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## LOCAL LEVEL STRATEGIES FOR CAPTURING TOURISM REVENUE IN MANAS NATIONAL PARK: EXPERTS' OPINION

**Birinchi Choudhury || Research Scholar**  
**Dept. of Business Administration**  
**School of Management Sciences**  
**Teapur University**  
**Sonitpur Assam. PIN: 784028.**

### ABSTRACT

There are number of studies undertaken to measure leakage amount of tourism revenue in the village level economy based on national parks or protected areas. Few studies are undertaken which develop local level strategies based on the available resources the local economy has. The present study has taken this issue by formulating objectives like to identify the cause of leakage and to develop local level strategies. The paper has focused different strategies suggested by the Experts' Panel Opinion.

**KEYWORDS** :local, strategy, tourism, revenue, leakage.

## INTRODUCTION

There are basically two schools of thought one school (Holland, Burian & Dixey 2003; Sillignakis, n.d.; Gopal, Varma & Gopinathan, 2008) advocated tourism as a strategy to get economic development and the other school (Britton, 1982, 2004; Weaver 1998; Walpole & Goodwin 2000; Brohman 1996; Lacher & Nepal, 2010) criticized tourism for its leakage effect specially in developing countries. According to this school of thought, in developing economies, the tourism based on other developed countries for goods and services. They have to import food grains, construction commodities or even human resources. Between these two schools, some scholars advocated alternative tourism such as ecotourism or nature based tourism. They advocated development of tourism due to conservation purpose. Among them the leading scholars are Goodwin (2002), Walpole and Goodwin (2000), Goswami (2004). They campaigned tourism in protected areas because, income achieved from tourism by the people living adjoining areas of protected areas are attracted for conservation because they can understand that tourist will come to see the protected areas if it is properly conserved and protected. However numbers of empirical studies done by Sandbrook (2010), Walpole and Goodwin (2000), Choudhury and Goswami (2012) are found where a large amount of tourism leakage is found in the protected areas too. But still, tourism in protected areas is important for conservation purpose. Where number of studies are found quantified leakage amount of tourism revenue in protected areas and national parks, there are few studies which developed local level strategies for minimizing leakage so that the local community living adjoining areas can capture maximum tourism revenue in those tourism destinations. The present study based on Manas National Park of Assam (North East India) has found out the main causes of tourism revenue leakage and developed some local level strategies so that local community can adopt themselves without taking any assistance from the Government.

### 2. Objectives:

There are basically two objectives of the study. They are:

- To find out the cause of tourism leakage in the local level economy of Manas National Park
- To develop local level strategies for minimizing leakage from the above mentioned study area.

**3. Methodology** The data were collected from primary as well as secondary sources. Before, going through the primary data, the author did extensive literature survey for finding out the strategies adopted in different parts of the country and

abroad. The primary data were collected through stakeholders opinion organizing group interviews. The author gathered stakeholders like Owner of tour camps of Bansbari Lodge, Birina Lodge, Manas View Jungle Resort, Forest Range Officer of Bansbari Range and Bhuyanpara Range, NGOs activists those offering accommodation to the tourists, presidents and secretaries of Manas Jeep Safari Association and Manas Elephant Safari Association, Headmen of villages adjoining Manas National Park, tour guides, and two academicians involved in projects on tourism in Manas National Park. After taking stakeholders opinion, the authors compile the strategies suggested by the stakeholders and send it to the experts for their opinion. The expert panel has comprised Forest Range Officers of Bansbari Forest Range and Bhuyanpara Forest Range, two academicians working for tourism development in Manas National Park, the President and the secretary of the NGO, Manas Ever Welfare Society, one member of the NGO, AA- RANYAK. The justification of choosing the people as member of expert panel is all are involved many years in tourism and conservation activities in Manas National Park. **4.Result and Discussion:**

### 4.1 Problem 1: Lack of awareness and motivation among the local people.

**Strategy 1:** Lack of local's awareness is an important cause of poor involvement of the local people in tourism in Manas National Park (MNP). It is of the opinion of the stakeholders that the local people are unaware that tourism can be an alternative source of income for them. The local NGOs working on tourism and conservation can create awareness for tourism among local villagers. Of course, the NGOs like Manas Ever Welfare Society (MEWS), Manas Mouzigendri Ecotourism Society (MMES) and Manas Souchi Khungur Ecotourism Society (MSKETS) are successful to create awareness regarding conservation through rescuing different wild animals and fauna, organizing public meetings, seminars, plantation programs, plastic cleaning operations and observing World Earth Day and World Environment Day. But they have not worked to create awareness among people regarding tourism related activities. Though the NGOs have started to receive tourists by providing services like accommodation, food and safari, they have not created awareness among local people. Local NGOs can take a leading role in creating awareness among the people of adjoining village of MNP that tourism may be a good option of income source for them. The NGOs can motivate local people by providing them opportunity to earn in the tourism activity operated by the NGOs. They may start a programme targeting local youth to give them opportunity to visit other tourism destinations of the country where tourism has been opted as a source of livelihood so that local youths of MNP become aware about tourism. Whenever, the local people become aware about it, it will be easy for the NGOs to motivate people to engage in

different tourism related business such as restaurants, tour guides, drivers, production and sales of handicraft and handlooms items.

#### 4.2 Problem 2: Lack of linkage of local resources with tourism.

**Strategy 2:** Tourism in MNP depends on non-local people for positions like manager, mahut, boatmen and tour guides. To make locals' involvement in such positions, training among the local youths is must. There are number of capacity building NGOs, tour operators and institutions in the state viz. Game and Youth of Assam, Help Tourism, Tour Operators Association of Assam (TOAA), Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship etc. By inviting resource persons from these institutions and organizations, the local NGOs may organize capacity building workshop in adjoining villages of MNP. The leading tour operator, Help Tourism voluntarily provides capacity building training to local people and gives a market linkage to them by sending tourists into those destinations where local community have been trained by the tour operator. MEWs already organized a food processing training programme with the assistance of Aaranyak, an NGO, and a tour guide training workshop with the assistance of Help Tourism for 36 local women and 37 local youths respectively. Such kind of training should be organized in other tourism related activities like mahut, rafting, handicraft and weaving, horticulture etc. TOAA also provide training to local community living adjoining areas of tourism destinations. The Manas Gypsy Safari Association invited the President and the Secretary of Kaziranga Development Association in 2010 to share the experiences they have and to get tips for getting success in tourism business. Following the suggestions given by Kaziranga Development Association, the Manas Gypsy Safari Association requested tour camps owned by non-local actors to refrain from providing Jeep Safari by the tour camps but to send the tourists for them. This strategy was successful to increase locals' participation in Jeep Safari. Formation of cooperative society or SHG may be good strategy to increase linkage local handloom and handicraft items and agricultural items with tourism.

The local NGOs may motivate the local weavers, craftsmen and farmers to form SHGs and they may be trained up accordingly to develop their skill. At the individual level, village people do not have marketing skill. But formation of SHGs or co-operative societies will increase their skill. Initially the SHGs can open their outlets in their own home since they have little money to invest. The local NGOs involved in tourism development may act as a bridge between the SHGs and tourists. The local NGOs may start retail outlet in their tour camps and may give the opportunity to local people to sell their products. Besides, after formation of SHGs, local weavers, craftsmen, farmers will have the capacity to motivate the tour camps for marketing their products or to allow them to open retail outlets into the tour camps.

IORA, a private tour camp in Kaziranga National Park (KNP), has started similar activity. It organized a skill development workshop in 2004 for the local weavers inviting experts from IIE under the sponsorship of Panchayati Raj. After the workshop, IORA has been encouraging the weavers to produce handloom items and purchasing those products to sell in the retail outlet, IORA HAAT located in the hotel premises. Though this project has benefited IORA, it has given a platform to local weavers to be economically empowered and to capture a considerable amount of tourism revenue with them.

There is high potentiality to start such kind of programmes in MNP since local tribal and non-tribal weavers have the skill to produce handloom items. If they are organized, they will be able to generate tourism revenue by producing and selling such kind of items. In KNP, a SHG, Aparajita, started tourism business producing handlooms items and started to sell from their retail outlet located at the office of the SHG, the resident of the president. When sale gradually increased, NEDFi constructed a retail outlet for the SHG.

Now, the 20 members are regularly producing different kinds of handloom items, sell those items in the retail outlets constructed by NEDFi and have earned more than five lakhs rupees in the last tourism seasons.

There is an NGO, ANT with its head quarter at Chirang District of Lower Assam which is working in the Western Forest Range, Panbari of MNP. It provides training on weaving and handloom to the poor women and makes them efficient and skillful so that they can produce different handloom items. After the completion of the training, the NGO encourages them to produce different handloom items and purchases at reasonable rate which are sold in different retail outlets located in different cities of the country. It also provides interest free loans to setup handicraft store to sell their products. By forming SHGs, the local weavers of the adjoining areas of MNP can take this opportunity and can start their own business after completion of the training. Since the local weavers have not organizational skill, some other local NGOs like MMES, MEWS may act as a coordinator initially. Besides, ANT should increase its area of operation to other forest ranges of MNP.

The strategy of formation of SHGs can be adopted in case of handicrafts works and farmers producing agricultural and horticultural items. Formation of cooperative societies or SHGs will increase their organizational strength.

#### 4.3 Problem 3: Local youths/farmers do not have sufficient financial strength to start tourism business or to supply agricultural items.

**Strategy 3:** One of the important problems of the local people living in the adjoining villages of Manas National Park is that people do not have sufficient capital to start tourism related business. In that situation, they may take financial help from Micro Finance Institutions like ASOMI. ASOMI is one of the leading micro finance institutions in Assam and it has a branch office at Sorbhog of Barpeta District, near to Bansbari (central range) of Manas National Park. ASOMI basically provides loans amounting, Rs 2000 to 25000 to each member of a SHG (Max 2,50,000 to a Group) which contains 10-20 members and Rs 10,000 to 50,000 to each member of a Joint Liability Groups which contains 3-5 member under same sex, income and social status.

ASOMI has provided training to some village women of Sorbhog area of Barpeta District (a neighbouring place of tourists entry point, Manas Gate) and provided loan for starting a manufacturing noodle farm, under the brand name, Sorbhog Marka Noodles. This kind of project can be started in MNP too.

#### 4.4 Problem 4: Tour camps by non-local actors

**Strategy 4:** Large share of the accommodation are of non-local owners leading to huge amount of revenue leakage. Local people do not have the capacity to provide accommodation facilities due to lack of capital. The economic condition of the local people is so bad that an individual family cannot provide accommodation facility to the tourists. NGOs like MEWS and MMES are very successful in tourism business providing accommodation facilities. Therefore it should be encouraged to form more and more NGOs that can provide accommodation as a group which is not possible at individual level.

#### 4.5 Problem 5: No tourist entry point in Panbari Range

**Strategy 5:** Out of the three forest ranges, Bansbari and Bhuyanpara have opened as tourist entry point and people of this locality are aware regarding conservation. Deforestation is still a problem in Panbari Range. It is of the opinion of the stake holders of MNP that in Panbari Range too, the forest department should start a tourist entry point because if the local people start to earn tourism revenue they will prevent wood smuggling and hunting of wild animals. The



local youths should take the driving role by forming NGO that involves in tourism business. In Kokilabari of Bhuyanpara range, there was no tourist entry point before MMES started accommodation to tourists. MMES has started receiving tourists and provided accommodation to the tourists. Gradually the local people are getting benefits from tourism and they have realized that forest and wild resources should be conserved since tourists come to see the wildlife of the National Park. Opening of a tourist entry point in Panbari Range will not only increase the awareness regarding conservation but also will give the opportunity to capture tourism revenue among the local community.

#### 4.6 Problem 6: Poor infrastructures in the adjoining villages of Manas National Park

**Strategy:** According to a previous study (2006) and the stakeholders, the economic condition of the people living in the fringe villages of MNP is very bad. In that situation, they cannot develop tourism infrastructure without spending huge money by the public authority. Still there are number of potentialities where they can develop the infrastructure with their own efforts without getting any external assistance. It must be noted here that the wildlife lover do not come to enjoy luxury but to experience natural environment. Keeping this in mind, the local people can concentrate on those businesses where requirement of capital is low. Since they do not have sufficient money to develop infrastructure, they can start bullock cart service when tourists want to see local tea gardens or tribal villages. ANAJAREE, an NGO formed by local youths started similar activity in 2010. The NGO has hired elephants from different parts of Lower Assam and has started Elephant Safari in Manas Gate of Bansbari Range. Though it is in the primary stage it has high potentiality to grow and capture considerable amount of tourism revenue.

The adjoining villages of MNP are dominated by the Bodo tribe. Besides, Chowtal (tea tribe) and other ethnic groups like Assamese, Nepali etc. also live in those fringe villages. Each ethnic group has its own culture and tradition. Focusing their ethnic culture and tradition, the villages can be developed as Model Ethnic Villages so that these can be centre of attraction among the tourists. By charging entrance fees in such model villages, retention of revenue is possible. The positive thing is that for formation of model villages there is no need of huge investment of capital. By preserving the fragrance of ethnicity and tradition and maintaining cleanliness and natural environment, Model Ethnic Villages can be formed by the villagers themselves through their own effort and awareness. Mawlynnong Village of Meghalaya is very successful as a model village which got the status of cleanest village in Asia in 2003. Besides, Huay Pu Keng village of Northern Thailand is very famous among the tourists for its unique culture. Adapting it as model, different traditional and tribal dance can be displayed in front of the tourists come to the villages. The life style of the tribal people, its culture could be the centre of attraction for the tourists if it is properly positioned.

A considerable number of day visitors come to the National Park either for picnic or for excursion. The local people do not get any benefit from this segment of tourists. The forest department charges entrance fees from day visitors which is a leakage. The day visitors may be targeted for the benefits of the local people. Local people can sell souvenir items, fruits, packaged water, tea, local honey, curd etc. to the day visitors and can earn considerable amount of money.

#### 4.7 Problem 7: Insufficient tourists in Manas National Park

**Strategy 7:** Compared to other tourism destinations, tourism is still in nascent stage in MNP. The tourists flow into MNP is not satisfactory for which there is a little scope for the local people to get them involved. The NGOs those started tourism business, private tour camps, Gypsy Safari Association, Elephant Safari Association etc. everybody should promote tourism of MNP through opening

websites where every information will be available about MNP. Today is the era of information technology. Tourists prefer to search about their potential tourism destination in the websites. Websites increase networks and popularity. Besides, the people of the tourism business should be very professional. Professionalism and their hospitality to the tourists should be remarkable so that the tourists can carry back a unique experience with them. The tourists share their experiences with others and references of the former visitors help to spread the good thing among others.

## CONCLUSION

The literature suggests that in developing economics, the benefits of tourism do not go to local community due to leakage. The present study has fulfilled the gap and taking opinion from expert panel. The Expert Panel has suggested some strategies that are compatible to the local economy. It is well known that the developing countries have insufficient resource to meet the demand. Therefore it cannot be thought that government will solve every problem. The important implication of this study is that all the strategies are in the local level economy with the available resources the local economy has. In such a situation, the peripheral areas will be able to capture tourism revenue within the host economy.

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