Case Study: What makes the Community in CBT? An account on Tanzania CBT recent experience

The tourism literature has long debated the link between tourism and local communities, but fails to clearly define the term community, giving muddy indication on who should be considered to be a legitimate member of such group of individuals in Community Based Tourism (CBT). The term community has become a buzzword in most tourism literatures particularly in the tourism planning and development discourses (Salazar, 2012). The unclear definition of the term community has led to conflicts in power, benefit sharing and ownership of many tourism ventures. The fuzziness around this definition paves the way for exploitative relationships in many places where CBT programs are practiced, raising questions over its entire concept. While CBT programs are intended to empower people and reduce poverty level in rural communities, the representations deployed in constituting the targeted "communities", remain largely unexamined (Salazar, 2012). Tosun (2000) had already argued that one of the reasons for community-based tourism programs to fail is the hindering factors associated with the problematic assumptions embedded within the concept of community.

In the specific case of Tanzania, while tourism development has been largely focusing on wildlife and scenic resources within protected areas (Akunaay, Nelson, & Singleton, 2003),CBT programs have focused on the cultural aspect and lifestyle of people living in rural areas. The efforts to develop and promote CBT started in early 1990's with support from Tanzania Tourist Board (TTB) and Netherlands development organization (SNV); with an increasing number of CBT projects

being initiated by the local people in the mid 1990s mostly in the northern part of Tanzania, where the majority of tourism attractions are located. This led to a move towards the establishment of more community focused tourism initiatives with the aim of contributing more effectively to the livelihood of rural communities. Currently there are about 40 CBT initiatives in Tanzania, with about 85% of these located in the northern tourist zone. However, since the first assessment conducted by SNV in the mid 1990s, no rural supply chain analysis has been conducted to evaluate the level of contribution of these initiatives to the livelihood of rural communities.

This case study draws upon findings from an investigation of the planning, structure and implementation of CBTs in a number of selected areas in Tanzania. In-depth semi structured interviews were conducted in 2012 with two CBT groups (one in the north and one in the central area) and pioneers who initiated the process of establishing a number of CBT initiatives in Tanzania. The research confirmed the lack of clarity over the term 'community' in the definition of the Tanzanian CBT model. Each of the CBT initiatives had members involved according to their willingness to be part of the initiative, status within the community or upon the parameters established by the 'owner' of the specific CBT initiative. CBT models differed greatly in terms of structure, size, development level, and resource capacity (human, natural and cultural), opening the CBT approach to a number of criticisms. Although guidelines to govern more effectively the operationalization of CBT had been approved by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism, they failed to address some of the core questions associated with CBT, in particular: what is a community and how can CBT be an equitable way to involve all those belonging to a community? The research showed that a CBT project could succeed only if the 'community' has been clearly defined (direct and indirect beneficiaries), a truly representative governing organization has been put in place and all stakeholders understand their role within the new CBT development.

Management of CBT projects should not be left in the hands of few committee members (too often belonging to elite groups), but to skilled individuals with a specified mandate. The chances of success of a CBT initiative are directly linked with the skills and attractiveness provided by those living in the community through their traditional way-of-life as much as through their ability to make it appealing to visitors. Overall, CBT needs to be more enterprise-based rather than purely culture-based, as a diversified tourism experience that brings together culture, wildlife and all that is available in a locality, through a CBT entrepreneurial approach, may create a tourism environment, which encourages visitors to spend more time and money on products that truly benefit a clearly defined group of people, the so called 'community'.

References

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