

**ROLE OF NGOS IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM  
DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF NGUNU ZIRO OF  
ARUNACHAL PRADESH**

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**Abstract**

Sustainable tourism is one of the emerging concepts of development that believes in sustaining the socio-cultural, natural and built environment by making conservation economically viable for the local community involved. The paper is based on the case study methodology on 'Ngunu Ziro', a community based institution in Ziro located in the Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh, working towards responsible tourism for better utilisation of local resources by involving the community members. In depth interviews have been conducted with the members of the organisation and the local community. It has been observed that Ngunu Ziro has been playing an incredible role in the promotion of sustainable tourism by adopting appropriate development strategies.

**Keywords:** Non-governmental organisations, sustainable tourism, community participation, Ngunu Ziro

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## 1. Introduction

The World Tourism Organisation (1996) defined tourism as comprising of “activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year and not less than 24 hours for leisure, holiday, business and other non-remunerated purpose”. As Monisola (2012) states, “tourism can be regarded as a catalyst for national and regional development, bringing employment, exchange earnings, balance of payments advantages, and important infrastructural developments benefiting locals and visitors same way”. Depending on the travel experience demanded by the tourist, new forms of tourism has been developed. The concept of sustainable tourism is often used interchangeably with related concepts like eco-tourism, green tourism etc. A common perception regarding the term is that it is the kind of tourism that seeks to minimize the negative impacts of tourism on the environment at the same time seeking participation of the local community for their development. The World Conference on Sustainable tourism held in Lanzarote on April 1995 paved the way for the formulation of the Charter of Sustainable Tourism. The Charter of Sustainable Tourism is a declaration that lays down eighteen principles as to how tourism should be controlled so that it can be included in the global strategy for sustainable development. The Charter also accords due stress to the role to be played by all stakeholders in the tourism industry. The Charter declared that tourism development should be based on criteria of sustainability, ‘which must be ecologically bearable in the long term, economically viable as well as ethically and socially equitable for the local community’. The most widely accepted definition of sustainable tourism is the one given by UNWTO which defines it as the “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.”

In light of the above discussions, it is clear that the entire idea of sustainable tourism rests on community participation i.e. the involvement of the host community in the development of tourism. DeAraujo and Bramwell, Sautter and Leisen unanimously agree that the most critical stakeholders that should be considered in the tourism planning literature are the local residents. Since the local residents are likely to experience the greatest impact from such developments, informing them of relevant aspects, considering their views, involving them in different stages in the decision making process and ensuring that they gain actual benefits are advocated and

promoted by many as fundamental to sustainable tourism. It has been emphasized by the World Tourism Organization that the local community need to be involved in tourism planning, implementation and evaluation. It emphasizes holistic and sustainable development with a sense of ownership of community members, so that they love, take care of, depend on and utilize tourism resources, which is a basis of sustainable development and community empowerment. If local people or stakeholders are not provided an opportunity to participate, socio-cultural and environmental problems will result, causing unsustainable business operations.

One of the key stakeholders in development projects are the non-government organizations which work very closely with the local communities by taking a more participatory approach. It is increasingly recognised that NGOs do a better job than governments not only in promoting participation but also in converting aid money into development that lasts (Tosun, 2000). The following paper is based on the case study on NgunuZiro, a local NGO in the Ziro valley in Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh, which adopts community participative tourism for natural resource conservation and village community development through tourism and its related activities.

## 2. Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are:

- i) to study the viability of the Apatani lifestyle as a tourism product,
- ii) to study the involvement of NgunuZiro in the tourism development in the study area, and
- iii) to study the sustainability measures that have taken place through community participation by NgunuZiro.

## 3. Methodology

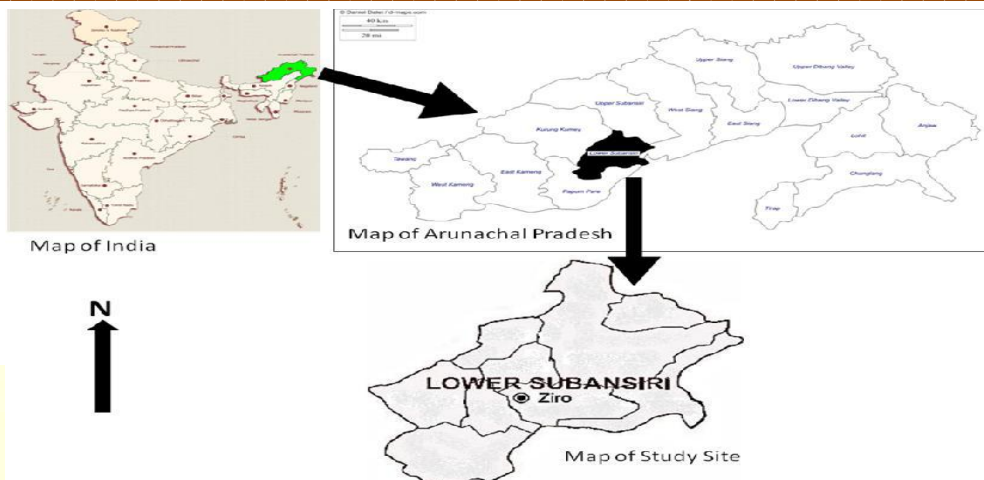
The research employed both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods. Fieldwork has been done in a mixed methods approach, including interviews and questionnaires. Interviews with key stakeholders of NgunuZiro were conducted by using interview schedule. This was further supplemented by in depth interview with members of Self Help Groups of

current projects as well as the local community. Secondary sources that were used include journals, published books, unpublished reports and newsletters, the internet as well as research reports of past students.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

The study mainly focuses on the extent of activities and achievements of Ngunu Ziro in implementing sustainable tourism practices. Ziro is home to the Apatani Tribe of Lower Subansiri district in Arunachal Pradesh. The Apatani is one of the major ethnic tribes of Arunachal Himalaya, who have traditionally lived almost exclusively within the plateau area of Ziro Valley. They have traditional land use practices and rich ecological knowledge of natural resources management and conservation. Known for their intensive wet-rice cultivation-cum-pisciculture, this tribal community have attracted the UNESCO to propose the Ziro valley as a World Heritage Site for its 'extremely high productivity' and 'unique' way of preserving the ecology. Unlike most other hill tribes, who practise jhum cultivation, this unique tribe have been practising wet-rice cultivation integrated with pisciculture and rural forestry in the restricted flat valley land. The rice fields are surrounded by thickly forested mountains on all sides, presenting a picturesque landscape. The Apatanis have a culture of planting trees on private land even though they live in the middle of forests to support the expanding population, where planting follows cutting which has been a sustainable practice. The religious beliefs of the tribe have also contributed in conserving the sacred groves which are the storehouse of the ecologically and socially valued species like the ethno-medico botanical resource, thereby protecting the whole ecosystem function. Thus nature plays an inseparable part in the customs and tradition of Apatani tribe.

**Figure 1. Map of the study area**



It has been realised that to keep alive the old heritage, it is imperative to involve the local community in such economic activity which is nature based as well as economically and socially viable to the whole society. In other words, development of sustainable tourism can be a tool of conservation and promotion of the sustainable lifestyle of this indigenous community. The Apatani valley, as a tourist destination, primarily attracts tourists who are interested in exploring the ethnic tribal heritage amidst the bounty of nature. ‘NgunuZiro’, an NGO based in the Apatani valley, has initiated the project of development of tourism in Ziro. Their main objective has been conservation of nature by sustainable practices.

**Table 1: Monthly Tourist Arrival Report (January 2013 to December 2013)**

Sl. No	Month	Indian	Overseas	Total
1	January	854	24	878
2	February	925	18	943
3	March	1275	23	1298
4	April	789	45	834
5	May	997	21	1018
6	June	546	11	557
7	July	463	23	486
8	August	701	19	720
9	September	950	17	967

10	October	571	18	589
11	November	618	20	638
12	December	595	19	614
	<b>Total</b>	<b>9284</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>9542</b>

**Source: Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Office of the District Tourism Officer, Lower Subansiri District, Ziro**

#### 4.1 Ngunu Ziro: Historical background & objectives

It all started with the Future Generations Arunachal (FGA), a community based organisation registered with the Government of Arunachal Pradesh in 1997 under the Societies Registration Act. It is also a member of the State Wildlife Board and has been advocating community-controlled hunting instead of ban on it, which precipitates illegal hunting activities.

FGA started community based eco-tourism with the support of Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE) in 2010. The primary aim of the project is to promote responsible tourism so that it contributes to the preservation of tribal culture and conservation of the valuable pristine environment. The focus is also on to provide alternative or supplementary livelihood options to the indigenous community through tourism. It started with the home-stay projects in the Apatani villages where the idea was to bring the benefit of tourism directly to the community level and to give the tourists a unique experience of the Apatani eco- cultural landscape and true flavour of the way of life of the Apatanis. With this initiative of FGA, there was the formation of an apex community based institution called Ngunu Ziro which was assigned to oversee the whole project. It is registered with the Government of Arunachal Pradesh under the Societies Registration Act (SR/ITA/4966). The main thematic areas of its works are:

- community empowerment by building their capacities,
- environmental conservation by promoting healthy traditional practices and awareness activities for school children,
- livelihood initiatives for the village people,
- promotion of responsible tourism by encouraging involvement of local people in tourism activities.

#### 4.2 Projects undertaken

Future Generations Arunachal in collaboration with Ngunu Ziro began the tourism project in Ziro valley by imparting various trainings on eco-tourism and benefits of home-stay facility. The training curriculum ranged from nature guide, trek development, packaging of local cuisine to marketing and networking with different stakeholders. Later, six members were taken for an exposure tour to Sikkim to see the practices and mechanism of home-stay there. Soon after, two home-stay units were started in Siro village by Shri Hibu Tatu and Shri Punyo Chada. Now more home-stay units have been started in Tajang, Hija and Hong villages also. Home-stay units are now receiving tourist and hosted many guest from overseas also.

**Table 2: Projects and workshops undertaken by Ngunu Ziro**

Name of Project	Co-initiators	Location	Date of initiation
2 Homestays	NABARD, Young MissionAdventure club	Siuro village	2010
1 Homestay	NABARD	Tajang village	2010
Two-day workshop on Ecotourism Promotion	FGA, Darjeeling, ATREE, Ford Foundation	Ziro	2010
Training Program for Tourist Guides	Rural Tourism Management Committee	Ziro	2010
Community Wildlife Survey	FGA, Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) and Ashoka Trust for Research in	Apatani Plateau and Talley Valley	August 2010

	Ecology and Environment		
Awareness workshop on community participation	FGA	Ziro	October 2010
Zero Waste Management Program		Vivekananda Kendra School, Ziro	February 2012
Responsible Tourism Workshop	Dept. of Tourism, Lower Subansiri District and FGA	Ziro	2014

Source: Field study by the researcher, March 2014

#### 4.3 Practices Defining Sustainable Tourism by Ngunu Ziro

- i) Ngunu Ziro initiated its journey with start-up projects like livelihood projects, conservation awareness, and capacity building and later got involved in responsible tourism development through community participation. It is jointly run by community women group, farmers club and youth group. Community participation is seen in the form of homestay ownerships, trained local tourist guides, nature guides, wildlife projects where we also see the involvement of hunters.
- ii) Ngunu Ziro has been considering equity in the flow of benefits of the home-stay initiative by way of maintaining a roster for allocation of visitors to the home-stay units. This ensures that there is cooperation rather than competition among the home-stay units. The striking fact is that these homestay units, equipped with modern facilities, are completely devoid of any advertising promotions. The multiplier effect of the home-stay initiative also flows to the other community members. The local women of the villages have been organized into Self Help Groups (SHGs). These



groups are encouraged and supported to take up various activities like weaving, fish farming and kitchen garden. Food items such as vegetable, rice, fruit, meat, fish handicrafts are provided by the SHGs to the home-stay units. Not only that, cultural programme such as folk dance and songs are presented by the local artist and villages women.

- iii) The local youth are employed as nature guide or tour guide for trekking and sightseeing thereby providing meaningful employment to them. Ngunu Ziro also conducts village tour accompanied by trained local guides, and helps tourists to take part in their traditional rituals and festivals along with a nature trail in the nearby Talley Valley which is a wildlife sanctuary.
- iv) Ngunu Ziro in collaboration with FGA has remarkably increased the sense of ownership of the local community members in protecting and conserving pristine local environment of the Apatani Plateau. According to the founder member, Dr Kanno, 10% of the profit earned from tourism ventures flow to the organisation, another 10% is contributed to the village welfare community. They make sure that the ideas and views of local people are incorporated in the decision making of the organisation.
- v) They have been working towards creating awareness among school children about zero resource waste management and to keep Ziro clean and green. They are also promoting beautiful products made out of plastic wastes, as a part of campaign to make Ziro a zero waste town. Under natural resource conservation program, local level Conservation Area Management Committees and subsequent sub-committees are formed to mobilize local people for overall conservation and development.
- vi) Community wildlife survey is carried out in the Apatani valley and Talley valley as a part of project to promote community-based conservation. The idea is to generate a baseline data on wildlife in the area using traditional knowledge and scientifically

acceptable methods. On the other hand, visioning workshop on promotion of ecotourism are being organised by Ngunu Ziro as a part the project designed to establish linkage between conservation and livelihood needs of the local community. The objective of such programs has been to work out detailed plans for tourism development with active participation of both members of Local Coordinating Committee (LCC) and Village Welfare Workers (VWWs).

- vii) In their effort to promote and preserve the cultural heritage, Ngunu Ziro has initiated the concept of homestay where a tourist can get the first-hand experience of the tribal lifestyle. The tourists staying in the homestay are welcomed as any other guests of the family and can interact with the members sitting together in the typical Apatani living room cum fireplace where they offer an insight into the Apatani people's life. The interior design of these homestays, although equipped with modern facilities, gives highest importance to exhibits of the indigenous handloom and handicrafts to keep intact the ethnicity. The tourists are served with local food mainly home-grown in the organic kitchen gardens and poultry farms. This presents a picture of how a typical Apatani household is self-sustaining.

**Table 3: Community participation through Ngunu Ziro**

Aspects of participation	No. of persons
Local people in homestay projects	7 couples
Local people as tourist guides	22
Local people tour operators	10
Self-Help Groups	27

**Source: Field Survey by the researcher, March 2014**

## 6. Conclusion

Sustainable tourism has significant impact on societal and conservation efforts. It gives new opportunities to the local community to market local products and services and also allow them to diversify their livelihood options by taking direct participation in tourism activities and also make them realise the value of their community assets – their culture, tradition, beliefs, cuisine and lifestyle. Tourism should be community-based, participatory and designed to improve the economic and social well-being of local residents where environment is the prime concern. It has been observed that Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) have increasingly played an important role in the development projects by empowering the host community by imparting various training and capacity-building programs to make tourism a participatory development process. More active participation of the local community will usher in further social and economic development in the study area. NGOs like Ngunu Ziro can take up future projects to make sustainable tourism a grand success among the Apatanis of Ziro valley as well as set an example for the others working in the similar line.

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