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SUSTAINABLE INITIATIVES FOR COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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11.1 Introduction
Tourism as a potential source of livelihood arguably has immense potential. Tourist attractions cannot merely be considered places of general human interest, but must also have the capacity to offer authentic experiences. In recent years, sustainability has emerged as a fundamental topic of debate in tourism, resulting from enormous negative effects of mass visitation. Factors such as economic, social or human well-being paradigms are more likely to be associated with sustainability. Some positive outcomes of sustainability such as enhanced life quality, economic opportunity generation and better livelihood generation are common elements of sustainability in tourism. The tourism industry is mostly aimed towards attracting opportunities. It can thus make positive contributions to the local community’s livelihood as benefitted from sustainability. Examples show that with aesthetic diversities, specific countries have been able to capitalise on these potentials. However, these countries are different from the others disrupted by unwanted and negative consequences related to tourism. Bangladesh, a South Asian country, is said to have rich tourism resources. A considerable part of said resources remains unexplored and seek attention for tourism promotion with them. This research looks at Bangladesh as a selected case of an emerging economy. Thus, the aim of this study is to explain sustainability under the lens of community-based tourism (CBT), which is viewed as a supplier of livelihoods and beneficial in the development of local communities. In this regard, clear clarifications of practices by both the tourists and the local communities are offered. In addition, this research offers alternative suggestions for CBT development through sustainable tourism promotion, with the Sundarbans as an example.

11.2 Sustainability: the notion
Sustainability has rather become a buzzword in the current tourism industry. The development of concept is largely indebted to the Brundtland Report that came into the public in 1987 (World Commission on Environmental Development, 1987). Since then, ‘sustainability’ as a concept has managed to move from theory to practice. Sustainability as a critical concept generates enormous responses from both academics and practitioners (Saarinen, 2006).
Practically, the term ‘sustainability’ is more robust. It is supported by useful and valid research topics through the engagement of many ideas and initiatives (Glavic & Lukman, 2007). Sustainability is likely to become an important concern in coming years, due to the obvious increasing demand of resources and the intentions to meet them. The massive use of resources can be problematic in many cases where there should be a proper balance between mass consumption and supply capacities (Lv, 2019). Planned consumption of resources is important to promote sustainability in almost every area of a community’s livelihood.

In CBT, there are numerous issues related to sustainability. However, sustainability practices in CBT essentiality represent the exploration of relevant issues, followed by suggested ways to solve them. CBT supports sustainability that is beneficial for community well-being and tourism promotion. Sustainability practices in CBT can exert positive influences on the community’s livelihood, as well as on the entire population base (Aronsson, 2000). The practice of ensuring sustainability in CBT is widely sought after across the world (Mowforth & Munt, 1998). Significantly, CBT needs to appear in sustainable forms to offer better outcomes. Sustainable forms of CBT are much anticipated. Any negative or drastic outcome can be the result of complexities in policy planning and management. Sustainable forms of CBT are also in high demand mainly because of the nature of mass tourism that simultaneously places heavy pressures on the tourist attraction and the local community’s livelihood.

In the Sundarbans, expectations from sustainability practices, the use of resources and the practices in reality have huge gaps (Rahman & Hassan, 2016). The theoretical application of sustainability is very often missed. The responsibility for and care towards the ecology and forest are absent in many cases. Consumers of the Sundarbans’ resources arguably do not necessarily care about the nature and the forest. An understanding of the meaning of sustainability and the sustainable use of resources by consumers are mostly absent (Lv, 2019). Thus, the demand for emphasising sustainability practices is emerging as important for the sake of responsible and long-term supply of resources. Sustainability practices need to be convenient and available. Thus, more user-friendly policies are required. These need to be well documented in all the stages of planning. The proper use of resources to make sure that they will be able to serve future generations is essential to ensuring sustainability. There needs to be an effective link between the supply and use of resources. The types of use of forest resources can range from low to enormous (Holden, 2008). Thus, proper attention is required to validate demands and consumption based on supply capacities. Thus, the meaning and understanding of sustainability in the context of the Sundarbans need to be elaborated upon, as well as well planned and executed, in particular, on the basis of sustainability (Rahman & Hassan, 2016).

It is essential to attract proper attention from all stakeholders involved in CBT to ensure sustainability of development approaches. This demand is valid mainly due to the impact generated from CBT that, in many cases, can be negative (Lee & Jan, 2019). The necessity to understand sustainability thus can be intertwined with CBT and both of them jointly can then lead to development practices. Communities in the Sundarbans need to adopt responsible patterns of consumption (Bangladesh Forest Department, 2019). Increasing tendencies of the local communities to generate alternative and reliable forms of supply sources have rendered the notion of sustainability more important and valid than ever.

### 11.3 Community-based tourism: the concept and application

CBT as a notion stays at the forefront of promoting tourism in rural areas, in both developing (Honey, 2008) and developed countries (Storey, 2004). The background of CBT is
quite deep rooted, as stated by Cornelissen (2005), “Community tourism has a long history, originating from the participatory and empowerment development models that emerged as a new paradigm in development discourse in the 1970s”. CBT has links to local culture, particularly in the context of tourism “attraction” and tourism “impact”, where CBT values the local culture and outlines ways for enhancing and rescuing the local culture and heritage (Flacke–Neurdorfer, 2008, p. 252; Telfer & Sharpley, 2008, p. 124).

One research study outlined the many diverse angles of CBT in the rural settings of poor countries (Ndlovu & Rogerson, 2004). Even though CBT mostly covers rural areas, it can also include urban areas, for example South Africa, where “so-called community based tourism initiatives include programmes for developing ‘township tourism’ in localities such as Soweto, Inanda (Durban) and Khayelitsha (Cape Town) and of several rural community-based eco-tourism initiatives” (Rogerson, 2004).

In the particular rural settings of a developing country, CBT is acknowledged to have the capacity to contribute to poor rural peoples’ livelihoods. Sebele (2010) suggests that rural areas in developing countries are very often featured as having a shortage of facilities and industries. These are thus commonly inhabited by the poorest people of the society. This affirms that the earnings from CBT actually create opportunities for local communities. In reality, there are a number of factors associated with the socio-cultural setting of a rural area. These can offer the base on which CBT in such areas can be promoted and developed. Such a community attachment to CBT does not only strengthen the local economy but also advances the community itself. CBT initiatives need to be cooperative to cover necessities for local communities.

11.4 Sustainable tourism: the Sundarbans context

The Sundarbans are the subject matter of this research. The Sundarbans are a UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site (WHS) (World Tourism Organization, 2019). Proper attention of all relevant stakeholders is required in the Sundarbans for ensuring sustainable use of its resources. Issues that stay as barriers to ensure sustainability can be influenced by the local communities that have better control and access over resources. There are three main forest dependent communities – the Mouwalis (Honey Collector), the Bawalis (Wood Cutter) and the Jele (Fisherman) – in the Sundarbans.

The sustainable use of resources in the Sundarbans is another area of attention, where it is very often understood that resources are limited in a fragile environmental setting. The natural setting of the Sundarbans is delicate and fragile. Raising awareness about these was also important when the site was a declared UNESCO WHS (The United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2019). Natural resources can never be eternal. On the other side, communities dependent on fishing, wood or honey collection are more vulnerable to issues of sustainability and are subject to suffer more from growing environmental concerns. These communities are also more likely to suffer from the negative impacts of mass tourism. They have also developed a kind of carelessness attitude due to pressured aspects of survival and livelihood. For example, in the negative impacts of the way they collect honey, as they have to survive and do not care about anything else that may get in the way of survival.

It has also been evident that mass tourism can jeopardise both the natural and environmental habitats and can lead to serious trouble for them (Sharpley, 2009). Mass tourism can very often be harmful towards natural and ecological habitats. It has been evident that pollution in some parts of the forest have reached such a level that natural habitats are disturbed (World Bank, 2019). Issues of CBT in this forest have never been well attended. It is believed...
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that most of the general tourists and all of the forest dependent communities (i.e. ‘the Moulwalis’ or Honey Collector; ‘the Bawalis’ or Wood Cutter and ‘the Jele’ or Fisherman are commonly responsible for the pollution inside the forest that is a concern (World Tourism Organization, 2019).

If the government allows the forest-dependent communities’ irresponsible attitudes towards collecting resources to continue, then surely there will be a huge disaster (Asian Development Bank, 2008). The Forest Department has a sensible role to play when mass tourism impacts the natural habitat (Bangladesh Forest Department, 2019).

11.5 Responsible use of natural resources can lead to better resource management

Activities for CBT promotion in the Sundarbans are noteworthy and evidenced through the intervention of international agencies. Due to diverse factors, facilities for CBT have yet to reach an acceptable level. However, the forest as a tourist attraction very often faces obstacles and challenges that have visibly increased in recent years. In terms of managing this popular attraction, it is argued that the Sundarbans are not properly managed and very often tourists fail to get the services and products they require (Khanom & Buckley, 2015). This negatively impacts their motivation to visit this attraction. Proper management is a demand from tourists and from the forest’s beneficiaries (Blower, 1985). Mismanagement and a lack of proper coordination between governmental agencies can be held responsible for this situation. These concerns have altogether made this attraction less prominent in mainstream tourist interest. Tourists can hardly be happy with an attraction with waste disposals inside the forest, where waste visibly lies all over. This can harm the natural habitat and cause serious imbalance in nature and ecology. The government needs to be conscious of these issues. Due to a larger land area, it can very often be difficult to manage the Sundarbans’ resources properly (Hussain & Acharya, 1994).

The oil spillage incident inside the Sundarbans had seriously negative consequences, not only on the flora and fauna but also on the entire forest’s settings and stakeholders (National Geographic, 2014, 2015). This recent oil spillage incident shows that the application of innovative technologies can reduce the risk of accident. For environmental sustainability, considerable attention is also required with roles being effectively played by both the public and private sectors. Recent concerns over environmental issues have received increased attention from diverse groups of the population. Both the beneficiaries and the stakeholders within the tourism industry have the potential and responsibility to overcome negative impacts of tourism and focus on the positive aspects. However, constraints and challenges always exist in overcoming the negative issues. Smaller countries in the world with weakened economic settings have remained subject to negative sustainability issues and, thus, more vulnerable.

11.6 Sustainability, community, tourism and development

The definition of sustainability can vary in diverse circumstances. However, the meaning and application of it need to be effective and rewarding. Sustainability can represent numerous things to local communities. The benefits generated from sustainability can sometimes be crucial and challenging. There can be difficulties and complexities in realising and capitalising on the benefits of sustainability in promoting a tourist attraction like the Sundarbans (Butler, 1991). This attraction is important for the sustainable supply of local community livelihood. These communities are comprised of forest-dependent populations and their
tourism-related activities. There is a constant demand that CBT initiatives need to be in line with local community developments. Thus, more emphasis needs to be placed on such sustainable practices and on CBT. On the other hand, development can very often interact with CBT and related activities. It is also important that all such CBT development and related activities support and advance sustainability (Beeton, 2006).

CBT is considered essential for an attraction like the Sundarban to nurture, validate and thus promote natural resources. It is also critical to outline the meanings of CBT, sustainability and development in a systematic manner. Development and related activities are required to be placed on the front line of the development agenda on which the local communities can rely. There should be well-planned and well-executed policies to support and encourage CBT in this forest. The first agenda could possibly cover development that should be sustainable by nature (Responsible Travel, 2019). On the other hand, most local communities in and around the Sundarbans are optimistic in capitalising and reshaping the forest as a global example in which both tourism and development activities can take place in the similar manner (Responsible Travel, 2019).

CBT and development activities are interrelated and dependent on each other, in terms of their use and responsibility-sharing features (Beeton, 2006). Theses appear more evident in the particular case of the Sundarbans. CBT can support managerial development of an attraction (Responsible Travel, 2019). Development activities sometimes can appear to oppose sustainable practices, thus creating unexpected pressures on both the livelihood and the natural habitat of the entire area. However, the pattern is still in a process of constant change. This now relies upon and emphasises more sustainable issues and thus to identify the basic issues related to tourism management and development initiatives. The raising concerns of sustainability, CBT and development are in fact being more emphasised in a changing world that is concentrating more on the responsible uses of resources, both natural and manmade (Aquino et al., 2018). Also, the increasing attention on CBT and development activities can create anticipated influences on a properly formulated and implemented set of management and development initiatives.

11.7 Tourism practices as management agenda: the VICE model

According to Climpson (2008), the VICE model involves the better management of a tourist destination that multiple stakeholders and beneficiaries are attached to. It is a framework that allows stakeholders to get engaged and work together more closely. Practically, the VICE Model attempts to view destination management through interaction with the visitors, the industry through which they are served, the community through which they are hosted and the environment on which their collective impact and responses are placed. Every circumstance deserves appropriate attention from management bodies and thus involves a set of plans for better quality management. Approaching visitors with a welcoming attitude can help satisfy them through closer engagement. Linking the host communities with more emphasis on protecting the local environment is also another factor for consideration. All of these aspects are arguably claimed to be satisfied best by the VICE Model. As seen in Figure 11.1, the destination management, in particular, is responsible for the proper application of this model in practice.

In case of the Sundarbans, the VICE Model can have applicability in numerous ways. It can help enrich the knowledge of the destination manager or positively check the potential future of the destination. This is executed through checking the usability of this model on the visitor, possible complexities, impacts and environmental consequences. The destination
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is likely to be sustainable if all these checks are carried out in a systematic manner, which is one way to show the rationality of the VICE Model. The types and patterns of tourism can appear in numerous forms based on their features and offers. Tourism in some specific cases can create extra pressures on nature, the local livelihood and even on entire socio-cultural settings. The enormous impacts of tourism on the natural habitat and ecology can also hardly be ignored. These all need to be given the attention that they deserve to ensure a future for following generations. Forms of tourism have to be sustainable for the environment (Garau-Vadell et al., 2018). This is a basic requirement of the present beneficiaries and resource users. There should also be more attention and emphasis placed on tourist attractions that promote tourism and related activities. In other words, tourism has to be capable of generating and passing positive impacts onto the local community’s livelihood (Imbaya et al., 2019). These all should also appear in the expected forms of opportunity generation and attraction promotion. There needs to be a balance between attraction management and tourism, which is expected to be sustainable. In an attraction like the Sundarbans, tourism is a natural characteristic, which can also take the shape of mass participation. Sustainability in CBT is a type of tourism that typically should generate positive impacts (Lee & Jan, 2019). Sustainability in CBT is one model and should be linked with responsibility sharing and concentrating more on natural and environmental fragilities.

The management of a natural tourist attraction like the Sundarbans is relatively difficult, as the clear engagement of stakeholders, beneficiaries and relevant parties can produce issues or concerns that can become complex, making it more difficult to generate any agreeable solution in many cases (Asian Development Bank, 2008). However, in tourism, and in this

![The VICE model](image-url)
particular case of the Sundarbans, the nature of the involvement of the concerned parties is complex from the perspective of both concepts and practices. There are increasing factors emerging with this case that can sometimes take the shape of unreal expectations. Local communities as the beneficiaries can use the resources irresponsibly or the behaviour of tourists can even disturb the natural setting and habitats (Rahman & Hassan, 2016). The management of such an attraction that is both fragile and popular necessitates extra care. Such management can take the shape of the responsible use of resources that are limited (Hassan, 2012). Thus, the VICE model as discussed and selected for this study can be have a valid application in this given case of the Sundarbans. The forest is the hub and centre of attention for forest-dependent communities, tourists and sustainability advocates at the same time and in a similar rhythm (Bangladesh Forest Department, 2019). Thus, findings reveal that the Sundarbans are a tourist destination badly in need of better management approaches. This is where the VICE Model is suitable to the current situation.

11.8 Conclusion

This study aimed to explore sustainability in CBT with particular focus on the Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest in Bangladesh. Tourism in any attraction can have both positive and negative effects. The Sundarbans, a rapidly popularising tourist attraction, can become the subject of global attention. Tourists from all over the world can turn to this place for visitation. The VICE Model can be effective in managing visitors and the destination more effectively, where visitors, industry and the community are closely related to the environment.

CBT has the potential to add elements to development agendas, with its broader strategic dynamics of development in a community. Sustainability issues need to be given priority in all cases where the use of essential technology becomes a concern. Tourism, sustainability and development cannot be seen as separate entities, but rather than as a common concern. Numerous practices in tourism with issues of sustainability can become well documented in country and regional contexts. This conceptual research critically and elaborately analyses the identified aspects. However, the inclusion of community opinion can be an interesting area to consider. This is rather a limitation of this research. Future studies can include the voice of the local community in order to frame tourism in its given communal context.

References


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