



Research Paper

Towards an ecotourism policy: global practices and the lessons for Jammu and Kashmir

Mustafa Malik

College of Economics, Management and Information Systems, University of Nizwa, Sultanate of Oman

Corresponding author E-mail: mustafamalik@unizwa.edu.om

Received: 18/09/2018

Revised: 08/10/2018

Accepted: 21/10/2018

Abstract: Jammu and Kashmir, the Himalayan state, lying in the northernmost part of India, is famously known as *Paradise on Earth* for the fact that nature has bestowed the region with immense idyllic natural beauty and unique heritage and culture - an ideal ecotourism destination by all means. The tourist arrivals to the state have steadily kept increasing, even though the state has witnessed turmoil over the past three decades. Unfortunately the state has not seen a similar growth in the eco-friendly tourism infrastructure, even when tourism to the state is being promoted as a peace strategy. The lack of a robust tourism (more specifically ecotourism) policy in the state has led to the haphazard tourism development with uncontrolled consequences on the environment and the local communities. This study conducts an analysis on present state of ecotourism policy in the State, and proposes a sustainable ecotourism policy framework. The study uses benchmarking approach to analyze ecotourism best practices within the country and from selected countries around the world. The proposed ecotourism policy framework will provide

insights to the tourism policy makers in the state towards establishing a robust and sustainable ecotourism policy.

Keywords: ecotourism, sustainability, policy, Jammu & Kashmir

INTRODUCTION

Tourism plays an important role in the economic development of many countries around the world. Yet it brings immense negative impacts on the local environment, culture and communities in absence of proper policy and planning (Gartner, 1996; Inskeep, 1991; Smith 1989). One of the major concerns of the contemporary tourism is to develop and promote alternative sustainable tourism ideas, those that are economically beneficial and at the same time do not compromise or conflict with a destination's social, cultural, environmental and future generation needs. Promoting eco-tourism (as a responsible tourism idea) is among the best options that supports and promotes sustainable tourism agenda.

Ecotourism evolved during 1980s as a direct result of the world's acknowledgement and reaction to sustainable and global ecological practices

(Diamantis, 1999). The realization of tourism policy makers and promoters about negative impacts of mass tourism on destination environment together with the emerging shifts of consumers (tourists) away from mass tourism towards more individualistic and enriching experiences (Diamantis, 1999), gave rise to the development of alternative forms of tourism under the banner of ecotourism. Ecotourism advocated protection and preservation of natural and cultural environment while encouraging economic development (Sisman, 1994) and is being perceived as high value low volume enterprise that has a potential to be a prosperous economic industry as well as deliver ecologically sustainable development to the regions that have unique natural environment (Courvisanos, and Jain 2006). No doubt, ecotourism has the potential to create positive environmental and social impacts; it can unfortunately be as damaging as mass tourism if not properly done and managed (Megan, 2002), as it involves rare and pristine landscapes. The tourists, by their very presence, result in some degradation of the environment, however small that may be (Courvisanos and Jain, 2006), and its intensity enhances overtime once the attractions get more familiar with the visitors and the frequency of visits to these destinations increase.

Since ecotourism is nature based and encompasses varied forms and themes of tourism in practice – from adventure tourism to agro-tourism; from nature based tourism to community tourism; from experience and special interest tourism to wildlife tourism etc., and there is a thin line between tourism and eco-tourism, it demands proper policy, regulation and management and not a mere lip service from the governments and practitioners. The proper policy, planning and control of ecotourism destinations have evolved as

the globally identified need (Martin and Uysal, 1990).

The state of Jammu and Kashmir (read J&K hereafter) lying in the northern-most part of India, famously known as *Paradise on Earth*, is endowed with immense potential of being an excellent ecotourism destination. The breathtakingly pristine floral and faunal resources, including lush-green hill stations, snow clad mountain, vast pasture lands, rivers, lakes, valleys, backwaters, wildlife sanctuaries etc. makes it a visitor's paradise. The tourist arrivals to the state have steadily kept increasing, even though the state has witnessed turmoil over the past three decades - a very positive indication of the region being tourist and tourism friendly. Yet unfortunately the state has not seen any significant growth in the tourism infrastructure, leave alone eco-friendly tourism infrastructure. The state government included ecotourism as a strategy in the J&K State Forest Policy in 2010 with certain proposed actions, however it does not elaborate upon their implementation. The state's Department of Tourism came up with a Draft Tourism Policy in 2015 which identifies promotion of eco-tourism as core tourism activity in the state supported by eco-friendly infrastructure, but remains silent upon its implementation. In 2016 and later in 2017, the state government for the first time issued a draft eco-tourism policy, inviting comments and suggestion from the stakeholders. The draft ecotourism policies of 2016 and 2017 though identified vision; objectives; strategies; management; and impact assessment of ecotourism, these do not elaborate upon actual policy performance indicators (PIs); criteria for impact assessment; roles of different committees; coordination among different departments and stakeholders etc. Thus, eco-tourism though found a mention in various tourism related plans and policies of the state, still there is lack of a robust

eco-tourism policy in the state. In absence of such a policy, tourism is being haphazardly developed with uncontrolled consequences on the environment and the local communities.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is a descriptive study of ecotourism policy initiatives of selected states in India and certain selected countries around the world to develop benchmarks for ecotourism policy in Jammu and Kashmir. Various ecotourism principles such as conservation and protection of natural environment, stakeholder involvement, community benefits and wellbeing, and environmental education and awareness among stakeholders etc. have been considered. The study uses comparative analysis and benchmarking approach to compare the J&K's eco-tourism policy preparation and planning with the eco-tourism policies of other eco-tourism promoting states in India as well as selected countries around the world to identify best practices in eco-tourism. After analyzing the existing ecotourism policy initiatives and practices, policy gaps for Jammu and Kashmir has been identified. An eco-tourism policy framework for the state of J&K is presented and certain policy recommendations are made. The proposed policy framework and recommendations may help J&K to improve its ecotourism policy initiatives and in return would ensure sustained ecotourism growth in the state.

1. *Eco-tourism – global trends*

Ecotourism has emerged as an alternative form of tourism that is not only economically viable and environmentally sustainable, but it goes much deeper to support protection of local culture and heritage as well as embraces community development through local peoples' involvement and engagement. Presently ecotourism is described as one of the

fastest growing sub-sectors of tourism across the world. Although there is no commonly acceptable data available that presents actual number of eco-tourists and its impacts around the world, various studies show that ecotourism is evolving as a significant contributor to the world tourist arrivals and earnings. Filion et al. (1994), presented that while 32% of visitors to Australia and New Zealand search for the scenery, wild plants and wildlife as part of their trip; 80% of the total tourists visiting Africa, and 69-88% of the European and Japanese tourists visiting North America considered wildlife and bird watching to be the most important attribute of their visits. According to Travel Guard Update 2013 (www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org), 24% of the travelers surveyed preferred green destinations. The same study showed that according to the travel agents surveyed, 38% tourists prefer archeological sites, 22% prefer wildlife and bird watching, 18% prefer visiting national parks and 16% prefer visiting local culture and communities. According to Conde Nast Traveler readers' survey 2017 (www.lodgingmagazine.com), there is a growing desire among tourist for simplicity during travel. Instead of "multi-destination, run-around-see-everything spots," the survey says, more travelers are looking to "kick back, relax, and enjoy the place", and when it comes to destinations (and getting there), secondary cities and smaller airports are more popular than ever.

Lately there has been a considerable change in the tourist consumer behavior. The growing trend among majority of the global travelers is - to explore newer-unexplored destinations, be more responsible visitors, be sensitive to a destination's culture and values, get involved and experience their stay in authentic settings. The demand for environmentally and socially responsible

products and services is on rise and consumers are even ready to pay more for these services that are sustainable in nature and focus on conservation and protection of local environments and cultures (Yaiza, and Juan, 2016).

These trends show that the ecotourism segment is rapidly growing all around the world. Nevertheless, there is a growing concern that the growth of ecotourism at ecologically sensitive and fragile sites may lead to higher tourist footfall, exceeding the carrying capacities of such sites, and thus lead to a newer form of mass tourism. Thus many ecotourism sites are facing the danger of turning into a newer mass tourism sites. This necessitates, more than ever, that destination managers are aware of the role they need to play in managing destination sustainability and facilitate and encourage all stakeholders to do the same. Therefore, a robust ecotourism policy should ensure not only protection and preservation of destinations but also ensure local community development through enhancing their participation and economic benefits.

2. National-level Eco-Tourism Policy initiatives in India

The protection and conservation of natural ecosystems and resources, which is the core essence of ecotourism, finds mention in the Article 51 (A) (g) of the Constitution of India under the Directive Principles of State Policy which stipulates that it shall be the fundamental duty of every citizen 'to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures'. Though, Government of India (GOI), through its Ministry of Tourism, brought its first National Tourism Policy in 1982, there has been no direct ecotourism policy at national level till 1998, when the Ministry of Tourism, GOI, issued the Ecotourism Policy and Guidelines for the first time. Nevertheless, before the Ecotourism

Policy and Guidelines of 1998, the GOI has adopted various ecological and environmental conservation models complemented with stringent regulations such as Environmental Protection Act, 1986; Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 (amended 1993 and 2002); Forest Conservation Act, 1980; Biological Diversity Act, 2002; Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006; Environment Impact Assessment Notification, 2006 etc.

The Ecotourism Policy and Guidelines of 1998, though a welcome step towards a concerted effort in promoting the country as a potential ecotourism destination, emphasized on environmental protection for the sake of profits. While it considered all ecosystems in India as ecotourism resources, listed various principles that govern the ecotourism, and identified key players and their roles in ecotourism businesses, it lacked to recognize local communities as important stakeholders in ecotourism development, instead reduced their role to mere providing of services to tourism, as 'hosts'. The policy failed to recognize the inherent link between ecotourism and the local communities'-social, cultural, economic and institutional processes. Another national ecotourism policy initiative came from The Ministry of Environment, GOI, in the form of Guidelines for Ecotourism in and Around Protected Areas, 2011. This guideline is, no doubt, limited to the protected areas such as national parks, bio-reserves, wildlife parks etc. The preamble of the guideline recognizes ecotourism as means to protect the natural ecosystems and their wilderness, and its potential to contribute to the economic wellbeing of the local communities, and recognizes local communities as stakeholders and owners in the whole process. It stipulates that the first benefits of ecotourism in the protected areas must go to the local people, and in

the long-run capacity-building should be carried out to forge a sustainable partnership between the forest department, tourism professionals and local communities (Guidelines for Ecotourism in and Around Protected Areas, 2011) – thereby encouraging a stakeholder approach to ecotourism.

3. *Tourism and eco-tourism policy initiatives in Jammu and Kashmir*

Tourism is considered as the potential economic growth sector of the state and a backbone of the state's economy which otherwise is mainly dependent on agricultural, horticultural and livestock activities. Socio-political instability has prevailed in the state over the last three decades which has been a setback to the state's tourism industry; nevertheless it has witnessed a surge in the overall tourist arrivals during past few years. Despite tourism being one of the potential contributors to the state's economy, the Government has failed to formulate a comprehensive tourism policy in the state, a report published in The Indian Express on March 18, 2017, said. It is obvious that in the absence of any concerted general tourism policy in the state, a comprehensive and more specific ecotourism policy remains only a dream. No doubt the State Government has taken some initiatives towards formulating tourism policy in general and ecotourism policy in specific, over the last few years, but these policy documents or initiatives are still being called 'draft documents' despite passing of many years. The various policy steps that the State government has taken by and large are:

3.1 Formation of J&K Tourism Advisory Board: The Government of J&K for the first time in 2015, constituted a 23 member Tourism Advisory Board, chaired by the Chief Minister of the State with an array of experts from the industry, government, and academia. The Board was re-constituted in 2017 vide the J&K Government Order

number 23 TSM of 2017 issued on 16.11.2017, and its membership was extended to 36. Since its establishment the Board has met twice, first time in November 2015 and second time in May 2017. During its first meeting in 2015, the board raised a need to expedite the process of formalizing a comprehensive tourism policy for the State (a draft tourism policy was issued by the Department of Tourism in February 2015). According to a report published in *Kashmir News Services* on May 29, 2017, the Tourism Advisory Board in its second meeting in May, 2017 discussed the draft tourism policy and proposed to further seek the suggestions and views of the stakeholders.

3.2 J&K Draft Tourism Policy: the J&K Department of Tourism for the first time issued a draft tourism policy in 2015 on its website (the draft tourism policy is available at http://www.jktourism.org/images/new_draft_trsm_policy.pdf). It has set a vision to position the state as a leading global tourism destination by 2025. The policy identifies various strategies related to promotion, packaging and diversification of state's tourism product. Though it proposes an institutional framework comprising of various committees, the specificities of these committees are not explained. The policy, even after three and half years of its release is still in a draft form and open to public for suggestions. It is high time that the Government speeds-up the process to formalize it.

3.3 Policies related to eco-tourism: The State Government for the first time included *ecotourism* as a strategy in the J&K State Forest Policy in 2010 with certain proposed actions (though it does not elaborate upon the implementation of these actions). The State's Draft Tourism Policy of 2015 identifies promotion of eco-tourism as core tourism activity in the state supported by eco-friendly infrastructure. In 2017, the State's Forest, Environment and

Ecology Department, for the first time issued a draft eco-tourism policy, inviting comments and suggestion from the stakeholders. The policy though identified vision; objectives; strategies; management; and impact assessment of ecotourism, it does elaborate upon an institutional framework for its implementation, actual policy performance indicators (PIs); criteria for impact assessment; roles of different committees; coordination among different departments and stakeholders etc. For ecotourism to be properly implemented, ecotourism stakeholders are dependent on governments to develop policies that will protect and manage natural resources (Megan E. W. 2002). Eco-tourism though found a mention in various tourism related plans and policies of the state, still there is lack of a robust eco-tourism policy in the state. In absence of such a policy, tourism is being haphazardly developed with uncontrolled consequences on the environment and the local communities.

4. Benchmarking national and international ecotourism policy best practices:

To meet the objectives of ecotourism a focused and concerted policy approach is a basic requirement. The sustainability and success of ecotourism will directly depend on the identified course of actions in an ecotourism policy followed by an institution. The basic objective of an ecotourism policy nevertheless, should be to provide tools for regulating growth of tourism within socially, culturally,4.1.1 environmentally and economically viable and acceptable limits. The policy should set criteria for effective identification, evaluation and mitigation of impacts; and develop an effective institutional framework for effective policy implementation. To guide effective ecotourism development through an appropriate ecotourism policy, benchmarking national and international

best practices can be useful. This section identifies ecotourism best-practices nationally and internationally to propose an ecotourism policy framework for the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

4.1 National ecotourism policy best practices:

The national Ecotourism Policy and Guidelines of 1998, mandates and encourages the states to have their own ecotourism policies. Over the past two decades, various states across the country have vigorously campaigned for promotion of ecotourism. Yet there appears a confusion surrounding not only in the definition of ecotourism adapted by these states and what they want to achieve, but also the way their ecotourism policies are structured. For example, whereas Himachal Pradesh Ecotourism Policy uses stakeholder approach to ecotourism development with a detailed institutional set up, Chhattisgarh considers tourism development as the primary task of the private sector with the state's role limited to facilitation only. On the other hand Madhya Pradesh Eco & Adventure Tourism Policy, has purely business orientation where private participation and financial considerations are emphasized, at the same time Kerala emphasis on participatory ecotourism programs to regulate unplanned tourism growth. Regardless of the weaknesses the ecotourism policies of various states have, this section identifies ecotourism best policy practices across selected ecotourism promoting states in India.

Karnataka: The state introduced Wilderness Tourism Policy in 2003, established an Ecotourism Development Board in 2013. Although the state is yet to bring a specific ecotourism policy, the ecotourism development board of the state considers institutional structure; guidelines and frameworks; awareness and education; opportunities for training and capacity building among stakeholders; community involvement and standards and

certification as vital to the state's ecotourism development (www.karnatakaecotourism.com).

4.1.2 *Kerala*: The state of Kerala is one of the pioneering ecotourism promoting states in the country. The state was the first in India to bring in eco-certification scheme under Kerala Tourism Eco-Initiative 2004, to make each tourism sub-sector eco-friendly. The Participatory Ecotourism program of the Forest Department in 2005 was pioneering step to directly involve the community into ecotourism projects by making provisions to provide financial assistance for establishing community ecotourism.

4.1.3 *Himachal Pradesh*: The state issued revised Ecotourism Policy in 2017. The policy identifies low-impact facilities, positive host and visitor experiences, environmental and cultural awareness, conservation and local community benefits as its core principles. The state's forest department has established Ecotourism Societies at the state, division and circle levels to facilitate ecotourism through public private partnership. The policy has an emphasis on community based ecotourism with a well detailed institutional setup (HP Ecotourism Policy 2017, available at www.hpforest.nic.in).

4.1.4 *Madhya Pradesh*: The state's Tourism Department issued an Eco & Adventure Tourism Policy in 2002. Later in 2005, the state established Madhya Pradesh Ecotourism Development Board as an autonomous organization in the state's forest department in 2005. Presently the state's ecotourism is governed by ecotourism guidelines as enacted in the State's Forest Policy 2005 and the State's Tourism Policy 2012 (www.mfp.mpforest.org). These policy guidelines focus on proper management and development of conserved and protected area, minimizing ecological and environmental impacts, constant monitoring of the adverse effects from

ecotourism activities, specially trained staff to engage in the operations of ecotourism activities, encouraging private investments in the ecotourism projects.

4.1.5 *Goa*: Though Goa does not have separate ecotourism policy, the State's Forest Policy 2009, sets provisions for ecotourism development in the state. The policy identifies preservation and conservation of natural areas, measuring and controlling erosion, increase in tree cover, and securing people's involvement in promoting ecotourism as core principles.

4.2 Eco-tourism: International best practices:

Internationally various initiatives have been taken to establish standards and principles for ecotourism. The Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism, 2002 identified four specific principles that distinguish ecotourism from any other form of tourism. These are - conservation of natural and cultural heritage; involvement of local and indigenous communities in the planning, development, and operations and their wellbeing; interpretation of natural and cultural heritage to visitors; cater to individual travelers as well as organized tours of small sized groups. Similarly the International Ecotourism Society through its revised ecotourism principles of 2015 identified - minimizing impacts; environmental and cultural awareness; positive experience of both visitors and hosts; financial benefits for conservation; financial benefits for community and private industry; interpretation of destination to visitors; construction and operation of low-impact facilities; and respect of rights and beliefs of local community and their empowerment - as core principles on which ecotourism should be based. The Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism 2002, further emphasized on the member countries to formulate ecotourism policies at national, regional

and local government levels in due consultation with all ecotourism stakeholders. The following section discusses ecotourism initiatives in different countries.

4.2.1 *Australia:* Australian ecotourism has long been championed as amongst the best in the world (Dowling, R. K. 2002). It was one of the first countries in the world to prepare a national ecotourism plan in 1994. Since then the country has made remarkable accomplishments in ecotourism including a range of ecotourism strategies, setting up of national and local ecotourism associations, publication of an annual ecotourism industry guide, establishing best practice ecotourism techniques, setting up ecotourism education and training courses, and developing the national ecotourism accreditation scheme (Dowling, 2001). One of the pioneering steps has been the establishment of Ecotourism Australia, a not for profit organization focused on inspiring environmentally sustainable and culturally responsible tourism (www.ecotourism.org.au). The organization's whitepaper titled 'Ecotourism Australia – Blueprint for a sustainable future' considers protection of parks, involving operators, investing in the future and incentivize quality as core principles of ecotourism. Each of the Australian states and territories have their own autonomous ecotourism plans and strategies, for example Queensland Ecotourism Plan 2013-2020, which focuses on quality environment and visitor experience through 'best practice ecotourism' with assured assistance to private operators regarding certification, training and incentives. The plan strives to facilitate best practice and innovation to increase indigenous ecotourism opportunities, and investment into ecotourism products.

4.2.2 *USA:* The ecotourism industry in U.S. is predominantly privately owned and locally

managed. Several land and water management agencies such as, National Park Service, National Forest Service, U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management and National Marine Fisheries Service, coordinate to promote ecotourism in the country. Although the regulations governing ecotourism vary from state to state depending on their location and status, the land use and management activities are generally delegated to local (county or municipal) levels. The U.S experience indicates that a number of variables such as carrying capacity, seasonal issues, community involvement and support, environmental impact assessment, environmental education and on-site interpretation, are important in planning, developing and maintaining successful ecotourism operations. As a result various ecotourism providers are practicing environmental friendly and sustainable operations such as Eco-lodges that run on alternative power sources have emerged throughout Alaska; and California offers 'urban ecotourism' with over 125,000 green jobs (www.theculturetrip.com).

4.2.3 *Canada:* The ecotourism sector in Canada uses collaborative approach, as evidenced by numerous regional and local ecotourism associations that are active in collaborating various ecotourism stakeholders at local levels and establishing quality standards for ecotourism best practices, such as Adventure Travel Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia Adventure Tourism Association, Ecotourism Society of Saskatchewan, and BC Wilderness Tourism Association etc. The Canadian government provides funding and technical assistance to not only individual startups but also to these associations and recognizes them as chosen representatives of the sector (Canadian Tourism Commission). In 2006, Canada started working with Sweden and Finland on a project called Sustainable

Model of Arctic Regional Tourism (SMART), to develop tools, resources and incentives to help arctic tourism companies operate in the best interest of the environment. The project developed a set of guidelines for visitors to be respectful to environment, support accommodations that employ locals, support local means of transport and food.

4.2.4 *Brazil*: Brazil adopted “Guidelines for a national ecotourism policy” (*Diretrizes para uma política nacional de ecoturismo*) in 1994. The ecotourism definition it adapted focusses on use of natural and cultural heritage, promotion of conservation, environmental awareness through environmental interpretation, and well-being of the (local) population as core principles of ecotourism (Matheus, and Raimundo, 2017).

4.2.5 *China*: Ecotourism in China has been a focus of Chinese policy makers over last two decades. The country designated year 2009 as the “Chinese Ecotourism Year” with the slogan ‘be a green traveler and experience eco-civilization’ (Wang, S., et.al. 2009). Though China adopted a National Ecotourism Development Plan in 2008 advocating harmony of the environment and the economy with guidelines for stakeholders for a healthy ecotourism industry (Wang, S., et.al. 2009), it is yet to establish a national ecotourism policy / framework. The lack of proper ecotourism policies and guidelines at national and local levels has recently been associated with the degradation of some natural tourist sites in China (Linsontheroad, 2011).

4.2.6 *Africa*: Africa’s wildlife and natural beauty have been attracting tourists since more than a century. By 1980s, realizing that tourism has done more damage to the eco-system than good, Africa led the international trend towards sustainability while keeping the lucrative business of tourism alive (Trobaug, 2017). From the beginning Africa’s ecotourism revolves

around two core components – the environment and the local communities; what is termed as Environment and Community Oriented (ECO) system that sees the community as an integral part of the ecotourism success in the continent (Trobaug, 2017). The system is to ensure that economic benefits reach to local people through involvement, hence giving locals a reason to conserve and protect the environment.

4.2.7 *Costa Rica*: Known as the ‘poster child of ecotourism’, Costa Rica’s tourism industry is largely comprised of ecotourism activities (Honey, 1999). To mitigate the negative impacts of pre-1980s tourism, Costa Rica adopted various sustainability programs such as the Environmental Service Payments (ESP) to offer financial stimulus to reforestation and forest protection by 1990s. It started promoting ecotourism as an alternative land use, as part of these strategies (Miranda, 2003). Over the years Costa Rica has adopted various national initiatives to help it to strengthen its position as a world leader in environmental conservations such as Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST), and Blue Flag Ecology program. With a market-oriented approach to ecotourism and conservation (Courvisanos, and Jain, 2006), Costa Rica through its flagship CST program categorizes and then certifies each tourism company on the basis of its operations and how they comply with the model of sustainability. Protection of environment, sustainable development, community involvement, economic viability, incentives to businesses based on sustainability achieved, and education and training are core elements of ecotourism in Costa Rica.

4.2.8 *Bhutan*: Bhutan recognizes ecotourism as a means towards environmental protection and nation development. Its ecotourism policy emphasizes on ‘high-value low-impact’ tourism focused on enhancing

community participation and conservation capacities.

4.2.9 *Nepal*: Nepal established a National Ecotourism Strategy and Marketing Programme in 2004. The strategy emphasized on cross-sectoral planning, increased private sector participation, poverty elevation through village tourism, community participation and an extensive marketing program.

The above benchmarking of ecotourism practices nationally and internationally suggests that the ecotourism involves certain basic principles such as conservation and protection of natural environment, involvement of different stakeholder in ecotourism development, education, training and awareness among all parties involved in ecotourism, extending economic benefits to the local communities etc. This is supported by the Weaver and Lawton (2007) who identified five standards of ecotourism as a) Protection of ecosystems – maintenance, protection and harmony; b) Maintenance of physico-chemical conditions of the area – no waste overflow and no contamination (water, soil and air); c) Conservation of local culture and history; d) Blending of infrastructure with environment; e) Sustainability – carrying capacity, environmental education, benefits to local community, community based management, and ecological, socio-cultural and economic sustainability. Thus from the above benchmarking and various other studies such as Weaver and Lawton (2007), Bansal & Kumar, (2011); Bhuiyan, et. al. (2012); Blamey, (2001), and Hill & Gale (2009), many dimensions of ecotourism clearly emerge that must be put in place by the policy makers while planning for development of individual ecotourism products or the development of an area-based ecotourism. These dimensions are:

a) Ecotourism is nature based or occurs at the places of ecological or cultural interest

- b) The core philosophy of ecotourism is to conserve and preserve natural resources
- c) Both the visitors and the visited are educated about the local environment
- d) Local community involvement planning and implementation of ecotourism projects
- e) Coordinated approach among public and private stakeholders in managing and regulating ecotourism projects
- f) Ecotourism projects are economically viable to fund the long term preservation of the ecotourism sites.
- g) Ecotourism impacts are continuously monitored, assessed and mitigated.

5. J&K Ecotourism Policy gaps:

The J&K Draft Ecotourism Policy 2017 is the state's only exclusive official document available with regard to ecotourism. This section identifies gaps in the policy, based on the ecotourism dimensions identified above, as discussed below.

5.1 *Role of stakeholders not specified*

The policy lacks to describe the role of important stakeholders in ecotourism, such as the community, private sector, local bodies, and department of tourism etc. Hoffman (1998) argues for strategic alliance between stakeholders for achieving the sustainability objectives, even when there are ideological and business differences between stakeholders.

5.2 *Lack of proper institutional mechanism*

Although the policy identifies establishment of Ecotourism Coordination Committee, and Project Implementation Agencies (PIA) with memberships from different government departments and agencies, it fails to identify their roles and responsibilities. Since ecotourism is based on balancing tourism development and conservation of natural and cultural assets, it demands for stricter environmental regulations; contest for minimizing new infrastructure development; and supports higher local community involvement. This can become a problem as different

government agencies and departments involved may, at times, have intersecting responsibilities and contradicting agendas regarding planning and development of ecotourism. Therefore there is a need to establish an umbrella mechanism with clear linkages among relevant government agencies, to allow such bodies to work together successfully to achieve the ecotourism policy objectives.

5.3 Lack of commitment to community involvement:

Ah-Choy (2010) argues that the one of the core precepts of ecotourism is empowerment and provision of financial benefits for local communities. The local people as being ultimate beneficiary of ecotourism, has been highlighted by the Ecotourism Society in its definition of ecotourism which describes it as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the wellbeing of local people”. This policy fails to specify how local communities are to be involved in and benefited from ecotourism development in the state.

5.4 Lack of measurable environmental impact assessment (EIA) and monitoring criteria:

Although the policy mentions of conducting periodic impact assessment studies and research to ascertain impact of eco-tourism on environment, it fails to specify specific policy performance indicators (PI) and mechanism of evaluation. The socio-cultural and collective welfare of community parameters are altogether ignored.

5.5 Lack of regulations, guidelines, criteria and incentives regarding ecotourism operations, private participation and community involvement:

Although the policy mentions that all activities shall be carried out in accordance with the provisions of various forest and wildlife acts of the state, it does not specify details of such regulations or guidelines. There are no specific criteria or

guideline in the policy that would reflect on how private sector and community involvement in ecotourism development is ensured, evaluated and incentivized.

5.6 Limited scope:

The policy is constrained with limited scope in various aspects. Firstly the policy limits its scope administratively as all ecotourism activities are overseen by the officials from the states forest department who not only may lack the basic understanding of tourism and how it operates, but also may fail to coordinate other government agencies involved in absence of any administrative control over them. Secondly the policy only refers to the ecotourism activities that can be carried out within the forest and protected areas. It does not cover ecotourism activities that can be covered outside the forest and protected areas such rural and urban areas, thus limiting its scope to the forest and protected areas only.

6. Policy recommendations and proposed ecotourism institutional framework for Jammu and Kashmir

6.1 Institutional Framework:

The present draft Ecotourism Policy is issued by the Forest, Ecology and Environment Department. The policy provides for establishment of Ecotourism Coordination Committee at the state level, headed by the Principal Chief Conservation of Forests as Chairperson with membership from various government agencies. The policy provides for limited private sector participation and no community involvement at the state level. At destination level, the policy provides for establishment of Project Implementation Agencies at different ecotourism destinations. Yet again, there is limited participation from private sector and no involvement of local community leaders.

It is argued that for effective planning and development of ecotourism, the Tourism

Department rather than the Forest Department be responsible for coordinating and regulating ecotourism in the state. This is for three basic reasons:

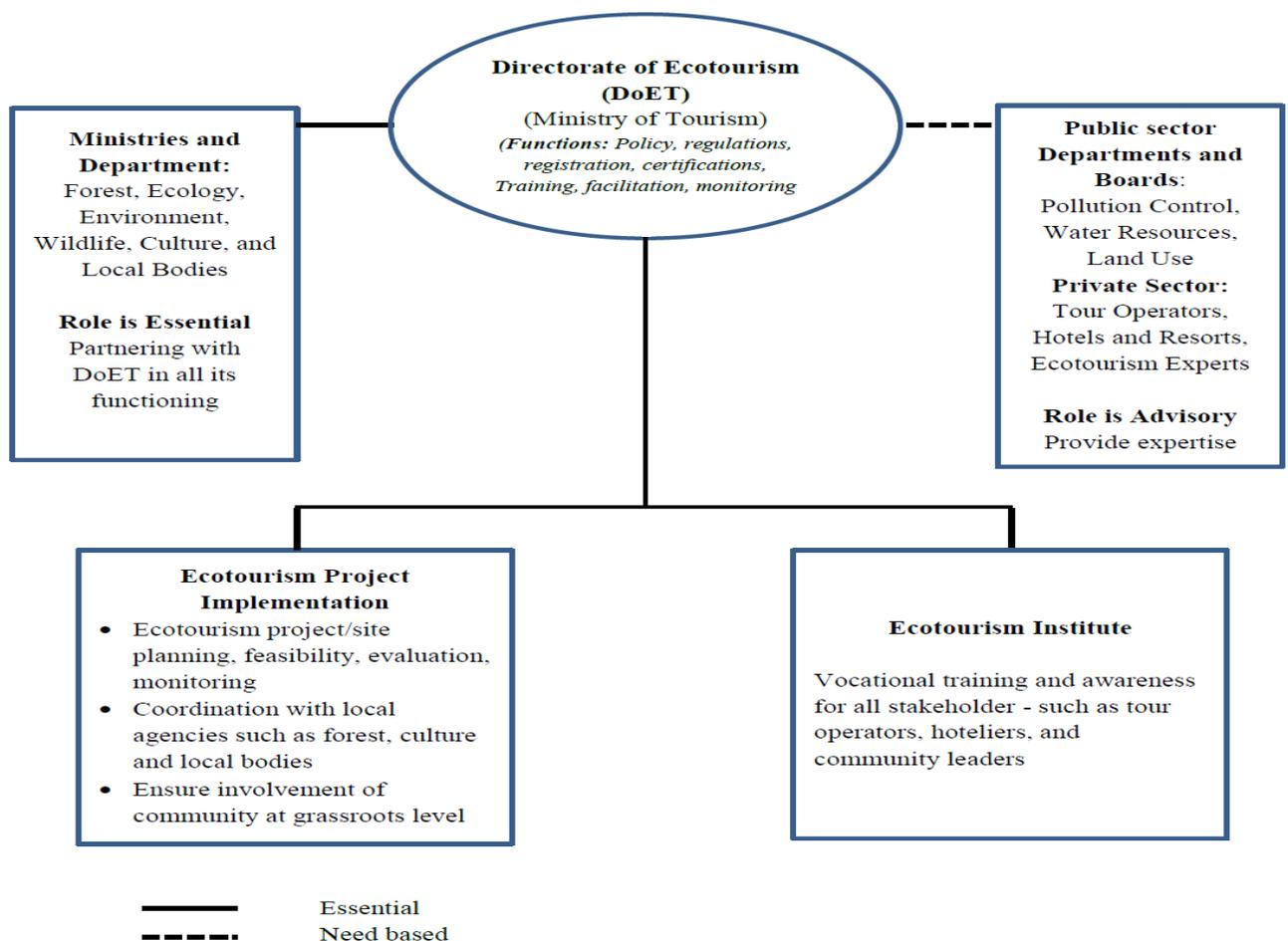
- a) Under the forest department the ecotourism limits its scope to the forest, wildlife and protected areas only, whereas the potential ecotourism sites such as lakes, rivers, waterbodies, parks, cultural and heritage sites falling under rural and urban areas are ignored;
- b) The forest officials may lack the basic understanding of tourism and how it operates. Nevertheless they may provide important expertise and inputs regarding conservation and protection of natural sites

and habitats. Thus Forest Department should provide a supportive role rather than a supervisory role.

- c) Since the state Department of Tourism in general is responsible for planning and development of tourism, creating tourism infrastructure, and marketing and promotion of tourism, having a parallel agency (Forest Department) to oversee ecotourism in the state create a conflict in implementation of ecotourism projects.

Based on the arguments above a proposed institutional framework is presented in the fig.1 below:

Figure 1: Proposed institutional mechanism for ecotourism for the state of J&K



6.2 Stakeholder coordination, involvement and ecotourism awareness:

Ecotourism involves a number of stakeholders such as government agencies,

private operators, non-governmental organizations and community. Even operating enterprises involved in ecotourism may vary from community

based to private enterprises to public enterprises to those that are co-managed. Any ecotourism policy should cater to all stakeholders. This study proposes to map ecotourism stakeholders in the state and establish provisions and criteria for their involvement and engagement. While stakeholder coordination is ensured, their awareness of ecotourism and what it actually means is necessary. Buckley (2013) noted that while the principles of ecotourism may be common across various manifestations of ecotourism, there is inconsistency in how they are understood and implemented by stakeholder. Thus stakeholders need to be educated about environmental, socio-cultural and economic sensitivities of ecotourism.

6.3 Community involvement:

Ecotourism has to be essentially authentic; experience based and should provide interpretation of local environment and culture. This necessitates the local people's involvement and engagement in and appreciation of ecotourism activities. Literature shows that the major ecotourism success stories around the world are the ones where the local communities have taken an active role not only in protecting and conserving the local environment, but also in planning and managing such ecotourism sites. The successful ecotourism projects have become partners in the ecotourism venture and now value and protect their environment. (Hans, 2016); in Turkey the management of Kuscenneti National Park encourages local bodies participation by allowing nearby communities to provide infrastructure and services to visitors, thereby flowing visitor expenditures to local people more easily. The economic benefits have positively changed the local community attitudes towards tourism around the national park (Zal and Breda 2010); and in ensured community benefits through local people's participation, involvement and engagement. For example Damaral and

Camp, situated in the Torra Conservancy in North-West Namibia which during 1980s witnessed rampant poaching and killing of wildlife due to severe drought, is presently a successful ecotourism destination owned and largely run by the local community. The combination of luxury lodges and big-game safaris has been successful at drawing tourists. The wildlife has more than doubled because locals have Bangladesh the Sitakunda Botanical Garden and Eco-park project in Chittagong has enriched the area with natural regeneration, new plantations, and eco-friendly infrastructure to provide nature-based tourism. The projects are providing considerable revenue to the park authorities as well as income to local people (Nath & Alauddin, 2006). These success stories suggest that the local community is the key to successful ecotourism projects. It is recommended that the state of Jammu and Kashmir while finalizing its ecotourism policy ensures local people's participation at every level in the planning and implementation process of ecotourism projects. This will not only ensure local people's appreciation and support for ecotourism activities, but will also that local people are benefited socially and economically as they get engaged and involved in ecotourism. More so local community involvement will ensure authentic visitor experience and interpretation of local environment and culture.

6.4 Establish measurable Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and monitoring criteria:

Ecotourism is perceived as environmentally responsible tourism. Though this is the intent, the reality is that even ecotourism does often have detrimental impacts on environment and can be unsustainable both ecologically and economically (Sesega, 2001) if not properly managed and assessed to mitigate

its negative impacts. Since, ecotourism is essentially not 'non-consumptive, it inherently has impacts. As a conservative strategy, ecotourism's benefits must exceed its costs. Thus it is important to know when ecotourism activities (purported to be conservative) may cause more damage than good. Therefore, continuous assessment and monitoring of impacts from ecotourism as well as developing impact mitigation strategies is absolutely essential in order to minimize negative impacts and maximize positive ones. The monitoring and mitigation strategies should consider environmental, social, ecological, economic and as well as impacts on local communities. Since the Draft Ecotourism Policy of Jammu and Kashmir does neither identify any impact assessment criteria nor refer to any other policy in this regard, it is proposed that a proper Impact Assessment (IA) model is adopted with clear criteria and indicators for evaluation.

6.5 Extend scope of ecotourism policy beyond forest and protected areas:

As discussed earlier the Jammu and Kashmir Draft Ecotourism Policy is constrained with limited scope as it refers to the ecotourism activities that can be carried out within the forest and protected areas only thus ignoring ecotourism potential of the state outside the forest and protected areas. Since much of the ecotourism potential of the state exists in the form parks, rivers, lakes existing in rural and urban areas outside the forest limits, there is a need of comprehensive ecotourism policy that covers these areas as well. Therefore, as has been proposed in the institutional framework above that to extend the scope of ecotourism policy beyond forest and protected areas, the Tourism Department of the state should be entrusted with the supervisory and regulatory role in the development and implementation of ecotourism in the state

and hence extend the scope of ecotourism policy beyond forest and protected areas.

6.6 Establish an ecotourism institute:

For successful ecotourism, specialized education and vocational training of stakeholders (community and ecotourism service providers) along with research, capacity building, and needs and impacts assessments are very important. It is proposed that the state of Jammu and Kashmir establishes ecotourism institutes to impart vocational training, identifies capacity building needs, and conduct impact assessments.

6.7 Certification and incentives for ecotourism providers:

Certification and incentive programs promote standards beyond legislation compliance as these assume market interest in the ethical forms of production, and as such promotes desire for market transparency, and market-based approaches to sustainable production (Xavier, F., 2017). While De Vicente (2004) argues that certification is largely supply oriented, that ensures that an activity or a product meets certain desired standards, Bien (2006), Russillo et al, 2007 and Font & Carey, 2005 opined that the certification helps ecotourism operators to gain market advantage as well get recognized as sustainable. In this line, necessity of introducing a certification program that recognizes the sustainable ecotourism products and providers may be underlined. Also such certification programs need to be complemented with monetary and non-monetary incentives to ecotourism stakeholders, which in turn will encourage them for nature conservation, particularly in remote and ill-monitored regions where a weak presence of the state hinders the use of alternative tools of environmental regulation (Sven Wunder, 2000). It is therefore recommended that the J&K Ecotourism Policy provides for an extensive certification program complemented with

an incentive program to promote ecotourism in the state.

Conclusion: Ecotourism is perceived as a sustainable way of promoting destinations to visitors that seeks to preserve and protect natural environment and cultural heritage as well as promotes economic benefits to all stakeholders including local communities. Many researchers have concluded that ecotourism may have similar impacts on destination as mass-tourism unless effectively controlled, managed and regulated. Since ecotourism involves natural and environmentally delicate and fragile sites, it necessitates the role of government in regulating ecotourism operations. A robust ecotourism policy with clear guidelines on all issues concerning ecotourism is required. This paper analyzed the Jammu and Kashmir Draft Ecotourism Policy and identified gaps through benchmarking with ecotourism policy initiatives and best practices within India and around the world. Consistent with the principles inherent to the concept of ecotourism, this study suggested an ecotourism policy framework for Jammu and Kashmir. The recommendations made will go a long way in helping policy makers in the state to refine the state's ecotourism policy.

REFERENCES:

Gartner W. C. (1996) *Tourism Development: Principles, Processes, and Policies*. Van Nostrand-Reinhold, New York.

Inskip E, (1991) *Tourism Planning: As Integrated and Sustainable Development*, Van Norstrand-Reinhold, New York.

Smith V. (1989) *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.

Diamantis D. (1999) The concept of ecotourism: evolution and trends. *Current Issues in Tourism*. 2 (2&3), 93-122

Sisman R. (1994) *Tourism: environmental relevance*. In: Carter, E. & Lowman, G. (Eds.). *Ecotourism: A Sustainable Option*. Willey, New York.

Courvisanos J. and Jain A. (2006) A framework for sustainable ecotourism: application to Costa Rica. *Tourism and Hospitality Planning and Development*. Routledge Taylor and Francis. 31(2), 131-142.

Martin B. S. and Uysal M. (1990) An examination of the relationships carrying capacity and the tourism lifecycle: management and policy implications. *Journal of Environmental Management*. 31 (4), 327-333

Filion F. L., Foley J. P. and Jacquemont A. J. (1994) The economics of global ecotourism. In M. Munasinghe and J. McNeely (eds) *Protected Area Economics and Policy, Linking Conservation & Sustainable Development*. World Bank: Washington DC.

Yaiza L., and Juan F. (2016) Factors influencing the willingness to pay for sustainable tourism: a case of mass tourism destinations, *International Journal of Sustainable Development & World Ecology*, 24 (3), 262-275

Megan E., W. (2002) *Ecotourism: principles, practices & policies for sustainability*, 1st Ed. UNEP.

Dowling R. K. (2002) Australian ecotourism – leading the way. *Journal of Ecotourism*. Taylor and Francis. 1(2-3), 89-92

Dowling R. K. (2001) Oceania (Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific) In: Weaver, D.B. (ed.). The Encyclopedia of Ecotourism CABI Publishing, Wallingford, UK, pp. 139-154.

Matheus F. S. and Raimundo S. (2017) The results of ecotourism policies in protected areas in Brazil and Canada. Brazilian Journal of Tourism Research. 11(3), 454-479

Wang S. et.al. (2009) Comparison of ecotourism policies and implications for China's ecotourism development. Journal of China Tourism Research. 5, 259-272.

Linsontheroad (2011) Ecotourism in China. Article available at <http://mynatour.org/destination/ecotourism-china> (retrieved on 25.05.2018)

Trobaug C. R. (2017) How does ecotourism in Africa work? Article available at <http://traveltips.usatoday.com/ecotourism-africa-work-18001.html> (retrieved on 25.05.2018)

Honey M. (1999) Ecotourism and Sustainable Development: Who owns Paradise? 1st Ed. Island Press, Washington D.C. Chapter 5. Costa Rica: on the beaten path. Pp. – 128-181

Miranda M. (2003) Institutional capacities for sustainable progress, experiences from Costa Rica, Ph. D. thesis, Utrecht University, Utrecht, Netherlands Geographical Studies.

Weaver D. B. and Lawton L. J. (2007) Twenty years on: The state of contemporary ecotourism research. Tourism Management, 28, 1168–1179

Bansal S. P. and Kumar J. (2011) Ecotourism for community development: a

stakeholder's perspective in great Himalayan National Park. International Journal of Social Ecology and Sustainable Development, 2(2), 31-40.

Bhuiyan A. H., Siwar C., Ismail S. M., Islam R. (2012) The role of ecotourism for sustainable development in East Coast Economic Region (ECER), Malaysia. OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development. 3 (9), 53-60.

Blamey R. K. (2001) Principles of ecotourism. In: David B. Weaver (Ed) Encyclopedia of Ecotourism. New York: CABI Publishing.

Hill J. and Gale T. (2009) Ecotourism and Environmental Sustainability: Principles and Practices. Published by Ashgate. p.261, Britain.

Hoffmann H. B. (1998) The tourism industry and the evolving need for strategic alliances: a DoZana perspective. Paper presented at Seventh International Greening of Industry Networking Conference, Rome, November, 1998.

Ah-Choy (2010) The nascent development of ecotourism in Lagong Hill, American Journal of Applied Sciences. 7(12), 1528-1531

Buckley R. (2013) Ecotourism and conservation. In: R. B. and J. Packer (Ed.), International Handbook on Ecotourism. United Kingdom: Edward Elgar Publishing. pp. 233–244

Hans T. (2016) Namibia: an ecotourism success story. Article published on the website of The International Ecotourism Society. Available at <http://www.ecotourism.org/news/namibia-ecotourism-success-story>
<http://www.ecotourism.org/news/namibia-ecotourism-success-story>

[ibia-ecotourism-success-story](#) (retrieved on 25.04.2018)

Zal N. and Breda Z. (2010) Tourism in protected areas: observations from Kuscenneti National Park. *Anatolia: An International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research*. 21(1): 73-87

Nath T. K. and Alauddin (2006) Sitakunda Botanical Garden and Eco-park, Chittagong, Bangladesh: Its impacts on a rural community. *International Journal of Biodiversity Science & Management*. 2(1), 1-11.

Sesega S. (2001) Ecotourism and the Pacific Islands environment – impacts, potential and implications for management. Paper presented at the Seminar on the Sustainable Development of Ecotourism in the Pacific Islands, Suva Fiji. Available at: https://www.sprep.org/att/IRC/eCOPIES/Pacific_Region/156.pdf (retrieved 23.05.2018)

Xavier F. (2007) Ecotourism certification: potential and challenges. In Higham, J., 2007. Ed. *Critical Issues in Ecotourism: Understanding a Complex Tourism Phenomenon*. 1st Ed. Butterworth-Heinemann. USA.

De Vicente J. (2004) Demand for Certification: Tourist Industry and Marketing Experts, CEAD & TIES.

Bien A. (2006) A Simple User's Guide to Certification for Sustainable Tourism and Ecotourism, Handbook 1, 3rd Edition, CEAD.

Russillo A., Honey M., Rome A. and Bien A. (2007) Practical Steps for Marketing Tourism Certification, Handbook 3, CEAD.

Font X. and Carey B. (2005) *Marketing Sustainable Tourism Product*, UNEP.

Sven Wunder (2000) Ecotourism and economic incentives-an empirical approach. *Ecological Economics*, Elsevier, 32, 465-479