

Dilemma of a Paradise Destination: Tourism Education and Local Employment as Contributors to Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Sustainable tourism development is frequently promoted by Small Island Developing States (SIDS), to curb the developmental constraints which they face, as well as to create employment opportunities. However, in pursuit of tourism development, many SIDS have often ignored the crucial component of local participation in both tourism decision making and employment. Using mixed methodology, the aim of this research was to determine the role of tourism education and local employment as factors contributing to the sustainable development of tourism in the context of a SIDS destination. The research indicated that there are numerous factors mitigating local participation in tourism employment. The research further indicated that tourism education can play a crucial role in sustainable development of the destination. Concurrently, the research findings indicated that in aggressive pursuit of tourism development, the government has failed to address the critical areas of local employment and tourism education as part of the broader national development plans.

Introduction

Tourism has expanded from a relatively small activity of limited importance to what is arguably the world's largest industry (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009; United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2009; World Travel and Tourism Council [WTTC], 2009). Due to the developmental potential that it holds, SIDS have embraced tourism as a development tool. In this regard, tourism is often promoted in policy agendas on the grounds that it will enhance the lives of local people through the creation of employment, wages, as well as attracting overseas investments (Ashe, 2005; Ashley, Roe, & Goodwin, 2001; Craigwell & Moore, 2008; Liu & Wall, 2006; Tisdell, 2001; Wall, 2009). This study uses the Maldives as an example of a SIDS that is pursuing tourism as a development tool, to determine the role of tourism education and local employment as factors contributing to the sustainable development of tourism in the context of a SIDS destination.

'Sustainable' Tourism in SIDS

Echoing the Brundtland Report, the UNWTO (2005, p.12), defined sustainable tourism development as "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities". The sustainable tourism development paradigm has generally been adopted by SIDS, albeit to varying degrees. However, governments often put more emphasis on the economic goals rather than give due consideration to environmental and social concerns of the destinations (Hall, 1994). Often in SIDS, 'sustainable' tourism development is generally focused on the carrying capacity of island tourist destinations (Coccosis, 2002) and does not address broader issues of sustainable tourism development. Consequently, there are many cases of unsustainable tourism development in SIDS.

It is recognised that tourism can contribute significantly to the economic development of SIDS destinations. This can be in the form of backward and forward linkages, through employment, wages, and taxes or levies on tourism income reaching the local population. However, these positive contributions of tourism development are reduced in some SIDS due to a number of factors. A recent study indicated that in SIDS destinations such as Grenada, Bahamas, Fiji, Papua New Guinea and Cape Verde the economic multiplier of tourism was small (Singh, 2008). Key contributing factors to this situation were the lack of established linkages with the local communities, the patterns of tourism employment, as well as the level of tourism related knowledge and skills within the local communities.

Often, due to the unavailability of local labour to meet the tourism industry demand within the SIDS, there is also a high dependency on expatriate labour to fill these skills shortages. This dependency is a major challenge facing the sustainable development of SIDS (Wilkinson, 2001). In fact, the extensive use of expatriate labour is identified as one of the

primary factors that mitigate the positive economic impacts of tourism (Conlin & Baum, 2003; Shakeela & Cooper, 2009; Wall & Mathieson, 2006).

In addition, due to the negative image of the tourism industry as an employer in many SIDS, tourism is neither accepted as a respected field for education nor is the industry recognised as a desirable career path (Charles, 1997; Conlin & Titcombe, 1995; Shakeela, Ruhanen, & Breakey, 2008; Zopiatis & Constanti, 2007). As such, the lack of skilled and educated local people to fill tourism jobs created within the tourism industry, threatens the economic sustainability of the tourism industry in many SIDS destinations, such as the Maldives.

The Republic of Maldives

The Republic of Maldives is an independent archipelagic nation located south of the Indian sub-continent, straddling the equator on the Indian Ocean. The archipelago consists of about 1,190 coral islands, each on average less than three metres above sea level. The islands are dispersed on an exclusive economic zone of 859,000 square kilometres, stretching 820 kilometres from north to south, 130 kilometres from east to west at its widest point (Department of National Planning [DNP], 2009a). The islands of the Maldives are geographically formed as 26 natural atolls but administered as 20 atolls. Only about 194 islands are inhabited by local people, and of the remaining islands, 94 are exclusively developed as individual self-contained resorts on a one island-one resort basis (DNP, 2009a; Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, 2009).

The tourism industry is the backbone of the Maldivian economy. Despite a downturn of international tourist arrivals following the global financial crisis, tourism contributed 27 percent to the GDP and 29 percent to government revenue in 2008 (DNP, 2009b). Other significant industries such as fishing have contributed only five percent to the country's GDP during the same period. Tourism is also the largest foreign currency earner in the Maldives, generating about 70 percent of the foreign currency (DNP, 2009b).

The UNWTO's *Tourism 2020 Vision* (2001) study forecasts that the Maldives will be South-Asia's star performer, being among the most visited five countries in Asia by year 2020. Additionally the WTTC (2009), estimates that in 2009 the Maldives would generate 52 percent of Travel and Tourism Economy Employment. Such forecasts are positive for the Maldives in terms of tourist arrivals, employment, and subsequent contributions to the national economy.

The Maldivian tourism industry is purported to be an example of 'successful' sustainable tourism development (for example see: Domroes, 2001; Inskeep, 1991; Vellas & Bécherel, 1995). Yet, it is argued that those atolls furthest away from tourism activities are not experiencing significant benefits from tourism (Saeed, 2007, 2008; Tourism Concern, 2009; Yoosuf, 2008). From the current Maldivian population of just over 310,000, the economically active population in 2007 was just over 129,000 (aged 15-64 years). During the

same year the country had an unemployment rate of 14 percent (DNP, 2009b). Despite this, by the end of 2008, Maldives had an expatriate workforce of nearly 81,000 (DNP, 2009b; Ministry of Human Resources Youth and Sports, 2009) with the majority directly or indirectly employed in the tourism industry. While an exact record of local employment in the tourism industry is unavailable, considering the local/foreign employment structure in the tourism sector, Clique Associate Trainers and Consultants (2007) estimated that by the end of March 2006, 53 percent of the tourism workforce comprised of expatriates.

While there have been several attempts to develop an educated and skilled workforce for the tourism industry, such as the South Asian Integrated Tourism Human Resources Development Programme (1995), Integrated Human Resource Development Project (2004), they have failed to meet the demand of the rapidly growing industry. Hence, some tourism operators have begun conducting in-house apprenticeship programmes to meet the immediate need for educated and skilled employees. The government operated Faculty of Hospitality and Tourism Studies (FHTS) established in 1987 is the only institution currently offering tourism education and training. Enrolment figures show that student numbers at the FHTS have sharply dropped from 900 in 2004 to 300 in 2007 (DNP, 2009a). To maximise the benefits of tourism and to ensure its long-term sustainable development, the high dependency on expatriate employment in the Maldives is untenable. Therefore, the reasons behind low local participation both in tourism education and local employment need to be determined.

Methodology

To address the research aim, three objectives were adopted. They were:

1. To identify the issues affecting the attraction and retention of local people in tourism employment in the Maldives.
2. To examine the extent to which tourism education meets local employment needs in the Maldivian tourism industry.
3. To examine the role of government and the tourism industry in the provision of tourism education in the Maldives.

Fieldwork research was conducted using mixed methodology. A total of 28 in-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted with tourism educators, and eight focus group discussions were held with local community representatives in four different geographical locations of the country. Due to the small population involved in the quantitative study, all the resorts in operation at the time of the research was conducted were selected.

At the end of the four weeks survey period, a total of 74 usable questionnaires accounting for 47% of the population were received. Based on the 2006 Maldives population census, the selected four atolls represented 54% of the population of the country. All the identified tourism educators participated in the research. The sample size therefore allowed for the generalisability of the study to the whole of the Maldives.

The quantitative data collected through the survey questionnaire was analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (*SPSS*, v15.0). As content analysis is useful in uncovering knowledge and new insights from the participants' perspective (Maxwell, 2005), this method was used to analyse transcripts from the in-depth interviews and the focus group discussions. For each of the qualitative data sets multiple responses were coded. Interview excerpts were assigned identifiers based on whether the respondent was a member of a focus group (FG) or undertook an in-depth interview (INT).

One means by which qualitative and quantitative data can be integrated during analysis is to transform one data type into the other to allow for statistical or thematic analysis of both data types together (Caracelli & Greene, 2008). In order to achieve integration of the mixed methodology approach, the qualitative data analysed from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were transformed into numeric ratings. This quantification of qualitative data enabled the researcher to compare quantitative results with the qualitative data.

Results

Issues affecting the attraction and retention of local people in tourism employment

The first research question within research objective one focused on issues affecting the attraction and retention of local people in tourism employment in the Maldives. The qualitative research indicated a myriad of issues including social, human resource, economic, institutional, and religious factors affecting local participation in tourism employment, while the quantitative tourism industry responses indicated issues of human resource, and social issues (Figure 1, Table 1).

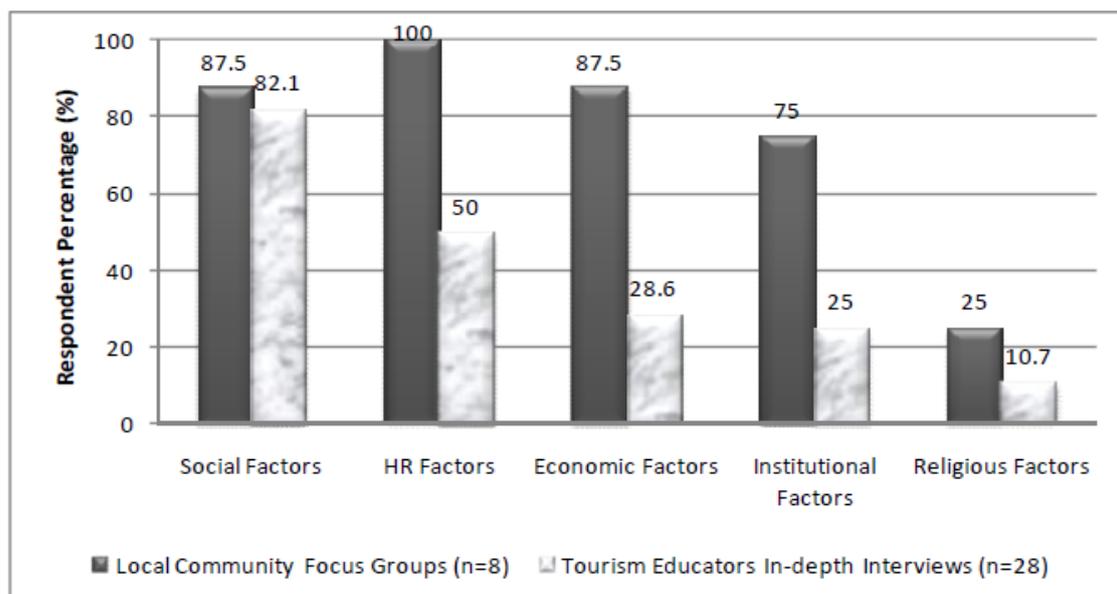


Figure 1: Issues Affecting the Attraction and Retention of Local Employees
 (Note: Multiple Responses Included; None Responses Excluded)

Social issues, including the negative images of the tourism industry, issue of distance from work and home, social isolation while working at a resort, and parental influence affecting tourism employment were identified in the qualitative research. Half of the local community focus groups (50%, n=4), and 43% (n=12) of tourism educators considered the negative images of the tourism industry as a social issue affecting the attraction and retention of local employees in the Maldivian tourism industry. Nonetheless, the tourism industry survey did not indicate the negative images of tourism as an issue, and in fact identified the lack of vocational skills among employees, lack of employee commitment and unavailability of skilled labour as primary issues.

Table 1: Issues Affecting the Attraction and Retention of Local Employees

	Tourism Industry Survey Percentage (n=74)					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Response
Lack Vocational Skills	31.1	48.6	12.2	1.4	0.0	6.8
Lack Employee Commitment	48.6	28.4	13.5	4.1	2.7	2.7
Unavailability of Skilled Labour	47.3	28.4	12.2	4.1	2.7	5.4
Inadequate Professional Experience	31.1	37.8	24.3	1.4	1.4	4.1
Lack Academic Qualification	21.6	35.1	25.7	9.5	1.4	6.8
Negative Images of Tourism Industry	14.9	8.1	29.7	28.4	10.8	8.1

Analysis of human resource issues cited by both local community focus groups, and tourism educators revealed issues of poor employee facilities, discrimination, lack of employee commitment to job and employee attitude and expectations. Poor employee facilities were identified by 63% (n=5) local community focus groups and corroborated by 14% (n=4) of tourism educators. While discrimination between the locals and expatriate employees (88%, n=7) was the overarching issue identified by the local community focus groups as affecting the attraction and retention of local people in tourism employment in the Maldives, this was not articulated by tourism educators.

Low salary and lack of employee incentives were the dominant economic factors arising from the qualitative research. As such, three quarters of local community focus groups (75%, n=6), and 29% (n=8) of tourism educators regarded low salaries generally offered by the tourism industry as an economic issue affecting the attraction and retention of local employees in the Maldivian tourism industry.

Analysis of institutional factors addressed by both local community focus groups, and tourism educators indicated issues of lack of employment contract, absence of labour law, and locals having to compete with the Asian labour market for employment in the home country as the main institutional issues that affect the attraction and retention of local employees in the Maldivian tourism industry.

Look, our people to get into a resort they are competing with people from the region. I agree we have regulations that are meant to discourage bringing in people from abroad to jobs that are available to local people... but when you look at the composition of [local] people who work in the resorts, the good majority just barely meets the 50%. Then of course they [resort operator] would claim that they couldn't find locals. Now we leave it up to the resorts or the employer to announce and then try to find a Maldivian. So, in effect we are subjecting our people to compete with people from Bangladesh or India, where there is higher unemployment compared to us (INT22).

Furthermore, a quarter of local community focus groups (25%, n=2) and 11% (n=3) of educators cited that religion plays a role in influencing women's participation in tourism employment in the Maldives.

And the situation we have here now. Religion is also something that is emerging as a factor. I think that will also influence those who want to go to work in the tourism industry. Parents from those kinds of families will not send their daughters to work because in their belief a woman cannot travel alone. And this will be a hindrance for a woman to work in any industry. I think that is already happening here (FG04).

The second question within research objective one addressed stakeholder views on overcoming the issues of low levels of local participation in tourism employment in the Maldives. There was consensus amongst the stakeholders that tourism education and training is important to increase local participation in tourism (Figure 2). More specifically, the tourism industry respondents agreed that increasing local participation could be achieved by educating prospective employees (92%), the local community (85%), and parents (78%) (Table 2). In this regard a tourism educator opined:

Once people have an understanding of what this industry is about, once these people understand who tourists are, that they are just normal people, even if their culture is different, even if their religious beliefs are different, they will be more ready to accept the industry (INT21).

Table 2: Increasing Local Participation in Tourism Industry

	Tourism Industry Survey Percentage (n=74)					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Response
Educating Prospective Employees	52.7	39.2	6.8	0.0	0.0	1.4
Educating Local Community	52.7	32.4	8.1	1.4	1.4	4.1
Educating Parents	45.9	32.4	12.2	2.7	5.4	1.4

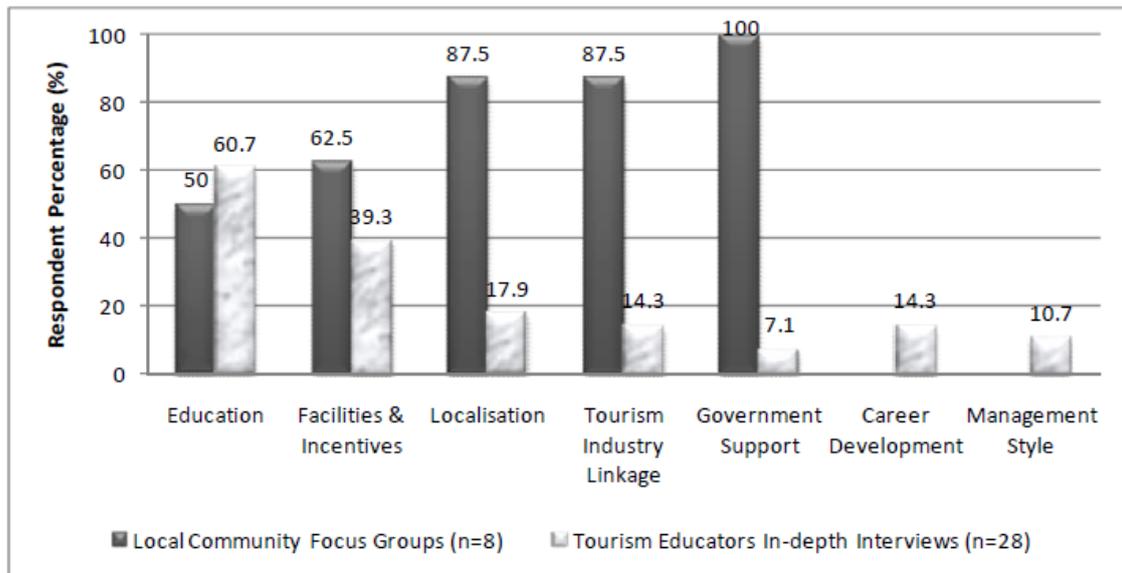


Figure 2: Increasing Local Participation in Tourism Industry
(Note: Multiple Responses Included; None Responses Excluded)

While providing better employee facilities and incentives was regarded by 63% (n=5) of local community focus groups, and 39% (n=11) of tourism educators, localisation was regarded by 88% (n=7) of local community focus groups, and corroborated by 18% (n=5) of tourism educators as a way in which local participation in the Maldivian tourism industry can be increased.

Extent to which tourism education meets local employment needs

The second research objective examined the extent to which tourism education met local tourism employment needs. The tourism industry survey indicated that 46% (n=34) of the

respondents agreed that the programmes offered at the tourism training institute in the Maldives (FHTS) addressed the local employment needs (Table 3), a view which triangulates with the perceptions of 39% (n=11) tourism educators. However, with regard to the quality of tourism education programmes offered, just over half of industry survey respondents (53%, n=39) considered the quality of tourism education programmes offered to be low. Emphasising that the programmes do not meet the tourism industry needs a tourism educator noted:

This is an out of balance education system. There is more emphasis now on academic knowledge. Those who come for employment comes with an academic certificate with no clue about the real thing... We need the right balance... The person should be trained in a way that it meets the industry, be industry fit. To be fair I have to say that the courses offered does not meet the industry needs (INT23).

Table 3: Provision of Tourism Education and Training

	Tourism Industry Survey Percentage (n=74)					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Response
Programmes emphasise on hotel and restaurant sector neglecting tourism related sectors	10.8	48.6	31.1	4.1	1.4	4.1
Quality of programmes offered is low	14.9	37.8	33.8	9.5	2.7	1.4
Programmes offered addresses local employment needs	8.1	37.8	32.4	18.9	1.4	1.4

Similarly, all the local community focus groups (100%, n=8), and 36% (n=10) of the tourism educators did not consider the tourism education programmes met the local employment needs. Analysis of the survey responses also indicated that over half of the respondents (59%, n=44) agreed that tourism education and training in the Maldives emphasised primarily on preparation of students for the hotel and restaurant sector while neglecting tourism related sectors such as travel agency, tour operations and transport (Table 3).

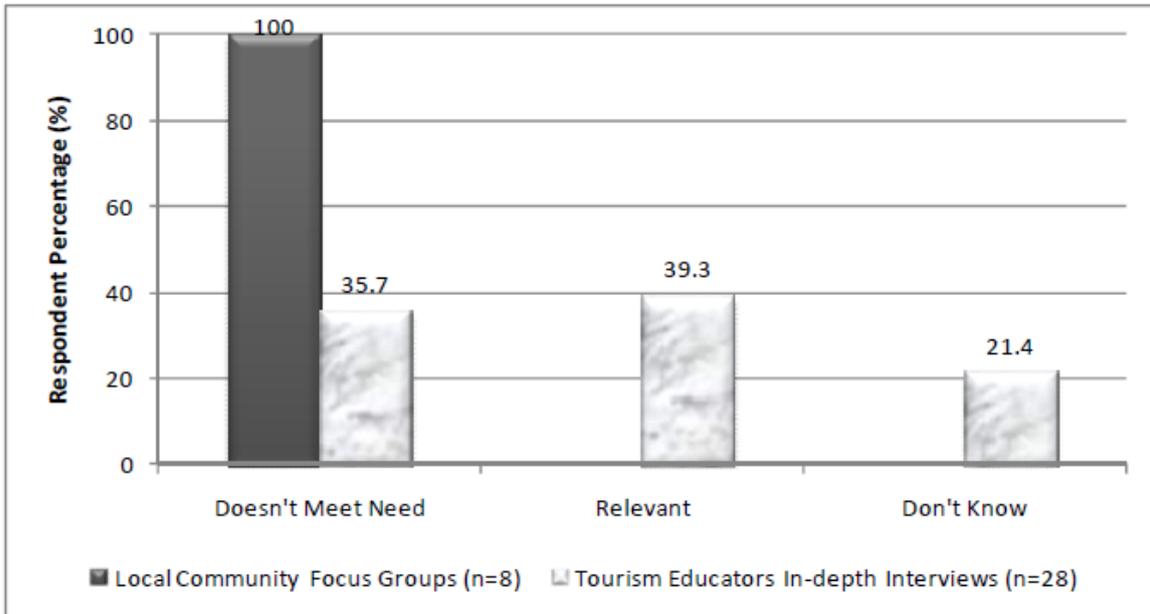


Figure 3: Provision of Tourism Education and Training
(Note: Multiple Responses Included; None Responses Excluded)

The role of government and the tourism industry in the provision of tourism education

The third research objective examined the role of government and the tourism industry in providing tourism education. The tourism industry respondents agreed that tourism education should be carried out by both government and the tourism industry (87%), and rate government as the second option (51%). In contrast, the local communities and tourism educators considered that the government should play the role of educator (Table 4, Figure 4).

Table 4: Role of Government and Tourism Industry in Tourism Education & Training

	Tourism Industry Survey Percentage (n=74)					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Response
Government and Tourism Industry	54.1	32.4	8.1	0.0	4.1	1.4
Government	20.3	31.1	24.3	5.4	17.6	1.4
Tourism Industry	9.5	33.8	27.0	2.7	23.0	4.1

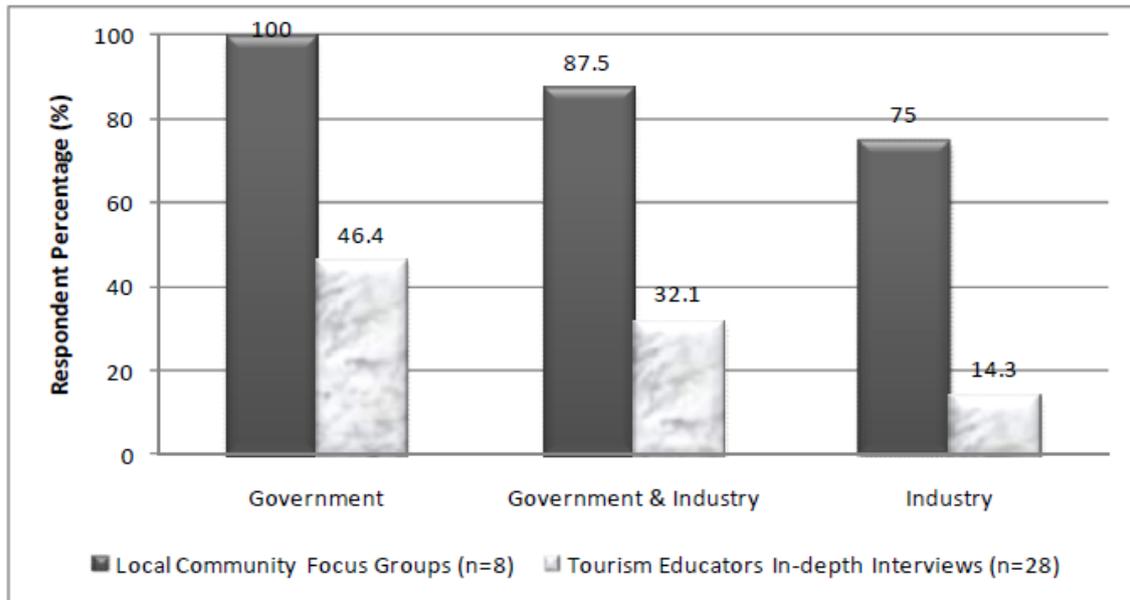


Figure 4: Role of Government in Tourism Education & Training
(Note: Multiple Responses Included, None Responses Excluded)

The second question within research objective three examined government policies in tourism related human resource development. The majority of tourism educators (64%, n=18), and 88% (n=7) of local community focus groups stated that the government lacked human resource development policies. None of the interviewed stated that the government has sufficient human resource policies and strategies in place (Table 5; Figure 5).

Table 5: Government Policies in Human Resource Development

	Tourism Industry Survey Percentage (n=74)					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Response
Lack of Policies and Guidelines to Develop Human Resources	45.9	17.6	21.6	6.8	1.4	6.8
Has Effective Human Resource Development Strategy	12.2	17.6	32.4	23.0	2.7	12.2

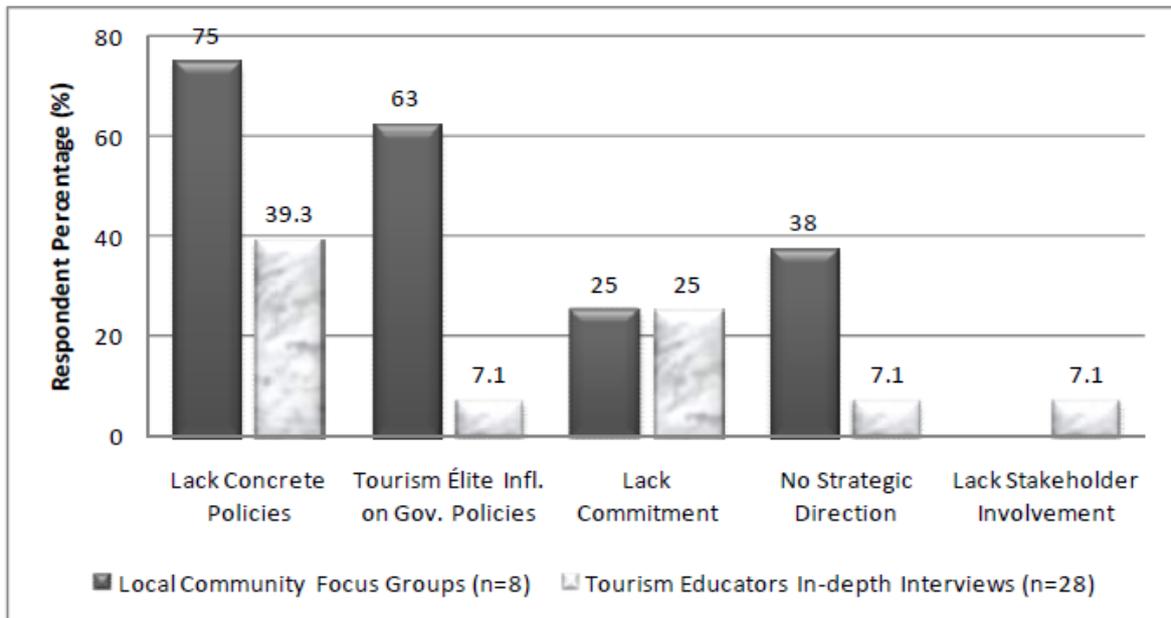


Figure 5: Government Policies in Human Resource Development
 (Note: Multiple Responses Included; None Responses Excluded)

In this regard a local community representative noted:

What I feel is that tourism here also just took off without proper planning and policies in place. Similarly, there is no attention given to any tourism education or human resource development in this atoll. They [government] do everything to make foreign employment easy, but no plans are there for locals [employment] (FG03).

Discussion

The *raison d'être* for SIDS to promote tourism is because the industry may represent the only means of creating much needed employment and income opportunities. The limited means of revenue generation available to most SIDS destinations makes tourism an even more important fiscal contributor to the national economies. Nonetheless, sustainable tourism development in SIDS such as in the case of the Maldives is often not successful for a number of reasons. Consequently the introduction of tourism does not necessarily put a nation on the path to development (Telfer & Sharpley, 2008). This is because while there are a host of good intentions, inaction in the implementation of official planning and policy where they exist, leads to the goals for sustainable tourism development not being achieved (Dodds & Butler, 2009).

The research indicates that from the perspective of local communities the negative image of tourism is a key factor mitigating local participation both in tourism education and employment. In this regard a tourism educator stated:

The other is women...because 50% of the working population is women and they don't work in the resorts, mainly because the public perception of the resort in the Maldives is something very different from what we know it is...it is just a place you go

and work and you stay, not mingling with the guests except at the time of service... but the perception in the country is that, these are places where people are drinking and running around naked, illegal things going on, it's an immoral industry, this is a not a proper place for people to work, especially young women to go and work. That attitude is something which is ingrained in the national conscious and national attitude. That will take time to change (INT24).

The key social themes of the negative images of the tourism industry resonates with previous research in the SIDS context of the Caribbean (Charles, 1992; Conlin & Baum, 2003) indicating that negative images of tourism do influence local employment in the tourism industry. For tourism to be developed on a sustainable basis a crucial component is community involvement in the tourism decision making process. Concurrently, local capacity building is vital to ensure sustainable tourism development at the destination (UNWTO, 2000). Further, perceptions and attitudes of the local communities towards tourism development also need to be addressed during the planning and policy making stages of developing the industry. This will ensure the industry is developed on a sustainable development basis that benefits all stakeholders of the SIDS destinations.

This research also indicated that from the perspective of the employer, the negative images of tourism were the least of the issues affecting the attraction and retention of local people in tourism employment. This is consistent with previous research (McGehee & Andereck, 2004) which indicated that those who are more actively involved in tourism were more likely to be supportive of it and were more knowledgeable about the positive impacts of tourism.

Poor employee facilities were the key human resource theme identified in the research. In this regard, a local community representative noted:

Resort accommodation is another major issue. The employees are stacked up in one room as if they are in an egg carton. The Maldivians have developed too far to live in such [confined] conditions (FG01).

Due to the enclave nature of tourism in the case of the Maldives, employees work and live on the same island. Consequently, boundaries between work and leisure time can often be obscured. In such a work environment, poor employee facilities and working conditions will undoubtedly have an effect on how the industry is perceived by the locals. Hence, the poor employee facilities existing in most SIDS destinations add to the negative images associated with tourism employment held by local people. This further exacerbates the unattractiveness of tourism employment for locals.

The human resource issue of a narrow labour market identified in the research resonates with previous research in the SIDS cases such as Samoa, Anguilla and the South Pacific (Fletcher & Snee, 1989; Theuns, 1994; Wilkinson, 2001). The small population base in SIDS is

one of the characteristics constraining sustainable tourism development in these destinations.

Low salary and lack of employee incentives were the dominant economic themes that emerged from this research.

I don't think the industry is paying good enough salaries to attract people. Given if they were to pay relatively good salaries, then Maldivians would be willing to take up the jobs (INT14).

The research finding indicating low salary as an issue affecting the attraction and retention of local employees in tourism employment contradicts previous research conducted in the SIDS case of Cyprus (Sharpley & Forster, 2003) which found that the majority of employees were satisfied with the wages they earned. This demonstrates that different destinations have different attitudes towards remuneration as a motivating factor for tourism employment. However this research is consistent with the general literature indicating that the negative image of the tourism industry as an employer is often associated with poor pay and working conditions (Riley, Ladkin, & Szivas, 2002; Ruhanen & Cooper, 2009).

The research indicated tourism education as being crucial to increasing local participation in tourism. As has been discussed earlier, local employment in tourism is imperative to establish sustainable tourism development in SIDS destinations. In the SIDS case of the Caribbean, Lewis (2008) had also identified the key role tourism education plays in achieving sustainable tourism development. A community with an awareness of tourism has the added benefit of attracting potential local employees and this subsequently has the potential to minimise traditional cultural resistance to careers in tourism. Furthermore, educated and skilled local people can participate more meaningfully in tourism employment. Contributions from such a community will also be valued assets in the planning and development of sustainable tourism in SIDS destinations.

According to Baum and Szivas (2008) the role of the government in shaping the development of a nation can range from active intervention to deliberate distancing or incompetent neglect. It is observed that in SIDS destinations such as the Maldives, in pursuing aggressive plans to develop tourism they have failed to address the critical areas of local employment and tourism education in its national development plans. Furthermore, in some SIDS tourism development is viewed as mere physical expansion of the tourism industry. Since destinations such as the Maldives do not possess adequate numbers of educated and skilled labour to meet such physical expansion of the tourism industry, there is very little benefit that such an 'expansionist' attitude towards tourism development can have for the local community. Therefore, in order to ensure sustainable development of the tourism industry, increasing local participation progressively as the tourism industry expands is crucial to retain the positive impacts of such developments. This can be achieved through education and local employment.

This research has indicated that despite the increased number of tourist arrivals and consequent increase in foreign exchange earnings, as Telfer and Sharpley (2008) have noted, the introduction of tourism does not inevitably bring local employment to the communities which the industry promises, nor is tourism developed in a sustainable manner that benefits all. Due to the neglect of appropriate human resource development measures within the tourism industry, this research indicated that tourism education often does not meet the local needs for employment. In spite of the numerous challenges facing both tourism education and local employment, the research indicates that tourism education and local employment can contribute to the sustainable development of tourism in the SIDS destinations.

Conclusions and Future Research

In the holistic context of sustainable tourism development, tourism education and local employment are inseparable. Therefore, in order for the SIDS to follow the path of sustainable tourism development advocacy, it is crucial that local employment and tourism education policies are integrated in the broader national development plan. The SIDS governments have a catalytic role to play in ensuring that tourism education contributes to local employment and subsequently to the sustainable development of tourism. Therefore, instead of implementing piecemeal policies in higher education and employment, as well as specifically in tourism education, the SIDS governments should integrate tourism education policy and local employment policy into the broader national development plan. Without government support for sustainable tourism development through established education and employment policies, tourism education and local employment as contributing factors to the sustainable development of tourism in SIDS destination will continue to face numerous challenges, barriers and limitations.

The views of the student population were beyond the scope of this study. However, it is recommended that further investigations be taken incorporating the views of the student population. Additionally, it is recommended that further exploration be undertaken to determine the actual net benefit of tourism revenue obtained by the local communities in SIDS. Analysis of gaps which exist between local employment needs and student perceptions of tourism related employment, and gender issues related to tourism employment in the SIDS are also worth further research.

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