

Potentials of Community Based Tourism Development: A Study on Maheshkhali, Bangladesh

Jameni Javed Suchana & Manzuma Sharmin Munne

Abstract:

Years after years, Community Based Tourism (CBT) has been used as a response to the negative impacts of the international mass tourism development that is traced back in 1970's. It ascertains the participation of small rural communities and conservation of nature and local culture. Despite growing studies on the role of Community Based Tourism, a few researches has been conducted on developing community-based tourism in Maheshkhali, an upazila of Cox's Bazar District in the division of Chittagong, Bangladesh. This paper reviews how CBT development in Maheshkhali can assure economic development of local people, preserve tradition and culture of Rakhains and maintain environmental balance. This study is a descriptive research drawing on empirical data and literatures from different sources. To review the existing literature, desk based research method has been followed. Again, secondary data has been analyzed theoretically. Further, informal interview method was followed to discuss with locals, tourists, and experts of tourism industry. This study finds out that there is a huge scope of developing CBT in Maheshkhali and it is feasible if active participation is ensured of all stakeholders. With the limitations of reliable data and unavailability, this paper tries to fulfill an identified need to study how CBT development can preserve culture and tradition of a community, generate revenue and protect environment in any other island, hills or area of Bangladesh. This research can help relevant stakeholders to better understand the necessity of developing CBT in Maheshkhali to ensure sustainability.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a resourceful industry in the form of the evergreen natural reserves around the world along with the treasure of man-made attractions. The natural resources include the greeneries, mountains, wild animals, seas, rivers, beaches, sands and sceneries. The manmade resources include culture and tradition with the people and civilization, color and texture, rhythm of human lifestyle, food habit and so on. With the development of CBT, tourism industry has re-shaped the resources distribution among people of different communities through the transfer of money from the rich tourists to the community people and stakeholders of the industry. Thus, CBT can ensure equity of income distribution. CBT helps to make awareness among the communities about environmental impacts and thus helps protect the environmental of the rural areas. It can also revitalize the economic viability and social enrichment with the consideration of the preservation of environment and the sustainability. It also enriches the tastes of the culture, tradition, heritage and experiences of life of both tourists and different communities. Bolwell and Weinz (2008) mentioned that CBT could be an effective tool for poverty reduction in the community. It can circulate benefits and overcome hindrances of tourism in community. Therefore, the aim of this study is to find out the scope of developing CBT in Maheshkhali to ensure economic development of local people, preserve tradition and culture of Rakhains and maintain environmental balance. The result of the study is likely to make significant contributions to the policy making and practice by relevant stakeholders.

1.1 STUDY AREA

Maheshkhali Island is the main island of Maheshkhali Upazila, in the Cox's Bazar District of Bangladesh. It is the only Mountainous Island and the first Digital Island in Bangladesh with the essence of natural beauty of seas, sands, mountains, hills and landscapes. This land is blessed with the geographical intensity and natural beauty. The culture of Rakhains along with the locals, religious ascent of Adinath Temple, Buddhist temples and antique taste of nature can assist developing CBT in Maheshkhali.

2. RELEVANT LITERATURE

2.1 Definition of CBT:

Community Based Tourism (CBT) is linked to tangible and intangible tourism resources, tourists and community for sharing experience of the community, providing tourism services and developing community through individual, groups and organizations (Aref, 2011). It is a type of tourism where residents manage their tourism supplies and provide those to tourists (Polnyotee and Thadaniti, 2015). CBT is a win-win situation if the visitor-host participation can be ensured by dint of the cultural enrichment, social understanding and involvement in different tourism based activities (Wimalaratana and Silva, 2009). It can recreate ample opportunities for the establishment of the tourism industry on the basis of local culture, heritage and environment (Murphy and Murphy, 2004). In 2015, Polnyotee and Thadaniti published a paper in which they described how CBT as the "Holistic Strategy" could ensure the sustainability of any tourist destination through economically, socially, politically, culturally and environmentally in Patong Beach, Phuket, Thailand.

2.2 Significance of CBT:

CBT ensures community empowerment and resource mobilization and creates employment and revenue (Giampiccoli and Kalis, 2012). Again, employment generation can be ignited as an important impact of economy, society and political empowerment in the community (Vajirakchom, 2011). CBT tends to the economic development of the localities from remote, rural, people of small towns, poor, marginalized, ethnic minority (Goodwin and Santilli, 2009;

Micheal, 2009; Islam, 2015). For instance, Pro-poor tourism (PPT) in the form of CBT can minimize the poverty level of the rural areas (Goodwin, 2008) and ensure women empowerment as a home based activity (Islam, 2015). CBT creates a platform of the community participation in the planning and decision-making process of utilizing natural resources and cultural elements for the employment generation and poverty alleviation (López-Guzmán, Sánchez-Cañizares and Pavón, 2011; Chili and Xulu, 2015). However, the life and culture of host community must be focused as the tourism product to provide experience of the cultural authenticity, redeem social value and environment conservation in that community (Boonratana, 2010). Moreover, CBT bridges the community development and regional development through the participation of community and local leadership of different stakeholders (Satarat, 2010; Manu and Kuuder, 2012; Nuzhar, 2016). CBT ventures can improve the effectiveness of community capacity building through active participation of community, effervescent leadership, sustainable approaches along with policy and legislation (Manyara and Jones, 2007).

2.3 Potentials of CBT in Bangladesh:

There are some of the countries in the world like Indonesia, Philippines, Nepal, Vietnam, Malaysia, Laos, Thailand, Iran, Croatia, Uganda, Kenya, Jamaica, Peru, where CBT is successfully managed and functioned. Similarly, CBT has already been in practice in the northern part of Bangladesh. Paharpur, Dinajpur, Sonargaon, Netrokona and Tangail are under the operation of developing CBT with the supervision of Bangladesh Tourism Board since 2016. In addition, Putia, Manikgonj and Srimangol are also under the operation of CBT development since 2017. CBT can be successfully adopted in Bandarban, Sundarbans, Cox's Bazar, Kuakata, Sylhet, Paharpur, Mainamoti, Bagerhat and other places known for special handicrafts or craftsmanship. CBT can be an effective tool to preserve nature and wild life and local culture of Sundarban (Haque et al, 2016) with the help of community engagement. CBT in Chittagong Hill Tracts (Rangamati, Bandarban, Khagrachori) offers cultural diversity, traditional lifestyles and cultures of ethnic communities. As a result, CBT can be in forms of agro tourism, rural tourism, village tourism or ethnic tourism (Chakma, unknown). Community Based Ecotourism in Sundarbans has the potentials for earning revenue from sale of local handicrafts, cultural shows, amusements and tour guidance. Local people are directly and indirectly linked to tourism activities. Nature based CBT in Sundarban has the potential to support poor village people, to provide home stay services, sale handicrafts, conserve the nature and generate income. Contributions of CBT in Horinghata, Borguna are employment generation, better standard of living and women empowerment through sale of organic food, cultural programs, hunting deer and handicraft business (Islam, 2015). But it is a matter of disappointment that having numerous tourism resources and tourism potential in Maheshkhali, there is no significant research on adopting CBT and CBT development in Maheshkhali. This study has been conducted to fulfill that gap.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is a descriptive research and based on primary and secondary data. Expert opinion of tourism industry has been considered for the reliability of the study. For the understanding of CBT development in Maheshkahli, survey using purposive sampling technique was conducted for collecting quantitative and qualitative data. A total number of 60 respondents (20 experts, 20 local people and 20 tourists) were interviewed for the study. Closed-Ended Questionnaires in both English and Bangla languages were prepared using 5 points Likert-Scale model for the experts, tourists and local people. All questions in the questionnaires were related to demographic, economic, environmental and social issues of Maheshkhali and

also related to potentials of tourism and other aspects of CBT development in Maheshkhali. Primary data was collected from survey (direct and phone call) in between 3 August, 2017 to 10 September, 2017. A number of 20 tourism experts of government organizations (Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, Bangladesh Tourism Board, and Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism), hotels, travel agencies, tour operators and handicrafts sellers participated in survey through direct interview. A number of 20 (12 Male and 8 Female) local people from Maheshkhali and Cox's Bazar were also interviewed with a different set of questionnaire in Bangla. A number of 20 tourists (12 domestic and 8 international) from Maheshkhali and Cox's Bazar were interviewed using both English and Bangla questionnaires. Secondary data was collected from different sources like Google Scholar, Scopus journal, Academia, etc. (using keywords). A number of 26 available articles were reviewed by using keywords to find out core information related to this paper. These articles were also reviewed to develop the theoretical framework of the article. Necessary statistical tools were used to analyze the collected information. This study has the limitation due to unavailability of the data of tourist arrival and tourist receipt in Maheshkhali.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

CBT development in Maheshkhali can be helpful to ensure economic development, to preserve ethnic tradition and culture and to protect environment. CBT can play a crucial role in tourism industry of Bangladesh through ensuring community involvement and community participation in Maheshkhali.

4.1 Potentials of CBT Development in Maheshkhali

CBT is a new form of tourism in Maheshkhali. CBT development in Maheshkhali can be made in light of Cultures and Traditions of three religions namely Muslims, Hindus and Rakhains. Tourists visiting Cox's Bazar can also visit Maheshkhali very easily due to the short distance from Cox's Bazar. Tourists can stay with local people and experience their livelihoods. Tourists can find the differentiations of the cultures and traditions, religious values and festivals of Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists people in Maheshkhali. In addition, they can experience the lifestyle, culture, tradition, festival, and handloom of Rakhains also. Tourists can also pray in temples and pagoda with respect. On the contrary, they can get the archaeological overview of ancient Adinath Temple, Ananda Myitta Buddhist Temple and Pagoda. Thus, through CBT development in Maheshkhali, tradition, culture, language and food habits of Rakhains can be preserved from being exiled. Local people and Rakhains can earn more revenue by providing experiences of their livelihood, performing Rakhains cultural programs, doing religious programs, arranging local fairs, offering agro products, and selling handicrafts and clothing to the tourists directly. Tourists can enjoy the mountainous island, natural beauty and drive along with sea with the help of locals. CBT development in Maheshkhali can be a model for the exchange of cultures, traditions, values and norms among tourists and local people. Thus, CBT development in Maheshkhali can be innovative and productive not only for the revenue generation and poverty reduction but also for the preservation of our traditions and cultures to future generations. For all these to work positively, it requires to develop right kind of infrastructure development in Maheshkhali. Environment friendly infrastructure development will accordingly ensure the sustainability of CBT in Maheshkhali.

4.2 Economic Contribution of CBT Development at Maheshkhali

CBT assists community by the economic development and resource mobilization. CBT creates ample opportunities of employment and improve productivity in the community. The findings of the present study show respondents' deep concern for developing CBT in Maheshkhali.

CBT will be helpful to facilitate self-employment generation and to increase the local production and sale of local products like agro product, shrimp, dry fish, betel leaf and others if CBT is introduced. So, people would not switch their traditional business. From the survey it is found that locals were directly or indirectly serving to tourism like weaving cloths from handloom, selling handicraft or hold sole proprietorship. Experts stated that CBT would motivate local stakeholders for reasonable investments in Maheshkhali. In terms of the home-stay facilities, Rakhains showed their eagerness to provide facilities to the tourists that can preserve their culture and traditional lifestyle also.

4.3 Social Contribution of CBT Development at Maheshkhali

CBT offers experiential journey to tourists coming from different culture, religion, language and lifestyles. Social norms and values are distributed between guests and hosts simultaneously through CBT. Tradition and cultures can be shared and preserved among guests and hosts through CBT. Rakhains are living their livelihood with ethnic tradition and culture more than hundred years in Maheshkhali. Experts and local people were found optimistic about the positive effects of CBT development in Maheshkhali. Experts stated that through CBT, women involvement could be ensured to generate revenue from home stay. Tradition and culture could be preserved through CBT. However, some experts showed their concern regarding safety of local people and tourists might be in danger. They suspect that tourist presence might hinder rituals whereas others disagreed in this issue. Most of the tourists were found excited to learn about the concept of CBT and would like to experience life in Maheshkhali and to explore the taste in Bangladesh. As a whole, 60% tourists were completely satisfied with the services given by the locals whereas 40% were completely disagreeing about the services when they set out for day tour in Maheshkhali. Tourists stated that local people were very friendly during their trip. However, they said that they couldn't enjoy or get access to enjoy festival or religious functions easily and frequently. Some put focus on accessibility to Maheshkhali and were not satisfied with the cleanliness and hygieneness. However Rakhains were eager to participate in CBT development in Maheshkhali to protect their traditions.

4.4 Environmental Impact of CBT Development at Maheshkhali

CBT development can preserve environment. Beautification with greeneries and hygienic presentation to tourists can reduce the environmental pollution. CBT can provide an experience to revive mind and heart of tourists. CBT development in Maheshkhali can assist local people to maintain environmental purity through the beautification of surroundings, hygiene, tree plantation and agriculture. On the other hand, excessive tourist arrival, infrastructural development and waste disposal can pollute environment. Experts and local people shared their views about environmental impact for developing CBT in Maheshkhali. Experts were optimist about the preservation of environment through CBT. They said that Agro tourism could be developed through CBT and it is possible to introduce organic home stay facilities for tourists could preserve environmental beauty. However, some experts were concerned about the adverse environmental impact due to infrastructure development in Maheshkhali and environmental pollution by the tourists directly or indirectly. However, locals were very optimistic to develop CBT through actively participating in tourism development and providing authentic experience to tourists staying with them.

4.5 Problems of Developing CBT in Maheshkhali

CBT has both positive and negative sides. It helps employment and revenue generation of the local people. On the other hand, it also creates adverse impacts on the locality. Experts and local people stated some potential major problems for developing CBT in Maheshkhali.

Among these, there is a lack of systematic outlook of the policy planners for developing CBT in Maheshkhalhi. Absence of standard infrastructure and recreational facilities in the rural areas for tourists makes the experience dull. Even there is lack of arrangement of facilities during trip and so far the satisfaction level of tourists is not as good as perceived. Though tourists can enjoy natural beauty, sometimes they are not allowed to enjoy religious festivals of Rakhains and livelihood of local people. Moreover, language barrier hinders affiliation and communication among the guests and hosts as local people are not educated enough to communicate foreign tourists right now. Again, artists and performers of Rakhain cultural events are losing their interest due to adaptation to modern art and culture. Furthermore, it is not possible to develop CBT immediately in Maheshkhalhi overnight and get the benefit of it unless the community awareness is created regarding tourism development and their participation is not ensured.

4.6 Scope of developing CBT in Maheshkhalhi

CBT development in Maheshkhalhi can be feasible with the assistance of policy planners through effective planning for the infrastructure development and with the aid of all other stakeholders. The focus should be on the long-term benefit. It is very explicit that Maheshkhalhi is such an island where an experiential journey can be created in the middle of the sea, mountain and plain land by providing standard facilities of home-stay with accommodation, food and recreational activities. For this reason, local people need to be motivated through CBT awareness program to utilize their intangible resources to tourists and ensure economic development. Educated local people can also play an important role here through working as tour guide. Again, different Cultural groups in Maheshkhalhi can assist tourists to enjoy recreational events and festivals for example, Rakhain Festivals, which will help to preserve their traditional art and culture as well. Training program for local artisans can assist to preserve destination based tourist souvenir development. Financial support can encourage artisans to continue their traditional businesses.

5. CONCLUSION

Maheshkhalhi has plenty of tourist attractions. Tourists who come here do not miss traveling to experience the culture of Rakhain, Adinath Temple, Buddhist temples and antique taste of nature. These attractions are not the only reasons why people travel here. Other factors such as accommodation, security/safety, amenities and facilities are also important. This research suggest to develop a strategy for sustainable community based tourism in Maheshkhalhi that will be useful to retain, sustain, preserve and conserve existing resources for the future generation. Future research should focus on finding out the ways of developing community-based tourism in Maheshkhalhi. The present research found that there is a serious lack of community involvement, participation and understanding of the principle of community-based tourism development and management. Therefore, future research should focus on how to encourage stakeholders' participation in tourism development and management and how to ensure distribution of benefits equitability.

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