Community participation in the development of rural areas: a leaders' perspective of tourism

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Abstract

The development of tourism has been heralded to be a mechanism for sustainable rural development. Sustainable development of any nature requires that any efforts aimed at developing rural areas must involve the community in which the development is undertaken. This has given rise to concerted efforts by governments and development practitioners to involve local communities in development initiatives undertaken within their locale. The study analysed the importance of community participation in tourism development, with the aim to ensure the sustainable rural development of areas such as Nqileni village. This was undertaken using a qualitative research approach using semi-structured interviews to solicit data from five members of the Nqileni village community in their different capacities of leadership within the community. The data was analysed using the NVivo system, version 11. The results revealed that the community leadership viewed the participation of members of the community to be paramount in development initiatives undertaken within the area, which also allows for the building of capacity, and ultimately empowers the community to meaningfully participate in the sustainable development of the area. The results can be summed up by the view of one of the respondents who stated that there must be mutual understanding between leadership and community members on all aspects of the tourism and development projects, as this will empower the community, thus allowing for meaningful participation.

Keywords: Community participation, decision-making, tourism initiatives, capacity building

Introduction

The developing world has been seen to suffer from chronic shortage of political will in relation to the implementation of a participatory tourism development approach because of the industry's inability to change the distribution of power and resources (Tosun & Timothy, 2001; Yasarata, Altinay, Burns & Okumus, 2010). This often results in the indifference of governments towards indigenous development practices, which have the ability to diminish the elected government's influence on decisions, due to dynamics brought upon by traditional participatory practices (Tosun & Timothy, 2001). Such practices often result in the participation of the local communities being a missing ingredient of sustainable development in many developing countries (Bonn & Fisher, 2011). In other words, this growing interest of citizen

participation in decision-making relating to development emerged from the needs of governments for indigenous action in development projects (Tosun, 2000).

The primary purpose behind the development of tourism in rural areas is to create opportunities and facilities for income generation and modernisation of the area (Reza-Maleki, Moradi & Persa, 2014). Such endeavours have been actively pursued in the wake of a continuing decline in rural agrarian economies characterised by falling rates of employment and decreasing income levels (Anderson, 2002; Batyk, 2011; Sharpley, 2002). This has seen authorities in rural areas put emphasis on the development of tourism, aiming to revive the socioeconomic health of rural areas and, in the process, escalate prosperity within the community (Sharpley, 2002; Nygaard, 2009: 163; Sango, 2014: 153). However, there has been great debate regarding the contribution of tourism towards the plight faced by rural communities as, in many cases, evidence of benefits has been slow to emerge, being modest at best, and usually afforded to certain groups within the communities (Moscardo, 2014). Harun, Hassan, Razzaq, Rasid and Mustafa (2012) further affirm the uncertain nature of tourism benefits through the indication of the limited earning potential of tourism ventures and lack of meaningful involvement of local communities, due to constraints of knowledge, skills and resources; and the dependence of the industry on external support, often for extensive periods.

The picture painted above provides a gloomy indication of tourism's ability to assist in the development of communities and rural areas. The less-than-positive outlook indicated above can be remedied through effective and meaningful participation of local communities in sustainable development initiatives such as tourism. Such practices are often attributed to be critical mechanisms for the promotion and support of community-level development (Edwards, 2015). This process is further viewed to be the undertaking of initiatives aimed to provide people within the community with skills and knowledge, in order to participate in tourism activities, with the objective of enabling them to make decisions and take actions that will see the development of tourism maximising the economic, and providing social and environmental benefits, with minimal negative effects to the area and its people (Aref, Redzuan, Gill & Aref, 2010; Khosravi, Mohamed & Nair, 2015).

Literature review

Overview of community participation in rural development

Development practice has in recent times adopted a popular term in the form of community participation. The term is now practically *sine qua non* (an essential condition) for development practitioners seeking project funding (Dosner, 2004). This has led to literature being produced that established a firm understanding of the significance of community participation in the efforts of the development sector to enable the world's underprivileged to exert influence over decisions and institutions that affect their lives (Ndevu, 2011). The popularity of the concept of community participation in modern day planning originated during the 1960s as a response to the inefficient and dominant top-down and expert-driven approaches to planning (Shahidul & Swapan, 2016; Tandon, 2008). The rationale behind this mode of participation by communities allows for the promotion of greater efficiency, more accountability and transparency, enhanced ownership and ultimately the empowerment of the native community (Dosner, 2004). Lee (2013) affirms that this will allow for a community to play a meaningful role in the sustainability of any development, as it will afford the community an opportunity to participate, thereby increasing the community's value in relation to the enhancement of positive effects and mitigation of negative effects of the development. This further provides the community with a voice in decision-making, while representing diverse communities of interests in all stages (from goal setting, to programme and project design) without compromising an assortment of needs the local community may aspire towards (Shuib, Hashim, Akmaniza & Nazir, 2015).

Development scholars and practitioners have been pondering the issue of community participation for the last three to four decades – with a number of them crediting the 1980s as the decade of participation. This has initiated the current manifestation of organised community participation in terms of social movements, non-governmental organisation (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs) (Botes & Van Rensburg, 2000). Hickey and Mohan (2004: 5) indicate a historic narrative of participation that includes an extensive and varied genealogy in development thinking and practice, often acknowledged and regenerated as part of new schools of thought, institutional agendas and changing political circumstances.

According to Siyongwana and Mayekiso (2011), the change in South African politics in the mid-1990s brought with it significant changes in terms of development, with the government instituting policies that offered people an opportunity to participate in the development of their own areas. In addition, Shaidi (2007: 46) emphasises the essence of community participation and consultation to be a legislative imperative and a core value of democracy in South Africa. This is evident in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), which prescribes that provision of sustainable services to communities should be undertaken with the involvement of communities and community organisations in matters of development and governance. Ndevu (2011) further explains the essential nature of community-based participation in efforts to facilitate change in the development discourse and practice spectrum. This is further asserted by Dill (2009) indicating timeous efforts by development scholars to highlight benefits of participation in the ever-shifting landscape of development. This happens when ordinary citizens undertake deliberate collective action to address problems and issues deemed important, appropriate and part of their needs (Gibson, 2006). Ndevu (2011) highlights the imperativeness of information-sharing with the community, which is a primary requirement in allowing recipients of the development to occupy a central role in the decision-making process regarding the direction taken by the development, the form and scale of the development; while affording them an opportunity to feel that they are part of the solution.

The significance of community participation in development of any nature is a process well documented. Rasidi, Ngah and Ramli's (2014) adoption of the International Association for Public Participation (IPA2) (1990) core values for the practice of public participation further describe the need for community participation in the planning and design stages of a project, which not only enhances goodwill and togetherness of a community, but has a close relationship with community building, consensus building and sustainability (See Table 1).

Table 1:   Association for Public Participation (1990)   Source: http://www.iap2.org/?page=A4

Core Values for the Practice of Public Participation
1. Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognizing and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.

Community participation in tourism development initiatives

"Community participation approaches should be able to challenge existing power structures if genuine empowerment is to be achieved in previously disadvantaged areas" (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2015:27). While tourism literature on community participation is abundant in academic circles, it is, however, important to note that much of this has been focused mainly on the importance and lack of community participation in tourism planning and development, rather than the actual realisation of a participatory practice involving residents in development projects (Muganda, Sirima & Ezra, 2013). There has been a raging debate on the merits and validity of participatory tourism development as certain parts of the academic world find it to be valid, whilst others argue that it applies to some localities and not in others. Obviously, there will be varying degrees of applicability of community participation as well as inconsistencies in the realisation of the expected benefits (Tosun, 2006). This brings to the fore a unique challenge, because the success and sustainability of developing tourism destination requires goodwill and active participation of the host communities (Nicholas, Thapa, Ko, 2009; Rasoolimanesh & Jafaar, 2016; Rasoolimanesh, Jafaar, Ahmad & Barghi, 2017). In addition, an active local participation in tourism development allows for positive contribution to the quality of life of indigenous people, and also enables tourism to be sustainable (Nicholas, Thapa, Ko, 2009; Sisrisak, 2009; Rasoolimanesh, Jafaar, Ahmad & Barghi, 2017). This improves residents' sense of belonging, fosters social network development, and instisl greater appreciation and understanding of the value of the local area (Gursoy, Jurowski & Uysal, 2002; Rasoolimanesh, Jafaar, Ahmad & Barghi, 2017).

A western-based ideology, which infuses technocratic strategies of tourism development, has dominated tourism policy formulation in developing countries (Bianchi, 2002: 273 as cited in Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2015). Similarly, community participation in the development process, especially in developing countries will always have its roots in legacies left by western ideology. These include western social work and community radicalism, together with participatory programs by the United Nations (UN) that have become a source of inclination for community participation as a contemporary ideology in the provision of public goods such as housing, educational and health (Tosun, 2000).

Developing countries have, in recent time, placed the enablement of community participation in tourism development high on the development agenda. (Timothy, 1999; Cole, 2006; Saufi, O'Brien & Wilkins, 2014). This has seen community participation constituting a common pursuit of a goal aimed at improving the local community through collaborative efforts of members of that particular community (McCloskey, McDonald, Cook, Heurtin-Roberts, Updegrove, Sampson, 2011:26). Noble as this may seem, communities in developing countries are often constrained from participating in development by institutional factors such as centralised decision-making processes, exogenous top down development practices, and a general lack of capacity amongst host communities (Saufi et al., 2014).

The move from colonialism by the developing world towards democratisation led to countries moving towards Western modernity aimed at improving the lives of communities. This led to development practices that relied on the authorities, because of the assumption of locals being uneducated and incapable of sustaining themselves (Nuttavuthisit, Jindahra, & Prasarnphanich, 2014). Such practices became unpopular with the sustainable development ethos, and gave rise to a need to avoid the unsustainable development culture that saw agencies and government employ traditional bureaucratic paternalism, according to which a belief of superiority over members of the community and a conviction that they know what is good for the people (Tosun, 2000). All this can be remedied through meaningful community participation, which can be achieved through enabling the community to take part in development initiatives, which will require that communities be capacitated to significantly contribute towards the development of tourism.

Research methodology

The study employed a qualitative research approach coupled with an in-depth exploratory examination of community participation in the development of rural areas through tourism, particularly Nqileni village. This relied on semi-structured interviews using a non-probability purposive sampling technique to collect the empirical data required. The focus of the study was on Nqileni village, which houses the Bulungula Lodge, a tourism project owned and managed by the community. This project is a community-based tourism enterprise aimed at the development of the Nqileni community with initiatives in education, health and infrastructure (Bulungula, 2015). The sample was chosen based on the respondents' close proximity to activities and developments associated with tourism within the village. The sample comprised of the following community leadership stakeholders with the aim of ensuring that the voice of the community is listened to and heard.

Community leadership

- Local headman
- Ward councilor
- Ward committee member
- Manager of Bulungula lodge
- Local Economic Development Officer for Mbashe Local Municipality

The study included 5 semi-structured interviews with community members in their different roles as indicated above within the area. Data was collected in isiXhosa using a digital recorder. These interviews averaged a duration of 20 minutes per interview. In addition, services of professionals were solicited for the transcription and translation of the data. The data was then professionally analysed using NVivo software version 11. This produced a comprehensive observation report accompanied by nodes, word clouds, cluster analysis, tree maps and words trees to provide a clear picture of the views of the respondents engaged in the study, which were then objectively analysed and interpreted by the researcher.

Results

The study undertook to engage respondents (community leaders) of Nqileni village using semi-structured interview schedules. This was under the categories placing respondents in accordance with the role they play in the community in relation to tourism. Table 1 below provide biographical details of the respondents to show their relevance to participate in the study.

Table 1: Demographics of the community leadership

	Age	Residence	Length of residence	Role
1	Estimated age- 30-39	Nqileni	Whole life	Ward Committee member
2	Estimated age- 50-59	Nqileni	Whole life	Headman
3	Estimated age- 40-49	Nqileni	Whole life	Ward councillor
4	Estimated age- 30-39	Nqileni	Whole life	Manager- Bulungula Lodge
5	Estimated age- 30-39	Dutywa	2007	Local Economic Development Officer for Mbashe Local Municipality

In almost any context, leadership become vital in plotting the trajectory of any course forward. Leadership is meant to conceptualise vision and provide alignment to the vision by bringing

together ideas, people, resources and processes among others. This has been seen to be very important for local leaders to promote community participation in development initiatives within the area. The data collected and analysed provided the themes shown in figures 1 and 2 below.

Figure 1: Community leadership on tourism development
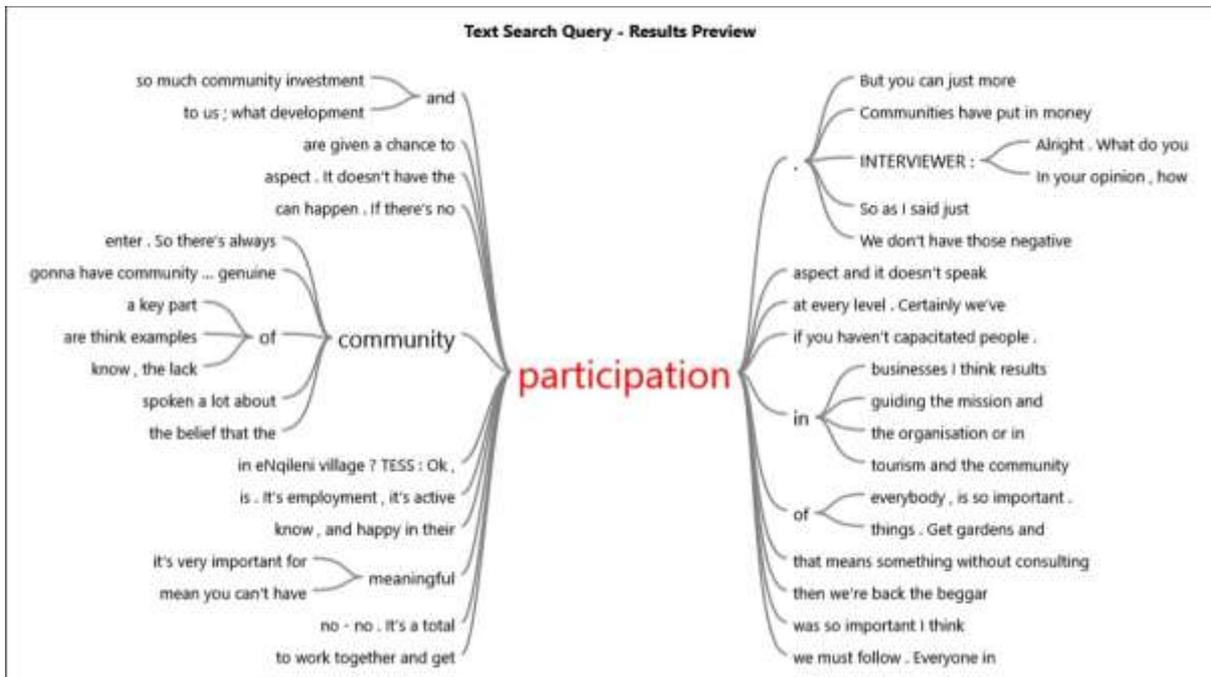
Figure 2: Community participation in tourism development

It has been seen to be very important for local leaders to promote community participation in development initiatives within the area. This was hence divided into the following sub-subthemes:

a) Importance of community participation
The findings reveal a perspective shared by community leaders in relation to community participation in tourism development. These were seen in the community leadership's

identification of employment, learning and local economic boost as pivotal factors that allow for meaningful participation of the community in tourism. Respondents show this in the following comments:

"Tourism is a growing sector and provides opportunities for local growth economic growth. Hence community participation is very important for the whole community as it promotes job creation." (Respondents 5).

"Community participation provides an opportunity for the community to become self-employed using their skills instead of relying on government for jobs and grants." (Respondent 1).
"Also if you look as the Ocean economy we could benefit since this place is near the beach people could fish and sell and make money." (Respondent 3).

The above agree with Sutawa's (2012) findings placing community participation as an important notion aimed at empowering residents to take their future and livelihoods into their own hands, which has become an expectation and common practice in sustainable tourism development circles (Sutawa, 2012). This notion is further advocated by Scheyvens, (2002: 239) and Saufi *et al.,* (2014) asserting that the success of tourism ventures should only be considered if the participation of the local community results in some measure of control over decision-making and equitable sharing of any accrued benefits.

Factors and obstacles hindering participation of the community in tourism

Community leaders further articulated on factors that hinder community participation in development initiatives such as tourism. This brought out narratives that discouraged community participation. These are as follows:

a) Elitism, factions, greed and corruption

The politics of the area often come into play with the local elites occupying positions of benefit ahead of ordinary members of the community. In addition to this, some of the local elites and leaders often see development projects as a way to benefit more from such projects, even at the expense of the whole community or the development itself. This often results in the creation of factions within the community, which leads to corrupt practices further compromising community members interest in participating in development initiatives within the village. This is supported by a narration by a responded stating the following:
"No matter how good a development plan might be, there will always be people who will have their own agendas for a particular development. It is therefore up to traditional leaders and general leadership to ensure that they select the right people." (Respondent 1).

"They want to make sure that any kind of development there must be something for them in order to get anything for that particular area." (Respondent 4).

"There seems to also be some occurrences of factions between the village chief, local members and business people. This causes segregation and has a negative influence on development." (Respondent 3).

"Corruption is also a factor and this discourages people from participating. Sometimes individuals aim for personal benefit rather than that of the community." (Respondent 3).

This is consistent with Tosun (2000) stating the hesitance of the elites in sharing the fruits of development with the people often considered being property less, uneducated and without connections to authority. This can be attributed to structural limitation of community participation where elitism take precedence over equality in the distribution of benefits of

tourism within the region as per observations in the works of Tosun (2000) and Droga and Gupta (2012).

b) Language and lack of capacity

The village's remoteness was a common narrative that came out of interviews with the community leadership of the limited language skills and capacity. This ascribes the minimum business language skills (English) and lack of capacity to not only the location of the village but also the chronic lack of infrastructure and superstructures needed to enable seamless development of the area.

"I would say that a definite barrier is language if someone who does not speak isiXhosa comes it is going to be difficult to communicate and a second person will be needed to translate." (Respondent 3).

"The potential for development of tourism in Nqileni village is there, but the problem is skills; knowledge of tourism and markets; and a general shortcoming in communicating in English" (Respondent 5).

The above assertions give credibility to the importance of capacitating the local community for development initiatives such as tourism as this allows for meaningful participation, thereby assisting in the decreasing tension that can be created by development initiatives that do not fit with local aspirations, values, needs and capabilities (Murphy, 1985 as cited in Harun, Hassan, Razzaq, Rasid & Mustafa, 2012). This kind undertaking can further assist in the improvement of the community's ability to participate in decision-making processes relating to the development and enhance the resources (human, organisational and infrastructural) that will enable the community to draw upon in the quest to improve their own lives (Khosravi, Mohamed & Nair, 2015; Sithole, Giampiccoli & Jugmohan, 2018).

c) Leadership conflict

Nqileni village, like any rural area, is subject to a dual leadership challenge. This constitutes a traditional leadership (chiefs and headmen) and an elected leadership (ward councillors and ward committee members). This has seen a difficult relationship between the two institutions because the two leadership style are not concurrent with each other. Respondents note this as follows:

"Traditional leaders and ward councillors are not working together in some of the projects. Traditional leader believed that they owned the land, whilst some local communities preferred to work with ward councillors. This then led to lack of cooperation." (Respondent 4).

"Because you find out that some of the people or the local communities they prefer to the ward committee… to ward councillor rather for any kind of development that they're interested on. On the other hand, there is a chief here or a traditional leader that says 'We own the land, the land belongs to us. If government or whoever who want to develop this area must come to the chief because the land belong to the chief.' So, this kind of… kind of not good cooperation between the traditional leaders and the ward councillor." (Respondent 5).

The above asserts truth in the limitation formulated by Tosun (2000) which indicate the obstacle above to be an operational limitation where a lack of co-ordination between traditional and political leadership is the order of the day. It must be noted that community participation as citizen power requires a concerted effort involving different ideological beliefs, political forces, administrative arrangements and redistribution of wealth and power in developing countries (Tosun, 2000; Eversole, 2010; Mansuri & Rao, 2012: 88).

d) Skills development and empowerment of residents

The capacitation of the community with the requisite skills to participate in development initiatives such as tourism is critical to any development and/or community. The finding revealed ways in which the community leadership envisaged to overcome the obstacles indicated above. These included but not limited to training in particular areas such as marketing; finance; administration; information sharing; and other facets of business and entrepreneurship. In addition, the community leadership also eluded to the need to maintain the appeal and attractiveness of the area while advising and encouraging participation of the local community in development initiatives (entailing mutual understanding and solidarity). This was further elucidated by the following respondents' narrations:

"Community member needed to be trained in areas which they lacked or were weak in." (Respondent 3).

"Keeping the areas clean and tidy would be appealing to any tourist and they would then feel the need to stay and indulge more into what the area has to offer." (Respondent 2).

"Community members need to be encouraged to participate in development. They need to know what the rewards would be to the community for the developments as this would keep them motivated and empowered." (Respondent 1).

"There must be mutual understanding between leadership and community members on all aspects of the tourism and development projects as this will empower the community, thus allowing for meaningful participation." (Respondent 4).

"Community members are encouraged to work together during any tourism and development projects. This also ensures the protection of the entire community as well as the tourists that visit the village." (Respondent 5).

"Empowerment is key to meaningful community participation. This entails trainings, skills, education and information about the development." (Respondent 1).

The above is consistent with the assertions of the National Tourism Sector Strategy (2011) stating that the beneficiation of rural communities and their levels of awareness of the industry and capacity in relation to tourism is evidently limited, leading to external business interests taking advantage of the natural and cultural resources belonging to rural communities without any accrual of benefits for the host communities. This has been see to be perpetuated by poor involvement of local communities and previously neglected groups in the tourism sector, coupled with the absence of adequate education, training and awareness opportunities (South Africa. DEAT, 1996: 11-14). The need to enhance the skills and knowledge within a community will allow for the building of capacity, which in turn minimises the constraints that limit the community's ability to fully control their participation in tourism development (Cole, 2006: 39; Moscardo, 2008: 67; Aref, Redzuan, Gill & Aref, 2010).

Conclusion

The development of tourism in rural areas has seen an increase in interest from different quarters of leadership (traditional, political and business) within such areas. This has also seen an even bigger surge in the attention paid by general members of the community to development initiatives undertaken within their locale. This has been evident in the results of the study showing the value placed by community leaders on the importance of community participation in the development tourism. The value indicated does not come without caution in the possibility of conflicting relations between the different leadership structures (traditional, political and business) found in rural areas. This was indicated in the results stating strains in

working relations between leaders (especially, traditional and political) arising from beliefs of ownership of resources (traditional leadership on land and community) against the role of an elected government, which eventually negatively impact on the community that desperately need development.

The development of a rural area is a notion that aims to empower the community to be self-sustainable through endeavours and initiative such as tourism. This has been seen in the results stating the importance of community participation in development initiatives. This is indicated to be possible through the building of capacity amongst members of the community, the elimination of obstacles to development such as corruption, and the minimisation of conflict between the leadership structures found in rural communities.

Finally, the study does not intend to claim authority on community participation in the development of rural areas through tourism, but intends to open debate and dialogue on issues of leadership in rural areas that have the potential to derail well-intended development initiatives aimed at alleviating poverty and minimise vulnerability. This therefore, provides a platform for future research around issues of governance in rural areas, roles and responsibilities of community leaders in sustainable rural development as well as focus on the influence of community leaders in decision-making process regarding community development projects.

Recommendations

- Development in rural areas is often faced with leadership challenges because of conflicting values and styles found in political and traditional leaderships. The study recommends that both leaderships cooperate and agree on a stable governance that will provide the direction that the development is to embark on to avoid conflict which often leaves the development and the people it is meant for worse than they were previously, with resources wasted and nothing to show for the utilisation of such resources.

- Rural areas aiming to remove themselves from poverty and vulnerability are often hindered by the availability of infrastructure. It is recommended that a concerted effort on the part of the local and provincial government to make provision of infrastructure such as roads and telecommunication, which will connect the village with its source market, investors and donors.

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