



Scope for Livelihood Intervention Based on Wildlife Tourism in Nameri National Park of Assam: An Analysis

KEYWORDS

tourism industry, wildlife tourism, livelihood, community, national park.

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ABSTRACT *Tourism industry has emerged as a major industry globally and a major sector in many economies. Wildlife tourism has experienced a dramatic and rapid growth in recent years worldwide and is closely aligned to eco-tourism and sustainable-tourism. The study is mainly based on primary information and data collected from five fringe villages around the Nameri national park of Assam. The focus of the study is to identify various possibilities of livelihood scope available in wildlife tourism and barriers to local participation in tourism in around the Nameri national park of Assam.*

Introduction:

The importance of Tourism¹, as an instrument of economic development and employment generation, particularly in remote and backward areas, has been well - in the world. (http://www.academia.edu/2075082/ETHNIC_TOURISM_IN_INDIA_A_CASE_STUDY_OF_PUNJAB). Its most important economic feature is that they contribute to three high-priority goals of developing countries: foreign-exchange earnings, the generation of income and employment (Taleghani, 2011, http://www.jofamericanscience.org/journals/am-sci/am0611/71_3910am0611_412_416.pdf). The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimate that tourism contributed 9.2 per cent of global GDP and forecasts that this will continue to grow at over 4 per cent per annum during the next ten years to account for some 9.4 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (WTTC 2010) (<http://www.crctourism.com.au/wms/upload/resources/Tourism%20Economics%20Summary%20WEB.pdf>). It is also India's largest service industry, making a contribution of 6.23% to the national GDP and providing 8.78% of the total employment in the country (<http://www.trcollege.net/articles/74-development-and-impact-of-tourism-industry-in-india>).

Tourism offers labour-intensive and small-scale opportunities compared with other non-agricultural activities (DeLoitte and Touche, 1999), employs a high proportion of local people and values natural resources and culture, which may feature among the few assets belonging to the poor. Besides, it also provides livelihood opportunities, particularly to the local people. The livelihood impacts that the tourism industry includes are the creation of employment and economic opportunities and benefits for individuals, households, and the collective community and also a wide range of non-financial livelihood impacts. (Scoones, 1998; Department for International Development, 1999; Ashley, 2000a; Ashley et al., 2001; Simpson, 2008).

Tourism industry is often referred to as the world's largest industry and regarded as a means of achieving sustainable development and it represents significant economic, environmental, and socio cultural opportunities for many local communities² (Sharpley, 2002). Tourism is an important opportunity to diversify local economies. It can develop poor and marginal areas with few other export and diversification options. Remote areas particularly attract tourists because of their high cultural, wildlife and landscape value (Ashley et al. 2000).

Wildlife tourism has been recognised as a livelihood strategy complementary to the maintenance of biodiversity in many regions (Goodwin and Roe, 2000; Shah, 2000; Sebele, 2010). Wildlife tourism mainly based on national parks and managed reserves constitute an important aspect of tourism (Roth and Merz, 1997).

Wildlife tourism has experienced a dramatic and rapid growth in recent years worldwide and is closely aligned to eco-tourism and sustainable-tourism. Wildlife tourism is based on the twin goals of fostering wildlife conservation and natural area tourism. It embraces all three types of nature tourism – it is partly adventure travel, is nature-based and involves ecotourism's key principles of being sustainable and educative as well as supporting conservation (Newsome et al., 2005).

In this context, wildlife tourism is the most prominent segment of the tourism industry in Assam. Assam has great diversity of wildlife constituting of mammals that include species of conservation concern, like the One Horned Rhinoceros, Golden Langur, Hoolock Gibbon, White Winged Duck, Tiger, Clouded Leopard, Elephant, Swamp Deer, Gangetic Dolphin etc. Moreover, different species of reptiles are also found here. The internationally known Kaziranga National Park and the Manas National Park are World National Heritage sites while the many other national parks and wildlife sanctuaries such as Pobitora, Orang, Nameri, Barail, Panidihing and Dibru Saikhowa have their individual beauty and charm. With emphasis on the national parks, it is noted that they are serving as a good source of revenue generation for the government and also boosting up the state's position in this area. During 2013-14, the number of tourists, both foreigners and Indian, staying at the tourist lodges in Assam was 44,63,479 and the revenue collected by these tourist lodges of Assam was Rs. 1,91,31,800/-. In 2009-10 revenue contribution of Kaziranga national park was the highest (85.5%) followed by Pabitora (10.5%). Orang and Nameri national park contributed 2.19% and 1.92% respectively. In terms of domestic tourist influx to national park Kaziranga, Pabitora and Nameri was 83.40%, 9.88% and 3.44% respectively.

²Community may be defined as the locality of the human settlement within a fixed geographical area or a local social system which involves interrelationships among people living within that fixed locality or a type of relationship of

shared identity (Lee et.al., 1990).

In this study, an effort has been made to analyse scope of rural livelihood intervention in wildlife tourism around Nameri national park of Assam.

Methodology:

The study is mainly based on primary information and data. For the study, Nameri national park under Sonitpur district of Assam was selected on judgement sampling. Five fringe villages around the sample national park were selected. The sample villages are Dharikati, Tarajan, Gamoni, Mekahi and Sotai. The selection of the sample villages was primarily based on the consideration that the selected villages were at least minimally accessing livelihood opportunities offered by the existing tourism enterprises. Altogether fifty households were interviewed from the sample villages. The primary data was collected through interview and by administering of structured questionnaire in the year 2013. Questions regarding the perception to tourism development, earning opportunities and perception of barriers to their participation in the tourism industry were asked. The secondary sources used in the study included journals, published books, unpublished reports and newsletters, government policy documents and the internet. The data was analyzed using descriptions and classification. According to Kitchin and Tate (2000), descriptions refer to the portrayal of data in a form that can be easily interpreted. Classification on the other hand involves the breaking down of data into constituent parts and then placing them into similar categories or classes (Kitchin & Tate, 2000).

Study Area

Nameri national park located in the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas, on the northern bank of the River Brahmaputra is in the Sonitpur District of Assam. This national park lies between 26o50/48//N to 27o03/43//N latitudes and 92o39/E to 92o59/E longitudes and occupies an area of 200 sq. km. The park is criss-crossed by the River Jia-Bhoreli and its tributaries namely Diji, Dinai, Doigurung, Nameri, Dikorai, Khari etc. It is about 35 kms distance from Tezpur and 9 km from Chariduar. It was notified as a reserve forest in 17.10.1979 and was declared a Sanctuary (137 sq. km) in 18.9.1985. Provisional notification of national park (200 sq.km)was declared on 27.02.1997 and final notification as national park was on 9.9.1998. (www.namerinationalpark.com). "Before independence the park was designated as Game Centaury for hunting of animals. There are 4(four) forest villages and 1(one) agriculture farming corporation is situated in the west buffer of the park. Similarly 4(four) forest villages and 1(one) Taungya village are there in the east buffer. There are 18(eighteen) revenue villages situated outside but along the southern and south-western boundary of the park (Das, 2013)".

Analysis:

Local perception of Tourism in Nameri national park:

The present study shows that 90.11 per cent of the respondents are aware of the increase in tourist inflow to Nameri national park. As much as 71.28 percent respondents also believe that the growth of tourism in Nameri national park has brought benefits to the local community. As reported by the respondents, the nature of the benefits accruing to the community are improved roads, increase in the value of land holdings, provision of eco camp, means of communication, exchange of culture and also vaccination of cattle. In fact, 14.22 percent of the respondents believed that the building of roads, tourist camp and provi-

sion of tube wells were ways in which the community was receiving a share of the revenue earned from tourism in the national park. However, 60.5 percent of the respondents viewed that the benefit from tourism in the national park was primarily being received by a 'section of the community', viz., those who have contracts related to work in the national park. A section of respondent 6.12 percent and 11.56 percent, opined that increased tourism in Nameri national park was benefiting certain families and individuals respectively. It shows the distribution of benefits from the tourism is not equitable. Only 20.15 percent of the sample viewed that tourism in the Nameri national park had created more job opportunities in the area.

Table -1
Local Perceptions about Tourism

Question	Yes Signifying Agreement
There has been an increase in tourist inflow	90.11
Tourism has created more jobs	20.15
Tourism has benefited the entire local community	71.28
Tourism has benefited a section of the community	60.5
Tourism has benefited only certain families	6.12
Tourism has benefited only particular individuals	12.38
The community participates in sharing revenue from tourism	14.22

Source : Field survey

Respondents' views on earning opportunities from tourism:

A very important dimension of tourism development, in recent years, has been the attempts at its use as a livelihood strategy, enabling the local people to secure all or part of their livelihood from tourism related employment or entrepreneurial activity (Goodwin and Roe, 2001). It was found that 77.89 percent of the respondent thought local people could earn from tourism in the national park. It was interesting to note that the largest number of respondents (30.21 percent) showed an interest in opening shops (pan shop, tea stalls, stationery goods, etc.). Other activities, in which the respondents appear to be interested, selling handicrafts and handloom products (12 percent) and transportation (6.21 percent), vehicle and car parking (1.65 percent), hotels (accommodation and food) (5.12 percent). Some of the respondents also expressed an interest in operating tours (3.24 percent). None of the respondents were interested in running pay and use toilets or running laundry/ cobbler or barbershops for the tourists. Nameri national park offers scope for rafting while 5.21 percent of the respondents showed an interest in providing for this activity. There were 1 percent respondents who expressed an interest in arranging for angling. Another important activity showed interest by 25.20 percent respondent is related to eco camp. With the financial support of the North Eastern Council, the concept of the eco camp is the outcome of the joint effort by the institutions namely Department of Forest, Government of Assam and Assam (Bhorelli) Angling and Conservation Association (an NGO). Generally, the eco camps offers ideal site for stay of tourists and safari arrangement.

Table 2
Respondents' views on earning opportunities from tourism.

Opportunities for local trade in products and services	Per cent
Selling Handicrafts	12.00
Entertainment (music, dance, theater performances).	1.1
Cooking meals and keeping guests in the house	2.25
Hotels (accommodation and food)	5.12
Operating tours	3.24
Providing agro-livestock products to lodges and hotels	5.24
Local guides	2.41
Transportation (rickshaw, auto, car, elephants, etc.)	6.21
Shops (Pan shop, tea stalls, stationery goods, etc.)	30.21
Laundry/cobbler/barber shop	0
Petty contracts (road building, repair, goods supply, etc)	3.25
Pay and use toilets	0
Angling	1.0
Rafting	5.21
Vehicle Parking and Car washing	1.65
Eco Camp	25.20

Source : Field survey

Respondents views on barriers to local participation in tourism:

Respondents also viewed on barriers to local participation in tourism. The largest number of respondents (68.24 percent) opined that lack of proper organizational skills was their major problem. A significant respondent (55.26 percent) mentioned the lack of start-up capital is one of the important barrier and of education and industry-specific skills (50.28 percent) as major hurdles to their involvement in the tourism enterprise. It was found that lack of awareness and poor existing tourism infrastructure is the hindrances for 40.28 percent respondent. However, it was viewed that the lack of local attractions and lack of opportunity for participation in the tourism ventures is the barrier for 15.42 percent and 10.29 percent respondents respectively.

Table 3
Respondents views on barriers to local participation in tourism.

Factor	Percent
Lack of start-up capital	55.26
Lack of awareness	35.21
Lack of organizational skills	68.24
No market for products	24.20
Poor infrastructure	40.28
Lack of education and skills	50.28
No local attractions	10.29
Lack of opportunity for locals	15.12

Source : Field survey

Conclusion:

Wildlife tourism has been one of the most important segment contributing to the tourism sector in the state. Nameri national park, in recent years, has attracted both domestic and foreign tourists. The increasing number of visitors to the national park has contributed to revenue earnings. Though there are various barriers to local participation in tourism, there is a great scope for developing the tourism enterprise in the region particularly to deliver livelihood to the community adjoining to the protected area. This will have to be an additional diversification enriching local livelihoods and it can be by enabling income for consumption and investment.

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