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The Role of Ecotourism in the Prosperity of Local People in the Tandooreh National Park and the Shir-Ahmad Wildlife Refuge- Iran

Mansoori S.

Department of Environmental Science, University of Pune, India

Behzad R.

Department of Environmental Science, University of Pune, India

Jaybhaye R. G.

Department of Geography, University of Pune, India

Abstract:

The Shir-Ahmad wildlife refuge and the Tandooreh national park are established to maintain biodiversity. However, conservation of environment and economical condition are main issues in both areas. This research compared the role of ecotourism in the prosperity of local people of both protected areas. The results revealed that although local economic condition in both study area are below living standard but since the Tandooreh national park is more popular to visitors, then local economic have better condition with compare to the Shir-Ahmad wildlife refuge and local people are more friendly with the natural resources.

Keywords: *Ecotourism, economic incentives, natural resources, local people business*

1. Introduction

Ecotourism is one of the fastest growing industry in the world which basically beside its impact on promoting conservation of natural resource, helps to increasing local community education level as well as improving wellbeing of local people in destination area (Huber and Bennett, 2002, 2003). Somewhat ecotourism has seen as an opportunity for local people to achieve positive benefits from ecotourism development with providing local market for selling wide range of products to tourists (Langoya, 2005). Morphy (1985) described community participation as central to the alternative ecotourism concept which must to be ensure that benefits reach to residents in destination area (Simmons, 1994). Ecotourism also encourage local people with their small business to promote to higher economic multipliers which community approach to decision making and help to ensure their traditional and lifestyle are respected (Kutay, 1992).

Ecotourism apart from its role on conservation of environment and increasing local community awareness regarding the natural resources also is an economic incentive for local people business and well-being of them. The present research evaluates the feasibility of ecotourism in the Shir-Ahmad wildlife refuge and the Tandooreh national park as a key for conservation of environment and economic incentives for local communities near these protected areas.

2. Ecotourism in Iran

Ecotourism activities are gradually becoming popular in Iran. Although Iran has a diverse climate and remarkable biodiversity, major limitations such as lack of conclusive regulations, educational programs and infrastructure, have contributed to the slowing down development of ecotourism in the country. Iran has various natural attractions such as temperate forests in the north with high humidity and rainfall (1700 mm), deserts and salt lakes in the central part of Iran, high mountains (such as 5,604 meter high Mount Damavand), glaciers and coastal areas (ghadimi, 2008). The present investigation has adopted micro-level approach and hence two protected areas in Iran have been compared in this investigation. The Shir-Ahmad wildlife refuge and Tandooreh national park have been selected as the study area.

3. Study Area

It situated 15 km far away Sabzevar city on north-east of Iran and north-west of Khorasan Razavi province in the range of 57° 42' E to 58° 30' E longitude and 36° 00' N to 37° 11' N latitude. Sabzevar and Neyshabour are the biggest cities about this wildlife. Jolein, Saleh-Abad, Nazl-Abad, Cheshmeh-Avash, Ali-Abad, Saqieh, Yahya-Abad, Hashem-Abad and Dowlat-Abad are representing as most important villages and settlements around this region (Figure No. 1).

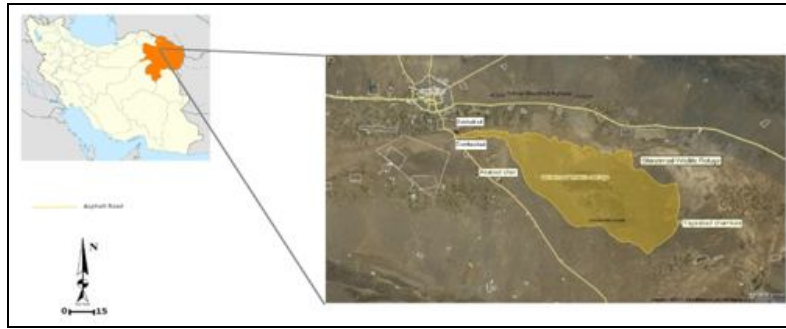


Figure 1: Situation of the Shir-Ahmad wildlife refuge in Iran
Sources: Google map

Rout of Mashhad-Tehran highway (expressway) with capability of 20 lack passengers and travelers is just 5 km away from this area. This has enhanced the potentials of tourism activities and around the wildlife refuge. The tourism has been a low key in the recent past.

Tandooreh National Park, bounded between latitudes $37^{\circ}19' N$ & $37^{\circ}33' N$ and longitudes $58^{\circ}33' E$ & $58^{\circ}54' E$, is situated in the north of Khorasan province in Dargaz division (Fig. 1.2) and the big cities nearby Tandooreh national park are Mashhad, Ghochan and Dargaz.

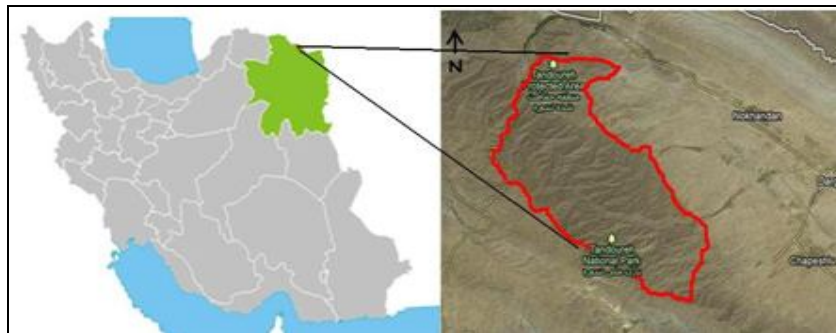


Figure 2: Situation of the Shir-Ahmad wildlife refuge in Iran
Source: Google map

There is no human habitation in Tandooreh national park area limit but there are Alibelagh and Baba Nestan shrines in the northwest and northeast of the region. There are many villages around Tandooreh national park. The main access road to the national park is a paved way from Ghoichan to Dargaz which passes from Tiran monitoring station to Daroongar monitoring station within the study area. The other access roads are paved ways from Dargaz to Emamgholy and Dargaz to Chelmir and a sandy road from Shekarab to Chehelmir. There are few other ways through which only animals can pass.

4. Method of study

It is necessary for ecotourism planning to understand the socio-economic set up of the local people. Further their development and conservation of the wildlife refuge may be achieving national goals like economic growth, environmental protection, tourism development, etc. The process of wildlife conservation depends on socio-economic condition of local people. This can the wildlife generate national benefit? If is not economic gains for local people, so there would be no any economic incentives or it is negligible, hence local people not become involved in conservation process.

To understanding the local communities satisfaction regarding selling their products and situation of local marker and handcrafts two set of questionnaire has been circulated among local people of 9 villages around the Shir-Ahmad wildlife refuge and 6 villages around the Tandooreh national park. The results will be comparing with each other.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. The Shir-Ahmad Wildlife Refuge

In the Shir-Ahmad wildlife refuges all the nine villages having population about 3991 shows that agricultural as the main occupation. Overall socio-economic condition is poor and if the wildlife resources are used in non-contaminated manner there are scopes for achieving of local people. The survey was conducted to know the occupation of the local people (Figure No.3).

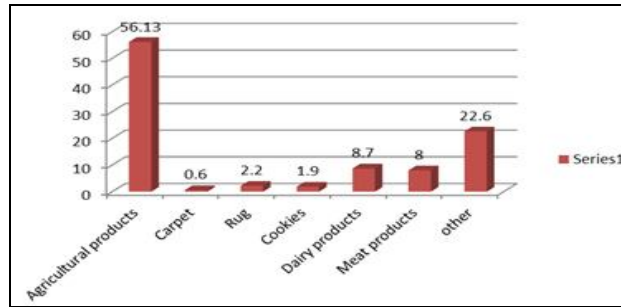


Figure 3: The Shir-Ahmad Local people business
Source: Researcher

About the 66.45% of respondents in the Shir-Ahmad area believed that they are not getting any attractive price for their products (Figure No. 4). Many local products are available in markets near us. These are either locally grown agricultural products or locally made items by local businesses in our community. Local business owners always want to maintain a certain level of expertise for their products. They tend to try and know their customers personally thus provide personalized services to them. For local farmers, it helps them come up with better practices to supply better produce to consumers. A local business causes less negative environmental impact because they make local purchases which require less transportation. They also set up their shops in the towns as compared to the edge of the towns. This reduces congestion, pollution and habitat loss. Reduced automobile use reduces use of fossil fuels hence reduced emission of harmful gases to the environment.

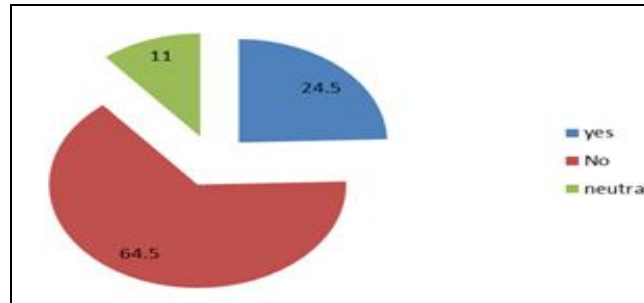


Figure 4: Selling price satisfaction
Source: Researcher

5.2. The Tandooreh National Park

About 37% of local people of Tandoore are farmer and agricultural products have highest proportion of their products. Meat products and felting are 12% and 10% of total sample. Rug and Mat weaving have less proportion among the sample (Figure No. 5).

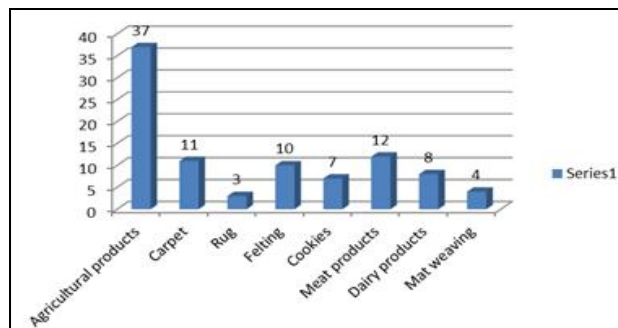


Figure 5: The Tandoore local people business
Source: researcher

About 51.7% of local people near the Tandoore national park are in believed that they are not getting benefit from selling their products and 48.3% of them believed that they get best price for selling their products (Figure No.6).

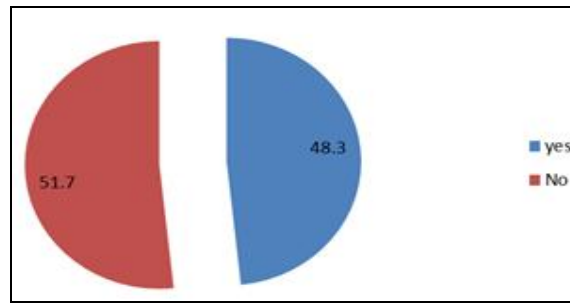


Figure 6: Selling price satisfaction
Source: researcher

6. Results and discussion

The ecotourism helped the local residents to bring benefits and income who have been involved tourism activities. The village administrators and community leaders significantly took part in the ecotourism policies in villages and they believed that tourism brought increased income and better living such as roads to the village. The local resident family members were able to share and work jointly when they perceived that the tourism brings benefits to their community. This outcome supported Wallace and Pearce (1996) who believed that ecotourism had economic and other benefits to local residents that complemented rather than replaced traditional practices.

The socio- economic analysis result reveals that economic condition of local people around the Shir-Ahmad wildlife refuge is below than living standard in Iran. Also respondents in any job opportunities were not give good income and hence most of them, even higher level educated people believed that the hunting of species from this wildlife is more profitable than their business.

The socio-economic analysis result of tandoore villages revealed that economic condition of local people around this national park also is below living standard but since more number of visitors and tourists visited this national park they have much better condition for living also the results shows that the satisfaction level of local people near the Tandoore national park is more than The Shir-Ahmad villages.

It has been proved beyond doubt that active participation of all the stakeholders in tourism activity is essential for conservation of wildlife refuge as well as well-being of local people. It should not be for the sake of conservation but conservation for development. This kind of strategy can be to achieve sustainability of the present study which has good potential for ecotourism. Thus it may be useful to follow the principle of ecotourism by visitor's shouldering their responsibility and also local people by supporting conservation practices.

7. References

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