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Review Paper

Community Involvement in Tourism and its Viability in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Community Based Tourism (CBT) is a recent buzzword among the tourism policy makers of developing countries, the donor agencies, NGOs, and the stakeholders. Conceptual evolution of tourism taught us to be more focused and careful on the concept of sustainable tourism. Consequently, more emphasis is being given on the concept of community-based tourism— an offshoot of sustainable tourism; without which sustainability is not ensured. The paper examines some of the success and failure issues of CBT and proposes three models of CBT on the basis of observations by different researchers. Attempts have also been done to explain which of the models might turn a CBT into a viable initiative. Finally, in light of the model, Bandarban— a mountainous region of Bangladesh has been examined as a jackpot of successful CBT. Bangladesh, being an over populated country, needs to protect the tourism assets from depletion because of overflow of tourists to a particular destination. No law can ensure sustainability of the tourism assets unless the local people are involved and trained up to make them aware that tourism assets are owned by them and these, if preserved properly, will generate income for them and for generations to come.

Keywords

CBT, sustainability, heritage site, tourism asset, models

1. Introduction

As a phenomenon, CBT is still under experimentation in many regions of the planet. Many of the countries of South-east Asia, Africa, and Latin America have been practicing CBT to achieve two-tier benefits by involving the local people in this non-mechanized industry for their economic betterment and the other one is to ensure sustainability of the tourism assets. Some studies show that the benefits from CBT is not up to the expectations, some even raised questions about its viability. Nevertheless, a few numbers of the academic pursuits indicated CBT as the appropriate tool for achieving the two-tier benefits.

The observation is that the present concept of Public Private Partnership (PPP) will not bring benefit to the community people as it is indeed a top-down approach. Instead, through bottom-up

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approach the community people should be encouraged to own and manage the CBT projects. This approach can be regarded as Public Private Community Partnership (PPCP).

However, the term 'Community' has many connotations. A community normally means a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common. A community is a social unit of any size that shares common values. The word "community" is derived from the Old French *comunete* which is derived from the Latin *communitas* (from Latin *communis*, things held in common), a broad term for fellowship or organized society (Oxford Dictionaries, 2014). One broad definition which incorporates all the different forms of community is "a group or network of persons who are connected (objectively) to each other by relatively durable social relations that extend beyond immediate genealogical ties, and who mutually define that relationship (subjectively) as important to their social identity and social practice (James Paul et al, 2012).

The term Community-based tourism holds the concept of offering tourism products to the tourists by communities with a view to meet economic, social, and environmental needs of local communities. Due to unprecedented growth of tourism and its negative effects, an increased interest has arisen in sustainable and community-based tourism (CBT) (Shunnaq et al., 2008 and Cooper, 2004). Sustainable tourism and community-based tourism (CBT) are subsets of the concept sustainable development (UNWTO 2008 quoted by Braun). Sustainable development is defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) as 'development that meets that needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED, 1987). From the view point of CBT, sustainability may encompass economic, social, cultural, and environmental elements. A real CBT concept can bring sustainability in all these elements. Two prime concerns of sustainable tourism are (i) to increase the income of the local people (financial sustainability) and (ii) to conserve the tourism assets from destruction (environmental and ecological sustainability). Only a well-planned CBT effort can ensure these.

2. Objectives

The paper aims at finding out the importance and significance of community-based tourism and its feasibility in Bangladesh context.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Financial Sustainability

In developing countries, specifically in Bangladesh, tourism business is dominated by rich and the elites. Rich people of the society own luxurious hotels, theme parks, eating places, cottages, motels, casinos and other establishments. Big tourism investments are done in urban areas or in other touristic destinations mainly. The underprivileged ones do not have entry to ownership; but only the lower category jobs of waiters, housekeeping, guards, and bearers are opened for these poor people. The catchy buzzword 'poverty reduction through tourism' is not meaningful in under developed/developing countries as the benefits of tourism as an economic activity may not reach up to the poor people. The African continent has experienced an exponential growth in the number of tourists, but this has not led to local communities obtaining economic, social or environmental benefits (Novelli and Gebhardt, 2007). It is postulated that if the members of a community become the owner of tourism assets, probably then they can rip the benefit of tourism. Keeping that in mind, for over three decades, CBT has been promoted as a means of development whereby the social, environmental and economic needs of the communities are met through the offering of tourism products they own. However, from different instances it is mostly found that community people, being financially handicapped, have to depend on outsider financiers/investors for building

the establishments and facilities. The local people simply become the workers there. Therefore, we probably need a big shift from the Public Private Partnership (PPP) concept to Public Private Community Partnership (PPCP) concept. Under PPP, the private parties are big investors and the benefit goes up. In PPCP, as the community people are encouraged to have equity in any form so they will have the feeling of ownership. This feeling will ensure economic and environmental sustainability.

3.2. Environmental Sustainability

Sustainability of the tourism assets, both natural and/or manmade, much depends on the extent of involvement of the community to protect it. Unless community develops the feeling that tourism assets are the sources of income for them, these people will not be serious in caring and protecting these assets. Many of the historical ruins in Bangladesh are being destroyed by the local people as they are yet to be involved with the conservation and marketing of these tourism products. Paharpur Buddhist monastery, which dates back to late 8th century (781–821), is the largest Buddhist viharas south of the Himalayas. It was designated as UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985. This site is under the supervision of the Archaeological department of the GoB. But the heritage is under threat because of Anthropogenic causes and activities of the local people such as Intentional or deliberate ignorance, religion based destruction, physically deteriorating-through breaking plates, bad habit of scratching on terracotta plaques, writing on terracotta and brick walls, pathway made heather and thither or surroundings of the site, ride on the top of the main temple, grazing goats and cows, firing inside the temple area, etc. These happen due to lack of skillful knowledge for proper treatment, bad handling, lack of administrative frame work, bad display and storage system and wrong conservation and restoration practices. The authority is not following conservation rules. Man is the main deteriorating agent of main temple and its bricks and terracotta plaques. All these destructions happen because of, along with other factors, ignorance of the nearby community about the commercial and economic values of the tourism assets, be it man-made or natural. Absence of government policies to involve the local community in maintaining and capitalizing the tourism assets is another major reason of destruction. Therefore, if we really mean sustainability in tourism, there is no way but to involve the local community in money making activities capitalizing the attractions. Recognizing the necessity of CBT, the UNWTO in 2014 has been celebrated the world tourism day around the world under the theme Tourism and Community Development - focusing on the ability of tourism to empower people and provide them with skills to achieve change in their local communities.

4. Methodology

The study followed an observation method with relational analyses through collecting secondary data from different sources. The study was supported through an extensive review of existing literature in the related field. The secondary data were analyzed in a qualitative approach for the further advancement of the study.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1. CBT: Success and Failure

To the researchers, policy makers, donors, and stakeholders it has been a big question if CBT efforts/projects are successful or not. Almost since last four decades, CBT has been thought as a tool by which the local community can alleviate their economic condition. Many of the countries namely Cambodia, Thailand, Nepal, India, Indonesia, Peru, Uruguay, Bolivia, Chile, Kenya, Namibia, etc. claim to have successful CBT stories. However, some critics are confused about the word 'success'. Harold Goodwin, along with Rosa Santilli (2009) mentioned in their study, out of 116 CBT initiatives nominated from all over the world, only four were economically sustainable

(keeping in mind that only 28 of the projects responded) (Garvin Christine 2009). There is evidence that many CBT initiatives enjoyed very little success. Mitchell and Muckosy (2008) reported from a research by the Rainforest Alliance and Conservation International which reviewed 200 CBT projects across the Americas that many accommodation providers had only 5% occupancy. They also concluded in this way that “the most likely outcome for a CBT initiative is collapse after funding dries up.” The main causes of collapse were poor market access and poor governance. In 2006 a survey of 150 CBT organizations by ResponsibleTravel.com and Conservation International revealed 18% qualified as CBT organizations. Again, average bed occupancy was close to 5%. (Goodwin and Santilli 2009). Different studies’ results demonstrate that there is a broad range of criteria which the researchers used to identify an initiative as CBT. The significant criteria used in the academic definitions are community ownership/management and community benefit, occupancy rate, social empowerment, poor market access, fund shortage, lack of initiative and skill, and other social and economic ingredients. Thus, in view of large number of CBT failure, it is evident that there is a major gap between the academic definition of the concept and the way it is used by practitioners. Different researchers identified different elements to assess the success and/or failure of CBT projects throughout the globe. It is evident from different studies that there is no agreement on the concept of ‘CBT’. In the surveys the concept of CBT has been used to describe projects and initiatives. So, while evaluating performance of projects, more emphasis was given on financial issues which might not be right approach to evaluate the success of CBT since CBTs are more sophisticated, more tender, and delicate type of initiatives like Prof. Younus’s ‘micro credit’ phenomenon. Hence, the study findings on the success/failure of community-based tourism confuse the researchers, policy makers and stakeholders in perceiving the correct definition of CBT. Researchers tried to understand what actually a CBT is in light of different success criteria; and used these criteria to formulate the definition of a (successful) CBT.

Side by side we find that, for many of the CBT projects there has been no efforts to assess if these are successful or not. Many of the CBT projects funded by government/donor agencies in developing countries, have not been monitored to assess their success. Therefore, the actual benefits to the local communities remain largely unqualified. Contrariwise, many apparently recognized CBT initiatives capitalizing man-made resources were not considered as CBT by many expert researchers. These so-called CBT initiatives have demonstrated very considerable employment, local economic development and collective community benefits, for example Manda Wilderness (Mozambique), Aga Khan Development Network in Pakistan (Baltit and Shigar Forts) and Chumbe Island (Tanzania) (Goodwin and Santilli 2009). Some researchers objected that material livelihood benefits and economic sustainability are not important in assessing success or failure for CBT projects Goodwin and Santilli 2009). In some other studies, understanding of a CBT has emphasized on community’s Unique Selling Tourism Offers (USTO), and available tourism assets around (Hasan S R. 2013). In this approach, more emphasis has been given on the inherited unique potential skill coupled with the natural/man-made tourism resources. Mere creation of eco-lodges and offering some services to the tourists will not allure tourists to visit the area. The Unique Selling Tourism Offers (USTOs) must be intermingled with the natural/man-made tourism attractions. CBT initiative in La Yunga in Bolivia is an example to support this observation. Community-based tourism initiatives in Bolivia are based on the development of community-owned and managed lodges or homestays. At La Yunga the lodge attracted only 60 visitors per year with a bed occupancy of 2.7% only. The community subsequently developed a walking trail which in 2005 attracted 1000 people paying \$1.80 trail fee, grossing \$1800 plus guide fees and other purchases from the community. The example demonstrates that the common focus on accommodation only is inappropriate– the community benefited far more when it

provided an activity, their initiative required a much smaller investment than the investment in the lodge and provided significantly larger benefits (Goodwin and Santilli).

Conservation International, in collaboration with different organizations, is trying to establish successful CBT in different regions of the planet. One example of a successful community project is the Chalalán Ecolodge in the Bolivian Amazon, a joint initiative of the rainforest community of San José de Uchupiamonas and Conservation International (CI) in Bolivia. In this destination someone can travel up the Beni River in a dugout canoe and enjoy a walk through the forest with local guide who will share their extensive knowledge of plants and animal behavior. Tourists can learn about the San José community's history and stories, as well as the making of traditional Tacana handicrafts before enjoying a dinner of "dumoquavi", a traditional dish (river catfish wrapped in leaves). Created in 1995 by a visionary group of San José villagers, the ecolodge provides employment opportunities through nature-based tourism, a much-needed economic alternative to logging. CI's goal at the outset of the Chalalán project was to create a viable ecolodge that was wholly owned and operated by local managers and staff. As such, they trained villagers in marketing and management, house-keeping, food preparation and how to guide tours. In February 2001, the full ownership of the lodge was handed over to the community and today 74 families benefit from its employment and management. CI is initiating community-based tourism projects in Ethiopia and Thailand (Quoted from Justin Francis, 2014). Keeping the two important ingredients of a successful CBT in consideration we get some definitions given by organizations, researcher, and practitioners. The Thailand Community Based Tourism Institute defines CBT more rigorously as: "tourism that takes environmental, social and cultural sustainability into account. It is managed and owned by the community, for the community, with the purpose of enabling visitors to increase their awareness and learn about the community and local ways of life." WWF defined it as a form of tourism "where the local community has substantial control over, and involvement in, its development and management, and a major proportion of the benefits remain within the community." (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009)

The Mountain Institute (2000) and other researchers used the concept of CBT very broadly to "describe a variety of activities that encourage and support a wide range of objectives in economic and social development and conservation." Mountain Institute identified potential tourism products as 'community-based tourism assets' and can 'range from nature-based activities to local handicrafts to cultural events. Different definitions of CBT from different viewpoints highlighting different dimensions coupled with identified factors of success or failure of CBT indicate the need for having a clear idea on CBT. We need to perceive the concept of CBT from the viewpoint of the USTO elements of the community and surrounding natural/man-made tourism resource. Different communities inherit unique artistic expertise from their ancestors in various types of craftsmanship like hand weaving, pottery, goldsmith, embroidery, snake charming, dancing etc. which could be called as Unique Selling Tourism Offers (USTO). All communities may not have the USTOs and may not be suitable for CBT. To ensure which community is suitable, an assessment of community tourism potential should be carried on. Following proposed models may help us in assessing the potentiality of CBT at the very initial stage. However, it needs further study to establish value and usefulness of the propositions. These models have been based on the tripartite relationship among tourists, communities and touristic attractions. Scope and extent of interactions and complimenting ambience between these three components may determine the success/failure status of the CBT. The proposed models are:

Model 1: Transit travelers destined for natural/man-made attractions via community settlements

Here, the main attraction is natural/man-made tourism assets; so, there is less benefit to the community. This type of tourism is not CBT in real meaning; rather it is basically traditional tourism based on natural or man-made attractions. Community is secondary element here. Scope

for community involvement is least here, consequently benefit for community from such type of tourism is minimal. Example: tourism in the Sundarbans – world's largest mangrove forest in Bangladesh. The itinerary there is mostly boat-based and little chance for interaction with the communities residing in the forest.

Model 2: Only Community USTOs (no other added attractions)

Apparently may yield good benefit for community, but as it is based on 'single destination-single activity', so only a specific market target may be attracted. Example: Craft villages in different parts of Bangladesh (hand loom weavers, potters, snake charmers etc.). However, in such locations, extent of interaction with community may be limited because of short stay by the tourists and thereby may not yield sound dividend to the community. Success of this type of CBT highly depends on the proximity from the urban area. So hypothetically it could be presumed that chance of success for this model type is slim for remotely located initiatives.

Model 3: Community USTOs blended with natural/man-made tourists' attractions (community is the host)

In this case, community activities are blended with nature or man-made tourism assets. Both community activities, culture, lifestyle, craftsmanship and the natural and man-made attractions become worth selling products. The relationship is complementary. Tourists are initially tempted to visit an area which contains something worth seeing. It may be natural or man-made. Tourists will need food and accommodation and other facilities there because of prolonged stay there. So, it creates scope for the community to involve more in offering these tourist services. Along with the services, community's USTOs, when blended together, will yield the maximum benefit to the community. Example: Trekking tourism in Bandarban, Khagrachari and Rangamati Hill districts of Bangladesh. In this case main tourism product is trekking. But for a long trekking trail the tourists may have to stay in some impassable remote hilly places. Establishment of a five-star hotel or the like can neither be possible nor be desirable to ensure ecological and environmental sustainability. The tribal people there can supply the food and accommodation in eco-cottages built in compliance with the local environment. During tourists' leisure time the tribe people may sell their unique tribal cultural performances, handicrafts etc. to the tourists. PPP will not yield desired results without the active involvement of the local community. So Public Private Community Participation (PPCP) may be the successful implementing tool. This model may yield maximum benefit for the community, vis-à-vis ensure highest level of sustainability.

5.2. Tourism: Bangladesh Perspective

It is widely recognized that Bangladesh is rich in natural beauty and panoramic views, which a tourist wants to enjoy. The Lonely Planet Guide, world's leading publishing travel guide elected Bangladesh as one of the top ten interesting travel destinations of the world in 2009. But, unfortunately, despite having almost everything including unparalleled natural beauty, historical background, unique cultural diversity, and archaeological resources, Bangladesh is lagging behind in tourism from other South Asian countries.

Bangladesh is yet to achieve significant progress in terms of international tourism receipts and tourist arrivals compared to other South Asian countries. World Travel & Tourism Council (2014) claims that the total contribution of Travel & Tourism to the GDP of Bangladesh was BDT460.3bn (4.4% of GDP) in 2013, and is forecast to rise by 7.9% in 2014, and to rise by 6.5% pa to BDT935.5bn (4.7% of GDP) in 2024. In 2013, the total contribution of Travel & Tourism to employment, including jobs indirectly supported by the industry, was 3.8% of total employment (2,846,500 jobs). This is expected to rise by 4.2% in 2014 to 2,965,000 jobs and rise by 3.0% pa to 3,974,000 jobs in 2024 (4.2% of total). All the indicators show a slow but steady growth in tourism and hospitality sector of the country.

5.3. Importance of CBT in Bangladesh

The economy of Bangladesh is predominantly based on foreign remittance, agriculture and garments industry. In developing countries like Bangladesh, transformation from a traditional agricultural economy to an industrial economy is difficult for many reasons. Beside development initiatives in rural areas are unevenly distributed and insufficient. On the other hand, minimum efforts have not been initiated to tap most potential tourism assets, distributed scattered all over. Besides, failure to involve the local people with the local tourism assets, lack of interest and lack knowledge to conserve the assets, absence of appropriate laws to protect the tourism assets, carelessness of the tourists and also high tourist turnout are destructing our tourism resources in many places. Some specific circumstances that give the ground for Community Based Tourism development in Bangladesh are-

- a. Over Populated Country
- b. Conservation of tourism assets by involving the local community
- c. Ignorance of the local community about the value of the tourism assets.
- d. Weakness in trained and motivated human resources needed to plan, manage, and protect the resources
- e. Economic vulnerability due to instability of agriculture and export of goods and services
- f. Existence of several unique Communities having separate tradition, culture and craftsmanship.
- g. Concentration of tourist money in city-based tourism establishments; thereby uneven distribution of tourism earnings.
- h. Exposure and Protection of local age-old traditional craftsmanship from extinction.

5.4. CBT Development in Bangladesh: Where from to Start?

There are many different communities inheriting expertise from their ancestors in various types of craftsmanship like hand weaving, pottery, goldsmith, embroidery, snake charming etc. These communities are settling in groups in different scattered places all over the country. In addition, there are about 45 different tribal groups spread across the country. The proportion of the tribal population in the 64 districts varies from less than 1% in majority of the districts to 56% in Rangamati, 48.9% in Kagrachari and 48% in Bandarban in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). According to a UNDP report in 2009 there are roughly 1.3 million tribal/ethnic people (GoB, 2011). Out of different areas of Bangladesh where the tribal groups are residing, Bandarban is probably the most potential jackpot for CBT initiatives. Bandarban – ‘the roof of Bangladesh’, as described by the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (the National Tourism Organization of Bangladesh), is a hidden paradise away from the din and bustle of the world. Though not developed for tourism activities yet, today or tomorrow it will be one of the paradises for eco-tourism. Tourism is seasonal in pattern in Bandarban, and can be divided into peak and off-peak season. It has been estimated that almost half a million tourists visit Bandarban during peak season (Oct–March). And in off season (April–September) almost 0.15 million tourists visit Bandarban making a total of almost 0.65 to 0.70 million tourists per year. As a rough estimate, the total receipt from tourism sector in Bandarban stands at around Taka 100 crore or US \$ 12.5 million (Hasan S R. 2013).

Day by day the total number of tourist arrival is increasing. It is hoped that it will continue, as a craze has been developed within the tourist to spend their leisure time in Bandarban. With diversified and quality services offered to the tourists, tourism can be the single most contributing sector in the economy of Bandarban. The trail through Bandarban is probably the most exciting trail in Bangladesh. It goes through a number of exceptionally beautiful places in Bandarban that are still unknown to the mass tourists and thus full of mystery. Some ethnic villages adjacent to

the trail was found potential to be developed as Trail Village containing a planned camping ground. These Villages can be developed as trekking service delivery points where tourists can get basic facilities like food and beverages, accommodation, wash, and recreation. Some of the trekking service points (Trail Village) and facilities are required to be developed.

These trekking service points (Trail Village) should be located at spaces nearby the small ethnic “para” (village). The whole community should be involved in establishing, running, and maintaining the camping grounds. The Sardar” (leader) of the community will be responsible for coordination.

Community-based Tourism (CBT) program may include home-stay families, community tour guides, craftsmen, performers, local restaurants, farming, poultry and other interesting activities. Guests may stay with a local family in a home-stay, in a community-owned lodge, or at community campsite. Local transport is used when traveling during the program. Whole community should be involved in establishing, running, and maintaining the facilities. Earning through a camping ground could be shared by the concerned members of the community who maintain the camp ground. In this way there could be a substantial uplift of income among the ethnic tribal groups. The community people may be involved in a variety of economic activities to serve the tourists under the concept of CBT. The following figure shows the probable activities which may be offered to the tourists in a particular trail of Bandarban:



Figure 1. Sectors of community-based tourism where community can be involved.

However, before finding out the community villages which can be developed as a CBT initiative, we propose the following framework for planning and developing a successful CBT. The study presents the original framework developed for Rio Esteban (Brown, 2008) with some modifications and changes in the following figure 2.

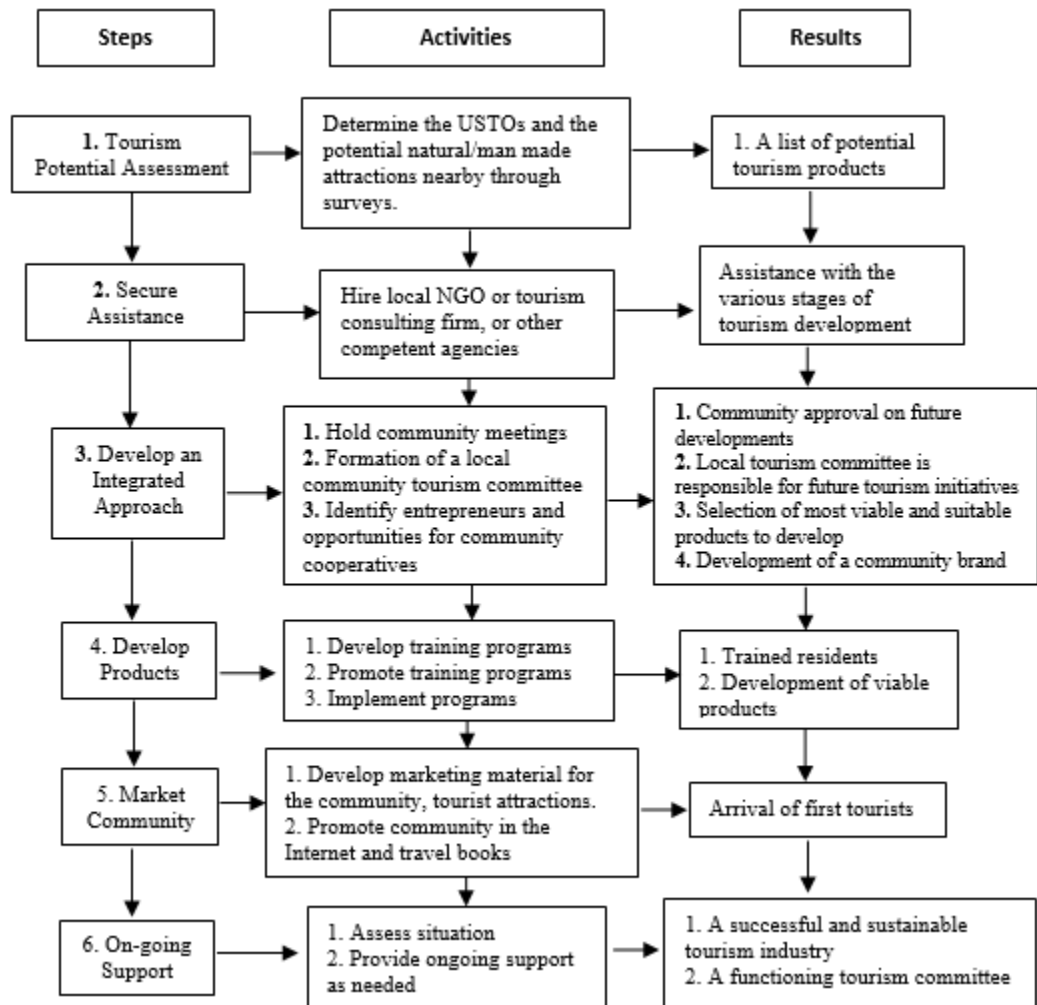


Figure 2. Framework of how Community based tourism development should occur.

6. Conclusion

The tourism industry in Bangladesh is an important investor group with the potential to provide extensive benefits to the local economy of destination areas. However, there is no consistent analysis of tourism's impacts on the ecosystem or neighboring communities. CBT may generate a significant flow of money within the community through different avenues, for example, handicrafts manufacturing, providing home stay, working as porters, etc. Exploration of potential rural tourism destinations is essentially needed in Bangladesh to provide increased access of the poor in this sector. Benefits of tourism are to be directed to the poor either through training and employment provision or tourism related micro and small entrepreneurial support. If a sufficient proportion of people are employed, there may be a social change and the conservation of this valuable resource may be initiated and facilitated. But, lack of knowledge amongst the poor regarding tourism development is a problem in CBT in Bangladesh. Again, to be involved in a sophisticated industry like tourism necessary training and education is mandatory. Furthermore,

fragmentation of stakeholders in Bangladesh tourism is a testament to the lack of proper networking between different players. Networking among the tourism and related stakeholders is another issue that needs to be considered. A decisive and inclusive plan is inevitable recognizing the importance of community-based tourism in participation with the government, NGOs, tourism and related organizations and the community through PPCP. Lastly, it is mainly the government machinery which has to come forward with a determination and commitment to alleviate the lifestyle of our poverty-stricken but highly hospitable communities having rich cultural and craftsmanship tradition by utilizing the CBT concept.

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