Tourism for Mountain Community Development in Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT
Tourism is becoming rising industry in Bangladesh to both the public and private sectors for its importance as business, socio-economic enhancement, environmental protection and poverty alleviation tool. Tourism has used as socio-economic, cultural and development tool for communities in many countries. Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) consists of three districts of southeast part of Bangladesh namely Khagrachari, Rangamati, and Bandarban. This region covers 10% of total land area in Bangladesh. The CHT is full of natural resources like forest areas, rivers, lakes, water bodies, hills, cliffs, flora and fauna. These attractions can make CHT a popular tourists’ destination to the visitors. The present study examines the possible impacts and potentials of tourism for mountain community development in Chittagong Hill Tracts. The study also identifies problems and necessary recommendations for tourism development in this area for communities development. Present study is a descriptive research initiative uses empirical data and literature based on extensive search from various sources. The theoretical framework of this study reveals that government role, local communities’ participation, private sector investment and tourists’ intention are influencing tourism development in study area. Moreover, tourism development in CHT area can ensure economic, social and environmental benefits for local communities. The main potentials of tourism development in this area are; geographical diversity, conservation education, policy and international support and local people involvement. The study identifies some problems such as lack of awareness and basic facilities, negative impacts and insufficient attention are remaining in CHT. The study recommended several steps- create awareness, infrastructure facilities, encourage private investment, building positive image, local people involvement and develop local spots for tourism development in CHT. Finally, tourism development in CHT will create local well-beings as well as foreign exchange earning opportunities for Bangladesh.

INTRODUCTION
Tourism is a promoting and growing industry in Bangladesh today. This is becoming rising industry to both the public and private sectors for its importance as business, socio-economic enhancement, environmental protection and poverty alleviation tool. The tourism industry in Bangladesh has great potentials as foreign exchange earner and provider of job opportunities with the resultant of multiplier effect on the country’s economy as a whole. But the country has failed to use its tourism potential due to lack of proper initiatives and entrepreneurship steps from public and private sectors (Star, 2006). Bangladesh has rich cultural tradition, natural beauty, beaches, forests, lakes, hills, wild lives, archaeological attractions, monuments, handicrafts, sanctuaries, religious festivals, cultural heritage, tribal culture and architecture, incredible greenery, mighty rivers and attractive river cruises, sunny beaches, colorful tribal life and attractive cultural functions that offer great tourist attractions (Haque, 2005). These above mentioned facts and features can make Bangladesh a popular tourists’ destination in the world.

Tourism has used as socio-economic, cultural and development tool for indigenous communities in many countries. Cohen (2001) indicated that tourism has developed political, economic and cultural systems of indigenous people in tribal areas of Northern Thailand. Hampton (2005) found that indigenous communities
participate in decision making process of tourism industry for their empowerment and ensuring benefits. 

Tourism has ensured multiple benefits such as cultural, socio-economic and political gains for indigenous communities in Taiwan (Hipwell, 2007). Tourism development offers economic opportunities, conservation education and several projects such as building bridges, health posts, schools and safe drinking water in mountain communities of Nepal (Nepal, 2000). Dyer et al. (2003) identified the tourism benefits for indigenous communities in Australia. They found that tourism ensured employment opportunities, working together with indigenous communities, increased cross-cultural understanding and improved material welfare. Tao and Wall (2009) examined the effect of tourism to secure the livelihoods of local people on Cau indigenous community in Shanmei, Taiwan. The study revealed that tourism maintained links with agriculture and promotes agriculture and culture products for increasing revenue to give economic benefit for local communities. Moreover, tourism preserves and uses local natural resources and indigenous culture, change life style and provide new livelihood options for local people.

Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) consists of three districts of southeast part of Bangladesh namely Khagrachari, Rangamati, and Bandarban. This area is only hilly area in Bangladesh covers 13,295 square kilometers and border with India and Myanmar. This is situated between 21°25’ and 23°45’ north latitudes and between 91°45’ and 92°50’ east longitudes. This region covers 10% of total land area in Bangladesh. According to 2011 provisional census, population of this area is 1.5 million which 1% of total population in Bangladesh. About 50% of the populations are tribal people and followers of Buddhism. There are 11 indigenous ethnic communities are living in this region. They are: Bawn/Bawm, Chak, Chakma, Khyang, Khumi, Lushei/Lushai, Marma (Maghs), Mrus/Mro (Moorangs), Pangkhua/Pankhua, Tangchangya, and Tipperas (Tipras). This area has a low population density with 100 people per square kilometer (CHTDF, 2009). The climate is subtropical, with a mean monthly maximum temperature ranging from 25 to 34°C; the annual average rainfall ranges between 2032 and 3910 mm, 80% of which occurs during the period of May–September (Thapa and Rasul, 2006). The CHT is full of natural resources like forest areas, mountains, rivers, lakes, water bodies, hills, cliffs, flora and fauna. There are two natural lakes- Rainkhiangkine and bagakine and one artificial lake-kaptai lake are situated in this region. The fauna mainly includes monkey, fox, jungle cat, fishing cat, wild boar, land turtle, king cobra, reticulated python, rat snake and other non-poisonous snakes. More than 60 families of birds are found in this area. The present study examines the possible impacts and potentials of tourism for mountain community development in Chittagong Hill Tracts. The study also identifies problems and necessary recommendations for tourism development in this area for communalities development.

Methodology:

Present study is a descriptive research initiative uses empirical data and literature based on extensive search from various sources. Secondary materials, like reports, tourism statistics of Bangladesh, research articles, daily news papers, seminar papers were used in this study. Furthermore, the study develop theoretical framework for tourism development in CHT for ensuring community benefits.

Theoretical Framework:

Tourism development is an integrated approach for any area. Government active role, local communities’ participation, private sector investment and tourists’ intention are influencing tourism development in study area. Local communities are participating in planning, decision making, benefit sharing, resource conservation and keeping social harmony for tourism development (Tosun, 2000; Ryan and Aicken, 2005).
Government can play role through implementing rules and policies, resource management, infrastructure and sustainable development, effective marketing and branding (Simpson, 2008) and maintain security in CHT area. The private entrepreneurs can invest in CHT for tour operating, accommodation development, tour guides and small and medium business enterprises (Yaman and Mohd, 2004; Shuib et al., 2008). The tourists also contribute for tourism development in CHT through their positive intention for enhancing local economy, responsible visit and willingness to pay for resource and conservation development (Gursoy et al. 2007). Moreover, tourism development in CHT area can ensure economic, social and environmental benefits for local communities. In economically, tourism development creates income generation, employment; reduce poverty and opportunity for business and local goods selling (Archer and Cooper, 1998; Lindberg, 2001). Tourism development in CHT ensures social benefits such as social balance, migration, community development, exchange culture and develop life style and attitude of local people (Wearing and Neil, 1999). In environmentally, tourism development can enhance environmental well-beings such as biodiversity conservation, ensure sustainable agriculture and water security, reduce soil erosion, and effective management for resource and ecosystem (Zhong et al., 2011).

Discussion:

Table-1 represents the tourist arrivals in Bangladesh. The scenario shows that tourist arrivals in Bangladesh are increasing year by year and growth rate also showing positive trend.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tourist arrivals</th>
<th>Year-to-year growth rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>244509</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>28711270</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>312575</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>343590</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>367410</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>Attractions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rangamati</td>
<td>Beautiful landscape, sweet water lake, colorful bribes, tribal museum, hanging bridge, homespun textile products, ivory jewellery, tribal people, numerous tribal life fishing, hiking, bathing and enjoying nature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandarban</td>
<td>Numerous mountains and hills, affordable resorts, jungle tracking, tribal people, numerous tribal life fishing, hiking, bathing and enjoying nature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khagrachari</td>
<td>Rain forests, wide variety of birds and animals, tribal lifestyle of Chakmas, Alutila hill, 100 meters long dark Cave at Alutila hill, seeking nature and beautiful landscape.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHT are full of tourism attractions such as mountains, landscapes, rain forest, jungle tracking activities, water bodies, lakes, tribal life style, tribal textile and handicraft products (Table-2). All of these attractions are favorable to the tourists.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poverty level</th>
<th>Bangladesh average</th>
<th>Mountain average</th>
<th>Urban Mountain</th>
<th>Rural mountain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population below the poverty line</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population below the food poverty line</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population below the non-food poverty line</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table-3 highlights the poverty level in CHT area. The poverty level of this area is remaining in higher position rather than average condition of Bangladesh. In mountain area, poverty level is higher in rural areas compare to urban areas. This is indicating that the population of CHT area is facing poverty due to unemployment and alternative source for their livelihoods security.

Chittagong Hill Tracts has great potential for attracting tourists in this area. The main potentials of tourism development in this area are as follows;

Geographical diversity: Chittagong hill tract geographical diversity provides it fairly rich in flora and fauna. There are many of identified plants and species of which sizable number are flowering plants over thousand birds, thousands of insects, hundreds of amphibians and reptiles, many worms and several hundred mammals found in Chittagong hill tract.

Conservation education: The co-existence of man and nature can best be studied in Chittagong hill tract, which provides a great conservation and educational experience to the visitor. This area also offer a variety of nature observation such as open-air jeeps, elephants, boats, watch tower and walking in the hilly and forest parts of this region.

Policy support: The Government of Bangladesh announced a National Tourism Policy in 1992. The policy acts as a guideline for the overall development of the tourism industry in the country as well as CHT. Public and private sectors could play their respective roles for its promotion, earning of foreign exchange and creation of job opportunities for the guidelines of tourism policies.

International support: A strategic Master Plan has been formulated by World Tourism Organization with the assistance of UNDP for integrated development of tourism in the country. Steps have been taken to develop tourism infrastructure in phases as per the recommendations of the Master Plan, which include creation of tourism facilities at various places. Therefore, both public and private sectors have concerted for necessary efforts to development and utilization of the potentials of the industry.

Local people involvement: Local communities’ active participation is necessary for tourism development in any areas. In CHT, local people have cultural heritage and traditions, cultural integrity and traditional hospitality. All of these elements are suitable for tourism development in this area. So, tourism development in CHT can ensure active participation of local people and create economic opportunities for them.

In spite of potentialities, there are some problems also remaining in CHT for tourism development. The major problems are as follows;

Lack of awareness: Tourism development can ensure socio-economic benefits for local people in CHT. But most of the local people have not adequate knowledge about tourism development in this region.

Lack of basic facilities: The CHT has not yet developed basic facilities of tourism like accommodation, transportation and safety, which are key factors in maintaining the tourism industry in this area.
Negative impacts: Although tourism developments ensure the benefits for local communities, but it is not free from negative impacts. Imbalance and improper tourism development are creating deforestation and threaten in biodiversity of CHT which hamper in local ecosystem and conservation activities.

Insufficient attention: For development of tourism industry and its marketing has found to give insufficient attention to the possible significance of cultural and natural heritage in CHT. Many forests, mountain areas, biodiversity and other eco-systems are not utilized as tourist attraction in CHT.

Tourism is now one of the largest industries of the world. There are needed to take proper steps that may help to minimize the problems leading to development of tourism for betterment in the CHT. The recommendations are as follows:

Create awareness: It is necessary to create awareness among public authorities and the private sector regarding tourism development to contribute the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, which will help the improvement of standard of living of the local people in CHT.

Infrastructure facilities: The government should be arranged easy and cheaper visa facilities, safe water, food and security, emergency managements, availability of basic amenities and communication for tourists. Therefore, infrastructure development in CHT is most required element for expansion of tourism facilities to the tourists. Furthermore, airlines, accommodation and recreation facilities are also improved to attract the tourists.

Encourage private investment: Government can encourage private entrepreneurs to invest in tourism projects in CHT. Moreover, government has to be provided necessary facilities and infrastructures to the private entrepreneurs for implementation of development projects.

Building positive image: Every country has developed various slogans and theme to campaign and develop positive image for their tourism activities in home and abroad. Bangladesh should increased proper marketing and promotion for tourism destinations and products of CHT in international and domestic markets.

Local people involvement: The success of tourism development in CHT depends on local communities’ involvement in several activities. The governments and authorities can be facilitated local people for participating in tourism related activities such as employment, business, tour guides, accommodation, decision making, planning, benefit sharing and promotion.

Develop local spots: There may be developed new tourist spots in CHT using the local resources and attractions. Several issues such as suitable location, safety, infrastructure, budgetary allocation and local people positive intention must be consider for developing these tourist spots.

Conclusion:

CHT has great potentials for growth of tourism. Its geographical location down the highest mountain peak Everest has made this area subject of interest of people in the world. This area’s ecological themes, landscape aspects and natural attractions are suitable for tourism development. Three hill districts are very attracting to local and foreign tourist for tourism friendly situation. If tourism facilities developed in CHT, it will ensure benefits of indigenous communities in terms of social, economic and environmentally. So, tourism development in CHT will create local well-beings as well as foreign exchange earning opportunities for Bangladesh.

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REFERENCES


