

Community Based Eco-Tourism: Looking into the Government Policy Initiatives in Sikkim

Nisha Tamang Lama
North Bengal University, Siliguri
Department of Political Science

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I. INTRODUCTION

Eco Tourism is a means of sustainable economic development and protection of the cultural and natural heritage of our Country. It is a form of tourism involving visiting fragile, pristine, and serene natural areas, projected as a low impact and often small scale option to standard commercial tourism. Ecotourism is a type of nature based tourism that benefits local communities and destination, environmentally, culturally and economically. It also represents a set of principles that have been successfully implemented in various global communities and are supported by extensive industry and academic research. Eco tourism when properly executed based principles, exemplifies the benefits of social and environmental development. Epler Wood, the founder and director of the Eco tourism Society (TES), has defined ecotourism as “purposeful travel cares not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem while producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of natural resources financially beneficial to local citizens” (Epler Wood 1991,201). TES defines ecotourism as a nature based form of specialty travel, which involves “responsible travel to natural areas, which conserves then environment and sustains the well-being of local people” (The International Ecotourism Society, 2000).The world Conservation Union came up with a more comprehensive definition “Ecotourism is environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features- both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socioeconomic involvement of local populations” (The World Conservation Union, 1996). It was suggested that the term ‘ecotourism was coined by hector Ceballos Lascurain, who was at the time (July 1983) Director General of standards and Technology of SEDUE (the Mexican Ministry of

Urban Development and Ecology) and founding president of PRONATURA (an influential Mexican conservation NGO). Community participation.

Community based ecotourism (CBET) is a form of tourism that links local enterprise development with environmental conservation. Ecotourism, often misconstrued a simply taking a holiday in a nature, watching wildfire, or engaging in an outdoor or adventure sport, is distinguished from conventional tourism in that it employs measures to assure that the negative impacts on the natural and cultural environmental are minimized and mitigated. “Community based” ecotourism takes the definition one step further. It ensures that the benefits, both social and economic, are realized by local communities. In this way, CBET is simultaneously a mechanism for rural development and for conservation.

Community based ecotourism (CBET) means different things to different people. The International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as “ Travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people.”(<http://www.ecotourism.org/index2.php?what-is-ecotourism>)This distinguishes it from nature tourism, which involves visiting natural attractions but without any explicit objective of achieving environmental or social protection. Boo (1992) rephrased it as nature tourism that promotes conservation and sustainable development, introducing the element of pro-active conservation and economic development. Honey (1999) expanded the definition to include not only financial benefits for conservation and for local people, but also support human rights and democratic movements. In the context of conservation theory and practice, CBET us a form of community based natural resource management (CBNRM), a popular choice of activities in an enterprise based strategy for bio-diversity conservation and a common element in integrated

conservation and development projects (ICDP). Most ecotourism operations also claim to benefit local communities, either through employment or by contributing to community projects, but the term community-based in CBET implies going beyond this to involving communities actively. This has been interpreted as anything from regular consultations, to ensuring that at least some community members participate in tourism related economic activities, to partial or full community ownership of whole ecotourism enterprises. The wide range of interpretation of the conservation and community development objectives of CBET is reflected in the reporting of results. A project that creates a bit of local employment or helps reduce poaching of few species can be regarded as a success story or a disappointment, depending what it set out to achieve. A lack of consensus on fundamental objectives and realistic expectations underlines much of the debate around CBET, and ICDPs in general, corresponding author: Agnes Kiss (akiss@worldbank.org).

CBNRM plays an important role in human development. It stresses a kind of partnership between states, local government structures, and local communities and their legitimate representatives.

Local communities must be involved from the very beginning in planning a reserve, and be able to give their opinions and to be heard. Ecotourism can bring many changes to a society, and these communities must have a say in what hearted supported of these local communities, ecotourism and the reserves can fail-locals may actually start killing wildfire and destroying forests in retribution (Hughes 1996, stonich 1996; Tchamie 1994).

With money from ecotourism, jobs for local people become available (including Ownership and management jobs) and health and education of local people can be improved. With education of women, and decreased mortality rates for infants, women have less numbers of babies, and start birthing later in life. These health and education improvements can go to a long way in alleviating poverty, population growth and land distribution problems, which are the main causes of natural resource degradation and biodiversity loss (Murdoch 1980)

Greater community involvement is considered to be highly beneficial for the local residents in many different ways. The main underlying concept for the development of community based ecotourism is the empowerment of local people. In economic terms, ecotourism generates long term benefits that are distributed

equitably within the host community and can be used for the constant improvement of the community's infrastructure. Moreover, ecotourism can contribute to the psychological empowerment of the local people by enhancing their sense of self-esteem and by cultivating pride for their cultural and natural heritage. This happens because ecotourism reveals to the public the value of host community in terms of natural beauty or cultural uniqueness. In addition, ecotourism may strengthen social bonds with the community by promoting cooperation among its member's political empowerment include representational democracy wherein residents can voice opinions and raise concerns about development initiatives. Finally, ecotourism brings about political empowerment, since it creates a forum for the expression of the people's voices concerning issues of local development (Scheyvens,1999)

The concept of community based ecotourism development appears to meet the majority of the targets established in the definition of sustainable tourism, since it constitutes a tool for both social empowerment and long term economic development of the local communities (WWF International,2001) This is even more crucial for small, rural and remote communities that often suffer from the lack of government attention and assistance. Self-development through ecotourism is particularly important for these communities, since it gives people the opportunities to utilize their own internal strengths and resources in order to become more self-sufficient (Joppe, 1996). In fact, Ceballos- Lascuran (1993) contends that the goals of ecotourism can only be reached through active participation and cooperation of all stakeholders, since they all play decisive roles, a significant stakeholder in the development of ecotourism, it should leave enough room for the community to become an equal partner when it comes to decision-making and control over local resources (Joppe,1996). Communities can actively manage these values to increase the likelihood of better collective outcomes. Tourism can then appear as the easiest source of revenue generation for the community, but the sustainability level of the tourism development path that is followed might not always be profoundly considered by the local people (Eagles & McCool, 2002).

The local Communities are credited with having a greater understanding of, as well as vested interest in, their environment and are thus seen as able to effectively manage natural resources through local or traditional practices (Leach et al.,1999; Tsing et al.;1999). This move in global and local development discourse is part of wider

reassessment of the goals of conservation by international bodies such as the UN (for example, the Convention to Combat Desertification and Convention on Biodiversity both advocate community-based approaches), national governments North and South (for example, indicated by the number of countries signed up to the sustainable development goals of Agenda 21), and NGOs and community based organizations across the world (Un, 1995; Forsyth and Leach, 1998)

Three International organization the world travel and tourism council, the world tourism organization and the earth council, joined together in 1996, to launch an action entitled “ Agenda 21 for the travel and tourism industry towards environmentally sustainable development” A sectoral sustainable development programme based on the earth summit results the documents is of particular significance to Travel and tourism companies, government, national tourism administration (NTAs) and representative trade organization as well as the travelling public.

Agenda 21 is comprehensive programme of action adopted by 182 governments at the united nation conference on environment and development (UNCED), The earth summit on 14 June 1992. The first document of its kind to achieve international consensus, Agenda 21 provides a blueprint for securing the sustainable future of the planet, from now into the 21st Century. It identifies an environmental and developmental issue that threatens to bring about economic and catastrophe and present a strategy for transition to more sustainable development practices. As we have discussed earlier, the travel and tourism industry has a vested interest in protecting the natural and cultural resources that are the core of its business. It also has the means to do so. As the world’s largest industry, it has the potential to bring about sustainable development of the communities and the countries in which it operates. Concerted action from f=government and all sectors of the industry will be needed to realize this potential and to secure long term future development.

The Agenda 21 for the travel and tourism industry documents contains priority areas for action with defined objectives and suggested step to be taken to achieve them. The document emphasis the importance of the partnership between government, industry and non-government organization, analyses the strategic and economic importance of travel and tourism and demonstrate the enormous benefit in making the industry sustainable. Following the guidelines, many regions around the world, those were rich in

nature’s bounty set up eco-tourism projects. India too, in her Tourism policy (2015) initiated ecotourism in different regions. Sikkim is one such state that was a pioneer in the field.

II. ECOTOURISM INITIATIVES IN SIKKIM

Sikkim 2ND smallest state in the India, a small and beautiful state nestled in the Himalayas situated at the top of the amount kanchendzonga and boasts of an unexplored beauty. The lofty mountains dominate the skyline of Sikkim and invites tourists in its snow clad peaks, green emerald slopes, rushing streams, tall rhododendrons and sparkling orchids. Hilltop monasteries emerge from the rugged terrains while multi colored prayer flags wave in the mountain breeze. Endowed with tremendous natural beauty with lush green valleys to snowcapped mountain, it covers a total geographical area of 7096 sq. km extending approximately 114 km from north to south and 64 km from east to west, surrounded by vast stretches of Tibetan plateau in the north, chumbi valley of Tibet and the kingdom of Bhutan in the east, Darjeeling dist. of west Bengal in the south and Nepal in the west. Sikkim became a part of Indian Republic as the 22nd state on 16th May, 1975. It is situated in the Eastern Himalayas, lying between 27°N and 28°N and 87°59’E and 88°56’E.

III. COMMUNITY BASED ECT IN SIKKIM

Sikkim government has given thrust on the promotion of cultural tourism in different villages throughout the state, because village is the only place where the traditional cultural groups (Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepali) and their unique social activities can be experienced. Cultural tourism in this regard is a product that exhibits community tourism “interplay”. It is commonly based tourism that incorporates local community directly for its sustenance. Local Culture is the central attraction of such tourism. Local people’s participation is mandatory to perform traditional cultural practices. Thus, whatever the money is spent by tourists directly percolates to local economy. Thus, cultural tourism has the direct benefiting effect to local people, especially those who are unemployed. Promotion of such tourism in Sikkim was actually started after the year 2000. The studies by NGOs of Sikkim like Ecotourism and Conservation Society of Sikkim (ECOSS), Sikkim Development Foundation, Voluntary Health Association of Sikkim (VHAS) reveal that tourists, especially foreign visitors increasingly prefer rural areas in

their tourism itinerary. This particular dimension of cultural tourism is being promoted as village tourism by Sikkim government. (**International journal of Social Science Tomorrow Vol.1 No 4 ISSN: 2277-6168 June2012 www.ijst.com**)

Ecotourism and Conservation Society of Sikkim (ECOSS) and a Non-Government Organization had started a project Sikkim Himalayan Homestays in collaboration with United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Main objective of this project is to promote community based tourism. Local community participation is not a new concept. The word participation implies how and to what extent people are able to share their views, take part in an activity, project, program, decision-making, policy-making and so on. The United Nations (UN) describes community development as a process, designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation. Participation is naturally political as it relates to how groups and individuals are empowered and have control over their lives. Community based tourism projects generates ample scopes for local people or communities to be benefited, economically, it is basically low impact tourism, simultaneously it widens a way to protect natural as well as cultural environment for future generation which in turn is the sustainable way to promote tourism throughout Sikkim. The important fact is that the purpose of the project is only to initiate community based tourism at potential villages as facilitator. Once a village under the project becomes proficient enough to receive guests by its own, whole control regarding continuity of tourism goes to local body of that particular village. It means, when communities of that village become self-sufficient to perform as service provider or efficient enough to maintain the host guest relationship in a sustainable manner then the purpose of project is supposed to be more or less successful for that project village.

Sikkim Government has already adopted such projects to promote community based tourism in Sikkim. It is because of three basic facts that have already been understood by Department of Tourism.

- i. First Factor is that most of the tourist destinations are located in rural areas of the state. If the villagers are involved in keeping visitors at their homes, it will definitely promote cultural tourism simultaneously with nature based tourism. For this purpose, village tourism is needed to be highlighted with new model villages.

- ii. Secondly, village tourism generates enormous scope of earning for local youths, especially those who are unemployed So, upgradation of community based tourism makes local people economically self-sufficient.
- iii. Thirdly, community based tourism also contributes in the environmental sustainability. Tourists from urban areas diverse to rural areas of Sikkim and it will definitely decrease extra pressure on basic civic amenities like water supply, sewerage sanitation etc. This also certainly reduces congestion and pollution at urban centers of the states that is caused by huge influx of tourists during peak seasons.

IV. EMERGING REALITIES

Community based tourism centers in Sikkim are generally run, promoted and monitored by local people. Each and every community based tourism destination has its own local body or community based organization (CBO) E.G Kewzing Tourism Development Committee (KTDC) at kewzing village, Dzongu Ecotourism Committee (DEC) at Dzongu, Khedi Ecotourism Eco development Promotion Society (keep) at pastaanga village etc. This particular CBO works for the interest and welfare of local people of that village as well as regulates the total system of community based tourism including distribution of profit, generated from tourism sector. Those villagers who are interested in participating in tourism activities are directly or indirectly involved, but on a rotation basis, so that each willing village member may get the chance to take part in such tourism activities. In case of receiving guests also the rotation based involvement is followed by the villagers. Mainly in cultural programmes are also directly involved before the tourists. Remarkably any outsider's involvement is not allowed in such kind of tourist destinations. Construction of hotels in such villagers are strictly prohibited. Most significantly, the whole tourism activities in these villages are performed by the villagers is distributed among the participants by that CBO on the basis of their levels of participation. A fixed percentage of such profit is kept by the CBO for office fund to keep the whole system operating

Sikkim government has taken following initiatives; -

Commitment –mission statement

Taking into consideration the above facts, Sikkim Tourism has committed itself to the development of eco-tourism in Sikkim. The

mission statement of Sikkim Tourism is to make Sikkim a premier eco-tourism destination in India.

Investment of all stakeholders

Sikkim tourism takes views, opinions and feelings of all stakeholders including local people and tourists into account while planning the development of tourism in the state. For this, a close contact is being maintained with NGOs like Travel Agents Association of Sikkim, Sikkim Hotels and Restaurants Association, Kanchendzonga Conservation Committee, Sikkim Development Foundation, ECCOS and Green Circle etc.

Education and training of all awareness generation service providers and all those who come in contact with consumers.

For this purpose, the Tourism Department and STDC have started conducting orientation program for all those involved in providing service to the tourists. The objective is to make them aware of importance of tourism and need for following code of conduct of conservation and protection of the environment. For example, a public meeting was held on 2 October 2001 at Soreng in West Sikkim which was addressed by three cabinet Minister. Capacity building training are started to train local youth in the field of tourism as tourist guide speaking different foreign language etc.

New ecotourism project in private sector

The Government of Sikkim has recently signed a memorandum of understanding with a private company for construction of a new eco-tourism resort near gangtok.

All project in Sikkim to be eco-friendly

Sikkim Tourism is interested in seeing that all tourism projects in Sikkim are eco-friendly. For this, there is a close co-ordination between Eco-cell of Forest Department and Tourism Department. All projects in this sensitive bio-diversity areas are cleared through the Eco-cell of Forest Department. Thus, it is ensured that tourism development projects do not infringe on the environmental law.

Suggestion:

- Help conserve habitats of flora and fauna as well as any site, natural feature or culture, which may be affected by tourism.
- Make no open fires and discourage others from doing so. If water has to be heated with scarce firewood, use as little as possible.
- Keep local water clean and avoid using pollutant such as detergents in streams or springs. If no toilet facilities are available, relieve yourself at least 30 meters away from water sources and bury or cover the waste.

- Leave plants to flourish in their natural environment and avoid taking away cuttings, seeds and roots.
- Leave campsite clean after use.
- Help guides and porters to follow conservation measures.
- Do not allow cooks/porters to throw garbage in streams or rivers.
- Respect the natural and cultural, heritage of the area and follow local customs.
- Respect local customs and do not wear unfavorable clothes
- Respect privacy of individuals and ask permission to take photographs of local inhabitants.
- Respect holy places, do not touch or remove religious objects.
- Strictly follow the guidelines for personal safety and security and always take your own precautions and safety measures.
- Realize and respect the value of the environment, the flora and fauna, the monuments and cultural heritage.
- Practice conservation of nature and culture as a way of life
- Establish guidelines to protect valuable local resources and foster tourism management.
- React to the potential threat of investor who see opportunities in development but lack sensitivity to local values.
- Becomes effective nature guides and conservations of natural areas by utilizing practical and ancestral knowledge of the natural features of the areas.
- Be friendly to the visitor and help them to practices ecotourism principles.
- Use of plastics and others non-biodegradable items are not allowing to the trekkers during trek.
- Create awareness among all concerned, about the importance of sound eco practices in tourism development.
- Motivate the local community to increase their involvement in sustainable tourism activities.
- Organize training programs to prepare the local people to take up various vocations related eco-tourism.

The vision of the policy is to establish Sikkim an ultimate and unique ecotourism destination offering memorable and high quality learning experiences to visitors, and to contribute to poverty alleviation as well as to promote nature conservation. The Government of Sikkim addresses ecotourism as a priority sector and therefore, the

Sikkim Ecotourism Policy has been developed proactively by state with an aim to not only to ensure sustainable livelihood of the local people but to protect and manage forest, as well.

Sikkim Tourism Mission 2015 aspires to “make tourism the main livelihood of the people of Sikkim, and each and every household and individual, a skilled force for the tourism industry”. At the same time the Government of India increased focus on the development of the North East Region has marked tourism as a priority area (Draft National Tourism Policy 2015). New opportunities have emerged such as the Kailash Mansarovar pilgrimage through Nathula Pass, which was flagged in 2015. Improved core infrastructure such as completion of the ongoing widening of National Highway 10 to Sikkim and the commissioning of an airport in Pakyong will facilitate the flow of tourists to the state. Leveraging of information technology web based booking portals and mobile tourism information applications, high social media presence for tourist information dissemination, will make Sikkim more readily accessible to visitors. There is also a growing demand for new products village tourism and homestays, mountains, biking, paragliding, bird and butterfly watching, all of which can generate a host of new service providers from amongst the local youth. Tourism has linkages with a wide range of allied sectors and services that can provide employment and income to locals. By developing local capacities for entrepreneurship, and services delivery and a focus on high-value-nature and culture based products, the state has the capacity to leverage these opportunities to make tourism a key sector in Sikkim economy.

With a flourishing tourism industry that was on the one hand more bent towards mass tourism. In 2002. The south Asian Regional Conference on Eco-tourism was organized in Sikkim by the International Ecotourism Society (TIES) and Ecotourism and Conservation Society of Sikkim (ECOSS) with support from UNDP and the Ministry of Tourism. This was a milestone in introducing the concept of Eco-tourism to Sikkim and the North East Region and in defining community based tourism in the state. Several ecotourism sites in different parts of the state Kewzing, Yuksam, Dzongu and Pastanga were some of the first community based tourism (CBT) sites that evolved as a result and established themselves.

The core component of these CBT initiatives was the village homestay, a new tourism product that ensured spread of tourism benefits to local communities. Since then the Government has

taken several initiatives to support village tourism and eco-tourism including the notification of the Sikkim Ecotourism Policy in 2012 and the Sikkim Registration of Homestay Establishment Rules 2013 and more recently, the construction of over 1500 homestays in different villages all over Sikkim. The Sikkim Eco tourism Policy, 2011 was also developed by the State Government. It set guidelines and strategies for development of tourism around protected areas and forest areas of the State, which highlights the issue of zoning and carrying capacities in fragile areas. The Forest Environment and Wildfire Management Department through the JICA funded Sikkim Biodiversity and Forest Management Project (SBFP), has prepared the Sikkim Ecotourism Policy 2011. The policy advocates for certain strategies and guidelines for ecotourism development particularly for protected areas and also to bring consensus on the concept of eco-tourism. Eco-tourism has always stressed local participation, ownership and business opportunities, particularly for rural people (Epler Wood, 2002)

Sikkim also pioneered in creating an ecotourism pathway weaving in principles of strong community participation, as well as nature and cultural conservation on the other. Sikkim Biodiversity and Ecotourism Project (SBEP) has been working with this objective involving local communities, enterprises and the government for tourism development in the major trekking destinations of the state. The state has been a frontrunner in promotion of homestays which ensures tourism benefits directly for communities, and there are various forms of homestay tourism currently in the state. The Pokhri Sanarkshan Samite model formed under the lake Conservation Guidelines of the Sikkim Government that puts community at the forefront for management of wetlands that are prime tourism destinations in the state and there are strong private investments in this sector which also brace the overall state of tourism.

Local People become shareholders and owners of ecolodge or nature inns, or run local community based ecotours. Community-run ecotourism programs emerged around the world, offering travelers the opportunity to learn about different cultures, the social and cultural threats that local people face, and their understanding of local ecology. These programs can assist local communities with health care, education and with maintaining local tradition.

It is often apprehended that with the influx of tourists and advance impact on the local culture

may be create. The local people may be influenced by the food habits and dress of the visitors and may start adopting them, and gradually neglecting their own cultures etc. while coping the tourist especially the foreigners. However, in the case of Sikkim, our experience has been quite positive. The demand of tourists to see the culture of local people has in fact helped revival of interest of local people in their culture. Sikkim Tourism has been organizing Tourism festival since last three years where local traditional dance and music are displayed through the main thoroughfare of the Gangtok town. Various ethnic groups of Sikkim participate in these cultural carnivals with great enthusiasm and gusto. Thus tourism has created revival of interest and pride among local people on their culture.

Policy Vision 2020

The vision of the policy is to establish Sikkim as an ultimate and unique ecotourism destination offering memorable and high quality learning experience to visitors and to poverty alleviation as well as to promote nature conservation.

Policy Objective:

The main objective of Sikkim Ecotourism Policy are as follows.

- To bring all stakeholders on a common platform on understanding of ecotourism. To Promote ecotourism in a sustainable manner based on the global Sustainable Tourism Criteria. (GSTC)
- To Conserve the existing biodiversity, ecosystem and religious monuments of the state of Sikkim as well as Sikkim people's culture and tradition.
- To offer memorable and high quality learning experience to visitors, thus encouraging their responsible behavior during their visits and their cooperation for nature conservation efforts.
- To facilitate local youth as well as visitors to enjoy and appreciate excellent nature based activities.
- To encourage people in Sikkim to increase their pride and appreciation of local natural and cultural values.
- To regulate the high influx of visitors in heavily visited areas, thus reducing negative impacts of tourism.

Village Tourism & Homestays:

Sikkim with its overage of ethnic communities has incredible potential for offering for offering tourists a multidimensional cultural

experience. At the heart of the rural experience are the homestays spread across the state which provides a glimpse into the village life style and culture. Ethnic cuisine and food products, organic produce, ethnic songs and dances, traditional dresses, handicrafts, vernacular architecture, festivals, traditional medicines, folktales, are some of the items on offer in the cultural basket . The concept of rural tourism is fast growing across the globe as a responsible and sustainable tourism product with pivotal social objectives through local and regional people's participation. The village tourism in Sikkim could be more effective tool in boosting overall tourism scenario as the rural hinterland of this hill station are endowed with unblemished natural reserves, serene environment and unique cultural flavor. The endorsement of village tourism in Sikkim would ensure the dispersal of the tourist traffic from the cities congestion to the villages where they can have a glimpse of rural Sikkim from within. The objective of the state government to promote village tourism is to harness that vast untapped rural tourism potential of Sikkim so that its multiplier effects and benefits of employment generation and economic development would percolate directly to the local communities. Villages in Sikkim has so far preserved and sustained its rich racial culture and pastoral lifestyle that would offer distinctive experience and fascinating for the tourist. The development of process is to provide impetus of village tourism potential of different region of the state.

There is a growing concern that rapid development and modernization is slowly eroding these cultural treasures and tourism can play a major role in its conservation. The Tourism Department's project to create over 1500 homestays in villages across the state and the States Organic mission shall support the culture and rural based tourism provided linkages are developed.

In order for community based ecotourism to be successful (sustainable), there are many questions that need to be asked and answered in the planning process through implementation stages. One problem of participatory approaches must be pointed out- what defines "community" and "local" in terms of participation? Communities are not free of conflict, nor are they homogeneous (Peters 1996). This fact can complete any development plans for local communities-communities must agree on representatives for decision making (McCay 1996).

Brohman (1996a:59) agrees with Murphy and Gunn and maintains that grassroots development 'not only reduces the need for local

residents to trade off quality of life and social cost for economic growth, but would also contribute to a more broadly based positive towards tourism' When it comes to the management of these natural resources, however, women have traditionally been denied any role in the decision making process (Agarwal 1992)

Women as farmers and as gatherers of wood, water and natural non-wood forest products, may have more direct knowledge of the local environment than men. And as able entrepreneurs, they may be more likely to use extra income for health, education and general welfare, as long as they receive it directly. Women and racial minorities must be given a louder voice in policy if the goals of sustainability are to be realized, for these people are the important part of the community who are affected directly and indirectly by tourism.

Several developing countries have begun experimenting with participatory environmental policies, for example, Sri Lanka's National Forest Policy of 1995; Nepal Mater plan for the Forestry Sector, 1988; Pakistan's Forest Policy Statement, 1991; Zimbabwe's CAMPFIRE; and India National Forest Policy, 1988. These policy programs have aimed at securing willing participation of the local population protect and manage forest and wildfire for their sustainable development. At the same time, they also seek to give the local people a sense of involvement in the decision making process affecting their lives. Policy planners also favor community management as a means of integrating development and environment objective (Jackson, 1993, p.650)

Key Principles of Sikkim Ecotourism

The following key principles shall be directed, for all forms of ecotourism for the development, planning, management, and promotion in the state of Sikkim.

- Ecotourism promotion and development would conserve nature including biodiversity and ecosystems as well as local people's culture and tradition of Sikkim.
- Respect local communities culture, tradition and custom.
- Adherence to international ecotourism principles, guidelines and standards for the development of ecotourism in the state of Sikkim.
- Generate income sources to local communities preferably to economically disadvantaged through ecotourism activities.
- Promote sustainable use of natural, cultural and local resources to develop and promote

ecotourism in the state with the emphasis on the use of renewable energy.

- Facilitate partnership for planning, implementation, coordination and monitoring ecotourism activities with key stakeholders such as, local communities, NGO, government organizations, tour agents and tour operators.
- Enhance cooperation among the local entrepreneurs such as homestay operators, tour operators, tour agent's government organization and other key players in the development of ecotourism infrastructures and promotion of ecotourism products.
- Encourage visitors to learn the bio-diversity and ecosystems as well as local people's cultural and traditional values.

Important Component of Eco-Tourism Programmes in Sikkim

For the promotion and development of Eco-Tourism, the activities to be taken up would be eco-friendly and they would be also used for management, conservation, regeneration of Forest, Environment and Wildfire in the area and in the State as well. Some of the important components of eco-tourism programmes are:

- Improvement of surroundings of the destination including landscaping, development of parks, fencing, compound wall etc.
- Providing for improvement in solid waste management and sewerage management, Public Conveniences etc.
- Improvement of road connectivity leading to the tourist sites, especially from the National Highways/State highways and other entry points and also within panchayat limits.
- Illumination of the Tourist destination.
- Construction of wayside Public Conveniences.
- Construction of Budget Accommodation, Restaurant & Wayside Amenities.
- Procurement of equipment's directly related to tourism, like water Sports, Adventure Sports.
- Procurements of equipment directly related to tourism like water Sports, Adventure Sports,
- Eco Friendly modes of transport for moving within the tourism Zone.
- Refurbishment of the Monuments.
- Signage's and display boards showing Tourist Area Maps and documentation on places of interest at the location.
- Procurement of equipment's directly related to tourism, like Water Sports, Adventure Sports.
- Improvement of municipal services directly related to Tourism.
- Tourism Accommodation

- Trekking route, mountain biking, skiing, adventure in general should be improved.

Major Findings:

- An Ecotourism project benefits the entire community.
- Ecotourism bound to conserve the nature and nature's population.
- Ecotourism allow sustainable tourism in Sikkim.
- Rich species diversity attract tourist to come in Sikkim.
- Unscientific practiced of ecotourism causes biodiversity loss.
- Lack of awareness resulting loss of biodiversity in one hand and destroy the prospects of ecotourism in Sikkim
- Fees of trekking and pitching tent in Sikkim are very comparable to other state of India.
- Trekking in Sikkim projects some problems like availability of porter, trekking equipment's, and food staff etc., inconvenience of trek routes, problems pf permits and some miscellaneous.
- Sikkim offers limited prospect of trekking. Most of the trek routes are still unexplored, inexperienced and under developed. Though there are rest camps and trekkers hut established by the entrepreneurship of Sikkim Govt, but development yet to be required more.

Local Communities must be included in the planning and development of ecotourism projects starting in the early stages. In order for them to participate fully in the planning process, they must be aware of the impacts and be supportive of the development. Furthermore, it is important that local communities 'have a basic level of awareness of the potential benefits ad cost to tourism' to successfully participate in the planning process. (Woodley, 1993)

In a state such as Sikkim, where the central and the government have traditionally been the source of development and conservation support, it has been very encouraging to see a ready acceptance of the concept of local contribution to community identified actions. Sikkim Ecotourism Policy envisioned establishing the state as an ultimate and unique ecotourism destination offering memorable and high quality learning experience to the visitors; while contributing towards poverty alleviation and promotion of nature conservation. The state through the initiative of NGOs like Ecotourism and Conservation Society of Sikkim (ECOSS), Voluntary Health Association of Sikkim (VHAS), Khancendzonga Conservation Committee

(KCC), ENVIS, Sikkim ParyavaranSangrakshanSangh (SPSS), Travel Agents Association of Sikkim (TAAS) etc. are entrusted with the task of imparting education for ecological ethics through workshops, fairs, street plays and modal demonstrations exposing among students about the conservation activities; conducting seminars and quizzes in for developing awareness about conservation as well as extending collaboration with agencies like WWF (World Wildfire Fund) for conservation activities. Similarly, different skill development training for porters, vegetable farmers, cooks, animal operators and local guides etc. It also includes training and capacity building of NGOs and Stakeholders involved in ecotourism and conservation.

At present Government, stakeholders and the local NGOs have all tied their hands for making Sikkim, "The Ultimate Ecotourism Destination"

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