

Socio-economic and Environmental Impact of Tourism Development in Rural area of Abbottabad: A case study of Harnoi Lake

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Abstract:

This study analyzes the socio-economic and environmental effects of tourism development in rural area of Abbottabad, A case study of Harnoi Lake. Tourism is associated with local development and livelihood enhancement, hence it also creates economic and ecological pressure and complex culture. By employing qualitative research design, forty interviews were conducted with residents, shopkeepers, government officials and restaurant employees. Purposive, snowball and convenience sampling methods facilitated the access to different groups of stakeholder. The findings of the study show that tourism contributes to generation of employment, expansion of small enterprises, improved household and growth in infrastructure. Hence inflation in basic commodities, rising prices of land, fluctuation in seasonal income and unequal benefit distribution have generated economic vulnerabilities. Socially, community reported cultural disruption, increased conflict during tourist flow, decreased social cohesion. Environmental degradation has emerged as a most crucial challenge that reflected in accumulation of waste, loss of biodiversity, congestion and water contamination. The results focus on the need for planning of sustainable tourism, regulatory frameworks to protect the natural resources and the strategies which strengthen local participation. The research offers empirical evidences from rural tourist destination of Pakistan and also contributes to research on tourism-induced socioeconomic and environmental transformations.

Keywords: Tourism development, Socio-economic, Environmental, Harnoi Lake

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1. Introduction

Tourism is a multi-trillion and multidimensional international industry which significantly contributes to regional and national economies. Nations like United Kingdom, France, United Arab Emirates and Thailand generate revenue from tourism (Sultan et al., 2024). However, in Pakistan tourism has remained historically underdeveloped because of strategic neglect, weak governance and inadequate infrastructure. Tourism is explained as “the goose that lays golden egg, yet fouls its own nest” (Pham, 2012) showing dual potential for environmental or social harm and economic prosperity. Globally, tourism is considered as an important driver of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), employment creation and exchange earnings. Pakistan is blessed with different landscapes that range from deserts to snow-capped peaks, gives various untapped potential of tourism. Its cultural diversity, natural beauty and historical heritage like Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa and Taxila make it a hub of potential global tourism. Hence, security challenges, insufficient public investment, political instability and inadequate branding. Before the global economic crisis, Pakistan had received more than 50,000 international tourists per annum (Jalil et al., 2013). According to world economic forum 2011, travel and tourism share is 6.5% of GDP. World economic forum 2011 also expected that tourism and travel will produce almost 3.43 million openings which are 5.7 % of total employment level. Also, in export the share of travel and tourism is 86 billion. According to world economic forum, in 2009 it has improved its ranking from 125 to 113 in 2010 (Schwab and Sala-i-Martin, 2010).

Internationally, tourism is considered as an important driver of GDP, employment creation and foreign exchange earnings. Pakistan is endowed with vast landscapes that range from deserts to snow-capped

peaks that provides tremendous potential of Tourism. The cultural diversity, national beauty and historical heritage like Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa and Taxila make it a potential hub of global tourism. Hence, persistent political instability, inadequate branding, security challenges and insufficient public investment have lack of growth (Arshad et al., 2018). despite of international recognition, country has ranked 113/ 130 in World Economic Forum Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report showing lack of competitiveness in the international tourism market (Kantawateera et al., 2015).

In Pakistan tourism industry is rising with the support of international financing (Anwar, 2019). Tourism not just contributes to economic development but also encourages cultural exchange, community development and poverty alleviation. It forms opportunities for investment expansion, trade, and expansion in infrastructure, whereas posing challenges simultaneously are related to environmental sustainability and social cohesion. Northern areas in Pakistan are renowned for lush valleys, snow-capped mountains and lakes which serve as a major attractions (Khan, 2012).

Given its potential, tourism can be a crucial tool for development in Pakistan. Hence, limited work of scholars has examined socio-economic and environmental impact in specific local contexts. This research addresses the gap by assessing impacts of tourism development in Harnoi. The study investigates how the tourism shapes income, environmental sustainability, employment, investment and cultural values. Tisdell and Bandara (2004) said that social and cultural impacts of tourism should be noticed to increase profits of tourism at that area. In Abbottabad, there is a significant capability for tourism. The rural area of Abbottabad i.e. Harnoi was taken as a case study in the research. Research on tourism and effects on local communities are very

limited in Abbottabad. Hence, this study was proposed to examine socio-economic and environmental impacts of tourism development on local communities of Harnoi Lake.

This research contributes to real evidence from rural tourist destination which has received lack of academic attention. Just like past national studies which give more descriptive accounts, this study provides micro-level qualitative assessment of tourism impacts in Harnoi Lake that is based on direct narratives of community. The results expand literature on nature and rural-based tourism in Pakistan by showing how localized socio-economic and environmental pressures appear in destinations which undergo unregulated growth of tourism. The research also contribute to building of theory by associating empirical themes to established model of tourism impact like perspective of destination life cycle and social exchange theory.

1.1 Aims and Objectives

The purpose of research is to explore socio-economic and environmental impact of tourism on local communities in Harnoi Lake and to censoriously scrutinize the benefits of involvement of local community in tourism.

1- How does tourism development impact socio-economic and environmental conditions of local communities living around the Harnoi Lake?

2- How do local communities perceive their role, participation and expected benefits within the evolving tourism sector of Harnoi Lake?

2. Literature Review

The research on tourism has increasingly emphasized on community participation, sustainability, and ecological vulnerability in the developing countries. Present studies demonstrate that tourism development continue to stimulate employment and local economic diversification also,

whereas generating complex environmental and social pressures.

Tourism is not entirely an economic phenomenon, but it includes social, political, economic and environmental aspects. Impacts of tourism are classified in three classes i.e. social, economic and environmental. Social and cultural impacts include individual behavior, lifestyles and changes in value systems. Economic impacts contain financial streams. Tourism makes a productive economic involvement like rising foreign exchange earnings that expands the balance of payments subsequently and expand the service sector by creating employment over a expertise stages, attracts investment for development of infrastructure, economic modification, stimulates improvement of transformation infrastructure and long-term stability (Phoummasak et al., 2014). Environmental impacts include natural or atmosphere, pollution, loss of species, deforestation (Dwyer et al., 2000). Increased pollution and solid waste are associated with development in tourism sector (Buckley, 2004). Various studies have been carried out regarding socio-economic and environmental impact of tourism. Khan et al. (2011) inspect the students' perceptions about social, economic and environmental impacts of tourism in the tourists' destination of Chitral - Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan. The findings presented that students have stated economic impacts of tourism most positively, pursued by environmental impacts and social impacts. Students thought that tourism has provided work opportunities and can benefit to activate the economy in the region. They have high expectations and positive attitude of developing tourism in Chitral. Kanwal et al., (2020) show that enhancements in road infrastructure and transport in northern Pakistan substantially increased community support for tourism, though benefits were distributed unevenly.

The study focus on how increased accessibility changes patterns of employment and increases land values. (Rasool *et al.*, 2021) further observed that growth of tourism contributes to creation of local enterprises and also produce inflationary pressures mainly in rural destination where there is lack of regulatory oversight

A study by Mahmood and Khan, 2022, showed that tourism in KPK stimulated diversification in household income but seasonal instability is still a main barrier to stable livelihoods. Same conclusions were observed in Nepal by Adhikari and Upadhyay (2023), who noticed that rural communities get benefit from tourism expansion just because they have direct control over the tourism-related enterprises.

Recent studies also focuses on social adjustments which emerge from the exposure of tourism. Sultana *et al.*, 2022, demonstrate that in mountain destinations local communities experience shifts in lifestyles, dress code and structure of family as a result of increased interaction of visitor. Their results match with previous observations across the destinations of South Asia recommending a slow normalization of cultural hybridity

Baniya and Paudel (2021) also reported that tourism-induced behavioural change has weakened the community cohesion and also increased social tension during season of peak tourism. Such findings go with the experiences of residents in Harnoi Lake specially showing concerns regarding behavioural disturbances and decrease of adhesion to traditional norms.

Tourism driven ecological degradation has perceived rising attention in present literature. (Baloch *et al.*, 2020) referenced that unregulated tourism in northern region of Pakistan has accelerated deforestation and water pollution, mainly due to disposal practices and improper waste. (Pandey *et al.*, 2023) also observe comparable results in

Himalayan region of India where the congestion of visitor overwhelmed the capacity of local waste management and cause decrease in quality of freshwater.

In a cross-country analysis, (Ekanayake and Long 2024) showed that destinations of tourist are lacking strong structure of governance that face fast depletion of natural resources and the deterioration of aesthetic landscape. Their findings also align with the global evidence that tourism usually exceeds local ecological capacity of carrying when the growth is unplanned.

Khan (2013) investigated the socio-economic impacts of tourism on the people of two towns that consist of Rawalakot and Banjonsa situated in Azad Kashmir. The study results demonstrate that tourism development has substantial socio-economic impact on the individuals of study villages. Tourism formed the work openings and enhanced infrastructure of both villages. In distinction, it also carried some negative economic impacts such as raising prices of land, increased rent, and high prices of basic commodities. The tourism stimulated some socio-cultural impacts on the public of study areas in the system of variations in family structure, connection between the people of community and style of dressing etc.

3. Methodology

Research is a procedure that examines the queries to create conception amongst the problems and solutions. Methodology defines various scientific approaches like a brief explanation of research design, research methods, data collection, sampling etc. (Kothari, 2004). Qualitative research design was used to assess perception of local community about tourism impacts in Harnoi Lake. This method is suitable for investigating lived experiences, social meanings and context-specific changes that are

linked with tourism development. The study relied on semi-structured interviews that are complemented by field observations to know the flexibility and depth in data collection.

3.1 Population and Sample Size Clarification

The population includes, local business operators, residents, government personnel and tourism workers that are associated with Harnoi Lake. Because of absence of record of official population for tourist zone, the exact size of population can't be established. The qualitative study do not aim for statistical generalization hence a sample of 40 respondents was chosen to attain thematic saturation instead of numerical representativeness.

3.1.1 Sampling Strategy

Three sampling methods were used for various respondent groups and each are justified by its relevance

Convenience sampling: is applied to hotel staff, shopkeepers and vendors because of their availability in the commercial zones

Snowball sampling: is employed to residents because community networks facilitated access and referrals

Purposive sampling: it is applied to employees of tourism department and government officials that are chosen for their institutional knowledge

This triangulated strategy of sampling has ensured diversity in perspectives by maintaining feasibility in rural setting

3.2 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews from government officials and residents were conducted. Interviews were lasted between 25 to 45 minutes and recorded with consent. Interview guide covered the themes that are about social impacts, economic changes, community

participation in tourism and environmental degradation. Field notes were considered to document the environmental conditions, visitor behavior and quality of infrastructure.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data was assessed through thematic analysis that follow six-step approach of Braun and Clarke: coding, familiarization, theme development, definition and reporting and review. Codes were inductively generated to let the unanticipated themes to evolve. Credibility was improved through triangulation of verification of themes and various respondent groups with field observations. This methodology ensures transparency, alignment and analytical rigor with qualitative standards of research

3.4 Research Locale

Abbottabad is situated in Hazara Division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. It was established in 1853 and is named after the Major James Abbott, area has served as a military and administrative center under both British colonial administration and later Pakistani state (Shujah and Hussain, 2016). This district is known for stable social environment, high rate of literacy and diverse landscape. Abbottabad contains various well-known cultural and natural sites including Ilyasi Mosque, Harnoi, and Shimla Hill that attract number of domestic tourists

Harnoi is a small settlement which is located approximately 10km east of Abbottabad along Nathiagali Road. The town is at confluence of Harnoi streams and Barenglu and serves as enter point to the Galiyat region. Geography of Harnoi is defined by steep forested slopes, moderate temperature in sume and freshwater channels that contribute to its status as a famous seasonal destination. Area of Harnoi Lake is positioned in the commercial hub of

Harnoi Bazar and became a known recreational point after development of tourism facilities and small water bodies following 2005.

Local economy is formed by both tourism-related enterprise and subsistence activities. Residents are involved in food stalls, small shops, seasonal vending, guiding, boating services and part-time work in restaurants. Numbers of visitor fluctuate considerably with the peak inflow is reported during summer months. Though no official record exist, estimates of local said that 90,000 to 100,000 tourists annually visit this area. The environment pressure in valley include inadequate waste, rising commercial activities along riverbanks, and unmanaged construction. These issues directly contribute to landscape degradation, water contamination and congestion. Pine forests surrounding and freshwater streams encourage local biodiversity but the ecological features are rising vulnerably to unregulated use of land and tourism expansion.

Tourist Attractions in Harnoi Jeep Rally

From 2017, tourism Corporation Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (TCKP) and has organized annual jeep rally in the corridor of Harnoi-Galyaat. This even attract spectators and professional drivers from various regions and works as a promotional activity to support adventure tourism. Whereas the rally gives economic opportunities for service providers and local vendors, it increases environmental disturbance and traffic load during event period.

3.4.1 Chairlift

A privately run chairlift usually referred as "Khan chairlift" is been working for about fourteen years. This chairlift connects Harri Mitti to Damsal and gives elevated views of surrounding forested slopes and valley. It is the recreational facility in the area and also contributes to seasonal employment. Hence, rising number of travelers utilize facility places and

additional pressure on transport networks and local infrastructure.

3.4.2 Harnoi Amusement Park

Harnoi has a small amusement park that is located near stream, providing recreational activities like balloon-shooting games, carousel rides, horse riding, and small roller swing and play area for children's. These facilities contribute to options of entertainment that are available to tourists mainly families. The expansion of park has included commercial investment and indirectly support local business. On same time, concentration of recreational infrastructure that is adjacent to stream has contributed to noise pollution, crowding and stress on natural environment.

4. Thematic Findings

Analysis of the 30 semi-structured interviews with tourism workers, residents, local owners of business and government officials showed three main areas of theme: social and cultural adjustments, economic transformation and environmental pressure. These themes are capture in ways through which tourism development is reshaping the local identity, livelihoods and ecological conditions near Harnoi Lake.

Theme 1: Economic Transformations

Respondents have continuously highlighted tourism as a significant source of economic and income diversification. Seasonal employment opportunities are expanded in shops, restaurants, recreational services and small hotels. Most of the participants reported that tourism allowed establishment of small-scale enterprise like rental services, boat operations, food stalls and souvenir shops. The construction of hotels and guesthouses by private investors indicates the rising economic implication of tourism.

Hence, the residents have also pointed some negative economic pressures. Increasing prices of basic commodities, house rents and land values were attributed to tourism-related demand. The low-income households stated concerns that the benefits of tourism do not offset rising cost living. Seasonal swing in the number of visitors has created instability in incomes mainly for daily wagers. These experiences recommend that tourism brings new economic opportunities but its benefits are distributed unevenly.

Interpretation:

These results mirror the past studies in Pakistan and same developing contexts, where the tourism impacts local economic growth and also provides unequal benefit distribution and inflationary pressure. Thus, tourism around Harnoi Lake exhibits dual financial pattern: it rises opportunities for livelihood, hence intensifies the financial vulnerability for few groups.

Theme 2: Social and Cultural Adjustments

Tourism was perceived to impact family structures, practices of local culture and social behaviour. Various respondents have noted a shift from joint family to nuclear family system that is linked with changing preferences in lifestyle and increase financial autonomy. Few respondents considered this as a positive development which encourage self-reliance, whereas others viewed it as a weakening of traditional culture.

Concerns regarding increasing use of drug, petty crime and harassment specially at the time of tourist season were common. Residents also explained cultural disturbances like change in pattern of dressing and raised exposure to behaviour that is considered inappropriate in the local social context. For most of the respondents these social changes

formed unease and also contribute to perception of decreased community cohesion.

Interpretation:

The findings are consistent with literature focusing that tourism act as an agent of behavioral change and cultural contact, sometimes it intensify the value shifts or social tension (Ap, 1990; Mohammadi et al., 2010). In Harnoi Lake, cultural adjustments seem to show a tension between preservation of social and traditional norms and economic opportunity.

Theme 3: Environmental Pressures

Environmental degradation is emerged a most reported concern. Residents showed accumulation of solid waste management, traffic congestion, noise and water pollution as a major issues. Interviewers have reported poor practices of water disposal, contamination of lake from public littering and household sewage and disruption of flora and fauna because of overcrowding and unregulated construction.

Traffic congestion was considered as an everyday challenge during peak season and with limited road capacity that cause blockage, increased noise pollution and emissions. Residents of the area expressed great frustration over the decreasing water quality, declining access to clean water and raising pressure on natural resources

Interpretation:

These concern align with international studies presenting that unmanaged tourism frequently stresses fragile ecosystem which lead to deterioration in degradation of landscape, water quality and decrease environmental sustainability (Belsoy et al., 2012). Harnoi Lake pretense clear clue of exceeding its ecological carrying capacity.

5. Expanded Discussion

The findings of study show a complex interplay of burdens and benefits that are generated by tourism development in Harnoi Lake. Tourism works simultaneously as source of cultural exposure, livelihood resources and environmental stressor. Understanding the dynamics gives insight to ambivalent attitude of community toward industry.

5.1 Economic Opportunity and Inequality

Tourism act as economic catalyst by generating employment, attracting private investment and stimulating local entrepreneurship. These findings are comparable to other rural destinations that are experiencing tourism-led development. Hence increased prices of commodity, increasing rents, land speculation disproportionately influence low-income households. Further seasonal instability contribute to economic vulnerability. This impact supports the argument that economies that depend on tourism usually generate growth whereas intensifying local inequalities. Households that are integrated into supply chains of tourism benefit more than those that are reliant on agriculture or fixed incomes. Therefore, the results show the need for policy instruments which regulate inflationary pressures and stabilize seasonal income

5.2 Social Change and Community Adaptation

Tourism introduces new kinds of social interaction and exposes the residents to different cultural practices. Whereas few changes like increased independence among young individuals are positively perceived while others create tension. Concerns about erosion of traditional value, crime risks, and public behaviour show a community negotiating the identity amid at fast external influence.

These structure are well documented in the social impact literature of tourism, where the communities usually experience a slow renegotiation of norms once the tourism become a dominating local activity.

This negotiation in Harnoi appears to be current, producing both resistance and adaptation

Environmental Stress and Declining Carrying Capacity

In Harnoi Lake environmental impacts show a clear mismatch between environmental management capacity and visitor volume. The waste management system, water quality and surrounding infrastructure of Lake are under the significant strain. As the environmental degradation raises, long-term viability of destination become uncertain. In early development stages this trend is typical of destinations where fast growth outpaces the regulatory frameworks.

The main attraction of Harnoi Lake is natural scenery, continuous environmental deterioration also threatens not just the ecological integrity but the economic sustainability of tourism also. This strengthen requirement for stricter mechanisms of enforcement and integrated environmental governance.

6. Theoretical Implications

The findings of the study encourages main assumptions of Social Exchange Theory that holds that respondents assess tourism based on balance of perceived costs and benefits. Support for tourism in Harnoi Lake is conditional: residents value the economic gains but are also increasingly concerned regarding social and environmental risks. The results also align with Tourism Area Life Cycle model (TALC). Harnoi Lake seems to be in the stage of development. Without any coordinated planning, in stage destinations risk the premature stagnation

because of resident satisfaction and environmental decline.

6.1 Synthesis

The findings take together show that the Hanoi Lake is at a crucial juncture. Tourism has supported local economy and broadened the options of livelihood but social tension and environmental degradation are more pronounced. In the area future trajectory of tourism will rely on how well the governing institutions respond to emerging challenges. Community involvement, coordinated regulatory framework and effective planning are important to ensure that the tourism continue to lend to local development without intensifying social and environmental vulnerabilities

7.3 Limit unplanned construction.

Construction of restaurants, shops and hotels in ecologically sensitive zones must be restricted. A distinct zoning plan is required to protect the forested areas, wildlife habitats and water channels.

7.4- Introduce an entrance or conservation fee.

A little fee for visitors generate revenue which encourage environmental restoration, maintenance activities and upgrades infrastructure. This is a public practice in sustainable tourism sites internationally

7.5- Strengthen local security and regulatory presence.

Tourist facilitation centers, establishing check posts and surveillance system will help to decrease harassment incidents, petty crime and safety issues.

7.6- Develop community awareness programs.

Village meetings, workshops and tourism exhibitions must be used to educate people regarding impacts of tourism, visitor-management practices and environmental protection

7.7- Diversify tourist activities.

Developing trails for walking, handicraft markets cultural displays, and nature-based experiences may raise visitor spending and decrease pressure on a single point of attraction.

7.8- Encourage year-round tourism.

During off-peak seasons cultural festivals and events can help to stabilize income and decrease seasonal fluctuations in employment.

7.9- Develop emergency and health services.

A first-aid center, improved communication facilities (mobile, internet, networks, ATMs) and basic medical unit are essential to support both tourists and residents

7.10- Develop a regional branding strategy.

Marketing campaigns focusing the cultural and natural uniqueness of Hanoi Lake and can attract both international and domestic tourists.

7. Recommendations

The results show that tourism around the Hanoi Lake shows both risks and opportunities for local community. On the base of thematic analysis, following recommendations intent to strengthen economic benefits, protect the quality of environment and decrease social tensions.

7.1- Strengthen waste management systems.
A structures disposal system and waste collection is needed to further prevent contamination of lake and surroundings. Hiring sanitary workers during peak season, installing waste bins and establishing site of centralized waste will increase the environmental quality.

7.2- Introduce regulatory measures for pollution control.

Rigorous monitoring of waste discharge, sewage disposal and vehicle emissions from commercial facilities is required. Fines must be imposed on businesses and individuals that contribute to environmental degradation.

8. Conclusion

The study has assessed socio-economic and environmental impacts of tourism development in Harnoi Lake through a qualitative analysis of community perceptions. The results of the study show that tourism has formed significant economic opportunities including growth in employment, increased access to investment and improved entrepreneurship. On the same time, residents of the study encounter rising financial pressure because of increasing prices, uneven benefits distribution and seasonal instability.

Socially, it has altered the structure of family, raised concerns about cultural disturbance and crime and introduced new patterns of behaviour. These social adjustments show broad process of change that is common in rural destinations that experience rapid expansion of tourism. Environmentally it has produced most crucial challenge. Traffic congestion, waste accumulation, land degradation and water contamination show that the area is under momentous ecological pressure. Without any intervention, these impacts might undermine long-term sustainability of destination and lessen local support for tourism. Therefore, study focuses on need for coordinated approach which balance economic gains with social well-being and environmental protection. Improving infrastructure, implementing strategies for sustainable planning, engaging local communities and strengthening governance are important to ensure that tourism positively contributes to rural development.

By documenting the perspective of community, this study contributes to profound understanding of multifaceted impacts of tourism in northern Pakistan and gives evidence-based guidance for policy design which support inclusive and sustainable rural tourism.

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