSETS

- Multi-national Copper Wire Factory
- Reserve Forest, Waterfall and Hot Springs
- Forest Retreats (Kechara Forest Retreat, Eco Dusun Resort)
- Recreational Park (Lentang Forest Recreational Park)
- Mempaga Homestay (FELDA Scheme)
- Community Portal (Maju Bentong)
- Chinese New Villages

Material

- Timber
- Agricultural Products like ginger and durians

Capital

- Pre-war architecture buildings
- Forest Reserve (83,074 ha)
- New 12.9 Million health clinic in Chengmoi
- RM 8 Million bridge in Ketari

Implication of Study

a) Development of Action Plan

The findings of this study will provide an overview on the socio-economic landscape of the Bentong community. It will also enable the researcher to propose appropriate recommendations for interventions. This will be the base for the rolling out of Plan of Action upon completion of this study.

b) Enrichment of Body of Knowledge of Bentong

Apart from that, the findings of the study have social and educational implication and can make a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge concerning socio-economic of the local community in the district of Bentong. The findings lend support

to suggestions that knowledge sharing and transfer are important components in the upgrading of skills amongst the labour force.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and the gaps identified, a number of recommendations are highlighted in this section. The programmes identified are tailored to the needs of the identified community of Bentong and may or may not be relevant to other districts.

The following programmes are recommended as of the part of the profiling study for the development of Plan of Action

a) Business and Employability Opportunities

i) Local Food Industry

The local food industry in Bentong is known to many around the state and all over Malaysia. It includes products like ginger tea, soy sauce and kaya puff and is often purchased by tourists visiting Bentong. The study recommends that social network concepts like “*Guanxi*”, currently being practiced in Raub be introduced to the community in Bentong. Marketing and entrepreneurship skills should also be introduced to this community in order for them to thrive in their businesses.

ii) Cottage Industry

There are some unique products of cottage industry that have not been marketed well outside of Bentong. This includes *Nangka Madu*, *Musang King Durians* and *Bentong Tauhu Pok*. The study recommends that more agencies be brought in to help promote these cottage industry products both within Malaysian and overseas.

iii) Eco-tourism in Bentong

Bentong has many attractive places to offer. Forest retreats, recreational parks and resorts are some of the few. With the right trainings in place for operators of such places, more people can be made aware of such packages and this will help draw tourists to Bentong. This study recommends that programmes such as Eco-tourism Management, Tour Guide courses, Nature Sustainability and Responsible Tourism be offered to those involved in the everyday running of this business.

iv) Homestay in Bentong

One of the areas for development includes Homestay for tourists. This is to complement the existing tourism in Bentong. Some of the challenges that were highlighted in past literatures were lack of facilities, competition with unregistered home-stay entrepreneurs and maintaining the optimum level of cleanliness. Therefore, programmes like Housekeeping and Hospitality should be introduced.

v) Agriculture and Agro Tourism

Bentong produces many agricultural products such as ginger, durians and watercress. However, there is a lack of knowledge and skills to market these products. Lack of networking skills is another area that requires assistance and training.

Limitation & Recommendation for Future Study

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the study focuses on six target groups of the local community. Therefore, the responses from other groups of the community are not taken into account. The study also included literature reviews and analysis secondary data. However,

in the quest of obtaining credible secondary data and statistics, it was discovered that there are very limited published literatures in terms of studies carried out and articles written on Bentong. Pahang, as the administrating State has the overall data, manuals and information regarding its socio-economic growth. However, at the district level, where implementation is done, data and statistics of the district are difficult to obtain.

Therefore, it is hoped that the next few years will see more studies carried out at district levels in order to give a proper description of the actual local scenarios. The second limitation is this study is carried out in a quantitative method, though the researcher has used the face-to-face interview to gauge better response from stakeholders.

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