



2023 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Title: Converting disaster to opportunity through resumption of economic activities, community empowerment and integrated development: Good Practice Story from Sargaalaya

Destination, Country: Sargaalaya Arts and Crafts Village, Kerala, India

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In the category: Destination Management Environment & Climate Thriving Communities
 Nature & Scenery Culture & Tradition Business & Marketing

The Story in a picture:

Promotion of local arts and crafts



Summary:

Sargaalaya Arts and Crafts Village at Kerala, India is a purpose-built attraction to promote indigenous arts and crafts. The destination has promoted several unique initiatives for the resurgence of local economy and community empowerment. This Good Practice Story describe how the craft village assisted and helped the resurgence of local economy and to tide over the pandemic situation through various activities including organic farming, promotion of languishing arts, women empowerment and community involvement etc.



Good Practice Story:

Destination description

Brief background of the destination.

Spread across 20 acres of land, Sargaalaya Kerala Arts and Crafts village is an initiative of the Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala. Sargaalaya was established in the year 2011 in Iringal, Kozhikode District as a part of the responsible tourism initiatives and was conceived as a major tourism attraction in the Malabar region of Kerala. Situated on the banks of Moorad River, Sargaalaya is located close to the National Highway 66 and is at a short distance of 6 kms from Vadakara railway station. Sargaalaya can also be accessed through major roads from Kannur International Airport (56 kms) and Calicut International Airport (67 kms).

The project started as a venture for showcasing the Traditional Arts & Crafts of India (with specific focus on Kerala) and to boost the tourism sector. Materialization of Sargaalaya has supported development and revival of the Traditional Arts & Crafts and tourism industry of the region. The project is currently managed by the Uralungal Labour Contract Co-operative Society Ltd. Sargaalaya is a one stop destination for experiencing the arts and crafts heritage of Kerala. There are 27 cottages in the craft village where 64 varieties of crafts are made by hand. With the rare combination of art and tourism, the village paves platform for the empowerment of traditional artisans. With ample opportunity for sale of their products, and brand protection the whole traditional industry of Arts and Handicrafts is getting revived. The art lovers and tourists can witness live display of craftsmanship and are also provided with the opportunity of learning the unique skills directly from the talented artisan.

Issues faced

Problems/issues solved with the Good Practice Story.

Sargaalaya, in a short period of time since its inception turned out be one among Kerala's well developed tourism destinations. On an average four lakh tourists visit Sargaalaya every year. The center has contributed directly to the economic empowerment of the artisans in the State. The pandemic and subsequent lockdown had a devastating impact on the handicrafts sector and the fate of the artisans who are dependent on Sargaalaya was at stake. More than hundred people are working in Sargaalaya of which nearly sixty persons are artisans. Exhibitions and festivals were cancelled since February 2020. There had been no sale either through exhibitions or through orders. Even though the Government supported the community through essential distributions of necessary commodities, the pandemic continued to create specific financial needs. It was necessary to address the reduction of work. The artisan families, staff of Sargaalaya, the neighboring villages and other stakeholders were hit hard by the lockdown. The affected population needed extraordinary measures from Sargaalaya administration to effectively mitigate the dramatic impact created by the pandemic.

Methods, steps, and tools applied

Solutions implemented to address the sustainability problems or issues.

To overcome the situation created by lockdown, a resurgence program was envisaged by the Sargaalaya Management. A series of measures were implemented and the most important of them was agricultural development for economic empowerment. To ensure financial sustainability during the lockdown every direct employee including the top management ventured into agriculture. This was materialized as part of the employee-support scheme of Sargaalaya. Under the 'Subhiksha Keralam' project of the Government of Kerala, twenty-eight land plots beside the premises of the crafts village was used for vegetable farming. The produce was sold in local outlets in the neighboring villages and towns. The initiative benefitted forty-five employees and the neighboring villages. The

initiative created some sort of relief for the employees and artisans. Private farms (7.99 acres) and the land available at Sargaalaya (2.20 acres) were utilized subsequently. This was made possible through a series of steps which included primary surveys, community empowerment, community capacity building, awareness creation, stakeholder meetings, ensuing interdepartmental coordination, adoption of scientific organic farming practices and establishing linkages with the local markets.

Apart from farming, hundred new products were developed to increase the sales potential of the products once the lockdown is lifted. The destination management provided craft training to disadvantaged groups in the locality, women, and school children. The details have been given in the results and achievements section.

Sargaalaya initiated efforts to support the people of nearby 'Kottathuruthy Island'. For providing financial assistance to Kottathuruthy residents, Sargaalaya along with the Kerala Grameen Bank adopted the island and an amount worth Rs. 20000/- was provided to each household for mussel farming. Also, Sargaalaya on behalf of the island community submitted two proposals to SAF under Fisheries Department and with National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) jointly conducted financial literacy awareness program to Kottathuruthy Island residents in which all fifty-four families of the Island participated.

Key success factors

Critical elements that led to successfully solving the issues.

Several factors contributed to the success of this initiative. Sargaalaya played the major role in mobilizing initial funds and resources. The strong organizational capacity of the management was found effective in coordinating the staff, artisans and the local community, their capacity building and placing them under the same roof for effective implementation of the initiatives. Barren land was utilized for farming and such no rent was paid for the land. Sargaalaya launched the farming project with the help of the Kerala State agricultural department and ensured coordination throughout the project right from planning stages till implementation. The farm products were sold through the local outlets in the nearby villages and town centers. The farming was done in organic manner and thus there was high demand for the farming produce. Thus the availability of local market was one major success factor. Locally available seeds, farming equipment, abundance of water, help from the self-help groups (SHGs) etc contributed to the success of the farming initiative.

The other significant factors that contributed to the success of the program included the support from the local Panchayath Administration, support from the officials from the agricultural department, the need-based design of the program, high competency level of the employees, dedication etc. Thus, the major links of the unique process include good governance, the will power of the Sargaalaya administration to pay their employees their full wages during lockdown, accountability and transparency, resource mobilization, community awareness, capacity building and inter institutional coordination.

Lessons learned

Challenges faced while implementing the Good Practice and their solutions.

Biggest challenge while planning the project was the concerns regarding the sustainability of the project and the extent to which the farming operations could be scaled up. There were many other challenges that Sargaalaya had to overcome, the important issues which included pooling land and fund, skills and business management knowledge, the challenge of ensuring the women community regarding the profitability of the venture, the initial difficulties in establishing effective linkages and constraints in awareness generation due to lockdown guidelines.

However, all these constraints were effectively addresses through timely interventions. The major lessons learned from this success story are synthesized as contribution of good governance towards economic development, effective inter institutional linkages, community capacity building and empowerment. Such initiatives would ensure community involvement, togetherness, social capital, cultural harmony and are mutually benefitting and can successfully result in overcoming the financial struggles during pandemics and extended lockdown period.

Achievements and Results

Direct and indirect results of the Good Practice.

Since the inception of the initiative remarkable changes could be seen in the farming sector of the region. The initiative provided better returns on their investment. The project has helped to revitalize the farming sector as well as supported the staff of Sargaalaya and nearly ten acres of barren land were used. The initiative benefitted forty-five employees of Sargaalaya while the village made a turnover of Three lakh rupees in three months. The initiative protected the farmers, artisans and the employees and generated interest in scientific farming practices among the local community. Uninterrupted supply of organic vegetables during lockdown could be made sure for the surrounding villages and nearby towns.

The project adopted the nearby Kottathuruthy Island where Rs. 20000/- was given to each household for mussel farming. The residents of the island also received Rs. 1.42 lakh towards ornamental fish farming and Rs. 1.28 lakh towards marketing assistance from the Fisheries Department and established an aquarium within the destination. Apart from this, twenty-four women of the island received training and employment within Sargaalaya village. All the fifty-four families in the island got benefitted by the financial literacy awareness program.

Sargaalaya village developed hundreds of new products including souvenir and utility items post pandemic to increase the sales potential of their products. More than 400 local women received training and employment on handicrafts making. The destination also gave part time employment to 150 people including thirty youth from the local community during social function and festivals. Apart from this, it also provided training to more than 600 crafts persons in neighboring villages and targets to increase this number to 2000 crafts person in the coming three years. Further 200 students belonging to disadvantaged category were given ten days crafts training in Sargaalaya and they were able to acquire sufficient skill to make various types of craft items.

The Project, initiated and successfully implemented by Sargaalaya is an example of a timely intervention drawn up in the farming sector with foresight for addressing the employment issues during lockdown. It has benefited the small and marginal farmers, especially the women, the staff and the artisans. The project has been eventful in supplementing family incomes and generating gainful employment in the region during the lockdown.

Tips for other destinations

Your suggestions or recommendations for other destinations facing the same issues or implementing similar solutions

This success model or the alternative mode of livelihood program especially during the time of a pandemic could be replicated elsewhere in tourism destinations with same character. The project helped in diversifying the employee income streams, and they were able to support their families outside of their regular season. Agriculture has a major role to play in economic development as a main stream occupation as well as an alternative. Any tourism destination can take up farming as an

alternative in situations like continuous lockdowns. The destinations can make use of the barren land available in their immediate vicinity for farming purposes as it involves least rent. Extensive farming with the help of the neighboring communities can bring out great results. The administration of the destination can establish linkage with outlets and shops where their product can be sold. Community empowerment and involvement need to be ensured to make the initiative a big success. Group farming that involves the pooling of land, labour, capital and group cultivation can be practiced. Ensuring interdepartmental coordination is an imperative in effective materialization of the initiative. This will help in generating funds, sorting measures to mitigate the vagaries of climate and ensuring the support of farming communities. The destinations can practice organic farming and thus increase fertility of the soil.

Recognitions and Additional references

Recognitions and awards the Good Practice received and supporting evidence.

The initiative received recognition and accolades from various corners including eminent personalities, organizations, local self-government departments, governing bodies, tourism department, and agricultural department. The initiative got special mention in the State Government's 'Subhiksha Keralam' Project. All the print media and visual media gave special mention and references with a wide coverage of the initiative.

References:

1. Sargaalaya – farming during pandemic lockdown, 2021
2. Sargaalaya UNWTO Award Application, 2021
3. Report on Sargaalaya since its inception, 2022