DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES RELATED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF HOMESTAY TOURISM IN SRI LANKA

Namal Wijesundara
Lecturer
Department of Tourism Management
Faculty of Management Studies
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka
namalsusl@yahoo.com

Athula C. Gnanapala
Senior Lecturer
Department of Tourism Management
Faculty of Management Studies
Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka
atmsusl@gmail.com

Abstract:
Homestay is becoming popular among the tourists as an alternative tourism product which gives more authentic experiences about the local culture of the visiting country. It is a form of tourism that is closely related to the nature, culture, customs and traditions of the local community. Homestay provides the tourists foods and lodging and also arrange different activities related to the local culture as a means of education, entertainment and experiences. The developing countries are specially interesting to diversity their tourism offerings through community participation to attract more tourists and deliver the benefits to the rural areas. Homestay is considered as an alternative strategy to improve the socio-economic conditions of the rural areas. However, it is evidenced that there is no proper mechanism to develop the Homestay in Sri Lanka as a form of tourism product. Therefore, this paper is mainly to discuss the Difficulties and challenges associated with the Homestay development and operations. The study is carried out as a qualitative study using a variety of contact methods that consist of personal interviews, focused group discussions and document review. Two case studies were conducted at two home stay villages such as Padavigampola in Kegalle district and Seelogama in Ratnapura district. Homestay tourism, as a means of alternative tourism product, is not operating successfully in Sri Lanka due to certain difficulties and challenges i.e. misusing the concept, lack of youth participation, passive community initiations, lack of community leadership, lack of formal management system, lack of industry awareness, lack of facilities, lack of marketing & promotional skills, lack of networking, and communication problems were highlighted by community members. From the relevant authorities perspective, changing community attitude, political interference, slow implementation were highlighted as challenges for home-stay operations in Sri Lanka. However, homestay is a potential segment for Sri Lankan tourism. Therefore, the proper planning and management and the active involvement of all the key stakeholders are essential to develop the concept successfully. However, the government should play the key role actively and honestly.

Keywords: Homestay Tourism; Community Participation; Difficulties & Challenges; Economic Benefits
1. Introduction

Homestay is becoming popular among the tourism as an alternative tourism product which gives more authentic experience about the local culture of the country in which the tourists make their visits. It is very closely related to nature, culture and local custom, traditions and planned to attract the tourists who stay with local community get different cultural experiences and enjoyment. The Home-stay provides the tourists accommodation, food and beverages and different activities as a means of education, entertainment and experiences. The destinations are also want to diversity their tourism offerings through community based tourism activities like Home-stay to attract more tourists in order get the maximum economic benefits to the country.

Tourism industry in Sri Lanka mainly depends on mass tourism and slowly moving towards alternative tourism concepts. As a country Sri Lanka has identified the problems and issues related to the mass tourism like seasonality, economic leakages, domination of the international and large scale firms, socio- cultural and environmental issues etc (Bandara, 2003). The country consists with diverse tourist attractions in addition to beautiful beaches, like historical, cultural, natural, heritage etc which are real assets of the community based tourism. However, it is noticed the country use largely the scenic beauty and tangible cultural resources for the tourist satisfaction.

Many countries use natural and rural areas as a pull strategy to attract tourists and also use tourism as a development strategy to uplift the economic standard of the rural community through empowering them to create their own economic sources. The country takes many efforts to diversify its product offerings to target different market segments to go for the target of 2.5 millions of tourists by 2016 (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2011). The rural areas consist with many different tourist attractions related to natural and cultural heritage. Hence, there is a great potential to divert the local economy towards tourism though the capacity building and empowering programs. Tourism will help to generate income and employment opportunities, improve the infrastructure facilities, enhance the quality of life and to protect the natural and cultural resources.

Home-stay tourism is a sustainable community based tourism concept and the local community can get direct benefits and the money remain within the local community and also improve the visitor experiences and the satisfaction. The diverse parties like academics, NGOs, community and government organizations want to use tourism as a strategy to improve the economic standards through empowering local community to start their own business ventures. Other objectives are pushing tourism towards rural areas, rebuilding rural socio-economy from declining agricultural based traditional livelihood, protect & promote e traditional cultural values & systems and to ensure the sustainable development.

The word Home-stay has provided different meaning to different parties in Sri Lanka and based on their views we can identify three major parties who involve in Home-stay development in the country such as private entrepreneurs, national tourism organization (Si Lanka Tourism Development Authority) and the academics and researchers. The private entrepreneurs who themselves called as Home-stay operators have attracted tourists and provided foods and lodgings in their accommodation units through a longer period, some of them even practiced in 1970’s. Those operators allow tourists to learn about the way of life of the Sri Lankans/customs & traditions/cooking etc also have arranged village tours on demand of the tourists.

After ending the thirty years old terrorism problem in the country in 2009 the tourist arrival has increased gradually and the existed accommodation capacity was very limited to meet the increasing demand. Therefore, the government wants to find alternative accommodation units to meet the
increasing demand and they mistakenly defined the word Home-stay. According to them, those are supplementary accommodation units and really provide B&B facilities, required to provide luxury facilities like big hotels and the benefits goes to the businessmen. The third concept proposed by the academics and researchers and focuses the typical natural and cultural resources of the villages to provide lively experience and the village move as a one group towards one vision. The concept manages and operates by a Community Based Organization (CBO) with the support of the all villagers. The tourists come and stay in local houses and provide local foods and beverages and other necessary facilities. Also, design special programs to learn about local culture, customs & traditions to give wider knowledge and experiences and ensure the sustainability and the expected satisfaction of the tourists. The core concept is that the tourists should accept the local culture in which they stay and behave accordingly.

However, practically we cannot see the successful Home-stay operations in Sri Lanka and receive a less number of tourists annually even though we have resources and capacity to attract a large number of tourists. Therefore, the paper discuss, first, the problems and issues associated with the Home-stay development and operations, second, the steps and strategies that have taken by the government promote the concept. Finally, explore the attitudes and perceptions of the Homestay operators and to suggest the best approach to popularize and promote the concept. In addition to that, the paper makes attempts to conceptualize the concept though the previous studies to suggest a suitable definition related Sri Lankan context.

2. Literature Review

Home-stay considers as a lodging system and rising economic activity in the tourism industry (Yong, 2004). It has been gaining the attraction of tourists who expect to interact and link with the host culture, lifestyle, social system and specially community (Che Leh & Hamzah, 2012). The definition of the home-stay concept is always depend with the situations and conditions of each countries involved with it (Hamzah, 2009). Generally, home-stay concept is a type of accommodation or certain type of lodging facility where tourists have chance to stay and live with the host family where visitors have great opportunity to observe and experience the daily life of that particular family (Hussin, 2008). At the beginning of home-stay concept it was identified as an alternative place where people selected to spend their vacation. It started in late 1970’s in Europe. Different countries have given different meanings for the home-stay concept (Yong, 2004). In Australia, home-stay concept interpreting as lodging for international academic students. It further explained that students from other countries can accommodate with a local family until they graduate and it is an ideal setting for the foreign students to expose to the local culture and language from within the intimate and safe family surrounding. It is very much clear that different countries have given different definitions for the home-stay concept, but the given experience is same. Mohd Zaki (2011), has explained these variances by using below table.

The community based tourism (CBT) concept is new addition to the tourism industry and it has close bond with Home stay concept (Iryany, 2010). As Kunjuraman & Hussin (2013) revealed, CBT stresses direct involvement of the host community in tourism activities and it will empower the local communities in different aspects such as social, economic, and political. The real CBT projects get local people’s involvement directly in tourism development project. According to Mann (2000), CBT always encourage the host community to work together or to involve actively with tourism developers to get the maximum benefits from the tourism projects which are taking place within their region. Mostly, CBT projects are taking place in the rural areas which are enriched with natural resources. Home-stay programme is one of the best option to get active involvement of local people for tourism projects (Hamzah, 2009). In the Home-stay programme, visitors will accommodate with
local family for a short period of time and they are exposed to the local traditions, culture, believes, and way of life which bring new and unique experience for tourists (Kumar, et al. 2012). As per Hatton (1999) revealed, another benefit of the home-stay tourism is that it has stimulated local community and opened up their minds. It further says that Home-stay tourism supported to develop and enhance the socio-economic level of the host community if they seriously get involved in it.

Table 1: Home-stay concept in different countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Existing concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Agricultural home stay, Educational Home stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Cultural home-stay, Heritage home-stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Farm stay, Academic stay with locals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Educational Home stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>Leisure stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Farm stay, Cottage Home stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippine</td>
<td>Cultural Home stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Student home stay, volunteer Home stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Cultural Home stay, Leisure Home stay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mohd Zaki et al. (2011)

Even though Home-stay tourism gives diverse benefits to the host community, stakeholders always face diverse difficulties when they are practically implementing it. Some scholars have explored that home-stay operators have been facing numerous challenges when they practically implement home-stay projects (Ashikin & Kalsom, 2010). Further they revealed that there are mainly two types of challenges namely “Internal challenges” and “external challenges” and both these challenges may negatively affect on the success of community led home-stay project. As Ashikin & Kalsom (2010) revealed, Internal challenges refers to as any challenges that arising within the home-stay operators and host community that can be managed with specific measurement as the solution. Further, they explained External challenges as any difficulties arising beyond the control of the host community or home-stay operators. Ashikin & Kalsom (2010) has discussed the Internal and External challenges which are facing by home-stay operators and has summarized in the table 2.

Table 2: Internal & External challenges of Home-stay

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Challenges</th>
<th>External Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unbalanced demography</td>
<td>Misconception of Home-stay programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive community</td>
<td>Method of payment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Problems</td>
<td>Exploitation by external parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal organizational structure</td>
<td>Inefficient Networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over-commercialization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts in community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompetent community leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of creativity &amp; entrepreneurship skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ashikin & Kalsom, 2010
Other than these challenges, Bhan and Singh (2013) revealed that poor infrastructure facilities, Lack of skilled human resources, lack of legal regulations for home-stay operations, Lack of marketing & promotional tactics, Poor coordination among different tourism stake holders with home stay operations, less awareness regarding conservation of natural and cultural resources, Improper resource management system and poor maintenance of security and facilities existing are the major challenges that current home-stay operators are facing.

Table 3: Other Challenges of Home-stay

| Poor Infrastructure facilities       | - Poor road conditions  
|                                    | - Transportation problems  
|                                    | - Electricity  
|                                    | - Lack of healthcare  
|                                    | - Lack of communication facility  
| Lack of skilled human resources    | - Guides  
|                                    | - Entrepreneurs  
|                                    | - Hospitality professionals  
|                                    | - Lack of educational institutes  
| Lack of legal regulations          | - Registration of home-stay  
|                                    | - Booking of home-stay  
| Lack of Marketing & Promotions      | - Poor marketing network  
|                                    | - Insufficient funds  
| Poor ordinances                    | - Government bodies  
|                                    | - Tourism intermediaries  
|                                    | - Non-government bodies  
| Less awareness                     | - Conservation  
|                                    | - Upgrading  
| Improper Management                | - Physical resources  
|                                    | - Human resources  
|                                    | - Facilities  

Source: Bhan and Singh (2013)

Methodology:

The study is carried out as a qualitative study using a variety of contact methods consisting of personal interviews, focused group interviews and discussions. The use of these methods allowed for triangulation that enabled the researchers to examine where the data converged and, in turn, provide credibility for the findings (Bowen, 2009; Denzin, 2006). Two case studies were conducted at available two home stay villages such as Padavigampola in Kegalle district and Seelogama in Ratnapura district. Both villages were situated in Sabaragamuwa province of Sri Lanka. As the primary data collection methods personal interviews and focused group discussions were carried out with the homestay tourism operators, officers of the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, provincial tourism authorities, travel agents and academics.

The convenience sampling technique was used to select the respondents because it was relatively easy to determine appropriate respondents however it is important to note that the participants cannot be considered to representative of a target population. Caution needs to be applied in making statistical inferences from this sample (Kitchenham & Pfleeger, 2002). The interviews were guided by a set of pre-determined questions about the Homestay tourism operations. The main
The objective of interviews was to identify the main issues and problems faced by the different stakeholder which developing, functioning and promoting the Homestay tourism in Sri Lanka. Content analysis was employed to derived the research findings.

4 Case Analysis

4.1 Case Analysis I – Padavigampola Community Tourism Village

Padavigampola is a beautiful rural village, comprised with diverse tourist attractions such as rural community with the customs and traditions, lush tropical vegetations, paddy fields, mountain, water streams, caves and archaeological monuments, situated in Pinnawala of the Kegalle district. The Dolman (Gal Messa) and Caves on the mountain top are possible landmark for history of the village. World famous Pinnawala Elephant Orphanage is situated very close to this village and it also brings more added value for this traditional village. In addition to that many other attractions are situated within one hour drive from this place including one of the famous world heritage sites, temple of the tooth relic in Kandy.

In Padavigampola, 122 families are living with nearly 610 people. Major income source comes from agriculture and 78 families are mainly depend on it. Majority are cultivating paddy in addition to that coconut, rubber, vegetables, fruits and spices etc. are growing there well. The remaining families are getting income through government, private and self-employments.

The village is an ideal place for those who want to experience and explore the countryside beauty and tranquillity, traditional farming and cultivation, traditional livelihoods, typical village customs and the natural beauty of the environment. At present the village is prepared as a Homestay Tourism destination. The attitudes of residents towards tourists and the impact of tourism is one of the most important factors in tourism development. Negative community attitudes may be block tourism development (Inskeep, 1991, Gunn, 2002, Hall, 2000).

The concept of the first ever homestay tourism village Padavigampola came to the Sri Lankan vocabulary through the Tourism Development Master Plan of Sabaragamuwa province (Sabaragamuwa Province Tourism Master Plan, 2010) which is proposed by the tourism academics with the experience earned though the Malaysian homestay programmes.

The Ministry of Tourism in Sabaragamuwa Provincial Council and the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka worked collaboratively to develop this village. The provincial council provided the financial supports and the university contributed with providing the concept and other technical assistance to develop the village. However, the starting point of the homestay tourism development was more difficult.

We faced more difficulties to explain the concept to the villagers as well as to the officers of the provincial council, however, the officers were positive and interested about the concept (pers. comm, Academic 1).

At the beginning most of the villagers refuse to contribute for the homestay development programme, they were fear about tourists. Therefore, we faced difficulties to convince them to get their support (pers. comm, Tourism Officer 1).

In rural community tourism like evil, most of the people think about the negative impacts of it. When the word tourism come out, people imagine the sun bathing figures of the tourists due to the mass tourism concentration during the past. Therefore, usually rural community bear negative attitudes and perception about tourism and its operations.
We thought that when tourists come to our village, the behaviour patterns of the tourists, for examples, smoking, drugs, alcohols and fashion etc will be imitated by our people. The village culture will change and the harmony will also lose (pers. comm, Villager 1).

When we were asked by the provincial council to participate for the homestay tourism and provide accommodation for unknown tourists we feel bad. We thought they need more luxury facilities, food and beverages and other requirements, Therefore we had less interesting about the programme (pers. comm, Villager 3).

Initially many villagers had a negative attitude about tourism development in the village and therefore, they were reluctant to participate for the project. Therefore, the Sabaragamuwa university and the provincial council got together and arranged few awareness programs to explain the concept and the potential benefits of homestay tourism. Further, the provincial council developed the infrastructure facilities and provided more other public facilities to this village. After that gradually they changed their attitudes and nearly 25 families were willing to participate for the homestay programme (pers. comm, Gramaniladari (Govt. officer), Padavigampola).

After that the villagers actively participated for the homestay development programme with more positive hopes. The villagers improved the facilities of their houses, develop new toilets, arrange the home gardens nicely, participated for the programmes arranged by the local authorities to improve the public facilities of the village and awareness programmes etc. In addition to that, the skills development training programmes were conducted such as guest handling, food hygiene and safety, safety and security requirements, first aids, information technology etc.

Through the capacity building and awareness programmes the community participation increased gradually and the government also deliver more benefits to the village. The main motive of the community was the to gain economic benefits through tourism. Through the discussions the community highlighted that they seek more economic benefits though tourism development in their village.

We were through to participate for the Homestay programme to get an extra income though tourism activities. We mainly depend on farming activities and it is seasonal the tourism help us to increase our family income......... and assume it may help us to enhance our living condition....... (pers. comm, Villager 5).

Padavigampola is a typical rural village and the major income source is farming and it seasonal and affect for many weather changes, therefore getting less income. As a solution, the villagers want find alternative income sources; they believe through tourism they can earn an extra income, can give good education and required facilities for their children and finally improved living condition of the villagers. This was the major reasons that created the interest towards tourism and Homestay programme.

On the other hand, the villagers believe if they participate for home stay tourism the government will support to improve the infrastructure and other community facilities. Therefore, they had a positive perception through tourism development and the community will receive benefits directly and indirectly.

The provincial council is more interest to develop the tourism in our village they helped us to develop the main access road of the village and helped to develop the village temple so we believe in future too we can get more benefits (pers. comm, Villager 9).
Women unemployment was another reason for the community involvement for the homestay development project. In homestay the women has to play a major role like preparation of foods, housekeeping, caretaking etc.

Through the initial awareness programme conducted by the university and the provincial council, I believed the female can practice this sustainable concept without having many problems. Therefore, it is more suitable for ladies like me to get an extra income for the family (pers. comm, Villager 8).

Community participation for the homestay tourism development was a major challenge, however, though various strategies it was possible to get the active involvement of the villagers. With the support of the Sabaragamuwa provincial council and the Sabaragamuwa university villagers developed necessary products and services to offer for the tourists to attract and satisfy them. However, at the end villagers were unable to attract a sufficient number of tourists since home stay village is not declared open officially by the government.

We improved the facilities of our houses to attract and accommodate tourists, however still we have not received tourists as mentioned by the officers of the provincial council (pers. comm, Villager 10).

The villagers developed and improved the quality of their houses and other facilities spending their personal money, however they were unable to receive tourist as mentioned by the provincial council and the university, therefore the interest is gradually decreasing and also frustrated and the young people are leaving for other activities (pers. comm, Samurdhi (Govt.) Officer).

To solve the issue and promote the tourism in Padavigampola, the first thing is to do is the official opening of this village, the provincial council should involve it as the responsible govt. body. Then we can involve to develop a proper promotional mechanism give publicity in order to attract the tourists regularly (pers. comm, Academic 2).

However, the project has brought physical developments to the village. The main access road of the village is developed therefore the villagers can travel and walk without any problem. In addition to that a community centre and a new building for the temple has been constructed by the provincial council. And also local government has provided many other supports and assistance to the villagers to develop homestay tourism village and therefore, the people are happy about that.

Though the tourism project is not successful to attract tourists to the village we are happy because it helps to get the attention of the government and to improve the infrastructure facilities of the village (per. comm, Villager 7).

It is identified that the community of the village still bear positive hopes about the homestay programme also few other people are interesting to join for the project. The main thing is to do is officially open the village with a proper marketing programs with networking with different parties like travel agents, tour guides and tourism related government an non-government organizations. However, the relevant and responsible officers of the provincial council is silent.

We have spent a large amount of money to develop the homestay project and to improve infrastructure facilities. Now the project is ok and we want to open it. We as the officers did all the necessary things to develop the village however to open the village officially the political leadership is needed, however it is delaying day by day we also know that it is a problem for the villagers (pers. comm, Tourism Officer of the Provincial Council).
All the parties those who involved for the homestay development project in Padavigampola now in a dilemma regarding the future of the project. There is a great potential to develop this place since two famous tourists attractions are situated very close this site i.e. Elephant Orphanage and the Pinnawala Zoo. On the other hand product is ready people have positive attitudes and officers are interesting, therefore the political authority should give a leadership to open this project.

**Case Analysis II: Seelogama Community Tourism Village**

Seelogama is located very close to the famous tourist destination Belihuloya in Rathnapura District by the side of Badulla-Colombo highway, 158 Km from Colombo. Presently, 74 families are live in this picturesque village and the majority are farmers and cultivate paddy and vegetables. Many tourist attractions are situated surrounding areas including the way of life and village culture, mountain range, Samanalawewa reservoir, Belihuloya river, paddy fields, vegetable gardens, Horthain Plane National Park, comfortable climate etc. Therefore, the suitability this village to be developed as a Homestay tourism village has been identified by the Sabaragmuwa university and Sabaragamuwa provincial council and the provincial council together.

However, it was very hard to get the community involvement for the project. Therefore, conducted several awareness programs and spent money to develop the infrastructure and other facilities of the village to motivate and to get the attention of the villagers. As a result of that the villagers accept the concept and worked collaboratively with the provincial council and the university to developed the homestay tourism project. As highlighted by:

*Since we are living adjoining to Beihulpya, a famous tourism resort, tourism was not a new thing for us, we have seen their both positive and negative behaviours. However, we had a little doubt, when tourists come and stay our village their bad habits may imitate by our younger generation. Also, we had positive ideas about the positive economic benefits of tourism.* (pers. comm, Chairman, CBO).

*Involvement of the provincial council and the university, for the tourism development activities, remove our doubt and build confidence among us. Also the development of the village and provision of other facilities create positive attitudes about the tourism development in our village* (pers. comm, Villager 3).

*Initially 15 families were selected for the homestay project however it was necessary to improve the facilities of those houses, specially the washroom facilities. The villagers said that we do not have money to spent for those activities. Therefore we discussed with a government bank and arrange a long scheme for those villagers* (pers. comm, Government Officer).

*The provincial council asked us to improve the facilities of houses, however we faced difficulties to find the necessary money since we mainly depend on farming. Therefore, the provincial council arranged a long scheme for villagers, also they provided us the toilet equipment to improve the washroom facilities* (pers. comm. Villager 3).

*The provincial council helped us to develop the main access road of the village and allocated a plot of to construct the community centre of the village therefore we assume that in future also they give more benefits to the village* (pers. comm, Villager 5).

However, after the provision of all those supports and assistance five families have prepared their houses with standard facilities to serve for the international tourists and some of them have applied to register under the home stay accommodation program of the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority.
Preparing of our houses and the village for the homestay programme was big challenge for us in terms of the required knowledge, skills and money. However, with support of the provincial council and the university we were able to faced those challenges and develop the village and other programme up to a satisfactory level (pers. comm. Villager 1).

The provincial council, Sabaragamuwa university and the community worked collaboratively to develop the homestay village in Seelogama however it is not officially declared open yet therefore the community will not receive a sufficient businesses. Behihuloya is popular tourists destinations and many tourists pass this village every day. However, it is not aware the tourists as well the travel intermediaries like travel agents, tour guides due to the lack of publicity and promotions. Still they have not fixed even a name board for the village.

I improved the facilities of my house to provide accommodation facilities for the tourists, however still we are not receiving tourists as mentioned by the officers of the provincial council (pers. comm, villager 2).

We received few groups of tourists to this village both Sri Lankan and foreign tourists and it was new experience for us we treat them as our family members and they also behave and got positive experiences about tour village culture (pers. comm, Villager 5).

The villagers have developed positive attitudes about the tourism development however the problem is to attract the tourists. People are ready to welcome and provide facilities for the satisfaction of the tourists. The major issue is the provincial lethargic behaviour of the provincial council.

The provincial council is not interesting to open this village for tourists. Earlier they come and persuade us to engage in tourism, presently we have go and request them to take necessary actions to officially open the village for tourists (pers. comm, villager 4).

The biggest problem has faced here is to attract the tourists, therefore it is necessary to have a promotional and marketing mechanism as academics we involve for that, however it is necessary to open it officially by the provincial council, because the provincial council is the authoritative body for this village (pers. comm, University Academic 1)

We got bank loans to improve the facilities of our houses with the direction of the provincial council, however we have faced difficulties to pay the loan instalments, due to the non arrival of the tourists. Now it has become a legal mater (pers. comm, Chairman, CBO).

As a solution for the marketing problem and the delaying of the official opening of the homestay tourism village, a member has registered at the SLTDA under the homestay accommodation and selling his unit promoting through www.agoda.com and www.booking.com.

Even though one member has registered at SLTDA, the other members cannot do so, since SLTDA expect more facilities and standards like in a tourist hotel, especially the washroom, I hope that SLTDA has misunderstood our concept (pers. comm, Chairman, CBO).

Similar to the villagers in the Padavigampola homestay project, here also the community in a dilemma to solve the problem that they have faced. However, the community is still interesting and bearing positive attitudes about the project. The first and most important thing is to open the village officially by the provincial council. Then, it will be able to find a concrete solution for the second issue; the attraction of tourists through a proper promotional strategies.
5. Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to identify the issues and challenges faced in relation to the Homestay tourism developing in Sri Lanka. As an alternative tourism concept the Homestay can brings more advantages to the local community to extract the real benefits of tourism development. It is identified that there are three different types of operations under term "Homestay" available such as Homestay villages, B&B facility providers and individual operators. Homestay tourism as a means of alternative tourism product, is not operating successfully in Sri Lanka, except individual operators, due to several reasons:

First reason is the lack of clear understanding about the meaning and practice of Homestay. Since the beginning, the authorities were unable to understand the real meaning of homestay to conceptualize the concept. After ending the 30 years old terrorism problem in Sri Lanka in 2009, the tourist arrival was increased gradually. For example, in 2008 the country has attracted only 438,475 tourists and in 2014, the country has attracted more than 1.5 million of tourists (SLTDA, 2014). The government also identified tourism as a development strategy and wanted to attract more tourists and reach the target 2.5 million by 2016 (Tourism development strategy, 2011). However the existing room capacity was less than 20,000, therefore, as a solution need to find alternative accommodation units.

In 2010, Sabaragamuwa Provincial tourism development was prepared by a group of academics and they suggested homestay as a community based alternative tourism concept which can generate more economic benefits to the rural community. This was more similar to the concept practice in Malaysia (Tourism Master Plan, Sabaragamuwa Province, 2010). However, at the very beginning the SLTDA was unable to define concept accurately and defined wrongly the home-stay units as bed and breakfast units by SLTDA (pers. comm, Academic 2).

Few years back the SLTDA defines Homestay as a community based tourism programme which is initiated with the objective of distributing the tourism benefit to a fair cross section of the society by preparing houses/accommodation units carrying various themes, bringing out Sri Lankan authenticity, located in various destinations within Sri Lanka, with suitable quality standards be fitting the purpose of accommodating tourists, intending an interaction between the local community with the tourists giving opportunity to the tourist to experience Sri Lankan way of life (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, n.d). SLTDA has identified three main sub-categories under this scheme i.e. Home Stay Units, Bungalows, Rented Houses and Rented Apartments. Home Stay Units is a house occupied by a family with at least one room up to a maximum of five guest rooms which is/are ready to accommodate tourists where the tourist and the hosting family interact with each other. However the practice and promotion is not organized well for example the Accommodation guide published by the SLTDA still called all the B&B units as Homestays (Accommodation Guide, 2015).

Malaysia as a successful Homestay tourism destination has defined Homestay as the involvement of tourist in the village-style of living, to be part of a family and engage in all authentically Malay activities (Liu, 2006). Therefore, it is necessary to identify the expectations of the tourists to develop the right products and services, as destinations, to satisfy the exact needs and wants of the tourist, otherwise they will not be satisfied (Gnanapala, 2015). However, the relevant and responsible government authorities including SLTDA give less recognition and priorities for this segment and it will reflect the less interest and involvement of the tourism authorities promote this segment.
Second reason is the lack of officers and employees with relevant knowledge and skills about the concept and its operations. There should be experience and knowledgeable employees to develop and operate the homestay programmes effectively. However, it has become a big issue to find the knowledgeable employees at the decision making levels, experts few academics who got exposure from other Asian countries, but not in position to influence the decision and wishes of the political authorities. Even in the NTO of Sri Lanka operate Homestay division with more unskilled employees and trainees.

Third, there is no interest by the typical rural community to involve in Homestay tourism due to lack of motives in the marketing environment. Therefore, it has become a major impediment to provide typical experience about the Sri Lankan lifestyles. There cannot see the active involvement of rural community for Homestay expect the individual operators. The individual operators also try to give experience about the Sri Lankan culture in an artificial environment rather than demonstrating the natural setting of a typical villages. Further, the majority of the registered homestay operators are located in city areas therefore it also has become a major limitation to practice the pure concept. The lack of finance is the major reason that deviate rural community form the homestay tourism since the SLTDA has forced the operators to provide the standard room facilities like in a hotel therefore the community need to go for big investment. However, the country like Malaysia practice the concept with the available facilities to give the typical experience for the visitors.

Fourth, there is no incentive programmes designed by the authorities in order to motivate and attract the rural community for homestay operations. Most of the registered B&B homestay operators claimed that they will get nothing from the government and the operators have to pay the registration fee and other government charges and taxes whether they received businesses or not. Also, it is necessary to have a proper marketing programme to ensure the availability of guest throughout the year.

Fifth, the political involvement for the government activities is common scenario in developing countries, therefore, the Homestay tourism development also affected by the political decisions. For example, the only available two Homestay villages, i.e. Padavigampola and Seelogama, still not open due to the lack of political interests.

Next, the lack of education and training has become a barrier for new entrance as well for the successful operation of the existing businesses. It also has become a problem for even for the active participation of the government authorities to promote this segment.

Finally, the networking is the most important factor for the success of homestay operations. However, there cannot see the cooperation among the all stakeholders, other than working alone. It is necessary to have the contribution and participation of the all the stakeholders like travel agents, media, academics, researchers, government, community etc. for the smooth operations. However, in the present Sri Lankan context cannot see a good coordination and collaboration among all those stakeholders.

6. Conclusion

The Homestay tourism has become a popular and growing community based concept with different themes in the global context in both develop and developing countries. The Homestay tourism has an ability to provide more benefits to the local community and also provide a means of education, cultural awareness and entertainment for visitors. As an alternative tourism concept it generate less socio-cultural and environmental impacts when compare with mass tourism. Therefore, it is necessary to conceptualized and planned well to get the expected benefits. It is identified that there
are three different types of tourism operations in the destination under the term "Homestay" such as Homestay villages (presently two villages are available i.e. Padavigampola and Seelogama but do not open officially), B&B facility providers and individual Homestay operators.

However, Sri Lanka has faced lots of difficulties and challenges related to conceptualize the concept of homestay due to the; lack of clear understanding about the concept and its practices, lack of knowledge and skills, poor community participation, lack of incentives and other motives, political involvement for decision making, lack of proper education and training and the lack of coordination and involvement of the key stakeholders. The countries like Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia practice the Homestay operations successfully due the strong relationship among the government, industry, community and the academics (Hashim, 2005).

The B&B homestay operators are similar to the existing other supplementary accommodation units and they have registered under the Homestay unit of the SLTDA, However, they also have faced difficulties to find real homestay tourist and get the ordinary tourists and also become a competitor for other accommodation providers. The individual operators are running the business proper way, but they also have faced most of the problems and issues faced by the entire homestay market in Sri Lanka.

The homestay tourism is a potential segment for Sri Lankan tourism. Therefore, through proper planning and management and the active involvement of all the key stakeholders the market can be developed successfully. However, the government should play the key role actively and honestly. Also, it is necessary develop a national level homestay association with the involvement of all the operators and other key stakeholders should support for the smooth operations of the market segment.

References


Biographical Notes

C.N.R.Wijesundara is a lecturer in the department of tourism management, Sabaragamuwa university of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka and he teaches many tourism related subjects for the undergraduates who follows B.Sc. Tourism management degree programme. He completed his post graduate diploma in Tourism economics and Hospitality Management from the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka and currently doing his Mater thesis in the field of tourism. His research interest is Community participation for tourism and sustainable tourism management.

Athula Gnanapala is a Senior Lecturer/HOD attached to the Dept. of Tourism Management, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka. He obtained his doctoral degree in Tourism Management at the Xiamen University, P.R. China. His research interests include consumer behavior in tourism, sustainable tourism planning & development, tourism and green marketing and Dr. Gnanapala has published his research findings in national and international reputed publications.