

Ecotourism as Market based Conservation Scheme

EQUATIONS, India

The Scheme used for....

- directing private sector investment for conservation and for resolving environmental problems

Initiating sustainable resource management practices in line with Rio convention

Developing economic opportunities in rural and poor areas.

A brief history...

- Push for such biodiversity conservation schemes came from the Convention on Biological Diversity, in 1999
- Decision of Conference of parties V/25 that tourism has significant potential for conservation of biodiversity and for its sustainable use. And that historical observation showed that self regulation by the tourism industry for sustainable use of biological resources has been rarely successful.
- COP VII to the CBD started the process for elaboration of the CBD guidelines on Biodiversity and tourism development. Inclusion of indigenous and local communities though recommended in the guidelines is only voluntary.
- Launch of International Year of ecotourism in 2002 by the UNEP along with the World Tourism Organization. Supported by industry and travel giants. Indigenous and local communities from developing countries protested against this green washing by writing to UNEP.

Ecotourism in India...

- Less regulation, amendments to existing laws and policies further facilitates ecotourism growth.
- Funds from international financial institutions like World Bank and ADB and private investment. UNDP's and Ministry of tourism's Endogeneous tourism project is another ecotourism venture that promotes rural art and craft through rural village tourism with more funds placed for developing infrastructure than conservation.
- History of natural resources usurped by the State for conservation after independence has led to a break down of traditional systems of knowledge. Conflicts for resource use by indigenous local communities and by the industry are increasing cause for conflicts between communities and authorities. On the other hand policies are increasingly promoting ecotourism in protected areas and community conserved areas through National/ state level ecotourism policies, projects by IFIs, inter-government agencies.

Policies...

- National Environment Policy – recommends ecotourism in all ecologically fragile areas.
- Ecotourism policy guidelines issued by Ministry of tourism in 1998 approaches environmental protection for the sake of profit. It states that ecosystems have been well conserved. Lists all ecosystems of India as resources for ecotourism. Community's role is reduced to providing services to tourists and conserving the environment. Environmental protection is only necessary to protect business interests. Does not recognize inert linkages between ecotourism and socio-cultural, economic and institutional, environmental links of their traditions and cultural processes of communities. Thrust continues to be on developing infrastructure, providing import subsidy to industry, promoting ecotourism rather than conservation by low impact infrastructure and activity.
- State Tourism Policy – emphasis on opening private investment, opening eco sensitive areas for ecotourism. Impacts of unregulated ecotourism on livelihoods of local communities that are dependent on the natural resources is hardly acknowledged. Competition for resources between resource intensive tourism industry that sees natural resources as economic commodities and the local communities and consequent impact on conservation is not recognized. Wildlife Protection Act saw creation of protected areas and community conserved areas by displacement of local communities for conservation of wildlife and biodiversity. The same Forest Departments are now playing a key role in promotion of ecotourism, though participation of local communities is minimal and benefits are routed majorly to the state exchequer.

At Provincial/State level

- Chhattisgarh – does not have an ecotourism policy. But has information on their official website that states ecotourism is for promoting economically, culturally and environmentally sustainable tourism in 3 national parks and 11 sanctuaries.
- Madhya Pradesh-has a Ecotourism policy, 2007 that talks of infrastructure development, promoting less known areas, building community awareness and securing their participation, private sector participation.
- Tourism initiatives run by large, global tour operator are labeled as ecotourism while community run initiatives play a marginal role
 - Ecotourism provides sustainable supplement to livelihoods to these community run initiatives.
 - Fierce competition in the market controlled by economic interests at destinations makes it hard for community run initiatives to compete with global players.
 - Negative impacts of tourism like sewage, waste water, pollution are likely to negatively impact local communities. These problems are not addressed.
 - Issues of community rights, access and control over natural resources and participation are ignored as also found in World bank's sponsored JFM and India eco development project.

Role of women...

- Women's participation in the tourism initiative in Uttarakhand Hills (MSI) is largely prescribed by social norms - the roles that women are allowed to participate in are decided by the community first and then their family and this is accepted by women
- girls are being trained in mountaineering, does not mean that families are sending their daughters on regular expeditions
- relies on women's traditional skills in carpet weaving. Thus traditional knowledge and skills are the basis for including women into the tourism loop
Most
- employ women in areas where they need least additional training and can leverage on socially prescribed or traditional knowledge and skills such as care giving
- To some extent it also recognises the time intensive nature of women's work who being involved in agricultural activities are less likely to have the time to engage with tourists
- More agricultural work in addition to household chores, fuel wood and fodder collection

Andaman & Nicobar islands

- women are involved in comparatively low profile jobs like running petty shops for selling fish and fruit
- have lower employment opportunities even within tourism much like in other sectors
- success story is of three women who got together as members of a self-help group to start an eatery in Havelock Island. They are in contact with the guides in Port Blair who refer tourists to their eatery. However, the tale is not all good for other women on Havelock Island
- Fear increasing habit of drinking alcohol and prostitution

UNDP Programme – Endogenous Tourism

- Patriarchal norms, caste and gender are central to define the nature of participation, roles of influence and decision making of women in tourism
- Hodka in Gujarat - women who were initially a part of the Village Tourism Committee (VTC) left it due to social taboos and pressures resulting in the management of the Shaam-e-Sarhad resort being completely male
- In Raghurajpur, near Puri-Orissa, a temple and crafts village, the Raghurajpur Heritage & Tourism Committee is completely devoid of women
- at Lachen in Sikkim there was a lack of participation of women in decision making structures and process. This is also due to the fact that under the Dzumsa (form of local self governing body) structure the scope for participation and decision making of women is generally low
- in Chitrakote, Chhattisgarh, tribal dominated area women have a leadership role to play in the implementation of the ETP