Pro-Poor Tourism: A Strategy for Concordant and Sustainable Development of Rural Communities
(Case Study: Vali-e-Asr Village in the Vicinity of Persepolis)

Mohammad Goudarzi*1- Mahmoud Jomehpour2

1- MSc., in Regional Development Planning, Allameh Tabataba’i University, Tehran, Iran.
2- Full Prof., in Social and Regional Planning, Allameh Tabataba’i University, Tehran, Iran

Received 7 May 2014 Accepted 20 April 2015

Extended Abstract

1. INTRODUCTION
In the last two decades, tourism industry has gained great importance and transformed into one of the key factors of development in many countries. Hence, several countries, especially the developing ones, tend to attract more tourists. Nowadays, efforts have been made to facilitate the participation of the poor rural class in tourism. Ultimate goal of these endeavors is to improve life quality and reduce rural poverty. This research, based on the pro-poor strategies, attempts to investigate sustainable development of rural residents of Vali-e-Asr village in the vicinity of Persepolis. To do so, indicators of sustainable tourism such as economic, socio-cultural, and environmental factors have been taken into account.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
The experiences of rural development in different countries indicate that, tourism benefits have only strengthened the rich groups. While the impoverished and disadvantaged groups living in rural communities have received fewer benefits. In recent years, plans have been made to enable better participation of the poor villagers in tourism-related activities through effective management. If rural communities participate in this industry, it will contribute to a more sustainable rural development. Based on a number of studies, tourism affects the poor’s living in several different ways. Accordingly, it is essential to consider different ways because some of them are being ignored in policymaking. This industry influences communities from various aspects such as economic, socio-cultural, and environmental. Hence, pro-poor tourism, as one kind of tourism, seeks to create economic, social, cultural, and ecological benefits for the poor. By considering such factors, pro-poor tourism puts effort on involving the poor at the center of sustainability to improve their living conditions and to eradicate poverty.

3. METHODOLOGY
The present study benefits from both descriptive and analytical research approaches. To collect data, secondary reports were collected from published sources including the Statistical Center of Iran and official reports. Primary data was composed of 15 face to face interviews with members of village council, archaeological graduates, and tour guides. Furthermore, a sample of 67 households, or 19% of the total in Vali-e-Asr, was selected through systematic random sampling of a household list provided by the village council to complete the questionnaires. Although qualitative data provide us with more information towards people and their attitudes, data collected from questionnaires specify each impact separately and represents the better effectiveness of each indicator. Using index-based approach and with respect to previous studies, related sources, and experts’ opinions, 20 indicators were selected; 9 questions referred to economic, 7 questions to sociocultural, and 4 questions to environmental issues.

4. DISCUSSION
Based on the findings obtained from semi-structured interviews with experts and local residents related to employment (direct and indirect), most jobs are associated with the informal or non-management occupations. In other words, under former conditions (jobs without training) local activities such as transportation, grocery, craft, cooking local foods, etc. are often created without intermediaries of government and private sectors. Overall, tourism has created some jobs, namely, seasonal jobs for taxi drivers and
booming retail, and earning money through renting house to tourists and producing handicraft. Given the obtained data, the residents enjoy getting acquainted with new people and try to strengthen their language skills particularly to communicate with foreign tourists. The presence of tourists in the region has encouraged young people to improve their language skills. To achieve this goal, 300 teenagers and youths are learning a second language in Iran’s National language center in the hope of achieving jobs in Persepolis and to exchange cultural values. Young girls are often reluctant to perform traditional activities. So they hope that tourism boom, creates more formal jobs such as a tour guide. According to residents, as a result of tourists traveling to Persepolis, some changes could be seen in youth behaviors. Therefore, the life expectations of girls and boys have been raised. Visitors often show irresponsible behavior leaving trash behind them in lodgings. Traffic pollution was the other problem mentioned by most residents. Traffic and noise may be attributed to narrow and one-way road in the village. Due to closeness of the village to Persepolis complex and banned construction of a two-story building surrounding it, villagers are united to construct new houses to rent them to tourists in short term but the construction of such buildings have not destroyed the village landscape.

5. CONCLUSION
Findings indicated that, although tourism has had positive impacts on cultural and environmental aspects like language skills and awareness of the residents, from the economic aspect, despite creating limited direct and indirect jobs it failed in reducing the rural poverty. Participation has been very limited in private sector pro-poor tourism initiatives which are felt to yield few benefits to village inhabitants. Current policies thus appear ineffective and reforms are necessary if the potential for pro-poor tourism, embracing community engagement, is to be realized.

Key words: Tourism, poverty, Persepolis, Vali-e-Asr Village.

References

**How to cite this article:**

**ISSN: 2322-2514**  **eISSN: 2383-2495**