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Exploring Challenges and Opportunities in Rural Tourism within Manas National Park

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Abstract

National parks play a significant role in promoting rural tourism and have become increasingly important for the economic development of rural areas. Rural tourism is a growing sector that offers unique experiences and opportunities for travelers seeking to explore natural landscapes, experience local cultures, and engage in outdoor activities. Tourism-related economic activities; such as, home stays, ethnic restaurants, tour operators, and curio shops; thrive in proximity to national parks. Manas National Park is an important destination that accommodates many tourists from India and foreign countries that still lack rural tourism. The study aims to explore the potential tourism opportunities in Manas National Park and to identify the various challenges associated with rural tourism in the park, along with proposing appropriate recommendations. The study employed a qualitative methodology by conducting fieldwork in Manas National Park and collecting primary data through questionnaires and interviews.

The study finds that although young people are involved in economic activities, yet regional imbalances, policy deficiencies, and insufficient government efforts hinder locals from fully accessing these opportunities in order to boost local socioeconomic growth.

Key Words: *Rural Tourism, Wild Life, Economic, National Park, Livelihood*

1. Introduction

Tourism has emerged as a prominent societal occurrence with worldwide implications. Its impetus stems from the human inclination for knowledge acquisition and entertainment and for our inherent proclivity for exploration and in pursuit of novel encounters (Pearce, 2005). The advancement of education has fostered an inclination towards gaining deeper insights into global affairs, accompanied by a heightened eagerness to explore diverse perspectives. However, individuals' motivations are not solely driven by a thirst for knowledge; their religious and business interests also play a significant role. Furthermore, the human quest for novel experiences and information has been amplified due to technological advancements, which have effectively dismantled barriers to communication (Margetts, 2002).

Rural tourism not only assumes a crucial role within the global sphere but also possesses the potential to exert a similarly significant impact within the context of rural India (Su 2011). Through its ability to provide respite from the monotonous urban lifestyle characterized by traffic, noise, and

pollution, this form of tourism ensures a tranquil experience for travelers while offering them personalized and fulfilling vacation options. Moreover, it plays a pivotal role in generating employment opportunities for the local community, thereby fostering economic diversification and regional employment. The development of jobs and income derived from rural tourism holds substantial importance for the socioeconomic advancement of rural areas. For a country like India, where approximately 74 percent of the population resides in approximately seven million villages, the establishment of a robust platform centered around rural tourism would yield significant benefits (Ministry of Tourism, Government of India).

The Manas National Park located at the intersection of the Indo-Gangetic and Indo-Malayan bio-geographical regions, stands out as India's most diverse wildlife reserve. Nestled in the Himalayan foothills, the sanctuary encompasses a gradual alluvial slope transitioning from wooded hills to verdant meadows and lush tropical vegetation. This sanctuary provides a home to numerous rare species namely the tiger, pygmy hog, Indian rhinoceros, and elephant, as documented by Choudhury (2015). Located 41 kilometers to the north of the municipality of Barpeta Road and 175 kilometers northwest of Guwahati (the capital of the Assam), the Manas Wildlife Sanctuary adjoins the northern boundary of Bhutan's Royal Manas Wildlife Sanctuary, while the southern boundary adjoins the densely populated region of North Bengal.

Assam has experienced notable growth in its tourism sector, primarily driven by the allure of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries (Das, 2010). The state boasts of a total of seven national parks and eighteen wildlife sanctuaries, with Kaziranga and Manas National Parks standing out as the most renowned. The study areas selected for the research are Makhibaha, Bhuyapara, and Kaklabari. These are villages located adjacent to the park and are always neglected from developmental activities. Despite having located near the park with huge resources from the forest, these villages are not being considered as the attraction for tourism. This article aims to shed light on the challenges and potential of rural tourism, with a particular focus on the significant role played by Manas National Park.

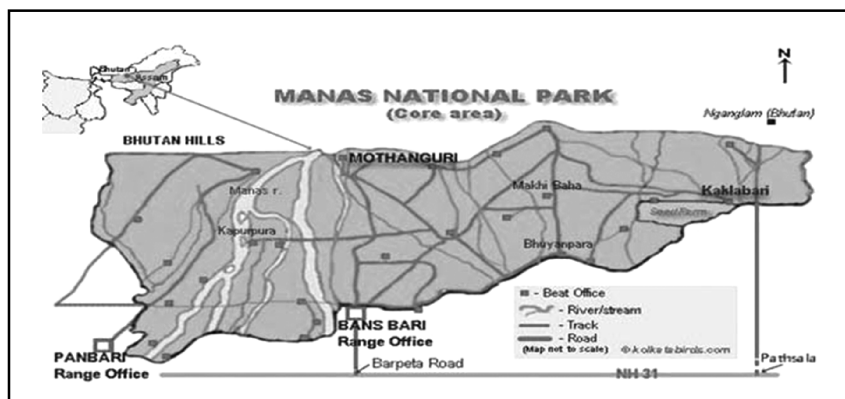


Figure 1. Map of Manas National Park

Source: <http://www.kolkatabirds.com/manas/manas>

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Manas National Park, recognized as a significant wildlife destination, has provided substantial economic opportunities for the local communities. These areas have showcased the essence of traditional village life through the avenue of rural tourism, encompassing a wide range of cultural aspects; such as attire, customs, craftsmanship, folklore and traditions. To attract tourists, rural tourism initiatives have organized a week-long folk cultural festival and an annual village fair at specific times of the year. Additionally, various endeavors related to rural tourism, including the establishment of orchid gardens, the cultivation of flowers, fruits, and vegetables, sericulture, mushroom farming, and the utilization of bamboo and cane crafts, have been implemented to captivate visitors. These efforts have contributed to the availability of employment opportunities for the villagers. However, the benefits derived from such initiatives have not been equitably distributed due to developmental disparities in the areas surrounding the National Park. Of the three ranges within Manas National Park that is Bansbari, Bhuyapara, and Panbari; Panbari and Bhuyapara have not undergone significant development for an extended period, leaving the local populace at a disadvantaged state.

Rural tourism operates in conjunction with community development while preserving the natural splendor and resources (Chen & Kong, 2021). The National Park plays a crucial role in providing resources to the local inhabitants and sustaining their livelihoods. However, this dynamic also leads to conflicts over land and resources, adversely impacting both the Park and its residents. Surrounding the national park, there are over 50 villages dispersed across its three ranges: Panbari, Bansbari, and Bhuyapara. Each of these peripheral settlements faces its own unique challenges and vulnerabilities. The forest-dwelling communities require fundamental infrastructure for their basic needs, including schools, electricity, healthcare facilities, water supply, roads and sanitation. Consequently, the residents' access to non-timber forest products is restricted in the National Park. Moreover, a significant portion of the population in these areas is affected by illnesses, such as malaria and dysentery. The people residing in these regions, burdened by economic backwardness and the enduring impact of militancy, have had the opportunity to engage in various economic activities through visitors to Manas National Park. However, the unequal distribution of development in the areas adjacent to the national park hampers their progress, resulting in disparities in revenue accumulation. While the Bansbari Range boasts adequate infrastructure, economic activities, and transportation, the Panbari and Bhuyapara ranges have experienced limited development for many years, leaving the residents struggling to meet their basic needs. This study aims to shed light on the challenges and potential prospects of rural tourism in these areas.

1. Objectives of the Study

- a) To examine the prospective tourism opportunities in Manas National Park.
- b) To identify the various problems associated with rural tourism in Manas National Park and to propose suggestions.

2. Methodology and Data Collection

The methodology adopted to examine the prospective tourism opportunities and to identify the problem is through the medium of qualitative method of study. In order to undertake this research, fieldwork was conducted within Manas National Park in Assam, with the aim of gaining insights into the effects on the local population and to incorporate the findings toward achieving the project's objectives. The study has primarily depended on primary data collection through a meticulously designed questionnaire and direct interactions with the respondents of the select villages. Additionally, secondary data sources, including books, scholarly journals, government reports, and online resources, were also utilized.

Altogether 30 local residents, 10 from each village, and 20 stakeholders consisting of employees, resort owners, and home stay owners were interviewed with an open-ended structured questionnaire using convenience sampling so that every respondent gets an equal chance. The local residents were asked questions in the local language viz., Assamese and all the responses were recorded in audio device. From the recorded audio, transcriptions were made; the responses were written in Assamese in pen and paper, then it was typed in computer in detail manner and analyzed. The privacy of respondents was kept and for that the names are being coded differently signifying each respondent differently. Secondary data also were used extensively to triangulate the findings of the study.

3. Literature Review

Gannon and Greffe (1994) finds that rural tourism generates money, provide employment, and function as a driving force for a wide range of activities. The ability of rural tourist channels to promote cooperation and alliances between communities in the region is emphasized by Briedenhann (2004). These channels also present opportunities for the development of culturally authentic tourism enterprises in less economically developed regions. Wilson (2001) focuses on the value of community involvement and collaboration in the growth of rural tourism and entrepreneurship. The studies' findings broadly imply that rural tourism can be a practical choice for rural communities wishing to diversify their economy and enhance their quality of life.

Based on the studies of rural tourism, it is suggested that India's social and economic development could benefit significantly from rural tourism. The potential for rural tourism to create jobs and secure livelihoods for residents has been highlighted by Gadad (2014) and Banu (2020). Reddy (2020a) points out the significant role of rural tourism in preserving culture, heritage, and tradition. According to Parashar (2014), improving standard of living and protecting the environment are two ways in which rural tourism may support sustainable tourism management. Overall, the studies imply that for tourists who appreciate traditional ways of life, arts, crafts, and culture, rural tourism in India may provide a unique and authentic experience.

Gantait (2021) finds that rural tourism is essential for providing rural areas alternate opportunities for employment and improving their socioeconomic position. As stated by Reddy (2020b), rural tourism may be a vehicle for rural development, but it needs careful planning and execution. While Dashper (2014) raises questions regarding the role of tourism in rural revitalization and observes that rural tourism may fall short in terms of anticipated economic advantages and employment generation, Aslam (2016) discusses the challenges of ensuring sustainable development in rural areas through tourism. Overall, the papers suggest that while rural tourism has potential benefits for rural communities, it also faces challenges that need to be addressed for it to be successful in India

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The collective findings within the above mentioned papers seems to indicate that rural tourism in India holds promise as a means to generate economic prospects for rural populations, yet it is also beset by numerous obstacles. Raheem (2014) argues that regional imbalances in Nigeria contribute to problems such as hyper-urbanization, unemployment, income inequality, and poverty. Kuzmynchuk (2019) proposes using marketing methods and tools to promote regional development and prevent the unevenness of development from becoming a threat to the economic unity of the state. Ahmed (2012) discusses how regionalism in Indian polity has deprived certain regions of the country of enjoying the benefits of economic growth. Finally, Ezcurra (2006) delves into the examination of the interplay between regional disparities and the level of economic development across 14 Western European nations. The study reveals that regional inequalities tend to escalate until a particular threshold of development is attained, at which point they begin to diminish and eventually stabilize.

4. Results and Discussions

Table 1: General information about the participants (stakeholders)

<i>Acronym</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Workspace</i>	<i>Year of Experience</i>	<i>Code</i>
Stakeholder 1	Male	21	Tour Guiding Sector	5	T1
Stakeholder 2	Male	25	Tour Guiding Sector	5	T2
Stakeholder 3	Male	28	Resort Owners/ Managers	2	R1
Stakeholder 4	Male	51	Resort Owners/Managers	12	R2
Stakeholder 5	Male	62	Resort Owners/Managers	15	R3
Stakeholder 6	Female	38	Resort Owners/Managers	5	R4
Stakeholder 7	Male	52	Resort Owners/Managers	2	R5
Stakeholder 8	Male	29	Forest Guard	5	FG1
Stakeholder 9	Male	36	Forest Guard	6	FG2
Stakeholder 10	Male	25	Forester 1	5	F1
Stakeholder 11	Male	32	Forester 1	8	F2
Stakeholder 12	Male	44	Forester 2	6	F3
Stakeholder 13	Male	42	Forester 2	10	F4
Stakeholder 14	Female	29	Game Watcher	8	G1
Stakeholder 15	Male	32	Game Watcher	9	G2
Stakeholder 16	Male	45	Beat Officer	9	B1
Stakeholder 17	Male	58	Beat Officer	5	B2
Stakeholder 18	Male	43	Range Officer	7	R1
Stakeholder 19	Male	28	Ranger	2	RA1
Stakeholder 20	Male	43	Ranger	8	RA2

Source: Primary survey

Table 1 shows the various stakeholders associated with Manas National Park. These stakeholders consists of the tour guiding sector, as well as resort owners and managers, who are collectively categorized due to the interchangeable presence of either the owner or the manager during visits to the resorts. Additionally, employees have been included in the study, with different staff members approached based on their availability. To ensure clarity in interpretation and to maintain the confidentiality of their identities, all stakeholders have been coded.

Table 2 : General information about the participants (Locals)

<i>Acronym</i>	<i>Village</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Year of Stay</i>	<i>Code</i>
Local 1	Makhibaha	Male	29	Agriculture	Since Birth	LM1
Local 2	Makhibaha	Female	21	Home Maker	Since Birth	LM2
Local 3	Makhibaha	Male	25	Business	Since Birth	LM3
Local 4	Makhibaha	Female	28	Agriculture	Since Birth	LM4
Local 5	Makhibaha	Female	51	Agriculture	Since Birth	LM5
Local 6	Makhibaha	Female	45	Farming	Since Birth	LM6
Local 7	Makhibaha	Male	52	Labour	Since Birth	LM7
Local 8	Makhibaha	Female	29	Home Maker	Since Birth	LM8
Local 9	Makhibaha	Male	36	Labour	Since Birth	LM9
Local 10	Makhibaha	Male	21	Service	Since Birth	LM10
Local 11	Bhuyapara	Female	25	Agriculture	Since Birth	LB1
Local 12	Bhuyapara	Male	28	Agriculture	Since Birth	LB2
Local 13	Bhuyapara	Male	51	Farming	Since Birth	LB3
Local 14	Bhuyapara	Female	23	Home Maker	Since Birth	LB4
Local 15	Bhuyapara	Male	38	Agriculture	Since Birth	LB5
Local 16	Bhuyapara	Female	52	Agriculture	Since Birth	LB6
Local 17	Bhuyapara	Male	58	Agriculture	Since Birth	LB7
Local 18	Bhuyapara	Male	43	Labour	Since Birth	LB8
Local 19	Bhuyapara	Male	28	Labour	Since Birth	LB9
Local 20	Bhuyapara	Male	43	Labour	Since Birth	LB10
Local 21	Kaklabari	Male	28	Labour	Since Birth	LK1
Local 22	Kaklabari	Male	22	Agriculture	Since Birth	LK2
Local 23	Kaklabari	Male	27	Agriculture	Since Birth	LK3
Local 24	Kaklabari	Female	36	Agriculture	Since Birth	LK4
Local 25	Kaklabari	Female	27	Agriculture	Since Birth	LK5
Local 26	Kaklabari	Male	28	Agriculture	Since Birth	LK6
Local 27	Kaklabari	Male	45	Agriculture	Since Birth	LK7
Local 28	Kaklabari	Male	44	Agriculture	Since Birth	LK8
Local 29	Kaklabari	Male	42	Agriculture	Since Birth	LK9
Local 30	Kaklabari	Female	35	Agriculture	Since Birth	LK10

Source: Primary survey

The above table 2 is related to demographic profile of the local people who are residing near Manas National Park. These individuals constitute an integral part of the park, being directly or indirectly connected to it, and their perspectives on rural tourism were deemed essential for the study. The research involved selecting three villages, from each of which ten individuals were chosen. Data on their age, village of residence, occupation, and length of residence were collected. To facilitate analysis and preserve the anonymity of their identities, unique codes were assigned to each participant.

Classification of Rural Tourism

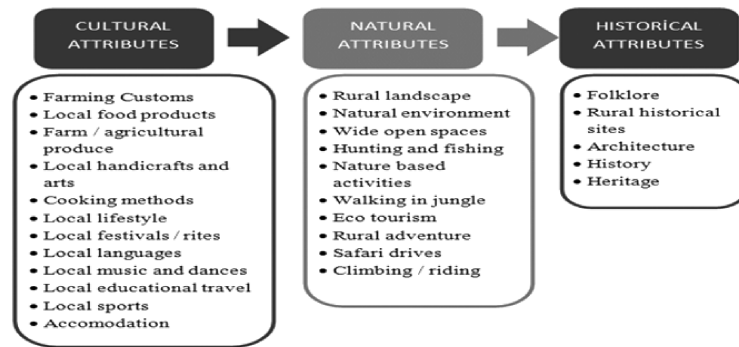


Figure 2: Classification of Rural Tourism Activities

Source: Nair et al., 2015, 330.

Prospective Areas for Rural Tourism in Manas National Park:

Manas National Park attracts national and international tourists during the season time, opening up the opportunity for the growth of rural tourism in that place (Devi, 2012). After hectic safaris and exploration of the forest, most tourists want to explore the local areas and get a taste of their cultures and their living (Bruner, 2005). Tourists exhibit a particular attraction to rural destinations due to their distinct and enchanting characteristics, encompassing elements of mystique, culture, history, ethnicity, and geography (Smith, 2012). Progress and financial gain for all parties involved depend on several factors, including attractions, investments, services, proper infrastructure, and varied hospitality marketing. For this collection of criteria to function, business people and government agencies must collaborate. Some prerequisites for the growth of rural tourism as well as several reasons to support it may be inferred from the literature. Some of the factors affecting rural tourism are:

(a) Model Village Tour: Many villages are on the outskirts of the national park (Nath, 2013). It has been seen that many tourists come to explore the village life in that area and explore the way of living

of the local people. Each ethnic village possesses its distinct culture and tradition, and by emphasizing and preserving their ethnic heritage and traditions, these villages have the potential to be developed into exemplary ethnic model villages (Choudhury, 2012*b*).

(b) Tea Garden Visit: Assam is known for its tea and people coming from different states want to visit tea plantation sites (Behal, 1992). There is also fascination among all foreign or local tourists coming to Assam to visit a tea estate or have a look over the tea estates. This purpose is being well served by visiting Manas National Park as there is a huge tea estate called Bansbari Tea Plantation, which gives the tourist chance to explore the forest as well as the tea estate. This can be monetized by collecting a small amount for entering the tea garden. Tourists can click pictures and separate resting places can be made. Local people from the villages can also open small tea stalls inside the area for revenue generation.

(c) Sport fisheries: The local villagers are all equipped with abundant lands and most of the houses has fisheries in their home. The rise of home stays has led tourists to get a taste of the cultures and virtues of the local people. Many home stays can start very popular sports fisheries. In developed nations across the globe, recreational fishing stands as a firmly established leisure pursuit. Furthermore, several emerging economies have also successfully established their own recreational fishing industries. However, it is worth noting that in countries such as India, there has been a notable absence of substantial discourse addressing the essential considerations for enhancing the sustainable progression of this specific endeavor (Gupta, 2015).

(d) Food tourism: Asia is diverse in terms of geography, socioeconomic, biology, and culture. The range of traditional meals reflects this as well. Traditional foods are defined as culinary offerings that have been cultivated, preserved, and celebrated for generations, with their origins dating back to ancient times (Harmayani, 2019). A significant number of tourists exhibit a preference for indulging in regional cuisines while on vacation, and ethnic culinary experiences rank among the foremost travel motivators for gastronomic enthusiasts (Türker, 2022).

(e) River Sports: River-based recreational activities like kayaking and canoeing, characterized by their relatively low environmental impact, have the potential to generate favorable economic outcomes that extend beyond coastal areas. To harness the full economic benefits of these activities and their role in promoting sustainable tourism development, it is essential to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing expenditures on river sports (Ferreira, 2021). Beki River one of the important

and prominent rivers, which flows in Manas National Park. Some of the adjoining villages can be taken into consideration for river sports. Professionals have to be hired or locals can undergo training for that and after obtaining a license, they can initiate river sports.

6. Problems of Rural Tourism

Poor Marketing Strategy: During 2020-21, Govt. has spent Rs. 1747.62 lakhs for Kaziranga and Rs. 460.042 lakhs for Manas (Economic Survey of Assam). The revenue collected by the forest department was 352.77 crore, as reported by the forest department. Despite collecting high fees, still, the footfall at Manas National Park is low compared to Kaziranga National Park.

The locals have an opinion that Manas National Park has been neglected in terms of marketing strategies. The study revealed that the owner of the home stay do marketing to attract tourists through social media but in a large scale the marketing is in lower side. One of the officials (named here as FI) in a view point said:

“The marketing has been done by the Tourism Department but the concentration is more in Kaziranga National Park, as the revenue is in larger scale from Kaziranga National Park. Recently Mr. Kevin Petersen visited Kaziranga National Park for a documentary which gave boost to the marketing tremendously and it has been observed celebrity and political figures visits the Kaziranga National Park more often due to the marketing done by the officials and government.”

Livelihood problems: Tourism has an impact on the livelihoods of persons and organizations, those who reside near tourist attractions. Assam's government's approach to the organization and management of MNP makes it difficult to manage the livelihood of people who live near the Park, as many lands have been encroached by locals and natural calamities such as floods take away many lands that are meant for agriculture every year. As a result, many lands have been encroached on by locals, and the park area is shrinking every year. The process of institution building is costly, as well as participating locally (Vedeld, 2002). Existing customary customs or rights of local populations living near the NPs are not taken into consideration when developing new policy decisions, making local administration more problematic and conflict-prone. In the context of participation most of the fringe people in the area has a negative perception about the participation of locals in decision making process. One of the locals (named here as LMI) said that:

“We don't get chance to participate in any decision-making process, the authority takes certain decision which impacts the livelihood of the people and upon complaining also they neglect and gives zero response.”

Contrary to the statements made by the locals, the officials provided a different perspective; however, the results remain consistent in nature. The official (named here as F2) said:

“The locals are always in a conflict with the park authority and don’t participate in decision making process, their demands are contradictory with the sustainable development of the national park.”

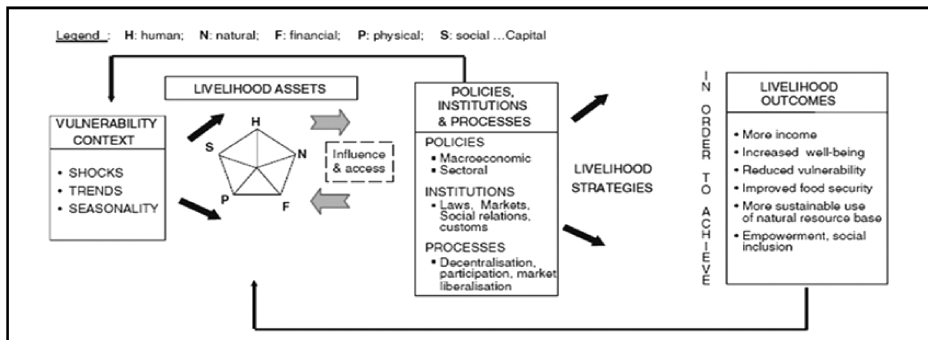


Figure 3. Livelihood Framework Model

Source: Livelihood Framework (Allison dan Horemans, 2006)

The subsequent model offers a potential solution to livelihood challenges. The illustrated figure 3 demonstrates that livelihood resilience depends on the capacity of individuals or groups to secure financial resources, which are influenced by various factors such as patterns, seasonal changes, and unexpected disruptions. These factors can be thoroughly examined through the frameworks of policies, institutions, and processes. Policy dimensions include both sector-specific initiatives and broader economic strategies, while institutional characteristics cover legal, market-related, social, and cultural aspects. Process-related elements involve decentralization, participation, and open trade.

Risk-taking inability: The risks associated with various stages in the development, advertising, presentation, marketing, and sale of rural products exert a continuous influence on the growth and progress of the rural tourism sector (Štetia, 2010). There exists a perception among stakeholders that local residents may lack awareness of tourism as a potential source of income and may be hesitant to invest their livelihoods in the tourism sector.

The study found that most of the people are either labour or agriculturist which puts them below poverty line and their awareness level is comparatively low, they are unaware of the govt schemes and other benefits which are bestowed for the local people residing near national parks.

Due to this the people are unable to start some economic activities with the help of government

schemes and benefits. The low risk taking ability of the locals are acting as a hindrance to the rural tourism in the area due to poverty.

Financial Hindrance: A primary concern faced by residents in the communities adjacent to Manas National Park pertains to the insufficiency of financial resources for the development of tourism-related enterprises. Financial constraints, in particular, have the potential to hinder entrepreneurs from making optimal investments in their ventures. Were it not for these financial constraints, entrepreneurs could bridge the gap between their available capital and the level of investment required for maximizing profits through borrowing (Paulson, 2004). The survey revealed that there has been lack of financial aid from the government for the locals. The local people are in a state of earning their livelihood by doing daily wage labour, agricultural works or doing some petty jobs in the resorts or guest houses. Most of the locals do not get any financial aid to start up some tourism activities. In this context another local (named here as LB 2) shared the view points of other locals as follows:

“There has been some help from the government at the time of Covid-19 but the government didn’t give any aids for starting any tourism activities or empowering the people to earn some revenue.”

Leakage of Revenue: Tourism leakage refers to a situation in which the economic gains generated from tourism-related activities do not remain within the same location and are instead diverted elsewhere. This diversion of economic resources is particularly pronounced when tourism establishments are owned or operated by entities from foreign countries. High levels of leakage are commonly associated with mass tourism and high-end, luxury tourism, both of which are typically externally controlled. Leakage can also occur when tourism-related products, services, and labor are imported from external sources. Consequently, mitigating leakage presents a significant challenge, especially in small rural areas that rely on the importation of skilled personnel and goods and services. In these rural areas, where entrepreneurship takes various forms, the impact of leakage is evident. Few new ventures emerge to meet the demand for activities specific to the region. Local entrepreneurs engage primarily in activities such as offering accommodations in their homes, organizing Jeep safaris, operating restaurants, and facilitating elephant rides, among others. These activities serve as vital sources of income, and the sustained support of local residents is essential for the functioning of the park. However, the potential for income generation has been constrained due to the occurrence of leakage. Establishment of resorts by outside party, selling of products which are not local and bringing human resources from outside creates Leakages of Revenue. It has been found in Manas National

Park that most of the above-mentioned points are present in Manas National Park, which acts as hindrance to the revenue generation through rural tourism. Most of the resorts and guest house are owned by the people residing outside state. One official (Named here as R1) remarked on the following topic as below:

“The local people are below the poverty line and due to lack of awareness and risk-taking ability they sell the land to other parties from outside and spent the money in agricultural works. They are themselves responsible for Economic leakage as the land are theirs and park management authority cannot sell their land on behalf of them.”

Regional Imbalances: Kaziranga and Manas National Parks, are declared as UNESCO heritage centers (Dutta, 2015), but the Assam government has always been more concerned about the development of Kaziranga National Park (Barbora, 2017). Kaziranga National Park indeed has more footfall of tourists and revenue generation is high (Economic Survey of Assam) in comparison to Manas National Park. Though Kaziranga is promoted immensely and famous for the one-horned rhino, but ecotourism potential in Manas is much greater compared to Kaziranga National Park, because of untapped tourism support and resources (Chakrabarty, 2019). Regional Imbalance in the field of development often acts as a hindrance to rural tourism. Kaziranga National Park has Eastern Forest Range, Kaziranga Forest Range, Western Forest Range, and Burapahar Forest Range. All the ranges are operative and developed in a systematic manner, which widens up the opportunity for rural tourism in those areas. Whereas in Manas National Park there are three forest ranges Bansbari, Bhuyapara, and Panbari. The Bansbari range is operational and developed in a significant manner but the Buyapara range is not developed in terms of infrastructure. The Bhuyapara range lacks the basic amenities for rural tourism. (Survey done by the researcher). Panbari range is also not operational (Choudhury, 2012c). Manas National Park calls for proper development of all the forest ranges, which will extensively enable rural tourism. As denoted by one beat officer (Named here as B2):

“Bhuyapara Range has been neglected since many years, all the concentration is upon Bansbari Range. Due to this attitude the infrastructure is horrible in Bhuyapara Range. No proper roads for tourists, even the electricity has a major problem in Bhuyapara Range, which makes it difficult for the tourist to stay. Due to lack of development and rising conflict between animals and human in this range, tourists afraid of staying here. As a result the tourism is getting affected.”

7. Suggestions

Rural tourism remains underdeveloped due to inadequate marketing strategies. It necessitates enhanced expertise and training. Traditional marketing methods are insufficient in the current age of Artificial Intelligence (AI), which, despite being in its nascent stage, significantly influences tourism. The increasing use of internet technology underscores the crucial role of big data and AI in fostering rural tourism development. The potential for rural tourism growth is substantial when leveraging big data (Xie, 2022). The government should prioritize continuous promotion and marketing efforts, particularly targeting foreign tourists, as they generate significantly higher revenue compared to domestic tourists. Alterations in policies, institutions, and processes can potentially impact the dynamics of disruptions, patterns, seasonal variations and access to financial resources for individuals or groups. Consequently, strategies are imperative for achieving objectives while safeguarding means of support. The objectives of sustaining livelihoods encompass additional income, enhanced well-being, food security, sustainable resource utilization, and empowerment. Notably, the tourism industry can induce changes in livelihood systems and rural lifestyles (Dharmawan, 2007). Therefore, it is crucial for governments to be attentive to this dynamic, as exemplified in the case of Uganda's National Park, where effective communication between the government and local residents in proximity to the conservation area is deemed essential (Ahebwa, 2012).

To address the risk-taking abilities, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) engaged in both tourism and conservation can play a pivotal role in disseminating knowledge about tourism opportunities among the local populace. Notably, organizations such as the Manas Ever Welfare Society (MEWS), Manas Mouzigendri Ecotourism Society (MMES), and Manas Souchi Khungur Ecotourism Society (MSKETS) have achieved notable success in raising awareness about engaging in tourism-related ventures in these regions. The study found that most of the local people's income is below three thousand and their awareness level is comparatively low. They are unaware of the government schemes and other benefits which are earmarked for the local people residing near the national parks.

In the context of Financial Aids, Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a vital role in identifying small-scale financial institutions that assist local individuals in obtaining loans. ASOMI, a prominent microfinance institution in Assam, operates a branch office in Sorbhog in Barpeta District and is situated in close proximity to the Bansbari (central range) of Manas National Park.

Elimination of economic leakage can be achieved by promoting connections within the local community. The primary objective of tourism linkages is to encourage the consumption of locally produced goods and services that exhibit competitiveness (Timms, 2011). This approach also aims to generate employment opportunities and retain foreign exchange earnings within the nation. It involves developing efficient marketing and distribution systems for locally sourced products and services needed by the tourism industry, enhancing market awareness, and increasing knowledge within targeted sectors through intensive research and analysis. The linkage initiative also aims to establish effective communication systems that facilitate relationships and trade between local suppliers and tourism entities (Sigala, 2008). Additionally, it seeks to improve the business environment for both buyers and suppliers through strategies and efforts by business associations, governmental ministries, and agencies. This initiative supports the development of sound economic and fiscal policies across various industries, thereby strengthening linkages. Furthermore, it promotes deeper integration between the entertainment and tourism sectors, enhancing networking, information sharing, and communication (Shanker, 2008). Balanced development in Manas National Park is essential, as it will enable tourists to explore various aspects of the park, increase tourism, and promote the growth of rural tourism.

8. Conclusion

The growth of rural tourism can be used as a concept of ecotourism and sustainable travel. Ecotourism focuses on preserving nature and culture, involving locals in tourism-related activities, sharing knowledge with visitors, and operating on a small scale to protect the environment. Rural tourism, as a result of its consequences, will become a consistent and low-cost tool for the village's socioeconomic improvement. As a result of the rise of rural tourism in areas such as Assam's Chirang and Baksa districts, due to Manas National Park, a large number of young people are now directly and indirectly involved in these economic activities. Due to faulty regional imbalances and lack of policies and park management the people of the villages are unable to access the opportunities that Manas National Park has brought in. Furthermore, the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have placed a considerable emphasis on encouraging locals to grow their economy through rural tourism. Even though the rural sector is important to the state's economy, the government's efforts in this area are insufficient. The Park's development is critical for increasing tourist numbers, and actions must be taken to strengthen rural tourism in Manas National Park for the development of the locals in those areas.

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