Impact of Tourism on Community Development and Sustainability in Maredumilli, East Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh–A Case Study

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Abstract

Tourism is one of the growing industry in Andhra Pradesh. Its high growth and development rates, considerable amount of employment generation, infrastructure development actively affecting various sectors of economy which positively contributing to the social and economic development of the state.

There are various issues to be taken into consideration regarding the sustainability of tourism in the state in the long term. Tourism impacts in Maredumilli, East Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh are widely distributed in terms of economic, social and environmental/physical aspects. In addition there are impacts on population structure, transformation of forms and types of occupations, transformation of values, influence on traditional lifestyle, and modification of consumption patterns, and benefits to tourists.

Thus there is need to develop the sustainability of tourism impacts for which the synchronized efforts of tourism stakeholders is required.

This paper studies the perception and opinion of tourism and its influence on various sections of people in Maredumilli and adjoining areas. This paper then identifies the emergent need of stakeholder’s synchronization for sustainable tourism development.

Keywords: Sustainability, Maredumilli, Tourism influence, Andhra Pradesh Tourism.
1. Introduction
In general, Community Based Ecotourism (CBET) is tourism that is managed by the community for the tourist destinations. With general tourism, tourist visits are often marketed and organised by private travel companies and government protected areas and the bulk of the profits go to the private companies and government enterprises. In contrast, CBET is managed and run by the community itself, management decisions are made by local people and profits directly go to the community. Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of the present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing the opportunity for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled, while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems (World Tourism Organization).

Andhra Pradesh is a southern state of India that has been bountifully endowed by nature – in the form of hills and valleys of the Eastern Ghats. The state has a population of about 80 million, of which 7% population is of tribes who live in forest tracts. The state has a long coastline of close to 1,000 kilometers. It has immense natural resources in the form of five major rivers and dense tracts of forests. The economy is primarily agrarian, with more than 65% of people living in villages. Nevertheless, the cities are also vibrant, and the capital city of Hyderabad is an international hub for IT, biotech, manufacturing and knowledge-based activities. The state has rich cultural and religious traditions, and also a strong Buddhist heritage. Because of the presence of some of the holiest shrines, the state receives the largest number of domestic tourists in the state. Andhra Pradesh is encouraging community-based eco-tourism in convergence with various stakeholders from the government departments and the community. The Forest Department under their Community Forest Management Program supports the initiative by providing opportunities for jungle walks, forest retreats, wildlife tourism, bird watching and trekking.

2. Objectives of the Study
Although there is phenomenal growth in Indian Tourism, but rural tourism was never given any priority. The concept of rural tourism has a noble cause, it is another kind of sustainable tourism that exploits resources in rural regions, causes little or no harmful impact, and generates increasing benefits to rural areas in terms of rural productivity, employment, improved distribution of wealth, conservation of the rural environment and culture, local people's involvement, and a suitable way of adapting traditional beliefs and values to modern times. Not much study has been done in India to assess the potential of rural tourism, the related challenges and opportunities. In this backdrop the present exercise attempts to attain the following objectives during the course of research.
The main aim of the study is to measure the potential of rural tourism in India. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. To understand the potential of rural tourism and community based development particularly,
2. To find out the impact of rural tourism to our society.
3. To identify the challenges and opportunities in community based tourism activities and its impact on the society and what is it contributing for various developments within Maredumilli, East Godavari, Andhra Pradesh
4. To identify the essential elements for development of sustainable and community based rural tourism.

3. Methodology
The present study has been conducted in Maredumilli and adjoining areas of East and West Godavari districts of Andhra Pradesh.

The sample respondents comprising both tourists from different socio-economic category of society. The empirical data had been collected to understand the Impact assessment of community based sustainable tourism on the society and to evaluate and analyze its positive and negative implications on the society. The survey was conducted using the convenient sampling method. Primary data was collected from 200 respondents by administering them a detailed questionnaire. The secondary data was collected from different sources. Simple statistical tools are used to analyze the collected data.

4. Research Design
Two basic techniques are used for research, i.e., observation method and survey method. The data collection instruments were developed to systematize the collection of data and to ensure that all the respondents are asked the same questions and in the same order. A sample of 200 respondents was contacted in Maredumilli and adjoining areas of East and West Godavari, and Vizag. The questionnaires were developed with open-ended and close-ended questions. The questionnaire was personally administered with the respondents.

5. About the Community-based Eco-tourism Center at Maredumilli
The Maredumilli Forests of East Godavari District, which form one of the less disturbed forest tracts of Eastern Ghats, are endowed with rich biodiversity of flora and fauna and are home to important wildlife like the tiger, bison, panther, varieties of deer, birds and butterflies. This forest forms catchments for River “Godavari” and River “Shabari.” It is also home to a number of primitive tribes like Konda Reddy, Konda Koyas, Valmikies, Gonds, Nayaka Podus, etc.
The Maredumilli Community Conservation and Eco-tourism Area is situated on Maredumilli-Bhadrachalam Road, nearly four kilometers away from Maredumilli Village, in the midst of undisturbed Eastern Ghats, which are home to rich flora and fauna. The area has many streams flowing over the undulating rocks in the deep woods and any visitor can feel the thrilling experience by living in nature and visiting the primitive tribal habitations of Konda Reddys and knowing their way of life.

6. Management Structure
The eco-tourism project is managed by the local, indigenous tribal community (Konda Reddy) of Valamuru Somireddypalem and Addaraveedhi Forest Protection Committees, with the active support of the Forest Department. The project was successfully completed in a short span of time due to the commitment of the highly motivated community coupled with the timely financial assistance from the Andhra Pradesh Community Forest Management Project. This also provided a unique opportunity for the native ethnic community to spread the message of conservation to the masses and provide opportunity to enjoy the nature in its pristine glory.

Community-based Eco-tourism Center infrastructure was created by the Forest Department under the Community Forest Management Project. The operations at this center are totally managed by local community members comprising of tribal community of Konda Reddys. Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation provides marketing support and training of the tribes in hospitality-related activities like food and beverage service, housekeeping, guide services, etc.

7. Revenue Sharing
The Forest Department under the Community Forest Management Program has arrived at a revenue-sharing mechanism with the local tribal community. Guide service, food and beverage, housekeeping and security are undertaken by the community members. The above activities are packaged in such a way that the total revenue derived is apportioned between the maintenance of infrastructure and services rendered by the community. The amount for the services rendered is shared equally between the 30 tribal families of Valamuru Somireddypalem and Addaraveedhi Villages. The members from the 30 families divide the various activities by turns and manage the center, thereby providing a wholesome experience of living with nature to the tourist.

The highlight of this rural tourism center, located in the heart of Eastern Ghat forests, is the incident-free operations within the last four and a half years in the extremist-infested forest tracts of Andhra Pradesh. The convergence of the activities by different departments and total involvement of community has paved the way for successful operation of the rural eco-tourism center.

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8. Economic Benefits
The local tribal communities derive many economic and social benefits from this innovative project both directly and indirectly. These benefits can be listed as:
   i)  Revenue to the 30 local families involved in the tourism project that is additional to their routine earnings.
   ii) Direct employment for 30 families, including women, in one way or the other through the project.
   iii) Sale of tribal handicrafts made of bamboo.
   iv) Income from sales of forest products such as Honey, Gooseberry, Jackfruits and Toddy.
   v) Tips from visitors while performing tribal folk dances.

9. Forest Department Benefits
1) Effective protection of forest and wildlife with involvement of tribal communities through Forest Protection Committees.
2) Weaning away the tribal community from practicing shifting cultivation that is unsustainable and harmful to the environment.

10. Social Benefits
The local communities also get social benefits out of interaction with the visitors. As tourism activity increases in the area, the local people exhibit their indigenous traditional skills and disseminate these traditional knowledge systems to the visitors. The local tribes also get trained in interpreting the flora, especially the medicinal plants, as well as the habits and habitat of the wild fauna, traditional therapies and healing systems.
11. Social Change
The most significant development in the area is a total return to peace. This area was till recently a stronghold of left-wing guerilla extremists operating in Eastern Ghats forest tracts. People used to get scared even to drive through the forest, let alone stay there. Now, with the tribal community taking up the full responsibility of running the ecotourism center, there is an unbelievable change in the safety and security perspective of the tourists. The tourists have the opportunity to stay in the jungle that was once considered not safe. Jungle Star Eco-camp is now a sought-after destination for birdwatchers, trekkers, butterfly lovers, wildlife enthusiasts and people interested in jungle stays.

12. Marketing Initiatives
The Forest Department directly markets this rural tourism initiative through their state and district hierarchy. APTDC has developed extensive marketing initiatives through its Information and Reservation Centers. The destination is also marketed through the APTDC website and several other supporting materials, such as brochures, handouts, etc.

13. Conclusion
Community based sustainable Rural tourism has been a valuable vehicle to bring the ultimate rural stakeholders in touch with tourism sector to increase employment. In order to make this more meaningful, it is very important that the sustenance issues be discussed with the community before the start of the project and also aggressive marketing of the destinations be taken up with the local and international Tour Operators. Both short-term and long-term planning, implementing and monitoring are vital in avoiding damage to rural areas. Environmental management, local involvement, sound legislation, sustainable marketing, and realistic planning are crucial for development of community based sustainable rural tourism.

There is no doubt, that Maredumilli, with its natural flora and fauna and lush green forests a will be emerged as a popular rural tourist destination in India with the hospitality of the people here and with the taste of ethnic food of this region. More development in Maredumilli can be expected by the government involvement and participation to promote ethnic and sustainable rural tourism to ensure sustainable economic development and positive social change, which should elevate the hopes and living standards of the people of this region in all walks of life on one side and protecting the environment, culture & traditions, heritage and its natural flora and fauna.

CBET offers both an opportunity and threat to communities. If the management and capacity building of local communities are not done in parallel, opportunities will be lost and significant damage will be caused. Some of the problems observed are benefits going to a small group committees, environmental damage, sex tourism and
indigenous people becoming vulnerable. These are some of the issues where researchers has to be extra cautious and give some constructive methods and techniques to overcome these problems and thereby contributing for positive community based tourism and promotional activities in Maredumilli, East Godavari, Andhra Pradesh.

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