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Enterprising Rural Tourism for Sustainable Rural Development in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Diverse and fragmented socio-cultural and environmental fabrics of rural areas offer a number of tourism entrepreneurial opportunities in anticipating the diverse interest of tourists. The tourism enterprises embody different alternative tourism labels to encroach to rural areas and replace the conventional mass tourism. However, prevailing tourism, development and implementation in rural landscapes do not compliance with the sustainable development criteria. The main objective of the study is to investigate enormity of the rural tourism enterprises in conjunction with sustainable rural tourism development (SRTD) process empirically. This adapted the qualitative case study approach to interpret the natural settings of socially constructed world of rural Sri Lanka. Semi-structured interviews of key informants, direct observation of community, appraisal of artefacts and field notes during the interactions in the setting supported to enrich the empirical study. Deriving thick rich descriptions through triangulated analysis of factual interpretations from multiple sources informs that inappropriate initiations and lacks in integration of stakeholders and local resources restrain development and designing of rural tourism enterprises to anticipate sustainable development challenges in Sri Lanka. SRTD claims the rural tourism enterprises to have rural tourism resource inventory, appropriate rural tourism product development and designing while integrating, cooperating stakeholders and local resources. Ensuring SRTD envisages socio-community enterprises to contribute for sustainable rural development at large.

Keywords: Rural Tourism Enterprises, Rural Tourism Products, Integrative and Cooperative Tourism Development, Socio-community Enterprising, Rural Sustainability

JEL Classifications: M000

1. INTRODUCTION

Diverse and fragmented natural and human geography in rural areas envisage great potentials for tourism, nevertheless fragility and susceptibility nature of rural fabric is hesitant to accommodate large volume mass tourism. Special interest and active holiday have turned the rural areas into an important segment of tourism and recreation (Tribe et al., 2000). Lacher and Nepal (2010) comment that the alternative forms of tourism such as ecotourism and rural tourism attract many visitors into rural areas of developing countries. Tourism has started to spread into more remote and peripheral areas over the last few decades progressively and increasing attention has been given to assess the role and impacts of tourism in the development of those areas (Pearce, 2002).

Cánoves et al. (2004) noted that rural tourism development has taken place in different stages, initially as a social function, interlinking families, it was taken as an instrument for regional development, and finally as a product, it was commoditized due to demands from the tourists. Besides, natural and cultural resource endowment, location, competition, entrepreneurial activity, and institutional arrangements differentiate tourism development in rural areas (Gill, 1998). This encourages the industry to expand into more remote areas.

In any form of tourism, the quality of the products and services incline to meet tourists demand and expectation (Sharpley, 2002; de la Torre and Gutierrez, 2008). The form of rural sustainable tourism urges to match both rural resource base and expectation

of tourists. Therefore, rural tourism enterprises integrated with many rurally characterised attractions and resources. McClinchey and Carmichael (2010) claim better understanding on the values of rural resource, not just for urban or non-urban land use, but also for the tangible and intangible value of resources for tourism. Further, Reid (1998) claims that a greater concentration of effort is needed for regulating and protecting the resource base to maintain viable and sustainable rural tourism enterprises. The commendable role of tourism in rural development is revealed by the potentially strong linkage with many rural resources and the integration with local and regional economies in a complex manner to derive many developmental benefits (Saxena and Ilbery, 2008). Considering tourism as a development alternative, Hall and Jenkins (1998, p. 29) bring forth some significant characteristics of tourism in rural areas such as; stimulate local business and create employment opportunities. It is a recognised and understood factor in regional social and economic development. Enterprising rural tourism needs to be clearly positioned in terms of its contribution to the various components of sustainable rural development.

2. REVIEW OF EMERGING RURAL TOURISM IDEALS

In inventorying rural resources, OECD (1993) illustrates that rural areas have much to offer society as a whole, including rich social heritages, cohesive communities, beautiful landscape, clean air, and recreational assets. Besides, Dewailly (1998) describes a wide variety of rural heritage constituents that are significant resources. This conveniently symbolized as “art” and “folk” encompasses agriculture and artisan machines, tools, vehicles the traditional business together with domestic and recreational life of families and business people. Further, added with significant civil and religious events, story-telling (e.g. legends, folk-tales and evening rituals) and art performance. This also includes colloquial language and dialect, local music, trades which are in process of disappearing, and local cuisine. These are prominently appealing features in rural areas to increase the desire of local population and tourists. Although, commoditization of heritage poses a serious question with respect to authenticity and tourist experience, the perception of the tourists and the need of conservation engender the development of heritage tourism products in rural areas (Dewailly, 1998). Rural tourism enterprises tend to commodity natural and manmade rural resources into different types rural tourism products.

In delineating rural tourism enterprises, Nylander (2001) includes the definition of Finnish government for rural tourism that is customer-oriented tourism in the rural area, based on natural facilities and resources such as culture, nature, landscapes. And family and small scale entrepreneurship are prevalent. In addition, tourism initiatives in rural areas are augmented with a number of rural attributes (Nazir et al., 2014). Janiskee and Drews (1998) add community festivals and celebrations, whether small or large, simple or complex, their process and parades that attract a large number of residents and visitors. Hall and Macionis (1998) include visiting vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows. Oppermann (1998) suggests farms and farm based rural

life. Frochot (2005) signifies agricultural world and its way of life. OECD (1994) incorporates the romanticism of the rural scene. In encapsulating Keanfsey (2001) illustrates rural tourism as the container of traditional cultures, national identities, and authentic lifestyles with connotations of romantic simplicity and golden traditionality. The countryside comprises with a large number of tangible and intangible natural and man-made geographical resources as alive and none-alive to enrich rural tourism enterprises.

Enterprising of tourism in rural areas comprises of restoring and rebuilding disappeared historic and heritage phenomenon, while preserving existing rural tranquillity and unique socio culture. Subsequently, Long and Lane (2000) and McClinchey and Carmichael, (2010) have rediscovered the rural resources as capital for rural tourism industry and re-assess the value of tangible and intangible rural resources for rural tourism and rural sustainable development. Garrod et al. (2006) underlines that the word “Countryside Capital” invented by the Countryside Agency in UK and they converge the term with rural tourism in order to generate the capital from the rural area itself for tourism entrepreneurial development. Revitalizing this, McClinchey and Carmichael (2010) and Shah et al. (2013) argue the elements of countryside capital would be the essential components of rural tourism and quality of the rural tourism is determined by the quality of countryside capital. Garrod et al. (2006) point out that the countryside fabric encompasses with capital stock, managing the flow to and from the stock carefully would ensure the availability of the capital for rural businesses that can assemble and sell products like rural tourism. Janiskee and Drews (1998) recommend the rural community to re-image countryside to a new future for a larger and better tourist industry. This intends to copy a traditionally successful tourism concept (old idea in new setting), rides a new tourism trend (another setting for a new idea), or explore a new tourism concept (bold new idea).

Unlike enclavic conventional mass tourism development, enterprising tourism in rural area does not require massive and expensive constructions and infrastructure development. More often existing facilities are further improved or abandoned resources and facilities are restored to anticipate tourists with specific interests. tourism developers and suppliers have encountered a number of alternative tourism products (Scheyvens, 2002) that emerged as antithesis to conventional mass tourism (Weaver, 1991). These alternative approaches tend to protect and add more value for uniqueness and differences of countryside. In addition, provide a boost to the local economy (Gunn, 1979; Hill and Gibbons, 1994; Gilbert, 1989; Inskeep, 1994; Kinsley, 2000; Long et al., 1990; Fagence, 1991; Lew, 1991). Further, diversified demand helps to form alternative or green or soft or responsible tourism on a small scale, which is more favourable for sustainability (Stabler, 1997) with reference to the carrying capacity and participation of the local community directly as a mean to achieve sustainable development goals (Matarrita-Cascante et al., 2010). In contrast, Paje et al. (2001) criticise the prevailing alternative tourism as a new way of sustaining colonial dependency patterns due to domination of external agencies, such as tour operators, travel agents and urban based facility providers. Similarly, Butler (1990)

underlines that promoting and accepting of alternative tourism without clear understanding on the end result potentially be more harmful for a destination and population than no development or even limited mass tourism. Moreover, many authors such as Butler (1991); Scheyvens (2002); Liu (2003) argue that prevailing alternative tourism products do not contribute much for the desired goals of sustainable development, or those are just new labelling for the same old mass tourism or creating new ways to encroach and exploit unsoiled natural and human geography.

3. METHODOLOGY

Lack of published or unpublished data on the relevant case study claims this study to adopt qualitative methodology, which is meant to understand; how people interpret their experience, how they construct their world, and what meaning they attribute to their experience (Merriam, 2009). Thus, qualitative researches provide significant and valuable contribution to the knowledge base in the relevant fields (Dann et al., 1988). While case study as a pervasive or well established methodology in tourism research and study, researchers and scholars extensively use it (Beeton, 2005). The study incorporate purposive sampling (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2009), snow ball sampling (Miles and Huberman, 1994) and convenient sampling (Marshall, 1996) techniques to carry on in-depth semi-structured interviews (Yin, 2009), observation and focus group interviews (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 2009) with national tourism authority, five provincial tourism authorities (PTA) and three local level authorities together with 17 rural tourism operators and local communities nearby the tourism initiatives. In-depth analysis of factual interpretations from socially constructed world of rural Sri Lanka multiple realities. Triangulation of data collection techniques and sources of data from different rural tourism stakeholders illuminate the gap between ideal and realities of rural tourism enterprising in achieving sustainable rural development's goals.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Several authors such as (de la Torre and Gutierrez, 2008; Dewailly, 1998; Nylander; 2001, Sharpley, 2002) remark the significance of rural tourism product designing, marketing and consumption in ensuring sustainable rural tourism enterprising. OECD (1994) describes the huge diverse resource potentiality for rural tourism product development. In Sri Lanka also Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) intervention after the tsunami motivated the diverse groups to work together to devise new products and marketing strategies (Calgaro and Cochrane, 2009). When I inquired about tourism product development and marketing Interviewee #1 (personal communication, 2012) stated;

“Always matching the product depends on the market. When we look at Indian market, we know what Indians are looking for, through that we started to promote MICE tourism then the religious tourism. Second one is the UK market, when we look at UK we promote honeymoon destinations, adventure tourism we have done both. Then we look at the German market, basically done with beach tourism, so based on that only we actually create.”

His statement illuminates that Sri Lanka holds a market focus tourism enterprises rather than concerning sustainability. It does not take any rural resources into consideration of in defining clearly rural tourism product of Sri Lanka. Adding to this, Interviewee #2 (personal communication, 2012) said “when you talk about tourism in the Central province, still tourism in the central province depends on mass tourism. But we are not closer to sustainable tourism, which is the concept accepted by the contemporary world.” Still in Sri Lanka tourism embraces with the same pattern of product development and marketing oriented conventional mass tourism. In the personal communication (2012) Interviewee #3 mentioned “every time they try to promote Kurunegala, which is the only district that possesses four historical kingdoms. But we saw that as a failure, always we are second to Anuradhapura, Polannaruwa and Kandy in heritage and historical sites.” This shows the failure of traditional stereo type tourism enterprising. Direct observation in the rural tourism sites in Kurunegala districts also confirms this through the absence of any tourist in the sites during my investigation. However, a large volume of tourists cross Kurunegala city every day, since it is located between Colombo and other major tourist sites such as Polannaruwa, Anuradhapura and Trincomalee.

In the central province also Interviewee #2 (personal communication, 2012) pointed out many places and stated that all these places practice mass tourism, which create many negative impacts. In commenting on the visits of domestic tourists Interviewee #4 (personal communication, 2012) pointed out that generally people spend 3-4 h and some people come in the morning stay till the evening, as there are many things to see here. During my interactions with community members confirm that the contribution from the domestic tourism also is very less, since they bring everything from outside even to cook and eat. During a personal interview (2012) Interviewee #5 spelled out the difficulty of including many tourist activities in village and lake adventure tour, due to short duration of conventional tourists' visit. He verified that there are many more things to offer in the village; still time constraint does not allow including anything. Adding to this Interviewee #2 (personal communication, 2012) stated;

“Most of the times Colombo based tourism organizations or tour guides only link tourism and natural resources or cultural heritage, but tourists expect something more than that. Tourists come here to enjoy or learn. However, organizations, from Colombo offer whatever they know. We know much about central province to offer many things from here.”

Although prevailing tourism structure encompasses many rural landscapes, it does not provide contented visit for tourists or benefits for rural communities. However, I could record the potential interest of PTAs and local community to develop some specific rural tourism products from different rural locations of Sri Lanka. Pertaining to this, Interviewee #3 (personal communication, 2012) elaborated;

“As development authority after studying, we want to make Wayamba as unique product in tourism industry of Sri Lanka. Sometimes may be in Asia, in Asia there is no any other place to see the cascade. We want to make like that,

but assistance and support we get for that, I don't need to tell you, you know the situation."

Rural areas possess diverse resources to offer a number of different tourism products from rural Sri Lanka. Rural tourism, because of the fragmented and small scale nature of the enterprises involved, is especially capable of exploiting individualistic market trends, although high quality selling and hospitality skills are needed (OECD, 1994). In the North-Central province also during a personal communication (2012) Interviewee #6 explained about the intervention in developing complete tourism villages, such as Thirappana, Horiwila, to promote rural tourism in collaboration with the community movements. Interviewee #7 also in his interview (2013) mentioned their interest to develop and sell rural tourism in Southern province beyond the sea concept. An outward bound tourism operator, Interviewee #8 in his personal communication (2012) conveyed his interest to diversify tourism (enterprising) into more rural adventures and relax holiday tourism incorporating rural community in the village. In Taiwan's rural tourism development embraces with two-pattern as entrepreneurial-centric and community-centric rural tourism (Chuang, 2011). Since I saw many name boards of tourism enterprises in rural areas with beautiful labels of alternative tourism such as eco-lodges, country holidays, nature's heaven, I could not avoid investigating about those places. In response, Interviewee #3 (personal communication, 2012) stated "there is no tourism sense, expecting only financial gain, not owned by the community (Jamil et al., 2014). In other parts of Sri Lanka also same things happen, in Sri Lanka there are owners or companies for rural tourism development, they are not really native community" (Jamil et al., 2014). At Meemure, Interviewee #9 (personal communication, 2013) pointed out "Sir, here there is a big tourist hotel, constructed by a foreigner (Sudu Mahaththaya), they have bought the land, which is to be taken over by the Forest Department for Knuckles, and however they have got it released it from the government." In addition, he showed me a popular route of a tourist trail, which is operated by a tour operator from Colombo. This factual information verifies that there are no any genuine rural tourism enterprise, operated by the community. Though there are a few rural tourism enterprises, such as Walawa Nadee, Heeloya, Diyakapilla, selling only short excursions. In fact, some villages such as Padavigampola, Seelogama, Walathawewa have initiated and developed the villages completely for tourism and recreation in rural areas, but still they are not merchandised to reach tourists.

Rural tourism should be initiated in rural landscapes by the rural community incorporation with other stake holders in rural areas. Verifying this, many authors such as Ali Pour et al. (2011); Ashley (2000); Dong et al. (2013); Randelli et al. (2011); Roberts and Hall (2001), describe that the rural tourism takes place within the socio-culture and environment of the rural community. This emphasizes that rural tourism should be owned and operated by rural stakeholders only. Development projects must be designed to help local institutions and residents to improve their ability to plan and manage their own environment; otherwise they will remain unresponsive to the underlying causes for environmental destruction (Wood, 2004. p. 6). When investigating rural tourism enterprises in this point of view, Interviewee #2 (personal

communication, 2012) states that although few organizations have started small projects here and there within the province, those are at preliminary level and negligible. Apparent rural tourism initiations in rural Sri Lanka are done by individuals as their own livelihood activity, since they can be small in scale and investment. In general, rural tourism-based enterprises are smaller and newer than other forms of economic activity (services, industry, and agriculture) in rural areas (Fleischer and Felsenstein, 2000). Usually, this is an attractive point for the individuals to initiate tourism in rural areas. This does not integrate broader local community or rural stakeholders. One of those prominent rural initiations is the homestay accommodation programmes which are highly patronized by SLTDA (Interviewee #1, personal communication, 2012). This initiation also intends to cater the needs of some individual community members and the accommodation need of tourists. It is not capable to empower a wider rural community or to anticipate the expectation of the rural tourists. In some rural villages sudden flow of tourism induce a community, a group, an individual or outsiders to utilize the opportunities. Relating this, Interviewee #10 (personal communication, 2013) described his beginning in rural tourism as;

"At present I involve in little bit of tourism due to domestics and international tourists' interest on the village. When tourists started to visit the village, people came here and took an effort to put up hotel. Then I thought to have touch with tourism and started at very small level as a simple village house I build the place and started providing facilities for the visitors at basic level. However, at the beginning I didn't have many tourists only a few known people visited. Sooner or later, through word of mouth became popular and a few tourists began to visit."

Circumstances enable individuals to involve in rural tourism in Sri Lanka, but this will not deliver the benefits for a wider society in the relevant village, causing unnecessary conflicts. My interaction at Meemure could reveal this, when some villagers started criticizing prevailing tourism operation of a villager. In some countries, the initiation for developing rural tourism was taken over by the government (Fleischer and Pizam, 1997). Revealing this, in Sri Lanka some rural tourism initiations are carried out by PTAs. Director planning, Sabaragamuwa Provincial Council stated "initially, we proposed to introduce homestay tourism programme for this village. From there we gathered 20 people and initiated this programme. Since then we continue the programme with various challenges, barriers and successes for the last 2 years" (Seelogama focus group discussion, 2012). In clarifying the way rural tourism initiations are carried out in the North-Western province, Interviewee #3 (personal communication, 2012) stated;

"We encourage the community to come up with their own proposal. We gather and instruct them, and then again obtain the proposal from them. Then it becomes their one, this happened in Panduwwasnuwara, they liked it very much and they found certain things, which they had used earlier from some other parts of the country and they brought a proposal to build up a museum."

He also mentioned that they were going to initiate Ayurveda and natures as competitive tourism products of the North-Western

province. In the North-Central province Interviewee #6 in her personal communication (2012) stated that they identified the potential places and they develop the proposals for the project, and they go to the community after the approval for the projects we received. During the Padavigampola focus group discussion (2013) CBTO the president and members confirmed that the community tourism project proposal was brought by Sabaragamuwa PTA, had an initial discussion and awareness programmes and started the physical development in the village. Without involving rural communities proposals are made by PTAs and initiated development process in the rural villages. This is a habitual practice in public fund utilization in rural development of Sri Lanka. In elucidating the disadvantages of routine practices Interviewee #7 (personal communication, 2013) commented;

“Yes, we also had a problem. We didn’t have a good communication with the community before the construction. In a way we are wrong. When it happened like this, different meanings and interpretations could have sent into the society by a person who is against the project due the road over through his land.”

Initiating rural tourism without rural community participation causes conflicts and disagreements among the rural areas. In some other villages rural tourism initiation has been taken place to ensure the sustainability of the primary projects of the NGOs. Prevalent initial projects were to minimize the environmental destruction or enhance organic agriculture, but the sustainability of these projects have claimed tourism as an alternative livelihood strategy, for example at Walaththawewa forest conservation project, at Heeloya organic agricultural project, and Rekawa and Ambalangoda coastal environmental conservation projects selected tourism to ensure the sustainability of the projects. However, factual interpretation of the respondents and observational facts of preliminary initiation of rural tourism in Sri Lanka elucidates that the majority of the initiations avert the integration of appropriate rural stakeholders and they are not purposively planned rural tourism initiatives. Even though PTA initiated certain projects, they have not been completely developed and marketed for the access of the potential tourists. Majority of rural tourism projects, which have been initiated by government and NGOs, are only considered as development projects and missing the entrepreneurial characteristics. Blackman et al. (2004) argue that successful rural tourism initiatives are under appropriate leaders, who are the champions capable to provide motivation and directions. Also they ensure necessary education and training for stakeholders, and mutual benefits for the stakeholders and the partners. In Sri Lanka also rural tourism initiatives, which had good entrepreneurial leadership, are still running successfully. One good example for it is the Walawa Nadee Ecotourism Initiative. In many other places, rural tourism is initiated by different names such as adventure tours, nature tours, village tours, but all these are short excursions into rural areas dealing with conventional tourists most of the times. Rural tourism enterprising in Sri Lanka includes varieties of rural natural and man-made resources to anticipate the tourists and hosts expectations. Yet, lack in product defining and designing, together with irregular development process infringes the integration of rural resources with tourism enterprises to ensure sustainable rural development.

5. CONCLUSION

Globally tourism has been recognized as a significant tool to regenerate socio-economy and ensure the sustainable development of peripheral and hinder regions, which comprise with majority of the world resource base. In ideal, rural tourism development through the integration of local resources and stakeholders while preserving and conserving natural and man-made resources determine the sustainable rural development. Naturalistic interpretations of socially constructed world of rural Sri Lanka elucidate that the reality of rural tourism development fails to anticipate the ideal of sustainable rural tourism development. As the entrepreneurship is the basic requirement to capitalize the resources and innovate viable products, poor enterprising of tourism in rural Sri Lanka curtails the capitalizing of rural resources into sustainable rural tourism products. Often inception of rural tourism enterprises are carried out not by the genuine rural stakeholders. Government and NGOs supported projects adopt top-bottom approach rather than entrepreneurship oriented bottom-up approach due to poor human and physical capacity of the rural community. Rural tourism enterprises also fail to integrate and cooperate with relevant rural stakeholders in enterprising rural tourism. Although rural Sri Lanka comprises with plentiful natural and man-made resources, prevailing rural tourism enterprises fails to incorporate and use sustainably. Lack in enterprising, poor cooperation of stakeholders and poor integration of rural resources curtail the innovation of sustainable rural tourism products in rural landscapes. This study envisage socio-community rural tourism enterprises to cooperate stakeholders and integrated rural resources holistically to produce sustainable rural tourism in rural tourism to ensure the sustainable rural development.

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