



A STUDY OF INVOLVEMENT OF LOCAL COMMUNITY IN ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. Chitralekha Kumar

Research Scholar, Pacific Academy of Higher Education & Research (PAHER), Udaipur

Dr. Dipin Mathur

Professor, Pacific Academy of Higher Education & Research (PAHER), Udaipur

Abstract

*Ecotourism has been the attraction for the nature lovers. The tourists are more aware and environment conscious. The Local community participation is very crucial in ecotourism development. The coastal belt of Maharashtra state has rich diversity of plants and animals. Present research is based on the activities of the local community in Velas village. The villagers working together to conserve the nesting ground of the endangered olive ridley sea turtle (*Lepidochelys olivacea*). This community participation has led to socio-economic development of the natives. Data has been collected from the tourists during the turtle festival. Findings reflected that the community participation plays a significant role in ecotourism development at the velas village. Policy level support would strengthen the business opportunity for the natives and conservation process of the sea turtles.*

Keywords: Local Community, Ecotourism, Participation, Turtle, Conservation

Introduction

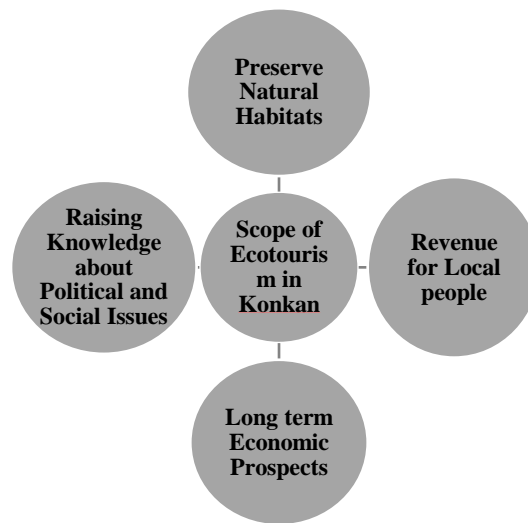
The state of Maharashtra has rich floral and faunal diversity. The deciduous forests of vidarbha and the ever-green forests of the western Ghats have unique natural beauty for the nature lovers. The state has identified the following ecotourism spots:

1. Pench Tiger Reserve in Nagpur
2. Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserves in Chandrapur
3. Umred Kharandla sanctuary in Nagpur
4. Nawegaon Nagzira Tiger Reserve in Gondia
5. Forest Development Corporation of Maharashtra Ltd. in Nagpur
6. Melghat Tiger Reserve in Amaravati
7. Tipeshwar Wildlife Sanctuary in Yavatmal
8. Bor Wildlife Sanctuary in Wardha

Besides these areas there are several other prospects for ecotourism in Maharashtra. The ecotourism services and the carrying capacity of the above-mentioned areas needs to be developed in sustainable manner to offer the best experience to the tourists and conserving the natural resources at the same time. The Konkan belt in Maharashtra has variety of opportunity spaces for promoting ecotourism and boosting the tourism industry in the state. The Konkan belt of Maharashtra was earlier known as the home of Lord Parshuram. At present there are five districts namely: Thane, Mumbai, Raigad, Ratnagiri and Sindhudurg that are on the Konkan coast. KONKAN TOURS CO Pvt. Ltd (KONKAN Tours) and its tourism development branches, such as Konkan Paryatan Charitable Trust, Kokan Paryatan Mahasangh, are working for the tourism development in Kokan region, to generate employment for local youth (MTDC, 2018).

Ecotourism development has tremendous potential in Konkan region of Maharashtra. The natural habitat of the Olive Ridleys turtle in the Velas village of the Ratnagiri district and the turtle festival is an attraction for the tourists. The natural nests and the hatcheries need more preservation and the carrying capacity of the village needs major development in the area of Infrastructure development. By utilizing the natural resources, the locals can be benefitted in multiple ways to generate revenue for themselves and sustain their villages. Home stays, local Konkani food and warm hospitality to the guests are some of the facilities that require trained local natives. This calls for the intervention of the various stakeholders.

Awareness about the social and political issues to the natives is a must and the Gram Panchayats can play a major role in promoting it. Lack of accurate socio-political information to the locals gives rise to mediators that create fear and illegal activities. Sustainability of overall process would provide for the long-term economic prosperity of the state. The natural surroundings, unique flora and fauna, beaches, the architectural masterpieces, hill stations, forts, national park, grandeur of Ganpati festival, regional music, sea food, dance and paintings all of these could be significant for the overall tourism development of the village.

Figure 1: Scope of Ecotourism in Konkan

The Indian Tourism Ministry recognized the economic significance of Ecotourism upon the natives of the location. Figure 1 reflects the scope of ecotourism in the Konkan coast of Maharashtra. It advocated the promotion of local community involvement in ecotourism activity. These activities would strengthen the economic development of the natives (ITDC Annual Report 2019).

Literature Review

The term Ecotourism earlier appeared in the 1960s-1970s (Nelson, 1994). The basic logic behind ecotourism was to identify the causes that led to the occurrence of depletion of natural resources by the tourists. Hetzer (1965) had identified the pillars of responsible tourism. Theas four pillars were the guiding source for ecotourism. Various studies have been conducted in the area of ecotourism science then. The major aim was to conserve the natural environment, promote the local culture and socio-economic development of the community.

Diaz (1997) had highlighted the threats that mass tourism brought with it. It damaged the natural habitat and negatively affected the natives of that area. Santhi & Kumar (2011) mentioned in their work ecotourism had significant role in nature conservation and rural development of the host natives. Hill & Gale (2000) identified that ecotourism helped in revenue generation for the local people by supporting their business along with nature conservation.

D.G.Lad (2013) mentioned in his research work that Konkan region of Maharashtra was emerging as an ecotourism destination that provided for diverse spots like marine park, beaches, wildlife sanctuaries, village experiences, forts and temples. Its unique flora and fauna is a delight for nature lovers and variety of sea foods to attract the foodies. The

increasing environmental awareness and the need to reduce the carbon footprints made Ecotourism the need of the hour. This calls for the active involvement of each stakeholder towards nature conservation. Healthy natural environments are critical to the ecological balance of all living entities.

India is blessed with natural beauty like mountains, sea, forests and various other geographical entity. India has a promising sector for tourism. It promotes job creation and revenue generation along with supporting nature. The World Conservation Union (Brandon, 1996) coined ecotourism as responsible travel to natural undisturbed areas. It also mentioned the opportunities for the social and economic development of the local people. Ecotourism is termed as “travel to natural areas that conservers the environment and sustains the well-being of the local residents” (TIES, 2004).

In this era of environmental consciousness Ecotourism has tremendous scope for the tourism industry across the globe (Roberts and Thanos, 2003). In the year 2008, the Government of Maharashtra formulated the Eco-Tourism Policy. The policy highlights about job creation, conservation of environment and culture, promotion of sustainable tourism in the state and provision of infrastructure. The Ecotourism policy also defined the role of Maharashtra State Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC), private tour organizer and government. It has option of training programs for the local people to develop alternative livelihood and income generation. There are fragmented approaches towards tourism development; hence a planned and strategic ecotourism management system needs to be identified. This would promote entrepreneurship and job creation.

Research Methodology

Present research is based on the data collected from 108 tourists. The researchers contacted the tourists during the turtle festival organized in March 2019. The turtle festival is organized by the entire community of Velas for celebrating the conservation of the Olive Ridley turtles. The hatchlings are released into the sea and it attracts the nature lovers to visit this village.

Area of Study

Velas village is area of study for the present research work. This village is located on the Konkan coast of Maharashtra in the Ratnagiri district. The village has rich biodiversity as it is surrounded by Sahyadri range on the one side and the Arabian sea on the other. The Olive Ridley Turtles are endangered species of sea turtles. These turtles have a specific feature of returning on the same beach to lay their eggs on which they were born. The community participation in the village has led to the development of ecotourism in the village.

Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the aspects of community participation towards ecotourism development at velas village.
2. To articulate the relationship between community participation and ecotourism development at velas village.

Sampling Technique

Random Sampling techniques has been used for data collection. The tourists were approached at the velas village during the turtle festival.

Data Collection Method

Data collection methods involve both primary and secondary sources. Primary data has been collected through a structured questionnaire. Secondary data has been collected from relevant research papers and articles from community involvement and ecotourism domain. 108 responses have been collected from 80 National Tourists and 28 International tourists during the turtle festival.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Statistical analysis has been done through SPSS version 20. Demographic profile of the respondents has been presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic profile of the respondents

Demographic Variables		Frequency	Percentage%
Gender	Male	70	65%
	Female	38	35%
Marital Status	Married	30	28%
	Unmarried	78	72%
Age	Up to 20 years	66	61%
	Above 20 years	42	39%
Qualification	Graduate	80	74%
	Post Graduate	28	26%
Nationality	Indian(National)	80	74%
	International	28	26%

Analysing Community Participation Factors

H_0A : There is no significant dependency between community participation and development of ecotourism at velas village.

H_1A : There is significant dependency between community participation and development of ecotourism at velas village

Chi square test of independence

Table 2: Chi Square output

Test Statistics					
	Local P and S	Local for Conservation	Local for Awareness	Local for Hospitality	Local for Hygiene
Chi-Square	60.222 ^c	133.556 ^c	64.444 ^c	130.000 ^a	45.000 ^c
df	5	5	5	6	5
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Test Statistics				
	ET economic D	ET educates	ET infra devp	ET employment
Chi-Square	107.333 ^c	97.280 ^e	57.111 ^c	55.224 ^e
df	5	5	5	5
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000

Table 3: Summary of Community Participation Attributes from SPSS

Variables	Chi Square	Sig.(2-tailed)
Actively involved in conservation process	133.556	0.000
Working extensively towards creating awareness	64.444	0.000
Deeply involved in hospitality of tourists	130.000	0.000
Working as Volunteers for cleanliness and hygiene	45.000	0.000
Ecotourism leads to economic development of local people	107.333	0.000
Ecotourism educates the villagers and the tourists	97.280	0.000
Ecotourism helps in infrastructure development in the village	57.111	0.000
Ecotourism helps in generating employment opportunities for the villagers	55.224	0.000

Table 2 and Table 3 reflect that the community participation attributes lead for ecotourism development. The P-value of community participation attributes on development of ecotourism are less than the corresponding level of significance hence we reject the null hypothesis. The Chi-square analysis approach was appropriate here as the simple random sampling technique was used, categorical variables have been selected and expected frequency count was more than 5 in each cell of the contingency table.

Limitations of the Study

This study is based on data collected from 108 tourists in the Velas village. Only one year was considered for the study i.e the turtle festival of 2019. More number of years may be considered for studying these attributes. This may give more details about the community participation in ecotourism development.

Findings & Discussion

The community participation attributes are significant factors that lead to ecotourism development. The natives are actively involved in the conservation process. Environment Conservation is the key domain of ecotourism development at the village. The villagers are working in rotational terms to take care of the turtle eggs. Once the hatchlings are successfully released in the sea, it is prohibited to go for a beach walk or any other beach activity. The turtle hatchlings may get stamped by the tourists etc. The entire conservation program runs on the facilitation of the female turtles to perform arribada (mass nesting by olive ridley turtles) and then securing the eggs in protected hatcheries. The hatchlings are finally released once they are ready.

The natives arrange for internal training programs by involving the NGO volunteers. Environment education plays a very vital role in ecotourism development. Creating awareness about the endangered status of the turtles and the do's and don'ts related to the entire destination is important. The local community is greatly involved in sharing the entire conservation process with the tourists. The tourists become more informed and the knowledge about the nature helps them to support the conservation process.

The natives are deeply involved in hospitality of tourists. They invite the tourists to stay with them by charging a very nominal cost. They provide home stay facility to the tourists, instead of infrastructure development in and around the village. The environment is conducive to the nesting requirements of the Olive Ridley turtles. Protection of the environmental conduciveness is of immense importance. They provide home cooked food to the guests and also allow them to cook with them in their traditional way.

Natives are working as Volunteers for cleanliness and hygiene. The entire community has worked towards reducing pollution in the village. They have restricted the damage to the forest area, prevented contamination of soil and water. Use of air conditioners are limited to only few households that provide stay facility to the tourists. The stay of the tourists is arranged in a nature friendly manner and luxurious lifestyle is limited. Reduce waste generation by the tourists is taken care by the village volunteers. The home stays are equipped with dustbins and the tourists are encouraged not to litter on the beach or the village area. Volunteers also spread awareness about reducing the waste generation from every household

Ecotourism leads to economic development of local community. The locals prepared their regional Konkani food and served it to the tourists at a reasonable rate. The workforce

involved in cooking these Konkani delicacies comprised mainly of female members from the village. The male members served it to their guests. It included locally grown plants and plant products prepared with traditional processes. The local art of rangoli making and cultural dance were big attraction for the national as well as international tourists. The local art and culture was greatly appreciated by guests and became an economic prospect for the local villagers.

Local community participates in initiatives towards educating the villagers and the tourists. They arrange programs to understand the process of environment preservation for the eggs and hatchlings. There are volunteers from the village and NGOs that are working towards educating about preserving the eggs from illegal theft, consumption, habitat loss and prohibiting fishing in and around the beach area. These preservations are the base for facilitating mass nesting and hence hosting the turtle festival.

The village community has worked on marginally improving the infrastructure of the stay facility, bathrooms, cottages in a nature friendly way. Two village homes have arranged for separate rooms for specific needs of the international tourists who request on prior basis.

Community participation helps in generating employment opportunities for the villagers. These eco-entrepreneurial activities provide economic development opportunities for the native villagers. The workforce involved in these activities help to reduce the negative impact to the environment and support conservation process. The employment generation opportunities at velas village through ecotourism has become a model to study. Various other villagers are getting involved in such entrepreneurial activities to support the budding entrepreneurs and their business development.

Conclusion

This research concludes that the community participation has supported the development of ecotourism in the velas village. These identified factors can be utilized for implementation in the other villages where the olive ridley turtles visit. The environmental conduciveness helps the survival of the endangered turtles and brings economic prosperity to the villagers. The tourists also find immense satisfaction in visiting the habitat of the turtles and surround themselves with nature. It is extremely important that each member of the village community must participate in the ecotourism development process. However, for the long-term sustainability of this ecotourism model it is suggested that the ecotourism policy be strengthen in the state. Encouraging ecotourism and active participation of the stakeholders is required for large scale development of such projects.

References

- Hetzer, N.D. (1965) *Environment, tourism, culture*. UNNS, Reported Ecosphere, pp: 1-3.
- Diaz, J. L., "developments Models and Conservations", *The school for field studies centre for sustainable development, Atenas, Costa Rica*, pp 42-47, 1997
- Jennifer Hill, Tim Gale, *Ecotourism - Environmental Sustainability Principles and Practice*. Ashgate, U.K (2000) PP 166-230.
- Brandon, K. (1996). *Ecotourism and Conservation: A Review of Key Issues*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.
- ITDC. (2019). *Indian Tourism Development Corporation Annual Report*. Retrieved from: <http://tourism.gov.in/sites/default/files/annualreports/Ministry%20of%20Tourism%20Annual%20Report%20English%20for%20Web.pdf>
- Nelson, J. G. (1994). *The spread of ecotourism: Some planning implications*. *Environmental Conservation*, 21(03), 248-255.
- The International Ecotourism Society. *International Ecotourism Society website*, accessed on February, 26, 2015. Available at: www.ecotourism.org
- Roberts, T. and N. D. Thanos. (2003). *Trouble in Paradise: Globalization and Environmental Crises in Latin America*. New York: Routledge.
- Lad, D. G., Thilak, J., & Thadi, M. (2013). *Component alignment and functional outcome following computer assisted and jig based total knee arthroplasty*. *Indian journal of orthopaedics*, 47(1), 77.
- MTDC. (2018). *Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation*. Retrieved from: <https://www.maharashtratourism.gov.in/treasures/beach/velas>
- V. Santhi, Shanthi, & Arun kumar, J. "Tourism in India-Emerging Trends". *South Asian Journal of Socio-Political Studies (SAJOSPS)*, Vol.11, No.2 (Jan-June 2011) PP 130-133.