

Socio-Economic Development of Rural Area of Konkan Region of Maharashtra State through Agrotourism.

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Abstract:

To preserve the natural heritage of Konkan region and to develop the socio-economic status, strategic scientific planning of agro tourism as a form of rural tourism is a need of hour. Therefore the focus should be on infrastructure development schemes coupled with anti-poverty fund schemes for increasing income and employment opportunities.

Introduction:

There are various terms used to describe tourism in rural areas including Farm Tourism, Agro Tourism, Soft Tourism and Eco Tourism (Beeton-2006)

According to the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), rural tourism is defined as tourism taking place in the countryside (Riechel et al, 2000). Rural tourism is located in agricultural landscapes and is characterized by enjoyment of a tamed nature or highly modified landscapes. It is about the land uses and human cultures that the interaction between humans and the land have created. It sees agriculture and farms as the foundation upon which the attraction is built (Knowd, 2001).

Any form of tourism that showcases rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, there by benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourist and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience is termed rural tourism.

Rural tourism comprises a number of drivers that help to create a demand. These demand drivers working either alone or in conjunction with others help to satisfy the needs of the visitor. Rural tourism is the alternative to mass tourism.

Agrotourism as an instrument for socio-economic development:

In the last 25 years of the 20th century the term Agrotourism appeared in international literature. There exists a parallel word

Agrotourism. The two terms have the same meaning and both consist of two parts *agri* or *agro* and *tourism*. The prefix *agri* derives from the Latin term *ager* which means field while *agro* comes from the Greek term *agros*, which means soil, while *tourism* is a form of active recreation away from one's place of residence and inspired by cognitive, recreational and sports needs.

The combination of *agri* and *tourism* resulted in the formation of a new word that means human tourism which aims to become familiar with farming activities and recreation in an agricultural environment.

Agro tourism can be defined as a "range of activities, services and amenities provided by farmers and rural people to attract tourists to their area in order to generate extra income for their business".

"Agro tourism is that agri-business activity, when a native farmers or persons of the area offer tours of their agriculture farms to allow a person to view them growing, harvesting and processing locally grown foods, such as coconuts, pineapple, sugar cane, corn or any agriculture produce the person would not encounter in their city or home country. Often the farmers would provide a home stay opportunity and education".(Taware 2008).

Agro tourism is a specific form of rural tourism with the following features:

- close relation to nature and the country side
- direct relationship to agricultural activities.
- main features that differentiate Agrotourism from conventional tourism.

- possibility of satisfying human needs with practical participation in the process of food production in the life of a rural family and in a rural community.

Agro tourism gives people a chance to learn about the lives of rural people, their culture and customs and satisfy emotional needs such as having direct contact with domestic animals, plants, animal products and processed products and experience the idyllic countryside.

A key factor in the growing interest of city inhabitants is where food comes from and how it is produced.

Two things to be noted are:

- Agro tourism benefits the entire rural community in terms of total revenue generation.
- Rural culture is the key component under agro tourism.

The emergence of agro tourism is helping to boost a wide range of activities, services and amenities to attract tourists to generate extra income by creating entrepreneurial opportunities.

Agro tourism is run essentially as a community-based initiative. It is beneficial for income and employment generation and development of rural arts and crafts. It is directly helpful for infrastructure development and preservation of heritage. The feasibility of enhancing agro tourism in our country can be determined by the following major considerations:

- Potential of the rural section for attracting inbound and outbound tourists.
- The level of tourism and general infrastructural development.

Functions of Agrotourism:

1) Socio psychological functions:

These include gaining new skills, meeting new people, reviving rural traditions and education. They are connected with increased respect for the rural community, the intermingling of rural and urban cultures and the opportunity to enjoy contact with the traditional lifestyle of the rural community.

2) Economic functions:

These consist of additional sources of income, income for communes, overcoming economic recession and promotion of socio economic development with the stimulation of development of agricultural, horticultural or animal breeding farms, generation of additional sources of income both for rural households and for local or regional governments and communes.

3) Spatial and Environment:

Agro tourism is the development and transformation of elements of the natural environment. Spatial and environmental functions include the consequences of Agrotourism for the natural and anthropogenic environments.

It gives tremendous economic impetus to a region in the form of creating employment avenues and increasing the standard of living of the under developed host community and it conserves the traditional cultural values with subtenants' exposure to the world community. At the same time, it provides security and advancement to the region.

Tourism potential in Maharashtra:

Maharashtra is the third largest state of India, both in area and population. It is located on the West coast with a 720 km long coastline. The lush green Konkan region, with its dense forests, is home to several wild life sanctuaries and nature parks. Maharashtra abounds in numerous tourist attractions ranging from ancient cave, temples, unspoiled beaches, ancient forts and monuments, forest and wild life unique hill stations and pilgrimage centres to a rich tradition of festivals, art and culture. The tourism market is estimated to be around 250 million domestic tourists in 2005 (Source: ATDC – Pune).

Potential for Development of Agro-Tourism in Konkan Region:

Surrounded by the Sahyadri hills on the east and the Arabian Sea on the west, the coastal strip of Maharashtra is known as the Konkan Region. Historically Konkan has been land with dense forest cover and a landscape fringed with beautiful beaches, picturesque hamlets, paddy fields, coconut grooves and mango orchards.

The region has tremendous potential with a variety of cultural aspects and production systems sufficient to attract tourists. It has seen substantial growth in tourism in the past few years, but this growth is clustered and unorganized.

Agro tourism development in Konkan region can be successful only when the development progress is linked with local communities who provide physical assets as tourism products. This is essential for two reasons. The concerned rural stake holders must be benefited socially and commercially from their own assets. The rural community must participate actively in order to maintain eco-biodiversity and traditional values.

Rural tourism has many potential benefits for rural areas (Federick, 1992). It can be an important source of jobs for local communities and for developing a disadvantaged rural area. Tourism can certainly be an important component of a sound development plan.

Bontron and Lasnier (1997) note that the impact of rural tourism varies greatly among rural regions and depends on a host of factors including work force characteristics and seasonality issues.

According to Beeton's (2006) model of rural tourism, the community is central to this process and in many ways cannot be separated from any element. Rural areas often have various problems like unemployment, lack of services, lack of facilities and lack of awareness at the same time as various potential attributes like natural environment, agriculture and ambience. According to this model, it is clear that besides agriculture and migration

for external employment, the central point is that the community benefits greatly from effective planning, promotion and marketing.

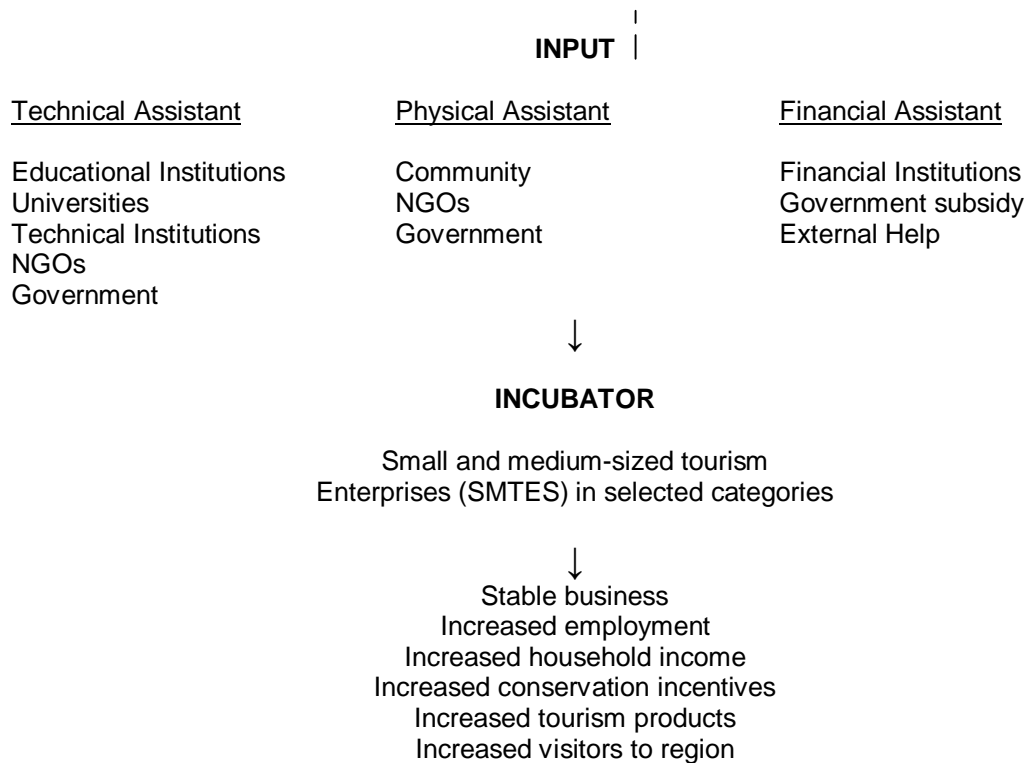
This model can be effectively implemented in rural areas of Konkan region through the Agro tourism concept, but Agro tourism in this region is in its infancy. There is an urgent need to initiate the process of incubating entrepreneurship for the overall development of the region.

In the present context, rural communities cannot be expected to perform the task of promoting agro-tourism exclusively. The role of Maharashtra Tourism Development Conversation (MTDC), Agro Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) and other national level organizations like Indian Tourism Development Corporation (TTDC) is important for providing the right direction in the near future.

In accordance with the Beeton model of community development through rural tourism, Dr. Anjan Bhuyan from Meghalaya has prepared a model as an initial attempt to suggest a strategy for rural development in India. This model is the Rural Tourism Business Incubator (RTBI). It is a process of developing, nurturing and promoting rural tourism by the rural community for the greater interest of the nation as a whole

The RTBI works at grass root level for tourism planning and promotion. It is a nodal agency devoted to the systematic process of enhancing tourism development. The details are presented below:

A MODEL OF INCUBATING TOURISM ENTREPRENEURS



Application of the RTBI model:

The Konkan region has the potential to develop agro tourism but to achieve overall socio-economic development, the implementation of the above model is necessary. According to the RTBI model it is most important to educate or raise the awareness of rural people about the hidden potential of the region for agro tourism.

As the Konkan region has key attractions such as scenery, mountains, rivers, beaches, cropping patterns and a pollution-free, natural and peaceful environment, it is very attractive to the urban population. Knowledge of developing all these assets must be circulated among the rural people.

Only awareness of tourism is not a key factor of success. The role of supporting and financial organizations is also important for the process of "Business Incubation" to start. It includes property development / management as well as small business development which can be done by conserving entrepreneurs' most

precious resources like time and money through cost sharing and capital conserving access to space services. This can be done by flexible and timely ways developed as per the requirements of entrepreneurs' needs such as helping entrepreneurs to overcome barriers like lack of information, and lack of access to capital etc and giving them ready access to learning resources on design and management of various tourism related activities

There is an immediate need to develop public private partnership programmes for the active participation of people. Financial institutions, especially nationalized banks, play a major role by supplying much needed capital to tourism-based entrepreneurs at special concessional rates.

Uncontrolled conventional tourism may pose potential threats to many natural areas in the Konkan coastal region. If the above strategy is followed, then the agro

tourism industry can be developed in the Konkan region.

So the scientific and strategic development of agro tourism will lead to development in the socio-economic status of the Konkan region.

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