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## **Eco Tourism: A Descriptive Study on Sitakunda Eco Park in Chittagong Division of Bangladesh**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of this study is to discuss the definition, thought, principles, and characteristics of the ecotourism. This descriptive research describes the principles, status of Sitakunda ecotourism and explores the opportunities in this sub-urban city. Bangladesh is trying to develop several eco-parks for her natural balances as they able to create half a dozen by this time. But the concepts of eco-park are not following appropriately as the standard of infrastructures, facilities and principles of Eco Park. However, this descriptive research tried to unearth the condition of Sitakunda eco-park in the light of its principles, characteristics and socio economic mobility and importance.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In many parts of the world, tourism has contributed to the dual goal of poverty eradication and conservation. Wildlife areas and National Parks constitute a significant market for tourism based on natural resources and local culture. These areas are also home to remote villages that sustain themselves on subsistence agriculture and forest resources. The co-existence of nature with impoverished communities offers an opportunity for pro-poor tourism. Tourism can support livelihood diversification, which is particularly important in remote areas as it is also labor-intensive, can grow with unspecialized labor and has low entry barriers (Holland et al, 2003, Elliott 2001). There is clearly a market for 'responsible' tourism that shows concern for the poor 'However, simply bringing tourists to remote areas is not enough. Tourism needs to be organized in ways that enable local people to have better access to tourists so that they can augment their livelihood through employment and small enterprise development (Goodwin 2002; Ashley 2002). Market-driven private commercial enterprises may not ensure adherence to such principles by themselves. As a result, the effectiveness of PPT strategies depends enormously on the local conservation authority (Ashley et al., 1999). Good policies and careful understanding of tourism-needs and the ability of local community to fulfill these needs are important for tourism to be pro-poor.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The main objective of the Study is to observe the Sitakunda hills as an ecopark as per eco tourism principles and definitions. Moreover the concept and definition of eco-tourism, eco-tourism in Bangladesh, the characteristics of eco tourism, background of Sitakunda eco park, the principles of eco-tourism, history of Sitakunda eco park, eco tourism in Sitakunda, and recommendation based on observation of the Sitakunda ecopark have been discussed in this paper.

### **METHODS AND TECHNIQUES**

In general, the principles and characteristics of Eco Park facilities have been analyzed which increase livelihood opportunities for any household depend on the eco tourism. Secondary data and very few primary data gathered through observations, using of different web sites, magazines, e-books, theses and scientific reports. Data gathered through archival records and interviews and direct observation.

### **Concept and definition of Eco- tourism**

What is Eco-tourism? To answer that question we should look at the meaning of the word Eco tourism first. Eco derives from the Greek word oikos, loosely translating as habitat, and is an abbreviation of the term ecology. The word tourism developed from the Hebrew word Tora, which means to study, learn or search. On this basis, many organization and researchers have tried to define Eco-tourism, but little consensus has been reached. This is mainly due to the many forms in which Eco-tourism activities are offered by a large and wide variety of operators.

Tourism has become one of the major cultural and economic forces in the world today. A very recent but widely hailed tourism alternative known as eco-tourism, is a potential instrument for rural economic development, environmental natural heritage conservation. The researchers have begun to examine how local people can get direct benefit from tourism. "In the 1980s, alternative forms of tourism began interest of governments, communities and scholars alike. These were given a raft of names nature tourism, soft tourism, responsible tourism, green tourism, eco-tourism, but all were seen as alternatives to mass tourism. Among these various labels, the term 'eco-tourism' has become prominent, though again consistent definition is by no means found, even among scholars. Most definitions do, however, incorporate concepts associated with sustainable development." For example, in sustainable development: exploring the contradictions'. Radcliff (1987) attempted to integrate economic development with ecological sustainability, and his work served as a conceptual basis for eco-tourism researchers. A lot of scholars now agree that ecotourism should require a two-way link between itself and environmental conservation. (Valentine 1993) and (Cater 1994). As our understanding increases of the close relationships between environmental conservation and local people, researchers are calling on eco-tourism to incorporate economic development as a fundamental element of conservation. West and Breeching (1991, p-392) Much has been written about eco-tourism, but there is little consensus about its meaning, due to the many forms in which eco-tourism activities are offered by a large and wide variety of operators and practiced by an even larger array of tourists. Nature tourism is based directly on the use of natural resources in a relatively underdeveloped state, including scenery, topography, water features, vegetation and wildlife.

BAOBAB – Alternative Roots to Travel defines Eco-tourism as a form of tourism containing as many of the following ingredients as possible:

- 1) Nature-based, with the main motivation for traveling the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas.
- 2) Supporting the protection of natural areas by generating economic benefits for host communities.
- 3) Providing alternative employment and income opportunities for local communities and increasing awareness towards the conservation of natural and cultural assets.
- 4) Minimizing the negative impacts upon the natural and socio-cultural environment including educational and interpretation features enhancing environmental awareness.
- 5) Organized for small groups of interested people.

### **Eco tourism in Bangladesh**

The concept ecotourism has recently gained importance and attention in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a country filled with natural beauty, and magnificent creatures. There are many hills, valleys, forests, natural stream, gardens, beaches, lakes and rivers in Bangladesh. So, ecotourism in Bangladesh is ideal. Although this is still a relatively new form of tourism in Bangladesh, Eco tourism is on the rise and extensive efforts are being made to promote it in the country. Eco tourism in Bangladesh is increasing in popularity as more people come to appreciate the landscapes, unique animal life and fascinating plants of the country.

### **The characteristics according to World Tourism Organization**

Characteristics can be summarized as follows, by the World Tourism Organization (WTO):

- i) All nature-based forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas.
- ii) It contains educational and interpretation features.

- iii) It is generally, but not exclusively organized for small groups by specialized and small, locally owned businesses. Foreign operators of varying sizes also organize, operate and I or market ceo-tourism tours generally for small groups.
- iv) It minimizes negative impacts upon the natural and socio cultural environment.
- v) It supports the protection of natural areas by
- vi) Generating economic benefits for host communities, organizations and authorities managing natural areas with conservation purposes.
- vii) Increasing awareness towards the conservation of natural and cultural assets, both among locals and tourists.
- viii) Providing alternative employment and income opportune tics for local communities.

#### **Other characteristics**

There are some other characteristics of ecotourism. A good ecotourism spot always maintains some specific characteristics which are followed:

- 1) Providing information to the visitors about culture and environment
- 2) Offering briefing to the tourists about socio economic environment
- 3) Offering tourist guides
- 4) Offering opportunity to meet with local communities
- 5) Understanding of local people's daily life and traditions
- 6) Providing opportunity for contributions to local NGOs
- 7) Ensuring that all park entry fees are paid in full
- 8) Offering site sensitive accommodations

(Source: Eco tourism: principles, practices and policy for sustainability-by Megan Epler Wood. First edition-2002 page no.23)

#### **The principles of Eco-tourism**

According to Wight (1994) the principles of eco-tourism have been defined as follows;

- i) It should not degrade the resource and should be developed in an environmentally sound manner.
- ii) It should provide long-term benefits to the resource, to the local community and industry.
- iii) It should involve education among all parties, local corn mutinies, government, non-government organizations, industry and tourists (before, during and after the trip) it should provide first-hand, participatory and enlightening experiences.
- iv) It should encourage all-parts recognition of the intrinsic value of resources
- v) It should involve acceptance of the resource in its own terms, and in recognition of its limits, which involve supply-oriented management.
- vi) It should promote understanding and involve partnerships between many players, which could involve government, non-governmental organizations industries, scientists and locals. (Both before and during operations)
- vii) It should promote moral and ethical responsibilities and behavior towards the natural and cultural environment by all players.

#### **History of Sitakunda**

Like other places of Bangladesh Sitakunda, widely known to be a gateway of country's largest commercial hub Chittagong, has a strong historical background which highlights the blessings of nature with scenic beauty, favoring huge potentialities of this region for trade and commerce. In fact, Sitakunda is one of the oldest sites of human habituation in Bangladesh. It is also the home of the country's first eco-park, as well as alternative energy projects, specially wind energy and geothermal power. The legends of the area state the sage Bhargava created a pond (Kunda ) for Sita Devi to bathe in when her husband Lord Ramchandra visited during his exile in the forests. Sitakunda derived its name from this incident. Sitakunda was almost ruled alternatively by various Buddhist rulers of Myanmar in the east and Muslims rulers of Bengal in the west. The eastern rulers originated from the Kingdom of Arakan, the Mrauk U dynasty, Arakanese pirates

and the Pagan Kingdom. The western rulers came from the Sultanate of Bengal and Mughal state of Suba Bangala. European rule of Sitakunda was heralded by Portuguese privateers in 16th and 17th centuries, who ruled together with the pirates, and the British Raj in 18th and 19th centuries, which unified Sitakunda into the rest of the Chittagong District.

During the 6th and 7th centuries CE, the Chittagong region was ruled by the Kingdom of Arakan. In the next century, it was briefly ruled by Dharmapala of the Pala Empire. The area was conquered in 1340 by Sultan Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah of Sonargaon, who founded the first dynasty of the Sultanate of Bengal. When Sultan Ghiyasuddin Mahmud Shah of the last dynasty of the Sultanate of Bengal was defeated in 1538 by Sher Shah Suri of the Sur Dynasty, the Arakanese captured the region again. Batsauphyu ( reign: 1459-1482 ) of the Mrauk U dynasty took advantage of the weakness of Sultan Barbak Shah of Bengal to lead the invasion. In this period, Keyakchu ( or Chandrajyoti ), a prince of Arakan, established a monastery in Sitakunda. Along with the rest of Bengal, Sitakunda came under the rule of the British East India Company after the company's defeat of the Nawab of Bengal at the Battle of Plassey in 1757. Rapid growth in the Bengali population since then resulted in an exodus of non-Bengali people from Sitakunda and its vicinity to the Chittagong Hill Tracts. During the Ardhodaya Yog movement, a part of the Swadeshi Indian independence movement, the governance of Sitakunda was briefly in the hands of Indian nationalists when, in February 1908, they took over the central government in Kolkata. In 1910, Indian Petroleum Prospecting Company drilled here for hydrocarbon exploration, the first such activity in East Bengal. In 1914, the first onshore wildcat well in Bangladesh was drilled at Sitakunda anticline to a depth of 762 metres (2,500 ft). After the Indian Rebellion of 1857, the British colonial government (British Raj) replaced the governance of the East India Company. When the British withdrew in 1947, after creating the independent states of India and Pakistan, Sitakunda became a part of East Pakistan. The first potential for a ship breaking industry appeared in 1964 when Chittagong Steel House started scrapping MD Alpince, a 20,000 metric tons Greek ship that had been accidentally beached near Fouzdarhat by a tidal bore four years earlier. During the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971, Sitakunda was part of sector two. The ship breaking industry began in earnest in 1974 when Karnafully Metal Works started scrapping Al Abbas, a Pakistani ship damaged in 1971. The industry flourished in the 1980s. As of 2007, Sitakunda had overtaken the ship breaking industries of India and Pakistan to become the largest in the world ([http://sitakundabd.com/index2.php?pg\\_id=history](http://sitakundabd.com/index2.php?pg_id=history)).

#### **Background of Sitakunda Eco Park**

The first eco-park in Bangladesh, along with a botanical garden, was established in 2001 under a five-year (2000–2004) development project on 1,996 acres of Chandranath Hills at a cost of Tk 3.57 crore in Sitakunda. The eco-park was established to facilitate biodiversity conservation, natural regeneration, new plantations and infrastructure development, as well as promoting nature-based tourism to generate income. But, it is claimed that "ignoring the dependence of local people on park resources created conflicts between local communities and the park authority" and "prohibition on the extraction of forest products from the park make the livelihoods of surrounding villagers vulnerable". Sitakunda Eco Park is situated 35 km northern side of Chittagong city and eastern side of Dhaka- Chittagong trunk road. It has given the status of eco-park by government of Bangladesh since last decade. The size of Sitakunda Eco Park is approximately 9.71 sq km represents the natural environment. It covers the area of 800 hectares (1996 acres) of mainly hilly and land area with two sub division: One is 1000 acres of area as Botanical Garden and another is 996 acres area considered as Eco- Park.

#### **Eco tourism at Sitakunda Hill**

An effective conservation strategy for a forest could turn the local poor from intruders into its keepers by making them stakeholders in the earning opportunities that conservation provides. Sitakunda Eco Park is a great tourist attraction and has seen a surge in the number of visitors in recent years. Tourism could potentially act as a vehicle for conservation by providing new livelihood Ecopark a recreational park established in any natural habitat that does not disturb or affect biodiversity or the community of that area. The concept of ecopark is of recent origin. The objective of establishment of an ecopark is for the recreation of visiting people from home and abroad, as well as creating a centre for the dissemination of knowledge to people of all age groups about the habits and habitats of the plant and animal populations

living there, and at the same time creating awareness about the need of conservation of biodiversity. Such ecoparks have been established in different countries in recent years to attract people for tourism, education, and research. Recently, Bangladesh Government has taken initiative to establish ecoparks at different places of the country. The first ecopark has been inaugurated at Chandranath Hill and surrounding areas, located in Sitakunda upazila of Chittagong. This project was initiated in 1999-2000 and is expected to be completed by the year 2004. The place is rich with tropical evergreen and semi-evergreen forest flora and herbs, shrubs, creepers and climbers of diversified habits. Some threatened plant species have been reported from this place and surrounding area. Of these, three natural Gymnospermous tree species, namely, *Podocarpous nerifolia*, and species of *Gnetum* and *Cycas* grow in the hills and nearby hilly streams. In the vicinity of the Chandranath hill is the famous temple of the Hindu Community. There is a hot water fountain near the hill. From the hilltop, part of the coast of the Bay of Bengal can be seen. Two other ecoparks are to be established in the Madhabkunda and Muraichara forest areas located respectively in Kulaura and Baralekha upazilas of Maulvi Bazar district. These locations are rich with natural evergreen and semi-evergreen tree species along with plantation forests. According to reports from forest department sources, Madhabkunda Ecopark will cover an area of 654.42 acres of land including about 400 acres of reserve forest. A section of KHASIA tribe lives in the forest villages of this area and is engaged in some agro-economic activities in the forestland. People of this tribal community traditionally grow betel vine, BETEL NUT, cashew nut, PINEAPPLE, LEMON, etc for their livelihood. A natural waterfall is also located in this area. A Safari park is being developed since 1998-99 in the Dulahazra forest area of Cox's Bazar district. To retain the natural beauty and conserve biodiversity in and around Sitapahar forest area, near the famous hydroelectric dam of Kaptai, another National Park similar to that of the Madhupur Sal forest is being developed since 1999. Another ecopark site is being developed in the Sameshchura Sal forest of Sherpur district. Recently, the Government of Bangladesh has started developing st martin's island as an ecopark with an aim to promote tourism .([http://banglapedia .search .com.bd/HT/E\\_0019.htm](http://banglapedia .search .com.bd/HT/E_0019.htm)).

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The establishment of Sitakunda Eco Park can improve local communities and meet the demands from the thrust of local and foreign tourists. But it needs further refinement of its housing facilities, security, amusement facilities, well equipped transportation, extension of areas etc. Conclusions with recommendations have drawn from my examination of the household in the Sitakunda eco-park by the following way.

- Small numbers of household currently participate in ecotourism sector in Bangladesh. There is a small scope for increasing local participation through tourism.
- There is lack of accommodation facilities so there need to be establishing hotel and motel with improvement in accommodation visitor can grow in number and the scope for local participation can increase.
- Household who do participate in the tourism sector have very little in term of landholding and literacy. Further more ecotourism facilities will improve the livelihood status of household who directly participate in this sector.
- The number of local jobs will be created from ecotourism such as shopkeepers, hotel & restaurants owners, transportations, guides, daily labors, etc.

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