

Chapter 7

Ecotourism for Community Development: A Stakeholder's Perspective in Great Himalayan National Park

S. P. Bansal

Himachal Pradesh University, India

Jaswinder Kumar

Himachal Pradesh University, India

ABSTRACT

Ecotourism is sustainable tourism, which is based on the ecological principle and sustainable development theory. There is emergent need of capacity building for local people for ecotourism in the villages of Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP). Ecotourism involves local community for the conservation of the area's ecology and biodiversity, in return, provides economic incentives to the community. This paper studies the ecotourism perspective from the point of view of major stakeholders of ecotourism, i.e., local communities, tourists, ecotourism operators, and government officials in Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) of Kullu district in Himachal Pradesh. This study determines the various issues related to ecotourism and these stakeholders' opinions about these issues. A lack of knowledge and awareness exists in the local community about ecotourism and its benefits, while the other stakeholders have strong opinions for various ecotourism statements. An ANOVA test is conducted followed by a Scheffe test to the different groups of stakeholders. The paper gives some suggestions to increase ecotourism awareness, capacity building for ecotourism for the local community, and community participation for the development of ecotourism in GHNP.

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ECOTOURISM

Ecotourism is nature-based tourism that includes an educational component for the tourists and other stakeholders and helps in conservation of the nature. The difference between ecotourism and nature tourism is that ecotourism is tourism that depends primarily on living things in natural systems' ecotourism involves both environmental and cultural-heritage aspects. Ecotourism is sustainable tourism, which is based on the ecological principle and sustainable development theory. Ecotourism helps in community development by providing the alternate source of livelihood to local community which is more sustainable. Its aim is to conserve resources, especially biological diversity, and maintain sustainable use of resources, which can bring ecological experience to travelers, conserve the ecological environment and gain economic benefit. Rural livelihoods are no longer considered as being a synonym for farming activities. Instead, it has been acknowledged that people in rural areas of developing countries pursue multiple strategies to make a living. Ecotourism helps in community development by providing the alternate source of livelihood to local community which is more sustainable. Its aim is to conserve resources, especially biological diversity, and maintain sustainable use of resources, which can bring ecological experience to travelers, conserve the ecological environment and gain economic benefit. Rural livelihoods are no longer considered as being a synonym for farming activities. Instead, it has been acknowledged that people in rural areas of developing countries pursue multiple strategies to make a living. Some have discovered tourism as a potential source of income complementing other activities. Ecotourism establishes a harmonious symbiotic relationship between sightseeing visit and environmental protection, which can make the negative influence of travel to ecological environment be reduced to minimum extent by strict management, so as to ensure the everlast-

ing utilization of resources. Ecotourism is very popular to travelers for its bases that emphasize on natural ecological environment and pay attention to ecological environment protection. Some have discovered tourism as a potential source of income complementing other activities. Even though tourism-related services require new skills and expertise, they may be closely linked to more traditional livelihood options. Ecotourism establishes a harmonious symbiotic relationship between sightseeing visit and environmental protection, which can make the negative influence of travel to ecological environment be reduced to minimum extent by strict management, so as to ensure the everlasting utilization of resources. Ecotourism is very popular to travelers for its bases that emphasize on natural ecological environment and pay attention to ecological environment protection. Ecotourism helps in involving local community for the conservation of the ecology and biodiversity of the area that biodiversity in return provides the economic incentives to the local community.

Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP)

Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) lies in the Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh. GHNP has rich biodiversity, sparse human populations, inaccessibility, little tourism, and a local economy based on traditional livelihoods. The forest environment provides local people with Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) such as honey, fruit nuts, bark of birch and yew, flowers and fuel wood. The Great Himalayan National Park offers the casual hiker and serious trekker a wide range of experiences in the natural wonders of the Park. GHNP ranks as one of the best national parks in the world and reveals its beauty, diversity, and depth through time spent in exploration. Great Himalayan National park contains several villages that have historically had some economic dependence on the resources of the land incorporated into the Park. In GHNP

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