Accessible Ocean Tourism

Inclusive Ocean Tourism and Skill Certification: Empowering Vulnerable Communities through Accessible Scuba Diving, Ocean Literacy, and Disaster Resilience Training

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INTRODUCTION

This case study examines how accessible skill certification in scuba diving, ocean literacy, and disaster resilience can advance- " inclusive ocean tourism" while contributing to the socioeconomic well-being of vulnerable communities— specifically, senior citizens and persons with disabilities

RWATER

Significance of case study

Through a series of pilot programs conducted in Island nations and Indian coastal regions, this project demonstrates that inclusive, inclusive training in ocean sports can unlock economic participation, enhance community resilience, and foster environmental stewardship.

China

Sri Lanka

Maldives

Philippines

Havelock Islands

Lakshadweep Islands

Jamaica

PHSA
PHSA
PHSA
PHSA
PHSA

Aligned with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC)'s Socioeconomic Impact pillar, the initiative expands access to the blue economy through equitable employment, fair labor practices, and intergenerational knowledge-sharing.

Vulnerable populations not only gain recreational and mental health benefits, but also acquire skills that support their inclusion in coastal tourism value chains and climate adaptation efforts.

This scalable, community-centered model offers a blueprint for sustainable ocean tourism destinations to become hubs of empowerment, equity, and environmental resilience.

Background and Literature Review- Problems and Gaps

Ocean tourism is a cornerstone of many coastal economies, but its benefits are often unevenly distributed.

Persons with disabilities and the elderly—despite growing global populations—remain excluded from tourism skill ecosystems due to inaccessible infrastructure,lack of training, and socio-cultural stigma.

PHSA
www.phsa.us

Foundational literature guiding this project includes:
Darcy & Buhalis (2011) on accessible tourism and inclusive design

WHO's Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030), emphasizing senior inclusion in recreational and educational systems
UNESCO's Ocean Literacy Framework, advocating public understanding of marine systems and hazards.

Studies from PHSA and HSA International, showcasing scuba diving techniques for the disabled as a tool for empowerment and therapy.
There remains a gap in linking inclusive recreation with structured vocational training, especially within climate-sensitive zones that require disaster preparedness and ecological knowledge—this study bridges that gap.

Methodology :

This was a community-based, mixed-method study conducted across island nations and coastal zones in India: Goa, Kerala, Sri Lanka, Jamaica, Florida, Lakshadweep Islands, Philippines, Maldives, China,Tamil Nadu, and the Havelock Andaman Islands.

Approach:

Surveys and focus groups with 200 persons who were participants from ocean tourism sectors.

Accessible scuba and snorkel training sessions, integrated with ocean literacy modules and disaster resilience modules.

Partnerships with local dive schools, rehabilitation centers, and community ,tourism boards.

Cultural inclusivity and dignity in training environments. Use of localized ocean knowledge for resilience education Enabling pathways to certification, employment, and community roles.

Ocean and Climate Literacy and Training included HSA scuba certification,basic rescue modules,steering local capacity for emergency response and coastal safety were taught.

Results and Key Findings
Empowering Through Skill and Certification

- Over 70% of trained participants expressed readiness to assist in local tourism or serve as peer educators.

Economic Inclusion

- Partnered with dive centers pledged to recruit certified professionals and youth who would be willing to handle disabled participants as safety marshals, diving guides storytellers, and eco-volunteers.
- Awareness and training such as eco-tour services, adaptive gear rentals, and accessible tourism education.

Social Equity and Mental Well-Being

- Participants responded that physical and menal healing, sense of purpose, and Training became inclusive with elders sharing traditional knowledge

- All participants were trained in handling the vulverable stratas of society specifically the disabled , beach safety protocols, and climate risk awareness.

- Inclusive training sessions simulated real-world hazard scenarios, reinforcing Community -based disaster preparedness

Sustainable ocean tourism

Implications for Sustainable Ocean Tourism
were accessible certified Government policy: Advocacy underway for national skill councils to recognize accessiblility ocean certifications in formal tourism employment program
10.GSTC Alignment: Socioeconomic Impact Pillar
GSTC Criteria Direct Contribution of the Project

A1: Maximize economic benefits reates paid roles - entrepreneurship for vulnerable citizen

A2: Community prosperity
Enhances local knowledge systems promotes tourism diversity

B3: Promote social equity
Inclusion of disabled and elderly people in coastal tourism careers

B4: Fair labor
Fair pay guidelines and inclusive hiring introduced at pilot sites
Implications for Sustainable Ocean Tourism
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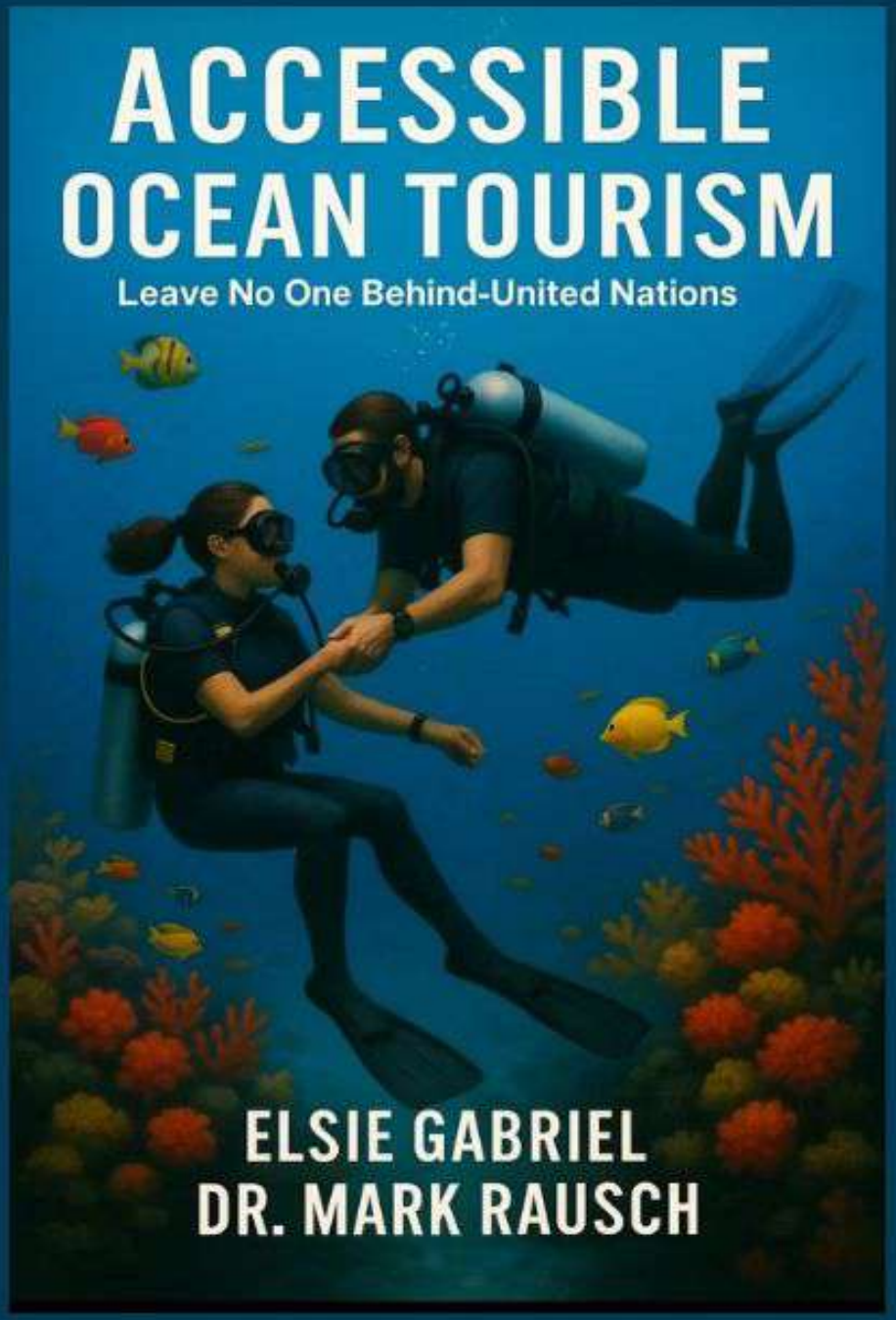
WATER

Conclusion

Inclusive ocean tourism is not only a moral imperative—it is a strategic solution. By equipping vulnerable groups with certified skills in accessible diving, ocean literacy, and climate resilience, we foster a regenerative tourism model that is equitable, safe, and sustainable. This work embodies the heart of GSTC's Socioeconomic Impact goals, offering a bold, replicable model that builds community pride, supports livelihoods, and ensures that no one is left behind in the blue economy.

THANK YOU

BY ELSIE GABRIEL & DR.MARK RAUSCH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