

## Evaluating community participation as a rural tourism workforce

Kago Mariam \*

M. Momocha Singh †

*Department of Management and Humanities*

*National Institute of Technology*

*Papum Pare 791113*

*Arunachal Pradesh*

*India*

Rupali Khaire §

*Department of Commerce and Management Studies*

*Sandip University*

*Nashik*

*Maharashtra*

*India*

Anuj Kumar ‡

*Department of Management*

*Apeejay School of Management*

*Delhi*

*India*

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### Abstract

Rural Tourism often focuses on culture, tradition, people, and exclusivity, which need protection and economic growth. Economic motives often prevail over other aspirations in tourism development. Hence, villages are slowly losing their uniqueness. Community participation is strongly needed to facilitate this fine balance. The paper aims to study the community's level of involvement in tourism. The research is also carried to find the general attitude of people towards tourism activities, desire to volunteer, level of awareness, and any training attended in tourism. The approach used is a mixed method (both qualitative & quantitative) and is based on primary data & secondary data. Study shows that local

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\* Orcid-id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9029-6738>

† Orcid-id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2507-698X>

§ Orcid-id: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-7034-4526>

‡ Orcid-id: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1205-2794>

\* E-mail: [kagomariam@gmail.com](mailto:kagomariam@gmail.com) (Corresponding Author)

community are willing to volunteer despite not engaging in tourism-related activities. The involvement of the Government & community is needed to build a favourable tourism ecosystem. For rural tourism to survive and endure, it needs feelings of ownership and active community involvement.

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*Subject Classification:* J19, R10, O18.

*Keywords:* Ownership, Rural tourism, Community mobilisation, Community participation.

## **Introduction**

Rural tourism has the potential to promote a village as the leading tourist artifact in the tourism industry, which could provide a fertile ground for rural culture, lifestyle, art, heritage, craft, textiles, handloom, exotic explorations, agriculture, etc., results into an amalgamation of economic growth and social progress. It encourages the rural population to self-employment rather than migrating to cities in search of jobs and earnings. It provides opportunities for having direct interaction between the locals and tourists, thus a chance to have a rich experience. It also allows the tourists to relax from the hectic life and have enthralling experiences of simple and serene rural life. Thus, tourism is a socioeconomic activity that could create massive employment [Choudhury, K., Dutta, P. & Patgiri, S.,2018]. Countries like India and other developing countries with diverse geographic topography, unique indigenous rural populations and unexploited natural resources have the potential to develop and grow rural and community-based tourism. However, it should be noted that the development should be sustainable and not threaten the ecology and environment of the areas [Bhatia,A., et.al., 2022]. . Tourism and development should go hand in hand without hampering the local climate and natural set-up. One should not indulge in tourism activities that could lead to the loss of nature and the loss of the population's culture. If the natural setup is disturbed, the very essence of experiential rural tourism and community-based development will be lost.

## **Literature Review**

Rural tourism emphasizes welfare and development at the grassroots level, thus boosting prosperity and peace in the concerned regions. In villages, effects are concentrated mostly in horticulture, agriculture, forestry, fishery, livestock, medicinal plants, and some other non-farm activities weaving, craft making, tourism, etc.

For any development and growth, it is essential to have good infrastructure and expand connectivity. These are the needs and requirements of any economic & social mobility and integration of the market. [Mize, T., Kanwal, K. *et. al.*, 2016]. Creating a hospitable environment is also important for tourism growth in the region. Services related to tourism generate lots of employment, thus boosting harmony and progress. It also has ripple effects extending beyond just tourism activities, benefitting other spaces like vendors, small shop owners, local sellers, etc. It also influences other formal business sectors like insurance, banking, construction etc.

People in rural areas want to be self-confident and self-reliant to shape their destinies and don't want to depend on external forces for their growth and survival. They also want the development to be sustainable and in harmony with nature. This is, however, possible by firstly empowering the locals of the region, and one cannot just depend upon the government to provide employment. Hence there is a need for capacity building and the development of non-farming activities among the rural populations.

Development and utilization of human resources are very important for the advancement of any region. For meaningful employment and to provide professional hospitality personnel who could provide quality services and stand by their roots, various skill sets based on training and entrepreneurial classes could be provided [Bhan, S& Singh, L.,2014].

It is important to encourage the local people to partake in policy making in welfare schemes along with the officials of rural projects since they only could protect their interests, and it is they who have to bear the consequences of implementing policies. Hence, they should be aware of their surroundings, be vigilant and actively participate in development projects in their area. The tourism industry is favourable to the community, which plans and executes through collaboration by taking into the confidence of the entire local population, dissipating doubts and fears of the local population, and providing support to undertake new welfare projects. By using various entrepreneurial consultants' help, banking, and private agencies, could guide, consult and involve the rural population to understand the benefits of community-based tourism. [Barnali Patowary & Parijat Borgohain.,2017],[ Kumari, K. & Omo, P., 2020].

Though the people of northeast India, in general, is widely known for being hospitable and welcoming in nature however, insurgence and violence problem in this region throw a bad light and apprehension about the region (Choudhury, 2022) (Menath, 2018), which affects badly to the

tourism industry in this region. To attract large numbers of tourists to this region, there is a need to re-create the whole image of northeast India through various campaigns, advertisements and rigorous media coverage.

### Objectives

- i. To study the level of involvement of the community in the conservation & development of tourism in their villages.
- ii. To find out the general attitude of people towards tourism activities, the desire to volunteer, level of awareness and any training attended in tourism.

### Study Area

Arunachal Pradesh is the easternmost state of India and the largest in the northeastern region. It is situated between 26.28° N and 29.30° N latitude and 91.20° E and 97.30° E longitude and has an area of 83,743 km<sup>2</sup> (32,333 sq mi). There are 25 districts in total, which are broadly categorized into three zones, i.e. eastern zone, the western zone and the central zone. Three districts undertaken for the study are Lower Dibang Valley (eastern zone), Lower Subansiri (central zone) and West Kameng (western zone). These three districts receive the most tourist arrival in their respective zones. Lower Dibang Valley hosts two major tribes, i.e. the Adi & the Idu Mishmi (both tribes have many sub-tribes). Roing is the headquarter of the district. It has various popular tourist destinations such as mehao lake, sally lake, forest park, riwatch, the hot spring at jia village, mayudia pass, bhismaknagar fort etc. Lower Subansiri hosts two major tribes, i.e., the Apatani & the Nishi. Ziro is the district's headquarters and is included in the tentative list of UNESCO world heritage sites. It is renowned for paddy-cum-pisciculture cultivation and water management in the field. Some popular tourist destinations in the district are valley wildlife sanctuary, siikhe lake, Kasa resort, bamboo groves, manpolyang, Tarin fish farm etc. Bomdila is the headquarters of the West Kameng district. Tribes residing at West Kameng are Monpa, Sherdukpen, Sartang, Aka, Miji and Bugun. A fortified village called Thembang Dzong in the district has also made it to the tentative UNESCO world heritage sites list. It is an ancient village with great historical and cultural importance. Some other popular tourist places are lhagyala gumpa, apple orchards, the hot spring at dirang, shangti valley, monasteries at bomdila, tipi orchid centre, sela pass, nechiphu (zero point), ruins of bhalukpong, a national research

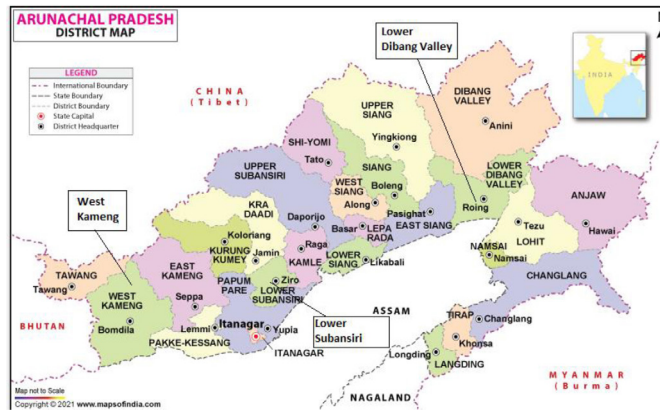


Figure 1

Map of Arunachal Pradesh showing Study Area:

Source: <https://www.mapsofindia.com>

centre on yak etc. All these attributes make the three districts perfect nominees for the case study as shown in Figure 1.

## Methodology

A mixed-method research approach was used. The research is both qualitative & quantitative based on primary data collected via questionnaire & field survey and through various secondary data available such as magazines, journal publications and reports. A structured and semi-structured questionnaire was used for the survey. For Sampling, Probability sampling (simple random sampling) was used, and the number of respondents was 360. Data for the present study were collected from October 2021 to February 2022. Initially, a pilot study was carried out with 45 respondents. A reliability test for the questionnaire scored 0.88 Cronbach's Alpha, indicating that the questionnaire is highly reliable. Analysis techniques used are frequencies, descriptive, crosstabs and Pearson correlation in SPSS software.

## Analysis

Socio-Demographic analysis of the respondents is shown in the given Table 1 below.

**Table 1**  
**Socio-Demographic Analysis**

| Demographic Factors  | Number of Respondents | %    | Demographic Factors         | Number of Respondents | %    |
|----------------------|-----------------------|------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|------|
| <b>Gender</b>        |                       |      | <b>Marital Status</b>       |                       |      |
| Male                 | 169                   | 46.9 | Single                      | 197                   | 55.5 |
| Female               | 191                   | 53.1 | Married                     | 157                   | 44.2 |
|                      |                       |      | Divorced                    | 1                     | 0.3  |
| <b>Districts</b>     |                       |      | <b>Education</b>            |                       |      |
| Lower Subansiri      | 190                   | 52.8 | Below Matric                | 14                    | 4.2  |
| L. Dibang Valley     | 152                   | 42.2 | 10th pass                   | 25                    | 7.4  |
| West Kameng          | 18                    | 5.0  | 12th pass                   | 83                    | 24.7 |
|                      |                       |      | Graduation                  | 126                   | 37.5 |
|                      |                       |      | Post-graduation             | 88                    | 26.2 |
| <b>Age (Years)</b>   |                       |      | <b>Length of Residence</b>  |                       |      |
| 18-30                | 165                   | 47.0 | < 5 years                   | 39                    | 11.6 |
| 30-50                | 149                   | 42.5 | 5-10 yrs.                   | 25                    | 7.5  |
| 50-65                | 23                    | 6.6  | >10 yrs.                    | 59                    | 17.6 |
| Above 65             | 14                    | 4.0  | Native                      | 212                   | 63.3 |
| <b>Annual Income</b> |                       |      | <b>Occupation</b>           |                       |      |
| <1 lakh              | 141                   | 50.4 | Farming & Allied activities | 39                    | 11.2 |
| 1-5 lakh             | 83                    | 29.6 | Govt. Service               | 146                   | 41.8 |
| 5-10 lakh            | 51                    | 18.2 | Private service             | 10                    | 2.9  |
| 10 lakh & above      | 5                     | 1.8  | Self-employed/ Business     | 30                    | 8.6  |
|                      |                       |      | Student/ researchers        | 95                    | 27.2 |
|                      |                       |      | Others                      | 29                    | 8.3  |

**Table 2**

Analysis to see if the people from three districts were engaged in any tourism or hospitality-related activities:

|       | L/Subansiri |            | L/Dibang  |            | W/Kameng  |            |
|-------|-------------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
|       | Frequency   | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| Yes   | 9           | 5.1%       | 0         | 0%         | 4         | 22.2%      |
| No    | 168         | 94.9%      | 149       | 100%       | 14        | 77.8%      |
| Total | 177         |            | 149       |            | 18        |            |

From Table 2, it was found that in Lower Subansiri, there were a total of 177 respondents, out of which only nine people (5.1%) were engaged in tourism or hospitality-related activities. In contrast, in the Lower Dibang valley district, there were 149 respondents, but none were engaged in the stated field. West Kameng district has 18 respondents, out of which a total of 4 (22.2%) responses were positive towards the stated field. When inter-district comparison was made, it was found that L/ Subansiri district has the most respondents engaged in tourism or hospitality-related activities at 69.2%. In contrast, for the W/Kameng district, it is about 30.8% and none in the L/Dibang valley district. It is graphically represented below in the given Figure 2.

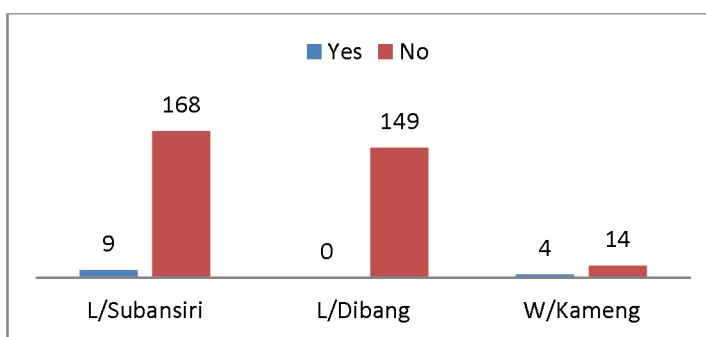


Figure 2

District-wise engagement of people in tourism activity.

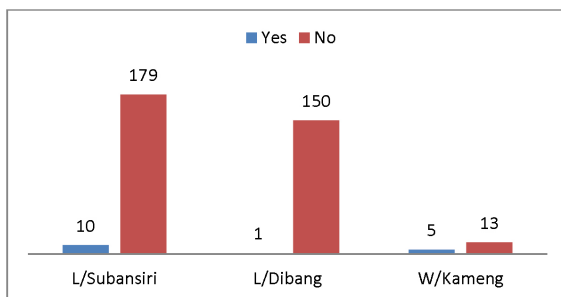
Table 3

Analysis to see if the people from three districts have attended any training related to tourism & hospitality conducted by govt. Or any other organization:

|       | L/Subansiri |            | L/Dibang  |            | W/Kameng  |            |
|-------|-------------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
|       | Frequency   | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| Yes   | 10          | 5.3%       | 1         | 0.7%       | 5         | 27.8%      |
| No    | 179         | 94.7%      | 150       | 99.3%      | 13        | 72.2%      |
| Total | 189         |            | 151       |            | 18        |            |

Table 3 shows that in the Lower Subansiri districts, out of 189 respondents, only ten have attended training. In the Lower Dibang valley district, 151 respondents and only one person attended the training. In the West Kameng district, having 18 respondents, five people attended the training. When an inter-district comparison was made, it was found that

in L/the Subansiri district, most of the respondents had undergone training in tourism 62.5% whereas, for the W/Kameng district, it is about 31.2% and 6.2% in the L/Dibang valley district. It is graphically shown below in Figure 3.



**Figure 3**

Training attended by the local people of three districts.

**Table 4**

Analysis to see the level of interest in volunteering among the residents of three districts:

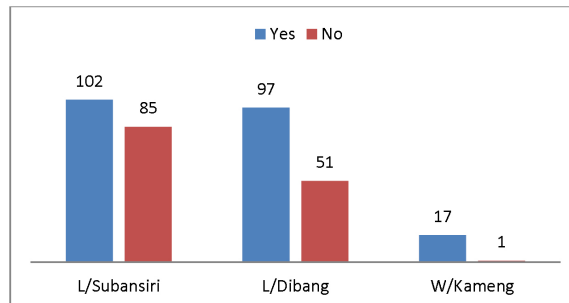
|       | L/Subansiri |            | L/Dibang  |            | W/Kameng  |            |
|-------|-------------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
|       | Frequency   | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| Yes   | 102         | 54.54%     | 97        | 65.54%     | 17        | 94.44%     |
| No    | 85          | 45.46%     | 51        | 34.46%     | 1         | 5.56%      |
| Total | 187         |            | 148       |            | 18        |            |

Table 4 shows that a survey was carried out to see if the residents of three districts were interested in volunteering for any tourism-related activities. The interested volunteer work included being a local tour guide or showing around the village; cooking & hosting large group tourists; participating in the traditional welcome of tourists on request; showcasing traditional wear for photography; involvement in performing local group dance for tourists; helping tourists for shopping in the local market for native products such as traditional dress, crafts, ornaments, agri- horti products; accompanying tourist if the tourist is interested in engaging in fieldwork or farming; teaching local culinary or cooking.

L/Subansiri districts, out of 187 respondents, 102 were interested, and 85 were not. Similarly, for L/Dibang Valley, out of 148 respondents, 97



were interested, whereas 51 were not. For W/Kameng districts, out of 18, all 17 were interested, whereas only one respondent was not. The total of three districts shows that from 353 respondents, 216 (61.18%) were curious, and 137 (38.8%) were not interested. It is graphically shown below in the given Figure 4.



**Figure 4**

**Level of interest to volunteer in tourism activity.**

**Table 5**

**Correlation between engagement in tourism activity and training attended:**

|                                       |                     | <b>*engaged in any tourism activities</b> | <b>*attended training related to tourism</b> |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|---|--|
| *engaged in any tourism activities    | Pearson Correlation | 1   | .463**                                       |
|                                       | Sig. (2-tailed)     |   | .000   |
|                                       | N                   | 344                                       | 343  |
| *attended training related to tourism | Pearson Correlation | .463**                                    | 1  |
|                                       | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000                                      |  |
|                                       | N                   | 343                                       | 358  |

\*\* Correlation remains significant for 0.01 points (2-tailed).

Table 5 shows a correlation between “Are you engaged in any tourism or hospitality-related activities” and “Have you attended any kind of training related to tourism & hospitality conducted by govt. or any other organization”. There is a significant moderate positive relation between training attended and engagement in tourism activity (having  $p=.000$ ).

**Table 6**  
**Correlations between training attended and desire for voluntary work in tourism:**

|                               |                     | The desire for voluntary work | training attended |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| The desire for voluntary work | Pearson Correlation | 1                             | .090              |
|                               | Sig. (2-tailed)     |                               | .092              |
|                               | N                   | 353                           | 353               |
| training attended             | Pearson Correlation | .090                          | 1                 |
|                               | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .092                          |                   |
|                               | N                   | 353                           | 358               |

Table 6 shows a correlation between “Will you be interested in volunteering for any tourism-related activities?” and “Have you attended any kind of training related to tourism & hospitality conducted by govt. or any other organization”. There is no significant relationship between interest in volunteer work and training attended related to tourism (having  $p=.092$ ).

**Table 7**  
**Local community participation in tourism development:**

| Sl. No. | Statements:  | Mean   | SD      |
|---------|--|--------|---------|
| 1.      | Awareness Programs about tourism and community development are often organized by Govt. the organization or Pvt. organization in your village.   | 3.0114 | 1.25579 |
| 2.      | NGOs & SHGs are actively participating and collaborating with the local community in encouraging and creating awareness about the positive effect of tourism when planned & implemented correctly. | 3.4403 | 1.06049 |
| 3.      | Officials from the tourism dept. & local body leaders involve local people/villages while deciding on tourism projects in your locality.   | 3.1437 | 1.16483 |
| 4.      | Local people or local communities have a strong influence over any decision-making process with the government & officials.  | 3.2808 | 1.11994 |
| 5.      | Govt. provides loans, incentives, subsidies, technical support etc., to the local people who want to start their tourism business at the village level.  | 3.2330 | 1.20173 |

*Contd...*

|    |  |        |         |
|----|--|--------|---------|
| 6. | Because of tourism, the traditional heritage is getting protected and preserved. | 3.7020 | 1.09204 |
| 7. | Given an opportunity, would you like to start a tourism business in future?      | 3.8052 | 1.12540 |

\*Higher the mean score, the stronger the agreement.

### Finding & Discussion

**Finding 1:** (Table 2) 96.2% of the total respondents (i.e. 360) were not engaged in any tourism business. 3.8 % of the respondents were engaged in the tourism business. Those who were engaged were mostly involved in the homestay and hotel business.

**Finding 2:** (Table 3) 4.5 % of respondents have attended any training, whereas 95.5 % did not attend any training in tourism. Training attended by them was mostly on homestays, tour operations, hospitality, Chief Minister Paryatan Vikas Yojna, tour guide, and trekking. On further asking if this training was useful to them? Most of them have agreed that it is beneficial to them. Therefore, the Dept. of Tourism, NGOs, and various private bodies should collaborate and give out such training in tourism so that many local people can take advantage of it and start their small ventures.

**Finding 3:** (Table 4) 61.2% of the respondents were interested in volunteer work in tourism. 38.8% were not interested. However, the 'interested' percentage is a very encouraging figure. Among the types of volunteer work, the most favoured activities were – (1) local tour guide or showing around the village, (2) participating in the traditional welcome of tourists on request, and (3) showcasing traditional wear for photography.

**Finding 4:** (Table 5) More the training is imparted to the public, the more they will be interested in undertaking self-employment or engaging in tourism activity. That can lead to the creation of an efficient tourism workforce. This can solve not only the issue of unemployment but also reduce the burden of looking out for government jobs, a widespread, persistent problem of the state.

**Finding 5:** (Table 6) Desire to volunteer will not be influenced by any training attended. People without formal training can be interested in

volunteering for tourism work. This is a very encouraging and good trait for developing tourism and the tourism workforce in the area.

**Finding 6:** (Table 7) The mean score for statements 1,3,4, and 5 is between 2.61 to 3.40 suggesting neutral, i.e. neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statement. Awareness is the first and foremost aspect of any development work (statement 1). Hence people need to be made aware of the tourism prospects. The government, NGOs & private stakeholders should rigorously promote and train the public. Lack of awareness may also be the reason behind #*Finding 1*, as seen above.

Regarding the involvement of the public in decision-making (statements 3 & 4), locals would know better about their locality. Therefore, they should be consulted and listened to whenever decisions are made. Local people were also unaware of financial or technical support if they wanted to start their business (statement 5). Financial consultancy firms and technological knowledge hubs should be created, collaborating with the tourism department, experts & banking bodies so that any local people would feel free to approach them for help, guidance or training related to their tourism business—a sort of walk-in help desk. A start-up-friendly tourism scheme should be introduced.

The mean score for statements 2, 6 and 7 is between 3.41 to 4.20. It means agreeing with the statement. More support from the government should be given to NGOs to bring positive change in the community (statement 2). Many Locals felt that tourism helps protect their traditional heritage (statement 6). This is a very encouraging quality of tourism. They have also agreed upon the statement that they would like to start their own tourism business (statement 7). A progressive reinforcement to the public would help create a capable workforce that otherwise is lacking.

## **Conclusion & Recommendation**

Communities must get actively involved with planning and policy-making. The success of any projects and schemes related to tourism is extensively dependent on the engagement and hospitality attitude of the local communities. It also depends on host residents' sense of belongingness and optimistic attitude towards development [Acharya & Halpenny.,2013]. Profits earned from such tourism projects should be widely distributed among the local communities' contributors and not just confined to government and business officials.

From analysis and findings, we have found that most of the local people of the three districts are least involved in tourism activities. In total, only 13 respondents out of 344 were engaged in tourism activity, with a percentage of 3.8% of the total respondents. Simultaneously training attended is also minimal, with only 16 respondents out of 358 saying 'yes' to have attended training in the relevant field, having a percentage of 4% of total respondents. However, the desire to volunteer shows a very favourable outcome, with 216 respondents out of a total of 353 respondents eager to volunteer, having a percentage of 61.18%. It shows more people willing to volunteer despite not being trained or engaged in the tourism business. It was also found that those 16 people who have attended training in the said field have found this training useful. Therefore more such activities should be organized by the Govt. and experts for the benefit of the public. Training can be given to tourist guides, travel agency businesses, hospitality, grooming & sanitation workshop, cooking classes, homestay etc. Also, collaboration can be done with various educational institutions to teach a foreign language, English speaking courses, and computer classes to interested local youths. Most of the people of the three districts neither agree nor disagree with the survey asking for their involvement by the government officials during decision-making. This can be a cause of concern if not addressed properly in future. Hence Government, along with community involvement, should invest and encourage more to create a favourable tourism ecosystem. So far, whatever is done by the government ends is not sufficient. More awareness using the tourism dept along with local youth, local governance, NGOs, social media etc., should be done. More schemes encouraging new tourism start-ups and tourism models at the village level should be introduced and monitored with the help of the tourism department and designated communities [Kumar,A., et.al., 2023]. Awards & recognition should be encouraged to popularise the potential of the tourism business. Familiarisation trips should be arranged either sponsored or voluntary (with some discounts and perks). Mapping of the villages from a tourism point of view should be undertaken so that the tourists and service providers do not face any problems while venturing. Local products should be converted into high-economic-value products. There is a need to increase the role of people and government in framing policies and plans in favour of tourism and the local community.

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