

Abstract

Fishermen community of Kuakata (a remote coastal area of Bangladesh): strategies for their sustenance in an era of globalization

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This research studied the fishermen community of Kuakata, a tourist resort of Bangladesh, incorporating tourism development and formulating strategies for sustenance of the fishermen community. Participatory Research Appraisal (PRA), Participatory Research Observation (PRO), case studies, interviews and questionnaire survey were key tools used in this research. Field investigators have collected various information of the fishermen community and tourism development at Kuakata. 500 households have been surveyed from 12 villages of Latachapali Union (e.g. Kuakata, Melapara, Nibinpur, Keranipara, Panjupara, Hossainpara, Musalliabad, Mombipara, Alipur, Naioripara, Farshipara and Khajura villages). 30 tourists were also interviewed for this research. It is found that daily activities of the fishermen are fishing, fry collection in the sea, share cropping, pulling vans and carts, day laboring, construction work, working in hotels restaurants and boats. 90% of the population of the Kuakata are Muslim, 6% are Buddhist (Rakhain Tribe) and 4% are Hindus. The Rakhain Community who inhabited Kuakata first (from Burma) introduced fisheries at Kuakata. Now, there are very few Rakhain families at Kuakata and the Muslims dominate the entire area. Most of the fishermen mentioned that agriculture was the main occupation of their fore-fathers. Poverty, landlessness and unemployment have pushed the people to Kuakata and availability of fish in the sea has brought them in the fishing profession. Fishing in the sea is a risky profession. Cyclone depression, robbery, loss of fishing gear due to strong current and waves make the life of the fishermen very uncertain.

Only the people of the Kuakata resort area and its adjacent villages are involved in tourism related activities. Income pattern of the fishermen community of Kuakata is not satisfactory. Their income rises during the period of *Hilsa* catch (from June to September). During month of February, March and April, when the community gets very little fish, they require large sum of money to buy fishing gears (nets, boats, anchors, floats etc.) as the fishing season starts from the next month (May). In this period, they borrow money from the money lender and get ready for fishing by becoming well equipped.

A tourist in Kuakata (sea beach) can enjoy the rare scene of sunrise and sun set, calm and quiet beach, natural forest, fishing villages, birds and sailing boats. Kuakata sea beach is about 18 km long and 450-900 meters wide. Tourist season at Kuakata normally starts from October and continues up to April. November, December, January, February and March are the peak season for tourism. It is found from this study that around 4000 tourists visit Kuakata in November, while only 500 tourists visit this place in August. There are 21 residential hotels for accommodation at Kuakata.

Fisheries and tourism at Kuakata are inter-related. The study found that tourists are found more frequently at Kuakata since 1998 and onwards. Poor transportation facility is the major problem for tourism development at Kuakata. Narrow, zigzag roads and presence of a large number of ferries on the way to Kuakata made the transportation system inconvenient for tourists and passengers. Recreation facility is barely minimum at Kuakata. The hotels are the only place for accommodation for the tourists and even these do not have any TV.

To support the fishermen community as well as promote tourism at Kuakata the research proposes a number of suggestions and recommendations. Tourist areas of Kuakata can be declared and delineated. A number of fish processing industries can be set up in and around Kuakata. The way to Kuakata can be improved by building more bridges, and a numbers of eco-parks can be developed in this site. The fishermen can be provided with soft loans by banks or NGOs to buy fishing gears.

Community service facilities such as schools, *madradas* and health centers to be established at Kuakata for the local people. Appropriate steps to be taken for profit sharing arrangement between the moneylender (*Dadandars*) and the fishermen community.