

Mission Report

Training Course on Planning and Management of Community-based Rural Tourism Projects (17-AG-25-GE-TRC-B)

Karaj, Islamic Republic of Iran

By

Pawat Rujiragonsgula

27 October – 2 November 2017

Executive summary

The Asian Productivity Organization (APO) was established as a regional intergovernmental organization, with a mission to contribute to the sustainable socioeconomic development of Asia and the Pacific through enhancing productivity. One of APO's key role is to strengthen the capability of the country members by providing productivity promotion, training, and consultancy services.

The tourism industry is regarded as an important economic driver to create job opportunities and reduce poverty because it does not necessarily require massive investment in infrastructure, as would developing manufacturing facilities. SME owners and individuals can engage in tourism businesses with their human resources and assets since the entry barrier is comparatively low.

With the strongest growth in tourism members in Asia-Pacific region, APO believes that tourism in rural area can be an effective tool to revitalize local communities; however, it is critical to seek strong support from residents and build community-based consensus on tourism facilities. Therefore, APO has developed a training course on planning and management of community-based rural tourism projects (CBRT) to provide participants with a chance to examine the directions of CBRT through analytical methodologies and techniques to identify and work with stakeholders for inclusive growth.

In this training course, held in Iran during 27 October to 3 November 2017, MFLF had been chosen by Thailand Productivity Institute as one of the representatives of Thailand. I (Pawat – Strategic planning team) was sent on a mission to learn about CBRT and to share the successful case of CBRT in Doitung development area such as Living University and Dek Fai D Camp.



The scope of studies can be summarized as followed;

- (1) Overview concept of rural tourism and key components of CBRT
- (2) Project Planning & Management in Sustainable Development Project
- (3) Communication Planning
- (4) Example of the selected successful case study of CBRT project: Homestay Program in Malaysia

Objectives

1. To study methodologies and techniques for CBRT project development.
2. To learn about latest trend in rural tourism from best practices in other countries and to apply and adapt those best practice to use in Thailand at Doitung rural community.
3. To share the successful case of CBRT in Doitung development area.

Participant

1. Mr. Pawat Ruiragonsgula Strategic Planning

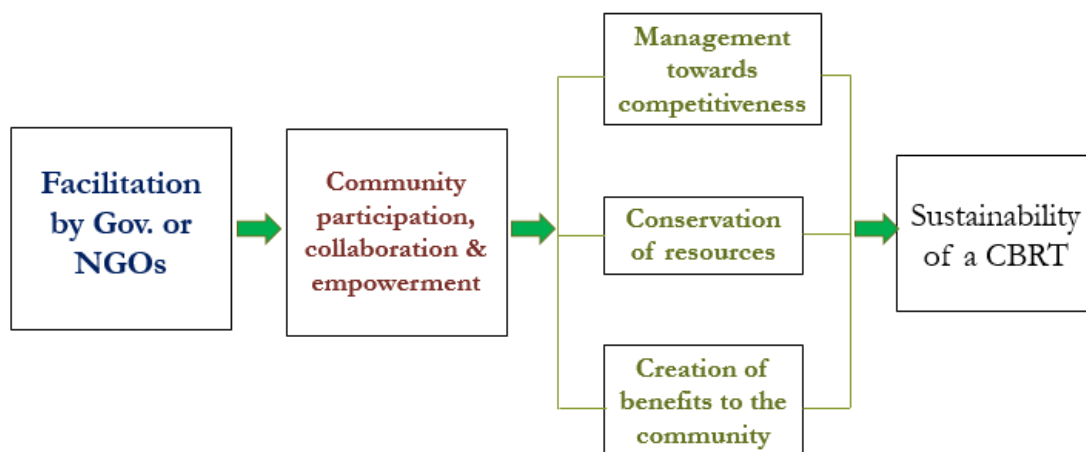
Time: 27 October – 2 November 2017

Location: Karaj, Iran

Summary of the training

Overview concept of rural tourism and key components of CBRT

- The term of rural tourism simply mean tourism in rural area, which includes cultural tourism, eco-tourism, sustainable tourism, nature tourism, wildlife tourism, agritourism, etc. However, to be community-based rural tourism, the tourist must involve in any rural based activity, meet with local people, and learn about rural life.
- The concept of CBRT is to create an alternative source of income for the villagers during their free time after harvest season, not to be their only source of income, in order to improve and diverse income (spreading economic risk) and to create employment opportunities in rural area while preserving their culture and way of life.
- In order to develop sustainability in CBRT, government and NGOs can help in facilitating the villager with the policy guidance and know-how. However, the community must be a main actor in the planning and the execution as well as a primary beneficial party with 3 key success factors of management towards (i) competitiveness (economic), (ii) conservation of resources (environment), and (iii) creation of benefits to the community (social).



- The development of CBRT in most of the participants' country including Iran, Fiji, Cambodia, India, Bangladesh, Taiwan, Philippine, Vietnam, and Indonesia has not been well-developed yet and the main barriers are culture and religious-belief. People in the village are not willing to open their house for guests or to have them around the community. On the other hand, Malaysia has been on the front line of CBRT development in Asia, as it is the first country in ASEAN that has promoted this kind of tourism since 1995 and is fully supported by the government. All of the home stay must register to the ministry of tourism and culture to ensure that it is qualified and complied with the policy guidance provided by government.

Project Planning & Management in Sustainable Development Project:

PM4SD, a certified project management methodology, was introduced during the training to serve as a guideline whenever we need to plan and/or design a project.

The product planning is one of the critical part of project planning. There are 4 main key considerations in product development process. First is to Think: planning, researching and conceptualizing the 'master-product'. Second is to Make: initiating product development, conducting training and developing organization. Third is to Do: executing according to plan, handling day-to-day management and launching marketing initiatives. Last is to Grow: adding new products and cultivating innovation.

With regards to PM4SD method for project management, the principles to plan and manage sustainable tourism projects are as follows:

- **Continuous Business Justification:** Ensuring that business model is sound
- **Learning from Experience:** Leveraging experience for continuous improvement
- **Roles and Responsibilities:** Clearly define and communicate the role & responsibility for each party involved since project planning stage
- **Managing by Stages:** Adjusting management style for each project stages
- **Management by Exception:** Being prepared to handle unexpected circumstances/results
- **Focus on Products:** Major product must be clear to target audience
- **Tailor to Suit the Project Environment:** Being sensitive to socio-geographical contexts
- **Collaborative Approach:** Defining common goal and mutual benefit to work harmoniously among all stakeholders

What happens during the project is the concrete opportunity to improve and transform sustainable tourism policies and project plans into actions. There are 6 variables to take into consideration for controlling and monitoring sustainable results: Cost, Timescales, Quality, Scope, Risks and Benefits.

In addition to project planning and management, a successful project requires an effective communication planning to ensure that the local community undoubtedly understand the purpose and take ownership of the project.

Communication Planning:

Community-based Rural Tourism, through increased intensities of participation, can provide widespread economic and other benefits and decision-making power to communities. People would participate only if they are interested. Therefore, the economic benefits will act as incentives for participants to be committed to the initiatives.

Communication is one of the key success factors that facilitates the participation of local community. Hence, it is very important to develop an effective communication plan, which defines the approach that a program will use to communicate with communities. The communication must be done by both facilitators and local leaders. There are 9 steps in developing communication plan:

1. **To identify Objectives:** The common objectives for communicating with participants and communities include establishing trust between partners and community, managing expectation of all stakeholders, encouraging participation and collaboration and ensuring the appropriate people

know about the benefit from the project.

2. **To choose target audience:** Different communication methods should be tailored for different group of audiences as they may need various levels of project information. Therefore, the stakeholder analysis should be conducted. The suggested target groups include leaders, participants (direct beneficiaries) and nonparticipants (indirect beneficiaries).
3. **To design key messages:** We need to keep asking ourselves on what are the messages that we want to communicate to audience and try to anticipate questions that audience will ask as if you are one of the community's member. The key messages will differ according to audience group.
4. **To select communication method:** There are various communication methods including written options (leaflets, flyers, notice board, social media, etc.) and oral options (community meetings, radio, help desks, door-to-door community mobilizers, etc.). The critical point is that the communication channel needs to match the context. Therefore, the great way to find out is to consult the local community on their communication channel preference and their current channel usages.
5. **To plan for two-way communication:** This type of communication can promote dialogue, allowing organization to gather ideas, suggestions, and feedback from target communities and help to adjust program to fit better to people's needs through formal and informal feedback.
6. **To establish the time frame:** People need to be informed about key developments so that they will be able to make the most of the program. Hence, we need to communicate with community members throughout the program, especially before starting key activities, before making changes to the program and upon encountering the delays.
7. **To draft a budget:** This would depend largely on the budget size of each project. The team needs to be more careful when investing in expensive communication channels such as mass media.
8. **To implement the plan:** A variety of activities may need to be used to roll-out communication plan. Therefore, we should consider the order in which different people need to know information so that the plan can be executed successfully.
9. **To monitor result:** To look for ways to improve, we should constantly review the communication plan during and after its implementation. The methods to review whether a communication approach is effective include observation, talking to staff and speaking to community members.

Throughout the training, Professor Kalsom always emphasized that it takes time for the local community to clearly and fully understand the communication messages that we want to deliver. This core methodology greatly resembles the principles that MFLF holds, which is the 'People Centric' methodology: To Understand the actual needs of a local community and To Engage with them in order to Support and Develop their well-beings.

In addition, the workshop held by Mr. Harro provided a great simulation activity for 'Tripartite negotiation for Public-Private-Community tourism project. This workshop highlighted the importance of communication to the success of any project. Each party could have different motives and own interest; however, all parties need to align



and find the mutual benefits for all stakeholders. Prior to meetings, it is crucial to be prepared and to anticipate other parties' opinion/position in advance.

Example of the selected successful case study of CBRT project: Homestay Program in Malaysia:

Local villagers in Malaysia have started to do Homestay projects since 1960's. It was not only until 1995 when the project was officially introduced by Ministry of Tourism and Culture Malaysia (MOTAC).

The homestay projects become a part of government strategy for developing local community. All participant (as a homestay host) must be enrolled under the supervision of the



government in order to ensure that the project is fully CBRT, where the benefits will be with the local community. The government entity is responsible for providing guidance and policy to the community, where all homestay hosts need to confirm to meet the standard of CBRT. In addition, the government also provide the funding for participating host to help them achieve the promoted standard accommodation.

This homestay project is fully community-based as all the project management and planning are being done by the local community. All visitors need to fill-in the evaluation form after the stay to provide feedback on their experience at homestay. The local community will use these insights improve and maintain the standard of homestay service.

Nowadays, it is no longer only the homestay service, but it also includes 1-day experience of mock ceremony for 1-day-trip visitors by holding local events for them to have local experience such as wedding ceremony.

The homestay project requires insignificant investment, yet yields a significant positive impact in bonding the host and visitors as visitors have been treated as if they were family members. These good memories and strong emotional connections of local community are some of key driving forces to keep the project running.



Potential Application for MFLF:

1. To build-on the existing CBRT products of MFLF by promoting the community participation/engagement in designing and developing the product initiatives. MFLF can provide a set of guidelines and support in brainstorming initiatives for the product. This local community empowerment is an important step to create self-sustaining community.
2. To promote and encourage the development of Homestay & 1-day-trip project within MFLF

development area, especially during SeeSan DoiTung festive seasons. MFLF could act as the project facilitator and/or the sales/distribution channel by including it into DoiTung tour package. It will not only help to reserve local cultural values, but also create an extra direct source of income for the community, which is aligned with the key objectives of MFLF in preserving Lanna culture and generating sustainable income for local communities.

