

## THE RELEVANCE OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT TO TOURISM

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***Abstract :** Tourism is often regarded as a tool of modernization and growth. However, the third world countries do not have the resources and skill to seize the opportunity offered by tourism development. There is an urgent need to provide training and skill enhancement to local communities; who often are last to receive economic benefits generated from tourism endeavours. This paper dwells on the recognition and development of economic opportunity with local participation with special reference to an ecotourism site in Goa.*

***Keywords :** LPG era, VET*

### **Introduction**

Third world countries have often used tourism as a development strategy, a tool of modernization and an avenue for economic growth. While doing so, it is drawn into the vortex of a global economic system over which it has very little control. The global tourism enterprises have superior entrepreneurial skill, resources and commercial power which enable them to dominate many Third world tourist destinations. Thus an adequately skilled workforce is a necessary precondition for tourism to reach its potential of contributing to socio-economic development, job creation and business opportunities.

As is true with any other industry, people in the tourism industry need a range of knowledge and skills to both start and operate a successful business. Not only do they need generic business knowledge and skills in such areas as marketing, financial management and planning, they also need specific tourism industry knowledge and skills. Tourism has been often used as a vehicle for economic benefit of local communities by way of recruitment, training and skill development. Often the top-down approach attempts to force processes on communities without any regard for social, cultural and environmental issues.

In this context, it is important to understand the relation between tourism and employment, the significance of skill development to tourism development with special reference to Goa.

### **Tourism and Employment**

The tourism industry is growing by leaps and bounds despite global economic slowdown. Estimates suggest that tourism employs at least 255 million people throughout the world and contributes more than 9 percent of global GDP (WTTC, 2012a). This indicates the extent to which tourism plays a role in economic development of developing countries.

The corporate led tourism development is totally dedicated to consumerism. However, the beneficiaries of this growth in income have largely been multinational corporations, with local communities often seeing little economic benefits. Commenting on the extent of economic leakage, Ashley

et al, (2000) estimate that around 55 percent of tourism expenditure goes outside the destination country, implying that the local residents are not the direct beneficiaries of any tourism endeavour. This aspect is reflected in the book 'Tourism, Globalization and Development: Responsible Tourism Planning', in which Reid (2003) observes that local communities often form the front line in terms of service provision, but are last in line when it comes to benefiting from development. The local community is often viewed by the developers either as a common resource to be exploited or an obstacle to be overcome in order to implement tourism development programmes.

### **The Need for Skill Development**

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), "Skill development is of key importance in stimulating a sustainable development process. Its major contribution lies in facilitating the transition from an informal to formal economy. In the context of globalization it is also essential to address the opportunities and challenges to meet new demands of changing economies and new technologies." One of the important objectives of skill development is to create a workforce that is equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge so as to enable them to gain access to decent employment and ensure India's competitiveness in the ever dynamic global market. It seeks to empower various sections of society by increasing participation of youth, women, disabled and other marginalized sections of society.

Tourism is characterised by a workforce with a relatively low level of skill for the majority of jobs in the basic sectors. The principle obstacles encountered in upgrading skills are: lack of labour force and high level of staff turnover, the low image and particular working conditions of the tourism industry as a place to work, including seasonality; lack of basic qualification that could be upgraded and reduced competitiveness in micro-enterprises due to lacking development of labour.

### **The Goa Experience**

Goa, with an area of 3,701 square kilometers on the west coast of India, has within a short period become a favourite tourist destination for both domestic and foreign tourists. The small state of Goa has 'arrived' on the international tourism map, with the government pushing hard to sell Goa as the 'ultimate experience'. Campaigns like, "Goa – Everything Included", "Go Goa – 365 days", all point to the aggressive policies of the government. Although Goa joined national mainstream only after 14 years of the country's independence, tourist traffic to Goa registered such phenomenal growth that from 2 lakhs tourists in 1975 the figure has shot up to 27.8 lakhs in 2012-13, including 4.5 lakh foreigners, as against 26.7 lakh in 2011-12, including 4.45 lakh foreigners, showing an increase of 4.4 percent in the arrivals. Goa also witnessed an increase in arrival of chartered flights. According to Goa Tourism Department Statistics, 996 chartered flights carrying 2.15 lakh tourists arrived in 2012-13 as against 910 flights with 1.69 lakh tourists in 2011-12. About 742 chartered flights arrived from Russia followed by 152 flights from the United Kingdom ([www.goatourism.gov.in](http://www.goatourism.gov.in)).

Going by the tourism trends in Goa, it is for sure that tourism industry is not only going to stay, but also flourish as it contributes to the economic development. Several tourist sites have tourist traffic way beyond their carrying capacities. Additionally, the state has had to grapple with problems offset by conventional tourism and the ban on mining activities. Many tourist destinations in Goa are under undue stress and are gradually losing their natural character for which they are visited.

However, all is not lost in this paradise though. A new experiment in community-based ecotourism in the Netravali WLS; one of the worst affected by mining, is taking shape. Villagers of Verlem in Netravali WLS have geared up to host tourists in their humble homes as a part of community-based ecotourism project. Designed on the lines of a cooperative model, the project is named 'Aangan' was initiated in July 2014. The project is owned and operated by the local community for which the 'Verlem Ecotourism Cooperative Society' (VECS) has been formed. Mineral Foundation of Goa (MFG) has provided the technical, moral as well as financial support for this project. The MFG, is only one of its kind initiative in the country set-up by the industry having a co-operative ideology and people-centric approach. It was established as a NGO in 2000, and has State government and Central government participation. Its primary motive was to address the social and environmental issues concerning the communities residing in the mining belt of Goa, thus, fulfilling the objective of ecological regeneration of these areas (Goa Development Report, 2011:33), as well as community involvement, which has for long been a matter of serious concern. This organisation can be credited for gathering, monitoring, generating, and providing updated information. It has also helped foster debates on key issues with the main objective to provide strategic information and has ensured sustainable competitiveness for tourism.

Located around 570 m above mean sea level, Verlem is a hotspot of biodiversity and a delight for wildlife enthusiasts and birders. Initial training provides core work skills and the underpinning knowledge, industry-based and professional competencies that facilitate the transition into the world of work. To this

end, the Mineral Foundation of Goa narrowed in on the Netravali Wildlife Sanctuaries, the worst hit by mining in Goa. The Shivshakti Mahila Self Help Group at Verle in Netravali, 14 women from Padalwada live and work with their families in the 950 square meter plot successfully experimenting and growing strawberries for the first time in the state.

Basic education ensures each individual the development of their potential, laying the foundation for employability. This aspect was recognised by Parag Rangnekar, Programme Officer at MFG, who has been closely associated with the project, in a personal interview, said that the rationale behind formation of a cooperative society was to ensure that the profits reaped by the society are shared exclusively among the villagers. Every villager has the right to buy a share from the society, and the dividends will then be shared among shareholders of the society. Explaining the concept of a home stay in Verlem, stress has been laid on maintaining the rustic character of the village to offer the tourist the authentic feel of the country life. What is significant about this home stay is that the guest will be able to stay along with the host and enjoy the food prepared by the host. No separate cottages or rooms have been built for the home stay, except upgrading the existing wash room facilities and providing proper beds and linen in the guest room. This is essentially a community initiative which lays emphasis on a non-intrusive approach and minimal intervention.

The principle underlying the entire ecotourism project is that the basic means of livelihood have not been compromised or replaced by the new eco-venture. Agriculture will continue to be the mainstay of the village economy, while the ecotourism project will be a supplementary source of income for the villagers, stresses Rangnekar, adding the “sustainability concepts” have been introduced in the project taking into consideration the carrying capacity of the village. Agriculture and tourism should go hand in hand. There is a need to protect agriculture, as agriculture will ensure tourism. Strawberry plantation is also a part of the ecotourism project of the villagers' collective. Currently, five houses have been earmarked for house stay, and depending on the type of response from tourists, more houses will be added to the project with phase wise scaling in the project.

Thus this ecotourism model is managed by a cooperative of farmers who do not consider themselves as employees but partners in this association. To make this possible, a feasibility study was carried out keeping in mind 'limits of social acceptability'. Since home stays will impact women, the entire project and its details, in terms of number of days for home stays, number of guests, period between two home stays and other decisions were arrived at only after regular consultation with women and local communities. To ensure that this endeavor does not threaten the delicate social fabric, the project emphasizes on a 'no alcohol policy'. The effort here is to project an alternative Goa. Although challenges of waste management, religious orientations of guests and hosts, resistance from some local people, and threat of commercialization loom large, this project is a relatively unique example of a community-based initiative that is not managed, co-managed, or initiated by “outsiders” (Belsky, 1999).

It is a known fact that staff for the tourism endeavour is often sourced from outside local areas because of a perceived lack of suitable candidates with necessary skills with local communities (Ashley, De Brine, Lehr & Wilde, 2007). Therefore, there is a need to understand effective approaches to developing skills and improving capacity within local communities. In the case of Goa practical guidance for action was initiated to transform learning into innovation, taking into account the “fragile” reality of the State and using bottom-up approach, partnership and co-operation between all stakeholders concerned (ec.europa.eu). This model of ecotourism is in its initial stage and may provide avenues for further research.

### **Conclusion**

Thus there is a need to integrate development objectives into the business models. It is important to identify challenges and possible resolutions to skills issues that have hampered development within the tourism sector. Skill development can help build a 'virtuous circle' in which the quality and relevance of lifelong learning and training for women and men fuels innovation, investment, technological change and enterprise development. Further, this will facilitate the process of economic diversification and competitiveness that economies need. This will lead not only to creation of more job, but also more productive jobs thereby facilitating the march towards economic prosperity.

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