

# **Effect of Tourism on Sustainable Rural Livelihoods**

## **(Case Study: Baraghan Village - Savojbolagh County)**

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### **Extended Abstract**

#### **Introduction**

Tourism has recently been introduced and recognized as one of the strategies for rural development and poverty reduction especially in developing countries and been implemented and proved successful in some areas. Tourism development in rural areas is seen as an agent both for rural economic regeneration and as a way of contributing to cultural and environmental conservation. These researchers contend that tourism has many advantages over other economic sectors, making it an effective tool for poverty alleviation. These advantages include: providing opportunities for linkages with other local industries and livelihood activities, thus increasing the scope of local participation, being able to build upon a wide resource base especially on natural and cultural capital which are assets to the poor despite the few export and diversification options usually they access to, being labor intensive and small scale and opportunities to employ women and addressing gender inequality. Given this comparative advantage, it is recommended that the poverty

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agenda be incorporated more explicitly into national tourism plans and strategies to enhance the participation and opportunities for the poor (WTO, 2002). However, the existing tourism literature stream, has recently been criticized for its lack of focus on rural livelihoods and poverty reduction and being too focused on tourism development specifically, with some contending that this deficiency can be addressed using a Sustainable Livelihood Approach (Ashley, Roe and Goodwin 2001;UNWTO, 2004b). In the 1980s, the SLA was introduced as a new approach to poverty reduction and rural development.

### **Methodology**

This research is descriptive-analytical in nature and uses a case study method to investigate the impacts of tourism on rural development of the village of Baraghan in Savojbolagh county of Tehran province. Time frame of the research has been between 23 November 2009 and 20 August 2010. Data were collected comes from different sources i.e. questionnaire-based household survey, interviews, secondary data and observations. To conduct this survey, questionnaires have been given out among 64 rural families have been chosen via random sampling method among the whole 202 village households in 2010. Semi structured interviews have also been carried out with 15 individuals in order to obtain their more detailed perspectives and experiences with tourism in the village and associated changes, complementing the information acquired from household survey.

The research employed an indicator approach to examine the tourism status of the village and the application of sustainable livelihood approach in this context. The main way of developing indicators has been a top-down approach, developing indicators from literature and by experts. The indicators selected under the guideline of the sustainable livelihoods for tourism approach developed (SLFT) by Shen, constituted of 6 main components namely tourism context, livelihood strategies/activities, livelihood assets, institutional arrangements, vulnerability contexts and livelihood outcomes. Indicators under each component were then

slightly refined to better reflect the actual situation of the case (table 1). Indicators developed are merely tools to facilitate an understanding of how tourism works in the village. The data pertaining to the first five components of SLFT framework were collected via interviews, secondary data and observations. Data related to the 6<sup>th</sup> component, i.e. livelihood outcomes, were obtained via household survey questionnaire given out randomly among rural residents. These data (pertaining to livelihood outcomes) also reflect sustainability status of Baraghan's tourism development.

### **Research Findings**

Tourism context of Baraghan: the main visitors of the village are those who are indigenously from Baraghan, but who have immigrated to larger cities like Tehran and Karaj, coming back to the village for spring and summer which are considered tourist seasons of the village. Of over 500 dwelling houses in the village, about a half is considered second houses i.e. population nearly doubles during these seasons. Most visitors come from the cities of Tehran, Karaj, Hashtgerd, Nazaraabd, Chalous, Noshahr and most of them are daily tourists of second house owners. According to the local statistics of the village, during tourist seasons, on average, 20-30 thousand tourists are visiting the village weekly. Findings show that tourism has a diverse range of positive and negative impacts on different local livelihood assets and activities of the village. The summary of some of these impacts have been demonstrated in table 2. It appears that tourism development has brought in changes to other local livelihood activities, thus its (mainly complementary) impacts on other local activities are accepted. For example, one of the outcomes of tourism development is the drastic increase in commodity prices, especially land prices leading to unrestrained land trade which, unless being controlled properly, could lead to a real trouble for the village livelihoods. Livelihood outcomes were evaluated through 26 quantitative attitudinal statements drawn from the literature and asked via household questionnaire. Questions were categorized under 4 main

sustainability aspects namely economic (8 questions), social (8 questions), environmental (5 questions) and institutional aspects (4 questions) with one question asking about overall satisfaction with rural tourism development. Responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

### **Conclusion**

To sum up, the research illustrates the need for adopting a newer holistic and systematic approach like sustainable livelihood approach toward evaluation of the role of tourism in overall rural development, allowing to address issues and impacts like assets, other activities, institutional arrangement, vulnerability contexts which usually remain unaccounted in existing traditional tourist's assessment literature. Findings from the case study indicate, despite pretty good number of tourism visiting the village during the year, due to limited tourist facilities and service businesses and institutions and lack of a systematic planning and policy making to optimum exploitation of rural tourism potentials and local participation, tourism in Baraghan village benefits only a small group of people by providing a market for some local products, and has made a limited and small contribution to rural sustainable livelihoods and development, especially to poor population not having access to capital for initiating a business. Non-community-based approach and not having been accounting rural tourism setting and market, improper existing laws and regulations and lack of an integrated marketing plan and spatial zoning are among other reasons for Baraghan's tourism's inefficiency. Nonetheless, based on the residents' overall approval of tourism development in the village, through appropriate tourism planning and policy-making in agreement with local situation, proper implementation of policies, and creating more economic and non-economic linkages between tourism and community, it is possible to improve the role that tourism plays in rural economic diversification being complementary to other livelihood activities and enhancing rural sustainable development and natural-cultural conservation.

**Keywords:** Sustainable livelihoods, Tourism, Rural development, Baraghan.

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