

Challenges & Prospects for Community Participation in Community Based Tourism (CBT) in Jaldapara National Park, Jalpaiguri. (W.B.)

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Abstract--- Jaldapara National Park, (formerly Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary) a national park located at the foothills of Eastern Himalayas in Alipurduar Sub-Division of Jalpaiguri district in West Bengal and on the bank of river Torsa. Jaldapara is located at an altitude of 61 m. and is spread across 216.51 km² (83.59 sq mi) of vast grassland with patches of river bound forests. It was stated a sanctuary in 1941 for the reason of protecting the Indian one-horned rhinoceros. In May 2012 it was declared a national park. This study assesses community participation in CBT development in Jaldapara National Park.

Data were collected by means of structured and questionnaires, interviews with key stakeholders and community focus group discussions. Results signify that even though community based natural resource management is well-liked in India; communities still visage challenges that hinder their participation in community-based tourism development projects. While some studies in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal point toward the value of community-based tourism, majority of adult residents in the Jaldapara National Park area did not know the success rate of West Bengal Forest Development Corporation Limited (WBFDC) in one-horned rhinoceros conservation. There was community displeasure about the loss of cattle grazing and other land-related benefits, lack of communication with the community, lack of benefits, the low numbers employed and the sluggish growth of the sub division which did not record a remarkable development. But this National Park now has over 184 (as per census report of 2012) of one-horned rhinoceros in Jaldapara range and has seen noteworthy visitor numbers rise in the last ten years. This paper examined how the West Bengal Forest Development Corporation Limited (WBFDC) has been so thriving in Production Forestry - Man-Made Forestry and one-horned rhinoceros conservation. The findings from two studies across tourists and retail customer samples converge and support the hypothesized moderating role of WBFDC in community tourism development. Based on findings recommendations were made for the future includes appointment and training for local people in tourism and management and use of single-community rather than multi-community trusts.

Keywords--- Community Development, Community Participation, Community Tourism, Qualitative Research

I. INTRODUCTION OF JALDAPARA NATIONAL PARK

JALDAPARA National Park in West Bengal is being the protected locale for the fantastic species of one horned rhino since long. The grass wetland, idyllic for Rhino's endowed with their natural habitat for their survival. Jaldapara National Park has the largest population of Indian one horned rhinoceros in the state, an animal in jeopardy with extinction, and is a habitat management area. The nearby Chilapata Forests is an elephant corridor between Jaldapara and the Buxa Tiger Reserve. Also close by is the Gorumara National Park, known for its population of Indian Rhinoceros. Toto tribes used to stay in this area before 1800 and at that time this place was known as "Totapara". Jaldapara Wildlife Sanctuary was established in 1941 for the purpose of protecting the Indian one-horned rhinoceros. The forest is mainly savannah covered with tall elephant grasses. Other animals in the park include leopards, elephants, sambar deer, barking deer, spotted deer, hog deer, swamp deer, wild pigs, and bison. Jaldapara is also a ecstasy for bird watchers. The birds generally found here are the crested eagle, Pallas's fish eagle, shikra, Finn's weaver, jungle fowl, peafowl (peacock), partridge, and lesser Pied Hornbill. From the reptile family Pythons, monitor lizards, kraits, cobras, geckos, and about 8 species of fresh water turtles can also be found here. The Jaldapara forest was given a "wildlife sanctuary" status in the British Era in 1941 when its area was 141 sq km. In May 2012 it was affirmed a National Park. Jaldapara is exceptionally rich in avifauna because of varied terrain, mosaic of vegetation and rich insect life.

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One Horned Rhino of Jaldapara

There are too many forest villages in the buffer zone of the forest. The latest rhino census of 2012 in Jaldapara has exposed that there are 184 one-horned rhinos in the national park, an increase of 35 compared to last year but foresters are worried that the male-female ratio is 1:1 when the ideal ratio is 1:3. The census in 2011 had shown there were 149 rhinos in Jaldapara forest. According to forest sources, maximum number of rhinos were spotted in Jaldapara east range (97), west and north ranges had 36 and 34 rhinos, respectively. Fifteen rhinos were spotted in Kodal busy range and two in Chilapata range.

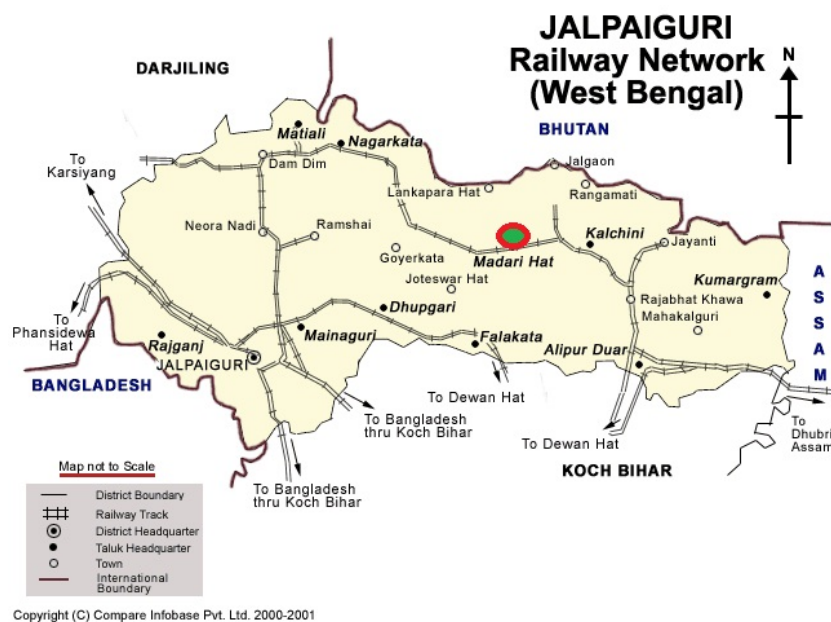


Fig: Map of Jalpaiguri District (Red-Green marked area is the location of Jaldapara National Park)

1.1. Community Participation in Tourism

The tourism literature since 1980s, has called for the insertion and participation of local communities in tourism; local residents are seen as a key resource in sustaining the creation (Hardy, Beeton, & Pearson, 2002). The 1992 Rio Summit introduced Agenda 21, a blueprint for action by host communities, which calls for tourism–community exchanges that are critical for sustainable development strategies. Adopted by 178 countries at Rio (Ritchie & Brent, n.d.), Agenda 21 promotes rural community participation to maximize the rural community's ability to control and manage its resources (Van Rooyen, 2004). The participation of rural communities in tourism ventures has been a key focus in the developing world for 30 years. According to Li (2006), western scholars consider active local participation in decision-making is a precondition if benefits are to reach communities. However, this has been difficult to practice in many developing countries because of a variety of restrictions. Community participation is, however, advocated for environmental reasons as well as for more sustainable development (Van Rooyen, 2004). Unless local residents are empowered and participate fully in decision-making and ownership of tourism developments, tourism will not replicate their values and will less likely generate sustainable outcomes (Lea, 1988). Wahab (1997) identified that there are three differences in the tourism development process between developed and developing nations. Firstly, owing to other urgent needs, such as the lack of clean water, food and shelter, local communities bestow a lesser amount of attention to tourism development and planning. Secondly, the lack of democracy in many developing nations shows the way to the supremacy of the ruling class in the growth practice. Thirdly, there is no system in some country to allow local people who are directly pretentious to

agree on their social participation to development thinking, as tourism is considered as an industry of national affair. Tosun (2000) said “community participation, as an ideal type, involves a shift in power from those who have had major decision-making to those who traditionally have not had such a role”. Ghimire & Pimbert, (1997) pointed that “genuine participation ensures that the powerless can develop, create and systematize their own roles and define their local forms of conservation and management”.

The aim of Community Based Tourism (CBT) ventures is to ensure that members of local communities have a high degree of control over actions taking place in their localities and a noteworthy quantity of the economic benefits (Scheyvens, 2002). Akama (1996) suggested that, local communities need empowerment to help decide what tourism facilities and wildlife conservation programmes they want in their communities and how tourism costs and benefits are to be shared among different stakeholders. Ideally, community participation involves designing development so that the intended beneficiaries are at the forefront and participate, by mobilizing their own resources, making their own decisions and defining their own needs and how to meet those (Stone, 1989). Furthermore, it is a useful public education tool, educating local people about their rights, laws and political good sense (Tosun, 2000). Although CBT has been promoted since the 1970s (Goodwin, 2006), often as a form of pro-poor tourism, studies indicate that many CBT projects have failed, usually because of lack of financial viability (Mitchell & Muckosy, 2008). Tourism is said to be pro-poor if it results in increased net benefits flowing to the poor (Mitchell & Faal, 2008). Goodwin (2006) in his assessment of CBT, stated that only a few projects have generated enough benefits to provide incentives for conservation and contribute to local poverty reduction.

An evaluation of CBT projects around the world carried out by the *International Centre for Responsible Tourism* at Leeds Metropolitan University, UK (Goodwin, 2006), found that CBT projects failed because of the following:

- There is a lack of understanding of the need for commercial activities. Local people must sell crafts, food, accommodation and wildlife or cultural experiences to tourists. This is the only way to ensure sustainable local income or conservation funds.
- There is a lack of commitment with the private sector, including travel agents, tour operators and hoteliers. The earlier this engagement takes place and the closer the partnership is, the more likely the project is to succeed.
- Location is critical. For poor people to benefit, tourists must stay in or near to these communities. Very few communities have tourism assets which are adequately strong to attract tourists – they rely on selling complementary goods and services. Tourists need to be close by for this to happen.
- CBT projects do not always endow with appropriate tourism facilities for generating income. Too many CBT initiatives rely on building lodges, which are capital demanding and need substantial maintenance, or walking trails from which it can be difficult to ensure revenue.
- Protected areas increasingly rely on money from tourists to pay for conservation initiatives. Local communities often have to compete with conservation projects for revenues.

II. METHODOLOGY

Data collection from primary and secondary sources took place between March and May 2013. Primary data collection tools included interviews with key stakeholders using both structured and semi-structured questionnaires. The interviews collected information on how community-based tourism i.e. CBT benefits and losses derived by the community from the West Bengal Forest Development Corporation Limited (WBFDC); how benefits, if any, are distributed among the community; problems or losses the community has come across; and the level of interface and community participation, if any, between the WBFDC and the community.

Informal face-to-face interviews were also held with the forest ranger of Jaldapara National Park to get more information on why and how the CBT projects can set up, the daily operations of the enterprise and its performance and to get his views on how the community is involved and allowed to participate in the CBT. The interview method was chosen in order to increase the response rate, ensure respondents understood the questions asked and ensure effective information gathering. Focus group discussions were also held in each of the adjacent villages of Jaldapara National Park, to get the community’s perceptions on the benefits of the CBT and to ascertain their level of community participation in the tourism enterprise. Secondary sources of data collection included journals, published books, unpublished reports and newsletters, government policy documents and the Internet to get information on CBT. Focus group discussions were chosen because they allowed more in-depth views and comments to be given by respondents as opposed to individual questioning. Some disadvantages remained: the groups may not have represented the whole community, and more outspoken individuals may have dominated the discussions. The medium of communication for the discussions and interviews was Bengali & Hindi as most of the local tribal communities were not showing interest in interacting with the researcher due to lack of confidence in English. All responses were then translated into English during the write-up of the

preparation of this report. The data collected were analyzed using descriptions and classification. Descriptions refer to the portrayal of data in a form that can be easily interpreted.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results indicated that there are a number of constraints and challenges in place, making it difficult for the community to get involved in the running and management of the existing CBT projects. These include the lack of collective sense of ownership and inadequate employment creation, dependence on external funding and lack of information. The results from focus group discussions with community members in the villages pointed out that residents have lost a number of natural resources, now found and located within the jurisdiction of the national park, the most important of which is their communal land. In this regard, the community believes it has incurred more costs than benefits. Residents feel the national park has converted them by taking away their grazing land, leading to the production of poor-quality domestic animals, which only fetches low prices. The community members also indicated that they have lost access to resources such as wild fruits, which they used to gather and sell, thatching grass as well as roofing poles. The losses, which they feel are improved by the lack of involvement, further augment the circle of poverty and defeat the goal of community-based initiatives, which is to eradicate poverty in the rural areas. Many people are not sharing in the benefits of tourism; most are disappointed and are not interested in the program. Evidence shows that if conservation projects do not bring about livelihood security, then poverty and environmental degradation may intensify in areas around parks and nature reserves.

To find an answer to the investigation question arisen in this paper, firstly the data concerning the hypothesis test will be displayed and, then, the descriptive statistics that allow us to reinforce those results and better understand those differences. Thus, beginning with analyzing if there are indeed some behaviour differences between CBT owners and private tour operators when they look for community development through promoting tourism at Jaldapara National Park, we see, through the observation of the results obtained by the test of hypothesis H_1 (there are differences in views in the CBT owners and private tour operators for community development)



CBT project at Jaldapara includes Elephant joy rides for the tourists
 Photo-courtesy:<http://doarsecovillage.wordpress.com/2013/01/02/enjoy-elephant-rides-at-jaldapara-national-park/>

Particularly in what concerns a set of factors about the necessity of community development adjacent to Jaldapara National Park, it was observed that there are different reasons that play significant role in community based tourism ventures. These factors are: development of infrastructure, development of different alternative tourism amenities to attract the tourists, publicity of CBT among national and international tourists, arrangement of proper transportation, and arrangement of home stay facility to the tourist to offer the flavor of village tourism etc.

Table: T-test results for the question H_1

		Levene's Test for Equality of variance		t-test for Equality of means		
Factors that exert influence upon the decision for CBT projects		F	Sig	t	df	Sig. (2 tailed)
Development of infrastructure, development of different alternative tourism	Equal variances assumed	0.314	0.576	2,854	219	0.005*
	Equal variances not assumed			2.868	197.163	0.005
Publicity of CBT among	Equal variances	40,409	0,000	4,043	219	0,000

tourists	assumed					
	Equal variances not assumed			4,350	217,723	0,000*
Arrangement of proper transportation	Equal variances assumed	587	0,444	3,660	219	0,000
	Equal variances not assumed			3,610	184,087	0,000*
Arrangement of home stay facility to the tourist to offer the flavor of village tourism	Equal variances assumed	10,844	0,001	4,955	219	0,000
	Equal variances not assumed			4,606	141,935	0,000*
Arrangement of amusement/activities for the tourists	Equal variances assumed	3,473	0,064	3,283	219	0,001
	Equal variances not assumed			3,246	185,707	0,001

*Significant according to a level of significance of 5%

Thus, after analyzing the results of tables, we may say that hypothesis is not rejected (there are differences in views in the CBT owners and private tour operators for community development) i.e., there are statistically significant differences on the perception of the following factors that exert influence upon the decision of CBT project allotment for community development of Jaldapara National Park:

- (i) Development of infrastructure, development of different alternative tourism amenities to attract the tourists can be done by the local people since they are more cautious about their locality development
- (ii) Arrangement of proper transportation is a necessary to pull the tourist towards this national park, PPP model (Private-Public Partnership) can be suggested to build a good communication set up.
- (iii) Arrangement of home stay facility to the tourist to offer the flavor of village tourism is an added tourism attraction, which can be offered only by the local people residing near the national park. This is one of the most popular tourism amenities that attract the people who love to enjoy the tourism with a swathe of inquisitiveness for social anthropology.
- (iv) Arrangement of amusement/activities for the tourists is also can be better done by the local people, as tourists look for some activities in their tour itinerary. This may include tribal song and dance programme, shopping of small take away gifts like model of one horned rhinoceros or tribal couple made out of wood or clay, fishing at river side or local pond etc.

IV. CONCLUSION

It was experienced problems in relating the community, tourist numbers are now increasing and profits are also being made through this growth of tourism. It would therefore be premature to say that CBT at Jaldapara area is not useful for rural communities and unfair to oversimplify that CBT projects are a failure. To ensure maximum community participation, the community should be well informed and educated about the tourism, forest and endangered animal conservation and over and above the tit bits of entrepreneurship. Communities require training on their rights and responsibilities and should be fully conversant about the facts and figures of their ventures and entitlements. For the benefit of the business enterprise, communities may hire candidates, on the basis of experience and qualifications and not place of residence. For community participation to be effective at the Wbfdcl, exchange of ideas between the different stakeholders should be optimistic and facilitated by the involvement of a liaison officer who can act as a facilitator between the community and the government.

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