



International Journal of Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)
A Peer-Reviewed Bi-monthly Bi-lingual Research Journal
ISSN: 2349-6959 (Online), ISSN: 2349-6711 (Print)
Volume-III, Issue-IV, January 2017, Page No. 297-312
Published by Scholar Publications, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711
Website: <http://www.ijhsss.com>

Pro-Poor Tourism at Maithon Dam Site: Harnessing Tourism Effectively for Economic Development and Augmentation of Local Livelihoods

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Abstract

The main purpose of this research is to identify and emphasize the potential for tourism with major focus on the development of sustainable or responsible dam site tourism correlated with pro-poor tourism at Maithon Dam, managed by Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC), situated at West Bengal and Jharkhand border. Since DVC's major thrusts are concerned with flood control, water management and irrigation, recreational importance has been disregarded to a great extent although the dam site holds considerable prospects for pleasure tourism. Despite tourism industry being established at Maithon Dam site, the extreme seasonal character of tourism and inadequate infrastructural development of the region generates an uncongenial effect on the environment coupled with poverty issues among the local livelihoods. There is lack of tourism driven employment opportunities and insignificant local socio-economic growth, hence attention is given to tourism as a vehicle for unlocking opportunities for the poor. Methodology employed is both descriptive and investigative while data were collected with the help of questionnaire from purposively selected samples of locals, tourists and visitors of the Dam site and its surroundings. Therefore the present paper analyses and justifies the latent tourism potentiality of the Maithon Dam site, effort being put on securing sustainability of tourism and empowerment of local livelihoods economically.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism Development, Dam site Tourism, Local Livelihoods, Socio-Economic Growth, Pro-Poor Tourism.

1. Introduction: A sustainable approach to tourism means that neither the natural environment nor the socio-cultural fabric of the host communities will be impaired by the arrival of tourists. On the contrary, the natural environment and the local communities should benefit from tourism, both economically and culturally. There is already debate about how to make tourism more sustainable and/or responsible. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) defined sustainable tourism as early as 1988 as “leading to the management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological

diversity and life support systems”. However to date, much of this debate has focused around environmental sustainability. Enhancing community involvement in tourism and initiatives to incorporate pro-poor elements, this approach to ‘sustainable tourism’ has not been taken into account mostly due to the fact that attacking poverty can be a critical component of sustainable development. The links between poverty, environment and development in this growing situation of inequality are widely neglected from tourism standards. Significantly though, the 1999 meeting of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development urged governments to, “maximize the potential of tourism for eradicating poverty by developing appropriate strategies in co-operation with all major groups, indigenous and local communities.”

The concept of sustainable tourism development revolves around the central issue of how to treat the natural and socio-cultural resources of host communities in order to elevate their economic well-being, sustain their natural and socio-cultural capital, gain intra and inter-generational equity in the distribution of costs and benefits, assure their self-sufficiency and satisfy the needs of the tourists.

The development of tourism at both regional and national levels has been given high priority for the economic development of India since the late 1980’s. It has immense potential to minimize regional inequality, employment generation, create earning and improving backward communities.

The present study throws light upon this tourism potentiality of Maithon Dam site, situated at the border of West Bengal and Jharkhand, India. The paper dissects the strengths and challenges of the dam site as a sustainable tourist spot balanced by the attention given to the economical and social empowerment of the host communities through pro-poor tourism.

2. Background of the study: The potentiality for tourism to deliver pro-poor growth balanced by sustainable tourism at the Maithon Dam site is the main focus of the study. Tourism development was not at all strived for at the Maithon Dam site. DVC constructed the dam on River Barakar for water management, irrigation and power generation purposes. In spite of this the scenic beauty of the spot along with the favorable climate from September to March has been attracting several tourists since its inception. But very little governmental initiatives have been taken to develop the tourism in all these years. The construction of the dam has displaced several villagers and although they have been resettled they were not given any compensation. The displacement of local tribal populations caused by the DVC has worsened the socio-economic status of the surrounding villages and more so since proper planning and measures to develop tourism has not been initiated so that it may create an alternate livelihood for the locals. In addition, significantly intense seasonality of tourism coupled with inadequate infrastructure in the area hinders the generation of employment opportunities for the poor. Therefore the main questions here are- can tourism at the Maithon Dam site be sustainably developed to encourage pro-poor growth and socio-economic growth of local communities? How can tourism be a mode to

generate significant employment opportunities for the local villagers? The possible interventions that focus on creating sustainable opportunities for the poor within tourism rather than expanding the overall size of the sector at the specific region by proper management and strategies are assessed in this paper. The analysis is done so that locals can get better access to tourists and can augment their livelihood through employment and small enterprise development (Ashley, 2002).

3. Hypothesis:

- The Maithon Dam site has immense potentiality in terms of sustainable and pro-poor tourism development.
- Tourism has not been successful with the empowerment of local livelihoods, - economically and socially at the Maithon Dam site.

4. Literature Review: Sustainable or responsible tourism has been discussed for the past several years now, although sustainable dam site tourism has been given very little emphasis globally. The current approach to ‘sustainable tourism’ fails to take into account the links between poverty, environment and development, thus targeting environmental concerns only with social issues towards the periphery (Roe, 2001). Pro-poor tourism, the more recent approach towards tourism development and poverty alleviation is now globally accepted and given importance. Case studies show that PPT strategies can ‘tilt’ tourism at the margin, generating new opportunities and benefits for the poor (Ashley, Goodwin, Roe, 2001). Considerable research work and literature has been published on pro-poor tourism elements throughout the globe mainly in poverty-stricken remote areas of Africa, Nepal. Experts have debated on the many possibilities and prospects of pro-poor tourism for stimulation of economic activities. Several tourism spots in India lie at rural set-ups with rural or tribal community being the hosts, although revenue generation generally suffer ‘leakages’, much of which is captured by middle or high-income groups, not the poor. PPT briefing has been studied in very few regions in India until 2003 when the Ministry of tourism (India) along with UNDP commenced a scheme called Endogenous Tourism Project (ETP) with poverty eradication as the main objective. Case studies and critical evaluation reports on the ETP has been documented. However assertive PPT strategies in vulnerable dam sites of India have not been documented previously.

5. Significance: This paper will try to assess how sustainable or responsible dam site tourism can be attained with major focus on pro-poor tourism at the Maithon Dam site. It will highlight the pro-poor strategies that might be introduced to battle poverty issues at the dam site.

6. Objectives:

- This paper is attempted to analyze the latent tourism prospects of the Maithon Dam site in terms of sustainable tourism co-related with pro-poor tourism
- Strategically introduced pro-poor elements in the tourism sector that enhances involvement of the rural community and empowers them economically are identified and assessed.

7. Methodology: The methodology employed in this paper is both descriptive and investigative in nature. The survey of the study was done by selecting 10 purposively selected samples from tourism related establishments such as accommodation units, helmsmen or boat operating units, roadside fast food units, local shops and auto drivers. The primary information was gathered mainly by questionnaire survey from the locals, hotels and tourists. Tourists were selected randomly from the site. The intended research was most fulfilling with the help of standardized questions of the questionnaire.

Observation schedules were also deployed to gather primary data. Observations have been part of qualitative information throughout the research. Observing locals, tourists and the identifiable socio-cultural aspects of Maithon dam region were a part of the observational research. In spite of the possible arising of a number of potential ethical concerns with the observation study, the research work has been smooth. Qualitative information has also been gathered by interviewing people. People's experiences, views and feelings have been gathered through this method. The interviews have followed a semi-structured format with a few selected topics presented by a few questions.

Field monitoring was done to analyze the measure of infrastructural development and people engaged to the tourism industry.

8. Historical and Cultural Background: Since 1852, Indian government had been concerned with the problem of flood in Bengal. Heavy damage by the floods in pre independence days, made post independent Government of India to plan a detailed roadmap to control the flood. After independence two River commissions and a Central flood control board were set up to implement the flood control mechanism. To control the flood occurred by Damodar River and its tributaries known as the 'River of Sorrow' in Bengal and Bihar, a new corporation was formed, following the model of 'Tennessee Valley Authority' named as Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) in July 1948 as an Act of Parliament. The project which was initially aimed to build four large dams, three hydroelectric stations one thermal power station and a barrage with a network of canals and tributaries was completed in 1956. The project was built with a "great enthusiasm and optimism that would change the lives of millions of people", as press used to report.

The Maithon Dam is a concrete cum earthen dam constructed on the Barakar River in 1957. It is 15,712 ft (4,789 m) long and 165 ft (50 m) high with 12 spillway gates. This dam was specially designed for flood control and generates 60,000 kW of electric power. The lake is spread over 65 square kilometers (25 sq mi) which is the biggest reservoir in DVC, also known as *Maithon Lake*.

8.1 Displacement and resettlement: As with any major infrastructural project in a rural set up in India, a large number of rural and tribal communities are displaced from their niche area and are resettled elsewhere. In case of the construction of Maithon Dam around 3700 families were displaced and driven out of their homes resulting in loss of livelihood. This uncertainty of future of the affected population caused by the DVC has had no apparent

In West Bengal the Maithon reservoir and its surroundings are situated under Salanpur Block of Asansol sub-division of Burdwan district. Ten villages of Dendua Gram Panchayat of Salanpur Block surround the boundary of the reservoir (Fig. 2). The dam is constructed on the Barakar River, a tributary of Damodar which divides the border of Jharkhand and West Bengal.



Fig. 2: Ten villages of Dendua GP, adjacent to Maithon Dam (Source: Secondary data)

On the right bank of Barakar, there is the Maithon Township that falls in Jharkhand. And on the left bank, there is Left Bank Colony, falls under Kalyaneswari region of West Bengal. The location of the dam site on the border of the two states, West Bengal and Jharkhand is one of the major reasons of sheer negligence.

Physiographically, the study area is situated on the *flood plain of Barakar River* and is diversified by the presence of local relief in the form of *residual hills* as well as *rocky isolated outcrops* which are dolerite dykes injected from the basement complex of granite and gneiss. The region is characterized by dry sub-tropical monsoon climate with general dryness. The winter months from November to February are very pleasant while the summer months are characterized by intense heat until the rain comes down. The vegetation is dry and dense in and around the region.

The unique and distinctive terrain coupled with dense forests and wildlife makes the dam site attractive for tourists and visitors.

10. The present status of tourism in Maithon Dam site and its assessment: Most of the dam sites of India have emerged as major tourist destinations and the Maithon Dam site is no exception to this fact. The dam overlooking the huge expanse of water of the reservoir along with the hilly terrain has been attracting tourists for the past 30 years.

The Maithon dam and its surrounding scenic beauty is the central tourist attraction here. Other than this, the Kalyaneswari Temple, a 500 years old temple of Maa Kalyaneswari, "The Goddess of Fulfillment"(who is an avatar of Maa Kali), about 2 km away from the dam is another place of tourist interest. However a consistent number of tourists visiting the temple travel here only for religious purposes and visiting the dam is of secondary importance to them.

Other destinations include the Amarnath Shiv Mandir on the Bhandar Pahar which is 90 km high is 1 km away from the dam. The view of the whole Barakar Valley and the Maithon Dam can be seen from the temple. The deer park is visible from the dam on the left side of the Barakar River. The park has been established and maintained by DVC. The Millennium Park (Jharkhand) located at the margin of the West Bengal and Jharkhand border is another place visited quite often.

Majority of tourists are of domestic origin at the Maithon dam site, with more than 85% of them being ‘same day tourists’. They may be called visitors or excursionists since they do not stay for more than 24 hours and who visit the spot for recreational purposes only. The rest of the tourists stay the night or more than 1 night and they come for visiting the dam as well as for religious purposes.

10.1 Accessibility and Transport Linkages: The nearest railway stations to Maithon are Barakar (5km), Kumardhubi (9km) and Asansol (25km). Bus routes connect the place with Kulti, Barakar, Panchet, Asansol, Durgapur, Chittaranjan etc. Regular buses plying through the dam connects West Bengal and Jharkhand. However the Dam road closes by 10pm and remains closed till 5 in the morning. Auto-rickshaws and cars are available on hire from Asansol, Kalyaneswari and from the Jharkhand section of the Dam. Trekkers also ply across the dam. All these modes of travel are used by night halt tourists as well as domestic excursionists.

10.2 Seasonality of tourist arrival: Tourist traffic follows a seasonal trend in Maithon. Extreme seasonality is an important feature of tourism in Maithon dam site. Usually peak season starts from October and ends in March. Off season starts from March and continues till the end of summer months. Since the region resides on the Chhota-nagpur Plateau, the summer months are uncomfortably hot. Seasonality of ticket selling at the boating sites of Maithon proves that huge influx of tourists occurs during winter seasons only (Fig. 3).

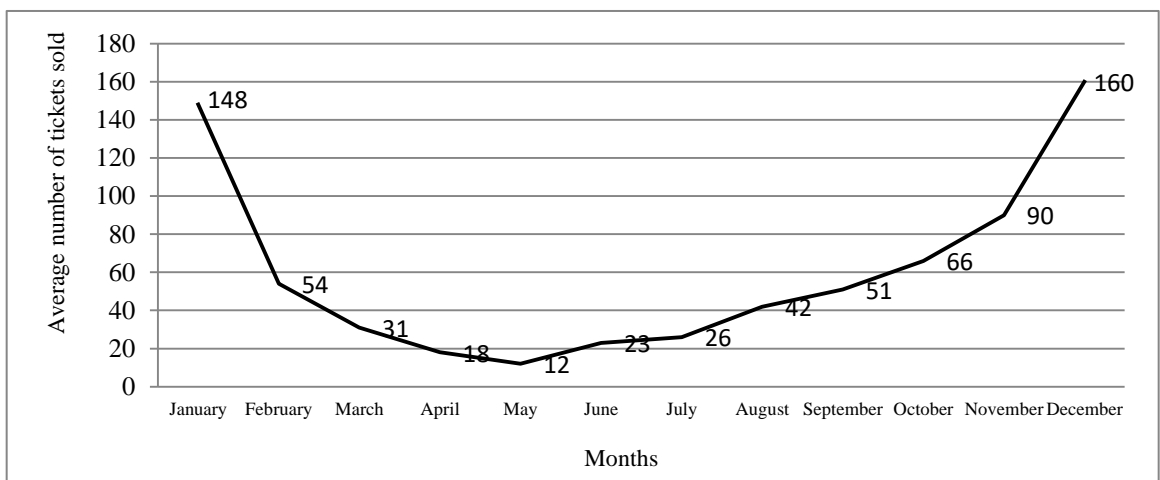


Fig. 3: Seasonality of ticket sale at a boating site at Maithon Dam (Source: Primary data)

Tourist flow decreases about 70% during off season. Winter months see the arrival of a large number of tourists, majorly in December and January. In addition, visits by foreign tourists also registered a peak in December but declined thereafter. The arrival of same day tourists however decreases only about 40% during off season, which implies that Maithon is a place of both national and regional significance. Monsoon months attract a few tourists who enjoy the beauty of discharge of the voluminous water from the dam’s spillways. The Christmas, New Year, weekend holidays and other national holidays also experience a large amount of tourist traffic. Hence the Maithon tourist site is characterized by high seasonality.

10.3 Infrastructure: Tourism infrastructure refers to a range of devices and institutions constituting material and organizational basis for tourism development. It comprises four basic elements: accommodation facilities, food and beverage facilities, accompanying facilities and communication facilities.

With couple of government owned hotels and newly developed lodges and private guesthouses, accommodation units are still developing in the region.

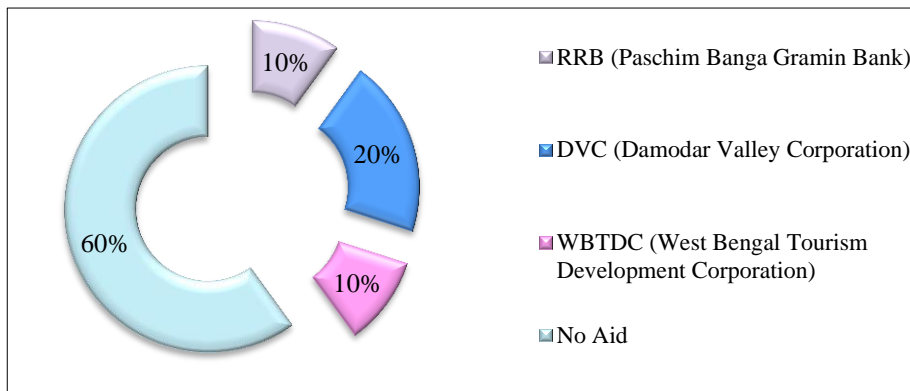


Fig. 4: Percentage of Government-Aid received by the hotels in Maithon

(Source: Primary data)

Power supply, water supply and roads are ensured and maintained by DVC. Lack of infrastructural facilities like proper accommodation units and food-outlets for the tourists is one of the reasons for hindrance in tourism development in the Maithon Dam site.

11. Status of local communities and the impact of Tourism on their Livelihood: Very

little thought has gone into the recreational importance of the dam. The major emphasis since the inception of the dam had been power generation, water management, flood control and irrigation. There is abundant tourism potential at the dam site which has remained untapped. Due to the extreme seasonality in tourist arrival, there is very little opportunity for a village household to depend entirely on tourism.



Fig. 5: Females of a household, a typical house seen in the dam-adjacent villages

There is no scope for the locals to trade with excursionists and local visitors. During recent times a few lodges and accommodation units have cropped up around the dam and Kalyaneswari Temple, and villagers take up attendant jobs. The villagers avail themselves with opportunities that reflect very marginal in character, like helmsmen/boat drivers, street vendors, cooks, waiters, room service attendants and sweepers in hotels, drinking water suppliers, as owners of small fast food shops etc. Accommodation units and hotels are used as marriage/community halls during off season. The Maithon Lake which is a boating site during peak season is used as a fishing ground during off season, operated by DVC itself. Tourism participation is mostly limited to the adjacent Dendua Gram Panchayat, since it borders the dam directly. A large segment of the population of the Dendua GP are BPL families (RHS, 2005), with most of the female population being illiterate and majority of the population belonging to backward caste. Fig. 6 shows the high incidence of female illiteracy in the area.

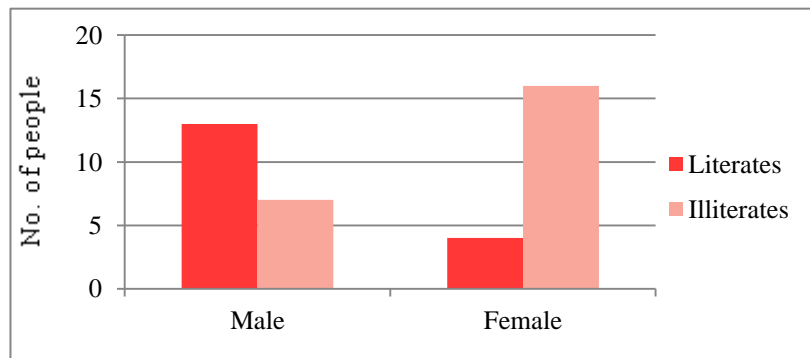


Fig. 6: Bar graph showing literacy of dam-adjacent villages (Source: Primary data)

A survey of a sample of 35 villagers of Dendua GP revealed that the percentage of working population related to tourism and non-working population have very little difference, while working population related to other sectors is negligible (Fig. 7)

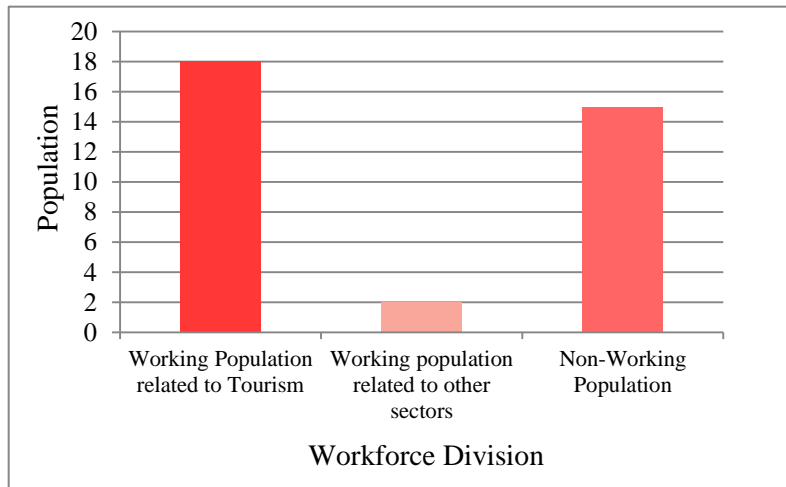


Fig. 7: Bar graph showing workforce participation of dam-adjacent villages

(Source: Primary data)

Occupations related to sectors other than tourism include very few workers who work at factories and shops in the town. There is visible socio-economic backwardness in the ten villages of Dendua GP. Due to high cost of irrigation the agricultural lands cannot be fruitfully used, hence the villagers have to rely on the little earnings from the varying tourist arrivals throughout the year. During off season many people migrate for other livelihood options to other districts of the state. Hence the impact of tourism on the livelihood of the adjoining villages of the Maithon Dam can be considered as negative.

Positive and negative impacts of tourism on the livelihood of the poor at Maithon Dam:

CATEGORIES	BENEFITS	LOSSES, PROBLEMS
Skills, Access to education	No benefit	Unskilled job opportunities related to tourism
Infrastructure- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Water ▪ Transport, roads ▪ Healthcare units 	Improved water supply due to high demand during peak season; Roads are maintained	Development of healthcare facilities nil
Other livelihood option: Farming, employment, migration	Many locals migrate to other districts for other livelihood options during off season	High cost of irrigation does not allow farming here; Employment opportunities at the power plant of DVC are very feeble for poor villagers.

Policy environment	No benefit	Policies and reforms towards sustainable tourism are nil; Policies towards the growth of poor displaced families are nil; Promotion of tourism not initiated
Opportunities for informal sector and small businesses	Job opportunities in hotels and accommodation units; small food outlets run by villagers	Due to strict regulations around the dam site a very small number of shops, food-outlets are allowed to be established in the area; Few hotels, hence very little opportunity for the locals
Casual labour opportunities	Water suppliers, sweepers	Peak season provides few labour oriented jobs while off season has nothing to provide
Household income	Peak season brings a few thousands	Almost no income during off season
Local culture	No benefit	No loss/problems

12. Making Sustainable Tourism more Pro-Poor: Tourism has been on the international UN agenda since the Earth Summit. However while most of the initiatives taken towards sustainable tourism development incorporate pro-poor elements, poverty reduction and economic growth has not been seen as a priority on the sustainable tourism agenda.



Fig. 8: Sustainable Tourism Model (Source: 12th European Tourism Forum, 2013)

Significantly though, in 1999, explicit reference to pro-poor tourism has been made in 7th meeting of the Commission for Sustainable Development which urged governments to maximize the potential of tourism for empowerment and eradication poverty in co-operation with indigenous and local host communities. Moving the sustainable tourism agenda to tackle poverty alleviation require actions like putting the poor and poverty (including the environmental dimensions of poverty) at the centre of the sustainability debate, rather than just the environment (Roe, 2001).

12.1 Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT): PPT is not a specific product but an approach to the industry that seeks to increase participation of poor people at many points in the sector, and that aims to increase their economic and social benefits from tourism while reducing the negative impacts on them. The language varies: harnessing tourism for poverty reduction or implementing pro-poor tourism or boosting the impacts of tourism on the local economy. But whatever it is called the principle is to adapt how tourism is done to generate more benefits for the local economy and poor people. The impacts of tourism on the poor depend on the behavior of the private companies and individual tourists. Yet these are strongly influenced by Governments, through its policies, regulations, public investment, expectations and actions in the sector. Fig. 9 shows the possible relationships between tourism and poverty.

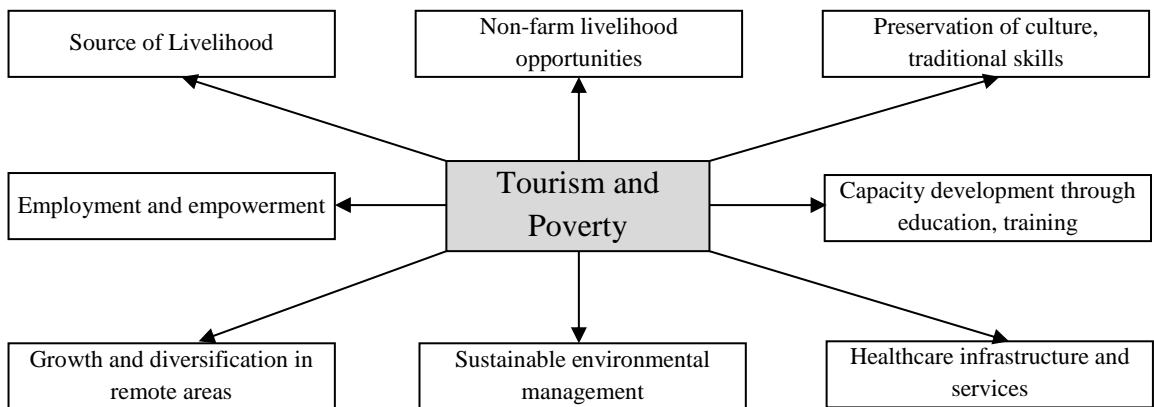


Fig. 9: Linkages between tourism and poverty reduction (Source: UN ESCAP n.d)

Advantages of the Maithon Dam site having great pro-poor tourism potential:

- Tourism is highly dependent upon natural capital. These are assets that some of the poor have, even if they have no financial resources. The Maithon Dam site has a diverse natural capital with beautiful surroundings, unique landscape and biodiversity. This is of immense importance for the further development of tourism and the sole reason for tourist attraction at the spot.
- The customer comes to the product, providing considerable opportunities for linkages between the host community and tourists. This is an important advantage for development of pro-poor tourism at the dam site.

- Compared to other modern sectors, a higher proportion of tourism benefits (jobs, petty trade opportunities) go to women. Many unskilled job opportunities are present surrounding the dam site related to the tourism sector.

These potential opportunities are inherently available in the Maithon Dam site.

13. Findings:

- The peaceful, serene landscape of the Maithon Dam surroundings appeals tourists from across the two states.
- There is extreme seasonality of tourism which results in migration of the locals for alternative livelihood options to other districts of Jharkhand and West Bengal.
- Visible low involvement of locals in the tourism sector, mainly because it generates very little earnings.
- Livelihood options other than tourism such as farming has very little prospect in adjacent villages because of high cost of irrigation. Irrigation is necessary here due to the low fertility of soil.
- There is increasing environmental degradation, contamination of water, soil and air pollution. The place is at present a mere spot for picnicking.
- There is immense negligence in infrastructure development and tourism development due to the odd location of the dam. Since it lies on the border of two states sheer negligence has hindered socio-economic development of the rural community.
- The Kalyaneswari Temple is an important religious attraction at the Maithon Dam site which draws tourists to this region throughout the year, henceforth enhancing tourism.
- Conversations with the residents reflected immense distrust on the political leadership of the region and hence they expect very little economic benefits or employment generated through tourism development.
- There is lack of governmental and private enterprise strategies ensuring promotion and marketing of tourism at the Maithon Dam site.

14. Recommendation: Strategies for Pro-Poor Tourism: Pro-poor tourism generates net benefits for the poor. The benefits may be economic, but they also may be social, environmental or cultural.

Augmentation of economic status of the rural people of the adjoining villages of the Maithon Dam site through tourism development and pro-poor tourism being the main focus of the study, the following strategic initiatives are considered.

14.1 Strategies focused on economic benefits:

- i. *Expanding business opportunities for the poor:* Small enterprises often provide the greatest opportunities for the poor. Government may take initiatives by providing financial support to introduce self-help program like sale of local products, handicrafts by the tribal indigenous community. Setting up of small restaurants and hotels by the natives should be considered too.

- ii. *Expanding employment opportunities for the locals:* Unskilled jobs may be limited and low-paid, but are much sought after by the poor. With growing accommodation units, unskilled job opportunities like room service jobs, water supplying and sweeping jobs may increase. Government as well as private enterprises should take up the responsibility of development of more accommodation units surrounding the dam site. Upgrading the quality of cheap hotels and food-outlets might increase the possibilities of more jobs for the locals.
- iii. *Enhancing collective benefits:* Collective community income from tourism can be a new source of income, and can spread benefits well beyond the direct earners.
- iv. *Enhancing involvement of women:* Development of socio-economic condition of women in this rural set up may need their involvement in tourism. Manufacturing of local food products, handicrafts and other small-scale manufacturing may be sold.
- v. *Establishing opportunities for the local youth:* The local village youth should be given opportunities as tour operators in the region. Development of tour operation in collaboration with the locals for wildlife watching should be facilitated.

14.2 Strategies focused on non-economic impacts:

- i. *Capacity building, training and empowerment:* The poor often lack the skills and knowledge to take advantage of opportunities in tourism. NGOs and government enterprises should bring about the change in them.
- ii. *Mitigating the environmental impact of tourism on the poor:* Tourism sometimes leads to displacement of the poor from their land, but in the case of Maithon Dam site, the construction of the dam has displaced the rural community. Degradation of natural resources due to tourism is the major concern here. The dam site has turned into a ground for picnicking, resulting in unwanted garbage accumulation and disruption of the natural set-up of the spot. Battling the environmental issue may be tricky, but a Sustainable Plan should be formulated to minimize negative impacts of tourism on the environment. Environmental guard stations and patrols should be maximized. In addition integrated solid waste management policies and strict rules for the visitors must be deployed at the dam site.

14.3 Strategies focused on policy/process reform:

- i. *Building a more supportive policy and planning framework:* Many governments see tourism as a means to generate money rather than to address poverty. Proper policies if implied on the study area might generate income for the local community.
- ii. *Bringing the private sector into pro-poor partnerships:* Locally-driven tourism enterprises may require input to develop skills, marketing links and commercial expertise. Private enterprises and NGOs should take up the responsibility.
- iii. *Promoting tourism:* Governmental initiatives to promote tourism of the Maithon Dam site will enhance tourist arrival, thereafter bringing more opportunities for the locals.

15. Conclusion: One of the primary objectives of this discussion was to link tourism, environment and poverty issues at the Maithon Dam site. In order to link the aforementioned three points pro-poor tourism has been chosen. Although as a development approach PPT is incipient and is therefore unproven empirically. Measurement through qualitative and quantitative analyses is essential to the long-term success of pro-poor approaches to tourism. Through strategic partnerships between community institutions and state and national governments, NGOs and the commercial sector (especially the travel trade), positive outcomes may be realized. Tourism development has often been focused at the macro level. There needs to be a shift towards building partnerships which brings national market places tourism experiences which reflect the characteristics of the destination, involving local communities and giving them a degree of control as hosts (Goodwin, 1998). The Endogenous Tourism Project (ETP) led by the Ministry of Tourism (India) and UNDP in 2003 can be taken as a prime example of an initiative that successfully reached at community-levels of few rural areas of India. However PPT cannot be achieved by differentiating from other development strategies; rather efforts should be made to co-develop tourism with other sectors to drive community growth sustainably and economically.

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