
COMMUNITY-BASED ECOTOURISM IN THE MAKING: A CASE STUDY OF LEMSACHENLOK, LONGLENG, NAGALAND

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Abstract: Rural people have a deep connection to the natural world and have strong social networks, with high quality social interactions and a strong social hierarchy. But today rural areas are no longer isolated from outside influences and this affects the morphological structure bringing about changes in socio economic aspects. On both, the effects maybe positive or negative. This study has identified existing and potential resources for community-based ecotourism in the forested tracts of *Longleng*, in Nagaland. The forest is a reserved forest and home to a variety of flora and fauna and also a treasure trove for researchers and scientists and a perfect destination for tourists and trekkers. The reserved forest has tremendous potential in terms of conserving and protecting one of the most fragile and productive ecosystems by involving the local communities leading to improvement in the quality of their life. Eco tourism is one of the recent opportunities for income generation without destroying the morphological setting of the environment. It also motivates economic development and social well being of people and at the same time preserves the natural environment and cultural heritage through awareness creation.

Keywords: Rural, Community, Nature, Forest.

Introduction: The basic concept of community-based ecotourism refers to ecotourism enterprises that are owned and managed by the community in order to gain income and utilize that income to improve their living standard. The term “community-based ecotourism” is used to describe ecotourism ventures that are characterized by high environmental consideration, increased control and involvement of the local residents, as well as significant benefits for the host community (WWF-International, 2001).

Community-based ecotourism refers more specially to tourism activities or enterprises that involve local communities; it operates in their lands, and is based on cultural and natural assets and attractions (Nelson, 2004). The entire community has some level of involvement and also is benefited.

The core aim of community-based ecotourism is poverty alleviation in rural communities through the creation of sustainable income-generating tourism activities, while conserving the delicate and sensitive ecological and cultural resources in their environments (Bhattacharya and Dubey, 2005). Community-based ecotourism has therefore been given much attention these days as it yields the results of the purpose for which it has been advocated for.

Objective:

- To identify the ecotourism potential of the study area
- To study the benefit of tourism to the host community

Methodology: Both the participant and non-participant observation methods were used for the collection of primary and secondary data. It is based on observation, field work and it is descriptive in nature

Study Area: *Longleng* District is a strip of mountainous territory in Nagaland, India located between 94°E - 95°E longitude and 26°N - 27°N latitude, it has a total area of 1066.80 sq k.m. It has 3 district boundaries and one state boundary, i.e., it is bounded by Mon district on the east, Mokokchung on the west, on the South it shares boundary with Tuensang and on North it has Nagaland's Inter-State boundary with Assam (Statistical handbook of Nagaland, 2009). The physiography of *Longleng* district is characterized by rugged terrain and serrated ranges separated from one another by narrow valleys. The altitude ranges between 150 to 2000 meters above the sea level. These mountain ranges are covered with thick forest and form the source of many

perennial streams and rivers of the district. *Dikhu* and *Yongmon* are the two principle rivers that flow through the district. *Longleng* district enjoys monsoon type of climate with a minimum temperature of 10 °C in winter and a maximum of 28 °C in summer. The average rainfall is between 2000mm and 3000mm.

Longleng district is very rich in natural resources upon which the economy of the state in general and the district in particular is largely dependent. The type of vegetation is characterized by sub-tropical mixed forest with broad-leafed evergreen trees and deciduous trees (*Longleng* district HDR, 2013). The villagers manages these forest through traditional institutions or local administrative units, which oversee the effective implementation of the customary laws, manages and controls their territory according to local customs and traditions. The local administrative units also lay down certain terms and conditions regarding the utilization of resources.

The biodiversity conservation for sustainable use was first initiated by the *Yaongyimchen* village and on seeing their achievement other neighboring villages like *Sanglu* and *Alayung* have come together to conserve and protect the natural resources under their jurisdiction. One of the best examples of communities coming together and working together towards a common vision is the '*Lemsachenlok*' reserved Forest. While there is a huge market demand for high quality timber in the state the area still has large tracts of dense and virgin forest protected by the communities. The villagers have been carrying out conservation initiatives for more than 6 years without any help or assistance from any quarters. This initiation to conserve and protect the nature is an example of social forestry and retention of tribal identity which had always been a part of the Naga tribal life and culture.

Lemsachenlok was in the news on 29th October 2016 when Hungarian Scientist Peter Fehervari along with his team visited the reserved forest on the invitation of the WII to satellite tag the Amur falcons. The traditional ecological knowledge systems and institutions of the communities have not only contributed towards sustainable resource utilization and management but have also sheltered millions of Amur falcons, the raptors that travel one of the longest migration routes among all birds they travel half way across the globe each year covering up to 22,000 km from Mongolia to South Africa. This is another unique attraction for ecotourism and yet a responsibility to welcome, provide shelter and protection.

Three wild life watch towers have been erected which is constructed with eco friendly materials such as bamboo and wood. The community keeps strict vigilance on the activities of men in and around the reserved area like picnicking, fishing, hunting, vehicular movement etc. They also restrict construction of any kind of structure to distract the wildlife and the natural settings.

The traditional livelihoods of the study area have been hunting and gathering, small scale subsistence farming, making crafts, etc. While some still maintain their traditional way of life, many others have gone into public life as white and blue collar workers, businessmen, civil servants and politicians. For those who have retained their traditional way of life, many challenges are being faced due to dwindling and degraded natural resources, and in addition some areas have been declared as protected areas. However, new livelihoods have emerged due to ecotourism, such as home stays, catering, sales of local goods and handicrafts, traditional entertainment, jungle trekking guides that require traditional knowledge. Other traditional livelihoods have been revived, such as craft making and traditional healing as an alternative to western medicine (Anne Lasimbang, 2010).

The community learning center is utilized as a place to learn traditional knowledge on weaving, beading, basketry, wood carving, etc. it also includes folk dances, folk songs, folk tales, etc. This knowledge was fast disappearing but through the training programs organized by the committee the knowledge is regained and retained. Ecotourism development will generate new interest in the villages' natural attractions, culture and traditional knowledge and open a market niche for traditional crafts and culture. This will help create pride and interest in local communities to revive their traditional knowledge as well as to see the value of environment conservation (Anne Lasimbang, 2010)

Tourists prefers to see something different, something new, something to photograph, something adventurous, they often want to mix their adventure with leisure activities. If marketed professionally *Lemsachenlok* has the potential. Tourist packages can also be provided with the combination of wild life safari, trekking, learn handicrafts and weaving from community learning centre, visit historical sites, experience local food and dancing, etc.

Conclusion: Current developments have been unplanned, and the short-term gains are likely to take precedence over the long-term environmental considerations. However the natural ecosystems and biological resources can provide goods and services for the tourism industry. The challenge is therefore to ensure that tourism is developed in harmony with environmental considerations.

Recommendations:

- The preserved forest is visited by a limited number of research scholars, scientists, media, nature lovers, etc, and there are no data about their number and the purpose of their visit. Data of visitors should be maintained in detail.
- Create itineraries for visitors to have a close relation with other historical, cultural and natural attractions.
- Tour operators should have ample information about the area
- There should be an overall land use plan in order to arouse interest, distribute benefits to wider local communities, and help to maintain the quality of recreation resources that attract tourists. The plan should include a zoning plan, where protected area can be divided in different zones.

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