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**STRATEGIC FACTORS FOR RURAL TOURISM SUSTAINABILITY**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Rural tourism has been identified as one of the most priority areas for development of global tourism. The advancement in rural tourism improves the quality of life of rural people and also provides better experience to tourists. Indian villages along with rest of the world have a great potential for tourism development with its attractive and unique traditional culture and values. Due to greater diversity of culture, Indian villages can maintain their tourism practices more efficiently and with differentiated offerings. Present study seeks to interpret various strategic factors which play an important role in the development and sustainability of rural tourism. The study further analyses the impact of various strategic factors which helps in sustaining rural tourism in J&K State. The study documents a survey of three hundred and six people who are linked with rural tourism as providers, intermediaries or end users.*

**KEYWORDS**

Rural tourism, Tourism sustainability, Tourism development, Strategic factors, Differentiated offerings.

**INTRODUCTION**

Tourism industry is among the major segments of world economy and contributes to five percent of the total worldwide GDP. Tourism industry will expand greatly in future and will offer new and modified products with customized offerings. Among all the emerging dimensions of tourism, rural tourism is one which is expanding its scope and area of business with a great speed. India is the leading nation who is developing its rural tourism mechanism through modern practices in the areas of marketing, production and innovation. The basic purpose of rural tourism is to benefit the local community through entrepreneurial opportunities, income generation, employment opportunities, conservation and development of arts and crafts, investment for infrastructural development and preservation of environment and heritage (Mishra 2001).

The potential for rural tourism is a major force in rural economic development resulting in poverty alleviation. If more tourism can be developed in rural areas, particularly in ways that involve high level local participation in decision making then poverty can be easily eliminated up to a greater extent. However developing rural tourism is a big challenge (WTO 2001). Successful rural tourism development depends on commercial, economic and other issues such as quality of product, infrastructural availability at tourism destinations, availability of skilled manpower, interest of investors, variety of products etc. Along with all these primary challenges there could be other secondary challenges such as administrative complexities in dealing with low populated areas, lack of policy formulation and implementation, lack of coordination between rural development and tourism development and Low priority to rural areas by state as well as central governments.

Rural tourism could be developed for different reasons. These could be for improving livelihood of rural poor, providing basic facilities such as schools & health centers, empowering people specially women so that they can take active decisions, developing infrastructure etc. Rural tourism development is thus seen as one strategic means to assist and develop rural economies.

**OBJECTIVES**

- i. To identify various strategic factors that has an impact on rural tourism development and sustainability.
- ii. To highlight role of each individual factor in rural growth and development.
- iii. To examine comparative nature of each factor in promotion and advancement of rural tourism.
- iv. To recommend strategies for future feasible expansion of rural tourism in J&K state.

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

Present study has been worked out with the help of primary data. The primary data has been collected by interviewing different people at different places who are linked with rural tourism in J&K state. These people were visited individually and with the help of a pretested questionnaire the information was collected from them both qualitatively and quantitatively. The data and information so collected has been analyzed statistically to identify the role played by each identified strategic factors in rural tourism promotion and development in J&K.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The various factors identified for rural tourism sustainability has been tabulated in table 1. The interpretation of each factor is discussed under the following headings:

**1. IMPROVING WELL BEING OF RURAL POOR**

Improving well being of rural poor has been identified as a primary factor which could help in supporting rural tourism sustainability to a greater extent. It has been found that majority of respondents i.e., 51 percent consider strong contribution of this factor in developing rural tourism while 20 percent respondents have no decided opinion. Moreover a total of 29 percent respondents believe that by improving well being of rural poor could not sustain and develop rural tourism in J&K state.

**2. EMPOWER RURAL PEOPLE**

People could be empowered in terms of decentralization, delegation of authority and self decision making. The analysis reveals that a total of 35 percent respondents consider greater applicability of this factor while 31 percent respondents have no opinion regarding this factor. However a considerable group of respondents i.e. 34 percent believe that by empowering rural people we cannot develop rural tourism as both have no direct relation.

**3. RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

Infrastructure is the backbone of every industry and tourism industry as a rapid growing industry also needs infrastructural support. A total of 54 percent respondents consider rural infrastructure as a primary tool for developing and sustaining tourism in rural areas whereas 26 percent respondents have no decided opinion. Moreover 20 percent respondents consider that infrastructure is a secondary requirement for tourism sustainability.

**4. IMPLEMENTING NEW TOURISM POLICIES**

For survival and efficient performance it is necessary to determine various courses of actions. The analysis of values reveals that a total of 38 percent respondents consider that it is mandatory to properly frame and implement rural tourism policies for its sustainability whereas 33 percent respondents have a neutral opinion for this factor. Moreover 29 percent respondents consider that already existing policies are enough and there is no need to develop new rural tourism policies.

**5. OUTSIDE GLOBAL INTERACTION**

The analysis of values reveals that a total of 27 percent respondents believe that outside global interaction for framing rural tourism policies is very necessary whereas 22 percent respondents have a neutral opinion for this factor. However 51 percent respondents suggest that J&K state is a mixture of multiple cultures and traditional values and totally different from rest of the world. So it is not possible that global interaction will be helpful in sustaining rural tourism in J&K.

**6. PROTECTION OF CULTURE, NATURE, HERITAGE & SOCIAL CONDITIONS**

The interpretation of values given for this factor reveals that 47 percent respondents consider that protection culture, heritage, nature and social conditions can be greatly helpful in reaching potential customers and generating new dimensions for rural tourism. However 18 percent respondents have a neutral opinion. Moreover 35 respondents believe that these elements can't be much helpful in developing rural tourism in J&K state.

**7. EMPOWER RURAL WOMEN**

Women have a great contribution in the development in all sectors. The analysis of values reveals that a total of 31 percent respondents consider that by empowering rural women we can enhance rural tourism to a great extent whereas 32 percent respondents has no decided opinion. A considerable group of respondents i.e. 37 percent says that women participation cannot be useful in developing rural tourism in J&K because women in J&K are not much dominant in work.

**8. FUNDING AGENCIES**

A feasible source of funds is the prime factor in the development of any sector. The analysis reveals that 58 percent respondents admit that recognition of suitable govt. as well as private funding agencies is a major tool in advancing rural tourism while 15 percent respondents have a neutral opinion regarding this factor. The analysis further reveals that 27 percent respondents believe that lack of funding is not a major hurdle in the development and sustainability of rural tourism in J&K state.

**9. ANTICIPATING CHANGE**

The analysis suggests that 33 percent respondents are of the believe that anticipating change in consumer satisfaction and buying pattern is a necessary requirement for rural tourism sustainability whereas 24 percent respondents have no decided opinion regarding this factor. Moreover 43 percent respondents consider that rural tourism is in beginning stage so there is no need for anticipating change at present in J&K state.

**10. ETOURISM PRACTICES**

Etourism is a modern innovation and application of ecommerce. The analysis reveals that 41 percent respondents consider that etourism procedure implementation will develop rural tourism at a large extent. However 34 percent respondents have a neutral opinion for this factor. Moreover 25 percent respondents don't consider the present time as right for implementing etourism tools and procedures.

**TABLE: STRATEGIC FACTORS FOR RURAL TOURISM SUSTAINABILITY**

Factors	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Improving well being of rural poor	22	29	20	17	12
Empower rural people	19	16	31	14	20
Rural infrastructure	23	31	26	11	9
Implementing new tourism policies	18	20	33	22	7
Outside global interaction	13	14	22	27	24
Protection of culture, nature, heritage & Social conditions	22	25	18	23	12
Empower rural women	13	18	32	16	21
Funding agencies	26	32	15	16	11
Anticipating change	13	20	24	28	15
Etourism practices	19	22	34	15	10

Source: Field Survey

**CONCLUSION**

The present assessment of various strategic factors responsible for rural tourism development showed a dominant effect in J&K state. All the identified factors play a very critical role in developing and sustaining rural tourism as responded by respondents. The factors that have a primary role in developing rural tourism have been assessed as improving well being of rural poor, rural infrastructure development, Protection of culture, heritage, nature and social conditions, funding agencies and implementation of etourism practices and procedures. That other factors that have a supporting role in developing and sustaining rural tourism in J&K state has been identified as empowering rural people, empowering rural women, outside global interaction and anticipating change.

**RECOMENDATIONS**

- There is a need to develop a strategic mechanism so that regular employment could be provided to rural youth.
- The govt. and other developmental agencies must look after in providing fringe benefits such as schools, hospitals, old age education centers for rural people.
- Regular training programs must be organized at regular intervals which could help rural people in making self decisions, developing skills and enhancing abilities.
- There is also a need to develop new and also implement various schemes through which rural people could be given financial assistance for establishing business units that also help in sustaining tourism.
- Special schemes for women must be developed and implemented for women working for tourism advancement and promotion.
- There is a greater need to develop effective communication networks so that potential consumers could get regular and proper information regarding tourism products.
- A greater need has been identified for development of a common plate form so that tourism suppliers and consumers and interact with each other regularly.
- Lack of transportation has also been assessed as a major problem in extending rural tourism so there is a need to effectively work for improving rural roads and transport system by local administration.
- Financial problems in developing rural tourism could also be minimized if work will be done in bringing public private partnership in this sector.
- As the rural tourism products are in introduction stage so there is a need for development of an effective promotion strategy so that information could reach to maximum consumers.

- There is a need to assess and evaluate global strategies that has been implemented in other countries for increasing the status of rural tourism in J&K.
- Customization in offering products could also be done in developing rural tourism in J&K because of presence of multiple cultures and religions.
- It is necessary to go for special trade fairs and seminars which should hold the participation of people from global environment.

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