

# Motivating Factors and Prospects for Rural Community Involvement in Entrepreneurship: Evidence from Mantanani Island, Sabah, Malaysia

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**Abstract**—In Malaysia, particularly in Sabah, the government has been promoting entrepreneurship among rural people to encourage them to earn their living by making good use of the diverse natural resources and local cultures of Sabah. Nevertheless, despite the government's aim to encourage more local community in rural area to involve in entrepreneurship, the involvement of community in entrepreneurial activity is still low. It is crucial to identify the factors stimulate (or prevent) the involvement of rural community in Sabah in entrepreneurial activity. Therefore, this study tries to investigate the personal and contextual factors that may have impact on decision to start a business among the local community in Mantanani Island. In addition, this study also aims to identify the perceived benefits they receive from entrepreneurial activity. A structured face-to-face interview was conducted with 61 local communities in Mantanani Island. Data analysis revealed that passion, personal skills and self-confidence are the significant internal factors to entrepreneurial activity, whereas access to finance, labour and infrastructure are the significant external factors that are found to influence entrepreneurship. In terms of perceived rewards they received from taking up small business, it was found that respondents are predominantly agreed that entrepreneurship offers financial benefit than non-financial. In addition, this study also offers several suggestions for entrepreneurship development in Mantanani Island and it is hoped that this study may help the related agency to develop effective support policies in order to encourage more people in rural area to involve in entrepreneurship.

**Keywords**—Entrepreneurship, motivation, perceived rewards, rural community.

## I. INTRODUCTION

ENTREPRENEURSHIP activity has been spanned a long period since 17<sup>th</sup> century of neo-classical economy until the new economic model in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Inspired by the different conceptualisations from the period of early economic models until the modern era, entrepreneurship can be defined as an activity of commercialisation of new ideas [1] by individual who owns and manage enterprises [2], and who possess specific aptitudes [3], like independence, risk taking, innovation, creativity and opportunism, and whose behaviour and processes are also shaped by environment context, including social and financial institutions, government agencies, and education institutions, for continuous economic growth [4], [5]. In a nutshell, entrepreneurship is a process of

changing the social and economic resources for commercialisation to gain income at various level of economy, i.e. micro (individual) and macro (firm and national) level.

In many developing countries, particularly in rural areas, the role of entrepreneurship has always been viewed by social scientist as the agent for the poverty eradication through the provision of employment opportunities. Often, small firms in rural areas are more labour-intensive in nature and dependent on local resources for production [6], [7]. Their rate of development is low compared to urban areas because they are exposed to a greater range of challenges due to the constraint environments. Some of the challenges that have been always mentioned in the literature include lack of training and support, as well as lack of access to capital resources and manpower to start and grow a business. As a result, the involvement of community in the rural area into entrepreneurial activity is less compared to in the urban areas.

In Malaysia, particularly in rural areas, one of the endogenous growth strategies that have been undertaken by the government is the One District One Product (ODOP) program, which aims to encourage rural entrepreneurs to convert the available natural resources in their district/village, using local experts and their creativity, to produce resource-based and cultural-based products for commercialisation [8]. Under this program, the government facilitates the rural communities with advisory services and technical training, which aim to develop their business knowledge and interest towards commercialisation for community-based tourism production, like homestay, handicrafts and local food. Nevertheless, despite the government's aim to encourage formal involvement in entrepreneurial activity, through financial and technical supports it has put in place, there is still low involvement of community in rural areas into entrepreneurship.

Mantanani Island is well-known as one of the islands in Sabah for its various tourism activities due to its beauty and unique characteristics, including culture and natural resources as the main tourist attractions [9], [10]. In fact, Mantanani Island which has been known as the 'pearl of Sabah' is not only visited by the local and international tourists, but also has been frequently visited by government and non-government agencies for their corporate social responsibility (CSR) and outdoor activities. Most of the communities in Mantanani Island are from the Bajau Ubian ethnic group. Currently, the island is populated by more than 1,000 people, with approximately 150 families. The men are actively involved as fishermen. Besides fishing, the communities especially the

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women, are involved in homestay program under the villagers' initiative and supported by the Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia (MOTAC). Besides, they also involve in small-scale downstream business like making salted fish, handicraft making and operating small retail shop (see Fig. 1). The Malaysian government has been intensifying the rural people to involve in homestay program, handicraft making, and native processed food, as the appropriate means to improve their socio-economic status [10]. Nevertheless, from the observation and informal conversation with the village leader, only few of them involve in entrepreneurial activity as full-time, in fact most of them rather like to work at the nearby resorts or at companies in the inland. It is crucial to investigate what makes an individual start a business, particularly to people in deprived area. Hence, a structured face-to-face interview was conducted with the local people in Mantanani Island, in order to explore the reasons for involvement in entrepreneurship. Besides, the study also enquired responses from the local people in relating to their perceived outcome that they expect to receive from entrepreneurship activity.



Fig. 1 Some of the Business Activities in Mantanani Island, including salted fish processing, coconut juice, handicraft, boat making and homestay program

## II. ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN RURAL AREAS

Analyses of past literature on small business start-up and performance lend some insights that beside personal characteristics, the external factors also play important role to small business performance. For example, two influential factors which are often mentioned in the literature are government assistance for entrepreneurial development [11], [12], [8] and social/family support [13]-[15]. Nevertheless, internal factors like personality traits, skills and motivations are also found to contribute to entrepreneurial activity. Among the personality traits that first proposed by the early works of McClelland [16] and Brockhaus and Horwitz [17], namely

self-achievement, personal control and risk taking tendency. These traits have always been found to play strong impact to successful entrepreneurs.

Previous studies found that government support was critical for entrepreneurial development in rural areas, for example in the form of subsidised equipment, and business or technical assistance [11], [18]. Likewise, another study has also found that training or education in relating to how to start a business is one of the key success factors for to nascent entrepreneurs in rural area [8]. A number of studies mention lack of skilled labour as one of the main reasons why small enterprises in rural areas are not so well developed compared with those in urban areas [19]. Nevertheless, previous studies on reasons for business start-up also found that "non-financial goals" as important, for instance, personal pleasure, freedom [20], to preserve local tradition [21] or to sustain the native's cultural identity [22]. These findings emphasise the importance of taking into account entrepreneurs' goals or motivations when deciding to involve in entrepreneurship.

Overall, it is found in the literature that government assistance like facilities/infrastructure, especially access to resources (financial, technical knowledge and skill), family supports, and personal goals or motivations have particular influence on the involvement of an individual in entrepreneurial activity. Nevertheless, much is still unknown about the nature of these influences, for example, the significance and impact of each factor towards different community and native. For example, family and friends might not be the main sources of support to community in rural areas to start a business, whereas government agencies might become more important sources of technical and knowledge support to them. Therefore, the current research needs to explore further empirically, the specific factors that may be important from the perspective of the local community for them to be involved in entrepreneurial activity.

## III. THE RESEARCH APPROACH

The objective of the study is to obtain personal perspectives of local people in Mantanani Island about what makes them to venture a business in the island. Relevant studies on entrepreneurship inspiration have been carried out by many scholars using two main approaches, (i) subjective perceptions by entrepreneurs about why they act as they do and (ii) quantitative scales to measure the extent to which entrepreneurs have certain motives or reasons behind their intentions [23]. Therefore, this study has considered gathering the data befitting the objectives through survey and observation to gather respondents' perceptions.

The study involved 61 respondents among the local community of Mantanani Island, regardless whether they own a business or not. All interviews were conducted in Malay language using structured questionnaire. The questions included dichotomous (demographic background and perceptions on motivation to involve in entrepreneurship) and attitudinal Likert-scale questions (perceptions on perceived rewards of entrepreneurial activity). Few open ended questions were also included in the questionnaire, in relating to respondent's opinion on ways to inspire entrepreneurship

activities among local people in the island. The samples were chosen conveniently from the list of 150 households provided by the village leader and the selection of the samples then were based on the availability and willingness of the respondents to be interviewed for the study. Altogether, 61 households were successfully approached by the researcher which led to 61 respondents whom are among the representative of the family, mainly the men, who are also the husband and father in the family. All data then were analysed using simple descriptive analysis and were tabulated appropriately in graphic manner to present the factors that are important for the involvement of local community into entrepreneurial activity, including the motivating factors, the perceived advantageous as well as the needed supports.

#### IV. THE FINDINGS

##### A. Respondents' Profile

A total of 61 respondents among the local community of Mantanani Island involved in the study. Table I shows that the respondents are mainly the male (63.9%), almost half (49.1%) were among the youth, aged below 35, followed by 39% of them at middle age, and quarter of them (25.5%) were matured group, aged over 46 years. In terms of education level of respondents, almost half of the respondents finished high school (45.8%), followed by 30.5% completed their primary school, 18.6% have no formal education and only few have a certificate or diploma. More than half of respondents have a household of 4 to 6 people (56.7%) and 28.3% of households have more than 7 people. In terms of occupation, most respondents were fishermen (29.5%), followed by resort employees (26.2%) and paid for odd jobs (19.6%). There are also respondents who are involved with their own businesses such as operating a small retail shop and homestay operator. Only one respondent worked as a teacher. In terms of income, more than half of respondents (52.5%) mentioned they receive incomes between RM 501 to RM 1,000 per month, 31.1% of them earn RM 500 and less, while only a small number have an income exceeding RM 2,000. It can be said, in terms of income, the respondents involved in this study can be considered as 'poor' as their average monthly income is less than the poverty line income of RM 1,050 per month for Sabah as reported by the Household Income Survey [24].

##### B. The Involvement of Mantanani Island Community in Entrepreneurship

Previous studies have found various pull and push factors that contribute to the involvement of individuals to start and grow a business, namely internal factors comprising personality traits like self-confidence, self-reliance, perseverance and desire [16], [25], financial and non-financial motives [23], [26], [27] as well as skills like management, interpersonal, and marketing [28], [29]. Besides, the external factors also play an important role in influencing an individual to engage in entrepreneurship, especially assistance from government institutions, access to resources such as finance, raw materials, infrastructure, labor and technical and social support from family and friends [30], [13], [14]. However, those factors may pose different impact to communities of

small entrepreneurs in rural areas especially in the village or island.

TABLE I  
 RESPONDENTS' PROFILE

Respondent's Profile		Quantity	(%)
Gender	Male	39	63.9
	Female	22	36.1
Age	25 and below	14	23.7
	26 to 35	15	25.4
	36 to 45	15	25.4
	46 to 55	9	13.6
	56 and above	8	11.9
Education	No formal education	11	18.6
	Primary School	19	30.5
	Secondary School	28	45.8
	Certificate/Diploma	3	5.1
Household	3 and less	9	15
	4 to 6 people	34	56.7
	7 to 9 people	14	23.3
	10 and above	4	5
Occupation	Fisherman	18	29.5
	Resort worker	16	26.2
	Odd jobs	12	19.6
	Retailing	3	4.9
	Homestay Operator	7	11.5
	Teacher	1	1.6
	Unemployed	4	6.67
Monthly Income	RM500 and less	19	31.1
	RM501 – RM1,000	32	52.5
	RM1,001 – RM1,500	3	4.9
	RM1,501 – RM2,000	1	1.6
	RM2,001 and more	2	3.2
No fixed income	4	6.5	

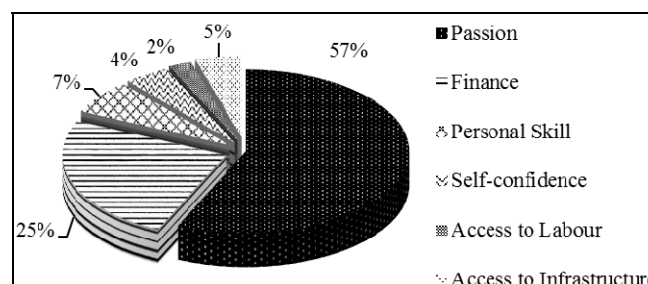


Fig. 2 Perceptions towards Factors for Involvement in Entrepreneurship (n=61)

Fig. 2 presents the perceptions of respondents regarding motivating factors for their involvement in entrepreneurship. It is found that more than half of the respondents (57%) mentioned 'passion' as the reason for them to involve in entrepreneurial activity. Meanwhile, a quarter of them said 'financial capital', followed by other factors like 'personal skills' (7%), 'access to infrastructure' (5%), 'self-confidence' (4%) and 'access to labour' (2%). Overall, large proportion of respondents (68%) chose personal factors like passion, skills and self-confidence as the pull factors to be involved in entrepreneurship compared to external factors namely financial capital, access to labour and infrastructure. Past study has also conformed this finding in which passion or love

towards something and self-confidence were found to be main reasons for an individual to start a business.

*C. Motives for Taking-Up Entrepreneurial Activity*

Previous studies proposed that entrepreneurs are motivated to accomplish motives or goals they set for themselves, and define their effectiveness on basis of how well they achieve them [26]. These authors also noted how goals (perceived rewards) can be both intrinsic (personal satisfaction, culture preservation, being one's own boss, independence) as well as extrinsic (financial, material) and can have implications for an individual's decision to behave entrepreneurially. It has been found from the literature that entrepreneurs who are motivated by intrinsic benefits like personal satisfaction, flexibility and pride in job tend to achieve lifestyle-oriented performance, i.e. modest level of business, home-based [27]. Meanwhile, entrepreneurs who are inspired by money and competent skills have showed direct effects towards venture growth, by having larger annual sales compared to those who have not [31]. Therefore, this study aims to gather the perception of Mantanani Island community about their motive or interest to be involved in entrepreneurial activities. Fig. 3 shows respondents' perceptions on the motives for taking up entrepreneurial activity, namely economic rewards (for income and job opportunities) and also non-economic rewards (preserving the cultural heritage and opportunity to learn the foreign culture). Majority of respondents gave positive responses (Likert score 4-5) towards economic motive compared to non-economic motive, where 85% of respondents agreed that entrepreneurial activity provides 'job opportunities' and 84% agree that entrepreneurship provides additional income. Meanwhile, negative responses (Likert score 1-2) were given more towards the statement related to non-economic interest compared to economic motive. This result is consistent with previous studies in rural entrepreneurship, where to earn decent income is the main motive for rural entrepreneurs in starting a business [32].

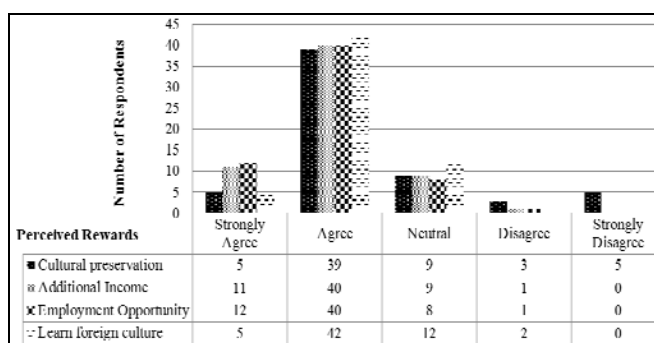


Fig. 3 Respondents' Perceptions on Reasons for Involving in Entrepreneurial Activity (n=61)

*D. Perceptions on Physical Infrastructure in Mantanani Island*

Previous study on small entrepreneurs in rural areas found that innovation could be more difficult among rural community due to absence of adequate capital resources and infrastructure [8]. In Mantanani Island, there are three types of infrastructure that are perceived as essential by the people in

the island, namely electrical and water supply, telecommunication reception and jetty. Fig. 4 shows respondents' perceptions towards the importance of having those three infrastructures in order to support entrepreneurial activity. Larger number of respondents provided positive responses (Likert score 4-5) towards telecommunication reception especially the telephone and Internet network (74%), followed by electrical and water supply (72%) and jetty (70%). This result is supported by some of the respondents when they said about the advantages of disseminating information through WhatsApp application and social media like Facebook and Instagram. The electrical supply in Mantanani Island currently is only available at night, from 6.00 pm to 6.00 a.m, which may obstruct daily or business activities.

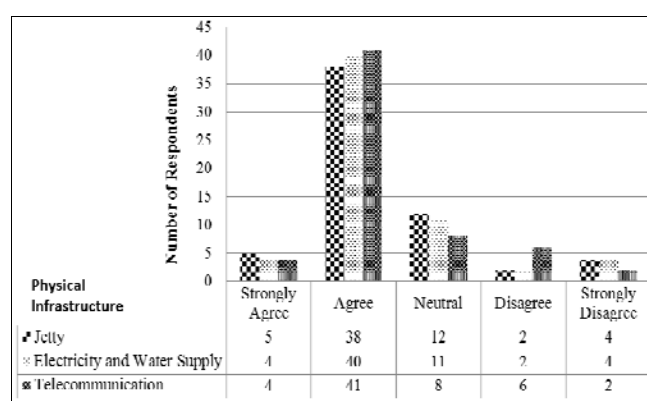


Fig. 4 Perceptions towards the Need for Physical Infrastructure in Mantanani Island (n=61)

*E. Opportunities for Entrepreneurship Development in Mantanani Island*

The surveyed respondents have expressed their expectations and hopes to have better physical infrastructure in the island in order to encourage more community involvement in entrepreneurial activity. As depicted in Fig. 5, the most important support needed is business development courses (28%), followed by reliable and continuous electricity supply for 24 hours a day (26%), provision of health clinic (21%), telecommunications reception (20%) and the supportive role of village chiefs and local associations (5%). These results are consistent with findings reported by Sabah Youth Development Strategic Plan 2016-2020 which involved 1,068 respondents throughout Sabah [33]. The study reported that most of the respondents who have involved in business said they take up a business because they have passion to do it. Furthermore, the study also found that youth in rural areas are more interested in going into business compared to salaried jobs. Therefore, the community of Mantanani Island, especially the youth should be channelled to the appropriate development and motivational efforts in order to boost their self-confidence and knowledge. Interestingly, previous studies on youth entrepreneurship has also found that some of the youths interviewed proposed several entrepreneurship development programs and activities for them, namely entrepreneurship fair, carnival, exposition, workshop and simulation courses, that may instil their entrepreneurial spirit

and interest [33].

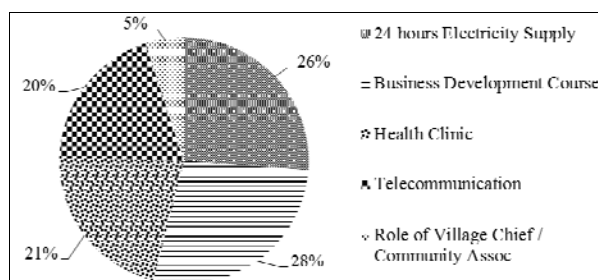


Fig. 5 Respondents' Suggestions towards Physical Support Needed in Mantanani Island (n=61)

#### F. Exploring the Prospects of Entrepreneurship in Mantanani Island

The outcome from the observations and respondents' comments related to entrepreneurship opportunities in Mantanani Island were analyzed qualitatively using SWOT analysis. In this analysis, all relevant data on internal and external factors to entrepreneurial opportunities in the community involvement in Mantanani Island were categorized into strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Table II shows a summary of the prospect of entrepreneurship in

Mantanani Island using SWOT analysis.

Table II depicts that Mantanani Island is potential for entrepreneurial activity especially in tourism-based business. This is true when the list of items under strengths and opportunities category is more visible than the weaknesses and threats encountered from the observation and informal conversation. Among the key strengths which can be found in Mantanani Island are its wealth natural resources, community, culture and the natural skills of the local community. Meanwhile, the external factors like receiving regular visit from students and non-government organisations, listed as a tourist attraction place in Sabah tourism calendar, small-scale of downstream business and also the growing numbers of resorts on the island, should be treated as valuable opportunities by the community through entrepreneurial activity. These strengths and opportunities may contribute to the development of small business by local people like homestay, retailing, and local food processing such as salted fish, fish crackers, village tour guide, restaurants, and event management such as handicraft and boat making demonstration, and cultural performances.

TABLE II  
 SWOT ANALYSIS OF PROSPECT FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN MANTANANI ISLAND

INTERNAL FACTOR ANALYSIS	
STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
1. Natural Resources - Island and its surrounding, marine resources 2. Collective Community Work - Fishermen Association, Homestay Program, Salted Fish Business Community 3. Culture - Local language, traditional custom/heirloom, traditional dance, history, folk tale, e.g. a tale of dugong fish (Malay Mermaid). 4. Personal Talent/Skills - Boat making, handicraft making, salted fish processing skill	1. Lack of Motivation - No passion, lack of access to capital resources, no self-confidence, lack of business skill. 2. Unsatisfactory Physical Infrastructure - Telecommunication, electricity and water supply, jetty.
EXTERNAL FACTOR ANALYSIS	
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
1. Tourist Destination/Attraction Place - Provide job opportunities to the community, e.g. tour guide. - Allow for service improvement to homestay operation. 2. Small Downstream Business Based on Natural Resources - Handicraft, salted fish, fish crisp, coconut-based product (e.g. jelly, virgin coconut oil) 3. Networking with Local and International Institutions - Receive regular visitor, opportunity for future market via word-of-mouth promotion, CSR activity help in preserving the beauty and cleanliness of the island. 4. The Growing Number of Resorts in The Island - Provide opportunity for new business start-up like local food, craft-based, and cultural-based.	1. Uncertainty in Security and Natural Disaster - Land invasion by neighbouring intruder, storm. 2. Lack of Support and Assistance from Related Institutions for Entrepreneurial Development. 3. Lack of Involvement among Local Youth into Formal Small Business.

Although the observation found some weaknesses and threats that may hinder the involvement of the community in entrepreneurial activity, it is not something that are impossible to be addressed or treated, for instance, self-motivation can be fostered through appropriate business courses or workshop by local successful entrepreneurs or related institutions. Whereas in relating to unsatisfactory physical infrastructure, it should be tackled by the government as well as to provide support for new start-up, especially in terms of financial capital, equipment and raw materials. The growing number of resorts on the island should also be treated as a trigger for more new business ideas among youth of Mantanani Island, for example, to start a tourist guide agency, local cuisine restaurant,

souvenir shops and handicrafts, selling coconut-based drinks or dessert and the like. These businesses do not only provide income to the entrepreneur, but also create employment opportunities for the local community.

#### V. CONCLUSION

Overall, the study suggests that financial capital is not the paramount factor for rural community involvement in entrepreneurial activity, but, personal factors such as a lack of passion and lack of self-confidence, as well as the external factors such as access to government support for physical infrastructure seem to play an important role in promoting the development of entrepreneurship in Mantanani Island. These

findings are consistent with several previous studies in the field of micro-enterprises in rural areas, where financial motive is not the main factor that drives rural community to venture a business. Other factors like to achieve own satisfaction, to grab opportunities [20], [34], government support and infrastructure [32], [35], [21] was found to be important reasons for the development of entrepreneurial activities in rural areas. In a nutshell, community of Mantanani Island has the potential to take up entrepreneurial activity because of the fascinating features of the natural resources and culture they possess. The tourism-based entrepreneurial activities such as homestay, handicraft, cultural and heritage event or seafood restaurant were able to give decent revenue to the local economy. The awareness of the importance of using the local resources and culture to develop business idea should be instilled among the people of Mantanani Island, especially among the youth, in order to raise the standard of living and the local economy of the community.

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