

Role of communities in ecotourism

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The proposition has three major terms and one should understand them before proceeding to the issue.

1. Role
2. Communities
3. Ecotourism

Role

A pattern of behaviour involving actions expected of an individual, or, what people adopt within a status. Societies may be seen as structures of positions in which people cooperate, compete, or conflict in pursuit of their own, or group, interests. Role language can be elaborated. Thus, the "role set" refers to the collection of actors in relation to whom the role is played. "Role model" refers to an idealized performance of the role, which is worthy of copying as defined by the common values of the system. In our proposition, the role means the activities of a particular group of people of a particular area.

Communities

Communities: set of people living together having mutual benefits and common dangers and depending upon each other for survival. At medieval times, group of town's people holding a charter from a feudal overlord or sovereign granting them certain privileges of self-government. In modern times the term is used to mean a group of people, not usually related to one another, sharing accommodation and behaving as a single household.

Here we will consider a group of people striving for same cause as Community. Here I consider community as a group of people striving for better environments in their respective area.

Ecotourism

There are a number of definitions of newly adopted terminology---Ecotourism. People believe that Ecotourism is an approach that creates a variety of quality tourism products and services that are environmentally, ecologically sustainable, economically viable, socially and psychologically acceptable. They further believe that Ecotourism must promote sustainable development by

establishing a durable productive base that allows local inhabitants and ecotourist service providers to enjoy rising standards of living.

A group of professionals say that the phrase ecotourism seems to be on the lips of many travel agents and corporations looking for new ideas in executive or "yuppie" getaways. But many "civilians" are wondering what ecotourism is and what is expected of them if they do go on a so-called ecotour.

So, Ecotourism is defined in different ways, by different groups of people with different agendas. Many tourists are attracted to the adventure that is associated with many remote, natural areas. Others wish to encourage conservation practices in environmentally sensitive areas, using profits to restore habitat, change public perception through education, and develop community. However, local people also want the opportunity for new jobs and capitalist ventures. No matter how one chooses to look at ecotourism, it is a new element shaping the use of rainforests and other natural settings. Likewise, ecotourism appears to be altering the lifestyles of indigenous peoples and causing certain changes in local behaviors.

Ecotourism is generally used when describing any manner of recreation or vacationing in a natural setting. Many critics and analysts of ecotourism have written about whether or not the activities involved are helping or actually harming rainforests and other popular sites of respite. Mathieson and Wall have extensively examined what many scholars and critics believe to be flaws in this method of travel. Environmental changes are seen to be caused simply by the building of hotels and accommodations, airports and roads in environmentally sensitive areas (wetlands, indigenous agricultural areas, and wildlife habitat). The problems associated with a booming tourism industry have taken many small areas in different countries by storm. Towns have experienced many problems due to the poor planning in sewage system size, dumping of sewage effluent into the ocean, and the lack of water, all of which have led to serious health problems for native peoples and tourists alike. Problems with effects from tourist activities and generally over-crowded conditions have also led to serious health and welfare concerns in these areas. Many countries that offer ecotourism opportunities are developing programs and activities that will help to limit and control the impact that tourism is having on the local landscape.

One point is acceptable by all that natural areas that may be of interest to an ecotourist will benefit from ecotourist activities only if the tourist can contribute money to the maintenance of natural areas, for changing the patterns of use by local people or those who destroy rainforests and other highly productive areas. Additionally, these areas will benefit if tourists are willing to take an active role in the maintenance and restoration processes.

Ecotourism has been argued as a negative force of social change in these remote, yet once isolated areas of the world. According to Sachs, Ecotourists

may in fact be traveling to remote areas in order to experience the customs and rituals of native cultures; however, they may not come equipped with a certain cultural sensitivity. In some cases, native peoples are forced to stage reenactments of history or rituals and customs that may not be a regular pattern of existence for them. Many times indigenous peoples are made to perform their customs, but during a time that is better for tourism, rather than during the appropriate season or day. Ecotourists paying for an "authentic" experience of native rituals are thus exposed to false images and beliefs, which perpetuates misunderstanding between these native peoples and western ecotourists. The case study of Kalash people in Chitral valley Pakistan is a prime example where people are wearing 3000 year old style of clothing---just for performing that their culture is living civilisation.

In addition, tourist money and behaviors are affecting the way in which native people wish to live. Westerners spending lots of money for luxury items on their vacation pump more wealth into the local economy. As a result, local people have been seen to acquire the western desire for expensive things, leading to major changes in the lifestyles of these people who have lived simple, more traditional lifestyles for centuries. Also, tourism tends to change the local landscape, no matter the pains taken to counterbalance tourist affects, and may change the way in which local peoples are able to feed and house themselves, do commerce, and live. Likewise animal behavior has been seen to change when tourists travel in relatively large numbers through their habitat.

I have my own opinion or definition of terminology or you can say phrase Ecotourism. Ecotourism in my opinion is an activity of sustainable tourism of local community, for the local community and by the local community.

If local community is not ready for sustainable activities, no body-no body can do Ecotourism.

Therefore the role of Community is the key factor in Ecotourism.

Case study of Murree Hills, Punjab Pakistan where community knows that it is playing havoc with its area, culture and ecosystem but its happy being immediate financial beneficial of unplanned growth of hotels and extreme inflow of tourists. They are of the view that economical aspect of Ecotourism is there. They are getting the benefit of massive tourism in their respective area.

Case Study of Naran Valley, N.W.F.P Pakistan where people are aware of degenerating and degrading environment and they want to control it.

Role of NGOs in developing "Community"

Here the role of non-Government Organisations (NGO) or sustainable organisations is very important for developing "Community". Therefore, the role of NGOs should be critically discussed before discussing their ideal role. Developing Ecotourism friendly Community in my opinion means "providing leadership to a group of people who are not aware of their duties and rights towards sustainable development and tourism activities".

By gone the days, when providing amenities to people, was the sole responsibility of governments. A time came when in third world countries including Pakistan people realised that the services being provided by government or its various departments either do not exist or of an inferior quality. Eventually people realised to work on self-help basis by establishing local groups, initially at Mohalla (street) and then at the National level. Most of the development work they carried out was with the orientation of welfare and through indigenous available human, natural and financial resources. However, thanks to foreign aid for development, which came through various channels and was helpful for these groups, to grown up and to bank upon. The available funds that initially were siphoned through the government now are shared by another, the non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

But another debate started within people and through print media about the way NGOs work and advantages they take from funds available to them. According to a news report most of these NGOs are headed by influential, politician, bureaucrats and rich people/elites. These are the people who plunder in the name of "NGOs" and deprive the deserving people of their rights. There are NGO people who were riding on bicycles in the past, now own more than one vehicle such as Honda Accord and Pejaro/Land Cruiser at their home. Those had pennies in their pocket until yesterday now having accounts in millions of dollar, what to say accounts in rupees. The ill-mannered people now have their meals in five star hotels."

Another statement given by a government official that published says: "The deserving people get a very small amount after a thorough prob. While on the other hand, NGOs get huge amounts on the recommendations of Ministers or influential. The proverb for such NGOs is "gold attracts the gold." What these NGOs are doing? Nothing! But plundering money. The amount, which is plundered in the name of women welfare, has no comparison in the history. In most of the cases, the head or patrons of these NGOs are women. These are not the ordinary women rather, the wives of rich or elites. The question is what is the purpose of these NGOs? And, what is the use of funds being received by these NGOs? If these NGOs had implemented the programmes according to their constitutions then unlike today, condition of the poor women was different. The poor women's condition was not so miserable. The society might not be desperate..."

A higher number of NGOs, besides enjoying the foreign funds, also tap funds from the sources which basically are for the welfare of poor, orphans and widows such as Bait-ul-Maal. The government and public now termed such NGOs civilised thieves, looters, and dacoits!

Meanwhile about Rs 4 billion had plundered from the Pakistan Bait-ul-Maal. The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the Senate took a serious note of irregularities and financial indiscipline in Pakistan Bait-ul-Maal and National Zakat Foundation. While scrutinizing, the PAC found that these funds were released to such NGOs, which either existed on papers only or did nothing for the upliftment and welfare of the poor and needy persons. The PAC decided to constitute a sub-committee to probe into the irregularities and to suggest viable mechanism for disbursement of funds from these sources to the deserving people.

The failure of non-governmental organizations and misappropriation of funds by them is not a new phenomenon in Pakistan. During the decade of 80s, a large number NGOs registered under the Cooperative Societies Act 1925 plundered Billions of rupees and deprived of the common people including poor and women. The government had registered cases against them. In 1992, most of the owners (influential) of these NGOs have been fled away from the country. However, the victims are looking forward for the justice since last 8 years and after a hectic judiciary process only a handful victims have received compensation or money back from them.

Survey of the Punjab University

Just after the crackdown of NGOs, a survey of the Punjab University published in Newspapers entailing 80% of NGOs of the country gets millions of dollars without doing any welfare work. Their only aim is plundering money. Only 20% NGOs are relatively functional. In Punjab 4000, Sindh 3301, NWFP 309, Balochistan 286 and Azad Kashmir 92 NGOs were reported not working according to their constitutions and promises.

The Donors Attitude

In Pakistan, donors' attitude toward working style of NGOs is also very complex. They respond quite slowly on reports and news such as corruption and misappropriation of funds within their partners' organisations. The major causes of failures are continuation of higher funding on recommendations of "consultants" (most of the time friends of NGO owners) and without assessing the capacity of an organisation or evaluation of the previous progress. Weak monitoring by the donors is another factor that promotes corruption within NGOs. The NGOs take shelter by using western jargon such as autonomy to an organisation, participatory decisions or consensus etc. Likeness and dislikeness

to fund NGOs and reluctance to work with rural-based NGOs are other reasons that have brought the NGO-sector of Pakistan at this situation.

Role of Communities in Ecotourism

Now, I can say that Ecotourism is a blend of controlled activities of a group of people having a goal of sustainable development in their respective area. This group not only behaves as a friend of nature rather it controls other anti-nature activities in its respective area. Therefore we can say that Ecotourism has no meanings without the role of local communities. Now we have a question that what type of role communities should play.

Ideal role of communities

1. Keep an eye on anti-nature activities.
2. Striving for mutual goal of economically viable mode of tourism in their area.
3. Help nature to sustain.
4. Build pressure group to control activities of "outsiders".
5. Feel and understand that their culture is indigenous and they should not act something contrary to their custom for pleasing "outsiders".

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