

North Asian International Research Journal Consortium

North Asian International Research Journal

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NAIRJC JOURNAL PUBLICATION

North Asian
International
Research Journal Consortium



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ISSN NO: 2454 - 2326

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A STUDY OF ECOTOURISM AND ITS MANAGEMENT IN MADHYA PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is becoming one of the value of ecotourism in creating opportunities for sustainable development of communities and management of ecosystem and environment was studied in the Madhya Pradesh state of India. This state promotes ecotourism in natural beauties, national parks and sanctuaries, apart from exclusive areas created for ecotourism. A brief analysis of Madhya Pradesh's Draft Ecotourism Policy shows that while the Policy acknowledges that communities should be involved in ecotourism. In the section of 'Recommendations', focus is on the challenges that ecotourism places on communities' social structures as well as those working towards the inclusion of them. The other areas that are looked at are ecotourism vis-à-vis income generation and conservation. The ecotourism income has continuously increased since its inception and the participatory management practices have also improved its ecosystem and surrounding environmental conditions. The area that was once degraded due to dumping of non-degradable plastic waste is now almost free from such environmental-unfriendly substances.

KEYWORDS: *Ecotourism, opportunities, funding needs, management and Income.*

INTRODUCTION

ECOTOURISM

Ecotourism is a form of tourism involving visiting fragile pristine and relatively undisturbed natural areas, intended as a low-impact and often small scale alternative to standard commercial (mass) tourism. Its purpose may be to educate the traveler to provide the funds for provide funds for ecological conservation to directly benefit the economic development and political empowerment of local communities, or to foster respect for different cultures and for human rights. since the 1980s ecotourism has been considered a critical endeavor by environmentalists, so that the future generations may experience destinations relatively untouched by human interventions.

The travel industry defines ecotourism as “purposeful travel that creates an understanding of cultural and natural history, while safeguarding the integrity of the ecosystem and producing economic benefits that encourage conservation. The long-term survival of this special type of travel is inextricably linked to the existence of the natural resources that support it” (Bandy, 1996 quoting: Ryel and Grasse 1991:164).

Key components of Ecotourism from various definitions

- Contribute to conservation of biodiversity
- Benefit indigenous/local communities
- Minimum consumption of resources
- Stress upon local participation, ownership and business opportunities
- Cater to small groups by small-scale businesses
- Include an interpretation/awareness experience
- Involve responsible behaviour on the part of tourists and tourism industry.

ECOTOURISM MANAGEMENT

This is a management level qualification for any individual who is or wishes to be involved in meaningful contributions towards the development of responsible human and environmentally friendly naturally and commercially sustainable ecotourism. The individual will be able to develop, plan and operate an ecotourism enterprise incorporating the principles of sustainable, traditional knowledge and livelihoods whilst balancing these with sound environment and business practices. It is a qualification in career pathway towards an accomplished sustainable ecotourism management and administration specialist.

The learner who has achieved this qualification will be able to integrate ecotourism management and leadership knowledge with those of customer service and the operational specifics of a given tourism context.

With regard to the implementation of sustainable tourism reforms, the qualification serves as a basis of an effective implementation process by defining and identifying those competencies required by technical tourism officials in the private and public sector. The possession of relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes by such officials is crucial to the implementation of sustainable ecotourism management reforms.

ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY IN ECOTOURISM INITIATIVES – SOME CASE STUDIES FROM INDIA

Mountain Shepherd Initiative (MSI)

In the fall of 2006, the Mountain Shepherds Initiative, a community owned and operated ecotourism venture, was formerly inaugurated in the vicinity of the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve (NDBR) in Uttarakhand. The Mountain Shepherds Initiative was born out of the social struggle of the Chipko (early 1970s) and Jhapto Chino (late 1990s) movements and more recent efforts by the Nanda Devi Campaign - to reclaim peoples land and forest rights.

In May 2001, the state government, with the support of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) commissioned the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF) to determine the feasibility of reopening the park to limited tourism activity.

In response to this development, the Bhotiya community came together to form the Nanda Devi Campaign in Lata village. On October 14, 2001, the community members of Niti Valley issued the progressive Biodiversity Conservation and Ecotourism Declaration (Annexure 1) to guide its future endeavours and held a workshop elaborating their community-based ecotourism proposals. The focus of the initiative has been to build capacities of the youth, to develop a product line and marketing. Today the MSI is a private community owned enterprise. The following are some of the impacts on the community:

Economic Impacts:

Community members from the villages are involved in the enterprise. The capacity building of youth has resulted in the reduction of migration to cities. Further, backward and forward linkages have been made, where some homes offer homestays, others provide the food and yet others make the souvenirs which are purchased by the tourists.

Social Impacts:

One of the founding principles of MSI is to establish a community-owned operation without human exploitation and environmental degradation. This has resulted in an ethos where the youth who are the guides treat the tourists as equals rather than in a hierarchical manner, which is very much the culture in mainstream private tour ventures.

Conservation:

A large part of the Nanda Devi Biodiversity Conservation and Eco Tourism Declaration of October 14, 2001 focuses on biodiversity conservation. All ecotourism activities are conducted such that there is no harm to the environment and that the diversity of the region is maintained.

This case study is an example of how the community seeing the impending tourism development in the region, took charge and therefore have evolved as a community based and owned ecotourism initiative.

Sunderbans Jungle Camp (SJC)

SJC is located in the Bali Island which is part of the India Sunderbans, a mangrove forest and a UNESCO world heritage site. Around the year 2000, there was a marked increase in the poaching in the forests of the Sunderbans. In response to this, the Field Director of the Tiger Reserve and WWF-India, West Bengal State Office, invited Help Tourism, a tour operator and destination management consultant to develop a community based tourism demonstration project. Apart from supporting conservation efforts and creating alternate livelihood opportunities, one of the major motivations for this initiative was also to counter the mega mass-based tourism that was being planned by Sahara India Pariwar Group in the region. What has emerged is an example of collaboration between the community and Help Tourism, which is a private player in the tourism industry.

Role of the community:

One of the initial preoccupations of the developers was the distribution of tourism benefits to the community. One of the ways identified was the involvement of the community members in the construction of tourism infrastructure. More than 3000 man days were created for construction and about 2000 people from 7 villages benefited from this. 70% of raw material used was purchased locally. Today much of the staff are from the local communities and food is also purchased locally. Out of the total net profit 7% is spent towards health projects for the community, 5% as donation the boat festival and other cultural activities, 5% as garments distribution and Garments Bank and 5% towards research and development, conservation initiatives to individuals and local organisations. All this adds up to 70% of the profits being retained within the area. Additionally, there are several community benefit schemes which have been initiated. However the most important aspect of community involvement in SJC is the role of the community in decision making processes. All stakeholders take joint decisions, while Help Tourism provides the technical inputs. During the implementation process, the local

community is always informed and involved at every stage. The local community also has equal right to take decisions on day-to-day operations, management and recruitment.

Community Based Tourism in Choti Haldwani, Uttarakhand

The Uttarakhand Forest Department in 2001, initiated a project to develop ecotourism in 4 villages within the Corbett National Park and Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary with support from LEAD grant, IUCN Himal and resources from local NGOs, operators and communities. Choti Haldwani was one of the villages and is located within the Corbett National Park.

The first step in the process was an Appreciative Participatory Planning and Action method with the community members. One of the important outcomes of this process was the formation of the Corbett Gram Vikas Samiti, registered as a society and the membership of which is open only the residents of the village. What started as a 5 member Samiti today has 22 members and charges an annual membership of Rs. 100. The following were the tourist development that was undertaken as part of this ecotourism project:

1. Corbett Heritage Trail
2. Guiding
3. Homestays
4. Moti Souvenir Shop
5. Information Kiosk

Benefits to the community:

Apart from keeping alive the legacy of Corbett, this ecotourism initiative has resulted in new jobs and additional supplementary sources of livelihood and 30 people are directly engaged in the initiative. As a means to ensure that the economic benefits reach everyone in the village, a portion of the charges for the guide goes to the Samiti, Moti's family members (Moti was a person who worked for Corbett), Diben babaji (an elderly person from Corbett's time) and the museum.

There is an increased awareness and appreciation of the region's natural and cultural heritage. In terms of conservation, the community is involved in tree planting, informing the Forest Department about forest fires and wounded animals. There has been a reduction in poaching, wood cutting and theft. Children are also part of the

conservation mechanisms through the club that has been formed. Women's participation has been through SHGs, which provide a number of souvenirs, which are sold at the shop.

Ecotourism's Impacts on Communities

The descriptions of ecotourism development presented above, span from total community ownership to involvement to mere employment being generated for some members of the community. Yet, some positive impacts, which are visible, are:

- Greater control over forest and other resources by the community
- A sense of pride about the historical and cultural heritage of the community
- Enhanced levels of conservation of natural resources
- Direct economic benefit to the communities and the mechanism of benefit sharing decided by the community
- Extent of involvement in tourism activities.
- The nature, form and pace of tourism.

The case studies presented are really exceptions, since there has been very little effort by the government as well as private tour operators to actually seek community involvement. The large numbers of experiences of ecotourism and eco development are more in the line of what has been encountered through the tourism development at Kanha and Bandhavgarh National Parks and eco development at the Satpura National Park.

Kanha and Bandhavgarh National Parks

The creation of Protected Areas has increased the wildlife population causing increase in people-animal conflict. Yet communities cannot take any measures to protect themselves against this conflict since that would necessitate confronting the forest department, which more often than not would translate into physical harm of the communities and its resources.

The sale of land to tourism projects is not a sustainable option for communities since these monies dry up rather fast and leave no other source of income in their hands. Until now the only livelihood option that has been opened up for communities is their employment in the campuses of the establishments in the tourism industry, which

translates to the fact that communities who were once land owners and practitioners of agriculture, with diverse cultural and social histories have become homogenous cheap labour in the tourism industry.

Though the carrying capacity of the 2 parks have been established at 300-400 and 700-900 guests respectively for Kanha and Bandhavgarh, the tourism facilities are increasing ref. This indicates that the limits of acceptable change have not been taken into account, further pointing towards unplanned tourism development in these 2 very important wildlife reserves.

Pachmarhi Biosphere Reserve

Satpura National Park, Bori Wildlife Sanctuary and Pachmarhi Sanctuary form the Pachmarhi Biosphere Reserve. Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) in their 'Social Assessment Report for the Satpura Landscape'⁵, have found that the role of the communities has been low in the decision making process vis-à-vis the management of natural resources, where they have been used merely in the implementation of government schemes. Further, displacement has been highlighted as a major issue in the existing conservation framework of the Satpura National Park. Apart from relocation of villages, an important case in point is the non-renewal of fishing license of the Tawa Matsya Sangh by the Madhya Pradesh Matsya Mahasangh and the subsequent declaration of the Satpura National Park as a Tiger Reserve, which caused another round of displacement in the region. Adding insult to injury is the fact that the MPTDC has established a resort in the vicinity of the reservoir consisting of 2 houseboats and 6 AC rooms with attached bath facility and also organises cruises in the reservoir.

This chequered history of the Biosphere Reserve shows that the Forest Department has not taken into confidence the community and that the eco development activities lack transparency and accountability to the people living in this region. This is an example of the government absolutely ignoring the communities living within the Biosphere Reserve.

Ratapani Wildlife Sanctuary

The Sanctuary is located in Raisen district and has been proposed as a Tiger Reserve and is expected to be declared as one in the next 6-8 months. In the centre of this Sanctuary is Delabadi, where there is the forest guest house as well as the Delabadi Jungle Camp, an establishment of the MPTDC. The campus comprises of a restaurant, 8 AC tent rooms with attached baths and a swimming pool.

On the way to Delabadi are several villages, none of which are part of the tourism activities in the region. Within the gates of the Sanctuary but outside the core, is a small restaurant owned by a family from Haryana⁷. The owner of this land is an old man who used to be in the armed forces during the II World War. As a war veteran, he was given about 500 acres of land. His sons and grandsons jointly own this land today. The family is currently attempting to get the required clearances for the setting up of a resort. Yet Delabadi has been promoted heavily as a tourism destination by the MPTDC due to the thick forest cover and the proximity to Bhopal (55 kms). The manager at the Delabadi Jungle Camp has reported that the 8 rooms are booked full almost throughout the period the Sanctuary is open to tourists.

Clearly, what emerges from the above examples and several others from across the country is that unless there has been either proactive response by the community or intervention by an outside agency, most ecotourism developments see the following impacts, which need to be taken into account while planning for any ecotourism programme:

MPEDB'S FRAMEWORK FOR ECOTOURISM

Ecotourism Policy of Madhya Pradesh (draft)

The ecotourism policy of Madhya Pradesh subscribes to the definition as laid out by the TIES. The policy indicates community involvement in terms of livelihood generation in its objectives and use of resources, where communities in consultation with them traditionally use them. However, there is no mention of the role of the community in conservation as well as in tourism development activities. In the section, which talks about policy implementation, the Policy highlights the concept of PPPP (Public-People-Private-Partnerships). There is however, no specific mention of what the role of each of the stakeholders will be.

Yet, while detailing out the functions of the MPEDB, there is no mention of what the Board would do to achieve its objective of community involvement or its principle of community consultation.

In the Madhya Pradesh Forest Policy (2004), there is a section on Ecotourism, which focuses on developing infrastructure and capacities of staff to be involved in ecotourism activities but does not spell out what the role of the community should be. The only mention is of local educated villagers who could be trained to work in the Interpretation Centres.

The ecotourism policy (Draft, 2010) clearly states that all ecotourism activities will be conducted in accordance to the Wildlife (Protection) Act, the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 and other directives and guidelines as announced by the Government. There however is no mention of The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 and the adherence to this very important Act which establishes the rights of indigenous communities to both protect and conserve forest and wildlife as well as grant land rights to land that they have been cultivating (with specific conditions applied).

Both the Ecotourism Policy of Madhya Pradesh (Draft) as well as the Madhya Pradesh Forest Policy (2004) have conceptualised the role and engagement of communities in a restricted manner and with no directions of how to achieve even this minimum agenda.

ECOTOURISM AS INCOME GENERATION

One of the recurring arguments presented by the MPEDB in the backgrounder for the workshop on PPP in Ecotourism held in October, 2010 is the need to create spaces for private investment in forests to augment resources required for forest management.

Estimating the costs of regeneration and the sources of funds received by the Forest Department is a difficult task. Firstly, identifying and segregating different cost components is a challenge since administrative costs overlap various activities including conservation and management.

Secondly, identifying the source of resources is also a challenge. The Forest Department receives money from both the state and central governments. There are several crores of funds parked in CAMPA, the utilisation of which has been extremely low¹¹. The Government of India is also receiving large amounts of funding from various International Financial Institutions for forest regeneration.

Fundamentally, the issue here is to examine if the income generated from ecotourism activities do go back to the Forest Department. Currently, all earnings from forests (NTFP, timber, entry fee etc.) go back into a common pool wherein all non-plan income of the state is parked, from where allocations for different expenses are made. There is no way to ensure that the incomes from tourism are ploughed back to the Forest Department for regeneration work. Therefore, the only direct benefit that is traceable is salaries people receive in case they are employed at tourism sites. This creates a rupture in the idea that ecotourism can be used as an income generation method for forest conservation.

It has been found that almost 70% of income from wildlife tourism is from the fees collected from the entry gate, which means the larger the number of tourists, the greater the earnings of the Forest Department. This is in complete opposition to the concept of ecotourism. Additionally, the large sunk cost of tourism infrastructure developed at the sites becomes redundant since several of the tourists prefer day visits to overnight stays¹². Further, it has been projected that per hectare annual expenditure for ecotourism is Rs.155 and the per hectare annual income is Rs.15¹³. This clearly goes to show that ecotourism by itself is not a self-sustaining activity. Ecotourism needs to be coupled with other income generating activity like NTFP, agriculture etc. for it to be a sustainable option for livelihood for communities.

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