

Shaam-e-Sarhad, Hodka

A Community-based Tourism Initiative



Seema Bhatt
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Author: Seema Bhatt

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1 | Introduction

Tourism is today recognized as the world's fastest growing industry and in recent years, has come to play a significant role in the economies of developing countries. Tourism has the potential to provide economic, environmental and social benefits. However, recent trends within tourism development globally and specifically in India raise several concerns about the adverse impacts of tourism. Tourism destinations are facing increasing pressures on their natural, social and economic environments. A large percentage of economic benefits from tourism tend to be garnered by people away from the destination and only a fraction trickles down to local communities. Tourism is thus characterized by a high 'leakage' rate of tourism receipts. Unregulated tourism is also known to degrade habitats and cause pollution of land and water. Mass tourism has often caused the exploitation of women and children. It has in many places also resulted in the privatization of common resources and displacement of people to make way for hotels and resorts.

The growing realization of the ill effects of mass tourism has led to a conscious effort to look at alternate models of tourism.

The growing realization of the ill effects of mass tourism has led to a conscious effort to look at alternate models of tourism. One such is community-based tourism. This kind of tourism has gained momentum globally, since it looks at aspects of community development, poverty alleviation and conservation of the natural and cultural heritage. In developing countries, it tends to focus on rural and biodiversity-significant areas.

2 | The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Endogenous Tourism Project (ETP)

Village or rural tourism that showcases rural culture and brings economic benefits to the communities, received a major thrust under India's 10th Five Year Plan and was accorded

priority. One of the initiatives to support this was the Endogenous Tourism Project (ETP), a joint venture between the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (MoT, GoI) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The term 'Endogenous' quite literally means, 'originating from within'. This four-year project (2003-2007) involved the selection of 36 rural sites as pilot projects for rural destination development in the context of tourism. Poverty eradication, one of the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) was also the guiding principle for this initiative. UNDP funded the capacity-building component while the rural infrastructure improvement was supported under the Government of India's Rural Tourism Scheme. The Incredible India marketing campaign launched in 2002 by the MoT, GoI had by then successfully catapulted

India into the global tourism market. To take this further, the ETP project was established with the objective that it would help open up the rural market and also benefit rural communities. As commented by the then Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, "Special thrust should be imparted to rural tourism, where sizeable assets of our culture and natural wealth exist".

It was envisaged that particularly women and unemployed youth could leverage their skills towards income generation with the help of the *Panchayati Raj* Institutions (PRIs) and Non Government Organizations (NGOs). Further, that by showcasing local culture and the surrounding environment, tourism would help in enhancing community pride and reviving dying cultural traditions. The underlying principle of the initiative was, "creating income generation strategies that leverage pre-existing local skills, is therefore 'endogenous' in nature. Thus, both rural communities and tourists would stand to benefit from the initiative". Endogenous or 'transformative' tourism aimed to broaden the traveller's horizon by transforming perspectives and promoting a mutual

environment of appreciation and learning between the local community and visitors¹.

Under the ETP, significant emphasis was given to community owned and managed tourism. The key stakeholders were meant to be community members including women, youth, and artisans. Village level institutions consisting of these stakeholders were to play a key role in decision making and project implementation. External support of the state and national governments, NGOs, and the travel trade was considered crucial for both the implementation and sustainability of the project. The role of the MoT, Gol was to facilitate linkages between various sectors and partners. Assistance of state governments was sought for the initial selection of rural locations as also the

established in the Banni area of Kachchh in Gujarat.

This case study provides an overview of the context of the project and reviews the process, progress and outcomes of the initiative, and examines it particularly as an alternate model to mass tourism.

3 | The Banni Area of Kachchh³

Banni extends across an area of 3847 sq. km covering about 8.4 per cent of total geographical area of the Kachchh district. The following lines written by the famous Kachchhi poet Duleray Karani aptly portray the region:



maintenance and development of infrastructure at selected locations. Specific NGOs were selected to help with capacity building based on their presence at the local level, acceptability by the local community, skills and field experience. Tour operators were seen as key for the marketing of the sites and facilitating package tours to the rural destinations². One of the projects was

*The lush green Banni
Skirting the Rann of Kachchh
Where wells burst with water
Green grasses bloom in heavenly gardens
Robust, muscular are the cows and buffaloes
No dearth of milk and butter
Where the sun rises
With the churning of buttermilk*

¹Pro-Poor Tourism Development - The case of Endogenous Tourism Project, India
May 2012 11:30 | Written by SudipDuttgupta at <http://scstsenvis.nic.in/>

²Mott MacDonald (2007). Evaluation study of rural tourism scheme. Retrieved from <http://tourism.gov.in/survey/ruraltourism.pdf>

³Background material about the region has been taken from the brochure on Hodka, Kachchh brought out under the UNDP project. Compiled and written by MansiAnand. Documentation support by PachchhamSetu

The pastureland of Banni, located on the northern border of the Bhuj district was once believed to be a part of the great Rann of Kachchh. The name Banni is said to be derived from the Kachchhi word, *Bannai* that literally means 'made up'. Banni has been formed by the sedimentation of alluvial soil brought by the rivers flowing from the north during the monsoon floods, over centuries. Over two thirds of Banni have high levels of salinity. Banni, at one time was considered one of the finest and largest grasslands in Asia with more than 40 species of grasses. However, over time this diversity has been reduced to only about 10-15 species. Banni still continues to support a range of floral and faunal species. Seasonal wetlands in the area support a large number of migratory birds. Over 273 species of birds have been reported from Banni, out of which 107 are migratory species (GIDE 2002).

The primary residents of this area are the Maldharis (cattle breeders) or Baniyaras who all practice Islam. There are 15-20 Maldhari Muslim casts in Banni. The various sub-communities that inhabit the Banni include, Jats, Raysipotra, Saiyads, Mutava, Node, Hingorja, Bambha, Kurar, Sumra, Juneja, Bhatti, Halepotra, and Khatris. The Hindu

sub-communities are the Meghwals and Vadhas. There are several views surrounding the ancestry of the Banni Maldharis. One view is that that they were originally of Hindu/Rajput origin and subsequently converted to Islam. A contrary view suggests that the Maldhari Jats originated from the farmers of Iran. The physical appearance of this community seems to support this view. Research by German scholars suggests that the Jats were originally from Germany. Legend has it that German ships had crossed the sea where the Banni exists today. Circumstances forced them to stay in Banni and eventually settle there. A Jat tradition actually seems to support this theory. The Fakrani Jats in particular make an offering of a small boat to their relatives during the fair at Peer Savala Pir (a Jat religious place). It is hypothesized that this may be related to a similar German tradition.

Banni has 34 villages inhabited by approximately 5,500 families and a population of 29, 509 (2001 census). These villages are called *Jheels* that translates into 'places with potable water'.

Kachchh's Rich Livestock Diversity

Kachchh, with Banni as one of the largest natural grassland's in Asia is home to a considerable diversity of livestock that is uniquely adapted to the harsh living conditions of the area. Some of the key breeds are: Kankrej Cattle, Banni Buffalo, Kachchhi Goat, Kachchhi Camel, Marwari and Patanwadi Sheep. The livestock hold a key place in the economy of the region since it provides milk, milk products, meat, wool and draft power. In 2010, the Banni Buffalo was registered as India's 11th buffalo breed, a significant achievement, since this is indeed the first time that a breed developed and conserved by a local community has gained national official recognition.

www.sahjeevan.org
www.bannigrassland.org



4 | Banni: Changing Lives, Livelihoods and Landscapes

Banni has been formed from sediments deposited by the Indus and other rivers over centuries. It is believed that before the Kachchh earthquake of 1819, the river Indus flowed through the Banni and rice cultivation was common amongst local farmers. However the earthquake resulted in the river changing its course to flow through Sindh that is now located in Pakistan (Thacker 2002). There are several factors affecting the Banni grasslands. Although, sediments from rivers resulted in making Banni one of the finest grassland areas in Asia, the region is now drought prone and the pastoralists need to move out their cattle each time drought occurs. The main source of income for the pastoralists here comes from the sale of livestock, milk products, wool and handicrafts. However, it appears that the traditional livelihoods are changing from livestock breeding to livestock grazing⁴.

Invasion of *Prosopis juliflora* has considerably changed the landscape. This non native tree was planted here by the Gujarat Forest Department to combat salinity ingress and aridity in the region. A ban was actually imposed on the cutting of this tree in the 1980s. It covered about 10 per cent of the land area then. However, by the 1990s, it had spread over 40 per cent of the land. Concerned that this tree was causing the destruction of the local vegetation and degrading the grasslands, the state Forest Department lifted the ban on cutting in early 2004. *Prosopis* was used to make charcoal locally and it was hoped that besides clearing the area, cutting of this tree will enhance local livelihoods. However, this decision unfortunately backfired. Trees were cut down indiscriminately resulting in severe degradation of the habitat. The ban was re-imposed in 2008 (Bhatt et

al, 2011).

The earthquake of 2001 with its epicentre in Kachchh, changed landscapes and resulted in fatalities, damage and destruction. Post this disaster, global support for rehabilitation and reconstruction was tremendous. Several organizations were established during this period and many innovative approaches used towards the restoration of the region. As a result, local communities were exposed to a range of outside agencies and this has changed the perspective of these communities, both positively as well as negatively.

There are also several social factors that determine the access and use of these grasslands by the pastoralist community. Institutions established by the twenty two Maldhari pastoralist communities have regulated the access and use of the grasslands over the years. However this is not clear cut and there is continued ambiguity over access and use issues between the Forest Department, the Revenue Department and the Pastoralist Association. Conflicting issues on how this grassland should be used are prevalent. These include: conserving the grasslands for their unique biodiversity; an area for the production of charcoal that feeds the power plants that have come up in the region and finally to sustain the area for the livestock breeds and resulting use⁵.



Charcoal making from *Prosopis juliflora*

⁴<http://www.bannigrassland.org>

⁵<http://www.bannigrassland.org/>

5 | Hodka⁶

It is believed that the Hodka Jheel was established about 300 years ago by what is called the 'Halepotra' clan. Halepotra quite literally means the son or descendant of Halaji who is supposed to have migrated from the Sindh. He is said to have had seven sons. Out of these the descendants of the son Dero are believed to have settled in the villages of Hodka and Dumado. Harijans from the Sanjot clan also inhabit the village of Hodka. They are said to have come here from Marwad in Rajasthan. Hodka represents the heart of Banni and showcases the art, architecture, culture and lifestyle of the region. The Hodka Jheel has six hamlets (also called *vandhs*). 234 families with a total population of 854 people inhabit these hamlets. The typical architecture of this region is represented by the local structures called *bungas* where people live. These are circular mud structures with thatch roofs and are said to be the most appropriate for the harsh conditions that this region presents.

Some of Gujarat's finest embroidery and leatherwork comes from the Banni area. In contrast to the stark landscape or

perhaps to compensate for it, the embroidery is in bright vibrant colours and extremely intricate in nature. Women are involved in embroidery for themselves as well as for the market. It is a family tradition that is passed on from mother to daughter. Women from both the Muslim as well as the Harijan community are involved in embroidery but each distinct as representing their own culture. The lifestyle (particularly of the Meghwal community) is intricately entwined in cattle and leather craft. This is essentially a male craft. Music is also an inherent part of the culture of Banni. Traditional folk songs and the playing of traditional musical instruments is an important part of the Banni lifestyle.



Tradition of embroidery passed on from mother to daughter

⁶ Brochure on Hodka, Kachchh brought out under the UNDP project. Compiled and written by MansiAnand. Documentation support by PachchhamSetu

6 | The Genesis of Shaam-e-Sarhad at Hodka

In 2004, Hodka was shortlisted by the then District Collector, to be considered under the UNDP's ETP. Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS) was considered as the nodal agency for the same project, with support from Sahjeevan, an NGO that had been working in this region since 1991, earlier as the Janvikas Ecology Cell. Sahjeevan works closely with KMVS. Both organizations were very clear that the idea could be implemented only if the local community was agreeable to it. Thus emerged the idea of establishing a community-managed tourism initiative.

The Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan (KMVS) was established in 1989 with the primary objective of empowering rural women in the region. KMVS's mission was to achieve this through awareness raising and supporting local collectives. As KMVS grew, its mission broadened to include areas of ecological restoration, livelihood access and diversification, violence against women, reproductive health and the strengthening of local governance through Gram Panchayats. From a single collective of rural women, KMVS has evolved into a network of seven grassroots level organizations across the Kachchh district. This network includes women pastoralists, farmers, artisans, fisher folk, wage workers, musicians, women elected representatives, traditional birth attendants, and also single self-employed women.

<http://kmvs.org.in/>

Tourism was not something that either of the organizations had worked on earlier. However there was strong feeling that an initiative such as this could potentially help to revive in the local community a sense of pride for their culture and environment. Hodka was proposed as the location of this experiment for a number of reasons. The grasslands and the livestock for which this area was famous were both on the decline, and this was a cause for concern amongst the local community. More importantly, the people of Hodka had worked with both the organizations and there was a sense of trust and an openness to listen to new ideas.

At the very outset, when this initiative was proposed, the two organizations held a meeting with the *Gram Panchayat*. The original idea was to support community-based homestays in Hodka. However, this idea was not culturally or socially acceptable. As per the traditional norms, normally any guest visiting the village was kept in a room (*Baithak*) outside the household. There were intense discussions amongst all the stakeholders to see if something on these lines could be worked out. There was considerable scepticism to begin with. It was suggested that initially tented accommodation on a very small scale should be tried. Hodka had received several tents after the earthquake of 2001, many of them lying unused. It was decided to use these tents for the initial phase of the proposed tourism initiative. A site, an old dried-up pond that belonged to the *Jhuth Gram Panchayat* (representing all the 13 villages of the area) was selected for this initiative. This was planned as a trial/test run since the community was not completely convinced that this would work. The resort was named Shaam-e-Sarhad or quite literally, 'Evening at the Border'. The responsibility of the overall construction was given to Hunnarshala.

Hunnarshala came into being as a result of associations established after the earthquake of 2001 to help with reconstruction of habitats. The post-earthquake reconstruction saw the emergence of some remarkable knowledge of traditional building systems. Hunnarshala was an attempt to capture this knowledge and experience not only for the reconstruction process but also for long term sustainable development of the area. It was registered as an organization in 2003. Three themes are core to Hunnarshala's work: – i) how people are empowered to shape their own habitats; ii) how habitat solutions can become more environment friendly, sustainable and disaster safe; and iii) how local artisanal knowledge and skills can deliver high quality products.

<http://www.hunnarshala.org/>

The initial concept, in the testing phase was to establish a place for people to stay, and serve them the local cuisine to recreate an authentic experience of an evening in a local

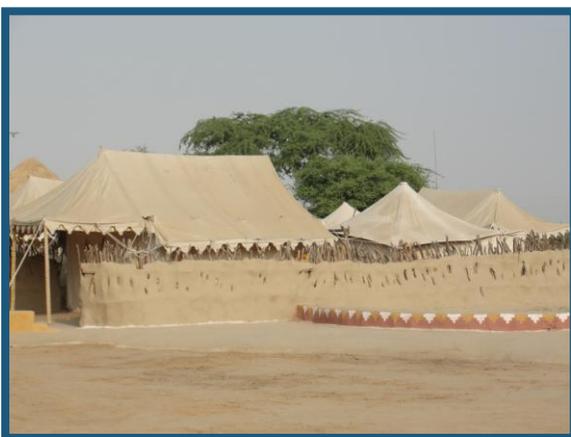
village. While tents were agreed upon, there was the issue of how they should be furnished from the inside. The concept of using earth and mud was discussed by Hunnarshala with the *Panchayat* members. There were a number of artisans in the villages who were comfortable building in mud. So the first step was making mud beds for the tents. The reaction of the locals was interesting. While they were comfortable with the idea of beds in mud, the concept of mud toilets was alien to them, since they did not have toilets at all. As a mid-way path, the compromise solution was quite remarkable. Toilets were designed tastefully, and were almost as luxurious as in any high-end resort, but built in mud. This even took tourists by surprise, since they did not expect luxury toilets in tents.

However, as Shaam-e-Sarhad opened for tourists and became more popular, the general feedback was to make available more permanent structures for accommodation. While considering the demand, the villagers were very clear that these structures should blend in with the landscape. Thus emerged the idea of permanent construction in mud rather than in concrete. This was appropriate as the region is known for its unique dwellings called *bungas*. *Bungas*, because of their construction, were some of the few structures that had withstood the 2001 earthquake. There was sense of pride within the community for having this traditional knowledge and using it to combat natural disasters. *Bungas* were also ideal structures to combat the extreme temperatures in the desert without the use of air-conditioning.

The community was also cognizant of the fact that tourists would actually come all the way specially to see these unique dwellings. There was a consensus within the community that these were the structures they wanted to build for the permanent construction at the resort. Firstly, because they were practical to construct, and also to give tourists a feel of how it would be to live in one. There was also an understanding that these structures should be easy to maintain and repair by the local community without any outside assistance. Each mud wall was also adorned with traditional paintings and artwork. A significant feature of the mud structures is that they have to be redone every year. This again is a community activity and gives people a chance to showcase new art while the walls are being redone. It is also an encouragement to the artisans to use their skills. Traditionally called *lipan*, the mud plastering is done by a group of women led by Ramaben who are called upon every year to



Bungas



Tents



Dining Area

carry out this task. The display of art on the walls of Shaam-e-Sarhad has encouraged the local people to be more innovative, and many have tried some of the new art forms used here in their own *bungas* (EQUATIONS 2008).

Once the accommodation was in place, some of the other elements for a successful tourism initiative were identified. These included building local capacity in the hospitality sector, training in management, finance, sanitation and hygiene etc.

Capacity Building

KMVS understood that for such a venture to take off and to sustain there was need for considerable capacity building, particularly in the hospitality sector, sanitation and hygiene etc. Contact was made with a tourism establishment called Desert Coursers in the Little Rann of Kutch that had been operating successfully in the area since 1984. The owner Dhanraj Mallik kindly sent his manager to train the local youth and stayed on there for several months until he felt that Shaam-e-Sarhad was ready to start operating for tourists. In the local dialect '*Bhumiyas*' are people who are well acquainted with and understand their '*bhumi*' or land. Youth were trained as interpreters and guides to accompany tourists and appropriately called '*Bhumiyas*'. Training is an ongoing activity and continues with each new season. The focus still remains on local youth.

Management

The *Gram Panchayat* set up a Tourism Committee that is directly responsible for the management of the resort. This committee has representatives from all the 13 villages of the *Hodka Panchayat*. The Tourism Committee still holds regular meetings to discuss pending issues. Shaam-e-Sarhad opened for tourists in 2005. There was considerable hand holding, both by KMVS and UNDP through 2006 and 2007. Financial support for any community-based tourism initiative in the initial years is crucial. As part of the ETP, Shaam-e-Sarhad

received substantial finances. INR 20,00,000/- was allocated for each of the 36 sites (EQUATIONS 2008). The Tourism Committee with the initial support of KMVS ensured that these funds were spent as and when required and with transparency and accountability.

Until 2012, there was a coordinator from KMVS available for support, and meetings were held at the end of every season for feedback, evaluation and adaptive management. The initiative was in the early years owned by the community, but with help in the management. Since 2012, Shaam-e-Sarhad is owned and managed entirely by the community. The resort itself has 14 full time employees who are local including the manager. The season at the resort is from October to March. 50% of the salary continues to be given to the employees even during the off season. Local youth employed at the resort go back to their traditional occupation as *Maldharis* during this time. The



first amount earned as profit was INR 75,000/- which was interestingly spent on inviting the renowned musician Sharafat Khan from Rajasthan to sing at the resort. The income from Shaam-e-Sarhad has grown from INR 100,000/- in 2005-2006 to INR 45,00,000/- in the year 2012-2013. The Tourism Committee decides how this income should be spent. Much of it goes towards maintenance of the resort and salaries. Money is also spent towards development within the villages depending on need. For example, if one of the villages needs pipes for the supply of water,

then funds from tourism are utilized for this purpose. Funds are also directed towards the cattle fair (*Pashu Mela*) held in the region.



Members of Tourism Management Committee

7 | Shaam-e-Sarhad Today

Shaam-e-Sarhad has been successfully running now for nine years. At present there are six two-person tents, four *bungas* and two family rooms. All these have attached toilets. Three meals are part of the tariff. All meals served feature traditional local cuisine. Banni is the land of milk and milk products, and meals are replete with milk derivatives, including local clarified butter (*ghee*) and buttermilk. A special is the pearl millet roti (*Bajara no rotlo*) with *ghee* and *gud* (jaggery molasses). Evenings at the resort resound with traditional music performances by local musicians under the open sky.

How Bajro Got its Name

Legend has it that Pearl Millet or bajro came to Kachchh around the 10th Century but was used only as horse feed. The Sama Jadejas ruled at that time and their most revered monarch was Lakho Fulani. Lakho felt that pearl millet could be used for human consumption as well. He ordered rotis to be made and these were fed to an old ailing woman. The woman ate the roti and not only did she relish the taste, but it also made her feel better. Pearl millet was thus given the name bajro meaning 'Ba' as in old women and 'jaro' to digest⁷.

⁷Brochure on Hodka, Kachchh brought out under the UNDP project. Compiled and written by MansiAnand. Documentation support by PachchhamSetu

Shaam-e-Sarhad is ideally located as a tourist destination. Villages that are a repository of different arts and crafts surround the resort. This includes the beautiful embroidery, leather, clay, metal, mud and woodwork. Tours are organized by the resort to these villages to see people work on these crafts, and also get a feel of their lives and livelihoods. A unique structure to capture and manage rainwater can also be seen here. Called *Virdas* in the local language, these are shallow pits dug by the Maldharis after studying the flow of water during the monsoon. These depressions are located just above the salty groundwater, but are dug in such a way that the saline water does not contaminate the sweet water. A mere ten inches of rain is adequate to provide sweet water from these structures for two to three months, after which the water gets saline with the steady rise of groundwater.

For the naturalist this area presents some unique biodiversity. The nearby 'white desert' is a sight worth seeing as is *Karo Dungar* (Black Hill) that is the highest point in the region. The resort facilitates visits to Chhari Dhand the nearby wetland. Chhari Dhand is the largest seasonal wetland in the area with an area of about 10 sq km. It supports a rich bird life, and over 50,000 birds of 55 different species have been recorded from this wetland.

Shaam-e-Sarhad is being marketed through a dedicated website (<http://www.hodka.in/>) that was designed with the help of KMVS.



Local Youth Trained in the Hospitality Sector at the Resort

There is also a tie-up with tour operators in Ahmedabad to further help with the marketing. Shaam-e-Sarhad is now well known through word of mouth. There are several tour operators (many from overseas) who have been bringing groups for several years now. There is also a dedicated person in Bhuj who manages reservations for the resort. Shaam-e-Sarhad is the winner of the 2010 Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) Gold Award for Best Rural Tourism Project.

8 | Impact of the Hodka Initiative: The Larger Context

The establishment of Shaam-e-Sarhad and its management gave the local community the confidence that it could actually own and manage its own tourism initiative. The success of this enterprise motivated the people to engage with/work on other livelihood-related activities as well. One of these was the formation of the *Banni Pashu Uchherak Maldhari Sangathan* (BPUMS) or the Banni Breeders' Association. This organization was formed in 2008 with support from Sahjeevan, with the primary objective of conservation and improvement of the Banni cattle breed. This includes the conservation of the grasslands where the animals graze and establishment of an organized milk market for the region. The wider objective was to ensure the availability of water and animal feed, support for systematic animal marketing under the overarching principle of the preservation of local culture and tradition. The Breeders' Association also initiated the process of characterization and developing the breed descriptor for the Banni breed with help from the local NGOs and the Agricultural University. These efforts resulted in the recognition of the Banni Buffalo as India's 11th breed. A key activity of the BPUMS is the annual cattle fair or the *Banni Pashu Mela* that is held primarily to provide a system for animal trade at the local level. The *mela* also provides a platform for all discussions relevant to the Banni region.

Some of the funds derived from the tourism, help support the cattle fair. The Breeders' Association has also launched a movement called *Banni ko Banni Rehne Do* (Let Banni Remain Banni) in protest against the Forest Department Working Plan for the region⁸.

It was also in 2005, the year that Shaam-e-Sarhad opened, that the then Chief Minister of Gujarat, and now Prime Minister, Narendra Modi visited Kachchh. He felt that this region could be promoted in a big way for tourism. This was the origin of the Rann Utsav or the Desert Festival that is held in the White Desert of Kachchh every year from December to March. A tented city of over 500 tents is set up especially for the Rann Utsav. While, in many ways, Shaam-e-Sarhad set the trend to showcase the culture and traditions of the Kachchh region, the Desert Festival has taken it to a much larger scale. The campaign for promotion of tourism in Gujarat, with Amitabh Bachchan as the brand ambassador, has added to the visibility and popularity of this region.



⁸ www.banni.in



Tented City at Rann Utsav

9 | Challenges

Setting Standards

The scale of operation at Shaam-e-Sarhad is still fairly small owing to limited accommodation, and thus a limited number of tourists. However the success of this initiative can be gauged from the fact that it is completely booked for the season, many months in advance. But the region is now opening up for tourism in a big way, and with the Rann Utsav, the number of tourists visiting the area has grown exponentially. This is going to put demands on Shaam-e-Sarhad for more accommodation. Two family rooms have already been added, and there is now discussion about more *bungas* replacing the existing tents. In case of expansion in scale and activity, there thus always the danger of compromising on standards. For example, in time to come it is possible that the completely mud architecture could get replaced by concrete.

The success of Shaam-e-Sarhad has also spurred many other similar initiatives in the area. Unfortunately, not all follow the same parameters that Shaam-e-Sarhad has set. A total of 50 rooms are now available in Hodka itself. In appearance these rooms may look

like those at Shaam-e- Sarhad, but *bungas* are now being constructed in concrete, and the same standards of cleanliness are often not maintained. A classic example of what could happen is the resort of Dhordo, adjacent to the tent city of the Rann Utsav. Inspired by the traditional architecture this resort has rooms styled as *bungas*, but equipped with air-conditioning and flat screen television sets in each room.

One way to guard against such eventualities is to develop and lay down a strict Code of Conduct. It may be hard to ensure standards in the entire Kachchh area, but it is possible for Shaam-e-Sarhad to take the lead and set standards for tourism in Hodka to begin with.



Changing Times: New resorts coming up

This is going to be a challenge, but if worked upon now, then this will be indeed a first for the country.

Women's Involvement

One of the key objectives of UNDP's ETP was the empowerment of women. This aspect has indeed been a challenge in the Banni, particularly given the social and cultural context. This is despite the fact that the lead NGO, KMVS has been working with the women of this region for several years. Women were in fact part of the Tourism Management Committee in the initial stage but were gradually phased out. Initially, food at the resort also came from household kitchens, primary catered to by the women. But this changed once the resort got its own kitchen where the cooking is now done by men. A group of women (Ramaben and her team) come every year to re-do the mud plastering at the resort, a highly specialized skill only they possess. Also, all the exquisite embroidery that is sold at the resort and in the surrounding villages is done by the women, but sold by men. Women thus remain an invisible component of this initiative. This is not from lack of trying, but the reality that social norms dictate in this region are very strong and hard to change.

10 | Key Factors for Success/Core Values

Shaam-e-Sarhad stands out as a successful initiative amongst the 36 projects that were supported through the UNDP/MoT projects. This is despite the fact that tourism was indeed a new concept introduced to the local community. This can be attributed to several factors. The primary one being the presence of effective local NGOs (KMVS and Sahjeevan) that had been working in the area for several years and the trust placed in them by the local communities. This was a crucial element. It is because of the rapport that these organizations have had with the community that they were able to introduce the idea of tourism. ETP projects were routed through the District Collector, who also was extremely supportive and dynamic. He was able to support the project here despite that

fact that the community had rejected the idea of homestays and opted to have a resort away from the villages. It is evident that the Collector understood the local context and was able to defend this decision. The success of this initiative must also be attributed to the local community who was open to experiment and take this forward. However, this would not have been possible without the many discussions that both the NGO as well as the District Collector had with the community. Importantly, there was a feeling of inclusion since community views were heard and also implemented.

The gradual success of the project reiterated in people the pride in their local culture and traditions. What was commendable was the fact that at no point, despite contrary feedback, did the Tourism Committee and the community at large feel the need to dilute or change anything in what was being served or practiced at the resort. The food served, for example, continues to be local and vegetarian, and tourists seem to relish it without feeling the need for anything different.

It is unreasonable to expect any community-based tourism endeavour to succeed without adequate training and capacity building. This is one aspect that was addressed at the very beginning of the project and played an important part in setting the standards. However, such training needs to be an ongoing activity, and refreshed at the beginning of every new season. For any tourism initiative it is crucial that high standards of cleanliness, sanitation and hygiene are maintained. It is creditable that Shaam-e-Sarhad has been able to do this, thanks to the vigilance of the Tourism Management Committee, the training imparted to the employees and the initial support given by the NGOs.

It is clear that community's vision for Hodka has gone beyond just tourism. The success of tourism at Hodka has empowered the community, and urged them to use the same cohesiveness in a larger context of livelihoods and natural resource management. Thus the emergence of the Animal Breeders'

Association and the fight to maintain the Banni area as it is. Extraneous factors such as the aggressive marketing of Kachchh as a tourism destination and the Rann Utsav have also helped in bringing Hodka into the limelight as a rural tourism destination.

11 | Shaam-e-Sarhad: Challenging the Dominant Tourism Model

Traditionally, tourism is predominantly associated with places of historic or cultural interest or of natural beauty. The attempt of the ETP was to consciously move away from the traditional tourism model to an experiential one. It attempted to highlight the fact that there was more to tourism than five star hotels. The international traveller now wants to experience and give back to the destination more than he takes from it. In India, what better than to focus on rural India that has much to offer in terms of art, culture and heritage? This was the idea that the ETP took forward. However, adequate infrastructure and capacities are needed if rural tourism has to be promoted in India in its true form since this is still a relatively new concept. The ETP was also a major paradigm shift from the kind of tourism projects generally supported by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. The MoT's focus in the past has been on support to infrastructure in the form of building of hotels and resorts. The overall framework of the ETP project that focused on processes rather than on products, and that placed communities at the helm of management and decision making in tourism, is in itself a digression from the norm (EQUATIONS 2008). The ETP, further links tourism to development. Shaam-e-Sarhad has very appropriately shown how community-based tourism can empower people to take the agenda of conservation and livelihoods further.

The dominant model of tourism in the country is one where outsiders (be it small entrepreneurs or large hotel chains) build,

own and manage enterprises. Local communities are rarely made part of these initiatives nor do they benefit from them. The Shaam-e-Sarhad model is unique in many ways, primarily because it is both community-owned and managed. There are examples in the country where tourism is community-based, but the enterprise may not necessarily be owned by the community, only managed by them. What has made a difference in Hodka is the fact that communities think of Shaam-e-Sarhad as its own. It is this ownership that has enabled the community to plan for a wider context and be able to direct funds from tourism in the supporting the unique grasslands that are home to them.

It must however be emphasized that Shaam-e-Sarhad is a small enterprise, promoting niche tourism as opposed to mass tourism that focuses on the heritage of the Banni area. It will appeal to the tourist who wants to have a first-hand experience of rural life. Its success can be partially attributed to the fact that it is small in scale and operation and can thus operate at the level of each individual tourist. If this is scaled up to cater to mass tourism, there is the risk that it will lose its exclusivity and unique selling point. Shaam-e-Sarhad could be considered a 'high end' resort. The tariff is INR 5200/- for two persons inclusive of all meals for the *bungas* and INR 3200/- for two persons and all meals included for the tented accommodation. This is in itself creditable because the community has over the years been able to maintain the standards and attract tourists. Rural tourism does primarily attract more foreign tourists wanting to experience 'first hand' rural India. However, one bad experience can result in the loss of credibility of the initiative. Many tourists today seek to try community-based tourism destinations and most of them access places through 'word of mouth'. To this end, Shaam-e-Sarhad seems to have established its credibility. This is further evident from the fact that many of the same foreign tour operators bring new groups of tourists here every year.

The Shaam-e-Sarhad model is unique in many ways, primarily because it is both community-owned and managed.

In terms of being considered an alternative, the project has helped bring social well-being through the promotion and sale of handicrafts and income from the resort itself. The question however remains as to how much transformation a project such as this can really bring to deep rooted social inequities. The youth in this case have found a new livelihood opportunity. Women, however as mentioned earlier still remain invisible but do gain from the sale of the embroidery that they exclusively create. The larger social context does not allow women more visibility.

However, it is crucial to point out that the project has brought to the larger community a sense of ownership and pride in something they consider their 'own'. They are indeed proud to be able to make decisions as how the income from tourism should be spent and also in the larger context make decisions on how to manage the local ecosystem. Indirectly, the project has also helped address the issue of conserving the Banni grasslands as also the indigenous cattle breeds thus helping to bring ecological stability in the region.

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