



## Empowerment of local communities through ecotourism in Uttarakhand

Mukta Dangwal\*

*Department of Economics Government Degree College, Dehradun Shahar, Dehradun Uttarakhand*

\*Corresponding author Email id: [dr.muktadangwal@gmail.com](mailto:dr.muktadangwal@gmail.com)

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**Abstract:** Sustainable tourism is leading to management of all resources in economy, social and aesthetic needs. It can fulfill and maintain the cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, and biodiversity and life support system. The present communication pertains to community based ecotourism development and to generate employment opportunities at local level in the state of Uttarakhand. Uttarakhand is well known all over the world for its magnificent beauty along with pilgrim's destination of Hindus and other religion. Besides the scenic view it is also famous for its great Himalayan mountainous range, tourist's spots, adventures places, spiritual, cultural and aesthetic etc. In spite of natural beauty and religious place, the folk of this region are suffering from poverty and unemployment which is resulting into out migration. Present paper is an attempt from author to make an analysis of tourist places of Uttarakhand and to make suggestions how to promote ecotourism at village level to solve the issues of unemployment and hence with induce reverse migration.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Local communities, Unemployment, Local Community Based Tourism (LCBT), Inhabitants

Ecotourism is the fastest growing sector in the world with an estimated growth rate of 15.45% (Amar Ujala 24<sup>th</sup> Feb.2022 Dehradun). It is one of the major sectors of the largest industries in the world. It can be defined as all nature-based forms in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in the natural areas. Cultural and environmental tourism can also be involved along with religious tourism which in addition, benefits the local population.

The demands for 'remote', 'natural' and 'exotic' environments by increasingly affluent consumers have resulted in a sharp increase in productivity of ecotourism ventures, basically in developing countries. In the Western countries bushy area and lands which were occupied by the native people have been opened simultaneously with the tourism industries. The terms ecotourism and cultural tourism are often been merely as marketing tools. Such forms of tourism are sometimes ethically inferior. When business is main driving force behind ecotourism it is not surprising that a ventures which emerge may serve to alienate, rather than benefit, local communities. In the South Pacific, the idea of ecotourism has been promoted within a very constrained circle of disclosure and business thinking that frequently fails to recognize the significance of social and political values in creation of sustainable tourism. Therefore, it would seem that there is a need for an ecotourism strategy that begins with the requirements, worries and welfare of the host people (Regina Scheyvens 1999, Sahni 2021).

In Uttarakhand the lifestyle, food habits and activities of the people regularly changes within a span of few kilometers. Due to this cultural diversity the community based tourism is being accepted by the local communities which is increasing their income by becoming a tool of their livelihood. The management and maintenance of tourist places of a particular area should also be done by the people of that region only. It is often seen that the private companies organize the travel expenses of the tourists for their own benefit, whether it is their accommodation or catering but the local people are deprived of economic benefits and only a few people involved in the tourism enterprise are benefitted. If community based tourism is to be developed



then it should be managed and operated by the members of the community living in that particular place. All management decisions should be taken in consultation with the community members so that all benefits accrue directly to the local community. As a result, a sense of mutuality, partnership, trust, management, protection and empowerment should develop among the members of the community. If we see from the point of view of community-based eco-tourism, it will play an important role in the protection of the community socio-economically because only the local people are able to protect and preserve their local heritage or natural resources and cultural values. Through eco-tourism, the tourists from different regions of the country reach their destination, get information about the natural and cultural heritage there and make the purpose of their visit successful and experience every moment spent there. The state contributes almost 50.0% of the Gross Domestic Products as income from tourism (<https://new-eco-tou>) but the local peoples are not getting proper benefits.

Local inhabitants were encouraged for eco-tourism by direct communication with the public living near various tourist places during the period 2019-2022. The public meetings were conducted at the village and Panchayat level to inform folk about the importance of eco-tourism, natural environment with stability, cultural heritages, and to encourage them to develop tourist places in different communities. Keeping in mind the environmental protection, the possibilities of employment were explored in the particular area. The information about the principles and uses of eco-tourism was also suggested in the meeting.

This paper is focused on the following objectives:

- To explore the unknown ecotourism places at the village and Panachayat level.
- To motivate the local inhabitants about the ecotourism and their benefits.
- To generate self employment through ecotourism.
- Information about measures to prevent migration in rural areas of Uttarakhand.

**Communities Based Ecotourism (CBET):** CBET should be used to distinguish between programmes that are environmentally conscious and those that strive to ensure that community members have a high level of influence over activities and a substantial share of the benefits result to them. Contrast this with ecotourism initiatives, which are entirely run by outside operators and which are likewise clearly characterised by the circumstances in which the majority of the economic benefits of tourism accrue to the government. A community-based approach to ecotourism recognizes the need to advance both improving people's quality of life and maintaining assets.

The author has chosen a few significant ecotourism destinations in the research area and examined their advantages for the community. Out of them, a few places have been chosen, including villages and Gram Panchayats in Chakrata, Dhanaulti, Mussoorie, Buranskhanda, Surkanda, Chopriyalgaon, Hewalghati, Chamba, Rani Chauri, Hindola Khal, Chandravadni, Devalsari Gajja Pratap Nagar, Madan Negi, Lambgaon, Sem Mukhem, Ghandiyal and Kunjapuri etc. Rural folk were motivated to generate employment opprtunities based on this ecotourism. The author suggests development of some specific tourst spots like establishment of phesant parks, maintenance of waterfalls, rock climbing spots, paraschute gliding schools, river rafting, Yoga training centres, ethnic food hubs and local cultural festivals, etc for attracting tourists.

It is worth to mention here that the Government of Uttarakhand has already made a plan to develop uttarakhand as a tourist state and declared state tourism policy (2018). The objectives set by the Government include creation of new tourist destnations, development of basic aminities to attract tourists, development of winter and alpine toursim, to promote enterpreneurship through startup and skilling centres, encouraging local peoples participation through 'Home stay' and 'Hunar se roxgar' projects. All these efforts will certainly be



beneficial to achieving the goal of making a self sufficient and self reliance Uttarakhand. The need of hour is the whole hearted peoples participation in this endeavour with a positive note that our Uttarakhand is a “DEVBHOOPI” in true sense where one can enjoy healthy and environmnet friendly life.

**Summary:** This paper is written with the objectives of encouraging peoples for coming up with different forms of start-ups related to hotels, restaurants, hutments, water sports, ethnic foods, gifts made of local materials, offering themselves as guides and many other possible ways of generating economy. Several unknown places can be developed as new tourist sites and the same time local people may be more aware towards making this tourism eco-friendly by using pollution free tools and encouraging organic farming to produce healthy ethnic food. It is hoped that in coming days the efforts of local peoples will encourage reverse migration to make the region culturally rich and a better place to live.

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