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Research Article

Community-Based Pro-Poor Tourism as a Vehicle for Sustainable Development in Wayanad District, Kerala

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Abstract

Tourism has always played a very crucial role in sustainable development. Community based tourism is also part of sustainable development that gives liberty in decision making process and gives importance to local communities. Tourism stimulates growth and serves as a catalyst for social and economic progress, particularly in developing and underdeveloped nations where it has demonstrated positive outcomes. The Tourism and Travel industry plays a major role in uplifting socio-economic conditions of the dependents of the tourism.

Pro poor tourism is an approach to reinforce overall economic well- being of communities. It is one of the imperative approaches for the development of backward and poor classes of the society in the underdeveloped and developing countries of the world. A fair distribution of income from tourism is very much important in pro-poor tourism as it influence the benefits are shared among the various stakeholders.

Pro-Poor Tourism enhances involvement of work participation by poorer people of the society and makes them engaged in employment. It creates a blend between tourism growth by elevating the level of poor people's livelihood status for eradicating the poverty and socio-economic prestige of poor people is enhanced through community-based tourism.

This paper highlights community based pro poor approach to sustainable development in the Wayanad district of Kerala. It reviews and evaluates the prevailing socio-cultural and economic conditions of the region and identifies various opportunities and challenges in relation to sustainable development of local business in rural regions of Wayanad.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Community-based tourism is an important approach with the fast-growing tourism industry. Poverty alleviation is a primary concern for many developing countries including India. The Tourism and Travel industry plays an important role in uplifting socio-economic conditions. Today tourism is one of the largest hospitality industries in India, with a contribution of 6.6% to the national GDP and providing 9.1% of the total employment. In general, tourism has become an important industry in both developed and underdeveloped economies due to its notable progress in economy and society. Pro-poor (PPT) is a strategy that targets to utilise tourism as a means to help reduce poverty among disadvantaged groups in the community. Pro Poor Tourism as a method to tourism development which leads to generation of net benefits for poor people. It denotes tourism that is developed by means of fostering the cause of poverty alleviation and sustainable development.

In India the prospects of tourism development appear to be quite promising in general and Kerala state in particular. In case of Kerala's economy Community-based Pro-poor tourism has great strategic importance due to its capacity for generation of wealth and job. Subsequently the inception of Responsible Tourism initiative in 2008, Kerala has become a leading model in promoting sustainable tourism and community-based tourism. Kerala claimed to be a leader in creating tourism policies that help the underprivileged while also acknowledging the problems caused by tourism. In Southern India, the state of Kerala has been regarded as a "development model" due its accomplishment in improvement of the socio – economic conditions of the underprivileged through community-based tourism.

This paper begins with a brief literature-based analysis of the beginning of sustainable and community-based pro-poor tourism concepts, and further examining the practical implications of these approaches in the context of tourism development in Wayanad.

Community based Pro-poor Tourism

Definition: Community based pro poor tourism is a practice of tourism which actively engages the local community in tourism-related undertakings and creates net benefits for the poor. These benefits go beyond monetary gains to include social empowerment, eco-friendly sustainability and preservation of our cultural pride and resulting in overall development of the community.

The pro poor tourism framework has attracted considerable attention from the point of researchers, various multinational agencies and NGOs for eradicating poverty through sustainable tourism practices. In recent years, similar efforts have been enhanced through various programmes connected to the United Nations sustainable development goals (SDGs). For instance, the United Nations sustainable Development programme has supported community-based tourism programmes in various developing regions after 2020, supporting the local community participation, women empowerment and sustainable development. These strategies focus on how tourism can

contribute to poverty alleviation through the means of sustainable community development.

2. REVIEWS OF LITERATURE

It is understood that PPT places poverty reduction at its core, with the aim of bringing net benefit to the poor and marginalized and by the way of escalating opportunities (Ashley, 2002). Pro-poor tourism aims to provide the poor with additional income through skills transfer and capacity building by engaging in tourism activities. As a result, PPT collaborates closely with microfinance organizations and the education and training sector.

Overseas Development Institute (2007) measured how the poor receives tourism-related income through the use of a micro-level technique and macro-level analysis. The macro variables that were employed were employment, foreign direct investment, and foreign exchange earnings. The micro level approach concentrated on how some specialty tourism businesses affected the livelihoods of the impoverished.

According to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), nearly any tourist destination or product can achieve pro-poor tourism goals. PPT principles can be used for any scale, whether micro or mega. Instead of creating a new tourism product, the concept's goal is to redistribute opportunities and resources.

Michot (2010) investigated the tourism policy in Kerala and its impact on the livelihoods of the residents in Kumarakom, a heritage site in the state. The research also assessed the pro-poor features of the tourism policy. In the initial study, it was discovered that the tourism policy in Kerala has had a beneficial effect on the economic and social conditions of the local community in Kumarakom. The research also highlighted both the financial and non-financial impacts of tourism on the community. Ultimately, it was concluded that tourism plays a positive role in alleviating poverty.

Community-based pro-poor tourism may be defined as tourism that involves local residents in planning and decision-making, gives priority to poor and vulnerable households, creates local employment and self-employment and ensures fair distribution of tourism income.

Linh et al., in their paper has proposed combining pro-poor tourism with community-centred development and sustainable-livelihood approaches. This combination emphasises community leadership, co-creation, empowerment and the development of multiple livelihood assets rather than dependence on tourism alone.

3. RESEARCH GAP

Existing studies have examined pro-poor tourism, community participation and ecotourism in different regions of India and abroad. However, there appears to be limited research specifically examining the perceptions of the local community in Wayanad District. The proposed study can address this gap by examining the relationship between community participation, perceived economic benefits, poverty reduction and support for sustainable development in Wayanad.

4. Statement of Problem

Community based pro poor tourism requires a strong support from the government because in its absence, the leading players in the industry will carry on with their main role ensuring that the poor never benefit from the tourism industry (Nawijn et al., 2008).

One of the primary states to develop specific policies with a definite Community-Based Pro-poor Tourism focus is Kerala. Research on tourism typically focuses on the industry's business, marketing, and trends. There aren't sufficient studies that examines thoroughly the political aspect of tourism. Therefore, Kerala is a perfect case study for analyzing the political factors influencing the tourism sector.

The water resources of Wayanad have not been damaged by tourism, however it has had an impact on other natural resources. The construction of resorts in Wayanad has led to loss of land for cattle and agriculture as well as deforestation. Additionally, the disposal of waste has led to the pollution of natural resources and the death of wild species.

5. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Aim: This study aims to give insight in the current situation in the tourism industry of Wayanad and could act as baseline study for the community based pro poor tourism project in Kerala, to make tourism in Kerala sustainable.

OBJECTIVES

- To understand the tourism effects on the livelihoods of poor, unskilled, semi-skilled workers in Wayanad, Kerala
- To evaluate the financial and economic benefits of Tourism.
- To examine the role of community based pro poor tourism in developing sustainable opportunities.
- To assess the socio –economic development and empowerment of local communities.
- To analyze the community based pro poor tourism and its implementation in Wayanad, Kerala.

6. Tourism in Wayanad District

Since the 1970s, Wayanad has fascinated few tourists due to its stunning forests and animals; only those who seek adventure-based travel into the Wayanad forests. However, the tourism at Wayanad began to become commercial 20 years ago, and since 2004, its tourism growth has accelerated.

It is found that the majority of visitors to Wayanad are members of the new elite, who came from Bangalore, Hyderabad, and Chennai, all of which belong to the growing international cities as a result of the IT sector. Moreover, Wayanad is one of Kerala's most sought-after destinations in both India and Europe, and due to its increased marketing initiatives, tourism continues even during the rainy season. Kerala's Wayanad district has identified the community-based sustainable tourism practices as the backbone of its tourism management and advancement because of its abundant flora and fauna. Majority of the destination management committees of varied nature-based attractions are presently trying to

promote their tourism attraction as a sustainable tourism product which helps in developing the local community economically and socially by contributing towards employment of local people in order to maintain the stability of local economy and by educating them about nature and hospitality.

Many visitors select Wayanad as a travel destination just to take advantage of the showers. In India, one of the greatest rainfall rates occurs in Lakkidi and other parts of Wayanad, and these particular areas undoubtedly meet the needs and expectations of these visitors.

Wayanad by its combination of heritage sites like Edakkal caves and agricultural products provides greater potential of indigenous people involvement in the tourism sector. Local population is involved by training them in local crafts such as bamboo and ceramic work. The local self-government bodies too could play a positive role.

7. Community based pro-poor tourism: Key to Sustainability in Wayanad

One of the Millennium Development Goals, which were introduced in 2000 with the intention of halving global poverty, is poverty alleviation. It might be argued that sustainable tourist development should prioritize reducing poverty over promoting general socioeconomic development since poverty is now at the top of the international development agenda thanks to the United Nations Millennium Declaration. The primary objective of a pro-poor tourism (PPT) approach is delivering net benefits to the poor, which sets it exclusively apart from ecotourism and other sustainable tourism methods.

It is understood that the tourism industry is mainly labor-intensive, which means that the poor are mostly unskilled can find job opportunities within tourism sector. One of the positive situations is that most of the under-privileged women are now able to find job opportunities within the tourism industry. The Community-based PPT concept is likely to bring market and financial welfares to marginal and rural areas.

Tourism development is an important instrument for poverty reduction for a quiet number of reasons. Firstly, unskilled workers might find adequate amount of work in the tourism industry. Secondly, there are relatively strong ties to the unorganized sector, which may have advantageous multiplier effects on poor populace whose livelihoods depend on it. Finally, the assets which some of the under-privileged needs to be preserved such as natural resources including animals, landscape, and cultural heritage. These are the major component of tourism.

It is observed that from 2004 onwards the tourism industry in Wayanad has immensely progressed bringing benefits to the poor by generating new job opportunities. In addition to the jobs created by the growing tourism sector, the government implemented a number of initiatives that gave Wayanad's impoverished even additional employment opportunities. Pro-poor tourism is primarily aimed at generating income for Adivasi communities.

7.1 Benefits and Participation in the tourism segment by the poor

Many, lodges and hotels were constructed as the industry is developed, and most people began to leave their old occupations for entering into the tourism sector, which largely offers a year around employment opportunities. Tourism industry gradually emerges, first in the accommodation sector and then rapidly in other sectors. Due to the availability of transportation tourist taxis, "auto rickshaws," and jeeps both visitors and residents were able to move around. The local communities including the poor can benefit both directly and indirectly due to the accessibility to new roads and transportation options. There are many job opportunities such as drivers, laundry workers, cleaners, bag carriers, and guides. Several measures were implemented to encourage the participation of the impoverished in the tourism industry as well as other businesses, in addition to these jobs in a new and growing sector.

7.2 Schemes that benefit the poor.

Social policy initiatives are an important aspect influencing the tourism industry by trying to alleviate poverty on national, state and district level. The responsible Tourism Policy is implemented in Kerala in 2007 which benefitted many regions. One such region is Wayanad district in which a responsible tourism department has been set up to put the policy into practice.

Numerous projects have been initiated by the Responsible Tourism department in to make sure that the local community benefits more from tourism. One of these schemes is a scheme trying to make sure hotels buy products from local farmers by way of a group of five women trading the products of the farmers. All these products are produced locally. Examples of this are spices and bamboo products.

The Wayanad Tourism launched the Responsible Tourism program in January 2008. Three thematic areas of responsible tourism were focused mainly on. environmental, social, and economic aspects. As part of economic responsibility, the hotel industry received the local goods produced by Kudumbashree units, local farmers, and local artisans. This enhanced their unity and lessened the divide between industry and the community. Wayanad has nearly 25% of total bamboo reserve of the state. Bamboo sector is one of the lively hood options for the adivasi communities. This bamboo helps in the production of plywood, bamboo flooring and other value-added products thus providing employment to large number of local people.

The Kudumbashree project is the most innovative initiative of the RT cell, proposed by the Kerala government. This initiative aims to empower women by providing training for starting their own businesses. It focuses on the principles of female empowerment, microcredit, and entrepreneurship. In November 2015, the government allocated Rs. 1.02 crore to the Wayanad District Kudumbashree Mission to initiate new projects in animal husbandry and rural micro-enterprise sectors through community development societies associated with the mission.

One of the initiatives from Wayanad. Responsible Tourism cell was the ethnic food corner which is near Edakkal caves and within the area of Pookotlake. This shop near Edakkal caves was run by tribal community in Wayanad and in Pookotlake by Kudumbashree. The ethnic food section at Edakkal, which provided tribal, ethnic, and indigenous snacks, earned an income of Rs. 1.25 lakhs in just one month. Currently, 20 Kudumbashree units, 20 farmers, and 10 artisans are supplying their goods through the Samrudhi shop. A key focus during the implementation was social responsibility. To enhance creativity in the initiatives, the RT cell organized a festival calendar aligned with pilgrimage sites, fairs, and festivals, identified major social issues related to tourism, and conducted studies on safety concerns, ethnic foods and local cuisines, as well as gaps in infrastructure. They also prepared a code of conduct, recognized community-based tourism products, developed souvenirs for Wayanad, created a destination directory, mapped resources, conducted social surveys, core destination audits, and compiled a labor directory.

A destination directory, containing all major components and resources of Wayanad district was prepared by the RT cell of Wayanad which contained all major resources and components of Wayanad district. RT cell had conducted a comprehensive and detailed study in order to prepare this directory. This was conducted by means of wide-range and grassroots-level resource mapping at the destination. This directory contained details such as natural, cultural, historical, geographical and community.

Souvenirs encourage the Development of local artisans, handcrafters and spice farmers was the result of encouragement for souvenirs which offered a new dimension to the destination. Three types of souvenirs like spice kits, sketching of Edakkal caves and coffee stump products were developed by RT cell. Two main packages which were introduced by RT cell were to enjoy the unexplored village life of Wayanad were named as road to the fragrant hill & journey to the soul of nature. It reveals the traditional art of living by showcasing locally available resources like bamboo, clay and theruva grass.

The Journey to the Soul of Nature experience is located in Karimkutty and Kottathara Grama Panchayat. The package provides visitors with an opportunity to explore the rich cultural heritage of the Kurichia community, historically associated with the warriors of Pazhassi Raja. The traditional joint-family system offers visitors insights into their distinctive way of life, customs, rituals, traditions, and indigenous practices related to agriculture and medicine.

A significant attraction of the package is the silkworm production centre, where visitors can learn about the various stages involved in silk production. The programme also provides exposure to plantations cultivating a variety of crops, including coffee, areca nut, coconut, banana, ginger, turmeric, pepper, and nutmeg. In addition, the fish pond offers visitors an opportunity to experience traditional methods of fishing, providing an engaging glimpse into local practices.

Another initiative recently introduced by the Responsible Tourism Department is the Village Visits Project. This one-day

programme is designed to provide tourists with an authentic experience of rural life and enable them to interact with and understand the traditional culture, lifestyle, and practices of the local community.

8. CONCLUSION

In this paper we have studied the concept of pro-poor tourism which is community-driven that has now started emerging in the tourism literature. Several initiatives and proactive interventions have been introduced, with many of them demonstrating tangible positive outcomes for economically disadvantaged communities. These measures have contributed to improving household incomes, facilitating greater access to tourism markets, strengthening networks and linkages, and enhancing local livelihoods and the overall well-being of the community.

Tourism is frequently viewed as an unsustainable sector because of its potential adverse effects on local culture, the environment, and the economy. However, the experience of Kerala presents a different perspective. The pro-poor approach of the state emphasises on sustainable development, varied tourism resources, and relatively high levels of social and human development, demonstrating the potential of tourism which contributes to poverty reduction and community welfare when it is appropriately planned and managed. From this perspective, tourism can be regarded as a form of development that incorporates economic viability, social responsibility, and environmental sustainability.

The initiatives executed in Wayanad have also attracted considerable attention from the Indian Ministry of Tourism, which has acknowledged their potential for variation in other parts of the country. Nonetheless, such replication should take into account Kerala's distinctive socioeconomic and institutional conditions, as the favourable circumstances that supported these initiatives in Kerala may not necessarily exist in other destinations.

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