

The 'Roots' project: supporting local livelihoods and improving the tourist experience

Start/end date: November 2008 to December 2011

Partners: NCAC (National Council for Arts & Culture), Gambia Tourist Board

Issue and Opportunity

The villages of Albreda and Juffureh are the most visited by tourists to the Gambia due to their association with 'Roots' – Alex Haley's famous novel about Kunta Kinteh. The Roots excursion includes the opportunity to meet the Kinteh family, visit the slave museum and crafts market and tour the two villages. Although the villages received thousands of tourists a year, there were few opportunities for the villagers to benefit financially from the excursion, with revenue mostly generated through donation boxes, payments for photos taken and the sale of certificates and crafts. As a consequence, tourists were 'hassled' to buy souvenirs, and to give donations, and children were begging. Customer complaints were so high in 2008 that the ground agents and tour operators were considering the removal of the excursion from their portfolios.

Objective

To put in place structures that would:

- generate revenue from the excursion for Albreda and Juffureh
- ensure a more equitable distribution of income within the villages
- reduce hassle and improve the customer experience

Activities

- Meetings with ground agents to agree the inclusion of an entrance fee of 50DL per person into the excursion price
- The election of a community steering group and the establishment of a community development fund
- Training and licensing of community guides (from Albreda and Juffureh) who would provide village tours and code of conduct agreed
- Review of components of excursion and changes made to enhance the visitor experience
- Product development training provided to crafts producers and vendors
- Children's crafts centre established to provide village children with a place to go when not in school and to deter begging
- Mechanisms to support the long-term sustainability of the project post-Travel Foundation funding put in place

Achievements

Revenue generation for Albreda and Juffureh

Around 28,000 tourists have been on the excursion since the project began, generating approximately £29,000 in income for the two villages through the new entrance fee -a significant increase in income compared to an average £235 per year generated through the donation boxes.

GAMBIA STATISTICS

Tourism – biggest foreign exchange earner (13% of GDP)

125,000 international arrivals
UK tourists – 56% total arrivals

20 large hotels (7000 beds)

Gross National Income per capita \$US450



More equitable distribution of income

16 community guides and a ticket collector now receive monthly salaries and payments are also made to the Alkalos of the two villages plus the Kinteh and Fofana families. £7000 in income has been generated for the community development fund to be spent on providing greater access to fresh water for the two villages (a decision made by the community steering group).

Reducing hassle and improving the customer experience

Weekly surveys were conducted with Thomas Cook customers during 2011: 72% rated the excursion as excellent or very good. 94% would recommend the excursion.

Positive feedback has been received from the parents of the children attending the crafts centre and a noticeable decrease in the number of children begging has been reported. Over 100 children regularly attend the centre and revenue from the sale of their crafts has been used to purchase essential school items for them. The community guides and Alkalos also report that the reduction in hassle, particularly hassle from children, has been the project's most significant achievement.

Other outcomes

As a baseline, the community guides, Alkalos and the two families were asked to identify and prioritise what they wanted to achieve from the project (using an outcomes star). Progress made towards achieving these outcomes were measured at regular intervals during the course of the project (scored on a scale of 1-14). Although there were commonalities between the groups, priorities differed in relation to income-related outcomes (since the Alkalos and Kinteh family were receiving some income from donations), skills development (the guides were expecting to receive training) and relationship-related outcomes. Comparing the baseline scores to the final scores (see table below) demonstrates significant positive progress made against all outcomes.

Desired project outcomes identified by beneficiaries	Outcomes in order of priority		Baseline scores		TOTAL	Final scores (April 2012)		TOTAL	% change
	Guides	Alkalos Families	Guides	Alkalos Families		Guides	Alkalos Families		
Reduction of hassle/children hassle	7	8	59	9	68	196	44	240	253
Promotion of Responsible Tourism	4		63		63	190		190	202
Sharing the Roots Heritage	3		64		64	173		173	170
Making friends with outsiders	2		61		61	160		160	162
Improve social status	8	4	52	25	77	141	29	170	121
Development of local community	6		52		52	115		115	121
Earning a living / Earn money	1	5	54	22	76	140	13	153	101
Gain knowledge/ develop skills and knowledge	4	7	66	22	88	149	21	170	93
Bring peace within the Kinteh Family		1		17	17		30	30	76
Equal share of tourism benefit		5		19	19		32	32	68
Improve relationships between the two villages		2		18	18		30	30	67
Stop rural urban migration		3		21	21		24	24	14

Issues and Challenges

Inter and intra community conflict

Both the Kinteh and Fofana families saw themselves as legal custodians of the Roots heritage. To secure their support for the project, the decision was made to allocate an equal proportion of the income from ticket sales to both families. Additionally, a fee is paid to the Alkolos of both villages. Building an entrance fee into the cost of the excursion, with the community development fund to be spent equitably between the two villages, has helped to reduce competition for purchases and donations from tourists, and consequently reduced tourist 'hassle'.

Changing established behaviour patterns

Although receiving a salary, some of the community guides continued to request tips from tourists. Similarly some of the women continued to request money for photos taken. The issue was discussed at community meetings and a Do's and Don'ts guide for visitors was produced, which included asking them to report any guide asking for tips. Tourists were also requested not to give gifts to individuals (particularly children) and a system was set up so that gifts could be put into a communal box for distribution later.

Understanding and allocating roles and responsibilities

It was agreed at the project onset that ground agents' excursion guides would bring the tourists to the villages and then hand over to the community guides for the village tours. There were problems initially with the ground agent guides not handing over to the community guides and also duplication or omissions in information provided to the tourists by the respective guides. This was resolved by providing the community guides with further training and producing a descriptive itinerary and briefing notes for both parties.

Engaging the crafts vendors

Customers reported experiencing most hassle at the crafts market and sales were low. The project worked with the crafts vendors to establish a code of conduct whereby tourists could have a 'hassle-free experience and also provided product development training to help producers differentiate their products from those available in other markets. The issue hasn't however been resolved, since the vendors feel that insufficient time is allocated to visiting the market and therefore continue to hassle the tourists. To address this issue would require a re-working of the excursion itinerary, although there may be an opportunity to re-engage the crafts vendors once they are able to see the project benefits i.e. water supply.



Attendance at the Children's Centre

Initially, parents were reluctant to allow their children to attend the centre because of the revenue that they were able to generate through begging from tourists. Following a decision to sell the crafts produced by the children to tourists, the parents are now able to see the benefits of their attendance as the centre not only enables the children to develop new skills but has also generated funds to provide them with school books and other items.



"This centre has changed the life of the children because they always have something to do and they stop going around the village when the tourists are in the village"

– mother of Binta B Jabang

Lessons Learned

Communities are not 'homogenous' – there is a need to fully understand relevant internal dynamics and conflicts at the start of the project.

Good (and ongoing) communication between stakeholders is essential to resolving issues. Structures need to be created to allow stakeholder groups and individuals to have a voice in an open and non-conflictual environment.

The introduction of a new revenue stream into a community needs to be supported by transparent and accountable systems for the allocation and spending of funds to avoid mistrust and ensure its equitable distribution.

It's important that stakeholders are able to see some benefits from the project as soon as possible, for example with the Children's Centre. Delays in making a decision on how to spend the community funds is thought to have contributed to a loss of trust in the project, and potentially an increase in tourist hassle, from those not immediately benefitting from salaries or fees.

Getting individuals to work for 'the greater good' is perhaps the biggest challenge. Where there is significant competition for trade, as with the crafts market, agreeing codes of conduct with stakeholders can prove challenging unless the benefits are immediate and tangible.

Recognising that tourist hassle will always be present, to a degree, where there is significant poverty and large disparities of income between host and guest. However, hassle can be significantly reduced when opportunities are created to ensure the shared distribution of benefits.

Long Term Sustainability

The management of the Children's Centre has been handed over the NCAC which is providing ongoing funding for the teacher.

The 'Roots' project is now under the management of the GTB which will continue to monitor the collection and distribution of funds, supported by the community steering group.

The Travel Foundation's Programme Coordinator remains involved and organises bi-annual monitoring visits as part of the overall Gambia programme.

Project Cost £UK18,000 over three years.

Further information

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"As the eldest of the family I am considered the breadwinner of the family and the income I am now receiving is making me proud that I can now perform my responsibilities of contributing towards the family. I am sponsoring the education of my two younger brothers, Essa and Omar and that of my sister Yasai."

