

Economic Impact of Ecotourism on Lives of Service Providers with Reference to Four Villages of Sikkim

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Abstract

The study examines the economic impact of ecotourism in the villages of Sikkim which are full of rich and pristine biodiversity and other natural resources. Ecotourism provides the tourist with a quality nature experience, generates funds and support for conservation efforts, has a minimal environmental impact, and provides socioeconomic benefits to local host communities. Tourism can contribute significantly to rural development, agricultural transformation, community enrichment and social empowerment. The main thrust of this study is to examine the impact of ecotourism as a sustainable development model for mountain communities. Ecotourism as a component of the green economy is one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry and focuses on environmental conservation, socioeconomic and capital development. The Government of Sikkim has been consciously promoting ecotourism for more than a decade to take advantage of its unique selling property - nature – to provide avenues for employment to the local communities. The growth of tourism without proper control and supervision will endanger the environment. A study was conducted to find out the impact of ecotourism on rural society, especially to assess the economic and environmental impacts to ascertain whether the commonly touted contention that ecotourism benefits the local communities is true in the case of Sikkim or not. To identify and quantify the impacts of ecotourism on environmental conservation, cultural heritage preservation, economic development, and enhancement of livelihoods, this study was carried out to focus on the way tourists can live harmoniously with the planet and has been identified as an important strategy for balancing economic growth and conservation. The study is intended to enhance the capacity of ecotourism to generate benefits for both the local communities and destinations (mainly the protected areas), and thus contribute to the sustainable development of the region more generally.

Keywords: Impact, environment, ecotourism, sustainable development, pristine biodiversity, economic growth, conservation