

Socio-Economic and Cultural Impacts of Homestay Tourism in Sirubari Village Syanja Nepal

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Abstract

The main aim of this study is to explore the socio-economic and cultural impact of homestay tourism in the local community of Sirubari village in Nepal. To accomplish the desired objective, the study has two fundamental objectives - to study the tourists' inflow trend during the study period of the current five years, and the socio-economic and cultural impact of homestay tourism on homestay households and non-homestay households in the village. To meet the objectives, the study has used descriptive and analytical research design using both qualitative and quantitative data from primary and secondary data sources determining samples from the population. The study selected samples using random sampling among the homestay operators and convenient sampling among the non-homestay households. For the primary data collection, the study has used both structured questionnaires and open interviews with the respondents. For the data analysis, the study used SPSS. The study concluded that the trend of tourists' arrival was increasing until 2019-20 AD. However, due to the influence of the global pandemic COVID-19, the trend of tourists' arrival appeared to be reduced remarkably, as it has been reduced by 58.95% in the year 2020-21. Likewise, homestay tourism in Sirubari noticed to be a pioneer to the socio-economic and cultural empowerment in the local community, as the homestay households increased to twenty-three from seventeen during these recent five years as compare to the period earlier to this study that there were only 17 homestay households until 2015-16 AD. Finally, the study observed that most of the key factors socio-economic and cultural assistance of local community is highly appreciated.

Keywords: Accommodation, Homestay, Nepal

1. Introduction

According to the council of Europe rural tourism refers to tourism in rural areas together with all the activities that take place at those locations and its most important features include peaceful surroundings, absence of noise, a preserved environment, communication with hosts, homemade dishes, and learning about farm work. Rural tourism has a promising future because working city people are becoming ever more alienated from nature. Losing touch with the natural environment, eating industrially processed food, and suffering pollution by smog, noise, and artificial lighting are the cause of discontent in modern people who increasingly choose to spend their vacations in a

countryside setting where they can find peace and quiet, restore their strength and learn about a different way of life. Tourists often want to try their hand at working around domestic animals, in vegetable gardens, or helping with food preparation (Jurdana, 2015). Rural tourism involves a spectrum of activities, services, and facilities organized by rural residents with the aim of attracting tourists to their area and generating additional income. Rural space is the fundamental resource for developing rural tourism and possesses huge potential in meeting the needs of the city population for peace and recreation in the outdoors. Rural tourism also includes visits to national parks and nature, other heritage spots in the rural area, taking scenic drives, enjoying the rural landscape, and staying on tourist farms (Mesaric, Zabcic, and Rebeka, 2008 cited in Jurdana, 2015).

Homestay Tourism is an alternative name for village tourism. A homestay, by its combined word homestay, is staying in someone's home as a paying guest for a short time period. But such guests are provided accommodation and services by individual families and communities too. Therefore, the home-stay regulation has accepted it as managed by an individual or community (Adhikari, 2014). The 'Homestay' seeks to draw tourists away from posh and crowded urban areas to the rural locality full of splendid natural surroundings, by providing them with clean, comfortable, and budget-friendly accommodation and food. Thus, the homestay offers the traveler a unique local experience and possibilities of interaction with the host family. It offers the chance to experience new and untapped places which have enabled the government to popularize new tourist destinations and provide an alternative source of income to the rural folks (Rakhal, 2014-15).

1.1 An Introduction to Sirubari Village

Sirubari is a hillside-located village with only 43 households and 60 inhabitants, mostly belonging to the Gurung community, including the families of retired soldiers of Indian and British armies. The village consists of 23 households that may offer guests accommodation. The village is neat and clean, very colorful and warm, while the people are friendly, well-educated and are enthusiastic about tourism. This renowned tourist destination is located in Adhikhola Rural Municipality-1, Syangja. The village is totally unspoiled Gurung settlement set in the hills at 1,610 meters above Sea level (Survey, 2022). The climate is ideal all around the year. At least once a week, villagers organize a cleaning campaign in the village's main trails and community area to make it aesthetically pleasing for the guests. Many mountain tourism destinations in Nepal are facing a deforestation problem due to the continuous supply of firewood to meet the growing needs of energy for tourists and local people. The case of Sirubari is again different; tourism has led to the adoption of alternative energy. 93% of the surveyed households have some sort of alternative energy sources such as improved cookstoves, biogas and solar cooker Sirubari won the "PATA Gold Award 2001" in the Heritage and Cultural Heritage category (Survey, 2022).

The village is rich in natural and cultural heritage. The major tourism resources of the village are Local Gurung culture, Livelihoods pattern, community forest/forest nurseries, and the Thumro Juro viewpoint. Gurung dances such as Sorathi and Gathu with some folk songs and dances are the cultural programs to welcome the guests in the village. Every evening is special in Sirubari. As soon as evening falls and the moon rises out of the clouds, the village echoes with the music of madal, khajari, and flutes. Some enthusiastic foreign guests can also be seen moving their feet to popular folk music. On the last day, after the guest's breakfast with the host, the villagers get gathered with

the guests in the Buddha Gomba, the guests get some blessing from the Buddha priest, and write some comments and their experience in the visitors' book. Then after the Tika and blessings from the priest, they are praised with Sirubari Topi as a token of love and appreciation and people queue up in line and offer flowers and garlands to the tourists getting farewell (Survey, 2022).

Sirubari village has its own Tourism Development Management Committee, composed of community members. It is responsible for assigning guests to hosts, which is done on a strictly rotational basis. It also ensures that accommodation standards are met and organizes cultural activities and educational programs. The contract with Nepal Village Resorts terminated in 2007, and villagers are now free to negotiate contracts with private tour operators and accept independent travelers (Survey, 2022).

The rationale of the study focuses on tourism which is a major and important source of foreign exchange earner has an important role in socio-economic and cultural development in the least developed countries like Nepal. Considering this fact Nepal Government has adopted a policy of expanding and promotional activities related to tourism in the district. The fact that the tourism industry occupies an important place in Nepal and the Nepal government has put efforts to level based development of this sector through declaration and celebration of 'Visit Nepal 1998', 'Destination Nepal, 2005', 'Tourism Year, 2011', Visit Nepal 2020. Expansion and explanation of more tourism destinations and resources help to attract more tourists. The specific objectives of the study are to study the trend and types of tourist inflow in Sirubari village, the socio-economic and cultural impacts of homestay on local people, and to study the opportunities and challenges of homestay business in the village.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

To make the study more reliable and comprehensive and for the completion of the task available articles, research papers, bulletins, reports, surveys, and books by various authors from different perspectives focusing on the field of tourism have been included.

Homestay is an alternative name for village tourism, which means staying in someone's home and providing an opportunity for the visitors to experience a place in an authentic, comfortable and homely setting. A Homestay, by its combined words (homestay), is staying in someone's home as a paying guest for a short time period. But such guests are provided accommodation and services by individual families and communities too. Therefore, the home-stay regulation has accepted it as run (managed) by an individual or community (Bhan and Sing, 2014). In homestay tourism, both the environment and culture are commoditized; market value is created with the demand of visitors. This provides a financial reward to the local indigenous community for conservation of the environment and their culture (Bhan and Sing, 2014). In general, the homestay provides visitors (1) unique (one of a kind) opportunity to experience the rich and hospitable cultures of the village; (2) an opportunity to see and experience astonishing objects no one else has seen or done before- especially amazing food; (3) to meet and really connect with the local people from the host country, and not just see them through a bus window; (4) become a part of a family, and an important part of a household, that is, a homely environment; (5) learn about environments and cultures through other

people's eyes, (6) contribute directly to the rural economy and people in need and (7) provide opportunities to support the community in conservation initiatives (Devkota, 2010).

Homestay Policy in Nepal

Tourism development in Nepal dates back to the early 1950s following the successful ascent of Mount Annapurna by French mountaineer Maurice Hergoz, and 3 years later the successful ascent of Everest, the world's highest peak, by the Nepalese mountaineer Tenzing Norgay and Sir Edmund Hillary, a New Zealander (Thapa, 2012). In 1985 the Kathmandu Research Centre carried out a detailed study on the prospects of village tourism in Nepal. Positive suggestions from foreign visitors/tourists paved the way forward to clarify this concept. After a long battle, the government of Nepal included a village tourism program in its tourism policy, 1995 (Upadhyay, 2003).

Nepal government's 9th 5-year plan (1997 to 2002) and 10th 5-year plan (2002 to 2007) gave due consideration to village tourism and promised to establish 14 different village tourism destinations in each geographical region within 5 years (Pradhananga, 1993). With the objectives to share tourism benefits with the rural community, deliver tourism service with rural participation, improve the living standard of the rural community through income generation, use self-employment as a tool for rural and local development, inform the tourists about rural traditions, arts, cultures, and livelihoods and give them opportunities to experience them, and make arrangement of simple and easy stay for tourists, the government of Nepal issued Homestay Operating Guidelines, 2011 on August 2011 to be effective from September 11. According to Homestay Association of Nepal, there are 145 community-based homestays in Nepal. Looking at the total number of homestays throughout the country within a few years it is a rapidly growing business in Nepal (Nepal Rastra Bank, 2015).

Homestay Business and Entrepreneurship

Many rural areas have possibilities for homestay tourism development since its social, religious, cultural, and geographical structure make Nepal one of the famous destinations for homestay tourism (Kandel, 2011 as cited in Bhudathoki, 2013). Homestay tourism promotes the development of primary and supportive tourism enterprises and local economic development through the use of existing potential and opportunities. The development of homestay tourism can provide opportunities for local communities by offering services or selling products to local and foreign tourists. It generates employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for the local community as well as uses available resources as tourist attractions (Rakhal 2014-15). It supports the promotion of cottage industries which would address unemployment; underemployment and poverty problems. The study aims to discuss tourism as a catalyst to empower the socio-economic and cultural aspects in the community.

Pradhananga (1993) in his study observed that the direct import content was 33.49% in the tourism sector, 17.34% in the tourism-related sector, and 8.94% in the non-tourism sector. The increase in tourist expenditure leads to an increase in imports and this was found to reduce the positive effect on the national economy. Arya (1999) found in the study that it results in increasing the annual income of the country. However, Arya tries to suggest that it is not necessary that the development of tourism in all areas are equally rewarding. Shrestha (1999) has concluded that the correlation

between tourist arrival and foreign exchange earning in terms of US dollars shows the importance of tourist arrivals for the economy. The tourism earning did not rise in terms of US dollars because of low per capita tourist expenditure. Nepal is considered as one of the lowest per capita per day in the world spending outlet came to be known as a cheap tourist destination. Upadhyaya (2003) detected that the economy of Nepal lacks in terms of industrialization. Therefore, some further alternatives have to be found which can induce the process of industrialization to put the path of rapid economic development for this global linkage of the Nepalese economy.

Nepal Tourism Board (2006) in "Rural Nepal Guide Book" Nepal is one of the richest countries in the world in terms of natural cultural beauty due to its geographical position and latitudinal variation within this spectacular geography are some of the richest cultures of Himalayan heritage and it has also invited tourist to meet the lovely people of rural Nepal share a meal with them, stay at their houses and family guests, taste their local drink and see them carry on with life graciously.

In the research article entitled "Local People Perceptions toward Social, Economic and Environmental Impacts of Tourism in Kermanshah (Iran)" by Mohammadi (2010), The result of the research showed tourism did not create enough benefits to the people in the area but the people agreed that tourism provided job opportunities. Changchun (2014) concluded that the articles were tourism has influenced them to improve their skills in managing businesses, which were increased their income and personal improvement. Tourism and entrepreneurship were supportive to address their socio-economic to more extent. Despite some negative impacts of tourism the local people of Luang Prabang Province agreed to promote and develop tourism in order to support local economic growth and local resident's income

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research has used a descriptive research design and described the results described logically. It has described the problem by using questionnaires and opinions. Mostly, this approach investigated empirical problems using questionnaires.

3.2 Population and Sample

The entire population is only 43, in that case 100% sample is desirable. The study has selected entire 23 homestay households because of the very small population. According to Bailey (1978), nonprobability sampling can be done on a spur of the moment basis to take advantage of available respondents without statistical complexity. The study selected 20 non-homestay households with a convenience sampling procedure.

3.3 Nature and Sources of Data

The study has accumulated primary data through questionnaires, interviews, and observation field work. The study has taken the sample homestay operators and non-homestay houses as the respondents. Likewise, the study took secondary data from various published and unpublished materials of related organizations, the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, relevant literature, and different archival sources

3.4 Data Analysis Tools

The study has reviewed the data obtained to avoid problems and ambiguities. The study has used SPSS to analyze both the quantitative and qualitative data collected.

4. Results and Discussion

The study has presented, interpreted, and analyzed the collected data for the fulfillment of its objectives. The information is in terms of the number of tourists arriving in Sirubari, the socio-economic impact of the tourism business in the village. The presentation, analysis, and interpretation of data are mainly based on the questionnaires used in field visits.

4.1 Tourist Inflow in Sirubari

Tourist inflow started in Sirubari since 1998 AD, after it was declared as tourism village. After the end of the insurgency, the situation has improved. In some years the arrival of tourists seemed increased and in some years it has decreased. The study has taken tourist inflow data for the past 5 years.

Table 1: Inflow in Sirubari

Year	Domestic	Foreign	Total	Total Increase/Decrease %
2016-17	1,900	56	1,956	-
2017-18	2,380	161	2,541	29.90%
2018-19	4,619	81	4,700	84.97%
2019-20	4,953	158	5,111	8.75%
2020-21	2,098	0	2,098	-58.95%

Source: Tourism Development Management Committee Sirubari, 2022

Table 1 shows that the tourists' inflow from the year 2016-17 to 2020-21 AD and found that the tourists' inflow trend in Sirubari has ranged between one thousand nine hundred fifty-six and five thousand one hundred eleven. The minimum number of tourists which is one thousand nine hundred fifty-six visited Sirubari in 2016-17 AD. Similarly, the maximum number of tourists which is thousand one hundred eleven has visited the place in 2019-20 AD. However, the number of tourists reduced to two thousands ninety eight drastically in 2020-21 AD.

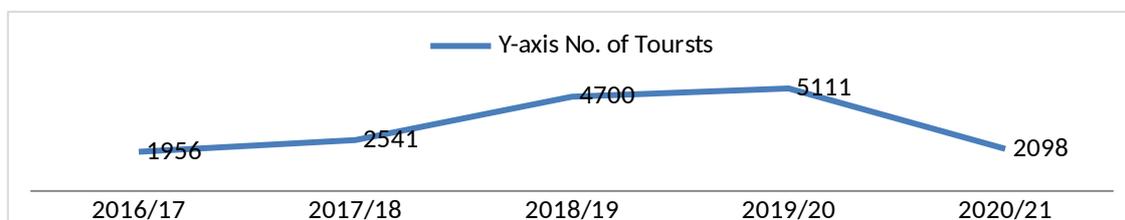


Figure 1: Tourist Inflow in Sirubari

Figure 1 shows that the arrival of tourists including both domestic and foreign throughout the years up to 2018-19 had a drastic increasing trend with an increased percentage of 84.97. However, the

arrival of tourists during the year 2019-20 has increased only by 8.75% which is comparatively reduction in percentage than of the year 2018-19. Finally, the arrival of tourists in the year 2020-21 has been reduced drastically to 58.95% than of the immediately previous year.

Regarding the drastic decrement in the tourist inflow trend in Sirubari in the year 2021-21 the research has made an inquiry with the question to the Treasury of Homestay, Coordinator of Management Committee, homestay operator, non-homestay operator, and local people of the village; why did tourists' arrival decrease drastically with reaching tourists inflow with negative percentage in 2021? For the query, they replied commonly that "It is due to influence of global pandemic COVID-19". It means the village could not be free from the influence of the global pandemic COVID-19.

4.2 Socio-Economic Impact

Besides benefits to the involved families, the homestay activity is postulated to put favourable socio-economic impact on the entire community. To know about the impact, the respondents from homestay households and non-homestay households were asked to express their opinions in terms of dichotomous questions 'Yes' or 'No' on the spill over of the homestay benefits on 12 different socio-economic facets of the community such as health, education, occupation, wealth, income, quality of life, women empowerment, social bonding, trade, environment, infrastructure and social awareness.

Table 2: Socio-Economic Impact of Homestay

S.N.		Responses				Total	
		Yes		No			
		No	%	No	%	No	%
1	Health	19	100	0	0	19	100
2	Education	18	94.74	1	5.26	19	100
3	Occupation	19	0	0	0	19	100
4	Wealth	19	100	0	0	19	100
5	Income Level	18	94.74	1	5.26	19	100
6	Quality of Life	19	100	0	0	19	100
7	Woman Empowerment	19	100	0	0	19	100
8	Social Bonding	19	100	0	0	19	100
9	Trade	19	100	0	0	19	100
10	Environment	19	100	0	0	19	100
11	Infrastructure	19	100	0	0	19	100
12	Public Awareness	19	100	0	0	19	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 2 shows that all the respondents agreed on tourism has improved people's health, wealth, occupation, quality of life, women empowerment, social bonding, trade, environment, the infrastructure of development, and public awareness. Only 5.26% of respondents argued that tourism has not empowered education and income level of the local people.

Table 3: Socio-Economic Impact of Non-homestay

S.N.		Responses				Total	
		Yes		No		No	%
		No.	%	No	%		
1	Health	19	95%	1	5%	20	100
2	Education	18	90%	2	10%	20	100
3	Occupation	20	100%	0	0%	20	100
4	Wealth	17	85%	3	15%	20	100
5	Income Level	20	100%	0	0%	20	100
6	Quality of Life	17	85%	3	15%	20	100
7	Woman Empowerment	20	100%	0	0%	20	100
8	Social Bonding	19	95%	1	5%	20	100
9	Trade	10	100%	0	0%	20	100
10	Environment	18	90%	2	10%	20	100
11	Infrastructure	19	95%	1	5%	20	100
12	Public Awareness	19	95%	1	5%	20	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

Table 3 shows that the 100% of respondents selected from non-homestay households agreed that tourism has a positive impact on the socio-economic facets such as occupation, income level, woman empowerment, and Trade. Likewise, 95% of respondents agreed that tourism has a positive impact on the facets such as health, social bonding, environment, infrastructure, and public awareness; 90% of respondents agreed that tourism has a positive impact on the facets- education, and 85% respondents agreed that tourism has empowered quality of life of people.

4.3 Cultural Impact

In order to analyze the impact of homestay tourism on the culture of the local community, the study took direct opinion collection from homestay operators, non-homestay operators, and other ethnics (whose population is very low) in the community and commonly found replies, that the homestay tourism in the village has been able to protect and continue the tradition of guests' honor in Nepalese society. Likewise, the conduction of daily cultural programs to welcome and entertain the tourists in the village has made the transmission of Gurung culture among the tourists making repetitions to the new generations of the community empowering them to carry forward easily in the days to come as well. On the next, the harmony of peace and unity which is the significance of Nepalese culture seemed as the people from other ethnics also seemed to enjoy playing different

musical instruments in the cultural programs in the village and serving the tourists being employed in homestay households as employees.

7. Conclusion

Sirubari is one of the important destinations of village tourism in Nepal since its initiation of the concept of village tourism. From the study, it has been observed that people in the village have been benefitted in different ways not only homestay operators but also non-homestay. Homestay business has provided employment opportunities to the indigenous local Gurung people. Local Dalit people who are not homestay operators involve in cultural activities playing panache baja. Similarly, local women from non-homestay communities involve in cooking, cleaning, and washing at homestay-operated houses. The homestay operators and non-homestay seemed satisfied with the inflow of tourists in the village. The majority of respondents agreed that they had learned many things related to daily behaviors, social manners, and lifestyles from the guests. During the field study, the respondents agreed that they realized themselves change in their way of daily manner and behavior. More than 80% of respondents agreed that the future of the Sirubari homestay business is bright. 57% of non-homestay people claimed that homestay operators are most benefitted from the tourism business in Sirubari village. Around 94% agreed that the tourism business has been supportive of the preservation of local culture and tradition.

The majority of the respondents agreed that tourism had positive impact on the socio-economic and cultural facets of the community. 12 different components of socio-economic aspects such as health, education, occupation, wealth, income, quality of life, women empowerment, social bonding, trade, infrastructure, and social awareness were included in the questionnaires. More than 70% of respondents agreed that tourism had a good impact on the facets. Similarly, the majority of the respondents from non-homestay communities agreed on the positive impact of tourism on mentioned socio-economic and cultural facets. The specialist doctors are sometimes called from Pokhara for medical check-ups of the villagers. The poor and diligent students have got the opportunities of scholarships at schools. The homestay operators have broadened their social relationship with foreign countries. The foreigners are attracted to appliances like jato, dhiki, panighatta and so on which are gradually disappearing from the village.

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