Tourism industry for poverty reduction in Iran

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This article attempts to illustrate the status of tourism and its barriers to poverty reduction in Parseh, Iran. Tourism is certainly a major contributor to poverty reduction in many countries. But, there are significant numbers of barriers to effectively using tourism industry as a tool for poverty reduction in developing countries. The findings through focus group discussion indicated that there negative attitudes towards tourism development on poverty reduction. The result of this study also found that there are some organizational and community barriers in tourism development for poverty reduction. The finding can assist the local organizations for remove this problem in face of tourism for poverty reduction.

Key words: Tourism, poverty reduction, barriers on poverty reduction.

INTRODUCTION

Although, the economic significance of tourism for developing countries is long established, it is not until recently that tourism has begun to be exalted as a powerful weapon to attack poverty (Zhao and Ritchie, 2007). The world tourism organization (WTO) asserts tourism as a vehicle for poverty alleviation in developing countries (Manyara et al., 2006). Today, tourism is beginning to be recognized as a major source of economic growth especially in poor countries (Bolwell and Weinz, 2008). Traditionally, the impact of tourism has been measured in terms of its contribution to gross national product and employment created. Tourism growth is most often measured through increases in international arrivals, length of stay, bed occupancy, tourism expenditures and the value of tourism spending (Jamieson and Nadkarni, 2009). There is enormous scope for the tourism industry to contribute better to less poverty in the world (Bolwell and Weinz, 2008).

According to the world economic forum (WEF) report, the tourism industry creates most new jobs in developing countries (Bolwell and Weinz, 2008). Hence, tourism is the major services export for many developing countries and has much potential to provide competitive advantage for them. But tourism growth is not universally inclusive of the poor. Moreover, the understanding of how tourism affects the poor is largely based on superficial analysis. Although, Parseh has many tourism attractions, but despite having so many tourism attractions, it is alleged that tourism does not play a significant role in poverty reduction in Parseh, Fars. Hence, this study attempts to shows the barriers of tourism on poverty alleviation in the study area.

PRO-POOR TOURISM AND POVERTY REDUCTION

Poverty has been defined as the “denial of opportunities and choices most basic to human development to lead a long, healthy, creative life and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-esteem and respect from others” (Hirschowitz et al., 2000). Poverty can be reduced through pro-poor tourism (PPT). PPT as an approach to tourism development that generates net benefits for poor people was introduced in the late 1990s through policy documents and reports sponsored primarily by the United Kingdom Department for International Development to explore the potential of tourism to eliminate poverty (Goodwin, 2002).

PPT refers to tourism that is developed in a way that furthers the cause of poverty alleviation. It has been defined simply as tourism that results in increased benefits for poor people (Suntikul et al., 2009). According to the PPT Partnership, PPT is tourism that results in increased net benefits for poor people. PPT is not a specific product or niche sector but an approach to tourism development and management. It enhances the linkages between tourism businesses and poor people so that tourism’s contribution to poverty reduction is
increased and poor people are able to participate more effectively in product development (Bolwell and Weinz, 2008). PPT is not a tourism niche but an approach to tourism development. It is distinct from, but related to, other emerging approaches to tourism, such as community based tourism and ecotourism (Suntikul et al., 2009).

It is acknowledged that, while tourism is an industry driven primarily by commercial interests and thus, with limits to its pro-poor potential, it does have a number of characteristics and advantages over other sectors in terms of poverty reduction. There is no unanimity of views on tourism and poverty reduction. For example, according to one critic, most of the effects of tourism on poor people are negative (Bolwell and Weinz, 2008). Figure 1 is an illustration of tourism development in poverty reduction.

**BARRIERS OF TOURISM IN POVERTY REDUCTION**

Although, there is a promising future for the agriculture tourism sector, the future looks blink if the existing barriers remain unresolved. Jamieson and Nadkarni (2009) identified some barriers to effectively using tourism development as a tool for poverty reduction. These barriers include:

i. Within the Asian context, there is very little recognition of the potential of tourism development by aid agencies.

ii. Lack of government programs and organizational capacity to respond to the opportunities provided by tourism development.

iii. Few, if any tourism and poverty officials have any education or training in using tourism as a poverty reduction tool.

iv. Limited access to tourism infrastructure and lack essential market knowledge to allow local communities to develop PPT strategies (Jamieson and Nadkarni, 2009).

Institutional factors can cause market linkage failures and reduce the chances of success for PPT (Bolwell and Weinz, 2008). Bushell and Eagles (2007) states tourism as a phenomenon of affluent contemporary societies is a particularly difficult concept to grasp in developing countries. In this sense, tourism development may be more difficult to achieve than other activities in developing countries. Barriers are generally similar in these communities, but a few factors tend to be more pronounced among these communities:

i. Lack of formal education and foreign language skills.

ii. Lack of decision-making and planning skills concerning the possible consequences of tourism, coupled with limited ability to control tourism development, unpredictable political climates, and long-term funding uncertainty (Bushell and Eagles, 2007).

As a consequence, community tourism facilities and services may be unacceptable for international tourists. Hence, building capacity in local communities is necessary for stakeholders involved in tourism development (Bushell and Eagles, 2007). There will always be particular barriers that need to be overcome if poor people are to significantly benefit from tourism. The ODI lists 15 different types of barriers to consider in this regard (Bolwell and Weinz, 2008). The barriers are listed in Table 1

**METHODOLOGY**

Parseh in Fars Province, Iran was selected as a case study area because it provided many opportunities to develop tourism industry; Persepolis (Old Persian Parsa, Takht-e Jamshid or Chehel Minar) was the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire (ca. 550-330 BCE). Persepolis is situated 70 km northeast of the modern city of Shiraz in the Fars Province. In contemporary Persian, the site is known as Takht-e Jamshid (Throne of Jamshid) and Parseh. The earliest remains of Persepolis date from around 515 BCE. To the ancient Persians, the city was known as Parsa, which means (Wikipedia, 2010).

This study is based on quantitative methodology to investigate the level of PPT and barriers of tourism related to poverty alleviation. Hence, to achieve the objectives of this study, the researcher uses quantitative method. Focus group discussion (FGD) was performed to collect data from local residents. FGD is probably the most widely used technique of gathering qualitative data (Grover and Vriens, 2006). Nykkel (2007) states that FGD is a tourism marketing research technique that combines personal opinions in the form of group discussion with a set of structured questions. According to Rafipoor (2005) FGD technique is an appropriate technique in social science research in terms of Iranian culture. FGD was conducted in a group setting and was used for obtaining a better understanding of participants' attitudes. There is no consensus among qualitative researchers on the optimal number of participants in FGD. Some researchers suggest the number of studies argued by four to twelve people (Mendis-Millard and Reed, 2007). But the ideal number of participants in each FGD is six to ten.

Participants of FGD were classified according to their place in the
Table 1. Barriers of Tourism related to poverty reduction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers to tourism benefiting poor people</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of human capital</td>
<td>Low literacy and poor job skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender norms and constraints</td>
<td>Beliefs that women should not work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of social capital</td>
<td>Poor communities are often not represented in civil society and economic planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of financial capital</td>
<td>Lack of micro credit, or revolving loan facilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompatibility with existing livelihood strategies</td>
<td>Seasonal subsistence activity may coincide with peak tourism period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Many poor people may live remote from places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of land ownership and tenure</td>
<td>Many poor countries have no effective rights of land ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of product</td>
<td>Subsistence food is not suitable for tourists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning process favors others – lack of planning gain</td>
<td>Developments set up in remote beach areas and purely benefit the industry with, for example, golf courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulations and red tape</td>
<td>Many certificates required from different ministries to set up small business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate access to tourism market</td>
<td>Tourism market may be geared to imports, or package tourism may avoid contact with the poor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low capacity to meet tourist expectations</td>
<td>Poor communities may be unaware of tourist expectations, or lack language skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of linkages between formal and informal sectors and local suppliers</td>
<td>Tourism enterprises may build on existing relationships with foreign suppliers, rather than seek local linkages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate tourist market</td>
<td>Segment may be largely package or domestic that ignores unique culture of destination.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of pro-active government support for involvement by the poor</td>
<td>PPT not included in development strategies, market facilities not provided, education levels low.</td>
</tr>
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RESULTS

Information for this study was gathered from residents through FGD. A qualitative analysis was undertaken to determine viewed the current level of PPT and also barriers of tourism related to poverty reduction. According to the collected baseline data, farming is the most common occupation in the 7 villages. There were overall 65 participants with an average of 57 years old. All participants were males. They were chosen because their villages are located around the historical area of Fars, Iran. The questions were about the contribution of tourism in poverty reduction and barriers of poverty reduction in terms of tourism development.

Tourism impacts on poverty reduction

In terms of tourism impacts on poverty reduction, most of the participants had an overall negative attitudes towards...
tourism impacts on poverty reduction. They believe that tourism does not have important role in their villages especially on poor people. The participants in focus groups also illustrated the level of PPT in their village is low. However, there were some justification in their argument. The authors’ observation also confirmed this argument.

**Barriers of poverty reduction through tourism development**

**Barriers through the Villages**

The findings showed that tourism development in their villages is without any certain planning for poverty reduction. Although, the FGD respondent referred to variety barriers in terms of tourism for poverty reduction in their villages, the study refer to some common barriers which have been discussed in majority of FGD groups. The most barriers in terms of PPT though villages were:

**Lack of local council capable:** They stated lack of capable leaders in local council as important barriers for PPT in their villages.

**Lack of conditions:** Majority of FGD participants believed there are no suitable conditions in their village to improve tourism industry.

**Lack of resources:** Lack of resources in the villages was other barrier of PPT. The most participants in FDG groups mentioned to this issue as main obstacles to PPT, they believe that their village have many tourism attractions, but they do not have financial resource to develop tourism in their area. They referred to tourism infrastructure and accommodation as an important issue to develop PPT.

**Barriers through local organizations**

Focus groups often complained about the lack local organizational support to provide adequate facilities and protection historical building:

**Lack of government support:** Lack of government support to provide funding for poor residents to participate in tourism activities.

**Lack of leaders’ tourism knowledge:** The participants in all groups mentioned to this issue as one barrier of tourism development to poverty reduction in their villages.

**Lack of capacity of local organizations:** FGD respondents believed that lack of capacity of local organizations; especially local tourism organization was behind the failure investment for PPT. However, in the end of any discussion they refer to the barriers of PPT through government policy as well as local organizations. With regards to the aforementioned discussion about barriers of tourism related to poverty reduction, the study summarized these barriers in two groups: barriers through villages and barriers through government (Figure 2).
Conclusion

This paper has identified the barriers of tourism development for poverty reduction. Lack of capable organizations and community resources were an important element contributing to limited tourism for poverty reduction. As have been mentioned by Jamieson and Nadkarn (2009), the tourism has some barriers related to poverty reduction in Asian countries. Hence, this argument has been confirmed by this study. Overall, the findings indicated that residents have negative attitude towards contribution of tourism development for poverty reduction. They referred to government policy and lack of local organizational capacity as main barriers related poverty reduction through tourism development.

Clearly, the described barriers may not be only specific to PPT development strategy; some of them may also be considered as common general problems of tourism development in other communities in Iran. Hence, it should be accepted that these barriers may be an extension of the prevailing social, political and economic structure in Iran, which have prevented communities from achieving a higher level of development. Base on the findings, empowerment can be a tool for poverty reduction through local tourism development. The findings of this study can be useful for academics, researchers and all stakeholders involved in designing, assessing or promoting tourism projects which are in any way associated with general development goals.

REFERENCES


