
SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN ECOTOURISM: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR BHUYAPARA VILLAGE NEAR MANAS NATIONAL PARK, ASSAM

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Social Entrepreneurship forms an important medium for strengthening the process of entrepreneurship in rural India. In the contrast of Eco Tourism, Social Entrepreneurship helps in developing a base in rural areas to empower the fringe people to start any economic activities which help the community as a whole. This paper focuses on the Bhuyapara Village of Assam which is adjacent to Manas National Park. Despite of being a hub for different tourist still the village is undeveloped and lack in entrepreneurial activities. The paper is focussed on community development with the mantra of participation of the fringe people through the means of Social Entrepreneurship.

Keywords: *Wildlife Management, Social Entrepreneurship, Manas National Park, Eco Tourism, Community Participation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism in India is a diverse and thriving industry that draws a multitude of visitors from all over the world annually. The nation's extensive cultural, historical, natural, and architectural wealth makes it an appealing destination for travellers seeking various experiences. India is renowned for its rich history, cultural heritage, and iconic landmarks. The nation is also a renowned hub of spirituality and religion with numerous sacred sites. India's wildlife and diverse landscapes are home to unique flora and fauna, while the country's geography offers opportunities for adventure tourism. Indian cuisine is famous globally, and visitors frequently seek out local food experiences. India is a hub for traditional Ayurvedic treatments and practices, while its coastline offers stunning beaches. Indian festivals, such as Diwali and Holi, provide exceptional cultural experiences, while local craftsmanship is evident in Indian textiles, jewelry, and pottery. India's wildlife and diverse landscapes are home to unique flora and fauna, while the country's geography offers opportunities for adventure tourism.

The Manas National Park, situated in the northeastern state of Assam, India, has been recognized as a UNESCO Natural World Heritage site. It is one of the prominent wildlife destinations in Assam. In 1990, it was granted the status of a national park and has since then been designated as a Tiger Reserve, an Elephant Reserve, and a Biosphere Reserve. The park spans over an extensive area of approximately 950 square kilometers (370 square miles) and is located at the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas. The park is located 41 kilometers north of the township of Barpeta Circuit and 175 kilometers northwest of Guwahati, the regional capital. It bridges the Manas River and is flanked on the north by the Royal Manas Wildlife Sanctuary of Bhutan, and on the south by Bhutan's highly inhabited region. Manas National Park and Tiger Reserve received the highest ever revenue in the last financial year which is 2022 to 2023 according to the record. According to the stats the revenue went up by 4% in the year 2022-23 which is Rs. 1,35,84,450 to be exact, and it can be noticed that huge growth of revenue if compared to the last 7-year average which is 37% growth (Economic Survey of Assam, 2021).

Arguably, in a developing country like India, the vast majority of the rural populations are indirectly dependent on natural resources and biodiversity elements (Bhuyan, 2018) but strict regulations have restricted the locals to use the park resources. The class of working individuals is scattered in the peripherals of Manas National Park. Manas National Park gave a tremendous opportunity for the locals to initiate business and also take up tourism entrepreneurship. Many entrepreneurs who were engaged in various types of work have been affected, and only a few start-ups have emerged that focus on activities with high demand in the area. The entrepreneurs in the region primarily engage in the following activities homestays, Jeep safaris, Restaurants, Elephant rides, etc.

The term ecotourism is surrounded by confusion (Cater, 1994). It has been defined by Blangy and Wood (1993) as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people." However, it is contended here that, regardless of definition, ecotourism is an instigator of change. It is inevitable that the introduction of tourists to areas which were previously seldom visited by outsiders will place new demands upon the environment associated with new actors, new activities, and new facilities. Manas National Park incorporates ecotourism in the National Ecotourism Plan with a conservation-oriented approach. Sustainability is a priority for park management, utilizing ecotourism for visitor enjoyment and preservation of delicate ecosystems. Proximity to one of the ranges of Manas National Park, there is a village called Bhuyapara.

Despite of having so much potential for entrepreneurship the village lack basic infrastructural facilities and still economic activities are in blur. Blessed with the attract like Manas National Park for gathering footfall of tourist still the eco-tourism is in far land in the location. This paper will focus on the eco-tourism essentials on Bhyapara village through a perspective of Social Entrepreneurship.

(Mowfort,1998) investigation, delineated three crucial criteria that are necessary for the triumphant execution of ecotourism: Firstly, it is imperative for ecotourism to prioritize the safeguarding of the holistic well-being of the destination. This includes the preservation of the natural environment, social fabric, cultural heritage, and economic vitality. Secondly, ecotourism should incorporate educational aspects that would be beneficial for the local community, tourists, and businesses alike. Lastly, a key feature of ecotourism necessitates the active participation of the local community in various ecotourism activities with the aim of fostering local community engagement.

2. OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the factors which encourages community participation in Bhuyapara village.
2. To know about the factors hindering community participation in Social Entrepreneurship.

3. METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on observation method and is qualitative in nature. Primary data was collected from different stake holders like local entrepreneurs, officials of Manas National Par, fringe people were surveyed with a semi structured questionnaire and in- depth analysis was done using convenience sampling method. Secondary data was collected from different websites, journals, and books.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Social Entrepreneurship and Community participation

In the field of social entrepreneurship, Dayat (2020) argues that it revolves around the dynamic engagement of the community across various developmental facets with the primary objective of forging social value, elevating both the societal and economic well-being of the community.

Expanding on this discourse, Witold (2020) emphasizes the significance of strong affiliations between social economy entities and their socio-institutional environment. This symbiotic relationship involves collaborative efforts with local institutions, social organizations, and neighboring businesses.

In alignment with these viewpoints, Kuo (2021) agrees that the synergy between youth entrepreneurship and community involvement holds the potential for fostering enduring development and enriching diversity within the local populace.

When exploring the domain of tourism-related social entrepreneurship, Richard (2020) contends that such endeavors possess the capacity to yield sustainable community development outcomes by catalyzing the active participation of residents and facilitating the integration of livelihoods.

Echoing this sentiment, Rama (2017) highlights the role of social entrepreneurs as catalysts for heightened community engagement. Their active immersion within existing systems and cultural dynamics empowers them to effect positive change through their influential involvement.

4.2 Social Entrepreneurship and Eco Tourism

The work of Kapil (2020) highlights the interdependent connection between social entrepreneurship and eco-tourism. In addressing social issues such as poverty, social entrepreneurship employs inventive strategies to construct sustainable business frameworks that uplift disadvantaged communities.

Evelyn (2018) distinguishes eco-tourism as an initiative that aims to provide ecologically sustainable, economically viable, and socially acceptable tourism. It endeavors to offer visitors exceptional experiences while mitigating negative ecological impacts.

Suppamas (2021) and Dian (2018) converge in their perspective, emphasizing the importance of community engagement in decision-making and tourism project management. Both social entrepreneurship and eco-tourism share the common objective of empowering local communities through job creation and the preservation of cultural heritage.

Drawing upon this, Soenarto (2019) proposes the integration of social entrepreneurship and eco-tourism principles to establish sustainable tourism models. This integration has the potential to generate mutual benefits for both local communities and the environment.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Product Potential and support Ecotourism in Bhuyapara Village

Within the confines of Manas National Park, there exist three distinct ranges namely Panbari, Bansbari and Bhuyapara which serve as vital links to various neighbouring villages. Nevertheless, the Bhuyapara Range which interconnects with the Bhuyapara village is grappling with a dearth of fundamental amenities such as electricity and proper infrastructure. It is noteworthy that the Basbari Range stands out for its substantial developmental progress, characterised by robust economic activities that have garnered considerable attention from authorities.

Unfortunately, despite its inherent capacity for ecotourism, the potential of Bhuyapara remains largely untapped. Specifically, the establishment of homestays, a pivotal facet for nurturing ecotourism, languishes in an undeveloped state within the Bhuyapara village. This situation highlights a significant disparity in attention and investment, consequently impeding the realisation of Bhuyapara's ecotourism potential.

Homestay programmes are known to promote sustainable tourism in rural areas (Kc,2021). In accordance with the notion proposed by Louise Gai Hjulmand et al. (2003), the homestay program's concept entails the provision of lodging for tourists within a village, in close association with a local family. This arrangement is designed to facilitate an experiential avenue for tourists, enabling them to gain insights into the local lifestyle, cultural facets, and the surrounding natural environment.

Drawing from the outcomes of the investigation, a range of resources has been discerned and classified to serve as distinctive products for the designated area. It's important to acknowledge that these findings come with certain limitations. The observations were confined to the Bhuyapara village, situated proximate to the Bhuyapara Range of Manas National Park, due to temporal constraints.

Table - 1

Types of Products	Local Resources	Description
Agriculture	Fruit, Lemon, Rice, Pepper, Bamboo	Local residents possess agricultural land and manage orchards. Among these entrepreneurs, certain individuals vend their locally cultivated produce through both market outlets and roadside stalls.
Fishery	Rohu, Katla, Prawn, Moka, Kos, Silver Cup, Glass Cup, Bhagon, Mirka	Local residents do fishing activities in some personal fisheries, ponds and from the Beki river.
Cultural	Toy making, tribal dance, Bihu	Local residents in Bhuyapara village engage in traditional toy making, Tribal Dance, and Bihu festival.
Gastronomy	Pork, Local wine, Bamboo shoot	Traditional gastronomy mainly associated with the process of making pork in different styles and the women in the areas are associated with different cooking process in Gunzema Kitchen
Physical Attribute of Bhuyapara Village	The setting of a fishing village steeped in tradition, replete with a bustling marketplace where time-honored practices prevail, and featuring dwellings and educational institutions that adhere to the 'long house' concept, all bear witness to a closely-knit community life.	The existing physical attribute of Bhuyapara Village
Ecotourism Activities	Homestay, wildlife sighting such visiting Manas National Park, , cycling around the village, fishing with the local resident and fishermen.	Possible ecotourism activities that can be combined and included in a homestay program's itinerary.

Within the Bhuyapara region, the Bhuyapara Ranger Office and Bhuyapara Village Association, operating under the banner of EDC (Eco Development Committees), take on central roles in administering Bhuyapara's

affairs and orchestrating its endeavors. The focal point shifts to the heart of the region, where insights from interactions with both villagers and officials resound with unwavering endorsement for this initiative.

Similar to the symbiotic relationship between Manas National Park's management and its local communities, the Bhuyapara Ranger Office and Village Association collaborate seamlessly to steer administrative tasks and catalyze local undertakings. This resonance becomes evident in the united verbal backing observed for various programs, exemplifying the collective dedication that defines the partnership between the ranger office, the village association, and the residents.

The pivotal role of the Bhuyapara Range Office in fostering connections, not only within the community but also in collaboration with entities like AARNYAK, a non-governmental organization, mirrors the endeavour's dynamics. This collaborative network echoes our own commitment to synergistic cooperation, aimed at enhancing training facilities and local support mechanisms within our own unique context.

The warmth and positivity expressed by the villagers and officials during interviews reinforce the significance of community involvement and collective endorsement, especially as we navigate projects such as promoting local entrepreneurship in Bhuyapara. This heartening alignment is reminiscent of the reception that our own conservation initiatives often receive from local stakeholders.

5.2 Antecedents Contributing to Community Engagement in Social Entrepreneurship.

The entrepreneurial developments in any place brings revenue and development in the place. Bhuyapara village one of the places which is in close proximity with the Bhuyapara Range is having every possibility to be one of the important destinations for Eco Tourism. Some of the factors which form the base for the community engagement in Bhuyapara village are:

- 5.2.1 Demographic Factors:** Age one of the important demographic factor which contribute to the community engagement in Bhuyapara Village. It has been seen in the case of Saroni Homestay where the owner's age is 75 and his son lives in Delhi for pursuing career in IT, this is a problem in case of continuity of Homestay business. The more Youth leaves the place it will be difficult for the old age people to run and maintain the enterprises.
- 5.2.2 Acceptance by Community:** Another important factor which discourages the community engagement in Bhuyapara Village is the acceptance of entrepreneurship in the region. Despite of having so much of potential still most of the people are uneducated and they lack trust on the officials and organisation which prevents them to attend the workshops and seminars conducted for the villagers in that region. Through the establishment of trust among both leaders and members, social entrepreneurship projects have the ability to attract volunteers for their endeavours.
- 5.2.3 Lack of Awareness:** Awareness is one of the important variables in enhancing entrepreneurial know how's in those areas. People belong to such a strata where the awareness level is very low and they don't want to learn from the different seminars and other activities which are being organised by the different NGO's in those areas. This discourse aims to impart knowledge to the immediate community regarding the advantageous nature of homestay programs with respect to community development. Accordingly, the promotion of awareness is inextricably associated with the acquisition of knowledge concerning the benefits and commercial strategies of Community-Based Tourism.
- 5.2.4 Inability to take risk:** The people residing in Bhuyapara Village are in a shape where they have only their land to use for their income. The land is used for the agricultural purposes and they rely on that for the income and running their family. They have a strong fear that if they start homestay and by converting their agricultural lands to commercial lands it may take away their integral part of source of Income.
- 5.2.5 Financial Problems:** Bhuyapara village peoples are mostly from below the poverty line and for them investing in Homestays is a big challenge. They have very few knowledge about the sources of funds which can be taken as loans. Different micro level financial organisation provides loan for starting up the homestays in the region. This is one of the important drawbacks for community participation in Bhuyapara village.

5.2.6 CONCLUSION

Ecotourism presents itself as a highly appealing industry that is readily implementable in rural regions. With appropriate guidance and meticulous planning, Bhuyapara Village possesses the potential to emerge as a coveted ecotourism destination through the execution of a homestay project. However, it is important to

consider various aspects of the homestay business's success. The initial root cause for starting a Community Based Tourism (CBT) by community members must be addressed as a priority. This is because the negative intentions and weak foundations of the people can create a domino effect, resulting in long-term impacts such as the downfall of the business. Therefore, it is crucial to tackle these issues in the early stages of the homestay business.

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