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Ecotourism and Environmental Education: An Opportunity for Bangladesh

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Abstract— Eco-tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world today. It is a form of natural resources based tourism focused on experiencing and learning about nature. The term ecotourism can be well described with the following five criteria: nature conservation, low impact, sustainability, meaningful community involvement, and environmental education. Environmental education must be fulfilled to perform ecotourism and is the step towards the process of understanding the natural ecosystems. The aim of environmental education is to teach and educate the people about the natural environments and ecosystems in order to live sustainable. Bangladesh is an attractive eco-tourism destination in south Asia. The present study discusses the implementation of environmental education to the society with the development of eco-tourism in Bangladesh. The people of the country are taught by educational programs, workshops, media, awareness activities, advertisements, and some other way for this purpose. So, collective efforts are necessary to foster clear learning regarding environment and concern about economic, social, and ecological aspects of eco-tourism.

INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is one of the famous and fastest growing industries in the world today. It is described as a form of natural resources based tourism focused on experiencing and learning about nature. Ecotourism presents a small segment of nature-tourism, which is understood as travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas (Gosling, 1999). The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people”. The term ecotourism can be well described with the following five criteria: nature conservation, low impact, sustainability, meaningful community involvement and environmental education (Mojca and Marko). The success of ecotourism depends on the proper implementation of these criteria. Every country gives emphasis to make tourism as environmental friendly by maintaining nature conservation with low negative impact on environment. For ensuring sustainable ecotourism, environmental education of the people and the effective involvement of community are must.

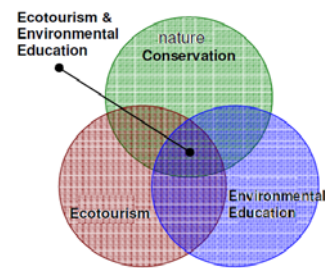
Environmental education is one of the five criteria for performing ecotourism. It helps to understand the natural ecosystems and conservation with their role in environment. Increased concern about the environment in recent decades has paralleled the development of environmental education, and in particular has clarified its aims and purposes (Sterling, 1995). The aim of environmental education is to teach and educate the public about the function of natural environments. It also gives

emphasize to manage the behavior of human towards eco-systems and conservation according to sustainability.

Bangladesh is a gift of nature. This country is an attractive eco-tourism destination in south Asia. Its natural resources, ecological advantages and situated in an important geographical nerve point are great pleasure for developing ecotourism here. Bangladesh has a host of tourist treasurers to offer to tourists- beaches, lakes, rivers, hills, forests, wildlife, tribal life, archaeological remains, including historical monuments, folklore, religious and cultural heritage, handicrafts and much more. All these combinations are enormous ecotourism products. So, environmental education will be fruitful to ensure ecotourism development as well as gathering the knowledge regarding environment. The study has focused the opportunities of environmental education in Bangladesh. The present study discusses the implementation of environmental education to the society with the development of ecotourism in Bangladesh.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ECOTOURISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Ecotourism and environmental education are highly related and depends on each other. The success of ecotourism cannot be achieved without proper environmental education. According to McCormick (1994) ecotourism is defined as “a purposeful travel to natural areas understand the culture and natural history of the environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem, while producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people”.



Some prerequisites for ecotourism development and environmental education:

- To foster clear awareness about economic, social, political and ecological aspect of tourism.
- To provide the knowledge, values, and attitudes to protect and improve the environment.
- To create opportunities of meaningful behavior towards the environment.
- To establish the ecotourism activities responses to sustainable environmental development.

SCOPE FOR BANGLADESH IN ECOTOURISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Bangladesh is an attractive ecotourism destination in south Asia. The natural attractions of Bangladesh are: the tropical climate, tropical beaches and sea, tropical forests, many rivers and lakes, beautiful tranquil scenery etc. Among the man-made features are historical and archeological sites, diverse culture, and infrastructure. Bangladesh has possess some unique natural resources of global significance such as the world's largest mangrove forest, the largest unbroken sea beach, a unique landscape set in the world's largest alluvial delta with flora and fauna, truly hospitable and friendly people. Some of the advantages of Bangladesh for developing ecotourism and environmental education are,

Natural resources: Bangladesh is full of natural resources. There are a lot of rivers, forest sites, water bodies, national parks and other natural sites are surrounding all over the country. These resources are the main attraction for developing ecotourism in the country. Again, the visitors can achieve environmental education from these natural resources.

Ecological specialization: Bangladesh has beautiful landscape and ecological sites. The natural picturesque beauty of the country attracts the tourists. There are a lot of natural and ecological places all around the country, which have the immense power to attract the ecotourists. This is also an element of environmental education.

Geographical importance: Bangladesh is the gateway of south-east Asia. It is connected by air and sea and by surface. It has tremendous strategic geographic advantages, which can immensely contribute the country to be an ideal ecotourism destination. So the situated in a geographical nerve point, the country may be a suitable example for environmental education.

The natural beauty of Bangladesh is a great attraction for the people. They can enlarge their knowledge by the teaching of nature. For ensuring environmental education some involvements are very essential as well as ecotourism development. These are,

People involvement: mass people are emerging source for environmental education. Without their spontaneous participation, environmental teaching does not occur properly.

Government role: Govt. has played a vital role for sustainable ecotourism development. Govt. formulates necessary laws and regulations for maintaining ecotourism. Moreover, govt. can facilitate in environmental educational programs.

Organizational efforts: Organizational efforts are very effective for environmental awareness of society. Environment and tourism related government, social and educational, organizations and non-governmental organizations have taken initiatives in this regards.

International organizations: Some international organizations is working for raising the environmental consciousness to the people. Among them WWF, UNESCO, WCED, WCU, IES are mentionable.

Media: Media is a powerful weapon for building the society. Media can take part in ecotourism development and encouraging the people to environmental education.

In Bangladesh has huge opportunity to ensure environmental education within the people. Some important ways for implementing the environmental education are as follows;

Educational program: Environmental education provides the school with a positive approach to society, because environmental education helps the entire process of education (Dimitra et al., 2005). All age groups of the people have involved under the programs. Educational programs has arranged for the students, teachers, and curriculum planners to ensure environmental experience and teaching.

Awareness activities: Govt. and other organizations have taken various awareness activities for increasing the consciousness towards the ecotourism and environment. Various programs such as, workshop, seminar, discussion meetings are helpful for the awareness.

Advertisement: Advertisement is an important way for developing the ecotourism and environmental education. Print and electronic media, publicity works, bill boards will be used in this case.

Trained tour operators and guides: Tour operators and guides are trained up for operating ecotourism in light of environment friendly situation. If they trained up properly, they can ensure the effective ecotourism as well as environmental education.

CONCLUSION

Very recently, the govt. of Bangladesh has passed a law named "The Bangladesh Protected Tourism Area and Special Tourism Zone Bill-2010" in its parliament. By passing the law, ecotourism will be a potential sector for Bangladesh. Again, environmental education also enhance by developing ecotourism. So, collective efforts from govt. and private organizations are necessary to foster clear learning regarding environment and concern about economic, social, and ecological aspects of eco-tourism.

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