

CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES THROUGH PRACTICE OF ECOTOURISM IN ARAVALLI RANGES OF GURUGRAM DISTRICT

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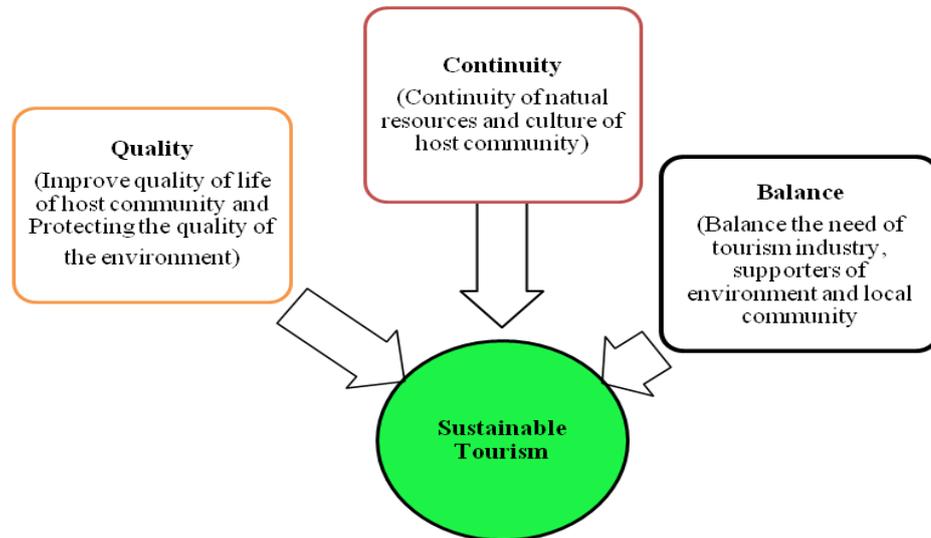
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ABSTRACT

Tourism has become the main source of income in developing countries by generating revenues and also provides employment especially for unskilled labor and migrants. The undulating topography of hill not only provides the scenic beauty but also act as lungs for the entire National Capital Region, Delhi (NCR). The dry area of Aravalli range are getting maximum consideration due to the exploitation of existing natural resources in Gurugram district. In spite of having rich resources, are being exploited by the industrialists, real estate developers, land mafia, government etc. The highways and the two other major projects are under pipeline (DFC and KMP) passing through the district resulted into bifurcation of natural habitat. Apart from this several other development activities in the form of encroachment like farmhouses, resorts etc built on forest land and commercially exploited the area. Thus, there is a mismatch between environment and development has been noticed in the region which will further affect the ecological balance. Thus, the idea of developing Aravalli ranges as an ecotourism centre will conserve the natural resources and ameliorate problems related to environmental degradation in district and required a strong institutional mechanism to restrict the prevailing illegal activities.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has also become the main source of income in developing countries by generating revenues accompanied with investment in infrastructure like roads, airport, water and sewerage facilities. It also provides employment especially for unskilled labor and migrants from poor rural areas in different sectors such as construction, agriculture etc. But extensively and uncontrolled tourism may further contribute in environment degradation. The two main areas of environmental impact of tourism are pressure on natural resources and damage to ecosystem. In other words rapid tourism activities can increase the competition for limited land resources and conversion of other uses will raise the land prices and build the pressure on agricultural land. Uncontrolled tourism activities can caused trouble for wildlife habitats and endangered species. At present the idea of developing sustainable tourism is taking place in order to ameliorate problems related to environmental degradation leading to the stage of equilibrium between environment and development (Nistoreanu, P., 2005).



Source: Keyser, 2002

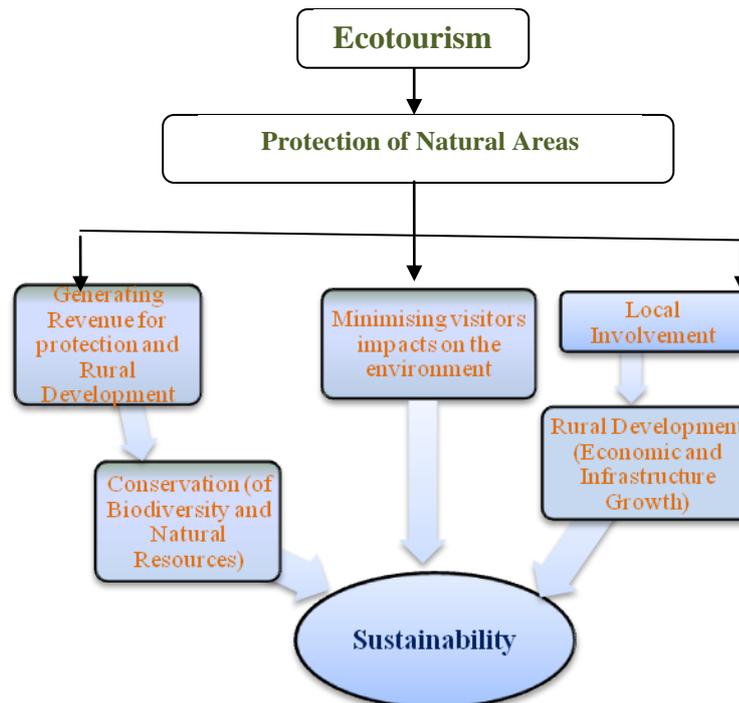
Fig. 1: Sustainable Tourism and its features

Currently, Ecotourism gaining popularity in developing countries since 1988 as it doesn't require any large investment, only small and local enterprises can effectively fulfill the condition of ecotourism and stimulating economic development. Ecotourism particularly catch private investment for the establishment of parks, natural reserve and contribute to preservation of biodiversity and ecological balance in developing countries.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Natural resources have for centuries been an important part of people's diet, and also have economy, social, cultural and spiritual relevance (Achin and Gonzalo, 2004). Natural resources would be referred to those resources not necessarily confined to economic value in the context of production and marketing but goes beyond to include socio-cultural and spiritual value. In developing countries, forest and conservation policies have traditionally been characterized by general suspect of local people's ability to manage the natural resources on which they depend (Heltberg, 2001). In many developing countries today, ecotourism is adopted simply because it is an alternative form of tourism focused on environmentally sound practices that contribute to the protection and conservation of the environment as tourism takes its course towards development at the expense of the environment (Azizur, 2010). Ecotourism has been identified as a form of sustainable tourism as expected to contribute to both conservation and development (Tsaur & Lin, 2006). It has been asserted that ecotourism can integrate conservation of biodiversity with socio-economic development of local communities because when villagers recognize that the potential exists to receive continuous income from tourists without an unsustainable use of their natural resource they will understand the importance of preserving the natural area.

As a result most of the government authority and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are impatient to develop ecotourism in protected areas in order to maximize these benefits. Thus it has been seen that majority of ecotourism development occurs within and around protected areas.



Source: Ross & Wall, 1999

Fig. 2: Ecotourism depicts balanced stage between conservation and development

According to the directives of ecotourism planning the first and foremost step is permanent protection of the resource. Secondly, once the area has a protected status, develop management zones. The most sensitive areas should have no development while less sensitive areas may be zoned for research, minimal tourism etc. and thirdly, establishment of a management authority that includes local people. Once the protected area is identified and zoned, this Management Authority should develop a long-term management plan that addresses regulation of the protected area, guidelines for development, financing and generating local economic development and monitoring the affects of tourism on the resources over time and lastly development design guidelines to ensure that tourism development is compatible with protecting the resource and maintaining scenic beauty.

The empowerment of local people, regulation by the government, education of locals, tourist and strong participation are the key elements were observed in the ecotourism projects. Here there are successful examples of different case studies all over the world shown the impact of practice of ecotourism in a region upgrade living standard of local community.

2.1 CASE I

Baboon Sanctuary, Belize

Bermudian Landing lies in the northwest of Belize city. It is a typically rural community in which community Baboon Sanctuary is Situated. It has 32 households and seven other nearby village involved in the sanctuary development. CBS was established in 1985 for the protection of black howler monkey and their habitat. It has

been asked to local residents, village council to give their support through certain management practices such as leaving a section along the river, protect the trees to serve as primary habitat of howlers and preserve vegetation serving as food sources for howlers. In 1987, for the first time villagers have provided guest rooms and meals to a small group of students visiting bermudian Landing to study monkeys. At present the local residents providing tourist facilities continued for several years and encouraged the community to diversify their services. There were about 3000 visitors who spent an estimated 1443483 rupees in the villages on meals, accomodations, souvenirs, guiding, persona etc. Thus CBS has been regarded as an excellent example of participatory ecotourism development in a community owned protected area.

IMPACT:

Environmental:

- Increase in howler population
- Agricultural practices in accordance with management plan.

Economic:

1. Increased tourism related business available
2. Inequitable distribution of tourism income among community members

Social:

1. Meals and Rooms for overnight visitors available in villager's homes
2. Training Session and social gathering

Management:

1. No national government
2. Not enough training in natural resource management
3. Inadequate basic infrastructure

2.2 CASE 2:

Gales Point Manatee Project, Belize

The practice of ecotourism in Gales point was proposed to raise revenue and conservation of natural resources in the villages. In this regard the Gales Point Progressive Cooperative (GPCC) was formed by villagers to promote ecotourism development and conserve the natural resources. In addition the robust use of resources has been encouraged and maintain of local culture, thus the income has generated from tourism effort and largely impacted the local community.

IMPACT:

Environmental:

- Protection of Manatee (Sea cow)
- Protection of unique ecosystems including coastal beaches, mangrove forests, saline marshes

Economic

- Community benefits from sale of different traditional crafts such as baskets, boat, mat, jewellery etc.

Social

- Business training for local women

Management

- Better management structure than CBS

Thus, from the above cases states that ecotourism projects help in raising the economic and social advantage to the adjacent communities. Even though there are certain issues have been identified that contribute in the failure of ecotourism practices such as lack of cooperation between tourist agencies, lack of public and private investment, planning for tourism, lack of training opportunities for people, the tourism sector and little involvement of community members in tourism management.

III. PROBLEM STATEMENT

This is basically a working paper in which a research problem has been mentioned to investigate that Ecotourism practices stimulates local economies and awareness while protecting natural resources, secondly, the practice of ecotourism asserts nearby community's ownership, control and access on natural resources. The aim of the proposed study will be the Development of Aravali Region (identified region) as an ecotourism hub.

Haryana state comprises of four physical division namely Hilly area of Shivalik, Plain areas, Sandy area, Dry area of Aravalli ranges but among them the dry area of Aravalli range are getting maximum consideration due to the exploitation of existing natural resources in the region. Aravalli ranges lies in the southern part of Haryana which is made up of limestone and slate. Due to the sub-tropical continental monsoon type climate with scanty rainfall, the area serve xerophytes vegetation such as *Prosopis spicigera* L., *Acacia arabica* wild, *Balanites roxburghi*, *Butea monosperma*, *Anogeissus pendula*, *Cassia fistula*, *Albizia lebbec* etc. The undulating topography of hill not only provide the scenic beauty but also act as a lungs for the entire National Capital Region, Delhi (NCR). According to the Wild life Census Report 2012, there are seven carnivores species registered in the Aravalli ranges including leopard is at the top of the food chain. Besides, the area having rich natural resources, still it is being exploited by the industrialists, real estate developers, land mafia, government etc for their personal proceeds. Similarly, the two major highways projects are under pipeline (DFC and KMP) passing through the district resulted into bifurcation of natural habitat. Apart from this several other development activities in the form of encroachment like farmhouses, resorts etc built on forest land and commercially exploited the area.

The main reason behind the depletion of resources in Gurgaon is the legal status of Aravalli which is still not clear to the State government and others. Secondly, Gurgaon city which is popularly known as 'Cyber city' is the hub of large manufacturer of automobiles and a home of large number of Multinational Companies (MNCs). It generates more than 50 percent of income tax revenues in Haryana just because of the important strategic location and good connectivity from all sides. Thus, there is a mismatch between environment and development has been discerned in the region which will further add into widespread ecological imbalance.

IV. CONCLUSION

The entire Aravali Range has become ecologically sensitive and critically fragile. Therefore, the present research problem emphasised on environmentally degraded Aravali hills ecosystem near Gurgaon in order to

seek appropriate solutions through ecotourism that can create equilibrium between the development and environment with the involvement of local communities. Consequently, a vital need has evolved to reduce the mismatch between development and environment otherwise situation would be more difficult to handle in future. In spite of the fact that degradation of natural environment all around has been observed and no comprehensive study has been carried out basing the Aravalli ranges yet.

Although, an important initiative has already been taken in this direction in the district. An ecotourism site has been proposed at Bhart Yatra Kendra situated in Bhondsi village with an area of 588 acre in the Aravalli ranges. The total budget of the project is 1.67 crore. About 70 acres of the kendra is being developed into natural awareness and education centre. Hence, the idea of developing Aravalli ranges in Gurgaon District as an ecotourism centre will conserve and protect the natural resources of Aravalli ranges and an urgent need of suitable policy framework to restrict the prevailing encroachment in the region.

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