

Study the tourism challenges and outcomes in indigenous community in conjunction with conservation in Shib Deraz village - Qeshm Island - IRAN

(Case study in the developing area in tourism)

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Abstract

Qeshm Island in Southern Iran possesses unique natural and cultural characteristics. On the coast of Shibderaz village, the endangered turtles known as hawks bill lay eggs. Traditionally, the local people used their eggs for food. Since 2001, a phased project of conservation, ecotourism and handicrafts production supported by the United Nations has been launched with participation of the local community, which has contributed to the conservation and enhancement of tourist potentials, and has diminished the smuggling of goods.

According to developing steps of the project some challenges appeared such as the influence of particular religious beliefs, division within the local community, cultural poverty, preference of private benefit instead of public benefits, seasonality of tourism, particular strange cultures (such as impossibility of women activities in society) and challenges with local authorities.

There are some achievements in this project: participating of people in all of the progress, holding the specialize workshops for local awareness, creating some needed structures which they have not ability to built for encourage them to participating. Step by step developing in cultural challenges, create confidence and finally abide to the principle create the solution for faced against the challenges.

Keywords: conservation -ecotourism -handicraft - local community – Qeshm island , hawksbill turtles

Full paper

Preface

One kind of tourism is that the one which is performed by local community's cooperation and this special type is very sensitive. To promote a regional partnership with local communities through tourism and cultural and environmental considerations and considering types, careful planning is required. Due to the delicacy and sensitivity to cultural tourism projects with local society is facing many problems. Ecotourism is a type of tourism which aims to conserve nature and improve the livelihoods of local people. Since ecotourism is a form of responsible tourism, aimed not only economic progress but it is very important principles and environmental considerations. Thus the correct and principled ecotourism partnership with local people that their first priority is the economic aspect, requires planning and professional training and is classified to the three aspects of economic, cultural and environmental sustainability and improved be close.

This paper reviews a three-stage project to promote cultural, economic and environmental area (conservation, ecotourism, and ladies handicrafts) in partnership with local community-based phenomenon, nesting the endangered sea turtles - (hawksbill turtles) in Qeshm Island in southern Iran deals.

Qeshm Island

Qeshm Island is located in Persian Gulf a longitudinal direction is approximately south-west of the northeast. Persian Gulf's largest island is 130 km long and is older than 22 countries and is located in the Hormozgan province. The city center of Qeshm is located in the eastern part of Island. The island's population is scattered in the villages. Qeshm like other Subtropical areas of the natural is the mild weather in winter and summer is hot and semi-humid. The rainfall is low and is often influenced by winds blowing from sea to land. Vegetation of the area is Nobosendyn vegetative plant in Iran. This vegetative region is a subset of the vegetative Sahara -sindian from Africa to India, which has many similarities to parts of Africa and its vegetation and palm trees, acacia, and mesquite that grew up there. Mangrove forests are in the northern part of its unique habitat for the birds. In this respect and taking into account the presence of desert and coastal habitats in ransom and 220 bird species with a very good place for bird watching. Jebeer Gazelle mammal is an indication that parts of the island and adjacent islands are visible. Interestingly in terms of biodiversity on the island there are the smallest mammals in the world. Whale is the largest and Shrew is the smallest mammals,. The island is important because of the geological attractions. There are many forms of precipitation, erosion and wind erosion and many sites have created many rocky gorge that ecotourism is of great importance. Salt dome on the western part and the world's largest salt cave are in this island. From this point Qeshm has been registered as a UNESCO geopark and is the only region geopark in Middle East in 2007. The island has very interesting cultural aspects. Indigenous peoples due to the influence of various nationalities with different cultures like the Arab-Persian Gulf and Oman Sea border of South Africa (the trades for long time), British, Portuguese, Dutch, Hindi and...along with the internal parts of Iran are certain cultures, languages and even mixed in a total scale irrigation networks. Coverage of indigenous peoples, customs, livelihoods and their architecture, all drawn from nature especially the sea offers its own characteristics. Sunni Islam is their religion and their faith and beliefs are very strong. Fishing and trading is their traditional occupations in the last 50 years as some people have turned to smuggling goods from the Arabic countries in southern Persian Gulf. As strategically view because of the narrow Strait of Hormuz and the traffic of commercial ships and oil is a geopolitical and military situation.

Hawksbill Turtle

From all 8 species sea turtle, 5 species that exist in the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea and has been reported. In the northern coast of Persian Gulf (coast of Iran) the most common species are as: green turtle and hawksbill turtle. Green turtles can be seen throughout the year on the sidelines of the coast's beaches but to lay eggs, they go to Oman (Arabian Sea south of the border) to the abundance of nesting. hawksbill turtles in the mid February's to May will be

in Qeshm and Hengam's beaches to lay egg, especially on the eastern part of Shibderaz village and southern part of Qeshm beaches can be seen. Hawksbill turtle is one of the endangered species in the Critically Endangered category, and the red list of IUCN, so needs to be protected and needs projects which in many different species of sea turtles in the world is done. In Qeshm Island this project had been performed since 2001 cooperating UNDP/GEF/SGP(United nations development program /global environment facilities/small grants programs) and QFA (Qeshm Free Area) on the eastern beaches of Shibderaz Village. Greatest threat for hawksbill turtles is being eaten by dogs and foxes who are abundant on the island and people who think turtle eggs are useful and it is also used as daily rations.

The baby turtles born season in mid-May to Mid-July in this time Qeshm is too hot and each mother in every releasing (Total of 3 times per releasing in every season) about 100 to 120 egg in every hole with depth of 50 centimeters. Baby turtles go to the sea after being born and mature after 30 years, female turtles come back to the same beach they were born. hawksbill turtles with 70 cm length is smallest type in other sea turtles. Factors such as being eaten by larger fish, seabirds and other factors are threatening the baby turtles.

Phase 1 -conservation project

From 2001 with the help of United nations and the Qeshm Free Zone Organization, a partnership project with local communities started to protect the village Shibderaz of the phenomenon of the turtles were laying eggs. In that case with holding meetings with eldest and religious people who had great influence and among the people and their justification, then the justification for the people and especially youth workshop began with welcoming people were facing. Youth people who were eating those eggs till then started to protect of the egg phenomenon every night.

As the area of nesting is wide and outspread and protection is impossible, so the project will be done with partnership of local people and can not be done by governmental ministrations (or government employees). Laid eggs need to be aggregate in to create a site focused on better protected there. So the local team checks each time after laying eggs , then keeps them into a cage in the same place , so foxes and dogs do not have access to reach them.

After baby turtles born within 2 or 2.5 months local team will take back to the sea, so the threads in beach will decrease(from nesting to born reaches zero) , but there are still threats the sea. Research and statistics, and local knowledge of protection during this action is done on the basis of future action is planned. The most important point about protection is that local people stopped eating the eggs and started to taking care of them so they became proud of their village.

Phase 2-Ecotourism Project

With the evident phenomenon of turtles laying eggs and the hawksbill turtles with the local people aware of the whole island and the tourists that visit the island of Qeshm → come and see this interesting phenomenon of this project, the village slowly down the slope the place became a tourist attraction. Local people welcome the arrival of tourists, and also ethics Guests revenues from servicing the tourists were effective in welcoming tourists.

But it was feared that the influx of tourists damage the environment to the nesting process. Therefore 2006 the second project (the second project phase 3) was formed. Based ecotourism project in the tourist village was under control. This control was applied in two directions. First result is reducing the negative effects of tourists, both destructive environmental impacts of tourism on the turtles and also their effects on social and cultural phenomena on local communities. To reduce negative affects of tourists, in high seasons (new years, Nourooz, March 21st to April 4th) a team including 20 local people in two shifts morning and evening , also in other seasons a team including 3-4 of local people Each with specific tasks defined by the control, guidance, leadership and service to tourists are involved. In that case many workshops and technical justification and several meetings with the local council, local people, sailing, and is composed of all stakeholders.

Also for correct and consistent operation from tourism, specially for continuing this protection project there is a local fund which all economic beneficiaries in this project has special rules that has approved experts from the local village council the project and be part of their income to the fund are deposited and also some parts of next years costs for protection and ecotourism the fund will be financed through credit and so on it will help to lasting the tourism. Also other projects in ecotourism, study of all values and natural and cultural attractions and the potential for the production of cultural products, as well as tips and information to tourists, and the subsequent environmental planning is to promote the village.

The most important of this project is zoning and site planning also setting standards of conduct of the Committee of Experts is tourist projects and the local village council (representing the people) appears, and finally approved by the local government for supporting Qeshm Free Zone Organization, and thus it is clear that each user with plans and specifications and the environment in which the site based on land and environmental considerations will be based on architectural design and site preparation and the Shibderaz village is run.

Also ecotourism project is active in introducing village and activities in tourism potentials to agencies. Organization of rural tourism services, such as tips, vehicle preparation, preparation of local foods and stay ... Other activities of this project.

Designing Shibderaz Village site

Just like said in ecotourism project, one of duties of ecotourism project is zoning of nesting site and also setting to determine how to deploy a site is relevant for. There are different usages in site like: environmental camp (Pavilion team deployed to protect turtles), ecotourism camp (Pavilion team deployed to control ecotourism committee), visitors center, documentary section, camping platform, buffets and restaurants, hand made products section, toilets, parking, information, laying eggs tours, cultural and natural museums, sea side platforms and

All these usages according to map and site zoning are designed by compliance with specific environmental considerations, and how each section of the site's natural values.

There are tow important points: first of all the program is more than a lightweight design and landscaping, and possible structures of such materials and try to avoid to harm the natural landscape, the topography of the site's main purpose (of turtles), harmony and also less damage to nature is the goal.

And the second is that the entire project is based on local and cultural patterns prepared on indigenous values especially try to make most use of indigenous natural materials like leaves of a palm tree, plant area, ... And make the most of the project is compatible with the natural environment.

Phase 3-Handcrafts project

One of the most important goals is to improve the livelihoods of local communities. Offering native Handicraft products especially provides context for the improvement of local community life.

The purpose of the project is to protect the hawksbill turtles and the ecotourism project and the presence of tourists in the Shibderaz village to see turtles laying eggs in endemic rural areas for the products was provided. With propose and support of SGP a project for preserving and restoring crafts village was defined.

The most famous art in this village is Golabetoun Douzi(Fret).

Golabetoun Douzi(Fret): Sewing of colorful designs on glittery fabric with golden edges is known as Golabetun Douzi .The artist draws the design on the fabric and places it on wooden circle tightened with rubber bands known as Kam followed by needlework.

In this project organizing local company including local women and performing different workshops for using handicrafts and to increase quality of products, teaching marketing and selling.

Activities done in this project:

- 1- Applying local products
- 2- Producing Frets with lower sewing and cheaper
- 3- Producing handicrafts with better quality
- 4- Using different colors and materials along adequate with demands
- 5- Reliable prices comparing to quality of products
- 6- Encourage tours for planning to visit local markets
- 7- giving the members enough information about protection project goals
- 8- printing business cards and distributing them in hotels, hostels and airports
- 9- Attending in fairs
- 10- Introducing the project in medias
- 11- Encourage children to learn the fret
- 12- Establish direct communication between producers and buyers to understand the real market conditions

Motivating women, creation of employment opportunities, preventing the disappearance of local craft, the interactions between tourists and rural women, motivating youth to learn the craft are all considered among the positive impacts of the project in the local community.

Negative impacts of the project:

- 1- more than usual self-esteem of some members of the local company
- 2- Internal conflict and the separation of the members and create a new group
- 3- Fading some of human relationships, such as self-sacrifice and ...
- 4- levels expected to increase women's wages
- 5-

Challenges

during the developing steps of the project , some challenges appeared that made the project some difficulties , but focus on the problems and looking for the best solutions and not the fastest one and of course solving them with local people participation and not only by exotic solutions ,kept the project on its way . some of these problems were because of believes and cultures .for example during the project some bodies were thinking that changes their mind about the traditional use of eggs like eating it as a food is directly opposite of their cultures and they have to resist against it and they said that when their fathers have eaten it so they are allowed to continue this activity . This is about cultural poverty and awareness in the village. but with some education program and step by step this problem became solved and they knew that the environment is very sensitive and their activities have effect on it so they decided to change their mind and high percent of villagers participated in conservation .

sometimes they divided to two or more groups and each preferred their private benefits instead of public . and every group went on their different way . of course in some cases this situation impressed the project but general attitude and public benefits pressed them to change their mind and they knew that if they continue they couldn't achieve public benefits that they can't take solitary .

the other problem was the impossibility of women activity in the project and society . working on handicrafts and making products needs to sell and because all handicrafts are man made and they are little expensive than the factory ones so they cant to gice any extra money to man seller that it is mora common in their culture to sell the products and they need to sell it by themselves and going to the beach for sell the products is forbidden in their culture so it was the important challenge in the project.

the other problem was the challenge with local government . for example in some period of the project they made some changes in the beach and made some entertainment structures and facilities exactly close to the sea and it impressed the project seriously . they thought that their constructions will help and serve tourists but the main reason of this site is conservation and all tourists have to know and realize this .

Conclusions and effects of project(achievements)

This 3 phase's project which is based on hawksbill turtles laying eggs, started from 2001 and is still working till 2011, significant effects has been done to improve Shibderaz village. Most important impacts are:

- Improving environmental situation and changing the situation from total damage to eggs to protection and getting back about 18000 eggs to site each year.

Old days in Shibderaz village, villagers ambushed near the beach and waited for the Turtle to finish laying eggs and move to sea, they collect all eggs and there was about 60 – 70 eggs for each person, and actually after this process turtle eggs and baby turtles have been cleared, and does not come back to the sea. And this is not about dogs and foxes which were waiting for this chance in other beaches. And this condition continued to the day that villagers had seen turtles laying eggs but no baby turtles!!! But by these workshops nowadays and also by the help of protection team about 18000 baby turtles come back to sea every year.

- Getting famous by tourism

Shibderaz village Regardless of the going back turtle and before protection and ecotourism projects, like other rural villages of Qeshm and had not a share of the tourist. Inbound tourists to the island of Qeshm went mainly for the markets or site for fun and mangrove forests, valleys, such as Hara or stars valley and ... Or for swimming and diving site went above and village did not share any of this process. The village was so quiet but full of unemployment. As soon as getting famous, tourists are every where they come to visit the site and Shibderaz and also the turtles phenomenon is famous. On the other side these tourists told every one about this village and made reputation for the village, many agencies and tours through the village to come and play movies through TV and magazines and also in the village ... The village is famous now.

- Local government officials' attention to the village facilities, projects and funds

Beginning of the project, Qeshm Free Zone Organization which is a local government in the past shows more attention to the village. Before there was no special benefits about this programs and Construction and development projects to the village, and basically other nearby villages were famous for sightseeing (mangrove forests, valleys) and there was no public projects that promote rural landscape and public status, such as asphalt and parking and In this village.

But now there are more Facilities, projects and more funds than the former and Shibderaz into the long-term priorities in the first. Free Zone facilities for tourist accommodation, the establishment, restroom, trash, etc. And handicrafts etc. have considered and implemented.

- Changing livelihoods career smuggling to alternative career (tourism services)

The villagers are poor, Very hot weather and high evaporation in summer and autumn and dry and the island is not suitable for agriculture in the region, being away from the capital (Tehran) and industrial centers and ... Unemployment was rampant in the village at the upper limit. Most people in the village fish or work in government facilities (limited), but also a group of people had turned to smuggling. They go to Persian Gulf countries (Oman) by boat to and from there to Iran and brought the market to sell. Now by becoming a tourist village with many people who are looking for a decent job instead of addressing the smuggling business

services such as tourism and tourists to stay in the house, cooking meals, local guides, transportation, give the boat to the nearby islands and see dolphins.

- Improving health in rural areas with tourism

General health status in the village has been raised long after the tourists. Tourists originally get attracted to the places with minimum health and clean environment. Shibderaz villagers for example, in order to attract more tourists and make them stay in their house, tried to improve the health status of rural households. In the ecotourism and protection team in Shibderaz village usually there is one shift for collecting garbage disposal of waste every day with the motorcycle in the site and the village. The tourist village has caused the Health Department is willing to implement the plan Qeshm health in the village Shibderaz over the past.

- People with new jobs, promote economic

The influx of tourists to the village Shibderaz to see the turtles would create new jobs in the village. A number of rural youth are active in projects in conservation, ecotourism and handicrafts are working. Others are active in services like a local restaurant or buffet for food products has been established. Many villagers have boats and recreation for the tourists to the Hengam island (near Qeshm island) and they are there to watch dolphins. Many of villagers have equipped their houses for renting to tourists. Some of them take tourists to show different areas in the village by car. Women aim to produce and sell handicrafts and the rural economy has improved.

- Being proud in the local community

There wasn't so much difference between Shibderaz and other villages in the past, even because some other villages located near tourist centers, especially natural sites were more famous island. but now day's villagers are proud of tourism and feel ownership about turtles and this point helps to continue the protection project and they stopped eating the eggs. They are in their decision to organize the village because of this sense of pride and try to behave more wisely with the village trying to reach a higher position.

- Promote public awareness of environmental and cultural knowledge, and especially because of its association with cultural tourists

Less communication with outside(especially out of island) and no need to communicate with other cultures in the past, all the villages of Qeshm, including the Shibderaz village, the countryside was closed, both culturally and in terms of belief. Girls and women were not allowed to participate in community and education levels were low and they spend time in house. They did not dominate country's official language (Persian) and the people of the island had never been abroad. But now their knowledge about environment has improved and many of them that can guide the tourists and tell the story of turtles for them and they are proud of themselves. They have found Cultural relationship tourists, they are good in Persian, and they enjoy the companionship with tourists. Women have more social life, crafts and especially the women they come in contact with tourists. Even to attend the exhibition to other cities and they have an effective role in the family economy.

- Empowerment of women's role in society while before they were in the background

Women in the island because of some religious and cultural restrictions have limits. in Qeshm Island villagers point of view the so-called social work belongs to the man who was trafficked to fishing and trade, or even smuggle and make money for his family. Multi marriage is usual in Qeshm. Women have to stay in house and are not allowed to do any public activities. Although we have the same life style in south of Iran even Shibderaz village but the situation is better and women are working and are effective in life's economy. They do marketing, they are active in society, the attend in fairs and do interviews.

- Send help to the tourist village with a tourist centers and agencies through seminars, articles, films and documentaries and ...

Villagers in themselves do not have enough possibilities to create a permanent and effective relationship with communities in urban centers like tourist agencies, and ... Tour leaders and their centers are introduced, such as radio, television, conferences, and journals and ... do not know how to connect. But there is some possibility for any project. So they Send them to the tourist centers have been introduced and this introduction helps to promote the tourism village.

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