

LOCAL PEOPLE PARTICIPATION IN RURAL TOURISM – A CASE OF KONNI PANCHAYAT IN KERALA

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Abstract:

Kerala has become one of the top tourism destinations and considered as the trendsetters in the country. The availability of natural resources and skilled laborers, strong local governments, helpful entrepreneurial community, multitude of small enterprises, streams of professionals and academicians, responsive tourism industry and responsible media give the state a perfect setting to implement and apply tourism. Rural Tourism that minimises negative social, economic and environmental impacts and generates greater economic benefits for local people. It gives the local people a sense of participation and socio-economic benefits. It is considered as a responsible path towards a sustainable future. It enables local people 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 people play a significant role in Rural Tourism that creates socio-economic development in the lives of the local community. Rural tourism is the way ahead for Kerala's tourism industry.

Key words: People Participation, Rural Tourism, Socio-economic development, Tourism Industry, Kerala.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an area where you have benefits in a local community. Local community is one of the important components for understanding community development for tourism development but is also important to appreciate how community affects local tourism development. Local communities have a key role in tourism development as they are crucial in providing a good environmental condition for tourists. Local communities are a basic element of modern tourism development. They are the focal point for the supply of accommodation, catering, information, transport, facilities and services for tourism development. The role of the local community in influencing the tourism development activities are becoming clearer. Malnati's, et al. (1993, p. 50) states that local communities must organize themselves at all levels to play a more effective role in development, and interact with government and role-players at all levels. They must be able to identify potential tourism resources and attractions within their communities and support responsible tourism and community development. They should be eager participants in tourism decision making with respect to major tourism development for communities.

The present study, therefore, pays attention to find out the local people participation in rural tourism in Kerala and to understand the people's perception and their support in the form of involvement and role played by them in rural tourism.

RURAL TOURISM

Rural Tourism is mainly conceived with three kinds of responsibilities which are termed as the 'triple bottom-line' economic responsibility, social responsibility and environmental responsibility. Though the concept of rural tourism was there right from 1996, it was after the Cape Town Declaration of 2002 that a detailed picture of rural tourism - including its aims, and factors evolved.

Rural Tourism was defined in Cape Town in 2002 alongside the World Summit on Sustainable Development. This definition, the Cape Town Declaration is now widely accepted and was adopted by the World Travel Market in 2007 for World Tourism Day.

Rural Tourism is about “making better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit.” Rural Tourism requires that operators, hoteliers, governments, local people and tourists take responsibility, take action to make tourism more sustainable.

The World Travel Market has adopted the Cape Town Declaration definition of Rural Tourism for its World Tourism Day which encourages the industry to take responsibility for making tourism more sustainable and demonstrate their responsibility.

The Cape Town Declaration recognises that Rural Tourism takes a variety of forms, it is characterised by travel and tourism which:

- minimises negative economic, environmental and social impacts;
- generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities, improves working conditions and access to the industry;
- involves local people in decisions that affect their lives and life changes;
- makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, 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, social and environmental issues;
- provide access for people with disabilities and the disadvantaged;
- is culturally sensitive, engenders respect between tourists and hosts, and builds local pride and confidence.

Rural Tourism encompasses all forms of tourism and seeks to minimize negative economic, environment and social impacts. It generates greater economic benefits to local people and enhances the wellbeing of local communities. It also makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, and maintenance of the world's diversity.

LOCAL PEOPLE PARTICIPATION IN RURAL TOURISM

People participation has been widely advocated as a critical element for tourism development. Local community participation in tourism ensures that there is sustainability, better opportunities for local people to gain benefits from tourism taking place in their locality, positive local attitudes and the conservation of local resources Wen, J. L. (2006). Participation is emphasized at the local level to facilitate physical development, the inclusion of community wishes in tourism planning and development and to ensure economic returns from the industry. The concept of sustainable development, made famous by the Brundtland Report (World Commission on Environment and Development. 1987), promotes community participation and calls for the protection and improvement of the quality of life of people. Moreover, more emphasis is placed on issues of sustainability, social equity and environmental responsibility, thereby ensuring that development provides opportunities for people of different incomes and skills, promotes a better quality of life for all, and most importantly protects the environment (Roseland, 2005). Local participation includes the empowerment and involvement of communities in decision-making, implementation and identifying local problems as well as introducing something that is adapted to local needs. Community involvement can be seen as important due to the local knowledge that exists within communities, which can be of major importance in tourism development. This increased participation of locals involves the inclusion of low-income people in both rural and urban areas, who are not normally involved in government processes. Citizen participation is regarded as something which is very essential and that should be encouraged because it makes the planning process more effective, equitable and legitimate, as long as those who participate are representative of the whole community and are capable of looking after collective interests as well as those of their own group (Buanes 2005).

LOCAL PEOPLE PARTICIPATION AND RURAL TOURISM IN KERALA

Kerala has emerged as one of the prime tourism destinations on the national and international map and is considered as the tourism trendsetter in the country. The availability of plenty of natural resources, skilled manpower, supportive entrepreneurial community, strong local-self-governments, civil society organizations, multitude of micro enterprises, streams of professionals and academicians, responsible media and responsive tourism industry, provide the state an ideal setting to implement and practice 'Rural Tourism.' Confirming to the goals envisaged by Rural Tourism worldwide, the Kerala Govt. encourages activities which generate economic benefit for local people and enhance their wellbeing. The communities which are benefited by rural tourism are Farmers, Transporters, Artists, Local Businesses, Guides & Workers, Women Empowerment like Kudumbasree, Craftsman, Fisherfolk, Unskilled Labour force etc.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

People participation (which can mean a level of control, ownership or influence) in a tourism initiative appears to be closely linked to the derivation of livelihood and other benefits from the initiative to that same community (**Murphy 1985**).

Participation of the local community is important in ensuring that visitors get an unforgettable, pleasant tourist experience, while at the same time enabling the community to derive benefits from their visits. Residents have the ability to provide helpful input in decision-making processes and, therefore, it is essential that they are actively involved in tourism planning and developments. The call for community participation is based on the assumption that participation lessens opposition to development, minimises negative impacts and revitalizes economies (**Hardy et al., 2002**).

A community's sense of ownership, feeling of responsibility and practical involvement in tourism has since been heralded by researchers and practitioners as central to the sustainability of tourism and of great importance to planners, managers and operators (**Boyd & Singh, 2003**).

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Rural 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 Rural tourism. Rural Tourism is not a product but an approach which takes 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. Rural tourism ensures it does not cause any problem to local communities. In Kerala local communities 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 focuses on local people participation in rural tourism. It aims to find out how the guidelines of tourism have been successfully implemented in the development of local communities socially and economically.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To identify the role of local people in rural tourism.
- To understand the socio - economic impacts on local community through rural tourism.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is basically descriptive and analytical in nature. It analyses in detail the various factors contributing to the participation of the local community in Rural Tourism in Konni Panchayat in Kerala. It also evaluates the socio economic impact of local communities through rural tourism development and the role of communities in nurturing tourism friendly practices. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data comes from a selected drawn sample of benefitted communities of rural tourism. For the purpose of data collection, field surveys 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 Service), Boat servicers and Drivers are taken into account. The sampling design proposed is convenience sampling. A representative sample of 50 selected beneficiaries form sample size. The sampling area selected for the study is Konni panchayat in Pathanamthitta district of Kerala.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

TABLE 1- PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Up to 30	5	10
	31- 45	25	50
	46- 60	12	24
	Above 60	8	16
	Total	50	100
Gender	Male	30	60
	Female	20	40
	Total	50	100
Education	Primary	7	14
	Secondary	26	52
	Higher secondary	10	20
	Graduation	7	14
	Professional degree	0	0
	Total	50	100
Marital status	Single	10	20
	Married	32	64
	Widow	5	10
	Divorced	3	6
	Total	50	100
Occupation	Employee	16	32
	Self employment	23	46
	Business	11	22
	Total	50	100
Experience	Up to 5	10	20
	6-12	34	68
	13-20	4	8
	Above 20	2	4
	Total	50	100
Category belong	Born & brought in locality	41	82
	Migrated from other places	9	18
	Total	50	100

Source: Survey Data

Table 1 shows the profile of the respondent taken for survey. 50% of respondents are in the age group of 31-45. Majority (60%) of the respondents are male. With regard to educational qualification most of the respondents (52%) are Secondary qualified. 54 % respondents are married. Majority of the respondents (82%) born and brought in their locality. With regard to occupation most of the respondents (46%) are Self employment. High number of respondents (68%) working in the tourism industry within the category of 6 - 12 years.

TABLE 2 - PROMOTION OF LOCAL PRODUCTION AND SERVICES

Promotion	Local Production		Services	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Within the locality	6	12%	14	28%
Hotel and resorts	15	30%	3	6%
Shops	5	10%	6	12%
Inside and outside locality	24	48%	27	54%
Total	50	100	50	100

Source: Survey Data

Table 2 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.

TABLE 3 - ROLE OF LOCAL COMMUNITY IN RURAL TOURISM

Category	Role in rural tourism	
	Count	Percentage
Yes	50	100%
No	0	0
Total	50	100

Source: Survey Data

Table 3 shows that 100 % respondents are in the opinion that they are having an active role in rural tourism activities. The local community plays a vital role in the field of Rural tourism by contributing their expertise and skills in various aspects. The most important outcome of the Rural Tourism 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.

SOCIO – ECONOMIC IMPACT OF LOCAL PEOPLE IN RURAL TOURISM.

Rural Tourism helps to create successful developments in socio – economic spheres of Tourism in Kerala. It affects the quality of life of the local community by influencing socio- economic conditions of a destination. Responsible tourism creates employment opportunities for local people and it has helped to develop household income and education level of the people in general.

TABLE 4 – SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT

Impact	High	Moderate	Low
Economic Impacts			
• employment opportunities	✓		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • income generation • investments • infrastructure development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ ✓ ✓ 		
Social Impacts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • standard of living • personal empowerment • social status • social awareness • decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ 		

Source: Survey Data

From the above table it is able to realise that rural tourism has made a significant economic and social impact on Local community. It is understood that Rural Tourism made a significant economic impact on the local community as it created employment opportunities, income generation, investments and infrastructure development. It is also understood that Rural Tourism made a significant social impact on the local community as it created developments in general standard of living of local people, personal empowerment of local people, social status of the local people, social awareness or knowledge of the local people and decision making power of the local people.

FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

The study shows that the local people participation plays a significant role in the Rural Tourism. It has found from the study that the representatives of the Rural Tourism create opportunities to work for tourism and thereby creates socio-economic development of the local community. Local people benefit from rural tourism through economic development, job creation, and infrastructure development. Tourism revenues bring economic growth and prosperity to attractive tourist destinations which can raise the standard of living in destination communities. Increase in tourism revenue to an area acts as a driver for the development of increased infrastructure. As tourist demands increase in a destination, a more robust infrastructure is needed to support the needs of both the tourism industry and the local community. Dominant barriers identified from the study were lack of available money to invest, lack of incentive programs, other business priorities, and limited access to suppliers of sustainable products, with the most common recommendation being the need for incentive programs to encourage businesses to become more sustainable. Even though the local community are encouraged to take part in tourism activities, they are not financially supported to invest in tourism by the authorities. Hence in this context it is better to take initiative to provide financial assistance to those needy ones.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to investigate the involvement and participation of local people in Rural Tourism in Kerala using a case study of local communities in Konni Panchayat. The study shows that the local community has a significant role in Rural Tourism and that helped to enhance the life status of the people. Rural Tourism has also made a significant socio-economic impact on the lives of local communities by way of providing numerous opportunities. Local people participation plays a significant role in reviving and sustaining the status of rural tourism, leading to economic development and subsequent improvements in the quality of life of local communities in Kerala.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- 1) The geographical area is limited to Konni Panchayat only.
- 2) Selected sample size may be too small to represent the population of the selected area.
- 3) Information provided by the respondents may not be fully accurate due to various biases.

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