

Strengthening Communities through Community Health Impact Assessment

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This paper discusses how Association for Social and Health Advancement (ASHA), in collaboration with the Coady International Institute, used the PATH (People Assessing Their Health) Process to increase the capacity of a tribal community in Mukutmanipur, West Bengal as they embark on Endogenous Tourism Project a joint initiative of UNDP and Government of India (Ministry of Tourism). Established in 1959 the Coady Institute is world-renowned as a centre of excellence in community based development. As this is a work in progress, long-term outcomes are not available. The paper presents the findings from May 2006 to September 2006.

Background information

The Project on Endogenous Tourism is part of a growing Government of India and UNDP partnership to promote new and innovative approaches to building livelihood opportunities through community action. This project will promote experimentation and exploration to develop alternative models in rural tourism. Thirty-six sites across the country have been identified with a view to developing a range of models in 'endogenous tourism'. The project will forge strong community-private sector partnerships and will bring together on a common platform a host of players such as local communities, artisans, local and state authorities, NGOs and private entrepreneurs.

ASHA is one of the 36 NGOs chosen from around the country to work with the local community and provide the 'software' for this project at the selected sites. ASHA is a non-profit, non-political, non-governmental organization which, since inception in 1997 (registered in 1998) has been working to improve the socio-economic and health status of disadvantaged rural and urban communities mainly in the state of West Bengal and neighbouring states of Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa. The organization endowed with a rich array of professionals from different disciplines undertakes development initiatives in health and socio-economic sectors as well as works as a support agency to other organizations and institutions (trainings, research and evaluations).

Mukutmanipur lying on the eastern side of a vast stretch of water body is a striking combination of rolling land, natural vegetation, lake and tribal hamlets. The water reservoir was created by construction of a twelve-kilometer long earthen dyke across the confluence of two rivers - Kangsabati & Kumari (the second biggest earthen dam in India). Mukutmanipur's undulating forested landscape marked by the vibrant colors of Palash and Sonajhuri trees is refreshing and invigorating for the body and mind. The host community of *Santhals and Bhumijas* exuding warmth, simplicity and sincerity and their festivals of Tusu, Badna, Sahrai, Karam symbolized by much music and dance make the Mukutmanipur experience worthwhile.

Local livelihoods are being enhanced using tourism as a vehicle for promotion like a number of micro enterprise activities being started and promoted such as sericulture, pisciculture, animal husbandry, horticulture, pickles, papad, and other food processing activities along with development of local handicrafts (the indigenous Sabai grass being used for developing contemporary items). Tourist infrastructure including cottages, interpretation center and amphi-theatre are envisaged to be created and ultimately to be managed by the local community. In addition there are efforts towards revival of local cultural heritage of performing arts and developing a number of adventure tourism activities such as rock climbing, kayaking, canoeing, hiking, and star gazing.

Goal

The goal of the practice was to help the community led management committee for the tourism project do the following: (1) develop an awareness of the broad determinants of health & well being; (2) create a unique vision of a healthy community; and (3) develop a tool to help them make decisions about the potential impact of tourism project on the health and well-being of their community.

Strategy

The strategy used was to engage people in a community development approach called the PATH (People Assessing Their Health) Process. The PATH Process, which was developed in north-eastern Nova Scotia, Canada, uses community health impact assessment (CHIA) as a way of engaging community people and organizations in the development of healthy public policy.

Process

The process was undertaken in Mukutmanipur during May 2006 involving 22 men and women who were members of Mukutmanipur Tourism Management Committee as well as local self help groups. The initial result was that the community members were able to critically analyze their situation in relation to the tourism project by looking at things in a new way. The group was able to develop a comprehensive vision of a healthy community and develop a community health impact assessment tool (CHIAT). This tool is a check list, outlining the indicators that help the community members achieve their vision of a healthy community.

Their vision of community's well being included the following aspects –

- Education for all villagers
- Improved economic condition
- Good roads and better communication facilities
- Availability of safe drinking water
- Sanitary latrine for every family
- Health awareness for all
- Scope of Higher education for all boys and girls
- Scope for Vocational training
- Improved Agricultural practices & better land use
- Adequate facility of irrigation
- Facility for Micro- credit
- Marketing & Distribution infrastructure facility within the village
- Opportunity for income generation through handicrafts, Food and fruit preservation enterprises and other micro enterprises
- Peace & harmony in the community

Community members with support from facilitators tested the tool using the construction of cottages as the project to assess and asking what potential impact these cottages will have on the well being of the community. The response from the group was overwhelming positive. They were surprised at all the issues that they thought of regarding the up coming cottages project during the exercise. They opined they had discussed and brought up issues which they had never thought of before. For example they would never have thought how this project would affect the harmony in the community by generating intra community competitiveness or how these cottages and the inflow of tourists might affect their culture and, in particular, the impact this project could have on the youth in their community. Some of them also were anxious about any damage to their environment due to enhanced tourist related activities

However looking back at how the proposed project will affect the different things identified above, they felt that the project in general would contribute to the overall well-being of the community. But they felt that they needed to put safeguards in place so that negative impacts could be mitigated.

An action plan was also developed from the test of the tool in order to see how to enhance the positive aspects of the project as well as to discuss ways to mitigate the negative aspects, if any. Their action plan reflected the following critical issues:-

- ⇒ Creating Facilities for providing first aid to tourists if required particularly in context of introduction of rock climbing & related activities
- ⇒ Provision of /Linkage to access Ambulance services if needed
- ⇒ Undertake social mobilization for Compulsory Primary Education for all children
- ⇒ Creating scope for Functional literacy for adult illiterate women which would also empower them and help them to participate meaningfully
- ⇒ Vocational Training opportunities particularly for unemployed youth and women (e.g. on Boat Repairing, Electrical repairing, Handicrafts including design support for items which have demand in market etc.)

- ⇒ Training on improved agricultural practices like Vegetable cultivation using Bio-fertilizer, Horticulture development (fruit tree plantation) for improvement in livelihoods
- ⇒ Pisciculture
- ⇒ Animal Husbandry – Duck Rearing, Goat Rearing
- ⇒ Provision of Safe drinking water
- ⇒ Intense mobilization so that each village household Sanitary Latrine in the s
- ⇒ Dustbin installation & Beautification of the area on the sides of the water body
- ⇒ Improving Local Transport facilities
- ⇒ Preservation of Adibasi (Tribal) language
- ⇒ Promoting Adibasi (Tribal) Culture (Dance, Songs & Festivals) :Helping tourists to understand tribal culture better

They also identified people in the community including members of the Tourism Management Committee and Self Help Groups who would be responsible for implementation of the above activities including areas where support from Government, Panchayat and other agencies including ASHA.

While the process was useful for the men in the community, it has empowered the women to a great extent, who felt that it provided them an opportunity to have a say and also be heard in the village development processes.

The PATH Process has been successfully carried out in six communities in Canada and is now being implemented in India. An important part of the on-going discussion and evaluation will deal with how the process can be translated into other cultural contexts

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