



Journal of Water and Land use Management
ISSN: 0973-9300, Volume 16, Issue 1

Sustainable livelihoods through rural tourism: A case Study of Majuli island, Assam

Krishna Kumar, Manjit Singh and Suresh Kumar Bandooni

Received: 20 October 2017
Reviewed and Accepted: 23 November 2017
Published: 04 January 2018

Abstract Rural tourism has the capability to generate large scale employment and provide livelihood options to a large population. India has huge potential for rural tourism in different segments of tourism like eco-tourism, adventure tourism, health tourism, farm tourism, nature base tourism, cultural tourism, religious tourism etc. Majuli, the first Island district of India, is the newest district of Assam and has great potentiality to rural tourism development. Agriculture had failed to provide livelihood security for the people of Riverine Island. Government initiated wage employment schemes also could not shown satisfactory result. Hence it has felt the necessity of alternative livelihood strategies for the people of the island. The present study has its general objective to explore the potentiality of rural tourism as a provider of livelihood security to the people of Majuli Island. The information regarding this study has been collected from both primary and secondary sources of data. The result show that every year, a large number of foreign and domestic tourists have come to the island. It has provided employment to the local residents in a diversified way in terms of rendering various services to the tourists. So tourism business may be an alternative livelihood for the rural poor's and will provide stable income.

Keywords Sustainable development; rural tourism; riverine island; rural economy

Krishna Kumar* (✉) ● Manjit Singh ● Suresh Kumar Bandooni***

**Shaheed Bhagat Singh (Evening) College, University of Delhi, Delhi*

***Miranda House, University of Delhi, Delhi*

✉krish24b@yahoo.com

Introduction

Rural tourism is a significant strategy for rural development by providing an alternative source of livelihood and large scale employment in the rural areas. Most of the countries of the world have recognized rural tourism as an important instrument for sustainable livelihood of the rural people. A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future (Department for International Development, 1999). In Assam 86 percent (population census 2011) of the population live in rural areas and more than 70 percent are dependent primarily on agriculture. But rural Assam has much to offer beyond agriculture. It has a great potentiality for different segments of tourism like eco-tourism, adventure tourism, health tourism, farm tourism, nature base tourism, cultural tourism, religious tourism etc. Majuli is the largest river island in the world and is located on the Brahmaputra River. It has great potentiality to rural tourism development and can provide livelihood security to the rural poor's.

Objectives

The present study has its general objective to explore the potentiality of rural tourism as a provider of livelihood security to the people of Majuli Island.

- The specific objectives of the study are to ascertain the trend and composition of tourist inflow into Majuli over the last five years.
- To highlight the various challenges faced by the tourist and providers of rural tourism services in the study area.
- To suggest ways for improvement of the impact of rural tourism as a perspective tool of rural development in Majuli.

Database and Methodology

The information regarding this study has been collected from both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data has been collected through field survey i.e. by taking personal interview of the people involved in this business and the tourist. The secondary sources of the data are published and unpublished sources like books, journals, reports, publications, unpublished doctoral thesis, tour and travel agencies of Majuli district and concerned web sites etc. Secondary

data from the Tour and Travel Agencies of Majuli has been used to get an overview of the trend and composition of tourist inflow into island.

Study Area

Majuli, the first Island district of India, is the newest district of Assam which was earlier the sub-division of Jorhat district of Assam. It had a total area of 1250 square kilometers, but having lost significantly to erosion, it now has an area of only 650 square kilometers (Devi, 2012). The accelerated rate of shrinkage in the size of island has severe impact on the socio-economic, demographic and cultural dimensions of the population. As per population census 2011, the total population of Majuli was about 167641 with a population density of 364 persons per sq.km. Agriculture is the main source of livelihood of the people of Majuli Island.

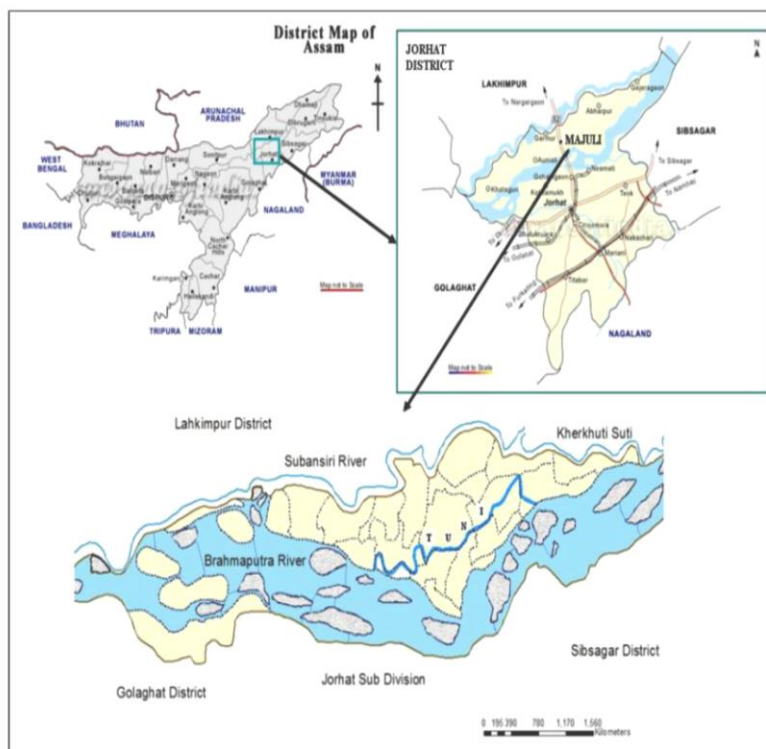


Figure 1 Location of the study area

Out of the total population, a number of 49973 comprising 29.81 percent of the total population constitute the total workforce of which 80.85 percent belongs to the farmers and 2.05 percent agricultural labour and another 17.1 percent populations were involved with tourism and other activities for their livelihood. But the agricultural productivity of the island is very poor due to heavy food visited to the island year after year. Agriculture had failed to provide livelihood security for the people of Riverine Island. Government initiated wage employment schemes also could not shown satisfactory result. Hence it has felt the necessity of alternative livelihood strategies for the people of the island.

Result and Discussion

Tourism and Livelihood Opportunities in Majuli

Rural Tourism has become an internationally recognised activity and has been considered by a greater portion of the world as a panacea for economic and social development of rural communities. It is also seen as real and sustainable support to the socio-economic problems in the rural areas and an important source of livelihood for the rural population (Tchetchik, Fleischer, & Fleischer, 2008; Doohyun et al., 2014; Ezeuduji, 2013a, 2013b, 2014). Globally, international bodies and national governments, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's), policy makers and institutions in the field of development see tourism as a viable tool for the development of rural areas. As a result, tourism has become the key word in rural development initiatives, in projects to alleviate poverty and in the conservation of cultural diversity of indigenous communities (Doohyun et al., 2014). Traditionally, rural communities relied on agriculture as a major economic base but Roberts and Hall (2001) note that these communities are likely to be incapable of sustaining themselves without a diverse economic base. Thus tourism and recreation have been viewed and adopted as integral components in the diversification of the rural economic base(see also Doohyun et al., 2014 and Ezeuduji, 2013a, 2013b, 2014). Unlike agrarian change, the concept of tourism in rural areas originates from the developed countries (Hall and Page, 2002). In developed countries, rural tourism is a favored means of regenerating the rural economy (Giampiccoli et al., 2013 and Ezeuduji, 2014) whilst in the developing countries it is seen as an option to diversify the rural economy in order to create a new perspective for rural populations and to reduce poverty and land abandonment (Sharpley, 2006).



Figure 2 (a) Sunset view from Majuli Island (b) Rich Biodiversity

There are huge potentials in Majuli for tourism activities. With a total area of 1250 sq. km, Majuli is the world's largest river island and it attracts tourists from all over the world. Mostly inhabited by Tribals, the culture of Majuli is unique and quite interesting and is one of the key reasons why people love this place so much. It is also called the cultural capital of Assam. Some of the important tourist attractions of Majuli are as follows:

Satras:- The Institution of Satra is a unique feature of Vaishnavism in Assam, founded by Sankardeva, the father of Assamese culture. The satras are not just monasteries, but centres of traditional performing arts.



Figure 3 (a) Dakshinpant Satra; (b) Garmur Satra; (c) Kamlabari Satra and (d) Auniati Satra

The songs and dances initiated by Shri. Sankaradeva, such as Borgeet, Bhatima, Jumora, Chali, Paalnaam, Noyua, Apsara, Satriya Krshna, etc. are taught and promoted here apart from numerous other crafts, of which mask-making is particularly significant. In 15th century the first Satra was founded in Majuli. Since then sixty five Satras have come up for the propagation of ethics and socio-cultural ideals.

However, at present there are only 31 sattras has been recognised by the Majuli Cultural Landscape Region Act, 2006. These sattras are the main attraction for the tourists due to their belief and rich customs.

- **Bird Viewing Places**:-There are a large number of “beels” (lake like wetlands) in Majuli which are the considered as the bird viewing places in Majuli.
- **Sunset** in the southern part of the island.
- **Satriya Nritya** at Uttar Kamalabari Sattra.
- **Mask Making** at Natun Chamaguri Sattra, **Pottery Culture** at Salmora and **Handloom Textile** at Jengraimukh are some of the famous tourist attraction points in Majuli.



Figure 4 (a) Hand-fan made by local man in Satra; (b) Beels

Current Challenges of the Tourism promotion in Majuli

Despite immense tourism potential that the region shows, it has not been able to cash in on the same failing even in the domestic market and one of the most important factors is the inadequacy of quality infrastructure. Even in the case of Majuli, the absence of quality infrastructure is one of the factors for overall development. However several reasons for this Inadequate infrastructure in terms of road links, extremely poor transport connectivity, lack of air and bus services, inadequate financial infrastructure, weak telecommunication infrastructure, etc. are its location and strong will of the government, which has restricted the growth of tourism in Majuli. Most of the places of tourist attraction are not by the road side, and approach roads are in bad condition. This is a strong discouraging factor,

which works against a good inflow of the tourist. Apart from the infrastructural bottleneck, inferior food quality, lack of well arranged package tour, poor service at the hotels and tourist guest houses, lack of facilities like good hotels and tourist lodges, affordable and reliable communication network, etc have been hampering the expected development and promotion of tourism in the region.



Figure 5 (a) Steamer (b) Ferry

Steamer and Ferry are the only mode of transportation to reach Majuli Islands for the commuters and tourist travelers and even the frequency of to and fro is very limited

Absence of well trained tourist guides is another reason which is not promoting its golden socio-cultural activities. Majuli virtually does not have any trained guides placed in important places of tourist attraction. Consequently, as the tourists arrive at such a place there is hardly anyone to satisfy the inquisitiveness of the tourists. The Department of Tourism initiated a programme to train tourist guides. The effort did not yield good result as most of the trainees left the job. Some of them found other means of livelihood while others found it to be less paying because of the poor inflow of the tourists to the region.

Lack of Coordination among different agencies of the government adds woes to the condition. There is a palpable lack of coordination among several agencies like Department of Tourism and Department of Archaeology in handling the demands of the tourists in places of both historic and religious importance. Besides the untrained human resources in terms of the tour operators, hoteliers, transporters, tourist guides, etc. the tourists doesn't get detailed information of the region which obviously is a barrier in the path of development of tourism industry in Majuli as tourists feels dejected because they takes lots of pain in reaching this UNESCO heritage. Thus despite abundance of natural beauty, the flow of incoming tourist has been marginal for the reasons of the lack of infrastructural and other related facilities in various tourist spots in the region

Discussion and Findings

Present Scenario of tourism in Majuli: Majuli has a great potentiality for different growing segments of tourism like Eco-tourism, Cultural Tourism, Agritourism and Religious Tourism etc. Every year, a large number of foreign and domestic tourists have come to the island. It has provided employment to the local residents in a diversified way in terms of rendering various services to the tourists. So tourism business may be an alternative livelihood for the rural poor's and will provide stable income. Majuli, the melting spot of tribes and communities like Ahoms, Kacharies, Brahmins, Kalitas, Konch Rajbongshis, Bonias, Koibatras, Nepalis, Kumars, Bengalis and Rajasthanis, etc. has been the cultural capital and the cradle of Assamese civilization for the past five hundred years.

Year	No. of Tourist Inflow		
	Domestic	Foreign	Total
2010-11	37897	6267	44164
2011-12	39947	6849	46796
2012-13	41963	7376	49339
2013-14	43732	7973	51705
2014-15	46768	8031	54799
2015-16	49215	9221	58436

The above table shows an increasing trend of both domestic and foreign tourist inflow into the Majuli Island over the last five years. The satras set up there, preserve antiques like weapons, utensils, jewellery and other items of cultural significance. Pottery is done in Majuli from beaten clay and burnt in driftwood fired kilns in the same mode as carried out by the people of the ancient Harrappan Civilisation. Sociologists have stressed on the preservation of these unique people, whose culture and dance forms are untouched by modernism. The handloom work of these tribes is also internationally famous. The satras have also honed certain art and craft traditions, which can now be found only here. In Natun Samuguri satra for example, one can still find the craft of mask-making; and in the Kamalabari satra, the finest boats are made.

A wetland, Majuli is a hotspot for flora and fauna, harbouring many rare and endangered avifauna species including migratory birds that arrive in the winter season. Among the birds seen here are: the Greater Adjutant Stork, Pelican, Siberian Crane and the Whistling Teal. After dark, wild geese and ducks fly in flocks to distant destinations. The island is almost pollution free owing to the lack of polluting industries and factories and also the chronic rainfall.

Suggestions

Tourism, thus, can be considered as a stable source of livelihood in the region. Some recommendations can be made through proper planning of master plans needs to be prepared with specific objectives be integrated with Majuli's overall economic and social development objective. Government intervention is necessary to enhance the contribution of tourism for providing livelihood security and poverty reduction. Maintains proper co-ordination and monitoring amongst various agencies and bodies of tourism. Private sector partnerships and public-private partnerships should be incorporated. Proper development of infrastructure, tourist facilities, enhancement of communication networks etc. Enhancement of the role of media in promoting tourism. State government should provide proper infrastructure for rural tourism in Majuli.

Conclusion

Tourism is an industry, which brings the world together, leads to enrichment of knowledge, exchange of culture and fosters international understanding. It is one of the largest industries in the world in terms of revenue and employment generation. Peoples all over the world are growing more interest to rural tourism or nature base tourism. The new approach of tourism can be a path to employment generation and economic development. Majuli is enriched with numerous attractive and diverse tourist resources, which is spread over different areas of the island. It is also regarded as the gold mine of tourism. If this resources would be utilized in proper way for attracting tourist, it will generate a considerable extent of livelihood opportunity and stable income to the rural poor's of the island.

References

- Akhtar, N., 2014, Tourism as an Engine of Rural Development in India- A Case Study of Sualkuchi Silk Village, Assam, Indian Streams of Research Journal, Vol. 4.
- Arnall, A., David S. G. Thomas, Chasca Twyman and Diana Liverman, 2013, Flooding, resettlement and change in livelihoods: evidence from rural Mozambique, *Disasters*, 37(3): 468-488.
- Ashley, Caroline, 1995, Tourism, communities and the potential impacts on local incomes and conservation, Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Namibia, Research discussion paper number 10.
- Ashley, C., 2000, The Impact of Tourism on Rural Livelihood: Namibia's Experience, Working Paper 128, Overseas Development Institute, Portland House, Stag Place, London.
- Ashley, C., 2002, Methodology for pro-poor tourism case studies, Working Paper Series, Overseas Development Institute, Portland House, Stag Place, London.

- Bradbeer, J., 1996, Rural Tourism and Sustainable Rural Development, *Area*, Vol. 28, No .2, pp. 241.
- Das, D., 2012, Tourism Industry in North- East Indian States: Prospects and Problems, *Global Research Methodology Journal*, Vol. II, 7th issue.
- Devi, M. K., 2012, Ecotourism in Assam: A Promising Opportunity for Development, *SAJTH*, Vol. 5, No. 1.
- Doohyun, H., Stewart William P. & Dong-wan Ko. (2014). Community Behavior and Sustainable Rural Tourism Development. *Journal of travel Research*. May 2012 vol. 51 no. 3 328-341
- Ezeuduji I.O. (2013a). Strategic eventbased rural tourism development for sub-Saharan Africa. *Current Issues in Tourism*.
- Ezeuduji, I.O. (2013b). Strategic eventbased rural tourism development for sub-Saharan Africa. *Current Issues in Tourism*
- Ezeuduji, I. O. (2014). Change management for sub-Saharan Africa's rural tourism development. *Current Issues in Tourism*
- Giampiccoli, A., Lee S „Shawn' & Nauright, J. (2013). Destination South Africa: comparing global sports megaevents and recurring localised sports events in South Africa for tourism and economic development. *Current Issues in Tourism*.
- Kalita, S., 2010, A Journey of Empowering a Community for Self Reliance: Endogenous Tourism Project in Sualkuchi, Assam, India, *Field Actions Science Reports*, Vol.4.
- Roberts, L. & Hall, D. (2004). "Consuming the countryside: Marketing for „rural tourism“." *Journal of Vacation Marketing* (Sage publications) 10, no. 3, pp 253-263
- Sharpley, R. (2006). *Travel and Tourism. Sage course Companions. Knowledge and Skills for Success*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
- Singh, S., 1997, Developing human resources for the tourism Industry with reference to India, *Tourism Management*, Vol. 18, No. 5, pp. 299-306.
- Tchetchik, A., Aliza Fleischer and Israel Finkelshtain, 2008, Differentiation and Synergies in Rural Tourism : Estimation and Simulation of the Israeli Market, *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, Vol. 90, No. 2, pp. 553-570 A