



Prospects and Challenges of Community Based Tourism Promotion in Mihintale Area

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ABSTRACT

The concept of Community Based Tourism (CBT) involves interaction between the tourist and the host community, is a booming concept in the tourism industry. The problems related to the under-development of Sri Lankan local communities can be addressed through proper implementation of CBT. However, at present there are only a few villages practicing CBT in Sri Lanka. In parallel to the present CBT development in Sri Lanka this research aimed at answering three strategic objectives, considering Mihintale Pradeshiya Sabha division as the focused area: a) to identify the contributing factors for CBT development in Mihintale; b) to identify the challenges in promoting CBT in Mihintale; c) to identify and propose suitable strategies to overcome such challenges in promoting CBT in Mihintale. In order to achieve the aforementioned objectives, both quantitative and qualitative techniques were adopted to analyze the data gathered from questionnaires, observations and interviews. The main findings of this research are: Mihintale is blessed with natural and cultural attractions that are underutilized in tourism promotions. Lack of awareness of tourism, poor leadership in the community, insufficient education and training, lack of motivation and no financial support to engage with CBT are the main challenges to promote CBT in Mihintale.

KEYWORDS: *Attractions, Community-Based Tourism, Tourism*

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1 Introduction

Sri Lanka tourism has grown like never before and total tourist arrival until November 2015 was 1,592,266 which is increased by 18.1% than the previous year (SLTDA, 2015). The value of tourism in 2014 exceeded two billion US dollars, making the tourism industry is one of the fastest growing industries in Sri Lanka (SLTDA, 2015). The present tourism development is highly focused on mass tourism movements that are managed by local blue chip companies and multi-national companies.

However, the fairness of the distribution of tourism benefits among local communities is at a critical and a questionable position. Unfortunately, local communities remain nothing much, but a polluted environment through most of tourism activities. Since a significant part of the tourism income is earned by the medium and large scale companies, community based tourism (CBT) which is small scale, can be identified as a successful tourism concept in which local communities can get the maximum benefits of tourism. CBT involves interactions between tourists and host communities and basically suited for rural areas which are to be managed and owned by the community, for the community.

Mihintale, where the Buddhism blossomed in Sri Lanka in 247 BC and comprising with many attractive places of historical, natural interest, many valuable resources and traditional living patterns, is having high potential for promoting CBT. On the other hand, poor household population in Anuradapura District, where Mihintale is located, recorded 11.8% where the national poor household population is 12.6% (Poverty in Sri Lanka: Household income and expenditure survey- 2006/07). Population below the poverty line in Mihintale Divisional Secretariats recorded as low as 18.97% (Headcount Index and Population Below Poverty Line by DS Division – Sri Lanka: 2002). Further, the population below the daily minimum level of daily dietary energy consumption is 48.9% in Anuradapura District. (District profile, Anuradapura, 2010).

Therefore, both availability of natural, cultural, social and historical values and livelihood standard of the community in Mihintale generates higher potentials for implementing CBT Successfully to improve the livelihood of the community in Mihintale. However, Mihintale has been paid the least attention in terms of promoting CBT by the respective authorities and tourism service providers in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this research mainly focuses on identifying the prospects and challenges of community based tourism promotion in Sri Lanka with special reference to Mihintale.

2 Statement of the problem

Even though tourism is playing an increasingly important role in developing economies (WTO 2006), the contribution of tourism for the rural development is very low and slow in Sri Lankan context. The problems related to the under-development of Sri Lankan rural communities can be addressed through proper implementation of CBT concept. Though CBT improves social sustainability by empowering local communities to manage their own resources available in villages, providing meaningful employment opportunities, and assisting with cultural preservation only few villages practice CBT in Sri Lanka. This is probably due to the absence of literature in this field and lack of awareness among the communities towards CBT. Thus the central focus of this study is to fill the gap in literature on community based tourism which will in turn make positive changes in the rural settings.

3 Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are:

- To identify the contributory factors for CBT development in Mihintale;
- To identify the challenges in implementation & promotion of CBT in Mihintale;
- To identify and propose the possible strategies to overcome such challenges in promoting CBT in Mihintale.

4 Review of literature

With the purpose of accomplishment of social, environmental and economic needs of local communities through the offerings of a tourism product, CBT has been promoted over the last three decades all over the globe (Braun, 2008).

CBT is a new paradigm in modern tourism & most of the new world, tourists are now demanding

community-based experiences from their tour planners. Different scholars have defined community-based tourism (CBT) in different ways. Simpson (2008) defines CBT as “a model which centers on ownership, management and control of tourism projects by the local community”. The Thailand Community Based Tourism Institute (1997) defines CBT more rigorously as, “tourism that takes environmental, social and cultural sustainability into account. It is managed and owned by the community, for the community, with the purpose of enabling visitors to increase their awareness and learn about the community and local ways of life”. Moscardo (2008) viewed CBT as an alternative form of tourism, which aims to maximize benefits to local people and achieve community development objectives through building community capacity and empowerment.

Since, CBT is based on the active participation of the local community, it's important to create community events which may encourage CBT while creating a relationship in between local community and visitors. To facilitate this, different public administrations, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), private institutions and the local community itself should get involved and work together. As many other industries, CBT is developed on set of theories and concepts. Responsible Ecological Social Tours Project (REST, 2007) identified some principles through which host community can use tourism as a tool for community development. According to REST, CBT should:

- i. Recognize, support and promote community ownership of tourism;
- ii. Involve community members from the start in every aspect;
- iii. Promote community pride;
- iv. Improve the quality of life;
- v. Ensure environmental sustainability;
- vi. Preserve the unique character and culture of the local area;
- vii. Foster cross-cultural learning;
- viii. Respect cultural differences and human dignity;
- ix. Distribute benefits fairly among community members;
- x. Contribute a fixed percentage of income to community projects.

Other than REST, many scholars have identified same principles of CBT in different ways. Tosun (2000) said, “active community participation in the development of their tourism industry is central to CBT and it is also seen as a development strategy that is based on community resources, needs and decisions”. In addition to that, Choi & Sirakaya (2006) stated, “once tourism is developed, the community will then actively control and manage their tourism industry, thus allowing for greater benefits to be retained within the community”.

The importance of culture & its features were identified by McKercher and Ho (2006). They mentioned “cultural assets, a destination's traditions and way of life, are ideally suited to become tourism products because they encompass the features that make a community unique and are experiential in nature”. All communities cannot start & run a successful CBT venture. Braun (2008) mentioned that “not all communities will be suitable for CBT. To ensure each community is suitable, an assessment of community tourism potential should occur. Community tourism success depends upon the active involvement of locals who are able to communicate aspects of local culture to the tourists (Kneafsey, 2001). Therefore, the development of dynamic and collaborative planning processes is crucial in those destination communities that are experiencing strong growth and change due to tourism (Jamal and Getz, 1995). Jamal and Getz (1995) suggested research on resident attitudes indicates that residents' opinions on tourism development within a community can vary greatly depending on such variables as scale of tourism development, perception of benefits, and the overall sustainability of the destination. Jamal and Getz (1995) further explained that representatives from the various stakeholder groups should be involved at an early stage in the planning process.

According to Nyaupane et al.(2006), the main limitations local communities are facing when implementing CBT projects are as following: lack of financial resources, infrastructure or know-how; limitations of a cultural kind; and potential conflicts between the different public administrations. In addition, the below mentioned factors are identified as extremely important for CBT implementation (Kibicho, 2008): the inclusion of stakeholders, the evaluation of individual and collective benefits, the setting of objectives, and analysis of decisions to be implemented. The main benefits of community tourism are the direct economic impact on families, socioeconomic improvements, and sustainable diversification of lifestyles (Manyara and Jones, 2007; Rastegar, 2010). CBT is certainly an effective way of implementing policy coordination, avoiding conflicts between different actors in tourism, and obtaining synergies based on the exchange of

knowledge, analysis and ability among all members of the community (Kibicho, 2008).

According to Guzmán et al., (2011) the structure of CBT can be broken down into four categories. Firstly, there are small tourist offices, which, in some cases, also work as tourist guides, and whose relevance is not yet of high importance due to a lack of planning in the majority of the areas tourists visit. Secondly, there are institutions which collaborate with the local tourism industry, mainly local public administrations, NGOs and universities. Thirdly, there are direct service companies which can be further divided into two groups: accommodation and food and beverage; and shops selling local products, which are becoming increasingly important. Finally, there are various transport and financial businesses.

5 Methodology

This study utilized case study approach based on both primary and secondary data. Four key stakeholders of CBT Projects in Sri Lanka have been identified to collect the primary data, including five academics, ten tourism and hospitality professionals, five CBT practitioners and fifteen villagers and community leaders. Face to face, semi structured interviews have been used to collect data from academics and tourism and hospitality professionals including tourism service providers and intermediaries. Structured questionnaires were used to collect the data from CBT Practitioners while focus group discussions were conducted for around two hours to collect data from villagers and community leaders of the DS Division of Mental. In addition to that the researchers deployed participatory observation method to identify the knowledge, skills and attitude of the villagers. The data gathered is analyzed in descriptive terms. Secondary data were collected using journal articles, scholarly articles, previous publications, reports and book chapters.

In order to achieve the first objective responses from academics, professionals and CBT practitioners were gathered using the questionnaire method and interview method. Community members (villagers), CBT practitioners and academics contributed to achieve the second objective of the study through focus group discussions and interviews.

6 Results and discussions

6.1 Contributory factors for the promotion of CBT in Mihintale

It's important to identify the potential tourism products available, for the purpose of assessing the potential for CBT development within a community. Various potential tourism products and opportunities were identified and documented through participant observation and household surveys in Mihintale area. The tourism assets which can be developed into tourism products can be classified into seven categories: a) Natural attractions; b) Historical /man-made attractions; c) Cultural attractions; d) Activities; e) Location; f) Skills (Table 1).

Table 1: Tourism Assets in Mihintale

Category	Assets
Natural Attractions	Weather
	Wildlife and sanctuaries
	Viewpoints (The rock of invitation, Mahakanadarwa tank etc)
	Caves
	Flora and Forests
Historical/man-made attractions	Ancient temples, Stupas
	Ancient Hospital with stone canoe
	Ruins of a large monastery with alms halls and relic houses
	The Refectory
	Caves
	Tanks and ponds
Cultural Attractions	Local food
	Rituals and traditions
	Local language
	Festivals at different times of the year

	Traditional industries (Chena cultivation, fishing, farming etc)
	Healing practices and local medicines
	Folk music, dance and stories
Activities	Trekking & tracking
	Teaching English to village children
	Bird watching
	Cycling
	Learn how to make cultural food
	Engage in traditional agricultural activities
Skills	Many residents have knowledge of local plants, medicines and animals etc.
	Small number of trained guides
	Average skills of speaking English of the local community
	Very courteous and hospitable

Source: Survey data, 2015

With all these tourism assets, Mihintale has unexploited potential for implementing CBT. Further, in global tourism context, there is a significant demand for Spiritual tourism and Eco tourism which can be easily implement in Mihintale. Travelers who are interested in heritage, history, archeology, art, meditation can fulfill their desires by visiting Mihintale.

History, heritage and culture are the supreme strength of Mihintale community and those can be promoted as key attractions with minimum cost at the initial stage. There are numerous activities like cooking local foods with locals to cultivating, livestock farming and fishing with the village farmers etc. can be done in Mihintale village. Apart from that meditation, cycling, trekking, tracking etc.

Mihintale is located only 14 km away from UNESCO World Heritage City of Anuradhapura, which is visited 79,685 inbound tourists in 2014 (SLTDA- Annual Statistical Report, 2014). Accessibility is at a satisfactory level with the availability of three modes of transportation air, rail and road.

The community is very courteous, welcoming, friendly and highly skilled in their traditional industries. Especially the elder people have sound knowledge about their culture, heritage, local flora & fauna and their medicinal values. Although English is not spoken widely throughout the community, the villagers know how to interpret their ideas.

6.2 The main challenges of implementation and promotion CBT in Mihintale

6.2.1 Lack of awareness of tourism

One of the main challenges for Implementing and promoting CBT in Mihintale is minimal awareness of the tourism of the community and their negative attitude towards the tourism. The majority of the villagers believes that when implementing tourism, sever issues related to sex and alcohol will rise and at the same time they will lose their cultural identity. That negative attitude and lack of awareness about the tourism should be avoided to the successful implantation of tourism in Mihintale.

6.2.2 Poor leadership in the community

The leadership skills of the community are important to implement CBT programs successfully. A leader with good leadership skills who must think of the community development and fair distribution of benefits should be available for successful implementation and promotion of CBT. However, Poor leadership in the community is one of the main challenges when promoting CBT in Mihintale.

6.2.3 Insufficient education and training

Insufficient or imperfect education and training of the community is also one challenge that has been identified. Responsible tourism authorities and institutions should give a sufficient education and training, which is currently not having with the community, to successfully implement the CBT programs

6.2.4 Lack of Motivation

Lack of the motivation of the host community is also one of the major challenges when promoting and implementing the CBT in Mihintale.

6.2.5 No financial support to engage with CBT

Reliance on donor funding is very high, especially at the initial stage of implementing and promoting CBT. Therefore, finding out sustainable funding sources is also one of the major challenges of implementing and promoting CBT in Mihintale.

6.3 Strategies to overcome the challenges in promoting CBT in Mihintale

6.3.1 Increasing the awareness of the community on tourism

Conducting awareness programs by the respective authorities with the help of professionals and academics of tourism to increase the awareness of villagers on tourism and its favorable impact on them is a significant strategy that should be implemented. As a result of that villagers negative attitudes towards tourism can be minimized.

6.3.2 Identifying and strengthening community leaders

The CBT projects belong to the community and should be managed by the community itself. The decision making and managing resources should be done by a community leader and that leadership should be accountable. Decision making authority should be there at the community level and decision making must be representative. Therefore, the agencies must identify and develop leaders with the right skills and attitude if the project to be sustained.

6.3.3 Training and development

The community is not involved in tourism, but farming, fishing and other traditional industries should give a proper training and development.

Therefore the training programs and workshops need to be designed after evaluating the needs of the communities. Also the relevant authorities should conduct these programs on time with decent time intervals in between. Also the resource persons have to be careful on the delivery method of their respective session. Finally, motivation of the community towards CBT can be increased through proper training and development.

6.3.4 Proper management of community based tourism association

It is important to make sure the availability and proper management of community based tourism association to give the initial financial supporting and consultation to the community whenever they needed.

6.3.5 Even and wide distribution of profit

It has to be make sure that the community receives an equal opportunity to serve and earn from CBT. Because the money would be the prime motive for villagers to join with CBT, it need to be handled carefully with full transparency. Responsible authorities should make sure that the benefits of CBT distributed equally and the benefit distribution must be linked with natural resource conservation also.

6.3.6 Encouraging community participation

Community participation is the key point of CBT and it creates and develop the sense of belongings where the CBT takes place. The success of CBT heavily relies on the commitment and cooperation of local communities because they themselves are the part of CBT product. According to France (1998) community can participate in CBT in 7 ways; plantation, manipulative and passive participation, consultation, material incentives, functional participation, interactive participation and self mobilization. Self mobilization is the highest level of community participation in which community has full control over both decision making process and over the execution and benefits. In this scenario, tourism development is seen as sustainable and the local community is independent.

6.3.7 Marketing and promotion

Making awareness of the tourism assets available in Mihintale through proper marketing strategies would be a greater advantage to overcome the challenges of implementing CBT Successfully. The agencies

concerned must identify new marketing methods to take the products to the potential clientele. Proper marketing steps, including product development, segmentation, targeting and positioning need to be done appropriately.

6.3.8 *Improving the availability of supporting services*

Supportive services such as renting bicycles, guide services etc. should be improved in parallel with the implementation of CBT in Mihintale since it's essential to have sufficient amenities and supportive services for the successfulness of tourism. . Further, it is advisable to improve these supportive services.

7 Conclusion and recommendations

There is no doubt that Mihintale has a number of tourism potentials which could be invested on CBT. These tourism attractions range from cultural, natural, social and historical attractions to other recreation opportunities. Despite the tourism potentials, Mihintale faces some challenges and barriers at the community level which need to be addressed if Mihintale is to develop CBT. Some of the barriers noted in this study are: lack of awareness of tourism; poor leadership in the community; insufficient education and training; lack of motivation and no financial support to engage with CBT. Therefore, following recommendations are forwarded to develop Mihintale as CBT destination.

- It is recommended to get the assistance of professional and academic bodies from the relevant authorities to assist the community to have awareness on CBT and market and promote the village both locally and internationally.
- It is strongly recommended to select a skillful leader to run the CBT project who has prior experience in this field and under whom potential individuals could be trained to be the successors. The consequences will not be bearable if the leader does not have the right knowledge, skills and attitudes to run the project and to manage the villagers.
- Highly focused training programs should be conducted regularly to keep the villagers in line with the CBT project. Training needs of the villagers should be identified in advance, preferably through a survey. The trainings should be conducted by locals who can speak *Singhalese*.
- It is strongly recommended that the community must be received financial assistance to make relevant improvements to their houses and to their tourism product since tourists are not interested in under developed attractions. Therefore, it is required to bring the community to an accepted standard.
- It is recommended that the community writing to other donating agencies or to leading companies in Sri Lanka who can give financial assistance under their corporate social responsibility projects
- Further, it's recommended that the benefits of the projects should be distributed evenly among its members as a method of keeping the members together.

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Appendices

Tourism in Sri Lanka in year 2014

Number of tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka	1,527,153
Number of foreign visitors visiting cultural triangle	627,136
Percentage of foreign visitors visiting cultural triangle	41%
Revenue from sales of tickets in cultural triangle from foreigners	Rs.2, 178,467,094.42
Number of foreign visitors visiting Anuradapura	79,685
Percentage of foreign visitors visiting Anuradapura	5.2%

(SLTDA,2015)

Mihintale, the first ever Sanctuary

Mihintale, where the Buddhism blossomed in Sri Lanka in 247 BC, was declared as a wildlife sanctuary in 247 BC by King Devanampiya Tissa. This recorded as the first ever sanctuary on the earth and still a wildlife sanctuary under Sri Lanka's Department of Wildlife Conservation with a history over two thousand years old. Not only the wildlife sanctuary, but also the ruins of ancient hospitals and medical baths indicate that one of the oldest hospitals in the world believed to be in the Mihintale. Caves, monasteries with alms halls and relic houses, refectories, ponds and tanks, beautiful shrines, stupas and statues are few other historical attractions available in Miintale. Further, flora and fauna, traditional livelihood of the community, unspoiled cultural identities of the community etc provide an excellent platform for tourism in Sri Lanka. (Architecture, history and travel of Sri Lanka, Mihintale, 2010)

General information about Mihintale

Location: 15 km away from the UNESCO world heritage site, Anuradhapura (15 Mins drive)

215 km away from Colombo (04 hrs drive).

130 km away from Kandy, one of the world heritage sites (03 hrs drive)

Accessibility: convenient accessibility y mode of road and rail.

Total Population: 809,000 (Anuradapura District, 2008)

Land Area (Sq. km): 6,664 (Anuradapura District, 2008)

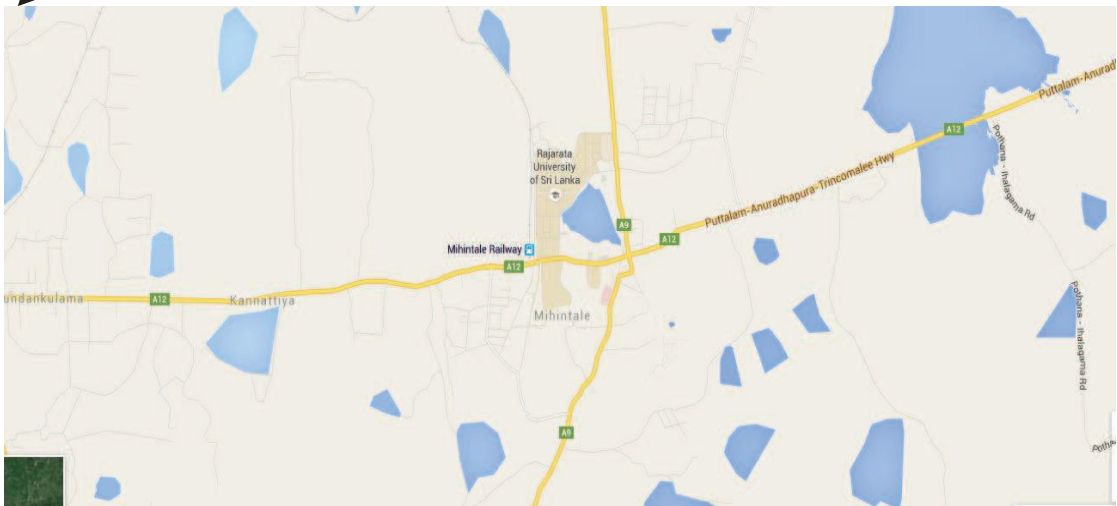
Population below poverty line: 118,000 (Anuradapura District, 2006-07)

(Headcount Index and Population Below Poverty Line by DS Division – Sri Lanka: 2002)

Map of Mihintale



Source: http://www.weatherforecast.com/place_maps/mi/Mihintale.8.gif, 2015



Source: <https://www.google.lk/maps/@8.3592822,80.5054415,14z>, 2016