



RESEARCH ARTICLE

COMMUNITY BASED TOURISM AND ITS ECONOMIC IMPACT: A STUDY ON KHULNA AND KUSHTIA AREA

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) on the economy of Bangladesh, focusing on the Khulna (Sundarbans) and Kushtia (Lalon&Khuti bari). CBT is a community-owned tourism model designed to foster economic development through the preservation of local culture and nature. Utilizing a primary survey of 50 participants alongside secondary data, the research evaluates how CBT influences income, employment, and poverty alleviation. Key findings indicate a significant positive shift in the demographic and economic status of participants. After joining CBT programs, unemployment among respondents plummeted from 42% to 6%, while self-employment rose from 26% to 50%. Income levels also saw substantial growth, with 44% of respondents moving into the Tk. 21,000–30,000 annual net income bracket and 84% reporting that their income had become sufficient to meet their needs. Despite these gains, the study identifies challenges such as the fragile state of the national tourism industry and lower participation rates among women and older age groups. The research concludes that with integrated national policies, public-private partnerships, and improved infrastructure, CBT can serve as a vital tool for sustainable rural development and foreign exchange earnings in Bangladesh.

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INTRODUCTION

Community Based Tourism (CBT) is a tourism system owned and operated by local communities, which directly contributes to the economic development of the community by preserving its own culture and nature. Tourism in Bangladesh creates local employment (homestays, guides), sale of handicrafts and rural income opportunities, which has a major impact on poverty alleviation and women empowerment (Muganda et al., 2010). Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is a very promising sector in the Khulna region, especially in the areas adjacent to the Sundarbans. It is tourism with the participation of local people, which has a large positive impact on the local economy without harming the nature (Yanes et al., 2019). The main objective of CBT in Khulna's Sundarbans, Dakop, Koira and Bagerhat's Mongla area (villages around Sundarbans) is to bring tourists closer to nature as well as introduce them to local culture and lifestyle. Community Based Tourism (CBT) in Kushtia is mainly developing around historical and cultural centers like Lalon Shah's shrine and Shilaidah Rabindranath Tagore's kuthibari. It is a tourism system operated with the participation of local people, which ensures direct income to the locals (Arintoko et al., 2020). Kushtia is called the cultural capital of Bangladesh with the visit of Baul emperor Lalon

Shah and the memorial of the world poet Rabindranath Tagore. Tourists visiting shrines or kuthibaris here get an opportunity to come in contact with the local way of life. The number of international tourists worldwide in 2024 was about 1.45 billion, an increase of about 11.5 percent compared to 2023 (Matapuri and Glampiccoli, 2020). In the first three months of 2025, the number of international tourists grew by about 5 percent year-on-year. As of November 2025, Japan has received nearly 39 million foreign tourists, surpassing its previous record (Tamir, 2015). In many developing countries including Bangladesh, tourism can be an effective means of poverty alleviation, employment generation and foreign exchange earnings. Average income increases through tourism. The most direct economic contribution of tourism is income generation. When tourists travel to a country or region, they spend money on accommodation, food, transportation, entertainment and shopping. This expenditure is directly added to the local business and service sector as income. Homestay: Local residents provide accommodation to tourists in their homes. Tourists get a real taste of the rural environment. Local Guiding: Boating on small canals inside the forest, bird watching or on known trails inside the forest with locals acting as guides (called "banjeevi" or bawali-mowali). Traditional food: Tourists are served locally produced fresh fish, crabs and special village dishes.

Handicrafts and Culture: Local women make and sell nakshikantha, Sundarbans honey, or bamboo-cane items. "Bon Bibi" songs or local folk songs are also organized (Kunjuraman, 2022b).

Research Questions

- What is the main theme of community based tourism?
- What are the main obstacles to the development of the community based tourism and what steps should be taken to remove them?
- How can community based tourism improve the different criteria of the poor like income, unemployment etc.?

Objectives of the Study: The main objective of the study is to evaluate the impact of community based tourism (CBT) on the economy of Bangladesh. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To analyze the various policy variables and to observe their effects on the development of CBT;
- To identify the specific problems in the CBT; and
- To provide some suggestions and recommendations to solve identified problems with view to alleviating poverty.

METHODOLOGY

The present study has been involved in collection of data both from primary and secondary sources. The study has been conducted mainly on the basis of primary data. The primary data have been collected through personal interview of selected members. The secondary data have been obtained from various books, journals and other publications were used for collecting secondary data. Both types of data have been collected by the researcher himself.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The development of tourism industry is very important to strengthen the economy of Bangladesh because the tourism industry of Bangladesh is very fragile compared to neighboring countries (Lapeyre, 2010). With proper planning and effective management, this sector can become an important source of income growth, employment generation and foreign exchange earnings for the country (Rifai, 2012). For this, it is necessary to first formulate and implement a modern and integrated national tourism policy, where joint ventures between the public and private sectors will be ensured and there will be clear guidelines for investors. The government receives revenue from the tourism sector in various ways—such as VAT and sales tax, hotel and restaurant tax, airport fees, tourism license fees, etc. (Adewale, 2016). This revenue can be spent by the government on education, health, infrastructure and social development sectors (Pavlic et al., 2013). The impact of Khulna and Kushtia the overall economy of Bangladesh is far-reaching:

Table -1(1) shows the gender status of the respondents. It is observed from the table that 56 % of the respondents are male, and 44 % are Female. From this data it is found that rural female are not in a position to income generating activities by CBT business. The table-1(2) reveals the age of respondents. It

is seen that during starting the CBT business the age of respondents were 20 – 30 years which stands 32% of total respondents (50). The table also expresses that 50% of the respondents established their CBT business between the ages of 31 – 40. The age group above 40 years consists of 18% respondents which is the lowest of the total respondents. This reason behind it may be that at this age persons do not agree to take risk. It is found from the Table-2(3), that, 40 % of the respondents were have an education up to SSC level, 36 % have an education HSC level and only 24 % completed their education Graduate or more respectively. It may be pointed out in this connection that percentage of up to SSC level in the rural area of Bangladesh is generally high.

From the Table -2(1) it is shown that before joining CBT, 22% of the respondents were student, 42% were unemployed, 10% were employed, 26 % were self-employed. However, after joining CBT's program Employment Statustransition was found to take place among the respondent's. It is evident from the data in the above table that the Employment Status of unemployed has declined from 42 % to 6 % and student, employed and self-employed have increased from 22% to 30%, 10% to 14%, 26% to 50%, respectively. The above information provides an indication that the process of occupational transition may be tended through the increased CBT operation. From the Table -2(2) it is shown that before joining CBTs, 18% of the respondents were trade, 30 % were GOs & NGOs job, 6% were tourism business, and remaining 46% were associated with other occupations. However, after joining CBT's program an occupational transition was found to take place among the respondent's. It is evident from the data in the above table that the occupation of trade has declined from 18 % to 10 % and others has decreased from 46% to 10 % where GO & NGOs job and tourism have increased from 30% to 34%, 6.0% to 46 % respectively. The above information provides an indication that the process of occupational transition may be tended through the increased CBT operation.

From the above table-2(3) it is found that 44 % of the respondents before to an income bracket was up to Tk.10000, 34 % fall in income bracket from Tk. 11,001 to Tk.20000 and remaining 6.0 % belong to income bracket above Tk.30,000 before joining CBT. In case of post CBT operation situation the table indicate the highest number of respondents 44 % concentrated in the income bracket of Tk.21000 to Tk.30000 as compared to CBT situation of 16 %. It also reveals that 10% fall in income group up to Tk.10000 while 34 % belong to income bracket from TK.11000 to TK.20,000 as compared to pre CBT situation of 34 % and 24 % respectively. Therefore, the above picture hints that CBTs finance have made a favorable impact on the income level of the respondents. The rising income increases the purchasing power of the respondents and may assist in improving their standard of living. Table -2(4) shows that 88 % of the respondents opined that their income is sufficient increased after starting CBT business and only 16 % replied that their income did not any change even after starting CBTs.

Challenges and opportunities: Infrastructure development is very important for tourism development. Improving safety and service quality is essential for the tourism industry. Tourist police should be strengthened in tourist areas and quality control and rating system should be introduced for hotels, restaurants and travel services (Roxas et al., 2020). Digital system for redressal of tourist complaints and ensuring

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents

No.	Item	Category	Frequency	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
1.	Gender	Male	28	56	56
		Female	22	44	100
2.	Age	20-30	16	32	32
		31-40	25	50	82
		More than 40	09	18	100
3.	Educational Status	Below and SSC	20	40	40
		HSC	18	36	76
		Graduate or more	12	24	100

Table 2. Profile of respondents

No.	Item	Category	Before		After	
			No. of Respondents	%	No. of Respondents	%
1.	Employment Status	Student	11	22	15	30
		Unemployed	21	42	03	06
		Employed	05	10	07	14
		Self employed	13	26	25	50
		Total	50	100	50	100
2.	Source of Income	Trade	09	18	05	10
		GO & NGOs job	15	30	17	34
		Tourism business	03	06	23	46
		Others	23	46	05	10
		Total	50	100	50	100
3.	Net income per year	Up to Tk.10,000	22	44	05	10
		Tk.11,000 -20,000	17	34	12	24
		Tk.21,000 -30,000	8	16	22	44
		Tk. 30,000 & Above	3	06	11	22
		Total	50	100	50	100
4.	Is your income sufficient	Yes	6	12	42	84
		No	44	88	08	16
		Total	50	100	50	100

Source: Field Survey

emergency healthcare will increase the confidence of domestic and foreign tourists. Tourism industry cannot be sustainable without human resource development. For this reason, hospitality and tourism related training institutions should be expanded, tour guides and service providers should be given professional training and foreign language learning opportunities should be increased (Kaur et al., 2016). The development of skilled and trained manpower will improve the quality of service and the income from the tourism sector will also increase. Although promising, there are still some challenges:

Infrastructure: Lack of improved communication and healthcare in villages near Sundarbans.

Lack of skills: Lack of guides with local communication skills in English or other languages.

Unplanned Development: Tourism growth without proper planning can cause damage to the environment.

Homestay facilities: Accommodation in local houses or 'homestay' services are being introduced for tourists. According to the report of Bangladesh Tourism Corporation, the monthly income of families engaged in homestay services increased by 20-40 percent (Ninic & Inguman, 2019).

Small and Cottage Industries: The expansion of tourism has led to the expansion of local handicrafts, such as bamboo and woodwork and khadi cloth markets, which directly contribute to the local economy.

Opportunities: Community Based Tourism is positively impacting the economy of Bangladesh in several ways:

Contribution to GDP: Tourism sector contributes about 4.4% to 4.7% of the total GDP in Bangladesh.

Employment Generation: This sector employs an average of about 2.23 million people every year.

Income generation and poverty alleviation: Tourism increases the demand for agricultural products and fish and meat in local markets, which indirectly helps farmers to increase their income.

Infrastructural Development: Development of roads and communication systems at both the public and private levels centered on tourism centers, which accelerates overall economic growth.

Women's Empowerment: In districts like Kushtia and Khulna, it has been seen that due to tourism, women are becoming financially independent by engaging in handicrafts and cooking services.

CONCLUSION

Tourism can be an effective means of poverty alleviation, employment generation and foreign exchange earning in many developing countries including Bangladesh. Average income increases through tourism. The most direct economic contribution of tourism is income generation. When tourists travel to a country or region, they spend money on accommodation, food, transportation, entertainment and shopping. This expenditure is directly added to the local business and service sector as income. Community Based Tourism in Khulna and Kushtia are not only tourism but also

an excellent example of sustainable development. It saves the lives of foresters on the one hand, gives tourists a unique experience on the other, and strengthens the overall economy of Bangladesh.

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