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## ***SUCCESSFUL ECO-TOURISM PRACTICES: ROLE OF STAKEHOLDERS***

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### **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study is to find factors for successful eco-tourism development. Tourism is the world's largest industry that promotes increased interaction of political and economic forces within a society. It may be regarded as consisting of tourists, a business, and an environment or community in which it operates thereby tourism phenomenon affects all these elements. This paper deals with the study of various stakeholders in tourism development. As suggested by various authors', management people, locals, tourism trade people and NGO's are main stakeholders in tourism.

All the information presented in this paper, if not otherwise cited is based on observations and discussions with the personnel of the NGO's, locals and the tourists.

To strengthen the theoretical ideas, three case-destinations in Indian Himalayas, Himachal Pradesh, were selected. Viz. Sangla Valley in district Kinnaur, Pongdam wetland in Kangra district and Ananda Project in Kullu District.

The Sangla Valley is situated in Himachal Pradesh, an Indian state in northwest Himalayas. Foreign tourist started visiting this valley in 1995. Since then, the number of tourists has considerably increased. This has resulted in development of many accommodation units.

It is obvious that the valley holds an enormous tourism potential for domestic as well as foreign tourist. Because of the growing popularity among tourists and the interest of inhabitants to use the tourist potential of this valley, the region will face a considerable boom in tourism in the next few years that may become a challenge for tourism development in a sustainable manner. A group of villagers decided to form a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) named as “Sangla Valley Sustainable Development Society” mainly for the cause of sustainable tourism development in the valley.

The second case study is a story of tradition, awareness, science, community participation, non governmental organizations, receptive administration and individual initiative combining to boost development, promote eco-tourism and conserve environment in a small village of Himalayas in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. Mr. Satinder Singh Guleria, who has set up the Institute for Environment Studies and the Science Awareness Trust, along with other dedicated people, who realized that action is better than just complaining, and all this in a place which most people, even in India, may not be able to identify on the map. Mr. Guleria’s area of work is in Sanauran village in Kangra district of HP, where the Pong Dam and the Ramsar Wetland expanse have received the attention of the organization.

Third case study is of Ananda Project in Kullu Valley of Himachal Pradesh. The purpose of the project is to “help local communities regain their self-reliance and return to a sustainable way of life” and the main focus is to “introduce cultivation techniques at the community level in order to help the villagers generate a sustainable source of income and to conserve endangered species of medicinal plants being over harvested from the wild”.

It can be concluded from the study that for successful eco-tourism development several stakeholders can play a vital role and most important is the role of community.

**Keywords:** Eco tourism, Community participation, Sangla Valley, Pong Dam wetland, Ananda Project.

## **1. CONCEPT OF ECO-TOURISM**

Eco-tourism is often considered to be a potential strategy to support conservation of natural ecosystems while at the same time, promoting sustainable development (Ross and Wall; 1999). Eco-tourism is usually considered to be more than just tourism to natural areas. However, the absence of a widely accepted definition of eco-tourism is associated with a lack of consensus concerning the distinctiveness of ecotourism and the extent to which it differs from other forms of the tourism. Since the formal introduction of the term by Ceballos-Lascurain almost two decades ago, controversies over appropriate uses for the term and inconsistency in its application have hindered the development of the concept and its practical realization at specific sites (Bottrill and Pearce; 1999). Those at the forefront of ecotourism research and development now provide a definition, which addresses the fundamental goals of conservation of natural areas and local development. The Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as

“ Purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the culture and the natural history of the environment; taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem; producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of the natural resources beneficial to the local people. ” (Wood, Getz and Lindberg; 1995)

The world conservation Union’s (IUCN) Commission on Natural Parks and Protected Areas (CNPPA) defines ecotourism as

“ Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features – both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations. (Ceballos-Lascurain; 1996)

Ecotourism is neither a simple concept to define nor a straightforward phenomenon to implement and evaluate. Ecotourism should be regarded as being more than tourism to natural areas and should be viewed as a means of combining the goals of resource conservation and local development through tourism in a synergistic fashion. This means that care should be taken to ensure that the goals of tourism development do not interfere with the goals of protecting natural areas and bio-diversity (Ross and Wall; 1999).

While providing an enjoyable experience in nature, the fundamental functions of ecotourism are protection of natural areas, production of revenue, education and local participation and capacity building.

While difficult to measure, ecotourism is believed to be the fastest growing tourism segment. In 1988 there were between 157 and 236 million international eco tourists, generating economic impacts of \$93 billion (Filion et. al.; 1994). There is a considerable debate over what ecotourism really means, however, the estimates of value generated are based upon a definition of the form, which allows tourists to enjoy and appreciate nature.

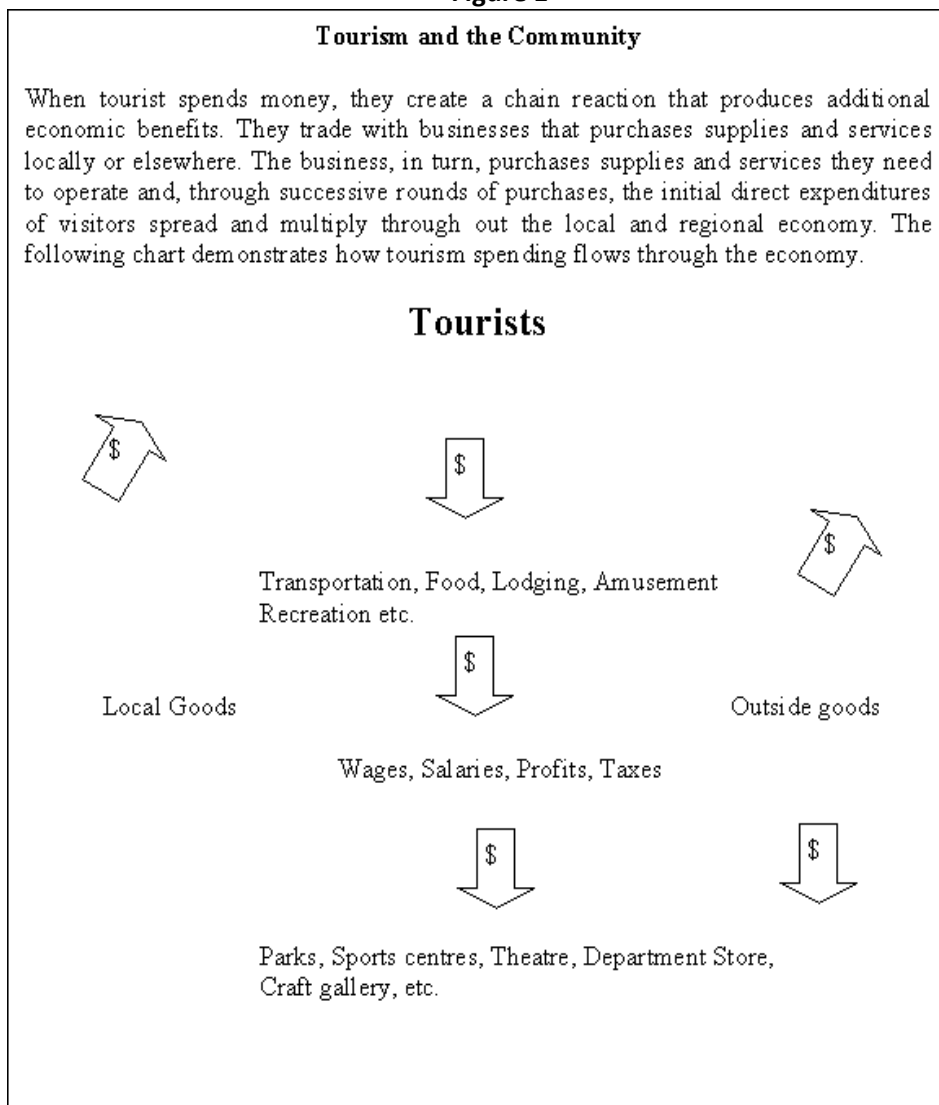
Eco-tourism development is not possible, if it remains the responsibility of the Govt. alone. It is an admitted fact that many environmental problems cannot be solved without the active participation of the local people and people-centered grass-root environmentally active organizations. Their involvement in the environmental protection programs is essential for discharging a variety of vital functions; because they know better as to which kind of environmental protection programs are in their best interest. Any program of environmental protection, which is thrust upon people, will not succeed unless it embodies their explicit acceptance in terms of their perceived needs.

The participatory approach offers 3 main advantages.

- 1) It gives planner a better understanding of local values, knowledge and experience.
- 2) It wins the local community backing for project objectives and communities help in local implementation.
- 3) It can resolve conflicts that arises when large infrastructure investments are made.

Tourism is an economic activity so it becomes necessary to spread its benefits to the community. When we plan we must think for the community. The environment is an integral part of the development, in their improvised state; the community depends on environment for their livelihood and substance. Communities have to meet their urgent short-term needs by preying upon natural resources available in their surrounding.

**Figure 1**



Source: Guide for Local Authorities on Developing Sustainable Tourism, A Tourism and Environment Publication, WTO, Spain.

They care more about extracting what they can today from the environmental resources than about conserving them for tomorrow. The result is often very opposite of

sustainability, with excessive exploitation of natural habitat. To make development sustainable, what is therefore required are strong poverty alleviation strategies that meet the basic needs of the community, and empower them in a manner which reduces their direct dependence on natural resources. So we are left with an option of

the usage of resource but for this we have to calculate the extent of benefit we can take from the resources without harming them or we need to find out the limits or the economic efficiency of the resources.

Community participation as described is central to the alternative ecotourism concept, with proponents arguing that participation in planning is necessary to ensure that benefits reach residents in destination areas and that ecotourism, which encourages local employment and small business development promotes higher economic multipliers, and that a community approach to decision-making helps to ensure traditional lifestyles and that community values are respected. A close working relationship between the local community and the industry will provide the means to support conservation efforts.

## **2. COMMUNITY AND TOURISM**

There is a close link between the community and tourism. Tourism helps a community become more attractive and prosperous. It is more attractive because a community must be appealing to draw and satisfy visitors, and it is more prosperous because these visitors spend money. With this money spent in community, the community develops. Many factors need to be evaluated when community leaders design their master plan for local development. These factors include land use, transportation, education, utilities, fire and police protection, government regulations, labour, housing and commercial and industrial activity.

Figure 1 illustrates how the economic benefits of tourism flow through the local economy. As shown in this diagram, there is some loss of economic benefits to purchasing goods from outside the area while use of locally produced goods and services leads to increased benefits within the local economy. The diagram also shows that some attractions, facilities and services – parks, sports centers, theatres, stores and art and craft galleries- developed for tourism are ones that community residents can also use.

### 3. TOURISM, THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE COMMUNITY

Tourism and the environment are closely interrelated. The natural and built environment provides many of the attractions for tourists and tourism development can have both positive and negative impact on the environment. Sustainable tourism development depends on protecting the environmental resources for tourism. The partners for sustainable tourism development are the tourism industry-owners and managers of tourism commercial enterprises, the environment supporters- advocates for environmental conservation, and the community-residents, community groups and leaders and the local authorities. Typically some members of the community will also be involved in the tourism industry or be environment supporters.

Figure 2

#### **The Tourism Industry, Environment and the Community**



Source: Guide for Local Authorities on Developing Sustainable Tourism, A Tourism and Environment Publication, WTO, Spain.

Figure 2, illustrates the interaction needed among these partners that is necessary to achieve improved quality of life for the community, with the interaction of all these ( tourism, environment and community) quality of life increases.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

Methodology consists of two parts

1. Interests of local people regarding tourism development.
2. Discussions have to be put in the perspective of ecotourism development.

The objective of this study was to identify that how tourism can be developed on sustainable basis in the study area. The data was obtained through Personal-in-depth interviews and workshops. The interviews were conducted using an informal discussion method with some pre-structured questions and were designed to gather “Quality” information from a relatively small number of respondents. All interviews were conducted according to “Funnel Technique”<sup>1</sup>. The discussion started on the broadcast possible level and gradually narrowed down through progressively more restricted channels. A list of points, which covered in the interview/discussion revolved around the following themes;

- Present tourism scenario
- Problems with the tourism development.
- Interest of local population.
- Role of community in the tourism development.
- Success of ecotourism.

#### **5. CASE STUDIES**

Role of SAT in development of eco-tourism at Pongdam wetland

Pongdam wetland is one of the largest man-made wetlands of northern India. Situated at the base of the Dhauladhar ranges in Kangra district of Himachal

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<sup>1</sup> Developed by Chisnal in 1986. In this discussion started on the broadcast possible level and gradually narrowed down through progressively more restricted channels. The final aim is to find out the various issues related to the objectives.



Pradesh the wetland came into existence in 1975-76. This wetland being the first major wetland, which potentially offers a transitory resting reserve for the migratory water birds coming from the Trans-Himalayan zone. Pong dam wetland was declared a wild life sanctuary in 1983 and in 1994, Ministry of Environment and forests, Government of India declared it a National wetland and now it has been given the status of Wetland of International Importance or Ramsar Site no. 1211 on 19/08/02. Being fed by 5 major streams emerging from the Dhauladhar ranges the reservoir has an area of about 45,000 hectares at maximum possible flooding – the level varies with every season and average around 30,000 hectares. Over 200 villages with a population over 85,000 lies along the wetland.

Pong Dam wetland has immense potential for bird watching, eco-tourism, water sports, angling and many other activities. Other attractions nearby are many places of cultural and religious importance in the vicinity of Pong Dam wetland. Famous heritage village of Paragpur is located just 15 km from the lake. The hilltops and ridges are also the setting for numerous forts and temples. Kangra fort (25 km), Haripur fort, and the ruins of another fort stand majestically mid-lake on the Shore of Ramsar Island. Many temples are also found near the lake as monolithic rock cut temple at Masroor, Jawala ji Temple, Dadasiba temple with its mid- 19<sup>th</sup> century wall paintings, and Chintpurni Temple.

The Institute for Environment Studies and the Science Awareness Trust (SAT) was set up by Mr. Satinder Singh Guleira along with other dedicated people in Sanauran village in Kangra district of HP, where the Pong Dam and the Ramsar Wetland expanse have received the attention of the organization.

This trust has been involved with bird banding of migratory birds and bird census at the International Ramsar Site, Pong Dam, since 2004, along with scientists from the famed Bombay Natural History Society. In recognition of talents and interests, Mr. Guleria was appointed as master trainer by State Council for Science, Technology and Environment to operate eco-clubs at school level and to train teachers in the schools in the Kangra district.

A measure of success of trust can be seen by the fact that over 1739 volunteers became part of the endeavor. The SAT motto is --- 'Save Environment, Save Life', 'Educate at grassroots Level', 'Eco Conservation', and 'Computer Application programs for poor children from interior'.

The Industrial Training Center, camps, mobile vans under the Asha—hope—programme have done a lot to improve the lot of the people, as have the computer classes. Most students had never seen a computer before. On the health front, there was some resistance from a few on issues like illicit liquor drinking and women issues but these were happily overcome.

Through camps in Bilaspur, Gathutar and other places thousands have been benefited. Ever-expanding team of SAT remain happily busy in cleaning of water sources like wells, plantation drives, health surveys and various other activities. They have also built a small library building, which took three months for 320 volunteers. The building can house 11 people and the Institute for Environmental studies can look forward to more good work. With proper planning and execution, the area can attract eco tourists from all over, as adequate infrastructure is built.

Further, the awareness programs developed by SAT are generating interest among local people about eco-tourism, and now, as a result people are coming forward for the development of eco-tourism related projects in the area.

#### Role of Sangla Valley Sustainable Development Society in tourism development

The Sangla Valley is situated in Himachal Pradesh, an Indian state in northwest Himalayas. Foreign tourist started visiting this valley in 1995. Since then, the number of tourists has considerably increased. This has resulted in development of many accommodation units. It is obvious that valley holds an enormous tourism potential for domestic as well as foreign tourists. Because of the growing popularity among tourists and the interest of inhabitants to use the tourist potential of this valley, the region will face a considerable boom in tourism in the next few years that may become a challenge for tourism development in a sustainable manner. A group of villagers decided to form a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) named as “Sangla Valley Sustainable Development Society” mainly for the cause of sustainable tourism development in the valley.

This society has been making several efforts for the development of tourism on sustainable basis in the area.

### **MOTTO OF THE SOCIETY**

Come let us all join hand in saving this beautiful valley for our next generations to come. One small step in this area can lead to a giant leap where everyone is putting in a small effort to save our mother earth from the negative effect of modernity.

### **WORKS UNDERTAKEN BY SOCIETY**

All-round efforts are being made to protect this valley from the adverse effect of tourism and negative approach brought on by modernity.

- ❖ Everyone in the village of Sangla and nearby areas are combining their joint efforts in the fields of tourism and agriculture.
- ❖ Their efforts are to make every thing sustainable i.e. save the nature and culture.
- ❖ Reduce deforestation and air pollution, by using more of solar energy.
- ❖ Renovation of old buildings for guesthouses and new ones to be built on old traditional style.
- ❖ All rubbish to be collected and disposed in a organized manner.
- ❖ To reduce pollution created by vehicles, public transport system to be supported.  
Demarcating protected areas so as to reduce the impact of tourist on this area.
- ❖ Working conditions to be created for local people to generate more jobs which are eco friendly and give a fair lively hood.
- ❖ More of local produce to be used, promotion of local cuisine at all eating-places.
- ❖ Agricultural practices should be eco friendly and use of organic materials to be promoted.
- ❖ Special incentives to be given to farmers on this issue.

Agricultural practices, which support the local traditions and customs and maintain good working conditions for farmers are to be encouraged with incentives from the government.

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### **CASE STUDY OF ANANDA PROJECT**

The Ananda project operates in the area around about 4000 old Krishna-temple near the village of Naggar, which is situated in the northern part of Kullu Valley in Himachal Pradesh, India. The purpose of the project is to “help local communities regain their self-reliance and return to a sustainable way of life” and the main focus is to “introduce cultivation techniques at the community level in order to help the villagers generate a sustainable source of income and to conserve endangered species of medicinal plants being overharvested from the wild.” (Ananda Project Website)

Tourists, who come to Naggar to volunteer, help villagers as much as they want and can in various tasks. These include taking care of vegetables, tree seedlings and plants, which depending on the season mean watering, weeding and collecting seeds. Also help in the office is needed. The price that tourists are supposed to pay includes accommodation in the guesthouse, two simple meals in the temple area and possibility to use shower.

Because the project is situated in the sacred temple area, tourists are expected to behave respectfully. Rules are somewhat strict e.g. tourists are not able to enter the temple or the kitchen where the food is prepared. Thus it is not possible to help in the kitchen, which is something that many tourists would like to do. The local family, who owns the office and the guesthouse where the tourists stay, eat their meals inside their home, which is located inside the temple area. Tourists are not able to mingle with them. For the tourists this is not usually a problem. Rather they enjoy sitting in the terrace of the temple and staring the valley below. Many tourists also make their own meals using any kitchen located in the guesthouse near the temple.

## **6. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

It is evident from the above study that tourism is supposed to be an economic indicator and it is responsible for growth in the employment and other regional development in the Himalayan region. But as tourism grows on a large scale it can lead towards some negative impacts. For better tourism we have to think for planned development, where the local community is given proper attention.

The study investigated the interests and needs of local population regarding tourism development in detail. For a sound sustainable development, the participation of more or less, all local people is required. Therefore it is important to analyse the interest and intentions of local people and the Society.

To put responses into the perspective of sustainability, a holistic approach is needed. That means, the discussion about tourism development has to be integrated in a broader view including all main aspects of life in study area.

To estimate the sustainability of the tourism development in study area, it is important to have an understanding of the system and have an understanding of the interaction with its wider context. The understanding of system requires at least a brief understanding of people's livelihood, of natural conditions and of the interactions of these sub-systems. Describing the livelihood, socio-cultural, political, juridical, institutional and financial aspects are taken into account. While describing the interactions of men with nature, the focus on process, organisation, and on function is required. The understanding of interactions with the wider contexts requires including power, rights issues and broader institutional and financial aspects. Studying these aspects, a description of the main outer forces and main obstacles is possible.

It is felt that conditions for sustainable tourism development might not be completely favourable. That is the reason the discussion about the interests and intentions has to be put into the broader perspective of sustainability.

The study arrives at the conclusion that although government is carrying out efforts to develop tourism in the study area, the local community should be involved in successful eco-tourism planning. For achievement of eco-tourism goals

the involvement of local community with appropriate management strategy is required.

Area evaluation for the eco-tourism development was performed with the help of survey to illustrate the application and utility of framework as a tool for sustainable tourism development. It is revealed that current relationship between people and resources is necessary for successful eco-tourism. Sustainable tourism development is not possible, if it remains the responsibility of the government alone. It is an admitted fact that many environmental problems can't be solved without the active participation of locals. The local community perceives tourism to be a tool for the development, and they have a positive attitude towards tourism development. They feel that if planned carefully then the impacts of tourism can be minimised. Moreover, NGO's are playing an important role in the eco-tourism development in the study area by means of creating awareness among the local population.

#### Success of ecotourism

Unfortunately, ecotourism without effective management, will be unsuccessful and of little consequence in the absence of adequate institutional arrangements and administrative commitments. The development of positive relationship between people, resources and tourism is very unlikely to occur without implementation of effective policies, management strategies, and involvement of a wide range of organizations, including NGO's and other development agencies.

To achieve success in ecotourism we should follow a process. The various steps of this process are

1. Impact assessment.
2. To plan for tourism development on the basis of sustainability.
3. Involvement of the local community.
4. To assist and encourage the participation of the NGO's.
5. To facilitate the functioning of the ecotourism development.
6. Examining the developmental process.

Finally we can conclude that ecotourism is neither a simple concept to define nor a straightforward phenomenon to implement and evaluate. Ecotourism should be regarded as being more than tourism to the natural areas and should be viewed as a means of combining the goals of resource conservation and local development through tourism in a synergistic fashion. This means that care should be taken to ensure that the goals of tourism development do not interfere with the goals of protecting natural areas and biodiversity. All the stakeholders in tourism development should safeguard the natural environment with a view to achieving sound, continuous and sustainable economic growth geared to satisfying equitably the needs and aspirations of present and future generations.

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