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Tourism Under Threat: The Role of Political Instability and Insecurity in Undermining Community-Based Tourism in Boga Lake

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Abstract

Research Purpose: The paper examines how issues of political instability and insecurity are impeding the growth of community-based tourism (CBT) in one of the leading tourist attraction sites in the Bandarban district of Bangladesh, Boga Lake. The main aim is to determine the political and security-based challenges to impeding CBT and suggest effective measures to develop a secure and sustainable tourist environment. *Data and Methodology:* Qualitative research design was adopted, where in-depth interviews were conducted using a purposely selected sample of the local residents, tourists, tour guides, and government officials. Thematic analysis was applied to collected data to clarify the key political and governance issues which hinder development of tourism in the area. *Findings:* The results show that the existence of the KNF armed group, the lack of the formal local governance institutions, and the lack of security means all contribute to the creation of the unstable milieu. This instability puts off tourist arrivals, it has a major impact on the local economy which is largely relied on tourism and it compromises the sustainability of CBT projects in the long run. *Research Implications:* The research highlights the need of addressing the problem with specific measures such as increased military presence, the deployment of effective security systems, and the involvement of the government. These measures are advanced to stabilize the region, to protect the livelihoods of the people and the expansion of CBT to be sustainable. *Originality:* This study provides a rare exploration of the intersection of political unrest, governance loopholes, and community-based tourism in a remote and security-sensitive setting, and thus presents a context-related paradigm of restoring tourism in politically volatile regions.

Keywords: Community-Based Tourism, Boga Lake, Sustainable Tourism, Political instability, Tourism threat.

Introduction

Boga Lake in Bandarban, a very remote Bangladeshi district of which not many people have usual passport, is a famous location for nature fans and adventure seekers. This can be a big tourist destination with its mesmerizing views, crystal clear blue waters and peaceful surroundings. Yet very much worth seeing although it has a problem developing its tourism industry, and the problem is mainly driven by political instability and its concomitant security concerns.

The region has become unsafe by the activities of armed groups like Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF). This is also accompanied by local conflicts and the absence of a good governance that leads to societies which are much afraid and insecure. These factors have resulted in a reduction in tourism, because people are afraid to get on a plane to a country which they know is unsafe. Boga Lake is really important for tourism, and this brings income to many of the local people who needs jobs and employment. Nevertheless, businesses, such as cottages and restaurants that

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are dependent on tourism are in a bad way due to continuing political instability. Other challenges to effective management and promotion of tourism are a weak and formal local government, and weak and formal law enforcement.

This study intends to analyze the role of political instability in tourism development at Boga Lake. This research investigates the ways in which political and security issues affect tourism using interviews with local residents, visitors, tour guides and government officials. This study will listen to the experiences and opinions which are directly involved, to identify the major obstacles to tourism growth, and to provide practical solutions to overcome the road-blocks.

The intent of this work is to provide advice that will enhance the security system and make for a safer atmosphere that is not only for the locals but tourists as well. The study intends to contribute to the development of a sustainable and viable tourism industry in Boga Lake by first identifying the challenges due to political instability in developing a tourism industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The effect of political instability on tourism development is enormous, especially in the areas where community-based tourism (CBT) is one of the key elements of the local lifestyle (Dibeh et al., 2019; Morakabati, 2019; Chen, 2020). Empirical evidence indicates that political instability, armed conflicts, ineffective governance, and lack of regulations create high risks to a tourist, destabilize the local economy, and hinder sustainability of the tourism industry in the long term (Dibeh et al., 2019; Morakabati, 2019; Tomczewska-Popowycz and Quirini-Poplowski, 2021; Rahimi, 2016).

This is the case at Boga Lake that represents these general trends. It has been shown that the political turmoil and insecurity severely limit the development of tourism in the Bandarban district (Morakabati, 2019; Rahimi, 2016; Fernando et al., 2013). The increasing risk of armed groups like Kuki Chin National Front (KNF) has created heightened fear amongst the tourists and the locals. Armed conflict has multiple impacts on tourism: it causes unsafe conditions that disorient tourism processes; it generates social and political tensions that scare visitors; it also sets economic barriers to tourism business such as hotel operations and mobility (Morakabati, 2019; Rahimi, 2016; Fernando et al., 2013).

Poor governance systems in politically turbulent areas will also increase the problems associated with tourism. The ability of the local institutions to make proper management of tourism is undermined by poor planning, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient law enforcement (Tomczewska-Popowycz and Quirini-Popawska, 2021; Sari and Cahyadin, 2021). As it happened with the Boga Lake, KNF activities have escalated the conflict in the area, especially between the Marma and Bam communities, leading to a failure to establish a local system of control and the inability to formulate a single tourism plan (Tomczewska-Popowycz & Quirini-Poplowski, 2021; Sari and Cahyadin, 2021).

Ambiguity in politics and unreliable governance is also a factor that discourages tourism infrastructure investment, which restricts the possibility of sustainable development (Dibeh et al., 2019; Tomczewska-Popowycz & Quirini-Poplowski, 2021; Yap and Saha, 2013). Because of this, businesses that rely on tourism in Boga Lake experience deteriorating demand, disruption in operations, and low economic stability.

According to scholars, to deal with political instability, it is necessary to focus on conflict-resolution strategies, governance enhancement, and the increase of the level of security (Soyu, 2023; Shehawy, 2015; Groizard et al., 2021). At the same time, CBT has the capacity to play a

role in peacebuilding because it enhances involvement in communities, collective resource management and collaboration between conflicting groups (Soyu, 2023; Shehawy, 2015; Groizard et al., 2021). Thus, the long-term development of tourism in Boga Lake requires the improvement of community engagement, better governance, and the resolution of local issues. Altogether, the literature proves that political instability, armed conflict, weak governance, and economic uncertainty are significant limitations to the development of tourism in conflict-affected areas. It is important that these challenges can be dealt with by means of improved security, better governance, and conflict-resolution mechanisms in order to allow the sustainable development of the tourism sector in Boga Lake and other similar countries.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, which is well-suited for exploring complex social issues and capturing participants' experiences and perceptions (Malhotra, 2009). A semi-structured interview method was used to investigate how political instability affects tourism development at Boga Lake.

Data Collection Process

In order to meet the research objectives, we concentrated on the political environment. This data was collected with a semi structured questionnaire developed. Respondents were briefed before interviews started on the research objectives and the importance of CBT development and problems in CBT development focused on political aspects.

The questionnaire was developed to collect data from their tourist, stake holder, government organizations and tour operators. To ask for, a set of questions were set. An interview was taken during collection of data with probing techniques in order to go for deeper insights as well as for hidden factors (Bryman, 2016). Political area explored through interviews. The political aspect is looking at local participation in decision making, in the allocations of benefits, and external actors in CBT. Lune and Berg (2017) used a structured questionnaire to obtain information from participants in terms of demographics. Twelve completed interviews were conducted over a five-day period through in depth interviews. The mean was 30 minutes (SD = 5 minutes) with a possible variation of up to 5 minutes per interview. The data captured was not only written notes but also audio recordings of the interviews.

Sampling

Judgmental sampling in the form of purposive sampling, is used in this study to select participants. It means that this method ensures us to select the participants based on the special criteria that can contribute to the goal of research (Patton, 2002). The sample is designed to represent diverse stakeholder groups within the Boga Lake community:

- *Tourists*: Visitors to and people who are involved in CBT initiatives or are recipients of the offers of local tourism in the Boga Lake area.
- *Local Residents*: Persons in the Boga Lake community that are either directly or indirectly connected to tourism activities.

- *Local Government:* An integral part of which included representatives from local government authorities responsible for tourism development and management in the area.
- *Tour Operators:* Organizations or individuals offering tourism experiences and services within Boga Lake community, with emphasis on CBT initiative participants.

Data Analysis

Data that was collected through interview sessions were analyzed using qualitative methods. The thematic analysis provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used as the base of the analytical strategy. The familiarity was done through reiterating transcripts one after another to reach out to the full scope, as systematic coding followed thereafter to outline recurring patterns. The codes obtained were then combined into larger thematic groupings where the accounts given by the participants regarding political instability and security issues as well as their effects on tourism in the Boga Lake area were summed up. These themes were later used as the interpretive tool to analyze the effects of the political and governance dynamics in the tourism milieu.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The main factors detracting the tourists' interest on Boga Lake tourism are political instability and insecurity. Both the fear of hijacking but additionally the being of the hill armed group, KNF, are important security issues, respondents said. It's a strong sense of insecurity among visitors that *Respondent 1* expressed when she said, *'I feel like there is a fear of being hijacked, because of the instability in the area.'* Multiple respondents also mention the fear of the KNF group, as in one instance, *Respondent 2* said that we are afraid because the condition of the mountain is unstable.

Another concern is the lack of a police presence, which increases the risk of crime. *Respondent 2* expressed, *"I did not see any police inside this area, and there is fear of robbery or big trouble,"* signaling a perceived vulnerability that undermines the attractiveness of Boga Lake as a tourist destination. Moreover, the tourists reported that the region's political instability, with the absence of a formal local government, creates a less favorable environment for investment, further hindering the development of tourism infrastructure.

There is widespread fear of mountain terror group attack, particularly the KNF, from a local people's perspective. *Respondent 5* said: *"With the Marma and Bam, there is conflict in the hills, it has destabilised the region, what we call KNF Case."* Consequences of this have been extremely severe to the local population that have had to live constantly with threats of violence. The Komar village is devoid of formal local governance, and the Karbari plays the role of de facto administrator, rendering the local economy very much in limbo.

Respondent 6 said, *with nature of business in the hills being hard due to extortion and instability in hills business is difficult and hence needs more military patrols in these area and attempt to put an end to extortion.* The economic challenges locals face in reliance on tourism as their livelihood meanwhile are motivated by security issues. Residents are calling for more increased security measures and military presence to stabilize area.

The local guides have the same concerns regarding the instability of the region. *'There is extortion here and there is fear of the hill armed group KNF,'* said *Respondent 10*. Businesses are not exempted, as are also tourist operations causing tourist centers to temporarily close. *Respondent*

11 stated, "*If the situation of the mountain becomes unstable, the tourist stops coming.*" In addition, they claimed that *too little control is being exercised by the Army and Border guards in that area, implying that people come to believe that the region is lawless.*

The local government takes the political instability and security threat seriously. *Respondent 8* also notes that *local (Karbari) leaders' roles in decision making is important and that much of what government does is formulated with their involvement.* The KNF Issue continues to destabilize the region and is caused by the conflict between the Marma and Bam communities. A local recruitment of youth by armed groups in the KNF is '*serious concern for the area.*' said *Respondent 8.*

Respondent 9 also reported that *Karbari leaders remain part of governance but their authority is constrained by prevailing armed conflict.* *Respondent 8* says that tourists also cause local unrest since, "*Plenty of tourists get drunk and start quarrelling; it's no fun for locals.*"

All respondent groups agree that security is the most top of the mind issue that directly impedes Tourism at Boga lake. Repeatedly, as foreign troops sped out in January and soon after, respondents demanded a stronger military presence in the wake of extortion and instability in the hills. Despite this, other local people and guides suggested that "*military patrol should be increased and that efforts should be carried out to stop extortion,*" as *Respondent 5* (local resident) had suggested. What's lacking is a healthy enough law enforcement presence in the region to protect locals and tourists alike.

It has also been made worse by worsening political unrest connected to the 2024 national elections. *Respondent 8* (Local government) concedes that '*the threat of an ongoing national political movement had created an atmosphere of fear among tourists which had made the conditions in region even worse.*' It has resulted in travel bans and scared off tourists, be those domestic and international.

All respondent groups identified political instability, notably associated with the presence of armed groups in KNF, as the main obstacle to tourism development at Boga Lake. The absence of formal governance and security infrastructure, as well as extortion and local conflicts, have made tourist and local safety a nonstarter. Respondents suggested increased military patrolling, stronger local governance, and stronger assistance of the government to establish environment that is safe for tourism development.

Recommendations

It is based on the insights from all respondent groups that it can be stated with certainty that politics instability, especially those emanating from the activities of the armed groups, is a major impediment to Boga Lake tourism development. A climate of fear and insecurity has been created both within tourists and in local communities because of the absence of formal governance and a proper security infrastructure and the problems of extortion and local conflicts. To address these challenges and pave the way for sustainable tourism growth, several recommendations can be made:

Increased Military and Security Patrolling: The area is unsafe because of the presence of armed groups. Second, it is necessary to build new military and security patrols in the region (Mataković & Mataković, 2019). Clearly, an army and border guard presence will be a constant, visible security presence being able to deter criminal activity and reassure tourists. It would not only make visitors safe but also put the trust of the local community (Mostafa & Hefny, 2016). *Installation of Robust Security Infrastructure:* In addition to patrols, securing the infrastructure

with security systems as well as surveillance cameras, secure checkpoints, and communication systems should be emphasised (Mostafa & Hefny, 2016). Implementation of these measures would facilitate effective monitoring of the situation as well as rapid response in emergencies as well as overall safety environment. Improving security systems will help tourists feel and see that the area is safe (Mostafa & Hefny, 2016).

Strengthened Government Intervention: Although it is the local government that is perceived to be responsible for decision making, there is the need for the higher government to intervene and ensure peace and stability (Látková & Vogt, 2011). The first thing for the government to do is to work with local leaders and take concrete measures to stop extortion, otherwise political conflict will continue. Also, the government should create a more formalized local governance structure so that resources and safety in the area will be properly managed (Frleta & Jurdana, 2020).

Community Engagement and Conflict Resolution: Since to address the political instability by bringing conflicting parties into dialogue and peaceful coexistence is the work of the issues underlying the political instability. Reduction in tensions and promotion of unity could be mediated and conflict resolved by mediation and conflict resolution programs. Long term stability will be achieved with involvement of local communities in peacebuilding and decision making processes (Látková & Vogt, 2011; , Frleta & Jurdana, 2020).

Tourism Awareness and Support Programs: Moreover, since tourists are perceived to be as much in need for reassurance as the hosts, informing them as to the challenges of the region and the safety measures in place (Mostafa & Hefny, 2016; , Nagaj & Žuromskaitė, 2021), should also be considered. Thus the services such as tour guides can help give better feel of the place and comfort to the tourists ahead plus they would give them information that would give them a chance tell them how to stay safe as they explore the place. In addition, training local tourism providers to address concerns about security in the areas visited by tourists could build up the overall tourism infrastructure (Nagaj & Žuromskaitė, 2021).

If these recommendations are implemented Boga Lake will start regaining its stability and the region will be transformed into a safer and more attractive environment for local and tourism in general. But these would not only help to make the area safer, but they would also provide a more positive and enduring tourism environment that would work for both the local community and for the wider economy.

CONCLUSION

The major challenges to tourism development at Boga Lake include political instability and security threats especially those related to the KNF armed group. The poor governance, lack of proper security facilities and a lack of consistent local wars continue to hinder the security and welfare of the tourists and locals. To minimize these challenges, the introduction of new security systems, consolidation of the governance systems, launch of conflict-management initiatives, and resource investment in tourism infrastructures should be introduced.

The sustainable tourism in the region cannot be achieved without a stable and cooperative atmosphere between the local communities, government bodies and tourism stakeholders. This development would not only revitalize the local economy, but it would also help in the general growth in tourism in Bangladesh and will help in a more peaceful and prosperous future of the region.

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