



Human Resource Policies: Striving for Sustainable Tourism Outcomes in the Maldives

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Published

2012

Journal Title

Tourism Recreation Research

Downloaded from

<http://hdl.handle.net/10072/47228>

Link to published version

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02508281.2012.11081696>

Griffith Research Online

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Human Resource Policies: Striving for Sustainable Tourism Outcomes in the Maldives?

Abstract: At an operational level, the appropriate mix of government policies, laws and regulations will contribute to the long term sustainability of tourism destinations. While human resource development (HRD) is recognized as a critical component for sustainable development of tourism destinations, in the context of Small Island Developing States few studies analyze whether appropriate policies are in place to address HRD needs and opportunities for the tourism sector. Drawing on research in the Maldives, this paper explores the role of government policies in HRD as a contributor to tourism development. Using a mixed methodology, data were gathered from tourism educators, representatives of the local community, and a survey questionnaire mail-out for tourism industry managers. This research indicated that the government has broadly neglected HRD policies in their overall tourism development plans. Additionally, a lack of stakeholder involvement in planning and policy decision-making for tourism related HRD was also revealed.

Keywords: government policy, sustainable tourism, human resource development, Maldives

Introduction

In both developed and developing nations, tourism is often used as a stimulant for economic development. For Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in particular, tourism can have a significant role in alleviating the developmental challenges they face: small populations, limited resources, remoteness, susceptibility to natural disasters, vulnerability to external shocks, and excessive dependence on international trade. Pursuing sustainable development strategies in SIDS are further stymied by high transportation and communication costs, disproportionately expensive public administration and infrastructure due to their small size, and little to no opportunity to create economies of scale (UN, 2011).

As Ryan (2001) affirmed, it is this ‘case of marginalities’ which compels some island destinations to be economically reliant on tourism.

Tourism is often seen by SIDS governments, industry operators and local communities as the ‘goose which lays the golden egg’. However, as Hawkins (1982: iii) so eloquently stated, tourism is “a goose that not only lays a golden egg, but also fouls its own nest”. For instance in some countries tourism has grown so rapidly that economic benefits have been tempered by social and environmental damage (Cushnahan, 2001; Wilkinson, 2001). Certainly other authors have attributed such negative impacts to failures in government policy to adequately and appropriately plan for, and monitor, tourism development (Archer Cooper and Ruhanen, 2005; Zubair, Bowen and Elwin, 2011). For tourism to be developed under the objectives of sustainable development, planning and policy must strike a balance between the local community need for development and visitor expectations (Cole, 2006) as well as giving due consideration to the economic, environmental and socio-cultural contexts of the destination.

As tourism planning and policy should lead to an improvement in the quality of life of host communities, Baum and Szivas (2008) endorsed an active government role to create positive environments for effective HRD within the tourism industry. While government support for tourism is usually based on the industry’s ability to create jobs; in developing countries governments often have paid limited attention to HRD and tend to ‘gloss’ over the issue. Indeed, as Liu and Wall (2006) observed, while HRD appears to be an integral component of tourism plans, in reality

tourism’s human resource issues are poorly conceptualized and the many studies of tourism development approaches, both theoretical and practical, provide no consolidation of useful recommendations to situate the human dimension as an integral part of a comprehensive planning framework for tourism.

In order to create a knowledge based economy a number of academics argue for HRD to be integrated into government tourism policies (Aykac, 2010; Baum, 2011). In practice this is a challenge in both developed and developing nations because at national, regional and local levels there are differing interpretations of the HRD needs required for tourism sustainability. For instance, investigating national tourism organizations Baum (1994a: 191) conceded that “tourism policy statements and related documentation isolate the human resource area within virtually self-contained sections or clusters of objectives, without any attempt to integrate them with other areas of concern”.

Arguably for SIDS, who are tempered with a number of developmental constrictions, government policies in HRD targeted at tourism industry are vital for sustainability of the industry. It is for this very reason that Conlin and Titcombe (1995: 66) advocated that “the industry and the government need to consider the development of human resources as a strategic, long-term investment which is absolutely necessary for the survival and growth of tourism”. This is echoed in the views of Conlin and Baum (2003) who affirmed that such government policies and planning should address local HRD issues, and specific tourism education policies must be articulated into national development policies.

Despite these calls for HRD integration within tourism planning, McLean (2004) noted, there is a paucity of research focusing on the tourism-related HRD experiences of various countries. Moreover, in the milieu of developing countries, academic debate on government involvement in HRD policy is limited (Baum and Szivas, 2008). Recognizing the importance of tourism policy that incorporates HRD, this article reports on the government’s role in HRD policy formulation and implementation within the context of the SIDS destination of the Maldives.

Literature Review

Defined 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” (UNWTO, 2005: 12), sustainable tourism has become universally endorsed as the preferred approach to tourism development. Fundamentally this acceptance is based on expectations that tourism will yield economic benefits such as foreign exchange earnings, employment and subsequent increases in income levels, as well as facilitate stakeholder involvement and engagement in tourism planning, policy and decision-making processes (Bramwell, 2010; Roberts and Tribe, 2005). While economic theories posit that tourism development should equate to enhanced economic growth for local communities, in fact the opposite may be true for SIDS.

Due to a number of mitigating factors tourism brings only limited economic benefits to locals communities in SIDS contexts, such as that of Anguilla (Wilkinson, 2001) and Fiji (Lockhart, 1993). Research also indicates that both in developing and developed countries local communities are often excluded from tourism planning processes (Butcher, 2010; Ruhanen, 2009). It is for such reasons that Hall (2011: 1) alleged that “sustainable tourism presents a paradox”. This paradox occurs because of the inherent vagueness of the sustainability concept and the failure of a number of sustainable tourism indicators. As Butcher (2003) noted, the term can be molded to fit one’s preference and can be used in a variety of circumstances by a variety of people to convey a variety of meanings.

Nonetheless, proponents of sustainable tourism advocate community involvement and participation in tourism policy and planning as a key instrument for sustainable tourism outcomes (Bramwell, 2010; Timothy, 2000). On the other hand, academics such as Weaver (2010: 208) contended that it is a “fool’s hope” to expect to find clearly defined local community involvement in tourism initiatives. In this context it has been alleged that due to

the disconnectedness between policy actors, participatory planning becomes a “buzzword, a *sine qua non* for development project proposals” (Mowforth and Munt, 2009: 267).

Although the tourism industry is a key source of employment in many SIDS, economic benefits that locals accrue from tourism borders on poor to moderate levels (Roberts and Tribe, 2005). For example, despite the fact that Anguilla has created nearly full employment through tourism, local involvement in the sector is largely confined to small scale accommodation units which suffer from low occupancy rates, and linkages to other economic sectors are weak (Wilkinson, 2001). In SIDS such scenarios exist because locals do not possess the necessary skills and education to fully participate in the tourism economy. Indeed, within the context of Vanuatu, Black and King (2002) identified poor HRD strategies as a major impediment to the sustainable development of tourism in the destination. Similarly, in the South Pacific, tourism planning and policy investment in tourism education and skills development is not a dominant feature (Ryan, 2001). Consequently, Berno (2007) noted that locals are unable to fully participate in tourism activities because of low levels of tourism education and training, and further are unaware of potential benefits tourism holds for them.

Presenting a sustainable human resource paradigm for tourism, Baum (1995) illustrated a number of weaknesses in traditional human resource practices and the strengths associated with more modern practices (Table 1).

Table 1 here

From the table it can be identified that key factors for achieving sustainable tourism outcomes is based on both the government and industry commitment given to nurturing and developing education and skill requirements for tourism. However, as McLean (2004)

identified, government policies on HRD differ greatly across the globe as there are various interpretations on what is meant by HRD.

For example, Weinberger (1998) listed 18 different definitions of HRD applied by various academics. A brief analysis of these definitions indicated that the core themes linked with HRD are learning, organizational development, career development, performance improvement, and training. Although there is no single definition of HRD, it is commonly accepted as a process of developing and unleashing expertise for the purpose of improving individual, team, work process, and organizational system performance (Swanson, 2009). With its historical roots in education and employment, HRD thus represents the learning and development orientation of both the individual and the organization (Gilley and Gilley, 2006).

While some academics, such as Wheeler (2010), argue that education and training are not synonymous, others observe that while in theoretical terms education and training has evolved independently, in practice they are heavily interwoven (Cooper and Shepherd, 1997). In this context, Go (2005) stated that HRD comprise the process of imparting knowledge (education) and the process of bringing a person to an agreed standard of proficiency for responsibilities through practice or instruction (training). For the purpose of this paper, HRD encompasses both tourism education and training. Thus, HRD policy for tourism can be described as a deliberate course of action developed and implemented by the government to educate and train people so that they can be employed in the tourism industry, start their own tourism businesses, and/or contribute to the planning and decision-making processes.

The need to include HRD in national development agendas is rapidly gaining interest across the globe. Although few, there are some instances of successful HRD policy integration across national policy levels. For instance, in Ireland (Fáilte Ireland, 2005), at

both the government and operational levels there is high recognition given to educated and skilled people for sustainable competitive advantage and profitability of the tourism industry. Hence in the HRD plan for the tourism sector ‘Competing through People: A Human Resource Development Strategy for Irish Tourism’ the government defined its active role in education and training as “primarily to act as a leader, facilitator and supporter of service delivery and standards” (Fáilte Ireland, 2005: 21). Through this initiative, the government has provided an impetus for sustainable growth of tourism in the country through skilled and educated people.

HRD policy addressing local contexts and people’s aspirations can have a profound impact on the communities’ ability to improve their quality of life; by enhancing their knowledge and awareness of the potential the industry holds for them. Conversely, the absence of policies encompassing, or specifically focusing on HRD can negatively impact on the sustainability of the destination. Often negative outcomes of tourism development emerge when the government gives priority to industry profits and capital accumulation in the economy (Bramwell, 2010) as opposed to focusing on HRD. Further, due to a lack of stakeholder involvement in tourism policy decisions, government policy regarding education and training needs in tourism can be made on erroneous assumptions (Lashley, 2009) leading to a mismatch between stakeholder demand for HRD and government initiatives.

There are a number of complexities involved in formulating and implementing sustainable tourism policies. Dodds (2007) identified that these include government’s economic priority, lack of planning, lack of stakeholder involvement, lack of integration with regional and national frameworks and policies, lack of political will, and political clash. These complexities and conflicts are often manifesting in developing countries. Analyzing government roles in HRD within the tourism sector, Baum (2011) stated that in developing

countries greater emphasis is placed on the government role with expectations around leadership in HRD policy development and implementation. Yet, within the government's policy and planning responsibilities, tourism education and HRD is often an area of neglect, and is largely excluded or, at best, marginalized (Baum and Szivas, 2008). In this context Baum (1994b) asserted that within government policies and planning, employment, education and training for tourism are often considered alongside other vocational sectors or do not figure as an area of specifically identified concern at all.

Indeed, as a result of immediate needs for front-line tourism employees, HRD focus has largely remained at a vocational level, with the aim of education and training being to develop manpower that can contribute to the profitability of industry operations (Cooper, Shepherd and Westlake, 1996). To aggravate the situation, industry operators often consider HRD as a recurring cost rather than an investment (Cooper et al., 1996). This situation not only exists in developing countries. As Lashley (2009) observed, in England although some employers spent considerable time and resources on HRD, the larger proportion of employers did not give HRD a high priority. In developing countries, where there are often unequal distributions of power and a disinterest to allow locals into tourism development processes (Liu and Wall, 2006; Ryan, 2001), further complexities arise when government and industry operators see even basic vocational education investment as futile (Lewis, 2009). Consequently in SIDS destinations, such as the Caribbean (Jayawardena, 2002) and Fiji (Harrison, 1998), public and private sector tourism education and training have never been adequate.

The Study Context: Maldives

Comprising of 1,190 coral islands, tourism in the Republic of Maldives began in 1972 with the opening of two resorts. While local people inhabit 194 islands, some 99 islands have

been developed as enclave tourism resorts (Department of National Planning [DNP], 2011; Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture [MTAC], 2011b). As negative socio-cultural impacts such as acculturation emerged, from the early 1980s the government intervened and enacted laws to prohibit tourists from staying in locally inhabited islands other than the capital and main island of Malé, and in safari *dhonis* (boats). After a quarter of a century of tourism in the country, and with a new vision of rapid tourism expansion, the government has amended the enclave resort development policy to allow for hotels and resorts to be developed on inhabited islands, reef locations off locally inhabited islands, as well as by lagoons (MTAC, 2011a).

As recently as 2008, government policy was to locate tourist resorts on uninhabited islands as this was considered to be “effective in limiting the influence of tourism on local communities” (Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation [MTCA], 2007: 58). Keeping tourism away from the locals was also based on ‘brand exclusivity’ and maintaining ‘quality’ of tourism product. Indeed the Third Tourism Master Plan (2007-2011) stated that “resorts built on isolated islands have supported branding Maldives as a high-end and upper market destination” and that “if Maldivian communities are allowed to run tourism enterprises on inhabited islands, then the quality and standard of the tourism product of the country would decline” (MTCA, 2007: 58-59). With the government policy of distancing tourism from local communities, the government had not considered developing local human resources to encourage local’s involvement in tourism as either entrepreneurs or employees.

Portrayed as an example of sustainable tourism (Domroes, 2001), the Maldives tourism industry embodies the classic ‘pleasure periphery’ (Turner and Ash, 1975), including hyper-dependency on tourism. Despite the financial crisis affecting the global tourism industry, in 2010 the country recorded a 21 percent increase in international tourism arrivals

(MTAC, 2011b). The strong tourism growth is reflected in tourism's significant contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (37%), government revenue (24%), and foreign currency earnings (70%) (DNP, 2011). By comparison, the second largest foreign exchange earner, and traditionally the largest employer, the fishing industry, contributed only one percent to GDP during the same period. So substantial is tourism's contribution to the economic performance of the country that as of January 2011, Maldives has been promoted from a 'Least Developed Country' to that of a 'Developing Country' status (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011).

The tourism industry creates a large volume of jobs in the country; arguably offering significant potential for Maldivians to reap economic benefits and improve quality of life. The World Travel and Tourism Council (2011) estimated that the tourism industry directly supported 87,000 jobs in the Maldives during 2011; 63 percent of total employment in the country. It is predicted that by 2021 that this figure will increase to 124,000 (77 percent of total employment). While such prospects are promising, previous research has shown that the tourism industry is not well regarded by Maldivians due to low wages, poor working conditions, limited career progression opportunities, low job satisfaction, and safety and security issues at the workplace (Shakeela, Ruhanen and Breakey, 2011b). Specifically in the Maldives there are issues of social isolation due to the enclave resort policy (Shakeela Shakeela, Ruhanen and Breakey, 2011a), and socio-cultural and religious reasons that inhibit Maldivian women from engaging in the industry (Shakeela Shakeela, Ruhanen and Breakey, 2010; MTCA, 2007). Such factors have led to limited involvement of the local people in tourism employment, combined with high levels of local employee turnover for those who are employed in the tourism industry. Indeed, DNP (2010) estimated that only 15 percent of employed local men and 4 percent of local women work in the tourism industry.

In order to meet the labor needs of the tourism industry, government labor regulations allow foreign employment; and state that a minimum of 50 percent locals must be employed where local skills are available (MTAC, 2011a). However, industry operators are able to bypass this on the basis that there are no locally available educated and skilled people to meet the industry demand. Indeed 2006 data showed that the industry employed 59 percent expatriates (MTCA, 2008). While the country has an unemployment rate of over 30 percent (Jamshath, 2011), recent figures suggest that almost 74,000 expatriates are working in the country, mainly from Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines (DNP, 2011). The expatriate employment equates to nearly one-quarter of the Maldivian population and up to 80 percent of total employment in the country (DNP, 2010). The Third Tourism Master Plan (MTCA, 2007) argues that reducing expatriate employment as a policy imperative has its limitations as there are insufficient numbers of locals to meet the industry demand. While government policy is to rapidly expand tourism, due to the insufficient attention given to HRD issues (Shakeela and Cooper, 2009) the pressure on the labor needs of the industry has not receded.

A review of government policy documents indicates that there is insufficient attention given to HRD needs of the tourism industry. For instance the ‘Seventh National Development Plan’ (Ministry of Planning and National Development [MPND], 2007) addresses the importance of human resource needs to support development and diversification of fisheries, agriculture, construction, transport and shipping sectors. Further this policy document identifies over-reliance on tourism as a sustainable development challenge. Yet, while this policy document mentions that “the Government will implement measures to encourage greater local participation in the tourism sector” (MPND, 2007: 55), the outlined strategies do not address how this will be achieved and largely ignores the HRD needs of the tourism industry. Similarly, the ‘Millennium Development Goals – Maldives Country Report’ (DNP,

2010) recognizes the social and economic ramifications of a high dependency on expatriate labor. To reduce the high unemployment rates, the need for a coherent strategy for absorption of locals into tourism sector is mentioned. However, how such a strategy will be developed or implemented is not addressed.

The first tourism policy document, the First Tourism Master Plan (1983-1992) placed HRD responsibility on industry operators. However, the industry regarded HRD as a cost rather than an investment, and considered HRD as a government responsibility (Shakeela and Cooper, 2009). As the First Tourism Master Plan policy failed to address skill shortages in the industry, the South Asian Integrated Tourism Human Resources Development Program (1995) and the Integrated Human Resource Development Project (2004) were initiated by the government. Evaluating these two projects, Shakeela and Cooper (2009) suggested that while these initiatives were commendable, they did not address industry and local needs for tourism education and training. Further, it was identified that due to confusion and duplication of HRD initiatives, combined with a lack of planning and coordination, and the lack of integration of tourism education in the national curriculum, the overall result was a dearth of skilled manpower needed for industry operations.

The strategic action plan of the current government '*Aneh Dhivehi Raajje*' (The President's Office, 2009: 27) states that it "places a strong emphasis on employment and human resource development and among its priorities remain the development of the Maldivian workforce as a skilled, competitive and disciplined workforce". Acknowledging that the high unemployment rate is as a result of lack of employable skills, in 2011 the government has initiated a vocational education program with the aim of creating 8,500 employable locals for the construction and tourism sectors (Jamshath, 2011). The success or failure of this initiative is yet to be seen.

Research Methods

Utilizing a mixed methodology, data was gathered from a sample of Maldivian tourism stakeholders between March and May 2007 to explore the Maldivian government's role in HRD policy formulation and implementation. The three pertinent stakeholder groups identified for this particular study were tourism and hotel managers, tourism educators, and local community representatives. Due to the considerable geographical dispersal of the stakeholders a variety of data collection techniques had to be employed: in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with tourism educators (n=28), semi-structured focus groups with local community representatives (n=8), and a survey questionnaire mail-out for managers in the tourism industry (n=74). A limitation of this study is that apart from managers, other employees working in the industry were not surveyed. The authors acknowledge that this is a limitation and an aspect to address in future research.

A snow-ball sampling method was employed for the tourism educator interview participants, while a non-probability purposive cluster sampling technique was used to select local community representatives for the focus groups. Based on population density, four atolls with the highest populations were selected for the local community focus group discussions. They included one in the Northern region, one in the Southern region, one in the South Central region, and one in the Central region. Combined, these atolls represent 54% of the population of the country. There are no significant differences in the nature of the tourism industry between atolls and so the sample selection was designed to allow for broader generalisability to the Maldives. Separate focus groups were also held with members of the Island Development Committee and the Women's Development Committee in the administrative capital of each of the four selected atolls. All focus groups were conducted in the local language Dhivehi, as not all participants were able to communicate in English. A bilingual researcher translated these interviews into English for analysis.

Due to the small population, all 74 tourist resorts operating at the time the research was conducted were invited to participate. Surveys were sent to multiple members of the senior management team at each of the resorts. A total of 156 survey questionnaires were sent to senior management. At completion of the four week survey period 74 usable questionnaires were received, accounting for 47% of the targeted sample population. This comprised responses from general managers (35%), human resource managers (32%), other department heads (24%) and training managers (8%). The interview questions for the in-depth interview and focus groups, as well as the Likert-scale questionnaire were based on a comprehensive review of the literature and particular HRD issues facing SIDS as discussed in the literature section.

Data from in-depth interviews and focus groups were organized, coded and analyzed utilizing the principles of content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004). With regards to the focus group data, the notion of “collective inquiry” (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005: 888) was used so the content of the focus group discussions were analyzed as a group rather than on an individual basis. For the purpose of identification, the local community focus group discussions were coded as FG, while tourism educator interviews were coded as INT.

The computer package, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the quantitative data collected through the tourism industry survey questionnaires. To determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire a Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient reliability analysis was conducted. This method shows an indication of the average correlation among all the items, in this case, of the research questionnaire’s number of items presented on the Likert-scale. Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient for the survey questionnaire was measured at 0.9; above the 0.7 standard reliability suggested by DeVellis (2003).

Findings

An examination of stakeholder views on tourism related HRD government policies indicated that the majority of tourism educators (64%, n=18) and local community representatives (88%, n=7) perceived there to be a lack of government HRD policies addressing tourism in the Maldives. Similarly, over half of the industry managers (64%, n=47) agreed the lack of government policies and guidelines in tourism related HRD to be a challenge facing the tourism industry (Table 2). Amongst the industry managers surveyed, only 30% (n=22) believed that the government has an effective HRD strategy for the tourism industry.

Table 2 here

To further explore these issues, the themes which emerged from the discussions held with the local community representatives and tourism educators are discussed below. The emergent themes included: a lack of concrete policies, tourism élite's influence on government policies, the government's lack of commitment to HRD, a lack of strategic direction in HRD, and a lack of stakeholder involvement in HRD policy development (Figure 1).

Figure 1 here

Indicating that the government lacked concrete policies in HRD, local community representatives stated that *“the government does not have such human resource policies let alone any human resource development policy”* (FG07). Similarly, *there is no attention given to any tourism education or human resource development in this atoll”* (FG03). This was corroborated by tourism educators who noted that *“the government does not have any policy on human resource development”* (INT11).

Well over half of the local community representatives (63%, n=5) noted that government policies are overly influenced by tourism industry owners and operators (élites). In this context local community representatives noted that “*these measures cannot be implemented because there are higher powers [élites] influencing government decisions*” (FG07). Interestingly, this was an aspect which was not revealed from the industry surveys; and only two tourism educators (7%) discussed the influence of tourism industry owners and operators influence on government policies as one which inhibits HRD in the tourism industry, expressed as:

The tourism industry has been very much part and parcel of the ruling élite who has kept the government propped up. The reasons are they have very successfully lobbied against laws restricting expatriate employment, they had strong lobbying in preventing Labor Laws from coming in, taxation is another. So it's this, an unholy alliance with an authoritarian government and the industry which has kept this rolling (INT11).

With regard to government commitment to HRD in the Maldives, tourism educators and local community representatives shared the view that the government lacked commitment to HRD in the tourism industry.

There is lack of human resource development support from the government required for the country and the private sector is now trying to supplement it. The government has failed in the national human resource development. You will see this in all walks of life, look at the number of doctors, nurses, tourism industry staff, look at other areas whether it is accountants or any specialized area (INT28);

There is no regulation in government to recognize the locals and value their experience. The government is not even trying to develop locals. If they [government] were doing something after 30 years of tourism, we would have seen the benefit of it. Where are the locals working in the industry? (FG04).

The lack of strategic direction by the government regarding HRD for tourism was a further theme revealed in this research. Discussing this aspect an educator stated that “*We are in a situation we don't know where we are going ... because there is no strategic direction*” (INT 19). The local community representatives were critical of government policies related to

tourism HRD, declaring that “*They [government] do everything to ease foreign employment but no plans are there for local capacity development*” (FG03).

Emerging from the research was also the issue of a lack of stakeholder involvement in government HRD policy development. A tourism educator noted:

I see major loop holes in all planning stages. At the decision making level, the members, the committees, the councils, they actually don't understand the consequence of the decisions they are making. They are just given just a two page or three page brief or the chairman will give a 5 minute brief, and then they will just discuss 3-5 minutes and that's it and based on this they come up with these policies and plans. There is no representation of the industry (INT15).

Discussion

This research indicated that while the government is aggressively pursuing tourism industry expansion, it has neither sufficiently addressed the HRD needs of the industry nor the local community's need for employment. As a local community representative aptly noted, this is because the Maldivian tourism industry “*just took off without proper planning and policies in place*” (FG03). This study further revealed that after a quarter of a century of tourism in the country the local HRD situation has not improved as “*the government has not done much to develop human resources*” (INT18). Government marginalizing the importance of skilled and educated local manpower for the industry is identified by the industry managers as a growing challenge facing tourism sustainability. Indeed, as evidenced in cases such as Anguilla (Wilkinson, 2001), tourism development policies which allows for industry expansion without limits on growth not only has negative impacts on the environment of the destination, but added pressure is placed on local human resources.

The lack of HRD policies pertaining to the tourism industry in the Maldives has two profound implications. Firstly, despite the Maldivian tourism being seen as a ‘tropical haven’, poor service delivery as a consequence of lack of skills and education will affect visitor perceptions. Indeed, today's discerning tourists are demanding high quality tourism products

and services. Recognizing this, Fáilte Ireland (2005) emphasized in their HRD policy that quality tourism products and services can only be produced and delivered through educated and skilled people. They can be only developed where there is an integrated HRD policy targeted at the tourism industry (Fáilte Ireland, 2005).

Secondly, for tourism to be sustainable, it must support local livelihoods. With the introduction of tourism in the country, the traditional local industry of fishing has been replaced by tourism. Yet, local communities are unable to fully participate in the tourism economy. This is because the government has pushed a policy to distance locals from tourism (see: MTCA, 2007). Further, as Shakeela et al. (2011a) identified, there are social, human resource, economic, institutional and religious factors inhibiting local employment in the tourism industry. The resultant dependency on expatriates to fill the skill shortages not only culminates in high leakages of economic revenue, but also contributes to creating high local unemployment rates. Additionally, there are encroaching socio-economic and cultural issues emerging within the destinations.

The Third Tourism Master Plan's perspective of maintaining a high quality tourism product by not allowing locals to be tourism owners and entrepreneurs (MTCA, 2007) goes against the basic premise of sustainable tourism development. Although this policy has recently changed, evidence indicates that no concrete action has been taken to address HRD issues at policy level. Thus, tourism in the Maldives has created a situation where local communities accrue limited benefits from tourism, while the larger volume of tourism wealth is concentrated in the hand of few local élites or disappears out of the country. Development theory holds that the stages of development must allow for social and economic transformations within the country and contribute to enhancing the quality of life of the local communities. Therefore, for tourism to be developed in a sustainable manner, local

community benefits from tourism must not equate to ‘crumbs off a rich man’s table’ (Lockhart, 1993). Concrete policies and long-term investments in HRD are necessary to enable locals to participate in, and benefit from the tourism economy.

Further, the government focus on skills development to fill low-paid jobs must not be a policy prerogative. While the current vocational education initiatives of developing 8,500 employable locals will undoubtedly fill some skills gaps, this does not address the broader local HRD issues at all. Therefore, rather than marginalizing HRD in tourism planning and policies, the purpose of government HRD initiatives in tourism must be to create skilled and educated locals, and thus create sustainable competitive advantages for the industry as well as maximizing local community benefits from tourism. Undeniably, rather than conducting ad-hoc skills development programs what is required is the development, and implementation of a long-term visionary HRD policy for tourism. Failing to do this will result in locals being unable to participate in tourism activities both as employers and entrepreneurs because they will not understand the potential of tourism benefits, as is evidenced in the context of the South Pacific (Berno, 2007).

Government inaction on appropriate HRD policy development, lack of commitment to HRD, and lack of strategic direction in HRD are causally linked to the finding that local élites influence government policies. This was revealed in the local community interviews but not found in interviews held with the tourism educators. Culturally, Maldives has a hierarchical system and follows a top down approach to decision-making. Although the country has a democracy with a separation of powers, in reality the Parliament is heavily represented by tourism industry owners, and business operators (local tourism élites). Thus they are in positions to influence regulatory policy decisions; a position which the local communities do not have.

Additionally, due to the relationship between government and tourism élites, and high levels of corruption (Transparency International, 2011) the government does not have the political will to implement specific policies related to the industry. For instance, legislation to introduce minimum wages was consistently blocked in the Parliament, although the law was eventually enacted in 2008 (Constitution of the Republic of Maldives, 2008). Despite the legal changes pertaining to employment, many industry operators still do not abide by this law and the government appears to have no role in enforcing it. Consequently, employers exert undue power on employees through various means, such as withholding wages and benefits, and terminating employees, if they protest (Niyaza, 2011). Such issues are not only faced by locals but also by expatriate employees. It is for such reasons that the U.S. Department of State (2011) stated that many expatriate employees in the country face conditions indicative of forced labor.

Further, it is evident through industry practices that where government policies restrict certain industry operations, operators often side-step these policies. For instance, although there is a minimum local employment regulation for individual tourism operators (MTAC, 2011a), these are often not respected by the operators on the basis that there are no locally available skilled and educated people to fit the job specifications. Hence, it is not surprising that local communities highlighted that government policies are influenced by local élites.

This research also revealed that there is a lack of local community involvement and participation in tourism planning and policy decisions. Within the context of developing nations, the influence of the élites in tourism planning and policy is noted, where there is a lack of fair representation of relevant stakeholders (Mowforth and Munt, 2009). Where locals are not allowed to participate in tourism planning and policy decisions erroneous assumptions

can be made in relation to HRD issues, and unsustainable practices can be expected to emerge (Bramwell, 2010; Lashley, 2009). Therefore to enable locals to fully participate in and benefit from tourism activities, as well as to ensure tourism sustainability, ephemeral HRD policies have to be replaced with long-term planning and development.

Conclusion

This paper suggests that although the Maldives is recognized as an example of sustainable tourism development (Domroes, 2001), the reality mirrors a different story. Indeed the pessimistic observation that tourism is “a goose that not only lays a golden egg, but also fouls its own nest” (Hawkins, 1982: iii) may hold true to an extent in the Maldives. With both the past and present models of tourism planning and policy, insufficient attention has been given to HRD as a contributor to tourism sustainability. Keeping tourism from local communities to a degree can minimize negative socio-cultural impacts. However, with the influx of expatriate employees and foreign ownership there are higher leakages of tourism revenue which potentially could have contributed to enhancing local livelihoods.

This paper also suggests that ad-hoc government policies pertaining to HRD has a detrimental effect on the long-term sustainability of the tourism industry. Concrete visionary policies targeted at local HRD are recommended if the Maldivian tourism industry is to be a true example of sustainable tourism development. Further, participatory planning where local communities are given a say in tourism development in their ‘back-yard’ is recommended. Future research should focus on the trust and power issues between government and tourism stakeholders, and the extent to which relevant stakeholders are allowed into the tourism planning and development processes.

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Table 1: Traditional and Sustainable Human Resource Practices

Traditional HR Practices	New Sustainable HR Paradigm
<i>Education, training and development</i>	
Training and development not planned	Planned training and development policies and strategies
Training compartmentalized with specialist department	Training recognized as the responsibility of all supervisors/management
No senior management commitment to training	Full commitment to training from CEO down
Training operates in isolation from other HR practices	Training linked to opportunities for promotion etc.
Gap between industry and education system	Partnership between industry and education system
Education programmers with little industry relevance	Education programmers based on industry research/identified needs
Education/training programmers terminal and not integrated	Education/training courses provide for further development and progression
Industry-developed skills not recognized by education	Industry-developed skills recognized and certified by education
<i>National HRD planning for tourism</i>	
Fragmentation of HR planning for tourism	Integrated approach to HR planning for tourism
HR considerations not recognized in tourism policy planning	HR considerations to the fore in tourism planning
Quality in tourism seen in exclusively physical product terms	Human resource contribution to quality recognized and nurtured
Local population detached from/hostile to tourism	Local population helped and encouraged to recognize their role in tourism

Adapted from Baum (1995)

Table 2: Government Policies in Human Resource Development

Tourism Industry Survey (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

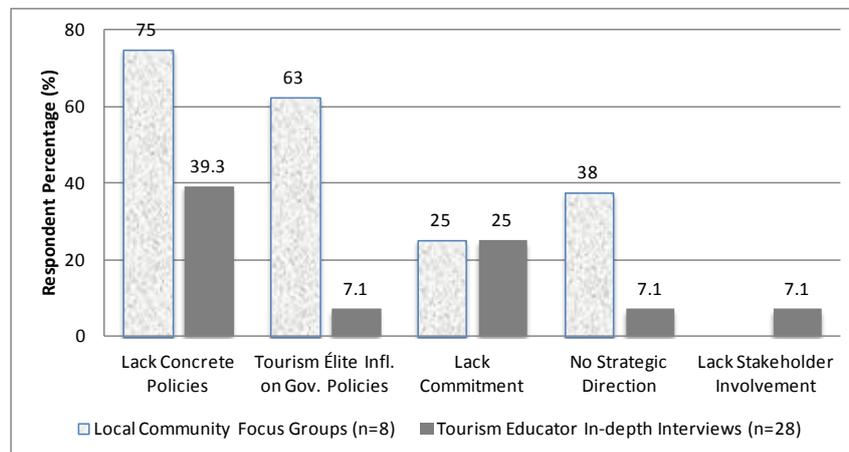


Figure 1: Government Policies in Human Resource Development
(Note: Multiple Responses Included; None Responses Excluded)