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Exploring the significance of alternative tourism as a way of alleviating poverty in rural areas

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CHAPTER 7 – ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

7.1 Introduction

The concepts of cultural villages in the country are still new and in the early stages of development including Noko Cultural Village. This chapter intends to analyse and interpret the cultural village in terms of the objectives that are set at the beginning of the study and those that are set by the members of the Ga-mohoboya rural village (ref: chapter 6). As noted, the cultural village possesses considerable scenic beauty of mountains and valleys, belief system, customs and related traditions and crafts.

Noko cultural village is a portrayal of a traditional village and its people who existed in the past. The key point of the analysis is to find the extent at which the cultural village is contributing in the alleviation of poverty, through job creation, improvement of the quality of life and protecting the environment. It was not easy to analyse some of the issues of the Case Study because of the lack of cooperation from the Finland government and some members of the community. The study also note the "tourism is a double edged sword that has positive and negative impacts, the challenge is to how to minimize the negative ones and encourage the positive ones through sound proper planning" Timothy (1999:149). The analysis of the case study will be according to the following sub-headings:

7.2 Infrastructure

The term infrastructure refers to forms of construction below the ground that provide the basic framework for effective functioning of the village. Adequate infrastructure is essential for the successful development of tourism and it is particularly critical factor in rural areas, which have limited infrastructure.

Infrastructure plays a pivotal role in social and economic development as it provides the foundation for all other forms of development. According to United Democratic Movement Leader, Mr. Bantu Holomisa, infrastructure can directly create jobs, and in the long term, ensure that the communities become economically and socially viable (Sowetan 2002: 15). According to Inskeep (1991:120), the basic infrastructure of an area that serves the community and economic development needs can often serve tourism with only moderate expansion and in turn, infrastructure built or improved to serve tourism can serve community needs.

The lack of infrastructure has a negative impact on the viability of the cultural village. Infrastructure especially roads, communication, water and transport serves many economic and social purposes and they are the drivers of rural economy. So, it is difficult to promote and develop the cultural village due to a lack of basic infrastructure. The following infrastructures components are analysed.

Water Supply

Water supply is a very important component in the development and sustaining of the tourism cultural village. The unavailability of water hinders the functioning of the cultural village and the community itself. It is argued that by mid 1990s almost 40% of the world population, mostly in developing countries were suffering from serious water shortages (Facts and Figures 2002:9), and stills a prevailing issue in rural areas. It is clear that water with the right characteristics, should be fundamental consideration in the location and siting of tourists development.

Water supply is also linked to the health and hygiene of the area as the cultural village use flush toilets, which needs piped water regularly. It has been noted that the people of Ga-mohoboya lack proper sanitation; there is a contamination of water resources that may cause health hazards to the communities. It is clear that if the water problem is not taken seriously then the future and development of the tourism sector should be questioned.

Roads and Transport

The cultural village is relatively isolated and not located next to extensive transport routes that flow to the Eastern part of the Kruger National Park; hence the cultural village does not draw heavily on the main tourism and industrial nodes of the region. Access to the cultural village from the township is very difficult because of the poorly developed roads. Roads also have a negative impact in terms of the neighboring people to access the area.

Some researchers argue that rural roads have been neglected issues in the government policy of the country. The emphasis on government has been on national roads and development corridors (Stilwell 1999:5). The inability to maintain the gravel roads by the local municipality, not only leads to physical decay, but also erodes human confidence and undermines the credibility of future developments in the tourism industry. This also leads to ineffective leakages between resources, services and appropriate delivery in the village and the process of carrying goods to well established tourist resource.

Only road transportation can access the area, there are no other types of transportation such as water or air type of transport. The only airport, which is nearby is the Gateway International Airport in Polokwane and the national one in Hoedspruit.

Telecommunications

There is a great disparity in access of telecommunications between urban and rural areas in South Africa. Inequalities are seen in the study to exist between the main white town and black rural communities in accessing telecommunication. The cultural village has tried to access telephone lines but in vain, and has a negative impact on the cultural village.

Most of the tourists rely on bookings before arrival, so it is difficult to make bookings in the cultural village and the expected people are not known until the last minute.

Sometimes there are no people to welcome the visitors, when they arrive unexpectedly. Preparations are not done in time to maintain the expectations of the tourists.

The above differs from the RDP policy, which states that the aim of the South African telecommunication sector is to provide universal, affordable access to all as rapidly as possible within suitable viable communication system particularly in rural areas. The above aim is not integrated into practice within rural areas and it is seen in the cultural village as an industry, which need a priority.

7.3 Community Participation

Experts often recommend community participation in planning and implementation of community projects. This will help to obtain information from local people who are affected and provide useful and substantive information about the nature of problems and stakeholders perspective on issues, priorities and preferences among policies (Mills 2002:533). An important aspect that emerged from the description of the study area is the lack of community participation and from the theoretical perspective is regarded as a contributing factor in the sustainability of the project. The community is largely at the mercy of foreign opinions.

The problems identified in the previous chapter marked by low levels of active participation by local people in the formal management and decision making of the cultural village with high participation of Finland government and ACACHS. The director of the village is unaware of the need to involve the public in decision-making. Grassroots participation is misinterpreted solely to include government officials; trained consultant from well established institutions, i.e. Lecturers from UNISA and community participation involving local people is viewed as interference. The communities are not allowed to voice out their needs and frustrations, and people from outside are the ones who identify problems, plan, implement and monitor the process.

Any tourism development should take into account that the host destinations are essentially communities. A community- based approach to tourism considers the needs and interests of the local people alongside the benefits of economic growth. This enhances the local participation and promotes the economic, social and cultural well being of these people. In summary, the functioning of the cultural village provided limited opportunities for participation and benefit to the local people.

While the development approaches discussed in the previous chapter have played an important role in addressing issues concerning women in the tourism development, they have not necessarily resulted in concrete translation into practice in many development projects including Noko cultural village. There is an absence of participation of women in any decision that takes place regarding the future of the village.

The role that women play are cooking, cleaning and ensuring that the reception is conducive for tourists. Traditionally, women are not allowed to argue or answer when they are not asked to do so. The importance of women in the functioning of the cultural village is overlooked.

The running of the cultural village by the director no longer impresses the community and the BRDT, but they are afraid to fire him, with a fear that they will no longer receive any funds from the Finland Embassy, as he is the one who introduce the community to ACACHS and the Finland government.

7.4 Institutional Elements

Some researchers argue that the lack of institutional capacity is recognized as one of the obstacles in the sustaining tourism projects especially in rural areas. According to McKenzie (1194:86) tourism has the potential role to play in South Africa, provided that appropriate institutional and policy frameworks are developed and that communities are empowered to participate in and benefit from tourism projects.

For tourism to contribute to the broader social, political and economic goals for development, institutional mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure participation of the local residents and accountable to local democratically elected bodies. Achieving successful tourism growth depends, as much on effective institutional factors, community commitment and strong leadership and the three should work together. This will also help to facilitate the participation of various social groups that represent the diverse interests of the broader community.

Organisational Structure

The impression obtained from the interview with the Director of the village is that his word with the influence from external people is final. He does not need any assistance or opinion from local leaders who are part of the cultural village; only the Finland and ACACHS people because of their financial support and experience in tourism. Management in the cultural village is inflexible, inefficient and ineffective to achieve the above- mentioned objectives (ref: chapter 6).

The existing organisational structure is the traditional top- down approach, hierarchical decision- making, relying on the ACACHS technical experts to give direction on the matters of the village. There is a high rate of foreign ownership contributing to the loss of control over local resource. In the opening of the cultural village Dr. Vuuren from UNISA, spoke about the future of the cultural village, rather than the chief or other leaders from the community. The cultural village needs to understand that development cannot be imposed in a top down manner. It is not (simply) about financial flows and other economic considerations, but fundamentally concerns the capacity of a society to tap the root of popular creativity, to free up and empower people to exercise their intelligence and collective wisdom (Brohman 1996:6).

Local Government Support

An overriding feature of the cultural village is a relative lack of stable local government capable of mobilizing development resources, deliver social services and infrastructure. Tourism is a sub- section in the Strategy and Development Department within GTM. Cultural tourism has only recently been seen as an important industry in the area, and as such local tourism managers and officers do not have relevant skills or expertise in the field of tourism. Officials lack resources in terms of personnel who are knowledgeable and the department is very skeptical about the value of the cultural village. The village lacks the cohesion and direction of stable local government involvement necessary to sustain itself over the long period and to coordinate the village with other economic sectors, development infrastructure and objectives. This will resolve issues related to overall sustainability and the distribution of costs and benefits generated by tourism.

In practice, the local government should work close to the people of the cultural village, to understand their needs, and able to communicate with them. It is the responsibility of the local government to make sure the village is socially and economically viable. This gives the cultural village a negative name in terms of its promotion and development. The White paper also stresses that tourism is not about marketing an image, but rather is an intricate management system which involve all affected parties, and urge them to putting it into practice.

Private Sector's support

The non-involvement of the private sector poses a negative impact on the village within the GTM. As the drivers and promoters of tourism in the area, their valuable support is very crucial. From the public workshop, it was clear from the discussions that awareness and capacitating the local communities on tourism issues is not part of the private sector's functions. The private sectors feel that through assisting the local communities, valuable time would be lost. There is a need for private sectors to work together with the communities of the cultural village in order to achieve sustainable products.

7.5 Economic Analysis

Although the establishment of the cultural village was geared towards the income generation and employment creation to the Ga-mohoboya community, Noko cultural village is far from profitable. The economic benefits from the cultural village are often less than anticipated. The visits are seasonal and more in summer than in winter and more money is spent in the Coach House where they are accommodated. The income generated from Noko Cultural Village is for paying low- income salaries, electricity bills, which is too small; meet the needs of the village. Coach House Hotel, who transport and accommodates the tourists, has in fact taken much of the benefits.

The manufacturer of arts and craft is one issue, while the sale to tourists is another. The study has noted that that the creativity of fine pottery, large stone carvings in the village are massive and heavy items to transport especially for air travelers and the area does not have water transport, which are mostly used to accommodate big items. Sometimes these products are very small scale and personalised and are unlikely to be profitable. Such incomes are very low and can be regarded as exploitative, but they are similar to domestic and casual as reported from the previous chapter.

At the same time, since the building of the cultural village, there has been a spread of benefits among the members of the village. It has been created six (6) permanent and more than fifty (50) casual jobs. Although these jobs and salaries are modest, they are significant in the rural areas where unemployment is a serious problem.

It is difficult for the cultural village to access funding from other institutions, given the background. At first it was a question of not registered as a company, and it is currently registered. From the observations it is clear that the village need a strong and sufficient funding from the provincial and local government.

7.6 Environmental Analysis

One of the main objectives in establishing the cultural village was to conserve the natural beauty and as a prerequisite for attracting tourists to the area. The cultural village has helped to preserve the indigenous plants that are available next to the village. The branches and trees that are used for weaving and carving, which are growing next to the cultural village is only for demonstration to the tourists, young people and women travel further away to collect for their own uses.

The establishment of the cultural village has helped to re-vitalized abandoned places. Since the forced removals, the place was abandoned and nobody was taking care for it. It has made it possible to realize the economic value attached to the place, scenery, which was robbed by the apartheid government.

The creation of the Noko cultural village as it beautiful and reflecting a relaxing paradise, has offered the community a new focus for energies and revitalized community activity. The huts are designed to reflect the undulations of the Drakensberg range and Thabina Nature reserve.

Although there are no signs of negative impact on the environment, the dependency of rural areas on natural resources in marginal areas have some negative impact as it leads to further poverty and low productivity. As noted that the rural communities depends on wild vegetables for food, with the environment changes, it will reduce food security, and limit opportunities for agriculture and leads to further poverty and low productivity.

7.7 Social and Cultural Analysis

Although tourism is regarded as an economic stimulant for society, it is also realised as a catalyst for social change and healing mechanisms. The cultural village has helped to strengthen the area's identity and traditional skills. Older people are passing their skills to tourists and younger generation who would continue then. It has helped the community

members to practice their skills and be appreciated by other people It has offered prospects of reevaluation of heritage and its symbolic importance, and the identity of the rural village, and have acquire social value and dignity

The tour guides, in taking some courses get some exposure and greater opportunity to visit places away from home, learning more about other cultures and people. They also teach tourists the local language, and they are also learning other languages to satisfy different market segment.

The area does not appear to be controlled by major conflicts, even though there are some misunderstanding with the BRDT and the Board members, which is currently sorted out by the Finland government.

The local paper (Letaba Herald) recently reported on the experience of foreign tourists who visited the village. According to the report, the visitors were quite amazed and very positive on the potential that the rural people have, the wealth of their cultural heritage and the beauty and the diversity of attractions.

7.8 Training

There is a lack of education and skills among the people working and around the village, only the international volunteers who have basic skills on how the cultural village should function. Training can be described as a systematic and organized process by which the employees acquire skills, attitudes and necessary information to achieve the objectives set by the organization. Training is also linked to development, where one performs the job effectively (Bennett 1994:239). There is a great need for education and training in the cultural village and also the community members. It is argued that in order to achieve economic growth, more emphasis should be put in the education element (Kilian et al 1999:21).

The labor force of the rural village can be regarded as its greatest asset. There is a potential for further exploitation of the labor force in the field of education and training need to be initiated to improve the quality of labour force. The emphasis should be on appropriate education and training relevant to the targeted people. The existing entrepreneurial talent should be exploited to its full potential.

There is a need for diversification of knowledge, even though the Director has a degree, he will be confronted with some economic, legal or technological issues, so it is important to have full- equipped people with different fields to run the village.

7.9 Marketing Strategy

The marketing strategy of the village is very weak and relying on outside people, i.e. UNISA website. There are no advertisements from the local radios or papers about the cultural village and even organizing events from the community level to stimulate the community's interest. This also put the community with direct competition with other private sectors, little experience, and effective marketing strategy is financially unaffordable and high risk of failure.

7.10 Conclusions

From the theoretical perspective, the cultural village should be able to generate jobs, income and improve the quality of life in the community. From the analysis of Noko cultural village no full evidence has been attained to support the statement. It is clear that the shortcomings commonly associated with the cultural village include high rates of foreign ownership contributing to a loss of control over local resources, seasonality of the sector, and lack of supporting infrastructure, capital and participation. The cultural village replicates problems of dependency; there is a domination of people outside the village.

CHATER 8- CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

The principal aim of the study was to explore the importance of 'alternative tourism' as a means of eradicating poverty amongst the mostly disadvantaged and marginalised people in rural areas. Although Noko cultural village can hardly be considered a fully representative of the 'alternative tourism' development, the study through the examination of alternative tourism literature, has illustrated elements that can prove that alternative tourism has the potential of improving the quality of lives in rural areas (refer to 3.2.1; 3.2.4 & 3.2.5).

The study, through the Case Study also confirms that alternative tourism is not always a means to development, but it is an industry that needs to be explored and marketed in a proper and planned way. Alternative tourism also confirms that there are other specific circumstances that need to be considered in order to achieve the hypothesis and objectives that are set by the study.

The chapter seeks to provide recommendation on 'alternative tourism' for future projects and plans for rural local poor people.

8.2 Alternative Tourism and Rural Areas in South Africa

Although 'alternative tourism' do have negative impact on the environment and the culture in some instances, they are relatively few (as shown in 3.2.3), rather it is an industry, which is well positioned to contribute to the improvement of people's lives in rural areas. 'Alternative tourism' also forms part of the rural development policy, i.e. Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Strategy and fulfills the developmental role of the local government. 'Alternative tourism' has the following advantages:

- 'alternative tourism' projects are more likely to be sustainable because of the educational and environmental elements attached to it;
- 'alternative tourism' is on a smaller scale than other forms of tourism which makes it easier for the rural communities to participate and operate in a community level; and
- Ownership of 'alternative tourism' projects provides local people with power, employment benefits, skills training and revenue.

The Provincial government with the local municipalities should take a leading and coordinating role to make sure that things are put into practice in the rural areas. The functioning of 'alternative tourism' in rural areas should become one of the developmental functions that are prescribed by the Local Government Act (1999) and the Municipal Structure Act in local municipalities (2000).

The tourism policy should give direction on how local community's tourism initiatives should be embraced in tourism development. The policy should clearly outline the relationship with other stakeholders, i.e. the slogan of public sector led, private sector driven and community based projects should be implemented accordingly.

It is noted that the training capacity in the country is unevenly spread among the provinces, with Gauteng, North- West and Western Cape, being the leading provinces. Northern Cape in particularly and to a lesser degree Mpumulanga and Limpopo provinces has shown little in terms of training capacity supported by the government. The South African Tourism (SATOUR), which is responsible for international marketing and promotion, setting industry standard, managing research, market intelligence and information in South Africa should assist the local and provincial authorities to facilitate the growth of tourism through community education, and the development of SMMEs in the tourism sector (RDF 1997:34). The country's rural areas are blessed with its natural beauty, wild life, and rich diversity of cultural and historical experiences that could become a unique selling point for our rural communities.

8.3 Lessons and Recommendations emanating from the Case Study

Noko cultural village is one of the examples of 'alternative tourism' in rural areas initiated at a community level. It is not a good example on its performance from the analysis, but there is a potential for the village to grow into one of the cultural destinations in the region. It is one of the projects that could inform future policies and strategies for sustainable cultural villages in the region and South Africa as a whole. In order to make Noko cultural village a destination on its own, other issues needs to be taken into account.

The cultural village should integrate elements of development planning, through the creation of participatory institutions, local economic development and sustainable development in order to achieve the desired benefits. The cultural village should emphasise small scale, locally owned development and weighted in favour of local people and greater community participation, which the cultural village lacks.

This kind of project requires a planned programme on the part of host communities including the local municipality and the province. It is a project that involves sub-sector such as, accommodation, education and skills. These need to be developed in support with private and public agencies to enhance the effective functioning of the cultural village.

Community participation needs to be embedded in the operation and functioning of the cultural village. The local municipality (who is aware of the misunderstanding among community members) should initiate discussions between members of the community and the affected stakeholders (ACACHS and Finland Government). It should be in a form of a workshop where all factors and issues are considered and reviewed. This would assist the stakeholders to identify gaps, formulate functions and benefits of each role players. It should start at a community level without the ACACHS and Finland government (to ensure that the community is not intimidated). All issues raised would form the basis of discussions and clarifications management and administration issues of

the cultural village. Ownership should be seen in planning, decision- making and implementation of the project.

A strong recommendation is placed on a development of **tourism infrastructure** such as roads, water, transport and social facilities in order to connect tourist to the village (Maseko 2001:92). The importance of transport and roads can determine the shape and viability of cultural tourism industries in the area.

A coherent **marketing strategy** should be developed to enhance the rate of tourists to the village, to have more day and night visits. As noted in the theoretical part of the study, tourism marketing in the country is directed towards large- scale investments instead of the small- scale development. According to Dahles (1999:5) small- scale development projects are instruments of transforming and improving the economy and society and they are not getting any support from both the public and private sectors.

There is a strong need for commitment from both actors of development to realise the potential of our rural people and their areas in poverty alleviation programmes. The following recommendations are open for discussion, further studies and need to be considered as a whole in order to overcome the challenge of poverty in rural areas; namely:

- ***Public, Private and Community Partnership-*** the involvement of the government with the participation of NGO's, private sectors and local communities should undertake actions aimed at integrating the planning of tourism as a contributor to the realisation of the benefits of the marginalised people. The development of alternative tourism in rural areas should be underpinned by the government policy framework, which should encourage the channeling of benefits to local people through their constructive involvement. This should include their participation in sustainable environmental management and economic growth, and upon private sector investment.

- ***A tourism levy***- in order to carry out the functions of the tourism industry, it will be necessary to establish a tourism fund. It is advisable that an equitable split in terms of contribution by the private sector, communities and local government negotiated. This levy should be proposed based on a set amount of all operators and additional rate per bed per annum for accommodation establishments. The proposed levy would be utilised for marketing, Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), SMME support, liaison, education and awareness programmes, research, maintaining standards at public attractions and project development.
- ***Proper participation in tourism development***- Local participation in the tourism industry has emerged long time ago and refined in the context of rural areas. People who enjoy or suffer the main impacts of tourism are those who live in tourists' destination areas, thus communities at the tourist destination must participate in decision- making (Tosum 1999:616). A call for greater public participation especially is given to the destination hosts in the tourism sector to permit a more equitable distribution of its costs and benefits. Tourism may bear little fruits, unless those affected are involved in all aspects. Alternative tourism builds on people's own initiatives with the government's support and facilitating role. External agents should mediate with the outside world, but decision-making should rest with the local people to determine their goals, needs and desires for development.
- ***Training, Awareness and Education***- awareness and understanding of facets that form part of the cultural village should be enhanced in the rural village. This should include, making people aware of the opportunities they can offer to tourists, their needs and values, understanding and the every day's lives and their importance. Training for rural communities should be vital, where capacity-building facilities becomes essential. This should include all community members interested and form part of tourism, should have access to training.
- ***Women 's support***- international experience has shown that access to education, training and basic facilities are crucial for women and also have a direct influence on reducing poverty. The study argues that the development efforts in rural areas

should therefore begin with the support to women in their tourism projects through empowerment schemes.

- ***Institutional Structures-*** hierarchical institutional structure should by replaced by more democratic, two- way process that empower people to design policies in their own interests. Institutional mechanisms will create conditions under which strong social partners can participate in decision making to enable local consensus on how tourism should proceed. It should facilitate the participation of social groups that represent the diverse interest to the broader community. Alternative tourism emphasises autonomy in the decision making of territorially organised communities, local self-reliance, direct democracy and experiential social learning.
- ***Proper Tourism planning and implementation-*** most of the rural projects are turning into white elephant because of lack of planning from the host community and the government. With the little skills that the communities have, the government should add value into proper planning, implementation and management. This should include operation and maintenance principles which are integrative.
- ***Balanced tourism growth and sustainability-*** tourism development should be based on criteria of sustainability, which means that it should be ecologically bearable in the long term, as well as economically viable and ethically and socially equitable for local communities.

The above recommendations should integrate the roles of a planner outlined in the previous chapters.

8.4 Conclusions

A more integrated planning approach is required by the government, private sectors, NGO's, CBO's and the communities in order to formulate a coherent strategy that will realise their developmental roles and functions to reach their common vision, otherwise the poverty destroying the poor rural communities will worsen. The promotions of

alternative forms of tourism in rural areas should be compatible with the principles of sustainable development to represent a guarantee of economic, socio- cultural and environmental stability in tourism industry.

The sustainability of the cultural village will not only provide jobs to the rural local people, it will provide sense of ownership and true empowerment will occur. This is the only way to uplift the previously disadvantaged people without exploiting them.

Making the tourism industry more representative, would not only empower previously disadvantaged people in South Africa, it would positively affect the image of the country to the rest of the world.