

PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY-BASED ECO-TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN POST-WAR AREAS: CASE OF CHUNDIKULAM BIRD SANCTUARY

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ABSTRACT

The tourism sector is one of the most valuable industries worldwide because of its direct and indirect impact on economic and non-economic performance. Despite Sri Lanka's over 25 years of experience with tourism challenges during times of conflict, the sector has become a crucial part of the country's economy since the conflict ended. However, the tourism sector still faces numerous challenges in terms of its development. This study examines the prospects and challenges of community-based ecotourism development in the postwar area, focusing on the Chundikulam Bird Sanctuary. This study aims to address three strategic objectives: identifying ecotourism potential, identifying challenges, and exploring implications for promoting community-based ecotourism. A qualitative approach was employed in this research, utilizing interviews and observations as the primary methods of data collection, with content analysis used for data interpretation. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with three residents and seven local authorities selected purposively based on their expertise in local knowledge and authority in the area. Each interview lasted between 15 and 30 minutes, depending on the participants' knowledge and experience with community-based ecotourism. The interview findings were cross validated using observational data to enhance the reliability of the results. The findings of this research indicate that Chundikulam has significant natural and cultural attractions, including ancient temples, dunes, beaches, diverse flora and fauna, and scenic landscapes, which have a strong potential for ecotourism. However, this study also identified several challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, economic constraints, technological limitations, management and marketing challenges, and the critical issue of community involvement in tourism development, all of which hinder community-based ecotourism development in this area. The study concludes by offering insightful analysis and recommendations. These suggestions emphasize the need for targeted efforts to enhance infrastructure, improve economic conditions, and increase community participation to promote community-based ecotourism.

Keywords: Community-based tourism in Mullaitivu, eco-tourism in northern province, post-war tourism, tourism development in Chundikulam, tourism in northern province