

ICH 2019**International Conference on Humanities****EVALUATION OF TOURISM POLICIES IN RELATION TO
ECOTOURISM IN JAFFNA, SRI LANKA**

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Abstract

Jaffna District is situated in the northern part of Sri Lanka and the tourism sector is being promoted in post war development. Jaffna has opportunities and potentials for ecotourism development. Presently, national, provincial and district level plans have been prepared to promote tourism in Jaffna District. However, there are lacks of initiatives related with ecotourism development in this region. This study focuses on the evaluation of the extent to which these tourism plans encourage ecotourism development in the Jaffna district. Primary and secondary data have been used in this study. The main method is content analysis of these plans. Results of the analysis showed that the initiatives on ecotourism have not been promoted based on true ecotourism concepts in all three documents. While comparing the three policy documents, which give certain focus on ecotourism development. But it does not adequately define ecotourism zones, resources, regulations and responsibilities. At this juncture, well prepared ecotourism policy is very vital to Jaffna district for the conservation and enhancement of the environmental attributes, local people wellbeing as well as regional development. This study recommends that it is high time to study the ecotourism potentials of Jaffna District in detail, put in place regulations to encourage ecotourism, conserve the environment and ecotourism attractions, provide intensive training to stakeholders, and increase the awareness and involvement of local communities in the development of ecotourism in the study area.

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1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the rapidly growing economic sectors in the world. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), it generates 10.4 % of world GDP (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2019). Global spread and diversification of tourism has produced economic and employment opportunities in many related sectors. At the same time, tourism development has put tremendous pressures and negative impact on the natural environment. At this juncture, the early part of the 1990s the “Sustainability concept” had been pushed forward by United Nation Organization. Subsequently, United Nation World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) had come out with guidelines and management practices for sustainable tourism in order to maintain a balance between socio-economic and environmental aspects (United Nation World Tourism Organization, 2015).

Ecotourism is classified as one of the sub-categories of sustainable tourism. Currently, eco-tourism is widely used in order to achieve sustainable development through conservation. It is becoming increasingly popular as an alternative to mass tourism (Mondino & Beery, 2019). The importance of ecotourism was felt by the environmental damage associated with mass tourism (Honey, 1999). While implementing ecotourism projects, opportunities are created for better management of natural resources. At this juncture, most of the countries, depending on tourism industry move to ecotourism to avoid the adverse effect of mass tourism. Therefore, they formulate the tourism policy to promote the ecotourism. Australia is the pioneer “region” in the world and given its status as a leader of ecotourism policy and planning (Fennell et al., 2001). While implementing the ecotourism project, some countries have faced difficulties. Recently, Trinidad and Tobacco tackled many challenges to run ecotourism. As a result, it formulated community based ecotourism policy after the multi-level stakeholder consultation (Ministry of Tourism, Trinidad and Tobacco, 2018). Similarly, Galapagos, Ecuador faced challenges on world heritage sites by environmental impact and it urged to evaluate the state of tourism. Subsequently the authority proposed community based ecotourism as the model for the future development of tourism (García et al., 2013). Various international environmental organization involved in ecotourism try to promote community-based ecotourism projects. For example, World Wildlife Fund [WWF] (2001) gives capacity building program to local community, particularly in developing countries like Sabah-Malaysia, Namibia-Africa, Brazil-South America.

Tourism in Sri Lanka plays an important role in the economic sector. In the last decades, growth of this industry has fluctuated due to the internal war which continued for almost last 30 years. Country has an opportunity for more tourism product from war affected northern and eastern region and missed the chance on a number of occasions due to improper economic policies, political violence (Fernando, 2017; Kamble & Bouchon, 2014). Since the war ended in 2009 the sector has grown exponentially (Central Bank Report of Sri Lanka, 2018). Subsequently, Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) has formulated Sri Lanka tourism strategic plans. It is expected to support sustainable development goals. The government encourage the tourism in many ways and creates popularity among the international tourists with the slogan: “Wonder of Asia” (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2018). Sri Lanka is a well-known island among the world tourists. A lot of rain forests, pristine beaches, national parks, and small islands are among the list of places to visit. It has tremendous potential as an eco-tourist destination. Sri Lanka has failed to take advantages even though there is a significant potential to develop

ecotourism which has grown in recent years. At present, Sri Lanka's ecotourism is still at the stage of special interest tourism (Gurusinghe, 2006). There was lack of understanding about the actual policies of ecotourism and no enthusiasm towards practicing eco-tourism in its real sense (Bandara, 2016). Eco-tourism can be beneficial and one of the one of the avenue for the lively hood of poor communities. The Sri Lanka government faces particular challenges to implement capital investment and infrastructure facilities to develop ecotourism due to limited financial and human resources. Further, privatization is also one of the barriers to implement conservation strategies in order to achieve sustainable ecotourism development. (Fernando & Shariff, 2013).

Jaffna District is reawakening from last thirty years of severe internal war. The effects of war are clearly visible in almost every aspect of socio-economic and environmental system of the region. At present, there are many initiatives carried out to improve the socio- economic condition of the local people (Jaffna District Sustainable Development Plan, 2018). Tourism is considered as one of the important sectors in National, Provincial and District level development plan. Jaffna district has resource potential for eco-tourism development and it will help to enhance the socio-economic condition of the local people as well as give opportunities to conserve the environment of the war-affected region. At this juncture, this study has been carried out to evaluate how extent the tourism policies emphasized in ecotourism development in the study area.

1.1. Eco-tourism: A Conceptual review of literature

Definition and guidelines for ecotourism development have been defined by the scientific community and various international organizations in recent decades. It was elaborated in different ways and mostly considered nature and value-based components in this definition (Weaver, 2001a). The term ecotourism had been used by "Hector Ceballos Lascurain", Mexican Environmentalist in 1983. Accordingly, ecotourism "as traveling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying scenery and its wild animals and plants as well as existing". Modified form of this definition was officially adopted by the "International Union for Conservation of Nature" (IUCN) in 1996 (International Union for Conservation of Nature, 2016). Boo defined "Ecotourism is nature travel that contributes to conservation through the generation of funds for protected areas, the creation of employment opportunities for communities surrounding protected areas, and by providing environmental education for visitors (Weaver, 2001b). Fennell (1999) elaborated that the eco-tourism "is a sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, and is ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented (control, benefits and scale).

It typically occurs in natural areas and should contribute to the conservation or preservation of such area (Fennell, 2002). Ecotourism has been defined from general to specific. However, the following three core criteria of eco- tourism have extracted from the different definitions. Which are "nature-based elements", "education and learning components", "requirement of sustainability" (Weaver, 2001a & 2001b). Honey (1999) proposed that the " Real ecotourism" has the following seven characteristics: such as "involve travel to natural destinations", "Minimizes impact", "Build environmental awareness", "Provides direct financial benefits for conservation", "Provides direct financial benefits and

empowerment for local people”, “Respect local culture”, “Supports human rights and democratic movements”. Currently, more attention is given to eco-tourism by government and conservation organization. Because it can provide simultaneous economic and environmental benefits. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) is oldest and largest eco-tourism society and devoted to promoting ecotourism and creating guidelines, standards, training, educational resources and technical assistance. According to Eco-tourism defined as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the wellbeing of the local people and involves interpretation and education (The International Ecotourism Society, 2016). TIES stressed that the ecotourism activities should adopt the ecotourism principles. United Nation World Tourism Organization has been engaged and promoted ecotourism development since the early 1990s and prepared set of guidelines and describes the eco-tourism characteristics (United Nation World Tourism Organization, 2005). World wild fund for nature have been included the ecotourism components such as “Social dimension”, “local community involvement”, “income generation for community” (WWF, 2001).

1.2. Institutional Arrangement for Tourism Development

The central government and Provincial Council are responsible bodies to develop tourism in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, under the central government, the Ceylon Tourist Board was established in 1966 to develop tourism both domestic and international in Sri Lanka. The Ceylon Tourist Board Act no. 10 of 1966 was repealed, and Tourism acts no 38 of 2005 was created. As per new Tourism act under the Ministry of tourism, the following organizations were set up to develop tourism in Sri Lanka. Which are, “Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority”, “Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau”, “Sri Lanka Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management”, “Sri Lanka Convention Bureau”. Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) has been prepared National level plan (Sri Lanka Tourism Strategic Plan, 2017). Provincial Councils are also responsible for enhancing the tourism-related activities in their respective region. Accordingly, Northern Provincial Council has been prepared Provincial Tourism Strategic plan at regional level (Northern Province Tourism Strategic plan, 2018) and Jaffna district also come under the Northern Provincial Council. Further, each district (25 Districts) in Sri Lanka has prepared plan to promote the tourism sector at district level. Accordingly, Jaffna District tourism development plan (Jaffna District Sustainable Development Plan, 2018) at Local level has been prepared by District secretariat Jaffna.

2. Problem Statement

Tourism policies have been formulated time to time at national level to develop tourism sector. However, there were no possibilities to promote tourism and to prepare tourism policy or plan in Jaffna district until 2009 due to ethnic unrest. Currently, the number of tourist arrivals is increasing onwards from 2012 and priorities are given by the government authorities to promote the tourism sector in Jaffna district. Even though, there are potentials for eco-tourism development, short coming of proper policy and initiatives with regard to ecotourism development in this region.

3. Research Questions

This research deals with:

- a) How extent tourism policies focus on ecotourism development in Jaffna district?
- b) What are the current situations of ecotourism related initiatives in the study area?

4. Purpose of the Study

The following are the purposes of the study.

- a) To evaluate how extent tourism policies to encourage developing ecotourism in Jaffna.
- b) To identify the current situation of ecotourism development related initiatives.

5. Research Methods

This study has been conducted by using primary and secondary information. Central government and Provincial council tourism strategic plans have been studied to evaluate the eco-tourism development initiatives. Accordingly, Sri Lanka Tourism Strategic Plan (2017), Northern Provincial council tourism strategic plan (2018), Jaffna district tourism development five years plan have been used for this study. These tourism documents evaluated using content analysis. Literature survey was made to understand different ecotourism definitions, characteristics and guidelines. Field observation was conducted (June-July 2019) to collect primary data to identify the current situation and initiatives for ecotourism development. The sites for field observation have been chosen based on the tourism documents. Accordingly, Chundikulam National Park and Delft Island has been included for field observation. Collected field data analysed using descriptive analysis.

5.1. Study Area

Jaffna District situated in the Northern part of Sri Lanka. Peninsula and seven inhabited islands have included within the boundary of Jaffna district. It divided into four major geographical regions such as Valikamam, Vadamaradchi, Thenmaradchi, and Islands. The boundary of North, East and west coast are Indian Ocean and south are Kilinochchi District and Jaffna lagoon. The area of the land including inland water is 1012 square meter. There are 15 Administrative Divisions in the Jaffna District. Total population is 624 179 consisting of 194,667 families (Jaffna District Statistical Handbook, 2018). The study area has potential for tourism development. Specially in 3S (Sea, Sun and Sand). Presently, there are different types historical, religious sites and pristine beaches have been listed as tourist attraction. Nallur Kanthaswamy temple, Nainathevu Nagapoosani Aammam temple, Nainathevu Rajamahaviharai, Jaffna Nagaviharai, Keerimalai Naguleswaram temple are listed with in religious site. The following are the important historical sites: Jaffna Archaeological museum, Jaffna library, Jaffna fort, Karainakar fort, Delft fort, Dambukolapatuna Sangamiththai temple, SangiliyanThoppu and Kantharodai temple. Manalkadu sandune beaches, Casuarina beach and Charty beach are Coastal pristine beaches for sun, sand and sea (Jaffna District Tourism Places, 2017). The following map (Figure 01) shows the study area.

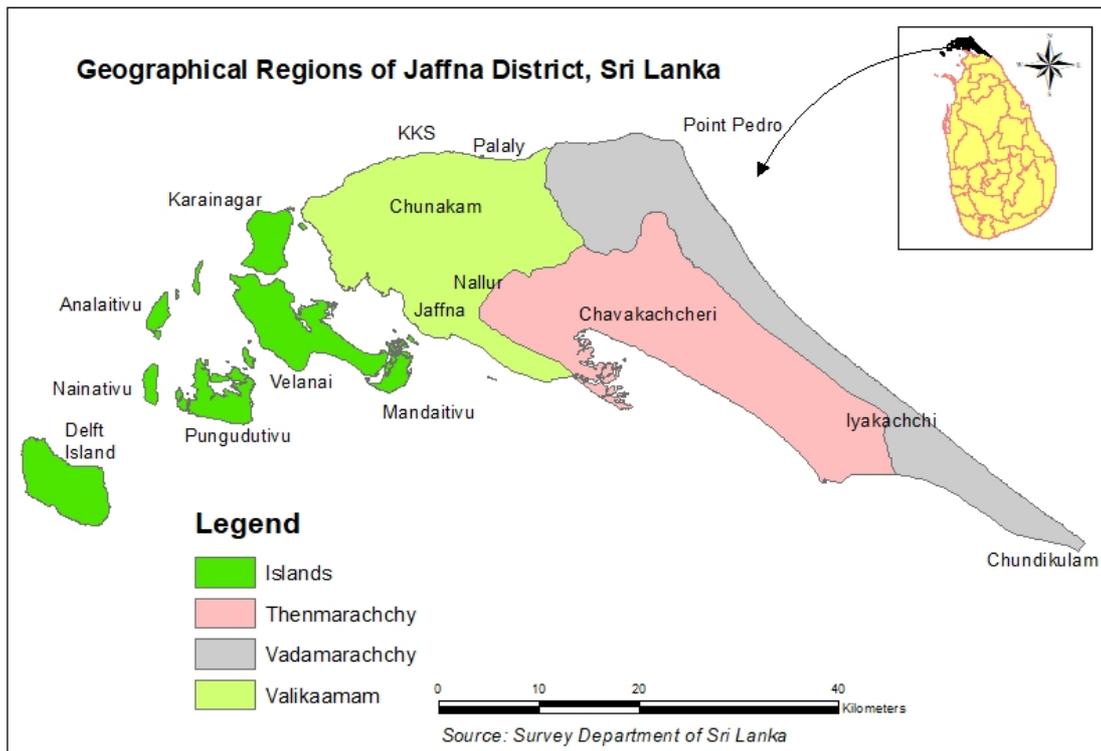


Figure 01. Study Area- Jaffna District

6. Findings

Proper tourism policies and strategic Plans are vital to face challenges in world competitive market. This has been constantly urging Sri Lanka to prepare strategic plan. The first and second Tourism Strategic Plan was prepared in 2009-2011, 2011-2016 respectively. During this period, there were restrictions for foreigners to visit Northern Province including Jaffna and no policies to develop tourism. It has recommended to develop tourism including Jaffna district with long term view and achieve United Nation Sustainable Development Goals (SDG:8, SDG:12, SDG:14). Northern Provincial Council (NPC) coverage area has five district including Jaffna. NPC tourism strategic plan gives more priority to develop tourism in Jaffna district. Further, district level five year development plans also included tourism development of Jaffna district. Sri Lanka Tourism Strategic Plan (STSP) has established framework for sustainable tourism development. Its mission statement highlighted socially inclusive, environmentally responsible and economically viable programmes that should be ultimately beneficial to local communities in particular and to the country as a whole. It was felt, that the sustainable growths of tourism are at a critical position due to poor conservation of environmental and cultural values and these are the reasons for market failure. To overcome these issues, action has been taken to improve institutional performance, governance and regulation. In the sustainable tourism context, eco-friendly practices and green principles for tourism, local community involvement, and all stakeholder participation are emphasized. It was highlighted that the limited awareness of local Community is the cause for conflict and local people should be involved in tourism sector to change the socio-cultural perception.

In Sri Lanka experience, there are limited opportunities for community interaction. Besides, the policy did not incorporate proper guideline to involve the local community. STSP mentioned that Sri Lanka can be a credible place if it focuses on eco-tourism realistically and intensely by this way, there is a possibility that Sri Lanka will become an international leader in ecotourism. Currently, government authority has an opportunity to include whole region for tourism development after the end of war. Accordingly, national plan was prepared to avoid regional disparity in tourism development. As a result, tourism hubs were proposed for tourism planning purposes. Jaffna is one of the tourism hub identified in national level plan and it was suggested to fully utilize the island areas of the Jaffna to promote coastal tourism with strong community participation. Further it is proposed that the accommodations to be established on water and excursion opportunities instead of large hotel accommodation. For instance community-based tourism product like excursion on traditional fishing boat, overnight accommodation on leisure boat and Low impact tourism with kayaking, recreational fishing, swimming, and diving are targeted to attract more tourist. Delft island has been considered as the main island to develop tourism in Jaffna because it has wild horses, beaches, cultural and historical sites etc. Constructing research and conservation centre for wild horses on Delft Island has emphasized in STSP. It shows that the effort has been taken to conserve the biodiversity via tourism development. Further, it is planned to promote fishing industries whereby visitors can see and interact with traditional fisherman.

The Northern Provincial Council of Sri Lanka (2018) has initiated many activities in post war development phase. At present there is growth in domestic and international tourist arrivals to the Northern Province including Jaffna. Even though, there are five districts included within Northern Province, Jaffna district is the main focus area to develop tourism. Development of coastal sites with local community participation is the main focus to attract tourist in this plan. NPC tourism plan also has given priority to develop Delft Island. Further, this plan has been put forwarded to establish marine sanctuary and Bird watching at Chundikulam National Park. Jaffna district five-year tourism development plan highlighted that the resources for tourism development have not been properly utilized due to lack of public and private investment, lack of environmental conservation measures and absence of community support. Further, there are many key challenges for tourism have been identified in the Jaffna district which are infrastructure limitation, lack of industrial professionalism, limited accommodations, ineffective environmental protection system, institutional and market failure. The main objective of developing five year plan is to ensure sustainable tourism in Jaffna district and focus on thrust area such as "income generation, green environment, employment, and social integration". The community-based tourism development plan also prioritized in district-level plan. Islands of Jaffna have been targeted as destinations to develop eco-friendly sustainable development with public-private partnership.

Based on three tourism policy documents field observation has been conducted in prioritized areas where tourism development was given priority in Jaffna. Accordingly, Chundikulam National Park has been identified for bird watching by Northern provincial council tourism plan. This site is located along with Chundikulam lagoon and it has dense mangrove forest which serves as habitat for migratory birds and native species. Here there are no proper arrangement for site seeing, enhance the environment and conserve the flora and fauna in this park. Similarly, Delft Island has been prioritized in three tourism documents. Wild horses are very important species in this region. This species are in vulnerable condition

due to changing weather pattern. During the summer period, these are badly affected by getting enough food and drinking water. Even though, there is a proposal to establish research centre and information Centre at Delft Island, no initiative has been carried out so far. Further, there are many tourism places of this island have been included in the Northern provincial council tourism guide book. But, it can be identified that there are very lack of basic infrastructure and service facilities and community participation in both sites.

In all three documents, more focus was given to increase accommodation facilities, tourism product, income generation and private investment. The documents felt the importance of the following aspects such as conservation of environmental and cultural value, community involvement and participation of stake holders to achieve sustainable growth of tourism development. Priorities have been given to promote low impact tourism, eco-friendly practices, community awareness, fishing and other local community involvement. It is emphasized that more attention to be given on the development of coastal tourism. Particularly special attention has given to promote Delft Island in all three documents. Chundikulam national park has been highlighted for bird watching in Northern provincial council tourism strategic plan. This bird sanctuary has the potential to develop ecotourism. However, the plan did not clearly include the ecotourism development.

7. Conclusion

This study evaluated the present tourism policy documents of the Jaffna District. There are three policy documents available for tourism development in the study area. These are prepared by the central and provincial government. While comparing the three policy documents, which give a certain focus on ecotourism's development but it does not adequately define based on real concept. Ecotourism zones, regulations and responsibilities were not included. While making decision regarding the importance of ecotourism need to publicize the recreation and job opportunities for the local people. Planners of tourism development should design lucrative and viable ecotourism projects to attract the private sectors in these projects. Besides, policy makers should allocate substantial finance to maintain nature conservation and need to ensure the concerted effort by all the relevant departments. Particularly, it is very important to take initiatives to conserve the Chundikulam National Park and protect the wild horses at Delft Island. Well prepared ecotourism policy is very vital to Jaffna district for the conservation and enhancement of the environmental attributes, wellbeing of local people as well as regional development. This study recommends that it is high time to study the ecotourism potentials of Jaffna District in detail, put in place regulations to encourage ecotourism, conserve the environment and ecotourism attractions, provide intensive training to stakeholders and increase the awareness and participation of local communities in the enhancement of ecotourism in the study area.

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