

Building Sustainable Places and Communities through Community-based Tourism Case Study: Debotakhum, Rowangchari, Bandarban, Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

The tourism industry is acknowledged as one of the most significant sectors of the national economy in many countries. Community-based tourism has been recognized as an alternative to being able to provide community welfare and community empowerment towards sustainable tourism. The tourism industry of Bandarban hill district is sprawling in an unplanned manner. To achieve sustainable development goals, tourism activity is required to be carefully managed. The research aims to investigate the economic prospects and how the current executed model of Community Base Tourism (CBT) located in Debotakhum, Rowangchari, Bangladesh is functioning. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to investigate the research objectives to analyze the economic data of the whole population living near the catchment areas including all the service providers have participated in the investigation process (no service providers were left out). The research revealed the approximate amount of revenue generated from this specific place throughout the year. Also, a series of issues were revealed through the research. Further, a few institutional framework issues related to planning also came under the light of investigation. To mitigate the gap, a rational and more practical insight that suits the based tourism (CBT) model the best was proposed. Finally, the paper concludes by discussing the implications of how to better integrate all the stakeholders including the young workforce, students and graduates in CBT projects, as the latter represents an institutional framework and an inclusive way in which all the involved parties can work together.

Keywords: Community based tourism; Sustainable development goals; Sustainable place and communities

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has been one of the fastest-growing industries around the globe and has contributed to the development of national and regional economies for significant decades. According to a report from the world tourism organization, in 2018, tourism's contribution to global GDP was 10.4%, accumulating an export value of 1.6 trillion USD and creating 319 million jobs worldwide. Followed by COVID-19, the industry tried to recover its losses. In 2022, the travel and tourism sector contributed 7.6% to global GDP; an increase of 22% from 2021 and only 23% below 2019 levels. In 2022, there were 22 million new jobs, representing a 7.9% increase on 2021 and only 11.4% below 2019. Domestic visitor spending increased by 20.4% in 2022, only 14.1% below 2019. International visitor spending rose by 81.9% in 2022 but is still 40.4% behind 2019

numbers. Bandarban is the second-most popular tourist destination among domestic tourists in Bangladesh. Bandarban is a district in south-eastern Bangladesh and a part of the Chittagong division. It is one of the three hill districts of Bangladesh and a part of the Chittagong hill tracts. The tourism industry is a blessing for the region. Especially if the development of the underprivileged native communities is concerned, in the achievement of the goals of the SDG by 2030, the local and central government must develop an inclusive framework for the tourism industry of Bandarban hill district [1]. The approach of inclusive tourism emphasizing community tourism and partnership with local communities will create a new door of harmony. "To achieve these goals and promote social harmony, special attention needs to be paid to the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)-a region that lags behind the rest

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of the country in terms of various development indicators and which has a history of social tensions” (<https://www.daily-sun.com/>, 2019). Fear and reluctance are present among the native people regarding the tourism industry. Moreover, the tourism industry may become a curse for the people of this region due to unplanned growth, large-scale intervention and mismanagement. Fear of social degradation is a big issue in this regard. “The Bandarban resort project is a tragic real-life replay of James Cameron's eco-conscious blockbuster, *Avatar* is a celluloid indictment against the kind of environmental injustices that the Bandarban resort project exemplifies. Why do we need a five-star hotel at the heart of the land that indigenous communities consider their spiritual home?”

The district does not have any policy or strategy to deal with the development of the tourism industry. To ensure the sustainability of the industry, people and the place, a holistic approach is an urgent appeal. The industry is facing some significant challenges [2]. Due to the historical and political unrest, the context of tourism development in Bandarban is different compared to other districts of Bangladesh. In recent years, after COVID-19, political unrest appeared to be a regular issue in Bandarban hill district. “Tourists were banned from entering three upazilas of the district since October 17, 2022, due to a joint operation by the security forces against militant organizations and the Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) in the border areas”. Therefore, the industry is losing revenue ranging from 2 to 6 crores every day. The present unplanned tourism industry is creating haphazard development and losses followed by political unrest in Bandarban hill district. The losses undeniably make a great impact on the economic development of this area. An integrated management system under an appropriate authority will help the industry to prosper and bring a balanced development for this region. Therefore, the main goal of this research is to find out how to help and flourish the community tourism sector of Bandarban. For this reason, this research has chosen Debotakhum as a role model for community tourism and attempted to find out how community tourism is the best way to improve the tourism sector in Bandarban hill district. Therefore, the research sets objectives to identify the economic impact of the Debotakhum in the region and how the existing framework is dealing with the development process. Next, with the received data, the research will uncover the gaps, opportunities and challenges in the current practice of CBT. Finally, based on the findings, the research proposes necessary recommendations for the sustainable development of CBT in Debotakhum, Rowangchari, Bandarban, Bangladesh [3].

CBT in perspective

The idea of CBT is all about people, land, environment and sustainability. The significant aspect of this idea is prioritizing the local people for economic freedom and environmental protection. The concept also shows concern about how the benefits can be shared among the local people, which means ensuring a balanced economic distribution among the general people of the state through participation and work. A lack of sustainability in tourism can create an adverse effect on the local community. Many countries around the globe like Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, Nepal, Vietnam, Malaysia and Lao PDR,

are where CBT is systematically and successfully managed. It must be noted that while the concept of CBT places local communities at the center of the tourism development process, multisectoral collaboration is required to foster a CBT ecosystem. Some communities may have the capacity to develop CBT entirely on their own, but many can find it challenging. Community empowerment agenda can greatly benefit from multi-sectoral stakeholder support. According to the world tourism organisation CBT means involving appreciation not only of nature but also of indigenous cultures, CBT facilitates prevailing in natural areas, as a part of the visitor experience; containing education and interpretation as a part of the tourist offer; generally, but not exclusively, organized for small groups by small, specialized and locally owned businesses; minimizing negative impacts on the natural and socio-cultural environment; supporting the protection of natural and cultural areas by generating economic benefits from it; providing alternative income and employment for local communities and increasing local and visitor awareness of conservation efforts [4].

As the CBT gets mature, the challenges for the community also increase. Inescapably, tour operators begin to show interest and extend their cooperation to form partnerships with the local community. Without having the necessary skills and expertise to cope with the increasing demand and number of tourist arrivals will be challenging CBT will require a technical and institutional framework specific to the region. The auto-generated tourism industry can help open new opportunities to change the local people's fortune. Like any unplanned development, the tourism industry in Bandarban has issues around development. As there is no planning or policy framework, sometimes disputes and disagreements arise from the local community sides. “The announcement that a five-star “Marriott Hotel and Amusement Park” is being built in Bandarban no doubt comes as welcome news to Bengali elites and the nouveau riche looking for novel and instagrammable ways of spending their weekends and disposable incomes in the luscious hills of the CHT”. This year, 2023, UNWTO sets an agenda for investing in the three P's. People, planet and prosperity this sector requires investing in people, as they are the foundation of tourism. Also, the industry has to ensure that the tourism sector delivers on its responsibilities to the planet. A solution to the climate emergency is one of the most urgent and pressing risks and challenges of the next 10 years of prosperity to foster innovation and entrepreneurship. To meet the SDG's goals, the tourism industry of Bandarban can play a greater role and has the potential to change people's lives faster than any industry in Bandarban hill district.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research gathered relevant information through a questionnaire paper, interviews with key stakeholders, focus group discussion and review of available documents, records and opinions of the government officials and local people, the questionnaire has three sections. The first part of the questionnaire covers general information on participants. The second part, Part A, is for restaurants, hotels, resorts, transportation or others that provide services to tourists. This

part covers questions related to income and tourist demand. Part B has open-ended questions for participants interested in providing more information. The next part, part C, is for government, local representatives, direct stakeholders and senior citizens in Bandarban hill district; each session lasts about 10 to 15 minutes. Finally, part D covers a questionnaire for tourists to understand their experiences. We have chosen all the people living in the service providers living around the spot. The census method (A statistical investigation in which the data are collected for every element/unit of the population is termed as census method) was used to understand overall economic contribution as well as Social Impact Assessment (SIA) to measure the level. The total sample size of the survey was 300. Rowangchhari Upazila had (21 restaurant owners, 56 tourist guides, 73 three wheeler Mahindra and taxi drivers) 150 participants from service providers were interviewed face to face while they were on the job. 50 tourists were also interviewed on the spot, 100 local people were from the surrounding tourist spots and the public representatives and policymakers were from the locality. Excel and SPSS were used to analyze the data set. The limitations of this research are that there is not any economic data in the academic arena that can relate to or compare. Apart from a few exceptions, the participants were

active and friendly in providing all the necessary information for this research. Research has no potential ethical problems that could arise as a result of this study [5]. All the participants had provided their identity and signed knowing that the data would be used for research to make an impact on policy advocacy for the betterment of this industry.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results, finding and concluding remarks

To understand the economic prospects, the research digs deep into all the sources that are accumulating revenue from Debotakhum tourist spots. The local community has active participation in the service industry. The economic data are collected firsthand from the spot. On the way to Debotakhum, around Debotakhum and Kochhoptoli, there are at least 21 restaurants that sell food to tourists. These restaurants are providing services to tourists (Tables 1-9).

Table 1: The name of the restaurant has been used in short form for privacy purposes.

Sl. no	Name of sector	Name of entity	Peak season (lowest income) daily	Peak season (highest income) daily	Off-season (lowest income) daily	Off-season (highest income) daily
Amount in BDT and USD						
1	Restaurant	NCB	1500	2000	1000	1200
2		CYU Marma	2000	3000	1000	1500
3		RT	500	1000	300	500
4		MHC Marma	5000	10000	1000	2000
5		T. Restaurant	3500	5000	2000	2500
6		MCU Marma	1400	1500	300	900
7		AJ Tonchongya	2000	3000	500	1000
8		LG Hotel	5000	10000	1000	1500
9		JN	10000	20000	5000	6000
s10		SP	3500	4000	1500	2000
11		I. Restaurant	1000	1200	1000	500
12		TFFR	6500	7000	1600	2000
13		NNMR	3000	4000	5,00	1000
14		TR	2200	2000	1000	1200
15		HTRR	15000	18000	6000	12000

16		CTP	3000	4000	500	1000
17	Debota Khum Restaurant	DKS	4000	5000	1500	1800
18		BT	3000	4000	1000	1500
19						
20	Burmese Market	BBM	2000	4000	1000	1500
21		MSS	20000	25000	10000	15000
22		TT	20000	30000	4000	10000
			114100	163700	41700	66600
			1,028.74 USD	1,475.94 USD	375.972 USD	600.473 USD

Table 2: The amount of annual revenue received from hotels, restaurants and handicraft stores in Rowangchhari Upazila.

Description	Minimum amount in BDT and USD	Maximum amount in BDT and USD
During peak-season	$114,100 \times 30 \text{ days} \times 6 \text{ months} = 20,538,000$	$163,700 \times 30 \text{ days} \times 6 \text{ months} = 29,466,000$
During off-season	$41,700 \times 30 \text{ days} \times 6 \text{ months} = 7,506,000$	$66,600 \times 30 \text{ days} \times 6 \text{ months} = 11,988,000$
Total amount	28,044,000 BDT	41454000
	252,848 USD	373,754 USD

Table 3: Revenue by tourist's guide Rowangchhari.

Name of sector	Name of entity	Peak season (lowest income)	Peak season (highest income)	Off season (lowest income)	Off season (highest income)
Tourist guide	Daily	375000	500000	112500	150000
	Month	11250000	15000000	3375000	4500000
	6+6 month annual	67500000 BDT	90000000 BDT	20250000 BDT	27000000 BDT
		608,587 USD	811450 USD	182576 USD	243435 USD

Rowangchhari has registered 92 tourist guides under the Upazila administration of Rowangchhari. During the season each tourist guide receives at least two to three teams for the tour [6].

Table 4: Debota Khum receives a significant number of tourists annually.

Season	The minimum amount in BDT and USD	Maximum amount in BDT and USD
Peak season	67500000	90000000
Off-season	20250000	27000000
	87,750,000 BDT	117,000,000 BDT
	791,164 USD	1,054,885 USD

Table 5: Table for Debotakhum Vela and Boat.

Sl. no	Name of sector	Peak season (lowest income) in BDT and USD	Peak season (highest income) in BDT and USD	Off season (lowest income) in USD	Off season (highest income) in BDT and USD
1	Debotakhum, Vella and Boat	Daily	60,000	75,000	22,500
2		Month	18,00,000	22,50,000	6,75,000
3		6+6 month	10,800,000	13,500,000	40,50,000
4			97,374 USD	121,717 USD	36,515.2 USD

Table 6: Annual revenue generated by Boat and Vela.

Season	Minimum in BDT and USD	Maximum income in BDT and USD
Peak season	10,800,000	10,800,000
Off season	40,50,000	54,00,000
Total income	14,850,000 BDT	16,200,000 BDT
	133,889 USD	146,061 USD

They receive 400 to 500 tourists every day during the peak season. However, during the off-season, they receive only 150 to 200 tourists daily. They charge 150 takas for outside tourists and

locals 50 takas. Debotakhum generated a minimum of 14,850,000 takas to 16,200,000 taka yearly.

Table 7: Revenue from vehicles in Rowangchhari.

Sl. no	Peak season (lowest income) in BDT and USD	Peak season (highest income) in BDT and USD	Off season (lowest income) in BDT and USD	Off season (highest income) in BDT and USD
Per day	154000	167200	66000	88000
Per month	4620000	5016000	1980000	2640000
Half year	27720000	30096000	11880000	15840000
	222,878 USD	271349	10711	142815

During the peak season, a minimum of 70 three-wheeler Mahindra gets trip around touring Debotakhum and surrounding Rowangchhari charges 2,200 BDT for a day. Approximately 76 taxis, all three-wheelers' are operating on that route. However, during the off-season, the number declined to

less than half. This sector generates 39,600,000 takas to 45,936,000 takas per annum. The table below shows the annual revenue generated by this sector [7].

Table 8: Annual revenue from the vehicle in Rowangchhari.

Season	Minimum in BDT and USD	Maximum in BDT and USD
Peak season	27720000	30096000
Off-season	11880000	15840000
Yearly revenue	39600000	45936000
	1,258649 USD	414,164 USD

Table 9: The total sector-wise yearly revenue generated by the Rowangchhari tourism industry.

Sl. no	Description	Yearly income minimum in taka and USD	Yearly income maximum in taka and USD
1	Hotels, restaurants, resorts, small handicrafts, varieties shop	28044000	41454000
2	Transportation taxi, bus, motorbikes	39600000	45936000
3	Boat and Vella	14850000	16200000
4	Tourist guide	87750000	117,000,000
	Total minimum to maximum	170,244,000	220,590,000
		1,534,939 USD	1,988,864 USD

The amount of money generated through various activities has been a great contributor to workers and service providers. The tolls that are collected in the tourist spots have been creating jobs for locals and money has been donated to local schools and Rowangchhari college. In the transportation sector, local communities are active. A significant number of indigenous people have been found driving three-wheelers; out of 76, 74 of them are Indigenous living in the surrounding area. As tourism thrives, the local drivers will be able to make a livelihood through this industry. Debotakhum is managed by the local community, involving all the representatives, including youths, village head (Karbari), members and union parishad chairman, as well as being monitored by Upazila administration Rowangchhari. The guides are listed and registered to ensure the security of the spots. Some packaged system catering services are offered at reasonable prices. The packaged lunch system is convenient for tourists. The upazila administration is seen as playing a facilitating role in the case of Debotakhum management.

Basic issues of Debota Khum community tourism

It was revealed during the research that the spot needs facility development to maximize the tourist experience and satisfaction. The provided services are basic. There are no quality toilet facilities for tourists. Waste management is also poor. The locals are not concerned about the waste produced by tourist activities. There are not any medical services in or around the tourist destination. Injured tourists suffer because of a lack of emergency medical services. Other common issues are unrest and political conflict in this region. The sudden call for travel restrictions for tourists due to a political emergency also causes a loss of revenue for this industry. Moreover, there is no food security standard measurement and service providers are lacking training. Tourism is heavily dependent on the goodwill of the host community. Therefore, positive attitudes and professional manners are expected from locals to increase visitors' experience.

No specific strategic management plan is taken

If the host communities are not well prepared or motivated, then it becomes challenging for CBT's success. In the case of Debotakhum, it has no specifically designed strategic management plan. The locals' quality of social amenities and attitude towards tourists require more training, motivation and facility development. The main factors that make CBT successful are the support from authorities, government, friendliness and awareness about CBT, Debotakhum also shows the deficiencies in making tourists feel more welcome. While discussing with tourists they also mentioned the continuous checkpoints that make their journey prolonged. Some also mention the fear of abductions and insecurity. Some complained about the tourist travel ban for uncertain periods. They also recommended that if the checkpoint procedures could be less time-consuming and rather than banning tourist travel, the security could be enhanced by police or taking appropriate measures that will make tourists warmer [8].

Lack of amusement activity

Authority: Like other tourist spots in Bandarban, Debotakhum also has some ambiguity regarding the management authority. Although currently under the management of the Rowangchhari upazila administration, according to the clause of the Chittagong hill tracts peace accord-1997, the control and management of the tourism sports should be given to the Bandarban hill district council. As a result, the issue of management remains unclear. The research also reveals that Bandarban hill district was recently included in the Bandarban district master plan but the lack of a clear policy on who will manage the government spots is acting as one of the major hurdles for the successful implementation of CBT.

Recommendation: Debotakhum tourist spot is practicing the CBT business model unplanned way. To implement the currently adopted tourism master plan, it is very important to implement an overall plan centered on the district council, in accordance with the terms of the Chittagong hill tracts peace

accord-1997. In this case, the Bandarban Hill District Council (BHDC) can promote entrepreneurship by involving local communities within that sector.

This proposed model will help to shape the sector in a very significant way by properly implementing it with sufficient resources. First of all, BHDC should adopt both a long-term and short-term strategy. To execute, BHDC may recruit experts to prepare strategic planning and budgeting for tourism development. BHDC can form a district executive committee to review the development progress. The following chart, shown below, thoroughly describes the idea (Figure 1).

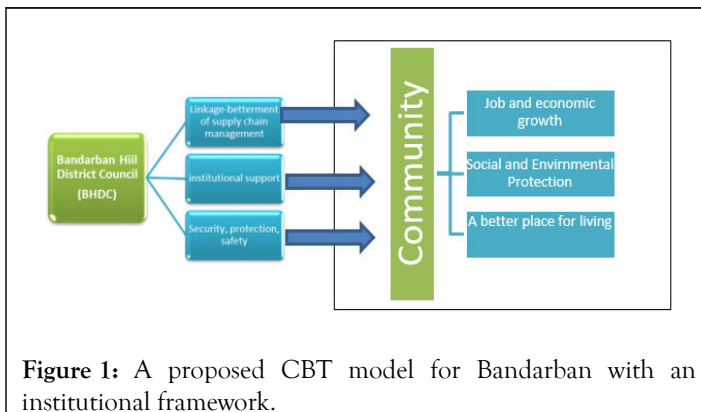


Figure 1: A proposed CBT model for Bandarban with an institutional framework.

An integrated effort towards making local lives better through this Community-Based Tourism (CBT) model will positively bring prosperity and harmony to this region. The final objective of this research is to provide insights and advocate for adopting a strategic framework based on the findings. Since 1971, Bandarban hill district has had no comprehensive plan adopted by the government for the tourism industry [9].

An institutional framework is also suggested below to execute the CBT for Bandarban hill district. Tourism management strategies for Bandarban hill district (Figure 2).

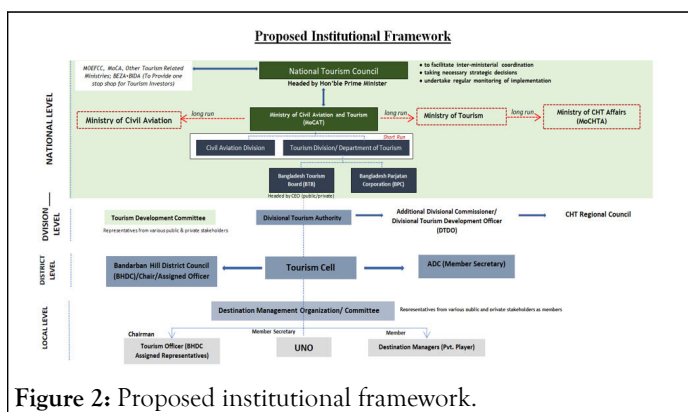


Figure 2: Proposed institutional framework.

As per the BHDC Act. 1989, 1998 (amended) and regional council act. 1998, Bandarban hill district council is the key authority in the district and has the legal mandate to manage, supervise, plan and execute tourism-related programs and coordinate with all concerned stakeholders. Since Chittagong hill tracts is distinct in terms of administration, culture, geography, ethnic diversity and socio-economic characteristics from the rest of the 61 districts, BHDC is the proper authority to lead the tourism sector. Institutional framework-

- National level: MoCHTA will represent
- Division level: Regional council chair/assigned official
- District level (tourism cell): BHDC chair/assigned official
- Upazila level: BHDC assigned representative

The proposed setup will have a National Tourism Council (NTC), headed by the hon'ble prime minister as the apex decision-making body, looking into all aspects of tourism in the country. It will have representations from all major tourism-related ministries, including the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism (MoCAT), Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), ministry of culture, BEZA, BIDA, etc. Operating under the direction and command of the NTC will be the ministry of civil aviation and tourism, which in the long run should be divided into two separate ministries one looking after civil aviation and the other dedicated to running tourism operations in the country. Under the tourism wing of the MoCAT, functions the Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB) and the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC). Major structural changes/additions are being proposed for the BTB in the current master plan. The major recommendations include the setting up of the divisional tourism authority at the division level which will be chaired by the additional divisional commissioner or a specially appointed Divisional Tourism Development Officer (DTDO). This body will not only have representations from all the line departments, but also private sector stakeholders like tour operators, hotel owners, NGOs, etc. The divisional tourism authority shall supervise and provide coordination between the various district tourism cells to be established at the level of the districts and supervised by the Bandarban hill district council/assigned person. The district tourism cells will oversee the Destination Management Organizations (DMOs)/committees. These have been developed based on the tourism characteristics of the priority clusters. The roles and responsibilities of each DMO are discussed in detail in the following section. These will supervise all tourism sector activities in the particular tourism destination and will have representation from all important tourism stakeholders in that tourism destination including private sector bodies and relevant NGOs. This body will have a destination manager to carry out the day-to-day activities of the body and will be supervised by the Bandarban hill district council/assigned person of the district concerned. As per the BHDC Act. 1989, 1998 (amended) and regional council act. 1998, Bandarban hill district council is the key authority in the district and has the legal mandate to manage, supervise, plan and execute tourism-related programs and coordinate with all concerned stakeholders [10].

CONCLUSION

CBT is becoming increasingly popular as a pro-poor growth development tool. The study shows the amount of revenue and jobs generated in the case study area can bring positive changes through proper planning and execution. The integrated proposed model and institutional framework will facilitate the local and central government agencies to adopt and embrace the management ideas for the greater benefit of the community. Considering all the findings, there are no alternatives but the proposed CBT model can build the place and community

sustainable. However, the projects should be taken with careful consideration through continuous innovation, value chain analysis, targeted marketing, and regular monitoring to ensure the maximum benefits of CBT.

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