

Rural Tourism And Poverty In Bangladesh: Unlocking Opportunities For The Poor

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The purpose of this paper is to investigate the nexus between tourism micro-enterprises and the alleviation of poverty in rural Bangladesh. Three quarters of the population of Bangladesh live in rural areas where poverty levels as measured by income and calories intake are high. Pro-poor tourism [PPT] and community-based tourism [CBT] have been proposed as the appropriate programs for addressing poverty by providing opportunities for income and employment generation. However, a number of barriers prevent the poor from participating in such programs, including a lack of social capital and skills that need to be addressed before the benefits of PPT and CBT can be realized. A single embedded case study involving Government, Tourism and Non-Government Organisations [NGOs] in Bangladesh investigates these barriers. The potential for micro-businesses to supply traditional handicrafts to tourism is then discussed as well as the need for industry, government and NGOs to work with micro-credit organisations to unlock opportunities for the poor people of rural Bangladesh.

Key Words: Rural tourism, Poverty, Bangladesh.

Field of Research: Management

1. Introduction

The nexus between tourism development and poverty alleviation has received growing attention over the last three decades. Simultaneously, United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has attempted to develop a firm global agenda for the support of tourism as an approach for development in general, and poverty alleviation in particular, for the developing countries (Ferguson, 2007). As a result, implicitly or explicitly, many developing nations have been considering this sector as a fast track for development.

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However, Zhao & Ritchie (2007) have argued that the relationship between tourism and poverty alleviation still remains unexplained or unknown in most of the tourism literature. They have also argued that the implication of tourism development for poverty alleviation has been overlooked by tourism scholars and to some extent the relevant research is either fragmented or limited in scope. Harrison (2008) argues that the concept of extending tourism benefits to the poor is distinctive neither theoretically nor in methods. Therefore, tourism development as an effective tool for poverty alleviation needs a theoretical framework as well as understanding of applied research in different contexts.

Bangladesh has been struggling since its independence for economic emancipation. Poverty is a serious problem for the country to confront, along with acute political instability and recurring natural disasters. It is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Presently, total population of the country is about 150 million (BESR, 2007). About 75% of the total population live in the rural areas of Bangladesh (FAO, 2009). The population density is almost one thousand people live per square kilometer. The per capita income is only US\$520 and nationally, some 40% of the total population of the country is poor and in rural areas the rate is ever higher (43%) than the national level (BESR, 2007). In Bangladesh poverty is generally measured both by Direct Calorie Intake (DCI) and Cost of Basic Needs (CBN) methods. According to DCI method people who take under 2122 kilo calorie food are treated as absolute poor and those who take under 1805 kilo calorie are treated as hard-core poor (BESR 2007).

Tourism, as a potential development sector in general and for poverty reduction in particular, can only address to the problems of Bangladesh provided the potentiality of rural tourism and its prospect of poor rural people's involvement is well understood. In doing so, Bangladesh has been considered as a single embedded case for this paper with special focus on the rural landscapes of the country along with the National Tourism Organization (NTO) and some Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).

The National Tourism Organization (NTO) also known as Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) has been functioning for the development of tourism since its independence under the auspices of the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism. In 1988, the Master Plan for tourism development of Bangladesh was prepared by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the then World Tourism Organization (WTO) jointly (Hall & Page, 2000). The plan is being updated by the UNWTO. Under that master plan, the Government of Bangladesh took steps to establish special tourist zones in three different areas with the aim of sustainable tourism development. Those areas are:

- 1) Cox's Bazaar- famous for the world's longest continuous sea beach (120 km),
- 2) Kuakata-natural sea beach of the country from where the sun rise and sun set over the sea can be enjoyed and
- 3) The Sunderbans- the world's largest mangrove forest declared as the World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1997.

Subsequently, the National Tourism Policy (NTP) of the country was declared in 1992 (see Table 1). Alleviation of poverty by creating employment opportunities was one of the broad objectives of the Tourism Policy of the country (GoB, 1992). Surprisingly, tourism in the rural landscapes has not been considered in the National Tourism Policy of the country. Despite formulating the Master Plan-National Tourism Policy, two decades before, Bangladesh is yet to achieve any significant progress in terms of international tourism receipts and international tourist arrivals compared to other South Asian countries like, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Pakistan (see Table 2). Lack of research between tourism and poverty relationship is considered as one of the major problems for tourism's least contribution in the country's poverty reduction problem (Hall & Page, 2000).

Table 1: Broad objectives of The National Tourism Policy of Bangladesh Declared in 1992

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>To create interest in tourism among the people</i> • <i>To preserve, protect, develop and maintain tourism resources</i> • <i>To take steps for poverty-alleviation through creating employment</i> • <i>To build a positive image of the country abroad</i> • <i>To open up a recognized sector for private capital investment</i> • <i>To arrange entertainment and recreation</i> • <i>To strengthen national solidarity and integrity</i>
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Source: GoB 1992

Table 2: International Tourism Receipts and Tourist Arrivals by Country of Destination

	International Tourism Receipts (US\$, million)						Market share in the region (%)			Change (%)		Receipts per arrival ¹	Receipts per capita ¹
	1990	1995	2000	2002	2003	2004*	1990	2000	2004*	'03/'02	'04/'03		US\$
South Asia	2,029	3,404	4,797	5,429	6,743	8,686	4.3	5.3	6.8	24.2	28.8	1,140	6
Bangladesh	11	25	50	57	57	67	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	17.2	245	0
Bhutan	2	5	10	8	8	12	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.3	50.0	1,350	6
India	1,513	2,581	3,460	3,103	4,463	6,121	3.2	3.8	4.8	43.8	37.1	1,770	6
Iran	61	67	467	1,357	1,033	1,074	0.1	0.5	0.8	-23.9	4.0	645	16
Maldives	89	211	321	337	402	479	0.2	0.4	0.4	19.2	19.1	775	1,410
Nepal	64	177	158	104	200	230	0.1	0.2	0.2	92.3	15.0	595	8
Pakistan	156	110	81	97	136	186	0.3	0.1	0.1	39.8	36.9	285	1
Sri Lanka	132	226	248	363	441	513	0.3	0.3	0.4	21.5	16.3	905	26

	Series	International Tourist Arrivals (1000)						Market share in the region (%)			Change (%)		Average annual growth (%)	
		1990	1995	2000	2002	2003	2004*	1990	2000	2004*	'03/'02	'04/'03	'90-'00	'00-'04*
South Asia		3,150	4,233	6,086	5,833	6,426	7,613	5.6	5.5	5.2	10.2	18.5	6.8	5.8
Bangladesh	TF	115	156	199	207	245	271	0.2	0.2	0.2	18.0	10.9	5.6	8.1
Bhutan	TF	2	5	8	6	6	9	0.0	0.0	0.0	11.8	47.7	14.3	5.0
India	TF	1,707	2,124	2,649	2,384	2,726	3,457	3.0	2.4	2.4	14.3	26.8	4.5	6.9
Iran	TF	154	489	1,342	1,585	1,546	1,659	0.3	1.2	1.1	-2.5	7.3	24.2	5.4
Maldives	TF	195	315	467	485	564	617	0.3	0.4	0.4	16.3	9.4	9.1	7.2
Nepal	TF	255	363	464	275	338	385	0.5	0.4	0.3	22.9	13.9	6.2	-4.6
Pakistan	TF	424	378	557	498	501	648	0.8	0.5	0.4	0.6	29.4	2.8	3.9
Sri Lanka	TF	298	403	400	393	501	566	0.5	0.4	0.4	27.3	13.1	3.0	9.1

Source: UNWTO, Compendium of Tourism Statistics, 2005

However, rural tourism has become well established in most of the developed countries of Europe, North America and Australia (Mafunzwaini & Hugo, 2005). Albeit rural tourism has become truly global, least attention has been paid to this new tourism product in the developing nations (Page & Getz, 1997). Similarly, tourism in the rural areas has not developed in Bangladesh till now. This paper will, therefore, investigate the potential for tourism in rural areas to alleviate poverty.

2. Literature Review

In the recent past, rural tourism was restricted to traditional farm-based or agri-based tourism (Oliver & Jenkins, 2003). However, with the changing pace of time and environment the concept has captured a wide range of potential activities include touring, water-based activities, land-based activities, conservation activities, cultural and educational activities health and fitness activities and gastronomic activities (Oliver & Jenkins, 2003). The key component of rural tourism is the close association with the physical environment in rural settings (Stabler, 1997).

Tourism in rural areas and its impact on rural communities has become of increased interest among the tourism scholars worldwide (Mafunzwaini & Hugo, 2005). In developing countries, rural areas suffer from the effects of urbanization and the decline of many traditional industries (Mafunzwaini & Hugo, 2005). Tourism can revitalize such rural areas through diversification of economic activities (Bennett, 2000). Moreover, rural tourism can provide a useful way for addressing regional economic imbalance in developing countries (Page & Getz, 1997). Usually, rural areas are endowed with wildlife, natural scenic beauty, distinctive local food and indigenous culture that can provide enormous opportunity for tourism development whilst simultaneously rural development and economic growth (Mahony & Van Zyl, 2002). Researchers argue that business opportunity related to rural tourism has potential for income generation and job creation in rural areas.(Mafunzwaini & Hugo, 2005).

The development role of tourism was first argued early in the 1970s (Harrison & Schipani 2007). Researchers noticed that developing countries are deprived of benefits derived from tourism and suggested proper planning that includes the socio-cultural, economic and environmental factors (Butler 1974, de Kadt 1979, Edelmann 1975, Hyma & Wall 1979, Jafari 1974, and Sadler & Archer 1974,). Subsequently, tourism practitioners and international organizations started working with tourism and began to use it as an effective tool for poverty alleviation. Poverty reduction through rural tourism usually involves, either Pro-poor Tourism (PPT) or Community-Based Tourism (CBT). For example, with a new philosophy of Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT) the United Kingdom's Department of International Development (DFID) undertook a strategic initiative in late 1990s to combat poverty by harnessing the power of tourism (Holden 2008).

Pro-poor tourism is defined as *"tourism which generates net benefits for the poor"* (Ashley, et al. 2001). Pro-poor tourism development strategies seek to maximize tourism benefits to the poor while, reducing negative impacts (Torres & Momsen 2004). Moreover, the pro-poor approach covers the entire spectrum from private-sector initiatives and community endeavors to establish private-public joint ventures and public-sector infrastructure enhancement (Torres & Momsen 2004). The pro-poor tourism practitioners advocate for placing poverty issue on the tourism agenda (Goodwin 2000, Ashley 2000 and Roe & Khanya 2001). They have also argued for including the issue in the industry-wide objectives. Nevertheless, the social and economic inequality between tourism related enterprises and the poor is common in the developing countries (Britton, 1982 & Brohman, 1996) and that has complicated the involvement of poor in tourism (Britton, 1982 & Brohman, 1996). Harrison (2008) argues that the approach remains on the academic and development margins and suggests that there should be a link between PPT and poverty alleviation in terms of both theory and practice to make the approach effective.

Subsequently, at the World Summit on the Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002 with the main goal of decreasing poverty in the world by 50% until 2015, the UNWTO launched their Sustainable Tourism for the Elimination of Poverty (ST-EP) initiative (Dimoska 2008). Nevertheless, both PPT and ST-EP practitioners have been able to draw substantial attention of the tourism scholars,

governments, NGOs and many international organizations.

Community Based Tourism (CBT) is another recent approach suggested by tourism scholars for bridging the tourism actors with the local community and the poor (See, Manayara & Jones, 2007; Sebele, 2010; Ashley, 2006; Harrison & Schipani, 2007). The PPT and ST-EP practitioners have considered the approach for empowering the local poor and ultimately reducing their poverty (Bowden, 2005; Cole, 2006 & Muhanna, 2007). The effectiveness of CBT has been claimed in the rural landscapes of some African countries like, Southern Africa, Gambia and Botswana (Ashley, 2006) along with Maldives.

However, contentious opinions are there regarding the desirable form of rural tourism development. Universal agreement is still lacking among the tourism researchers in aspect of the net benefits that is derived from rural tourism development. Butler & Clarke (1992) purport that a normative conceptual framework of the phenomenon is yet to be developed due to shortage of theoretical research in different contexts.

3. Methodology

Within a single embedded case, this research has focused on some key organizations related with tourism development in Bangladesh. These organizations are the National Tourism Organization (NTO), Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), UNDP, Tour Operators' Association of Bangladesh (TOAB), Bangladesh Hotel, Restaurant and Cottage Owners' Association, Cultural Institutes and a few Governments Departments. The snowball sampling technique was applied to reach other interviewees. The predetermined sample served as initial contacts and those respondents helped as reference points and source of other knowledgeable respondents.

The primary method for data collection was in-depth interview using open-ended questions. Even though the questions were open-ended, a structured set of questions was used for the respondents in obtaining the information. The in-depth interviews for this paper were conducted from January 2010 to July 2010. A total of 49 in-depth interviews were conducted of different stakeholder categories, including National Tourism Organization, NGOs, UNDP, Tour Operators' Association, Hotel and Restaurant Owners' Association, Handicrafts Businessmen and Civil Administration. Out of 49 in-depth interviews, a representative sub-sample of ten key interviews have been transcribed and analysed for this paper. The interviews were conducted at preferred time and places of the participants. As a consequence of this research design, descriptive or within-case analysis technique has been applied for data analysis. A summary report, based on each interview, was developed by the researchers. The reports were sent to the respective respondents for feedback. Modifications were also done after receiving respondents' feedback on the transcript of interview. However, analysis was considered only when the respondents fully agreed with their respective interview summary reports. This ensures the validity of the findings in this research.

Prior to interview, each participant was given a verbal description about the purpose of this research over telephone or face-to-face and asked if he/she would be interested in taking part in the interview. The participants who expressed interest were sent e-mails or letters (which ever was convenient to the respondent) containing written information about the interview session, instructions, a consent form, a questionnaire and contact details for ethical issues should arise in future. All the interviews were recorded. Prior permission from each and every respondent was secured for recording and taking photographs while conducting each interview.

4. Findings

In Bangladesh, most of the tourism destinations of the country are city-based while the tourism business of Bangladesh is dominated by rich and elites. Owners of luxurious hotels, restaurants, cottages, motels are the rich people of the society. Few lower category jobs of waiters, house keeping, guards, and bearers are opened for the local poor people. No evidence has been found while conducting this research where the poor people of the rural areas are considered actively activities of tourism related organizations. According to one interviewee, *“.....I wanted to find some organizations that were doing planning and developing of the tourism sector here in Bangladesh. I started collecting all the knowledge about people and how to do everything but I could not find the right organization. I have heard that the government, the NTO (National Tourism Organization), the private organizations etc. are here but I could not see that they are doing development like- vision, strategy, planning policies and how to implement those”*. The wealthy tourism business people are compelled to employ the local poor because of surplus cheap local labor. Moreover, most of the lower category positions are temporary, so in the off-season there is high unemployment.

A wide range of barriers exist for the poor that restrict them from becoming involved in tourism. Most of the interviewees admit that there is a lack of knowledge amongst the poor regarding tourism development. The multidimensional and complex nature of Bangladesh poverty is the main cause for such a knowledge gap. The people of impoverished destinations are not only poor in terms of per capita income but also other socio-cultural reasons. Nationally, some 40% of the country's people are poor and in the rural areas rate is ever higher (43%) than the national level (BESR 2007). The poor people have least knowledge and understanding regarding country's tourism development. In some destinations local poor are even completely unaware of tourism.

Lack of social capital, for example trust, among the poor to improving their livelihoods involving in tourism is another major barrier. Social capital is a resource that originates from group interaction because of trust, reciprocity and co-operation (Carpenter, Danieri & Takahasi, 2004). However, most of the poor in the impoverished destinations are engaged as day labors in agriculture sector. They are willing to be involved in agriculture because their forefathers were also in that occupation and this has become a tradition. Sometimes they are reluctant to switch from their traditional occupation of farming to tourism. According one of the

interviewees, *“.....Poor people feel fear to shift to a new occupation from the current occupation. They don't want to take risk. At the time of investment they think, from where to collect the capital? Will they survive here? Can they compete with the existing players in the market? All these are barriers to them. Besides, they have the lack of knowledge”*. Although the government efforts to organize the rural people for a common good have often ended in failure, NGOs have better success in developing social capital in many instances of rural development in Bangladesh (Mondal, 2000).

However, to be involved in a sophisticated industry like tourism necessary training and education is compulsory. The tourism and hospitality training institutes in Bangladesh, albeit a few, are city-based. Secondary school education is compulsory for entrance in most of these training programs. It is hardly possible for the poor people of the country to access such costly and centralized training. According to one of the interviewees, *“..... people are not getting proper training and education. You know the gap is knowledge gap. They don't know how to deliver the services...Let me give an example of home stay. Though it is small in size, ultimately it includes all the components of hotel management. Now you need not to teach them overall hotel management. But for home stay they need to have minimum knowledge regarding house keeping. The village people don't know how to ready the bed. After arrival tourists should be provided welcome drinks with green coconut water or lemon juice. But they don't know these. You need not to teach them it in a very modern language; just you have to do it in language of a layman”*. So, the employment opportunities in the tourism sector for the poor illiterate people should be explored while simultaneously related training opportunities should be extended to them by Government, Industry and other stakeholders.

Fragmentation of stakeholders in Bangladesh tourism is a testament to the lack of proper networking between different players. According to one of the interviewees, *“.....I got very frustrated because it was so scattered. People here are so good. Here Initiators are very good and people are knowledgeable but they are not united..... all the people I could find say- we need to be united, we need to be connected somehow”*. Another interviewee says, *“.....Actually, I hope just after uniting people will start to do something..... I think the lacking of Bangladeshi tourism are – lack of sustainable values, sustainable tourism and knowledge sharing in general. As Tourism is a scattered sector, so you need to unite people from marketing, environmental science, tour operators and form lots of other sectors”*. Without stakeholder networking development of country's tourism as well as harnessing its power for poverty reduction cannot be realised. Thus, government, NGOs, international organizations and tourism related enterprises have a significant role to play in this issue.

Local foods are conceptualized as authentic products that can symbolize the place and culture of a destination (Sims, 2009). As an agri-based economy, the major source of food supply of Bangladesh is its rural areas. The fresh and organic foods produced in the rural areas of Bangladesh can be a distinct rural tourism product. Moreover, the rural poor people have the fair opportunity to be involved with this new tourism product. According to one interviewee, *“... If rural people can be made*

understand how many dishes and menu can be prepared by the locally produced materials then they will be able to prepare and serve dishes that are cooked by the materials produced in their locality and even in their own land. It also has a marginal benefit. His family will also enjoy a portion of that cooking. Normally, chicken is not cooked without any occasion, but when they will serve it the customer then of course they will enjoy a portion of it. So, it is also a big matter, but they don't know it".

5. Discussion

Most of the people of the country (74%) live in the rural areas and they are poor as well. However, tourism is still urban oriented in cities that are already overpopulated. Unlocking the tourism's potential in rural areas can provide a great opportunity for the country to address poverty. Moreover, there is an enormous opportunity to develop cruise tourism using the rivers flowing through rural villages. So, it would be more effective for the country to bring tourism to the poor instead of pushing the poor towards already overpopulated urban destinations. Nevertheless, before taking initiatives to develop tourism in the unexplored areas, the poor people's involvement opportunity must be taken into strong consideration by all the stakeholders in general and the government in particular.

Tourism in rural areas, heritage sites and protected areas also has great potential in the country. In many developing countries protected areas have long played a significant role as tourist attractions (IUCN 1994). As a result ecotourism has become instrumental for many protected areas. There are 19 protected areas in Bangladesh that currently have potential for nature based eco-tourism (see Table 3). Community-based forest management and alternative income generation opportunities related to ecotourism can be effective steps to conserving the biodiversity of these areas for ecotourism destinations whilst also improving the livelihood of the local communities.

Table 3: List of Protected areas of Bangladesh

Sl. No.	Protected Areas	Forest Types	Location (District)	Area (ha)	Established (Extended)
A. National Parks (IUCN category V)					
01	Modhupur NP	Sal Forest	Tangail	8436	1962 (1982)
02	Bhawal NP	Sal Forest	Gazipur	5022	1974 (1982)
03	Himchari NP	Hill Forest	Cox's Bazar	1729	1980
04	Lawachara NP	Hill Forest	Maulvibazar	1250	1996
05	Kaptai NP	Hill Forest	Rangamati	5464	1999
06	Ramsagar NP	Sal Forest	Dinajpur	27.75	2001
07	Nijhum Dweep NP	Coastal Mangrove	Noakhali	16352.23	2001
08	Medha Kachapia NP	Hill Forest	Cox's Bazar	395.92	2004
09	Satchari NP	Hill Forest	Habiganj	242.82	2005
10	Khadimnagar NP	Hill Forest	Sylhet	679	2006
B. Wildlife Sanctuaries (IUCN category IV)					
11	Sundarban (East) WS	Natural Mangrove	Bagerhat	31226.94	1960 (1996)
12	Pabla khali WS	Hill Forest	Rangamati	42087	1962 (1983)
13	Char Kukri Mukri WS	Coastal Mangrove	Bhola	40	1981
14	Chunati WS	Hill Forest	Chittagong	7761	1986
15	Rema-Kalenga WS	Hill Forest	Habiganj	1795.54	1996
16	Sundarban (South) WS	Natural Mangrove	Khulna	36970.45	1996
17	Sundarban (West) WS	Natural Mangrove	Satkhira	71502.13	1996
18	Fashiakhali WS	Hill Forest	Cox's Bazar	1302	2007
19	Hajarikhil WS (Proposed)	Hill Forest	Chittagong	2908	-
C. Game Reserve (IUCN category VI)					
20	Teknaf GR	Hill Forest	Cox's Bazar	11615	1983
D. Eco-Parks and Safari Park					
01	Sita-Kunda EP	Hill Forest	Chittagong	808	1998
02	Madhu-Tila EP	Sal Forest	Sherpur	100	1999
03	Madhob-Kunda EP	Hill Forest	Maulvibazar	266	2001
04	Banskhali EP	Hill Forest	Chittagong	1200	2003
05	Kua-Kata EP	Coastal Mangrove	Patuakhali	5661	2006
06	Dulahazara SP	Hill Forest	Cox's Bazar	900	1999

Source: Nishorgo Support Project 2008

The scope and opportunity for backward linkages of tourism with the small and micro enterprises can have an overwhelming impact on the local people's livelihood. Bangladesh is well known for micro-credit insurgency in rural areas. More than twenty thousand local, national and international NGOs are working for the socio-economic development of Bangladesh. Micro-credit is one of the facilities extended by NGOs to help the poor in forming small and micro enterprises. These NGOs can play a catalytic role in linking the poor with country's tourism sector. Special consideration and attention should be extended also by the banks, financial institutions and NGOs to the tourism related Small Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) of the country in terms of interest rate and credit conditions.

The traditional handicraft sector is also a promising sector in Bangladesh provided its synergies are well explored and utilized in tourism sector. Rural poor and the ethnic minorities of the country produce their daily necessities using cane, bamboo and leaves as raw materials. Most of the poor people still use pottery as utensils. In many regions people produce their own clothes by using handlooms. These traditional handicrafts items can be attractive to both local and foreign visitors. However, traditional handmade products are becoming obsolete due to availability of cheaper Chinese plastic products (Field Interview).

Most of the poor and ethnic communities are still unaware of the demand for these items to the tourists. There are a few craft organizations in Bangladesh, for example Bangladesh Folk Arts and Crafts Foundation functioning under the administration of the Ministry of Culture and Bangladesh Handloom Board (BHB) under the auspices of the Ministry of Textile and Jute. These organizations have been trying to revive the lost crafts and handloom products of the different parts of the country. The overwhelming efforts of these organizations in reviving the country's traditional crafts and handloom industry will be futile unless other organizations also take responsibility to linking this sector with the tourism development.

6. Conclusion

Tourism is already considered as one of the most influential tools to utilize in many poor and developing countries. Bangladesh has considered this challenge of the United Nation's declaration of halving the world poverty, yet often the position of tourism as an important stimulus to poverty reduction is not recognized fully in the country. Moreover, a wide range of barriers exist for the poor to be involved in country's tourism sector. Lack of trust, reciprocity and cooperation among the poor people for considering tourism as a promising sector for improving their livelihoods is a crucial issue to be confronted in Bangladesh. Although a large number of NGOs and government organizations have been working with micro-credit program in the rural areas of Bangladesh, the full benefits of the programs have not reached to the majority of the rural people. Exploration of potential rural tourism destinations is essentially needed in Bangladesh to provide increased access of the poor in this sector. Local foods of the rural areas can be presented as regional and cultural symbols that can generate revenues, benefiting the poor people. Networking among the tourism and related stakeholders is another issue that needs to be considered also. Reduction in poverty can be achieved in Bangladesh only if the benefits of tourism are directed to the poor either through training and employment provision or tourism related micro and small entrepreneurial support.

However, rural tourism development can be of great importance in Bangladesh as a country with a dominant rural population and agri-based economy. Tourism in the rural landscapes in Bangladesh can be an effective means of promoting development of micro-businesses. A decisive and inclusive plan is inevitable recognizing the importance of rural tourism in transforming the rural economy and the rural society as well in participation with the government, NGOs, tourism and related organizations and the rural people.

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