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**Agro and Community-Based Tourism for Destination
Development: A Study based on Heeloya Tourism Village,
Sri Lanka.**

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Abstract

Agro Tourism and community-based Tourism (CBT) significantly enhance sustainable development in most international and local tourism destinations. As an Asian country, Sri Lanka consists of diversified traditional customs, festivals, and rituals in the agricultural industry. Nevertheless, it generates a niche market for agro-tourism and CBT. Heeloya tourism village, situated in the central province of Sri Lanka contains unique natural and cultural products. The remarkable traditional village culture and the rural agricultural environment generate an impressive experience for the tourists who arrive at Heeloya tourism village. The present study aims to identify the possibilities for developing agro-tourism and CBT in Heeloya tourism village and to recognize the challenges that negatively influence in development of agro-tourism and CBT in the destination. The research is conducted using the qualitative method, and the data is collected through interviews and

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observations. Content analysis was used for the study to analyze the data. The results of the study revealed that it has the tremendous potential to develop the destination through agro and CBT in Heeloya, and the farm base activities, cuisine, accommodation, entertainment, educational activities, and natural and cultural environment are the major drivers that enrich the agro-tourism and CBT in Heeloya. Also, it was recognized that minimal awareness of the positive impacts of agro-tourism and CBT by the host community, less knowledge about the techniques in agro-tourism, less knowledge in foreign languages, infirm leadership, lack of financial support and less motivation of the host community are the major challenges in developing agro-tourism and CBT in Heeloya. The practical implication of the study is to achieve destination development through enhancing agro-tourism and CBT in Heeloya.

Keywords: Agro Tourism, Community Based Tourism, Destination Development, Sustainable Development.

Introduction

Tourism contributes to worldwide economic growth (Figini & Vici, 2010). Sri Lanka can be identified as an agricultural country that consists of diversified opportunities to develop agro-tourism and community-based tourism (CBT). However, agro-tourism and CBT represent niche markets in the tourism industry.

Agro-tourism is a way of sustainable tourist development and multi-activity in rural areas through which the visitor has the opportunity to get aware of agricultural areas, agricultural occupations, local products, traditional food and the daily life of the rural people, as well as the cultural elements and traditions (Kumbhar, 2009). Agro-tourism has become a significant income-generating form of tourism in most Asian countries. Due to the economic, social, and environmental positive impacts, agro-tourism is vital in tourism. Ochterski and Roth (2016) stated that agro-tourism helps farmers to remain with farming activities constantly and, at the same time, enhances the quality of life of their families by earning an extra income. Further, due to the development of agro-tourism, it contributes to income generation of the local community in the regional areas. Agro tourism concept has the potential to generate jobs, increase income, and utilize rural resources (Eranda &

Niroshana, 2019). Further, it enhances the social development of the community in the destination. Therefore, it will significantly affect the sustainable development of the rural community. Ultimately, agro-tourism conserves the natural and intangible cultural heritage, such as the rural people's traditional agricultural practices and customs.

Community-based tourism (CBT) has been presented as an alternative means to traditional mass tourism in developing countries and is developed as a community development tool that aids communities in taking control over tourism management and development and delivers benefits to the communities which are generated by tourism activities (Trejos & Chiang, 2009). Due to the diversified positive impacts, community-based tourism ultimately causes to reach sustainable development in the destination.

CBT becomes a poverty reduction tool that aids the local community in various ways, such as by offering educational opportunities, environment conservation and income-generating activities (Cooperation, 2014). CBT is a model that centres on the local community's ownership, management, and control of tourism projects (Simpson, 2008). Dissanayake and Samarathunga (2015) mentioned that although community-based tourism is conducted on a small scale, it can be identified as a successful tourism concept in which local communities can get the maximum benefits of tourism. Also, community-based tourism can be a significant influencer for the economic boom of developing countries, including Sri Lanka.

Heeloya is a remote and typical Kandyan village that is abundantly beautiful in the backdrop of the mighty Knuckles range, and it can be considered one of the emerging CBT destinations in Sri Lanka. Heeloya agricultural village is situated 30 km from Kandy in the Kandy District. Some unique attractions in the village present a natural and scenic beauty for the tourists. According to the Grama Niladari's records of the Heeloya area, 254 families live in the village, 223 houses, and the population is 864. However, only 20 families participate in tourism-related businesses (Arachchi, 2018). The village is naturally authentic, and their farming lifestyle has never changed since their settlement. Paddy farming, beekeeping, toddy tapping, handicrafts, and spice growing are the primary income sources of the villagers (Trip Advisor, 2021).

Eranda & Niroshana (2019) have mentioned the scope of tourism at Heeloya village, such as homestays, tasting traditional village food, harvesting and preparing food with villagers, traditional agricultural methods, experiencing cattle farming, experiencing waterfalls, hiking, and wild camping. Agrotourism and CBT can be considered the most appropriate forms of tourism to earn revenue and upgrade the social lifestyles of the local community in Heeloya. If these two forms of tourism can be managed appropriately, it will affect the regional area development, community empowerment, and sustainable destination development in Heeloya village.

When a destination is developing for agro and community-based tourism, it should recognize the possibilities of the tourism products. As the major objective of the study, the researchers focused on identifying the possibilities to develop agro Tourism and CBT in Heeloya village and as the specific objective to observe the challenging factors that negatively affect the agro and CBT development in the destination.

When considering the significance of the research study, it benefits various stakeholders. As the primary stakeholders, international and domestic tourists can consume the unique agro and community-based tourism products in Heeloya. It can be caused to attract various types of tourists to the destination in the future. Also, as one of the key stakeholders, the community in Heeloya is significant. The community can enhance their awareness about the destination, and community empowerment can be obtained through developing the agro and community-based tourism in the destination. Ultimately it can be caused to the socio-cultural development of the community in Heeloya.

Resource administrators such as Sri Lanka Tourism Promotional Bureau, Urban Development Authority, Provincial Council, and Central Province Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority can recognize the possibilities to develop agro and community-based tourism products in the destination. Further, tourism entrepreneurs such as hoteliers and travel company members can identify the target markets to achieve their profits. Also, small and medium entrepreneurs such as craft vendors can identify the possibility of their market for developing the products.

Literature Review

Agritourism has been suggested to foster rural development through youth retention, revitalization of local economies and preservation of agricultural and natural heritage (Fleischer & Pizam, 1997; Hegarty & Przeborska, 2005; Sharpley, 2002; Wicks & Merrett, 2003). Reviewing the literature, the following agro-tourism activities can be identified.

Table 01: Agro Tourism activities

Activity	Major Activities
Farm-Based	Participation in farming activities, farm tours/ farm demonstrations, fishing, cattle rides
Food and accommodation	Unique dining experiences, Bread and breakfast, agro-catering business, organic foodstuff facilities to consume farm products in the farm/ picnic areas, cookery classes, and cookery demonstrations
Entertainment and educational activities	Nature trails, watching wildlife, hiking, kayaking, boating, farm, museums/ heritage, fairs, festivals and special events
Selling farm products	On-farm direct sales, U-pick operations or roadside stands Off-the-farm direct sales - Farmers' markets, county, and state fairs, sale in special events, Direct and indirect sales of value-added products.
Supplementary products and activities	Sale of village-based handicrafts Participates in activities related to local enterprises Wildlife photography.

Source: Compiled by authors from Kizos and Isoifides, 2007; Stanovčić et al., 2018; Malkanthi and Routry, 2011. Rambodagedara et al ,2015.

Perera, Rambodagedara and Silva (2005) stated that agro-tourism is a well-established practice in many developed countries as an alternative income source for the rural farming community. Also, it was mentioned that agro-tourism is being practiced in many regional countries such as Thailand,

Malaysia, India, Nepal, Bhutan, and Indonesia, providing numerous benefits to the rural community. Therefore, Perera, Rambodagedara and Silva (2005) described that in those countries, agro-tourism has become an essential part of agriculture and rural development, and agro-tourism mainly focuses on improving the livelihoods of the rural farming community at the policy level.

As a developing country, Sri Lanka has great potentialities to promote the agro-tourism concept. Further, Perera, Rambodagedara and Silva (2005) mentioned that Sri Lanka could take advantage of agro-tourism, which can be considered an effective and reachable alternative practice to enhance the economic and social well-being of the rural farming community, which could ultimately lead to rural development. Therefore, if agro-tourism is managed according to relevant practices and principles, it will become one of the major forms of tourism in Sri Lanka.

Giampiccoli & Saayman (2018) stated that community-based tourism is about social justice, empowerment, equity of benefits, redistributive measures, ownership of the tourism sector, and holistic community development. Also, Hamzah & Mohamad (2013) described that community-based tourism has been acknowledged as a catalyst for rural community development.

Suansri (2003), through the community-based tourism handbook (as cited in Samarathunga, Silva and Wimalarathana, 2015), identified some principles through which the host community can use tourism for community development. Therefore, as Suansri (2003) described, CBT should be planned according to the following principles.

1. Recognize, support, and promote community ownership of tourism.
2. Involve community members from the start in every aspect.
3. Promote community pride.
4. Improve the quality of life.
5. Ensure environmental sustainability.
6. Preserve the unique character and culture of the local area.
7. Foster cross-cultural learning.
8. Respect cultural differences and human dignity.
9. Distribute benefits fairly among community members.
10. Contribute a fixed percentage of income to community projects.

Further, Suansri (2003) mentioned that before developing CBT in line with these principles, it is necessary to prepare and build the capacity of the host

community to manage tourism. Also, Suansri (2003) described that natural and cultural resources are identified as the first element of CBT, and CBT affects the preservation of the natural resources, and the customs and culture represent the unique value to the CBT destination. Further, the author has mentioned that community organizations, management, and learning are other key elements of CBT. According to Suansri (2003), community development and ownership are the major factors in community organizations. Within the management element, the author has mentioned that the benefits of CBT should be fairly distributed to all the stakeholders. As mentioned by the author through the element of learning, mainly focusing on major activities and services such as fostering a shared learning process between guests and hosts, educating and building an understanding of diverse cultures and ways of life, raising awareness about natural and cultural conservation among tourists and the local community.

Samarathunga, Silva and Wimalarathana (2015) mentioned that there are successes and failures in CBT development in Sri Lanka to date with untapped tourism potential in rural communities. Further, the researchers stated that the rural communities in Sri Lanka have no awareness and bear no responsibility for tourism development in their villages. If the relevant authorities plan accurate strategies to develop these niche markets for the Sri Lankan tourism industry, it will greatly affect the boom of the tourism industry.

Reviewing the literature, the researchers have identified some tourism research studies conducted in the Heeloya village. Arachchi (2018) has conducted a research study on factors affecting the less community participation in homestay projects in Heeloya. Through the study, the researcher expected to identify the factors that promote community participation in the tourism industry. Results of the study suggested that structural and cultural barriers positively and significantly affect community participation.

Bandara, Gangananda and Pettiyagedra (2021) have identified that the stakeholders held a favourable image towards tourism development in Heeloya, and there should be a proper mechanism to promote tourism. Further, Harshani (2019) mentioned that tourism positively impacts poverty alleviation in the Heeloya community. According to the study conducted in Heeloya tourism village, Eranda and Niroshana (2019) have stated that the agro-

tourism concept is still in the infancy stage, facing several challenges and agro-tourism village has a diversified set of initiatives to attract tourists based on its unique rural environment.

According to the literature, it was identified that fewer studies had been conducted within the Heeloya tourism village related to agro and community-based tourism development. Therefore, the study will provide information related to destination development by identifying the potentiality of enhancing agro and community-based tourism in the Heeloya tourism village in Sri Lanka.

Methodology

The study is conducted to identify the potentialities of developing agro-tourism and CBT in Heeloya. By developing these two forms of tourism, researchers expect to achieve destination development. The researchers have used the primary data for the study, using unstructured interviews and observations. The purposive sampling method was used to collect the data. The data was collected from the 1st of November to the 13th of November 2021. The sample study consisted of purposely selected local farmers and small-medium tourism entrepreneurs from Heeloya village. There were 06 local farmers and 04 small-medium tourism entrepreneurs from Heeloya tourism village who participated in the unstructured interviews for twenty minutes. The 04 interviews were carried out in the workplaces for the small and medium tourism entrepreneurs, and 06 were held near the paddy fields for the farmers. The question areas included the farm-based and community activities, customs and rituals, entertainment and educational activities of the Heeloya community, and the challenges of developing tourism products in the destination.

Results and Discussion

The study was conducted to recognize the role of agro and community-based tourism in achieving destination development in the Heeloya tourism village. Through the interviews, the respondents provided in-depth and detailed information, including their opinions about the possibilities of developing agro-tourism in Heeloya village. Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis. Through the analysis, it was identified that the major potentialities to develop the agro-tourism and CBT in Heeloya.

According to the study, it identified major activities conducted by the farmers. The farmers have responded that they are cultivating paddy, home gardening, livestock, and spice trading as the major agro activities. Also, some farmers mentioned engaging in toddy tapping and, beekeeping, handicrafts selling as extra revenue-generating activities. Further, the farmers provide the cattle farming experience to the tourists when they travel to Heeloya village. Also, farmers have responded that providing the above services for tourists can generate affordable income for their families.

According to the respondents, it has revealed that unique customs and rituals of the local people related to food culture gain an authentic experience for the visitors. Tourists can participate in activities with the community and generate a unique experience in local cuisine and rural village life. For instance, tourists can attend events related to local cuisines and pluck fruits and vegetables to make local food and beverages. Further, tourists can stay in homestay units in Heeloya village and get an authentic experience in a natural environment.

Further, it was revealed that entertainment and educational activities greatly influence the visitors to travel to the Heeloya. Tourists have opportunities to participate in diversified adventure activities within Heeloya village, such as trekking, cycling, camping, village tours, and experiencing a Perumaal Ella waterfall and a natural swimming pool.

According to the study, it was identified that developing more farm-based activities, marking authentic cuisines, and providing accommodation and entertainment activities are majorly affecting the destination development in Heeloya tourism village. All six farmers stated that agro and community-based tourism enhance the diverse career opportunities and obtain affordable income for the local community in Heeloya. Also, the four small and medium tourism entrepreneurs mentioned that they have greater opportunities to sell their products to tourists.

In addition to the potentialities for developing agro-tourism and CBT in Heeloya, researchers identified some challenging factors that cause negatively for the development of these two forms of tourism. One of the main challenges in implementing, developing, and promoting agro-tourism and CBT in Heeloya, is the minimal awareness of the positive impacts of the tourism industry by the host community. It was identified that only twenty families are

engaging in tourism-related businesses. Also, it revealed that most villagers believe that tourism will increase negative socio-cultural impacts such as alcohol, drug addiction, and cultural destruction, and it was identified that most villagers have less knowledge and techniques regarding agro-tourism and CBT. Further, the study revealed that less education and skills in the local community are also challenging factors. Most of the villagers in Heeloya have less knowledge regarding the languages. There are only ten trained guides who have adequate knowledge of English. Also, infirm leadership and less motivation in the community are challenging factors in developing agro-tourism and CBT. There are only sixteen homestays in the village, and the villagers follow a rotation system to reserve the tourists in the homestays. Due to the rotation method, some poor leadership issues are identified in Heeloya. Lack of motivation towards agro-tourism and CBT is another major issue in Heeloya. Also, another major challenging factor revealed through the study was lacking the financial support. Most villagers in Heeloya do not have sufficient capital to engage in farming and community-based activities. Further, small and medium tourism entrepreneurs in Heeloya face financial difficulties when promoting their products to tourists. Due to the fewer financial assistantships and sponsorships, they have a negative impression of collaborating with agro-tourism and CBT.

Conclusion and Recommendations

According to the study, agro-tourism and CBT severely influence to the destination development in Heeloya tourism village. Further, it was identified that farm-based activities, cuisine, accommodation, entertainment, educational activities, and the natural and cultural environment provide an authentic experience for tourists. Even though Heeloya village has great potential to develop agro-tourism and CBT, it was identified that there are some challenges and barriers to implementing these two forms of tourism. Major challenges found through the study are the lack of awareness of agro-tourism and CBT, less education and skills of the local community, infirmed leadership less motivation in the community, and lack of financial support.

These challenges and barriers can be overcome by applying the relevant strategies and approaches in Heeloya tourism village. Increasing the awareness of agro-tourism and CBT among the community in Heeloya under academic and professional assistantships to understand the benefits and

opportunities of the tourism industry. Most Heeloya villagers are engaged in agriculture as their primary occupation. After evaluating the community's needs, relevant training programs, including proper techniques and methods of agro-tourism and CBT, must be developed. Researchers highly recommend a skillful leader with prior experience in agro-based activities to continuously guide the community. The relevant authorities and people must conduct the training programs and motivate the community to engage in agro-tourism and CBT daily. These programs will contribute to the sustainable development of the community. Researchers strongly recommend providing financial assistantships for the community to establish agro-tourism and CBT in Heeloya. Authorities must collaborate with the community to gain these assistantships.

Stakeholders must be responsible for establishing a proper agenda to develop agro-tourism in Heeloya. Community participation is a major factor in developing any form of tourism Industry. When the community is involved with the agro-tourism and CBT industry, there will be more opportunities for the social life empowerment of the community. By enhancing their careers through agro-tourism and CBT, their foreign language knowledge and social lifestyle can be developed. Small medium tourism enterprises in Heeloya will be the most appropriate way to achieve the community empowerment of the destination.

There should be great possibilities for domestic and international tourists who visit Heeloya to engage in diversified activities in agro-based or community-based tourism. The stakeholders, such as the community in Heeloya, travel agencies, travel companies, SLTPB, SLTDA, and hoteliers, can collaborate to develop the destination by adding new tour itineraries to their tour packages, resource developing, advertising, marketing and promoting the destination Heeloya as one of the agro-tourism and CBT destinations in Sri Lanka. Applying the strategies mentioned above and approaches within the destination, Heeloya can be developed as one of the sustainable agro-tourism and CBT destinations in Sri Lanka.

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