

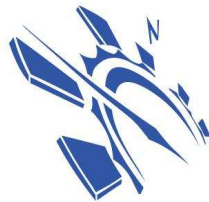
# **Pro-Poor Tourism in Kumarakom, Kerala, South India: Policy Implementation and Impacts**

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# **Pro-Poor Tourism in Kumarakom, Kerala, South India: Policy Implementation and Impacts**

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## **Abstract**

*Even though the world is coming through a global economic crisis, the tourism industry is still expected to keep booming at an impressive rate of almost 10%. By predicting that the figure of 1 billion international travelers will probably be hit in 2010, it is clear that this sector has impacts on peoples' lives, especially those living in developing countries where tourism is seen as a great opportunity to generate income. However, because of the way the industry is ruled, tourism did not bring the expected economic benefits to local communities. In many ways, tourism has been harmful not only to the environment, but also to social structures. It is important that the authorities must redesign their tourism policies toward a more sustainable and responsible direction. In 2006, the Indian state of Kerala launched the Responsible Tourism policy. Through these new policies, Kerala acknowledged the issues generated by tourism and claimed to be a pioneer in designing tourism policies that benefit the poor. Therefore, this study seeks to (a) examine the tourism policies recently implemented by the Kerala Department of Tourism; (b) assess the impacts of these policies on the peoples' lives; (c) evaluate the actually pro-poor aspects of these policies; and (d) explore the possibility to replicate the model of Kerala to other destinations. The results showed that Kerala's new tourism policies are truly innovative. Under what is called "Responsible Tourism Initiative", there are measures designed to achieve poverty alleviation through tourism activities. Kerala is paying attention to respect the Pro-Poor Tourism principles; and although it takes time to see the efficiency of policies on the field, the pilot project of Kumarakom already showed positive outcomes on economic and social empowerment of the local community. On the other hand, the possibility to replicate what is ongoing in Kerala seems more questionable regarding the state apparently benefited from a set of very favourable initial conditions that may not be possible to find anywhere else.*

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## **Introduction**

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world, which gives it a central role in the global economy in the future. In addition, the industry is expected to keep growing, especially in the developing parts of the world. Future predictions are that the global tourism industry will have great impacts on the livelihoods of the world's poorest people.

Until recently, tourism was considered to be just like any other business. The focus of multinational companies and governments was mainly on macro economic growth, foreign exchange earnings and private sector expansion; poverty reduction was therefore a secondary interest. The growth of the industry through conventional package tourism fails to meaningfully benefit the poor and the revenues hardly trickle down to the poor. Therefore, the tourism industry has, so far, not been an exception to other industries. The industry has instead evolved within the neo-liberal globalised context and therefore, it has a tendency to be strongly exploitative, whether it is natural resources or human population. Hall (1994) argues that tourism and the policies that regulate the industry are largely focused on effectiveness and economic benefits and do not pay particular attention to social justice and equality.

### *1.1 Statement of the Problem*

When looking at different studies and reports that dealt with the Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT) issue, it becomes obvious that in order to be effective, PPT needs strong government supports because without government intervention and support, the dominant players in the industry will continue with their dominant role that ensures that the poor never benefit from the industry (Nawijn et al., 2008). Authorities have to implement policies to regulate the tourism industry and redesign it towards a model that would include ethics and social justice. As noted by Ashley (2002), if PPT is to have a significant impact, it should be integrated into the already existing tourism industry. This crucial objective can be realised only if the governments implement policies that officially support the development of PPT.

The Indian state of Kerala claims to be a pioneer in the field of Pro-Poor Tourism. Kerala is one of the first places to design concrete policies that clearly focus on PPT. Usually, tourism researches focus on the trends, business and marketing of tourism. Very few studies exist that comprehensively explored the political dimension of tourism. The case of Kerala is therefore an ideal example that can be used to analyse the political aspects that impact the

tourism industry. Thus, the objective of this study is to examine how the state of Kerala operates and understand its tourism development, in order to establish what mechanisms have been put in place to make tourism in the state pro-poor.

### 1.2 *Research Objectives*

The basic objective of this study is to analyse the tourism pro-poor policy recently implemented in Kerala. The study will focus on the history, the road map and the implementation process of the “Responsible Tourism Initiative” (RT) in order to identify the steps taken to fight poverty through tourism activities. Also, the research intends to assess the different benefits, financial and non financial, that may brought to the local communities through their interaction with tourism industry. Furthermore, the study aims at analysing the very specific context in which this policy takes place and to interrogate whether the PPT policy put in place in Kerala could be effectively replicated elsewhere.

### 1.3 *Study Site*

Even though an increasing number of economists, scholars, or development workers agree to consider tourism as a tool for development and poverty reduction; there is still few examples of PPT on the field. Small-scale project at community level showed efficiency, but the state of Kerala wants to take it to the next stage by implementing pro-poor tourism policies and projects at the state level.

### 1.4 *Significance of the Study*

It is true that the tourism policies chosen by a government will have impacts on the population. Whereas plenty of harmful cases over the local communities have been reported, this study intends to demonstrate, through a case study, that if tourism policies are designed with a pro-poor perspective, local people could really benefit from tourism activities. Though there might still be pertinent issues that need to be addressed, the study of both the Kerala Responsible Tourism Initiative and the Kumarakom village pilot project are expected to demonstrate to key players in the industry, tourism policy planners and tourism business operators the kind of measures that need to be implemented to make the state a better tourist destination.

## **2 Literature Review: Situation of Pro-Poor Tourism Research**

This section is a review of the available literature and the situation of the pro-poor tourism research. Before explaining how PPT actually works and why it deserves to have a priority place on the poverty agenda, it is important to look at the reasons why new ideas on how to manage the tourism industry emerged and the relevance of the Mainstream Mass Tourism (MMT) within the debate.

### *2.1 Mainstream Mass Tourism (MMT)*

The massive increase of international travelers and tourism development is a direct result of the globalisation process. Globalisation is the free flow across borders of capital, labour, currencies, ideas and people. The emergence of high capacity airplanes in the 1950s, opened the doors for the growth of the tourism industry. The 1990s decade further increased the expansion rate of the industry with more growth forecasted for the future. The internet has also facilitated the growth of the sector, with low-cost holidays and travel destinations available all over the Web; a large number of people from developed countries can now afford standardized trips to Asia, Africa or Latin America. In the 1950s, the number of international travelers was about 25 million people, this number is expected to reach 1.56 billion in 2020. (UNWTO, 2006)

The tourism sector, as it is designed and operated, is a direct product of the Neo-liberal ideology due to the fact that it can only flourish in an extremely open and deregulated economic environment. Hardly any other business represents such a power of Trans National Companies (TNCs). The most widely recognised negative impact of MMT is the economic redistribution unfairness. This is especially in the developing countries where more than 2/3 of the revenue realised from tourism does not reach the economy, a fact that is attributed to the extensive leakages of foreign exchange (Pleumarom, 1999). These structures in the tourism industry impact directly on people's livelihoods. The working conditions in the tourism industry of developing countries are characterised by extremely low remuneration, poor and exploitative working conditions, long working hours, over reliance on tips, poor training and insecure employment terms (Beddoe, 2004). Additionally, there are issues of child labour and sexual exploitation, which are central to the tourism industry than in many other businesses. According the International Labour Organisation (ILO), up to 10% of the tourism industry working force is made of children.

## 2.2 *The Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT) Concept*

During the mid 1980s, there emerged new ideas about different approaches in operating the tourism industry. Today, Eco-tourism is a comprehensive idea and encompasses numerous concepts such as Nature Tourism, which aims at discovering natural wonders by minimizing the impacts of people on the environment; Adventure Tourism and more recently, Ethnic Tourism, which takes the tourists into a cultural immersion within local indigenous communities. All these new forms of tourism are much more concerned with ecological and cultural conservation than poverty reduction. The aim is more on minimizing costs on people's lives rather than bringing benefits to them. In eco-tourism, many actors pursue initiatives that have beneficial environment impacts, but those impacts are of secondary importance to the poor and marginalized communities (Cattarinich, 2002).

PPT puts poverty reduction at the center, bringing net benefit to the poor and marginalized is the goal and expanding the opportunities is the mean (Ashley, 2002). Pro-poor tourism does not only aim at generating additional income to poor people, it also endeavours to provide the poor with capacity building and skills transfer in order to generate additional income by themselves, through tourism activities. Thus, PPT works closely with the education and training sector and microfinance institutions.

PPT differs from all other concepts because it is not just a new product or a new niche market under the eco-tourism umbrella. It is a holistic approach to address the problems and the needs of the poor and marginalized communities. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) said that it is possible for almost any tourism attraction or product to meet pro-poor tourism objectives. PPT principles can be applied to any scales, micro or macro. The objective of the concept is a matter of redistribution of resources and opportunities and not the creation of a new tourism product. PPT is a shift of power that is required to achieve poverty reduction through tourism (Mowforth, Charlton and Munt, 2007). Therefore, a pro-active interventionist approach is needed from the governments in order to effectively realise the objectives of the concept.

PPT has a holistic notion of poverty alleviation. Non-economic benefits are as important as economic gain. An improved management approach of the tourism industry can provide new skills, better access to education and health care, improving access to clean water and transportation networks. Intangible benefits may also be provided such as access to

information, opportunities to communicate with the outside world, increased access to market opportunities, strengthening the community institutions and structures, and enhancing community pride (Roe and Goodwin, 2001).

PPT differs from existing alternatives of tourism because it focuses not only on the local level which is the limit of the respectable Community Based Tourism (CBT) concept. Due to the fact that the poor and marginalized communities do not have the avenues to negotiate with tourism companies, the authorities have the responsibility to advocate for and promote their interests, therefore, the governments need to change their policies and create new ones that cater for the needs of the marginalized within the tourism industry framework. Without such actions at the macro level, PPT may remain a niche market with nothing but numerous community run bungalow style businesses; which is good for marginal benefit of a particular community but which does not address the larger picture of poverty reduction objective.

### *2.3 Reasons Why Tourism can Reduce Poverty*

This is a diverse industry with a wide range of activities. There are many opportunities especially in the informal segment of the industry, which can greatly benefit the poor by offering them jobs and skills to work within the industry. Tourism is dependent upon natural resources (e.g. landscapes, wildlife and outdoor activities) and upon cultural diversity. These are assets that even the poor and marginalized communities possess. Since they live within these tourist attraction destinations and therefore they should benefit from any revenues being realised from their exploitation. In addition, they possess rich cultural heritage, which, unfortunately, has been exploited without them benefiting from it. These are assets within the tourism sector, which can directly benefit the poor and marginalized.

The tourism industry is largely labour-intensive, meaning that the poor that are largely unskilled can find employment opportunities within. A positive scenario is that many poor women are now able to find employment opportunities within the tourism industry. The PPT concept is able to bring market and financial benefits to remote and marginal rural areas. The non-financial benefits which include community empowerment, access to infrastructures and resources, participation in the decision making process, are very important for poor people,

and they have the ability to reduce and eventually eradicate the vulnerability of the poor and marginalized. PPT goes beyond community tourism because it involves planning, policy and investment.

### **3 Pro-Poor Tourism in Kumarakom, Kerala, South India**

Pro-poor or responsible tourism is increasingly becoming popular but so far only a couple of places in the world are effectively implementing initiatives that are in line with pro-poor tourism principles. The Indian state of Kerala has been identified for this study as one of these few places that are implementing pro-poor, responsible and sustainable tourism measures.

In 2006, the Kerala Department of Tourism proactively decided to make the state tourism policies more pro-poor. The framework for these new policies is officially known as the Responsible Tourism (RT) Initiative. The pilot project of Kumarakom is taken as a case study to conduct an evaluation of the RT.

#### *3.1 Kumarakom Tourism Situation Prior to RT Initiative*

When Kumarakom was developing as a popular destination for tourists, the arrival of tourism industry was initially considered as good news by the local people. However, it became apparent that a gap between the tourism industry and the local population was emerging and widening rapidly. Initially, as the local farm land was being converted into tourism infrastructures with a reduction in agricultural production, the local workers were happy because they were able to increase their wages through construction jobs. However, this situation only lasted for a short time. Mr. Saroop Roy explained the results of the study conducted by Equations in 2002 in Kumarakom. He stated that people should not think that they could live only from tourism activities, but rather consider it as a potential additional source of income. In Kumarakom, tourism was considered by farmers as a more valuable and a less tasking activity.

The demand for land on which to build hotels and resorts increased its value. Villagers, some of them attracted by the opportunity to make money, sold their land and others who could no longer afford to pay land rent had no choice but to trade their traditional farming activities for tourism related jobs. Most of them eventually got into financial difficulties after losing their land and no meaningful skills with which to operate tourism activities.



At this time it was clear that the people from Kumarakom were not benefitting from the new tourism businesses. As much as the opening of hotels and restaurants created many job opportunities, majority of tourism business operators failed to give jobs to the local people. Since the people of Kerala are well educated<sup>2</sup> and also because of the protective measures implemented by the socialist government, the cost of the Keralan workforce is the highest in the country. For these reasons, over 80% of the hotels' staff were recruited from outside Kumarakom; a significant number of them were from Northeast India, the poorest part of the country. It has also been reported that the working conditions in the tourism sector were very low: workers had no job security, there were many cases of broken contracts without sufficient reasons and labourers were poorly paid.

Besides these serious economic issues, people from Kumarakom became victims of the tourism industry in many other different ways. Villagers' lifestyles and occupations are closely related to the canals, bays, lakes and shores in the area that have been using for fishing, collecting shells, or as a mean of transportation. But in order to satisfy the tourists' needs of privacy and tranquility, many resorts owners closed the access routes to lakes and canals to the local community. In addition, resorts increasingly operated tourist cruises in the backwaters by motorboats, which has considerably damaged the fishing nets used by local fishermen

The same survey conducted by Equations in 2002 among 140 households in the village shows that tourism expansion has not meaningfully contributed to infrastructure development and improves the living standards of people of the community. When the people were asked about their opinion considering if "*the tourism development in Kumarakom contributed to their situation*", 62 answered that tourism had not made significant contribution in improving roads or transportation system, 87 answered 'no' regarding the supply and quality of water, 90 answered 'no' for the electricity, and 99 responded 'no' regarding the possibility of employment.

### 3.2 *Implementation of the RT Initiative in Kumarakom*

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<sup>2</sup> According to the Government of India Planning Commission, literacy rate in Kerala is 91% while that of average India is 65%.

Although the Department of Tourism declared the place as a pilot destination for Responsible Tourism in 2007 but commencing the RT initiative in Kumarakom was not an easy task. As discussed earlier, the local population was very reluctant to new policies and tourism in general. Some activists opposed the programme. Their argument was that this project would only make things worse. The Panchayat representatives and some officials from the Kerala Department of Tourism organised a meeting in May 2007 to explain the schedule, key players, and the means, aims and objectives of the RT initiative.

After this meeting, it was actually possible to start the RT implementation. The first objective was to revive the agricultural sector in Kumarakom. The Department of Tourism asked for help from Kudumbashree, Panchayat and from the Kerala Institute of Travel and Tourism Studies (KITTS) to conduct a survey and analysis concerning the possibility of linking the local population with the tourism businesses and market. First, KITTS identified the groups of people who were struggling the most. They listed the families of farmers living below the poverty line, the local producers who had difficulties in accessing the market to sell their produce. In addition, KITTS researchers did a survey from the hotels and restaurants to establish their exact needs of fruits or vegetables. This process made it possible for the local self-government to establish the link between the local farmers and the hotels. The Destination Level Responsible Tourism Committee (DLRTC) cell prepared an agricultural calendar for the supply of products to the hotels: what should be cultivated and at what time, and the overall amount that will be needed by the hotels. 18 hotels and resorts accepted signed an agreement to purchase their vegetables, fruits, etc exclusively from local producers.

Today, farmers and tourism business owners have a good working relations, but it should be realised that this has not been so easy. At the beginning of 2008, Mr. Rupesh, the destination level coordinator of RT in Kumarakom, faced numerous challenges. In February 2008, when all the crops were ready for harvest, the hotels and resorts failed to respect their promises and refused to buy the local products. Most of them argued that Kumarakom items were too expensive. That it was much more profitable for them to buy wholesale products from Tamil Nadu (Kerala's neighbouring state). At this stage, the RT initiative was in crisis in Kumarakom. M. Rupesh and the Panchayat informed the Kerala Department of Tourism on this situation. Dr. Venu, the Prime Secretary, and the creator of the Responsible Tourism Initiative arrived in person, in Kumarakom and called for a meeting with tourism business owners. He firmly requested them to cooperate with the initiative. Two weeks later, 15 hotels,

among them the luxury Taj Resort and 5 stars Lake Resort, made a written and formal agreement with DLRTC and the Panchayat. They agreed to purchase products from the local farmers. The first sets of 11 products were sold to the hotels and resorts on 18 March 2008.

After one year of efforts from the DLRTC, the RT initiative has real and quantifiable results. These are:

- Significant increase in local agricultural production
- Creation of a cultivation calendar
- Creation of systems for steady prices to avoid inflation and market fluctuations
- Creation of 10 Karshakasamity (farmers groups), with a total of 460 people
- Creation of 20 Kudumbashree units, with a total of 250 women
- Creation of 5 Micro Enterprises focused on women
  - 1 women fish processing unit
  - 1 women chicken processing unit
  - 1 women Chappathy (local bread) processing unit
  - 2 coconut supply units

M. Prasanth, who is the State Level Coordinator for the RT initiative, explained that people are looking for sustainable economic and development activities. Additional income is welcomed but what the community wants is consistency regarding their income. This is the major reason for the success of this partnership. Farmers know that they can produce a certain amount all the year around for a ready market. The RT initiative in Kumarakom has reached 1,350 direct beneficiaries through this agricultural project.

One year after the initiation of the RT in Kumarakom, M. Rupesh and his team developed new projects to enable local people to access the tourism market and benefit from it. Recently, the DLRTC team organised the link between several tourist hotels and some local artists. The hotels agreed to buy products, services or performances from two handicraft units, one women's cultural group performing Thiruvathirakaly (traditional Kerala dance art), and one women's painting group. Besides providing additional income for the art performers, this project also enables the promotion and conservation of the traditional art forms from Kerala, and avoids the usual cultural breakdown that happens when tourism is developing in a destination.

The most recently initiated project is called the “Village Life Experience @ Kumarakom”. Mr. Rupesh personally designed this packaged tour project that was launched in July 2009. The tourists are taken to see how the real life of the villagers is. Tourists can enjoy a visit to a fish farm; vegetables and fruits farm, duck farm, paddy fields, and can also learn a bit about the Keralan traditional fishing techniques. The cost for a half-day trip is about 1,000 rupees, and the amount of money earned is equally divided among the villagers that participated in the tour.

As stated above, it is apparent that DLRTC is giving a very special role to women in the Responsible Tourism initiatives and projects. Women played crucial roles in the implementation of the RT initiative. Through the constant work of Kudumbashree in organising and monitoring women’s work, now 760 women are included in the cultivation programme, 35 in retail activities, 30 in art and cultural groups, and 45 in the village tour group. This is an important step toward women empowerment in Kumarakom; these groups of women have now become the decision makers of the programme. In such a way, a carefully managed tourism industry can help the poor rural women to become increasingly empowered, improve their status in their families and within the society.

### 3.3 *Examples of People Impacted by the RT Initiative.*

#### 3.3.1 *Organic Farming Activities.*

Mr. Mohan has been one of the first farmers to be linked with the RT project. He is now the manager of a Karshakasamithy (farmer groups). His farm is also included in the Village Life Experience tour. He is the proud producer of 100% organic fruits and vegetables species. For Mohan, being part of the RT initiative dramatically changed his life. Before being linked to the hotels to sell fruits, vegetables and fish, he had no sustainable means of living. He had no income and was only producing just enough food for his family. Now, he makes sufficient money by selling his products through the RT network and his production has greatly increased. Besides, he also earns money when a tour comes to visit his farm and when the tourists stop for having lunch prepared by his wife. With this extra income, he has been able to buy some additional land. Therefore, Mr. Mohan has been economically empowered in a sustainable way. He is now able to comfortably sustain himself and his family all the year round. He has also been socially empowered for several reasons. He has become the leader of

a Karshakasamithy and is highly respected and recognised by other farmers in the area. He is involved in key decision making processes, attending meetings in the local self-government. He also feels proud of his activity and is truly happy to show his successful work and lifestyle to international tourists.

### *3.3.2 Local Business.*

Miss Samrudhi is running a fruits and vegetables shop that provides food for the partner hotels. She was informed of the possibility of opening this business because she is part of a Kudumbashree group. This shop was opened with the help of a local government loan, paying back the credit at 200 rupees a day. The hotels place their orders and then the produce by local farmers is delivered to them. Samrudhi says that the RT initiative had made a strong and positive impact on her life. Before, she had no consistent income and now she can proudly face economic difficulties. Her husband was a drunkard, a factor that could be attributed to their previous economic situation. She was highly indebted, therefore, she and her family were in a very uncomfortable social situation. Presently, these difficulties are increasingly being resolved and since she gets given responsibilities in her day to day running of the business, she also feels socially empowered within her family, as well as in the wider community

### *3.3.3 Handicraft Business.*

There is also the example of a handicraft workshop run by a 50 years old artist. In 2008, besides building a partnership with Lake Resort for purchasing fruits and vegetables, the RT office also initiated a bridge between the resort and local artists making souvenirs and handicrafts. This particular story is actually the one that the RT is the most proud of. Prior to this opportunity, this man and his family were living in terrible conditions and absolute poverty. He had been unemployed for a long time and was a drunkard. He earned no income for the family, had no land, and his children were unable to go to school. The family's critical case was reported by their neighbours to Mr. Rupesh. He came to visit this man to try to unlock some opportunities for him to get access to the tourism market. After discussions he found out that that this man had wonderful artistic skills and could design and make wood items. Subsequently, Mr. Rupesh went to see the resorts management and finally concluded a

deal with Lake Resort. The man would have to produce souvenirs and handicrafts for the hotel such as wood sculptures but his star item would be the traditional Keralan houseboat replica. The luxury hotel now uses it for decoration and sometimes offers it as gifts to its customers. This partnership provided this man a sustainable income of 15,000 rupees a month, which is more than the average income for rural people. He has been able to give back dignity to his family, stopped drinking, and his son is studying computer science in Bangalore after receiving a college tuition loan. The man declared that without this opportunity, he probably would have taken his life. The government of India has been touched by this case, and in a bid to encourage other successful partnerships like this, the authority awarded the family a loan with very low interest to build a better house and a better workshop. This man is planning to hire an apprentice very soon; whom he will teach his skills, and thereby increasing his production capacity and realising more revenue.

#### **4 Evaluation and Analysis**

This framework is designed from “Methodology for Pro-Poor Tourism Case Study” written by Caroline Ashley, and “Pro-poor Tourism: Putting Poverty at the Heart of the Tourism Agenda”, written by Caroline Ashley, Charlotte Boyd and Harold Goodwin. Based on its experience, UNWTO has also identified some mechanisms to reduce poverty levels through tourism. The following checklist is a cross results from these three models. It is important to keep in mind that since PPT practices or initiatives are quite new, the framework is designed to identify good initiatives and to assess preliminary impacts but it is still early to draw definitive conclusions

In this section the objective is to answer initial research questions.

- What is pro-poor in Kerala Tourism policies?
- What are the concrete impacts on the poor people?
- Is Kerala a specific case, or is it possible to replicate it elsewhere?

##### *4.1 Put Poverty Issues on the Tourism Agenda*

PPT can be stated as an additional objective, but this requires pro-active intervention and a well-designed strategy.

*Are pro-poor objectives explicit or implicit in the initiative?*

Kerala's decision to officially make tourism a tool of poverty alleviation is unique in India. In other parts of the country, tourism is just considered as any other industries. For example, before starting any project, the Department of Tourism asked KITTS and Equations to initiate a study to identify families living below poverty line, targeting most struggling group is of primary importance.

*Incorporate PPT into Mainstream Tourism*

Kerala acknowledged that the responsible tourism policies should not be a new niche market but the principles should be applied to any business at any level in the industry.

#### 4.2 *Actions to Overcome Problems*

- *Education to raise peoples' awareness on the PPT issues and challenges. Education and training targeted at the poor (particularly women) to enhance peoples' consciousness of tourism related opportunities.*

Dr. Vijayakumar, the KITTS principal, noticed that the institute takes the aspect of responsibility of tourism activities very seriously. Besides teaching traditional tourism management or hospitality, KITTS is integrating in every programme, a pro-poor focus. They are working in close collaboration with the Department of Tourism in order to coordinate the state's policies and objectives with what is taught to the next generations of tourism businesses operators or policy makers. KITTS receives strong support from the government to emphasize on the responsible and pro-poor aspect that can be found in tourism activities.

According to Dr. Vijayakumar, the Department of Tourism is committed to have maximum transparency and accountability in all facets of its projects. He told me something that is very encouraging; that students are now studying tourism not only because of employment but also because of the social and economic impacts of tourism on the local population. Mr. Saroop Roy concurred with Dr. Vijayakumar. They are both quite confident

in the ability of the next generation of tourism workers. In collaboration with the institute, Equations organised a workshop with the KITTS students. They spend a couple of days in one of the four DLRTC, and their mission was to find out what are, according to their observations, the problems generated by tourism. The results were satisfying, showing that the next generation of tourism managers is sensible enough about these issues.

- *Employment of the Poor in tourism Enterprises.*

Companies that are locally owned operate 80% of the rooms and now the overwhelming majority of the hotel staff is from Kumarakom region. Apart from the peak season in November and December when more workforce is needed, DLRTC requests the hotels and resorts to hire people from the localities. According to Mr. Rupesh, DLRTC had developed new tourism products that include the poor in the tourism market. This is the example of the 'Village Life Experience @ Kumarakom'. In this tour package, the strategies that enable poverty reduction are clearly explained. The DLRTC wants the visiting tourists understand how this activity benefits to the local poor people.

- *Supply of goods and services to tourism enterprises by the poor or by enterprises employing the poor.*

During the launch of DLRTC in Kumarakom, making the hotels and restaurants buy local goods (food, handicrafts, etc.) and services (transport, guides, etc.), was the very first priority of the project. In Kumarakom 15 hotels and among them the most luxury resorts, signed up contracts to buy their food from the local farmers. Besides, another agreement has been made: for any construction project, raw materials have to be provided by the local producers.

- *Direct sales of goods and services to visitors by the poor (informal economy).*

The establishment of coconut stalls alongside Kumarakom main road was a project fully designed and financed by the Responsible Tourism Initiative.

- *Establishment and running of tourism businesses by the poor: micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSME). It is crucial to provide assistance to micro finance.*

Five micro enterprises of food processing and one shop have been financed through micro credit delivered by the RT Initiative. Dr. Venu argues that the goal of this initiative is not just



distributing money to the poor people by taking it from the benefits generated by tourism. Pro-poor tourism is not charity. The philosophy of Responsible Tourism is equal relationship; giving the poor people's the tools to make additional income through tourism activities. The role of the Department of Tourism is to unlock the opportunities.

- *Work through partnerships, including the tourism industry. What efforts are made to involve other stakeholders?*

The case study provides a good example of a partnership between and among business owners, farmers, local government, tourism company operators, education body through KITTS, and NGOs activists through Equations and ICRT, India. A great innovation has been made to slow down the development of unsustainable tourism activities. No-Objection Certificate (NOC) has to be delivered by Panchayat, Forest Department and State Pollution Control.

- g. The creation of infrastructure for tourism industry should benefit the wider community.*

When implementing a tourism project, access to basic amenities (water, electricity, roads) for local community has to be ensured. Within this objective, the hotel owners and the government financed a re-treatment of used water facility, but the local community can benefit from it as well. The privatization of lakes and canals that some resorts did a few years ago is on the way to be resolved. It will be possible by the beginning of 2010 for the villagers to have back what they owned for centuries.

- h. No standardized approaches, tourism authorities should take into account the differences and cases should be treated differently considering the circumstances.*

Acknowledgement that different kinds of places (beach, rural, backwater or urban) should be considered differently with their particular issues and objectives (different approach from mainstream mass tourism). The government pays attention to develop a kind of tourism that is appropriate to the traditional Kerala society values (respect the environment, responsible, slow paced, smart, Ayurveda.).

## **5 Possibility to Replicate Kumarakom's Pilot Project Elsewhere.**

Besides the natural beauty of "God's Own Country" and its numerous cultural attraction, the

state of Kerala has some political and social structures that are important assets in the implementation of PPT.

Kudumbashree, the women oriented poverty reduction organisation, was a strength for the implementation of the Responsible Tourism Initiative. The organisation played a role of active partner by providing groups of organised women who were ready to work within the RT framework. Kudumbashree benefits from a strong reputation within the Kerala community and therefore this partnership gave the needed credibility to the Responsible Tourism initiative, which was then able to use Kudumbashree network. The Kudumbashree project fits exactly with Kerala's approach to development and is perfectly integrated into the state's strategy.

Kerala decided to make tourism an engine for poverty alleviation several years ago. Consequently, Kerala appears to be a pioneer in its approach to tourism development. This might be related to the fact that the state has always been very left-wing. This has a big influence over Kerala's development strategy. The roots of Kerala's vision for fair and pro-poor tourism policies can be found in communist principles. The small size of the state can be considered as a natural asset as well. It obviously makes it easier for the decentralization and the implementation of policies. Furthermore, Kerala has the best education system in India.

Kerala is not overly reliant on overseas tourists and this is an important factor. A critique made on tourism development is about the over-reliance on foreign markets and thus the vulnerability to external factors (fashion in destinations, global crisis, terrorism and environmental threats). Therefore, local people working in small tourist businesses become entirely dependent on these external factors. For the case of Kerala, this justified critique might be no longer true. Though there is an annual increase in the number of international tourist arrivals in Kerala, Kerala's tourism industry is far more reliant on domestic Indian tourism. The government is also aware of the emergence and increase of the Indian middle class that represents hundreds of millions of people. Once they acquire sufficient income to enable them to travel, people from developing countries start to travel in their own countries. Looking at India's amazing diversity on natural and culturally attractive sites, this is understandable. The objectives were to know if Kerala's tourism was pro-poor, the extent that the pro-poor policies impact on the poor people and, if the case of Kerala should be taken as an example and replicated elsewhere.

The state of Kerala is trying to make tourism more Responsible and pro-poor. The government is also careful to drive these new policies slowly. They started new pilot destinations and so far Kumarakom results have been fruitful. A lot of initiatives and proactive measures have been implemented and already shown concrete positive impacts on the incomes of poor people, access to tourism market, networking and improvement of people's livelihoods and of the overall well-being of the community.

On the other hand, there can be some skepticisms about the possibility to replicate this case in other places. Kerala's initial conditions were absolutely fundamental in making these policies come true. The traditional left-wing orientation of the citizen, the well-organised and powerful civil society, the existence of Tourism Institutes such as KITTS and of poverty reduction organisations such as Kudumbashree and the well-educated population are numerous assets that are not necessarily available elsewhere, especially among the Less Developed Countries. Besides, not so many places have the advantage of having so many tourist attractions as Kerala does. When it is not a commercially realisable project, it is very complicated to organise pro-poor partnerships between the tourism industry and the local people.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The first stage of the RT started from September 2008, until September 2009. It is now considered that Kumarakom has moved to the second stage. The Committee wants to replicate what has been a success (local partnerships, sustainability of income, new tourism product). In this regard, the Department of Tourism is planning to use the case of Kumarakom as a framework, but all cases are different and projects have to be customized to match with the local features.

Whereas it is often said that tourism industry is unsustainable especially because of the negative impacts it may have on culture, environment and economy, the case of Kerala is different. The Kerala government's pro-poor orientation, alongside with its sustainable development ideology, its numerous attractive tourism sites and its high social and human development; may soon be proof that when tourism is understood and managed this way, it can bring benefits to the people and fight poverty. In that case, we can honestly refer to an economically, socially, responsible and sustainable tourism development.

The Indian Ministry of Tourism considers what has been done in Kumarakom as very impressive and would like to implement similar policies all over the country. However, it is important to keep in mind that Kerala benefits from very favourable initial conditions that may not be easy to find in other places.

As previously stated, in order to be effective, PPT measures have to be economically viable but the lack of communication over the PPT programme in Kerala might be a considerable issue in the long run. If the tourists knew more about it, they may openly ask for it, and the industry and the governments would probably take the issue more seriously. In order to increase the popularity of PPT and of socio-economic dimensions of tourism more generally, it is relevant to create an international label for tourism businesses and destinations that respect established guidelines.

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