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RESPONSIBLE TOURISM - A GRASS ROOT LEVEL EMPOWERMENT MECHANISM: CASE STUDY FROM KERALA

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Abstract

When the scale of growth shifts from economic terms to human development indicators, it is the empowerment of people of bottom level decides the real development of nations. To ensure faster, sustainable and inclusive growth, participation of people from all walks of life is essential especially for the marginalized sector. The concepts of local self governance and participatory approach pave way for democratic decentralization and sustainable development of villages. In par with these concepts, a novel approach Responsible Tourism (RT) charts new trend in grass root level empowerment by ensuring involvement of all the different sectors of society. Here the article articulates the strategies and institutional mechanism of RT initiatives of Kerala as a strategy for the empowerment of common people in tourism destinations.

Keywords: Responsible Tourism (RT); Decentralization; Local Self Government (LSG); Triple Bottom Line (TBL); Destination Management; Sustainable Development and Participatory Process

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Introduction

Even though the concept of Grama Sabha (Village Assembly) and decentralization is not new, it received more impetus after the 73rd amendment to the constitution which made a three-tier system of Panchayath Raj. The Panchayath Raj system empowers people and enables them to think, discuss and decide on myriad socio-economic issues around them, that makes democratic decentralization and self-governance a reality. The view of Mahatma Gandhi was that Grama Swaraj (local self governance) is the panacea to save our villages from

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degradation, and the entire edifice of rural development of India is built on this principle. Development is a two way process that requires active participation from people as well as all other constitutional functionaries. The participatory approach facilitates resource mobilization and support of people, ensures people at bottom level are getting benefit from various projects of government. In order to achieve sustainability and self sufficiency, people at grass root level should own the agenda of development and participate in local governance by involving in debates, deliberations and decision regarding the plans, policies and programs of Government (Dwarakanath, 2013).

It is important to note that, due to various political and social reasons, the state of Kerala has the strongest system of local self governance in India, having come much farther down the road to devolution of powers to Local Self Governments (LSG's). This three tier system established a new idiom for governance by focusing on local economic development and service delivery, especially services for the poor the most in the last tier (Saradha, 2008). The experience of Kerala undoubtedly proves that decentralization of power, functions and funds provides great scope for development and good governance of regions. The project Responsible Tourism (RT) initiated by Kerala in line with these notion creates myriad stories on grass root level empowerment and community participation. As a tool for sustainable tourism development, RT strives to bring people at marginalized level to the mainstream society by ensuring sustainable livelihood and curbing various pressing social concerns. This successful RT model and the institutional mechanism of Kerala offers immense opportunities for empowerment of neglected mass who struggle to meet both ends.

Responsible Tourism

Responsible Tourism is a tourism management strategy embracing planning, management, product development and marketing to bring about positive economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts. For tourism operators it is about providing more rewarding holiday experiences for guests enabling local communities to enjoy a better quality of life and conserving the natural environment (Spenceley et al. 2002). The most wide and often referred definition of RT is that *'it is about creating better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit'*, that aims at minimizing negative economic, environment and social impacts (Francis and Goodwin, 2003) . It generates direct benefits to local people by contributing to the development of local economies which in turn provides better living condition for the host communities. The industry-community rapport created through RT principles develops a win-win situation and it also makes positive

contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural diversity. Albeit the idea of RT was evolved right from 1986 (Jost Krippendorf), it was only after the Cape Town Declaration (2002) it got a comprehensive guidelines and structure that as follows.

- Minimizes negative economic, environmental, and social impacts;
- Generates greater economic benefits for local people and enhances the well-being of host communities, improves working conditions and access to the industry;
- Involves local people in decisions that affect their lives and life chances;
- Makes positive contributions to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, to the maintenance of the world's diversity;
- Provides more enjoyable experiences for tourists through more meaningful connections with local people, and a greater understanding of local cultural, social and environmental issues;
- Provides access for physically challenged people; and
- Is culturally sensitive, engenders respect between tourists and hosts, and builds local pride and confidence.

Responsible Tourism envisions a triple bottom line (TBL) approach viz. economic responsibility, social responsibility, and environmental responsibility. Though each area has its own relevance, utmost importance is for economic responsibility that seeks to make use of local resources optimum by encouraging spending by local, generating employment and promoting local procurement so that the local economy and the local people get the benefit of tourism development. The TBL responsibility suggested by Cape Town Declaration can be encapsulated as:

Economic Responsibility.

- Assess economic impacts before developing tourism and exercise preference for those forms of development that benefit local communities and minimise negative impacts on local livelihoods (for example through loss of access to resources), recognising that tourism may not always be the most appropriate form of local economic development.
- Maximise local economic benefits by increasing linkages and reducing leakages, by ensuring that communities are involved in, and benefit from, tourism. Wherever possible use tourism to assist in poverty reduction by adopting pro-poor strategies.
- Develop quality products that reflect, complement, and enhance the destination.

- Market tourism in ways which reflect the natural, cultural and social integrity of the destination, and which encourage appropriate forms of tourism.
- Adopt equitable business practises, pay and charge fair prices, and build partnerships in ways in which risk is minimised and shared, and recruit and employ staff recognising international labour standards.
- Provide appropriate and sufficient support to small, medium and micro enterprises to ensure tourism-related enterprises thrive and are sustainable.

Social Responsibility

- Actively involve the local community in planning and decision-making and provide capacity building to make this a reality.
- Assess social impacts throughout the life cycle of the operation – including the planning and design phases of projects - in order to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive ones.
- Endeavour to make tourism an inclusive social experience and to ensure that there is access for all, in particular vulnerable and disadvantaged communities and individuals.
- Combat the sexual exploitation of human beings, particularly the exploitation of children.
- Be sensitive to the host culture, maintaining and encouraging social and cultural diversity.
- Endeavour to ensure that tourism contributes to improvements in health and education.

Environmental Responsibility

- Assess environmental impacts throughout the life cycle of tourist establishments and operations – including the planning and design phase - and ensure that negative impacts are reduced to the minimum and maximising positive ones.
- Use resources sustainably, and reduce waste and over-consumption.
- Manage natural diversity sustainably, and where appropriate restore it; and consider the volume and type of tourism that the environment can support, and respect the integrity of vulnerable ecosystems and protected areas.
- Promote education and awareness for sustainable development – for all stakeholders.
- Raise the capacity of all stakeholders and ensure that best practice is followed, for this purpose consult with environmental and conservation experts.

When many tourism destinations do not maintain harmony between destination community and tourism industry, Responsible Tourism paints successful stories of healthy acquaintance of industry and community in the canvas of world tourism map. The role played by local people in decision making, planning and management of destination-matters out all such apprehensions. Along with TBL responsibility consideration, the mutual accord among the trio - local community, industry and Local Self Government (LSG) acts as a key success factor for destination development. This is the lesson from the Responsible Tourism initiative of Kerala in India.

Responsible Tourism, Kerala – a Participatory Planning Process

Being a place with scenic beauty and abundant natural attraction, Kerala has a distinctive position in the international tourism map. Tourism has been one of the main sources of income in the state. Growing at a rate of 13.31%, the tourism industry is a major contributor to the state's economy. Kerala attracted 0.66 million foreign tourist arrivals in 2010, (Tourism Statistics, Kerala Tourism, 2011). Along with these, there are so many reasons like the availability of plenty of natural resources, skilled manpower, supportive and entrepreneurial community, strong Local Self Government (LSG), civil society organizations, micro enterprises, academicians, responsible media etc. substantiate why Kerala is ideally suited for implementing Responsible Tourism (Vijayakumar and Rupesh, 2011). The Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala organized a state wide consultation on



Responsible Tourism in these background in 2007 that witnessed participation of a wide range of stakeholders including representatives of

Local Self Governments, tourism industry, civil society organizations, academicians, and media. It was in the wake of this consultation, a State Level Responsible Tourism Committee (SLRTC) was formed with representation from all stakeholders (Fig.1), and the committee decided to take up the implementation of Responsible Tourism initiative in Kumarakom, Wayanad, Kovalam, and Thekkady on a pilot basis. Followed by the formation of state level executive committees on Economic, Social and Environment, a Destination Level RT Committees (DLRTC) and executive committees were formed in all the four destinations.

Additionally, State Level Technical Support Cell and Destination Level Responsible Tourism Cell have been set up as a supportive mechanism for the day to day activities and implementation of the RT programme.

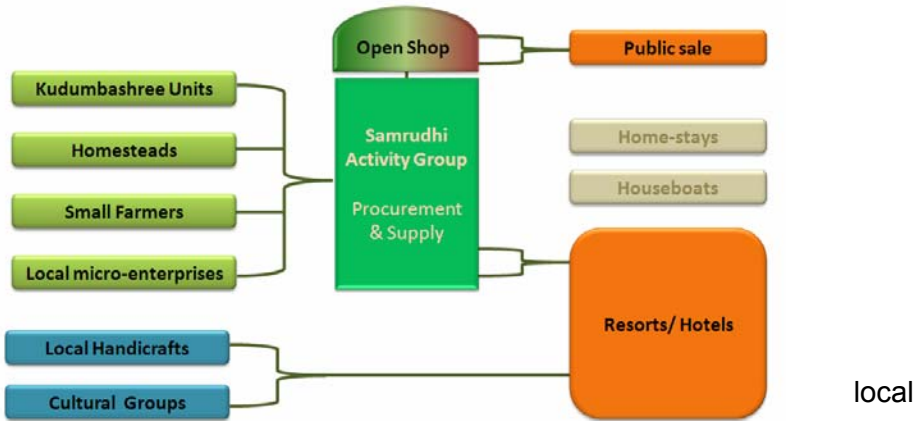
SLRTC: This Committee holds all the powers to plan and execute the RT programme in the State through the Dept. of Tourism. The Committee comprises of a broad mix of representatives of government, Local Self Governments, tourism industry, civil society organizations, academicians, media, members of the legislative assembly, organizations involved in tourism and individuals who can contribute high levels of professional expertise in the area.

DLRTC: The whole responsibility for the implementation of RT programme at the destinations relies on this Committee.

Responsible Tourism at Destinations

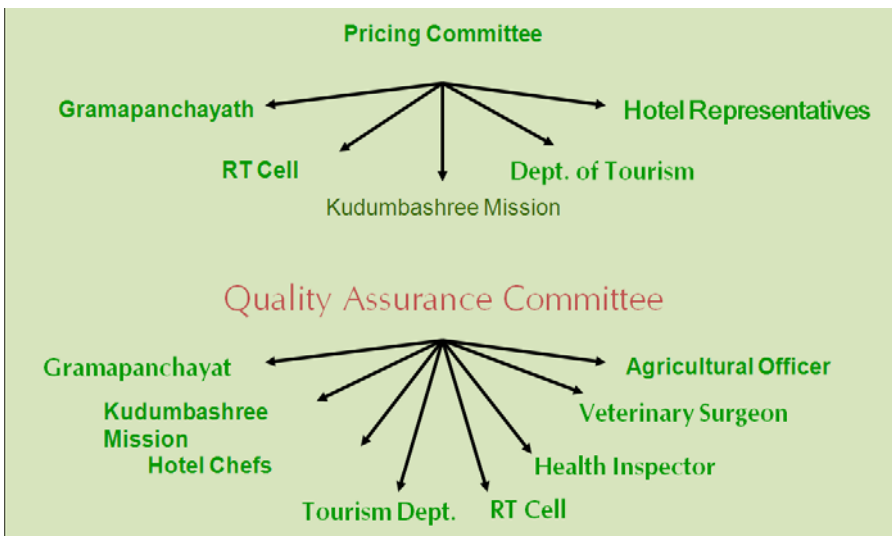
As the prime objective of the project was to increase livelihood opportunities of destination community, RT Cell focused on the industry-community rapport through continuous sensitization programs. In order to strengthen these linkages, a demand-supply gap assessment study on

Figure 2: Production-Procurement Mechanism



produces was done and organized stakeholder’s meet for bridging this gap. Considering the possibilities of local procurement of industry demand in local produces and services, the SLRTC has decided to position the State Poverty Eradication Mission, or Kudumbashree as it is popularly known, in destination to fill this void.

Figure 3: Structure of Price Fixation and Quality Assurance Committees



At one side attention was on industry-community-link-up and on other side focus was on the enhancement of agricultural production and to

build a strong procurement supply mechanism. Based on the demand chart and local produces list, RT cell conducted destination wide awareness and training programs on homestead farming, souvenir making, and related livelihood opportunities. Formation of 'Samrudhi'- an activity group under the banner of Kudumbasree for procurement and supply of local produces was the most successful venture of RT initiatives (fig.2). Samrudhi group developed a Supply Calendar to ensure prompt supply of products to hotels, and the Price Fixing Committee and Quality Control Committee formed (fig.3) in the destinations with equal participation from stake holders were enough to resolve issues of supply shortage, price determination and quality problems.

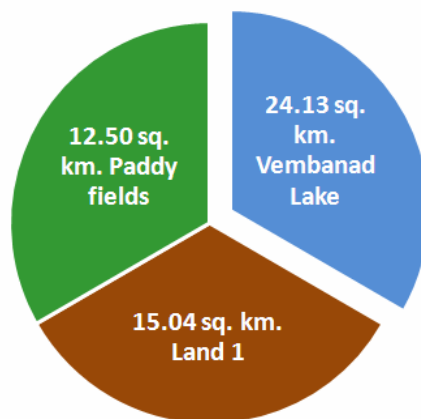
Figure 4: RT – A Participatory Process



After 5 years of experiments and experiences of the implementation of RT, Kumarakom emerged as the most viable and replicable model. It is learnt that, as a mediator and facilitator, Local Self Governments (LSG's) -Panchayaths have a decisive role in the success of all kind of projects, especially in the robustness of industry-community partnership ((fig.4).. Unless LSG's and local community take the ownership of RT, it will not accomplish its targets. In the background of this learning, Govt. of Kerala

now is on the road of replicating this model in other destinations. Manuals and guidelines are already been distributed to corresponding local governments.

Chart 1: Geographical Spread - Kumarakom



Responsible Tourism at Kumarakom

Kumarakom- a paradise of mangrove forests, green paddy fields and coconut groves interspersed with enchanting waterways and canals adorned with white lilies spreads in an area of around 51.67 sq. km with population 6000 (Chart. 1) Life of the people closely associated with backwater, agriculture; and fishing is the major livelihood activity. Though many of the inhabitants welcomed tourism development initially considering the manifold increase of land value and income opportunities, most of the local labourers lost their traditional occupation and those displaced from the lands converted for tourism could not be compensated with alternative jobs. Also around 80% of the regular employees in big hotels were from outside Kumarakom and clustering of the resorts blocked access of local people to backwaters that badly affected those who depended it for household activities, fishing and shell collection. Amidst apprehensions, mass campaigns launched by RT Cell produced results and that helped to build trust among community members. Table.1 illustrates the efforts put for stabilizing activities in the destination.

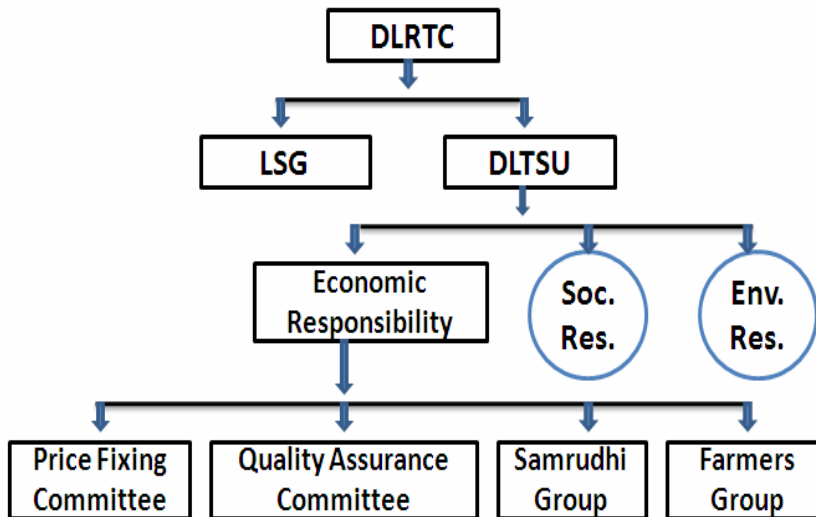
Table.1: Details of initial Sensitization Programs- Phase: 1 (Source: RT State Cell Kerala)

Sl. No.	Particulars of Meeting	No.
1	LSG Members	45
2	People Representatives	10
3	Partnering Hotels	135
4	Kudumbasree Office bearers	82
5	Samrudhi activity group	82
6	Kudumbashree cultivation groups	140
7	Kudumbashree Micro Enterprises	88
	Total	582

As part of the strategies to improve agricultural production, RT cell carried out a survey in the Panchayath area to identify cultivable areas and land left fallow that resulted in the cultivation of 85 acres of land. LSG played a crucial role in mobilizing Kudumbasree volunteers to cultivate 55 acres of land and to encourage local farmers to take up another 30 acres along with the introduction of homestead farming in 612 houses.

Economic Linkages

Figure 5: organizational Layout – Kumarakom
(DLTSU – Destination Level Technical Support Unit (RT Cell))



Community industry harmony is one of the success factors of Kuamrakom model. It is reported that around 1000 local residents are getting benefit from RT activities. Samrudhi shop – the active procurement supply system at the destination lead by Kudumbasree members ensures uninterrupted supply of products especially to hotels and nearby community. It is heartening to note that 90% of the hotels in the destination associate with RT Scheme. Even though the initial supply list comprised only 14 products, it got enhanced to 48. Studies reveal that Samrudhi shop is supported by over 400 local production units, Kudumbasree vegetable units, 14 units of local farmers, and 360 homestead units; and each unit gets an average amount of Rs 20,000/month. There are 4 Kudumbsree owned and women managed canteens are operating in the destination, the average monthly revenue of each unit is approximately 2 lakhs. Table.2 shows that total revenue of Samrudhi group over these years is Rs. 7605000 and the total income generated through RT initiatives is around 24million (2008 June to 2013 June) (Table.2). Additionally, various other micro enterprises like fish processing unit, chapatti making unit, chicken processing unit, tender coconut unit, gift making unit, pappad making unit, handicraft, painting unit, souvenir unit, plantain leaves supply unit, fish farming, lotus cultivation units and different cultural groups are contributing for the sustainable livelihood of village community. It is imperative to consider

the fact that all these progress happened in a small village where earlier did not have even a single micro enterprise.

Table.2: Samrudhi Sales (2008 – 2013 June) (Source: RT Cell Kumarakom)

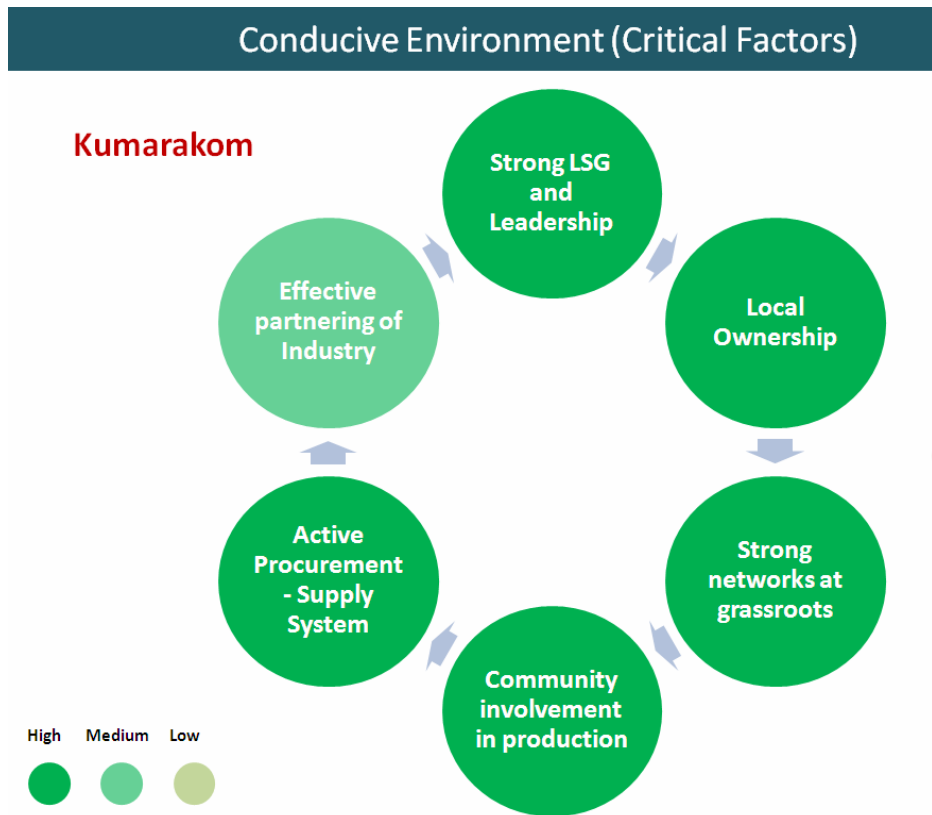
Year	Samrudhi Sales (In Rs.)	
	Hotel	Open
2008	475000	250000
2009	1,000,000	325000
2010	1400000	485000
2011	600000	115000
2012	1700000	320000
2013	750000	185000
TOTAL	5925000	1680000
Grand Total	7605000	

Table.3: Micro Enterprises Revenue (2008 – 2013 June) (Source: RT Cell Kumarakom)

Year	Micro Enterprises						Total (Rs.)
	Canteen	Souvenir Unit	Cultural Groups	Home stead	Farmers Unit	Other Processing Units	
2008	0	0	0	0	150000	0	150000
2009	0	200000	0	150000	350000	75,000	775000
2010	0	800000	180000	350000	550000	185000	2065000
2011	650000	1280000	0	380000	220000	380000	2910000
2012	2000000	1400000	600000	595000	850000	1580000	7025000
2013	1480000	885000	450000	325000	395000	865000	4400000
Total	4130000	4565000	1230000	1800000	2515000	3085000	17325000

Within a short span of time Responsible Tourism scheme at Kumarakom came out with credible results that influenced the development of destination as well as local community. As a strategy for sustainable tourism development, RT throws light to various prevailing issues of destination management.

Figure 6: Destination Environment - Kumarakom



Strong LSG Leadership

A strong Local Self Government is essential to bring the voiceless to the fore of the society. Local government is in the forefront from the very beginning to facilitate the task of economic linkages including identification of farmers, ensuring the availability of experts on crop management, arrangement of crop loans and insurance, leadership in liaison with the hoteliers, monitoring the activities of pricing fixing committee and quality assurance committee etc. Ownership, accountability and transparency of LSG made the process more participatory and this good governance approach extended to all sections of society ensured the development process inclusive, equitable and sustainable.

Community Participation: The goal of inclusive development will not be achieved without the participation of local people. The initiative to fill the trust deficit between industry and community became a giant leap that gradually attracted common people to the road of sustainable

tourism development. Active community especially women members in the board are now willing to take up any challenging task of managing small, medium and micro enterprises. It is significant to note that almost all the thousand families in the village are directly or indirectly associated with Responsible Tourism initiatives. Table.4 shows the ways and strength of community involvement in RT project.

Table.4: Community Participation (Source: RT Cell Kumarakom)

Sl. No	Details of Participating units (direct beneficiaries)	No. of Units	Total Participants
1	Women Groups	64	845
2	Home Stead	675	675
3	Farmers Unit	14	600
4	Local Production Units	100	100
5	Village Life Experience Package	3	62
6	Voluntary Life Guards	----	35
7	Naturalist	3	10
	TOTAL		2317

Along with procurement supply system there are multiple ways for the local community to participate with RT activities, like homestead farming, naturalist or tour guide, micro enterprise operation, artisan, cultural group, food production unit, campaigner etc. Mr. Muraleedharan, an artisan in the destination earns around Rs.30,000/month, Sebastin, a farm owner makes an average amount of Rs. 250/day as a partner of Village Life Experience(VLE) tours, around 45 families in the destination get an average of Rs. 150/day through VLE, Mr. Bhagath, a local tour guide has an average daily income of Rs. 500 and Mrs. Suma, a lady, farmer and rower gets an average of Rs. 200/day by taking tourists in to the village in her boat. The Suvarna Cultural group – the first professional women and children cultural group in Kerala, trained by RT cell, charges Rs. 4000 to 7000 for showcasing Shinkarimelam and Chendamaelam, and different other local art forms.

Community Based Tourism (CBT) Products, a strategy to ensure people involvement aims at promotion of destination art, culture and unexplored areas becomes an innovative theme of RT. The *Village Life Experience Packages (VLE) developed by the RT Cell* offer verities of unseen activities and attractions in the hinterlands of villages to tourists. Packages titled “Village Life Experience at Kumarakom”, “A Day with Farmers’ & ‘A Day with Fisherman” incorporate service of local

guide/interpreter, boat ride, Anganwadi visit, fish farm and demonstration of traditional fish catching methods, home garden, coconut leaf weaving, traditional crafts making, toddy tapping, coir making, and autorikshaw ride.

Rather than benefitting; local community participating in planning, budgeting, managing and monitoring of the project and this intrinsically develop a sense of responsibility among members of society. Here Responsible Tourism creates responsible citizens, that community itself now responsible to respond to negative practices in the industry and taking leadership position in identifying and rectifying unethical practices in the destination this in turn helps to maintain destination clean image.

People Empowerment

This is evident from the vibrant participation of women members (table.5) under the brand of Kudumsree - now the catalyst of community development in the region, takes up different projects creating employment and livelihood. In order to provide technical expertise, Panchayath, RT Cell and different other departments coordinate training programs, capacity building exercises, and promotion of entrepreneurship in different formats. Majority of the local people are covered under some kind of training programs and this ongoing program incorporates training on organic farming, wasteland cultivation, food safety, houseboat operation and backwater cruising, candle making, responsible driving, virtual learning, life guarding etc. (table.4)

Table.5: Training and Capacity Building Programs (Source: RT Cell Kumarakom)

Sl. No	Particulars of Training	No. of Participants
1	Guide Training	30
2	Samrudhi Group	25
3	Organic Farming	110
4	VLE Training	75
5	Handicraft making	15
6	Kudumbasree	1500
7	Production Units	600
8	Farmers	600
9	Life guard	45
10	Auto, Taxi, Boat Driver's training	150
11	AIDS Awareness	150
	TOTAL	3300

In line with objective of the National Policy for Empowerment of women, 2011, women must be economically and socially empowered through focused efforts; RT provides myriad platforms for women to empower themselves and to the part of main stream society and governance. When 85% of women in India are destined to find their future through structural forms of dependency (John, 2012), almost same percentage of women at Kumarakom become a part of any Self Help Group (SHG) or micro enterprise. This also paved way for creating new opportunities for women in politics and governance, even though they have 50% reservation in local elections. In nut shell, this participatory purpose increases the ability of people to exercise their power and to make their living better. Two paper bag units employed 68 women working in the destination produce and supply eco friendly bags to hotels and nearby market, also around 145 women are newly trained for the production of various eco friendly products.

Table.6: Women Participation (Source: RT Cell Kumarakom)

Sl. No	Women initiatives led	No. of Units	Participation (Number)
1	Kudumbasree	20	600
2	SHG	10	75
3	Production Units	10	30
4	Micro Enterprises	20	100
5	Cultural Groups	4	40
	Total	64	845

Empowerment has different dimensions; personal empowerment, social empowerment and destination empowerment and all these happen at Kumarakom because of strong grass root level leadership and community ownership. The combined efforts of village people and the environmentalist led to declare the bird sanctuary at Kumarakom a plastic free zone, helped to protect mangroves, and to curb back water pollution. Under this initiative, around 2500 mangroves have been planted so far; integrated with the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee programme, the Panchayath is also launched a campaign to plant 1,500 mangrove plants.

It is apparent that Responsible Tourism Scheme at destinations not only enhanced producer or enterprise groups but also created more space for the local people to improve their standard of living. While there are certain prevailing challenges of professionalizing top level of the enterprises, strengthening marketing and promotional strategies and to achieve the target of 'zero waste' destination, LSG moves with the optimism that more combined efforts from different government departments and industry fraternities will provide impetus to this unending pace.

Conclusion

5 years of experience of implementing Responsible Tourism in Kerala proves the capability of Local Self Government to build industry-community trust and the leadership to coordinate activities in triple bottom line areas. The Kumarakom Panchayath has efficiently mobilized local community and ensured local ownership through continuous programs that guarantee positive and meaningful involvement of the local community, through which it has brought about local economic empowerment especially to the women community. Despite the first ever coordinated initiative in India to implement Responsible Tourism; it has produced significant outputs at Kumarakom in terms of enhanced

cultivation and community participation. It is vital to remember that, these achievements are noteworthy when leading tourism destinations fail to balance tourism development and retain their unique tradition livelihoods, culture and heritage. But the long term commitment of Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala, and its strenuous efforts to coordinate different stake holders invariably proves that Responsible Tourism model at Kumarakom could be replicated in all growing tourism destinations to ensure sustainable of tourism development.

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