Community Based Tourism (CBT) Wealth Creation Project

Sustainable Rural Regenerative Enterprises for Families (SURREF) visits Country Style Community Tourism Network (CCTN)

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Introduction

The following report is a summary of a learning journey by Sustainable Rural Regenerative Enterprises for Families (SURREF) and six individuals representing stakeholders and partners who traveled to Jamaica from December 11 to December 16, 2011. The participants were comprised of stakeholders committed to sustainable tourism who also aim to provide leadership and advice to SURREF and other partners related to constructing a Community Based Tourism (CBT) Value Chain in the Alabama Black Belt. Participants are comprised of an objective group of diverse representation within the Value Chain who are specializing in various components addressed by the Value Chain construction process.

In the summer of 2011, SURREF approached the Countrystyle Community Tourism Network (CCTN) to identify ways that the CBT Wealth Creation Project could learn from their 35 years of CBT development in their country. SURREF had recently completed a Value Chain exploratory project to help research the possibility of constructing a Value Chain of CBT in the Alabama Black Belt and they asked CCTN to help research the building of a community tourism Value Chain using a particular Destination Management Structure (DMS) in the region. After conducting preliminary research and meeting with CCTN community members and partners in Jamaica, we presented our findings to additional Regional DMS partners to obtain their feedback. We will incorporate theirs and additional members input into our final recommendations for the organization and structure of the DMS. The following report will summarize key learning, operational scenarios, resources and management of the CCTN approach in Jamaica and likelihood for success in Alabama. While some of the contents are specific to the Gees Bend/Wilcox County Destination we have been developing, many of the recommendations could be applied to additional management structures within the Black Belt region and beyond.
Tourism Products

The diverse cultural and natural resources of Jamaica are often overlooked by the majority of travelers to the country. The explosive growth of mass tourism focused towards all-inclusive resorts and port towns have left extremely valuable tourism assets untouched or underdeveloped.

Community Based Tourism (CBT) is a viable mechanism to increase tourism growth in rural and remote areas of the country. Though per person economic value of CBT is less than that of mass tourism, the incremental economic impact may be greater as a means to improve livelihoods. For this reason, CCTN has chosen to focus on tourism as a means to facilitate community development.

Tourism Package Supply

CCTN believes that poor product quality (which affects the available supply of experiences) is a larger problem than identifying tourists interested in their offerings. Their hospitality training seeks to address this issue. They have been overwhelmed by the response and interest for local experiences after going to just a few outlets of their target markets. Referrals provide more additional clients than they can handle currently.

Ah- Ha! Product Quality Shortcomings

Many Learning Journey participants wanted to purchase products when visiting the local villages but felt as though the products were not competitive or unique to products they experienced in more popular areas such as Montego Bay. Many also felt as though the products were overpriced and not packaged sufficiently.

The community tourism experience was less attractive in the area of what one might consider “supplementary experiences” like the availability of artifacts with which to really touch the process (in some cases), the availability of souvenirs to complement the tourism experience, and such amenities as clean restrooms and adequate and safe parking facilities. All of these could be incorporated into a community tourism experience, especially when social wealth is adequately developed to allow clusters of individual projects to support a single tourism experience. It is imperative that we educate the families and producers to make enough products to sell once the tourists start coming.”
Tourism Product Demand

CCTN markets their trips and experiences through websites and through publication in tourism guidebooks. A large number of their clients are repeat clients and referrals.

Some target markets that CCTN has served are:

- AGRO-TOURISM
- ECO-TOURISM
- GRAVESTONE TOURISM
- SCHOOLS
- UNIVERSITIES AND COLLEGES

Ah-Ha! More than average experiences

If sufficient attention is paid to the quality of the experience, the community tourism experience seems likely to provide more personal enrichment than traditional tourism. Lack of demand is not the problem. By being able to offer and customize a wide range of experiences, they can customize their trips to meet the market interest. They perceive that there is a huge (untapped) market looking for more than just ‘sun, sand and sex.

Community Development Process

The CCTN development model tries to build community wealth by focusing on the following four areas:

- Community Asset Identification. Individuals are encouraged to identify previously unidentified community assets and this becomes the resource for information about the community. The individual sees that both they and their community have assets that they have previously overlooked. From the standpoint of the seven forms of wealth, this exercise is one to build and identify individual and to identify existing social
wealth.

- Training program on community-based tourism. Subjects include entrepreneurial opportunities, niche markets, and importance of hospitality skills, networking, and reasonable expectations for business owners. This training program is in partnership with the Jamaican Tourism Product Development Company.
- Community Engagement with CCTN. The success of each individual project forms a nucleus for community development.
- Finally we observed that once the community is engaged, the politicians will get involved implementing program activities into public policies and building and financing very large scale projects that are beyond the capability of the local community (They seem to also like to claim credit for earlier community successes.)

Locally Sourced Community Products

Above:
Locally produced products on display during the study workshop from the Beeston Springs Community.

To the Left:
Youth participate in Community Based Tourism Training with the Tourism Product Development Corporation. The youth are allowed to enter the training at various levels of educational achievement. CCTN helps nurture their community development involvement by providing a place for training.

"I was impressed that in every community or village we toured, children were involved in music, art, dance or hospitality and were seriously committed to the scholastic aspect of tourism history and commerce. Many children said they aspire to own tourism related businesses when they become adults. Everywhere we visited, from Maidstone in Manchester, Jamaica (where Marcus Garvey lived), the Black River community in St. Elizabeth Parish, beautiful Treasure Beach to Beeston Springs high in the mountains of Jamaica, the experience included children and they were a vital part of CCTN value chain."  ~ Noah Hopkins
Value Chain Partners

CCTN is involved with an extensive network of value chain partners. Though our meetings, visits and discussions, it seems clear that the following entities were part of the CBT value chain, see below (Figure 4: CCTN value chain contributors).

“CCTN seems to have the flexibility to offer a wide variety of community experiences. As a value chain, there is definite duplication in tourism providers. This was evidenced by the fact that our van broke down two times during our 6-day trip, and Diana was able to bring in other transportation providers as needed. There were many restaurants that were recommended. And there was a wide variety of community experiences that we experienced and even more on the CCTN website. This seems to be an important lesson in any value chain. There is security in having multiple players at any point in the chain and not relying on one transportation partner or one accommodation partner, etc.”

-- Melissa Levy

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<tr>
<th>FIGURE 4: CCTN VALUE CHAIN CONTRIBUTORS</th>
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<tr>
<td>STUDENTS WHO WILL EVENTUALLY PARTICIPATE IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY</td>
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<td>THE INDIVIDUAL COMMUNITY MEMBERS WHO ONE DAY MAY BECOME ENTREPRENURES WITHIN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY</td>
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<td>SMALL HOTEL OWNERS</td>
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<td>RESTAURANTS AND FOOD PROVIDERS</td>
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<td>NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL TOURISM PROJECT FUNDERS</td>
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“When all was said and done, I learned that value chain strengthening/wealth creation is only partially about identifying and strengthening existing enterprises. It is equally or may be even more about discovering, building and developing capabilities of individuals to create new enterprises.” -- Linda Vice
“Our civil rights stories are just as rich and can be personalized in the way the tale of the Marcus Garvey’s experiences were. The intellectual capital is here in the form of the personal experiences of those who were part of the movement. We just need to make it part of our social capital by the way we capture and present the material.” --Joanne Bland

CCTN’s Approach

CCTN is acting as the central value chain facilitator and gatekeeper. All activities are channeled through the organization. Revenue generated from this value chain is managed by CCTN, who then in turn, distributes the funds.

The method of legal organization of the business was somewhat unclear partially because there were two entities involved: CCTN and NBCF Villages as Businesses. CCTN’s management structure includes:

- MANAGEMENT TEAM PARTNERS
- COMMUNITY AND INDIVIDUAL PARTNERS
- MEMBERS
- PATRONS
- SPONSORS
- INTERNS

In some ways, portions of these enterprises function as what would be considered a for profit business in the United States. (The group was applying for grant funding and had received donations which would only be authorized to a non-profit in the United States. Similarly the structure includes such roles as Sponsors and Patrons, which would typically part of a non-profit organization in the U.S.)

It seems too early to assess the pros and cons of this management structure. The organizational mission and program are well defined and a number of revenue sources have been identified. However a number of program elements appear to be undeveloped, specifically:

- COMPLETION OF A PROGRAM BUSINESS PLAN
- DEFINITION OF MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES
- REGULAR MEASUREMENTS OF PROGRAM SUCCESS THROUGH SURVEYS, ATTENDANCE FIGURES AND OTHER ASSESSMENT.

“It seemed obvious in retrospect but not so much beforehand, that any real impacts on wealth would come from the development of the individual and intellectual capital of community members long before impacts on economic and political, etc. could be felt. In this way, CCTN and SURREF are very much alike in that we both start with the individuals development first.” --Euneika Rogers-Sipp
Wealth Creation

The community tourism enterprises we saw during our journey provided a unique opportunity to view wealth creation in action. We saw investments in wealth being made by a number of entities:

- **Individuals** use their own intellectual and individual wealth and tap the dormant intellectual and individual wealth of the community (social wealth) to create the community asset survey. Individuals then invest both in the development of their own tourism enterprise and in the creation of a wealth component that is beneficial to the community. This act invests in social capital.

- **Tourists** invest in built wealth by supporting projects identified for tourist investment.

- **Countrystyle** itself provides primarily training (intellectual capital) and serves as a development hub.

- **The JA Government** provides funding for infrastructure projects (built wealth) and environmental preservation (environmental wealth).

- **The European Economic Commission (EEC)** provided the initial moneys that funded the development of social capital (linkages) and intellectual and individual capital (training and knowledge) that initiated the formation of the management groups. We also saw other **international funders** who provide funding for various infrastructure projects related to tourism.

**A-Ha! Wealth Creation Observation**

As a Value Chain Intermediary, CCTN steers a relatively large number of individuals toward community wealth creation. Only a few actually complete the training activities and start their own successful enterprise. Even fewer coalesce with other enterprises in the community to eventually create financial, natural, built and political wealth cycles back into the community.
Ability to Measure Achievement

We found that CCTN’s inability to track and quantify its progress and successes to be a severe hindrance to its overall and long-term success. CCTN’s programmatic scope and loose organization structure has allowed it to adapt in terms of changing economic climates, but has potentially diminished its value proposition for potential donors, investors, or long-term clientele. As the organization’s goals and activities have changed, only anecdotal evidence of success exists. Key indicators that are necessary to secure long-term funding are not in place.

Implications for the Black Belt and SURREF

The learning journey to Jamaica provided an opportunity to look at the Black Belt through the lenses of the similar situation that we found in Jamaica. The villages are rich with natural resources. The statistics in Jamaica on poverty and unemployment are amazingly similar to those of Wilcox County Alabama where SURREF’s pilot destination is based. The unemployment statistics in both places were hovering between 18 and 20% consistently. They are both rural areas with poor infrastructure in transportation and education. The work ethic is similar. The people are willing to learn, but the general population seems to need additional leadership or entrepreneur skills.

A number of the specific tourism attractions we saw could be easily duplicated in the Black Belt. Namely:

- THE SMALL ORGANIC FARM WE VISITED WAS FASCINATING TO – TO SEE THE CROPS, IDENTIFY THEM AND THEIR USES AND THEN TASTE A PRODUCT MADE FROM THEM. THIS IS SOMETHING THAT CAN EASILY BE DUPLICATED IN THE BLACK BELT USING LOCAL CROPS TO CREATE AN AGRI-TOURISM EXPERIENCE.
THE EXPERIENCE OF THE BEE KEEPER’S FARM. THE DEMONSTRATION EXHIBIT PROVIDED WAS VERY SIMPLE, BUT HIGHLY EFFECTIVE IN EXPLAINING THE MECHANICS IN THE MAKING OF HONEY.

A LOCAL BAR/RESTAURANT WHERE WE WERE ENTERTAINED BY LOCAL MUSICIANS. THIS KIND OF ENTERTAINMENT BY LOCALS IS SOMETHING ELSE THAT WE NEED TO DEVELOP IN THE BLACK BELT AND HAVE AVAILABLE FOR TOUR GROUPS TO EXPERIENCE.

A SMALL LOCAL RESTAURANT WITH A LOCALLY OWNED SMALL RESORT ATTACHED TO IT. THIS WAS PLACE THAT BLENDS BOTH THE RURAL ASPECTS OF JAMAICA AND THE BEACHES/OCEAN THAT FOR WHICH JAMAICA IS FAMOUS. IT WAS SMALL, PERSONAL AND HAD AUTHENTIC ARCHITECTURE AND FOOD.

“The average person, even the tourist who has frequently traveled to Jamaica, has little knowledge of the rich cultural experiences and natural capital to be found away from the walled resorts and beaches of the island……. We learned about the tours that are being developed with history and stories of the area as told to us by a local resident whose family was involved in the settlement of the (Black River) area. This is the kind of experience that can be developed easily in the Black Belt of Alabama. The same kind of tourist who would seek out this experience in Jamaica, the cultural tourist, is the same market available to us here in the Black Belt.” --Linda Vice

Conclusion

Both SURREF and CCTN have similarly objectives, to use Community Based Tourism to promote community and economic development and develop livelihoods for people in their individual communities.

There are pieces of the CCTN approach that SURREF may want to consider incorporating into its approach and may be already, such as the focus on encouraging community members to learn more
about their community, building pride in community and self, the focus on inclusion of youth, and the approach of community development through tourism in general.

We found a number of areas where SURREF may also choose to advance or diverge from the CCTN model.

**Set an Initial Focus**

Tourism is a broad and deep value chain with impacts on several levels and among several stakeholder groups. Because tourism is first and foremost an industry and requires revenue to function, concern for economic sustainability must be the first consideration. A key indicator of success is that tourism exists at all. Additional areas for success can be specific understandings of how tourism can successfully impact the socio-economic fabric, the cultural heritage, and the environment. While a tourism initiative can certainly do it all – a program’s success can be measured by just a slim selection of these impacts.

Black Belt Community Tourism should be as focused as possible on what’s realistic and achievable in the short term and how that is beneficial to long-term, broader goals. Special consideration should be paid to geographic scope, number of stakeholders involved, and time and resource constraints.

**Find a Niche**

Tourism is an industry of great competition. In order to maximize competitive advantage, a destination must offer an experience that is unique and authentic to the place. Additionally, that offer must meet a need or gap in the market place. In the short term, investment in training and product development must be strategically directed towards goods and services that meet both criteria.

**Set Standards**

Because the Black Belt is a relatively undiscovered tourism destination, the initial presentation of the product must provide a superior experience to the customer in all aspects. Only products that meet market-ready standards (as set by the community) should be offered, even if that means that the total number of offers is small. A poor experience early in a destination’s life cycle could negatively impact its opportunities for growth.

**Measuring Progress**

SURREF seems to be ahead of CCTN in terms of measuring progress. In discussions with CCTN, we found that they are now attempting to determine how to measure their progress. SURREF is well on its way to having measures of progress around the seven forms of wealth.

**Inclusion and Transparency**

Community buy-in is key to a successful community tourism development initiative. The community must develop their own goals so that tourism in the destination is reflective of their own vision. Progress towards those goals must be shared with the community on a regular basis to maintain stakeholder buy-in and ensure positive forward momentum.
Transparency is key to prevent any negative sentiment or distrust. The decision-making process, financial operation, and mechanism for dispute resolution must be completely clear and unencumbered.

**Research and Analysis of the Incoming Market as a Permanent Role**

In Jamaica, there seemed to be several tourism-related agencies not all working cooperatively. Many seem to be competing around similar roles. While the Tourism Product Development Corporation seems to be in charge of certification, the agencies under the Ministry of Tourism seem to be all playing roles in marketing and development.

If we think about the Black Belt region, the public-private interest coordinator seems to be the Southwest Alabama Tourism Office. However, it is unclear who or what agency is researching and analyzing the incoming tourist market. As part of the upcoming work, SURREF may choose to pursue a study of demand. SURREF may also want to fulfill additional public-private interest coordinator roles.

In conclusion, our visit to Jamaica was worthwhile in learning about how community tourism is done there. No model is perfect. CCTN is still learning but has some interesting methods that may be useful in the Alabama Black Belt. CCTN’s commitment to community development through Community Based Tourism and its approach to marketing and market demand are all instructive as we construct this value chain in the Black Belt.
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