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## Attitudes of local people towards community based eco-tourism in the Sundarbans

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### ABSTRACT

*Tourism especially nature based tourism is increasing throughout the world day by day. The Sundarbans Reserve Forest (SRF) in Bangladesh is a suitable place for developing tourism. The purpose of the study was to find out the attitudes of local people's towards community based eco-tourism (CBET) in the Sundarbans. The study was carried out by a questionnaire survey with purposive selection based on diversity of occupation and sex in that area. A 5- point rating Likert scale was used to measure the local people's attitude towards community based eco-tourism. Most of the people of the study are poorly based on income and depends on the forest as well as are fisherman among male and housewife among women. Natural beauty of this area, scope to watch wildlife, tourist security, house or eco-cottage quality, toilet and bathing facilities are favorable as well as communication and infrastructure facilities are an obstacle for developing CBET here. CBET will increase alternative job opportunities and income as well as it will reduce disturbance of forest and illegal harvesting according to the respondents. Forest Department is cooperative and tourists are more conscious now than before. People are now satisfied with CBET and keen to involve with this. This research is important for tourism policymakers in Bangladesh for their decisions.*

**Key Words:** Sundarbans, Resources, Community Based Eco-tourism, local community participation and attitudes.

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### I. Introduction

Community based eco-tourism (CBET) is defined as an ecotourism initiative with high environmental consideration, the participation of the local community, increased control and potential benefits for the host people (WWF, 2001). It is different from other ecotourism ventures that are planned and controlled by outsider as well as generate very negligible benefits for the local people (Scheyvens, 2015). It is an 'environmentally responsible travel' through enjoying the beauty without hampering nature that helps

to conserve nature and provides a potential economic benefit for the local community (Kaplan, 2013). With the increasing interest in ecotourism and outdoor recreation, forests become an essential element for the tourism industry (Kuvan, 2005). Bangladesh is a country of great tourism potential as it hosts several tourist attractions including both the natural and cultural elements (Das and Chakraborty, 2012). The country has a variety of forests for tourism development in different parts ranging from tropical forest to swamp forest and the mangrove forest (Alam et al., 2010). For applying CBT programmes to the world's largest single mangrove forests, Sundarbans is a potential candidate (Bhuiyan and Moss, 2001). It is a potential candidate for its ecological importance globally, rich biodiversity, beautiful scenery, diverse livelihood groups, friendly host communities and favorable weather etc. (Islam et al., 2012). Famous species Royal Bengal Tiger (*Panthera tigris*), as well as 324 plant species and 375 animals, remain in Sundarbans (Iqbal et al., 2010). Already, Sundarbans is considered as one of the best tourist destinations in Bangladesh. By providing political and economic incentives for conservation, CBT has decreased anthropogenic pressure on the Sundarbans as well as provides extra benefits to the regional and local economies (Weaver, 2006).

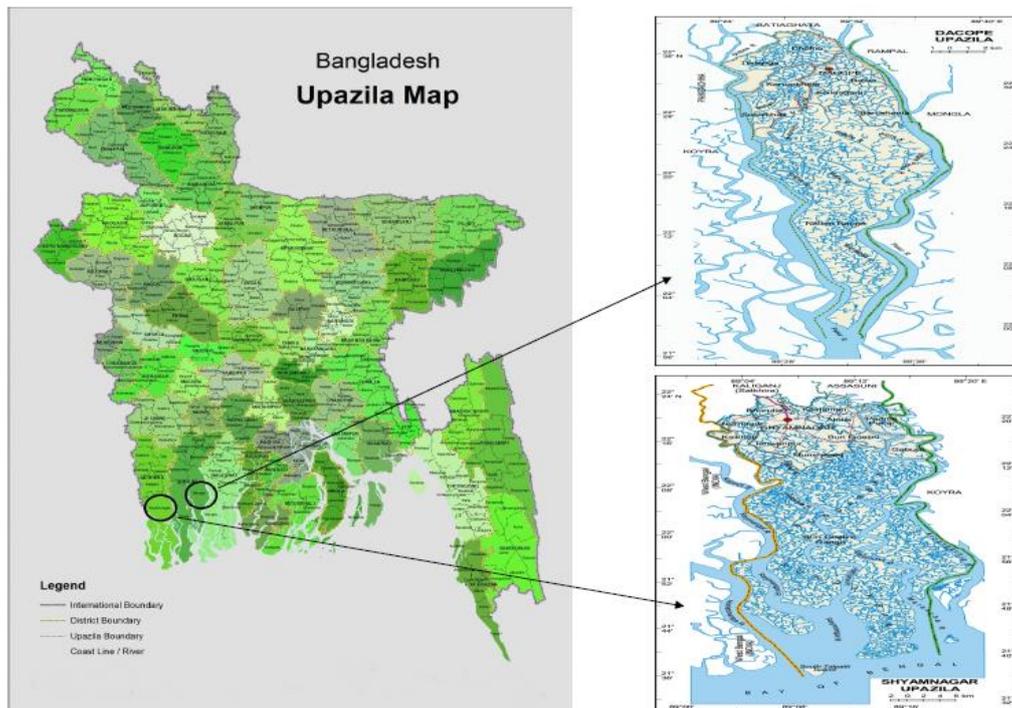
Comparatively, community based ecotourism's concept is new in Bangladesh. Community based tourism (CBT) programs have been started recently in several protected areas in Bangladesh under a project of Integrated Protected Area Co-management (IPAC, 2008–2013) (Islam et al., 2013). In our Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Sundarbans tourism can be a significant contributor (Das and Chakraborty, 2012). Forest Department (FD) stated that including 2% of foreign tourists, about 100,000 tourists visit this forest every year (USDA-IRG, 2009). It is expected to increase from 3.9% (US\$3,786.4m) in 2010 to 4.1% (US\$8,781.7m) by 2020 in Bangladesh from this sector (Saha et al., 2015). The government of Bangladesh is updating the tourism policy by emphasizing the community participation, and their livelihood improvement as well as to protect nature. For the benefit of all, it will contribute to the development of responsible, healthy and sustainable ecotourism (Islam et al., 2013). Forest Department giving their one of the top priorities for the development of eco-tourism in the Sundarbans (Siddiqui, 2003).

Sundarbans perform ecological functions and provides support for livelihood activities (Shah and Dutta, 2010). About 3.5 million people living around the Sundarbans and they depend directly or indirectly on this forest's ecosystem services (Giri et al., 2008). Tourism has some negative impacts on the Sundarbans such as habitat destruction, eutrophication and species loss due to hotel and road construction and coastal pollution for tourism activity (Iqbal et al., 2010). Ecotourism can be a possible solution for solving this problem as it has a suitable strategy for reducing the environmental impacts of tourism (Iqbal et al., 2010). For the adjacent community people of the Sundarbans, community based ecotourism is promoting the household income generation as well as creating the employment opportunity compared to other households' economic options (Saiful et al., 2011). Dey et al. (2020) found a great prospect for developing CBET at Munsiganj union in Shyamnagar Upazila under Satkhira district of Bangladesh. We have a little knowledge about tourism concerning the community perception in the Sundarbans of Bangladesh (Islam et al., 2013). In absence of proper understanding, favorable attitude and adequate knowledge of the local community toward CBET is not only obstacles for tourism development but also incur loss of government revenue. As local people are main stakeholders of CBET, it is imperative to find out the real attitude of local people toward developing CBET in Bangladesh. The purpose of the study was explored to assess the attitudes of local communities towards CBET to facilitate development of CBET in the Sundarbans. This knowledge of people's attitude is important for the authority to make better managerial decisions for CBET development in Khulna and Satkhira district in the future.

## II. Materials and Methods

### Location

Sundarbans mangrove forests and the people of the impact zone of the Sundarbans are mostly concentrated in Khulna, Satkhira, Bagerhat and Patuakhali coastal districts of South and South-Western Parts of Bangladesh.



**Figure 01. Location map of the study area (Source: Google image)**

Out of these four districts, Khulna (Dacope Upazila) and Satkhira (Shyamnagar Upazila) districts adjacent to the Sundarbans (Figure 01) were selected purposively for this study. Dacope Upazila is located between 22°12' to 23°59' North latitude and between 89°14' to 89°45' East longitudes under Khulna district (BBS, 2011) as well as Shyamnagar Upazila is located between 21°36' to 22°54' North latitude and between 88°54' to 89°20' East longitudes under Satkhira district (BBS, 2011).

**Reconnaissance Survey**

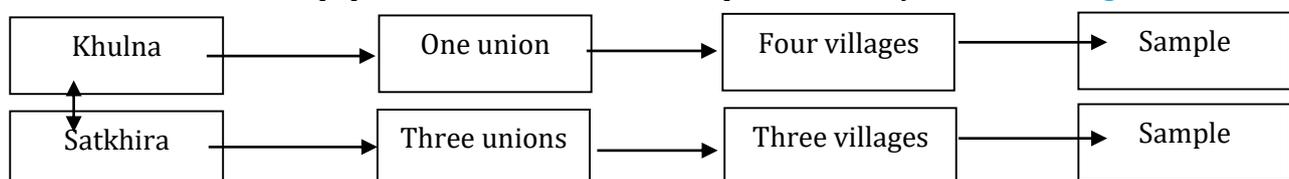
We conducted a reconnaissance survey in the study area prior to data collection to get an idea about the study area and acquire some basic information regarding community based ecotourism. During the survey we discussed with the local peoples about the objectives and this survey helped us to realize the existing condition of the study area.

**Questionnaire preparation and testing**

We prepared the questionnaire for the selected community considering the objectives of the study. We used a 5- point rating Likert scale for preparing the questionnaire. In questionnaire we took strongly agree = 5 point, agree = 4 point, neutral = 3 point, disagree = 2 point and strongly disagree = 1 point for analysis. For fulfilling the objectives and collecting the selected information of the study, the questionnaire was tested. Finally, we had prepared the final questionnaire by deleting or adding some points.

**Sampling design**

Purposive sampling design was used during the interview to ensure a representative proportion of major community based ecotourism stakeholders like beneficiary and local stakeholders. In these study, four villages (Dhangmari, East Dhangmari, Vojonkhali and Khoilashgonj) of Dacope Upazila under Khulna district and three villages (Munsiganj, Kalichi, Burigoalini) of Shyamnagar Upazila under Satkhira district were selected purposively nearby Sundarbans. A total of 100 respondents (50 in Dacope Upazila and 50 in Shyamnagar Upazila) were selected purposively for taking the interview. Therefore, a total of 100 populations constituted the sample of the study as shown in Figure 02.



**Figure 02. Flow diagram of population and sampling design**

### Questionnaire Survey and Data Collection

The questionnaire was made to consider the aspects of obtaining the information. All the necessary information needed for the study was collected with meticulous care.

#### Primary data collection

For fulfilling the objectives of the study we used two types of methods like the qualitative or described and quantitative analysis. A questionnaire survey of 100 respondents and two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) was conducted for collecting the quantitative and qualitative information respectively during January of 2016. A single person questionnaire interview using 5 points Likert scale and FGD consists of 10-15 members (who are mainly dependent on the Sundarbans) was conducted in quantitative and qualitative part respectively.

#### Secondary Data Collection

Secondary information was collected from various Government and Non-government organizations (NGO) such as Forest Department, Relief International (Khulna), Joar Ecotourism (Munsiganj, Satkhira), Rupantor Ecotourism (Khulna), relevant papers from internet and related books from Forestry and Wood Technology Discipline, Life Science School, Khulna University, Khulna.

#### Data Processing and Analysis

We processed, analyzed and interpreted the data for finding the result of the study. After completing the data collection from personal interviews and FGD, we transferred schedules to a master sheet for facilitating tabulation. The report of the study is written and analysis is done through the systematic way by using a computer program of MS word, Microsoft Excel and SPSS of version 20.

### III. Results and Discussion

Very young and young people were dominated among the respondents as well as average education level and monthly income of the respondents was class six and 6775.00 BDT respectively (Table 01). Here most of the people's occupation was fishermen among men and housewife among women.

**Table 01. The demographic profile of the respondents in the study area**

Selected characteristics respondents	Categories	Percentage of respondents
Gender	Male	69
	Female	31
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>
Age (years)	Very young (18-25)	34
	Young (26-35)	31
	Middle aged (36-45)	15
	Old (above 45)	20
	<b>Total (Mean = 32)</b>	<b>100</b>
Level of education	Illiterate	15
	Class I-V	24
	Class VI-X (SSC)	48
	Above SSC	13
	<b>Total (Mean = class VI)</b>	<b>100</b>
Monthly income in BDT	Tk. 3000- Tk.5000	25
	Tk.5001-Tk.10000	52
	Tk. 10001-Tk.15000	15
	Above Tk.15000	8
	<b>Total (Mean =6775)</b>	<b>100</b>
Profession	House Owner	14
	Housewife	27
	Fisherman	22
	Student	12
	Boatman	7
	Guide	4
	Gher	3
	Baoali	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	

Islam et al. (2011) found the average literacy rate and income of the respondents were class five and 4620 BDT respectively at East Dhangmari in Dacope Upazila of Khulna district. Saha et al. (2015) found that the average annual income was Tk. 8495 and 4433 for the boatman and eco-tour guide respectively in the same study area. Shah and Dutta (2010) found that about fifty percent of the households depending on forest- earn 75%-100% of their total income from the forest resources at Southkhali union in Sarankhola Upazila of Bagerhat district.

**Table 02. Descriptive statistics of variables**

List of variables (used likert scale data)	Dacope (Khulna)			Shyamnagar (Satkhira)		
	Mean	Standard deviation	CV (%)	Mean	Standard deviation	CV (%)
Natural beauty of Sundarbans	4.660	0.519	11.146	4.820	0.388	8.051
Opportunity to watch wild life	4.440	0.929	20.931	4.680	0.551	11.774
Communication facilities and infrastructure quality	3.600	0.989	27.492	3.080	0.868	28.185
House or eco-cottage quality for night stay	3.960	0.879	22.215	3.720	0.938	25.240
Toilet and bathing facilities	3.640	1.006	27.617	3.860	0.800	20.731
Drinking water facilities	2.220	1.359	61.245	2.640	1.466	55.546
Security of tourists	3.800	1.010	26.582	3.460	1.034	29.893
CBET adjust with local culture	3.960	1.195	30.165	3.980	1.179	29.738

Strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, neutral = 3, disagree = 2 and strongly disagree = 1

Most of the people in both the Dacope and Shyamnagar area were agreed with the statement that Sundarbans has good natural beauty and having opportunities to watch wildlife (Table 02). Saha et al. (2015) stated the same result in the same area and found a positive relationship between household income and natural beauty of the ecotour service providers. Tourists can enjoy night view of sundarbans from other side of river especially at Kalinchi village in Shyamnagar Upazila. Communication facilities and infrastructure quality were not at a satisfactory level which was affecting negatively the possibilities of tourists visiting in that area. Road communication facilities were better in Khulna district than Satkhira district according to respondents. Henderson (2011) stated that international tourists have negative attitudes towards a country that has an improper arrangement of infrastructures. The infrastructures like bank, ATM, government other facilities attract the tourists. If the tourists get such facilities in an eco-site, they prefer it to visit (Saha et al., 2015). House condition, toilet and bathing facilities in the study area were good for night stay according to the respondents. Though house conditions, toilets and bathing facilities were not so good before, after coming different NGO, those facilities are not so bad now. Houses were made based on local tradition and maximum furniture was made through bamboo and local traditional things. According to the interviewees, the drinking water facilities in the study area were not good except for Kalinchi village at Symnagar Upazila in Satkhira districts. In the study area, most of the respondents agreed with this opinion and there have security for tourists in their area. They said there has pirate but they create no harm to the tourist as well as Forest Department and the local authority is very careful about tourist security. Hoque et al. (2016) stated that a secure tourist environment is a prerequisite for developing tourism. Henderson (2011) also mentioned that political instability, security and safety is an influential factor for both domestic and foreign tourists and this risk varies from culture to culture. However, in 2018 the government has declared officially the Sundarbans as a pirate-free area, which will improve the destination's image perception to tourists (Hoque et al. 2016). In the study area, most of the respondents strongly disagreed with this opinion that tourism affects local culture and tradition. Few of the respondents of the study area felt that ecotourism had some impact on their economic and socio-cultural life. While the economic aspect's impact was generally positive, the impact on culture and traditions was opposite (Islam et al. 2011).

In the study area, most interviewees agreed with this opinion that it will create the alternative job opportunities in their area, increase income, has long term benefits and help to develop the local market (Table 03). In the study area, due to increasing population dependency on forest resources was increasing day by day. So, if CBET will develop in this area, it can be alternative job opportunities for local people. Islam et al. (2018) found that it provided alternative income sources for improving the living standard of the local people and reduced their dependence on the Sundarbans for their living.

Islam et al. (2013) found most of the people agreed that they will stop extracting natural resources from Sundarbans, if they find an alternative income source. In the study area, most of the respondents strongly agreed with this opinion that it will help to reduce disturbance of forest and illegal harvesting. They told that illegal fishing, hunting and others these kinds of activity will reduce for this. Ecotourism is a tool for rural development and bio-diversity conservation (Aronsson, 2000).

**Table 03. Descriptive statistics of variables**

List of variables (used likert scale data)	Dacope (Khulna)			Shyamnagar (Satkhira)		
	Mean	Standard deviation	CV (%)	Mean	Standard deviation	CV (%)
CBET creates alternative job opportunities	4.060	1.185	29.189	4.340	0.872	20.081
CBET increase income	4.040	1.087	26.911	4.120	1.023	24.830
CBET has long term benefit	4.163	1.027	24.684	4.221	1.035	24.547
CBET develops local market	3.960	0.988	24.972	4.080	1.026	25.171
CBET reduces disturbance of forest	4.180	1.003	24.016	4.240	1.058	24.968
CBET reduces illegal harvesting from forest	3.875	1.068	27.568	4.040	1.068	26.442

Strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, neutral = 3, disagree = 2 and strongly disagree = 1

In the study area, most interviewees agreed with this opinion that the Forest Department (FD) officials are cooperative in different kinds of tourism activities and some NGO are helping them (Table 04). People involved with CBET were happy that they had an alternative job opportunity especially November- January. Local community participation was satisfactory and most of the respondents in the study area, who were not involved in CBET, want to involve in it. Satisfaction level both involve and not involve people was very much now with CBET. People wanted that opportunity of CBET should be increased so that more people can join with this and increase their income. However, they expect help from both the government and the non-government organization for solving their problems. Islam et al. (2018) mentioned that local people want law and security enforcement, loan facility, musical instruments for cultural activities, improvement in handicrafts and training in English language. Training will benefit both the local people who are interested in ecotourism and the tourism industry contributing to the national economy (Shamsuddoha et al., 2008).

**Table 04. Descriptive statistics of variables**

List of variables (used likert scale data)	Dacope (Khulna)			Shyamnagar (Satkhira)		
	Mean	Standard deviation	CV (%)	Mean	Standard deviation	CV (%)
Forest department co-operation for developing CBET	4.180	0.873	20.895	4.080	0.965	23.664
Help from Government and NGO						
Consciousness of tourists about eco-tourism	3.571	1.207	33.813	3.900	1.092	28.016
Eagerness to involve CBET	4.220	1.050	24.893	4.060	1.235	30.435
Satisfaction of peoples by CBET	4.180	0.962	23.022	4.100	0.994	24.265

Strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, neutral = 3, disagree = 2 and strongly disagree = 1

#### IV. Conclusion

An overall positive and favorable attitude towards community based eco-tourism was found among the interviewees in the study area. Community participation for the ecotourism activity is highly satisfactory besides most of the respondents of the study area want to involve in community based ecotourism. Since the interviewee is a representative of a region, there has a great scope for the development of community based eco-tourism and it can be a good example for our country. The people of the study are getting benefits from the tourism activity directly and indirectly. The local administration has a favorable attitude towards the development of ecotourism activities in the study area and it is also accepted by local stakeholders strongly. Bangladesh is also an overpopulated country, so it has important to involve local people with ecotourism. The people of the study areas are now

continuing the community based ecotourism activities on small scale. It is necessary to improve their economic condition because most of the people of the study area are poor. They are facing problems due to the limited knowledge about CBET, poor transportation and communication facilities, poor infrastructure, limited drinking water facilities etc. The government should formulate and implement sound ecotourism policy and improve the security of the tourists, accommodation facility as well as transportation and communication infrastructure for supporting local tourism development programs in the Sundarbans. Carrying capacities of each popular site should be assessed on yearly basis and visitors should be limited at that level.

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