COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MANIPUR

AshaThokchom
G. P. Women's College, Imphal

Abstract

Community based tourism is tourism in which local residents (often rural, poor and economically marginalized) invite tourists to visit their communities with the provision of overnight accommodation. The residents earn income as land managers, entrepreneurs, service and produce providers, and employees. At least part of the tourist income is set aside for projects which provide benefits to the community as a whole. When we come to 'Community participation' it refers to a form of voluntary action in which individuals take up the responsibilities of citizenship. Community participation is an educational and empowering process. People cooperate with those able to assist them, and identify problems and needs for mutual concerns. The term 'community' or 'host community', in the context of tourism, refers to a group of people living in the same locality, or tourism destination. In the Northeast Region (NER) of India in general and Manipur in particular the concept of community participation in tourism development is not widely prevalent and is in infancy stage. In this backdrop the paper adopt a hypothesis that Community based tourism is a factor for maximizing the socio-economic benefit of the community and growth of tourism industry in the state. It also looks into the aspect of how different communities in Manipur can participate in tourism development.

Key words : *Community participation, Community based tourism, host community*

Situated strategically on the extreme Northeastern frontier of India bordering Burma (Myanmar), Manipur has been through the ages the meeting ground of the people and civilizations from the east and the west, a sort of melting pot of the Indo-Aryan and Mongoloid races and their cultures. In the ancient period, Manipur experienced waves after waves of traders, invaders and colonizers because of its strategic location. Being located on the international route by which people from the Indian sub continent could reach the ASEAN countries. The state of Manipur comprise of 9 districts. They are Bishnupur, Chandel, Churachandpur, Imphal-West, Imphal-East, Senapati, Tamenglong, Thoubal and Ukhrul. With total population of 23,88,634(census 2001) and 22,327 sq. km. in area the State is divided into two distinct spaces. In the centre there is a valley of 2,238 sq. km. (10 per cent of the total) surrounded by hills stretching from the northern to the southern direction. The hills constitute 20089 sq. km. (90 % of the total). The valley is inhabited mostly by the Meitei and in the hills by the Naga and Kuki tribes. In many literatures- colonial ethnography, local history and travelogues,this tiny state is describe as a land of green valleys, blue hills and a mosaic of a rich cultural heritage. This means that in both the valley and hill areas there are important tourist centre and historical sites which we cannot mentioned all in this paper. Among the abundant endowments, nature has gifted Manipur, the brow-antlered deer- Sangai, the Siroy Lily and the Dzuko Lily are sui generis- which are not available anywhere else in the world. All these are only waiting for the tourists to come and be seen. The potentiality of tourism that could be developed as the most profitable industry in the state is higher than that of any other normal industry. Another aspect is that in every historical sites and tourist centre we found a history of ethnic relations- the story of emotional relationship between the three ethnic communities i.e. the Meitei, Kuki and Naga. But unfortunately due to the politics of ethnicity in the modern world the underlying history of the sites were forgotten. In a nutshell its significance has almost lost. We found very less domestic tourist and the infrastructures surrounding it were in shambles. No social interaction and no gathering. As a result the chasm between the ethnic communities increases day by day. However in our in depth study and interaction with local communities we found the prospect of tourism are still in plenty.

The local communities respond that due to political problem social interaction among the communities is widening. But the feeling of oneness in their mind still prevails. The hospitality and tolerance that make essential fabrics of the Manipuri society have not lost. Manipuri people don't have the nature to ill-treat their guests and make them victims of circumstances the like of which we had seen in Jammu and Kashmir. In this situation community based tourism will play a vital role in bringingthe growth of tourism industryas well as bringing communal harmony in the state. People know that through tourism a community can earn income of their own, but the real concept of community participation in tourism development is not aware among the people of the state. In order to implement this system we need to impart education on tourism development. Therefore in this regard the role of state authority that is Tourism Department is very important. In recent past we have seen tourism festivals known as 'Sangai festivals' in Manipur being organized every year but lack the participation of communities from deferent part of the state. Similarly, in our study of other NER we hardly found community participating in tourism development. As a reason of this we used NER and Manipur synonymously in this paper. However such practice has started gradually in the state of Nagaland and Sikkim and it is known as 'village tourism'. For instance, in Sikkim, the idea of village tourism is that every villager should construct two extra rooms to accommodate tourists. The tourists, in their turn, can have the taste of rich cultural tradition that the state offers. This will also economically benefit the average Sikkimese, especially the rural population. In general most of the Northeastern states severely lacks the wherewithal for building up infrastructure and creating a pool of well-trained personnel. Most of the investment and technical assistance essential for the development of tourism in the developing countries come from outside sources –multinational firms, foreign governments, and international financial institutions. The tourism industry is controlled either directly through their local elite agents for the benefit of outsiders. There has been no participation by and consultation of the local people in decision- making. Tourists have minimum contact with the local people and the locals do not share the wealth and income tourism generates. Tourism is isolated from the local economy; obviating any

linkage tourism may have with other sectors. The locals are thus alienated from the development and benefits of tourism. There are well-documented evidences of local people having only a little or no say in the development of tourism in their locality.

Concepts of 'Community Participation' in Tourism Development : Collective action includes planning, management, and control of local resources for the solution of the common problems and materialization of common needs. In this sense community participation involves a shift of power from the ruling elitist decision-making group to the common man who had been traditionally kept out of the power ambit. Thus, community participation may be regarded as a tool to readjust the balance of power. It exemplifies the reassertion of the community views against the idea of centralized decision-making as the developer of local communities. Participatory experience of the people in the process of development has become the inspiration for community participation in tourism development process. Community participation in tourism development process can thus be construed as an offshoot of community participation in the development process. This concept is supported by the views of many scholars in the following way. Inskeep[1] has pointed out that host communities must have a voice in shaping their future as a matter of right. He has called for the maximum involvement of the local community to maximize socio-economic benefits of tourism for the community. Woodlet[2] has argued that "a community based approach to tourism development is a prerequisite to sustainability". Ryan and Montgomery[3] have stressed that "communities need only be educated about the benefits of tourism, and that their involvement in good visitor management techniques will actually solve problems". A contented host community is the strongest base for a thriving tourism industry. If that condition is obtained, the facilities built up by the tourism industry will be beneficial both for the host and the guest. Further believe that community participation is a tool to solve major problems of developing countries: achieving a more equitable distribution of benefits of tourism and discouraging undemocratic decision-making. Thus from the above concept and definition we can infer that the most basic requirement for the development of tourism is the tolerance of residents at destinations towards tourists. Community participation alone can create a favourable attitudinal change among the locals towards tourists at the destinations. Resident-tolerance will come spontaneously and gradually acquire strength if opportunities are provided from the very start for active participation of the local people in the ownership and operation of tourist facilities. This inevitably calls for conscious and meticulous planning of tourism. Here again Murphy[4] has emphasized a planning strategy that focuses on identifying the host community's goals and desires for and capacity to absorb tourists. He stresses that each community must have the freedom to identify its own goals and pursue tourism to the extent that it satisfies local needs. This style of planning recognizes that social and environmental considerations need be included in planning and that tourism should serve both tourists and local residents. If local people are not involved in the process, the implementation of even the most well-planned and well-meaning programs will be altered by those very people. Furthermore, tourism is a complex domain where the solution of issues hinges on the interplay of various stakeholders such as the public sector, private sector and organizations, and environmental activists. No single individual or group can, by acting alone, resolve tourism prob-

lems. Hence planning of community-based tourism development must recognize and include the interests and views of the various stakeholders involved in decision-making. However despite the above theoretical insights certain limitation of community participation in tourism development can be analyzed. The limitations may be analyzed under three headings: Limitations at the operational level, Structural limitations, and Cultural limitations.

Limitations at the operational level : This limitation level include the excess of centralization of public administration of tourism development, lack of coordination between parties involved, and lack of information made available to the local people of tourist destination.

Structural limitations : This type is found in many developing countries where community participation seems to be problematic due to structural constraints associated with institutional power structures, and legislative and economic systems.

Cultural limitations : There are some cultural factors that function as obstacles to the emergence and application of participatory tourism development approach: limited capacity of the poor locals, and apathy and level of awareness in the local community. The above mentioned limitations also have its roots in the NER in general and Manipur in particular because of the ethnic plurality in the region. Despite such constraints we can draw the following points which may function as policy implications for participatory tourism development approach in NER: Opportunities for local people to take part in decision-making process, Decentralization of the administrative system, Avoid the system of clientelism. Engage local social organizations/institutions/NGOs in tourism development, Respect the cultural attitudes of local communities

Create opportunities for the local people to take part in decision-making process : We can look community involvement in tourism from two perspectives- in the decision-making process and in the benefits of tourism development. Community participation in tourism development in many of the Northeastern stateshas been contemplated as a means of conferring economic benefits through the creation of employment or through the opening up of small-scale business ventures. It has seldom been recognized as creating opportunities for local people to have a voice in the decision-making process in tourism development. The face of the matter is that without the local people having a say in the decision-making process, it is very difficult for them to get adequate benefits from tourism development. Thus the opportunity for taking part in the decision-making process is a precondition for sharing economic benefits. It isalso pointed out that as tourism becomes very popular, outside capital flows on a large scale into the destination, alienating and ultimately proletarianising the locals. It is therefore imperative that measures must be taken in the initial stage itself for empowering the local people to keep control over tourism development.

Decentralization of the administrative system : The administrative system and planning activities in NER are highly centralized with little or no space for democratic citizen participation. Obviously, community participation requires decentralization of public administration. However, for participation to be meaningful, decentralization must be accompanied by a conscious and deliberate action for granting autonomy to local bodies. Local autonomy enables communities to bring to light the possibilities of exercising choice and thereby acquire the capability in handling their own development. Hence, local governments should be reorganized

to defend, protect, and reflect concerns and interests of local people in their administrative territories. Additional financial resources should be made available to the local authorities for initiating and operating community development projects and organizing participatory activities. In other words, there must be an explicit and adequate financial commitment to community involvement in tourism development. Care must be taken to see that the reorganization and empowerment of local governments do not lead to a transfer of power to the traditional local elites, the self- willed local barons. For such transfers will only worsen the conditions of the weaker and disadvantaged sections of the local population. Hence new measures must be designed and implemented to ensure equal treatment of all residents. The decentralized public administration structure should also incorporate special education and training programs to enable the locals to become involved in the tourism development process as entrepreneurs and employees. As part of this educational and training programs free consultancy services should be made available to tourism-related and other small business in tourist destinations. Moreover, tourism development workers should be hired to work with the locals to develop and market value-added

Avoid the system of clientelism : At present the socio-political, cultural and economic structures of NER have over-politicized the state, which has ushered in a patron-client relationship between politicians and elite business interests. The politicians at the helm of affairs have access to immense state resources which they hand out to their elite business clients at the expense of the majority. This system is call asclientelistic approach to development. If this system is prevalent the locals will be isolated from the affairs of tourism development. The only way to do away with clientelism is to establish a strong democratic state. The democratic state ultimately works against clientelism and makes it easier to utilize financial, fiscal, and educational instruments to enable people to involve in tourism development.

Engage local social organizations/institutions/NGOs in tourism development : The local social organizations may not always remain mute to their systematic alienation from tourism development. They may at times react, especially about the manner in which the benefits of tourism development are distributed. The dominant groups may view such reactions as revolutionary ideological movements which may threaten the very existence of the tourism industry. This possibility of misunderstanding may inflict a sense of despondency and fear in the community leaders and the communities themselves. This results in frustration which holds back the locals from expressing their opinions on matters relating to tourism development. Here external agencies such as the NGOs and civil societies can playa critical role because they are closer to the people and therefore understand them better. They are good institutional tool to empower host communities. They can effectively use the various educational, organizational, financial, socio-cultural, psychological, and political means to move towards a more participatory tourism development approach. According to Desai, the NGOs have two functions in this context- service delivery and policy advocacy. Service delivery means to provide technical, legal, educational, and training services to the host communities for involving in the tourism development process. Policy advocacy means lobby-ing directly for policy changes. Usually the government channels incentives through institutions such as the municipalities, banks, and technical training schools. NGOs can assist communities to access these institutions and thus enjoy the various fiscal and financial incentivesprovided by the government for tourism. NGOs can also extend additional financial assistance, which will enable the local people to have a greater stake and influence in the development of tourism in their locality.

Respect the cultural attitudes of the host communities : Community involvement in local affairs, including tourism, is not uncommon among traditional communities. There are communities in which the provision for public involvement is engraved in their cultural mores. In this aspect we can look into the case of Solomon Islands by Sofield[5]. Heprovides us that the Island culture requires consultation with communities before embarking on any venture hitherto unknown to the locals. Any default on this count, the community will consider as an affront to its rights, and may lead to violent conflicts. The Solomon Islands episode underlines the necessity of prior knowledge and respect for the cultural attitudes of the host communities, if investors that is, non-local, in tourism development in the NER are to succeed. However, participatory culture is not a feature common to all communities. Cultural remoteness of communities to tourism is, in fact, a limitation to local participation in most of the northeastern states of India. The removal of cultural barriers to participatory tourism development is not a easy development effort; it requires a long educational process. Flexibility is an essential ingredient of any form of participatory tourism development approach.

Conclusion : Thus we viewed that the priority and most critical factor for ensuring community participation in Tourism is the involvement of host communities in the decision making process. A greater involvement of the community facilitates the success of planning at the destination level to make it a path for domestic and in turn for international Tourism.Thekey stakeholders in the Tourism Development process must bear this critical factor in mind while taking each and every initiative towards the development activities at the destinations. The three rationales- the planners, the administrators and the agencies of Tourism development in the NER should pay attention to provide adequate space for the content ofthecommunity responses and their perspectives that, in turn, pave the way for the successful implementation of Tourism programs at destinations.

References

I. Inskeep, (1991), *Tourism Planning: An intergranted and sustainable development approach,* New York, Van Nost Land Reinhold.

A. Woodley, (1993), Tourism and sustainable Development: The community perspec-tive. In *Tourism and Sustainable Development: Monitoring, Planning, Managing,* J. G Nelson, G Wall, and R. Butler, eds., Department of Geography, Canada, University of Waterloo, P. 137.

C. Ryan, and D. Montgomery (1994), *Attitude of Blackwell Resident to Tourism and Issues in Community Responsive Tourism, Tourism Management,* Vol.I5(5), P.369.

P.E Murphy (198S), *Tourism: A Community Approach,* New York and London, Methuen, P165.

Trevor H. B. Sofield, (2003), Empowerment for Sustainable Tourism Development, Elsevier Science Ltd The Boulevard, Langford Lane, Kidlington, Oxford OX5 IUG, UK.P13.