

Final Evaluation Report

Your Details	
Full Name	Kamal Thapa
Project Title	Local People, Nature-Based Tourism and Protected Areas in Nepal: Implication for Conservation
Application ID	32174-B
Date of this Report	09 May 2023

1. Indicate the level of achievement of the project's original objectives and include any relevant comments on factors affecting this.

Objective	Not achieved	Partially achieved	Fully achieved	Comments
To assess types and distribution of socio-economic costs and benefits generated by protected areas (PAs)				This objective has been achieved. The result is also published as a peer reviewed journal article.
To assess the environmental impacts of nature-based tourism in PAs				<p>This objective has been partially achieved. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, studying environmental impacts of nature-based tourism was not possible as there were no tourism activities for about 2 years as well as no permission to travel for fieldwork. Instead, this objective was modified to explore the socio-economic benefits and costs of nature-based tourism in PAs to local people through the systematic literature review. I analysed the global studies of nature-based tourism in PAs. The findings have been published as a peer-reviewed journal article.</p> <p>I plan to carry out the environmental and climate impact (carbon emissions) of nature-based tourism in the future, subject to funding and time availability.</p>
To evaluate local perceptions of protected areas and nature-based tourism				This objective has been fully achieved. The findings on local perception of PAs will soon be submitted for journal publication in about a month.
To assess the feasibility of visitor fees in funding protected area management and buffer zone development				This objective is partially achieved. No new data was generated for this project (funding) period as there was no tourism due to COVID-19 pandemic. However, we re-analysed the data on visitor fees from Langtang National Park that was collected previously. This new analysis has been submitted for journal publication.

			<p>I plan to carry out this study covering Langtang National Park and Bardiya National Park to generate new data on visitor fees, willingness to pay for national park entry fee, etc. This would then help us to evaluate the temporal and spatial stability of entry fees. This will, however, depend on the availability of time and resources/funding.</p> <p>Instead of collecting new data on visitor fees, we collected the data on equity of benefits and costs from protected areas and tourism. This is due to the academic requirements for PhD degree as the project had to be adapted to meet both the COVID-19 guidelines as well as university guidelines for doctoral studies.</p>
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2. Describe the three most important outcomes of your project.

- a).** Global review on the socio-economic impacts of nature-based tourism in protected areas to local people has been documented. I found Nepal is one of the top countries to be studied on nature-based tourism but the studies are not uniformly distributed in protected areas.
- b).** Protected area management in Nepal, as managed through the integrated conservation and development (ICD) approach, is hard to prove that it really follows the ICD principles in practice.
- c).** Local support for protected areas was highly influenced by the perception of benefits received from PAs.

3. Explain any unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project and how these were tackled.

The COVID-19 pandemic was the biggest challenge to conduct this study. As the project proposal was developed and submitted for funding, COVID-19 took control of the world. However, these problems were tackled through several measures. First, I postponed the project start and completion date. Actual field work was postponed until the local authorities in Nepal permitted for field work and until the time, we feel safe for field work. Also, COVID-19 precautions were applied during field work such as by maintaining social distancing and use of personal protective equipment such as mask and sanitiser, among others. I also adapted the project to conform to the academic standard of the university as this was part of a doctoral studies. Therefore, given the COVID-19 pandemic, academic integrity and the requirements for doctoral studies, I adapted some of the study objectives. This is clearly explained in the above table too (answer 1).

4. Describe the involvement of local communities and how they have benefited from the project.

We have consulted with local people during the field work. We were in contact with the responsible person of buffer zoner users committee in our field site and during preparation of the field work. This provided us an opportunity to present about our work as well as make our study objectives clear to the local people. In some cases, these users committee members provide guidance on field work, location of settlement, household survey and sometimes accompanied in the field, etc. Local students were also used as a guide for logistical support in Langtang. Although, the local people did not benefit directly from this work as this was academic research, the results would certainly help to receive benefit in the future. For example, implementation of the result/findings and recommendations as suggested by this work help them enhance benefit or reduce the costs/burden from protected area management.

5. Are there any plans to continue this work?

Yes, I am interested to continue this work further. As mentioned earlier, some of the objectives were only partially achieved due to COVID-19 pandemic. I am interested to further explore the tourism aspect of the study site to complement the current study. I have interest in exploring environmental impacts of nature-based tourism, economic impacts (especially job/ employment benefit from nature-based tourism) and temporal and/or spatial variability/stability in the willingness to pay for park entry fee.

6. How do you plan to share the results of your work with others?

I plan to share this work with others through journal publications, through presentation in workshops, seminars, conferences and by sharing publications emanating from this research. As a result, up to now I have published two peer reviewed publications and two articles are under consideration for publication as a result of this project. In this project period, I have been able to publish another paper (accepted, in press now) which was funded by second grant. Further, another paper has been recently published but not related to this project. However, the skills and knowledge gained from this project as well as my research training helped me to achieve publication. I have also presented two papers at international conferences and another paper has been accepted for presentation in an international conference. Further, the thesis will also be made available online through university online repository, through research platform such as Research Gate and Google Scholar, and by submitting to library, etc.

7. Looking ahead, what do you feel are the important next steps?

My study sites are important nature-based tourism destinations among all the national parks and protected areas in Nepal. Unfortunately, I feel that the tourism component has been missed as I was not able to survey tourists in these national parks. Therefore, additional work on nature-based tourism and its contribution of benefits and costs to local people, measured through some objective indicators,

could provide strong foundation for future work. Similarly, prospect of sustainable financing of protected areas is another important research that can be combined with nature-based tourism. In the time of limited funding available for nature-conservation, self-financing strategies could be the best option. Implementation of the research findings would be another challenge as this study is academic research, but the management activities depend on respective national park offices.

8. Did you use The Rufford Foundation logo in any materials produced in relation to this project? Did the Foundation receive any publicity during the course of your work?

Yes, I used the Rufford Foundation logo in presentations. I have also acknowledged The Rufford Foundation in my article as a funding source. Further, I will acknowledge Rufford in all the reports, thesis and publications that will come out of this work and use its logo in upcoming presentations. This will certainly provide more publicity to the foundation.

9. Provide a full list of all the members of your team and their role in the project.

Kamal Thapa – Principal investigator (PI), proposal development, preparation of application for research permit, human ethics approval, research methodology, data cleaning, data analysis, report preparation, thesis preparation, peer-reviewed article preparation, conference presentations, and overall guidance to the field team. **Amy Diedrich** supervised the overall research work, helped in research design, supported in development of survey instrument, co-authored journal paper etc.

Injun Acharya – Lead the team in the field. Field work, coordinating with the park office for research permit, supervising field work, conduct pilot survey, household survey.

Santosh KC – Coordinating for research permit with department of national parks, data entry, and other logistical support.

Manoj Thapa – Pilot survey, field work.

Sunil Bhattarai – Field work, household survey.

Mitra Acharya – Field work, household survey.

Buda – Field work, household survey, logistics.

Nigali Self-Reliance Development Centre (NSDC) - Mobilisation and recruitment of the field team on behalf of PI and in co-ordination with PI. This was also a research/field partner as the disbursement of fund to pay for the field team was to be through the official channel. JCU, on behalf of the PI signed the contract with NSDC.

10. Any other comments?

I carried out this project during the COVID-19 pandemic era. Therefore, some of the activities were beyond the control of the PI and as such, some objectives were only partially achieved. Further, this work is also part of academic research and needed to adapt to the university requirements including project activities. I am really interested to conduct the research work that are not achieved in this project but that are equally important to support nature conservation.