

Rural Tourism: A Local Economic Development Strategy

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is a popular economic development strategy and rural tourism is seen to be a promising industry for rural development. Local economic development (LED) is defined as a process in which local governments, the private sector, and community-based organizations form partnerships to manage existing resources to create jobs and stimulate local economies. Tourism is widely recognized as a tool for boosting local economies. Rural tourism destinations contribute to community empowerment as well as long-term local economic development, and sustainable rural tourism is seen as a critical component of rural development. This is especially true in rural areas, where the introduction of new sectors has not been sufficient to compensate for the decline in economic prospects for rural residents. Tourism is one of the most popular non-traditional rural development techniques, and it supports enterprises such as recreation, arts, and crafts. Tourism entrepreneurs, particularly local hosts, play an important role in this process since, in addition to their own individual contributions, they create jobs, stimulate other sectors of the local economy, and enhance the appeal of their destination. The development of rural tourism destinations is guided by the potential of villages as a tourism product attribute. The community is not an afterthought; it is an essential component of the destination's tourism offering. This means that the community benefits from and bears the costs of tourism in their area. Tourism products and specific local wisdom are inextricably linked to the community. The research was carried out in Nqileni, a rural tourism-dependent village in the Xhora Administrative Area of South Africa's Eastern Cape Province. To gather the necessary empirical data, the study adopted a qualitative research methodology and used a non-probability purposive sampling technique with a semi-structured interview schedule to solicit the gathering of data. The data was analysed using the NVivo version 11. The findings of the study suggest that tourism is a good strategy to achieve local economic development in rural areas specifically. The results of the study further confirm that tourism has the potential to create employment opportunities for local community members and this results in the reduction of poverty levels in rural areas.

Keywords: rural tourism, local economic development, community empowerment, sustainable rural tourism, and tourism destinations.