

# Developing Inclusive Tourism in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT): A Case Study on Sajek Valley, Bangladesh

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**Abstract** - The study focuses on the inclusivity of tourism development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, specifically in the Sajek Valley, and examines whether it has improved the socio-economic status of local ethnic minority groups. The research found that the development of tourism in Sajek Valley has brought numerous benefits to the local community, including modernization, improved access to education and electricity, and alternative livelihood options. Inclusive tourism has also helped to develop a sustainable tourism industry that values the preservation of cultural values and involves local leaders in decision-making. The development of tourism has also fostered a cordial relationship between Bengali businessmen, tourists, and local ethnic minority groups. However, challenges to inclusive tourism remain, including the relocation of local ethnic families, environmental concerns, a sense of relative deprivation among local ethnic minorities, and a lack of mutual trust between different ethnic groups. To ensure the sustainability of Sajek as a tourist destination, further research is necessary to understand and overcome these exclusionary factors. Overall, inclusive tourism has been a positive force in Sajek Valley, benefiting the local society and promoting sustainable development, but there are still areas to improve.

**Keywords:** Sajek, Inclusivity, Tourism, Sustainable Development

## I. INTRODUCTION

The subjects of development and indigenous peoples are significant areas of discussion within both the academic and policy spheres, particularly in Bangladesh. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG #16, which focuses on peace and justice, and SDG #10, which emphasizes reducing inequalities, prioritize conflict management and sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). While Bangladesh is making progress towards achieving sustainable development, addressing the inequalities present in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is a crucial issue that must be resolved to effectively implement the SDG goals. In this context, tourism has emerged as a rapidly growing sector in developing countries, including Bangladesh (Mondal, 2017). It is also taken into consideration as a method to decorate socio-monetary situations for human beings. The monetary blessings of tourism may be measured through the variety of employment possibilities and foreign money inflows it stimulates, each of which makes contributions to the countrywide economy. But

tourism is not constantly sustainable for all of the communities. Cultural approaches to life, land and method of livelihood are occasionally seriously broken through tourism enhancement. This is a tourism development dilemma. The national leaders and entrepreneurs of Bangladesh consider tourism as a means of local as well as national development. CHT is considered one of the key areas to expand tourism industry and attract more tourists (Mondal, 2017). However, tourism development in CHT also poses challenges and threats to the indigenous communities, including cultural and environmental impacts (Chakma, 2016). Therefore, sustainable tourism development practices that take into account the concerns and needs of the local communities are necessary to achieve the SDG goals while ensuring the protection of the indigenous peoples and their rights.

Despite considerable attention paid to the conflict, peace-building, and identity issues of ethnic minority populations, research in the CHT has yet to fully explore the effects of development programs, including tourism, on the region since the signing of the Peace Accord. While efforts have been made to improve conditions and reduce disparities, there is a noticeable gap in the literature regarding development perspectives in the CHT. Indigenous people in the region desire sustainable, culturally-sensitive alternatives to traditional economic activities that are often tied to their cultural identity and livelihoods. Fear of cultural and economic displacement looms large, underscoring the importance of examining the relationship between development, tourism, and local communities in the CHT.

So, while exploring tourism in CHT; the local indigenous people's participation is very important. The positive attitudes of the indigenous people towards developing tourism will help both parties. Sense of belongingness and ownership can change the negative attitudes toward tourism. This study considers the process of local people as well as the stakeholders' participation in developing tourism as 'inclusive tourism.' It is projected that inclusive tourism can minimize the tourism 'dilemma' in CHT. Thus, sustainable development is possible in these areas. Otherwise, a sense of deprivation can grow among the CHT people which may lead to tension as well as conflict. Thus, the present study has the

merit to inform the policymakers that the current development efforts must be conducted under the informed consent of the local community. The main objective this study is to explore the effects of ‘inclusivity’ in the tourism industry of CHT and challenges in this regard.

## II. CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS (CHT) AND TOURISM

The CHT is located in the south-eastern region of Bangladesh and has a total area of 5,089 square miles (13,189 square kilometers). It has borders with India and Myanmar (Khan, 2015). The CHT is made up of three distinct hill districts, named Rangamati, Bandarban, and Khagrachari. Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Bawm, Chak, Khumi, Khyang, Mro, Lushai, Pankhu, Uchai, and Tankhu are their long-established ethnic group names (Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh, n.d.). The aforementioned 11 indigenous groups consist of more than 500,000 individuals (Indigenous Peoples in Bangladesh, n.d.). However, the CHT is also home to a significant Bengali population that moved and settled in the region throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s. Research conducted in different eras by Bengalis indicates that the Indigenous Peoples of the CHT have always been distinct from their Bengali neighbours not only in terms of ethnicity, language, and physical appearance but also regarding the land management systems, farming methods, and social, cultural (i.e., lifestyle, beliefs, and customs), political, and economic practices (Uddin, 2010).

The absence of Environmental Impact Analysis (EIA) in the implementation of several projects in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) has been subject to frequent criticism. The adverse effects of such activities have had a significant impact on both the ecological and socio-economic well-being of a considerable portion of the population. The Karnafuli Multipurpose Project, initiated in 1950, serves as a case in point where the project’s far-reaching consequences have irreversibly altered the region, causing enduring suffering. The CHT region has long remained marginalized, owing to decades of political instability and an antagonistic environment.

Nonetheless, the signing of the CHT Accord in December 1997 brought an end to a decade-long conflict, opening up opportunities for government and private investment across various sectors. Notably, the tourism industry in CHT has witnessed significant investments in the past decade. Given that CHT possesses one of the largest forest areas in the country (more than 4,600 square kilometres), tourism has had a profound impact on the region’s natural environment. Indeed, nearly all major tourist sites in the area have been developed, focusing on their natural surroundings, highlighting the need to acknowledge the sector’s environmental impact (Chakma *et al.*, 2019).

The recent formation of unplanned tourism has become a hazard to the territories of those ethnic communities (Tithila, 2020). Public and private companies are building exclusive

hotels to increase the tourism industry. Taking over a massive chunk of property in the CHT demonstrates aggressive development ambition. In fact, the recent trend of tourism has regarded this enormous territory as a major sector of investment. Recently, a renowned construction company was seeking to establish a five-star facilities hotel in Bandarban Thanchi tourist location. Some tribal ethnic groups in that area protest this method of making luxurious hotels on their food production fields.

TABLE I TOTAL LAND AREA OF CHITTAGONG HILL TRACT AND TOURIST SPOTS

| Name of The Area | Size of The Area (Square Kilometers) | Number of Tourists Spots |
|------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Rangamati        | 6116                                 | 20                       |
| Khagrachhari     | 2749                                 | 09                       |
| Bandarban        | 4479                                 | 18                       |

Source: (Hasan, 2021)

The term “tourist spot” refers to a location of interest that draws tourists, usually due to its inherent or shown natural or cultural value, historical significance, natural or architectural beauty, or ability to provide leisure and entertainment.

TABLE II NUMBER OF HOTELS AND GUESTHOUSES IN CHT

| Name of The Area | Hotel/ Rest-House (Public Govt Owned?) | Hotel/ Rest-House (Private) |
|------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| Rangamati        | 09                                     | 10                          |
| Khagrachhari     | 03                                     | 17                          |
| Bandarban        | 01                                     | 29                          |

Source: (Hasan, 2021)

Nevertheless, with the development of CHT tourism, the issue of land acquisition has come to the forefront of public and media consciousness. When the military chose to build tourism destinations in Bandarban, 202 Mro families were living in fear of eviction (Chowdhury & Chakma, 2016). In addition, the Bangladesh Army has created a small number of tourist destinations across the CHT, including Nilgiri and Sajek, which had limited *Jhum* cultivation in the area and the ability of locals to travel to resort areas. As the strong actors helped each other out for financial reasons, the indigenous people were powerless.

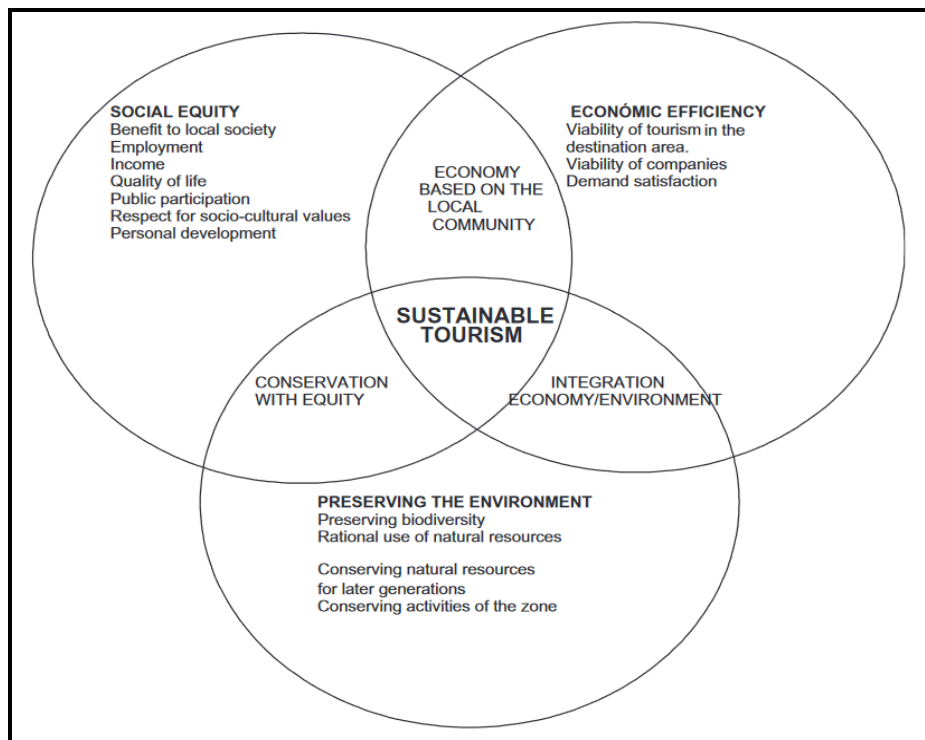
Since *Jhum* (in the hilly areas of Bangladesh, *Jhum*, sometimes referred to as shifting agriculture or slash-and-burn farming, is the most typical kind of agricultural. The vast majority of native people are accustomed to this type of farming. *Jhuming* is practiced on muddy hills outside of reserve forests) cultivation has been an integral component of indigenous culture for centuries, its loss due to dispossession has cultural repercussions. Other events tied to *Jhum* production may also be at risk if they are forced to relocate. Furthermore, the growth of tourism poses a threat to traditional ways of life that rely heavily on the natural world (Rosy, 2022). Since this is the case, land encroachment is a significant source of conflict among indigenous people, the government, and the armed forces.

Indigenous people are not helpless bystanders; the Ranglai Mro case illustrates their resistance. In 2016, the Government of Bangladesh planned for the “Alutilla Special Tourism Zone, Khagrachari” project, which involved the acquisition of 699.98 acres of hilly land. The proposal elicited profound anxiety, concern, and grievances among the indigenous Jumma peoples residing in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), including those in the Khagrachari district. The Bangladesh Economic Zone Authority (BEZA) under the Prime Minister’s Office was responsible for the establishment of the special tourist zone in the Khagrachari district, which prompted approximately 300 indigenous families to fear the potential loss of their ancestral Jhum land. The indigenous communities’ apprehension culminated in a series of protest events, leading to the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs’ decision to revoke the proposed special tourism zone project (“Govt Cancels Khagrachari Tourism Project,” 2016). There is undeniably considerable work that can be done as indigenous peoples are not included in the development process, and their opinions are marginalized as a result of the discriminatory behaviours and current dominance of powerful individuals (Rosy, 2022). To reduce risks to native people and their traditions, it is essential to learn from the past and incorporate lessons learned into future planning for tourism and other industries.

### III. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

To determine whether the tourism activities in CHT are sustainable or not, this study adopts three dimensions of sustainable tourism. These are economic sustainability, social sustainability and environmental sustainability. Economic sustainability entails generating wealth at various levels of society while also considering the cost-effectiveness of all economic activities. It is, above all, about the viability of businesses and activities, as well as their ability to be sustained over time.

On the other hand, Social sustainability entails the protection of human rights and the provision of equitable opportunity to all members of society. It necessitates a fair distribution of benefits with a focus on poverty reduction. Local communities are prioritized, with a focus on maintaining and developing their life support systems, recognizing and honouring diverse cultures, and avoiding exploitation. Finally, Environmental sustainability entails conserving and managing resources, particularly those that are non-renewable or vital to human survival. It necessitates action to reduce air, land, and water pollution while also preserving biological diversity and natural heritage (Hall *et al.*, 1998).



Source: Drawn up from (Hall *et al.*, 1998)

Fig. 1 Sustainable Tourism Model

In addition to the aforementioned three pillars, the present study employs an inclusive tourism framework developed by Regina Scheyvens and Robin Biddulph (2017). Inclusive tourism is characterized by transformative tourism, which entails the participation of marginalized groups in the ethical

production or consumption of tourism and the equitable distribution of its benefits. Inclusion, in broader terms, involves two critical inquiries: firstly, determining who is included (and excluded); and secondly, examining the terms on which inclusion is granted.

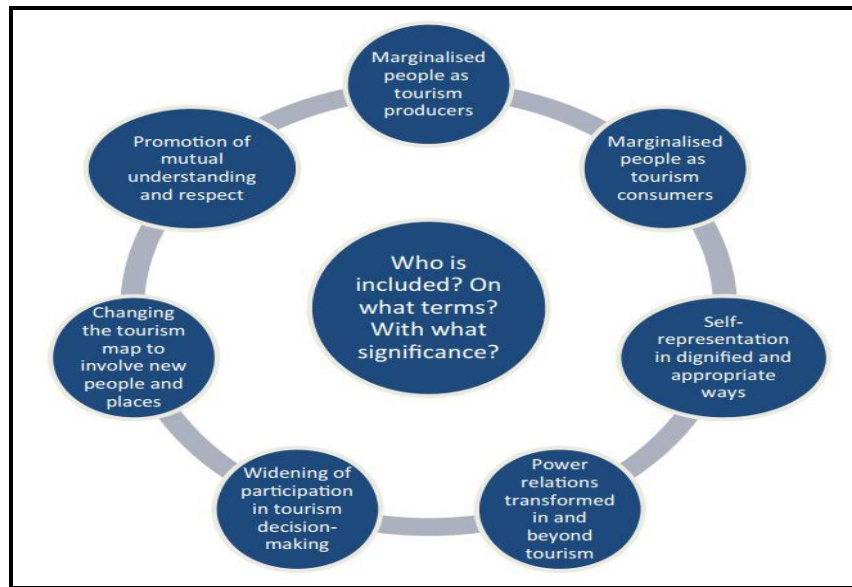


Fig. 2 Elements of inclusive tourism (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018)

Based on the theories mentioned above, this study will be analysed by the following framework.

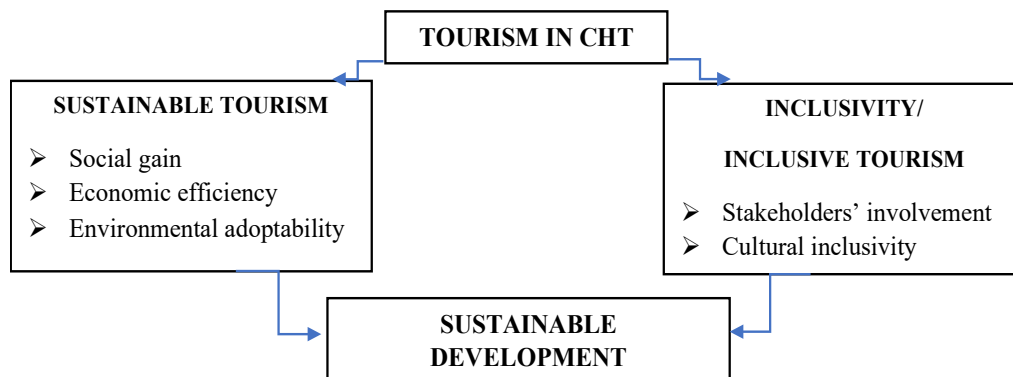


Fig. 3 Analytical Framework

The main aim of this study is to understand tourism and its expansion in CHT of Bangladesh. The growth of tourism in CHT is inevitable. But at what cost? The growth of tourism is not at the cost of lives and livelihoods, culture, tradition, and customs of the indigenous people of the CHT. Developing tourism without destroying the customs and livelihood of the local people is very important. Tourism with social gain, economic efficiency, and environmental adaptability will ensure sustainable tourism. On the other hand, local inhabitants' participation in the decision-making process of tourism development and considering their cultural heritage and cultural sustainability ensure the inclusivity of tourism in the CHT. 'Sustainable tourism' and 'inclusive tourism' combinedly ensure the sustainable development of tourism as well as the development of CHT.

#### IV. METHODOLOGY

The present study has adopted a qualitative approach, utilizing a method of data collection that seeks to analyze the attitudes and circumstances of both the ethnic community and Bengali people concerning tourism and development

issues in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). The qualitative method employed in this research involves a holistic and comprehensive examination of the situation, with particular emphasis on gaining an in-depth understanding of the perceptions and experiences of the ethnic community and Bengali people with respect to tourism and development in the region. This method aims to provide a nuanced and rich analysis of the phenomenon under investigation, encompassing a range of perspectives and insights that are not readily obtainable through quantitative research methods. The questions have been designed to explore information about the attitudes of the local people (especially, the local tribal ethnic community) in order to understand their perception of tourism, employment scope and their development. In terms of data collection tools, we use 20 key Informant Interviews (KII), 4 in-depth Interviews, 2 focus Group Discussions (FGD). The two most popular sampling techniques, purposive and convenient sampling have been used to determine the possible respondents because these techniques can align the best across nearly all qualitative research designs.

TABLE III CATEGORIES OF THE RESPONDENTS

|  |
|--|
| The businessman from the local ethnic community          |
| The businessman from the Bengali community               |
| Headman (Ethnic Community Leaders)                       |
| Local Political Leaders                                  |
| Law enforcement agencies (Army, BGB and Police Officers) |
| Journalists (Local newspapers)                           |
| Employees from Ethnic communities                        |
| Employees from Bengali Community                         |

*A. Study Area-Sajek Valley*

The researchers select Sajek Valley as the study area. Sajek Valley, which was once the scene of insurrections and is now surrounded by the hills of Mizoram on the east and Tripura

on the north, serves as a showcase for Bangladesh’s cultural diversity by involving people of various ethnic backgrounds in the growth of tourism there for the region’s economic benefit and social upliftment (Ali, 2021). Konglak Hill is one of the primary tourist attractions in Sajek Valley, which also includes Ruilui Para, Hamari Para, and Konglak Para. The last settlement, which is primarily populated by Lusai people, is situated on Konglak Hill on the Bangladesh side. There are also Tripura, Pangkhao, and Chakma inhabitants in addition to the Lusais. Soon after the country’s road network connected the valley with the rest of the country in 2014, tourists began to flock to Sajek (Ali, 2021). The road that cut through the valleys and rocky terrain of the Kasalong mountain range was finished by the Bangladesh Army after around ten years. Due to its challenging high topography and lack of noticeable commercial activity, it used to be one of the most isolated locations of the nation (Shachi, 2017).

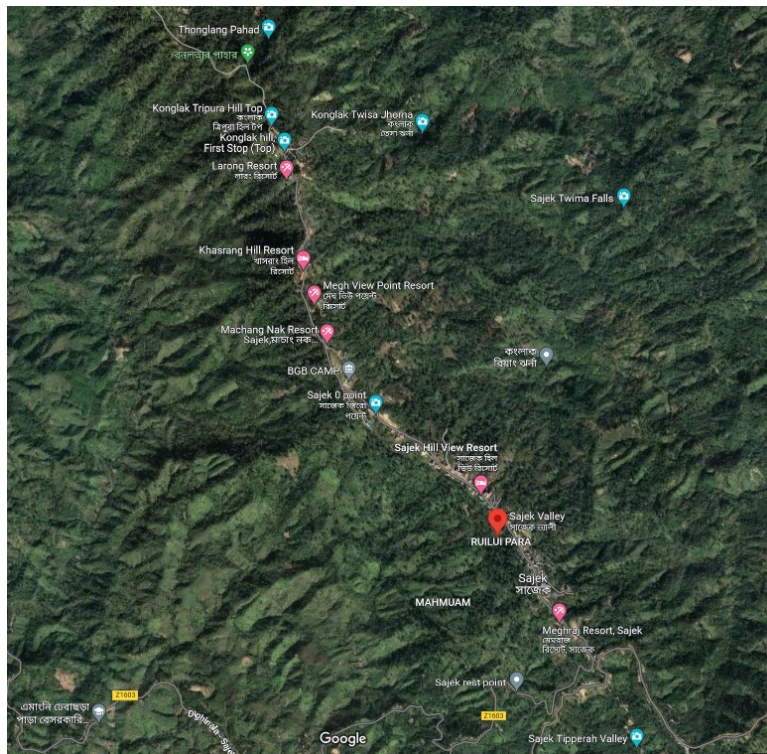


Fig. 4 Sajek Valley Map (Source: Google Map)

Sajek was not well-known to the general public and had no road connections to Rangamati or the nearby Khagrachhari. Prior to Sajek’s establishment of the majority of the resorts, residents of Rangamati Town had to travel for roughly two days to reach Ruilui. The fact that 83 resorts in the region joined the Cottage Owners Association of Sajek (COAS) till 2020 from its initial total of six in 2016 shows how thriving the tourism industry is in Sajek. Sajek, which sits at an elevation of about 2,000 feet above sea level and is surrounded by hills and mountains as well as protected forests and wildlife, offers panoramic splendor all year long and provides a sense of the passing of the seasons (Ali, 2021). As a rising tourist spot and economic zone, Sajek is the proper area for conducting the study.



Fig. 5 Sajek Valley (Source: Dhaka Tribune)



Fig. 6 Sajek Valley (Source: Porzoton.com)

*B. The Context: Tourism in Sajek*

Sajek Union has eight headmen in eight Mouzas, two from the Tripura ethnic group and six from the Lusai ethnic group. From top to bottom of the power hierarchy first the headman, then the Karbari, and after that, the ward member. The tourist area is mainly populated by Tripura. On the other hand, only 30-35 families of the Lusai ethnic group currently live in the area. However, the two headmen of Rui Lui Para and Konglak Para are from the Lusai ethnic group. Although in the past, more than 200 families of Lusai lived there. Most of the Lusai families have migrated to India, mainly due to lack of facilities. The Lusai were economically and educationally advanced. One of the notable reasons for this advancement is their ancestors' experiences to work closely with the English during the British Period. They also have close ties with Mizoram in India. However, both the Lusai and the Tripura ethnic groups continue to live in harmony. Before the establishment of the tourism industry, there were only Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) members speaking Bengali in the area. Every month, their rations were sent to the BGB camp by helicopter. There was a union Parishad, but it had no activities in this area. All the activities were done in the adjoining Marishya Union. Before the development of the tourism industry, there were no roads in the area, so there was no traffic congestion. At that time, it used to take two days to go to the nearest haat (market) i.e., Baghairhat that sits once in a week. During that day of the week, the local ethnic

people used to sell whatever they produced from *Jhum* cultivation and carry it on their heads while walking. And they would buy oil (especially kerosene, since they do not consume a lot of edible oil), salt, tobacco leaves, and molasses for 10-15 days as they were not available in their residence. Those who lived near the Indian border frequently bought necessary things from India. When there was a slight illness in the medical field, they would take herbal medicine made by themselves, as modern medical treatment was not available. But in the event of a major accident, they are likely to get into the most trouble. Also, in the field of education, they did not have slightest opportunity. Nonetheless, apart from the hardships, they had maintained their own culture and rituals without the distortion of modernity or environment pollution.

With the development of the tourism industry, there has been a lot of infrastructure development in the region, starting with the communication system. Advancement of the communication system helped locals to get education and health facilities, as they can easily travel to the distant thana or District headquarters. They can also carry their goods easily to market and get a better price. Moreover, tourism in CHT in general, and Sajek, in particular, contributed to employment opportunities for tribal ethnic communities. The local people get a good price for their agricultural products because of the increased demand. In this study, it is found that these opportunities have been created because of the enhancement of tourism in Sajek. These opportunities are considered "the elements of inclusivity". On the contrary, there are many new challenges as well as drawbacks of tourism in Sajek. These are, environmental degradation, cultural extinction, relative deprivation, etc. These drawbacks are considered "elements of exclusivity" in this study.

**V. ELEMENTS OF INCLUSIVE TOURISM IN SAJEK**

The following figure shows the elements which are the positive outcome of tourism in Sajek Valley. These outcomes are because of the inclusivity of the local inhabitants of Sajek (especially the ethnic tribal people).

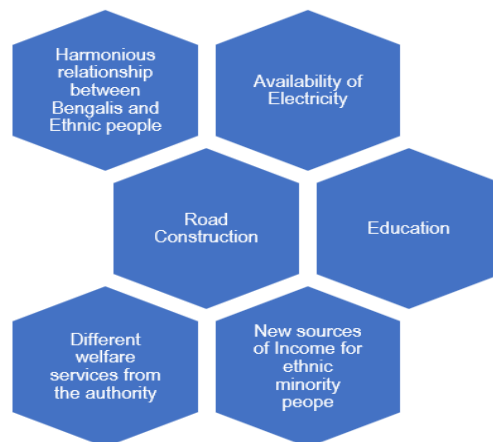


Fig. 7 Inclusive Factors/Elements in tourism development in the Sajek Valley

### A. Socio-Economic Benefit to Local Society

Due to the development of the tourism industry, the people of the region are benefiting from the positive aspects of modernization. In this case, road construction and the easy availability of electricity have further improved their standard of living. In this context, the headman of Rui Lui Para said: “If it were not for the tourism industry here, day laborers, *Jhum* farmers, carpenters, and others, the development would not have been possible for them. If we think about our past, there was nothing in terms of communication and security. Elephants, tigers, and bears used to hunt our domestic animals around our houses. The development we are seeing now is something we have never imagined in our lives.”

The headman of Konglak Para echoed the same thing: “The development that has taken place in Sajek has had many benefits. After the development of the tourism industry, electricity has been available here, roads have been built, and now traders can take goods from here or we can take them to the market by vehicle. In all respects, things have improved now.”

In an interview, a Tripura small businessman highlighted the same point: “I am better off than before because of development. Earlier, we had to walk to Baghaichhari or Marishya. But now, as the road has been constructed, the communication system has improved. It has solved many problems. I used to go to the market by walking for two days to sell the goods and get a good price. Now I can sell my goods from home at the same good price. I think we are safer now than ever before.”

Besides, the rate of education has also increased in the region after the development of the tourism industry. Participants in the interview said that the schools that were not functioning properly before now have regular classes. The digital school program has also given a new dimension to the quality of education in the region. The army chief in charge of Sajek Valley said: “Even if you go to a remote area, you will see that there are schools and people are studying there. We, as well as a number of NGOs, are working for this development; and the local people are trying to make the most out of this.”

In addition, the development of the tourism industry has brought about a positive change in the economic status of the local ethnic minorities. They used to make a living by *Jhum* cultivating, but now they have many options for living. One local resort trader and *Jhum* cultivator put it this way:

“Apart from *Jhum* farming, many locals now have jobs and businesses, and some of them have odd jobs like mechanics. Since there were not many resorts in this place in the beginning, at that time, tourists stayed at the houses of the locals. Later, a few locals who were aware of the industry and had some capital invested in small resorts. In recent times, many of them do not even manage it themselves; instead, they rent it to other Bengali traders.”

According to a local Tripura businessman, “I used to cultivate *Jhum*. I used to grow mainly paddy and various vegetables. If there was a good harvest, the crops would last for a year. Otherwise, it would have been enough to run for six or seven months only. So, there were so many uncertainties. After the introduction of the tourism industry, I have been working in army camps for 2-3 years for 6-7 thousand Bangladeshi Taka (BDT) per month. Then, along with three other partners, I started resort business, which has been bringing me good fortune and economic certainty.”

In other words, the development of the tourism industry here has created a win-win situation. In this case, a Bengali resort businessman reflected on the present situation, “Being local, people from small ethnic groups are earning handsome amounts of money. They are renting out land and resorts. They have had other employment opportunities as well. As Bengalis, we can also run good businesses. With the advent of electricity, we have had some advantages. We used to use generators; now we get direct electricity.” He added, “There are many people from ethnic minority groups who are working at the resorts and restaurants. At the same time, it is cost-effective for the businessmen, as they can recruit locals at lower wages. It also creates new opportunities for employment for the locals. For example, three people from ethnic minority groups are currently working in my restaurant. And I have a Bengali manager and another Tripura manager at my resort.”

The army in charge of the tourist spot summarizes the impact of tourism on Sajek like this: “When it comes to Rui Lui Para, Konglak, or Sajek Valley, the developments that are taking place start at a very individual level. Many resort owners are from ethnic minority groups. Some Bengali investors or the younger generation of entrepreneurs come here to conduct business at the resort. As much as this Sajek is being developed, so is the personal development of the ethnic minority groups. Almost all of the Lusai community that lives here are businessmen, whereas only 5-6 years ago, they used to only cultivate *Jhum*. The development of tourism in Sajek in the last 5-6 years has led to a dramatic change in their state of living. The children of those who are well-known here due to economic prosperity are already studying in Khagrachari (the closest town). Some of them have their own cars. In other words, after becoming a tourist destination, the overall situation of almost everyone has changed positively.”

### B. Cultural Inclusivity

Bengali businessmen and tourists have developed a cordial relationship with the local ethnic minority groups, which is essential for the sustainable tourism industry. In this case, the distinct cultures of the ethnic minority groups have helped the tourism industry to develop further. A Bengali resort businessman, in this context, said, “The main reason why tourists come to Sajek is not only its beauty but also to get acquainted with the cultures of the ethnic groups. Spending time with them is one of the major attractions for tourists.” In

Ruilui Para's Headman's words, "Since I have become accustomed to tourists, it feels bad not to have them in the off-season. Because of tourism, we have developed a beautiful bond with a lot of good people." A Bengali businessman has provided some evidences of the harmonious relationship, "The relationship of Bengali traders with small ethnic groups has been strengthened by their helping each other in various perils. For example, a few days ago, their (one of the ethnic tribal communities) house was on fire. We (the Bengalis) were the first responders to go there and help them put out the fire. When they are sick or in danger, we help them financially as much as possible."

Besides, it has become easier to develop the tourism industry as there is no open animosity between the ethnic groups of the region. The Bengali resort businessman said in his interview, "The Tripura and Lusai communities have maintained social harmony between them. A striking example of this is the local election in Sajek. As a Tripura elected as a Ward member, it was seen that the Lusai tribesmen were the first to welcome him with garland and sweets. However, if there is any problem raised between the two groups, it is resolved by the youth associations, which serve as the local civil society."

### *C. Preserving Cultural Values*

Although the army is responsible for the security and administration of the place, the local power structure is always given importance in making any new decision. For example, when it was decided to build a tourism industry, the local headman was consulted first and work was started accordingly. At the same time, local practices have been giving preferences for resolving any dispute. In this case, the army chief in charge of this region said, "Three ethnic minority groups live in this area. If any problem arises, we try to solve it according to local practices. If there is any problem taking place between the communities or within the communities, we try to prevent the escalation first, and then three people from each of the tribes are sent to the headman, who is a respected person here. Everyone is bound to listen to the headman. Since I am in charge of this area, I have to deal with every dispute in this area."

So, I solved all these problems by following the local practice. If someone commits a criminal offense, we will bring him to justice, that is, hand him over to the police." He added, "Ethnic riots, such as those between people from ethnic minority groups and Bengalis, are major concerns here. We strongly handle such situations and lead to de-escalation. Whenever I get the news that there is a problem between two or more groups, I try my best to prevent any kind of violence. Then I send them to the headman. If needed, the police administration may be involved. However, most of the time, we resolve the disputes internally. If I took direct legal action here, the grievance would have remained and the conflict would not be solved. So, by preserving their cultural values, we make sure that Lusai, Tripura, and Bengalis all coexist in peace."

### *D. Environmental Adaptability/Sustainability*

The development of the tourism industry has naturally increased the pressure on the local environment. When more people gather, more garbage naturally accumulates. And not all tourists are equally aware of the environment. However, in this case, the resort owners' association has taken the initiative to keep the environment clean. In this regard, the Bengali resort businessman said, "The tourists who are aware throw the garbage in the dustbin, and those who are unaware throw garbage on the road. However, we try our best to keep it clean. In addition to that, three days a week, on behalf of our resort owners' association, we collect the garbage through garbage trucks and burn it once a week. We also have a monthly clean-up operation that runs from the helipad to the police camp. Every resort manager, an employee from each restaurant, and the president of the resort owners' association take part in this cleaning program."

### *E. Services from the Authority*

The authorities, especially the army, have taken a number of positive steps to involve everyone in the development of Sajek and make the tourism industry more sustainable. In this case, the headman of the Ruilui neighbourhood gave full credit to the army for the development of their ethnic group. One of these measures is to prevent road accidents. Since Sajek Valley is a remote area, road accidents are common. In this context, the Army Chief of the region said, "Road accidents were a big issue here. There were bike accidents every day. Now the maximum speed limit has been set to 20 kmph and signboards have been installed in different places. If any accident happens, I am to be informed first through a phone call. We immediately go for rescue. Since there is a security problem in the area, if there is an accident, the biggest challenge is to rescue the injured quickly. Since there is no hospital here, if there is an accident involving a person who is seriously injured, I have to get permission first. Then I have to cross Dighinala with an escort and the patient. That is how we are ensuring the tourists' safety. Again, since there is no pharmacy in the Sajek tourist spot, we started a community clinic project under my own supervision, and we occasionally bring in specialist doctors here. We tell the villagers in advance that there will be a medical campaign, so they can come for consultation."

## **VI. CHALLENGES (EXCLUSIONARY ELEMENTS)**

Apart from the positive outcomes, there are certainly some challenges that hinder the stakeholders from reaping the full benefits of tourism. Firstly, one of the major exclusionary factors in the development of tourism in Sajek is the relocation of local ethnic families. The main goal, in this case, is to evict the family and build a resort or infrastructure in their place of residence. Secondly, the development of the tourism industry has had a detrimental effect on the environment of Sajek, with the victims being the local ethnic minorities. The water crisis, in particular, is a big challenge here. The crisis is also hurting the tourism business. Thirdly, despite the economic and infrastructural development of



Sajek as a result of tourism, the people of the local ethnic minorities do not feel fully involved in it. “Relative deprivation” works in this regard, especially among the Tripura people. Finally, while there is no direct conflict or violence between the local ethnic groups, there is a lack of mutual trust. The Tripura, in particular, feel deprived of many rights, mainly because of the Lusai people and their headmen. The Lusai community, on the other hand, feels more deprived than the other dominant communities, such as the Chakma. The challenges or the exclusionary factors should be examined in the further researches to understand the sustainability of the valley as a tourist spot.

## VII. RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

It is well understood that tourism in Sajek valley has contributed to the development of these areas to a great extent. More importantly, cohesion between the Bengalis and the ethnic tribals has been found as a result of tourist development. All other modern amenities of living standards and livelihood have been possible through tourism. The development of road communication and the availability of electricity have made education facilities and health services reachable. These benefits as outcomes of tourism give a notion of inclusivity of the local inhabitants and could have brought the local ethnic tribals into the mainstream of development. But it is also found that there are some shortcomings of the development through tourism that have been identified as the exclusivity of the development. Some disagreements were found in the context of Stakeholders’ involvement, cultural inclusivity, and cultural sustainability. Along with the disagreements, environmental adaptability has been found huge challenge for sustainable tourism in CHT in general and Sajek in particular. In addition to these intra-ethnic tribal commotions are also found as an important issue to grow tourism in a sustainable development fashion.

To ensure the sustainability of the industry, it is important to make tourism more inclusive. In this context, it is important to continue to prioritize socio-economic development, as it is essential in improving the standard of living of local ethnic minority groups. Continuous Efforts should be made to develop a cordial relationship between Bengali businessmen and tourists and local ethnic minorities to ensure that cultural diversity is respected and preserved. The authorities, especially the army, should continue to provide essential services to promote the sustainability of the tourism industry. Finally, consultation with local headmen and practices should continue to be given importance in making any new decisions, to ensure the inclusion of all stakeholders and the sustainable development of the tourism industry in the region. To address the challenges hindering the full potential of tourism development in Sajek, stakeholders should take several steps. Firstly, the issue of the relocation of local ethnic family’s needs to be addressed through fair compensation and alternative resettlement options. This will help to ensure that tourism development is inclusive and does not harm the rights of local communities. Secondly, there should be a focus on promoting sustainable tourism practices

that prioritize environmental conservation and preservation. Efforts should be made to mitigate the water crisis and other negative impacts of tourism on the environment. Thirdly, local ethnic minorities should be provided with equal opportunities to participate and benefit from the tourism industry. This can be achieved through community participation and decision-making in tourism planning and development. Finally, stakeholders should work towards building mutual trust and addressing issues of relative deprivation among different ethnic groups. This will help to ensure peaceful coexistence and promote social harmony in the region. Further research should be conducted to understand the sustainability of the valley as a tourist spot, and to identify additional measures to promote inclusive and sustainable tourism development in Sajek. In conclusion, stakeholders should work towards ensuring that tourism development in Sajek is inclusive, sustainable, and promotes social harmony in the region.

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