

# Role of Community Groups in Rural Responsible Tourism

**Dinu Dennis**

Asst.Professor, St.Paul's college, Kalamassery, Kerala, India, Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management

## **Abstract:**

The development of responsible tourism products is significantly influenced by community groups and the absence of community groups, responsible tourism cannot be implemented. Any product related to responsible tourism is built on these foundations. With the help of these community groups, we can give visitors a genuine village experience. community groups are participating various tourism activities in destination .community organizations plays a critical role in encouraging responsible tourism by ensuring that tourism activities benefit local communities while reducing harmful social ,cultural and environmental repercussions . Community groups' primary responsibilities include raising awareness and advocating for the preservation of the environment and culture. as well as cooperation with stakeholders. And by establishing business and employment opportunities, they can have a good economic influence. They can also offer sustainable tourist practices. And environmental protection, as well as cultural preservation. Machu, Pichu, Thailand, Chiang Mai, and the Kumarakom Responsible Tourism Project kerala, India The globe has embraced Peru's successful models of responsible tourism.

**Keywords:** Role of community groups, responsible model in Kumarakom, kerala, stake holders in responsible tourism, responsible tourism mission, and community based activities, cultural preservation

## **Introduction**

In order to boost economic benefits in underprivileged areas, the UN Tourism Organization has carried out poverty-eradication programs and sustainable tourism projects during the last 10 years. A set of 17 global goals, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS) were established by the United Nations in 2015 with the aim of addressing most of the world's issues. Tourism is the way by which these goals may be achieved. The 17 goals might be achieved using sustainable tourism practices. Tourists are becoming more interested in local cultures as a result of the locals' preservation of their traditional civilization and culture. Furthermore, residents' awareness of the environment is raised by the presence of several rare and unusual species.

Sparked a movement to protect natural resources so that travelers might enjoy stunning travel experiences. Despite the fact that tourism may effectively reduce poverty by boosting local economies, its growth has harmed traditional culture and altered the standard of living for locals. Early on in the growth of tourism, locals have detrimental effects on social, environmental and cultural elements rather than reaping their financial rewards. so responsible tourism can use as tool to reduce this poverty by active participating of local people to became the part of responsible tourism projects . Thus, in order to improve the quality of life for locals, promote a higher appreciation of traditional culture, and preserve

the environment through tourist planning and management, academics have developed community-based tourism. In the domains of tourist planning and development, STDs have been extensively studied. In contrast to early stages of tourism development, STD not only boosts local economies but also meets the requirements of visitors, improves the quality of life for locals, and protects the environment.

Community groups are play vital role responsible tourism development .community empowerments are essential part of responsible tourism. Empowerment refers to the ability to act at either an individual or collective level .While it serves as an effective means to enhance the skills and resources of local communities, true community empowerment requires the active participation and united efforts of its members, rather than focusing solely on individual initiatives.

Responsible Tourism (RT) emphasizes a thoughtful and conscientious approach to tourism. It is defined as:

**Promoting Environmental Responsibility:** Encouraging sustainable practices that protect and conserve the natural environment. This involves reducing the ecological footprint of tourism activities and preserving biodiversity.

**Engaging Local Communities:** Ensuring that local communities actively participate in and benefit from tourism. This includes providing opportunities for local employment, supporting community-led initiatives, and respecting cultural heritage.

**Ensuring Safety and Security:** Prioritizing the safety and well-being of tourists while fostering a welcoming and secure environment for visitors.

**Encouraging Accountability:** Advocating for the shared responsibility of governments, employers, employees, unions, and communities to uphold ethical practices, fair treatment, and sustainable development within the tourism industry.

Responsible tourism is able to generate benefits to the local community .the standard of well being should be improved through responsible tourism projects According, The Department of Environment and Tourism, South Africa defines RT as a way to allow the local community to enjoy quality of life via socio-economic benefits And responsible consumption of nature resources (Jennifer Kim Lian Chan,Kamarul Mizal Marzuki,Tini Maizura Mohtar, 1 December 2021).the local community should be fully involved in responsible tourism project as much as possible then only they can get the benefits from the Responsible tourism development. they should have active participation in all the stages of responsible tourism development . The growth of tourism must engage the local people as much as possible, providing them with chances for management, ownership, training, and capacity building. The community's benefits must be maximized through employment and business ownership in agro forestry, tourism, and other endeavors. (Chan & Marzuki, 2021, )

### Local Community in Lower Kinabatangan

The Lower Kinabatangan region in Sabah, Malaysia, is a treasure trove of biodiversity and cultural richness. This area is home to unique wildlife like orangutans, pygmy elephants, and proboscis monkeys, as well as local communities with a deep connection to the land. The Orang Sungai, the indigenous people of this region, have lived alongside the Kinabatangan River for generations, relying on fishing, farming, and now eco-tourism to sustain their way of life. The people in the Lower Kinabatangan have a rich cultural heritage and an intricate understanding of the river and its surroundings. For many, daily life revolves around the natural environment, which provides food, water, and livelihoods. However,

modern challenges such as deforestation, habitat destruction, and the expansion of palm oil plantations threaten their traditional way of life.

### **Promoting Responsible Tourism AT Kinabatangan**

Since 1991, several tour operators have established lodges in the region, and the local community has increasingly engaged in tourism-related activities. Villagers have actively participated by developing home stay programs in areas like Batu Putih (Miso Walai Homestay), Sukau, Bilit, and Abai, contributing to local economic development and cultural tourism.

One effective example of a home stay program in Malaysia is Miso Walai Homestay in Batu Putih. The home stay offers a range of services, including boat trips, guides, and cultural and natural activities for visitors, in addition to lodging. These activities, which let tourists experience the indigenous way of life and scenic splendor, include jungle trekking and cultural performances. By making use of the local environment and cultural traditions, the home stay also gives the community opportunity to generate revenue. Locals profit from working in lodges, providing fish to tourist attractions along the Kinabatangan River, and running their own lodging establishments, such as guesthouses or bed and breakfasts (B&Bs). By bolstering the local economy and preserving natural and cultural resources, this paradigm encourages sustainable tourism. Over 20 lodges are currently run by the private sector, some of which are members of the Kinabatangan Corridor of Life Tour Operators Association (KiTA), which actively supports and involves local communities in tourism-related activities. Borneo Eco Tours and Sukau Rainforest Lodge were the first to operate in the area in 1992, and their efforts have successfully established Lower Kinabatangan as a premier ecotourism spot, drawing high-end ecotourists from Europe and North America over the years. As a result, local communities along Lower Kinabatangan have opened budget lodges and home stays. The growth of ecotourism in Lower Kinabatangan has indirectly raised local awareness about the value of natural resources, such as forests and wildlife, which are key attractions for tourists. To broaden the range of tourism offerings, it's crucial to preserve the Orang Sungai cultural heritage. This would not only enhance the tourist experience but also create additional income opportunities for the local community. (Tini Maizura Mohtar, 1 December 2021)

Lower Kinabatangan has strong potential to become a competitive and sustainable tourism destination over the next five years. The expected increase in resort developments presents opportunities for local communities to actively participate in tourism. This, in turn, will boost the economic benefits for the locals. Moreover, most respondents believe that community involvement in tourism development should be expanded, as the locals play a crucial role in the growth and success of ecotourism activities in the area.

### **Community-Based Tourism and the Role of Communities in Responsible Tourism**

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) represents a form of tourism that places local communities at the core of planning, operation, and benefit-sharing. It is a strategy designed to promote sustainable development by fostering local participation, preserving cultural heritage, and ensuring environmental conservation. CBT aligns closely with the principles of responsible tourism, which emphasizes minimizing negative impacts while maximizing socio-economic and environmental benefits for local communities. The concepts of power relations and trust are central to community-based tourism studies on locals' perceptions of tourism. Inequitable power dynamics cause locals to see tourism negatively in the host community. (T. Ramayah, 2019)

### **Defining Community-Based Tourism**

CBT is a type of tourism that places an emphasis on how local communities may be involved and benefit from the planning, execution, and administration of tourist-related activities. CBT places a higher priority on equitable benefit-sharing, local ownership, and the preservation of the environment and culture than mass tourism does. The following are important traits:

- Active participation in decision-making processes is known as community participation.
- Sustainability: The preservation of the environment and culture over the long term.
- Economic Empowerment: Using local businesses to provide revenue for community people.
- Authenticity: Providing authentic cultural experiences that honor the customs and values of the local community.

### **The Role of Communities in Responsible Tourism**

The goal of responsible tourism is to minimize adverse effects while optimizing beneficial contributions to the economy, society, and environment. Achieving this equilibrium depends heavily on communities. There are several aspects into which their role may be divided.

#### **1. Cultural Heritage Stewards**

By sharing customs, ceremonies, and tales with tourists, communities serve as stewards of their cultural legacy. This preserves intangible cultural treasures for future generations while also improving the tourism experience.

#### **2. Preservation of the Environment**

The traditional knowledge that local populations have about their environments is extremely useful. The sustainable use of natural resources is ensured by including them in environmental conservation projects. Programs for reforestation, wildlife protection, and environmentally responsible travel are a few examples.

#### **3. Economic Factors**

By engaging in tourism, communities may make money from locally owned lodging, tour guides, handicrafts, and food.

### **Problems and Fixes**

Notwithstanding its promise, CBT has a number of issues that might prevent it from succeeding. These consist of:

**Limited Capacity:** Many localities lack the knowledge and tools necessary to oversee tourism-related operations. Programs that increase capacity with an emphasis on marketing, business management, and hospitality are the answer.

**Over tourism:** Unrestrained travel can result in environmental damage and cultural dilution. **Solution:** Encouraging off-peak tourism and imposing visiting caps.

**External exploitation:** The possibility that outside investors would take advantage of regional resources without fairly sharing the benefits.

The establishment of locally owned tourist businesses and equitable revenue-sharing schemes is the answer.

### **Case study of Kumarakam, Kerala, India**

One of the best examples of responsible tourism is Kumarakom. Kumarakom's implementation of respo-

nsible tourism initiatives. Creating better environments for people to come and live is a key component of responsible tourism. It combines environmental awareness, social responsibility, and sustainable methods. A prime example of how community involvement and ethical tourism can coexist is Kumarakom, which is tucked away in Kerala's backwaters. In order to achieve a healthy balance between tourism, the environment, and local livelihoods, the community at Kumarakom has accepted the paradigm of responsible tourism. The concept of responsible tourism has been present in the tourism literature since (Smith, 1990; Cooper and Ozdil, 1992). Seminal works by deKadt (1980) and Krippendorf (1987).

Kumarakom, located on the banks of Vembanad Lake, is renowned for its serene backwaters, vibrant biodiversity, and eco-tourism initiatives. The Responsible Tourism (RT) project launched in Kumarakom in 2008 by the Kerala Tourism Department showcases how collaboration can lead to sustainable tourism development.

1. **Environmental Projects:** preserving the environment of Vembanad Lake by reducing overfishing and pollution. Encouraging eco-friendly houseboats with appropriate waste management systems and solar power. Promoting organic agricultural methods among nearby farmers in an effort to cut down on the use of chemicals.
2. **Impact on Society and Culture:** revival of traditional arts through tourism-related cultural initiatives, such as Kathakali and Mohiniyattam. Showcasing regional cuisine and handicrafts to provide guests a distinctive cultural experience.
3. **Empowerment of the Economy:** Direct job openings in tourism-related fields including boat services, guiding, and hotels. Projects headed by women and backed by self-help groups, such as micro businesses and handicrafts.
4. **Government and Nonprofit Assistance:** Strategies implemented by the Kerala government to guarantee equitable pay and community capacity building. NGOs are essential in encouraging ethical travel and educating residents about sustainable behaviors.

### **The Role of the Community in Responsible tourism at Kumarakom**

The community at Kumarakom plays a pivotal role in sustaining responsible tourism through active involvement in decision-making and operations.

- **Local Planning and Governance:** In order to guarantee fair rewards and reduce environmental damage, village panchayats actively participate in the planning and oversight of tourism-related activities.
- **Hospitality and Cultural Ambassadors:** Residents act as guides and storytellers, enriching the tourist experience with authentic insights into local culture and history.
- **Conservation Activities:** Farmers and fishermen work together to keep Vembanad Lake and its environs in natural balance.
- **Women Empowerment:** Women-led co-operatives and self-help groups contribute to economic stability through traditional crafts, eco-friendly products, and home stays.

### **Role of Government Support in Strengthening Community Participation in Responsible Tourism at Kumarakom**

Kumarakom, a well-known destination for responsible tourism, exemplifies how government support can empower community participation in tourism development. The active involvement of local

communities is critical in ensuring the sustainability and authenticity of the tourism experience, and this is where government intervention plays a pivotal role.

The government's Kudamabasree initiative is a major factor in the development of responsible tourism in Kumarakam. In order to improve women's empowerment in Kerala, Kudumba Sree initiatives were initiated by Kerala state government. This is a state sponsored poverty alleviation programme with broader goals of women's empowerment (realised through women's collectives) and local economic development (realised through close integration with the local government who are themselves empowered as stated previously (Chettiparamb)

One of the key contributions of the government is policy formulation and implementation. By introducing well-structured policies that prioritize community participation, the government ensures that tourism activities align with local needs and aspirations. Initiatives such as the Responsible Tourism Mission in Kerala have paved the way for community members to actively engage in tourism-related ventures. Initiatives taken by the Kumarakom Panchayath (the local government) are detailed by the website of Kerala Tourism Watch (an organization that pools together civil society activists and local communities that protest against exploitation arising from tourism related activities). Local community peoples are earning from responsible tourism activities 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, Sebastian, 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 (Paul Mathew1, 2014)

### **Role of responsible tourism mission to strengthening the community participation**

The Responsible Tourism Mission was initiated by the Government of Kerala to establish sustainable and inclusive tourism practices. It aims to create livelihood opportunities for local communities while promoting cultural and environmental sustainability.

**Community Involvement:** Local residents are actively involved in tourism activities such as houseboat operations, handicrafts, farming, and cultural performances. This participation ensures that the economic benefits of tourism directly reach the community.

**Entrepreneurship Development:** The RT Mission facilitates skill development and financial support for local entrepreneurs. Notable ventures include the sale of coir products, spice tourism, and home stays, which offer authentic cultural experiences to tourists.

**Cultural Revitalization:** RT programs have rejuvenated traditional art forms like Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, and folk songs, allowing tourists to experience Kerala's rich heritage while providing performers with sustainable income sources.

**Sustainability Practices: Environmental conservation measures include:**

- Promotion of organic farming practices.
- Waste management systems in collaboration with the local panchayat.

- Conservation of mangroves and wetland ecosystems.
- **Tourism Resource Pools:** The concept of Tourism Resource Pools involves training community members to act as guides, storytellers, and facilitators, enhancing visitor experiences while creating employment.

### **Impact of RT in Kumarakom**

**Economic Gains:** Household incomes and economic inequality have significantly increased as a result of the community-centric strategy. Supply chains connected to tourism have given local producers and craftspeople direct access to markets.

**Social Benefits:** Social inclusion and empowerment have been facilitated by the growing participation of women and underrepresented groups in tourism-related activities.

**Environmental Conservation:** By encouraging environmental care among local stakeholders, RT programs have helped to preserve Kumarakom's distinctive biodiversity.

**Recognition and Awards:** Kumarakom has received several national and international accolades for its RT initiatives, solidifying its position as a global leader in sustainable tourism

### **Local community's perception towards responsible tourism**

Numerous other researchers have confirmed that when persons or people psychologically identify with particular places, they display environmentally conscious behavior. Communities are not only synonyms for geographical locations, but also involve emotional and psychological, interpersonal interactions and mutual benefits among residents. (Chenga, *Current Issues in Tourism*, 2017). The way locals in a place understand and assess how tourism affects their lives and environment is known as community perception. Economic advantages, cultural effects, environmental shifts, and the degree of community participation in tourism planning are some of the variables that influence these impressions (Andereck et al., 2005). Negative impressions can result from problems like environmental degradation, cultural commodification, and isolation from decision-making processes, but positive attitudes are frequently fueled by concrete advantages like infrastructure development and job prospects (Mbaiwa, 2005).

### **Benefits of Responsible Tourism as Perceived by Communities**

Responsible tourism is frequently seen by local communities as a way to accomplish sustainable development. For example, eco-friendly tourist methods can help rural and indigenous populations by reducing resource depletion and preserving biodiversity (Scheyvens, 1999). Initiatives for cultural preservation under frameworks for responsible tourism also give communities a chance to commemorate and display their heritage, which promotes pride and a sense of identity (Richards & Hall, 2000). Additionally, the money made from responsible tourism frequently goes toward neighborhood

### **Difficulties with Perception in the Community**

Notwithstanding its advantages, ethical tourism has trouble becoming widely accepted in the society. The unequal distribution of tourism's benefits, which can lead to socioeconomic divides within communities, is one of the main problems (Tosun, 2000). Furthermore, resistance and mistrust are frequently the results of inadequate consultation and a lack of transparency with local stakeholders during the planning stages (Mitchell & Reid, 2001). Particularly in regions with delicate ecosystems,

environmental issues like the growing strain on natural resources may also have a detrimental effect on community sentiments.

### **Techniques to Promote a Positive Community Image**

Building trust and cooperation between local communities and tourist stakeholders is crucial to the success of responsible tourism. Residents' sense of accountability and ownership can be increased by participatory methods that include them in decision-making (Simpson, 2008). Perceptions and involvement can be further enhanced by educational efforts emphasizing the long-term advantages of responsible tourism and capacity-building programs for residents. To preserve good ties, governments and tourism associations should also make sure that benefits are distributed fairly and that complaints are resolved quickly.

### **Case Studies: Community Perceptions in Practice**

The impact of community perceptions on responsible tourism initiatives is demonstrated by several cases. Through cultural preservation and economic empowerment, the Responsible Tourism Mission in Kerala, India, has garnered broad support for its successful engagement of local communities in sustainable practices (George et al., 2020). On the other hand, the lack of significant community involvement in certain over-traveled locations has resulted in criticism and mistrust, highlighting the significance of inclusive initiatives (Butler, 2018).

The effectiveness of responsible tourism is largely dependent on how the community views it. While unfavorable opinions might sabotage efforts and lead to disputes, favorable attitudes toward tourism initiatives can greatly enhance their durability. Therefore, the long-term sustainability of responsible tourism depends on comprehending and resolving community concerns, encouraging inclusive engagement, and guaranteeing equitable rewards. Prioritizing cooperation and the welfare of the community can make tourism a potent instrument for sustainable development

### **Factors and obstacles hindering participation of the community in tourism**

#### **A. Corruption, greed, factions, and elitism**

Because local elites have positions of advantage over regular community members, politics in the area frequently come into play. Furthermore, a few of the local leaders and Leaders frequently view development initiatives as a means of maximizing their own gains, even at the price of the development or the community as a whole. This frequently leads to the division of the community into factions, which in turn encourages unscrupulous behavior and further undermines the will of the populace to take part in village development projects. "Corruption is also a factor and this discourages people from participating. Sometimes individuals aim for personal benefit rather than that of the community. (Tshepiso Jonathan Setokoe, 2019)

#### **B. Lack of ability and language**

Community leadership of the limited ability and proficiency in the language. This attributes the lack of proficiency in English, the minimal business language, to more than just the village's location. but also the persistent absence of superstructures and infrastructure required for the

Area's smooth growth

#### **C. Conflict in leadership**

In certain initiatives, ward council members and traditional chiefs are not collaborating. While some loc-

al groups wished to own the property, traditional leaders thought they owned it. to collaborate with ward council members. Consequently, there was a lack of cooperation. It leads to conflict

#### **D. Residents' empowerment and skill development**

Every development and/or community depends on the community having the necessary skills to take part in development projects like tourism."Community members needed training in areas where they were weak or lacking." (Ramukumba, 2019)

### **Techniques to Strengthen Community Participation in Rural Responsible Tourism**

In rural areas, community involvement is essential to the growth of responsible tourism. The local people is frequently touched by the rise of tourism, either directly or indirectly, thus their participation in decision-making and implementation procedures is essential. In order to guarantee that the advantages of rural tourism are long-lasting and enhance the community's long-term well-being, this chapter looks at strategies to improve community involvement.

#### **1. Community Education and Awareness**

In order to prepare local populations for tourism potential, education is essential. Initiatives to increase knowledge of the advantages and possible hazards of tourism can improve comprehension and support. The importance of cultural preservation, the socioeconomic effects of tourism, and sustainable tourism practices should be the main topics of community-based workshops and training sessions.

#### **2. Workshops and Training**

It is important to give local populations hands-on training in sustainable practices, hospitality services, and tourism management. Partnerships with academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, and tourism development groups can be used to conduct these training courses. Such workshops can be used to develop skills as well as foster a sense of accountability and ownership for tourism-related projects.

#### **3. Campaigns for Awareness**

Campaigns for public awareness are crucial for educating locals about the possible benefits of responsible travel. Local media, community events, and social media platforms should all be used in these campaigns to spread the word about environmental preservation, responsible traveler conduct, and the potential economic benefits of tourism.

#### **4. Inclusive Decision-Making Processes**

A key component of responsible tourist development is empowering local people through their participation in tourism planning and management. In addition to giving the local population a sense of ownership and control over the tourism process, participatory decision-making guarantees that tourism development represents their demands and interests.

#### **5. Involved Planning**

It is possible to prevent the imposition of outside interests that might not be consistent with local values by incorporating community voices into the tourism planning process. Public discussions, community forums, and frequent gatherings where local stakeholders—such as citizens, business owners, and cultural leaders—may express their opinions can help achieve this.

#### **6. Community Forums**

The establishment of continuous communication channels, like advisory boards or community forums, is essential for the ongoing discussion between locals and tourism officials. These forums offer a place for cooperative problem-solving, address concerns, and facilitate the sharing of opinions on tourism initiatives.

### 7. Support for Local Entrepreneurship

Tourism provides significant opportunities for local entrepreneurship, and fostering such initiatives is essential for ensuring that the economic benefits of tourism are retained within the community. By supporting locally owned businesses, tourism can contribute to the empowerment of community members, especially in rural and underserved areas.

### 8. Creating Economic Opportunities

Another strategy to increase community involvement is to support neighborhood companies and businesses. Communities can receive a reasonable portion of tourism-related income by promoting regional cuisine, handicrafts, and cultural events. Profits stay in the community when community-owned tourist initiatives or cooperatives are established.

### 9. Using Technology as an Enabler

There are new ways to link communities with visitors thanks to technology. Digital platforms, for instance, can assist in promoting locally based tourist experiences to a worldwide audience. Locals may maintain their competitiveness and knowledge by learning how to use tools like social media, reservation platforms, and data analytics.

Increasing community involvement in tourism is not only a good concept; it is essential. We can develop a tourist paradigm that supports sustainability, maintains cultures, and uplifts communities by emphasizing cooperation, education, and participatory decision-making. Communities are the foundation of responsible tourism, not simply stakeholders.

## Conclusion

The success of responsible tourism ultimately depends on how well we integrate community voices into its design and execution. Empowering communities is not just a moral imperative it is the foundation of sustainable and responsible tourism. Community participation is integral to achieving the objectives of responsible tourism. By involving local populations in planning, governance, and benefit-sharing, tourism can become a catalyst for sustainable development. While challenges remain, the growing recognition of community participation's value offers hope for a more inclusive and sustainable tourism future.

The success of responsible tourism ultimately depends on how well we integrate community voices into its design and execution. Empowering communities is not just a moral imperative it is the foundation of sustainable and responsible tourism.

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