

# Tasik Bera's Semelai Tribe in Peninsular Malaysia: Viability of Achieving Conservation Goals through Community-based Tourism (CBT)



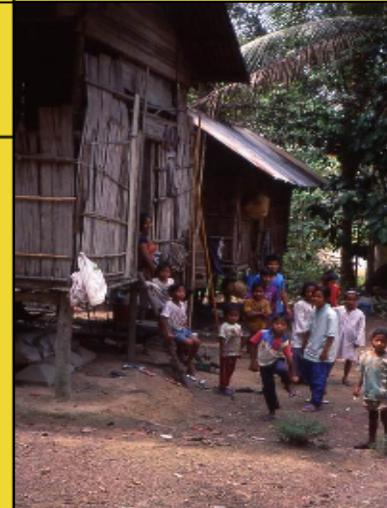
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**CENTRE FOR RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT**

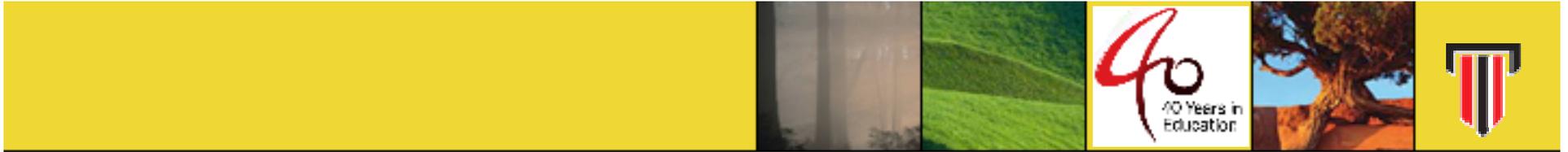
TAYLOR'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

In association with



World Ecotourism  
Conference 2009:

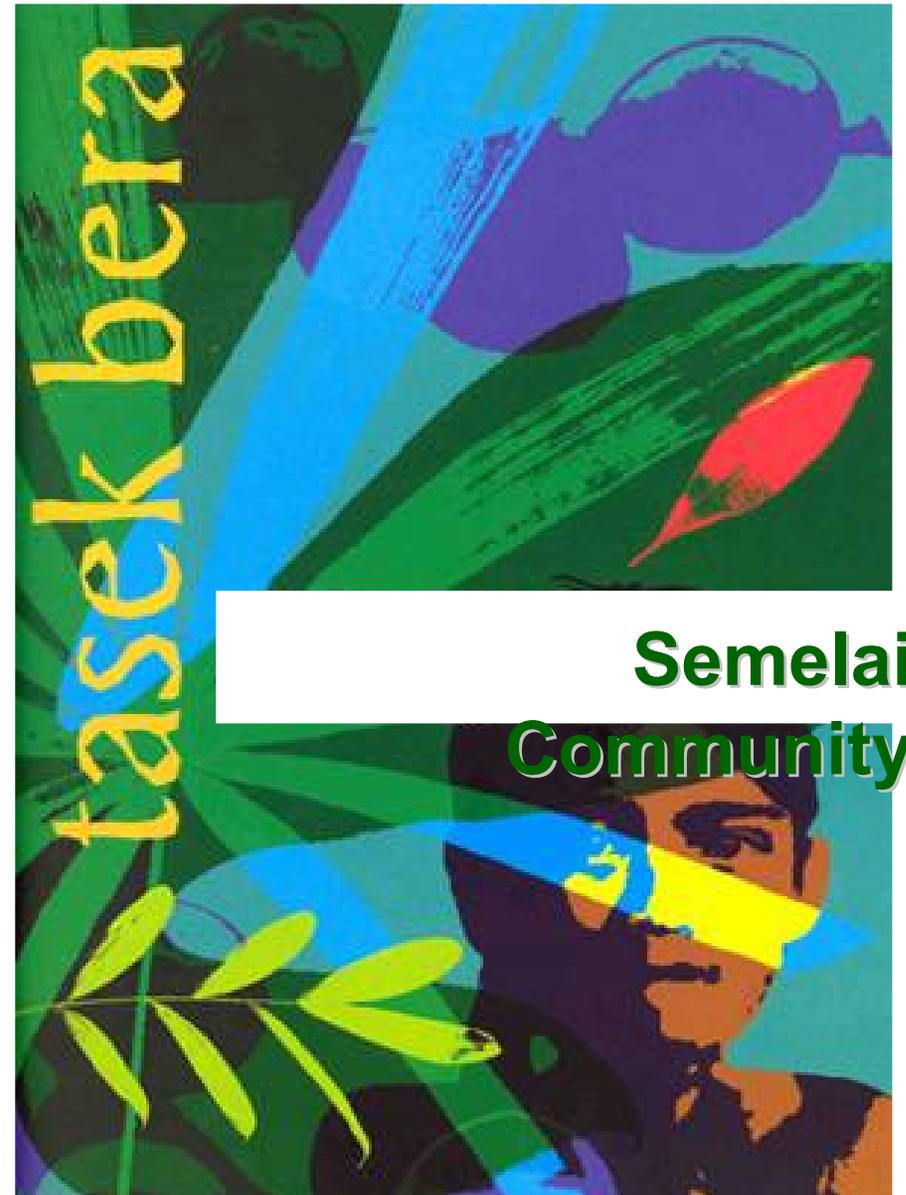
15-18 July 2009



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*All photographs are courtesy of Puah, S.N., Wild Asia, Amran, H. and Nair, V. (2006-2009)*



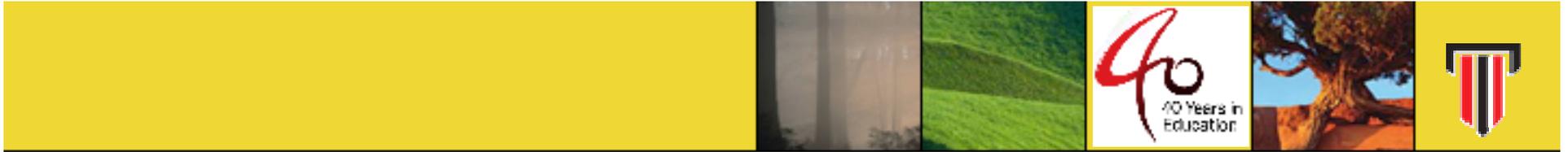
# Introduction



## Community Based Tourism (CBT)

- ❖ Occurs when decisions about tourism activity and development are **driven by the host community**.
- ❖ **Cultural exchange** - tourists meet with the local communities and witness aspects of their lifestyle.
- ❖ **Homestay** programme under the Ministry of Tourism, Malaysia - **guests live and dine with the host family**.
- ❖ Form of tourism which “**seeks directly to impose a formal economic activity on to a culture in which informal activities have previously been dominant**” (Laws *et al.*, 1998).

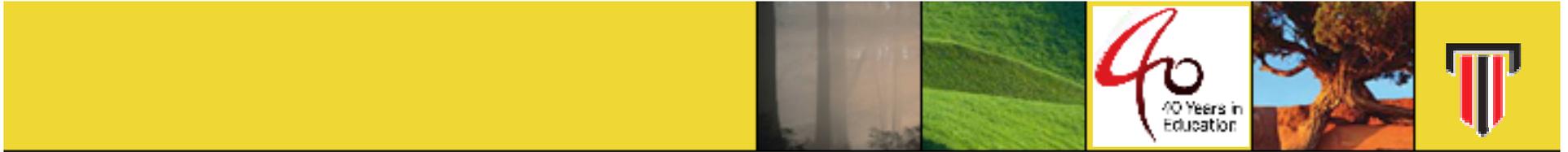




## Community Based Tourism (CBT)

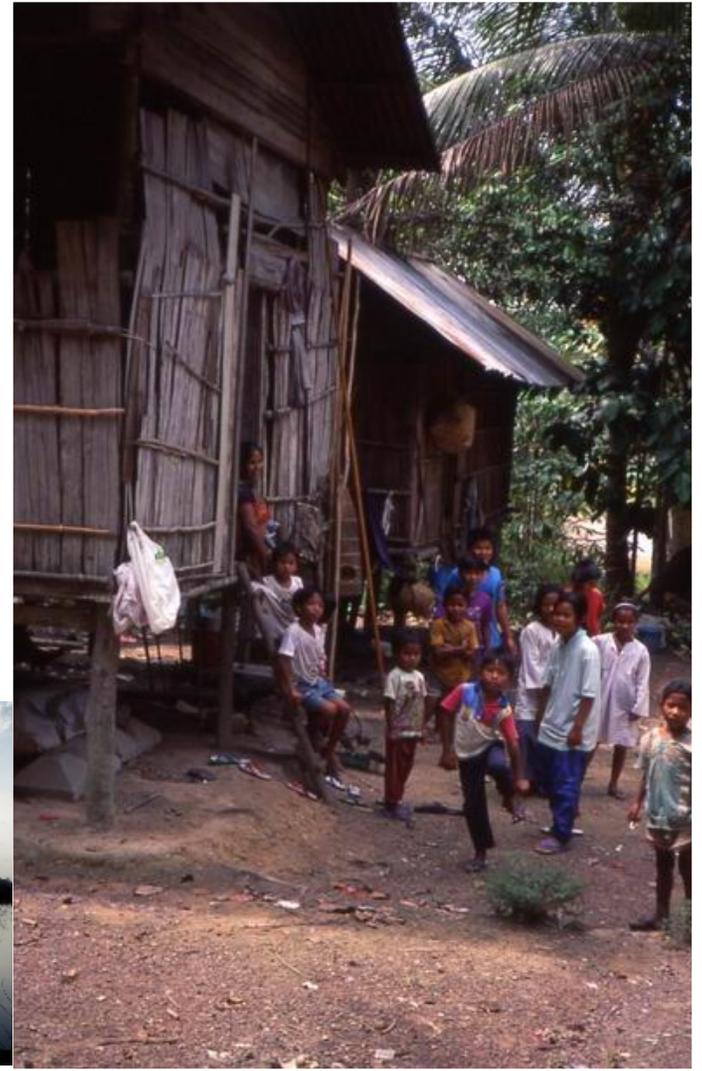
- ❖ “Tourism that **consults, involves and benefits the local community** (rural villages in developing countries and indigenous people)” (Mann, 2001).
- ❖ Common practice in many traditional **rural areas**.
- ❖ Given emphasis in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Tourism Charter in 2000 (APEC, 2009; Hatton, 1999).
- ❖ Many developed member countries in APEC, namely Canada, Australia, Vietnam, Laos, China, Philippines and Indonesia, has applied successfully the concept of CBT.
- ❖ Foster **local development** in developing countries, particularly in the poorer rural areas (Harris & Vogel, 2002)





# Community Based Tourism (CBT)

- ❖ Income generated from tourist staying in the homestay can **assist** many **indigenous communities** in Malaysia to move out of poverty (Gomez, 2004).
- ❖ The indigenous **Semelais** of Tasek Bera is one such community that has long been involved the homestay programme.



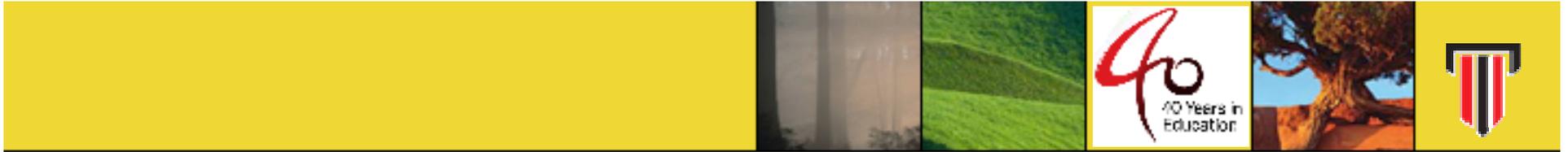


## COMMUNITY PARTICIPATIONS IN HOMESTAY

NO.	STATE	NO. OF HOMESTAY	NO. OF VILLAGES	NO. OF PARTICIPANTS	NO. OF ROOMS
1	Perlis	2	2	34	38
2	Kedah	6	6	115	165
3	Langkawi	4	9	94	150
4	Pulau Pinang	9	9	204	204
5	Perak	6	30	178	248
6	Selangor	16	20	535	535
7	Melaka	5	5	111	144
8	N. Sembilan	8	26	231	365
9	Johor	15	18	471	772
10	Kelantan	8	10	163	163
11	Terengganu	7	7	149	155
12	Pahang	12	21	375	412
13	Sarawak	19	21	233	243
14	Sabah	18	39	225	413
15	Labuan	3	3	65	75
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>3,183</b>	<b>4082</b>

\*Till 31 March 2009

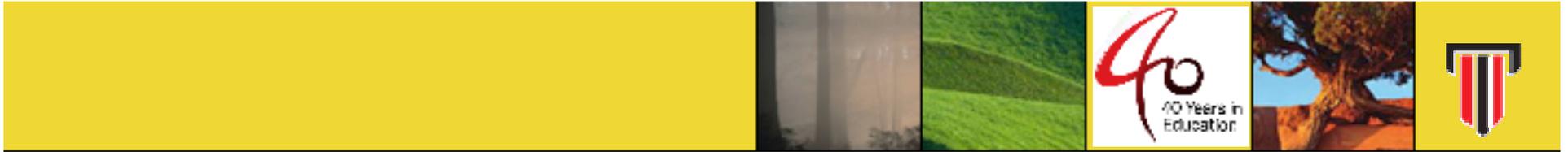
(Source: Amran, 2009)



# Ramsar Convention 1971

- ❖ The Convention on Wetlands, signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971.
- ❖ Intergovernmental treaty which provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the **conservation and wise use of wetlands** and their resources.
- ❖ There are presently 159 Contracting Parties to the Convention, with 1838 wetland sites, totalling 173 million hectares, designated for inclusion in the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance.



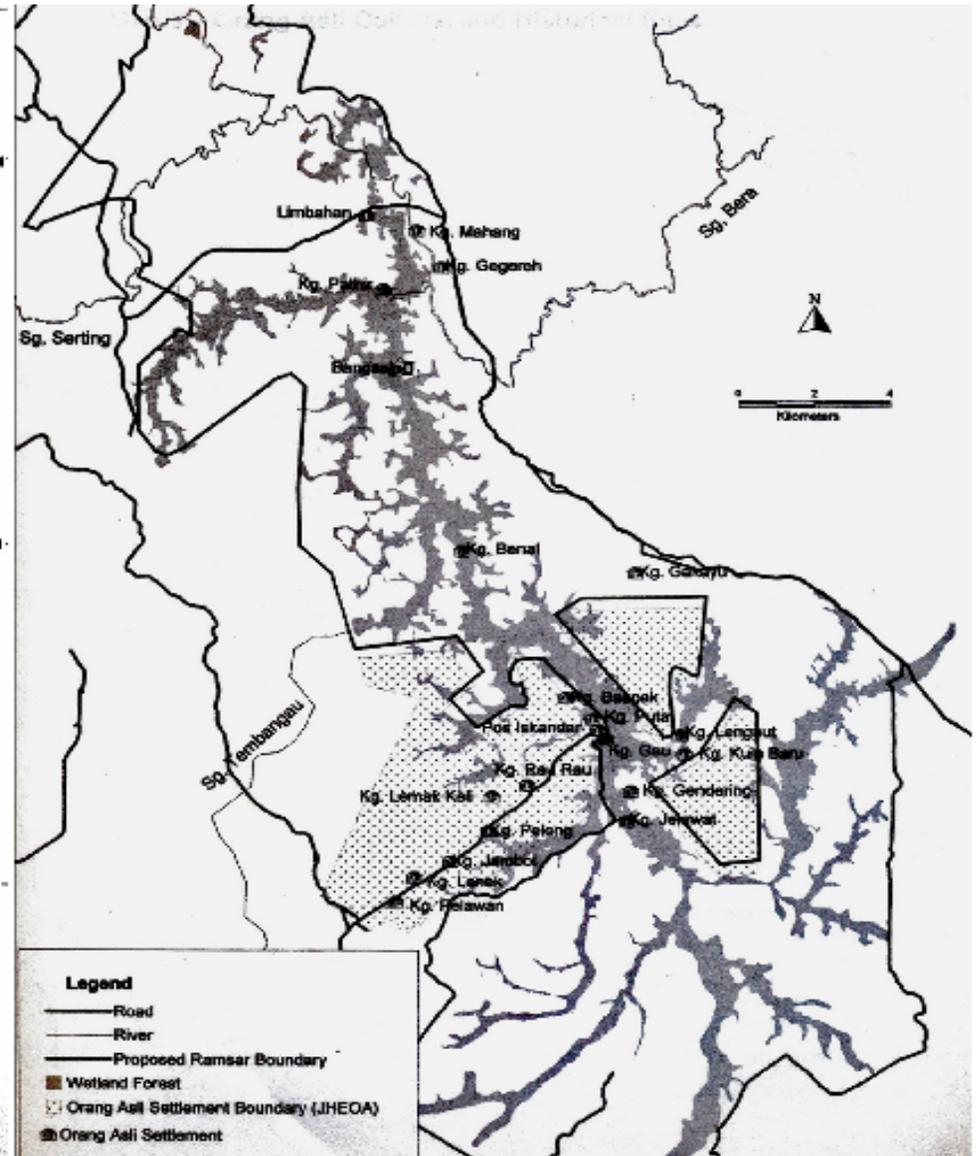
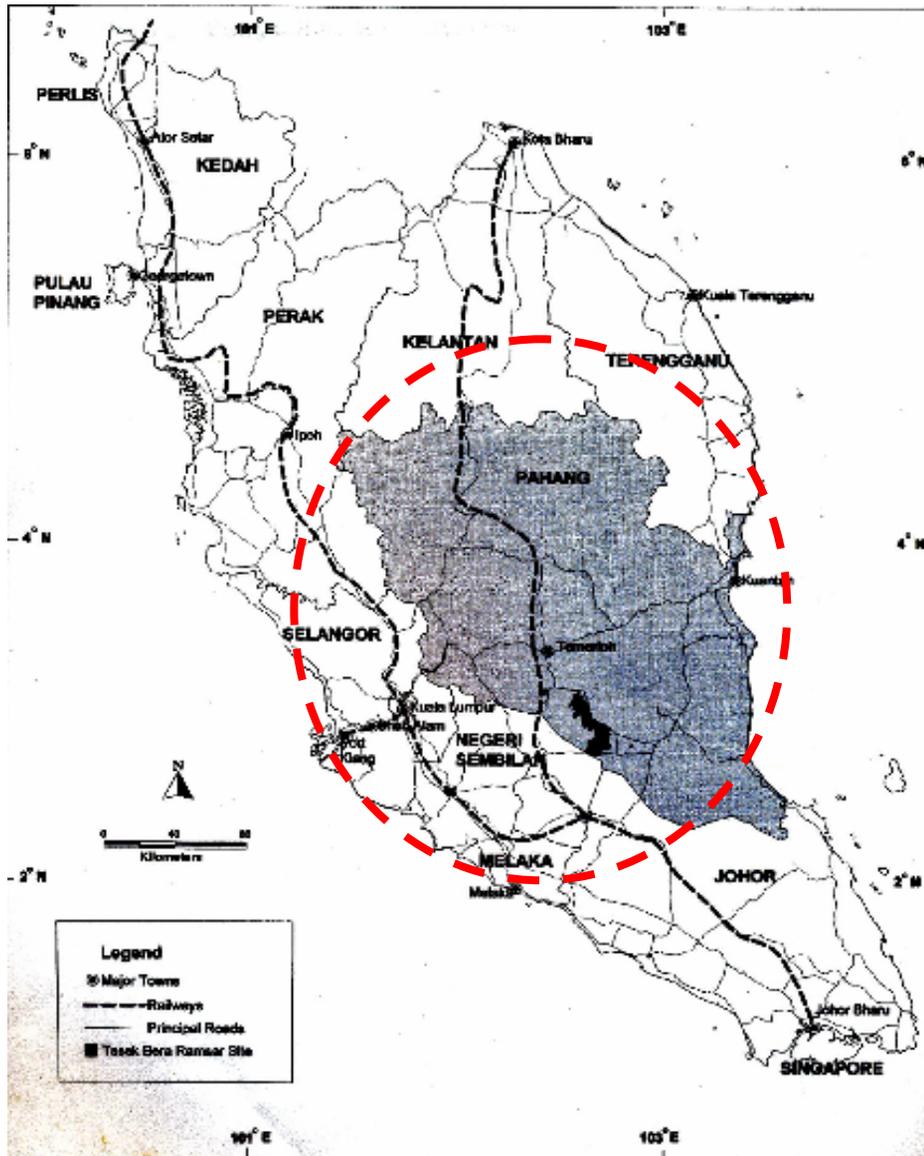


# Ramsar Convention 1971

- ❖ In 1994, Malaysia became a contracting party to the convention.
- ❖ Tasek Bera was designated as **Malaysia's first** Wetland of International importance or **Ramsar site**.
- ❖ The project was financed by Danish Cooperation for the Environment and Development (DANCED)
- ❖ Implemented by the Pahang State Government with technical assistance from Wetlands International - Asia Pacific (ESCAP, 2003).
- ❖ The project aims to **conserve and enhance the biodiversity of Tasek Bera** and its catchments, and ensure the wise use of its wetland resource.

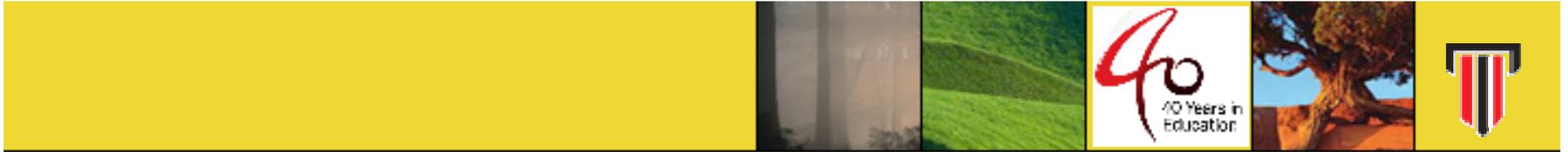


# Orang Asli Settlements: Tasek Bera Ramsar Site



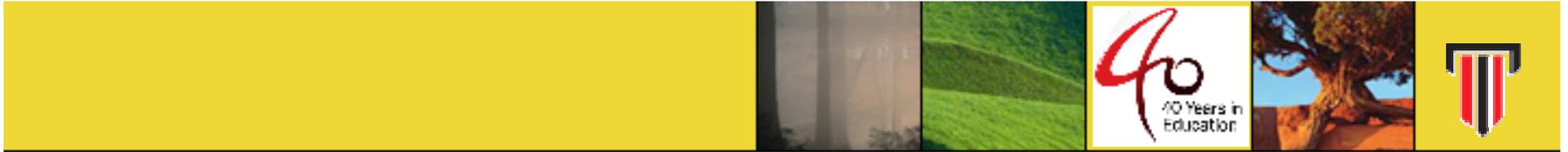
Source: Wetlands International – Asia Pacific, 1999

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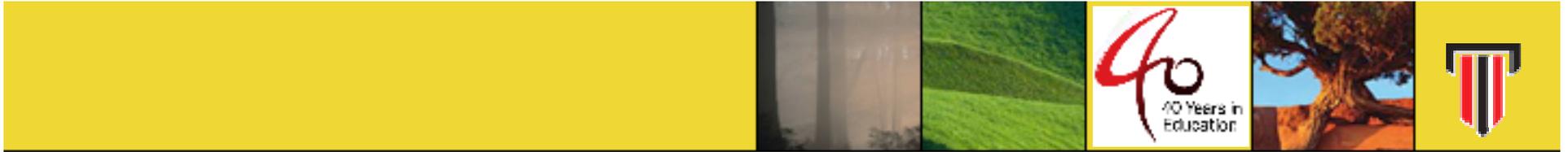
## The Issue...

- ❖ The indigenous Semelais who fished and farmed in the land and lake felt that there was **no future** for them despite the tourism efforts.
- ❖ Although they were identified as stakeholders but the **land and the tourism business** does not belong to them.
- ❖ They were mere workers for the travel industry who fed on the **tourism receipt leakages**.
- ❖ **Migration of youth** to urban areas to look for employment continued.
- ❖ The **older generations** who are untrained **with little skills struggled** to operate the CBT projects initiated and left behind by the non-government organisations (NGO).



## The Issue...

- ❖ Thus, this “**ill-devised**” **homestay project failed** to fit into the tourism system.
- ❖ Is ecotourism the **economic solution** for ethnic minorities in the long run?
- ❖ Are the NGOs and the travel **industry being selfish** to leverage on the ethnic minorities in the name of ecotourism?
- ❖ How can CBT **homestay** effectively **alleviate poverty** among the indigenous community in Malaysia?
- ❖ In an **economic downturn** what will be the fate of these ethnic minorities who have subscribed to ecotourism as a means to their economic livelihood?



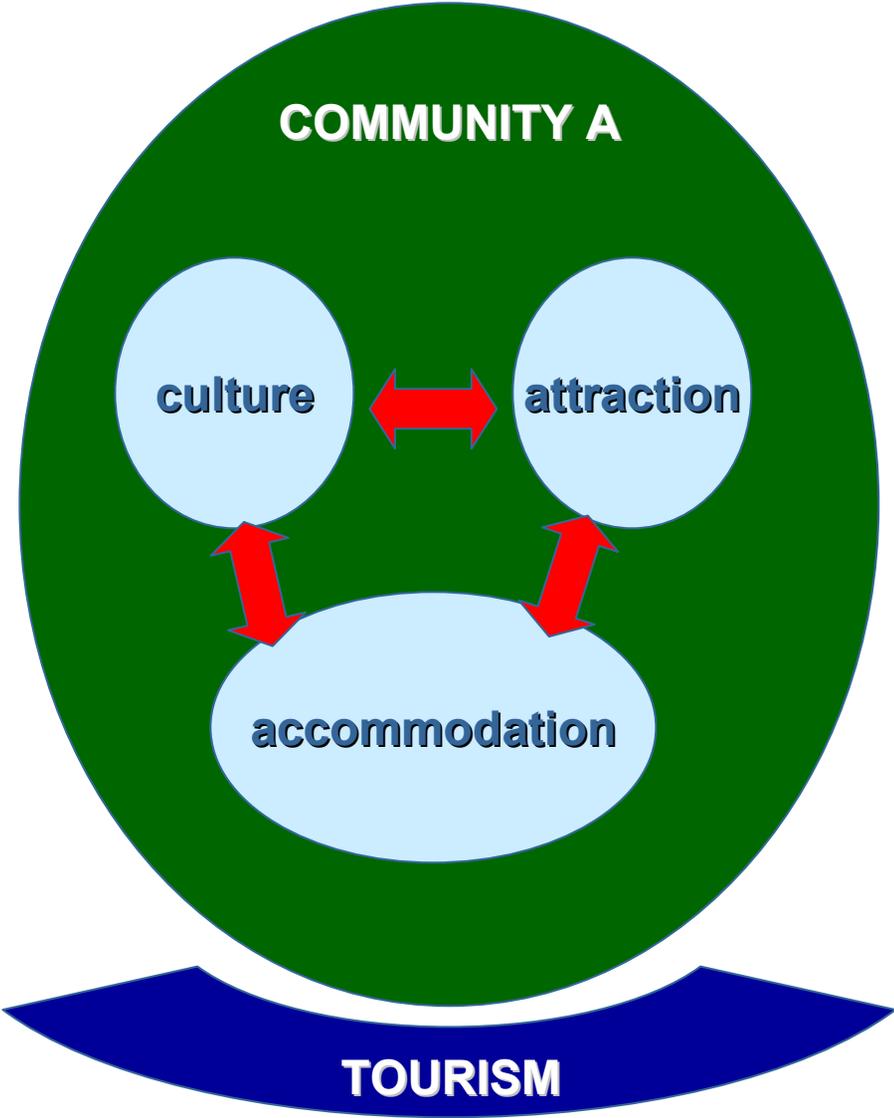
## The Issue...

- ❖ Will NGOs return to foster the community when **grants/funds** have been **used up**?
- ❖ Is this “**hand-out**” culture of being over reliant of these grants/funds doing more damage than good in terms of sustainability of the project?
- ❖ Should remote destinations adopt:
  - **community-based tourism** (tourism operated as a cooperative → closed cluster within community), or
  - **tourism-based community** (tourism inspired community → open cluster inviting/sharing tourism based resources)?



# COMMUNITY BASED TOURISM

# TOURISM BASED COMMUNITY

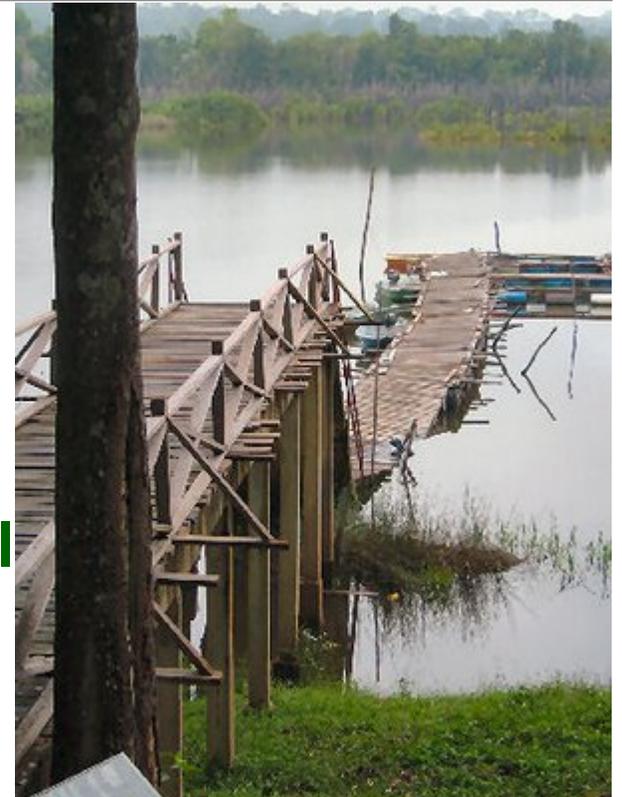




## Objective of Study...

Hence, the main objectives of the study is:

1. to analyse the **success level** of the homestay project in Tasik Bera, Pahang, Malaysia;
2. to understand the **function of the local community** in the CBT and **how poverty is reduced** effectively at Tasek Bera, and
3. to review the **role of the Government** in ensuring the success for the homestay project and the contribution towards CBT.





# Homestay @ Tasek Bera

- ❖ **Largest freshwater swamp** in Peninsular Malaysia.
- ❖ Situated in the South of **Pahang**, some 190 kilometers by road from Kuala Lumpur.
- ❖ The eastern side of the wetlands is **accessible** by generally good standard two lane metalled highways. The western side is served by laterite roads.
- ❖ There is **no public transport** to the lake.
- ❖ **Rich in biodiversity** with many different kinds of birds, endangered species such as crocodiles, tigers and elephants and endemic water plants.





# The Semelai Community

- ❖ **Indigenous community** living along the banks and surrounding forests of **Tasek Bera**.
- ❖ Lived here for more than **600 years** as **hunters** and **gatherers** obtaining the bulk of their food from hunting, fishing and trapping of land and water animals as well as collecting forest produce such as rattan, resin and medicinal plants.





# The Semelai Community

- ❖ Main source of **income - tapping rubber** and **selling the scrap rubber** to traders that visit the settlement. **Operate sundry shops** and **nature guides** to tourists and fishermen.
- ❖ The close **interdependence of the Semelai and the lake** is a crucial factor for their survival.

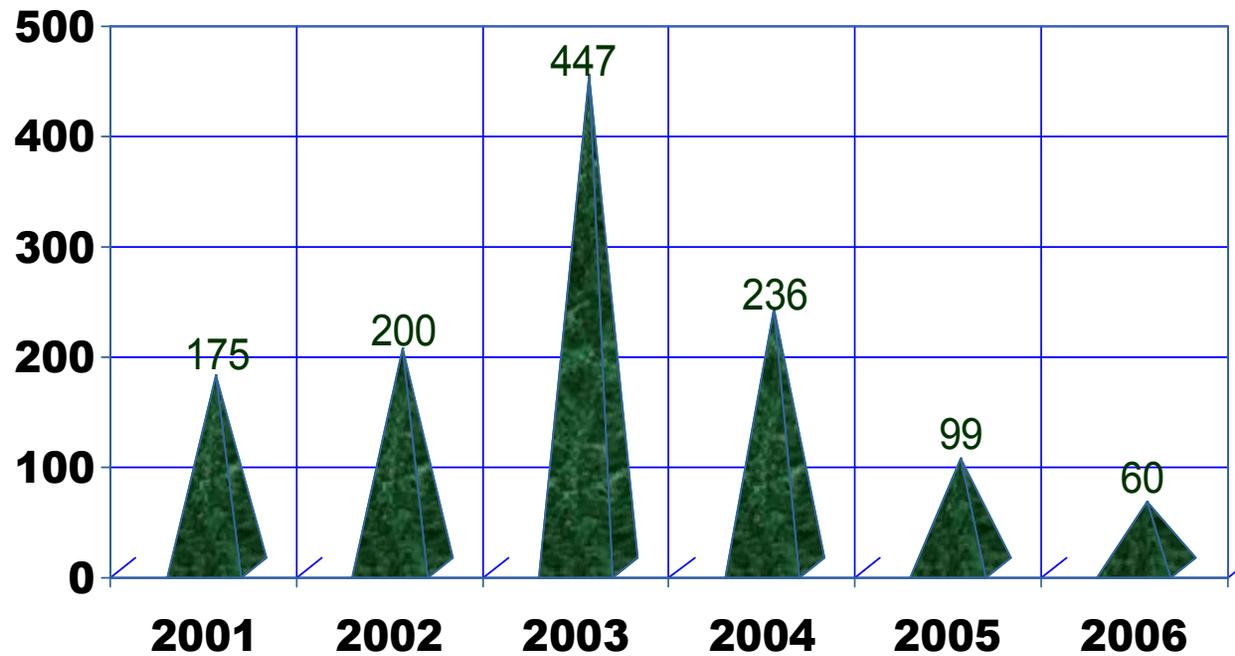


## Challenges of the Semelais

- ❖ The **level of water** at the lake dropped significantly.
  - tourist could not enjoy the water activities as per the original tour package.
  - for the local community, fishing was not possible with the conditions of the lake.
  - the oil palm plantation surrounding the lake also used water from the lake for their production.
- ❖ **Over reliant on NGOs** resulted in the direct inter-actions with the tourists almost impossible for them without the presence of the NGOs.



# Challenges of the Semelais



Tourists' arrival to Tasek Bera homestay project  
(Wetlands International, 2006)



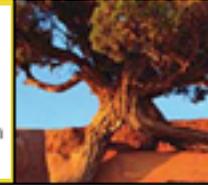
# Research Methodology



- ❖ Tasik Bera was used as the case in this study to understand **how the indigenous Semelai community have used the homestay programme to overcome poverty.**
- ❖ The field study was conducted with assistance from Wild Asia, a Malaysian based social enterprise conservation organisation.
- ❖ A series of interviews with structured questionnaires were conducted on various stakeholders to address the research question.
- ❖ Using the Delphi method, the response from the interview was analysed.



# Research Methodology

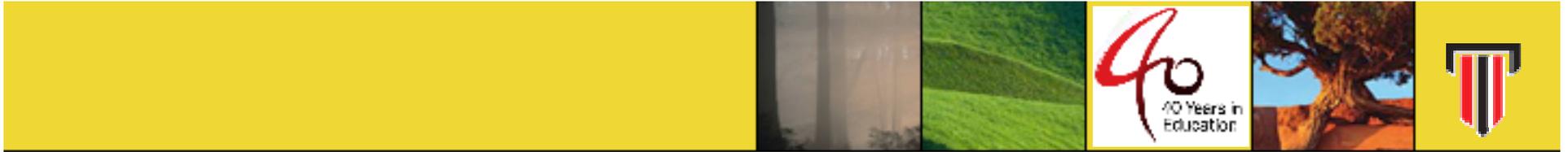


- ❖ Four experts were selected to participate in the Delphi method of knowledge elicitation, namely from the following organisation:



- ❖ An analysis of the consensus responses from the experts were used to understand the challenges that is facing the Semelais in Tasek Bera.
- ❖ Field observation of the existing environment of Tasek Bera was undertaken by the researcher to better understand the issues.

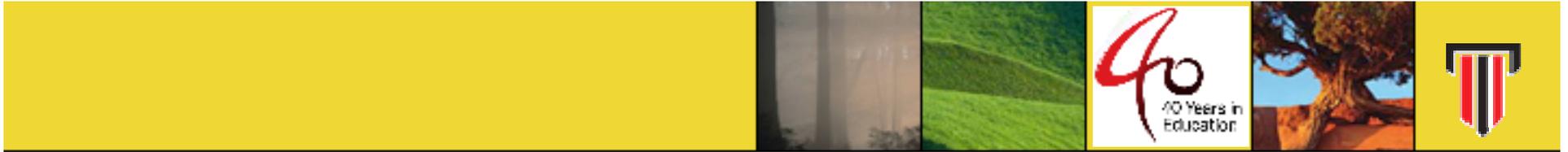




# Analysis of CBT homestay at Tasek Bera

- ❖ Eight (8) issues that were discussed and recommended for adoption at Tasek Bera are as follows:
  1. Certification from the Ministry of Tourism, Malaysia.
  2. Training by the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, Malaysia.
  3. The local community – the Semelais.
  4. The characteristics of a CBT homestay package.
  5. The role of the NGOs.
  6. The marketing and promotion of the CBT.
  7. Profit sharing.
  8. The ecotourism travel agencies / tours operators.

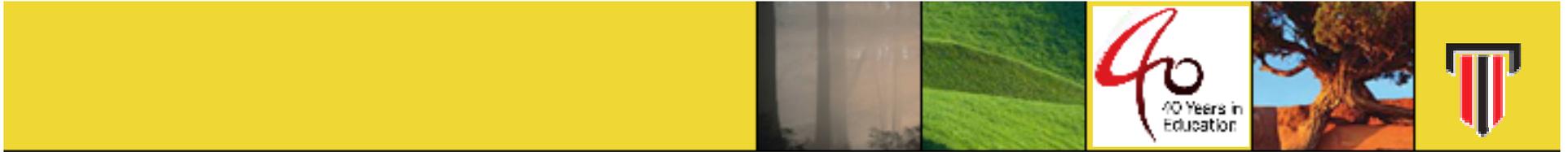




# 1. Certification from the Ministry of Tourism, Malaysia

- ❖ To legally handle a homestay programme in Malaysia.
- ❖ This legal registration requires respecting some conditions that can be the base for a successful homestay project.
  - To have complete support from the whole family.
  - Dedicated rooms for the guest.
  - Clean toilet/bathroom that is suitable for tourist.
  - Close to the other primary and secondary tourism attractions, facilities and activities – good accessibility.
  - Good organisation on the homestay in all the homes that is participating in the programme.





## 2. Training by the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, Malaysia

- ❖ Trainings organised by Inst. for Rural Advancement (INFRA) are essential for empowering the local community to have the skills to manage the homestay efficiently. There are 2 levels of training:
  - **Level 1: Basic level** is undertaken by the Malaysian Homestay Association (MHA). Training on the basic running of a homestay.
  - **Level 2: Advance level** is undertaken by INFRA. Participants, who have been successful. Emphasise on marketing and promotion.
- ❖ INFRA can coordinate and regroup several other villagers to come together and attend the same training modules to overcome the 40 pax minimum.
- ❖ Service and hospitality trainings need to be emphasised without over depending on the model of Desa Murni Village in Temerloh, Pahang.

### 3. The Local Community

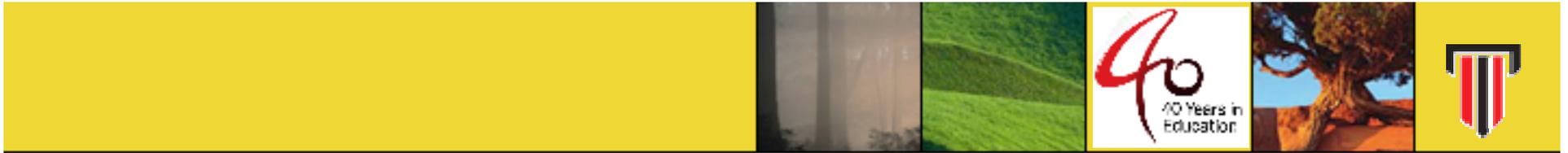
- ❖ Should have a local champion who is able lead the others.
- ❖ Encourage youths - fresh ideas and they will have the drive in earning a better income and staying in their village, rather than migrating to the city.
- ❖ Youths will be more willing to master the English language to welcome foreigners, using of technology and computers and also to do book-keeping and managing of the accounts.
- ❖ Adequate employment can be created, at the beginning as part-time or on volunteer mode and to evolve as full time when the need arise.



### 3. The Local Community

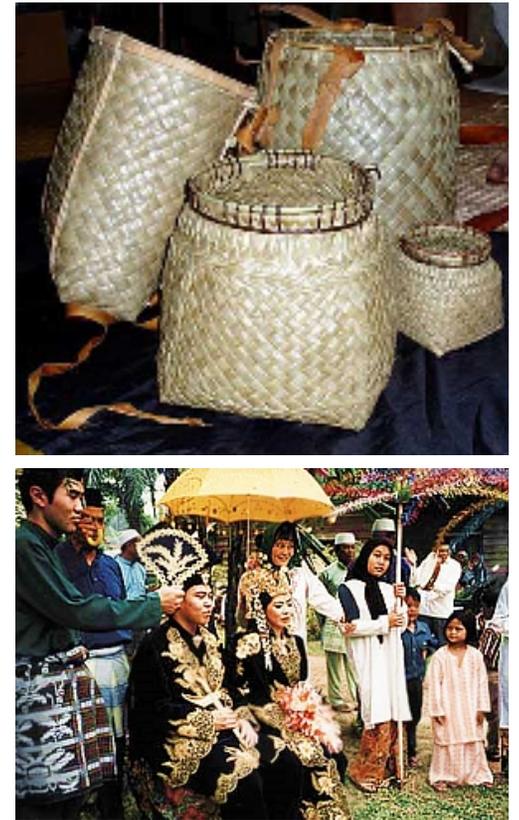
- ❖ Showing the local community culture to the tourists can be a way to make the community feel pride of themselves and feel less marginalized in the society.
- ❖ The Semelai Association of Boating & Tourism (SABOT) bureau committee members must be well represented by the youths. This will result in more innovation and fresh ideas in managing Tasek Bera CBT homestay.
- ❖ As the benefit of the homestay is briefed to all the youths, and a local leader is elected, he/she can convince the community to support the project.
- ❖ Thus, more homes can be converted into the homestay project.





## 4. The Characteristics of a CBT Homestay Package

- ❖ All CBT homestay package has to include:
  - Accommodations
  - Meals with the host families
  - A guide visit of the village
  - A experience of the art and craft in the village
- ❖ Others activities - cultural performance and traditional games can be organised by a local committee.
- ❖ The local committee should prepare a list of cultural performances that they can present to their tourists at an affordable price.





SABOT

## Tasek Bera Back to Nature Eco-Tour Packages

### Rasau Eco Tour (4 Days 3 Nights)

- Primary School Students only  
RM50 per person (40 people or more)  
RM55 per person (less than 40 people)

### Kerboboj Eco Tour (4 Days 3 Nights)

- Secondary School Students only  
RM95 per person (40 people or more)  
RM100 per person (less than 40 people)

### Kercut Eco Tour (4 Days 3 Nights)

- College and University Students only  
RM160 per person (40 people or more)  
RM180 per person (less than 40 people)

### Sebarau Eco Tour (3 Days 2 Nights)

- Corporate and Other Sectors  
RM160 per person (10 people or more)  
RM180 per person (less than 10 people)

### Yoh Hapit Eco Tour (4 Days 3 Nights)

- Corporate and Other Sectors  
RM200 per person (10 people or more)  
RM220 per person (less than 10 people)

### Semelai Homestay (3 Days)

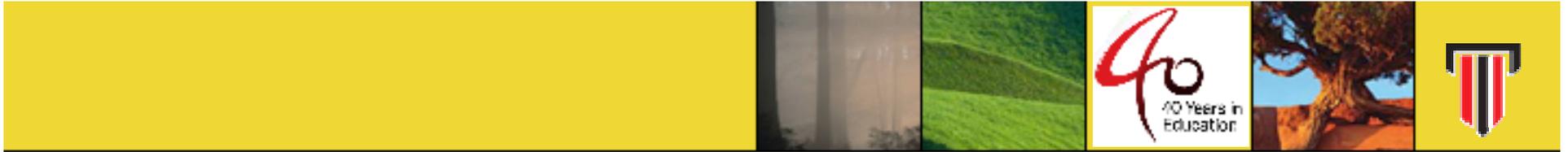
- RM75 per person (10 people), food and accommodation only, excluding activities in eco-tour package.

#### These eco-tour packages comprise:

- Accommodation (Traditional Semelai House)
- Food by Semelai cooks
- Canoeing
- Boating
- Jungle Trekking
- Cultural Demonstration
- Solo Night
- Swimming

**Note:** Replacing the activities listed above will entail a revised fee. Prices are subject to change without prior notice.

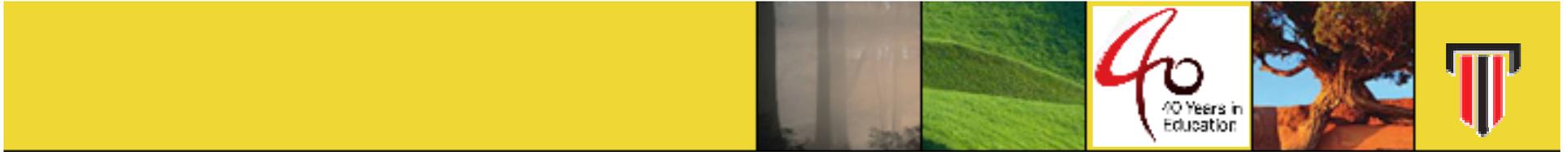




## 5. The Role of NGOs

- ❖ Bridge between the tourists and the village.
- ❖ The NGOs should play the role to guide the community at the initial stage.
- ❖ All major decisions in the running of the homestay must be left to the local community.
- ❖ Wetlands International and Wild Asia actively promoted the homestay project at the initial stage and also guide the local community in better managing the project.
- ❖ In March 2007, Wetlands international ended the supports in Tasek Bera after ensuring that the local community is motivated and well trained to manage the business.





## 6. The Promotion of the CBT

- ❖ Identify the unique selling point that can attract tourists, i.e. the unique traditional Semelai culture compared to other homestays.
- ❖ Unique image - best way to attract this niche tourist product that is surrounded with interesting biodiversity and natural landscape.
- ❖ At Tasek Bera the unique handicraft of the Semelai women is becoming more and more successful.
- ❖ Effective marketing and promotion should highlight this unique product which in turn will popularise the homestay.





## 6. The Promotion of the CBT





## 6. The Promotion of the CBT

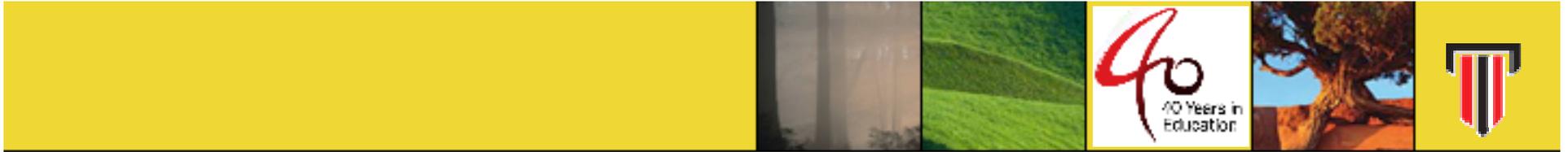


## 7. Profit Sharing

- ❖ Main motivation factors for the villagers.
- ❖ Everybody plays a role in the whole tourist experience.
- ❖ Every member will receive their proportion of the income.
- ❖ If the villagers see the continuous income and benefit that they get from these programmes, they will be more motivated to continue the programme.
- ❖ Clear, transparent and fair partnership with tour operators who are responsible is essential for a win win benefit for both parties. In some homestay programme in Malaysia



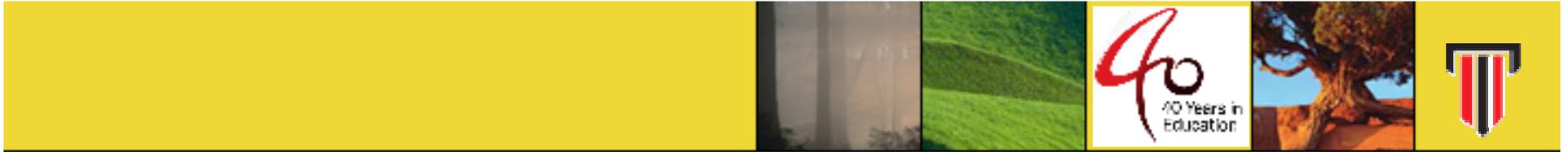
(Images: Amran, 2009)



## 8. The Ecotourism Travel Agencies / Tours Operators

- ❖ Responsible travel agencies/tour operators are essential for the success of the homestay programme.
- ❖ The efficient network and linkages of these travel agencies/tour operators is needed for the marketing and promotion of the programme.
- ❖ Use the network of the international outbound ecotourism group such as the Ethical Tour Operators Group to promote.
- ❖ Other organisations such as Wetlands International and Wild Asia have also contributed significantly in educating tour operators to be responsible.

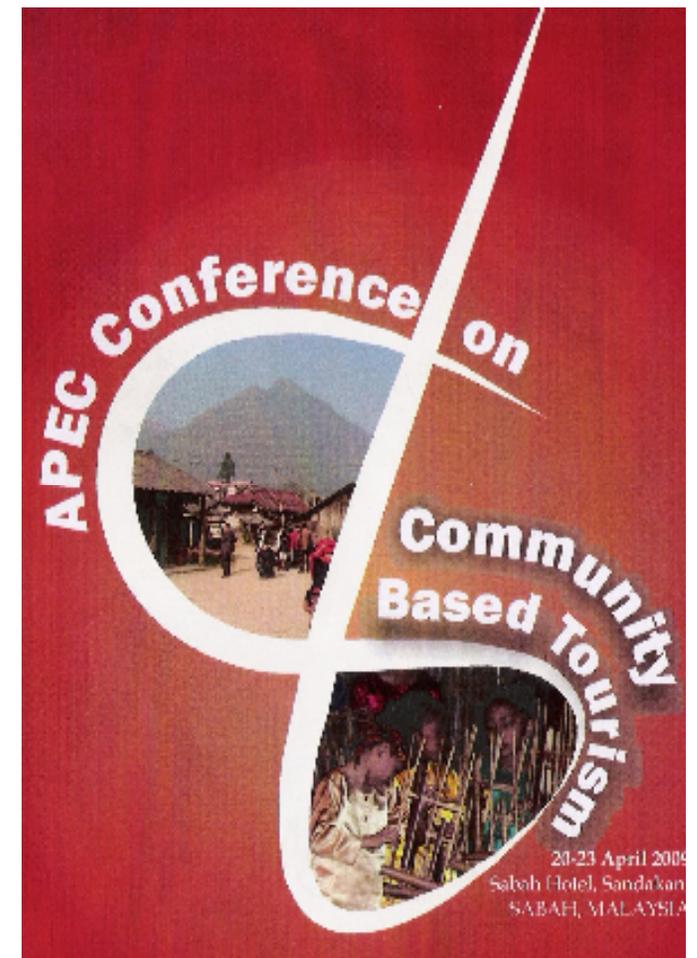




## Other Recommendation:

### Handbook on CBT - How to Develop & Sustain

- ❖ Recommended to adopt the **Handbook on CBT: How to Develop and Sustain CBT**.
  - Developed by the Ministry of Tourism, Malaysia (Amran, 2009).
  - Funded by Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).
  - Taskforce headed by Universiti Teknologi Malaysia.
  - Adopt best practice from Malaysia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Philippines, China, Chinese Taipei, Korea, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.
  - Nine(9) steps by APEC is recommended as guiding principles for all future CBT development.



Images and figures are courtesy of Amran (2009) for APEC project on developing handbook for CBT.



# Conclusion



- ❖ Success in poverty alleviation via tourism depends on effective **community-public-private partnership** that serves to **reduce financial leakages** and **increase economic linkages** to the local economy.
- ❖ CBT provides **alternative economic opportunities**, which are in essence in rural areas.
- ❖ The case study of Tasek Bera is an example of how indigenous Semelai community have tried to **create entrepreneurial opportunities** to move out of poverty via various partnerships.



# Conclusion



- ❖ The project **failed to sustain** despite the efforts of the NGOs.
- ❖ Thus, CBT may not be the economic solution for the Semelais if a **holistic plan** is not put in place to **involve the youths and the** senior citizens in a well structured programme that will economically benefit and sustain the community. It is a possible solution but only if it is managed by the communities themselves and if they have some capacity to handle it (e.g. language).
- ❖ The industry in general seemed to leverage on this ethnic minorities in the name of ecotourism but without **concrete sustaining plan**, alleviating poverty via CBT is a certainly a challenge especially during the current economy state.



# Conclusion



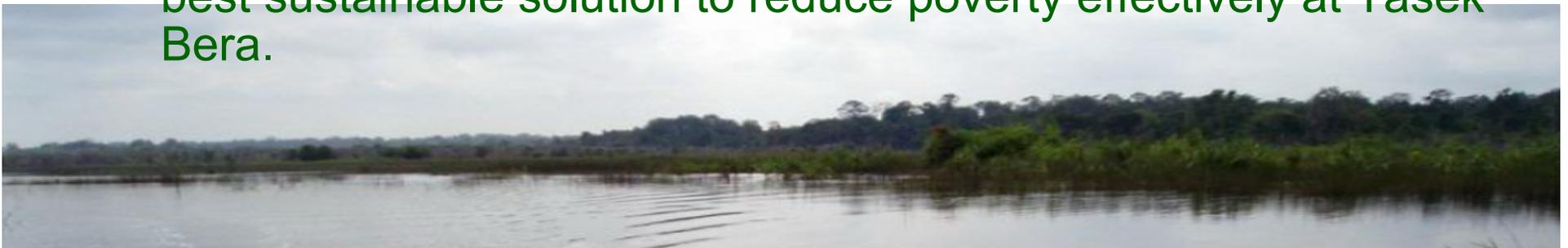
- ❖ The moralities of those industries in treating ethnic minorities in the name of eco-tourism, have been pushed aside for their self-interests in pursuing their own goals.
- ❖ CBT homestay if managed properly, may improve the economic standards for some indigenous communities who are at a decent comfortable zone - where they have some formal education and decent basic facilities.
- ❖ But they will not be suitable for the poorest of the poor who have no land and are struggling to put food on the table every day.
- ❖ There are no significant numbers of ethnic minorities who are heavily dependant on ecotourism to be affected by the economic downturn. Except for maybe a handful of people in special cases.



# Conclusion



- ❖ As tourist numbers to these niche tourist destinations dwindled, sustaining the homestay programme will be beyond abilities of the community. The project can succeed if the project was initiated and driven by their self-interest in conservation in the first place.
- ❖ **Over dependence on “hand-out” culture** will do more damage than good in terms of sustainability of the homestay project in rural destinations, as seen in the Tasek Bera case study.
- ❖ Remote destinations like Tasek Bera should instead **adopt tourism-based community**, i.e. tourism inspired community via open cluster inviting/sharing tourism based resources. Adopting community-based tourism, i.e. tourism operated as a cooperative – closed cluster within community, may not be the best sustainable solution to reduce poverty effectively at Tasek Bera.



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# Thank you

# Terima kasih

# ... for your kind attention

# Q&A

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