
Community Participation In Ecological Management For Developing Ecotourism Perspectives

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ABSTRACT:

The term eco-tourism was initially used to describe nature-based travel to relatively undisturbed areas with an emphasis on education. The concept has developed to a scientifically based approach to the planning, management and development products and activities. Around the globe, eco-tourism is quickly becoming one of the most popular forms of vacationing. Eco-tourism primarily aims to provide awareness to the visitor of the protective, productive and regulatory functions of the ecosystem. Eco-tourism can play a significant role to uplift the local population with regards to economic benefits and livelihood. There is a need to identify the good eco-tourism spots and develop the infrastructure to provide good hospitality and educate the people regarding environmental conservation.

Dalha Mountain is one of the unidentified ecotourism destinations of Janjgeer district of Chhattisgarh. To study the impact of ecotourism on livelihood of local residents of area a survey had been performed. The forests of the mountain having mixed tree species could lure numerous tourists and generate ample opportunities for the local people to gain economic benefits without adding trauma to the biodiversity of the region. Besides being the spiritual place of worship Dalha mountain is an attractive cultural ecotourism destination. The forest dwellers are getting benefited from ecotourism activities because of which they have started taking interest in conservation and ecotourism. There is a need to take some major steps which could make Dalha a popular ecotourism destination.

INTRODUCTION:

Tourism involves travel to areas of natural and ecological interest, typically under the guidance of a naturalist, for the purpose of observing the floristic diversity, wildlife and

learning about the environment and at the same time focus on the important flora-fauna and promotion of understanding and conservation of the environment. The emergence of tourism as an important instrument for sustainable human development including poverty alleviation, employment generation, environmental regeneration and advancement of women and other disadvantaged groups in the country requires support to realize these goals. Tourism is changing rapidly as nature, heritage, and recreational destinations become more important, and conventional tourism is forced to meet tougher environmental requirements presenting a challenge to government and private enterprise to develop new approaches to the tourism market. Theoretically, eco-tourism can be defined as a type of tourism where the environment, local community and visitors all are benefited. In practice, the term ‘eco-tourism’ is often used by tour operators as a marketing tool to promote any form the tourism that is related to nature. Eco-tourism is a responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people. Historical, biological and cultural conservation, preservation, sustainable development etc. are some of the fields closely related to Eco-tourism. Ecotourism is considered the fastest growing market in the tourism industry, according to the World Tourism Organization with an annual growth rate of 5 % worldwide. During 1990, tourism received increasing attention in developing countries. In India, for instance, there has been a large increase in international tourism in the last few years. In the year 2002, there has been a 14.6 % increase in international tourist arrivals along with 22.4 % growth in foreign exchange and most of this increase is due to India’s protected areas made for *in situ* conservation of biodiversity declared by Central and State Government categorized as Biosphere reserves, National parks and Wild life Sanctuary. Nature-based tourism a sub-sector of tourism can be an important channel for redistributing resources from countries who demand higher nature based vacation to developing countries, which comprise mega-diversity regions and protected parks (Gossling, 1999). The term ecotourism was coined by Hector Ceballos-Lascurain in 1983, and was initially used to describe nature-based travel to relatively undisturbed areas with an emphasis on education. The ecotourism is defined by the World Tourism Organization (WTO) as, “Tourism that involves traveling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the specified object of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural aspects (both of the past or the present) found in these areas. The concept has, however, developed to a scientifically based approach to planning, management and development of sustainable

tourism products and activities. Basically ecotourism means-“ tourism involving travel to areas of natural or ecological interest, typically under the guidance of a naturalist, for the purpose of observing wildlife and promotion of understanding and conservation of the environment.” Historical, biological and cultural conservation, preservation, sustainable development etc. are some of the fields closely related to eco-tourism. Through ecotourism travelers come to better understand the unique natural and cultural environments round the globe. The World Conservation Union (IUCN) describes ecotourism as, “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.” However for tourism to be called ecotourism, it should be fully compatible with the conservation goals of the country, while at the same time pose minimum threat to the continuation of local culture and society. Moreover, it should contribute by means of income and education to the contribution of ecosystems (Brown 1997). About the impacts of ecotourism the optimistic view is that tourists are an economic force that can promote the conservation of the natural attractions. Here revenues from tourists, in the form of entrance fees, domestic air fares, accommodation and food, hiring charges of the guide, sale of local goods such as handicrafts and souvenirs and tax revenues levied on the above, are disturbed among the population that is most likely to exploit the natural areas.

Chhattisgarh is one of the greenest states of India with over 44% of its total area under lush forest. It is home to 3 National Parks, 11 Wildlife Sanctuaries and 1 Biosphere Reserve. The Indian government has recognized Chhattisgarh as a “maximum tourist potential” state and will help its endeavors in establishing itself as ‘a center of ECOTOURISM’. Chhattisgarh the 9th largest state in India rarely comes up in the vocabulary of a tourist guide. The lack of publicity has protected it’s yet to be explored natural beauty and cultural heritage from the prying eyes of a seasoned traveler. Chhattisgarh has identified some regions with a very high potentiality for ecotourism with a lot of initiatives. Chhattisgarh is destined to become the most favorite ecotourism destinations in India and few among best in the world. To study the potentials of ecotourism at one large unit of protected area i.e. Biosphere reserve and smaller unit wild life sanctuary has been selected to undertake the research in Chhattisgarh the present study was conducted. The objective of the study is to know the impacts of ecotourism on sustainable livelihood of local people. Stem, *et. al.* (2003) studied the community participation in ecotourism benefits and examined the ecotourism’s effectiveness as a conservation strategy. The research conducted reveals that ecotourism is effective as a

conservation strategy as well as for employment generation. Lindberg (1998) identified three economic aspects of ecotourism. Through tourism, the natural areas can be added values, user fees and revenue to support natural area protection and ecotourism and economic development. Corcoran (1996) found that some individuals are generating supplemental income from ecotourism and are optimistic about its future. Rural communities are developing tourism as a source of new jobs and income. Two models have been highlighted that provide a framework for community-based ecotourism strategies.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out at Akaltara block of district Janjgeer Champa of Chhattisgarh, India. The Dalha Mountain is about 10 km away from Akaltara. The mountain is situated near river- Leelgar (the supporting river of Arpa/ Mahanadi River). The mountain lies at a distance of about 40 km. from district Janjgeer. The natural beauty of the mountain makes the place a good option for ecotourism.

The vegetation of Dalha area is mixed and bamboo forests. The major species of the forest are *Shorea robusta*, *Terminalia tomentosa*, *Anogeissus latifolia*, *Adina cordifolia*, *Gmelina arborea*, *Dalbergia paniculata*, *Ougeinia oojeinensis*, *Lagerstroemia parviflora*. the area herbivores fauna, sambhar, langur, wild boar, bear, flying squirrel etc. are in plenty. Among birds, maina, cuckoo, parrot, vulture, kingfisher, seven sisters, etc. are found. The inhabitants of the villages near Dalha mountain are poor simple people. Principal agricultural crops cultivated in the study area are paddy. Grasslands are also found in patches in open areas biotic interferences coupled with edaphic factors helped in the perpetuation of grasslands are also noticed. Ecofriendly tourism will link local people for conservation and also create a source of income to them. This will benefit both people and tourists.

The enquiry was conducted by survey method and collection of information was based on primary data. Local people were selected as respondents to know whether they have knowledge of ecotourism principles or not, if they are aware of the benefits they can get through ecotourism or not, whether they understand what is protected area, conservation and their importance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Tourist Spots of the study are :

The important tourist spots of Dalha mountain are as follows :

1. *Sidhhamuni Ashram* : At the east of the mountain this religious ashram place creates good prospects for ecotourism. Near Ashram *Suryakund* and *Hanuman Mandir* are also good tourist spots.
2. *Nageshwar Kund* : At the south of the mountain Nageshwar kund is having mythological and religious significance, also known as residing place of *Naga*. *Dalha's Nagpanchami* festival fare is also famous a famous event of the area.
3. *Vishweshwari Temple*: At the top of the mountain Vishweshwari temple is full of aesthetic beauty with religious worth.
4. *Ardhnariswar Temple* : Thousands of pilgrimages come to worship at temple.
5. *Vishnumandir*: At the middle of the mountain covered with natural sights.
6. *Chandeli mountain*: Near the main mountain of dalha this Chandeli Mountain which is covered with greenery and natural ponds also make the place a good habitat of wildlife.

Thus beautiful temples, rangeland, open grasslands, mountains etc. also possess cultural attractions within the major ecotourism zones. These zones possess high potential to attract the tourists and thus promote ecotourism.

In the present study interview of local residents was conducted which revealed that villagers chief occupation is agriculture, 10% people do cattle farming, 20% in collection of minor forest products, 30% people in labour work, 18% people do job/service in nearby areas, 25% people do business (eg. Small shops, hotels, dhabas). The forests of mixed tree species keeps luring numerous tourists and has generated ample opportunities for the local people to gain economic benefits without adding trauma to the biodiversity of the region. Besides these being the spiritual place of worship it is always an attractive ecotourism destination. The awareness about ecotourism, biodiversity and conservation among these people was also examined. It revealed that 18.10 % local residents were fully aware about ecotourism and 54.50 % were fully aware about conservation. Though there are some who believe the conservation of the flora and fauna an immediate necessity. This clearly indicated that there is need of awareness among people in relation to area and ecotourism then only the aim of ecotourism can be achieved.

The discussion with tourists and villagers revealed that still there is a need to improve the infrastructure facilities in the study sites and the tourist would not be discouraged for the unavailability of the facilities e.g., staying, transport, guide etc. The results showed that the

inadequate infrastructure facilities would not attract and will adversely affect ecotourism. They concluded that the infrastructure facilities may play a significant role to attract the people for ecotourism. The local people should be involved as trained guides and to provide staying facilities to visitors. Also limited number of tourists should be allowed on the basis of carrying capacity.

Rawat & Sharma (2003) suggested that infrastructure for developing Stakeholder based ecotourism in Uttaranchal, India. According to them the facilities for “3A” (Approach, Arrival and Accommodation, available for the development of ecotourism. There was a need of participatory approach for village level existing institutions for formulating the infrastructural support to the government for ecotourism. Local communities must be trained for wider participation and distribution of benefits. According to Nelson(2004) ecotourism has clearly benefited the local communities. The income generated from such activities had provided new development options. The process of developing ecotourism had helped to improve the community’s capacity to manage its natural resources. Stem *et. al.* (2003) studied community participation in ecotourism benefits which revealed that communities where tourism was economically viable alternative people had left environmental destructive practices. The reason that has been put forward is fully employed people have less time to hunt or cut trees. Some people have claimed that feeling the value of the forest covered land for tourism they have left their land. But the residents of the present study area did not give any such response. They did not find any such benefit of ecotourism.

CONCLUSION:

The present study is based on prospects and potentials of ecotourism in Chhattisgarh with special reference to Dalha Mountain area of Akaltara block of Janjgeer – Chama of Chhattisgarh India.

➤ Eco-tourism can play a significant role to uplift the local population with regards to economic benefits and livelihood. There is a need to identify the good eco-tourism spots and develop the infrastructure to provide good hospitality and educate them regarding environmental conservation. In Chhattisgarh there is a lot of scope for the eco-tourism industries to earn more revenues and play a significant role for conservation of nature and natural resources.

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- If the tourist spots of these unidentified areas are properly identified and the publicity is made then the ecotourism industry will play a significant role in employment generation for local residents as well as to uplift their livelihood.
 - The awareness of these people is necessary and it should be done by the forest department, Non-government Organisations and other environmental organizations.
 - To get the conservational benefits of ecotourism, awareness among both the tourists as well as the local inhabitants of the ecotourism area is needed.
 - Some negative impacts of tourism had also been identified in the form of increased solid waste generation, cultural loss etc. Although through the interview it was found that their lives had improved since tourism's arrival, some people have noted the negative impacts. They felt that ecotourism negatively influence conservation through unintended economic, cultural, social and environmental side effects.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE WORK:

- Awareness among the tourists along with local residents in relation to flora and fauna through the environmental education should be provided, so that the people could learn more and more about the importance of biodiversity conservation.
- Guides should be taught conservation issues and the tourists should be told about local conservation efforts and why they are deemed important.
- Tourists should be made aware of the damaging potential of their stay and should be properly informed on 'eco-tourism etiquettes' and how to behave to reduce any negative impacts they might produce.
- To create awareness among people regarding conservation of nature and natural resources.
- To generate employment and livelihood options for the local community.

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- To mix the modern and traditional knowledge for the upliftment of the eco-tourism industry.
 - To aware the tourists regarding traditional and cultural values of the regional area.
 - Good food arrangements like restaurants, dhabas should be available for different economic class tourists.

 - Cut noise pollution. Do not blare aloud radios, tape recorders or other electronic entertainment equipment in nature resorts.
 - In case temporary toilets are set-up near campsites, after defecation, cover with mud or sand. Make sure that the spot is at least 30 meters away from the water source.
 - Respect people's privacy while taking photographs. Ask for prior permission before taking a photograph.
 - Various movie shows has to be conducted for tourists in relation to environmental awareness activities.
 - Polythene and plastics are non bio-degradable and unhealthy for the environment and must not be used and littered.

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