



# The Importance of Community-Based Tourism in a Developing Country: A Study on the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh

Shelamony Hafsa<sup>1</sup> and Mohammed Mosaraf Hossain<sup>1\*</sup>

## Abstract

Community-based tourism has emerged as a transformative model in developing countries, aiming to enhance livelihoods and socio-economic status within local communities. Despite its widespread application globally, rural areas of Bangladesh, such as the Chittagong Hill Tracts, have seen limited adoption of this approach. This study investigates the potential of community-based tourism within the context of developing countries, with a specific focus on its applicability in the Chittagong Hill Tracts to uplift marginalized communities. Qualitative methods were employed to explore the positive impacts of community-based tourism, drawing insights from various scholarly articles, books, newspapers, publications of national and international organizations, and online resources. The findings underscore the potential of community-based tourism to alleviate poverty, foster socio-economic development, and promote natural and cultural conservation. Moreover, it highlights the importance of mitigating the adverse effects that traditional tourism often imposes on local communities. It is recommended that Bangladesh's tourism policymakers

embrace the community-based tourism model to maximize tourism benefits while bolstering the livelihoods of indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. By integrating this approach, there is an opportunity to empower local residents economically and culturally, thereby contributing to sustainable development goals within the region. This paradigm shift could not only diversify tourism offerings but also ensure equitable distribution of tourism revenues, fostering inclusive growth and community resilience.

**Keywords:** Community-based Tourism, Community Development, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh.

## Introduction

Tourism is generally considered as one of the important means of driving economic progress at national and international levels. Tourism creates job opportunities for the local people as well as contributes to the national GDP of a country. Community-based Tourism (CBT) ensures economic and social benefits through community participation in every stage of tourism planning, development, and management (Ashley & Garland, 1994; Bao, 2008). The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is blessed with too many natural resources which have become the most popular tourist attractions in Bangladesh. People of different communities also stayed here from the ancient period. They have unique cultural resources, traditions, lifestyles, dress and ornaments, occasions, festivals, and rituals which all could be considered as tourism products (Blackstock, 2005). But very few studies have been

**Significance** | Community-Based Tourism (CBT) can empower marginalized communities in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts, fostering sustainable development and cultural preservation.

\*Correspondence. Mohammed Mosaraf Hossain, Department of International Tourism and Hospitality Management, Primeasia University, Dhaka-1213, Bangladesh.  
E-mail: mosaraf.hossain@primeasia.edu.bd

Editor Abu Zafur Ziauddin Ahmed, And accepted by the Editorial Board Dec 28, 2020 (received for review Oct 06, 2020)

## Author Affiliation.

<sup>1</sup> Department of International Tourism and Hospitality Management, Primeasia University, Dhaka-1213, Bangladesh.

## Please cite this article.

Shelamony Hafsa, Mohammed Mosaraf Hossain, (2020). The Importance of Community-Based Tourism in a Developing Country: A Study on the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh, Journal of Primeasia, 1(1), 1-6, 560016

2523-210X/© 2020 PRIMEASIA, a publication of Eman Research, USA.  
This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license.  
(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).  
(<https://publishing.emanresearch.org>).

conducted on community development through tourism in the rural area of Bangladesh like CHT. Although the tourism sector is expanding day by day, the implementation of CBT in the CHT has not been considered as an essential part of tourism development, though many developing countries have good examples of CBT projects. That is why the major purpose of this study is to find out the importance of CBT in the context of developing countries so that it can be implemented in the CHT of Bangladesh. Identifying the potentiality of CBT is another aim of this paper as it is being applied in different parts of the world to develop the livelihood of local communities. The reason is that if CBT can be developed, there are huge opportunities to benefit the local communities by poverty alleviation, reduce the rate of illiteracy, conservation of natural, environmental, social, and cultural resources (Chan & Bhatta, 2013; Goodwin & Santilli, 2009).

It is expected that if the local communities involve directly with tourism activities through the CBT model, their living standard may improve alleviating poverty situation, education level may increase, natural, environmental as well as cultural resources can be conserved and socio-cultural development can be ensured (Islam & Carlsen, 2012). Many studies on community development through tourism in different countries have prevailed. This paper attempts to present information on different communities, the benefits of participating in CBT, policies on the advantages of CBT emphasizing community development of Bangladesh particularly in the CHT.

Several studies have been conducted on CBT in different countries in the world. CBT is a platform of community involvement in tourism development and management for the sustainable tourism industry. It has a parallel relationship between community participatory philosophies and community developments where community people own the controlling power on the whole process (Ife, 1995). Similarly, CBT can be applied as a tool of sustainable tourism industry studying on North Queensland tourism destinations. Okazaki (2008) examines how a CBT model works in community participation levels in Palawan, the Philippines, where a community-based ecotourism project has been implemented by the indigenous community. The model of CBT helps to build a good relationship among the elements like community participation, power redistribution, and collaboration processes in managing tourism projects. He also suggests that the stakeholders of tourism development can use the CBT model to enhance community participation because community participation will help to get the maximum benefits from CBT. Goodwin and Santilli (2009) stated that local people of tourist destinations can meet their social, environmental, and economic needs through CBT. They argue that the success and benefits of CBT on the local community are not monitored properly in developing countries although many projects are implemented. A limited number of studies found on

the genuine output of CBT on the community livelihood (Islam & Carlsen, 2012). A study on the potentials of CBT in poverty reduction in Kenya. As United Nations World Tourism Organization emphasizes the contribution of micro-level tourism initiatives in poverty reduction and economic development Kenya government adopts community-based enterprises (CBEs). This study measures the critical success factors of the CBEs. A similar study is found in Lao People's Democratic Republic where examines the role of CBT in poverty alleviation. They mention that tourism was introduced as a development tool first time in the 1970s. Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Netherlands Development Agency helped to implement some projects like CBT to facilitate tourist movement in Mekong Basin as a part of the poverty alleviation strategy. That is why CBT is also considered in Lao as a form of pro-poor tourism. Likewise, study the contribution of CBT on development and poverty alleviation in Nicaragua. The result shows that the bottom-up CBT model is more effective in the quick growth of the local economy and positive impact on it rather than traditional top-down CBT. Also, researches the development of CBT for rural and isolated communities in Papua New Guinea. This study emphasizes the impact of the development of CBT. An empirical study is also found on CBT in developing countries particularly in El Salvador conducted by (Novelli & Gebhardt, 2007). The community, in this study, believes that tourism development in rural areas can create job opportunities and generate wealth.

Limited number of studies on the relevant topic have been found in Bangladesh. Some researchers have conducted the study based on poverty alleviation as a tool of community development in different countries. In most cases, developing countries and their rural areas, as well as poor communities, were the main field of study. Some studies show the contribution of tourism in this regard whereas some studies demonstrate the positive and negative impacts of tourism. It is suggested that poverty alleviation can be a significant objective of CBT in rural areas in developing countries. Although the CHT in Bangladesh is full of natural beauty, most of the Indigenous people living in this area.

### Materials and Methods

A qualitative study has been conducted and secondary sources of data have been used to develop this paper. A wide range of journal articles, books, newspaper articles, reports, and publications of different national and international tourism organizations as well as published information on different websites have been reviewed critically to prepare this paper. Primarily, the positive and negative impacts of the CBT have been identified precisely from the experiences of different developing countries on which a potentiality of the model for rural areas like the CHT has been found out. Several limitations have also been analyzed to implement

the CBT on the CHT reviewing the publications. Based on the previous publications some examples from different countries have been drawn in implementing CBT projects in the rural areas so that the CBT model can be adopted in the CHT in Bangladesh.

It is known that CBT is a modern concept of tourism relatively different from mass tourism activities. Most of the tourism developing countries apply CBT as a community development project in rural areas. [13] Presents several strategies and projects of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) for community and rural development in many Asian countries such as rural tourism development master plan for Malaysia, CBT development plan for Indonesia, development of community-based Tourism guidelines for Mongolia, and institutional strengthening and capacity building project for Timor-Leste. Likewise, there are also several case studies on Asian countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Iran on the community development program. In Nepal, one of the notable development initiatives is the 'tourism for rural poverty alleviation program' (TRPAP) initiated in 2001 especially for poor people, marginalized women, rural areas, and the environment (Wearing et al, 2002). CBT has direct & indirect influences in boosting the economic, environmental as well as socio-cultural development of Bangladesh through ensuring the participation of the local community in tourism activities. It will create additional job opportunities for the person living in Chittagong hill tracts which indirectly improves their educational level, living standards & increase people's awareness about their local resource conservation. From various studies, it has been found that several developing countries like Thailand, Malaysia are focusing on developing CBT in their resourceful villages to improve their standard of living but those countries who want to implement CBT have a specific model or guidelines for the implementation of CBT in any particular area. In terms of Bangladesh, several models or guidelines have been proposed by different scholars but still, now they don't have any recognized model or guidelines through which they can practice CBT in their area. So, it's high time to develop specific guidelines for specific parts of the country (Like CHT) with the concern of different tourism scholars as well as coordination of countries' concern authority (BTB, BPC) for enjoying the benefits of CBT.

### Results and Discussion

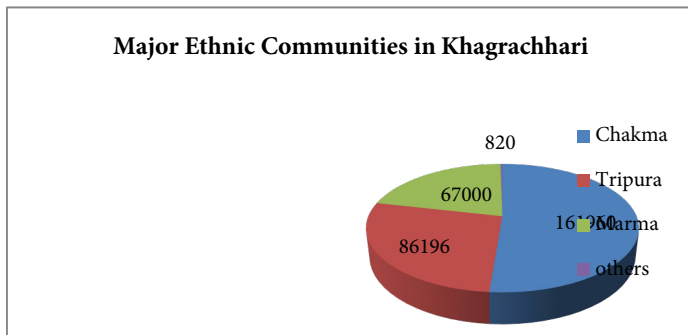
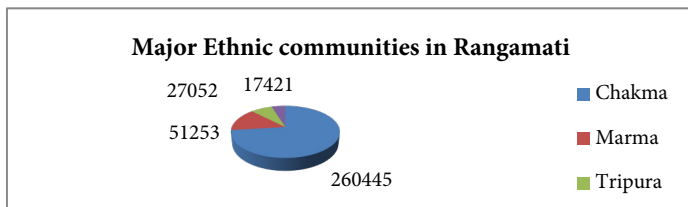
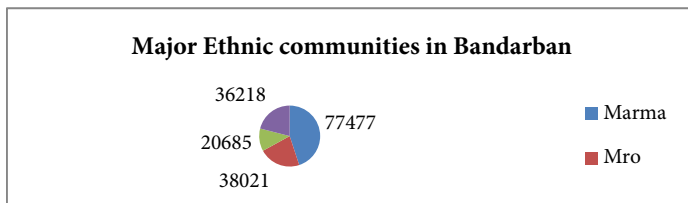
Diverse ethnic groups are living in different regions of Bangladesh mainly in the CHT. Ethnic communities have cultural differences although they live combined in different villages of hill tracts. One-third of the total communities are living in the CHT region (Polnyotee.; 2015). They also have their traditional social systems, customs, language, literature, food, habits, festivals, and religious practice. According to the published calendar (2020) of CHTDB (Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board) following table 1 is

prepared: According to another source, there are 8, 45,541 indigenous people, and 7, 52,690 Bangali people in three hill districts. The proportion of the population of the ethnic groups, recognized as ethnic minorities by the government, of three hill districts are presented separately. In the Bandarban district, the population of Marma community is 77, 477, the population of Mr Community is 38, 021, the population of Tripura community is 20,685 and the population of remaining other communities are collectively 36, 218. In the Rangamati district the population of Chakma community is 2, 60, 445, the population of Marma community is 51, 235, the population of Tripura community is 27,052 and the populations of the remaining other communities are 17, 421. And in Khagrachari district the population of Chakma community is 161, 960, the population of Tripura community is 86, 196, the population of Marma community is 67,000 and the population of other communities is collectively 820 fig. 1 respectively.

The study reveals that the Chittagong Hill Tracts consisting of three districts Khagrachhari, Rangamati, and Bandarban have huge potentials for flourishing tourism. The CHT is ethnically, culturally, and topographically diverse with a population of 1.6 million people. About 50% of the total population of these areas is from different ethnic people. Each ethnicity has a unique culture, lifestyle, traditions, dress, and occasions which all could be attractive tourism products. Although they have unique tourism products as well as natural tourism places but many of them are living below standard life due to poor employment opportunities. If they can ensure their participation in tourism activities then they can easily sell their unique tourism products to tourists & enhance their living standards. Community-Based Tourism will help to increase the income of the local community and will make people self-reliant. The most important benefit of CBT is the change in locals' outlook on life and themselves. CBT may open up the horizons of the future for the community, giving hope and therefore a willingness for locals to get involved, produce and take control of their lives. So, CBT is important for community people of CHT to improve socio-economic conditions. Community participation is another key factor of successful tourism. That is why many researchers attempted to find out the specific role of community participation in tourism development for ensuring community benefits. CBT will help to create the potential for empowering the community, enhancing their involvement in decision making, and ensuring the environmental and cultural conservation as well as the overall development of the community (Satarat.; 2010). Community-based tourism is considered one of the development weapons of any country. Thus, multiple factors that the respondents perceive as significant in the successful management of CBT in their community are possible. According to the overall response, community participation, tourism resources, and natural resource

**Table 1.** Number of different community’s people in the CHT.

Community	The approximate number of people	Community	The approximate number of people
Bawm	12, 424	Pangkhoa	2, 274
Chak	2, 835	Tanchangya	44, 254
Chakma	4, 44, 748	Tripura	1, 34, 145
Khyang	3, 899	Mro	39, 004
Khumi	3, 369	Marma	2, 02, 174
Lushai	959	Bangali	6, 95, 256



**Figure 1.** Distribution of Ethnic communities in different districts.

awareness are perceived as the top three success factors of CBT with strong community leaders and effective community organization as the fourth and the fifth (Vajirakachorn.; 2011). CTB is intended as a tool for community development and environmental conservation. Understanding the community situation will help to maximize the capacity of CBT to act as an effective and sustainable community development strategy. CBT will ensure various environmental sites like natural resource management rights, natural resource conservation, and so on. Formal and informal education is provided to the community for preserving the local culture and traditions (Wimalaratana.; 2009).

Although several positive outcomes have been identified to implement the CBT model in the CHT a range of limitations and challenges have also been found. These are: Insufficient laws and policies regarding implementation and monitoring CBT in the CHT, Insufficient role of National Tourism Authorities such as Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB), and Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) in the promotion of ethnic resources of the CHT, Lack of awareness of both guest (tourist) and host community, No training facilities for tourist guides and tour operators, Communication barriers between guest and host community, Communal unrest situations, Conflicts among local political parties, Safety and security problems, Lack of local community involvement in both planning and executing tourism activities, Lack of local government involvement in tourism and so on.

### Conclusion

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), nestled in the southeastern region of Bangladesh, boast natural beauty and cultural diversity. This study aims to explore the potential of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) as a catalyst for local development in this developing country context. It highlights the benefits of CBT in engaging diverse communities, enhancing their livelihoods through direct involvement in tourism planning, development, and management. Despite limited application in the CHT, similar models in other developing countries have successfully uplifted rural communities. The region presents a promising opportunity to implement CBT, bridging gaps caused by insufficient policies and occasional communal unrest. The study underscores the marginalized status of many ethnic groups within the region, despite burgeoning tourism. It advocates for the introduction of CBT as a means to integrate local communities more effectively into the tourism sector, fostering sustainable development with support from national tourism authorities and local governance.

### Author contributions

M.M.H., conceptualized and developed the methodology. S.H., prepared the original draft and collected data and reviewed and edited the writing.

### Acknowledgment

The author thanks the Department of International Tourism and Hospitality Management, Primeasia University, Dhaka-1213, Bangladesh.

### Competing financial interests

The authors have no conflict of interest.

### References

- Akhter, N., & Rahman, M. (2017). Community-based tourism in Bangladesh: A case study of Bandarban Hill District. *European Journal of Social Sciences Studies*, 2(7), 61-75.
- Ashley, C., & Garland, E. B. (1994). Promoting community-based tourism development: Why, what, and how? Directorate of Environmental Affairs, Ministry of Environment and Tourism.
- Ashley, C., & Garland, E. B. (1994). Promoting community-based tourism development: Why, what, and how? Directorate of Environmental Affairs, Ministry of Environment and Tourism.
- Bao, J. (2008). Tourism and community development: Asian practices. *Tourism and community development: Asian practices*.
- Bao, J. (2008). Tourism and community development: Asian practices. *Tourism and community development: Asian practices*.
- Blackstock, K. (2005). A critical look at community-based tourism. *Community development journal*, 40(1), 39-49.
- Blackstock, K. (2005). A critical look at community-based tourism. *Community development journal*, 40(1), 39-49.
- Chan, R., & Bhatta, K. D. (2013). Ecotourism planning and sustainable community development: Theoretical perspectives for Nepal. *South Asian Journal of Tourism & Heritage*, 6(1), 1-5.
- Chan, R., & Bhatta, K. D. (2013). Ecotourism planning and sustainable community development: Theoretical perspectives for Nepal. *South Asian Journal of Tourism & Heritage*, 6(1), 1-5.
- Chowdhury, M. M. I., & Rahman, M. (2019). Indigenous peoples' participation in community-based tourism: A case study from the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 14(4), 359-374.
- Goodwin, H., & Santilli, R. (2009). Community-based tourism: A success. *ICRT Occasional paper*, 11(1), 37.
- Goodwin, H., & Santilli, R. (2009). Community-based tourism: A success. *ICRT Occasional paper*, 11(1), 37.
- Haque, A. N., & Rahman, M. M. (2019). The role of community-based tourism in empowering indigenous women: A case study from the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 65, 78-88.

- Hossain, M. S., & Hasan, M. (2020). The role of community-based tourism in sustainable development: A case study of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 28(6), 821-839.
- Ife, J. W. (1995). *Community development: Creating community alternatives-vision, analysis and practice*. Longman Australia.
- Ife, J. W. (1995). *Community development: Creating community alternatives-vision, analysis and practice*. Longman Australia.
- Islam, F., & Carlsen, J. (2012). Tourism in rural Bangladesh: Unlocking opportunities for poverty alleviation? *Tourism Recreation Research*, 37(1), 37-45.
- Islam, F., & Carlsen, J. (2012). Tourism in rural Bangladesh: Unlocking opportunities for poverty alleviation? *Tourism Recreation Research*, 37(1), 37-45.
- Islam, F., & Carlsen, J. (2016). Indigenous communities, tourism development and extreme poverty alleviation in rural Bangladesh. *Tourism Economics*, 22(3), 645-654.
- Islam, F., & Carlsen, J. (2016). Indigenous communities, tourism development and extreme poverty alleviation in rural Bangladesh. *Tourism Economics*, 22(3), 645-654.
- Islam, M. S., & Hossain, M. S. (2019). Community-based tourism development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts: A sustainable approach. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 18(3), 225-240.
- Karim, A., & Bhuiyan, A. (2020). Community-based tourism development: A pathway to sustainable livelihoods in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh. *International Journal of Community Well-Being*, 3(2), 217-233.
- Khaleque, M. A., & Islam, M. R. (2021). Empowering indigenous communities through community-based tourism: A case study of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 1-19.
- Novelli, M., & Gebhardt, K. (2007). Community-based tourism in Namibia: 'Reality show' or 'window dressing'? *Current Issues in Tourism*, 10(5), 443-479.
- Novelli, M., & Gebhardt, K. (2007). Community-based tourism in Namibia: 'Reality show' or 'window dressing'? *Current Issues in Tourism*, 10(5), 443-479.
- Okazaki, E. (2008). A community-based tourism model: Its conception and use. *Journal of sustainable tourism*, 16(5), 511-529.
- Polnyotee, M., & Thadaniti, S. (2015). Community-based tourism: A strategy for sustainable tourism development of Patong Beach, Phuket Island, Thailand. *Asian Social Science*, 11(27), 90.
- Satarat, N. (2010). *Sustainable Management of Community Based Tourism in Thailand* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <http://libdcms.nida.ac.th/thesis6/2010/b166706.pdf>
- Vajirakachorn, T. (2011). *Determinants of success for community-based tourism: The case of floating markets in Thailand*. Texas A&M University.
- Wimalaratana, W., & Silva, D. A. C. (2009). Community Based Sustainable Tourism: A Case Study of the Monaragala District. *Sri Lanka Journal of Agrarian Studies*, 13(1), 23-44.