Collaborative Marketing for the Sustainable Development of Rural Tourism Destination: A Case Study of Mangalajodi, Odisha

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Abstract: This paper is a case study of the village Mangalajodi, one of the emerging rural tourism destinations of Odisha. Erstwhile, the local community people were making their livelihood by fishing from the Chilika Lake and poaching of migratory birds. But the large-scale poaching activities led to the ecological imbalance and biodiversity degradation at this Birds Paradise. It also brought defamation, unsustainable livelihood practices and cultural deterioration to the region, badly affecting the socio-economic condition of the local community. With the introduction of eco-tourism, a remarkable rejuvenation has been observed at this rural destination. Tourism has not only provided alternative livelihood to the villagers but also encouraged the conservation of natural and cultural resources. The collaborative marketing of tourism at Mangalajodi by various stakeholders is signified as the key to the sustainable development taking place over there. This paper elaborates the roles of various stakeholders, mainly the holistic involvement of local community, NGOs, Government, private organizations, tour operators and travel agents, tourists in this regard. It also discusses the major challenges and possible way ahead for the effective implementation of collaborative marketing for the destination. Insights drawn from this would be useful not only for the betterment of the present scenario of Mangalajodi but also for the sustainable development of other rural destinations having similar potentials by using collaborative tourism marketing as a reliable tool.

Key Words: Rural Tourism, Eco-Tourism, Stakeholders, Collaborative Marketing, Sustainable Development

I. INTRODUCTION

Being one of the fastest growing industry, tourism has been proved to be the driver of growth and development. With the need of time various different forms of alternative tourism like rural tourism, nature tourism etc. have been evolving, which support the socio-cultural and environmental development along with the economic development in a very sustainable manner. Especially the increasing interest among responsible tourists for rural tourism is emerging as a boon for the states like Odisha having the potential to be developed as a major rural tourism hub. In this era of modernisation also the rural life, natural landscapes, culture, tradition, heritages etc. are found intact all across Odisha. But very few rural destinations are able to realise the potential of rural tourism. Mangalajodi being one of those destinations showcase the effectiveness of rural tourism, especially in the eco tourism form, in assisting local community through diversifying the economy, providing additional livelihood opportunities for the local residence, enhancing community pride and protecting the biodiversity and fragile eco system of the destination.

Rural tourism is very much linked to the sustainable development by constantly seeking to achieve social and economic progress in ways that does not exploit valuable natural resources. It helps an environment, which has primarily been used for agricultural economic activities (e.g. rural and rural fringe areas) to overcome the economical and demographical problems without disturbing the wellness of the natural and cultural setup.

Keeping in view the nature and special characteristics of rural tourism, especially in ecotourism form, an innovative and deliberate approach is much required. Rural tourism being significantly different from mass tourism needs proper planning and marketing with the support, integration and inclusion of various stakeholders such as citizens, entrepreneurs, community leaders, government and non government organizations, social funding agencies, tour operators, travel agents and even tourists etc. for its long-term success. Also integrated approach towards negotiating the pros and cons of ecotourism and some of its elements promise greater success than individualism. This exploratory case study explains the sustainable development process of rural tourism at Mangalajodi considering the roles of stakeholders in the collaborative marketing framework. This is meant to pave the way for other such rural tourism destinations to evolve as successful models of rural tourism and achieve sustainable development of the place with the help of tourism.

II. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study is based exclusively on the eco-tourism initiative at Mangalajodi by Mangalajodi Ecotourism Trust (MET) with the major support of Indian Grameen Services (IGS) as the tourism at its very initial stage in this rural destination. Various stakeholders in connection with this initiative are considered for the study. The sustainable development taking place at the destination with the implementation of tourism has been explored.

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

From the review of various research papers, thesis and documents etc. differences in opinion for defining rural tourism has been observed. Overall, rural tourism activities provide relatively good background for rural development which can also provide good opportunities and facilities for rural employment and income-raising opportunities, and have a particularly important role in rehabilitation and modernization of rural areas (Anabestani & Vesal, 2016). A rural tourism destination could be defined as a wider area dominated by the natural and/or farmed/ forested environments where specific natural, economic and socio-cultural features, such as tradition, local cooperation, trust and reciprocity are harmoniously embedded and as such create a unique tourist product that is predominantly small scaled, nature friendly, "ethno-cultured", in other words 'sustainable" (Gadad & Kamasethy, 2014).

Ecotourism, a sub-category of rural tourism or sustainable tourism, is perceived by many rural communities as a new means of attracting visitors and stimulate local economies through generating tour revenues while conserving the natural, social and cultural resources of the communities (Shikida et al., 2010). The rural tourism guideline released by govt of India supports these definitions, expanding the scope of rural tourism by recognising farm/agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism, and eco-tourism as its different forms.

Sustainable development is one of the major characteristics of rural tourism. Brundtland Commission's (1987) report: Our common future defined sustainable development as the development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs. Much of the critique of sustainable development focuses on the double nature of the concept: claiming to combine socio-cultural and environmental preservation with economic development (Wall et al., 2005). Yuan & Wang (2008) pointed out seven characteristics of eco-tourism which are: (1)Destination has a good ecological environment, rich cultural atmosphere; (2)Tourists, local residents, tourism operators and managers with high environmental awareness; (3)Minimize negative impact of tourism on the environment; (4)Eco-tourism can provide funding for the environmental protection; (5)Local residents can participate in eco-tourism development and management and share economic interests, and thus provide support for the Environmental Protection; (6)Eco-tourism can help tourists and Local communities to build environmental awareness; (7)Eco-tourism is a new kind of sustainable tourism activities.

Tourism destinations are complex and dynamic systems that involve various stakeholders each with different understanding of same tourism system (Joshua et al, 2014). Like all other kinds of tourism, ecotourism also retains multi fragmented characteristics. The delivery of tourism products and services often involves the intervention of many different stakeholders who may be the govt organizations, private or voluntary sectors as well as community groups and tourists. Thus, a stakeholder in tourism can be understood as a group or individual who can affect or is affected by tourism development (Bultjens, white & Neal, 2012). Some research studies (Shikida et al., 2009) have boldly emphasized on the relationship between community and extra community stakeholders that will enable the effective development of sustainable tourism especially in developing countries where rural community people are not efficient to establish tourism by their own. So, there is a need for other stakeholders to participate actively in collaborative marketing for the successful implementation tourism.

IV.OBJECTIVES

- To understand the development process of rural tourism at Mangalajodi.
- To figure out the roles of various stakeholders in collaborative marketing of Mangalajodi as a tourism destination.
- To find out the sustainable development brought by tourism in Mangalajodi.
- To trace out existing challenges for the rural tourism development at the destination.

V. METHODOLOGY

Since the rural tourism at Mangalajodi is in its initial stage, the empirical data analysis and thematic content analysis methods are found convenient by the researchers for this exploratory study. The primary data have been collected by observation and from the key informants through semi-structured interviews. Key informants are the members of MET, representatives from IGS who are actively associated with the promotion of MET, villagers especially boatmen, photographers, shopkeepers, artists, craftsmen/women, SHG members and village leaders. Secondary data, that plays a key role in this research paper are collected from the brochures and records of MET, various documents including previous studies, progress reports, learning studies, strategy notes done by IGS, Website of MET and social media pages, documentaries and so on.

VI.MANGALAJODI - THE DESTINATION

Mangalajodi is an emerging rural tourism destination situated in the Khurdha district of Odisha. This scenic village located on the northern banks of Asia's largest brackish water lake; Chilika Lagoon just 75 kms from Bhubaneswar toward Berhampur, which is also a Ramsar site and popularly known as "Bird's Paradise". The climatic condition and the eco-system attract more than 300 species of migratory and resident birds from different parts of the globe during winter. This fragile eco-system hosts more than Ilakh birds every year and along with the serenity it attracts nature lovers and wildlife enthusiast from all across the world. But, just before few decades the village was very much defamed as poachers' village. Poaching of birds was extensive, one of the major sources of livelihood for the villagers along with large scale fishing and agriculture. The continuous and conscious effort by stakeholders like some government officials, community members, NGOs, the villagers became the protector of this destination and biodiversity after an alarming deterioration of its natural resources, especially the birds' species.

The Significant transformation has been taken place with the introduction of rural/eco-tourism at Mangalajodi. This unique destination offers Homestays and activities which includes bird watching, photography, boating on marshes, etc. hosted by the local communities. It has been designated as an 'Important Bird Area' by Birdlife International for the significant global waterfowl habitat. October to February is the best season to visit Mangalajodi.

VII. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

7.1 Development of Rural Tourism at Mangalajodi

The development process of rural tourism, especially in eco-tourism form at Mangalajodi can be elaborated through two different

7.1.1 Pre-Tourism Implementation

Being situated on the northern bank of the Chilka Lake, Mangalajodi supports some of the largest congregation of migratory birds arrive from the Caspian Sea, Lake Baikal, Aral Sea, remote parts of Russia, Kirghiz steppes of Mongolia, Central and South East Asia, Ladakh and the Himalayas to feed and breed in its fertile waters, particularly during the winter. Since ages villagers of Mangalajodi have been making their livings from traditional farming and fishing from the Chilka Lake. Worshiping Village deity Maa Mangala, nature and migratory birds considering seriously the concept of "Atithi Devo Vaba" (The Guest is equivalent to God) are very much into their tradition. But from 1970s up to around 1995 some of the villagers found poaching of migratory birds and selling them as another way for earning their livelihood. This moral degradation for the greed of more earning was supported by the illiteracy and some of the unethical demands of leaders, rich influential individuals and corrupted government officials forcing villagers for poaching either by providing money or threatening them. Eventually this "Bird's Paradise" defamed as the "Poacher's Village".

A survey conducted by Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) in 1995 showed an alarming decrease in the number and species of migratory birds at Mangalajodi during winter. It also stressed upon the drastic deterioration of ecosystem and reduction of fish production in the area as a result of large scale poaching activities. This in fact led the Chilika Development Authority (CDA) to consider the threat of poaching seriously. Officials of CDA conducted a series of meetings with leaders, villagers, youth and even poachers to spread the awareness of bird conservation among the communities with the help of volunteers of Wild Orissa (a local NGO working on wildlife conservation) to bring back poachers to the mainstream of the society. In that initial phase some of the youth of Mangalajodi with the objectives to prohibit poaching activities, conserve the nature, formed a citizen forum named as "Maa Kalijai Jubak Sangh". In the presence of CDA officials, they even took a vow in the name of Goddess Kalijai, which is mentioned below:

"We pledge that till we are alive, we will neither hunt, <mark>eat bird meat</mark> nor allow anybody to kill birds. This is the truth, truth and nothing but the truth."

With the help of volunteers from Wild Orissa, the ex-poachers and village youth formed a bird protection committee, named as "Sree Sree Mahavir Suraksha Committee", was formed with the help of volunteers from Wild Orissa and village youths. It took the initiatives for the conservation of wetland and birds. CDA and local forest department assisted the Wild Orissa and the committee to speed up the momentum of conservation exercises at Mangalajodi for some years till 2002. Government started giving a monthly stipend (initially 500 INR, later 1000 INR) to conservators and poachers in order to motivate them. These initiatives were partly successful, but neither consistent nor brought poaching activities to an end.

7.1.2 Implementation of Tourism and its Growth

A significant change in attitude of the community as a whole took place with the introduction and implementation of tourism at Mangaljodi. Around the year 2002-2003, 25 youths of Mangaljodi and 7 from nearby villages were given Guide Training by CDA in association with Wild Orissa. That brought a different kind of livelihood opportunity for villagers which previously was limited to fishing, agriculture and illegal poaching. Wild Orissa along with another well-known NGO named CPSW supported by RBSFA, started ecotourism in the form of camping for bird watchers and nature lovers in association with some specialised eco/rural tour operators and with the support of trained local guides.

Still, because of some internal conflicts, lack of coordination among various stakeholders, lack of transparency, and absence of proper promotional strategies etc. ecotourism at this rural destination could not be able to realise its full potential. The rural/ecotourism activities and flow of tourists to Mangalajodi were very insignificant till 2008. CPSW was also on the verge of cease its operations going on at Mangalajodi at that point of time.

In the year 2009, when Indian Grammen Services (IGS) was roped in by RBS to establish community based ecotourism activities at the Mangalajodi because of their extensive experience in community development across several parts of the country. After a deep study, understanding the situation and attitudes of the villagers properly, IGS started executing its ecotourism operation in a very well planned manner. Mangalajodi Ecotourism Trust (MET) was set up. Tourist guiding, hospitality, housekeeping and food preparation training were provided to the local people under the banner of MET. Local boatmen were engaged to provide boating facilities to tourists and awareness were spread among the villagers on a large scale. A private land was taken on rent from a villager to establish accommodation facilities for the tourists. Homestays were being established along with local food options. It was found safer and much more convenient from the earlier temporary camps. Some of the educated villagers were given adequate training on the managerial aspects to host tourists and visitors.

IGS is also looking after various marketing strategies to promote the destination and attract tourists to the destination. A well dedicated website, email account, social media page, telephone facilities, videos was developed in the name of MET. IGS has also been promoting this ecotourism project at various travel and trade fairs. Well maintained contacts with tour operators and educational institutions also helps in attracting tourists, wildlife photographers, travel writers, academicians, etc. to the destination.

In fact the travel stories in different books, magazines, blogs, photos, documentaries, reviews of tourists in various internet platforms and positive word of mouth are proven to be some of the most effective promotional tools for MET. MET is also supporting increased production of handicrafts and cottage industry products for economic benefit of the local people by encouraging growth in tourists demand for the same. Brochures containing small information about the place, activities to be done, products of MET and various characteristics of eco tourists have been given to each guest at the office.

IGS is very much aware about the sustainable development and promotion of responsible tourism. So any kind of mass tourism related activities to the place is generally discouraged. The special visitors are given attention and cooperated by the members of MET. The already established connectivity, easy accessibility to the destination and all other factors mentioned above can be considered successful in order to establish Mangalajodi as a major ecotourism spot in the map of Odisha. The number of eco-tourists is also increasing in every year bringing positive developmental changes in and around Mangalajodi. Few other groups of local people have also started similar ecotourism activities at Mangalajodi looking at the success of MET.

7.2 Roles of Various Stakeholders

7.2.1 Local Communities

local residents are playing the role of conservator as well as ground level operators in providing tourism services. Some of the villagers are directly employed by MET as office staffs, housekeeping persons, cook, guide etc. who are decently trained and mostly multilingual. Local boatmen also get fair opportunities to earn from the tourism activities by providing boating facilities. Local people are very hospitable and now very much aware about ecotourism and sustainable livelihood. Creation of various community institution for the developmental purpose like MET solely depends on the cooperation of local people. Some other community members are also trying to establish ecotourism ventures individually or with the help of other organisations getting encouraged by the success of IGS initiatives and sustainable development of tourism in Mangalajodi. But all the service providers are having a cooperative relationship with each other and actively participating in decision making for the development of tourism and conservation of the biodiversity of the place.

7.2.2 IGS

Indian Grameen Services (IGS) is registered as not for Profit Company under Section 25 of the Companies Act, established in the year 1987. IGS is engaged in self sufficient community based livelihood promotion through capacity building, research & sustainable development. In the case of Mangalajodi also the Bhubaneswar chapter of IGS acts as a facilitator and promoter of ecotourism at the place. The organization is involved in research and development, providing training to the local residents, spreading of awareness for conservation of nature and birds, positioning of destination by using various marketing tools, building a network with all the stakeholders effectively. MET is the brain child of IGS. The managerial aspects of MET such as record maintenance, tour-package development, communication with tourists and tour operators, fund management etc. are taking place under the active guidance of IGS. IGS is also trying to maintain a healthy conflict less intra community relationship between all other service providers in the community.

7.2.3 RBSFI

RBSFI, as a not-for-profit entity of RBS is actively supporting conservation by providing sustainable livelihoods to forest dependent communities, especially in the ecologically fragile landscapes and other locations in the country, paving the way for a constructive relationship between communities and efforts towards conservation. Here RBSFI is providing financial support and technical guidance for the community capacity building by implementing ecotourism through IGS.

7.2.4 Government

Observing the development in Mangalajodi through the intervention of ecotourism, the district administration and various line departments started extending their hands in the recent past for the development of the village and the initiative. It includes basic infrastructure such as road and providing gates on railway track passing through the village, declaring Mangalajodi as an ecodestination by the State Government. Local administration also frames various policies for the betterment of destination and looks after their implementations. Safety and security matters along with the protection of nature and natural elements are taken care by Govt. broadly. Now state Govt. is also trying to promote Mangalajodi as a major ecotourism destination. Some tourism infrastructure like bird watching tower was built by CDA. Few more such infrastructural development like construction guest house is going on at the destination by the forest department.

7.2.5. Tour Operators

Tour operators and travel agents specialised in providing rural/eco/responsible/sustainable/ethnic tourism services shown their keen interests for Mangalajodi. IGS professionals through MET build up that ecosystem and tied up with many such operators from Kolkata, Mumbai, Bhubaneswar, Puri etc. for the effective promotion of the destination. Being the profit makers and promoters tour operators have been sending the visitors to experience the ecotourism at Mangalajodi which creates a win-win situation.

7.2.6 Tourists

Tourists play the role of consumer, economic contributors and eventually the promoters. They mostly belong to responsible tourist category as in wildlife photographers, bird watchers, travel writers, researchers, nature lovers, FIT and students. Tourists are the source of income for local communities. They directly invest in the place by buying different kind of services, crafts and other commodities from the premises of MET and nearby local shops. Sometimes traditional artists like Paik of the community also got

rewards from tourists. Most of the time they also play the role of promoter by blogging, writing about the destination on various platforms, making documentaries, promoting photographs of the place and birds and spreading positive words of mouth.

7.3 Sustainable Development brought by Tourism

Sustainable developments brought by tourism in Mangalajodi can be elaborated by considering the holistic approach of economic, socio-cultural and environmental development.

7.3.1 Economic Development

Sustainable livelihood opportunities: Along with providing additional livelihood, tourism is supporting the traditional livelihood practices of community such as farming and fishing while eliminating the evil practice of poaching of migratory birds at

New employment opportunities: Demand of various services like; guiding, housekeeping, food-production, boating, transportation like auto services from the nearby railway station to the destination etc. creating new employment opportunities for local community people.

Sale of local products: Selling of local handicrafts, food, farm and fisheries products and other rural products encourages local craftsmen and sellers.

Multiplier effect: Multiplier effect can be clearly observed from selling and buying of goods and services at various levels for fulfilling the requirements of tourists.



Fig7.3.1.a: No of tourist visited Mangalajodi from 2010-11 to 2016-17



Fig7.3.1.b: Total Revenue Generated from 2010-11 to 2016-17 from Tourism at Mangalajodi

7.3.2 Socio-cultural Development

Re-establishment of cultural ethos and social dignity: Earlier the village was very much infamous as a poacher's village. Villagers were mocked by others as illiterate poachers outside the village. Now Mangalajodi is a famous ecotourism destination, creating a unique example. Villagers are even organising festivals for worshiping the nature and showing gratitude to migratory birds, reviving some of the age-old traditions. Social dignity of residents is getting magnified in terms of conservator of nature and ecotourism service providers.

Acknowledgement, Recognition and Awards: Community members involved actively in ecotourism activities are getting acknowledged, recognised and awarded on various national and international platforms by government and reputed private organizations.

Involvement in decision making: Local residents are getting fare enough opportunities to establish community institutions and get involved in decision making for the development of ecotourism initiatives at Mangalajodi.

Gender mainstreaming: women are also getting the opportunity to participate and earn their livings from ecotourism activities. *Increased quality living standard:* Quality of living standards of local people is increasing with increase in economic benefits, capacity building, skills training and adopting sustainable way of living.

Cross cultural interaction: A healthy cross cultural interaction between local community and tourists is taking place at Mangalajodi.

Promotion of art and culture: Traditional local art and ethnic culture like local handicrafts, Paika dance, processing of river food etc. are getting promoted through tourism which previously were almost unknown to the outside world.

7.3.3 Environmental factors

Revival of wetland ecosystem: The natural ecosystem of wetland was critically damaged due to large scale illegal poaching. Due to ecotourism the wetland ecosystem is revived and measures are developed strategically to restore the sustainable ecosystem

Increase level of environmental awareness: Looking at the increasing value of natural environment among tourists and other organised activities awareness level for environmental conservation is increasing among villagers. Fishermen are getting aware about the fact that defecation of birds will support growth of algae which in turn will be a source of food for fish, ultimately increasing the fish production. Various other organised activities also helped in the increasing the environmental awareness level of residents.

Maintenance of Carrying Capacity: Rural/Eco tourism by its very nature discourages overcrowding created by mass tourism such as excursions and exploitation of local resources while encourages number of visitors to act responsibly matching with the carrying capacity of the destination.

Optimal use of environmental resources: Eco-tourists are very much responsible in nature. They leave nothing but the footprints and memory at the destination by appreciating the natural resources. It also helps in the protection of natural resources which makes the destination look clean and green.



Fig7.3.3: Sustainable Development at Mangalajodi

7.4 Existing Challenges

Major challenges in front of tourism development at Mangalajodi are found as follows;

- Seasonal characteristics of tourism results in increasing tourist inflow in winter and very less in all other seasons, which creates a deviating economic incentive to the host community participating in ecotourism activities.
- Increasing intra-community conflicts.
- The monitoring of tourists and maintaining the carrying capacity at the destination are emerging as serious challenges with the increase popularity of the place.
- Some unethical practices like; taking tourists more than the capacity of the boat for boating, inflation in the values of commodities at the place.
- Sometimes it is found difficult in maintaining a healthy relationship among stakeholders and taking care of other aspects of sustainability at the destination.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

To drive the tourism initiatives for long term transition towards sustainability at Mangalajodi, few recommendations is highlighted as below;

- District administration must take the necessary initiative to collaborate with the communities effectively for capacity building and ecotourism development.
- Strict regulations must be implemented to maintain the acceptable carrying capacity of the destination.
- Conservation aspect must be ensured and detailed scientific biodiversity research must be conducted with proper monitoring measures for the ecosystem at Mangalajodi wetland.
- Positive attitude of the villagers towards ecotourism and sustainability must be developed and maintained by implementing effective measures and guidelines.

IX. SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research can be conducted to find out and measure various factors affecting the collaboration of stakeholders in the marketing of rural tourism destination like Mangalajodi. Perception of various stakeholders regarding collaborative marketing of rural tourism destination is another interesting thing to explore.

CONCLUSION

The rural model at Mangalajodi is undoubtedly unique in the sense where the stakeholders, local community being the core among them, are collaboratively managing and leading the whole offerings of tourism services and protection of the ecosystem. This is a classic example of livelihoods and conservation both are going hand-on-hand re-stabilising the cultural and traditional practices. The study demonstrates that, collaborative marketing of rural tourism is a viable tool for sustainable development in rural areas. In a state like Odisha where around 83.32% of its population resides in more than 51000 villages, establishment and promotion of rural tourism can play a meaningful role for a holistic development in a sustainable manner

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