

Assessing the Effectiveness of Community Tourism Development Projects: With Special Reference to the Southern Province in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Community Based Tourism (CBT) has become popular as a tool for eradicating poverty and ensuring sustainable tourism. Therefore, several CBT projects were initiated to empower the communities in rural tourist destinations to start tourism businesses. The aim of this study is to examine the assistance provided by such CBT projects, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the projects in terms of achieving project goals and community goals. Ruhunu Tourism Bureau (RTB), one of the CBT empowerment projects that operate in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka, was selected for this study. Kanneliya and Viharahena tourism villages were selected as research sites. Mixed method approach was applied for this study. By using random sampling technique, 100 participants from each village were included in the sample. Additionally, 10 villagers from both villages, and 5 officers from this project were selected to get the real perception on the effectiveness of the project. Structured questionnaires and interviews were used for primary data collection. Community empowerment efforts were taken as the independent variable, and three dimensions, namely, financial assistance, capacity development and network building, were used to measure the degree of assistance. Project effectiveness was the dependent variable of this study, and two sub dimensions, namely, economic development and socio-cultural development, were used to measure the project effectiveness. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. Findings revealed that among the community empowerment efforts, financial assistance has had a significant impact on achieving project effectiveness. However, community expects further assistance to improve bio diversity, infrastructure, skill

development, and market connections to enhance tourism and socio-economic development in the area.

Keywords: *Community Empowerment, Community Tourism Development Projects, Economic and socio cultural development, Effectiveness, Southern Province*

1. Introduction

Community Based Tourism is used as a pro-poor strategy, mostly in the least developed and developing countries (Irshad, 2010). Therefore, CBT projects had been initiated in many rural tourist destinations in Sri Lanka, which were severely affected by poverty and war (Aslam & Wahidin, 2015). Employment creation, diversification of the local economy by creating more livelihood opportunities, local economic development ensuring sustainable tourism are some aims of such CBT projects (Sriyani, 2018). Though many tourism development projects were implemented to eradicate poverty in rural villages, to ensure sustainability in tourism, and to uplift destination image, most of such projects were unable to achieve the expected goals (Sriyani, 2018), because, there were several issues, such as lack of infrastructure, lack of financial support, and negative environmental and social effects in attaining the goals of the project (Boronyak, 2010). Also assessing the effectiveness of achievement of such goals is very rare. Therefore, initiating new projects further, without identifying the bottlenecks of the existing projects, may hamper the local economy further.

So, whether such community tourism development projects function effectively to reach both the project goals and the community goals, as expected at its planning stage, is the main problem of this study.

1.1. Research Questions

- Does the CBT project affect the growth and survival of village level tourism businesses?
- Is the CBT project able to achieve its project goals and community goals through the community empowerment efforts?
- Are there any bottlenecks of the community based tourism development projects in the two selected villages?

1.2. Research Objectives

- To assess the impact of the facilitation role of the community based tourism development projects on the growth and survival of the village level tourism businesses.
- To assess the effectiveness of the community based tourism development projects in terms of the achievement of project goals and community goals.
- To reveal the bottlenecks of such community based tourism development projects, and to provide suggestions to resolve the bottlenecks of the projects.

2. Methodology

This research utilized the mixed method, because both quantitative and qualitative data are required to assess the effectiveness of the project. The quantitative method was applied to test the existing views of the beneficiaries on community tourism development projects, and the qualitative method was applied to get the real opinion of the community and the officers regarding the effectiveness of the selected community tourism projects, and to reveal the bottlenecks of the projects. Both primary and secondary data is used in this study. Primary data was collected by using a structured questionnaire and interviews. Structured questionnaires were delivered among selected people in the community, who are engaged in tourism businesses. The population of the study is the entire community of people engaged in tourism in rural tourism villages, and had received such assistance under a particular community empowerment project. Among the community empowerment projects of Ruhunu Tourist Bureau (RTB), the Kanneliya home stay project and the Viharahena ecotourism project were selected from the five projects implemented by the RTB and its' supportive institutions, such as Department of Forest conservation (DOFC), Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), World University Services of Canada (WUSC), in the Southern Province of Sri Lanka. Random sampling method was applied to select 100 people from the community, who are engaged in tourism businesses in both villages. In addition to that, ten people from both villages were selected, using the convenient sampling method, to collect their real perception on the facilitation role, the benefits they received, and the bottlenecks of this project. Other than the selected people, interviews were organized with five officers of the supportive institutions (three from RTB, one from DOFC and one from SLTDA), who facilitate these projects to discuss their experience, outcomes, and whether there were any failures.

2.1. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework that was used for this study, based on the existing research gap.

2.2. Hypotheses

According to the argument of Tasci, Semrad and Yilmaz (2013), tourism projects will be effective and lead to a healthy economic development through the provision of grants, capacity development, and improvement in team relations. Further, Duflo (2012) argued that Community Empowerment efforts can significantly influence the development of the economic condition of the project. Based on such arguments, the 1st hypothesis of this study was developed.

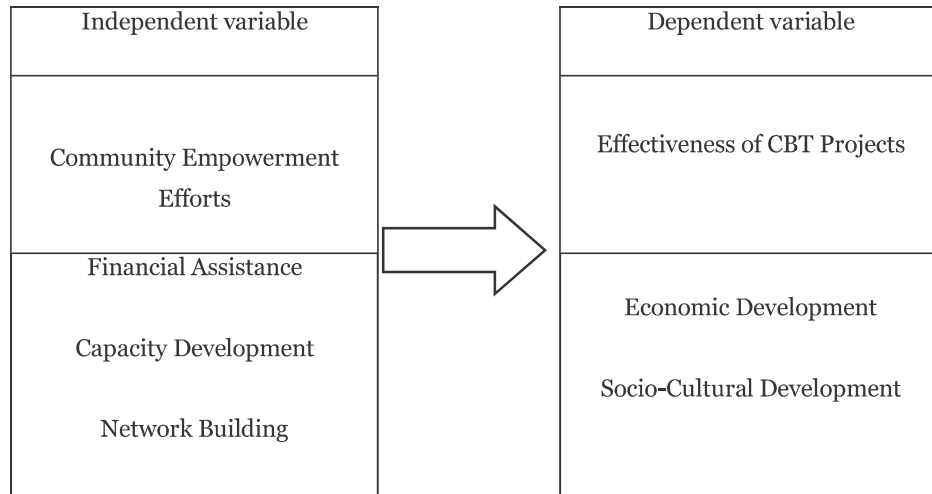


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

H1: Community empowerment efforts affect economic development of the community significantly.

According to the Scheyvens' argument (2002), Community Empowerment efforts have a significant influence on the socio cultural development of a tourism project. Also Kumara (2016) has attempted in his study to test the effect of Community Empowerment efforts on the socio cultural development in the Sri Lankan context.

H2: Community empowerment efforts affect the Socio-cultural development of the community significantly.

3. Results and Findings

As shown in Table 1 the Cronbach's Alpha values of Financial Assistance, Capacity Development and Network Building are 0.777, 0.782 and 0.718 respectively. Also the Economic Development and Socio-cultural Development has values of 0.718 and 0.784 respectively. All those values are in between 0.7 and 0.8, indicating the stability and consistency of the data set.

According to the descriptive statistics of Independent Variables, the highest mean value (4.70) was related to Financial Assistance, followed by that of Capacity Development (4.34) and of Network Building (4.17). A higher level of mean value depicts that, overall, the empowerment efforts are at a satisfactory level. The Dependent Variables, Economic Development and Socio-cultural Development, reported 4.60 and 4.71 respectively. It means that the Socio-cultural Development is comparatively higher than the Economic Development.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha value and Descriptive Statistics of the Variables

		No: of items	Cronbach's Alpha Value	Mean	SD
Independent Variables	Financial Assistance	3	0.777	4.70	0.438
	Capacity Development	4	0.782	4.34	0.527
	Network Building	4	0.718	4.17	0.502
Dependent Variables	Economic Development	4	0.784	4.60	0.420
	Socio-cultural Development	4	0.795	4.71	0.403

Source: Author Survey, 2020

The results of the multiple regressions analysis related to hypothesis one are shown in Table 2. There is a strong relationship between the community empowerment efforts and the Economic development, because Pearson correlation is 0.728. R² value is recorded as 53.1 percent, which means that 53 percent variation in the economic development is explained by the community empowerment efforts. The significance value is 0.003. Therefore, the first hypothesis can be accepted.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis Results of the Relationship between the Community Empowerment Efforts and Economic Development

Correlation

		Economic Development	Community Empowerment Efforts
Pearson Correlation	Economic Development	1.000	0.728
	Community Empowerment Efforts	0.728	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Economic Development	1	0.000
	Community Empowerment Efforts	0.001	1

Model Summary and ANOVA^a

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	0.728 ^a	0.531	0.526	0.28949	110.813	0.000 ^b

Coefficient Statistics

Model		Un standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-0.239	0.461		-0.519	0.605
	Community Empowerment Efforts	1.040	0.099	0.728	10.527	0.003

According to Table 3, Pearson correlation value is 0.701, which means that there is a strong relationship between the Community Empowerment Efforts and Socio cultural Development. Further, R² value implies that 49 percent variation in Socio cultural Development of the society is explained by the efforts of community empowerment. Also, the significance value is 0.00, which is lower than 0.05. Thus, hypothesis two can be accepted.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis Results on the Relationship between the Community Empowerment Efforts and Socio cultural Development

Correlation

		Socio cultural Development	Community Empowerment Efforts
Pearson Correlation	Socio cultural Development	1.000	0.701
	Community Empowerment Efforts	0.701	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Socio cultural Development	-	0.001
	Community Empowerment Efforts	0.000	-

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	Sig.
1	0.701 ^a	0.491	0.486	0.28949	94.488	.000 ^b

When the previous research findings are considered, Duflo (2012), and Doepke and Tertilt (2011), stated that Community Empowerment efforts on economic development have a positive relationship and a direct impact on project success in the developed and developing countries. However, Scheyvens (2002) mentioned that Community Empowerment efforts on Socio

cultural development go beyond the economic development concept. Though Community Empowerment efforts help to build a bridge between supports and on Socio cultural development within the tourism projects (Emery & Flora, 2006), it was very low in Sinharaja village's tourism project in Sri Lanka (Kumara, 2016).

Coefficients

Model		Un standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.239	0.461		0.519	0.605
	Community Empowerment Efforts	0.960	0.099	0.701	9.720	0.000

As per the perceptions of the villagers and officers on the effectiveness of the project, overall assistance of the project in both villages affects the achievement of community goals, and they were satisfied with the project intervention in tourism development in the area. Officers' view was that financial assistance of the project contributed significantly to achieve a considerable level of growth in the tourism businesses in the villages, and thereby achieving project effectiveness.

However, the villagers are facing infrastructural issues, lack of marketing knowledge, public littering, drug addiction etc. Inability to provide what customers demand, coordinating issues of tourist arrivals, and rigid decision making process are the bottlenecks highlighted by the officers.

Arranging training programs, introducing agro tourism concepts, developing infrastructure facilities, providing awareness to the tourists on the necessity of protecting the environment, developing a mechanism to handle tourist arrivals are some solutions suggested by the villagers to solve the bottlenecks of the projects. Simplification of rigid decision making process, partnership with other tourism service providers, such as travel agencies, and conducting researches about projects' bottlenecks and villagers' real needs were the suggestions provided by the officers.

4. Conclusion

Based on the first research objective, it can be said that there is a strong, positive relationship between Community Empowerment Efforts and Economic Development, as well as between Community Empowerment Efforts and Socio cultural Development in both villages. Therefore,

the facilitation role has had a significant impact on achieving growth and survival of tourism businesses in both villages.

As per the second objective, villagers are satisfied with the assistance provided and the officers' view was that financial assistance is what influenced the achievement of project effectiveness.

With regard to the third objective, villagers highlighted infrastructure problems, public littering, and drug addiction as the bottlenecks they faced. On the other hand, rigid decision making and approving process, villagers' inability to provide what customers demand, and coordinating issues of tourist arrivals are the bottlenecks from the view point of the officers. To overcome bottlenecks, villagers have suggested some solutions, such as developing infrastructure, arranging training and awareness programs, introducing agro tourism concepts, and developing a mechanism to handle tourist arrivals. Simplification of the decision making process, partnership with other tourism service providers, and conducting researches about the project's bottlenecks, community's real needs and wants were proposed by the officers to overcome the bottlenecks.

4.1. Future Research

Other than Kanneliya and Viharahena, there are five CBT projects that operate in four other villages; namely, Mediripitiya, Godahena, Madunagala and Rekawain, in the Southern province of Sri Lanka under the authority of RTB. Other than the RTB projects, several other government and non-government organizations have initiated such CBT projects in other provinces as well. Therefore, the scopes of coverage, as well as, the supportive mechanism of such projects, need to be analyzed to generalize the findings. Further, community empowerment efforts on environmental protection were not discussed in this study, though the environment is one of the elements of sustainable tourism.

4.2. Significance

Findings help to assess the effectiveness of CBT projects, in terms of achieving project goals and community goals. This will be helpful for project initiators, policy planners and the community to identify the pros and cons of the projects. Further, the findings will be helpful for the future researchers to find the research gaps in this field.

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