ECOTOURISM AS A FLUCTUATING SOURCE OF INCOME FOR LOCAL COMMUNITY

Zohreh Zarezadeh¹ and Hamidreza Rastegar*

1. Department of Marketing Strategy, University of Pune (INDIA)
2. Department of Environmental Sciences, University of Pune (INDIA)

*E-mail : zohreh_z99@yahoo.com
: hamidreza_hr@yahoo.com

Received February 06, 2009  Accepted April 29, 2009

ABSTRACT

Implementation of ecotourism programs causes creating of very attractive business in the area due to its revenues and ease of doing in comparison to traditional jobs in the local community such as agriculture. Ecotourism introduces many changes to communities, positive and negative and one of its disadvantages appeared in the community when the fact of seasonal business appeared in the area. After implementation of ecotourism it will become the main source of income for the community and other older jobs will be left. Fluctuation in number of tourist causes high and low season and sudden drop in cash flow after high season is like a shock to the community which is followed by the problems like less income for the families, unemployment and some costs like cost of maintenance of tourist facilities. This paper studies the problem of seasonal jobs in ecotourism and the ways which the local community should face the problems with keeping balance between their traditional jobs and ecotourism and how to convert ecotourism to other kinds of tourism in low season.

Key Words : Ecotourism, Seasonal job, Local community, Temporary jobs, Permanent jobs.

INTRODUCTION

When for the first time ecotourism was introduced in Africa in 1950’s no one had thought one day it could be one of the most acceptable terms in which sustainable development achieves. Ecotourism has been defined as “Environmentally responsible, enlightening travel and visitation to relativity undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socioeconomic involvement of local populations”. There are many other definitions about ecotourism and all
emphasize on importance of conservation of the environment and developing of the local community. Local communities are known as people who have been living in the area for a long time and enjoy their traditional way of living. Nowadays all efforts put on involvement of the local population in this fast growing industry to get benefit out of this business.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Many areas all over the word are known as ecotourism destination and tourism infrastructures and facilities are developed over there. The mass numbers of tourists according to capacity of the destination visit the area and enjoy the beauty of nature and/or watching the wildlife in their own habitat. As result the new business introduced and an alternative source of income will be created in the area. Many of local population concentrate on this new and attractive source of income and due to their needs, abilities and skills will engage. The face of the community will slowly change and ecotourism will become the most important concern of the community and all try to participate in ecotourism. The participants included former hunters who now lead tourists as birding and wildlife guides, small farmers and artisans who now sell handicrafts to tourists, fishermen who know the rivers and now supplement their incomes by driving tour boats, and local leaders who know their communities and now assume management of their own lodges.

The older businesses like agriculture and livestock will receive less attention due to their difficulty and less benefit in comparison to this new born business and may leave in many families. For example Rose E. Hernandez and her friends in their research in Escudo Jaguar in Mexico divided the community in three parts and find out that 41 percent of income in households with members of the River transport section, 66 percent in households with members of the cabin/restaurant section and 61 percent in households employees is from the ecotourism activities in the Locandon forest after almost 12 years of introducing the ecotourism to the area.14

In another research on three communities of Amazon (Posada Amazonas, Chalalán, and Kapawi) Amanda Stronza and Javier Gordillo say:

…finally, delegates from all three sites noted a problem related to an increasing sense of dependency on tourism income. They commented that some people were starting to work less often (or with less intensity) in hunting, fishing, farming, and extraction because they were waiting for profits from tourism. “Some have misunderstood how much they were going to benefit, and so they do nothing”, a man from Posada Amazonas explained. “Instead of tending to their farm, they are just waiting for tourism money”.

There are many other examples show dependency of the local communities to ecotourism industry in the places where ecotourism plans implemented. When people shift entirely from other income sources, they become vulnerable to boom-bust cycles and seasonal fluctuations of the tourism market.
Table 1: Different form of community involvement in tourism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Type of enterprise or institution</th>
<th>Nature of local involvement</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Privet business run by outsiders</td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Kitchen staff in lodge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supply goods and service</td>
<td>Sale of food, building material, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Enterprise or informal sector operation run by local entrepreneur</td>
<td>Enterprise ownership</td>
<td>Craft sale, food kiosk, campsite, home stays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-employment</td>
<td>Guiding services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supply goods and service</td>
<td>Hawking, sale of fuelwood, food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Community enterprise</td>
<td>Collective ownership</td>
<td>Community campsite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collective or individual management</td>
<td>Craft center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supply of goods and services</td>
<td>Cultural center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Employment or contributed labour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Joint venture between community and privet sector</td>
<td>Contractual commitments</td>
<td>Revenue-sharing from lodge to local community on agreed terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Share in revenue</td>
<td>Community leases of land/resources/concession to lodge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lease/investment of resources</td>
<td>Community holds equity in lodge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Participation in decision-making</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Tourism planning body</td>
<td>Consultation</td>
<td>Local consultation in regional tourism planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>Community representative on tourism board and in planning fora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Participation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ashley and Roe (1998)

Ecotourism and seasonal job

In introducing of ecotourism in an area the successful implementation of the plan is the main concern. Overview of peer-reviewed articles, Agrawal and Redford (2006) found that newly generated local jobs and incomes were the most common “indicators of success”. For the creating of job opportunity and successful running of this business, we need the sufficient number of tourists in the area. Tourists in ecotourism are usually interested in two parts; one beauty of nature and second watching wildlife. This fact leads us to come to this point that the number of tourists visit the area depend on many variations that make high season and low season in the area. For example restriction by the park authority during breeding times, condition of weather, special occasions in particular times of the year and many others. Fig. 1 shows variety in number of tourists visiting Ostional village in Costa Rica in 1995.
This is an example to show the variety in number of tourists visiting an area through the year makes the high and low season in ecotourism. In this condition during low season cash flow ends and financial incentives disappear and the members of community who are involved in the ecotourism activity will receive less income during the low season. This problem can be like an epidemic which destroys all same genes in one area. So fluctuation in tourist numbers is a disadvantage for those household not receiving income from other productive activities. Agriculture and other old businesses have already left or play a small role in family activities and sudden drop in income will create a big problem. The problem can also show itself in the form of unemployment in the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There exists the danger in community-based seasonal job on ecotourism of gaining big amount of money in particular period of the year and unexpected reduction of cash flow in the rest of the year. Changing the traditional jobs to tourist business for gaining more profit makes problems in local community for covering investment cost, maintenance cost, opportunity cost and life expenditure in the low season because their seasonal job has already become their main job. But with strong decision making, there is no tragedy because communities are able to solve their problem effectively. There is some solution such as:

1. Accepting ecotourism business as temporary job in addition to tourists business as temporary job, they can keep their traditional job as permanent job. Seasonal business has more profit in the high season but in the low season people who run tourist business have to expend that money for life expenditure, cost of investment, cost of maintenance and opportunity cost. But if they run their traditional business in low season they can cover at least their life expenditure and save some money for investment. There are some methods for keeping their traditional job as a permanent job:

   * Keeping their family job as permanent job: In the most of areas ecotourism is seasonal job and in high season for ecotourism, people who involve to this business are so busy but in the low season they are free and unemployed. Due to unemployment they can keep their family job and engage to ecotourism business as temporary job. In low season all members of family
participate to family job and in the high season members of family with lack of skills and knowledge about tourism can take care of family job and rest of the family can engage to tourist business. For example in Frontera Corozal the high season coincides with the school vacations in the community; thus, within members’ households the children provide help with domestic tasks, taking care of the animals in the home gardens and helping with various agricultural activities.

- **Partnership**: People who have a tourists business should enter into partnership with a group of people who have traditional job and divide their jobs into two parts; traditional job and tourists business. In high season members of group do both business based on their responsibility and their skills and in the low season all members can participate to traditional job. It has benefit for both because tourists business has so much profit which people who are in traditional job can gain benefit from that and in the low season other members can obtain some money for at least their life expenditure. Any development will boost local jobs and economic growth, but a revenue sharing mechanism will do more to enhance welfare and can potentially achieve a much greater increase in community incomes, skills and empowerment.

- **Working as a worker**: Another solution is, the people who are engaged to tourists business can work as a worker for the people who have traditional job and at least they can gain their life expenditure in low season.

- **Changing facilities of properties**: the people who are owner of properties which use for tourist purpose can change the facilities of their properties which can be used by the local community for different purpose. For example the people who have a restaurant or resort for tourist business, can use their properties as a club, school, weeding hall and meeting hall for local community and it has its own advantages for both owner and local people, owner can gain money for his properties which must be unused in low season and local people have access to some facilities which were not in their area.

2. **Keeping tourists business as permanent job**: The best solution for local community is to find the way which they can increase entrance of tourists to their area in other season.

- **Converting ecotourism to sport tourism**: Some area has potential for organizing some sports, for example an area with high snow fall can prepare some facilities for skies. Boyd and Butler (1999) suggest that less exotic temperate first word landscapes such as the remote, northern Canadian forests known for sport hunting and fishing.

- **Converting ecotourism to cultural tourism**: Local community has particular culture, festivals, dishes, dances and games which are special for that area. Cohen (1972) suggested that tourists could be identified by the degree of novelty or familiarity they seek. Local community can attract novelty-seeking tourists and repel those tourists who need the comfort of familiar surroundings. Converting ecotourism to cultural tourism helps local community to keep sufficient number of tourist to their area in all season and also helps tourists who are interested to know about local culture. For example the Tawushan mountain area is not only rich in its biodiversity but also in the cultural heritage of the Paiwan.
• **Converting ecotourism to agritourism**:
In some areas, low season for ecotourism is high season for harvesting and agriculture activities in local community. With converting ecotourism to agritourism the local community can attract tourists who are interested to visiting places during harvesting. In places like Forest County, focusing on undisturbed natural areas could both constrain ecotourism development and timber harvesting on public lands because the main job of this community is working in the woods and it helps community to maintain the local culture based on working in the woods. For most rural communities in Taiwan, agritourism is one of the important elements in their diversified economy. Ayala (1996) argued that Germany’s Rhoen Biosphere Reserve, a historical agricultural area characterized by interspersed small settlements, rolling hills, woodlands, pastures, meadows, fruit orchards, and hedgerows that given it ecological stability and diversity, should be considered such an ecotourism plan product. Agro-ecotourism development is based on organic agriculture combination with ecotourism to provide acceptable recreation opportunity without destroying the natural rural environment.

• **Organizing exhibitions and fares**:
With organizing arts and crafts exhibitions and fares which are produced in the local area and offering off for low season, local community can attract tourists who are interested to visit a place and crafts with low expenditure.

**CONCLUSION**

Ecotourism industry introduced to an area which has not had any experience of outside people and earning money more than their life expenditure. With entrance of tourists to the area suddenly money flows to that area and local people will change their jobs without any attention that the ecotourism business which has already become their main business is seasonal. Investment in seasonal business makes problems for local people because in low season in additional of life expenditure they have to pay some costs according to their investment which is unused in low season. But if the local community participates in decision making they can solve their problems and find out some solutions. Therefore they can keep ecotourism business as temporary job and look at their traditional job as permanent job like keeping family job and do both, partnership and changing the utilization of their investment or they can take benefit from ecotourism business as permanent job like converting ecotourism to cultural tourism, sport tourism or agritourism.

**REFERENCES**

5. Boyd S.W. and Butler R.W., Definitely not monkeys or parrots, probably deer and possibly moose: opportunities and


-----

**Environment is God’s gift, preserve it**

😊