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STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP LOCAL SELF-EMPLOYMENT IN THE TOURISM SECTOR BASED ON THE RESOURCES OF THE JAFFNA REGION

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1. Introduction to regional development

Regional development is economic within a specific geographic region. Refers to the process of improving social and environmental conditions. It focuses on enhancing the overall well-being and quality of life of the residents of a particular area. Regional development strategies aim to stimulate economic growth, increase employment opportunities, reduce poverty and promote sustainable development in a region.

Regional development recognizes that different regions have unique characteristics, strengths and challenges. It acknowledges that a one-size-fits-all approach may not be effective in addressing the specific needs and goals or ideals of various regions. Therefore, regional development emphasizes the need for strategies designed based on the local context, available resources, and regional capacities.

2. Favorable resources for the tourism sector of Jaffna region

The Jaffna region is renowned for its natural resources, archaeological features, cultural heritage, and traditional hospitality rooted in its cuisine. Tourism in Jaffna has grown steadily in recent years as the region has been opened up to tourists since the end of Sri Lanka's civil war. Jaffna has unique cultural and historical attractions and it presents itself as a fascinating destination for travelers. When considering favorable resources to the tourism sector, the following aspects stand out:

2.1.Cultural heritage sites such as sacred sites and places of historical pride

Jaffna boasts a rich cultural and historical heritage, featuring numerous ancient temples, remnants of early Tamil Kingdom, and historic forts that stand as significant landmarks of the its past. Tourists are attracted to the region's unique architecture, religious sites, temple festivals and cultural heritage events that reflect the distinct traditions of Jaffna. For example, during Thai Pongal, the traditional kite-flying festival in Valvettithurai attracts numerous local and international Tourists.

2.2. Beaches and Islands

Jaffna has many stunning, peaceful beaches and nearby islands that offer beautiful landscapes and scenic views. Tourists are attracted by activities such as boat rides, sunbathing, swimming and the beauty of marine life swimming through the water, the small Colorful stones, Coral reefs sparkling in the sunlight on the beach, the elegance of the sandy beaches, the natural plants found along the coastline and water sports (Snorkeling - explore deep into the sea and enjoy tropical fish species and colorful coral reefs, deep-sea swimming, windsurfing, wave-

riding and wakeboarding etc..). These activities captivate tourists. For example, Casuarina Beach is a popular spot for local and international Tourists, Known for its golden sand and clear water.

Additionally, areas such as Karaitivu, Velanai, Mandaitivu, Nainativu, Annalaithivu, and Neduntheevu, where coral reefs stretch across the shorelines, are an attractive feature for tourists. In this, Nainativu (Nagaithivu) Island is a sacred pilgrimage site with historical and religious significance. Neduntivu, known for its wild horses and unique landscapes, is another popular destination accessible by boat.

2.3. Mangrove forests and Sanctuaries

Mangrove forests and sanctuaries provide home for a variety of animals and birds, both migratory and native. Along with the locals, tourists engage in activities like fishing, exploring the mangrove areas by boat, birdwatching and enjoying nature, making this area a popular tourist destination.

2.4. Cultural and Local Experience

Jaffna offers tourists the opportunity to experience the local Tamil culture and lifestyle. It encourages warmly welcome tourists and share their knowledge of the local way of life. International tourists are eager to learn about the cultural aspects, traditions, clothing, jewelry, food habits, and customs of the people living here.

In addition to introducing traditional Tamil dishes, the locals are also known for unique foods such as crab curry, fish curry, coconut flour pittu, idiyappam, odiyala kool, palmyra-based sweets, Paruthithurai vadai, appam, dosa, and idli. In response to tourist preferences, both government and private organizations have set up traditional food outlets.

Additionally, traditional clothing, old coins, artifacts, pottery, and household items used over three decades ago are displayed for tourists, offering a glimpse into the region's rich heritage.

2.5. Developing Infrastructure

The tourism sector in Jaffna is rapidly growing, with the development of new hotels, restaurants, and transportation options. This expansion provides tourists with a wide range of choices for accommodation, dining, and travel. The reopening of the A9 road has significantly increased tourist arrivals. Additionally, the reconstruction of the railway line connecting Kankesanthurai to the A9 route has further facilitated travel for tourists from southern Sri Lanka.

In 2015, the Yal Devi train service to Jaffna was launched, followed by the Uttara Devi train service in 2018, both of which have brought a considerable number of tourists to the region. With this rapid increase in visitors, investors have shown great interest in establishing more hotels in Jaffna.

The services of the Palaly Airport have also become a crucial focal point in the development of the tourism sector. As a result, these opportunities have led to the emergence of modern facilities and accommodations in Jaffna, catering to the needs of tourists. For example, hotels such as Green Grass Hotel (established in 2009), Jetwing Star Hotel (2010), Thalsawana Holiday Resort, Tilko City Hotel, Thinnai Five Star Hotel (established in 2016), Valampuri Star Hotel, Yarl Hotel, Blue Whale Hotel, Jaffna Heritage Hotel, Ganams Hotel, and Fort Hammenhihal Resort have provided numerous options for the convenience of tourists.

2.6. Palm Tree Resources

Palm tree-based food products, palm fiber brushes, palm leaves fans, mats, baskets, palm stalk fibers, toys, different kinds of plain and colored handicraft items, Furniture, ropes, leaf hats, idiyappam plates, and other such items attract both local and international tourists. These unique products showcase the local craftsmanship and are highly appealing to tourists.

3. Local self-employment opportunities centered on tourism in the Jaffna region

Tourism provides a wide range of employment opportunities in various fields. Generally, tourism-based direct job opportunities are available in hotels, travel agencies, museums, and national parks. In terms of local self-employment opportunities for people in this sector, the focus is on:

3.1. Tourist Guide - As a tourist guide, one can provide local knowledge and expertise to tourists visiting Jaffna. This includes guiding tourists through cultural and historical sites, as well as taking them on nature walks and wildlife safaris.

3.2. Homestay Host - Jaffna is known for its hospitality, and many tourists prefer to stay in homestays to experience the local culture and cuisine. As a homestay host, one can provide accommodation for tourists in their own home and offer traditional Jaffna dishes.

3.3. Transportation Services - As the tourism sector is expanding in Jaffna, the demand for transportation services such as taxi and tuk-tuk rides is increasing. Additionally, activities like boat rides to coastal areas and islands are also attracting more tourists. As a self-employed

driver, can provide safe and reliable transportation to tourists. As an independent transportation provider, services like car or motorbike rentals can be offered.

3.4. Handicraft Sales - Jaffna is famous for its handicrafts, including making mats, weaving, traditional jewelry and palm fiber products. As a self-employed handicraft seller, you can create and sell your own handmade products to tourists visiting the district. For example, foreign tourists, especially during the summer, tend to prefer palm-made hats over synthetic materials like nylon and polyester, as these fabrics increase heat. Palm hats are more popular due to their air ventilation properties. Additionally, palm fiber products are environmentally friendly and suitable for natural settings like beaches or forests, where tourists prefer not to handle plastic materials such as polythene. As a result, when visiting such areas, tourists buy and use palm-made baskets and boxes.

3.5. Food and Beverage Services - With the unique cuisine of Jaffna, the demand for food and beverage services is increasing. In this context, as a self-employed chef, one can offer traditional Jaffna dishes to tourists through a food truck, restaurant, or catering service.

3.6. Becoming a Translator - Some tourists face communication challenges when visiting new places. Those with language proficiency can become translators and guide them effectively. Since a large number of Tamil-speaking people live here, local Sinhala tourists can be guided in Sinhala, while foreign tourists can be assisted in English.

3.7. Photography and Videography Services - Many tourists wish to capture their experiences during their travels, and Jaffna offers numerous scenic locations for photography and videography. Services can be provided as a self-employed professional photographer or videographer specializing in tourism-related projects.

3.8. Event Planning and Coordination - The Jaffna region hosts numerous festivals and events throughout the year, including cultural and religious celebrations. As a self-employed event planner or coordinator, one can assist in organizing and managing these events by offering services such as venue selection, catering, and entertainment arrangements.

These are just a few examples of local self-employment opportunities in the tourism sector in Jaffna. With the growth of the tourism industry, entrepreneurs have many opportunities to offer their unique skills, services, and experiences to tourists.

4. Issues and Barriers Affecting Local Self-Employment Development Focused on the Tourism Sector

In the Jaffna District, although there are many opportunities for local communities to engage in self-employment in the tourism sector, there are several challenges that individuals face in starting their own businesses. Similarly, in the existing tourism-related industries, there are various internal and external factors that act as barriers.

4.1. Limited access to financing

Starting a self-employed tourism business requires a significant amount of capital, whether for purchasing equipment, obtaining necessary permits and licenses, or covering marketing and advertising expenses. Without adequate access to financing, it can be challenging for individuals to start their own tourism-related business. At the same time, there is a need to continuously develop initiatives to attract tourists, requiring a consistent business structure and production. Assistance for these, whether from the government or private non-governmental self-employment development agencies, is limited and available to only a few. And while some may receive financial support in installments, these amounts are often insufficient or not provided regularly.

4.2. Lack of Modernized and Adequate Infrastructure Facilities

The tourism industry in Jaffna is still developing, and in some areas, the lack of infrastructure makes it difficult for self-employed individuals to operate effectively. For example, there may be limited transportation options, poor internet connectivity, or a lack of suitable venues for events or accommodation. Factors such as warehouses, processing plants, marketing agencies, unequipped warehouses, and a lack of multi-store complexes also influence this.

4.3. Limited Marketing and Advertising Resources

Marketing and advertising are crucial for attracting tourists to a business, but self-employed individuals often lack the resources to invest in these activities. This makes it challenging to compete with established businesses in the industry and attract new customers. Even if their products utilize efficient distribution systems, reaching customers through advertisements becomes essential. Platforms like Amazon, Taras or eBay even sell items like dried curry leaves for dollars, demonstrating how advertising enables such sales. One major issue for self-employed individuals is the difficulty they face in allocating funds for marketing, which presents a significant barrier.

4.4. Seasonal Fluctuations

The tourism industry in Jaffna is largely dependent on seasonal fluctuations, making it difficult for self-employed individuals to maintain a steady income throughout the year. Earning revenue during the off-season can be a challenge. Additionally, during the peak tourist season, there is an increased demand for products as more tourists visit Jaffna. However, recent trends show that Jaffna experiences high heat during the summer, along with unpredictable rainfall, which makes it harder to attract tourists. This directly impacts the ability to sell their products, sometimes leading to a situation where businesses cannot operate effectively.

4.5. Language Barriers

Although English is widely spoken in Sri Lanka, language barriers may still exist for some tourists, particularly those from non-English-speaking countries. For self-employed individuals who are not proficient in certain languages, this makes it challenging to communicate effectively with customers. Tourists from countries like France, Germany, Russia, and China are more comfortable with their native languages than with English. Additionally, many of these tourists prefer to use local guides when visiting Jaffna, which can create difficulties for self-employed individuals trying to sell their products directly to customers.

4.6. Limited Access to Training and Education

Many self-employment opportunities in the tourism sector require specific skills or knowledge, such as language proficiency or cultural expertise. However, not all individuals have access to training or educational programs that would help them develop these skills. Technical colleges primarily focus on courses related to cake production and hotel management. There is a lack of focus on industries such as basket weaving, boat construction, mat weaving, palm tree-based products, marine-related industries, and agricultural production, which limits the growth potential of these sectors.

4.7. Difficulty in Obtaining Permits and Licenses

Depending on the type of self-employment business an individual wants to start, they would need to obtain various permits and licenses from local or national authorities. However, this process can be time-consuming and complex, requiring individuals to navigate through bureaucratic systems. Moreover, many of the relevant organizations are based in Colombo, and the mandatory annual fees, municipal taxes, and permits for shipping capital can present significant barriers.

4.8. Lack of Awareness About Self-Employment Among the Public

The mindset of the people in Jaffna is often oriented towards government employment or overseas migration. Additionally, certain self-employment activities are viewed as lacking social status, which makes it difficult to sustain the benefits they offer. Furthermore, there are many different perceptions about self-employment, and a continued lack of awareness, coupled with old-fashioned views, serves as a barrier for today's youth.

4.9. Economic Instability in the Country

Several events, including the COVID-19 pandemic, currency devaluation, and recent economic downturns, have discouraged new self-employment entrepreneurs. The severe impact of these events has led many to reconsider starting a business, as they are uncertain about the capital, production, sales, and profitability of such ventures. This has become a significant barrier to self-employment.

4.10. Palm-Based Products

In Jaffna, the production of palm-based products has been hindered by social discrimination and a backward mindset, where people from certain castes are relegated to this line of work. There is a prevailing attitude, even among educated communities, that palm-related work is a menial occupation. As a result, the abundant palm resources remain underutilized.

Overall, while there are numerous opportunities for self-employment in the tourism sector in Jaffna, individuals face various challenges when starting their own businesses. It is crucial to carefully consider these factors and develop a comprehensive development plan to address and mitigate these obstacles. Moreover, many existing industries have been severely impacted by economic instability, and it is equally important to prepare entrepreneurs mentally to face these challenges.

These barriers and issues often stem from deep-rooted beliefs and attitudes within the communities themselves. Therefore, there is a need for government programs to provide systematic opportunities and for future initiatives to focus on production-based economies in Jaffna.

5. Logical and practical solutions to alleviate the above problems and obstacles and promote sustainable regional development

There are a number of logical steps that can be taken to promote tourism-based local self-employment in Jaffna. Thus;

5.1. Development of training and education programs

Developing training and capacity building programs to develop skills in language skills, cultural awareness, hospitality, customer service, marketing, advertising and financial management as skills needed for individuals to start tourism-related self-employment. For this, the government has partnered with private companies to provide training and guidance programs and set up vocational training centers to impart special training to self-employed people based on tourism.

For example, through technical college centers found in Jaffna, weaving training for young men and women, training for middle-aged women on how to prepare traditional food to attract tourists and providing training for hotel management, training for cooks and decorators, and hand painting and polishing of many handicrafts such as conch, sculpture, etc. Training provision for production of spectacular varieties in a morphological structure, Palm Development Association By providing training related to palm products, mention may be made.

5.2. Promotion of good local self-employment activities related to tourism

Through Jaffna Divisional Secretariat to get self-employment project proposals from the local community people who want to do self-employment by giving self-employment interest application and to those who present the best self-employment project proposal, approach the government banks through the divisional secretariat and get the loan for the same and encourage printing industry.

5.3. Creating digital platforms

Creating digital platforms for self-employed tourism businesses to market their services and manage bookings. These platforms include websites, social media accounts and mobile applications. This allows self-employed businesses to easily connect with tourists. For this visit Jaffna Tourism Facebook page.

5.4. Development of tourist attractions

Small islands i.e. Sapta Islands are found in the vicinity of Jaffna. When the islands that are not frequented by tourists are converted into attractive islands with eco-friendly parks and beaches,

tourists will go there to visit, and because of their arrival, there will be employment for the people who go by the boat, as well as tax income for the government, and income for the people who drive the boat. And income can be generated by eco-friendly production of barbarian cuisine along the beaches to meet the food demand of tourists visiting the islands.

5.5. Development of activities related to palm oil production

Mainstreaming of palm-based products in export business. That is to introduce palm-based products not only in the Sri Lankan markets but also in the international market as Made in Sri Lanka as Sri Lankan products.

The use of palm products in European culture in alternative systems for their use. For example, Europeans are fond of drinking coffee and tea. They use Chinese clay pottery more for drinking cup and tea instead of drying the bottom and shaping it like a tea cup or cutting the bottom pottery and shaping it into a vase to stimulate their appeal.

Palm production in Jaffna is hampered by the backward nature of the people due to caste exclusion, so bringing the benefits of palm production and the purpose of getting more profit among the people. Creating awareness.

Production of palm-based products in spectacular variety. For example, dyeing palm leaves green and red and polishing them with pearls, oysters and marbles.

Bringing modernity in palm products. Government introduction of machinery for handicrafts. For example, palm weaving machine.

Encouraging among the students to find new types of research related to palm production in its growth and breeding methods.

Instead of liquor, brandy and whiskey, the cottage industry of liquor is legalized and sold in better containers to most tourists.

5.6. Facilitation of obtaining permits and licenses

Conducting seminars on easy guidelines for obtaining permits and licenses from Govt. That is, when starting a new self-employment, what permits and licenses should be obtained from the government, how to obtain permission from the press office, how to obtain permission from the village servant, and giving advice on the areas where self-employment will be profitable, and observing local people's self-employment related processing plants and warehouses where

they are not available. processing plants, warehouses and infrastructure for the local population by intimation to the appropriate superior. Providing facilities.

5.7. Promoting self-employment by introducing shopping malls

Traditional market systems are found in Jaffna. But as foreign tourists are found to be fond of supermarkets, the local self-employed people of Jaffna should set up a supermarket to attract tourists and bring a project to be carried out in the shop blocks found there with low monthly rent.

5.8. Promotion of Eco-Tourism

Jaffna has many natural attractions like beaches, islands and sanctuaries. In this way eco-tourism initiatives such as bird watching tours, nature walks and camping should be developed. It also aims to create tourism opportunities and provide employment to local people.

The above issues can be presented as logical and practical solutions to reduce the problems and obstacles affecting local self-employment development centered on tourism and promote sustainable regional development.

6. Conclusion

Thus, this report based on the topic "Resources of Jaffna Region and Strategies for Developing Local Self-Industry Focusing on Related Tourism Sector" provides an introduction to regional development, physical and cultural background of Jaffna District, and analysis of local self-employment focusing on tourism in Jaffna Region. Favorable resources and of Jaffna territory in relation to local self-employment opportunities centered on tourism, and the problems and obstacles affecting local self-employment development, it elaborates on logical and practical solutions to alleviate the above-mentioned problems and obstacles and promote sustainable regional development.

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