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# A Qualitative Study On Barriers To Community Participation In Ziro Valley, Arunachal Pradesh

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*Abstract:* Community participation, particularly in a developing state, is an important aspect of sustainable development efforts. However, better understanding of structure and organization of community participation can help to decipher the impediments of tourism businesses in the region. In this paper, we attempt to identify the barriers in tourism participation by the local community involved in tourism businesses viz. hotels, homestays, travel agencies, tour operators etc. The study was conducted in the region of Ziro valley, Lower Subansiri district, Arunachal Pradesh, India. Data were collected from the local tribal people of Ziro valley involved in tourism activities using the convenient sampling technique. We conducted in-depth interviews, participant observation and documented sources to collect the data and conducted thematic analysis using NVivo 14 software. The findings identified that low level of external support for infrastructure & venture promotion and lack of awareness & capacity building as the two most important barriers in tourism participation. The findings suggest that the local community are ready to involve in tourism activities if proper financial inclusion and linkage among all stakeholders are implemented, which is in contrast with some of the tribal regions where it is observed that the local communities are reluctant in tourism development. The study helps to fill in the research gaps in the implementation of community-based tourism development projects specifically in a tribal region and will further help the policy makers to build sustainable tourism planning.

**Keywords - Community participation, Community-based tourism development, Tribal region, Ziro valley, Arunachal Pradesh**

## I. Introduction

Tourism emerges as a booming industry that adds to a region's economic progress. It supports economic growth to local economies, fosters job creation, and plays an important role in eliminating wealth inequities within communities. This industry has the ability to strengthen an area's overall prosperity by giving a significant economic boost and opening the road for improved livelihoods for its citizens. Tourism, while offering numerous advantages such as fostering destination development, preserving heritage and culture, and boosting economies, simultaneously poses challenges to the sustainability of destinations and various tourism facets like culture and ecology. These emerging challenges have prompted the need for a more cautious and responsible approach to tourism, leading to the emergence of 'Sustainable Tourism.' Sustainable tourism is grounded in the belief that a participatory development approach can effectively implement the principles of sustainable tourism development (Yanes et al., 2019). By actively involving local communities in tourism initiatives, this approach creates enhanced opportunities for residents to access more substantial and equitable benefits from tourism activities unfolding in their localities (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). It is proposed that implementing sustainable tourist development principles can be made easier by using a participative development strategy. According to Tosun (2000), doing so increases the chances for local people to gain greater and more fair advantages from tourist projects within their neighbourhoods. According

to Scheyvens (2002), this may encourage attitudes that are more friendly to the growth of the tourism industry and help to preserve local resources. A similar strategy can raise the local level of acceptance for tourism-related activities. The key is to realize that the success of the tourism business depends heavily on the active support of the local community. Without their enthusiastic involvement, the tourism sector's long-term viability could be compromised (Blackstock, 2005).

Integrating host communities into the tourism development process is crucial since it has a big impact on the level of support and success the sector receives (Muganda et al., 2013). It could be argued that the trajectory of tourism development is closely tied to the involvement of local communities, as evidenced by their variety of roles as tour guides, owners of lodging establishments, and employees of development organizations (Dogra & Gupta, 2012). Ensuring meaningful participation of host communities in the tourist sector is a strategic need as well as an issue of inclusivity. These communities are essential components of the tourism ecosystem, playing critical roles that go beyond being passive observers. Their participation as employees in various positions, such as development authorities, hotels, and guides, emphasizes their direct contribution to the industry's functioning and growth (Imbaya et al., 2019). Moreover, the attitudes and perceptions of host communities toward tourists wield considerable influence over the overall tourist experience. Positive interactions and welcoming attitudes can enhance visitor satisfaction and, in turn, promote destination loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. Conversely, negative attitudes may deter tourists and tarnish the destination's image (Weaver, 2012). Therefore, fostering a conducive environment for host communities to actively participate, benefit, and contribute to tourism development is inevitable. This involves not only economic considerations, such as providing employment opportunities but also the promotion of cultural preservation, environmental stewardship, and socio-economic well-being (López-Guzmán et al., 2011). Numerous researchers share a unanimous perspective that community participation stands as a vital instrument for attaining sustainable tourism development at a destination. It is widely held that the extent of community involvement directly correlates with the quality of development and planning outcomes.

When seeking to engage in tourism activities, local communities face a variety of challenges. These difficulties include a lack of awareness & skill sets, limited accessibility to funding, and a complex vertical hierarchical structure (Blackstock, 2005). It is worth mentioning that various barriers within the tourism sector are interrelated and have a significant impact on the overall tourism environment. The nature of these barriers varies depending on the stages of the tourism development process and the socioeconomic and cultural system within the host places. Furthermore, it is significant to recognize that the features of these barriers can vary by place. The research aims to investigate and identify the barriers encountered within the community-based tourism initiatives and attempts to devise approaches to foster greater inclusiveness in community-based tourism.

## II. Literature Review

CBT is an alternative to mass tourism which focuses on local community's overall development. Local community is considered to be the focal point and have substantial control over management and development and thus major benefit of the development stays within the community (Haywood, 1988). The study of community-based tourism can be viewed from various perspectives. To begin, it entails an examination of the decision-making process, in which local citizens are empowered to actively participate in tourist development, allowing them to express their worries and wants. Second, it comprises an appraisal of the tangible benefits of tourism, such as the creation of new job opportunities (Bhattacharyya, 2004). However, less turnover in generating revenue, low economic impact with regard to employment, low footfall of tourists and low capacity of accommodating the visitors may be considered as a limitation (Zapata et al., 2011). Still community-based tourism is seen as one of the major components of sustainable development.

According to Giampiccoli (2020) community-based tourism contributes in reducing inequality and favours towards redistribution. To have a successful community-based tourism development some important elements required are participation, partnerships, encouragement and acquisition of skills (Bittar Rodrigues & Prideaux, 2018). The equitable distribution of benefits is fundamental to the relationship between tourism and development, and the Community-Based Tourism (CBT) model is one that places emphasis on it. CBT guarantees that the economic, social, and cultural benefits of tourism are more fairly divided among locals by actively incorporating local people in decision-making, resource management, and tourism activities (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2014). Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has emerged as an important tool for poverty alleviation in various regions. By actively involving local communities in tourism initiatives, it enables residents to gain access to income-generating opportunities and a share of the tourism revenue (Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014). This approach empowers communities by providing them with a stake in the tourism industry, whether through employment, small-scale enterprises, or the sale of local products and services. CBT often promotes the preservation of natural and cultural resources, ensuring that these assets

continue to attract tourists, generate income, and enhance the overall quality of life for local residents (Zapata et al., 2011). CBT contributes to poverty reduction by fostering sustainable economic development and community well-being.

### III. Barriers to Community Participation

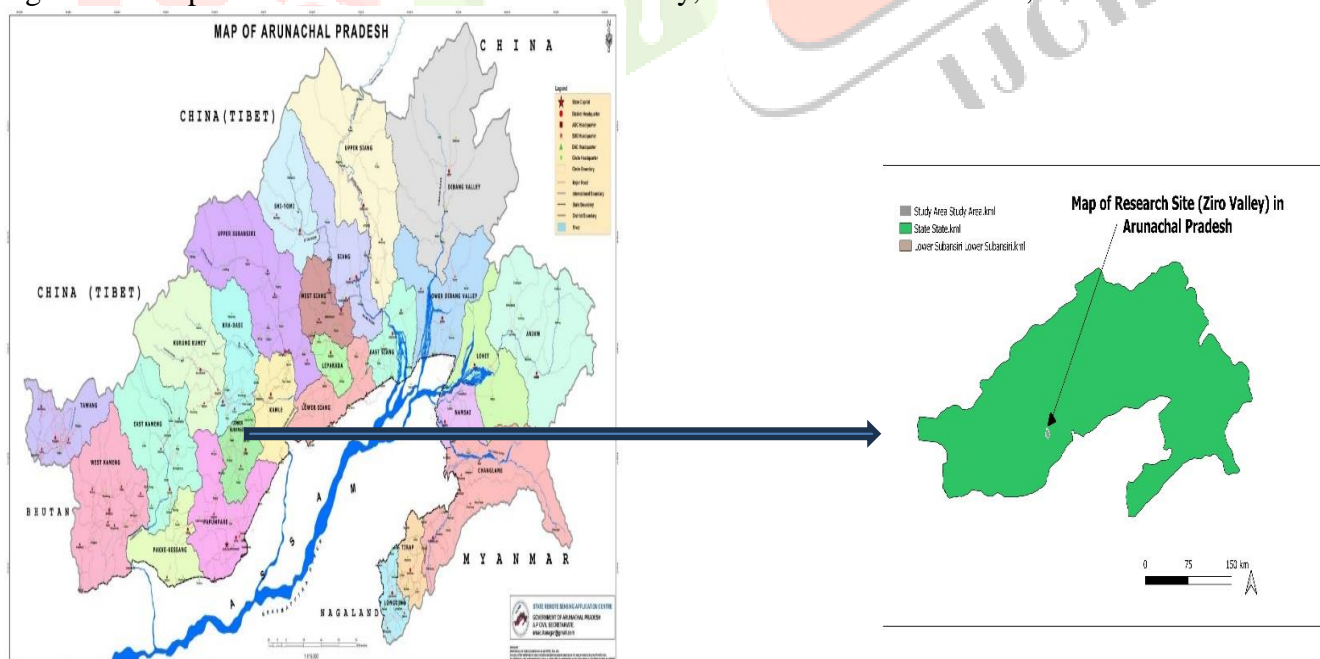
The local community face various challenges in participation; for example, due to lack of financial resources, high level of centralization controlled by public administration and not including the locals in decision making process towards tourism development (Dogra & Gupta, 2012). According to Tosun (2000) there are basically three barriers which exists in community participation; operational barrier, structural barrier and cultural barrier. The barriers to community participation also depends on the position of tourism life cycle, sociocultural structure in destination and can be region specific (Yaja et al., 2023). These challenges are frequently compounded by conflicts arising from interactions between tourists and residents (Yu & Lee, 2014). In some studies, it is identified that there is a notable absence of local residents in decision-making processes related to tourism initiatives and a pervasive lack of self-assuredness among community members engaged in tourism-related endeavours. According to (Patowary & Borgohain, 2017), local residents in Ziro valley felt excluded from tourism development decisions and lacked awareness of tourism potential. However, the study didn't delve into the underlying reasons for this exclusion or the barriers causing such sentiments, warranting further investigation. These challenges substantially hindered the efficient operation of tourism businesses in the region (Yaja et al., 2023). The multifaceted nature of barriers to community engagement in tourism is evident. These barriers encompass a spectrum of issues involving land, labour, and capital, intertwined with social conflicts and ethnic tensions. Understanding the intricate dynamics of these barriers is essential for fostering sustainable and inclusive tourism development in diverse contexts.

### IV. Research Methodology

#### Study Area

The research was conducted in Ziro Valley, situated within the Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh. This district is located at an elevation of 1500 meters above sea level and is approximately a two to three-hour drive (118 km) from the state capital, Itanagar. The nearest airport is Donyi Polo Airport in Hollongi, and the primary mode of transportation in the state is by road. Figure 1 illustrates the study area's location. The region is predominantly inhabited by tribal communities and covers an area of 3,460 square kilometers, with an estimated population of 83,030 (Lower Subansiri district official data, accessed from <https://lowersubansiri.nic.in/>)

Fig. No. 1: Map of Arunachal Pradesh and Ziro valley, Lower Subansiri District, Arunachal Pradesh



Source: Arunachal Tourism, Governemnt of Arunachal Pradesh

Apart from the cultural and geographical attractiveness, Ziro valley has successfully utilized the external support to advance its goal of community-based tourism development. There are criticism regarding heavy external support by many CBT experts that advocates the dependence on external funding leads to lack of sustainable CBT development around the world (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Weaver, 2012). In Kenya, CBT



was not a successful concept because of the role of external intervention which leads to over dependence on foreign resource and donor funding (Manyara & Jones, 2007). The study identified various success factors like awareness and sensitization, community empowerment, effective leadership and capacity building. If tourism initiatives are addressed locally and priorities of the local community are taken into consideration the objective of poverty alleviation and economic development would be established successfully. In a study of CBT Model in Nicaragua, it was established that the model had a positive impact only when the shift is made from redistribution policies and over dependence on external donors in strengthening towards local market (Zapata et al., 2011). However, it is argued that external facilitation, specifically the government agencies plays a vital role in the success of CBT projects (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2012; Kontogeorgopoulos et al., 2014). This would seem to be the case in Ziro valley where high level of CBT readiness are assisted by the external agencies. The external agency most important to its success are the government agencies and NGOs. Ziro valley has received various external support like 'one district, one product'(ODOP) under the Pradhan Mantri Formalization of Micro Food Processing Enterprise (PMFME). Under the aegis of this scheme Kiwi fruit was officially adopted for Lower Subansiri District. Tourism department of Arunachal Pradesh in the past decade has gradually shifted towards the concept of eco-tourism. Under the scheme of Deen Dayal Swavalamban Yojana the local communities are encouraged to start-ups, innovation and entrepreneurship like eco-tourism. State government agencies also provided the hospitality training to some homestay owners during the initial stage of operations. Apart from the government agency, NGOs like Future Generations Arunachal (FGA) with the support of Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), a non-profit organisation started community based eco-tourism in Ziro valley in 2010 (Mize et al., 2016). An apex community-based NGO Ngunu Ziro works in eco-tourism projects like homestays and nature guide. It networks with tour operators, government agencies and other units to promote home stays. It also imparted various trainings on eco-tourism and benefits of home stay facility. However, the impact of the training in the overall achievement of the trained local community can be one of the objectives for further study. A floating model hut and the Achukuru welfare society (Mother's Home, Suluya) Homestay were developed by GB Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment and Sustainable Development, North East Unit, Itanagar and it also provided other valuable ornaments and articles to homestays to cater best services to the tourists (Mize et al., 2016). The Achukuru welfare society is generating revenue of Rs 60000 from entry fees, Rs 3.3 lakhs from fisheries and Rs 3 lakhs from Homestays annually (Mize et al., 2016). Tribal communities of Ziro valley have enormous knowledge about the environmental conservation and sustainable management through traditional ecological knowledge but how this traditional knowledge can be amalgamated with the development of tourism is not well defined in the study (Das, 2021; Dollo et al., 2009). Ziro valley need a sustainable holistic destination branding which can help to cater more nature based oriented tourists (Choudhury et al., 2016).

The primary objective of the study was to identify the barriers to community participation in Ziro valley. To gather data, we employed the convenient sampling technique, focussing local tribal individuals in Ziro Valley who were actively engaged in tourism-related activities. Data collection methods encompassed in-depth interviews, participant observation, and a thorough examination of documented sources. The total sample size for data collection were 11 with whom in-depth interview was conducted. Subsequently, we conducted a thematic analysis of the collected data utilizing NVivo 14 software.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

Firstly, the responses collected from the participants were merged into different folders in the NVivo software and then, the data were clustered into 4 different factors which is shown in the Table. no. 1.

Table No. 1: Themes of perceived barriers clustered

CLUSTER 1: Lack of awareness & competent skills	CLUSTER 2: External support and venture promotion	CLUSTER 3: Infrastructure development	CLUSTER 4: Other findings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of awareness</li> <li>• Lack of professional skills</li> <li>• Lack of marketing knowledge</li> <li>• Low level of internet knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of participation</li> <li>• Control by the higher authority in decision making</li> <li>• Lack of support from the government agencies</li> <li>• Low level of income</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electricity shortage</li> <li>• Having water shortage</li> <li>• Low level of tourist inflow</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climate as a barrier</li> </ul>

In the same way to devise approaches to foster greater inclusiveness in community participation, the responses collected from the participants were again clustered into another 4 different factors shown in

Table no. 2.

Table No. 2: Themes of CBT solutions to inclusive growth clustered

CLUSTER 1: Linkage among stakeholders	CLUSTER 2: Awareness and Capacity Building	CLUSTER 3: Financial Inclusion	CLUSTER 4: Effective use of social networking and marketing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involving local people in decision making</li> <li>• Involvement of all the tourism stakeholders</li> <li>• Use of local knowledge for sustainable development</li> <li>• Infrastructure development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness programme for the local people</li> <li>• Skill and training programmes for local people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial assistance by external actors</li> <li>• Investment in tourism product development by government agencies</li> <li>• Proper utilization of tourism fund</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing internet knowledge</li> </ul>

Table No. 3: Case count and Code count after the establishment of themes were analysed using NVivo 14 software.

Name	Files (Case Count)	References (Code Count)
(RQ1) Barriers to community participation in tourism	11	104
(Theme) External support and venture promotion	11	34
(Theme) Infrastructure development	11	28
(Theme) Lack of awareness & competent skills	11	39
(Theme) Other findings	3	3
(RQ2) CBT solutions for inclusive growth	11	91
(Theme) Awareness and Capacity Building	11	23
(Theme) Effective use of social networking and marketing	8	13
(Theme) Financial Inclusion	11	21
(Theme) Linkage among stakeholders	11	34

The total count for the research question 1 and research question 2 were 104 & 91 respectively. The code count of external support and venture promotion is 34, lack of awareness and competent skills is 39 which are at the higher side.

## V. Findings & Suggestions

The research outcomes have pinpointed two prominent obstacles hindering tourism participation: firstly, a deficiency in external backing for infrastructure development and venture promotion, and secondly, a notable gap in awareness and capacity-building efforts. These barriers are instrumental in impeding the engagement of the local community in the tourism sector. The inadequacy of external support, especially in terms of enhancing essential infrastructure and fostering entrepreneurial initiatives, emerged as a significant constraint. Furthermore, the study highlighted a conspicuous absence of awareness-building campaigns and initiatives aimed at enhancing the capacity of local residents to actively participate in tourism activities. These limitations underscore the need for strategic interventions to address these challenges effectively. Initiatives to bolster infrastructure, promote tourism ventures, and provide comprehensive training and capacity-building programs are essential to overcome these hurdles. By rectifying these issues and equipping the local community with the necessary tools and knowledge, the path to greater tourism participation can be paved, fostering sustainable development and more inclusive engagement of the community in the tourism industry.

## VI. Conclusion

The research findings underscore several critical factors essential for the success and growth of community-based tourism (CBT). Firstly, the active inclusion of local voices in decision-making processes is imperative. This ensures that the tourism initiatives align with the community's needs and aspirations, fostering a sense of ownership and participation. Secondly, equipping local entrepreneurs with the requisite skills and knowledge in the field of tourism business is of paramount importance. This not only enhances their capacity but also enables them to manage and operate tourism-related ventures effectively. Moreover, government agencies can play a pivotal role by providing financial support in the form of loans and subsidies for homestay businesses. This financial backing can significantly boost the establishment and sustainability of such ventures. Leveraging the internet as a promotional tool for CBT projects is another vital aspect. Online platforms can help in reaching a wider audience, attracting tourists, and creating awareness about the unique offerings of CBT initiatives. Lastly, macro-level planning involving infrastructure development and the provision of essential amenities is crucial. These enhancements contribute to the overall appeal and accessibility of the destination, making it more attractive to tourists and addressing these key factors can pave the way for the growth and prosperity of community-based tourism development in Ziro Valley.

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