



ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS: A CASE STUDY ON RESPONSIBLE TOURISM AT KUMARAKOM

Dr. Syamnath R. S.

Assistant Professor,

Lourdes Matha Institute of Management Studies,

Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala

Abstract

Kerala acclaimed as one of the most preferred tourism destination had bagged the prime international recognition when it was conferred with the top United Nations Award, UNWTO Ulysses Award, for Innovation in Public Policy and Governance for their Responsible Tourism initiative in the year 2013. The Rural women as a part of Kudumbashree played a massive role in transforming Kumarakom to a Responsible Tourism destination. Responsible Tourism through Kudumbashree empowered rural women and enable women entrepreneurs to address various social problems which leads to sustainable development. Empowered women and women entrepreneurs played a vital role in survival of poor households; Responsible Tourism in Kumarakom was successful in recognizing their initiative as an important strategy for sustainable development. Responsible tourism lead to many women entrepreneur finding opportunities to start a small scale production that match their skills and competence. Responsible Tourism programme in Kumarakom has acted as a catalyst for fostering and creating women entrepreneurs in solving the societal problems.

Case study method is used in the study to investigate the contemporary social phenomena of real life in their natural setting. This case study showcases the successful role played by rural women and entrepreneurs as a part of Kudumbashree in transforming Kumarakom into a Responsible Tourism destination. The study assess how Responsible Tourism was successful in building up community based social entrepreneurs and empowerment activities in addressing societal issues. This paper also examines the various economic, social and environmental responsibilities adhered to by these entrepreneurs in sustainable tourism development.

Keywords: Economic Sustainability, Kudumbashree, Responsible Tourism, Social Entrepreneurs, Sustainable Development, Women Empowerment

Introduction

Kerala is one of the most prominent tourist destination in the world. Its unique culture, heritage, architecture, art, cuisine etc. coupled with the natural beauty and asset made the state popular among both domestic and international tourists. Tourism in Kerala is diversified into different forms and one such form is Responsible tourism which catalyst sustainable development through community participation. Responsible tourism in Kerala was initiated in 2007 as a result of public debate and brainstorming. Thus started the pioneering venture of responsible tourism initiative in India. Responsible tourism aims to make destinations as “Better place to visit & better place to live” by minimizing the adverse economic, social & environment impact of tourism, thereby enhancing the wellbeing of host community and providing enjoyable experience to tourists. Responsible tourism encourages for an economically developed, socially sustainable and environmentally compatible tourism destination through achieving three forms of responsibilities which are termed as the “triple bottom line”- economic social and environmental responsibility. The pilot RT (Responsible Tourism) was launched at four destinations namely, Kovalam (Thiruvananthapuram), Kumarakom (Kottayam), Thekkady (Idukki) and Vythiri (Wayanadu). By realizing the benefits of Responsible tourism in 2012, this initiative was extended to three more destinations namely, Kumbalangi, Bekal and Ambalavayal.

Responsible tourism initiative of Kumarakom gained popularity in a short period and was acclaimed by the United Nations. Kumarakom is a part of Kuttanad, ‘the rice bowl of Kerala’ a backwater tourist village, with a cluster of little islands on the backdrop of the state’s largest fresh water lake – Vembanad. The presence of 4 K’s of Kumarakom makes Kumarakom popular i.e. Kayal (backwater), Kuyil (birds), Kandal (mangroves) and Kettuvalam (house boats). The Government of Kerala in the year 2005 declared Kumarakom as a Special Tourism Zone (STZ), and subsequently declared as a pilot destination for Responsible tourism in the year 2007. Kumarakom spells out the successful story of implementing RT initiatives and became a model destination for implementation of Responsible tourism initiatives. Responsible Tourism model at Kumarakom bagged the biggest international recognition when it was conferred the top United Nations Award, UNWTO Ulysses Award, for Innovation in Public Policy and Governance in 2013. Thirteen out of eighteen resorts operating at Kumarakom are classified under the Responsible tourism classification scheme introduced by the Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala; this shows the wide acceptance of Responsible tourism by stakeholders. The Responsible tourism initiative in Kumarakom won numerous awards and recognitions in a short span of time which are listed below

Table No. 1**Awards and Recognitions**

Sl. No.	Award	Year	Category
1	National Tourism Award	2007-08	Best Responsible Tourism Project
2	National Tourism Award	2008-09	Best Responsible Tourism Project
3	PATA Grand Award	2011	Environment
4	National Tourism Award	2011-12	Best Rural Tourism Project
5	National Tourism Award	2012-13	Best Civic Management of Tourism Development
6	UNWTO Ulysses Award	2013	Innovation in Public Policy and Governance
7	PATA Gold Award	2014	Corporate Social Responsibility

Source: www.keralatourism.org

Women and women entrepreneurs in community participation

Before the emergence of tourism in Kumarakom, the major economic activities of the local community were agriculture and fishing. With the advent of tourism in Kumarakom, the infrastructural development for tourism threatened the local community as they were dependent on agriculture and fishing for their livelihood. Paddy fields and other cultivable land was converted to dry land for the construction of hotels, resorts, restaurants and other tourism supporting infrastructures. This led the local community to shift their income generation from agriculture and fishing to building construction and related activities. The local community got jobs on construction sites and once the establishments got functional, the local community was deprived of employment and tourism benefits as the industry requires skilled and trained manpower.

Due to the lack of skilled and trained manpower in the local community, tourism establishments procured manpower from outside Kumarakom. This threatened the locals as they lost income and employment. The whole community was driven towards poverty and unemployment. The benefits of tourism were in the hands of private entrepreneurs who ran tourism business in and around Kumarakom. Agriculture and fishing were hard because of wet land conversion, lack of access to lake and the disturbance caused to house boats plying over Vembanad lake. The governments' decision of implementing Responsible tourism in Kumarakom motivated the local rural women and their association to be a part of tourism and its development. The rural women and their association exploited the opportunity by undertaking and initiating various activities and tasks for the implementation of Responsible tourism.

Rural women in association with Kudumbashree, responsible tourism cell, and the Department of tourism played a massive role in implementing and practicing responsible tourism as the benefits directly goes to the local community. This initiative taken by a group of women has led to the empowerment of women in the local community and molded various women entrepreneurs. This initiative mobilized the maximum benefits of tourism

to the local community by which the economy is preserved by tackling the severe threat of poverty and unemployment.

The various initiatives of rural women and their association in the initial days were in the form of conducting surveys in tourism establishments such as hotels, homestays and resorts to understand the demand for fruits, vegetables, grains, livestock's, milk and milk products items to prepare a demand calendar for the entire year and started cultivating the fruits and vegetables in homestead farms and other unused lands. Fulfilling the recruitments of tourism industry by local procurement, preserving and promoting the local art and culture, environmental protection through waste management, running awareness campaigns, Mangrove regeneration program etc. are some of appreciable activities in this initiative. The women group motivated and encouraged the local community to get involved and be part of tourism by providing necessary supports, training and awareness in association with Kerala Institute of Travel and Tourism Studies (KITTS) and Responsible tourism cell. Various women and their association became entrepreneurs by establishing ventures like shops, restaurants, and other supporting facilities to tourism.

Triple bottom line responsibilities

The state level responsible tourism committee (SLRTC) and district level responsible tourism committee (DLRTC) made an earnest effort in transforming Kumarakom into a responsible tourism destination. The enthusiastic voluntary initiative taken by the rural local women and women entrepreneurs in implementing responsible tourism is vital. By adhering various responsibilities the gender group was able to transform Kumarakom into a socioeconomic and environmental sustainable tourism destination. The various triple bottom line responsibilities underlined by Responsible tourism are mentioned below;

Economic responsibility

The primary focus of RT is the economic enhancement by tourism through developing ventures, community development, poverty eradication, unemployment abolition, etc. **The economic responsibility observed by Kudumbashree addressed the economic concerns of the local community, mainly the poor with the active support of tourism stakeholders.** Kudumbashree in association with Panchayat, Tourism department and Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies (KITTS) established a link between the local farmers and hotels to create a demand calendar which showcases demand for items in each season to enhance production. This initiative enables and enhances farmers and local producers who found it difficult to access the market to sell their produce. Kudumbashree also motivated the families below poverty line having land to cultivate fruits and vegetables needed for the hotels by providing seeds and fertilizers. The regular of supply, price, quality, quantity etc. were the various issues confronted by the farmers and the producers. Price committee, quality committee, agreement of supply etc. were made in association with industry and experts to address these issues.

The Kudumbashree units joining hands with the RT program started paddy cultivation in around 300 acres and produced 3825 quintal of paddy. They also contributed to the ecological sustainability of the area by spinning the uncultivated land into cultivable land.

Kudumbashree members runs a shop named 'Samrudhi' to ensure timely supply of vegetables to the hotels and resorts. Here the vegetables and fruits which are produced by the local community were supplied to the hotels to enhance local procurement and to avoid delay and shortage in supply. Samrudhi is accessible to the local community if the products are not fully sold out to the hotels. The procurement details of Samrudhi shop is mentioned in the below table;

Table 2**Samrudhi Procurement Details**

Year	Amount in INR
2011	5,20,445/-
2012	36,45,784/-
2013	39,78,145/-
2014	32,45,781/-
Total	113,90,155/-

Source: Field survey

TEN Kudumbashree members came forward as entrepreneurs by establishing an ethnic food restaurant, named 'Samrudhi Ethnic Food Restaurant' in the year 2011. The members got trained in food and beverages service, production and housekeeping from responsible tourism cell to manage the establishment. This serve as the major eating point for tourists, tourists' taxi drivers, hotel Staff, as the food is reasonably priced. 80% of the crops, vegetables, fruits, fish, poultry etc. needed for the restaurant is locally produced and procured to sustain economic stability. The revenue of Samrudhi Ethnic Restaurant is mentioned below;

Table 3**Samrudhi Ethnic Restaurant Revenue**

Year	Amount in INR
2011	1,30,000/-
2012	9,79,434/-
2013	9,22,869/-
2014	4,62,246/-
Total	29,95,549

Source: Field survey

Village life experience (VLE) packages is another initiative where tourists are provided with an opportunity to visit and experience the rural life of the poor households. Tourists enjoy/experience coconut leaf weaving, screw pine weaving, coir making, mat making, souvenir making, cow rearing, broom stick making country boat ride, fish farming, vegetable/ fruit farming, paddy fields, duck farming, toddy tapping, coconut climbing etc. The revenue gained by the VLE package is mentioned below;

Table 4**VLE Revenue**

Year	No of Tourist Visited	Amount in INR
2011	147	1,07,000/-
2012	219	1,80,250/-
2013	167	1,52,000/-
2014	269	2,74,050/-
Total	802	7,13,350

Source: Field survey

Responsible tourism identified and encouraged the local community skilled in souvenir making and other art works and gave an opportunity to sell the art works to the tourists visiting Kumarakom. Various local communities came forward as entrepreneurs by setting curios shops and souvenir making units, with the increase in demand.

Responsible tourism identified and encouraged the local community skilled in souvenir making and other art works and gave an opportunity to sell the art works to the tourists visiting Kumarakom. Various local communities came forward as entrepreneurs by setting curios shops and souvenir making units, with the increase in demand.

Social responsibility

Social responsibility of Responsible tourism initiative is to address the socio-cultural impacts of tourism that affect the society where tourism flourishes. RT initiative in Kumarakom with the support of Kudumbashree took efforts to protect and sustain the local art, culture, tradition, festivals, rituals etc. of the destination. Women's and children's cultural groups were formed under the banner Suvarna Cultural Group to perform traditional art forms like "Thiruvathira", "Kolkali", "Singari Melam" etc. and tie up with hotels for performance.

Responsible tourism initiatives organizes various skill development and capacity building programs to the local community including housekeeping, food and beverages serving and production, guides training, ethnic food production, souvenir production, fish farming, agriculture etc.

Environmental responsibility

The most important tourism element in a destination like Kumarakom is its natural attraction and a clean and healthy environment. Kudumbashree undertake various initiatives to accomplish the environmental responsibility. The Kudumbashree develop a cleaning group with its members named "Parisarasevikass" for the collection of waste from places and to treat the waste in the natural way. Kudumbashree's role was immense in implementation of the campaign "Zero Waste Kumarakom". Kudumbashree trains women's on vermin compost so that biodegradable wastes can be treated at the source itself. The outcome of the vermin compost is supplied to home shed farmers for their kitchen garden. By anticipating the severe threat of plastics, Samrudhi stops the use of plastics and promote bags and sacks made out of paper and cloth.

Another landmark initiative by Kudumbashree is the Mangrove Regeneration Program named "Kandalammachi", where Kudumbashree units plants mangroves in public places near water bodies. Kudumbashree units convert 55 acres of fallow land into good harvested paddy field. After being aware about the consequences about pesticides and chemicals in cultivation, Kudumbashree controlled the usage of pesticides and fertilizers in their farm.

Kudumbashree and RT initiatives jointly identified the unused ponds and canals for fish farming and lotus cultivation. The harvested fish and lotus is supplied to the hotels and Resort kitchens and for decorating purpose. The survey conducted by kudumbashree to identify new birds reserves other than Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary has identified four new bird reserves areas namely Kaipuzhamuttu, ThollayiramKayal, Narakathara and Mooleppadam. Bird species in these areas were identified and documented by the group of rural women associated by Kudumbashree.

Conclusion

Responsible tourism initiatives enable the rural women to be self-reliant and moulds several social entrepreneurs in addressing social issues through community participation. The rural women and women entrepreneurs played a massive role in transforming Kumarakom into a Responsible tourism destination by fulfilling its responsibility towards the economy, society and environment. The successful implementation of responsible tourism was a stepping stone for a leading female oriented, community-based, women-empowering venture. This form of tourism as a model has to be implemented in more destinations so as to attain a balanced social development, where the benefit of tourism directly goes to the local community. This could encourage the rural women for self-empowerment, leadership, socio-economic development and entrepreneurship.

REFERENCE

1. Beeton, S. (2006). *Community development through tourism*. Collingwood VIC: Landlinks.
2. Chettiparamba A. and Kokkranikkal, J. (2012) Responsible tourism and sustainability: the case of Kumarakom in Kerala, India. *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*, 4 (3). pp. 302-326.
3. Goodwin Harold. (2011) *Taking Responsibility For Tourism*. UK, Oxford: Goodfellow Publishers Limited.
4. Hall, D and Richards, G. (2000) *Tourism and sustainable community development*. London: Routledge.
5. <http://know.unwto.org/content/responsible-tourism-project-kumarakom-department-tourism-government-kerala> retrieved on 22/02/2019
6. <http://www.backwaterripples.com/another-feather-in-the-cap-for-kumarakom-responsible-tourism-project/> retrieved on 22/02/2019
7. <http://www.keralatourismwatch.org/node/87> retrieved on 15/11/2018
8. <http://www.kudumbashree.org/index.php?q=resptourism>, retrieved on 22/02/2019
9. <http://www.rtkerala.com/kumarakom.php>, retrieved on 16/02/2019
10. <https://www.keralatourism.org/kumarakom/kumarakom-responsible-tourism.php> retrieved on 22/02/2019
11. <https://www.keralatourism.org/rt-responsible-tourism-kumarakom.php> retrieved on 22/02/2019
12. KITTS. (2013) *Responsible Tourism Initiatives Of Kerala A Case Study On Kumarakom*. Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies.

13. Liburd, J.J. (2004) NGOs in Tourism and Preservation – Democratic accountability and Sustainability in question. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 29(2). pp 105-110.
14. Management with Local Communities. *World Bank*. WWF. USAID. Washington D.C.
15. Vijayakumar, Dr. B., B.R. Saroop Roy. (2011) *Tourism And Livelihood Selected Experiences From Kerala*, Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies.
16. Vijayakumar, Dr. B., Roopesk Kumar K. (2013). *Utharavadhithuva Tourism Enthu? Engana?* Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies.
17. Das y. Shoby (2014), *Responsible Tourism in Kerala: Issues and strategies*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Kerala.
18. Binu R. 2008, *Ecotourism Marketing – A Strategic Approach*, Ph. D. Thesis in Management, University of Kerala.
19. Ahamed Dr. S. 2007, *Socio-Cultural Effects of Tourism in Developing Economies*, Review of Social Sciences, Kerala Academy of Social Sciences, 4 (10) pp 45-52.
20. Thampi Santhosh P. 2002, *Ecotourism Marketing with Reference to Kerala*, Ph. D. Thesis in Management, University of Kerala.
21. Zaei Mansour Esmail and Zaei Mahin Esmail, (2013), The Impact of Tourism Industry on Host Community, *European Journal of Hospitality and Research*, 1(2). pp 12-21
22. Fency P.S. 2008, *Socio-Cultural and Environmental impact of Tourism in Kerala*, Ph. D. Thesis in Sociology, University of Kerala
23. Sugathan Vinod C. 2014, *Socio-Economic Impact of Sustainable Tourism on Local Economy*, Ph. D. thesis, University of Kerala
24. Madhu R. 2013, *A study on Marketing of Backwater Tourism in Kerala*, Ph. D. Thesis, Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswathi Viswamaha Vidyakya, Kanchipuram
25. Shaji B.P. 2014, *Management of Nature Based Tourism Destination in Kerala*, Review of Social Sciences, Kerala Academy of Social Sciences, XV (2). Pp 83-89.
26. Vijayan J. 2007, *Tourism Development and Involvement of Local People at Destination*, Ph. D. Thesis in Commerce, University of Kerala.
27. Basheer, A. 2012, *Environmental Impacts of the Tourism Industry in Kerala*, Ph. D. Thesis in Commerce, University of Kerala