



Impacts of Eco-tourism on Ethnic People: A study on Lawachara National Park, Sylhet, Bangladesh

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Background of the Study

Tourism is an increasingly essential element of economic, social and cultural development and it has become one of the largest global economic activities (Western, 1993). Ecotourism refers to tourism that is based on the natural environment but that seeks to minimize the harmful impacts and better still, seeks to promote conservation. It focuses on local cultures, wilderness adventures, volunteering, personal growth and learning new ways to live on our vulnerable planet. Ecotourism has been defined as 'environmentally friendly' tourism, and classified by the International Ecotourism Society (1991) as: "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people". Ecotourism is one kind of sustainable tourism, both environmentally and culturally, which has the capability to ensure economic and social benefits to the whole society. Ecotourism presents a small segment of nature-tourism, which is understood as travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas (Gossling, 1999). The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) previously known as the Ecotourism society in 1991 gave a definition of Ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people". The World Conservation Union (1996) defined it as "visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, has low negative visitor impact and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations". The term ecotourism can be well described with the following five criteria: nature conservation, low impact, sustainability, meaningful community involvement and environmental education (Mojca and Marko).

Ecotourism is important for a country in different aspects. Ecotourism is a growing segment of the global tourism industry that is making significant positive contributions to the environmental, social, cultural and economic well-being of destinations and local communities around the world. Offering market-linked long-term solutions, ecotourism provides effective economic incentives for conserving and enhancing bio-cultural diversity and helps protect the natural and cultural heritage of our beautiful planet. By increasing capacity building opportunities, ecotourism is also

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an effective vehicle for empowering local communities around the world to fight against poverty and to achieve sustainable development. The two main importance of ecotourism are environmental awareness and economic development. The areas visited are usually exotic and thrilling sites and at the end of the visit, the tourists gain the need to promote awareness about the threat to the environment. Ecotourism also empowers the local community, since the tourists pay for hotel accommodations, tour guides, eating in hotels and transportation. It is important to preserve the environment for a number of reasons. The forests are habitat to numerous wild animals and destruction of the forests destroys this balance. On a moral argument, we must preserve God's creatures. In other aspects, ecotourism is a foreign exchange earner for several countries. A good example is Kenya. The ban against poaching really helped in the cause to protect the wildlife. If ecotourism did not educate the Kenyan public and the world, all wild elephants in Kenya would be dead. Close to a million travelers visit Kenya for the spectacle of seeing the famous 'Big Five' animals. Tourism now earns Kenya millions of foreign exchange revenue. This goes a long way in empowering the community. Many people now have jobs in hotels, game parks, touring agencies, etc. Community based ecotourism will improve local people's standard of living leading to increased appreciation of the parks (Sumardja 1995, Ediwijoto 1996). Many studies have suggested that local participation in projects from the earliest stages is crucial to success. Pretty (1995) has analyzed the different interpretations of participation, ranging from merely imparting information that development is going to occur, to the full involvement of the affected community at all stages (from the initial planning phase through implementation and management). Tourism is the country's third largest foreign exchange earner, generating \$5,172 million in 1995, and is expected to become the largest within ten years (Jakarta Post 1996). This is especially important now, in a time when ecotourism is part of the development strategy of nearly every developing country. Not only is ecotourism an essential part of the development approach for Costa Rica, Tanzania, and Kenya, but it is also the greatest earner of foreign currency in these countries (Moreno, 2005, 217). In Ghana, community-based ecotourism came to the fore since 1996 towards developing economically and culturally sensitive locations in rural parts of the country (Ghana Tourism Authority, 1996). According to Epler Wood (2001), "community-based ecotourism (CBE) is a growing phenomenon throughout the world. The CBE concept implies that the community has substantial control and involvement in the ecotourism project and that the majority of benefits remain in the community". The benefits of Ecotourism are clearly seen by governments in both developing and developed nations for a variety of reasons. For example, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Kenya are usually mentioned as models of successful Ecotourism (Eagles, et al, 1999).

Bangladesh, a country of south Asia lies between 20°34' and 26°38' north latitude and 88°01' and 92°41' east longitude. It shares boundary on the west and north side with India, on the south-east with Myanmar, and on the south with Bay of Bengal. The country enjoys a sub-tropical monsoon climate characterized by rain-bearing winds, moderately warm temperatures, and high humidity (Mahbubul Alam, Yasushi Furukawa & Salma Akter (April 2009). Bangladesh is a country of diverse attractions

that include the lush green countryside, the world's longest sea beach, colorful cultural diversity, remains of ancient civilization and the world's largest single patch mangrove forest. There remain numerous potential spots of ecotourism opportunities throughout the country. There are numerous opportunities for ecotourism in protected areas. Such opportunities are revenue generation (*i.e.*, user fees, entrance fees and donations), employment creation, and justification for protected areas, healthier economies, environmental education, and improved conservation efforts (Borrie et al. 1998, Drumm & Moore 2005). Presently, there are 19 notified protected areas (*i.e.*, 11 national parks, seven wildlife sanctuaries and one game reserve) in Bangladesh (NSP 2006). Ecotourism has long been emphasized in the tourism planning process in this country. In 2004, Bangladesh earned about \$67 million (Table 2) as foreign exchange earnings from tourists (those who came with tourist visa, not necessarily that they spent their money on tourism alone), which is 1.4% of what India earned; it is 14%, 26%, 9%, and 8% of what Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka earned respectively in that year. The 2007 economic review of the corporation states: "The foremost objectives of the corporation are to promote tourism in Bangladesh, build up positive image of the country abroad, elevate infrastructure at tourism sites, provide services to the tourists and develop tourist resources that exist in Bangladesh, creating employment opportunity in different sectors of this industry which is helpful to alleviate poverty." It can bring improved income and living standards for local people. It can revitalize local culture, especially traditional crafts and customs. It can stimulate the rural economy by creating demand for agricultural products and, through infrastructure development projects; it can inject capital into rural areas. So for vigorous Ecotourism marketing for the benefit of all sharers, there is a need for interaction among the local community groups and leaders and the local authorities. Earlier in Bangladesh, tourism activity was centered at the beaches and some other attractive areas. But of late, this idea has been changed. Conservation of nature and culture is the most important theme of all planned tourism development. There is vast potential to develop and promote ecotourism here.

The Government of Bangladesh has been in continuous endeavor to integrate her ecotourism resources, planning, management & utilization which are based on the Principal of i) Optimum Multiple use, ii) Maximum sustainable use iii) conservation and development of the natural resource base. Ecotourism is a sizeable and growing industry for the local people as well as country. One of the primary advantages of ecotourism is that it provides an impetus to expand both conservation and tourism development. The key players in the ecotourism business are the Government, the local authorities, the developers and the operators, the visitors and the local community. Each one of them has to be sensitive to the environment & local traditions and follow a set of guidelines for the successful development of tourism. In addition, non-governmental organizations and scientific/research institutions also have to play key role in the development of ecotourism.

The Bangladesh Government plans to establish an Eco-Park in Moulvibazar district, which will take up more than 1,500 acres of Adivasi (indigenous peoples) ancestral land for tourism, named Lawachara National Park. It is a part of the West

Bhanugach Reserved Forest; the reserved forest was established through an order under the Forest Act. Socio-economic values of the Park are important because a number of communities including ethnic minorities reside within and around the forests on which they depend for their livelihood. So the Park also is a potential source of Ecotourism, aesthetic and cultural values, scenic beauty and ethnic diversity. Its conservation values are regional and national but also with local implications. Ecotourism is considered the fastest-growing market in the tourism industry, according to the World Tourism Organization, with an annual growth rate of 5% worldwide, representing 6% of the world's gross domestic product and 11.4% of all consumer spending - not a market to be taken lightly. Attention to ways of alleviating poverty through Ecotourism has been growing. Socio-economic values of the Lawachara Park are important because a number of communities including ethnic minorities reside within and around the forests on which they depend for their livelihood. So the Park also is a potential source of Ecotourism, aesthetic and cultural values, scenic beauty and ethnic diversity. The purpose of this study is to understand the socio cultural, economic and environmental impacts of ethnic people of Bangladesh.

The main objective of this research paper is to find out the impacts of Ecotourism on ethnic people. This paper searches the economic, cultural, social and environmental impacts on native people of Lawachara National Park, Sylhet, Bangladesh. Here economic impacts are considered as Occupation, Income, Job opportunities, Loan opportunities, fuel, Land ownership and handicrafts business. Cultural aspects are Language, Dress, Food and House. Social aspect of this study covers Literacy rate, perception about Tourism, Transport, Security and accommodation system. Again Environmental aspects refer Environmental knowledge, Keeping Forest clean, wild animals/ biodiversity conservation and Forest conservation. Following diagram shows the conceptual framework of this study:

Methodology

In this, research descriptive research design has been followed to evaluating the impact of Ecotourism on native people. Both quantitative and qualitative methods have been used in this research to achieve the objectives of the study. The selected study area is Lawachara National Park in Kamalganja, Sylhet. "Household Hade" (Male or female) is being selected as unit of analysis. All households of Khasia Punji/ Lawachara punji and Dulahazra/ Dolubari are the population of this study. There are total 90 house holds in these village of Lawachara National Park. By using Simple random sampling 46 households have been selected. Between them 14 households are selected from Khasia Punji and 32 households have been selected from Dulahazra. Both secondary and primary data has been collected to study the area. Face to face interview and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) are the main sources of primary data.

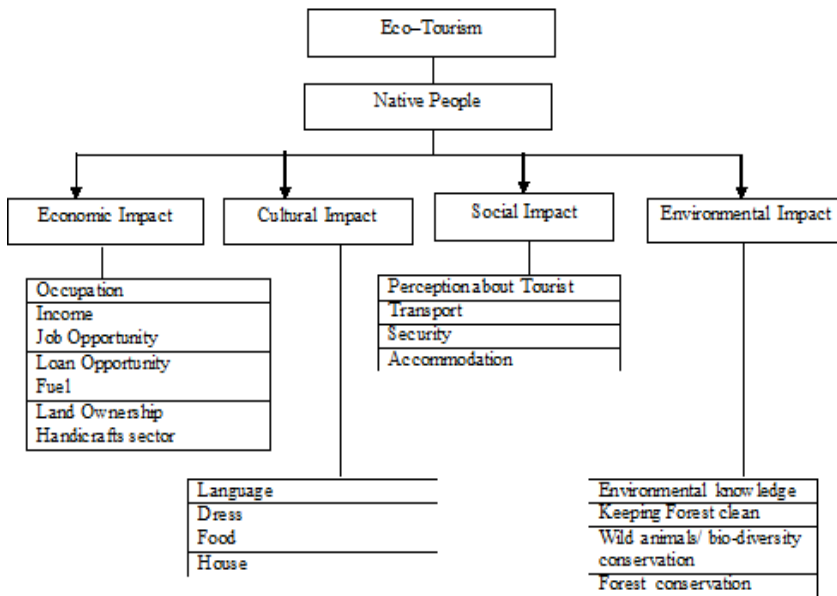


Figure 01: Conceptual framework of impacts of Ecotourism on ethnic people.

Result discussion

There are two villages inside the Eco-park which are locally known as “Khasia punji” & “Dulahazra”. 30% respondents of the study are from “Khasia punji” and 70% respondents are from “Dulahazra”. Khasia ethnic group live in the “Khasia Punji” and Tipura ethnic group live in the “Dulahazra”. 70% respondents are Christian, 28% are Hindus and only 1% is Muslims.

The main occupation of Khasia people is cultivating betel leaf. And key occupation of Tripura people is Agriculture. But eco-park changes the occupation of these two areas. Nowadays ethnic people of these areas are not only depending on their traditional occupation. About 37% respondents said that they have changed their occupation after starting eco-park in this forest. People of different household are now engage in eco-tourist guide, Security guard of park, Driver, Shopkeeper and Handcraft business which is shown in Figure 02.

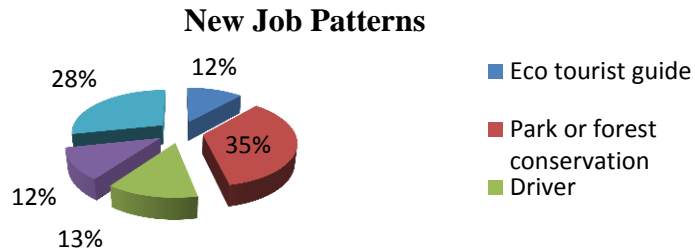


Figure 02: *New Job Patterns in Lawachara Park*

As like before, about 83% households are still dependent on Eco-park anyhow. One of the family members of those households is work in Park where only 17% people are not engage with the park. After establishment of Eco-park different NGO are working here for both environment conservation and poverty reduction of local people. “*Nirshorgo*” project and IPC works here for the protection of biodiversity, forest conservation and local development. BRAC, ASA, RUSA and Heed-Bangladesh are implementing here microcredit, literacy, Sanitation & health Program. Respondents said that before establishing eco-park there was no NGO or development organization and they were unable to get help from these kinds of organization. Now 54% respondents take micro credit from NGOs, and many of others are facilitated in different ways. NGOs are also work for the development of Handicraft business by which locals could able to reduce poverty. Ethnic people or native people lost their power or control over the forest after establishment of Eco-park. But 89% residents collect their daily fuels from forest. Rest of the villager collects fuels from local market. Those households which are running handicraft business, still they collect their raw materials from the forest. Traditional handicrafts are very attractive to the visitors of the park. People of Dulahazra village are the foremost producers of indigenous traditional cloths. There are 25 households produce traditional cloths and sell in local market. The people of this village agreed that eco-park increases the rate of their income because visitors like to buy their handicrafts. Field data show the present condition of participant’s family income (see figure 03). Family income of the maximum of the natives is now from 15000-20000 taka. The comparative income data give us a clear understanding about the impact of Ecotourism on income level of local residents. It shows that present family incomes of these ethnics are better then of past. Past mean income was 15000 taka and now the mean income of theses family is 16500 taka.

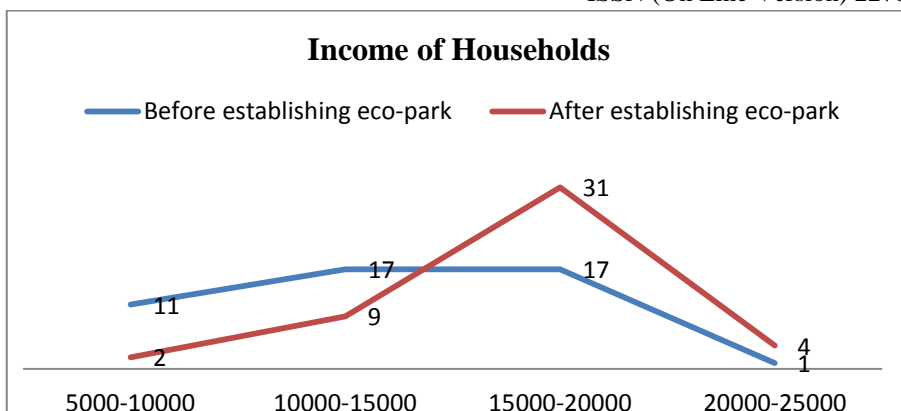


Figure 03: Comparing Households Income

There are also many other impacts of Ecotourism. After establishment of eco-park government focus on the development of the roads. 87% respondents mentioned that after establishing eco-park they got developed roads and communication systems. They also said that because of eco-park and tourism local government give better security in this forest now. Peoples were agree that they have very little or zero knowledge about environmental conservation and sustainable usages of forest resources before establishing eco-park. Now 74% respondents said that they have learnt how to conserve forest. Among 46 households who participate in this study; 13 households were participated in garbage dispose and forest cleaning system where nowadays 27 households take participation in these activities. 15 households were participated in forest conservation where after establishing eco-park 30 households participate in forest conservation. Like this before establishing eco-park 32 households were participated in bio-diversity conservation and at this present time 45 households participate in conservation of bio-diversity. The following table 01 shows some core changes after establishing the eco-park:

Table 01: Major Behavioral Changes after Eco-park in Environmental conservation

	Before Establishing Eco-Park		After Establishing Eco-Park	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Participating in garbage dispose and forest cleaning system	13	33	27	19
Participating in forest conservation	15	31	30	16
Participating in bio-diversity conservation	32	14	45	1

89% respondents were addressed ecotourism also plays role for changing or mixing their language. Participants of this study said that they talk to visitor in formal Bengali language and sometimes they use this formal language in their family conversation. Visitor's language and dress pattern influences Youngers and youth peoples. Actually Ecotourism influences ethnic life in various ways. The following

table 02 shows the empirical evidence of different aspects of ethnic life after establishing eco-park.

Table 02: *Leading Influences of Eco-park in Ethnic life*

Description	Yes	No
Change in Occupation	37	63
Dependent on Eco-Park for Livelihoods	83	17
Dependent on Forest for Fuel	89	11
Enjoy Loan/Micro finance Opportunity	54	46
Using Raw Materials for Handicrafts	36	64
Producing Traditional Cloths for sell	53	47
Getting Wage by work in Eco-park	15	85
Development of Transport After Eco-park	87	13
Impact on Accommodation	63	37
Increase Security System	76	24
Knowledge about Environmental Conservation	74	26
Language Mixture	89	11
Change in housing pattern	67	33

This is true that Ecotourism has many positive influences on native people but there are also some negative influences as well. After establishing eco-park, ethnic peoples lost their control over the land and resources of the forest. Authority fixed a specific territory for building their houses. Before establishing eco-park local inhabitants were able to establish or build houses anywhere in the forest only by the permission of the ethnic group leader or head. Now they are unable to build up any houses outside of the define territory. 85% respondents were claimed that they work for the eco-park authority but they never got any wages for that works. They also complained that eco-park authority forced them for free labor. Some people do not like Ecotourism because tourist sometimes do not show enough respect to them. Sometimes tourist damage their betel gardens, stole their lemons from tress. For all of these negative reasons native people have different perception about Ecotourism. The perception index of Ecotourism is given below in table 03.

Table 03: *Perception index of Ethnic People about Ecotourism*

Perception Index	Index value	Frequency
Very Bad	1-4	3
Bad	5-8	9
Not bad Not Good	9-12	13
Good	13-16	14
Very Good	17-20	7

According to the data of figure 06, it seems that most ethnic people have “Good” perception about Ecotourism. They accept tourist easily where they are not satisfied on officials of the eco-park.

Conclusion

Ecotourism enhances the sustainable development of environment & economy. It also brings positive changes in social and cultural aspect of human life. Before establishing eco-park in Lawachara Forest life of ethnic people was excluded from modern technology, knowledge and information. Their traditional culture became mixed with other cultural elements after establishing eco-park in this forest. Dress pattern and language become changes with the interaction with park visitors. Nowadays people are getting the change of modern education, medical facilities and chances for increasing their households' income. Rate of households' income is better than before. Besides doing traditional jobs now they are involved with additional economic activities. To fulfill the tourist interest they are generating new business ideas and become economically well-off. Especially traditional dress and different hand crafts business are flourishing here. National and International NGOs are working here for developing the life of ethnic people. They offer micro credit, health service and child education for progressing the way of life of indigenous people. They run several programs by which people become more conscious about forest and bio-diversity conservation. Again, for the attraction of tourist interest government ensures higher security in this area and people feel more safety than before. Though this is a hilly area but local government builds up roads for easy communication. Easy transportation helps ethnic people to participate in competitive market of different cities. Not only they are socially and economically beneficial but also they are participating in environmental conservation. Now ethnic people are knowledgeable about necessity of environmental conservation and taking part in forest cleaning, bio-diversity conservation and eco-park conservation. Like many of positive changes of ethnic life; locals are also facing some negative impacts of Ecotourism. A crucial complaint is that they are being persecuted and exploited by eco-park officials. Officials forced them for providing free labor in eco-park. Some tourists also stole their betel leaves, lemons and showing rough conduct with them.

Therefore we could conclude that Lawachara Eco-park has a great influence on local ethnic people. Now ethnic people are willing for welcoming the other cultural elements like language, dress pattern, house pattern etc. They are taking modern technology, education and getting modern medical facilities. The highest influential aspect of ethnic life by Ecotourism is their income. Income level is rising here gradually. Moreover, comparatively more people than before are participated in environmental conservation, which is conforming sustainable forest usages.

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