

LOCAL COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN RESPONSIBLE TOURISM – A CASE OF KUMARAKAM PANCHAYATH IN KERALA

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Abstract

Tourism is one of the largest service industry which significantly contribute to global economy. The growth of industry is accompanied by several costs, affecting the lives of host community. The success of tourism depends on the active support of local community, without which the sustainability of industry is threatened. Sustainability is achieved only through responsible tourism activities. Responsible Tourism (RT) is considered as a responsible path towards sustainable future. It enables local communities to enjoy a better quality of life through increased socio-economic benefits and improved national resource management. It provides various employment opportunities to enhance their wellbeing. Local community plays a significant role in Responsible Tourism that creates socio-economic development on the lives of local community.

Key words - Responsible Tourism (RT), community participation in tourism. Socio-economic development. Quality of life.

INTRODUCTION

In tourism destinations where more meaningful interaction between tourists and local community fosters socio economic development to such places. However, growth of industry is also accompanied by several costs, affecting the lives of host community. The success of tourism depends on the active support of the local population, without which the sustainability is practically impossible. Responsible Tourism (RT) is not a product but an approach towards attaining sustainable tourism. Sustainable Tourism is an attempt to make a low impact on the environment and local culture, while helping to generate future employment for local people. The aim of sustainable tourism is to ensure that development brings a positive experience for local people, tourism companies and more particularly to tourists themselves. Recognising the active participation of the local community is an integral part of sustainable tourism. The present study, therefore, pays attention to find out the community participation in Responsible tourism in Kerala and to understand the community perception and their support in the form of involvement and role played by them in responsible tourism venture.

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM (RT)

Responsible Tourism (RT) in Kerala is the pioneering concept in the Indian Tourism literature. This initiative started in Kerala on a pilot basis in four destinations known as RT destinations viz, Kovalam, Kumarakam, Thekkadi and Wayand. Among the destinations Kumarakam appreciated for the best RT model by WTO. Hence the present study focusses on the responsible tourism activities of Local Community in Kumarakam.

The importance of Responsible Tourism (RT) was recognised in South Africa. The concept of RT was first endorsed by the White Paper on the development and promotion of Tourism in South Africa (RSA, 1996b), which was followed by the publication of the National Responsible Tourism Guidelines for South Africa (DEAT, 2002) and the Cape Town Declaration of Responsible Tourism in Destination. (Cape Town, 2002)

The Cape Town Declaration (2002) recognises that Responsible Tourism takes a variety of forms. It is characterized by travel and tourism which

- ✚ “minimises negative environmental, social and cultural impacts;
- ✚ generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the wellbeing of host communities, by improving working conditions and access to the industry;
- ✚ involves local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances;
- ✚ makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage and to the maintenance of the world’s diversity;
- ✚ provides more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local cultural and environmental issues;
- ✚ provides access for physically challenged people; and
- ✚ is culturally sensitive and engenders respect between tourists and hosts.”

Responsible Tourism represents a way of doing tourism planning, policy and development to ensure that benefits are optimally distributed among impacted populations, governments, tourists, and investors. Furthermore, Responsible Tourism practices require strong leadership and involve ways of managing tourism resources to achieve optimum benefits for the different communities of interest. It is a tourism or leisure activity implementing practices that are respectful of natural and cultural environment and which contribute in an ethical manner to the local economic development. It therefore favours that tourist's awareness concerning his own impacts on the local territory and makes him an actor of his experience. After all Responsible Tourism (RT) is considered as a responsible path to sustainable future.

Responsible Tourism enables local communities to enjoy a better quality of life through increased socio-economic benefits and improved national resource management. Responsible Tourism through Conservation programme educate both tourists and community about the importance of the fragile marine eco system of the places. The key is to work hand in hand with the local community to ensure development happens at the right pace and does not exploit those who live there. The responsible tourism or travel cannot exist if the community is not involved. The Responsible Tourism venture in Kerala focus mainly on three thematic areas – the economic, social and environmental aspects of destination. It makes the natives an integral part of the growing tourism industry in the village and promote pride in their land and culture. The Kerala Govt. has taken initiatives towards sustaining the tourism industry in the region and has implemented many programmes through RT initiatives. Conforming to the goals envisaged by RT activities worldwide, the Kerala Govt. also encourages activities which generate greater economic benefits for local people and enhance their wellbeing. It is also culturally sensitive and creates a greater awareness of the need for sustaining diverse cultures and the nature of destination. From the tourist perspective, the activities help him/her to interact with the local people and thus provides a more enjoyable tourism experience. Simply RT is treating others the way they wish to be treated.

The Responsible Tourism concept, by embracing a quadruple bottom line (i.e., considers the cultural, social, environmental and economic aspects) and aiming to benefit all those involved, is trying to overcome the social problems associated with poverty, intergenerational equity concerns, and loss of cultural diversity. For (George, 2007) the main features of RT are that it aims at developing a competitive advantage, assesses, monitors and discloses the impacts of tourism developments, involves local communities for them to achieve socio-economic linkages; encourages natural, economic, social and cultural diversity; promotes the sustainable use of natural resources.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Community participation is a key element in Sustainable Tourism. Community participation in the tourism development process has emerged and been refined in the context of developed countries. Community participation in a tourism initiative appears to be closely linked to the derivation of livelihood and other benefits from the initiative to that same community. Community participation is often regarded as one of the most essential tools, if tourism is to make substantial contribution to the national development of a country (Lea, 1988). According to the Khama Rhino Sanctuary Trust (KRST) management plan, community participation is a planned effort to influence community opinion through good character and responsible performance, based upon mutually satisfactory two-way communication (Grossman, & Associates). (Tosun, 2000) asserts that it is a tool where aim is to readjust the balance of power and to reassert local community views against those of developers or the local authority. For some, community participation in tourism ensures that there is sustainability (Woodley, 1993), better opportunities for local people to gain benefits from tourism taking place in their locality positive local attitudes and the conservation of local level to facilitate physical development, the inclusion of community wishes in tourism planning and development and to ensure economic returns from the industry.

Responsible tourism has typically understood as a broad set of tourist interactions that engage with and benefit local communities and minimise negative social and environmental impacts. Usually community participation focuses in decision making processes and the benefits of tourism development (Gibson and Marks 1995, (Timothy, 1999), Tosun 2000). It is thought that only when local communities are involved in decision making, can their benefits be ensured and their traditional life styles and values respected (Gunn 1994, Lankford and Howard 1994, Linderberg and Johnson 1997, Mitchell and Reild 2001, Sheldon and Abenoja 2001, Timothy 1999, Well 1996).

Community participation via employment as workers or as small business operators, rather than participation in the decision-making process, has been recognised to help local people receive more than economic benefits (Tosun 2002) The success of tourism depends on the active support of the local population (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004), without which the sustainability of the industry is threatened. Residents should be the focal point of the tourism decision making process (Choi & Sirakaya, 2005). Tourism increases employment opportunities for the local people (Dyer, Gursoy, Sharma & Carter, 2007; Gu & Ryan 2008), improves the local economy (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004;) contributes to income and standard of living (Belisle & Hoy, 1980), brings in new businesses and improves investment opportunities (Dyer et al. 2007) enriches the community fabrics, cultural values, leads to heightened self-esteem fabrics, cultural values, leads to heightened self-esteem and improves quality of life of the residents (Milman & Pizam, 1988).

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION: KERALA RESPONSIBLE TOURISM MODEL.

Responsible Tourism venture in Kerala helps the natives reap the benefits of the new industry by offering their product and services to visitors. It also provides opportunity for interaction with tourists giving the natives exposure to new ideas and culture, and also gives them a platform for showcasing their talents.

Confirming to the goals envisaged by Responsible Tourism worldwide, the Kerala Govt. encourages activities which generate economic benefit for local people and enhance their wellbeing. The communities which are benefited by RT are Farmers, Transporters, Artists, Local Businesses, Guides & Workers, Women Empowerment like Kudumbasree, Craftsman, Fisherfolk, Unskilled Labour force etc.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Fariboz Aref(2006) has made an attempt to investigate the relationship between sense of community and level of participation in tourism activities in Shiraz,Iran. He points out without community participation and sense of community tourism development could not be achieved. Sense of community is an individual's perception of being responsibility to supported by, and belonging to his/her community. He found out that there is significant relation between sense of community and level of participation for tourism development. Sense of community can have a catalytic effect on development of tourism industry through enhancement of local participation.

Wen Jun Li based on a study in the Jinzhaigou Biosphere reserve of china, it is demonstrated that despite weak participation in decision making process, the local community can benefit sufficiently from tourism. Thus, to have a say in the management arena is only one of many ways to ensure that local people benefit from ecotourism. Rather, the modes of participation are related to the institutional arrangements and the different stages of tourism development present in a community.

Cavat Tosun has found that there are operational, structural and cultural limits to community participation in the tourism development planning in many developing countries although they do not equally exist in every tourist destination. Moreover, while these limits tend to exhibit higher intensity and greater persistence in the developing world than in the developed world, they appear to be a reflection of prevailing socio-political, economic and cultural structure in many developing countries.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Responsible tourism is an innovative and far reaching concept in Kerala tourism literature. It is becoming a global trend. Operators, destinations and industry organizations in many countries are already practicing Responsible tourism. RT is not a product but an approach which take place in communities, natural and cultural heritage sites and environments where people live and work. It is also challenged to demonstrate its positive impacts on livelihood, social and economic development and conservation. Responsible tourism ensures it does not cause any problem to local communities. In Kumarakam local community make up the majority of the tourism workforce and also perform a large number of unpaid and paid work in family tourism business. So, the present study focusses on local community participation in Responsible tourism. It aims to find out how the guidelines of RT have been successfully implemented in the development of local community in socially and economically.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- ❖ To understand the role of local community in Responsible tourism
- ❖ To study the socio- economic impacts on local community through Responsible tourism.

HYPOTHESES

H1: Local community has a significant role in Responsible Tourism

H2: There is significant socio- economic impact of Responsible tourism on local community.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY & DATABASE

A descriptive nature of study conducted on participation of local community in Responsible Tourism in Kumarakam panchayath based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data comes from selected drawn sample of local beneficiaries of Responsible tourism. For the purpose of data collection field survey with structured interview schedules were used. Secondary data comes from published sources like tourism journals, govt. publications, websites etc.

For the purpose of designing samples the various beneficiaries like Entrepreneurs, Fisherman, Farmer, Kudumbasree workers, Craftsman, Artists, Housekeepers, Food & Beverages culinary (Catering Servicers), Houseboat servicers and Drivers are taken into account. The sampling design proposed is convenience sampling. A representative sample of 100 selected beneficiaries form sample size. The sampling area selected for the study is Kumarakam panchayath in Kottayam district of Kerala. Simple mathematical tools and statistical tools such as percentage analysis, t test, mean and standard deviation, correlation, paired t test etc was used for analysis of data. The data were analysed with the help of SPSS software.

Table 1 Profile of the Respondent

Characteristics	Categories	Kumarakam	
		Frequency	Percentage
Age	Upto 35	5	3.3
	35-45	82	54.7
	45-55	55	36.7
	55-65	7	4.7
	Above 65	1	.7
	Total	150	100
Gender	Male	94	62.7
	Female	56	37.3
	Total	150	100
Marital Status	Single	2	1.3
	Married	148	98.7
	Total	150	100
Education	Degree	1	.7
	Plus two	25	16.7
	SSLC	115	76.7
	High School	5	3.3
	Primary	4	2.6
	Total	150	100
Living status	More than 10 years	27	18
	Since I was born	123	82
	Total	150	100
Experience in Tourism Industry	Up to 5	28	18.7
	5-10	109	72.7
	Above 10	13	8.7
	Total	150	100

Source: survey data

Table 1 exhibits the profile of the respondent taken for survey. 54.7 % of respondents are in the age group of 35-45. Majority (62.7%) of the respondent are male. 98.7 % respondents are married. With regard to educational qualification most of the respondents (76.7%) are SSLC qualified. Majority of the respondents (82%) living in their locality since their birth. High number of respondents (72.7%) working in the tourism industry within the category of 5 -10 years.

Local community take part in the Responsible tourism venture either directly or with the help of an agency such as RT group (Responsible Tourism special interest group), State Poverty Eradication Programme known as Kudumbasree (Group formed by the members of Ayalkkoottam or Area development societies that fall under CDS), Samrudhi Group (Group operated by Kudumbasree members), Co-operative society etc. In this study 82% of the respondent opined that they procure and supply their product and extend services directly and extend services directly and 18% respondent depends on the help of agency.

Table 3 Market of Local produces and Services

Market	Local Produces		Local services	
	N	%	N	%
Within the locality	9	6	41	27.3
Hotels & Resorts	69	46	11	7.3
Shops	7	4.7	38	25.3
Inside & outside locality shops and resorts	65	43.3	60	40
Total	150	100	150	100

Source: survey data

The Table 3 shows that the local community is getting an opportunity to sell their product and extend their services with no geographical limitations. They market their product and services within and outside their locality, Hotels & Resorts, Shops etc.

Local community plays a significant role in Responsible Tourism by contributing their expertise and skills in the field. The table 4 explains the perception of the Local community on the role in Responsible Tourism and Decision making process.

Table 4 Perception of Local community on the role in Responsible Tourism and Decision-Making process.

Category	Role in Responsible Tourism		Role in Decision making process	
	N	%	N	%
Yes	69	98.6	172	97.2
No	1	1.4	5	2.8
Total	70	100	177	100

Source: survey data

97.2 % respondents are in the opinion of they are having an active role in responsible tourism activities. The rest are indirectly participating in Responsible Tourism. The local community plays a vital role in the field of Responsible tourism by contributing their expertise and skills in various aspects. The most important outcome of RT initiative in Kerala is that it has created a healthy and positive relationship between the tourism industry and the local community. The various ways in which local community is involved in tourism are activities like Transportation, Marketing and sales of local products or services, Tour operating, Providing accommodation, Catering food and beverages, Laundry services, Local Food production, Ground transport, Excursions and attractions, Cultural, social & sports events, Furniture & crafts, Infrastructure, Service and resource of destination, Energy & waste supplies, Water recycling & disposal, Photo shoot , Garden & Landscaping , Boating/Houseboat service etc.

Table 5 Perception of respondent on the Local Community participation in Responsible Tourism.

Role Performed	Mean	Std. Deviation	Test Value	t value	p value
Entrepreneurs	4.39	.95	3	17.88	.000
Workers at all levels	4.36	1.01	3	16.46	.000
Decision – makers on development.	4.17	.85	3	16.76	.000
Consultant on tourism policies.	4.38	.97	3	17.55	.000
Financial supporters of tourism development.	2.64	1.14	3	-3.89	.000
Total	19.95	3.45	15	17.59	.000

Source: survey data

The local community in Kerala act as entrepreneurs, Workers at all levels, Decision – makers on development, Consultant on tourism policies, Financial supporters of tourism development in Responsible Tourism. From the table 5 it is understood that the first four ways of participations shows high mean score and the test value (3) is more than 1.96 (table value) at 5 % level of significance. The mean score of financial supporters are less which indicates that the local community is not financially supported to invest in tourism.

Socio – Economic impact of Responsible Tourism on Local Community.

Responsible Tourism helps to creates successful developments in Socio – economic spheres of Tourism in Kerala. It effects the quality of life of local community by influencing socio- economic conditions of a destination. Responsible tourism creates employment opportunities to local people and it has helped to develop household income and education level of the people in general. The perception of local community on the socio- economic impact on the responsibility of Responsible Tourism are explained in Table 7 and Table 8.

Table 6 Perception on the Economic Impact of Responsible Tourism on Local Community (Test Value 3)

Economic factors	Mean	Std. Deviation	t value	p value
Employment opportunities for the people.	4.42	.838	20.76	.000
Household income of the people in general.	4.31	.881	18.15	.000
Educational level of the people.	4.00	1.036	11.82	.000
Income generating projects for the people in general.	4.05	.817	15.78	.000
Entrepreneurial training (general entrepreneurial spirit& development among local people)	4.04	.896	14.20	.000
Total(Test value 15)	20.82	3.36	21.18	.000

Source: survey data

The table 6 shows that all the economic indicators of the responsibility are met by the Responsible Tourism as it shows high mean score and t value of each indicator is more than the table value 1.96 with p value .000. Which shows that there exists a significant difference on the opinion of respondent on the various economic indicators responsible tourism. From this it can able to realise that Responsible tourism has made a significant economic impact on Local community.

Table 7 Perception on Social Impact of Responsible Tourism on Local Community (Test Value 3)

Social Factors	Mean	Std. Deviation	T value	P value
General quality of life of local people.	4.10	0.97	13.83	.000
Decision making power of the local people.	4.23	0.93	16.12	.000
Social status of the local people.	4.02	1.04	12.06	.000
Social awareness or knowledge of the local people.	4.08	1.04	12.72	.000
Quality of goods & services in general.	4.16	.94	15.09	.000
Accessibility (transport & Communication)	3.90	.95	11.60	.000
Total(Test value 18)	24.50	4.25	18.74	.000

Source: survey data

The table 7 shows that all the social indicators of the responsibility are met by the Responsible Tourism as it shows high mean score and t value of each indicator is more than the table value 1.96 with p value .000. Which shows that there exists a significant difference on the opinion of respondent on the various social indicators responsible tourism. From this it is understood that Responsible Tourism made a significant social impact on local community as it created developments in general quality of life of local people, decision making power of the local people, social status of the local people, social awareness or knowledge of the local people, quality of goods & services in general, accessibility (transport & Communication) of local people.

Table 8 Correlation between Life Status before and after Responsible Tourism

	Mean	Std, Deviation	Correlation	P value
Life Status before RT	25.19	7.50	.116	.156
Life Status after RT	53.12	11.71		

Source: survey data

From the table 8 it is clear that there is a perfect correlation between life status of local community before and after Responsible Tourism. The result of the test (Table 11) shows that a high positive development has occurred in local community by way of getting involved in Responsible Tourism.

Table 9 Socio- Economic Development of Local community.

	Mean	Std. Deviation	t value	p value
Life Status before and after RT	-27.93	13.16	-26.006	.000

Source: survey data

Table 10 Result of Hypotheses Testing

Sl no	Hypotheses	Statistical test	t value	Significance level	Result
1	Local community has a significant role in Responsible Tourism	t test	17.59	.05	Accepted
2	There is significant socio- economic impact of Responsible tourism on local community	t test	21.18 18.74	.05	Accepted

Findings and Suggestions

The study shows that the Local community participation plays a significant role in the Responsible Tourism and the decision-making process under Responsible Tourism. It has found from the study that the representatives of the Responsible Tourism create opportunities to work for the tourism and there by creates socio -economic development of local people. Even though the local community are encouraged to take part in tourism activities, they are not financially supported to invest in tourism by the Govt. authorities. Most of the people may reluctant to work for tourism because of lack of finance. Hence in this context it is better to take initiative to provide financial assistance to those needy ones.

CONCLUSION

The Responsible Tourism is a pioneering concept in Kerala Tourism. It provides many worthwhile employment opportunities to local people in the destinations. Local community are the focal point for the supply of local products, catering, homestays, transport, facilities and services for tourism development. The study shows that the local community has a significant role in Responsible Tourism and that helped to enhance the life status of the people.

Responsible Tourism has made a significant socio- economic impact on the lives of local community by way providing numerous opportunities. The remarkable feature of Responsible tourism is it provides better living conditions to the local community, extra income generation, emergence of new entrepreneurs and micro enterprises. After all it has established new linkages and increased seasonable trade.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The geographical area is limited to Kumarakam Panchayath only.
- The interpretation is based on the responses of the respondents. Therefore, the research is limited by the capability, genuineness and willingness of the respondents.
- The sampling method adopted and sample size selected also can be limited factors.

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