

Chapter 17

Adequacy of Government Policy on Ecotourism: A Case Study of Sikkim

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ABSTRACT

Sikkim is known as a natural and ideal destination for the tourists looking for exotic and varied experiences. The study explores the adequacy of the policy in the context of eco-tourism principles espoused by eco-tourism society (TES) which are - minimize physical, social and psychological impact, Build environmental and cultural awareness, Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts, Produce direct financial benefits for conservation, and Recognize the rights and spiritual beliefs of the Indigenous People. Methodology used is case study for based on a structured questionnaire with 55 statements (on Likert scale) responded by the civil officers of the state government involved with eco-tourism policy and its implementation. To make it more meaningful one sample t-test has been conducted to test hypotheses. It concludes that the policy document has areas with distinct adequacies and inadequacies. The purpose of the study is to identify inadequacies that need to be addressed to make the policy document holistic and help in facilitating its proper implementation.

INTRODUCTION

The present case-study was undertaken at Sikkim, a small Indian state located between Nepal and Bhutan. It provides distinct and diverse opportunities for the eco-tourists and sensing this opportunity the Government of Sikkim has come up with an eco-tourism policy document with a view to harvest benefits of this economic sector while ensuring that negative effects are contained sufficiently, if not eliminated completely. This chapter investigates the adequacy of the policy in the context of internationally accepted

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eco-tourism principles advocated by eco-tourism society (TES) and are - minimize physical, social and psychological impact, Build environmental and cultural awareness, Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts, Produce direct financial benefits for conservation, Generate financial benefits for both local people, Deliver memorable interpretative experiences to visitors, Design, construct and operate low-impact facilities and Recognize the rights and spiritual beliefs of the Indigenous People. The chapter begins by providing an insight into the Sikkim as a tourism destination, followed by emergence of eco-tourism and then succinctly introducing the principles of eco-tourism mentioned earlier. The chapter thereafter focuses on describing the methodology adopted to undertake the study, followed by result and discussion and conclusion. Innovative features of the study are that eco-tourism policy of Sikkim has been explored for the first-time. Also no studies (exploratory or otherwise) measuring eco-tourism on its proposed principles exists so far. Use of one-sample t-test in a case study also is sufficiently innovative.

Sikkim

Sikkim is a tiny Himalayan Indian state with an area of 7096 km² and a population of 6, 07,000 (2011 Census). Physically, it is an enclosed basin, nearly 60 km wide, between two deeply dissected north-south transverse ridges, each of them about 128 km long (Karan, 1969). The state is blessed with exquisite natural beauty, salubrious climate, rich biodiversity and a friendly host population. In addition to this the state's unique cultural traits adds to its attraction (Sattar, 2011). Despite its remarkable potential, tourism is rather new to Sikkim (Jha A, 2001) but has quickly emerged as a major economic sector in the state.

Tourism

Despite its immense economic benefits and contribution tourism till recently has been associated with socio-environmental and developmental problems. Batra and Kaur (1996) clearly bring out conflict involving tourism and environment by using environment-audit. They concluded that two dissimilar kinds of relationships exist between tourism and environment - coexistence and contradictory. Coexistence results in a well-balanced relationship between tourism and environment. conflicting relationship between the two, however lead to the problems of pollution and other ecological issues. They further opine that social costs in tourism are far higher than caused by other types of industries Unfortunately these costs largely have remained unacknowledged. Brohman (1996) underlines issues concerning increasing crime, overcrowding, overloaded infrastructure, pollution and environmental degradation particularly in the context of tourism in the third world countries. Once again he highlights that these issues are ignored as tourism results in fast economic growth in the third world countries. Noronha (1999) reports that tourism in Goa has caused uncontrolled increase in land prices, enhanced consumption, rapid and unplanned development, drug abuse and prostitution. He further found that inhabitants of Goa feel threatened and degraded by inappropriate values and behaviour of the tourists. Madan and Rawat (2000) in their study focussed upon the impact of tourism on the environment of Mussoorie. They brought out that random and scattered development of tourism infrastructure because of high demand for lodges, hotels and other basic amenities lead to pollution and environment degradation, Singh (2002) found positive-correlation between ecological degradation and perceived erosion of cultural values in Garhwal.

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