

THE ROLE OF INDIAN GOVERNMENT POLICIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL ECOTOURISM DESTINATIONS

AZ INDIAI KORMÁNYZATI POLITIKA SZEREPE A RURÁLIS ÖKOTURISZTIKAI FEJLESZTÉSEKBEN

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Abstract

Travel and tourism are major source of foreign exchange in India. The potential employment opportunities in this sector have improved over time. This paper focuses on ecotourism and rural development in India, how ecotourism can help rural communities to sustain their livelihood in India and what the governmental policies are towards this rural ecotourism development. It can have both positive and negative impacts on rural as well as urban communities. The Government of India published the development of ecotourism in its new Ecotourism policies and guidelines.

Keywords: ecotourism, rural development, employment opportunities

1. Introduction

Eco tourism means any form of natural attraction, like flora and fauna to attract visitors to rural places thereby the local community benefiting economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience and can be termed as rural ecotourism. Ecotourism in India is essentially an activity which takes place in the countryside. It is multi-faceted and a lot of them get benefits different sectors of tourism like farm/agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism, Ecotourism and wildlife tourism growth potential can be a control of natural resource as a strategy for Rural Development. The development of Rural Tourism is useful for a country like India, where almost 74% of the population resides in its 7 million villages (Mellor, 1968). Ecotourism has the potential to enhance wilderness protection and wildlife conservation, while providing nature-compatible livelihoods and greater incomes for many people living around natural ecosystems. This can help to contribute directly to the protection of wildlife or forest areas, while making the local community stakeholders and owners in the process. Throughout the world the trends of industrialization and development have had an urban centric approach. Alongside, the stresses of urban lifestyles have led to a “counter-urbanization” syndrome. This has growing interest towards the rural areas. Village tourism as the primary tourism product should be promoted to spread tourism and its socio-economic benefits to rural and new geographic regions. Key geographic regions would be identified for the development and promotion of eco-tourism.

2. Tourism in India

The role of tourism industry is increasing the process of globalization. The major consideration of government is concentrated towards tourism industry economic development and growth (Sam Aram, and Mirzaee, 2009). It can help to boost the income of the residents and create employment opportunities and possibilities of protecting the natural resources, create the awareness between the host and the guest society. The development of Rural Tourism is useful for a country like India, where almost all the population lives in its 7 million villages.

The Guest is equivalent to god in Indian culture. “Atithi devo Bhavah” is a slogan of Indian tourism industry. India is a land of diversities of cultural and traditional activities that is why millions of tourists from around the globe visit India. Tourism does not only mean growth in Indian economy but also generates employment. The Indian Ministry of Tourism controls tourism industry and stakeholders, creates all the rules and regulation and laws related to the development of the industry, administration and promotion of tourism in India. The ‘National Tourism Development Policy’ 2015 was adopted when the government realized that Tourism was an important industry for economic development. In the same year it provided direct and indirect employment opportunities and launched an international marketing campaign to promote Indian tourism industry for a global audience.

3. Ecotourism in India

Mostly Ecotourism and community-based tourism are responsible branches of tourism which consider the protection and development of opportunities for the continuation of their life purpose of lasting ecology and respond to the environment’s present needs (Campbell, Lisa M, 2009). Ecotourism provides cultural, social, economic and environmental benefits to rural communities (Scheyvens,1999; Campbell, Lisa, 2009). It raises funds required for nature conservation and generates employment opportunities (Goodwin, 1996). Ecotourism gives opportunity to some small-scale entrepreneurial facilities, such as restaurants, lodges and local handicraft recreational activity businesses, home stays (Che, 2006). The revenue generated by local people from entrance fees in protected areas and rents of the souvenir shops (Goodwin, 1996) can fund local conservation trusts that compensate farmers for crop and clearing and can be a development opportunity of the destination.

Ecotourism in India is very rich and very committed to the characteristics of the area in which tourist activity takes place (Petric, 2013). This activity is compulsory to insist on a complex definition of rural ecotourism. Rural ecotourism could be defined as environmental based tourism which should take place in rural areas, but this simplification could be problematic in the area of making clear arrangements between urban hotels or resorts situated in rural areas (e.g. golf hotel, spa resort or tourist villa) and genuinely rural experience on a tourist farm or in a rural hotel (IMRD 2014). “Rural ecotourism is a term used when rural environmental is a key component of the product of tourism products” (UNWTO, 2004). This concept presupposes the contact with tourists and specific rural experience. Besides, the opportunity to actively participate in certain agritourism activities and other activities, traditions, local cuisine and lifestyle of residents should be offered, as long as possible. This approach towards attracting tourists could provide a completely new experience which is almost impossible to achieve in the destination of mass tourism activities.

According to the literature review and an Indian national survey of rural tourism destinations, it is possible to pick out a few specified tourist destinations and fancy them with the help of NGOs to develop the tourist offers in rural destinations. Tourist offer is extremely well developed and represented by many micro and small entrepreneurs (Hall, Mitchell and Roberts, 2005). Family owned businesses are based on limited resources for further development for the destination development, this kind of enterprises usually remain small and, in the wider context of employment, it leads especially to women empowerment (Moric, 2013). Modern society rural lifestyle is the main attraction, and most of the urbanized people would like to experience the rural life style, so government policy's for the protection of this intangible element of rural cultural heritage is highly recommended (Moric, 2013). In governmental policies, the rural area is conserved with authentic rural life is an essential resource for rural ecotourism products and services. Rural areas are of poor production, in smaller quantities and maintain the traditional way of life, which represents a significant platform for creating innovative tourist products, attractive to tourists from industrialized and suburban areas that have lost the key features of recognition as a rural area (Hall, Mitchell and Roberts, 2005).

4. Rural Tourism and Ecotourism Guidelines for Rural Development

Rural tourism is a form of tourism activities that showcase the rural areas including rural life, art, cultural, traditional flora and fauna and heritage of rural locations and provide employment opportunities to local people (Roberts, L. & Hall, D. 2001). The strategies which have undertaken the development of rural tourism as a mass tourism market, are going to mean valuable development to rural economies can be expressed not only in financial terms but also as employment contribution to the well-being of local people, encouragement towards the adoption of new environmental conservation and new working practices. Indian rural tourism is relatively new, the potential for rural tourism is a major focus in economic development and reeducation (Rathore, N, 2012). According to Honey (Honey, M., 2008) ecotourism provides the following benefits to local people and rural tourism development:

- Sustainable use of natural resources.
- Developing and maintaining the diversification of the natural, cultural and historical development of the country side.
- Agritourism plays a key role to attract more tourists to the countryside. The planning and development must be attractive to tourists.
- Sustaining the local organizations in socio-economic development of the community, as well as in the protection of nature, historical and cultural values.
- The contribution of local communities to the tourism sector by sustaining and motivating groups for the development and promotion of local tourism and the protection of the environment, historical and cultural assets.
- The development of agritourism must have a key role to attract tourists and the economic source of local communities must be supported by professional training, continuously high-performance of workshops among the locals.
- Marketing and promoting the rural touristic resources.
- Monitoring negative tourism activities and actions plans to protect and conserve the natural environment, as well as rural tourism resources.

5. Indian government Strategies for the Promotion of Ecotourism Development

Tourism growth is economically and potentially can be increased in rural places in India. Rural tourism development is a strategy for Rural Development. The development of rural areas is a strong motivation for Rural Tourism, which is helpful for a country like India. Across the globe trends of globalization and industrialization development have an urban centric approach towards the rural areas. Moreover, the expenditure of urban lifestyles has led to urban cultural expansion (Singh & Dr JS, 2015). This has grown motivations towards the rural areas. The trend of urbanization has led to falling income levels due to the financial crisis of the country, fewer job opportunities in the total areas leading to an urbanization syndrome in the rural areas (Rathore, N., 2012). Rural ecotourism is one of the few activities which can provide a solution to this economic problem in rural areas. On the other hand, there are other influences which are shifting the trends towards rural areas, like increasing levels of awareness among local communities, interest to visit the historical heritage and culture, which improve the accessibility of the destination and environmental awareness. In developed countries it is a trend among tourists to visit the rural areas for getting relaxed resulting from their usual lifestyle, because in a modern lifestyle the tourism in village settings means to experience and live a relaxed and healthy lifestyle. This concept has taken the shape of a formal kind of Rural Tourism in India.

This scheme provided will promote rural tourism as a main source of financial benefits to local communities and it has socio-economic benefits to rural places and its new geographic regions. Major geographic areas will be identified for development and promotion of Rural Tourism, according to Kutay aytuğ & Mahshid mikaeili (2017). The implementation of the region would be done through a convergence committee appointed by the district collectors. Activities involved like improving the environment sustainability, hygiene, infrastructure, local people empowerment, etc. will be eligible for assistance. Apart from providing financial assistance the focus would be to tap the resources available under different schemes of the department of rural development, state government and other concerned departments of the government. of India.

These principles should be envisaged both for governmental organizations and tourism and service providers of such ecotourist products. These ideas presented are accompanied by a more and more accentuated tendency of the civilized world of living in good terms with the environment, spending more time in nature, being closer to all what is clean.

Munt asks (Munt, I. 1994): Who are the eco tourists and what do they expect?

- They are between the age of 30 and 59.
- They are highly educated people who know well the natural resources.
- They must have above average income.

Eco tourists are usually imagine rural tourist places as ones having high quality services, professional local guides, and there must be small group tours for groups maximum (15 people), having enlightenment educational awareness programs, good and high-quality local traditional food prepared from local ingredients, quiet areas far away from traffic, quality accommodation, not necessarily luxury hotels, but clean and proper; environment conservation. (Mostly ecotourist like to know that the money which they spent goes back into environment protection.)

6. Key Government Policies towards the Development of Ecotourism

It is important to involve all stakeholders in the implementation of ecotourism policies. Synergy and collaboration among the Central Government, State Governments, hospitality sector, State Forest Departments, Protected Area managements, and local communities and civil society institutions are vital for ensuring the successful implementation of the guidelines (Sekhar, N. U., 2003).

- Create an awareness among the local communities of rural tourism development, where there is an opportunity to provide income generated activities in their areas.
- Rural tourism is mainly encouraged by either central or state government funded projects, but these initiatives have to be designed, planned, implemented and managed and the development should be done by the rural people themselves, so they have to be community-based tourism and community controlled activities.
- Various educational departments have special projects and awareness programs for the implementation of rural tourism.
- Rural tourism should be a local community activity rather than development activities in the rural areas.
- Village Tourism Committee under the leadership of Village panchayat should be aware that all the communities will get proper economic employment at the destination.
- The Village Tourism Committee members should have sub-committees, each sub-committee is assigned with specific portfolio aimed at promoting Local food and hospitality and tourism must have; Culture: customs, rituals, traditions, performing and folk art; Architecture; and Traditional/indigenous goods and material.
- Policy related to communication and cleanliness of the local people and skill, management of tourism waste, management of the accounting of the development of indigenous publicity materials.
- Construction of village museums and parks that showcase the rural life through photographs, exhibits, artefacts, flora and fauna models all prepared originally.
- Development of marketing models and promotion of rural tourism.
- Governments provide services to the rural areas under the scheme of sanitation.
- The natural, cultural, human environmental and capital resources must be used in destination development.
- The infrastructure must be ecofriendly.
- The tourist can have allowed to visit the places all the year round, which is a better opportunity to get income generated activities for local people.
- Homestay people get some awareness of the tourists.
- Quality and service provided by homestay people should be authenticated.
- The villagers should provide more leisure opportunities to the tourists, for example nature walks, trekking, climbing-mountains/trees, exploring biodiversity in natural parks.
- Rural tourism must occur far away from the urban areas, so it should have good accessibility for the tourists to reach the destination.

7. Positive and Negative Impacts of Ecotourism

Tourism industry in India has several positive and negative impacts on the economy and society. (Lee, W. H. & Moscardo, G., 2005). The impacts are highlighted below

7.1. Positive Impacts

- Creates an interest and awareness among the tourists about India's indigenous flora and fauna. It acts as a forum to educate and encourage conservation efforts and economic support for local communities.
- Boosting the economic development in areas surrounding reserves through sustainable development of environment
- Increase the revenue for local communities, which is helpful for better economic conditions.
- Preservation of local cultural assets
- Creation of employment opportunities for local people
- Encourage participation of local communities in the protection and conservation of the local areas where they live

7.2. Negative Impacts

The fundamental economic benefits that derive from ecotourism have resulted in excessive commercialization that has resulted in the obvious violation of rules, guidelines that have been put in force for the protection and conservation of the environment and the rights of the people.

- Ecotourism's main purpose is only the basic conservation of flora and fauna that is sufficient to attract tourists. It does more harm than good. The tourists arrive in and ride around the parks in vehicles which pollute the environment and scare the animals. The incessant flow of tourists disturbs the animals. Also, tourists leave behind garbage such as plastic bottles etc. which lead to environmental degradation.
- In mass tourism there is increasing demand for ecotourism, land around parks and sanctuaries is being cleared through deforestation, displacement of people etc. to accommodate hotels, resorts etc.
- Mismanagement of governmental strategies of ecotourism sites causes more harm than any little good that ecotourism brought about.
- Ecotourism takes away a lot of natural resources from local communities, and in return provides them with low-paying employment positions in the resorts etc. that are established. No viable long-lasting employment opportunities.

8. Suggestions for the Improvement of Rural Tourism in India

The main attractions of Indian tourism are historical monuments, cultural aspects of India, wildlife scenery, forests and beaches. Some touristic spots are famous among the tourists for ecotourism development in all over the country. Again, some sites have potentiality, but they attract fewer visitors. The substantial number of governmental organizations, tour operators and guides are necessary for ecotourism to attract the global tourism market, the major activities of the Indian Government for ecotourism development are discussed below.

Strategies

To promote the ecotourism sector, the government has insisted on facilities for the global and regional strategic alliances among the local state governments, tourist organizations and the local destination communities. This partnership has improved the quality of tour service and fostered greater collaboration with other countries, tour operators and travel services, transport service providers and local tourist destinations. The local governments in India promote and analyze the differentiated strategies for unique and distinctive travel patterns and needs for promoting ecotourism destinations. The government should motivate the local people to participate in the development.

Improving Ecotourism Products

The government is continuously promoting and developing ecotourism destinations. Currently, there are about 80 national parks and 441 sanctuaries in India, which work for the protection and conservation of wildlife resource in India as guided by the National Ecotourism Plan during the period of 2013-2016. The government has given greater importance to ecotourism through the preservation and conservation of natural attractions such as wildlife sanctuaries, national parks, highlands and coral islands. The government should encourage the local communities to establish ecotourism projects in natural areas owned by governmental properties.

Improving Accessibility

The Indian government is continuously expanding and upgrading infrastructure and communication facilities to make them accessible for the countywide, which supports the improvement of the tourism sector. Air, rail, road and sea transportation infrastructure facilities have been improved to facilitate the development of tourism industry.

Employment and Training

Indian ecotourism policies have influenced the local originations to increase the employment opportunities in the ecotourism sector. The Indian Government has improved the quality of tourist services by advising the training through workshops and coordination of the National Tourism Human Resource Development Council (NTHRDC) and National ecotourism councils. Tourist guides have been encouraged to gain knowledge about ecotourist destinations and more languages.

Marketing Promotion

The Ministry of Tourism has the specific agenda to promote ecotourism in the country in a responsible and sustainable manner, and on the basis of this mandate the promotion of ecotourism assumes larger importance.

Sustainable Tourism Development

A more environmental approach towards tourism planning and implementation has been undertaken to ensure sustainable tourism development in Indian tourism industry. Governmental policies have been directed strictly to the preservation and enhancement of existing natural assets so as to minimize environmental damage. The government gives importance to minimize negative impacts of ecotourism so as to preserve the environment.

Investment

To promote ecotourism destinations, the public and private sector have encouraged developments of innovative tourism products and services. For this purpose, the provision of incentives has been considered for the development of special interest products in ecotourism. The government insisted the PPT partnership to get awareness invest in the tourism sector.

Research and Planning

The government is conducting a research and impact to summarize the ecotourism related programs and projects. Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) has been fully updated in this concern. The TSA mechanism is supporting subsequent policy making and readjustment of strategies and programs for the tourism industry.

Safety and Security

India has increased efforts to ensure the country as a safe and pleasant place to visit. The police authorities have strengthened to increase security for tourists. The country has capitalized its' political stability and diverse racial harmony to foster the country's image as a tourist-friendly destination. Government initiatives have been introduced for ecotourism developments.

Guidelines

Ecotourism guidelines for sustainable ecotourism development by the Ministry of Tourism have been drawn up in the National Ecotourism Plan. These guidelines are giving proper instructions how to develop ecotourism in the specific areas in countryside.

Market Segmentation

The government has already set up new market strategies for tourism in rural areas. With this goal the government has given emphasis to ecotourism development in protected areas, forest areas, mountains and natural attractions.

Infrastructure Development

Improvement of communication and infrastructure facilities are compulsory for boosting the ecotourism activities. Local governments spent a lot of allocation on the development of infrastructure and communication in ecotourism areas, which ensures the ecotourism development in this region.

9. Conclusion

Geographical, cultural and environmental diversity of a country like India has a plenty of opportunities to develop and promote eco rural tourism. If the implementation and promotion are properly done in rural tourism projects, it can influence the rural economic growth by generating employment for the youth. It solves the potential of addressing such issues as poverty, empowerment of women and strengthening the economic status of the rural people and conserving the natural and cultural resources. The Indian government considered the guidelines of the development of ecotourism in rural destinations to be important. It is a very crucial activity from the point of view of rural development because of its contribution to the socio-economic development and employment opportunities for

the rural people. Still in its nascent state, concentrated efforts must be made by both the State government as well as the Ministry of Tourism to develop and promote rural tourism in India.

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