

Village Tourism as Sustainable Development Alternative: Empirical Evidence from Mawlynnong, the Cleanest Village in Asia

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Abstract

While the impact of global warming and climate change has been crucial in the question of sustainable tourism development, village tourism has drawn the attention of the world. Sustainability considerations have been making ways in each and every development initiative in the last few decades. In line of this trend, the concept of the ‘new tourism’ has emerged. The economic globalization of the world has initiated this type of tourism trade and as such the countries possessing attractive bio-diversification empirical and historical heritage have the opportunity to develop the ‘new tourism’ sector to reap benefit out of this ever-expanding industry. In view of such reality, this article attempts to investigate on the conceptual dynamics and benefits of village tourism and explores reflective state of these theoretical underpinnings, on the basis of an in-depth analysis of a case study drawn from a successful village tourist destination. Finally, there has been a great deal of study focused to the role of village tourism on how it enhances the economic status of host and local communities in developing countries like Bangladesh and beyond.

Keywords: Village Tourism, Development, Sustainability, Biodiversity, Local Community etc.

Introduction

Background

An increasing number of rural communities throughout the globe are seeking to capitalize on tourism as a means of sustainable economic growth and development (Koth et al, 1991). Cresta (2012) finds that the tourism of the new millennium is in a phase of deep evolution: the anthropological-cultural changes of the modern society and the processes of globalization have determined a modification in the consumption patterns of the individuals and have generated a new way of thinking about the holiday, not only leisure and relaxation, but experience of life and personal enrichment under the social, cultural and environmental profile. Hence the evolution of the demand towards new forms of tourism have taken place and through ‘new tourism’ a tourist is experienced, aware of opportunities and empowered.

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Village tourism falls into the category of ‘new tourism’ that has been identified as a tool for rural revitalization (Okech et al, 2012). For tourism to be described as village tourism, it should mirror the characteristics that signify a rural area including small settlements, low population densities, agrarian-based economics and traditional societies. The rural settings of Bangladesh also provide a strong foundation to promote village-based tourism because of its unique lifestyle, unspoiled culture and tradition. If marketed in an innovative way it can bring tourism benefits in the villages that can also create huge employment opportunities for the local people.

The Statement of the Problem

Tourism industry contributes considerably to the society, economy and to the environment - either man made or natural (Harrington, 2001). This connotes that the growth rate of tourism and its forms, particularly village tourism has spurred challenges on the socio-environment of cultural and natural landscapes worldwide. Supporting the same assertion, as cited in Pederson (2002), World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimated that tourism generates some 12 percent of the world total Gross National Product (GNP). This being the case, tourism and especially village tourism has emerged as a striking wing of tourism that seems to be the remedy for the prevailing socio-cultural and environmental challenges bedeviling the universe. However, village tourism is a very new concept in South Asia especially in Bangladesh.

For cultivating local economic growth, the villages need to be turned toward tourism. Many rural community leaders have successfully identified the advantages of tourism in enhancing their economic conditions. However, a system to provide information on the demand for rural tourism and to monitor changes in tourist expenditure patterns in the rural community is currently lacking. Most of the previous works on tourism has focused on geographically aggregated areas, but this article aims to highlight rural-based village tourism. Therefore, this article is an attempt to highlight the rural based village tourism based on the incredible tourism product. Hence, the broader objective is to primarily analyze the picture of village tourism of Bangladesh in order to establish an attractive image of the country so that this can be a fabulous and fascinating destination for the nature lover village tourists.

Approaches to the Problem

Literature Review

Tourism is the fourth largest industry in the global economy with much of the growing market focused around pristine natural as well as cultural environments, which plays an important role in the economic development of a country especially the developing country (Honey and Gilpi, 2009). Encyclopaedia Britannica describes the urge to travel is as old as civilization. There are basically two schools of thought on tourism issue; one school (Holland et al 2003; Gopal et al 2008) advocated tourism as a strategy to get economic development and the other school (Britton, 1982; Weaver 1998; Brohman 1996 ; Lacher and Nepal, 2010) criticized tourism for its leakage effect specially in developing countries. According to this school of thought, in developing

economies, the tourism based on other developed countries for goods and services. They have to import food grains, construction commodities or even human resources.

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) in 2001, in its long-term forecast *Tourism 2020 Vision*, anticipates an average annual tourism growth rate of 4.1 percent until 2020. Developing countries in particular have looked to tourism to help increase national foreign exchange earnings, GDP and employment rates, and to improve socioeconomic conditions in peripheral regions (Weaver, 1998), which can be ensured by 'sustainable tourism'. Fennel (2002) defines sustainable tourism as to denote the adoption of the principles of sustainable development by the tourism sector. In this sense, it could be argued that, as denoted by Bendell and Font (2004), sustainable tourism refers to meeting the needs and rights of present tourists and host communities and regions, while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. Okech et al (2012) find that tourism can also bring a range of other benefits to rural areas, such as infrastructural development and spin-off enterprise opportunities. Accordingly an important question is whether more can be done to develop tourism within the villages in the rural areas, as a way of dispersing the benefits of tourism and increasing its poverty impact.

Methodology

Qualitative analysis was deemed most appropriate given the exploratory nature of the research. Interviews, observations and secondary sources were the main vehicles of inquiry employed in this study. In the light of emphasis placed on local level impacts in the article, it was also deemed appropriate to take a participatory case study approach that has the capacity not only to produce specific recommendations for the area under investigation, but also to generate broadly applicable results and strategies for allowing destinations elsewhere to improve their capacity to benefit from village tourism. Accordingly, this article adopts Mawlynnong village as a case study, the choice of which was not accidental, rather on the way to a recent visit of the authors to an international conference in Shillong in the capital of Meghalaya, an northeastern State of India. The tiny village has been attracting visitors because of its bizarre tag of 'Asia's Cleanest Village'.

Discussion and Findings

Tourism vs. Sustainable Tourism

Tourism, in general, is travel for recreational, leisure or business purposes, which constitutes one of the most significant and potent sectors of any economy. As a global phenomenon, it has been hailed by some as the largest industry in the world and consider it as an industry that continues to grow. Tourism is the basic and the most desirable human activity describing the praise and encouragement of all people and government. It is the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business or other purposes as defined by WTO (Dale et al, 2005). There is an increasing global awareness about the importance of tourism development, its benefit and its possible effects

on the society. This is not only due to the considerable inflow of foreign currency that is connected with tourism, but also to the contribution of tourism to the country's overall development, both on central and peripheral level.

Tourism has many potential benefits for rural areas. It can be an important source of jobs for non-metro communities, especially for those that are economically underprivileged. Because jobs in the tourist industry often do not require advanced training, local residents with few skills can readily work as food servers, retail clerks, and hospitality workers. The aim of promoting tourism is to increase the net benefits to rural people, and increase their participation in managing the tourism product. If more tourism can be developed there, particularly in ways that involve high local participation in decisions and enterprises, then poverty impacts are likely to be enhanced.

Tourism provides economic, social as well as cultural development on the society. It is not only an avenue for national export and foreign currency earnings; it is also one of the few economic options to harness the development of remote and rural areas. Now a day more and more people want to spend leisure time in nature, so it is an important window of the hospitality industry. Ecology is an important component for development of tourism. The village tourism creates opportunities in areas having unique features or attributes in natural scenic beauty. The WTO has adopted the sustainable approach to tourism as one that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. The concept of 'sustainable tourism' is closely linked to that of sustainable development, which was recognized for the first time in the Rio Conference in 1992.

What is 'Village Tourism'?

Village tourism is the part of rural tourism and the later takes many different shapes. The rural landscapes with their resources, characters and physical proximity to urban systems and large size are more ideal space of consumption of 'new tourism', which has been considered as center to the village tourism. Village tourism is the primary tourism product to spread tourism and its socio-economic benefits to rural and its new geographic regions, thereby stopping the exodus from rural to urban areas. This will also lead to other people to seek alternative ways on how to diversify the tourism benefits to other parts of the country as well at par with conventional conservation.

Rural tourism is particularly relevant in developing nations wherein farmland has become fragmented due to population growth. Many niche tourism programs can be located in rural areas. From eco-tourism to agri-tourism and seasonal events, tourism can be a viable economic component in rural community development. Glimpses of the traditional lifestyle of people go a long way towards satisfying the curiosity that drives most tourists. Agriculture is becoming highly mechanized and therefore requires less manual labor. This is causing economic pressure on some villages, leading to an exodus of young people to urban areas. Rural tourism allows the creation of an alternative source of income in the non-agricultural sector for rural dwellers. The added income from rural tourism can contribute to the revival of lost folk art and handicrafts. It is an ideal and natural method of rural and urban economic exchange. The nature of rural tourism

products, often involving small-scale operations and culturally-based or farm-based products can be conducive to wide participation.

The objective is to showcase rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations and in villages, which have core competence in art and craft, handloom, and textiles as also an asset base in the natural environment. The intention is to benefit the local community economically and socially as well as enable interaction between tourists and local population for a mutually enriching experience. For the tourist, whose expenditure creates revenue for host community service providers; rural tourism adds value through packaged programs in art and craft imparted by skilled local artisans. Village entertainment groups unveil local history and culture, natural and oral treasures.

Tourism Development in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a developing country, in which tourism should be recognized as a major thrust area of economic growth. The contribution of tourism to Bangladesh economy and employment is yet to be satisfactory though gradually growing at a very slow pace. Travel and tourism's direct contribution to GDP was Tk. 19,295 crore in 2012. It is expected to increase by 6 percent annually to Tk. 35,370 crore by 2022, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), a London-based institute. However, the state of tourism in Bangladesh is yet to be developed in true sense, other than adopting the National Tourism Policy in 2010.

Bangladesh's tourist attractions are varied, ranging from natural to archaeological, cultural to historical and these are spread all over the country. As a natural consequence, rural areas have more than their share of tourist attractions. Jobs for local people around the prime attractions of Bangladesh may be created in various forms: handicrafts producers and sellers, cooks, waiters, tour guides, ushers, betel-nut and tea vendors, etc. However, Bangladesh is not known as a tourist destination in the international tourism market. The country has so far failed to attract international tourists due to absence of natural characteristics and adequate facilities at various tourist spots resulting in less foreign investment in this sector. The contribution of the earning from tourism to the country's GDP is less than 1 percent (Hassan et al, 2013). Though the sector got recognition as an industry only in 1999, but it never received attention from the government to become a vibrant industry. Therefore, there is an urgent need to view tourism of the country in a holistic sense beyond its boundaries bringing together the stakeholders and retains tourism assets for future.

Table 1: Travel and Tourism Contribution to GDP

Bangladesh	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Travel & Tourism Direct Contribution to GDP					
LCU (local currency units) bn	133.509	134.968	148.095	167.619	192.954
US\$ bn	1.946	1.955	2.126	2.260	2.353
2011 US\$ bn	2.156	2.049	2.109	2.220	2.353
Real growth (%)	2.5	-4.9	2.9	5.2	5.9
% share	2.4	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.0
Travel & Tourism Total Contribution to GDP					
LCU (local currency units) bn	278.623	281.061	305.206	340.359	394.770
US\$ bn	4.062	4.071	4.382	4.590	4.813
2011 US\$ bn	4.500	4.267	4.346	4.507	4.813
Real growth (%)	4.7	-5.1	1.8	3.7	6.7
% share	5.1	4.5	4.3	4.2	4.2
Travel & Tourism Direct Contribution to Employment					
Real growth (%)	-1.5	-8.7	-0.5	1.0	2.2
% share	2.0	1.8	1.7	1.7	1.7
'000	1367.6	1247.4	1240.4	1252.9	1281.5
Travel & Tourism Total Contribution to Employment					
Real growth (%)	0.5	-8.9	-1.7	-0.5	3.0
% share	4.4	3.9	3.8	3.7	3.7
'000	2959.4	2695.7	2648.0	2633.4	2714.4
Visitor Exports					
LCU (local currency units) bn	4.706	4.377	6.136	6.244	7.695
US\$ bn	0.070	0.060	0.090	0.080	0.090
2011 US\$ bn	0.080	0.070	0.090	0.080	0.090
Real growth (%)	-12.4	-12.5	31.4	-5.3	13.4
% share	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.4

Source: WTTC, 2013

Despite some prospects, Bangladesh still remains at the bottom of the travel and tourism competitiveness index as per World Economic Forum (WEF). The country has been ranked 123rd out of 140 countries with a score of 3.24 out of 6.00, according to Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2013 (WEF, 2013), which was 129th out of 136 countries in 2011. In South Asia, the position of Bangladesh is at the bottom compared with its neighbors India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan; and in the Asia Pacific region, out of 25 countries, Bangladesh is ranked at the bottom, i.e. 25th.

Potential of Village Tourism in Bangladesh

As a destination for village tourism, Bangladesh with an area of only 144,470 sq km, there is definitely a lot to see, enjoy and do here, which enjoys a unique position for easily accessible from many popular destinations in South Asia. The geographical location and its natural characteristic are congenial for village tourism activities. This 'mystic' land has long been a

strong attraction to the tourists, researchers and poachers. The country possesses a great potential for village tourism development. This is a country of vast, largely unknown and unspoiled natural beauty and reserves, which are simply unique and fascinating the great potentialities for growth of village tourism. These natural phenomena are composed of hills and vales, forests, rivers, lakes, sea and beaches, and the evergreen landscape embracing the country. The topography is mainly flat alluvial plain, criss-crossed by the world's three mighty river systems, the Padma (Ganges), the Jamuna and the Meghna and their innumerable tributaries. The east and the northeast of the country join India, and the southeastern part, adjoining Myanmar, is mainly hilly with dense forest.

Though rural-based village tourism has experienced relatively steady growth in some developing countries; yet its development in many others, including Bangladesh, is characterized by stagnation. Post-independence, while critical issues like agriculture, infrastructure etc. hogged the limelight, travel and tourism received step daughterly treatment, as it was deemed a 'luxury' and affordable by only a few. However, in last four decades the industry gained some form of momentum despite the fact that the governance in this sector is yet to be improved. As a country, Bangladesh has numerous villages with natural beauty and attractive countryside offering excellent opportunities for village tourism. Due to its natural landscape and cultural heritage, the country owns a great potential in order to develop village tourism activities, so becoming an important destination in South Asia for such particular tourists.

Village Tourism influencing Lives: Case study of Mawlynnong Village of Meghalaya, India

In order to obtain a clear view regarding the status, attraction level and state of a successful village tourism, a case study from a selected village tourist destination is presented as follows:

Overview

The present study in Mawlynnong village in the State of Meghalaya (the abode of clouds) of northeastern India uses a modified Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) and brings out the fact that effective integration of community involvement can bring out a massive success in village tourism. The village has won accolade for being the cleanest village in Asia in 2003 by Discover India magazine, which was reinforced by BBC and National Geographic in 2004, and UNESCO endorsed it in 2006 – thus introducing it to the world. Since then it has found a place in the tourist map of Meghalaya – thus introducing it to the world. Since then it has found a place in the tourist map of Meghalaya. Even though the inhabitants are not wealthy (average monthly household income is Rs. 4000 only), they have kept their village clean through good practices and voluntary compliances. The village is spread over two square km and located 90 km from Shillong and barely 4km from the Bangladeshi border shrouded within clouds on foothills overlooking the plains of Bangladesh, and the road leading up to it has some of the most panoramic and breathtaking views in the vicinity.

The rolling Khasi Hills - between the floodplains of Assam and Bengal - were described by the British as 'the Scotland of the East', and provided the natural connection for people between these two plains until the British-ruled Indian subcontinent was partitioned into India and East and West Pakistan in 1947. It was an important point of trade and commerce between Assam and Bengal and the Dawki Bridge, built by the British over the Umngot River in 1932, connects the Khasi-Jaintia Hills and South Assam, in present day northeast India, with Sylhet district of present day Bangladesh. Today, on the Indian side of the border is Dawki town in the Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya - 80 km from the state capital of Shillong - and on the Bangladesh side is the border town of Tamabil - 55 km from the divisional headquarters of Sylhet, Bangladesh.

The place is very far from civilization, which was built during the reign of the Khasi King and took sixty years to grow. A two-hour drive from Shillong and one-hour from Dawki-Tamabil, a sign reads "Welcome to Mawlynnong, the cleanest village in Asia" as you enter the village. It's like something out of a fairy tale. The village is situated 18 km from the state highway, now assigned to be the international highway between India and Bangladesh. This highway has connected them to the outside world, much more than other northeast Indian tribal communities. Mawlynnong is at the end of the arterial road and the vast plains of Bangladesh can be easily seen from any high point in the village. There are around 90 households of the Khasi people in the village. All the villagers are Christian by faith and the village livelihood is sustained by farming in their plots of land in the community forest adjoining their village, and the major crops are betel nuts and betel leaves, pineapple, jackfruit, bay leaves, broomsticks, and honey. Their favorite activity is fishing and they go in groups along trails to crystal clear streams with their fishing rods, often entering Bangladesh. Now these paths, with amazing living root bridges (rubber plant), clear streams and gushing waterfalls have opened up the village of Mawlynnong to their newest community activity.

It is only in recent years that the outside world has discovered this gem of a place, and has appropriately called it the cleanest village of Asia. This has slowly become a popular village tourist destination due to its location as well as of the distinction of being the cleanest village, well above 2 km from the sea level that is a community based village tourism initiative. Since then, tourism has brought about many positive changes to the village. The community has made collective effort to maintain the ambience of a clean village, where tourists pay an entry fee of Rs. 50 for a visit. The money generated is thus utilized in positive endeavors. The village also referred as 'God's own garden'.

For travelers, there are many small and hidden delights that Mawlynnong offers. The high skyline walk in the village offers a bird's eye view of the surroundings especially a panoramic view of Bangladesh plain. The village has an eco-friendly structure and is built using community's own architectural traditions. One can visit incredible living root bridges, which are remarkable examples of sustainable engineering. These manmade natural wonders became famous after BBC made a documentary on them. The village was unknown to the outside world, as it was connected by road until 2003. The road connectivity brought the first tourist to the village.

The most interesting aspect of the village is the Khasi people, who with their charm and graciousness have won the hearts of all travelers who visit here. This tribe follows a matrilineal society, wherein the family is traced by the surname of the lady and the property of the family is passed on to the youngest daughter of the family; a concept, tourists are not very familiar with. Women run the shops in the village, and therefore, economically more powerful. For staying in the village, there are arrangements for home stay and a few tree houses run by the village council. Since then the village has seen a gradual increase in the number of tourists especially domestic tourists travelling to explore the destination.

The village has an exceptional sense of environmental management through traditional knowledge and enforcement much before it became well known. Apparently, there is no incentive for the largely poor people to maintain the village; even their livelihood does not depend on it since the practice of cleanliness is age old and does not need tourist money to sustain. The origin and the sustenance of the practice is an enigma since it is not seen in any of the other neighboring Khasi villages. The village is damn pretty and certainly very clean and organized – with small bricked footpaths crisscrossing the village and networking the entire community. All the houses are simple, cozy and small here – and immensely delightful is the community’s passion towards gardening, as all the houses have a verandah where the villagers grow varieties of exotic flora. This, in a way, adds colors to the village and to the surrounding rich-in-green landscape.

The local Khasi people are charming, culturally rich and certainly know how to appreciate beauty. The villagers work in their fields and regularly contribute to community work, which is a major part of their daily life. “Cleanliness and respecting nature is a tradition passed on to us by our ancestors,” said a female resident from Mawlynnong. She continued, “As a child I was taught that clean surroundings are a key to healthy life. At home, school and at the place of worship cleanliness has been emphasized and gradually it sanked in me as a way of life.” This way of living has been adopted and further evolved into a planned community initiative by every resident of the village. “Everyday the villagers, young or old, keep the surroundings clean. Earlier four to five members used to be employed for it but now it’s just all of us doing it conscientiously and voluntarily,” she continued.

Waste segregation is among the many things that villagers do to maintain cleanliness and the tourists equally cooperate respecting the values of the community; bamboo dustbins are placed at every small distance and no one litters around. The level of awareness about maintaining cleanliness is immense among the villagers. Even if a leaf falls, whoever sees it the first, surely picks it and puts it in the dustbin. There are stylish bamboo dustbins everywhere and separate compost pits in various pockets of the village for organic and inorganic wastes. All the waste from the dustbin is collected and kept in a pit, which the villagers use as manure. The village established its own special committee for cleanliness that consists of members of the village who are either too young or too old to cultivate land.

The village has earned the reputation for being arguably best educated in India – all its residents can read and write and each house has a toilet. The society head has made it mandatory for all

children to be educated, and there's an English-medium school that teaches classes one through eight. Lessons in hygiene start in school so that children can be taught from an early age how to keep their surroundings clean and green. The children of this village are also taught to collect litter at an early age. They have learnt to harvest rain water in the most innovative and eco-friendly ways - in natural stone basins. Every house has a large rock placed outside, with a cavity in its center, to collect rain water. The rain is incessant here!

As one walks around the narrow zig-zagging paths of the village one is astounded by the clean well maintained black tarmac and the spotless front-yards and sidewalks of the bamboo stilt houses. The village has a good forest from where fruits and vegetables are available and the people living here are allowed to take whatever they need from the forest for their own use but cannot employ it for any commercial use. For necessities, they travel two hours to the next town in time for the weekly market. Transportation options are few and far between. There's the elusive bus, but most just prefer to walk endlessly through forest and rain. The village council makes it a point to organize and conduct workshops to create awareness of the dangers from global warming. The villagers are also given training to save their forest.

Usually it is very rare for houses located in villages to have sanitation facilities. However, each house of the Malynnong village has a toilet and sanitation facilities are very good here. The village also has public toilets that can be paid and used by villagers from neighboring villages and towns as well as by tourists. Everyone takes part in the ritual weeding, sweeping and cleaning of the gardens and roads which happens every evening. The village is well supplied with an efficient localized water supply and sanitation system. Life is hard up here in the rainiest part of the Himalayas, but the inhabitants have a permanent smile etched on their faces and wonderful warmth in their hearts.

Lessons Learnt from Case Study

- Traditional institutions shape the local organizations while the leadership structures and their functional roles ensure compliance with rules, norms and beliefs among the populace. In rural communities these can assist in achieving improvements in socio-economic conditions of the people. They play an important role in conservation of natural resources and ensuring sustainable livelihood.
- Globally, many indigenous institutions do deliver service for a variety of agencies. However, all these are primarily to extend economic benefits in order to pull them up from poverty. There are very few traditional institutions which put such a high premium on economically non-remunerative but socially and environmentally highly valuable service. One such institution is the village council of Mawlynnong.
- Leadership at the community level, clear rules and transparent collective decision making are fundamental elements in the success of this type of local development initiative. The initiatives reviewed in the village of Mawlynnong have reached a point of maturity, which has enabled them to connect to the market.

- There is a lot urban society could learn from Mawlynnong and its environmentally conscious citizens. The self sustaining models though rudimentary have very strong foundations and have more to do with behavior and customs that the peoples have adhered to and upheld.
- This initiative can bring hope to any habitant, where big dumps of waste are a common sight. The village has developed a hybrid institutional model by seamlessly integrating the traditional with the modern which has become instrumental in managing sustainability. This model can be replicated elsewhere with suitable modifications.

Findings of the Study

The major findings of this study are as follows:

- Nestled in the pristine East Khasi Hills, the residents of the picturesque village Mawlynnong along the Indo-Bangla border have learnt to live at harmony with Mother Nature and might very well become an example that urban folk should emulate.
- An in-depth study of the village was needed and field visit helped the authors to relate the theoretical aspects with the practical situation existing on ground. The case study on the village is considered to be very important as the issue arises out of the need to deconstruct the underlying structures and processes that makes the un-remunerative business of environmental management sustainable.
- A remote village in the north-eastern part of India is setting an inspiring example with its unique community cleanliness initiative, amidst contrasting unclean cities and villages with waste littered everywhere, which can teach any country about village tourism.
- Far from the madding crowd, a village has rapidly gained fame as a village tourism hotspot. It not only set an example of community sustained cleanliness but also, in the process, developed a model of village tourism that preserves its nature, age-old traditions, and provides livelihood to residents.
- Any urban society could learn from Mawlynnong and its environmentally conscious citizens. The self sustaining models though rudimentary have very strong foundations and have more to do with behavior and customs that the peoples have adhered to and upheld. This initiative can bring hope to any habitant, where big dumps of waste are a common sight.
- Finally, the results and conclusions derived from the case study presented in the article indicate that there are, indeed, efficient and sustainable ways of preserving the natural environment and cultural heritage of sensitive areas such as Mawlynnong, while at the same time, stimulating their economic development and social wellbeing. The challenge lies in convincing all the stakeholders to work together in this direction.

Concluding Remarks

Recommendations

The recommendations of this study are as follows:

- There should be initiatives for village tourism development in the country especially in the naturally and culturally rich areas.
- The country needs to focus on village tourism based on activities for overseas tourists. They may be offered the opportunity of fishing and staying in tents and also home-stays in villages.
- Greater awareness needs to be generated among all stakeholders regarding village tourism by contributing to the conservation of the natural resources and cultural heritage, thereby helping the local people by improving the standard of their living.
- The leading tour operators of Bangladesh should consider offering package tours on rural tourism. They should take tourists to the villages. Such packages not only have the potential to improve their bottom lines, but they will also generate employment at both formal and informal sectors in rural areas of Bangladesh.
- Participation of women in the economy surrounding the tourism attractions of rural Bangladesh should also be encouraged.

Conclusion

Sustainable development emphasizes the positive cultural-economic change, which is to make as little environmental impact as possible and helping to sustain the indigenous populace, thereby encouraging the preservation of natural settings and habitats when visiting a place. Any village of Bangladesh can be a tourist attraction as the villagers are very hospitable. The country would be able to make sustainable tourism development through developing village tourism in the country that focuses on participating in a rural lifestyle. Thus, a successful village tourism industry is about integrated policies, planning and social learning. Though there are many challenges remaining for the development of village tourism in Bangladesh, but there also remains vast opportunities of this sector. The cooperation between private and public concerns is vital in this connection, as it would ultimately strengthen the cohesion between socio-economic institutions. If properly adopted, planned and executed, the industry will go a long way to economically empower host and local communities by improving their standard of living as well as changing and challenging the way they think and look at things.

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