Communication, Leadership, and Community-based Tourism Empowerment in Brunei Darussalam

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Effective communication plays a part in the success and the sustainability of tourism and hospitality management, including community-based tourism (CBT). In Brunei Darussalam, communication barriers have affected the growth of the CBT industry at both local and national levels. By analysing responses from 16 local CBT operators, this investigation focuses on aspects of communication and its channels in securing sustainability and empowerment of the CBT industry. This study found that the CBT ventures in Brunei include: (1) horizontal/lateral communication between CBT operators and surrounding communities; and (2) top-down communication and bottom-up accessibility between authorities, community leaders, and CBT owners. This paper further discusses how bureaucracy can impede the success of CBT operations, and how a collaborative approach between stakeholders has inspired the formulation of a new Interactional Model of Leadership and Empowerment among CBT stakeholders, which can be used to measure the efficacy of communication among stakeholders in the CBT industry.

Keywords: Community-based Tourism; Communication; Empowerment; Leadership; Sustainable Tourism

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INTRODUCTION

The growing literature on tourism and hospitality management has acknowledged the pivotal role of effective communication in supporting the development and success and securing the sustainability of the tourism industry (Aas et al., 2005; Dolezal, 2015; Grenna et al., 2006; Kokkranikal et al., 2011; Tölkes, 2018). Other studies have also recalled the significance of reviewing the efficacy of communication strategies between stakeholders to ensure an undisrupted process of sustainable leadership in the tourism and hospitality industry (Freeman, 2010; Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2018; Sène-Harper & Séye, 2019; Zielinski et al., 2021), including those involving community-based tourism (CBT). Ideally, it is essential for successful and sustainable tourism development to foster a communication strategy that can identify how factors such as information, awareness, advocacy,

network building, conflict mitigation, and communication platforms can be support-ed (Grenna et al., 2006). These factors remain relevant in studies focusing on CBT that normally include discussions of community control, leadership and empowerment, and their contribution to the equality, well-being, conservation, and development of the surrounding community (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2014).

According to ASEAN Community-Based Tourism Standards, CBT refers to the "tourism economic sector dominated by small businesses that provide goods and ser-vices to a visiting tourist clientele...while fostering equitable and mutually beneficial host-guest interaction" (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016, p. 1-2). This paper refers to CBT as "a form of tourism run by local community members which specifically focused on offering products and services in small-scale industry and hospitality" (Noorashid & Chin, 2021, p. 2). The components of formation, power control and decision-making, mutual interactions, and partnership, as well as participation from relevant stake-holders, are crucial to maintain the success and the sustainability of CBT operations.

Despite the small amount of literature on tourism in Brunei, previous studies have implied communication barriers as a hinderance to the growth of tourism in the country (Ahmad, 2015; Bhuiyan & Haji Abdul Wahab, 2018; Mohd. Kassim, 2003; Salleh, 2017). The Brunei Government has implemented various initiatives to boost the tourism sector, but the country still "appears to be left far behind in its tourism development and contribution, even by neighbouring countries such as Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar" (Ahmad, 2015, p. 210). Whilst never proven at large, hierarchical and bureaucratic issues may be a major cause of the slow growth of the tourism and hospitality sector vis-a-vis the neighbouring countries.

Chin et al. (in press) provided evidence that the inefficacy of communication between tourism stakeholders has caused unequal distribution of equality and empowerment among community-based operators. This study argues for the need to have guidelines and frameworks to reduce such issues in the tourism industry in Brunei as it has happened in other countries (Dahles et al., 2020; Nyakiba et al., 2018; Sène-Harper & Séye, 2019; Trupp & Dolezal, 2020). In addition, this paper attempts to fill in the research gap by exploring the causal inter-relationship between commu-nication towards empowerment and securing the sustainability of CBT by focusing on the following research questions:

1. Why does communication play a pivotal role in securing the sustainability of the CBT industry?
2. How is empowerment channelled through communication between CBT stakeholders?
3. How do effective communication and equality secure the empowerment of CBT in Brunei?

By analysing responses from 16 local community-based tourism operators, this paper formulates an interactional model of communication and empowerment that can be used to overview and measure the efficacy of communication and relevant factors to be considered among stakeholders in the CBT industry, particularly in cases involving bureaucratic experiences. We believe that this model is highly relevant and applicable in other Southeast Asian and European contexts where further resolution is needed.

BRUNEI DARUSSALAM, TOURISM AND COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM

Located on the northwest coast of Borneo, Brunei has an area of 5,769 square kilometres (2,227 square miles) and consists of four districts: Brunei-Muara, Belait, Tutong, and Temburong (see Figure 1). Brunei has a population of 453,600, with 336,000 (74%) being local Bruneians and the rest made up of permanent or temporary residents and expatriates (Brunei's Department and Economic Planning, 2021). Brunei adheres to its national philosophy *Melayu Islam Beraja* (Malay Islamic Monarchy or MIB), which acts as the guidance and way of life for Bruneians.

Figure 1. Map of Brunei Darussalam (authors' copyright)

Brunei's economy mainly relies on the production and exportation of crude oil and natural gas, which account for 90% of the national economy, but the country is committed to develop its tourism industry to detach itself from dependence on its main exportations (Ahmad, 2015; Salleh, 2017). In 2007, Brunei joined the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) to strengthen its profile as an international tourist destination (Wassler & Weber, 2014).

Based on the Brunei Tourism Performance Final Report 2020, there was an increase in international visitor arrivals to Brunei from 4,060,174 in 2015 to 4,521,336 in 2018, but the numbers decreased drastically to 1,070,614 in 2020 due to the pandemic (Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism [MPRT], 2021). Brunei has recently shifted its focus to building its domestic tourism to overcome losses (Abu Bakar, 2020; Chin & Fatimahwati, 2021; Noorashid & Chin, 2021; Pehin Dato Musa & Chin 2022), such as developing campaigns in areas such as culinary experiences across Bruneian regions and leveraging new infrastructure such as the Temburong bridge, which connects the mainland to nature-based tourism products and services

(Azney, 2020; Mahmud, 2021). These efforts are strategized to promote tourism as a key sector for the Brunei Vision 2035, which is to position Brunei as a knowledge and service-led economy (MPRT, 2019).

Under the ASEAN CBT Standard, there has been an increase in the number of CBT establishments in Brunei in recent years, even as the concept of CBT is still relatively new and stipulated. Along with the rise of micro-small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) (CSPS, 2021a, 2021b; Mahmud, 2021), CBT is now recognised as an alternative form of tourism contributing to the growth of the national economy. However, to date, there is no specific legal framework for CBT in Brunei. Based on the CBT case studies in Brunei (Adli & Chin, 2021; Janaji & Ibrahim, 2019; Noorashid & Chin, 2021), there is no statistical evidence of CBT operations, as the capacity of CBT involvement is still new and undetermined. Nevertheless, Noorashid and Chin (2021) have found over 40 CBT operations that are involved in small-scale, community-based tourism enterprises (CBTEs), including cultural galleries/centres, lodges and homestays, and travel service providers/intermediaries. Therefore, this paper tries to formulate an interactional model of communication and empowerment to measure the efficacy of communication and relevant factors to be considered among stakeholders in the CBT industry.

This paper calls for further investigation on the formation of CBT in Brunei, as this knowledge is still underdeveloped. The uniqueness of CBT in Brunei and its correlation to power relations and equality distribution between stakeholders can be adapted to other countries with similar interests in using CBT as an alternative form of tourism to diversify their community and national economic growth targets.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is an overlap between the roles of communication and empowerment in the tourism and hospitality industry (Aas et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2012; Kokkranikal et al., 2011; Tölkes, 2018), particularly in CBT and entrepreneurial activities (Abukhalifeh & Wondirad, 2019; Dolezal & Novelli, 2022; Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014; Sunuantari, 2017). Despite its growing literature, there is still a necessity to assess theoretical foundations, impacts, and outcomes of effective communication in tourism (Coles et al., 2013; Tölkes, 2018; Wehrli et al., 2017). Through effective communication and platforms to benefit relevant stakeholders (Bramwell & Lane, 2000; Freeman, 2010; Sinh et al., 2016), CBT serves as a channel towards social justice and empowerment, equity of benefits and redistributive measures, holistic development of community, and reclaiming of ownership in the tourism industry today (Dolezal, 2015; Giampiccoli, 2020; Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018; Mayaka et al., 2019).

In the hospitality industry, entrepreneurial success can be achieved by maintaining a sense of equality and inclusivity, while boosting community participation and sustainable development (Giampicolli & Mtapuri, 2017; Nordin et al., 2014; Zeppel, 2006). This is in line with one of the three major dimensions ensuring viable and successful tourism operations and fair distribution of socioeconomic benefits postulated by UNWTO, including stable employment, income earning opportunities, and social justice for communities (UNWTO, 2021). Empowerment involves multi-dynamic and context-dependent processes of enabling local communities to initiate ventures/

enterprises, and of owning power and control to manage, make decisions, mobilise resources and choose partnerships to achieve quality of life, socioeconomic well-being, and social justice (Aghazamani & Hunt, 2017; Chin, 2017; Khalid et al., 2019; Nordin et al., 2014). In this case, providing equal access and equity in community participation also enhances empowerment in CBT industries (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018; Heimerl et al., 2010).

Although CBT is a self-participatory initiative, many studies highlight the importance of achieving common goals and getting external support from stakeholders (Asker et al., 2010; Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018; Matilainen et al., 2018). Several global case studies further affirm the complexity of equality and empowerment between different stakeholders in achieving various levels of community empowerment (Anuar & Sood, 2017; Asker et al., 2010; Chin et al., 2017; Chin & Hampton, 2020). Nevertheless, issues of inequality and lack of empowerment can be resolved by streamlining goals and policies as long-term interests between stakeholders through the effective use of communication (Burgos & Mertens, 2017; Freeman, 2010; Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2021; Stone, 2015; Tosun, 2006). Other studies reported that the sustainability of CBTEs can be measured by an understanding of bonding social capital – the dynamic relationship between small groups within larger groups in CBT (Dodds et al., 2016; Matilainen et al., 2018; Taylor, 2016). However, bureaucratic involvement and hierarchical communication have hindered the success of tourism activities especially involving CBT ventures (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018; Mayaka et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2021; Salazar, 2012; Taylor, 2017), further raising discussions over the need to reclaim the power of formation, control and decision making for the community with enough intervention from other stakeholders (Fan et al., 2021; Giampiccoli, 2020; Giampiccoli, A., & Saayman, 2018; Tosun, 2000).

Communication has a significant role in supporting tourism and leadership (Grenna et al., Mishra et al., 2006; Ruck & Welch, 2012; Tölkes, 2018). This can happen through community engagement in exchanging knowledge and skills to maintain and support stakeholders, realising local tourism programmes and policy implementations, and empowering stakeholders in their planning and decision making (Abukhalifeh & Wondirad, 2019; Belz & Peattie, 2012; Freeman, 2010; Hardeman et al., 2017). Moreover, empowering CBT operations can foster high levels of confidence and motivation that will enable and ensure small-scale businesses to deliver their CBT products (Asker et al., 2010). Training of leadership styles and entrepreneurial skills is also important in CBT development and empowerment (Kayat et al., 2016; Ngo et al, 2018; Zapata et al., 2011). Previous scholarship also highlighted the necessity to develop communication skills among stakeholders to ensure effective performance of community tourism (Aghazamani & Hunt, 2017; Raub & Robert, 2012). The challenges of maintaining equality and empowerment in CBT are identified as lack of knowledge, interest, and skills, as well as the perception of the local community towards CBT (Farrelly, 2011, Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2018; Petrić, 2017; Pusiran & Xiao, 2013), due to lack of communication between relevant stakeholders (Arasli et al., 2019; Bianchi, 2003; Ernawati et al., 2017). Nomnian et al. (2020) found that effective communication – from authorities to operators and to consumers – can be fostered when all relevant stakeholders are able to comprehend mutual roles and dependency, communicative needs, and sociocultural and linguistic identities.

Other contributing factors to the success of CBTE include the involvement of responsible community leaders, strong community-based associations, active participation among local, talented individuals, and effective communications (Abukhalifeh & Wondirad, 2019; Boley & McGehee, 2014; Chili & Ngxongo, 2017; Kayat et al., 2016; Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014). The tourism and hospitality sector should practice empowering leadership, such as leading by example, coaching, participative decision making, informing, and showing concern (Hon & Chan, 2012). Brownell (2010) claims global hospitality organisations are influenced by relatable behaviours, personal characteristics, and manner, and that empowered leadership should involve fostering interdependency and creativity among stakeholders (Giampiccoli et al., 2015; Yildiz et al., 2014).

In Brunei, issues surrounding tourism and hospitality studies are not discussed at great length in academic literature, and only three studies have investigated CBT affairs in Brunei (Adli & Chin, 2021; Janaji & Ibrahim, 2019; Noorashid & Chin, 2021). In short: Janaji and Ibrahim (2019) remarked on the economic empowerment of homestay owners as part of economic gain and development within community tourism; Adli and Chin (2021) explored the formation process of CBT products vis-à-vis mass tourism in Brunei; and Noorashid and Chin (2021) reported on unequal access to resources amid CBT operators' efforts in maintaining the resilience of their businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst these studies have hinted at issues related to bureaucratic experiences in CBT, our current framework (see Figure 2) further reviews the effects of communication and leadership and pivotal interrelationship between important stakeholders affecting issues of equality and empowerment within CBT operations in Brunei.

METHODOLOGY

This investigation used a qualitative approach and purposive sampling. The data was collected by interviewing 16 local owners of CBT operations (see Table 1 for backgrounds of CBTE owners). A few CBT operations were contacted through the list of CBT operators from the official webpage of the Tourism Development Department Brunei (TDD, 2021) under the Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism (MPRT) in Brunei, while others were selected due to their successful experiences as widely-known CBT operators. The face-to-face interviews took an hour on average and were conducted between March and April 2021 at the owners' CBT establishments. During this time, the country had almost no cases of COVID-19 community transmission, thereby allowing data to be collected in a safe and secure environment.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit the CBTE owners' experiences in managing CBTEs through personal and/or collective approaches (with the community), as well as their beliefs and attitudes towards the sense of ownership, empowerment, and procedures in their CBTEs. The interviews were conducted in either English or Brunei Malay language depending on the preference of the participants, where data in Brunei Malay were later translated for analysis. Content analysis was used to determine themes based on the salient features in the responses.

These approaches contributed to the emergence of new discussions and a designated framework that can be expanded for future investigations. Furthermore, these new findings can be reproduced in different contexts and settings. Ethical consent agreement between the researchers and the CBTE owners was made prior to the interviews. The participants also requested to remain anonymous in the writing of this paper.

Owners	Age	Gender	CBT Line of Work	District	Year Established
A	54	Female	Lodge	Brunei Muara	2015
B	52	Female	Homestay	Brunei Muara	2018
C	50	Male	Homestay	Brunei Muara	2009
D	46	Male	Lodge	Brunei Muara	2015
E	40	Female	Homestay	Brunei Muara	2012
F	52	Male	Homestay/cultural village	Brunei Muara	2015
G	36	Female	Travel service provider	Brunei Muara and Tutong	2018
H	26	Female	Cultural centre	Tutong	2012
I	64	Male	Homestay/cultural centre	Tutong	2017
J	56	Female	Homestay	Tutong	2010
K	40	Female	Homestay	Temburong	2011
L	67	Female	Guesthouse	Temburong	2006
M	59	Male	Guesthouse	Temburong	2014
N	69	Female	Guesthouse	Temburong	2001
O	25	Male	Lodge	Temburong	2020
P	76	Female	Homestay	Temburong	2007

Table 1. CBTE owners' demographic backgrounds and CBT lines of work

We acknowledge the limitations of our study, as investigation of communication events in tourism should be raised involving many stakeholders, including particularly the government and authorities, in discussions surrounding bureaucratic experiences. However, due to the restrictions during the second wave of the pandemic in August 2021 onwards, we believe the current study on CBT owners/operators can generate further discussions of the aspects of bureaucracy, communication, and participation from their perspectives.

We further justify this limitation by highlighting the importance of CBTE owners/operators' perspectives as being part of the community, and community aspects are the most significant factors in any CBT discussions and formations (Ramli et al., 2015; Taylor, 2016). CBT operations should involve dynamic partnerships from various stakeholders, but the management of this industry is largely based at the community level (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016; Yanes et al., 2019; Zapata et al., 2011).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Following our early observations and research findings, we further formulated the following theoretical framework (see Figure 2) that shows the three important stakeholders of CBT management in leadership, empowerment, and communication, namely authorities, community leaders and CBT operators (Abukhalifeh & Wondirad, 2019; Asker at al., 2010; Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014; Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2014, 2018; Grenna et al., 2006; Noorashid & Chin, 2021). More discussion about the newly formulated framework can be found towards the end of this section.

Figure 2. Interactional Model of Leadership and Empowerment among CBT Stakeholders (authors' copyright)

Based on our research findings, the formation of leadership and empowerment in CBT management in Brunei strongly focusses on three aspects: (1) the relationship between CBT owner and subordinates, (2) the relationship between CBT owner and the local community, and (3) the relationship between CBT owner and authorities. All three aspects involve dynamic relationships, leadership and effective communication between tourism stakeholders affecting the prospects and the sustainability of CBT ventures that will be discussed in this section.

Open Communicative Leadership and Community Participation Secure CBT Sustainability

As most CBT ventures operate as small-scale and family-owned enterprises, they are managed by the owners themselves or among senior family members. Some CBTEs (specifically C, D, E, F, H, K and O) are operating as structured organisations. For instance, Owner E runs a homestay as part of a larger marine-tourism-based company, Owner F manages a large-scaled community homestay and Owner H operates a family-heritage cultural centre with multiple, traditional activities that cater to both local

and international tourists. These establishments tend to practise a more hierarchical structure and require more staff and hospitality workers to accommodate daily services and clients. Thus, there is a need to hire workers from local communities.

All CBTE owners practise a centralised-style leadership where they have much control over the management, decision making and work delegation among family members and/or the local employees. These owners claim such practices have secured the flow of business management, as none have reported any issues within operations. There is also less formality and a high level of flexibility and tolerance between CBTE owners and their employees, which is expected due to the nature of CBT.

As part of the small-scale tourism industry, CBT is highly manageable and resilient to challenges vis-à-vis mass tourism (Adam & Alarifi, 2021; Kampel, 2020; Liguori & Pittz, 2020; Sobaih et al., 2021). CBT formation is often practised to empower the role of the operators and surrounding communities (Dolezal, 2011, 2015; Giampiccoli, 2020; Mayaka et al., 2019). This is evident in our data, as all CBT owners claim to feel empowered from having control in internal management and decision making for their businesses while practising open, internal communication between the owners and their employees.

> Yes! He [the husband] started off the business and we train the people and our staff. We're quite flexible in what we do. Sometimes we have our tour guide doing the job as a snorkel guy, and then he's also looking after other things, amid also a boat captain. So, we are quite a flexible bunch and employees are happy having new roles depending on the demands of the market. In Brunei, it is very hard to get fixated in one area of expertise or services because of the seasonality. So, it's just not sustainable if we just focus on one thing. That's why we also shift and expand our business according to season. Obviously, there's a little bit difficult [following regulations], but essentially, I think we do have a lot of autonomy to do what we want. (Owner E)

> So, I am the manager in our team. I divide employees into different tasks. I usually ask them which area they prefer to get involved in, and then delegated the activities accordingly. But I will always tell them to be free to get involved in another activity to gain more experiences. Yes, I have the full authority to manage and to decide how the CBT-based establishment runs. (Owner H)

Fostering effective communication and leadership between CBTE owners and operators with the local community has been reported to contribute to community participation and collaborative efforts (Abukhalifeh & Wondirad, 2019; Cole, 2006; Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014), which is also evident in the current study. These CBTE owners empower local communities by creating jobs for the retired communities, single mothers, and people with special needs.

According to the CBTE owners, the decision to hire local people is their own, with no intervention from other stakeholders. Moreover, employing a local workforce and volunteers from surrounding communities is seen as supporting the community and utilising the surrounding culture and natural resources.

> We provide many economic opportunities for our *penambang* [ferryman in Kampung Ayer- a cultural village]. Since the opening of our new hiking trails nearby, we have provided several jobs as tour guides for local people and pensioners. We also provide opportunities for our people and other people from nearby villages to sell their products and crafts here at our homestays and cultural centre. Besides, we also give opportunities for our young people to get involved in cultural activities and performances, and yes, they're being paid too. (Owner F)

> We've brought in many local staff. We also work with An-Nur Harapan [a local social enterprise providing vocational training for different abilities youth]. We work together for less able people. Once, we gave a guy a chance to be an apprentice, so he worked with us for three days, and then we offered him a part time job for three days a week. He's working with us now. We also accept a lot of interns as a way to develop our youth. We give them a little taste of what it's like to work in a private industry. (Owner E)

> ...what I try to focus on my business is more on youth development. I want the youth that are involved here to sharpen their skills in terms of communication and gaining income. We encourage them to sell their own products here, for example food products. But at the same time, I am also open to other individuals, especially the low income or whoever is interested to get involved. (Owner H)

Some CBTE owners further bolster the sense of community participation by engaging in social activities with the surrounding community, such as organising inspirational talks about setting up CBTEs, participating in family adoption schemes and accommodating international participants from the Ship for Southeast Asian and Japanese Youth Programme. These activities are a way for the owners to give back to their communities, while also promoting their businesses.

> We get to showcase our culture to other people. I had the chance to accommodate participating youth from the Youth Ship programme, I took some of them as guests. I showed them our local culture, lifestyle, and food. I taught them how to make *Ambuyat* [a local dish made of tapioca starch] and *Kelupis* [a local snack made of glutinous rice rolls]. I show them our Bruneian culture. (Owner J)

> It was actually in December last year that we held a youth camp in collaboration with *Majlis Kesejahteraan Masyarakat* (Brunei's Council on Social Welfare). It's a non-government youth organisation for social welfare. I believe we have the same goal and mission. We want to help the community in Brunei too. So, they did a three-day and two-night camping here and we partially sponsored them by reducing the cost of staying in here. We helped them to enhance their activities here in Temburong. (Owner O)

In CBT, increasing community participation can strengthen the sense of empowerment and effective interactions in tourism activities (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018; Nordin et al., 2014; Scheyvens & Russell, 2012). The charity-based accommodations provided by the CBTE owners in Brunei do not only operate as business ventures, but

they are also set up as charity drives to empower and provide economic opportunities for the surrounding communities. This has helped towards building a cooperative climate through effective communication between CBTE owners and their surrounding communities.

> We've been active for around six years now, and our most recent charity programme was just last week. We handed out basic necessities to the needy families, so it'd be easy for them to prepare them for Ramadan (fasting month). So yeah, we helped around 100 families in Brunei Muara, Tutong and Belait and we also provided assistance for 20 needy families here in Temburong as well. (Owner O)

> Now I have rented out a block of my guesthouse for the Charity Department at the Baitulmal [government sector]. I know I won't get profits from it compared to renting them out normally. But I'm doing this for the sake of my late father's last wish. It's for his charity too...we charge less for the people in need of place to stay, especially the elderly. Also, now I am also setting up business space around this guesthouse so local people nearby can start up their small businesses. It'll be an attraction for the locals to come by. (Owner K)

Janaji and Ibrahim (2019), as well as Lopes (2019), reported that most CBTEs were set up due to passion and only a few were based on entrepreneurial and financial motivations apart from their aspirations to promote local products, services, culture, and lifestyle. In their study, CBT owners who provide homestay services in Brunei felt empowered from the opportunities to operate their businesses by engaging local communities, while also promoting Bruneian culture including the origins and makings of local food and lifestyle. The CBTE owners in our study also reported on the success of continued initiatives fostering relationships, communication and cooperation with the surrounding community, as they continue to receive positive participation from the locals, either through partnerships and/or clients, that eventually generate profits and incomes to secure the sustainability of their CBT operations (Arbulu et al., 2021; Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2021; Haywood, 2020).

Hierarchical and Bureaucratic Communicative Leadership and its Impact on CBT Empowerment

There is a complex relationship between communication and leadership involving external agencies and stakeholders. In the interviews, there are reports of issues surrounding hierarchical and bureaucratic communication and involvement between CBTE owners and authorities (government). This is also intertwined with the role of leadership across top-down channels of communication. The CBTE owners remarked on the significant roles of the *ketua kampung* (head of a village) and *penghulu* (head of subdistrict or a group of villages) and their influence and decision making over CBTEs.

In Brunei, the concept of the *ketua kampung* and *penghulu* is similar to that of community leaders in the general context of tourism (henceforth referred to as community leaders). As an important government agent, these community leaders are the "eyes, ears and mouths" and the middlemen for the country's bureaucratic

administration of the community. These community leaders also represent the government through the Tourism Development Department (TDD) as stakeholders in the community-level tourism industry.

Some CBTE owners remarked on the significance of their community leaders in supporting CBTEs, while others expressed their doubts as to whether their involvement can contribute the success of CBT ventures. A key issue is the transmission of knowledge and directive orders from the government through community leaders. For instance, Owners A and M commented on inadequate information, while Owner J mentioned a lack of cooperation from community leaders. Moreover, 14 out of 16 CBTE owners claimed that they have never seen a cooperative climate and were never part of the community discussions, signalling their frustration and feeling unempowered as small-scale entrepreneurs and as part of the community. In contrast, the other two owners, who were members of the Village Consultative Council, were able to voice their opinions and were kept updated with the CBT affairs in Brunei.

> Usually, only *ketua kampung*s and *penghulu*s are being called to listen to seminars or workshops [about CBT]. But usually, this information was not relay to us (community), or the CBT operators. We hope they [relevant stakeholder] would come to us and communicate better. (Owner M)

> Yes, I am involved as a member of our Village Consultative Council, also the association dealing with the culture, tourism, and hospitality sector in this village. Yes, they do listen to my opinions. I will join any meetings and discuss on what should be done for our village. If I received any guests, I would inform our community leader. That's how I manage my homestay. (Owner C)

> I am actually the secretary of our Village Consultative Council, so I have to be there with these community leaders around to discuss about the development of each village and any products that will be suitable to promote by each village. So, I have the chance to voice my opinions and discuss about arising matters. Being around the community leaders also help because they should be the ones who know more about CBT. (Owner F)

In Brunei, local community leaders are the agents of transmission for CBT owners, as they also support the community welfare and well-being (Pang, 2018) and transmit the knowledge and standardisation of CBT as part of Village Consultative Councils affairs (BruDirect, 2019). In this case, active involvement of community leaders and open communication between them and the CBTE owners are crucial to ensure the owners are being equipped with the current knowledge of CBT practices (Abukhalifeh & Wondirad, 2019; Chilli & Ngxongo, 2017) and necessary support to sustain their business (Aghazamani & Hunt, 2017; Giampiccoli et al., 2015; Kayat et al., 2016). However, this is yet to be achieved at large using top-down communication.

Adli and Chin (2021) stated that "the lack of leadership [and] the lack of proper management system[s]" and licensing issues are unresolved problems in homestay operations in Brunei (p. 23). Similarly, the present study found that disengagement between authorities and CBT owners may have caused confusion amongst CBTE

owners as to how to register and obtain licenses as official CBT operators. Only three out of 16 CBT establishments are formally registered, while others reported either being registered under Business License 16-17 and supported by their respective District Offices or waiting for assessment or approval. Some refused to register their businesses with the TDD, as they were unaware of the benefits of being registered, or their businesses were not able to meet the ASEAN community-based tourism standards, or felt that the authorities did not understand their operations.

> We are aware of the registration process and CBT standards, and now we run our operations based on Business License 16-17 and approval from the District Office. We tried applying for CBT registration and license, but we couldn't meet their standards, these are too high for us. We started off just as residential scheme and only came about to do CBT-based homestays recently. We didn't initiate it as business. It was more natural for us to live here and offer homestay experience for people. Yet again, we can't meet the high CBT standards. (Owner F)

> For some of these CBT operations, we should know who to refer to. There is nothing set on the paper. There is no guideline. I haven't seen any guideline [specific for CBT operations in Brunei]. I've only seen guidelines for lodges and the ASEAN tourism. I told them I said the ASEAN guidelines are good, no doubt, but not everybody can achieve that guideline. (Owner A)

> Actually, we did apply [for registration]. The last time I checked, it was still in process, but I don't know what's the update with them, because it's so hard like for us to be fully certified. It's not the license. It's the Standard Operation Procedure. (Owner O)

> I don't know [about the CBT guidelines and policies]. We run this place by ourselves. Also, because we built this house not for the purpose of business, the idea only came after that, so probably it won't get certified to some extent. We do acknowledge about safety precautions and all for our customers. (Owner L)

The dissatisfaction with bureaucratic experiences (Adli & Chin, 2021, p. 22) may be due to the abrupt changes of management and jurisdiction from the Ministry of Home Affairs to the Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism (MPRT) in aligning interests to promote local products and services. The CBTE owners in this study stated that the confusion and frustration over the inconsistencies of management made them feel reluctant to go through bureaucratic processes. Some CBTE owners did not have a mutual understanding with the TDD on how CBT operations should be undertaken, as they did not receive guidelines for their CBTEs. Furthermore, most of these CBT operations also started out of passion, where their establishments were modified from old houses to become CBT operation sites. Some owners recalled this as contradictory to the standardised guidelines by the bureaucracy and appealed for authorities to revise the registration and licensing procedures for the local establishments. There is a clear misunderstanding between the government policies and the CBTE owners' aspirations and capabilities in running CBT operations.

Based on the interviews, the knowledge of being registered and owning a CBTE license with the MPRT is undervalued, therefore, these non-registered CBTEs

tend to run and develop their businesses independently with minimal support and guidance. Most respondents also reported to be cautious about extending promotional activities and accommodating more clients, despite receiving overwhelming responses from them. In contrast, Owners C, H and J are registered officially, they feel empowered to run their businesses without restrictions, and affirmed that they receive assistance such as free promotion and marketing and funding channelled by MPRT to their businesses. The situation derived from ineffective communication and leadership has since affected the empowerment and raised issues of inequality for non-registered owners. While such issues have been discussed as a priority at the national level (Salleh, 2017), fewer actions have been taken to improve these problems involving local CBT practices.

> Yes, my homestay is registered with the Tourism Development Department. I need to, I can't set up this homestay without license. That's how I get my clients too. Sometimes they come from acknowledgement by the Department. When we are registered, the Department may be able to track our businesses, so when they need accommodation for certain guests or clients, they will call me first. That's their Standard of Operation Procedure, their guidelines. So, it helps with the promotion of my homestay too. (Owner C)

> We are under 'One Village, One Product' a platform to promote authentic local products by village consultative councils overseen by Ministry of Home Affairs. So, we're presenting the village for Ministry of Home Affairs. While for our cultural products, we work together with Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism. So, with the diverse products that we have, it kind of supports us in terms of income in our lively hood. We also received a financial support for our jetty. It is funded by the Ministry of Primary Resources and Tourism, they're going to start the construction soon. (Owner H)

As aforementioned, other studies have noted the importance of fostering consistent knowledge and principles of CBT among major stakeholders in tourism and hospitality sectors (Dodds et al., 2016; Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2016; Mayaka et al., 2019). Inadequate information on CBT development and restricted access to relevant information may impede the prospects and sustainability of the CBT owners' businesses in Brunei. However, according to Grenna et al. (2006, p. 1) all local stakeholders including CBTE owners "must be able to access the information they need to understand their long-term interests, articulate their opinions, identify proposals, and network effectively with one another." CBT can achieve sustainability by having open and effective communication and better leadership management between authorities, community leaders and CBTE owners (Asker et al., 2010; Brownell, 2010; Farrelly, 2011, Petrić, 2017; Pusiran & Xiao, 2013).

   This paper has revealed some communication inefficacies within leadership in CBT management, particularly involving the relationships and exchange of crucial information in both top-down and bottom-up approaches. These issues have contributed to the emergence of unequal distribution of opportunities among local CBTEs, prompting a call for policymaking and effective communication channels benefitting all stakeholders in Brunei. Such efforts can be realised by bolstering

mutual cooperation and partnership between stakeholders and strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building and achieve sustainable tourism (Aref & Ma'arof, 2009; Asker et al., 2010; Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018; UNWTO, 2021).

In response to our research questions on (1) why does communication play a pivotal role in securing the sustainability of the CBT industry?; (2) how is empowerment channelled through communication between CBT stakeholders?; and (3) how do effective communication and equality secure the empowerment of CBT in Brunei?, following our findings and discussion, effective communication flow from authorities to community leaders and further to the CBT operators can affect the sustainability of CBT operations. Based on responses from the local CBT owners, this can be detected clearly through the access of knowledge and opportunities in tourism passed down to CBT operators, and these can further enhance their existence in the CBT industry in Brunei. Active community leaders and participation of CBT operators with the surrounding communities have bolstered more opportunities in collaboration between the CBT operators and the communities, and further secure their sustainability in the small-scale tourism industry in Brunei. As a reflection on our research questions, Table 2 shows some highlighted findings on the importance of leadership style and effective communication between stakeholders in the success of CBT operations, particularly involving distribution of equality and empowerment among CBTEs in the tourism industry.

Formation, leadership and communication in CBTE operations	Main Findings
Internal leadership and communication	**1) The relationship between CBTE owner and subordinates:** a. Centralised leadership with high flexibility and less formality helps smoothen the delegation of work. b. Open communication and less formality and bureaucracy become effective channel. **2) The relationship between CBTE owner and the community:** a. Mutual partnership boosts CBT cooperation, benefits, and capacity. b. CBTEs flourish from contributing back to the community by creating jobs and charity.
External leadership and communication	**1) The relationship between CBTE owner and the community leader (the authority):** a. Effective top-down communication (from the authority) ensures transmission of knowledge and directives to CBT operators. b. Effective bottom-up communication (from CBT operators) ensures access of knowledge and resources from the authority.

Table 2. Summary of findings

This paper has shown that the interactional effects of leadership, communication and equality contributing to the empowerment of CBTEs can be assessed vertically (top-down approach between CBTE owners and subordinates; and bottom-up accessibility between CBTE owners and authorities) and horizontally (between CBT owners and surrounding local communities). The responses from the CBTE owners can be summarised using an interactional model, which justifies the importance of

communication and leadership to empowering CBT stakeholders in a bureaucratic environment as illustrated in Figure 2 earlier.

Our newly-formulated interactional model (Figure 2) suggests that the assessment of effective communication should involve a top-bottom approach of passing on information about CBT and directive orders from authorities through community leaders to the CBT operators (owners or managers), while also having mutual cooperation, agreement and partnership between the CBT operators and the surrounding communities. Meanwhile, the bottom-up communication between CBT operators and authorities should involve continuous and fair access to knowledge about CBT, relevant resources, and opportunities (such as funding, skills, investment, etc.) through community leaders. In this case, the interactional model suggests a continuous flow of open communication – both upward and downward – with fair treatment and access for the benefit of all stakeholders – in both internal (within CBT operations) and external communication (involving different stakeholders). This will contribute to the distribution of equality in terms of knowledge, resources, rights and practices, which can empower CBT owners, encourage community participation, and secure sustainability of the CBT industry. This is imperative, as securing "empowerment can support the management trustworthiness, which is an essential element of organisational commitment" (Kim et al., 2012, p. 10).

CONCLUSION

In the bureaucratic environment of tourism and hospitality activities in Brunei, the formation, management, equality, and empowerment of CBT ventures are affected via two means of communication: (1) horizontal/lateral communication between CBT operators and surrounding communities; and (2) top-down communication and bottom-up accessibility between authorities, community leaders, and CBTE owners, as discussed in the previous section and further illustrated in Figure 2. Whilst there are no reported issues on the former, the lack of interactivity and open communication in the latter have caused confusion and shown unequal distribution of directives, resources and opportunities affecting the sustainability of CBT growth in Brunei.

This paper has shown that ineffective bureaucracy can impede the success of CBT operations. The experiences reported by the CBTE owners call for a collaborative approach between stakeholders, particularly the government and community leaders, by analysing the importance of exchanging explicit directives and access to knowledge and resources. Furthermore, these responses inspired the formulation of a new Interactional Model of Leadership and Empowerment among CBT stakeholders. Due to its flexibility, we believe that this model can be further utilized in future investigations on other relevant factors contributing to the accessibility or interactional activities among stakeholders in CBT.

Focussing on the perspective of CBTE owners and operators, particularly in discussions surrounding bureaucratic experiences, has limited our study, but we believe our findings and discussion raise further potential by incorporating a larger sampling of the CBT population and the involvement of important stakeholders such as the government and the community leaders. This paper recognises that the knowledge of CBT, directives, access to resources and opportunities are mostly affected in local

bureaucratic experiences. It is thus suggested to have a larger sampling involving multiple stakeholders to generate further discussion in other aspects – for instance the cooperation with other NGOs and the larger community may have contributed to the survivability of small CBT operations during the pandemic. These recommendations for future studies are expected to raise more comprehensive discussion on the effects of bureaucracy and leadership that have impacted local and international CBT operations.

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DISCLOSURE

The authors declare no conflict of interest.