

Gender-Based Mangrove Safari at Vengurla, Sindhudurg District, M.S., India

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Abstract

This paper presents a case study of gender-based mangrove safari conducted by marginalized women SHG from Vengurla taluka of Sindhudurg district of India. The study attempts to highlight an innovative approach of government of using ecotourism to conserve natural resources by encouraging the participation of local stakeholders in resource conservation process through sustainable use of natural resources for earning their livelihood instead of preventing them. The paper also identifies the challenges faced by these women SHG in conducting this masculine profession and also brings out salient features of this ecotourism model.

KEYWORDS- Gender based, Vengurla, Mangrove safari, SHG.

1. Introduction

Coastal Vengurla taluka from Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra state, India is endowed with great tourism potential such as natural scenery, abundant natural resources, cultural monuments. Mostly rural community from the district depends on natural resources for their livelihood. The district has only 3.8 percent of the total mangrove vegetation in the state. Fishing is one of the major economic activities of Vengurla taluka which directly depends upon sustainability of mangrove ecosystem. Destruction of mangroves, creek pollution and changes in the land use threatened Mangrove ecosystem. Therefore, conservation mangroves became the pressing need to save the fisheries. Generally, the local communities are the key players in the process of conservation as they have a symbiotic relationship with natural ecosystems. In order to avoid conflict of interests, there is an urgent need to define the stakeholders as well as the benefit sharing. Recently, many countries are employing ecotourism as the strategy for conservation of natural resources and for wellbeing of local communities through sustainable livelihood. Because ecotourism is considered as environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socioeconomic involvement of local populations (Ceballos-Lascurain;1996). Many a times participation of local communities is negligible in tourism related endeavor due to lack of skill and less preference for locals for skill-oriented tourism activities. Coastal communities are observing the development and prosperity brought by the tourism industry by utilizing their own local resources. Hence, they do not get proper share in the profit.

2. Study Area

Vengurla is one of south most coastal taluka of Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra state (figure-1.1) is known for tourism, fisheries and horticulture. Vengurla tahsil is located

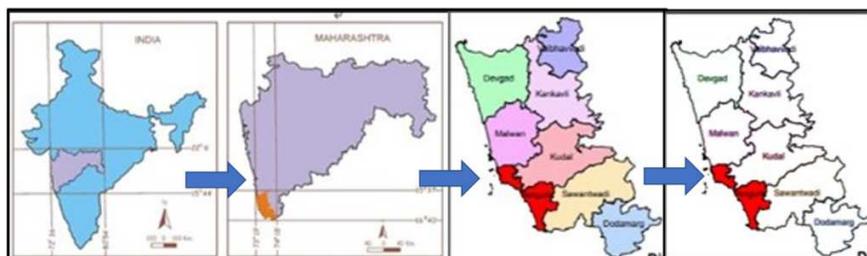


Figure 1.1 Vengurla taluka with reference to Sindhudurg District, India

at 15.87°N 73.63°E . The total area of Vengurla tahsil is 289.98 Sq.km. with total population of 88,387 and population density is 305 per Sq.km. (Population Census, 2011). Vengurla port is one of the important ports of south Konkan located on sea shore. It has 38 Kms. long coastline and fishing is one of the prime economic activities of the Vengurla taluka. It has 19 fishing villages with 7427 fishermen population (Population Census, 2011). The Vengurla taluka has rich tourism potential with beautiful beaches and pilgrim centres.

3. Need for the study

Recently, the coastal communities from the coastal Sindhudurg district are facing problem of declining fish catch due to over exploitation of fish stock, unsustainable fishing practices, destruction of mangroves and pollution of creeks. Most of the fishermen complained about permissions not being granted for setting temporary stalls or carts to serve tourists and generate additional income due to Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) restrictions. The women from the fishermen's community from Vengurla taluka use to spend several hours harvesting oysters from the rocks during low tide. Owing to decline in fish catch this activity could generate additional income for villagers to sustain and some solution for the same should be worked out for the same. Usually, women have close bonds with nature as their routine work depends upon environment. Degradation of natural resources increases their labour and time which they would have used otherwise for their self-development. Mangroves are the have high calorific value therefore, the poor fisher women using freely available mangrove wood as a source of firewood for cooking purpose. This maritime taluka has rich marine biodiversity which could be tapped for developing responsible ecotourism by involving the local coastal community. Normally, ecotourism focuses on preservation of natural resources, hence, many times the economic livelihoods of local people get threatened. Hence there is an urgent need to define the stakeholders and to share the benefits earned from tourism industry to avoid conflict of interests.

This paper presents the case study where Mangrove Safari was conducted by fisher women to generate supplementary income through conservation of mangrove

ecosystem (promoting fishery related tourism) and attempts to study a unique gender-based model of mangrove safari, challenges faced the women SHGs and highlights the attributes of Mangrove safari.

4. Objectives of the Study

- To know the gender-based Mangrove Safari from Vengurla taluka
- To understand the challenges faced by the fisher women in developing mangrove safari
- To identify the characteristics of gender-based Mangrove Safari from Vengurla taluka

5. Mangrove Safari in Vengurla taluka

Vengurla is one of coastal taluka from Sindhudurg district with rich marine biodiversity. Degradation of mangrove resources increases their efforts in collection of resources required for livelihood. They were required to spend 7 to 8 hours in catching shells. Greater interaction and close bonds with the natural environment than men encouraged fisher women to develop special knowledge about mangrove ecology. This developed interested among them in protecting environment and mangroves. The rural fisher women from Vengurlataluka from SwaminiSwayamsahayataMahilaBachat Gat (Self Help Group) were watching the mangroves since their childhood, but they were not aware about their environmental significance and medicinal uses. They had strong desire to venture into backwater tourism but were unable to do so due to Coastal Regulatory Zone (CRZ) restrictions and unavailability of funds. When they realized about the program, they showed their interest and came forward. The SHG members had undergone training for capacity building in mangrove interpretation, soft skills and hospitality management. Ten women members of SwaminiSHG conduct Mangrove Safari. The main aim of the Mangrove Safari is to create awareness among the local people and tourists in understanding the significance of mangroves and to strengthen coastal livelihood. Various authorities and stakeholders like Mangrove Cell, the Ministry of Environment and Forests, United Nations Development Program, the Global Environment Facility etc. came together for implementation of this project. (Vasudevan N. &Goenka D., 2017).

6. Challenges faced by the WomenSHGmembers engaged in Mangrove Safari

6.1.Lack of Funds

Swamini is a women self-help group run by the poor fisher women from Vengurla tahsil had an idea of Mangrove Safari but faced the main problem of funding as investment was needed to buy the boats and life jackets for the tourists.

6.2.Lack of Soft Skills

They faced the problem of effective communication with foreign visitors, due to lack of fluency in speaking English language. Some of them can understand English but are not able to communicate in English. Many members of Mangrove Safari are graduate but studied in vernacular medium hence are not fluent in English language.

6.3.Lack of Professionalism and Need for Capacity Building

Generally, participation of local communities is minimal in tourism related activities due to lack of skill. The area is visited by several foreign tourists and the fisher women earlier find it difficult to communicate with these foreign tourists mainly coming from United States and Sweden.

6.4.Entry in Masculine profession

Rowing the boats basically considered as masculine work, as it is physically tiring work. Especially when the direction of the wind is not favourable while rowing the boats then causes pains in the arms and hands. Moreover, local women started discouraging them.

6.5.Difficulty in remembering the Botanical Names

Generally remembering botanical names of flora and fauna with their families of origin is difficult for even to the educated people. The fisher women from Mangrove Safari were not from science background. Hence in the beginning, they find difficult to remember the botanical names of the mangrove plants.

7. Characteristics of Mangrove Safari from Vengurla taluka

7.1. The first Gender-based Ecotourism Model

Mangrove safari is an example of the first gender based indigenous low impact ecotourism model in India. It is non-traditional business with innovative idea where fisher women manually row the boats and navigate the backwater on their own. Usually, rowing boats is masculine work hence it is unthinkable for villagers. The fisher women earn a living from the unusual business of taking tourists, both Indian and foreign, on an exciting mangrove safari in the backwaters adjoining the Vengurla Port.

7.2. Capitalization of indigenous knowledge and skill

Coastal communities are affected by poverty and due to the dwindling sources of the livelihood. This case study showcases how new avenues for livelihood could be developed by ensuring the participation of indigenous community, their skill and knowledge. The Mangrove safari has enhanced the income of fisherwomen community by involving tourists in fishery related activities. Participation of indigenous fisher women communities has ensured the involvement of rural low-income group of fisher women from marginalized community.

7.3. Social Inclusion

The fishermen community from the coastal Sindhudurg district is poor and marginalized survives on coastal subsistence fisheries. Generally, the coastal indigenous communities are the key players in protecting marine biodiversity as they have a symbiotic relationship with the ecosystem. In order to avoid conflict of interests, to tap the marine resources for developing responsible tourism by involving the indigenous coastal community; The mangrove safari ecotourism model clearly define the stakeholders as well as the benefit sharing. Earlier, there was no direct linkage between local fishermen and tourism industry of Vengurla. This kept the local community deprived of sharing the profit. Indigenous based ecotourism is

owned, operated and controlled by indigenous group offer nature-oriented tourism services.

7.4. Low impact Tourism

Ecotourism is characterized with limited carrying capacity of the tourists, it is low impact and education-oriented form of tourism. To avoid water pollution and noise pollution caused by diesel boat, they use manually-powered boats. The mangrove safari of Vengurla has limited carrying capacity and carry at a time only ten tourists per boat and provide life jacket to each tourist. Thus, Mangrove safari model of Vengurla fulfills all the attributes of ecotourism as it is low impact tourism with less carbon foot print. These women interpret marine biodiversity and attributes of dense mangrove. They carry stick with them to remove the garbage struck in the trunks of the mangrove plants thus contribute to the conservation of mangroves both directly and indirectly by creating awareness in the community.

7.5. Sustainable Model of Ecotourism

Mangrove safari observes all three elements of ecotourism namely environmental care, economic feasibility and social inclusion. Mangrove safari ecotourism has successfully created new avenue through sustainable use of mangrove to improve their household income of fisher women. Owing to decline in fish catch mangrove safari activity could generate additional income by conserving mangrove ecology which is considered as the fish breeding ground. The women members of the mangrove safari had earned profits of over Rs. 70,000 in a short span of four months (January to April, 2017). Before pandemic-induced lockdown, till October 2018, they earned around to Rs 2,00,000 from only mangrove safari activity. Mangrove safari have turned them into successful entrepreneurs, and have started small restaurant. The dreams of these women SHG members have now new wings and are planning to organize a boating competition for women in the district on Women's Day, wish to start a mangrove nursery and have desire to start nature trail for bird watching and mangrove walks in near future. are also working on creating their own brand of pickle from the fruits of a mangrove species.

7.6. Mangrove Safari ecotourism model is Replicable

The Mangrove safari Ecotourism model has replicability. The women members of the Swamini help groups and others involved in these projects were invited to share their experiences with members from other communities and the project facilitated these visits. The approach adopted to promote replication of the model in the neighbourhood villages. It was informed that similar such models promoting community-based ecotourism are proposed in Hadi village, Malvan tahsil and Wadatar village in Devgad tahsil. Srishtidyan NGO from Mumbai gave training to the SHG on mangrove safari.

8. Conclusion

Mangrove safari of Vengurla is an example of women centric model for socio-economic empowerment of marginalized women. This has helped to create awareness, by using sustainable use of mangroves and promoted fishery related community livelihood. This has not only led to the creation of substantial income for the fisher women but increased

their self-esteem and confidence and metamorphosed them into successful entrepreneurs. To conclude in a nutshell, this gender- based model of mangrove safari ecotourism successfully linked the intangible resources to the monetary value. This ecotourism model underlines the need of involvement of women is therefore very much required to protect the natural resource base of the ecotourism.

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