

Project Update: March 2017

Bardia National Park (BNP) is an emerging ecotourism destination with global significance in part due to its role in conserving endangered wildlife such as tigers. However, there have been very limited locally organised efforts to promote ecotourism in the area despite its cultural attractions and rich biodiversity rivalling that of Chitwan National Park, one of the most popular tourism destinations of Nepal. This pilot project aims to lay foundation for promotion of ecotourism in Bardia National Park (BNP) and its buffer zone area through active involvement of local communities from the planning stage. During the last visit to BNP, following activities were conducted:

1. Building collaboration among tourism stakeholders working in BNP:

During the field visit to the park, the team found that a stakeholder meeting including representatives from various government and non-government organizations are interested in promoting ecotourism in the BNP was recently held by Tourism Development Society (TDS) in collaboration with ICIMOD. Hence we organized an interaction program on “Supporting community for ecotourism development in Bardia National Park” on July 1st 2016 in Tharu Home resort of Thakurdwara with representatives from various local groups who are directly and indirectly involved in tourism sector in buffer zone areas of the park. These groups were identified in consultation with Ecotourism Development Forum (ETDF) representatives. The discussion focused on challenges and opportunities for ecotourism development in Bardia National Park and buffer zone areas. The participants also outlined four priority areas where they need support from external agencies to develop ecotourism in the area. The programme was facilitated by Mr Yagya Prasad Upadhyaya, lecturer of Mid-Western University and chaired by Mr Mohan Chaudhary, president of ETDF. The results of the meeting were shared with different organisations such as Nepal Tourism Board and park authorities to further act on it.

Some of the priority areas outlined by stakeholders for future interventions aimed to support ecotourism development in the area:

1. Infrastructure (road, bridges, communication, electricity, health).
2. Awareness and promotion.
3. Declaration of the area as tourist destination by government.
4. Banking, security.
5. Skilled manpower.

As per discussion, some other factors associated with limited ecotourism development in the area are:

1. Lack of variation in food and accommodation facilities.
2. Expensive airfare.
3. Lack of investment on quality food and accommodation facilities.
4. Unhealthy competition among local tourism entrepreneurs.
5. Lack of eco-tourism information centre.

6. Community and local leaders not being aware of the significance of eco-tourism.
7. Lack of linkage and support from central level.
8. Lack of consideration of employee's rights.
9. Lack of originality and destination brand.
10. Lack of competency in language.

2. Capacity building of local conservation leaders for ecotourism planning

A 3-day long training for trainer's workshop on community based ecotourism planning was organised from August 23rd to 25th 2016 in Dalla village of Suryapatuwa VDC. Altogether, 13 women and 15 men representing 19 buffer zones of BNP received the TOT training. Participants had experiential learning about community based ecotourism since the TOT was conducted in "khata biocorridor homestay" of Dalla village. The programme was inaugurated by officiating park warden Mr Ashok Bhandari and buffer zone management council chairman Mr Netra Prasad Acharya. The workshop was facilitated by Ms Smrittee Panta with assistance from Mr. Nilkantha Acharya. At the end of the programme, certificates were given to the participants. Summary of the stakeholder meeting was also shared during this workshop.

3. Support community for visitor management

In September 2016, two youth from community based antipoaching unit at BNP were trained for conducting benchmark visitor survey. After discussion on the methodology for visitor survey with Dr Brijesh Thapa, 350 visitors who had visited the park were surveyed using self-administered survey questionnaire in English. The survey instrument was pilot tested and after some modifications, survey was conducted with the assistance of trained local enumerators during the 6-month period (September to February) covering both peak and off season for tourists in the park. The data has been entered and ready for analysis. The results will be shared in the final project report.

During the visit, it was found that ecotourism resource centre was located not within the park but rather in offsite location. Instead an information centre was near the entrance providing necessary park related information to the visitors. This centre was operated by community based anti-poaching group (a local highly recognized youth group for conservation). Hence this centre was further supported to serve as temporary ecotourism resource unit. Ecotourism materials collected from different conservation organizations were handed to the guide office.

A hoarding board was painted to guide visitors to the information centre.

