# SUSTAINING COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM PROJECT THROUGH LEWIN'S 3-STAGE-CHANGE MODEL

**Nor Haniza Mohamad**

Dr., Politeknik Ibrahim Sultan, MALAYSIA, haniza@pis.edu.my

## Abstract

Community-based Tourism (CBT) is a form of tourism that promotes community empowerment through managing a tourism project that can improve the well-being of the community. This includes economic, social and environmental sustainable development. CBT projects encourage local communities to be actively involved in the project by owning, operating, coordinating and managing the project at community level. In doing so, the community will have the upper hand in determining and controlling the income generated from the project. However, encouraging local community to participate in CBT project can be challenging, which gradually but significantly contribute to the health of the project. This paper aims to describe and share insights on Kurt Lewin's 3-stage-change model used by a successful CBT project to encourage their local community to participate in the project by changing their mind set and behaviours, and ensuring these mind set and behaviours become their second nature. The methodology of this paper is based on a case study, which is part of a larger scale longitudinal study conducted between 2010 until 2017 which involved the authors. The CBT project is known as Miso Walai Homestay, in the state of Sabah, Malaysia. The respondents were CBT volunteers called MESCOT (Model of Economically Sustainable Community Tourism). Data was collected through in-depth interviews and direct observation at the sites, as well as documents pertinent to the project. 54 MESCOT members were interviewed and observed at the site. Initially, only a small number of community members supported the project. However, MESCOT leaders had unknowingly used an approach similar to Lewin's 3-stage-change model: unfreezing, changing and refreezing. During the unfreezing stage, MESCOT leaders used bottom-up approach to create an awareness of why the community had to change the current state of economy and livelihood. During the change stage, these leaders encouraged the community to implement the changes through experiential learning process. Finally, during the refreezing stage, the leaders reinforced, stabilized and solidified the new state after the change through a CBT Master Plan developed by the CBT community themselves. Community participation is quintessential in ensuring a project can be sustained. The experience from CBT Batu Puteh suggests that a wide-based community participation can be achieved when the community members are ready in terms of the mind set and behaviours to contribute to a CBT project. In this case, Lewin's 3-stage-change model was proven to be useful in facilitating the change process. Therefore, CBT leaders at community level, planners at state level and funders should understand this process as a mechanism that can sustain a particular community project. Although this paper focuses on Miso Walai Homestay, Lewin's 3-stage-change model possesses generic process which can be adapted and adopted by other communities.

**Keywords**: Community-based Tourism, MESCOT, Miso Walai Homestay, Lewin's 3-stage-change model

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Community-based Tourism Failure

Essentially, community-based tourism (CBT) in rural areas is used as a rural development tool (Gunduz and Hatemi, 2005; Briedenhann and Wickens, 2004) because it has the potential to rejuvenate the local economy, preserve socio-cultural values, and conserve the natural environment (Hamzah and Khalifah, 2009) where other approaches cannot do so (Scheyvens, 2007). However, a few authors identified several barriers to the successful development of CBT: structural limitations, limited community involvement or control, conflict of interests among stakeholders, limited connections to tourism distribution systems, reliance on external agents for market information, limited or no formal planning, lack of tourism leaders, lack of skills and capital, and poor/limited infrastructure (Goodwin, 2009; Goodwin and Santilli, 2009; Moscardo, 2008; Hausler, 2008). Nonetheless, in general, CBT failures have always been associated with some recurring factors, which can be categorised as structural problems and rural community limitations. Multi-institutional collaboration is also necessary in community development process. For any community development project, such as CBT, it needs assistance from various external sources to overcome various limitations pertaining to community-based tourism up-scaling efforts (Ashley, 2006). Collaboration with various government agencies, which can also be termed as support networks, is a complex networks of actors found at the local and global arenas, as well as in the public and private sectors of society. These networks include nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), communities, state agencies, intergovernmental organizations, private companies and international financial institutions (Duffy, 2006). Such collaborative network is developmental and comes about from the need to fulfil either the supply-side or demand-side of tourism.

CBT takes various forms and labels. Nonetheless, its general it a project that is owned, run and managed by the local people. In Malaysia, there are numerous CBT projects. However, they are more popularly known as Homestays. These homestays are located in the rural areas and officially registered with the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture. In this study, the chosen homestay is called Miso Walai Homestay (MWH). It is a model of a successful CBT project that was located in Batu Puteh within the Kinabatangan region in the state of Sabah, Malaysia.

## 1.2 Lewin's 3-stage-change model

### 1.2.1 Stage 1: Unfreeze

Unfreeze is the stage where the target group is made aware of how the current situation, mind set, behavior, process, organizational structure or system that contribute to the unfavorable situations they are facing. All these elements must be examined and understood so that appropriate change interventions can be offered.

### 1.2.2 Stage 2: Change

Change is the stage where the change process is implemented. This process can take some time because the target group usually will struggle to accept and adapt to the new reality. During this stage, they learn new mind set, behavior, process, organizational structure or system (Burnes, 2004, Kritsonis, 2004). The frequency of opportunities to practice these changes influences the learning curve of the target group. In addition, the change process can be expedited through exposure, education, time and organizational support. However, change process must be carried out consciously by the management team; it has to be carefully planned and executed. Moreover, the target group must revisit the vision and mission of the change frequently to remind them of the necessity of the change.

### 1.2.3 Stage 3: Refreezing

Refreezing is the stage where the newly acquired new mind set, behavior, process, organizational structure or system are being reinforced. This stage is crucial to ensure that the target group does not experience a relapse or revert to the original mind set and behaviours. Refreezing demands constant reinforcement and monitoring efforts from the management (Burnes, 2004, Kritsonis, 2004)). In addition, the newly acquired mind set and behaviours can be cemented through rewards and positive acknowledgements.

Some critics (Dawson, 1994; Dent and Goldberg, 1999; Hatch, 1997; Kanter et al., 1992; Marshak, 1993) have claimed that Lewin's 3-stage-change model is out dated. However, Burnes (2004) refuted that this model is still relevant in understanding individual and group behaviours.

# 2 METHODOLOGY

In order to answer the central research questions of this case study "What was the process to change a

community?" a model CBT project in Malaysia, referred to in this study as CBT Batu Puteh, would provide the necessary contextual setting. MWH is located in the Kinabatangan district of Sabah, East Malaysia. This site was chosen based on perimeters which are: CBT programme that was in the maturity stage of its life cycle; accessibility to information gatekeeper; accessibility to source of primary data; availability of secondary data; active partnership with external agencies; and accessibility to the study site.

Data collection stage included preliminary site visit and a few subsequent visits. The preliminary site visit was made for the following purposes: 1) to allow the researcher to establish a rapport with the local community and become familiar with the study site and its issues, 2) to identify the key respondents and finalise the sampling method and 3) to test the research instruments - interview, direct observation and document analysis. Subsequent visits were made for data collection activities using the three research instruments. Based on the experience using the instruments during the first visit and the rapport established then, data collection process during the second and subsequent visit were more comfortable. Data collection included filling in the gaps that had arisen from the first field trip, updating data, triangulating information, and re-interviewing respondents. Data collection process stopped when the researcher decided the data collection activity had reached its saturation point.

Data Analysis stage focused on thematic coding so that the data could be examined, reduced, categorized, mapped, and compared (Yin, 2009; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Thematic analysis plan was prepared whereby a table containing themes identified from literature review was used as a guide to categorize the collected data. Then, the recorded interviews were transcribed. This process was done after each site visit. In order to ensure that the transcriptions were accurate, the researcher completed the final check by listening to the recorded file while running through the transcriptions and making necessary corrections were made accordingly. Next, data were examined and reduced. The researcher went through the hardcopy of the verbatim transcriptions to examine the content and identify significant words, phrases, and sentences. These were then highlighted. This was followed by data categorization where words, phrases, and sentences were coded into four categories, which reflected the four research objectives were highlighted. These were further coded according to coded thematic matrix prepared earlier. Findings were presented using narration, matrices, photos, and mind-maps according to the research objectives.

# 3 RESULTS

Respondents of this study were chosen among the MWH project volunteers who called themselves MESCOT (Model of Environmentally Sustainable Eco-tourism initiative). They provided insights into the process they went through at the beginning of the MWH project. These process changed their mind set and behaviours. These respondents agreed that the approach of the external initiator had contributed significantly to the change process during MESCOT's first three-year-planning stage (1997 - 2000) prior to the launch of the MWH project, and the following nine years (2001-2009).

## 3.1 Change Agent

In 1997, majority of the local community in Batu Puteh and a large part of Sabah region faced dire economic difficulty when logging companies ceased their operations to adhere to a national effort to conserve the environment. Subsequently, a group of youths in Batu Puteh established MESCOT initiative to overcome the economic struggle. They approached World Wildlife Fund Malaysia, based in Kinabatangan, Sabah, who agreed to give some seed funding to start a three-year research programme to identify potential economic activities in Batu Puteh. It also appointed a facilitator, Mr M, to guide MESCOT through the three-year process who became the change agent for MESCOT volunteers.

## 3.2 Role of Change Leader

The role of Mr M as an external initiator was undeniably significant in the development of MESCOT members. Although MESCOT members knew what they wanted to achieve, they had little knowledge of how to proceed with the idea since their capability was limited to village-level knowledge and skills, which were not compatible with the requirements of the tourism industry. It was pointed out that, initially, nobody in the village had experienced any extensive exposure to tourism or CBT. With Mr M's assistance, MESCOT managed to articulate their visions on paper and they then translated them into doable and structured forms of capacity building modules to develop the relevant tourism knowledge and skills needed by MESCOT. He set the project in motion particularly in the initial stage of MESCOT's establishment. Figure 1 shows Mr M at a capacity building workshop.

## 3.3 The Change Process

### 3.3.1 Stage 1: Unfreeze

Before the change process took place, Mr M carried out many discussions with the village leaders and MESCOT members. He wanted to gauge the extend of readiness and seriousness of MESCOT members to venture in CBT project. At that time in 1997, majority of MESCOT members were young; they had few academic qualifications, limited exposure to life beyond the village, and limited work experience. Therefore, internal motivation is a strong push factor for a change process. In order to create a successful CBT project, he had to change the mind set and behaviour of the MESCOT members. From the very beginning, Mr M did a lot of talking with Batu Puteh leaders and MESCOT members to ascertain their readiness to create a CBT project. MESCOT members were very clear of the importance of the project and their mission to create a project that could generate economic benefit to the local people. This state of readiness catapulted the project into action.

### 3.3.2 Stage 2: Change

In order to create change, Mr M used the bottom-up approach in MESCOT's capacity building process. The purpose was to create a new mindset, behavior, knowledge and skills that were required to run a CBT project. In addition, the process would also create strong self esteem a social cohesion among MESCOT members. Mr M always reminded MESCOT members that he was there as a facilitator. He made it clear that he was playing the role of a facilitator who would intervene when needed, but that all the decisions on how to manage and develop the CBT project would have to come from MESCOT members. With the funding from WWF, Mr M and MESCOT members searched for a base to enable them to carry out their activities. The first base was a vacant house that belonged to the village headman. This base gave them the freedom to carry out their workshops and activities. They were able to come and go as they needed without disturbing anybody.

One of the first actions that Mr M took MESCOT members started their workshop was to address their relaxed behaviour and low self esteem through capacity building programs. He initiated a discussion on a code of conduct and asked the group to brainstorm, present, discuss, finalize, and accept a set of rules that would form 'MESCOT's Code of Conduct', which included the consequences of any breach of the code of conduct. In the end, MESCOT members decided to commit to office hours of 9 am – 5 pm; a drastic change from their laid-back lifestyle. Those who were late were reprimanded by other group members, not Mr M. After a while, MESCOT volunteers could accept these working hours.

A few respondents reflected that had Mr M imposed a code of conduct on the MESCOT members, there was a high probability that the young MESCOT members would have rebelled. However, when they themselves had made the rules, they owned the rules and so had to abide by the rules that they had agreed on. This strategy was effective in reversing the relaxed attitudes of MESCOT members.

Mr M also addressed low self esteem issue of MESCOT members. He facilitated workshops and discussions but insisted that MESCOT would have to do all the work and take all the decisions. Again, the Code of Conduct played a role. They reminded each other to participate in discussions, and reprimanded their peers who broke rules. The situation expedited the readiness of MESCOT members to learn.

Mr M also created programs that built up the commitment of MESCOT members. During the early stage of CBT development, MESCOT members were trained to create activities that could generate income for the team. For instance, a few MESCOT members must prepare local cakes early in the morning so other members could sell them at the day markets near the village. Profits from the sales were kept in MESCOT's funds.

The most notable capacity-building project that created the most significant shift of mind set, sense of empowerment and sense of belonging among the MESCOT members was the construction of the Tungog Rainforest Eco Camp (TREC). This was started in 2002 when the Sabah Forestry Department gave permission and provided a fund of just under RM 900,000 for the construction of an eco lodge-type accommodation in a forest reserve located about 10 minutes downstream by boat from Batu Puteh CBT base. Figure 1 shows Mr M at a capacity building workshop.

Fig 1: Mr M at a capacity building workshop

Source: Courtesy of MESCOT, 2015

Instead of engaging a professional contractor to construct TREC, MESCOT decided that the local community should construct it with the help of foreign volunteers. Community members contributed in any way they knew how: investments were in the forms of hardwoods, cash, and labour. The TREC project, which was supposed to have been completed in three years, took almost eight years to be completed due to a lack of resources. Literally, a lot of sweat, blood, tears, and years of backbreaking work went into the construction of TREC, but at the same time, the process created a strong sense of pride and ownership among the local community. Today, TREC is regarded as a symbol of the local community's spirit, passion, and grit as well as a ground breaking capacity-building programme. Figure 2 shows some facilities available on TREC base.



Fig 2: Facilities available on TREC base

Source: Courtesy of MESCOT, 2015

### 3.3.3  Stage 3: Refreeze

During refreeze stage, Mr M made sure all the capacity building programs were put to test. This would enforce the use of knowledge and skills that the MESCOT members have learnt. After the MESCOT members have been trained for about three years, Mr M suggested that they start to accept tourists into their village. Although some of the members were still not confident, they nonetheless pursued the idea. Since that point, CBT Batu Puteh had been receiving a steady flow of tourists. On hindsight, MESCOT members appreciated the decision to open their village to tourists because it gave them the opportunity to put the knowledge and skills that they have learnt into practise. After TRE's success, MESCOT with help of foreign volunteers embarked on building another camping ground called Supu Rainforest Eco Camp (SREC). Figure 3 shows SREC compound.

Fig 3: Facilities on SREC

Source: Courtesy of MESCOT, 2015

Since the launch of the CBT project in 1999, Miso Walai Homestay, as it was popularly known, gradually managed to empower its local youths and women by employing the majority of them in ecotourism and conservation activities and widening its spread of economic benefits for the local community. Although many MESCOT members were indifferent to the recognitions they had achieved at national and international level, these. It took quite a while for such recognition to be registered in the minds of the local community. They found it difficult to fathom that their project, particularly its conservation activities, were nationally and internationally significant. However, tourist's arrivals from various interest groups had motivated MESCOT to learn to speak up to visitors and to be able to respond to interviews. The last visit to the site in 2017 shows that MWH is still competitively and actively

In sum, MESCOT had gone through a change process as suggested by Lewin's 3-stage-change model. MESCOT members may not be aware of the model or its process. Nonetheless, the change in mindset and behavior were progressively apt which enabled the villagers to participate in the CBR project meaningfully. Figure 4 depicts the change process that MESCOT members went through.
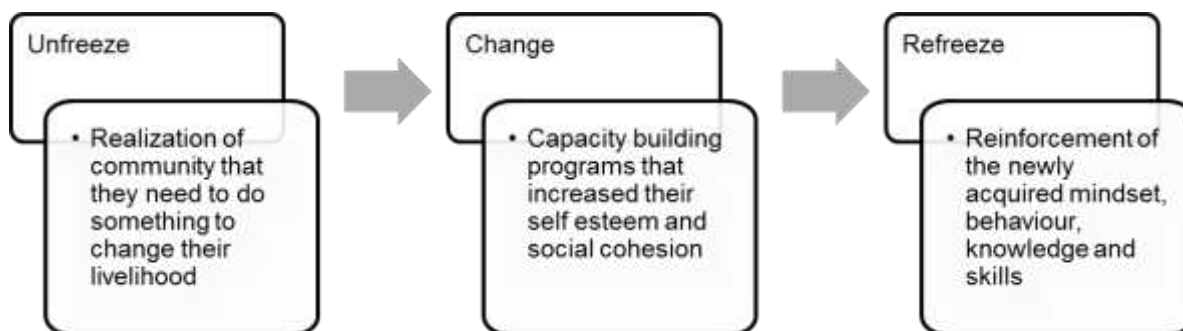


Fig 4: Change Process for MESCOT members

## 4 CONCLUSION

MWH experience had its own limitations similar to other communities. However, the decision to engage external initiator who had the tourism knowledge and skills to design capacity building programs played a vital role in changing the mind set and behaviour of the local community. Although unknown to the MESCOT members, they had gone through Lewin's 3-stage-change model. Each stage was essential and had been

carefully planned and carried out. A few significant themes such as Code of Conduct, bottom-up approach and capacity building had greatly contributed to the effort to shift the mind set and behaviours of MESCOT members. More importantly, CBT project leader must play an important role in guiding its community through the change process. Since the learning curve of each community is different, CBT leaders must posses the capacity to hand-hold the community through the change process to ensure its success. In MWH case, this process took about 14 years. This case also proved that Lewin's 3-stage-change model is relevant in explaining the activities that are crucial during the unfreeze, change and refreeze stages. It is hoped that this paper will shed some insights on how changes in communities and organizations can be carried out.

## 5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

## REFERENCE LIST

Ashley, C. (2006). How can governments boost the local economic impacts of tourism? Options and tools. Toolkit for Overseas Development Institute.

Briedenhann, J. & Wickens, E. (2004). Community involvement in tourism development: White elephant or empowerment? In Weber, S. & Tomljenovic, R. (Eds.), Reinventing a tourism destination: Facing the challenge , 167-177. Institute for Tourism Zagreb: Croatia.

Burnes, B. (2004). Kurt Lewin and the Planned Approach to Change: A Re-appraisal. Journal of Management Studies 41:6. Blackwell Publishing.

Dawson, P. (1994). Organizational Change: A Processual Approach. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Dent, E. B. and Goldberg, S. G. (1999). *Challenging resistance to change*. Journal of Applied. Behavioral Science, 35, 1, 25–41.

Duffy, R. 2006. Global environmental governance and the politics of ecotourism in Madagascar. Journal of Ecotourism, 5(1&2), 128-144.

Goodwin, H. (2009). Reflections on 10 years of pro-poor tourism. Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events, 1, 90-94.

Goodwin, H. & Santilli, R. (2009). Community-based tourism: A success?, International Centre for Responsible Tourism (ICRT). Occasional Paper 11. University of Greenwich.

Gunduz, L., & Hatemi-J, A. (2005). Is the tourism-led growth hypothesis valid for Turkey? Applied Economics Letters, 12, 8, 499–504.

Hamzah, A. & Khalifah, Z. (2009). Handbook on community based tourism: How to develop and sustain CBT. A Project Study submitted by Malaysia Government. APEC, Singapore.

Hausler, N. (2008, March). Community-based tourism (CBT) - What works and what does not work? Drawing on experiences in South America and Asia. International Conference on Responsible Tourism.

Hatch, M. J. (1997). Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic and Postmodern Perspectives. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kanter, R. M., Stein, B. A. and Jick, T. D. (1992). The Challenge of Organizational Change. New York: Free Press.

Kritsonis, A. (2004). Comparison of Change Theories. *International Journal Of Scholarly Academic Intellectual Diversity.* 8, 1.

Marshak, R. J. (1993). *Lewin meets Confucius: a re-view of the OD model of change*. The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 29, 4, 393–415.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

Moscardo, G. (Ed.) (2008). Community Capacity Building: an Emerging Challenge for Tourism Development. Building Community Capacity for Tourism Development (1-15). Oxfordshire, UK: CABI International.

Scheyvens. R. (2007). Exploring the Tourism-Poverty Nexus. Journal of Current Issues in Tourism. Vol 10. Issue 2-3

Yin, R. K. (2009). Case study research: Design and methods (4th Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.