
“Responsible Tourism-Issues
and Practices”-
March 23&24, 2012, Guwahati,
Assam

Rapporteur’s Report

By Meghali Barua

Title of the Workshop: “Responsible Tourism-Issues and Practices”

Date: 23rd and 24th of March,2012

Location: Greenwood Resort, Guwahati, Assam

DAY TWO: 24TH MARCH, 2012

“MORNING SESSION”

TECHNICAL SESSION IV: ENVIRONMENT & WILDLIFE LAW IN TOURISM

1. A SHORT FILM SCREENING: “ THE TRUTH ABOUT TIGERS

DIRECTOR OF THE FILM: MR. SHEKAR DATTARI

NARRATOR OF THE FILM: MR. ROSHAN SETH

CONTENT:

The touching film opened with a poignant scene where a majestic tiger is seen stalking two little deers frolicking and playing amongst themselves in the midst of a vast, dense forest. The documentary focuses on the pitiable plight of the tiger population in India in today’s times. This film throws light on the man- animal conflict, the truth of the so-called modern society. It was disheartening and sad to see the extreme damage done to these majestic animals by the ignorance and selfishness of a corrupt society so beautifully shown by the documentary. The impact of the illegal encroachment of the forests and the senseless poaching by the people leading to an alarming depletion of the tiger population was brought forth by the director of the short film. The documentary concludes with an appeal urging the people to do their bit to save the tiger population, now towards the brink of extinction and suggests certain stringent measures to be taken up by everyone if the tiger population is to be saved. The short film can be viewed at the website, “ [www. truthabouttigers.org](http://www.truthabouttigers.org)”

2. SECOND PRESENTATION : WILDLIFE LAWS FOR ECO-TOURISM-CONSERVING NATURE & WILDLIFE-TRAFFIC INDIA

PRESENTER: MR. SAMIR SINGHA, HEAD, TRAFFIC INDIA

CONTENTS:

- The presenter opens his presentation talking about the laws so very necessary for the protection of the wildlife and says the “ it is necessary to get a basic grounding of the laws” if the wildlife is to be protected.

- According to him eco-tourism must primarily involve and benefit the local people and that ultimately the first benefit accrued by eco-tourism must flow to the local communities.
- Mr. Singha gave the information that the “Wildlife Protection Act”, 1972 affords protection to the various species of wild animals (listed in Schedule I to IV) and plants(listed in Schedule VI), irrespective of where they are found. He also informed that the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 renders protection to the population of living species living in the Protected Areas (Pas).
- According to him, the Wildlife Protection Act,1972 is an act to provide protection to the wild animals & plants & for matters connected therewith or ancillary or incidental with a view of protecting the ecology.
- He talks about the various provisions of the Act and gives us an insight about the way poaching is carried out in the forests through some heart-rending examples including an incident where an elephant’s entire face had been carved out by a gang of poachers in their bid to cut out the elephant’s tusks.
- Mr. Singha throws light on the vast poaching network present in India with connections to Burma and China and shows how the poachers operate with their knowledge of the forests and the ill-equipped situation of the forest guards to deal with the new modern techniques of the poachers.
- He informs about the Sec 28 (d) of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 which mandates the Chief Wildlife Warden to manage the area under his or her jurisdiction. According to this section, the Chief Wildlife Warden may grant permission to any person to enter or to reside in a sanctuary for various purposes including tourism.
- He focused on the particular sections of the Act which are over- arching regulatory mechanism which gives direction to the central govt. to take appropriate measures pertaining to wildlife protection with particular focus on wildlife trade.
- Thereby he concludes by an appeal to the audience to have a better understanding of the laws pertaining to wildlife protection and conservation to protect the natural heritage of the country.

3. FIFTH PRESENTATION: ECO-TOURISM INITIATIVES (MADHYA PRADESH ECO-TOURISM DEVELOPMENT BOARD)

PRESENTER: MR. AJOY BHATTACHARYA, IFS, CEO, MADHYA PRADESH ECOTOURISM BOARD

CONTENT:

- Mr. Bhattacharya opens his presentation with the beautiful lines from a poem of Robert Frost and elaborates on the definition of eco-tourism according to the National Forest Commission ,2006 which states, “Ecotourism, as it is called, is the mantra of the new age travel industry. As ecotourism has mostly to do with nature and wilderness, the Forest Department becomes a key actor in the activity centred on ecotourism. The Department’s

capacity needs to be augmented, infrastructure raised and mechanisms of inter-department and inter-sectoral collaboration worked out"

- According to him the eco-tourism policies till date are more or less tiger-centric and he opined that Eco-Tourism is known globally for the 3 Cs- CONSERVATION, CONSERVATION EDUCATION & COMMUNITY INVOLMENT
- He informed that Ecotourism has been included in 12th five Year Plan by Planning Commission under the group of Wildlife, Ecotourism and Animal Welfare
- He elaborates on the initiatives on Eco-Tourism taken up by MP Ecotourism Development Board and briefs on the Board's features like it was the country's first such board, was constituted on July 12th, 2005 ,was an autonomous organization and had been constituted under MP Firms and Societies (Registration) Act, 1973 under the Forest Department of Government of Madhya Pradesh
- He briefs about the constitution of the body of the Board and elaborates on it's salient Mission & Vision and the various policy initiatives taken up by the MP government towards reinstating eco-tourism in it's state
- The various tasks include Destination Development (which includes development of logistics, accommodation, cuisine etc), Infrastructure Development(where already existing destinations are enriched) and Activities (which means maximizing on community benefits and activities)
- He then talks about the various innovative approaches taken by the Board to develop Eco-tourism which includes- Innovative Themes(like Bamboo based,Water based (floating cottage / cafe), Tree houses), Innovative Projects / Schemes(like Ecotourism based Sustainable Livelihoods for local communities and Wilderness camp – Jungle Sarai), Innovative Technology(like Ecotourism web portal which is a scheme to create easily accessible information for the stakeholders of ecotourism in MP and Gray water management, Indigenous (Appropriate) technology ,Resource, power, knowledge for the local - by the local, Rain Water Harvesting and Community based waste management), Innovative Infrastructure and Innovative Activities{ like Eco-Camps – Educational camps for nature conservation are organised at district level (50 students per district), Ecological Garden, Eco-Parks etc and also schemes like National competition for design of Laharpur ecotourism destination, total 261 participants from all over the Country}.
- He elaborates on the certification scheme of MP which includes- Eco Rating, Eco – Certification, Franchisee and Ecotourism Awards(which are divided into various categories like- Best Eco friendly Resort/Lodge , Best Tour/Travel Operators/ Ecotourism Activity Organisers , JFMC (EDC /FPC /VFC/ Gram Sabha), Individual for innovative initiatives ,Frontline officers of Forest / Tourism Departments promoting Ecotourism activities which would be given on Eco-tourism Day which falls on 12th July.

- He talks about the concept of Capacity- Building of Communities for Ensuring Livelihoods which is a continuous process and can be done through various workshops
 - He then elaborates on the various models within the Community Based Eco-tourism framework: Self- Initiated and community managed, NGO Initiated and community owned and Co-managed i.e. Community Managed and Government Supported
 - He elaborates on the PPP Scheme (Public-Private Partnership Scheme) which is a project based *Concession Agreement* between a government entity and a private entity, to create and / or manage infrastructure for public purpose, for a fixed time-frame, on commercial terms, and assets revert to government on end of contract and discusses the various processes under it in detail
- He concludes by talking about the various strategies undertaken to develop PPP structure for development of Eco-Tourism under it

4. FOURTH PRESENTATION: ROLE OF HOTELS IN ECO- TOURISM

PRESENTER: Mr. RAKESH MATHUR, Honorary Vice President, ESOI

CONTENT:

- Mr. Rakesh Mathur , in continuation of his presentation made on day one, “Role of hotels in Eco-Tourism” , further elaborated about the various guidelines pertaining to infrastructure, and guidelines pertaining to the use of the scarce resources like Air, Water, Energy, Waste, Sewage alongwith guidelines pertaining to the wildlife or eco- lodges which will help the hotel industry to become ecologically friendly and help to conserve the scarce resources in a better way.
- He enumerated some very simple steps which any hotel can follow to protect and conserve the ecological resources.
- He voiced certain concerns about the various ills rampant in the hotel industry like-
 - Hotel industry remains mainly an unorganized sector-large & unmanaged
 - The tourists and the service providers both are ignorant and lack awareness and education pertaining to the ecology
 - The lack of a proper waste management system particularly in the rural areas
 - The importance of plastics and synthetics segregation
 - The people must not follow the concept of “conspicuous consumption” if they were to leave less carbon foot-print. The people must learn to use the locals products to keep the ecological balance positively
 - People must understand the difference between Luxury and Comfort in order to lead an eco-friendly lifestyle.
- He talks about certain measures the hotel industry can follow as a whole to achieve the much desired action of being eco-friendly like Incentives to guest, Incentives to

staff, constant feed-back & incentives to manufactures, vendors, distributors & architects and the like.

- He concluded his presentation by reading out the “Eco-Tourism Pledge” and appealed to the tour operators and people to keep a copy of it in the lodges, hotels and individual houses and also made a special mention to the special needs of the differently-abled which needs to be addressed by the hospitality and hotel sector

5. FIFTH(Last presentation of the Workshop) PRESENTATION: ECO-TOURISM: STRENGTHENING LEGAL PROVISIONS(ISSUES, OPTIONS & STRATEGIES)

PRESENTER: MR. AJOY BHATTACHARYA, IFS, CEO, MADHYA PRADESH ECOTOURISM BOARD

CONTENT:

- He begins the last presentation of the day by talking about the various gaps existing between the eco-tourism policies and the resources available for the development of it like the non-specification of the role of the government, lack of community involvement, absence of incentives and the like
- He compares the salient attributes and features of mass- tourism and eco-tourism on various parameters like the goals, knowledge, experience, the cultural aspect and last but not the least- participation (of the community)
- He elaborates on the various principles which reinstates the necessity of legal framework for the development of eco-tourism like:
 - To identify legal back up for ecotourism and to draw a comprehensive policy based on the legal provisions available.
 - To bring in ecotourism under the working plans and to promote it as a tool for conservation and livelihood.
 - To make comprehensive policy and action plan for ecotourism at national level & state level.All these will in turn help to institutionalize the concept of ecotourism as a tool for Sustainable Forest Development
- He elaborates on the provision of the Supreme Court of India which states that importance of ecotourism is to be recognized by court by including '**value of ecotourism**' in the monetary value of services accruing from forest for computing Net Present Value (NPV)
- He states the quotation from the Indian Constitution which is "*It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife and to have compassion for living creatures*" and explains the provisions in detail of the various Acts & Policies at National and State levels which provides legal provisions and background for ecotourism which are-

- Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, Forest Conservation Act, 1980,
- Environment (Protection) Act, 1980,
- The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974,
- Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981,
- The *Panchayati Raj* Scheduled Areas Extension Act, 1996,
- Biological Diversity Act, 2002,
- Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, December 2006,
- National Forest Policy, 1988
- National Conservation Strategy And Policy Statement On Environment And Development, 1992
- National Environment Policy 2006
- National Ecotourism Policy and Guidelines (1998)
- National Tourism Policy, 2002
- He talks about the Ecotourism mandate of Tourism Ministry which elaborates on the basic principles guiding the eco-tourism initiatives of the Ministry which includes:
 - *The local community should be involved leading to the overall economic development of the area.*
 - *The likely conflicts between resource use for ecotourism and the livelihood of local inhabitants should be identified and attempts made to minimize the same*
 - *The type and scale of ecotourism development should be compatible with the environment and socio-cultural characteristics of the local community, and*
 - *It should be planned as a part of the overall area development strategy, guided by an integrated land-use plan avoiding inter-sectoral conflicts and ensuring sectoral integration, associated with commensurate expansion of public services*
- Mr. Bhattacharya concludes by elaborating on the wildlife tourism guidelines in the Protected Areas(PAs) according to the Wildlife Action Plan(2002-2016) and enunciates the various state policies and state laws on Eco-Tourism including that of Assam, Sikkim, Tripura,Kerala, Himachal Pradesh and the like. He also discusses the gray areas and issues associated with the development of Eco-Tourism.

6. OPEN DISCUSSION SESSION

MEMBERS OF THE PANEL: MR. RAKESH MATHUR, MR. MANDIP SINGH SOIN,MRS. SEEMA BHATT, MR. ASHISH PHOOKAN, MR. ANURAG SINGH

Mr. Mandip Singh Soin opened the platform for the open discussion session wherein the members of the panel and the participants of the workshop would interact on the issues and experiences related to the theme of the work-shop.

- The first question was directed to Mr. Ajay Bhattacharya who was asked , “ How to assess NPV(Net Present Value) in terms of Eco-Tourism?”. Mr. Bhattacharya answered the question by stating that till present no NPV(Net Present Value) calculation has been done for any eco-tourism destination and in PPP scheme the entrepreneur is given the permission to conduct tourism activities on a lease basis generating revenue for the state and the local community. Mr. Samir Sinha added that NPV is to be calculated is to be done in accordance to the Supreme Court guidelines.
- The second question was the questionability of the government’s policy or hand in the wide-scale deforestation in the name of development taken up for the construction of the four- lane construction in reference to the one being constructed from Guwahati to Shillong and from Guwahati to Silchar? This was addressed to Mr. Rakesh Mathur who answered that sometimes there is a conflict between human needs and the safety of the environment and stated that people should raise their voices against the cases which poses a threat to the environment.
- The third question was directed to Mr. Samir Singha who was asked that , “ If Kaziranga National Park is declared to be a Tiger Reserve would the value and the business of the Park go down?” Mr. Singha answered that declaring Kaziranga National Park as a Tiger Reserve would only mean that there would be more Central Government funding for the park and the fear of the conservation focus shifting from rhinos to tigers is baseless. He said that it would mean a greater layer of protection of the park by law. There will be focus management and the carrying capacity will be decided by the park authorities in terms of number of vehicles and tourists.
- The fourth question was directed to mr. Mandip Singh Soin which was, “ Conservation is for whom? Should not a part of the benefit of the forests go to the local communities?”

Mr. Mandip Singh Soin answered by stating that there are ways of achieving balance through eco-tourism vehicle between community involvement and conservation. Eco-Tourism is one the pillars of Responsible Tourism and there are other aspects to responsible tourism as well.

Mrs. Seema Bhatt exemplified by elaborating on a study she conducted at three heritage sites in India which included the Kaziranga National park focusing on the “ benefits & opportunities for communities” and added that given the legal framework of the country, eco-tourism is the best way to promote responsible tourism and benefit the local communities as well.

Mr. Anurag Singha said that there is no concept of “absolute balance”. He holds up the example of Manas Tiger Project who had a bad phase in the history due to political

turmoil where the local communities helped to get the park back to normalcy. For the stake –holders to reap maximum benefit, he says, it must be done through sustainable activities and regulation.

Mr. Mandip Singh Soin elaborated a personal experience at the house of the political Naga leader Phizo in Kohima who said that, “we can continue to blame the government or take of things ourselves”. Phizo talked about an intervention which was done some years back wherein an entire community signed a pledge to stop being their traditional role of hunters.

Mr. Ajay Bhattacharya added that one can have a win-win situation for everybody under law and legal framework of the government.

- The fifth question was directed to Mr. Ajay Bhattacharya who was asked, “Can tourism activities be allowed in the Protected Areas (PAs)?”

Mr. Bhattacharya explained that the focus of tourism activities is in the areas outside the forest or on the fringes of the forests. He adds that one should be careful and judicious in discussing PAs for eco-tourism development and gives the example of Kanha National Park and stated that one has to plan the use of PAs or other areas for the use of eco-tourism.

Mr. Soin added that one can draw the inference from the above discussion that one should be far more conscious so that eco-tourism initiatives do not go wrong.

- Mr. Soin shared some view-points where he stated that the ministry must shift the focus from a tiger-centric tourism to focusing on other groups of animals and flora and that the abilities and skills of the guides should be strengthened enabling them to become naturalists. He shares the example of initiating night-drives in parks and the feasibility of harvesting medicinal plants to benefit the local community.
- Mr. Soin further welcomed the participants to become new members of ESOI to be a part of further such workshops and to access the knowledge bank of ESOI on the website ‘to be a part of the change’. Mr. Samir Singha added that first night safari in India is to be opened shortly in Noida.
- Mr. Ranjeet Das, President, Tour Operators of Assam, gave his vote of thanks to the ESOI and the Assam Tourism Department and shared the knowledge that the Assam chapter of Tour Operators was the first to sign up the pledge of ESOI.
- Mr. Anurag Singha was given a set of written questions made out by the students of Cooton College, Guwahati(Mass Communication Department) which were:
 - What initiatives are being taken up by Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) for promoting tourism?
He answered that steps were taken up by the ATDC to develop tourism which would leave less carbon-imprint behind. He gives the example of the ATDC sponsored river cruise on the river Brahmaputra which is eco-

friendly and minimizes water pollution through its built-in sewage treatment system and other features like small consumption of diesel or fossil fuel.

- Can we stop deforestation and encroachment by further projects?

Mr. Singha defined that it is relative and that new projects need to be balanced. He adds encroachment is defined by over-population, expanding villages & the like. Thereby there is a need of the right policy in the right place.

- Can we state that tourism development is successful in North-East?

Mr. Singha explains that the tourism department is a budding department and has to work for its own development and its master plan. He said that the Tata Consultancy Service in collaboration of the govt. has started chalking out a Tourism Master Plan for the North – East region. He added that the Tourism Department has started the process of Joint Forest Community Management program like the one in Nagaon awarded by the World Bank.

There was a suggestion from the audience to Mr. Singha to develop the Jorhat Airport to initiate the tea-plantation tourism, development of tourism potential of the Upper Assam forests and the like.

7. VALEDICTORY ADDRESS:

Mr. Anurag Singha, MD, ATDC, addressed his vote of thanks to Mr. Mandip Singh Soin(Honorary President, ESOI), Mr. Rakesh Mathur(Honorary Vice President, ESOI), Mrs. Seema Bhatt(Consultant – Biodiversity, Ecotourism & Climate Change), Mr. Ranjeet Das(President, TOAA), Mr. Manoj Jalan(Organizer- The 10th Ecotourism workshop of ESOI in Guwahati) and said that it had been an enlightening experience where different issues pertaining to tourism had been highlighted. He added that in the two-days of the work-shop there had been brilliant session where everyone was enlightened and sensitized. He gave his special vote of thanks to the speakers and participants of the work-shop starting Mr. Mandip Singh Soin, Mr. Rakesh Mathur, Mrs. Seema Bhatt, Prof Sheila Bora(Professor-retired, Dibrugarh University), Mr. C.B. Ramkumar(Founder & MD- Our Native Village), Mr. Anirudh Chaoji(Director- Eco Tours, Pune), Ms. Mariyam Zakiah(Arch I, Delhi), Mr. Shivumso Chikro (Anu Shiksha Seva Trust, ASSET, Arunachal Pradesh), Mr. Bibhuti Lahkar (Programme Secretary, AARANYAK), Mr. Pema Wange(Project Officer, WWF India), Mr. Nima Tashi Bhutia(Khangchendzonga Conservation Society, KCC), Mr. Mrinal Chowdhury(Asst. Director, Assam Energy Development Agency) and last but not the least to Mr. Ajoy Bhattacharya (IFS, CEO, Madhya Pradesh Ecotourism Board) and Lara Sihna (Organiser, ESOI).

He concluded by quoting Mr. Chandan Bhrama, Honorable Minister, Tourism, Govt. of Assam, “ It is not the end; it is the starting of the process”.

The workshop was concluded with a special vote of thanks from Mr. Rakesh Mathur representing ESOI with a certificate distribution ceremony along with a photo session of all the participants of the workshop followed by lunch.