



Development of local level strategies for minimizing tourism leakage in Kaziranga National Park.

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ABSTRACT

Numbers of studies are found which have estimated tourism leakage in different tourism destinations. Such studies also suggested different strategies to mitigate tourism leakage. But most of the strategies are either beyond control for the local community or incompatible for the local situation. The present study has taken this issue and collected Expert Panel's Opinion regarding the potential strategies that are compatibles to the local situation.

KEYWORDS: local, strategy, revenue, leakage

1. Introduction:

In developing countries, there always has been a problem of leakage in tourism revenue. This is because of lack of linkage of local resources with tourism. The peripheral areas of developing countries have to depend on various goods and services on developed areas. It is shown in different studies undertaken by different scholars like Britton (1982, 2004), Weaver (1998), Walpole & Goodwin (2000), Brohman (1996), Sandbrook (2010) Lacher & Nepal (2010) and Choudhury and Goswami (2012) how the benefits of tourism are wiped out by leakage. Various studies have concentrated in quantification of leakage amount. There are few studies which studies about the potentiality of the development of such kind of strategies which can be easily adopted using locally available resources within the host economy. The present paper has taken this issue and explored some potential development strategies by taking experts opinion.

2. Objectives:

There are basically two objectives of the study. They are:

- I. To find out the cause of tourism leakage in the local level economy of Kaziranga National Park (KNP).
- II. To develop local level strategies for minimizing leakage from the above mentioned study area.

3. Methodology:

The study is purely based on expert opinion. Before taking experts' opinion, the author took stakeholders' opinion regarding potential development of such kind of strategies which can be adopted using locally available resources which are compatible to the local situation. For taking stakeholders' opinion, the author did a census survey of all four camps, souvenir shop, Kaziranga Development and Jeep Safari Association, Kaziranga Elephant Safari Association, dhaba and restaurants, tourist frequented retail outlets, tour guides, the President and the secretary of Kaziranga Suraksya Samittee and Range Officers of all four forest ranges viz. Burapahar Forest Range, Bagori Forest Range, Kohora Forest Range and Agorotoli Forest Range. After taking stakeholders opinion, the authors compile the strategies suggested by the stakeholders and send it to the experts for their opinion. The expert panel has comprised Forest Range Officers of four forest range offices, two academicians working for tourism development in Kaziranga National Park, the president of Kaziranga Suraksya Samittee, one member of the NGO, AARANYAK and two officials from the department of tourism, Government of Assam. The justification of choosing the people as member of expert panel is all are involved many years in tourism and conservation activities in KNP.

4. Result and Discussion:

4.1 Problem: Large share of the accommodation are of non-local owners in KNP leading to huge amount of leakage.

Strategies: It is challenging for the local people to reduce the amount of leakage from accommodation point in KNP. Hopefully, there is some potentiality for the local people to participate in the accommodation sector too. The mushroom growth of resorts and big hotels has not only increased the revenue leakage but also destroyed the scenic beauty of KNP. The big hotels and resorts have been established either in the agricultural land purchased from the local people or in the government

land leased from the Government. The local people should not sell their agricultural land to the corporate hand for the sake of their own's sustainability. For this, awareness campaign among the local people should be organized by the local Organizations and NGOs. There are number of local Organizations and NGOs viz. Kaziranga Suraksha Samity, Kaziranga Development and Jeep Safari Association, Krishak Mukti Sangram Samity working for the conservation of the National Park. These organizations can dialogue with the government to refrain from handing over of agricultural land to be converted to commercial land. Though government has encouraged non-local private corporate sectors to establish hotels and resorts for the development of tourism sector of KNP, it does not help the local community any way. Neither the restrictions on the entry of the corporate sectors can hamper the tourism in KNP though it is commonly believed so by the Government. Rather it will open a door for the local community to participate in the accommodation sector. Home stay facility may be a good option for them. Home stay facility has been used as a successful strategy in different places within the country and abroad. Literatures also have shown how village people get benefited providing home stay facility in China, Malaysia, Thailand and Sikkim and Himachal Pradesh of India. It is already established by the literature of Goswami (2004) that tourists do come to National Parks or Protected Areas for enjoying virgin forest and exotic wildlife rather than luxury. Taking this opportunity, establishment of big hotels and resorts should be discouraged. Because, the mushroom growth of hotel and resorts have created a number of problems for KNP. First, it has destroyed the animal's corridors which has not only increased the men-animal conflict but also disturbed the natural movement of the animals. Secondly, it has increased the problem of water management and solid waste garbage and thirdly, the rampant construction of concrete building has destroyed the scenic beauty of the national park. The private corporate sectors have converted the natural landscape to an artificial concrete township. The deep well boring for heavy use of water has created the fear of decreasing the ground water level. For saving from any more degradation of the scenic beauty of KNP, the construction of new big hotels and resorts should be stopped. This is possible if the local organizations protest such type of activity straightly. In such a situation, there is ample potentiality to provide home stay facility. The home stay facility not only increases the local community's participation in tourism but also maintain the ecological sustainability. But, it needs a proper plan which cannot be fulfilled within a very short period of time. There should be a comprehensive plan for the home stay service. As a part of the plan, a complete mapping or survey of the households, locations to be used for accommodation, animal corridors, water flows, potential draining system, potential solid waste disposal area should be done. It needs a huge investment and administrative assistance. This can be done under a high powered body comprising stake holders of KNP viz. Director of Tourism, KNP, the Forest Range Officers, representative(s) of the tour operators, representative of the home stay units, representative (s) of local NGOs and Organizations and Village Headmen. A project should be submitted to the Indian Tourism department and should make involve the local member of parliaments since it needs a huge investment.

Though some households have started home stay accommodation and succeeded to capture significant amount of tourism revenue, these home stay units have been run without any monitoring and planning. There is no uniformity regarding the tariff of lodging and meal. These

home stays are running without any guideline and regulation regarding minimum quality of lodging and food, sanitation and hygiene, security and safety of the tourists, garbage disposal facilities, water treatment system, architectural design of the rooms, surrounding environment, minimum space for the rooms used for accommodation etc. Though some home stay units have food facility, in some others, there is only lodging facility. Therefore it is important to bring these accommodation under the control of the body.

The staff or the owners should be properly trained up to deal with tourist. For proper monitoring and management, the body can adopt Himachal Pradesh Home Stay Scheme 2008 and Sikkim Registration of Home stay Establishment Rules, 2012 as model. Malaysia Tourism Department has introduced online booking facilities of home stay accommodations for the tourists where tourists can choose any home stay units listed in the webpage and can book online. Home stay facility of Malaysia, as it is one of the most priority areas of Country's tourism sectors, have succeeded to earn huge amount of tourism revenue in the recent years. Opening of website as it is done in Malaysia will promote home-stay facilities of KNP.

4.2 Problem: Lack of linkage of local resources with tourism.

Strategies: Though tourism has matured in KNP, it still depends on non-local people for positions like manager, chef and kitchen staff and mahut. To make involvement of local people in such positions, training among the local youths is must. There are number of capacity building NGOs, tour operators and institutions in the state viz. ASHA, Help Tourism, Tour Operators Association of Assam (TOAA), Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship (IIE) etc. By inviting resource persons from these institutions and organizations, the local organizations such as Kaziranga Development and Jeep Safari Association, Kaziranga Surakhya Samitee may organize capacity building workshop in adjoining villages of KNP. These organizations may talk with the tour camps seeking sponsorship for such type of workshop and training programme. Since the tour camps are doing business on the basis of KNP, it is their obligation to support local community. Of course, they have shown their goodwill gesture in different programmes related to the local community. All the tour camps already agreed to refrain from providing jeep safari from their respective tour camps and have started to send the tourists to Kaziranga Development and Jeep Safari Association. This kind of co-operation increases a healthy environment in the tourism sector of KNP. With the financial support of the tour camps, the local NGOs and organizations can organize workshops and training programmes for positions of chef, cook staff, reception, waiter, manager, tour guide, computer operator etc. After completion of such workshop and training programme, the tour camps can provide them opportunity for apprentices. Gradually, as they will become experienced and expert, they may be absorbed accordingly in their establishment permanently.

Though tourism has matured in KNP, locals' participation is not sufficient. People of the locality are skilled in weaving, culinary, handloom, handicraft and farming activities. The skill of the local people should be polished and developed to link it with the tourism sector by organizing training programme and workshop. Most of the souvenir products sold in KNP are imported from other parts of the state or even outside the state though there is high potentiality to produce those things locally. The local organizations should organize local people and develop their skill and should give a platform to them. A private tour camp owned by non-local actor, IORA, has started an exceptional strategy. It organized a skill development workshop in 2004 for 200 local weavers inviting experts from Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship under the sponsorship of Panchayati Raj. After the workshop, IORA has been encouraging the weavers to produce handloom items and purchasing those products to sell in the retail outlet, IORA HAAT located in the hotel premises. Though this project has benefited IORA, it has given a platform to local weavers to be economically empowered and to capture a considerable amount of tourism revenue with them. For the greater interest of the local weavers and craftsmen and of their own, the tour camps owned by local actors and non-local actors can open a souvenir shop at its premises and can adopt such type of workshop and training programmes comprising the local weavers. Before the workshop or training, the tour camps should influence those local weavers to form SHGs so that their activity will sustain. Accordingly, this kind of strategy can be adapted in case of food processing, horticulture and agricultural products too. Whenever the local people will become expert in such thing, the tour camp will be able to purchase their needs from those SHGs which intern will help them to capture tourism revenue in the

local economy.

Formation of co-operative society or SHG may be a good strategy to increase linkage local handloom and handicraft items and agricultural items with tourism, which also increases marketing skills. At the individual level, village people do not have marketing skill. Initially the SHGs can open their outlet in their own home since they have little money to invest. There is a case how formation of SHGs can strengthen the position of the local weavers. Some 20 weavers, including tribal and non-tribal, have formed a self help group, Aparajita, in 2004 in Basagaon Village under Kohora Range. Initially they used to sell their products in the residence of the president of the SHG. When the sale gradually increased, the NEDFi constructed a retail outlet for the SHG. Now, the members are regularly producing different kinds of handloom items and earning more than five lakhs rupees in the tourism season. This kind of strategy can be adopted in case of handicrafts and farming of agricultural and horticultural items. It is an example how formation of co-operative societies or SHGs increase organizational strength.

There are two more cases in KNP where formation of organization has increased the role of local people in tourism. In 1989, a few youths started Kaziranga Development and Jeep Safari Association. They appealed all tour camps to refrain from providing jeep safari service to the tourists but to send the tourists to the association. The tour camps accepted the appeal and have been doing accordingly. Now, under this association, there are 100 jeeps, all are owned by local youths, earning nearly Rs 50000/ per season as net income.

Observing the demand of the tourists, some local people formed Kaziranga Elephant Safari Association and started elephant safari in Bagori Range hiring elephants from different parts of Assam. Subtracting the rent of elephant, which is a necessary leakage, each member earns significant amount of income from elephant safari.

The distance between the jeep safari point and the elephant safari point of Kahora Range is approximately 1 km from the national highway. Taking this distance as opportunity, local farmers who have bullock cart/horse cart can start bullock cart/ horse cart safari to the tourists from the National Highway Point to the Jeep safari Point or elephant safari point. This activity will not only increase the potentiality to capture tourism revenue within the local community but also provide unique experience and lots of fun to the tourists. There are number of tribal villages near each tourist entry point under each Forest Range. Tourists wish to visit those tribal villages. Bullock cart safari/ horse cart safari can be started to visit tribal villages and local tea garden spread in the adjoining areas of the national park. There are some famous villages viz. Chandra Shing Rangpi Village and Ethnic Village in the central range. Chandra Shing Rangpi Village, a hillock village, is a very unique village situated in very natural environment surrounded by green hills. Ethnic Village is an artificial village constructed by the Karbi Anglong District Authority to give an idea to the tourists about the livelihood, life style, tradition and culture of different tribes and ethnic groups of Assam. All these villages are situated within 3-5 km from the tourist entry point of Kahora Range. It will be very exciting, fun and enjoyable to the tourist if bullock cart or horse cart service is provided to visit these places from the entry point.

Besides, Kahora Range, at Bagori and Agoratoli Range too, there are number of Mising villages (Mising Tribe) maintaining their traditional way of livelihood. Their traditional music and dance, traditional tools used in daily activity, traditional weaving, traditional clothing, traditional rice wine and other drinks, traditional food and traditional house etc. all may be the centre of attraction for the tourists if these are properly positioned and marketed. There are ample examples where these kind of traditional villages of China, Thailand, Malaysia and other developing countries have been earning millions of dollars from tourists.

During the tourism season, local people can set up ethnic haat near the entry point of Kahora Range (because Kohora Range has highest gathering of tourists) where ethnic food and drinks, souvenirs such as handicraft items, handloom items, tea and other traditional tools and items will be available for the tourists. The local entrepreneurs, craftsmen, weavers, chefs can organize themselves and can open stalls in the ethnic haat. It may be a good strategy for the local people to earn and capture tourism revenue since a significant number of foreign tourists and inbound tourists have demand for such type of items as it was found by Borkotoky and Goswami (2012).

4.3 Problem: Insufficient tourists in ranges other than Kahora Range.

Strategies: Compared to other tourism destinations, tourism is still in nascent stage in Burapahar, Bagori and Agaratoli Ranges. The tourists flow into those Ranges of KNP is not satisfactory for which there is little scope for the local people to get them involved. But a balanced development of tourism in every forest range is very necessary for the conservation of the national park. The organization like Kaziranga Suraksha Samity, Kaziranga Development and Jeep Safari Association should promote the other tourist entry points too through opening websites where every information will be uploaded about the wild animals available in those entry points. These local organizations may request the forest department not to charge entrance fees for a time period to encourage tourists into these tourist entry points.

As like as Kaziranga Development and Jeep Safari Association has opened its branches in Bagori and Agoratoli entry points, it should start another branch in Burapahar range too. It is observed that when a tourist wants to visit other entry points such as Bagori or Agoratoli from Kahora Range, the head office of Kaziranga Development and Jeep Safari Association provide jeep safari service from the head branch. It hampers the business of the jeep safari providers of the concerned forest ranges. Therefore, there should be an business understanding between

the branches that the head branch will drop the tourists into the gate of the entry point where the concerned branch office receive the tourists and arrange his safari their after. It will help to justified distribution of tourism revenue from jeep safari among the tourist entry points.

5. Conclusion:

The state government has been undertaken number of strategies for tourism development in KNP. But such type of strategies has increased only Government revenue. The conservation of any protected areas depend on the community living in the adjoining areas of the protected areas.

The local people have to realize how importance the wild resources are. If they get benefits from the tourism based on wild resources, they themselves get engaged protection and conservation of wild animals. Therefore, local people should be get participated in tourism programme. Most of the studies have provided such type of strategies which are general rather precise. The strategies which are developed by taking perception from the stakeholders are opened for discussion for the Expert Panel. They examined the strategies from the point of view of viability and found compatible according to the available local resources. Therefore, the strategies are looked significant for increasing local community's participation into tourism.

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