

Rural Eco Tourism with Special reference to Umswai Valley, West Karbi Anglong, Assam, India

K. Borah¹ and S.J. Baishya²

¹*Department of Earth Science, School of Applied Sciences, University of Science and Technology, Meghalaya, India*

²*Techno City, Kling Road, Baridua 9th Mile, Ri-Bhoi 793 101, Meghalaya, India*

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to understand the Rural Eco-Tourism in Umswai Valley, which is located in West Karbi Anglong District of Assam. This study is mainly conducted to know the form of tourism involving responsible travel to natural areas, conserving the environment and improving the well-being of the local people. At this moment, both in our country and in the European Union, rural tourism and ecotourism are among the most dynamic forms of tourism, as a result of the advantages which it offers both tourists and host communities. The paper analyses the role of Rural Tourism in the development of rural areas and also the various schemes undertaken by the state and central government for Rural Development. It analyzes how different systems can maintain their function in the context of socio-economic and cultural and the influence of different factors on the Sustainable Development of Rural Ecotourism in Umswai Valley and also its preservation and the environmental problem associated with it and the steps taken by NGO for its development of Rural Ecotourism in the study area. The paper also analyzed the influx of tourists visiting Umswai Valley since its inception into rural ecotourism, and also the benefits of Rural Eco-tourism. It also brought forward various cultural commodities and festivals of various tribes residing in Umswai Valley.

Key words: *Tourism, Rural Ecotourism, Sustainable development.*

Introduction

Rural Eco-Tourism is a new concept of Tourism for people to experience rural scenery. To ensure the sustainable development of Rural Eco-Tourism, it is necessary to analyze its planning aspects. With the increasing pace of urban life, people are yearning more and more for Rural Eco-Tourism. Rural Eco-Tourism is the tertiary industry in the economic development of that particular region.

It is a form of nature-based tourism that covers rural life as well as culture, art, and heritage at rural locations which results in favoring the local communities economically and socially.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) defines ecological tourism (or ecotourism) as “environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, to enjoy and appreciate nature that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations”.

In India, Rural Eco-Tourism is still an emerging concept and the sector is quite open and untouched for marketing. It is a new sector of tourism, promoting village tourism as the primary tourism product to gain maximum socio-economic benefits from it.

(¹Assistant Professor)

Umswai Valley is very unique and offbeat place to visit for rural tourism lovers. But getting here is a big challenge because it does not have a proper road connection to its destination. To reach Umswai Valley it has only two rural roads, one that can be accessed through Nellie and the other from the district headquarters i.e., Hamren via Rongpangbong.

In recent times Rural Eco-Tourism has been brought into the public view, although it has the potential for rural eco-tourism in past years. It was not possible in the past years, as in the 90's due to the rise in insurgency from various hill tribes belonging to the district.

Objective

The principal objectives of the study are outlined as follows:

- To study the concepts of Rural eco-tourism and its sustainability in Umswai Valley.
- To provide an overview of the Socio-Economic and Cultural settings of the Study area.

Methodology

The study has been formulated in different stages:

- In the first stage of the work, available literature on the topic has been studied for a good background and better understanding of the problem.
- Secondly, in the fieldwork stage the primary data through household surveys and field observation.
- Thirdly, in the post-fieldwork stages, the processing and summarization of the raw data



Plate 1. View of Umswai Valley

mainly toposheets and satellite imageries will be done using relevant GIS software and statistical techniques and again processed data has been represented cartographically. Lastly, tables, graphs, maps, etc are analyzed and interpreted to prepare the report.

Results and Discussion

Umswai Valley is located in the west Karbi Anglong district of Assam. In the west, it is bounded by the state of Meghalaya and Morigoan district of Assam, In the north, Nagoan and Hojai district. In the South, it is bounded by the Dima Hasoa districts of Assam. The district is located between 17°35' N to 18°32' N latitude and 75°16' E to 76°15' E longitude. It covers an area of 3,035 Km² (1,172 sq miles).

LOCATION MAP OF THE STUDY AREA

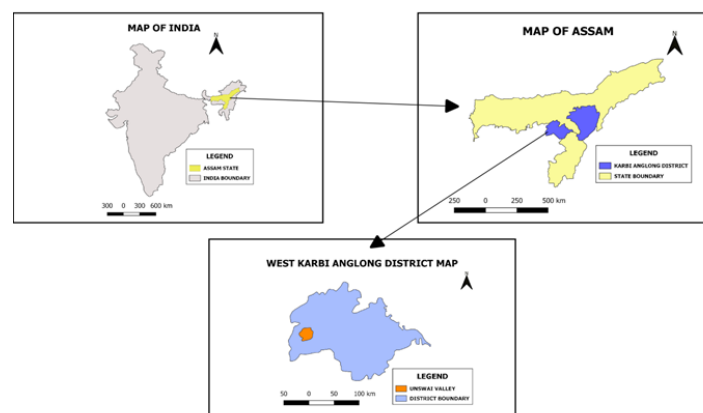


Fig. 1. Location of Study Area

Socio-Economic and Cultural Setting

The socioeconomic information that was taken is an attempt to synthesize relevant demographic, social, and economic data and to explain their relevance to resource management in general and environmental restoration in Umswai valley.

A striking peculiarity of the Tiwa is their divisions into two sub-groups, Hill Tiwa and Plains Tiwas. The hill Tiwas live in the western-most areas of "The Ancient Lalung- Tiwa Hills" now known as Umswai Valley of Amri block in West Karbi Anglong district (Assam) and as well as in the north-eastern corner of Ri - Bhoi district (Meghalaya). They speak the Tibeto-Burman language of the Bodo-Garo group.

Plains Tiwas live on the flatlands of the Southern bank of the Brahmaputra valley, mostly in Morigaon, Nagoan, Hojai, Kamrup (Rural) and (Metro), Sibsagar, Jorhat, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur and Dhemaji districts. The vast majority speak Assamese as their mother tongue, Tiwa language is still spoken in the foothill areas.

Rural Eco-Tourism and its sustainability in Umswai valley

Umswai Valley being endowed with abundant natural beauty is paving the way for the villagers to adopt Eco-tourism as their potential source of livelihood. At the same time, Eco-tourism is also stimulating the development of other economic activities like cultivation, local production of food, arts and crafts, homestays, tourist guides, etc., and helping in revenue increase in the region.

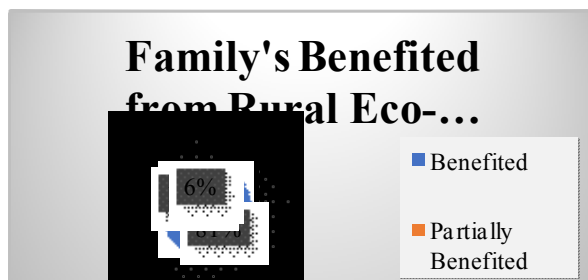


Fig. 1. Family benefitted from Rural Eco-Tourism in Umswai Valley
Source: Primary Survey
Sample size: 30

Umswai Valley has become a tourist destination for Rural eco-tourism lovers. From the time of its inception into the Tourism sector, various non-government Organisation (NGOs) along with the state gov-

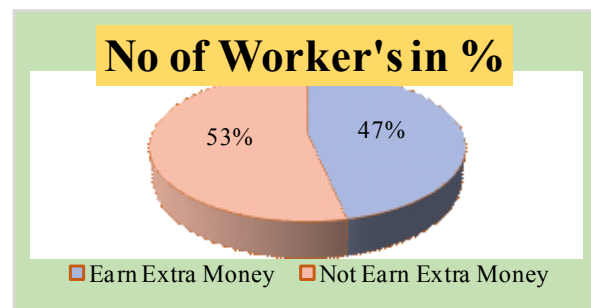


Fig. 2. Shows the No of workers who earn Extra Money:
Source: Primary Data
Sample size: 30

ernment has been promoting Rural Eco-Tourism of Umswai Valley across the state level followed by National and Inter-National Level.

Umswai Valley in the Karbi Anglong plateau in Assam is one of the most unique places comprised of many small villages like Shikdamakha, Bormarjong, Amsai, Langarkhon, Maulen, etc. These villages are inhabited by a set of indigenous hill tribes called the Tiwas, often referred to as Lalungs by historians.

Apart from being home, to an exclusive tribal culture, Umswai Valley has an extraordinary natural beauty. This makes Umswai Valley a great travel destination.

With the growth of Rural Eco-Tourism, there is also a concern for a sustainable environment as people have become more and more curious about exploiting their natural resources. As a result, there is now increasing agreement between the NGO and its local people to promote sustainable tourism development to minimize its environmental impact and to maximize socio-economic tourism interaction.

Conclusion

Given the above discussion, as Rural ecotourism is the largest rapidly growing industry and a significant tool for sustainable development in rural areas is a requirement to rebuild the socio-economy, by preserving and conserving socio-culture, environments, and economy for the future. The natural environment can be used as a resource for entrepreneurs and business venturing.

At the same time, entrepreneurs can help the rural area by generating income from Rural Eco-Tourism, such as by creating homestays and Restaurants, etc. As the current generation is very concerned

Table 1. Family benefitted from Rural Eco-Tourism in Umswai Valley

Particulars	Respondents Family's	% of Respondents
Benefited	24	80%
Partially Benefited	4	13.3%
Not Benefited	2	6.6%
Total	30	100%

Table 2. Shows the No of workers who earn Extra Money

Particulars	No of Worker	% Of worker
Earn Extra Money	14	46.6%
Not Earn Extra Money	16	53.3%
Total	30	100%

about natural resources and the green environment, the creation of Rural Eco-Tourism will attract their attention and create a large market for the ecotourism industry.

Future research should address those issues by giving a solid solution based on a technological perspective. It will help to boost the Rural Eco-Tourism industry in rural areas and help the society at large.

Conflict of Interest- None

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