

Agro Tourism for Rural Development: Creating a Business Model through an Exploratory Case Study

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Tourism is increasingly diversified to be more competitive. Agro tourism is also such a diversified initiative aiming at the fulfillment of sustainable development goals by focusing on rural areas of a country. Recently, agro tourism has drawn attention in the international literature and which has not been researched extensively in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to identify the stance of agro tourism and to discuss its role in rural development. Further, this paper ends with a business model to enhance agro tourism by incorporating salient stakeholders. This study was conducted using single case study method based on interpretivism philosophy. Accordingly, Heeloya tourism village in Central Province was selected as the case study and the primary data was collected using participant observations and in-depth semi structured interviews. The key informants of this study were administrators, farmers, community and tourists in the village. Further, a pilot study was conducted with officials at the Agricultural Department to get initial insights. Data analysis was initiated using transcription and summary development which led the researchers to adopt the thematic analysis and cross-tab analysis. According to findings, agro tourism village has a diversified set of initiatives to attract the tourists based on its unique rural environment. However, agro tourism concept is still at infancy stage with several challenges including negative attitudes of community, lack of infrastructure facilities and entrepreneurial skills. Rural development is also evidenced through the means of enhancing income of rural farmers and supported community, jobs creation, and enhancing the competencies of the community. However, researchers need contend that it is important to identify the problems in the village and those should be properly addressed by collaborating with relevant stakeholders. This idea is incorporated in the business model presented at the end to effectively achieve rural development through agro tourism.

Keywords: Agro tourism, Rural development, Case study method, Stakeholders, Business model