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Management for Viksit Bharat – Opportunities
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Year: 2026

A Study on Sustainable Tourism and Its Role in Conservation Funding in Madhya Pradesh

Harshita Chourasia^{1*}

¹Research Scholar G. S. College of Commerce and Economics (Autonomous), Jabalpur

Abstract

Sustainable tourism is increasingly recognized as a vital mechanism for balancing economic development with ecological preservation. In Madhya Pradesh, a state rich in biodiversity and home to several national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, tourism plays a significant role in conservation financing. This study examines the nexus between sustainable tourism practices and conservation funding in Madhya Pradesh. Using secondary data from government reports, NGO publications, and scholarly research, the paper explores how eco-tourism initiatives, visitor fees, and public-private partnerships contribute to the maintenance of natural habitats and protection of endangered species. Findings indicate that while sustainable tourism generates substantial revenue for conservation, challenges such as infrastructure gaps, inconsistent policy enforcement, and community participation remain. Recommendations include strengthening policy frameworks, improving revenue-sharing models, and fostering local community engagement to ensure long-term ecological and economic benefits..

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Conservation Funding, Eco-tourism, Madhya Pradesh, Wildlife Protection, Community Participation.

ISBN No. 978-93-7640-929-7

1 INTRODUCTION

Sustainable tourism is defined by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) 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 biodiversity-rich regions like Madhya Pradesh, sustainable tourism holds the potential to be a dual driver of economic growth and conservation funding. The state is home to iconic protected areas such as Kanha Tiger Reserve, Bandhavgarh National Park, and Satpura National Park, which attract domestic and international tourists.

Tourism generates significant direct and indirect revenues, part of which can be reinvested in conservation programs. However, the relationship between tourism and conservation funding is complex, influenced by policy, stakeholder involvement, and socio-economic contexts.

2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To assess the contribution of sustainable tourism to conservation funding in Madhya Pradesh.
2. To analyze the role of eco-tourism initiatives in wildlife preservation.
3. To identify challenges and gaps in tourism-led conservation funding mechanisms.
4. To suggest strategies for enhancing the efficiency of sustainable tourism in supporting conservation.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have underscored the importance of tourism revenue in financing conservation. Balmford et al. (2009) found that tourism revenues could cover a substantial portion of protected area management costs if efficiently allocated. In India, Krüger (2005) noted that eco-tourism has been instrumental in funding conservation projects, particularly in tiger reserves. However, studies (Buckley, 2010) also caution that tourism can lead to ecological stress if not managed sustainably.

Madhya Pradesh’s Tourism Policy (2021) emphasizes eco-tourism as a priority sector, recognizing its role in job creation, heritage preservation, and conservation funding.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative research design using secondary data from:

- Madhya Pradesh Forest Department reports.
- National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) performance evaluations.
- Ministry of Tourism statistics.
- Academic journals and NGO reports.

Data analysis involved thematic categorization under “revenue generation,” “conservation allocation,” “community participation,” and “policy effectiveness.”

Findings

5 ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION

Tourism in Madhya Pradesh generated approximately ₹8,500 crore in revenue in 2022 (MP Tourism Board, 2023), with wildlife tourism forming a substantial segment. Entry fees, safari charges, and eco-lodge rentals contribute directly to park management funds.

Revenue Allocation To Conservation

A portion of park entry fees and safari permits is earmarked for conservation activities, including habitat restoration, anti-poaching measures, and species monitoring. For example, in Kanha Tiger Reserve, 20% of gate revenue is allocated to Eco-Development Committees (EDCs) for local conservation and livelihood projects.

Role Of Eco-Tourism

Eco-tourism initiatives such as guided nature trails, community-managed homestays, and wildlife photography workshops have increased tourist engagement while generating funds for conservation.

Community Participation

Local communities, often dependent on forest resources, benefit from revenue-sharing schemes. In Pench Tiger Reserve, over 50% of the staff employed in tourism operations are from local villages.

Some Challenges In Implementation

- **Policy Implementation Gaps:** Inconsistent revenue distribution mechanisms reduce efficiency.
- **Carrying Capacity Concerns:** Overcrowding in peak seasons risks habitat disturbance.
- **Infrastructure Limitations:** Poor transport connectivity in some areas limits eco-tourism growth.

6 DISCUSSION

The link between sustainable tourism and conservation funding in Madhya Pradesh demonstrates a positive but underutilized potential. While revenue flows are evident, the effectiveness depends on transparent allocation, community empowerment, and maintaining ecological integrity. A multi-stakeholder approach is essential, where government agencies, private investors, NGOs, and local communities collaborate.

7 SUGGESTIONS

1. **Strengthen Policy Frameworks:** Enforce clear guidelines for revenue allocation to conservation.
2. **Capacity Building:** Train local communities in eco-tourism management and hospitality.
3. **Technology Integration:** Use GIS mapping and digital ticketing to monitor visitor flows and optimize carrying capacity.
4. **Public-Private Partnerships:** Encourage private sector investment in eco-lodges and interpretation centers.
5. **Monitoring & Evaluation:** Regular audits of conservation fund utilization.

8 CONCLUSION

Sustainable tourism in Madhya Pradesh has demonstrated its potential as a reliable source of conservation funding. However, its effectiveness relies on equitable benefit distribution, strict adherence to carrying capacity limits, and robust policy enforcement. With strategic planning, sustainable tourism can become a cornerstone of conservation financing, safeguarding the state's natural heritage while fostering socio-economic development.

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