

**STAKEHOLDERS' INVOLVEMENT IN
ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN JAFFNA
DISTRICT, SRI LANKA**

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**STAKEHOLDERS' INVOLVEMENT IN
ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN JAFFNA
DISTRICT, SRI LANKA**

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBO	Community-Based Organization
CCD	Coastal Conservation Department
CEA	Central Environmental Authority
COVID	Corona Virus Disease
DS	Divisional Secretariat
DTSP	District Tourism Strategic Plan
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EMS	Environmental Management System
FGS	Focus group Discussion
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GND	Grama Nilathari Division
GoSL	Government of SriLanka
GTZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
HEI	International Hotel Environmental Initiatives
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
JMC	Jaffna Municipal council

KPDA	Kantharodai People Development Society
MC	Municipal Council
MMR	Mixed method of Research
NGO-	Non-Governmental Organization
NP	Northern Province
NPTB	Northern Province Tourism Bureau
NTSB	National Tourism Strategic Plan
PTSP	Provincial Tourism Strategic Plan
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SLEF	SriLanka Ecotourism Foundation
SLTB	SriLanka Tourist Board
SLTDA	SriLanka Tourism Development Authority
TIES	The International Ecotourism Society
UC	Urban Council
UDA	Urban Development Authority
UK	United Kingdom
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme

UNESCO	United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNO	United Nations Organization
UNP	United Nations Party
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
USA	United States of America
VC	Village Council
WCED	World Conference on Environment and Development
WTTC	World Travel and Tourism Council
WTTO	World Travel and Tourism Council
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

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PENGLIBATAN PEMEGANG TARUH DALAM PEMBANGUNAN EKOPELANCONGAN DI DAERAH JAFFNA, SRI LANKA

ABSTRAK

Pelancongan merupakan sumber pendapatan pertukaran asing ketiga terbesar bagi Sri Lanka, dengan kerajaan secara konsisten melaksanakan pelbagai inisiatif untuk meningkatkan industri ini. Walau bagaimanapun, di Daerah Jaffna, perhatian terhadap pembangunan pelancongan hanya mendapat momentum yang ketara bermula pada tahun 2012. Kajian ini menilai dasar pelancongan semasa berkaitan pembangunan ekopelancongan di Daerah Jaffna, Sri Lanka. Ia mengkaji peranan pihak berkepentingan dan kepentingan bersaing mereka dalam memudahkan pembangunan lestari ekopelancongan. Kajian ini menyepadukan prinsip ekopelancongan, teori pihak berkepentingan, dan konsep triple-bottom-line dalam rangka kerja yang direka untuk memenuhi objektif penyelidikan tertentu. Kajian ini mengumpul data melalui kajian lapangan, tiga puluh temu bual mendalam secara bersemuka dengan kerajaan, pertubuhan bukan kerajaan, dan sektor swasta, lapan perbincangan kumpulan fokus dengan wakil masyarakat, dan empat ratus tinjauan soal selidik daripada pelancong dan sumber sekunder. Konsep ketepuan teori digunakan untuk memastikan kekayaan dan kecukupan data. Untuk memastikan kebolehpercayaan penemuan penyelidikan, kajian ini menggunakan pelbagai strategi, termasuk ujian rintis dan semakan ahli. Tambahan pula, penyelidik melaksanakan semua pengumpulan data, transkripsi, dan terjemahan untuk mengekalkan konsistensi. Data yang dikumpul dianalisis menggunakan kaedah analisis kandungan dan analisis deskriptif. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa walaupun beberapa aspek

ekopelancongan digariskan dalam rancangan pelancongan Daerah Jaffna, terdapat kekurangan rancangan ekopelancongan yang terperinci dan tumpuan yang ketara terhadap promosi pelancongan massa. Tambahan pula, kajian ini mengenal pasti kurangnya kesedaran dan kerjasama pihak berkepentingan untuk memulakan aktiviti ekopelancongan. Isu kritikal yang dikenal pasti di Daerah Jaffna termasuk mekanisme pentadbiran yang tidak berkesan, penyelarasan antara jabatan yang tidak mencukupi, dan kekurangan kerjasama pihak berkepentingan berkaitan pemuliharaan biodiversiti, penggunaan sumber, amalan berimpak rendah, pemerkasaan sosio-ekonomi dan sokongan infrastruktur. Kajian itu mencadangkan bahawa mekanisme yang tersusun dengan baik boleh memupuk kerjasama jangka panjang yang berkesan di kalangan pihak berkepentingan. Oleh itu, rangka kerja kerjasama pihak berkepentingan telah dibangunkan berdasarkan penemuan untuk memudahkan pembangunan ekopelancongan yang berjaya. Melaksanakan pengesyoran ini dijangka menyumbang kepada pencapaian Matlamat Pembangunan Mampan (SDG-12, 14, dan 15) di Daerah Jaffna.

STAKEHOLDERS' INVOLVEMENT IN ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN JAFFNA DISTRICT, SRI LANKA

ABSTRACT

Tourism is the third largest source of foreign exchange earnings for Sri Lanka, with the government consistently implementing various initiatives to boost this industry. However, in the Jaffna District, attention towards tourism development only gained significant momentum starting in 2012. This study assesses the current tourism policies regarding ecotourism development. It examines the stakeholders' role and their competing interest in facilitating the sustainable development of ecotourism. This study integrates ecotourism principles, stakeholder theory, and the triple- bottom-line concept within a framework designed to fulfill specific research objectives. This study collected data through field visits, thirty face-to-face in-depth interviews with government, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector, eight focus group discussions with community representatives, and four hundred questionnaire surveys from tourists and secondary sources. The concept of theoretical saturation is considered to ensure data richness and adequacy. To ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings, the study employs various strategies, including pilot tests and member checks. Furthermore, the researcher executes all the data collection, transcription, and translation to maintain consistency. Collected data was analyzed using content analysis and descriptive analysis methods. The results indicated that while some aspects of ecotourism are outlined in the tourism plans of Jaffna District, there is a lack of detailed ecotourism plans and a significant focus on mass tourism promotion. Furthermore, the study identifies a lack of awareness and

stakeholder collaboration to initiate ecotourism activities. Critical issues identified in Jaffna District include ineffective administrative mechanisms, insufficient inter-departmental coordination, and a lack of stakeholder collaboration concerning biodiversity conservation, resource utilization, low-impact practices, socioeconomic empowerment, and infrastructural support. The study suggests that well-structured mechanisms can foster effective long-term collaboration among stakeholders. Consequently, a stakeholder collaboration framework has been developed based on findings to facilitate successful ecotourism development. Implementing these recommendations is expected to contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG-12, 14, and 15) in the Jaffna District.

CHAPTER 01

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Economic growth in every global region is linked to the performance of key sectors, including tourism. Notably, those economies with "large travel and tourism sectors" shows strong economic resilience and robust levels of economic activity (World Economic Outlook Report [WEO],2023). Tourism has become one of the world's most important growth engine, accounting for more than 10 percent of global GDP directly and indirectly. Over the last decade, the number of travelers and related spending has increased significantly, bolstered by rising incomes, falling travel-related costs, and an increasing range of available tourist activities. The tourism sector is closely linked to others in the economy, including accommodation and dining, marketing, transportation, and aviation (International Monetary Fund[IMF], 2022). International tourists rose to more than 1.5 billion by 2019 from 680 million in 2000. Spending by international tourists amounted to nearly US\$1.6 trillion as of the end of 2019. Asia is becoming the fastest-growing destination for international tourism (United Nation World Travel and Tourism Organization [UNWTO],2022). These dynamics have turned tourism into a critical driver for socioeconomic progress. It is considered one of the best green options for addressing poverty, employment, and economic diversification in developing countries (United Nation Environmental Programme [UNEP], 2018). This global spread of tourism has produced economic and employment benefits in many related sectors.

Tourism supports one in 10 jobs (319 million) worldwide and generated 10.4% (US dollars 8.8 trillion) of world GDP in 2018. The travel and tourism industry also experienced 3.9% growth compared to the global economy (3.2%), and the sector created one in five new jobs over the last five years (World Travel and Tourism Organization [WTTO], 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has enormously impacted the travel and tourism industry worldwide. To recover the tourism industry from unexpected incidents, UNWTO has launched a new *Tourism Recovery Tracker* to support global tourism. Consequently, International tourist arrivals reached 97% of pre-pandemic levels in the first quarter of 2024. According to UN Tourism, more than 285 million tourists travelled internationally in January-March, about 20% more than the first quarter of 2023, underscoring the sector's near-complete recovery from the impacts of the pandemic (UNWTO,2024).

However, this mass tourism development has exerted enormous pressure on the natural environment, leading to the rise of environmental concerns worldwide. Popular tourism industries rapidly declined due to the mass tourism development. As a result, tourism authorities have faced challenges in maintaining the balance between sociocultural, economic, and environmental development (Hamka et al., 2022). The "Brundtland Commission" report emphasized the "Sustainability concept in the development process. After the popularized concept of sustainable development, "Sustainable Tourism" practices have emerged to mitigate the perceived negative effects of conventional tourism (Regmi & Walter, 2017). As a result, the United Nations General Assembly declared the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development in 2017. The World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism as "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 addition, the Agenda for Sustainable Development-2030 also highlighted the devise and implementation of policies to promote sustainable tourism (United Nations Organization [UNO], 2022). Thus, there are different types of tourism promoted as sustainable tourism categories. Accordingly, ecotourism is a sub-category of sustainable tourism (Weaver, 2001; Machnik, 2021). It is the fastest growing and niche market in the world tourism industry and is becoming increasingly popular as an alternative to mass tourism (Mondino & Beery, 2019). It is wildly popular among government and conservation organizations because it can simultaneously provide environmental and economic benefits (Mbaiwa, 2017 ; Grobois & Fennel, 2022). The "Real Ecotourism principles" had been listed by Honey (1999). Accordingly, Environment, Culture, Community, Conservation, Education, and Political Consciousness were prioritized. The emergence of ecotourism facilitates minimizing the environmental damage associated with mass tourism. Most researchers and tourism-related organizations suggested adapting ecotourism to strengthen the link between conservation and sustainable development. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) also sets guidelines, standards, and technical assistance to promote ecotourism (TIES, 2020).

Academics and practitioners have widely championed ecotourism as a potential contributor to conservation and development (Wondirad, 2020). After popularizing the tourism environment relationship, most countries shifted to ecotourism development and prepared ecotourism policy. For Instance, Costa Rica, Mexico, Trinidad, Galapagos-Ecuador, Indonesia, Colombia, South Africa, and Kenya (Honey, 2008 ; Garcia et al., 2013 ; Adeleke, 2015). Australia is the first

region to be presented, given its status as a world leader in ecotourism policy and planning (Fennell, 2021). Ecotourism development policy should work with other development policies of the Country. In the experience of Malaysia, in the early stage, tourism initiatives have been cooperated from time to time with a five-year plan and promoted new tourism products. Subsequently, national tourism policy and ecotourism plans have been prepared with the help of leading environmental-related non-governmental organizations. It contains strategies and guidelines for developing and managing ecotourism based on sustainability principles (Hamzah, 2004). While formulating ecotourism policies, one must consider ecotourism principles (Grosbois & Fennell, 2022). However, the policies are challenging due to the lack of shared responsibility in tourism development practices. Therefore, to achieve greater tourism sustainability, stakeholder participation has been insisted on developing and implementing sustainable tourism policy (UNWTO, 2017). It is suggested that the collaborative approach is essential in planning for building consensus among the stakeholders and should devolve the power of governmental institutions by providing stakeholders with specific responsibilities during the planning and implementation process (Kenawy & Shaw, 2016).

Tourism-related experts have proclaimed the benefits of stakeholder participation in ecotourism development (Brechtin & West, 2020). They argued that a "bottom-up" strategy offered significant potential for integrating conservation and development in tourism. Recently, community and other stakeholders' involvement has been emphasized in achieving successful development in ecotourism. The participation of stakeholders has a vast potential to influence positively or negatively (Nicolaidis, 2015). Based on stakeholder theory, the involvement of all

the stakeholder groups has been insisted in the entire tourism development process (UNWTO, 2018). Stakeholder Participation is a way to minimize challenges or negative impacts. In many countries 'experiences, ecotourism projects have achieved a successful outcome due to community and other stakeholder participation. For example, Costa Rica, Peru (Boronyak et al., 2010), Trinidad (Waylen, McGowan, Gulland, & Pawi, 2009), and Laos (Roche, 2009). Meanwhile, ecotourism suffered setbacks because of a lack of stakeholder participation in the Maya Biosphere Reserve (Devine, 2016), Ria Biosphere Reserve - in Mexico (Azcarate, 2010), and Tanoboase Sacred Natural Sites - in Ghana (Adom, 2019). Hence, ecotourism-related organizations such as the World-Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) support the promotion of the stakeholders' involvement in many developing countries (WWF, 2019 ; UNWTO,2017 ; IUCN,2016).

In Sri Lanka, tourism is a crucial source of income revenues. Tourism products are mainly based on natural resources. Sri Lanka is a well-known island destination among international tourists. It encompasses a wide variety of physical and ecologically important natural habitats. Many tropical rain-forests , pristine beaches, mountains, waterfalls, different categories of protected areas, and small islands are among the places to visit (SLTDA,2023). The Ceylon Tourist Board was established in 1966 to develop domestic and international tourism in Sri Lanka. The Ceylon Tourist Board Act no. 10 of 1966 was repealed, and the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) was established in 2005. This is the regulatory body for developing tourism in Sri Lanka. Tourism is one of the fastest-growing sectors, ranking as the third-largest exchange earner in the economy (SLTDA,2019).

In the past decades, the growth of this industry has fluctuated due to the last 30 years of internal war. The sector has grown exponentially since the war ended in 2009 (Central Bank, 2019). The government of Sri Lanka encouraged tourism in many ways and formulated strategic plans for the development of Sri Lanka's tourism industry to achieve sustainable tourism development. The government has created popularity among international tourists with the slogan "Wonder of Asia." As a result, Sri Lanka has been listed by the WTTO as one of the fastest-growing travel and tourism economic countries. The tourist arrivals statistics indicate a continuous increase from 2016 to 2018. Unfortunately, growth has declined due to the "Easter Attack" in April 2019. Consequently, a steep decline has been recorded since 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This unexpected incident badly affected the tourism sector in Sri Lanka and worldwide (SLTDA, 2021). More alarming is the fact that the economy of Sri Lanka suffered without the contribution of tourism income. It is one of the main reasons for the country's economic crisis. The program "Reopening Sri Lanka for Tourism" was implemented to restore the tourism industry in April 2021 (SLTDA, 2022). In addition, the Ministry of Tourism launched a promotional campaign to reach the target of 250,000 tourists per month after the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. Presently, the tourism sector is regaining to a satisfactory level (Ministry of Tourism, 2021).

Sustainable tourism development is crucial to preserving Sri Lanka's natural and cultural heritage and stabilizing the economy. It has tremendous potential as an ecotourism destination. However, Sri Lanka's ecotourism has still not developed to satisfactory standards compared to neighboring countries in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Region. Sri Lanka faces challenges in implementing

ecotourism due to the insufficient understanding and unawareness of specific procedures about authentic ecotourism among the operators. (Gurusinghe, 2019). Moreover, there is a lack of enthusiasm towards ecotourism in the real sense (Bandara, 2019).

Jaffna District is the study area in the Northern part of Sri Lanka. It is reawakening from the last thirty years of protracted internal war. The effects of war are visible in almost every aspect of the region (Balasuntharampillai, 2018). Jaffna district is a relatively new tourism entrant compared with other parts of the country. After the end of the war in 2009, there is a possibility of more tourists arriving in the study area (Central Cultural Fund, 2019). Foreign and local tourist arrivals have been increasing continuously since 2012. Presently, many initiatives have been carried out to enhance the socio-economic condition of the local community (District Secretariat, 2019). Accordingly, national and provincial development plans have prioritized developing and promoting the tourism sector. Therefore, Development initiatives are being accelerated to provide infrastructure and service facilities to promote the tourism industry in the study area (Northern Provincial Council, 2018).

The study area has immense untapped potential for tourism. Its natural beauty includes seven small, inhabited islands, lagoons with mangrove vegetation, migratory birds, wild horses, intensive fishing sites, coral reef coast and pristine dune beaches, historical archeological sites, and religious and cultural aspects. These are included in the list of tourist destinations in the Jaffna district (Jaffna District Secretariat, 2019). Carrying out sustainable tourism practices in the initial phase of tourism development is essential. In this context, developing ecotourism

will serve as a tool to enhance the livelihood development of the local community and environmental conservation. However, academic studies regarding ecotourism development are lacking. A few studies have been carried out to assess the resource potential for ecotourism development in the study area (Aloysius et al.,2020 ; Ranasinghe ,2017; Dissanayake & Samarathunga,2020; Balasubramaniam & De Zoysa,2018 ; Hamzayini & Arachchi,2020 ; Vainavi & Sinthuvaraki,2019). The researchers who conducted tourism related study in the Jaffna district also highlighted that there is a lack of academic literature and a lack of professionals related to tourism in the Jaffna district is the main obstacle to the future development of this sector (Ranasinghe,2017 ;Dissanayake & Samarathunga,2021). At this juncture, the present study tries to fill the gap and is essential to provide new insights while developing ecotourism in the Jaffna district. Furthermore, successful ecotourism development will be supported to achieve the SDG goals (SDG12, SDG14, SDG15) in the post-war development context. At this juncture, this study is essential and aims to provide new insights while developing ecotourism. It contributes to the current tourism development initiatives and implementation of successful ecotourism projects in the study area.

1.2 Problem Statement

Tourism is a vital sector in Sri Lanka's economy, but the 30-year civil war significantly impacted the economy, especially the tourism industry. After the war ended, tourists returned to this island paradise, reviving the Sri Lankan economy and flourishing tourism. Tourism could be the catalyst to reconstruct and spur the economy forward in the post-war environment. It has gained greater attention from the government and private sector following the return of international and domestic

tourists to the Jaffna District (the study area). Although the study area has good potential for ecotourism development, the tourism industry is riddled with problems. It has not developed sustainably nor significantly contributed to the reconstruction of the regional economy. The Sri Lankan government has been taking various initiatives to promote the tourism sector from time to time since 1966. The Sri Lanka Tourism Board was established in 1966, and then the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) was established in 2005. It is the responsible body for tourism development at the national level. It prepared ten-year plans and five-year plans from time to time. All these initiatives focused on the south, west, and central parts of the country. Unfortunately, the Study area was not included in this plan because there was no conducive environment in the study area due to internal conflict. After 2009, a peaceful environment was created, and the situation changed. The study area has been included in the National Tourism Strategic Plan 2017-2022. Consequently, a provincial tourism Strategic plan has been prepared. This was a milestone in Jaffna's tourism development. However, the activities mentioned in that plan have not been adequately regulated.

At present, priority is being given to developing socio-economic and infrastructure facilities. In this context, a well-designed ecotourism project can provide simultaneous benefits to this region's socioeconomic and environmental aspects. Tourism is a relatively new sector for the government and local people. During the initial phase of tourism development, respected authorities needed to systematically implement ecotourism projects with a fundamental understanding of ecotourism principles. Several essential requirements should be met within the initial planning process to gain successful outcomes. Ecotourism planning is complex and

cannot be promoted as an isolated activity. At this juncture, multi- stakeholder participation is crucial while formulating the planning process to develop shared responsibilities. Awareness and proper training regarding ecotourism principles and guidelines are lacking in the study area. Consequently, to embrace all these requirements, ecotourism development wants to move from a traditional static planning approach towards more dynamic collaboration between relevant stakeholders (Osman et al.,2018).

The lack of stakeholders' collaboration in implementing ecotourism projects has likely resulted in the tourism industry being haphazardly developed, incapable of maximizing its potential, with little benefits for the local communities, and resulting in poor environmental conditions in the study area. The government has not implemented proper mechanisms to regulate and incorporate stakeholders. Furthermore, tourism development in Jaffna District is currently following an ad-hoc development approach not based on scientific study, run mainly on a top-down government-centric approach, limited private sector, and other stakeholders' involvement, and these approaches do not lead to a sustainable model. In this context, a collaborative approach is essential in planning to build consensus between stakeholders and develop solutions (Kenawy & Shaw,2016). In the sustainable tourism development process, stakeholders are considered the main actors, and their management plays a vital role in the success of the tourism destination (Lyon et al., 2017). Existing literature reveals that ecotourism projects have failed worldwide because of a lack of shared responsibilities (Wondirad,2018). The same situation can be observed in the study area. The tourism authority developed nature-based sites called "Ecotourism sites" without considering stakeholder collaboration. As a result, these projects failed to gain the expected benefits.

While developing the ecotourism site, it is essential to assess tourism potential, the value of attraction, facility management, environmental concern, and local people's attitudes with the support of stakeholders. Otherwise, it will lead to failure in ecotourism development (Michael Hall, 2014 ;Tseng, 2019). In the study area, there is resource potential for ecotourism development. However, the potential sites cannot be a tourist site. Tourism authorities failed to realize this concern. This is the main obstacle in the study area. The site selection process is very crucial. During this process, ecotourism sites should be selected based on multiple criteria. Tourism authorities failed in the site selection process. As a result, the expected outcome could not be gained from the developed sites.

Ecotourism-promoting countries give priority to incorporating the ecotourism principles in their ecotourism plan. Environmental conservation is an essential aspect of ecotourism principles. Protected areas provide a suitable physical setting for ecotourism (Weaver, 2001). Considering the simultaneous benefits of protected area-based ecotourism, countries have established different protected areas, which have become eminent ecotourism sites worldwide (Frost & Hall, 2019). After the war ended, other protected areas were established in the study area. Chundikulam National Park, Delft National Park, and Nagar Kovil Nature Reserve. However, there are possibilities to promote protected area-based ecotourism, and many challenges have been observed in the study area.

Furthermore, the community's involvement and empowerment in ecotourism concepts are vital (Kia,2021). Much evidence from various countries enhances the social condition of remote rural areas (Snyman, 2014), (Nsor & Arthur,2017). As per

the study, local communities are not adequately absorbed in tourism because people have varying attitudes toward ecotourism development. Incorporating women-headed families and youths into the tourism sector is possible. However, their mindset has not changed to work in the tourism sector. Due to this reason, and absence of local community involvement and awareness is observed in the study area. On the other hand, government initiatives also need to improve in this regard.

After the peaceful situation, private investors are also interested in investing to provide ecotourism facilities. The respective tourism authorities have not created an attractive environment in which to regulate their investment. Many local non-governmental organizations work on environmental conservation, social enhancement, and livelihood development projects. Their activities, directly or indirectly, will support the ecotourism project. However, the tourism authorities failed to get positive support for their ecotourism development projects.

The study area has resource potential, including physical and biological resources. Different coastal sites fulfill the 3S (Sand, Sun, Sea), geological structures, protected areas like national parks and nature reserves, various types of flora, traditional fishing and agricultural activities, and rural life to attract tourists. Moreover, many religious sites reflect multicultural diversity and traditional events, and historical monuments are prosperous for ecotourism development. In addition, local resources can be available to support eco-friendly and low-impact activities. The potential of the resource mentioned above is not used optimally.

A framework is essential for the successful initiatives of ecotourism. The ecotourism framework should incorporate relevant stakeholders. In the study area,

stakeholders need to be adequately regulated in ecotourism initiatives, and a framework including relevant stakeholders has been prepared. In this context, ecotourism sites developed by the government authority without considering stakeholder collaboration failed to gain the expected benefits. Overall, efforts have not been taken based on the ecotourism principle to involve relevant stakeholders in the study area. These combine to enable this thesis to contribute to the body of work on tourism development in Jaffna District.

1.3 Research question

An exact research question and purpose direct the entire research project. Asking relevant research questions is essential for gathering the correct data (Boeije, 2011). The following are the three research questions selected for this study.

1. What are the ecotourism features highlighted in existing tourism policies of Jaffna district, Sri Lanka?
2. What are the stakeholders' contributions to ecotourism development in Jaffna District?
3. What is an appropriate framework for stakeholders' participation in ecotourism in Jaffna District?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the existing tourism policies about ecotourism development in Jaffna District, Sri Lanka.
2. To analyze the stakeholders' contribution to ecotourism development in the Jaffna District, Sri Lanka.
3. To develop a framework for stakeholders' participation in Jaffna District's

ecotourism.

1.5 Research Gap

The present study addresses the current research gap, particularly regarding stakeholder involvement. The tourism sector in Jaffna District is still in its early stages compared to other parts of the country. There are favorable conditions for visiting the Northern region, including the Jaffna district, after 2009. Numerous socio-economic development activities are currently underway to improve the war-affected areas. Government authorities are striving to boost investment and generate new employment opportunities. The primary focus is on developing the tourism sector at both national and regional levels. Notably, the Jaffna District exhibits significant potential for ecotourism development. However, an understanding of actual ecotourism development is insufficient among stakeholders, and there are numerous obstacles to developing ecotourism in the study area. At this juncture, the study on ecotourism development is essential and needed promptly.

Very few studies have focused on the development of ecotourism in the study area. These studies have specifically addressed the potential of resources for ecotourism and the level of public involvement in its development. Researchers who conducted a tourism-related study in the Jaffna district also emphasized the lack of academic literature and professionals in the tourism sector in the area. This absence of literature and professionals is considered a significant obstacle to the future development of the tourism sector (Ranasinghe, 2017; Dissanayake & Samarathunga,

2021). Furthermore, detailed studies regarding stakeholder involvement in ecotourism development are lacking. Study Understanding ecotourism and stakeholders' participation is an essential aspect of the sustainable development of future ecotourism. This study fulfills the research gaps to assess the level of involvement of stakeholders in ecotourism initiatives. Stakeholder relationships and interactions within the ecotourism sector are influenced by the presence of different stakeholders with competing interests. This study assesses the level of interest in being involved in ecotourism, the attitude and awareness of stakeholders, and barriers to involvement in ecotourism. This study includes relevant stakeholders such as government sectors, the local community, Nongovernmental organizations, the private sector, and tourists.

Stakeholders' understanding of ecotourism principles, their involvement, expectations, attitudes, and barriers will be assessed in this study, including non-governmental organizations, the private sector, and local communities. In addition, tourists are consumers of ecotourism products, and their perception of ecotourism features is crucial for enhancing facilities in the future. Therefore, a tourist perception survey was also conducted for this study. The research findings provide valuable insights into the processes involved in establishing effective stakeholder collaboration to enhance ecotourism development. It is crucial to develop an ecotourism framework. This study provides essential information to create a framework for the successful launch of ecotourism with the involvement of stakeholders in the initial phase of eco-tourism development. This study fills the research gaps on ecotourism development by examining its critical features. It is also crucial for supporting the government's reawakening plans. It ensures the

enhancement of the socio-economic welfare of the local people, promotes environmental conservation, and facilitates excellent regional development.

1.6 Organization of Thesis

This study is organized into six chapters: Chapter 1, Introduction, Chapter 2 Literature review, Chapter 3 Study Area, Chapter 4 Methodology, Chapter 5 Results and Discussion, and Chapter 6 Conclusion and Recommendation. Each chapter is further structured.

Accordingly, Chapter 1 is an introduction; it consists of the background of the study, Problem Statement, Research question, Objectives, Research gap, and thesis organization.

Chapter 2 describes a review of the relevant literature for this study. This chapter contains concepts, theories, and research on ecotourism and stakeholder involvement in ecotourism development. It includes the following subtitles: Introduction, Tourism Development, and Ecotourism. It has been further divided into subtitles: stakeholder theory, tourist satisfaction, literature on tourism in the context of Sri Lanka, and conceptual framework.

Chapter 3 explains the study area. It covers its location, Physical features, transport, economy, and tourism industry, which is divided into many sub-titles.

Chapter 4 organizes the methodology. It contains an introduction, data collection methods, and data analysis methods.

Chapter 5 describes the research's outcome and the analysis's results. It includes an introduction, an Analysis of existing tourism policies about ecotourism development, Stakeholder involvement in ecotourism development in Jaffna District,

and a framework for stakeholder participation in ecotourism development.

Chapter 6 is the final chapter that summarizes the conclusion, recommendations, Research contributions to the body of Knowledge, and study limitations.

CHAPTER 02

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

A literature review involves examining published information within a specific subject area to provide a summary of the sources. This process helps generate new insights for future research, contributes to formulating or refining research questions, and can also lead to the identification of new research questions. The review provides a broad and in-depth knowledge of our chosen research topic's theoretical, empirical, and methodological issues (Adams et al., 2014).

A current study is being conducted to understand stakeholder collaboration in ecotourism development. It aims to comprehend the historical development of ecotourism by conceptualizing the term. The study reviews the importance of ecotourism development, ecotourism and environmental conservation, ecotourism and sociolect-economic enhancement, and stakeholders' involvement in ecotourism development.

2.2. Tourism Development

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in the world. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the overall contribution of travel and tourism to the global GDP amounted to 9.9 trillion U.S. dollars in 2023 (WTTC, 2023). It was estimated that 285 million tourists traveled internationally in the first three months of 2024, about 20% more than in 2023. These results were boosted by continued strong demand, the opening of Asian

markets, and enhanced air connectivity and visa facilitation. The Middle East saw the most robust relative growth, with international arrivals exceeding 36% of the pre-pandemic level (UNWTO,2024). The World has faced an unprecedented global health, social, and economic emergency with the Corona Virus Disease- 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Travel and tourism are among the sectors most affected around the world. International tourist arrivals decreased by 97% in April 2020, reflecting travel restrictions in 100% of all worldwide destinations. This represents a loss of 180 million international arrivals compared to 2019. By regions, Asia and the Pacific are the first regions to suffer the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (51% decline), and Europe recorded the second decline with 44 % (UNWTO, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has enormously impacted the travel and tourism industry worldwide. To help the tourism industry recover from unexpected incidents, UNWTO has launched a new *Tourism Recovery Tracker* to support global tourism. Consequently, several sub-regions reached 80% to 90% of their pre-pandemic arrivals in January-September 2022. For instance, the Middle East reported the best results in January 2023, with arrivals 20% above pre-pandemic levels. In Asia and the Pacific, recovery accelerated to 61% of pre-pandemic arrival levels after the opening of many destinations and source markets at the end of 2022 (UNWTO,2023)

2.2.1 Sustainability Concept and Tourism Development

Tourism rose from the economic boom in the aftermath of the world wars. It was generated enthusiastically because of the holiday celebration in the 1950s. While boosterish prevailed in the tourism arena, limitations and damages became apparent

as early as the 1970s with the degradation and the over-development of places; thus, mass tourism was called into question. These critical perspectives on tourism came most notably from various Parties (Harsha, 2019). The global spread and diversification of tourism have produced economic and employment opportunities in many related sectors. At the same time, tourism development has put tremendous pressure and a negative impact on the natural environment. In the early 1990s, the "Sustainability Concept" was pushed forward by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). UNWTO has developed guidelines and management practices for sustainable tourism to achieve a balance between socio- economic and environmental factors. (UNWTO, 2015).

The "Sustainability Concept" became important in the 1980s since the introduction of "Eco-development" by the World conservation strategy, and this was a solid effort to consider environmental and economic issues. The sustainability concept was defined and popularized by the "Brundtland Commission" (Yasari, 2020). Consequently, the United Nations World Conference on Environment and Development (WCED 1987), also known as the World Summit, was held in June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro. It was the call for international adaptation to sustainability practices in development. Sustainable development has been defined as *"meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"* (UNDP, 2015). Economic, social, and environmental aspects are the three pillars of sustainable development. Accordingly, UNO sets goals and standards to achieve sustainability on the above pillars all over the World. The following Figure

2.1 indicates sustainability goals.



Figure 2.1 Three pillars of sustainable development

Source: (Purvis et al.,2019)

After popularizing sustainable development, sustainable tourism practices developed (Figure 2.2), and more priority was given to conserving environmental resources. The relationship between the environment and tourism is grounded in the sustainable use of natural resources. Tourism is fully integrated into the resource management process. The central goals of environmental conservation and resource sustainability are protecting and maintaining ecological quality (Thomsan,2021). Sustainable tourism was commonly perceived as being synonymous with alternate tourism. Mass tourism is seen as the more traditional form of tourism, and it has short-term development, free-market principles, and the maximization of income, which is paramount. Alternative tourism was developed as a reaction to the negative consequences of mass tourism. As a result, many types of tourism are considered within alternative tourism (Fennel,2020).



Figure 2.2 Conceptualizing Sustainable
Tourism Development

Source: (Yoopetch & Nimsa,2019)

2.1 Historical Development of Ecotourism

Ecotourism originated in the late 1970s (Ormas,1995), Higgins,1996). The first attempt has been made to combine tourism and conservation. The article "Tourism and Conservation: Conflict, coexistence or Symbiosis " highlighted the relationship between ecosystem and tourism (Budowski,1976). On the other hand, during the 1960s, environmentalists were alarmed by the over-exploitation of natural resources. Since then, the origin of ecotourism as a concept can be considered (Nelson,1994; Fennell,2003). Consequently, various discussions regarding ecotourism took place in the 1970s, and tourism researchers concentrated in the 1980s. Ecotourism emerged during the late 1980s due to the global awareness and reflection of sustainable development and ecological practices (Bjork,2007). However, it was suggested that the term ecotourism emerged in the late 1980s, highlighting that the Mexican ecologist Hetzer used it for the first time

(Diamantis,1999). According to Hetzer (1965), ecotourism practices should incorporate the lowest environmental impact, minimum impact, and maximum respect for host cultures, maximum economic benefits to the host country's grassroots, and enriching recreational experiences. In 1980, it gained attention in tourism academia and the tourism sector (Weaver & Lawton,2007). The increasing demand for nature-based experiences among tourists resulted in using natural resources as sustainable bases, contributing to ecotourism's growth. Mass tourism has many negative environmental consequences due to its rapid development. Therefore, environmentalists are alarmed by the adverse effects of mass tourism (Fennell, 2003). In this context, ecotourism has been considered an alternative to mass tourism development. Ecotourism has been encouraged by government sectors, nongovernmental organizations, private agencies, and environmentalists to achieve simultaneous benefits such as job opportunities, income generation, environmental conservation, and awareness of both hosts and tourists (Buckley, 2016). After popularizing the concept of sustainable tourism, ecotourism gained more attention and has been considered a conservation tool through tourism development. Considering the importance of ecotourism development, many events are organized to raise global concern. In 1992, *The World Congress on National Park and Protected Areas was held*, and ecotourism actors recommended preventing the impact of mass tourism. The *Mohonk Agreement* was created in 2000. This document establishes consistency among ecotourism standards and certifications around the world. Then, the United Nations International Year of Ecotourism was declared to raise global attention on ecotourism. Ecotourism Submit, in 2003, was the first Global collaborative effort for ecotourism, joining 130 countries. In the same

year, the Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism was created based on the submission of ecotourism. After that, ecotourism was designated as a tool to address the challenges of conservation and poverty worldwide (Feyers et al.,2017). McKercher (2010) further described the concept of ecotourism as being based on the ‘triple bottom-line’ concept of optimizing social, economic, and ecological benefits. Therefore, rather than trying to understand ecotourism as a distinct nature-based concept, we must trisect it into social, financial, and environmental dimensions using the triple bottom line principles (Wondirad,2018).

2.3.1 Conceptualizing Ecotourism

Ecotourism is one of the fastest-growing segments of the tourism industry and rising concern as one of sustainable tourism. It emerged as a component of alternative tourism development in the 1980s in response to the view that conventional mass tourism was detrimental to destinations (Wondirad et al.,2020). Ecotourism has been defined in different ways. The nature-based and sustainable components are combined with the definition. Mexican ecologist Hector Ceballos Lascurain used the Spanish word ecotourism in the 1980s. Ecotourism was practiced long before the term's coinage in mid-1980 (Weaver, 2001). Lascurain was acknowledged as the "father of ecotourism" at the 7th ecotourism conference (14th October 1999) in Australia- Fraser Island-Queensland (Dobrios & Fennel,2021). Consequently, various experts have given many definitions. Hector Ceballos – Lascurain(1983) defined ecotourism as :

“Traveling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the specific object of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural aspects (both past and present) found in these areas.”