



## COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM AND ECOTOURISM ARE POTENTIAL MEANS TO FACILITATE THE CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES OF THE SUNDARBANS – A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:** The prime challenge of the *Sundarbans* Reserved Forest (SRF) is the conservation of its natural resources. SRF can be conserved from different schools of thought. ‘Community-based Tourism (CBT)’ and ‘Ecotourism’ are some of those options from tourism lens which have immense potentialities to facilitate conservation initiatives of the *Sundarbans*. This paper deals with some of the theoretical perspectives of such types of alternative tourism to focus its potentiality at SRF and its surrounding villages (within 5 km from the boundary of SRF). The principles of ecotourism development resources are (a) Eco-development, (b) Moderate Development, (c) Naturality, (d) Specialty and (e) Informative Principle. Key issues for the development of CBT are (a) Participation, (b) Markets and Customers, (c) Capacity growth, (d) Impacts and monitoring, (e) Partnerships and collaborations and (f) Policies. Development of systematic and appropriate CBT and ecotourism can generate benefits in seven ways. There are (a) Employment, (b) Supply of goods and services to tourism enterprises, (c) Direct sales of goods and services to tourists, (d) Establishing and running a tourism enterprise, (e) Tax or levy, (f) Voluntary giving and support and (g) Investment in infrastructure. Absence of appropriate government policy on CBT and ecotourism, lack of knowledge, poverty of the local people, lack of environmental consciousness, poor institutional support, etc. hinder the development of CBT and ecotourism in the *Sundarbans* and its adjacent areas. SRF and its surrounding villages consist of potential resources for CBT and ecotourism which has potentiality to generate considerable benefits to the local people and thereby facilitate the conservation efforts of SRF. It is imperative to undertake adequate scientific research studies related to tourism and to undertake proper initiatives from the government, NGOs and private organizations (tour operators) for the development of CBT and ecotourism in and around the *Sundarbans*.

**Key words:** Community-based tourism, ecotourism, *Sundarbans* Reserved Forest, environment, empowerment, local community

### Introduction

Importance of healthy existence of the *Sundarbans* is well recognized due to its ecological, economical, social, cultural, political and institutional aspects. But, regrettably the *Sundarbans* Reserved Forest (SRF) of Bangladesh is experiencing illicit felling and overexploitation (Iftekhar and Islam, 2004). Due to the degradation there are different problems in environmental services e.g., protection against cyclones, tidal surges, land erosion, salinity, etc. and the forests also decline itself. Therefore, these factors individually or synergistically increase people’s vulnerability (Iftekhar, 2006). There is acute lacking of authentic and official data on the illegal felling of the SRF. But there is no doubt about the deforestation which is well evident through newspaper publications. There are scores of causes of this unprecedented deforestation where many local people as well as outsiders and officials are the evidence of such heinous activities.

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But these local people surrounding the villages of the *Sundarbans* may play a strong and vital role to conserve the natural resources of SRF. They are the most vulnerable population due to different natural calamities like Sidr, Aila, etc. Due to lack of income opportunities, education and environmental consciousness most of them are fully or partially dependent on the natural resource of the *Sundarbans* which threatens the forest as a whole. This scenario urges colossal alternative income generation for the locals which can alter the pattern of dependency on the natural resources of the *Sundarbans*. This modified dependency on the *Sundarbans* will contribute to reduce extraction of natural resources of the forest and restrict the illicit fellers by their non-cooperation attitude to smash up the forest. Community-based Tourism (CBT) and ecotourism approach might be the effectual and judicious alternative income generations for the locals surrounding the *Sundarbans* where the local poor people can be engaged in different activities which lead them to earn money and to build environmental awareness to promote conservation of natural resources.

Tourism has been considered as a ‘thrust sector’ in Bangladesh under the Industrial Policy, 1999. The National Tourism Policy, 1992 recognized tourism as a tool for poverty alleviation through generating employment opportunities; conservation and protection of biodiversity, environment, cultural heritage, etc. Besides these, Tourism Master Plan, 1992 (prepared by UNDP/ILO) prioritized River Tourism product, Village Tourism Development, Forest and Wildlife based tourism. National Environmental Policy, 1992 also promoted ecotourism development in Bangladesh. Moreover, the *Sundarbans* has been declared as a ‘Special Tourist Zone’ by the government during mid-90’s (Morshed, 2004). National Forest Policy, 1994 and The Forest Act, 1927 also encourage tourism by taking consideration of carrying capacity of nature. Very recently a ‘Tourism Board’ headed by the Prime Minister has been formed to develop and promote tourism in a sustainable way. In addition to this, ‘Tourism Act’ is going to be finalized shortly to regularize tourism activities in a systematic and controlled way. These samples of different initiatives regarding tourism profoundly indicate the importance and potentialities of tourism in Bangladesh.

Now-a-days, both domestic and international tourists and visitors come to the *Sundarbans* out of their curiosity and enjoyment. Hence, tourism is a growing activity in this mangrove forest and also has great potentiality to be treated as one of the attractive ecotourism destinations in the world especially for the ecotourists. Such attractiveness of the forest has been grown due to her unique biodiversity, scenic beauty, mammoth size, climatic condition, location, cultural aspects, etc. These resources of the *Sundarbans* have great potentiality to encourage and develop Community-based Tourism at the villages located at the vicinity of the forest who have direct interests on the forest. CBT has such potentialities that can change the present socio-economical condition of the local community people through the involvement in different tourism activities and also make them environmentally conscious and behave responsibly to the nature of the *Sundarbans*. By this initiative CBT is capable to promote conservation of natural resources of the *Sundarbans* as well as develop the local communities to alter their dependency pattern on the forest.

By taking the above mentioned background and the policy and legislation frameworks into consideration the author was promoted to address the problem (natural resource depletion of the *Sundarbans*) through some alternative and non-traditional tools like tourism (especially Community-based Tourism and Ecotourism) which can facilitate the conservation of the natural resources of the *Sundarbans* as well as promote community development. This study will focus how local people can be involved in community-based conservation with particular reference to tourism (CBT and ecotourism) activities and how their socio-economic and environmental aspects can be influenced by such tourism activities. This study is based on the theoretical perspectives of these two alternative forms of tourism and their potential application at the *Sundarbans* and its

adjacent villages. Therefore, the aim of the article is to show and analyze the theoretical underpinnings of community-based tourism and ecotourism as an alternative approach to conserve the natural resources of the *Sundarbans*.

### Study area

Ecotourism practice may be carried out all over the *Sundarbans*. But some fragile ecosystems should not be undertaken here for open access for all types of tourists. The *Sundarbans* is a tropical humid and mangrove type forest situated at the southern extremity of the *Padma* and *Jamuna* delta. The *Sundarbans* consists about 44% of the total forest area and 4.2% of the total land area of the country. The *Sundarbans* of Bangladesh is the single largest tract of mangrove forest in the world covering an area of about 6,017 km<sup>2</sup>, out of which 4,143 km<sup>2</sup> (68.85% of SRF) is landmass and 1,874 km<sup>2</sup> (31.15% of SRF) is water body. SRF stands at the southern part of Khulna, Bagerhat and Satkhira Civil district lying between latitude 21°39'00'' to 21°30'15''N and longitude 89°12'54'' to 89°29'04''E. The forest is bounded by the *Baleshwar* river in the east, *Harinbanga*, *Raimongal* and *Kalindi* River in the west which is also the international boundary with India, the Bay of Bengal in the south and many rivers, canals and human habitation in the north (Haider, 2004). In this article, Community-based Tourism (CBT) has been proposed at the surrounding villages of SRF. The *Sundarbans* Biodiversity Conservation Project (SBCP, 2002) identified 82 unions of 17 upazilas under Khulna, Bagerhat, Satkhira, Pirojpur and Borguna Civil district as the Impact Zone which was situated within the 5 km of the boundary of SRF. This Impact Zone is the potential area for developing and practicing CBT. Explorative research is needed to find out the suitable area for CBT within the Impact Zone.

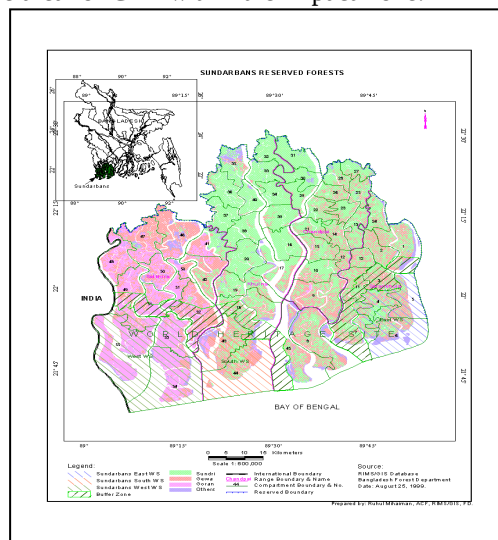


Fig. 1. The *Sundarbans* Reserved Forest of Bangladesh (SBCP, 2002)

### Tourism and conservation

Tourism can be defined as the temporary short-term movement of people to considerations outside the places where they normally live and work and their activities during the stay at the destination in order to satisfy a consumer needs (Law, 1996). Tourism is the world's largest industry which is still growing. The annual growth rate in tourism is expected to be higher than 4% over the next 20 years. The contribution of tourism to developing economies is impressive (Kruk *et al.*, 2007). Tourism is an increasingly essential element of economic, social and cultural development (Western, 1993). According to UNESCO, travel and tourism is one of the few sectors which has major growth potential. As for example, it provides opportunities for job

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creation and economic development; enhances social progress and strengthens communities, encourages the protection of the environment and contributes actively to conservation (Kamamba, 2003). Sustainable tourism provides one possible strategy for preserving biodiversity and promoting small-scale sustainable economic development. Some critics question how increased sustainable tourism income in areas of high biodiversity contributes toward biodiversity conservation (Catherine, 2007: 251). The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) asserts that sustainable tourism can be a tool for economic development and poverty reduction, arguing that tourism provides opportunities for selling additional goods and services; creates opportunities for local economic diversification of poor and marginal areas without other development opportunities; is based on cultural, wildlife and landscape assets that belong to the poor; offers better labour-intensive and small scale opportunities than any sector but agriculture; promotes gender equality by employing a relatively high proportion of women; reduces leakage from, and maximizes linkage to, local economies. Tourism therefore offers opportunities for substantial growth, although success depends on effective marketplace value, quality of the products developed and the establishment of meaningful community-private-public partnerships (UNWTO, 2002). Ilyina and Mieczkowski, (1992) has opined that 'knowledge-orientated' tourism is expending in the world with other forms of environmentally friendly tourism, such as ecotourism, adventure tourism and cultural tourism. Scientific tourism is a form of sustainable tourism (as for example ecotourism) has excellent prospects worldwide with the improving educational levels and increased interest on the demand side of the demand-supply equation in tourism. 'Knowledge-orientated' tourists are known for their modest expectations in terms of facilities, amenities, service and comfort.

Conservation can be perceived as overarching goal of resource management. Conservation is a socio-political process which aims to maintain the biodiversity. So, both biological and socio-political issues are important for the decision making of conservation (Alcorn, 2005; Eagles *et. al.*, 2002). Farming is not the only the way to solve the poverty. Along with agriculture, actual and potential rural and non-rural activities are also important to the construction of viable rural livelihoods. Therefore, the cross-sectored and multi-occupational diversity of rural livelihoods may need to be the cornerstone of rural development policy to reduce rural poverty to be effective in future (Ellis and Biggs, 2001). From this point of view, CBT and ecotourism may be such options of occupational diversity for the local people of the surrounding villages of SRF.

One of the most common uses of protected areas is tourism (Walpole and Goodwin, 2001) and the surrounding area, the people, their culture, practice, etc. are also (potential) attractions for the tourists. The natural capital (e.g., landscapes, flora, fauna, etc.) and associated traditional culture of protected areas draw attention of the tourists (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1993; Roe and Khanya, 2001). Promoting tourism to an existing protected areas and share a part of the profit to communities is a popular community-based conservation strategy. This can be done by encouraging or facilitating local investment into tourism activities (Western, 1993).

CBT and ecotourism have great potentialities to be developed to emancipate the local people and improve their socio-economic status. This will also create alternative source of income for their livelihood that facilitate to reduce the pressure on biodiversity. CBT has been used to describe a variety of activities that seek positive link between conservation and economic development. Local people can derive maximum benefits and contribute to conserve the local resources (cultural and/or ecological) on which tourism is dependent (RECOFTC, 2007).

### **Debates on community-based natural resource conservation**

Advocates of participatory conservation approaches insist that by denying local peoples' access to protected areas and by excluding them from decision-making processes, conservationists create tension between park managers and local residents, increase monitoring costs, and fail to benefit

from valuable local knowledge and resource management systems (McNeely, 1995; Wells and Brandon, 1992; Western and Wright, 1994 cited in Hayes, 2006; Berkes, 2004). Biodiversity conservation is doomed to collapse when it is based on bottom-up processes that depend on voluntary compliance of local people. Like him Rabinowitz's also promoted top-down approach to nature conservation-contrary to much contemporary political and conservation rhetoric. Most of the countries government controls the protected areas not the surrounding people that ultimately decide the fate of forests and wildlife (Rabinowitz, 1999 cited in Wilshusen *et al.*, 2002). "In the developing world, conservation by and large became the state's responsibilities, both during and after the colonial era" (Western and Wright, 1994). Again, Kramer and van Schaik (1997, cited in Wilshusen *et al.*, 2002) highlights the fundamental conflict between conservation and development at the local level. This incompatibility points out two conclusions. First one is that sustainable use depletes biodiversity (Redford and Richter, 1999; Robinson, 1993 cited in Wilshusen *et al.*, 2002) and the second one is that integrated conservation and development projects have not effectively safeguarded protected area core zone (Hayes, 2006). Even though there is much literature that supports the local people involvement in natural resource conservation. Community-based conservation is meant to be the opposite of top-down and centre-based conservation by focusing on the people who bear the costs and benefits of conservation. Community-based Conservation includes natural resources or biodiversity protection by, for, and with the local community (Western and Wright, 1994). "The grass-root approach recognized rural communities' dependence on sustainable use of natural resources such as soil, water, grazing land, forest products, and wildlife" (Uphoff, 1985 cited in Western and Wright, 1994). The goal for the future is to retain as large as a fraction of Earth's biodiversity as possible (Terborgh and Schaik, 1997). The basic element of earlier policy and scholarly writings about local communities and their residents are familiar. "People" were an obstacle to efficient and "rational" organization of resource use. Most of the current ideas about the community's role in conservation have changed radically: Communities are now the locus of the conservationist thinking (Agrawal and Gibson, 1999). Sustainable development should be based on local-level situations derived from community initiatives (Ghai and Vivian, 1992; Ghai, 1994 cited in Leach *et al.*, 1999).

#### **Community-based Tourism and Ecotourism: A Theoretical perspective**

**Community-based Tourism (CBT):** CBT is a visitor-host interaction that has meaningful participation by the both visitor and host, and generates economic and conservation benefits for local communities and environments. It has been broadly accepted that the local stewardship of resources plays an important role in the long-term sustainability of resource use. A range of collaborative activities has demonstrated that the participation of local communities in the management of forest resources greatly assists in conservation as well as promotes rural development. Community-based tourism is one such emerging activity that is generating much interest among local people, tour operators, government agencies, and business sector (Jain and Triraganon, 2003). Different CBT strategies to create net benefits for the poor have faced many problems to economic participation including lack of skills and organization, low understanding of tourism, poor tourism product quality and limited market access (van der Duim and Henkens, 2007). There has been little emphasis put on the analysis of the implications of sustainable tourism on specific local communities and on the industry's impact on the quality of life and on socio-ecological aspects of communities that are directly affected by the tourism industry particularly in developing countries (Akama and Damiannah, 2007). According to Jain and Triraganon (2003), objectives of CBT are:

- to contribute increasing and/or improving conservation of natural and/or cultural resources, including biological diversity, water, forests, cultural landscapes, monuments, etc;

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- to contribute in local economic development through increasing tourism revenues and other benefits to community participants, and ideally to an increasing number of participants;
- to encourage local participation in its planning and management; and
- to provide a socially and environmentally responsible experience and exchange for both visitor and host.

It is, however, important to note that the objectives of CBT do not always emphasize natural resource conservation and linkages with economic development. Cultural conservation, community and/or gender empowerment, poverty alleviation, and income generation, are also primary purposes in many cases. In any intervention and planning effort, it will be critical to have consensus and clarity about the objectives and to focus activities including monitoring and evaluation around these.

***Rationale of Community-based Tourism:*** CBT is a vision which is people-oriented alternative tourism practice (Urquico, 1998). Strict protection of natural resources has not always been successful, and neither has top-down centralized decision making and management of conservation and development. Thus, in the search for more effective strategies for conservation and development, reconciling conservation management with economic and social development of local populations is considered to have more potential for success. Tourism has the potential to link conservation and development, especially if local communities are able to capture economic benefits and are empowered to conserve the resources on which their incomes depend (Jain and Triraganon, 2003).

A moral perspective that argues that management by local people accompanied by devolved decision-making is more preferable since it can be more accountable and sustainable in the long-term. In the case of tourism, commercialization, and monopolization and the accumulation of benefits from tourism among relatively small numbers of beneficiaries are processes that have not benefited local communities. There has been, and continues to be, increasing concern that benefits must be more widely distributed, especially since the costs are often borne by local communities in the form of restricted or loss of access to resources at the sites (Jain and Triraganon, 2003).

Community based tourism could be one way of creating a more sustainable tourism industry (Blackstock, 2005). CBT based on natural and cultural heritage is one of the fastest growing sectors in the tourism industry. Now-a-days tourism seeking to be environmentally and socially responsible is not merely an ethical option for the customers but is also considered as attractive product for development and marketing point of view. Parallel to this, CBT can be treated as a segment of sustainable development strategy which is based on small-scale, locally designed and operated activities benefiting visitors, hosts and the environment. Nevertheless, the feasibility of such initiatives requires to be analyzed with particular reference to wider policy frameworks and complex national, regional and international markets (Jain and Triraganon, 2003).

***Community-based Tourism - key issues:*** The under-stated key issues (not exhaustive one) (Jain and Triraganon, 2003) should be considered while developing CBT.

***Participation:*** The level, number and types of different stakeholders' participation are treated as crucial to the success of CBT. The local communities living in or/and around the main destination is paid much attention in CBT as they are generally ignored in the decision-making process. The local communities build the ownership which facilitates the sustainability of conservation and getting economic benefits by ensuring their active participation (bottom-up) in CBT planning and development. Proper distribution of such benefits promotes community development as well as conserving the natural resources of the site.

*Markets and customers:* CBT can comprise a wide range of activities that collectively contribute to improved conservation and development of the destination. In case of developing CBT as a brand new enterprise in a community, intensive assessment and planning efforts, identify markets and understand the competition is required. CBT may also focus on adding value (e.g., training for local guides, infrastructure development, etc.) to existing activities resulting in increased revenues and incomes to local communities and incentives to conserve resources. To address these issues, understanding the market and demand of tourists; and risk management is required in CBT planning and management.

*Capacity growth:* The sustainability and success of CBT depend significantly on the skills, knowledge, technology and experience of the participants involved as individuals or organizations. Capacity building for developing (planning to evaluation) CBT is essential.

*Impacts and monitoring:* Proper monitoring the impacts of CBT activities should be carried out due to assess the changes of local communities and environment. These results (irrespective of whether the impact is desired or not) are very important for CBT planning and management. As a result, participatory monitoring and evaluation (PME) is an essential component of CBT planning and implementation.

*Partnerships and collaborations:* CBT should be planned, implemented and managed in an integrated way as it consists of diverse activities of different sectors and stakeholders. As a result, not only the local community but also the outside organizations (related to CBT initiatives) should be considered on the basis of co-operation and collaboration. Moreover, CBT is a complex type of tourism involving a chain of supply of products and services as well as a number of consumers. Community people need the collaboration of different actors (NGOs, government agencies and the commercial private sector) to attain economic and logistic supports. Such types of strategic partnerships, collaborations and alliances build upon respective strengths and interests are helpful to leverage resources and reduce risks.

*Policies:* The ability of CBT to generate benefits is often associated with key policies originating from a range of sectors, e.g., government agencies that handle forests, protected areas, tourism, finance, visitor permits and movements, agriculture, commerce, transport and so on plus international policies and treaties that influence global currency markets, commodities and borders. However, there are significant opportunities within the policy environment for supporting CBT development. There is a government CBT Development policy that supports community-run tourism activities on communal lands to encourage community access to development options and to generate incentives for conservation of wildlife and landscapes.

Cultural tourism can also enrich CBT by its manifest contribution to the local communities. Richards (1996) defined (double definition) the term “cultural tourism” as follows:

*Conceptual definition:* The movement of persons to cultural attractions away from their normal place of residence, with the intention to gather new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural needs.

*Technical definition:* All movements of persons to specific cultural attractions, such as heritage sites, artistic and cultural manifestations, arts and drama outside their normal place of residence.

Cultural tourism develops at a considerable speed and diversifies continuously in a multifaceted way. Cultural events signify highly positive rankings on different levels: economic impact, image improvement, and developmental prospects. The development of cultural tourism e.g., events and exhibitions depend largely on (Bachleitner and Zins, 1999):

- the cultural supply (attractiveness of the exhibition)
- the social and organizational structure (local and regional background)
- the cultural experience and
- the psychical and social prestige (distinction).

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There are several objectives of cultural exhibition tourism in its development and implementation. It is generally associated with regional promotional aspects if it is considered from the tourism policy point of view. However, there are different levels of interest (Bachleitner and Zins, 1999):

- on a regional level: to boost occupancy rates of companies in the tourism sector, the creation of new even if time limited—jobs, to improve the turnover of secondary suppliers, to attract new guest segments.
- on economic policy level: to improve local business attractiveness and as a consequence the opening of new companies in the service sector
- on a residents' level: a higher degree of regional identification, the emergence of a proper identity with space, history, and cultural heritage, an improvement of the quality of life (QOL).

There are seven ways in which the poor can be benefited from tourism (both CBT and ecotourism) economically (UNWTO, 2004):

*Employment:* If proper steps are taken then tourism can increase the level of employment of the poor people within different kinds of tourism enterprises (e.g., hotels, resorts, transport companies, attractions, tourism services, etc.).

*Supply of goods and services to tourism enterprises:* By taking necessary measures it is possible to maximize the proportion of visitor spending that is retained in the local community and to engage the poor in the supply chain process to maximize their economic benefits.

*Direct sales of goods and services to tourists:* Tourism can ensure the poor to earn more money by selling their products and services directly to tourists (e.g., selling foods, handicrafts, guiding services, transport such as taxis and boats, and accommodation).

*Establishing and running a tourism enterprise:* Necessary measures can be taken to stimulate the local people to run tourism businesses at individual or community level.

*Tax or levy:* Local and national governments can earn revenue through tourism activities as general income and business and also development taxes as well as more specific tourism-related charges such as airport taxes, bed taxes and visa fees that can be used for poverty alleviation.

*Voluntary giving and support:* Visitors and tourists as well as tourism enterprises may voluntarily support to the local poor communities that can also alleviate their poverty.

*Investment in infrastructure:* New infrastructure such as, roads, water and energy supply, sanitation, communications, etc. infrastructures are required for facilitating the tourists which also benefit the local people.

### **Ecotourism**

Aesthetic, topographic, biological and cultural features are the major components upon which tourism is based. International Union for the Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) Ecotourism Programme defines Ecotourism as "Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations" (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1993a). According to The Ecotourism Society (TES) ecotourism is "Responsible travel to nature areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people" (Blangy and Wood, 1992). The word *ecotourism* may be elaborated and defined by the meanings of its individual letter as: **E** = Environment, **C** = Conservation, **O** = Original, **T** = Tourist, **O** = Obedient, **U** = Upliftment, **R** = Recreation, **I** = Indigenous people, **S** = Sustainable and **M** = Management. So, in summary ecotourism means "recreation of the tourists in an original environment in such a way where tourists will be obedient for conservation of that environment by following sustainable management strategy as well as ensures participation of the

indigenous people for the upliftment of their living standards” (Islam, 2008). Ecotourism is not only a novel type of tourism but a kind of scientific tourism philosophy which is the most briskly developed tourism type in the world (annual growth rate 30%) (Zheng, 2007).

According to Zheng (2007), the principles of ecotourism development resources are based on scientific development philosophy. He argues that establishment and implementation of scientific development philosophy, maintaining the harmony between man and nature, considering the route of resource economical and environment-friendly ecotourism development and the efforts to realize the sound and sustainable development of ecotourism are essential for developing ecotourism resources of a destination. These principles are stated briefly as below:

**The Eco-development Principle:** The scientific philosophy of ‘protection or conservation’ should be judged first before the concept of ‘development’ in case of developing ecotourism resources at any ecotourism destination. In order to maintain the harmony between man and nature as well as to ensure maximum economic profit, we should place more stress on the ecological services and the sustainable use of natural resources of the destination. Ecotourism planning and construction should be lined with the protection of ecosystem.

**The Moderate Development Principle:** Carrying capacity of the nature, the requirement of ecological quality, tourism market, tourists’ demand, experts’ opinions, etc. issues should be kept in mind while planning and implementing the constructional activities at an ecotourism spot (after Wang, 2001 cited in Zheng, 2007). These activities need to be undertaken considering the natural beauty of the site, maintaining the proper sequence of the ecosystem, monitoring of environment and reasonable use of our resources. This will also improve the planning, construction and supervision of the ecotourism spots to magnify its attraction and appeal.

**The Naturality Principle:** Ecotourism is based on the natural environment so the maintenance of the natural features of the ecotourism spots is mandatory. The originality of the nature should be maintained to meet the demands of the ecotourists. In connection to this principle, human landscapes should be restricted to preclude the scratch to the natural state and all the travel routes and tourism facilities should be planned rationally to maintain the flavor of originality and protecting the environment and biodiversity.

**The Specialty Principle:** Ecotourism appeals tourists by its distinctive features and conspicuous specialty. Distinctive ecotourism products will satisfy tourists’ demands to pursue freshness, stimulate their imagination and encourage them to travel. As a result, we should endeavor to launch distinguished spots with their unique features guided by the market while developing ecotourism. In connection to this, we ought to try promoting ethnic folklore and historic elements for the ecotourism destinations.

**The Informative Principle:** Developing and practicing ecotourism is based on providing different information to the tourists and local communities. Tourists will learn, inform, enlarge their views, build their characters and enjoy the nature as well as its related aspects by getting the information. This ecotourism information shapes the tourists and residents as ‘responsible for the environment’. As for example, the explanation system at tourism destination can educate the tourists to respect and conserve the environment and surrounding communities. Moreover, the ecotourism service staff should provide good information to the tourists. Such a way, tourists and residents will be educated and facilitated to gain knowledge about ecotourism as well as develop strong commitment to save the environment.

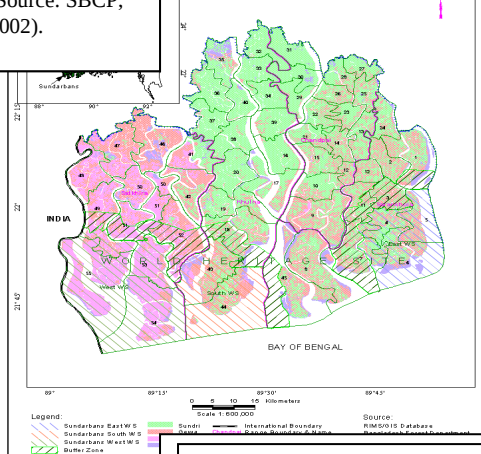
In addition to the above five principles of ecotourism resource development, this author (Zheng, 2007) has suggested five basic ways to develop ecotourism from the perspective of sustainable development. These are: (i) Making a good plan for ecotourism (ii) Giving prominence to the aesthetic value of natural ecology (iii) Having correct target market positioning (iv) intensifying the supervision of ecotourism spots (v) perfecting the training system of ecotourism.

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### **Potentiality of community-based tourism and ecotourism at the Sundarbans and its surroundings**

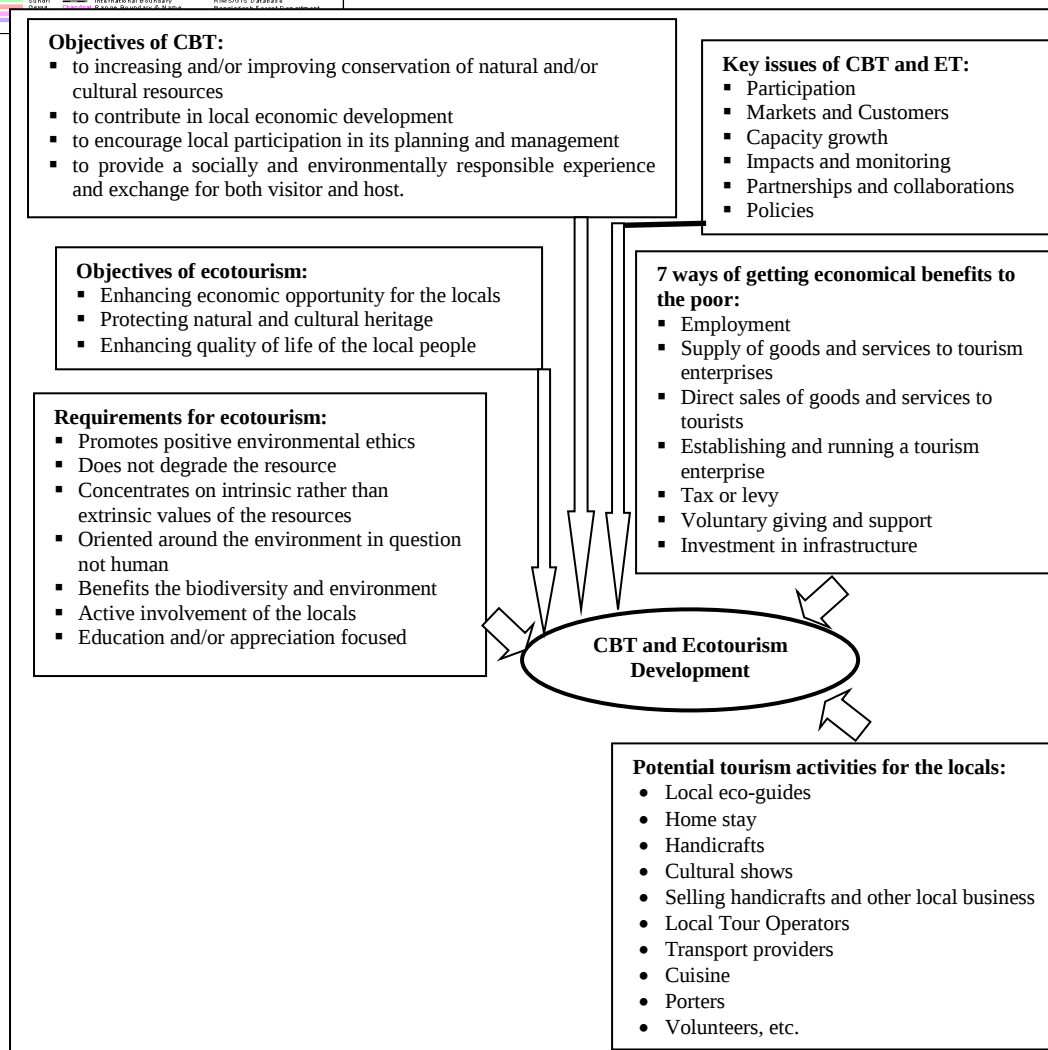
About five million people inhabiting the surrounding areas of the *Sundarbans* (within 5 km from the boundary of the forest) are directly or indirectly dependent on the *Sundarbans* for their livelihoods of which around 2.22 million people are directly dependent (Haider, 2004). A good number of these dependent local people can be involved with CBT and ecotourism practice by forward and backward linkages of the business. The *Sundarbans*- world's largest single contiguous mangrove forest is an excellent potential ecotourism spot in Bangladesh as well as in the world due to her enriched and unique biodiversity, different ecosystems, picturesque scenic beauty, historical cultural and religious affairs, etc. There are three basic components for ecotourism development. These are: local people, natural environment and tourists/visitors. We have huge population inhabiting the surrounding areas of *Sundarbans* including *Munda* and *Mahato* two indigenous community living *Koyra* upazila of Khulna and *Shamnagar, Debhata* and *Tala* upazila of Satkhira district who might be an attraction along with the main stream communities. But we seldom involve the local poor people in ecotourism to improve their socio-economic condition and to uplift their living standard. Now-a-days, a good number of tourists/visitors visit *Sundarbans* which ensures the flow of tourists. Ecotourism can contribute to conserve the natural resources of SRF by generating revenues; creating new employment opportunities and training for both locals and outsiders; and providing the opportunities for the environmental awareness and education for tourists, officials and resource users. These conditions also favor for CBT practice and development. Moreover, the cultural diversity, multi faced professions, life style, cordialness, etc. of the local community people residing the surrounding villages of the forest are the potential resources of practicing CBT at these villages. If we can involve and utilize the local community in an effective way of CBT and ecotourism (as per the above mentioned theoretical principles and guidelines) then their superfluous and undesirable activities against the nature will be prevented and the pressure on the *Sundarbans* for their resource extraction can be reduced. By this way the local community will be aware of the conservation value of the *Sundarbans* and be promoted to conserve it rather to destroy it.

There are a lot of underpowered population (especially the women) at the study area which negatively affect their livelihood. CBT is a form of tourism that aims to empower the local communities in self-reliance and decision-making through generating different alternative job opportunities; to promote environmental awareness and education; conservation of local culture; development of infra-structures and security; etc. which can improve the living pattern of the local communities and ultimately lead to reduce their pressure on SRF. It is managed by local communities, emphasizes the group process and sharing of benefits, and tries to support human rights and the capabilities of people. CBT also creates a consensus within the community to sustain both cultural and natural resources, aiming to preserve local knowledge by creating a cultural exchange process between local people and tourists.



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T and ecotourism development at SRF and its vicinity.



According to SNV (Netherlands Development Organization) (undated) there are some pre-requisites which are called 10A's in short for Sustainable Tourism Development. These 10A's are: Attractions, Activities, Access, Accommodation, Actors, Amenities, Affinity, Acts, Ability and Administration. These factors should be analyzed scientifically to be informed about the potentiality of CBT and ecotourism at the study area. But apparently (based on personal observation and experiences), it seems that if we can start working on these pre-requisites in a planned way by getting proper support from the relevant organizations then it is possible to develop CBT and ecotourism at the study area to reduce the pressure of the local people on the natural resources of SRF to some extent.

### Constraints

- No specific government policy on CBT and ecotourism for their development at SRF or its surroundings.

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- Lack of knowledge and technical know-how on CBT and ecotourism of relevant persons to practice and develop. Very few researches on tourism have been conducted on tourism at and around the *Sundarbans*. No scientific research has been found on CBT at the impact zone of the *Sundarbans*.
- Poverty of the local people hinders them to act and behave eco-friendly to conserve the natural resources of SRF.
- Less or no environmental consciousness and education among the local people.
- Poor institutional support for developing CBT and ecotourism at the study area.
- Lack of initiatives from government, NGOs and private organizations (tour operators) to practice CBT and ecotourism at the *Sundarbans*.

### **Recommendations**

The followings are some recommendations which may facilitate the development and practice of CBT and ecotourism at the study area.

- Needs specific CBT and ecotourism policy in Bangladesh so that these types of tourism can be practiced by the supports of different institutions.
- More and vast research studies are required in the filed of tourism at and around the SRF to generate knowledge and technical know-how to overcome the hurdles of developing CBT and ecotourism.
- Needs capacity building for the local people and relevant organizations (e.g., Bangladesh *Parjatan* Corporation, Forest Department, Tour Operators, Travel Agents, local entrepreneurs, local stakeholders, etc.) on CBT and ecotourism to be well-acquainted and ensure their participation in this field of tourism.
- Local poverty of the people needs to be reduced by the expansion of local employment and self-employment opportunities to reduce their pressure on SRF.
- Development of partnership amongst public and private sectors, NGOs and local communities to develop tourism.
- Improving economical, social, cultural and environmental activities of the local communities. More environmental campaigns and education is required for the locals.

### **Conclusion**

The *Sundarbans* is rich in biodiversity along with its social, cultural and economical values. The surrounding local communities of the *Sundarbans* are poor and directly and/or indirectly dependent on the forest for their livelihoods. As a result, their pressure is obliterating the natural resources of the *Sundarbans* day by day. If the increasing popular concepts of CBT and ecotourism are transformed into action with its proper management in and around the *Sundarbans*, it is predicted to facilitate the sustainability of the environmental, economical, social and cultural resources of the area. It may enhance the overall socio-economic development of the local communities located at the vicinity of the forest which may motivate them to reduce their traditional dependency on the *Sundarbans* Mangrove Forest to encourage its conservation efforts.

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