

Influencing Community-Based Tourism Empirical Study on Sylhet Region

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Abstract: *A work in progress on identifying the influencing factors behind community-based tourism on how it affects the cultural and lifestyles of the consumers of Sylhet region and also how it has contribute in the positive growth of the tourism sector of Bangladesh. The paper is a research proposal and the author hopes to publish a full paper with the outcome and correct factors of the CBT system in the marketing fields.*

Keywords - *Bangladesh's Tourism, Community, Development, Sustainable Tourism*

I. Introduction

Community Based Tourism (CBT) has been advocated as an integral part of sustainable tourism development by the scholars over the time for its capability to reduce tourism's negative impacts while enhancing its positive effects (Haywood, 1988; Jamal and Getz, 1995; Murphy, 1985). Connell (1997) implied that, CBT enables the sharing of knowledge and the transformation of the process of learning for the community's self-development; whereas, Arnstein (1969) advocated that CBT enables the society to fairly redistribute benefits accrued from the industry. The success of CBT however, is largely dependent on the involvement of all stakeholders, i.e. local government officials, local citizens, architects, developers, business people, and planners in such way that decision-making is shared (Haywood, 1988). Works of numerous scholars have also strongly advocated for CBT. Among the many reason, to mention a few, positive influence on the tourist experience due to supportive role of the community (Pearce, 1994; Wahab and Pigram, 1997), enhanced image of the destination due to enrichment of the natural environment, infrastructure, facilities and special events or festivals (Murphy, 1985), enhanced conservation of natural resources and increased redistribution of tourism income among people (Felstead, 2000) and sustainable development of tourism industry through a total implementation of tourism initiatives at the destination (Bovy, 1982). Halstead (2003) implied that, CBT development will provide a firm foundation for a successful and sustainable enterprise: profitability, environmental sustainability, social development.

Bangladesh has a landscape suitable for nature based tourism. The population and diversity of the sub-cultures also supports its opportunities for CBT, especially when its people are known for their hospitality around the world. Although tourism industry has grown to a juvenile stage in Bangladesh, CBT has been a very new concept around here. The concept and some interventions towards CBT has been seen nowadays that are mostly funded by foreign donor organizations with issues like human development, rights and access to power, bio-diversity preservation and so on.

The largest intervention has been taken by the USAID in collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh for CBT has been the 'Nishorgo' project. The project is a part of a larger intervention named 'Integrated Protected Area Co-Management' or IPAC that is working for the bio-diversity protection of the protected areas i.e. reserve forests, wet-lands etc. in the different parts of Bangladesh. As many of these areas are also visited by tourists coming from different parts, the Nishorgo project has been undertaken to ensure host community benefits and tourists' experience of nature and community from tourism. Despite of its limited operation and insufficient capacity, the Nishorgo project has been largely appreciated by all the concerns in and out of the country. Some of the 'Eco-Cottages' of the project has also received awards of tourism promotion organization for their contribution in value creation for the industry. As a whiplash of the Nishorgo project's success, a good number of private entrepreneurs around the country are nowadays becoming interested in investing over CBT.

The Sylhet region is one of the few areas of Bangladesh where the Nishorgo project is at its prime and experiencing a mentionable response from the stakeholders. Especially the forest areas of Moulovibazar and Hobigonj, the Nishorgo project has sponsored a number of CBT initiatives including forest trails, eco-cottages and other tourist facilities that are mostly manned by members of the local community. These initiatives not only create value for the visiting tourists, but also ensure the sustainability of the project through active support from the community. The success of Nishorgo project has encouraged quite a few private entrepreneurs, especially tour operators (i.e. Community Ecotourism) to engage the local community in their operations. The success of such initiatives is mostly seen at the tribal communities around the region.

In this scenario, CBT has immense significance for the tourism development of Bangladesh. Sylhet, a booming tourist destination of Bangladesh has mentionable opportunities in developing CBT. Thus a comprehensive study to identify the factors affecting the successful development of CBT in this region calls for significance. The proposed study would break new grounds through identifying these underlying factors and contribute to the industry from both intervention and policy level.

II. Literature Review on CBT and The Factors Affecting Its Success

Guzmán, Cañizares and Pavón (2011) implied that, CBT is based on the creation of tourist products characterized by community participation in their development. CBT is largely dependent on, along with all the tourism elements, interrelation and interaction between the community and visitors that enhances community empowerment and ownership, social and economic development, conservation of natural and cultural resources, and a high quality visitor experience (Taylor, 1995). They also identified the four categories as the underlying structure of CBT: local tourist offices providing services to the tourists, institutions collaborating with the local tourism industry (i.e. public administrations, NGOs, universities etc.), direct tourist service companies (i.e. accommodation, food and beverage; shops etc.) and various transport and financial businesses.

Many researchers, including Taylor (1995) identified the greatest challenge to develop CBT is the time-span required to mobilize the community stakeholders. In addition, Addison (1996) has identified some factors that may affect the successfulness of CBT initiatives. These are, Level of Education, Business Experience, Financial Assistance and Elimination of Conflicting Vested Interests. Gray (1985) and Joppe (1996) also emphasized on ensuring adequate Resources and Skills for the community residents to acquire the capacity to take part in CBT Development they might be unaware of the significance or process of participation. Tosun (2000) and Li (2005) also implied that, community involvement must be ensured along with the stakeholders of tourism development: governmental, quasi-governmental, non-governmental, private organizations and tourists. Tosun (2000) and Li (2005) identified the four approaches to CBT development: private investors operating tourist facilities in a destination area and providing employment opportunities for the locals, private investors voluntarily sharing some revenue to the locals mostly as CSR, private investors and community people collaborating through profit-sharing joint ventures and community enterprises established by community people who are self mobilized. However, availability of financial resources and expertise has to be ensured for the development of such CBT initiatives at the community levels (Dowler et.al, 2006; Tosun, 2001).

Ashley and Garland (1994) and Halstead (2003), identified the following factors that are crucial to the success and sustainability of CBT initiatives: Nature of the consultation process, Securing finances for development, Training and assistance, Amount and timing of benefits, Biodiversity conservation, Managing conflicts, Political stability, Ownership, Government support to communities, Business and development planning, Location and marketing and Financial viability. Studies of Othman et.al (2011) also pointed that, there are other underlying factors affecting CBT development, such as class, gender and patronage inequalities. Jamal and Getz (1995), in their study, identified that, CBT development is largely dependent on the proper treatment of issues like persistent initiative to treat different agenda, profound strategic planning and long-term problem solving process. To add to the list of factors affecting the successfulness of CBT initiatives, visionary strategic management at various levels; targeted presentation of tourism products, promotion to target market; acquiring knowledge on the demand factors and healthy link with travel agents and marketing networks have also been signified by scholars like Reed (1997).

Accordingly, the foremost thrust of this study has concentrated on the issues relevant to the CBT development in Bangladesh. The present study aims to create a practical, comprehensive, reader-friendly, and complimentary vision about tourism with special emphasis on the CBT development process in Bangladesh. Such type of research is inadequate in business literature of Bangladesh. Expectantly the study wishes to fill this gap.

III. Methodology

This study will be conducted through collecting and analyzing both primary and secondary data. This study will be descriptive in nature and comprehensive in scope. The proposed methodology for the study is as follows:

Research Problem: The research problem for the study is defined as:

“To identify the factors affecting successful community based tourism development in Sylhet region and analyzes their relative effect on successfulness of CBT works”.

The specific components of the research problem are:

1. The underlying factors arising from the tourism industry entrepreneurs (i.e. availability of resources for CBT development, profit potential, expected demand etc.) that affect the initiatives and development of CBT.

2. The underlying factors arising from the tourists (i.e. demand for community related experience) that affect the initiatives and development of CBT.
3. The underlying factors arising from the community people (i.e. mobilization for equitability and rights, motivation to take part in tourism industry, expectation of benefits etc.) that affect the initiatives and development of CBT.
4. The underlying factors arising from public and special interest groups (i.e. concern for community benefits, human rights etc.) that affect the initiatives and development of CBT.
5. The underlying factors arising from government and statutory bodies (i.e. legal frameworks and policies, special benefits for entrepreneurs, campaigns etc.) that affect the initiatives and development of CBT.

Nature of Research

Both qualitative and quantitative research designs will be employed to conduct the study. The qualitative studies will contribute in establishing the conceptual framework of the study. The quantitative study, in the form of questionnaire survey will compile benchmark data on the issues of the study and will be used to test research hypothesis. For the qualitative study, case studies, focus groups and secondary data analysis will be employed. For the quantitative part of the study, questionnaire surveys on the community members and tourism entrepreneurs at the destinations will be conducted.

Research Questions

The underlying research questions for the study are,

1. What are the factors affecting the development of community based tourism at the destinations of Sylhet region?
2. What are the levels of effect carried by each underlying factor in the successfulness of CBT development in the study area?
3. How the sets of variables can be managed to achieve ultimate output in the CBT development in the study area?
4. How can the insights and learning from the study can be generalized for CBT development in Bangladesh as a whole?

Research Hypotheses:

H_1 : The underlying factors arising from the tourism industry entrepreneurs have significant impact on the development of CBT works in the study area.

H_2 : The underlying factors arising from the community people have significant impact on the development of CBT works in the study area.

H_3 : The underlying factors arising from the tourists have significant impact on the development of CBT works in the study area.

H_4 : The underlying factors arising from the general public and special interest groups have significant impact on the development of CBT works in the study area.

H_5 : The underlying factors arising from the government and statutory bodies have significant impact on the development of CBT works in the study area.

Population and Sampling

The population for the study consists of two different types of elements, namely the community members and the tourism entrepreneurs at the destination level. The geographic coverage of the study will cover the tourist destinations of the Sylhet, Sunamgonj, Moulovibazar and Hobigonj district of Sylhet Division. Sample for the study will be constructed from both the elements. Due to the sparse geographic distribution of the population, convenient sampling will be used. Sample of 40 entrepreneurs (10 from each of the 4 district of Sylhet division) will be constructed from each destination. Sample of 200 community members i.e. households (50 from each of the 4 district of Sylhet division) will be created from the same.

The sampling technique will be non-probabilistic due to the limited number of available tourism enterprises and the saturated distribution of the tourist spots and tourist arrivals. Convenience sampling system will be used to sample the core elements of the research: tourism entrepreneurs, community people and tourists.

Data Analysis and Reporting Both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis will be employed on a large scale to test research hypotheses and drawing results of the study. To test the hypotheses of the study, t-test and chi-square test of correlation would be used. Other types of analytical methods may be employed as per requirement of the study. After completion of data analysis and finding generation, a thorough research thesis will be prepared and submitted for evaluation. However, regular reporting to the supervisor will take part to ensure effective study.

IV. Significance of The Study

CBT has been a 'Buzz' among the concerned tourists and industry stakeholders nowadays. As a country exploring its opportunities in tourism as a means of sustainable economic and social development, Bangladesh is putting significant attention towards the development of CBT. Nevertheless, the successful development of CBT largely depends on understanding the existing scenario of the concerned destinations, communities and the underlying factors paving the access of such initiatives inside the community in the true sense. This study, in this regards, would break new ground on the issue as it would explore and explain the core issues of successful CBT development. Such studies, thus, would not only contribute to the academic enrichment of CBT as a discipline, but would also contribute significantly in the policy formulation and implementation by the competent authorities for the sustainable development of this very promising sector of Bangladesh.

Finally, it may be said that, the study will be unique in the perspective of Bangladesh. The findings of the study would not only serve the academic purpose, but also would contribute significantly to the policy formulation towards CBT development and growth in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is high in regards to the prospect of tourism development, especially CBT. This study, hence, would be a significant support in the quest in the future tourism development.

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