

## An Analysis of Socio-Cultural Impacts of Ecotourism in Kodagu District

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### Abstract

Ecotourism is new concept in tourism industry. It has used a tool for sustain local environment and culture. The host communities have received more financial benefits by practicing it. Impacts of ecotourism has classified into three types, these are environment, economic and socio-cultural. The socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism describe the effects on host communities of direct and indirect relations with tourists, and of interaction with the tourism industry. For a variety of reasons, host communities often are the weaker party in interactions with their guests and service providers, leveraging any influence they might have. These influences are not always apparent, as they are difficult to measure, depend on value judgments and are often indirect or hard to identify. The negative impacts of ecotourism are the increase in drug and alcohol abuse, economic materialism, changes in traditional culture, negative influences on the youth of the local area and a change from the former peaceful lifestyle of the area. However, ecotourism also generate positive impacts as it can sharing and learning of new tradition, educational opportunities, employments opportunities, economic benefits for the local community/people and friendship with the visitors to the area. Kodagu district of Karnataka has beautiful landscape and diversified culture. These characteristics are attracting large number of domestic and international tourists. The district tourism has grown up in ecotourism from last decade holds a very bright future in the district. The present study has focused on the study of perceptions of people, representing the host communities of ecotourism, on the socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism in the Kodagu district. Expert interviews have conducted to collect the information on socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism in the study area. The results have shown both the positive and negative impacts; however, there are positive impacts have strong in improving local economy, infrastructure service, children education, conservation and reduction of poverty. A few negative impacts have identified such as uneven distribution of ecotourism benefits and commercialized of local culture. Though, the district has desirable potential to development of ecotourism in sustainable way with cooperation of all concern stakeholders of ecotourism.

**Key words:** leveraging, economic materialism, educational opportunities

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## 1. Introduction

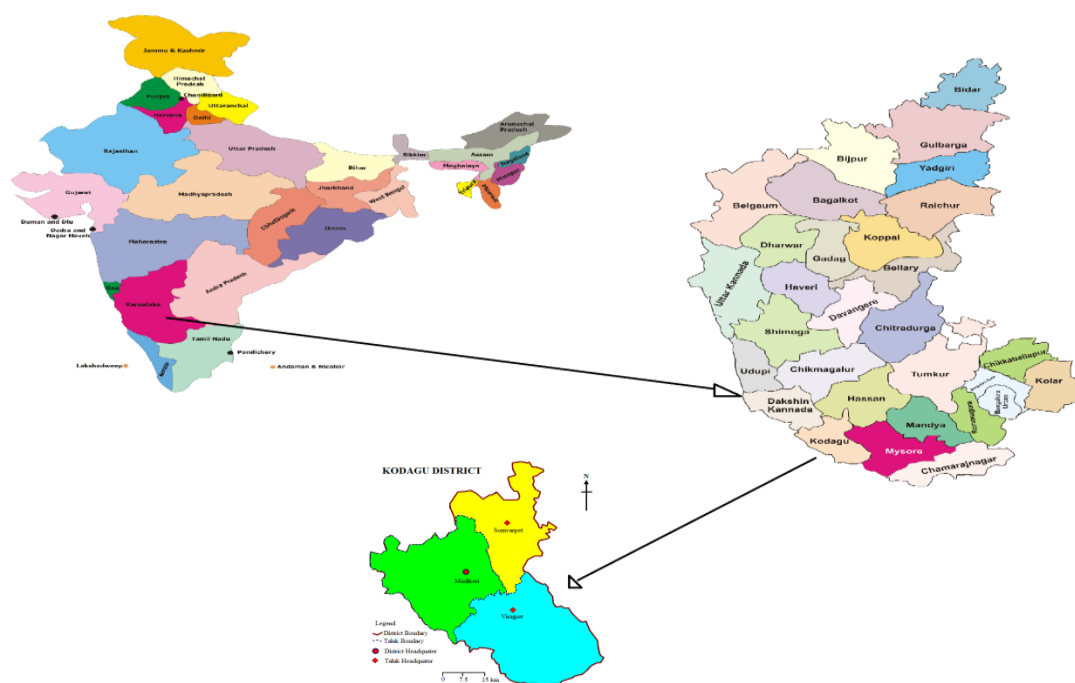
Ecotourism is a new concept in tourism. It is a purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the cultural and natural history of environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem, while producing economic opportunities that make conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people. In short, ecotourism can be conceptualized as any tourism program that is (a) nature based, (b) ecologically sustainable, (c) where education and interpretation is a major component and (d) where local people are benefited can be called ecotourism. If it does not satisfy any one of these components then it cannot be called a real ecotourism venture. Socio-cultural impacts are defined as “The ways in which tourism is contributing to changes in the value systems, individual’s behavior, traditional ceremonies and community organization” (Fox, 1977). In tourism, negative impacts on the host culture resulting from mass tourism developments are recognized. In theory, ecotourism developments have minimal impact and are sensitive to host cultures. However, difficulties can occur in the planning, implementation and management of ecotourism reserves. According to wearing (1993) ecotourism developments can bring a number of socio-cultural impacts to the communities in which the ecotourism takes place. However, it has also been found that ecotourism development can bring about negative socio-cultural impacts on host communities. The literature review revealed that only a small amount of data exists which examines the socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism on host communities. Socio-cultural impacts of tourism are difficult to assess. However, methods used to monitor and determine socio-cultural impacts include attitudinal surveys, frameworks to monitor impacts and socio-cultural carrying capacities (Stephen, Wearing and Libby, Larsen, 1996).

Kodagu district has enormous ecotourism resource with the backdrop of picturesque natural scenes, plenty of surface streams forming many waterfalls, evergreen and deciduous forest and the native Kodava people with unique culture. One of the outcomes of ecotourism is its effect on host’s socio-cultural aspects. The aim of this study is to examine the socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism on host community in Kodagu district.

## 2. Study Area

Kodagu as it is officially known as one of the tiniest districts in the southern part of Karnataka covering an area of 4102 Km<sup>2</sup>. The Kodagu district lies between 11° 56’ and 12° 50’ North latitude and 72° 22’ and 76°11’ East longitude. The Thadiyandamol (1750 m) is the highest peak and

Siddapur (900 m) is the lowest elevation in kodagu. The district consists of three taluks (administrative units) like, Madikeri (Mercara) the district Head Quarters, Virajpet and Somvarpet. The district borders Mysore district to its east, Dakshina Kannada district on the west, Hassan district in the north and the state of Kerala to the south. The total population of Kodagu district in 2011 is 554,762 persons. The district is known for various ecotourism spots like bird watching centres, cultural heritage spots, fishing camp/s, health promotion and spa centres, home stays, national parks and elephant camp, recreation centres, river rafting, trekking places and waterfalls.



### 3. Materials and Methodology

The expert interview involving government officers, leaders of the Non-Government Organization (NGO), community leaders and chief or employer of local authorities have been conducted. Through canvassing the structured questionnaires among these groups of people the information on socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism have been derived. The Interview has been conducted at various ecotourism spots like bird watching centres, cultural heritage spots, fishing camp/s, health promotion and spa centres, home stays, national parks and elephant camp, recreation

centres, river rafting, trekking places and waterfalls by selecting 100 samples (Respondents) to understand socio-cultural impacts, both positive and negative, of ecotourism. The positive impacts are sharing and learning of new tradition, educational opportunities, employments opportunities, economic benefits for the local community/people and friendship with the visitors to the area. The negative impacts of ecotourism are the increase in drug and alcohol abuse, economic materialism, changes in traditional culture, negative influences on the youth of the local area and a change from the former peaceful lifestyle of the area.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

It is unquestionable that ecotourism development would also affect the host culture and social system everywhere in the world. These effects could be both positive and negative. Positively, the locals (even not all) would be able to receive benefits from ecotourism, either directly or indirectly. According to the results of Likert Scale Analysis, the members of the host community have perceived that although the impacts vary from medium to high, ecotourism will provide mostly high positive impacts on social features and culture of local communities in study area (see Table 1). Most experts interviewed demonstrated that ecotourism, which is used to boost the local economy, will have high positive impacts on the diversification and improvement of local products, services and labor efficiency to support the ecotourism. They were optimistic that earnings received from ecotourism could be used by the communities to complement their sources of income apart from coffee plantation and coffee-related businesses to improve their livelihood strategies to tackle all-season conditions. Besides the use of ecotourism revenue to contribute to people's livelihoods, most interviewees were also confident that ecotourism benefits will provide high impacts to help strengthen local food security and local livelihood initiatives.

**Table 1: Perceptions of the interviewed expert on socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism**

Projected Positive Socio-Cultural Impacts of Ecotourism	Scaling Items				
	1	2	3	4	5
Improvement in infrastructure, both in terms of facilities and services	-	20	20	40	20
Better services (increase in diversification of local services)	-	25	25	35	15

Cultural and natural appreciation (i.e. encourage host communities and ecotourists to value cultural and natural assets)	15	20	35	30	-
Improved environmental education (i.e. a more environmentally informed communities)	-	20	25	35	20
Recognition, strengthening, revitalization and preservation of local culture and cultural-historic resources	-	35	30	20	15
Increase in employment opportunities or job availability and job quality which draw on local cultural knowledge	-	20	30	25	25
Established ecotourism interest in the areas	15	-	35	25	25
Stimulation of local livelihood approaches	25	15	15	30	15
Local empowerment and control over resources and development in the areas	-	15	45	25	15
Prevention of people's out-migration	10	15	30	25	20
Increased people's active participation in local development	-	20	35	30	15
Improve gender equity	10	25	40	15	10
Reduction in domestic violence through equal participation in household earning and development between men and women	15	20	35	30	-
Established sustainable livelihood alternative for local communities	10	20	35	25	10
Use of local labor and expertise	15	-	30	40	15
Increase people's sense of pride	-	25	25	30	20
Increase more voluntary works among local residents	-	45	35	20	-
Knowledge and experience sharing about cultures among local people and between local communities and tourists	15	-	40	25	20
Much lessons learnt from tourists, especially from the scientist and expert visitors	10	15	35	20	20
Open up people's mind about the outside world and development	-	15	25	40	20
Children and students are encouraged to study higher	-	-	50	25	25
Better social or public services in the areas (i.e. health care center, school, etc.)	-	-	55	25	20
Open-minded local authorities and governance	-	25	35	20	20
Well-planned development and conservation process in the areas	-	25	30	25	20
Better opportunities for young generation	10	15	25	25	25
Better information access	10	15	25	25	25
Better access to common natural and public properties for local communities	15	20	40	25	-
Better communication and transportation facilities and infrastructure	-	20	30	30	20
Well-managed tourist places	10	25	15	25	25
Increase in collaboration between all the concerned stakeholders, especially between present responsible institutions (i.e. Department of	15	35	25	25	-

Tourism, Department of Environment, etc.)					
<b>Total Score</b>	200	550	955	815	480
<b>Projected Negative Socio-Cultural Impacts of Ecotourism</b>	<b>Scaling Items</b>				
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Overcrowding of site	15	25	45	15	-
Host community and ecotourists are in conflict causing dissatisfaction	15	25	45	15	-
Demonstration effect (i.e. alien ideas and change of cultural behavior and lifestyle)	-	20	45	35	-
Effect on social pathology (i.e. increase in crime and other associated activities)	25	25	35	15	-
Change from a slow to a fast pace of life	-	40	20	40	-
Lack of sufficient infrastructure	15	30	25	30	-
Commodification and commoditization of local culture and loss of traditional knowledge	15	25	20	30	10
Loss of cultural value and heritage	30	20	30	20	-
Diversion, distortion and exploitation of resources for money	15	30	25	30	-
Disturbance of local cultural significant sites	25	-	30	30	15
Conflict of forest and land resources and other natural resources use	20	30	30	10	10
Degradation of the environment containing the sites (i.e. cultural value and significance)	20	20	40	20	-
Disruption to local people's lifestyle and living culture	-	30	45	25	-
Decrease in local cohesion of local communities	20	25	40	15	-
Local people are more interested in economic perspective than development and conservation in general	-	20	40	40	-
Conflict over land use pattern and division of coffee estate territory for cropping concession and ecotourism development zones	15	20	30	15	20
Children and youths abandoned education for economic pursue	-	25	35	20	20
Increase dependency of local communities on outside developers and planners	15	30	35	20	-
Local authorities have less control over development activities	15	30	35	20	-
Corruption and nepotism among local authorities and community members	-	40	25	35	-
Conflict over benefit sharing among authorities and local community members	15	25	25	35	-
Conflict between coffee estate owners and labors with regard to ecotourism tourism development plans	-	40	25	35	-
Influx and invasion of seasonal in-migrants into the areas when the sites become developed	-	20	20	45	15
Low sanitation in the areas	-	25	30	30	15

Abandon of traditional knowledge and skills and lifestyle among young people	-	20	35	30	15
Cultural assimilation and alienation	25	10	25	25	15
Rising up the materialism attitude among local people	-	35	25	40	-
Local people and authorities become money-interested by exploiting the tourists	30	20	30	20	-
The tourists first, the local people later	-	20	20	40	20
Tourists ignore local customs, traditions and religions	-	20	55	25	-
Rising the lack of accessibility to the natural resources for locals	-	35	45	20	-
Local people feel like animals living in the zoos	30	30	25	15	-
Deserting plantation and other agricultural activities	15	35	25	25	-
Local people and local guides tend to tell distorted information or to miss interpret the local cultural and natural resources	30	20	30	10	10
Deserting traditional land use patterns	15	35	25	25	-
Decreasing the use of local language	25	25	25	15	10
Decrease in traditional leisure activities	15	35	35	15	-
Young people leave family jobs for touristic jobs	15	30	20	35	-
Education in the tourist places becomes touristic educational oriented	15	25	40	20	-
Young people tend to learn how to cheat tourists	20	30	30	10	10
Losing the traditional play for kids and youth	15	30	35	20	-
Tourism only benefit business owners	10	15	40	25	10
Development becomes too touristic oriented (i.e. everything is organized just for touristic matters)	15	30	25	30	-
<b>Total</b>	550	1120	1365	1070	195

Source: Compiled by the Author. 2014(expert interviews)

**Notes:** The level of impacts varies from “1” which is equal to the “lowest quantity of impact” to “5” which is equal to the “highest quantity of impact”. The total score represents the total amount or level (strong or low) of ecotourism impacts on major aspects of measurement (socio-cultural).

Ecotourism development would also have high positive impacts on the improvement of infrastructural system and other social and public services in the district. An expressed perception among many questioned experts was that the local residents, ecotourism initiators could use the fees paid by tourists or local shop owners to support different infrastructures development plans. They explained that direct revenue (i.e. entrance fee, donations and conservation fees, taxes, etc.) and UNESCO’ funds could be used to construct environment friendly buildings, sanitation, pay for safe

drinking water, and improve the communication and transportation facilities in the district. However, it was mentioned by some environmentalists that this depends on how ecotourism revenue is managed and invested by responsible authorities through community-based projects. In this sense, the funding could be also obtained coincidentally from the government, NGOs and international NGOs whose policies and interests converge on poverty alleviation and biodiversity conservation in such rural tourism sites. This helps to avoid the criticism of local people or the ecotourism initiator teams on the misuse of earnings and the failure to address other urgent needs in the places. In addition, it is positive in a way that the community access to outside markets as well as the types of local goods and products will be enhanced. Most specifically, a number of communities' current pressing problems: i.e. health condition, children education, and access to safe drinking water etc. would be solved either partially or totally.

Many expert respondents also considered that ecotourism will have high positive impacts on the improved awareness, capacity and education of the host communities in study area. They expressed hope that in recognition of community support and willingness to play a crucial part in ecotourism, an engine for conservation and poverty reduction, a variety of education and training programs will be provided to communities. An expert respondent reported that environmental education programs have been designed and provided to tribal and local communities to increase their awareness about the value of natural resources and environment of the areas. When community members grow to be an environmentally well-informed, natural (also cultural) appreciation would be increased among them, providing healthier chance to manage tourism (ecotourism) in a sustainable manner. This idea was in some way supported through the results of analysis that ecotourism will have medium positive impacts on the strengthening of cultural and natural appreciation among local villagers.

Capacity of local communities could be strengthened via formal and informal education or via short-course training programs, according to Forest Range Officer of the Nagarahole (Rajiv Ghadi) National Forest. Capacity refers to the ability of the locals to understand and participate (or work) in ecotourism as well as conservation activities together with the ability to create and provide major and complementary services and products to tourists. The results of the analysis supports this viewpoint as ecotourism will provide high positive impacts in such a way, but the explanations of some respondents show that this benefit is based on how suitable these services and products are for the local setting and conditions. As said by an Education Specialist of the Sarva Shikshana Abhiyana (SSA), the Tribal Resettlement Scheme (TRS) is planning to provide two kinds of education programs to Kodagu district. First is the general education program and second is the specific environmental



and cultural program for the tribal concentrated areas. These will help local tribal people to increase their knowledge about the significance of their environment, biodiversity conservation, sanitation and hygiene improvement and the value of their culture. Through ecotourism and other environment awareness programs in the district, such programs will be prioritized and funded by the government via support and collaboration with other concerned agencies. As a result, local communities, particularly school-age children, would receive more opportunities to study higher. There was the same confidence among interviewed experts that good education and more job opportunities in the district would enhance better life and prosperity not only for the present communities, but also for the young generation. They mentioned that this is a part of contribution that a high positive impact of ecotourism could provide to improve education which is one of the long-term development objectives of the district. Even though the results of analysis show that ecotourism will generate only medium positive impacts on the stimulation of local livelihood approaches, most expert respondents interviewed clarified that the locals will have more livelihood alternatives. This would anyhow make them, especially those focus on the non-traditional export system and local resource support (like ecotourism), not to out-migrate to other areas. Instead, it would help people love what they have and prevent it, including the recognition, revitalization and preservation of their cultural resources (objects, events and activities).

The results of analysis also prove that ecotourism will provide high positive impacts on the improvement of knowledge, experience and vision of the locals through their constant interaction with tourists. A tourism expert mentioned that as long as their contact with tourists increase, they receive more access to information and communication, either through word-of-mouth or modern (cell phones) technology. Most expert respondents agreed that constant communication with educated tourists would help to open up people's minds about the outside world via the exchange and sharing of knowledge and experience. As much lessons and experiences as local communities and authorities could learn from tourists, especially from scientist / research / expert groups, they would use them to build up their quality of life and communities. This also supports the results of analysis that ecotourism development will cause high positive impacts on the increase of local sense of pride and willingness to participate in nature conservation and local development in their areas based on their improved knowledge and livelihood strategies.

Some interviewees mentioned that more benefits to the Nagarahole (Rajiv Gandhi) National Park and Dubare Elephant Camp residents would also come in a form of contribution from the Forest department, NGOs, and other civil society organizations which support the ecotourism initiative. These institutions have been very instrumental in and concerned with the establishment of settlements to local tribal, participatory Right to Education (RTE), and community support groups (Kodava

Samaja, Women Association, etc.). Their programs are substantially recognized as a social motive to promote local participation, encouragement and other local interests. They could facilitate negotiation between the coffee plantation owners and working labor groups through trainings, workshops and small-scale community-education programs. Thus, their supports and contributions would help build trust and network among community members and development teams. In addition, they would help to direct development plans, including ecotourism, to be more participatory and community-driven and help build local ownership and rights over resource access and consumption in the areas. Noticeably, most of the environmental and social experts questioned confirmed that a positive contribution could be forced in the improvement of local social capital, local negotiation skills, capacity of individuals, and conflict management and resolution skills among community members and authorities. A RTE Specialist explained that when local communities are empowered and given more control over natural resources and development benefits, they will participate proactively in development and conservation, regardless of gender, age, level of education and economic status.

In spite of many gains, the results of Likert Scale Analysis show that ecotourism will also create many medium negative impacts and some high negative impacts on local livelihoods and the management of the areas (see Table 1). It was mentioned by some experts who have been involved in Talacauvery (one of two Ecotourism Sites – Talacauvery and Bhagamandala) ecotourism that ecotourism would focus on niche markets. Therefore, it would not be able to favor all community members in terms of benefit distribution. According to the results of analysis and the clarification of some experts who have worked with OSW (Organization of Save Westernghat) and UNESCO, ecotourism initiative in the district has high positive impacts on income distribution and stakeholder involvement. They indicated that ecotourism might benefit only a small amount of villagers and institutions involved. The benefit recipients would be those who have direct connection with development and usually are compulsory business owners, members of local development authorities and community organizations, and implementing staffs. This is because these groups have more capabilities or capitals compared to working labors that represent the majority of population in the coffee plantation. This would lead to conflicts between each type (large/commercial, medium and small scale) of local coffee plantation owners as well as between local authorities, government institutions and community affiliates. Detail reasons from some experts interviewed could be interpreted that the empowered few would try to marginalize or conceal the rest of the communities in the areas in order to benefit solely from ecotourism-related gains. An anonymous respondent articulated that the same empowered few usually are those entitled to help to mobilize local resources necessary for ecotourism and to raise awareness among local people about biodiversity conservation. This is a threat to successful participatory ecotourism development because it leads to community

discontent and resistance about development plans. He explained that the higher dissatisfaction communities have, the more rejection and tension they will have on tourists and natural resources. This would make rural development mechanisms, which concentrate on collaborative and integrated livelihood approaches, in the district fail at the onset. This is due to logistical problem and the way that ecotourism revenue is not channeled properly for the well-being of the locals and all beneficiaries.

All NGO respondents paid more attention to the local empowerment, ownership rights and access rights to natural resources consumption in the district. They expressed their same worry that the responsible developer of ecotourism is more interested in Jungle Lodges and Resorts (JLR) than in the resolution of local livelihood problems. When Nagarahole (Rajiv Gandhi) National Park and Dubare Elephant Camp grow to be more environmentally concerned and are developed into full ecotourism destinations, some (or most) of the places will not be opened for local people/tribes. Thus, the result would be different from a vision that local livelihoods would be improved via ecotourism. Ecotourism (or its initiator in principle) would prevent local people from getting access to some potential ecotourism destinations. Apart from this concern, a majority of interviewed experts, especially environmental specialists, also projected a conflict over land use pattern and division of forest boundary for coffee plantation concession and ecotourism development areas.

From cultural perspectives, ecotourism could affect local communities in several ways if integrated management strategies are not taken into account. As shown in Table 1, a majority of expert respondents projected that ecotourism could present some high negative demonstration effects to local communities. They explained that when local people interact with and earn money from tourists, they would try to commoditize or commercialize their culture (e.g. traditional cultural performance and other cultural practices) to show to tourists. Maybe the patterns and authenticity of cultural activities, events and objects will be changed in order to respond to tourist interests and tour schedules. The lifestyle, stereotype and living culture of local people would be disrupted due to constant exposure to tourist culture. A peaceful and modest living environment would become dynamic and hectic; a slow pace of everyday life becomes busy and hasty just for a reason to survive in heavily-competed areas. A culture of modernity (in living and code of conduct) would be increased among the local people/tribes especially young villagers. When the youngsters recognize what or how to satisfy common tourists and the amount of money that they could earn from tourism, they would forget (or do not have time to learn) their traditional skills and knowledge applied before in their daily livelihoods. Another cultural concern was about the attitudes towards or behaviors of tourists in the areas. A tourism expert mentioned that in tourism industry tourists are treated as a king. Tourist satisfaction is the most important thing in tourism business. Therefore, every step of ecotourism

development in the district, compared to other neighbor district (e.g. Mysore, Hassan and Dakshina Kannada), would focus courteously on individuals or groups of tourists. Everything would be tourist-centered and tourist would be the first to serve and gratify but not the locals. Furthermore, since tourists have different qualities (e.g. culture, knowledge, respect etc.), some or most of them would disregard local custom, tradition and religion. This is inevitable and most likely to happen when tourists are not well informed about the purposes / benefits of ecotourism or not well targeted by ecotourism initiators in the areas.

The results also show other medium negative impacts of ecotourism on other aspects of local culture and social environment in study area. These include: overcrowding of the sites, children and youth abandon education in pursuit of tourism-related jobs, education in tourism places becomes touristic educational oriented, low sanitation in tourism places and drought of seasonal in-migrants into the district when the sites become fully developed. Distinctively, one negative ecotourism impact is shown as high on the change of community attitudes to be more interested in economic earnings than in development and conservation of the areas.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has conducted to highlight positive and negative socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism in the Kodagu district. The results have summarized as follows:

A. Positive socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism have strong in the improving local economy through receiving benefits from ecotourism. Ecotourism will push up local food security and local livelihood as high positive impacts. It contributes to development of infrastructure system and other social and public service like health condition, children education and access to safe drinking water. It also helps as an engine for conservation and poverty reduction.

B. Negative socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism are few such as ecotourism benefits are not evenly distributed in all stakeholders and local culture has commercialized through interact and earns money from tourists.

However, Kodagu district have desirable potentiality to growth and development of ecotourism when it can implemented in sustainable way with encourage of the concern people, local authorities and government.

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