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ROLE OF WOMEN IN ECO-TOURISM IN SIKKIM

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ABSTRACT

The main focus of the study is to know Role of women in Ecotourism in Sikkim. Ecotourism is a means of sustainable economic development and protection of the cultural and natural heritage of our country. It is a form of tourism involving visiting fragile, pristine, and serene natural areas, projected as a low impact and often small scale option to standard commercial tourism. Sikkim the ultimate ecotourism destination is the policy motto of the state. The state is employing a system of environmental fees and permits for entries and stay time restriction in some in environmentally sensitive high altitude pristine areas The Present study is entirely Based on both Primary as well as Secondary data. Primary data is collected through structured questionnaire. This research paper aims to analyze the role of women in ecotourism, which endeavors to create a responsible and sustainable tourism. Role of women in ecotourism, Women as farmers and as gatherers of wood, water and natural non-wood forest products, may have more direct knowledge of the local environment than men and as able entrepreneurs, they may be more likely to use extra income for health, education and general welfare, as long as they receive it directly. Women and racial minorities must be given a louder voice in policy making if the goals of sustainability are to be realized, for these people are the important part of the community who are affected directly and indirectly by tourism and Sikkim.

Keywords; *Ecotourism, Sikkim, role of women, ecotourism policy, community, sustainability*

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ROLE OF WOMEN IN ECOTOURISM:

Ecotourism is defined as responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment and improves the wellbeing of local people. Ecotourism is a type of nature based tourism that benefits local communities. It can also be defined as purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the culture and natural history of the environment, taking care not to disturb the integrity of ecosystem. Community run ecotourism programme

emerged around the world offering travelers the opportunity to learn about different culture, the socio and cultural threats that local people face, and their understanding of local ecology.

Over the 20 years, women's role in environment protection and sustainable development has increasingly been recognized. The third world conference on women in Nairobi in 1985 specifically noted women's role in environmental conservation and management, and the platform for action adopted at the fourth world conference on women in Beijing in 1995 included women and environment as one of its critical areas of concern. The international ecotourism society and the UNWTO state that women make up majority of the jobs of ecotourism worldwide.

However in case of Sikkim, our experience has been quite positive. The demand of tourist to see the culture of local people has in fact helped the revival interest of local people in their culture. Sikkim tourism has been organizing tourism festival since last 5-6 years where local tradition dance and music are displayed in Gangtok the capital city of Sikkim. Various ethnic groups of Sikkim participate in these cultural carnivals with great enthusiasm and gusto. The local community needs to be empowered to decide what focus of tourism facilities and wildlife conservation programmes they want to be developed in their respective countries.

The involvements of women in ecotourism in most of the states are less, Women sometimes may be left out even in participatory policies due to gender stratification. Women are important stakeholders in natural resource policies since rural women in developing countries are responsible for most of the collection of food, fuel, and firewood for commercial and domestic use. When it comes to the management of these natural resources, however, women have traditionally been denied any role in the decision-making process (Agarwal, 1992).

In the run up to UNCED, the women's environment and development Organization organized the first women's world congress for a healthy planet in 1991, which developed a platform known as the "women action Agenda 21". UNCED itself recognized women as a "major group" in sustainable development as reflected in Rio principle. UNEP has committed in its 2004-2005 program of work to make gender a cross cutting priority in all of its programs with an emphasis on;

- Empowerment of women in environmental decision making.
- Active participation of women.
- Technical assistance to women's network.
- Focus on women in reports on environmental links to ill health.
- Development of education and training materials.

- Organization of workshop.

Women as key CBNRM implementers: As farmers and as gatherers of wood, water and natural non-wood forest products, women may have more direct knowledge of the local environment than men. And as able entrepreneurs, they may be more likely to use extra income for health, education and general welfare, as long as they receive it directly. Women and racial minorities must be given a louder voice in policy making if the goals of sustainability are to be realized, for these people are the important part of the community who are affected directly and indirectly by tourism.

“Many of Wanchuk Centennial Park remote villages tend to be full of young girls and women with no jobs and limited educations” “they live in one of the country’s most popular tourist attractions”. Recognizing this, WCP (co-managed by WWF-Bhutan and the Royal Government of Bhutan), developed ‘the homestay programme’. The aim for homestays was to spread throughout the region, so that tourists can trek between the villages and stay with locals, rather than camping or staying in larger resorts, providing the villagers with an alternative source livelihood in the form of payments for rooms, meals, drinks etc .The ecotourism project though offers a lot more than just economic benefits. By creating an incentive to safeguard the integrity of the park (in the form of its attraction to visitors) the WCP Rangers hope that the villagers will become WCP’s primary guardian not only promoting a more sustainable lifestyle in themselves, but also encouraging them to prevent outside threats such as poaching. This combination of a reduced rural- urban migration, and a new motivation to maintain traditions, a WWF’s involvement has largely financial-supporting the Homestay with some required improvements, such as restroom facilities, as well as paying for hospitality training, and linking them with the tourist council of Bhutan. However now that the basic are in place the girls are keen to develop the program themselves; they have decided to form their own home stay committee, and look out for own guests- To attract guest would be their great challenge, hence the project has turned many of the young girls into small entrepreneurs.

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