

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON ECOTOURISM AND ITS IMPACT ON LIVELIHOOD WITH REFERENCE TO MANAS NATIONAL PARK

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Abstract

Ecotourism is a different form of travel and is not just like mass tourism. Ecotourism does not just provide a beautifully pristine and charming tour. However, it also provides and covers a learning process that teaches us to protect and take care of nature and to make efforts to improve local communities and surroundings as well as the area of ecotourism destinations. Ecotourism involves environmental and cultural tourism and it also benefits the local population and is a vital part of ecotourism activity. Tourism and retailing have a long and successful story and journey. However, it is known only to those closely associated with and aware of these industries. On a local basis, shopping has become less distinguished. Apart from necessary items like food, beverages, gifts, etc., tourists buy all types of goods and merchandise from local retailers. Service providers in tourism are specialty retailers such as hotels, ticket agents, restaurants, tour operators, guides, etc. A sample of 123 respondents was collected from respondents through a "standard questionnaire," which was created on a five-point interval scale.

Keywords: Ecotourism; local communities, Manas National Park, livelihood security, Sustainable Development

Introduction

It is very well known that the sector of tourism makes a huge contribution to the economic growth of any region. Additionally, tourism also provides various benefits to the region to the small and medium retailers and their enterprises. It also creates job opportunities and develops the local community, infrastructure improvement, etc. In cultural terms, tourism is known to be an element of community advancement, thanks to the meeting of different cultures. A positive contribution can be made by the tourism sector towards the maintenance and protection environment, the maintenance of national parks, and various other protected areas. Tourism is not just limited to hospitality and Accommodation, transport, and entertainment sector that attracts tourists like theme parks, sports, museums, and amusement parks, but tourism and its management are thoroughly associated with each other and all its functions, procedures, practices and process

are associated with the system of tourism. One has to agree that either large-scale or small-scale tourism does affect the host community. Along with the economic growth of the region, tourism also makes a significant contribution to the local labor market and creates a lot of job opportunities for them directly or indirectly as they supply various goods and services to visitors. The sector of tourism is the only sector which is providing material and calculated opportunities for trading for every nation, irrespective of the development level. For most of the developing nations, the basic pillar of their developmental process is tourism as it is the most dominant activity in the country, whereas for others, mainly islands and small countries, it is just the source of foreign currency and occupation, and thus establishes the platform for economic development. In present times, tourism is considered a dynamic economic activity that creates socio-economic transformations in the world and is increasingly important (**Zaei & Zaei, 2013**).

There are some social costs and inconveniences involved for the host population of the tourist regions. These can take compassionate forms like sharing favorite recreational areas and suffering problems, which is associated with the traffic of tourists on country roads. If the development of regional tourism complies with the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD), the increasing activities of tourism would provide economic advantages without causing any harm and adding up social and environmental costs. Tourism is planned and managed in such a manner and at that level that contributes to the host population of the region and their livelihoods. The level to which such an initiative considers the objectives and value of the host population is unanswerable. The sensitive planning and management of Ecologically Sustainable Development need the capability to forecast, monitor, and control the impact that has the possibility of threatening the social foundations and other natural assets that support life quality for the local population and are the attraction for visitors (**Greiner, 2010**).

In terms of social status and handsome monetary benefits, plenty of stakes are given to the local community through community-based ecotourism programs. The members of the local community who are involved in the ecotourism programs based on a community are capable of gaining a decent living as well as economic stability. The empowerment of the community is the guarantee of the initiative. The directly engaged operators in the program have very less or insignificant education. Even after having a poor educational background, these local people have proved their courage in publicizing the values of conservation and entertaining well-educated visitors. Tourism products based on nature are the perfect ecotourism initiatives in every respect and are considered welfare-oriented as everyone who is involved and participates in activities are gainer (**Pillai, 2011**).

Literature Review

Muro-Rodríguez, Pérez-Jiménez, & Sánchez-Araque (2020) stated that taking along all the necessary variables that are essential for the promotion of any city or a region as a tourist shopping destination. It is important that develop and establish combined strategies with the involvement of local retailers and agents, like traders and their agencies and other local institutions for the positioning of the region as an international tourist shopping destination. The selection of tourist destinations conditions all such strategies. This association is essential between the businessman

who is doing business in transport, commercial companies, Accommodation, hotels, etc., along with local institutes and promoters of tourism.

Choudhury (2017) explained that due to the leakage in the system and industry of tourism, the benefits of tourism are not appropriately received by the local community and population. A study was conducted wherein suggestions were taken by the [panel of experts. The panel suggested some strategies, which proved to be attuned to the local population. It is very well known that developing nations do not have sufficient funds for their development and to fulfill their needs and demands. It is known that their government is not going to fulfill all their demands and resolve all their issues. The study found that the strategies that are developed for the development of the nation are all cropped, and it is the tourism sector that can help the region in its development and can provide various benefits to the local population. In the study of a National Park, it is found that they are charging visiting fees from the visitors and it is considered a leakage. Here for the betterment and benefit of local people, they can sell items such as fruits, food items, packaged water bottles, tea, etc. to the visitors and earn a good amount of money for themselves.

Saikia (2020) studied how the economic conditions of the local population who are participating in tourism-related activities are impacted by tourism. Tourism is an essential tool as it generates employment opportunities, reduces poverty, and improves the living standard of the local people. The local population of any tourist destination is a vital element of that destination. The role they play in developing the tourist spot cannot be ignored. In Assam state, around 83% of the population lives in rural areas, and the best way to enhance their living standard is to enhance the tourism of that region as that would help in reducing poverty and also develop more employment opportunities. However, the activities related to tourism must be feasible, suitable, and applicable for every different destination must be determined and should be promoted and supported as that would provide it sustainable growth and help in its development.

Hussain et al. (2012) explained the contribution made by the tourism industry to the livelihoods of the local population of the region. Also, they suggested some ways in which these links can be strengthened. Some tourists were surveyed to examine the amount of money they spend when they visit the park. The balance of income streamed as leakage to buy supplies and logistic support outside the tourism zone. If these leakages are controlled, then there will be an increase in the financial benefits to the local stakeholders, and such leakages can be controlled with proper planning and prevention strategies like marketing products from cottage industries and the establishment of local-level institutes. Along with watching wildlife, natural trails and package tours must be promoted in the buffer zone and the connected forest areas for the enhancement of tourism to the untouched sites as it will ultimately help in the livelihood of the local population.

Saikia (2015) studied various opportunities that are available for livelihood in wildlife tourism. Wildlife tourism is considered to be a strategy for livelihood paired with the maintenance of the biodiversity of destination regions. A good contribution to the revenue income has been made by the increasing number of visitors to the park. Although there are huge hindrances to the local people's participation in tourism activities, there is huge scope for the development of the tourism sector in the regions, mainly to provide a livelihood for the local population who are living in

protected areas of the park. Enriching the local population, it will serve as an additional diversification and help them to earn income for their livelihood.

Hussain & Das (2013) found that there is a positive and significant influence of Ecotourism on the local as well as state population as it provides them the opportunities for livelihood along with employment opportunities. Ecotourism is recognized as an opportunity for poverty reduction, and it also supports the bring improvement in the economic and social lives of the local people. To maximize the benefits of the tourism sector, the participation and involvement of the local population are essential in the activities related to tourism. It is important to state that prospective environmental and socio-economic advantages of Ecotourism should be encouraged directly or indirectly. Generally, these activities help in the improvement of the well-being of human beings as they provide them the opportunity for employment and earn a good amount of money for livelihood. With the growing automation and consumption, it has become difficult for the local population of the region to preserve and safeguard the distinctive culture and craftsmanship of the destination region. The culture and craftsmanship only be if one identifies their importance and the commercial demand in the market. Ecotourism is the best way in which local art and craft will help in revaluation and use it gainfully. Activities related to Ecotourism can also help reduce the mass tourism pressure on the core area of the destination. Government and local bodies must work together for the promotion and development of Ecotourism.

Fetene, Bekele & Tiwari (2012) opined that the income that is earned through Ecotourism in any destination is very helpful and considered to be significant for the improvement of living standards and livelihood of the local people of the region. The income that is earned in terms of the entrance fee of Nech Sar National Park was found to be high as compared to other national parks, and it shows that it is a unique, and famous tourist destination. In this respect, as the number of visitors is growing each year and those who are coming to visit the place from other regions as well, the global partnership will help in increasing and contributing to the development of the region and protected area and in the reduction of the poverty in that region. The income that is generated was only through the entrance fee of the park, but there are many other ways of generating income within the national park like guide fees, accommodation charges, food and beverages, income from other various activities and games, etc., all these income will help in the development infrastructure of the park.

Banerjee (2012) explained that exposure to the environment and its education is the best thing that can be achieved will the help of Ecotourism. One of the major elements of Ecotourism is the opportunity for livelihood is considered the means to reduce the poverty of the local population. The tourist industry must focus on making local people get involved and participate more in tourism-related activities. Such participation of local people will maintain a social balance concerning the generation of income for the local population. This process will also reduce their dependency on the forests and help in the process of conservation and it will motivate the local population to protect their environment. To explain the probability of advantages of tourist involvement and develop strong support inside local communities, the advantages of the tour must be spread wholly.

Das & Sarma (2012) studied the joint venture between the "Conservation Association (ABACA)" and "The Assam (Bhorelli) Anglers." This venture is between the tourism agencies and the local population of the region. This joint venture was founded in 1956, a significant contribution has been made by ABACA toward livelihood opportunities and other initiatives related to natural resource management. The fees that were paid for the lease of land by ABACA were benefitting the local community. These earnings earned by the community were used for various welfare purposes such as providing money to self-help groups, establishing schools and their maintenance, building houses and roads, and celebrating community festivals. The majority of the local population earns a major source of their income by working as casual workers. Earnings through Ecotourism are also used for other purposes like purchasing land, livestock, and other necessary things.

Kumari (2021) stated that tourism has appeared as a tool for employment opportunities and helps in poverty reduction. It adds to about 6.23 percent of the nation's GDP and is providing India's 8.78% of the total employment. The study found that around 20 million of the population is working in India's tourism sector. The tourism industry is a great source of foreign exchange earnings. Accountable ecotourism program includes the minimization of negative influence on the environment and nature and enhancement of cultural reliability and safeguarding of the local population of the region. Ecotourism promotes recycling, the efficiency of energy, the conservation of water, the creation of employment opportunities, etc.

Poyyamoli (2018) opined that the aim of empowerment of local people would create multiple effects. The major target for the development through ecotourism services are the local retailers and local people of the region. The role and involvement of local retailers and local people in the activities related to Ecotourism benefit them by providing them with income. Higher the participation more will be incentives received by the local community as it improves their livelihood along with the conservation of the environment. The revision in the policy of Ecotourism must develop proper partnerships with local retailers and communities by traditional rights specific to the site that would help in the adoption of successful strategies of Ecotourism. Present rules and regulations related to Ecotourism by the system of incentives or disincentives and improve them as per the requirement.

Ramakrishna & Pandian (2021) found that tourism can be a major source of income for the rural population in most countries, and it also helps in the development of growth of the country. The visitors to the tourist destination usually lend a cottage to stay in, visit hotels and restaurants for food, and purchase popular traditional art and craft of the region, all these activities help the rural population earn a good amount of money. These activities also provide employment opportunities to people and help in the reduction of poverty. Tourists who visit the park also become aware of the conservation of natural resources and how they can contribute to safeguarding the natural resources.

The objective of the Study

1. To measure how Ecotourism impacts on the livelihood and local retailers.
2. To ascertain how Ecotourism impacts the livelihood of the local population.

Methodology

The nature of the study is empirical. The number of respondents who participated in the study was 123. To collect the data from respondents, a structured questionnaire was used. To identify the outcome of the study Mean and t-tests were applied. The method of sampling was convenience sampling.

Study's Findings

Table 1 shows the Gender, Male respondents are 57.72%, and females are 42.28%. Respondent's age group, those who are 22 to 25 yrs. are 41.46%, and respondents between 25 to 28 yrs. were 23.58%, of respondents were 28 yrs. and above is 34.96%. Looking at the type of services, Food / Beverages are 26.83%, Tour Guide is 21.95%, Accommodation is 21.71%, and Selling of Cultural Art / Craft is 19.51%. Regarding Employment, Employed are 31.71%, Unemployed is 43.09%, and Local Retailers are 25.20%.

Table1. Respondent's Demographic Details

Variable	Number of respondents	%
Gender		
Male	71	57.72%
Female	52	42.28%
Total	123	100 %
Age		
22 to 25 yrs.	51	41.46%
25 to 28 yrs.	29	23.58%
28 yrs. & above	43	34.96%
Total	123	100 %
Types of Services		
Food / Beverages	33	26.83%
Tour Guide	27	21.95%
Accommodation	39	31.71%

Selling of Cultural Art / Craft	24	19.51%
Total	123	100 %
Employment		
Employed	39	31.71%
Unemployed	53	43.09%
Local Retailers	31	25.20%
Total	123	100 %

Table2. Impact of Ecotourism on the livelihood of Local Retailers and Local Population

Sr. No.	Survey's Statements	Mean Value	t-Value	Sig.
1.	Ecotourism helps in reducing poverty among the local population of the region	4.21	13.656	0.000
2.	Being involved in ecotourism activities creates employment opportunities among local communities	4.12	12.720	0.000
3.	Ecotourism improves the living standard of local people	4.10	12.692	0.000
4.	By providing different services to visitors at tourists destination local retailers can earn a good amount of money	4.09	12.323	0.000
5.	Ecotourism improves the infrastructure facilities of the tourist destination	4.27	14.593	0.000
6.	Instead of hiring people from outside, local people and retailers must be given the opportunity to participate in tourism-related activities	4.31	14.799	0.000
7.	A good number of local and foreign visitors visiting the destination is a good opportunity to earn money	3.17	1.939	0.027
8.	Good tourist packages can be prepared with the involvement of the local population as it will improve their livelihood	4.00	11.454	0.000

9.	Local retailers can earn good money by providing facilities to visitors like food, Accommodation, tourist guides, etc.	3.21	2.376	0.010
10.	Leakage in the system must be identified and avoided to help local people earn good livelihoods and enjoy the benefit of living in tourist destinations	4.29	14.854	0.000

Table 2 shows the Mean values of the “Impact of Ecotourism on the livelihood of Local Retailers and Local Population” the first statement of the t-test says about the reduction in poverty “Ecotourism helps in reducing poverty from the local population of the region” the mean value is 4.21, next statement is regarding participation in activities “Being involved in ecotourism activities creates employment opportunities among local communities" the mean score is 4.12. The third statement is about improvement in the standard of living "Ecotourism improves the living standard of local people” it has earned the mean score of 4.10, next statement is “By providing different services to visitors at tourists destination local retailers can earn a good amount of money” the mean value is 4.09, the fifth statement is about infrastructure “Ecotourism improves the infrastructure facilities of the tourist destination” the mean value is 4.27. The next statement is “Instead of hiring people from outside, local people and retailers must be given the opportunity to participate in tourism-related activities” the mean value is 4.31, and the seventh statement is “Good number of local and foreign visitors visiting the destination is a good opportunity to earn money” the mean score is 3.17, next statement is about tourist packages “Good tourist packages can be prepared with the involvement of local population as it will improve their livelihood” with the mean value of 4.00. The last two statements are “Local retailers can earn good money by providing facilities to visitors like food, accommodation, tourists guides, etc.” mean value is 3.21 and “Leakage in the system must be identified and avoided to help local people earn good livelihood and enjoy the benefit of living in tourist destinations” mean score is 4.29. The t-value of each statement of the survey in the context of Ways of Innovating Education System and making it Effective is found to be significant as the t-value of each statement is positive and the significance value is found to be less than 0.05.

Conclusion

The tourism industry and Ecotourism are considered to be a good source of income for the country as well as the local people of the region, it must be promoted as much as possible. Tourist destinations must be attractive and the visitors must warmly be welcomed as they are a very good source of earning for the local retailers and local population of the destination. The government along with other traveling agencies work together and take more efforts to involve more and more local people in tourism-related activities as it will help local people earn a good amount of money and improve their living standard and livelihood. A leakage and a lot of corruption in the system have been identified that need to be removed to give local retailers and people of the region a good opportunity for their livelihood and employment opportunity. Conservation and protection of the

environment are possible only through Ecotourism, local people must protect their traditions, and culture as it is the only way to attract more and more tourists from all over the world. A T-test has been done to find out the outcome of the research, all the statements are found to be significant as the significant values for all statements are less than 0.05.

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