

*Essential Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes towards  
Sustainable Rural Tourism after a Decade of the Tsunami in Aceh*

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**Abstract**

The study investigated the rural tourism in Aceh after a decade of the tsunami. Reports revealed that tourism is the fastest growing industry in the world that benefits a country's economy and local communities. Thus, the main concern should be the human capital and human resources to ensure successfulness and the sustainability of the rural tourism activities. The paper aims to highlight the human capital issues which focus on the human talent while the human resources components are skills, knowledge and attitudes which are considered crucial for sustainable tourism in Aceh. Seven key informants were identified for the study. Additionally, a total of 103 respondents took part in the interviews and 450 participated in the survey. However, this paper focuses on the results from the interviews amongst the seven key informants and the participants during the interviews of the phenomenon. The results showed that there was lack of understanding of rural tourism concept and its meaning and also the low level of knowledge and skills in managing rural tourism. In addition, lack of local leaders and support for rural tourism add to the ineffective of its development. The study implies that human capital for sustainable rural tourism is essential. Thus, Aceh requires broadening the context of rural tourism from its concept to its sustainable management. Multiple means and ways need to be initiated to secure greater measure of sustainable development in rural tourism for the benefits of its community and its country.

Keywords: rural tourism, sustainable, knowledge, skills, attitudes

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## Introduction

Research on tourism and its influence as well as its impact have been considerably conducted by many scholars around the globe due to the many benefits it contributes to national welfare (Dimitrovski et al., 2016; Sharperly, 2014). Furthermore, tourism contributes to the social economic benefits for its stakeholders. As mentioned by Richardson and Fluker (2008, p.4) that “tourism is modern activities with significant economic consequences for governments, local communities and businesses, it also has important impacts on social, cultural and environments”. Accordingly, rural tourism as one type of tourism, also attracts researcher attention because it provides a new alternative of income generating, solve unemployment problems and at the same time preserve the cultural and social heritage and environment in rural areas (Shahab and Hashemi, 2016).

According to the World Tourist and Travel Council, by the end of 2015, travel and tourism will contribute US\$7.8 trillion or about 10% of total GDP. This sector will account for 284 million jobs, 9.5% of total employment (WTTC, 2015). In term of development, tourism has claimed consistent and reliable increase since 6 decades ago until now showing the strength and resilience of this industry and will continue to grow sharply within the next 2 decades (UNWTO, 2017). International tourist arrivals have increased from 25 million globally in 1950 to 1,235 million in 2016.

Tourism becomes more and more attractive for any nation that seek to improve their economic sectors through various branches of tourism activities and services that lead to economics benefit, as mentioned by Snieška, Barkauskienė& Barkauskas, (2014). Furthermore, Cooper (2012) mentions that tourism is the fastest growing industry in the world that benefits country’s economy and local communities. Tourism can be a significant source of creating new work places in rural communities. Moreover, it also helps to maintain and develop local culture in rural areas. Therefore, rural tourism not only offers business opportunities to local residents, but also encourages rural areas regeneration and economic development, and also increases quality of life for visitors and rural communities. Considering the many benefit of rural tourism, it is essential to explore how to make the most of this business as well as to assure its sustainability in the future.

In order to run a successful rural tourism activity, the main concern should be put into human resources promptness because tourism is a people center activities that provide services in many divisions and subdivisions such as accommodation, transportation, attractions as well as products selling souvenirs, culinary, etc. Tourism is a labour intensive sector that creates many jobs at all levels. According to ILO and UNWTO, the global tourism sector accounted for more than 235 million jobs in 2010 representing 8% of global direct and indirect employment, or one in every 12 jobs. It is forecasted that by 2019, the global sector will grow to 296 million jobs. In addition, tourism is a complex sector requiring many players to be involved in delivering the wide range of facilities and services that combine to provide the overall visitor experience. UNWTO ( 2017 ) suggested that typically the strategic plan or master plan of tourism would cover: Tourism resources which have the potential to be converted into viable and attractive tourism products; Tourist facilities and services, and opportunities for investment; Socio cultural, environmental and economic

impacts; Human Resources needs; and Community involvement and initiatives. Those areas are very much related to human capital and sustainable rural tourism.

Therefore, it is crucial to examine the human capital elements in rural tourism and do research analysis to add onto the knowledge base human capital element especially refer to Romei and Tortora (2014). Although, many studies have been conducted on human capital that focus on improving human resource as the important assets for an organization, however, there are rarely research related to the human capital in the scope of rural tourism community.

Hence, the aim of the study is to investigate the essential of knowledge skills and attitudes towards the development of rural tourism in Aceh after a decade of the tsunami. The findings demonstrated that the people in Aceh lack the knowledge and skills. In addition, the industry of rural tourism is not getting the support from the leaders and local community of Thus, Aceh faced tremendous pitfall in rural tourism. Obviously, the mobility human capital components are seen not effective. The leadership and the problems of violation of human rights is seen. The results of the study added knowledge to the notion of rural tourism leadership and most importantly the insights gained serve as practical implication for the development and sustainability of rural tourism in the context of Aceh.

### **Rural Tourism in Aceh**

Historically, Aceh had been in conflict for the past years with the Indonesia's military. The 30-year separatist conflict may have adversely affected the capacity of local government. The conflict had thwarted economic and social progress and stymied the development and delivery of government services (Masyrafah & McKeon, 2008). Aceh's great challenge is to overcome the enormous physical and psychic problems created by the tsunami in ways that serve its entire people in the long run. To succeed, Aceh indeed urgently required leaders and the cooperation of its community who emulate consistently the effort to sustain and even to re develop rural tourism as it has been reported tourism industry contributes significantly to the economy that elevates the whole nation to a more just path.

In Indonesia tourism sector is the fourth highest devisacontributor after oil and gas that provides huge support for economic's growth. Tourism sector also provide lots of new profession and job employment for community as well as open large number of industry such as hotel and homestay, travel and tour operator, restaurant craft industry, etc. These industries employ many workers and therefore reduce the number of unemployment which is a big problem in Indonesia. Tourism sector employ 10,18millions workers or it is about 8,89 % of national workers in Indonesia (McCartney, 2013). Thus, Indonesia Ministry of Cultural and Tourism encourages all kind of tourism activities that will help every potential province to jointly enjoy this new pervasive trend.

Aceh is one province in Indonesia that is located in the northwest of Sumatra island with the area of approximately 57,365.7 km square and the capital of Aceh province is Banda Aceh. It consists of 119 islands, 73 major rivers and 2 lakes. Aceh is surrounded by Malacca Strait in the north, Indian Ocean in the south and the west. In 2013, Aceh Province is divided into 18 districts and 5 cities, consisting of 289 sub

districts, 779 Mukims and 6,474 villages. Location of natural reservation/natural tourist attraction in Aceh are located in 12 places namely: Taman Buru LinggaIsaq Park, Serbajadi Natural reservation, Sabang/Weh Island Marine Park, Jantho Natural reservation, GunungLeuser National Park, Banyak Islands, RawaSingkil Wild Life, Aceh Besar Tourism Park, PocutMeurahIntan Grand Forest, Subulussalam Park, Simeulue Grand Forest and Lampuuk and Lhoknga Beaches (Aceh in Figures, 2016).

The fact that Aceh had been in internal conflict with Indonesian government for 31 years made this province isolated not only for international visitor but also national and local traveler who were feared to travel in Aceh. However, when Tsunami hit Aceh on December 26, 2004, then only Aceh start to draw attention from national and international communities and agencies who provided aids and assistances for the disaster victims. The Tsunami also brought a light on the peaceful agreement between The Acehnese Rebel Movement (GAM) who had been fighting for independence against the Indonesia authorities for years. The signing of the peace agreement or memorandum of understanding (MOU) in Helsinki, Sweden a year after the Tsunami on October 15, 2005 resulted in that Aceh remain as a province of Indonesia. Since then, the peace process has been quite smooth, without major incidents, The AAM (Aceh Monitoring Mission) funded by the European Union oversaw the process.

Even though, some of the most beautiful Aceh tourism and historical sites and beaches have been damaged by the massive earthquake and Tsunami disaster, however there are some other new tourism objects flourish that attract more tourists to come which are the Tsunami heritages. Furthermore, Aceh also is rich of events, attraction and unique cultures that will fascinate people. Some well known tourist spots such as The Baiturrahman Great Mosque, The Museum Tsunami Aceh, KapalApung heritage, Aceh State Museum, The Grave of Sultan Iskandar Muda, UjongBatee and Lampuuk beaches, Hot water pool, GunungLeuser National Park and Sabang island, most of the them are located in the village areas.

In Aceh context, tourism village is a village proposed to the government namely Cultural and Tourism Board to be appointed as tourism village. This tourism village has structured organization called tourism alert group which are consisted of one leader, a secretary and a treasurer and some members. Then this group will propose to Cultural and Tourism Board of Aceh to be legally appointed as formal tourism village. Once it has legally announced by the government as tourism village then only a village can name and publish their village as tourism village to run the tourism activities can get some support funds and to get some fund from government. Some activities that community can provide for tourist are homestay, art performance, natural adventure, agrotourism, etc.

## **Literature Review**

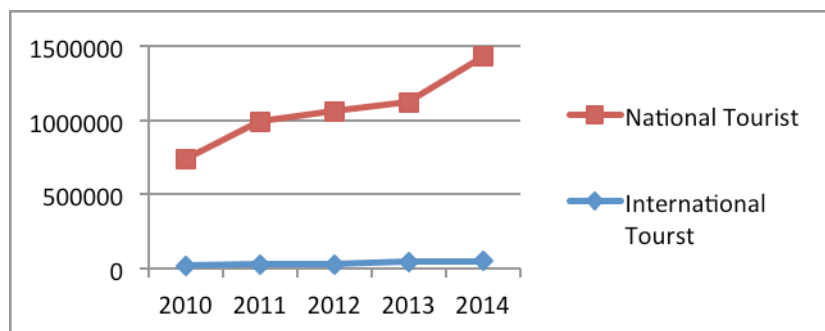
### **Rural Tourism in Aceh**

Most major tourist destinations in Indonesia such as Bali, Yogyakarta, Batam, Bandung and Jakarta, has rather relaxed modern cosmopolitan social outlook, which is quite conducive for tourism industry. However, certain regional provinces such as Aceh might not have that kind of luxury, and tends to be conservative. Furthermore,

Aceh is well known for its Islamic society with Syariah law applicable to its government constitution as part of its exclusive autonomy given by Indonesia government. The province has a relatively strict Islamic-based law, enforced by Islamic religious police, called Wilayatul Hisbah. Thus, some certain normally private matters, such as beach clothing, party and the consumption of alcohol, to a display of affections between couple, are discouraged, and might lead to a legal problem.

In addition, for the past several years, most Acehnese who live in rural area are the most reluctant to receive tourists especially tourists from non Muslim countries. They believe that tourist will bring bad influence to their culture and standard of living as well as people’s lifestyle. Therefore, they tend to reject tourist or tourism activities related to non Syariah activities. This view hss gradually changed especially when the Tsunami hit Aceh on December 26, 2004. At this time, people around the world come to Aceh to delivere aids and assistance for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the area and then followed by the signing of MOU Helsinki in 2005.

The number of tourists who come to Indonesia increase sharply each year for both national and international tourists. However, the number of tourist who come to Aceh increase sharply only for national tourist and for international tourist the increase is just slowly. Figure 1.1 shows the number of tourist growth in Aceh.



### Theoretical Framework

Based on the literature review, a theoretical framework is produced to facilitate in the data collection. The framework is made up of three major components: 1) Rural tourism; 2) human capital; 3) rural tourism management. The human capital draws on the theory (Becker, 1993) and Brewer and Hunter (2006). The human capital theory was further supported by Lepak and Snell (1999) who believed “two unique dimensions of human capital are important to examine in term of managing rural tourism which are values and uniqueness. To sustain rural tourism, it is believed leaders and local social support is crucial in the management paradigm. Finally, assuming that that the human capital components are significant, this research investigates how sustainable rural tourism can be developed and also what are the impacts toward the economy impacts for a country can filled the gap and provide more trendy information in the rural tourism context.

## Methodology

The study employed a mixed-method design in soliciting qualitative and quantitative data. It was envisaged that the mixed-method design would provide richer data and in-depth views of the participants' experiences. This approach consists of procedure in collecting, analyzing and integrating both quantitative and qualitative data during certain stages of the research process with a single study (Creswell, 2007). The first phase consisted of the collection and analysis of qualitative data. The qualitative results were obtained from interviews with seven key informants. All the respondents were asked the same set of semi-structured questions. Each interview lasted about one hour to one and a half hours. This paper highlights the experience of seven key informants being identified and the participants being interviewed for the study. These seven key informants consisted of five males and two females who are the officers from the Government body, local practitioners, community leaders and the community.

The key informants were identified as individuals directly responsible for developing or implementing policies or practices that affected rural tourism development. They included representatives from the Governor's Office and institutions from different agencies. The seven key informants shared an account of their experience and observations towards rural tourism after the tsunami. Most importantly, many issues were revealed upon their reflection after a decade of the disaster. The issue of leaders' local support towards rural tourism were revealed. The lack of understanding of its concept and meaning of rural tourism is far below common understanding as perceived by the communities. Thus, it was decided to investigate into understanding the essential components in human capital for ensuring the sustainable rural tourism. The results provided insights of rural tourism and its practices and management lies in the knowledge skills and attitudes of the many stakeholders.

All the seven key informants were interviewed at the first phase. The face-to-face interviews were carried out with the all the key informants officer from the governor's office, managers and staff at the Institute of Human Resource Development of Aceh, staff at the higher institution, a school principal, a community leader and a staff at the NGO. An additional visit was made to Aceh to confirm some of the initial findings. All the seven key informants went through the second interviews. A total of 14 interviews took place during the study. The profiles of the seven key informants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1  
*The Profiles of the key Informants*

No	Name	Age	Work Place	Educational Background
1.	Ramli	45	Governor's Office	Master
2.	Rosli	61	Institute of HRD Aceh	PhD
3.	Yusuf	62	Institute of HRD Aceh	PhD
4.	Suhra	39	Higher Institution	PhD
5.	Rozaih	51	School Principal	Degree
6.	Pak Kecil	54	Community Leader	High School
7.	Susan	44	NGO Staff	Degree

The key informants were asked to recall many episodes of their experience towards rural tourism during and after the disaster. Eventually, the key informants were asked about their experience and observation towards the rural tourism development during and after the tsunami. In addition, the actual of the key informants' names were not used in this report.

In this context of the other participants in the interviews conducted, the data obtained from all the participants were collectively analysed to uncover common themes and sub-themes on the learning experience of rural tourism of the stakeholders in Aceh after the tsunami. The data analysis involved three phases. The first phase was the analysis of qualitative data in terms of interviews, observational notes and documents amongst the participants. All taped interviews were transcribed. The qualitative data were content analysed case by case, using inductive and deductive analysis. Data reduction was then conducted to identify common themes and sub-themes in all thirteen cases. It is the aim of this paper to highlight only the issues focused concept and its meaning of rural tourism and also its essential components in human capital to sustain rural tourism development. Additional research needs to be carried out to investigate the negative and positive impacts of rural tourism towards the development of one's economy in the country.

## **Findings**

In line with the experience after the tsunami, a series of observations and reflective activities took place among the key informants about the issues of rural tourism. Many reviews had been done into re-developing the area of rural tourism especially rural tourism was found one of the effective ways to put people in Aceh back to their livelihood. People from the different level had planned various initiatives to give life again to rural tourism as a mean to boost economy to enhance the life of the community in Aceh. It was found that the lack of knowledge and skills to manage the rural tourism remain the critical issue as majority of the key informants uttered, "It is a country rich in culture, heritage and history". All they did suggest at this time is to rethinking of the culture of rural tourism in Aceh. The three themes demonstrate the problems and challenges of rural tourism in Aceh:

- Lack of understanding of rural tourism concept and its meaning
- Low level of knowledge and skills of rural tourism
- Positive attitudes towards rural tourism

### **Lack of understanding of rural tourism concept and its meaning**

In the interviews, however, with government officials or local people, there were huge confusions about the concept and its meaning of rural tourism. They key informants were even more puzzled after the decade of the tsunami, the development of rural tourism had not been made clear to its community. The key informants reveal, if the below sample is indicative of the general sentiments of tsunami survivors regarding the role of the leaders, then the government needs to re identify its accurate leaders and leadership especially in the reconstruction phase of the tsunami disaster. In nearly every village we visited survivors complained, often bitterly. Dr Yusuf recalled his learning experience; he convinced us that if only the leaders would have played more significant roles, many lives could have been saved. He said the more he thinks about

the issues, the more he identified the importance of what he 'reflected' and it would eventually lead him to compose himself and begin to act on it:

*I look at rural tourism from two side,, first is the potential that community have and how strong this potential can attract visitors to come to the village. Is it cultural tradition, like art performing or is it the fascinated natural beauty of the village.*

RoZIAH, the school principal herself was saddened by some of the confusions reactions of the people by the authority and she remembered, even things were overwhelmed and chaotic for the meanings and management of rural development in tourism as she uttered:

*People want to visit village to find something that has been diminished from city. Village is identic with traditional culture. The best activities for rural tourism is keeping the originality of what the community have been doing for their life such as traditional farming, teaching kids to read the holy Quran so that visitors can also do it together with them.*

### **Low level of knowledge and skills in rural tourism**

It was overwhelming to find out that within the community, they argued that effective knowledge for rural tourism is essential. For instance, they emphasized that certain levels are not only important during the disaster; skills and methods of development the places and people should be included in the town planning. Ramli was disappointed as he witnessed some irresponsible people in the industry did not pay attention towards the development of rural after the tsunami.

*We will provide the service and product as naturally as we can so that tourist can enjoy staying in our village. However, we have to develop new interesting way to attract more tourist by making some innovation and support local community with capacity building in rural tourism because if community are ready to participate and involve in tourism, they have to be trained and educated well.*

Past experience had alerted the community about being equipped with competent, skills and knowledge in order to sustain especially in tourism as Aceh is full of heritage and culture and the experiences of rehabilitation after the disaster....effective management of rural tourism is considered the best way to improve people economy. Pak Kecil who had the experience being the village head shared his observations:

*Capacity building for local community especially who runs the rural tourism business is very important such as communication skills and people understanding in how to manage homestay.*

*Local community will need assistance in developing their knowledge and skill related to tourism management and entrepreneurship as well as training of trainer program so that the knowledge and skills can be spread fastly.*



## **Positive attitudes toward rural tourism**

It is not easy to give a comprehensive evaluation how human capital can be sustained to improve rural tourism after the disaster. However, the investigations towards some of the key informants and participants revealed that the people in Aceh has positive attitudes towards the re-development of tourism and look forward the process of getting the industry to a higher level. Dr Rosli who was the former lecturer at the higher institution had strongly foresighted that the roles and the attitudes of the people at all levels are essential under the circumstances of a disaster.

*Yes, the strength of rural tourism is the uniqueness of traditional and culture arts, I think we are proud to show people.... More, tourism is the fastest way to get the local people back to its economy.*

*Acehnese are real homer and respect the guests. We are also not shy people, we want to share our rich culture with people and also our information about the disaster so that people can learn and be prepared for any disaster...*

The positive attitude despite the lack of knowledge and skills are one of the most important factors that this industry of rural tourism in Aceh should be given more attention. The lack of knowledge and skills in rural tourism management was perhaps the greatest challenge. Although the local people had experienced some degree of tourism, they had never faced a more comprehensive system in rural tourism in the history. All levels of people faced a multitude of challenges on utilizing, mobilizing and coordinating resources in the industry of tourism. According to the analysis, the responses to Aceh were laudable. It was in the unplanned situations, individuals in the community were encouraged to assist the industry of rural tourism.

## **Practical Implications for knowledge and skills management for rural tourism**

The findings showed that incompetence and ineffective of understanding its concept and meaning of rural tourism is one of the major limitations towards the development and sustainability for rural tourism in Aceh

The study also highlights the challenges of low level of knowledge and skills among the various stakeholders of tourism. This inadequacy affect not only its sustainability but also hider many initiatives to be developed to secure more effective rural tourism at a better pace to elevate the standard of living of its community. The results or outcomes of the essential of knowledge, skills and attitude will be an added knowledge not only to the notion of human capital but specifically towards the development of rural tourism in its context. However, its society should become places where reflective thought about the effective and ineffective use promotional programs. That requires the broadening the context of leadership to include transformative ends and means

While, it revealed from the study that lack of the components of human capital towards rural tourism, however, the people positive attitudes for its tourism support the whole industry at the area of Aceh. People's attitudes as personality, character and behavior that are shown from people daily activity in the aspects of wanting to

share and promote their culture and livelihood to outside people. Coupled with the right attitudes, education and training can be developed and shared among communities. For example, people who already learn about tourists and tourism activities advantages will have more supportive attitude toward tourism activities in rural areas, therefore, they will accommodate tourism activities most important factor in tourism activities are the feel of welcoming and comfortable. Especially local community attitude that is displayed with the way people communicate and interact each other that will really effect tourists intention and motivation to visit or revisit the places.

The above findings and discussion have made it apparent that one of the aims is to change the culture of appreciating the concept and meaning of rural tourism. It was revealed by the study, the development after the tsunami had experienced the failure of re-inventing into rural tourism thus far. In normal circumstances, most of the people reject the idea that rural tourism can secure a better livelihood and also the better future of its community, things should be governed by a strong authoritarian leadership in the context. This implies that effective management of its human capital has greater impacts on increasing the standard of rural tourism. The research findings clearly indicate that a rethinking to a new rural tourism culture is relevant for the redevelopment of Aceh rural tourism after the tsunami.

## **Conclusion**

The study sought to explore the essential of knowledge, skills and attitudes among the people towards rural tourism after a decade of the tsunami in Aceh. The study revealed that confusions of the concepts and meaning of rural tourism is still found within the community. The urgent need of developing the human capital through education and training is required as to give light to the industry. It can be concluded that although there is evident that there were limitations in the knowledge and skills among all levels of the people in Aceh at this state, effective leaders and leadership is inevitable. Therefore, it is understood, what possible should had been done remains to be done in terms of the reconstruction and rehabilitation, the roles of leaders in this industry had to be revitalized. Perhaps, a strong national leadership has to be rejuvenated within the culture for the development of its benefits for its people and its country. Therefore, the development of human capital for effective management of rural industry for a more equitable Aceh is indeed apt and timely. The findings add to the growing body of research on rural tourism specifically around the theme of rural tourism after a disaster. Future research is needed to investigate the roles and functions of each component of human capital in the essence of rural tourism.

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