

Economic Empowerment Of Local Community People In Talakona Waterfall Eco-Tourism Destination – A Study

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ABSTRACT

Tourism has become a popular global leisure activity and is an integral part of social, cultural and physical development in all the developing countries. The rapid growth of tourism development improves the local community's livelihood standards. Eco-Tourism is increasingly recognized as a community development tool with significant economic contribution. An attempt has been made in this research paper to study the economic empowerment scenario among local community people in Talakona waterfall ecotourism destination. This waterfall is a potential ecotourism destination located in Tirupati district of Andhra Pradesh. The study showcases local community people economic benefits through active participation in various ecotourism developmental activities and programs.

Key Words: *Leisure, Local community, Participation, Talakona, Livelihood*

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I. INTRODUCTION:

There is a close link between the tourism and community. Tourism helps a community become more attractive and prosperous. It is more attractive because a community must be appealing to draw and satisfy tourists and it is more prosperous because these tourists spend money. With this money spent in community, the community gets the development. Tourism and the environment are closely interrelated. Ecotourism is a form of tourism that generally involves visiting to fragile, pristine and protected areas. The activities of ecotourism have low negative impact on the ecology and are known for promoting ecotourism activities for achieving two important objectives: Employment creation and preservation of ecosystem. Ecotourism is a community-oriented and community-driven approach to provide maximum autonomy to the community members to take decisions and manage the facilities and amenities. It is a responsible travel to study, enjoy and admire the natural beauty along with wild animals, plants and indigenous culture. As such, the purpose is to provide an interactive environment for both the host and guest to understand each other and the travel to the ecotourism sites can educate the visitors, and create belongingness for conservation of ecology and ecosystem. Sustainable tourism development depends on protecting the environmental resources for tourism. The partners for sustainable tourism development are the tourism industry owners, managers of tourism commercial enterprises, the community residents and community groups.

Talakona Waterfall is one of the rich ecotourism destinations of Tirupati district, endowed with tick greenery fields and located in Eastern Ghats. Tribals mostly live in the forest, hills, plateaus and naturally isolated regions. The local community people have been actively participating in all safeguarding activities keeping in view the long term sustainable development of this ecotourism destination. More over the community people have been earning the money in different forms by selling the different services and forest goods and other souvenir products to tourists. In the long term this will indirectly guarantee the sustainability of their lives and enable them to be independent in the mainstream development of tourism industry. This study aimed to examine the involvement of the community people in Talakona waterfall ecotourism destination development. We also analyzed the sustainability of their lives. Further discussion of this study is related to the conceptual framework. This is followed by review of past studies, the methodology of the study, the empirical findings, conclusion and policy applications derived from this study.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Eco-Tourism has been essentially nature-based tourism with a variety of elements, with the major focus on tourist happiness, environmental preservation, and local community benefits. He considered two important components of Eco-Tourism: community engagement in biodiversity protection and the marketing of tourism as a strategy for natural resource preservation **Pramod (2004)**. Eco-Tourism, according to **Seema et al. (2006)**, has important consequences for nature and cultural preservation, forest conservation, rural livelihoods, and environmental protection and environmental education in India. According to **Rajasenani and Bijith (2012)**, the critical component for the success of Kerala's Eco-Tourism initiatives was sustainability and community participation. They sought to assess job and livelihood opportunities, physical and social infrastructure, public opinion, and attitude on forest protection, as well as the demographic and financial situation of local populations in the state's eco-tourism area. They discovered that Community Based Eco-Tourism has benefitted the community significantly since the majority of them rely on Eco-Tourism as their only source of income, and the community's socioeconomic indicators in Eco-Tourism locations indicate a good trend.

Hence, increased entrepreneurship and formation of new businesses are essential in creating and maintaining the economy through creation of new employment opportunities, increase the country's export capacity and economic growth. Here, entrepreneurs and business activities serve as catalysts for economic development **Gilder (1984); Todorka (2009)** as well as guarantors to the continuity of the economy. Tourism development is considered as able to contribute towards the improvement of socio-economic status of the local population and changing patterns of economic activities in the industry **Garegnani (1970)**.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The research study was developed based on the following objectives:

1. To know the profile of Talakona Waterfall ecotourism destination.
2. To assess the local community people in Talakona Waterfall ecotourism destination.
3. To examine the demographic profile in connection with livelihood business establishments.
4. Determine the motivating factors of pilgrim & tourist arrivals to Talakona Waterfall.

IV. METHODOLOGY:

The study was conducted with the support of both Primary and Secondary data sources. The primary data was collected through face to face interview using questionnaires with a total of 133 respondents. Pearson Chi Square Test was used for scientific proving of hypothesis. To assess the economic empowerment scenario among the local people, independent samples test (t-test) and analysis of variance (F-test) were conducted. The secondary data was collected from Magazines, Journals, News Papers, Books, Reports and Conference Proceeding Publications.

HYPOTHESES:

The study was designed to test the following hypothesis.

H01: Talakona waterfall is not a potential ecotourism destination.

H02: There are no possibilities for economic enhancement of local community people in Talakona waterfall ecotourism destination.

V. PROFILE OF TALAKONA WATERFALL:

This mesmerizing ecotourism destination is located in Nerabailu village in Yerravaripalem mandal of Tirupati district. It is situated in Sri Venkateswara National Park. It is located 58 Kms from Tirupati, 49 Kms from Pileru and 68 Kms from Chittoor. Talakona is known for thick forest and the etymological explanations given to the name Talakona is that, it is the head of the Seshachalam hills of Thirumala. There is a waterfall known as **Siddhodhara Tirtham** in Talakona valley. It is the highest waterfall in entire Andhra Pradesh state with 270 feet (82m). The Talakona forests host rare and endangered species of animals like *Slender Loris*, *Indian Giant Squirrel*, *Golden Gecko*, *Panther*, *Mouse Deer*, *Chital* and *Sambar*. The forest is mostly covered with sandalwood trees with some medicinal plants.

Talakona hills geographically are considered a part of the Eastern Ghats. Most of the visitors are pilgrims only. There is ancient shrine of Siddheswara in the valley and the devotees gather here in large number on every day in general and Mahasivaratri day in particular. The waters of Talakona are enriched with herbs and people believe that it has healing properties. There is a beautiful waterfall falling deep into the valley from a cliff on the upper reaches. The local community people said that the origin of water is difficult to be traced out since an underground stream surfaces here. There are deep caves scattered over the mountains where it is believed that sages meditate eternity.

VI. LOCAL COMMUNITY PEOPLE:

The local community is not an undifferentiated mass, but comprises people of different economic classes, clans or family groups, ethnic groups, both genders, and various special interest groups. Local community participation in all endeavors of ecotourism is not a new concept. The word participation implies how and to what extent people are able to share their views, take part in an activity, project, program, decision-making, profit sharing and other issues related to the tourism development process. The main underlying concept for the development of community-based ecotourism is the empowerment of local people. This is only possible when ecotourism planning takes into consideration the views, the perceptions and preferences of the local inhabitants (WWF-International, 2001). Community participation in ecotourism developmental activities makes the destination sustainable and attains the objective in its establishment.

The local community setup around this Talakona ecotourism destination comprised several castes like *Reddi, Kamma, Balija, Kummari, Kamsali, Uppara, Mutharasi, golla, boya, Yekula, Ediga, Madiga, Mala, Mangali, Vadde, Chakali, Sugali, and Yanadi*. Caste hierarchy is very much prevalent. Caste under endogamy is strictly observed. People observe caste based relationship in the matter of food (cooked and raw) and water. It is observed that the caste based occupations are very much in vogue. Reddi, Kamma and Balija are the agrarians and dominant castes. Gollas, Sugali and Yekulas are a shepherd caste profess animal husbandry beside agriculture, Boyas and Yanadis are Hunter gatherers. Mala and Madiga are the low social status communities; they are traditionally skin workers and laborers. The caste Kummara is traditional pottery, Ediga are toddy tapers, Mangali are traditional barbers and chakali are cloth washers. In the past the caste uppara used ass to carry salt for mobile business and the caste chakali were also used to carry the cloths to washing places. The caste Mutharasi (according to oral tradition of this caste elder) is the traditional warriors under the Kings and Brahmin is the dominant caste and they are traditionally Purohits. But now, due to the impact of fast track social changes these locally resided community people have involved in different livelihood fields irrespective of their origin caste based occupations.

The researchers have collected the data in between August to October, 2022 and approached around 133 local community people, who have been gaining the direct economic benefits by the arrivals of pilgrims and tourists. These respondents belong to backward community people i.e., *Boya, Golla, Kummara, Mala, Madiga, and Yekula* and leading the life in different livelihood occupations. The researchers have collected the data from local community people with the support of open ended questionnaire. The below table number one highlights the brief demographic profile of Talakona waterfall local community people along with their small livelihood business establishments.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF LOCAL COMMUNITY PEOPLE IN CONNECTION WITH THEIR LIVILIHOD BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENTS:

Table – 1

Local Community People Demographic Profile and their Livelihood Business Establishments

Type of Livelihood	Gender				
	Male	%	Female	%	
Tiffin Centre	15	20	10	17	
Tea Stall	14	19	07	12	
Hotel	12	16	11	19	
Auto Rickshaw/Cab Drivers	19	27	--	--	
Kirana Store	08	11	12	23	
Handicraft Makers	06	08	19	32	
Total	74	100	59	100	
Type of Livelihood	Age			Above 50	Total
	20-30	31-40	41-50		
Tiffin Centre	07	09	05	02	23
Tea Stall	05	03	06	04	18
Hotel	06	08	07	03	24
Auto Rickshaw /Cab Drivers	08	06	07	06	27
Kirana Store	04	06	04	04	18
Handicraft makers	08	06	05	04	23
Total	38	38	34	23	133

Marital Status						
Type of Livelihood	Married	Unmarried	Total			
Tiffin Centre	13	08	21			
Tea Stall	14	04	18			
Hotel	19	11	30			
Auto Rickshaw/Cab Drivers	17	12	29			
Kirana Store	16	06	22			
Handicraft makers	08	05	13			
Total	87	46	133			
Education						
Type of Livelihood	Middle Drop Outs	High School	+2	Diploma	Degree	Total
Tiffin Centre	02	05	07	03	02	19
Tea Stall	--	07	09	04	04	24
Hotel	04	02	08	06	06	26
Auto Rickshaw /Cab Drivers	03	05	07	04	02	21
Kirana Store	01	04	06	03	04	18
Handicraft makers	04	03	08	08	02	25
Total	14	26	45	28	20	133
Type of Livelihood Opportunities	No. of Local Community People involved in Small Scale Livelihood Business					
	Local Community People		%			
Tiffin Centre	15		11.27			
Tea Stall	12		9.02			
Hotel	10		7.51			
Auto Rickshaw/Cab Drivers	42		31.57			
Kirana Store	18		13.53			
Handicraft makers	36		27.06			
Total	133		100			

Initial Investment of Local Community People in Livelihood Small Scale Business						
Type of Livelihood	Below Rs. 200000	Rs. 200000 - 400000	Rs. 400000- 600000	Rs. 600000- 800000	Rs. 800000 and Above	Total
Tiffin Centre	04	06	05	06	--	21
Tea Stall	03	05	04	06	--	18
Hotel	08	04	06	04	04	26
Auto Rickshaw/Cab Drivers	04	06	09	05	06	30
Kirana Store	03	05	04	06	02	20
Handicraft makers	05	03	06	04	--	18
Total	27	29	34	31	12	133
Average Annual Income of Local Community People in Livelihood Small Scale Business						
Type of Livelihood	Below Rs. 100000	Rs. 100000- Rs. 200000	Rs. 200000- Rs. 300000		Total	
Tiffin Centre	04	05	03		12	
Tea Stall	05	07	06		18	
Hotel	10	06	04		20	
Auto Rickshaw/Cab Drivers	15	07	08		30	
Kirana Store	06	08	05		19	
Handicraft makers	13	12	09		34	
Total	53	45	35		133	

Source: Primary Data

According to above table statistical figures, the majority of Males have settled and become Auto Rickshaw drivers (27%) and the remaining have been living their livelihood in different hotels, Handicraft makers, Tiffin Centers, Kirana Stores and Tea Stalls. In the same lines, the majority of Women have settled in Handicraft making activities (32%) and the remaining have been living their livelihood in different Hotel, Tea Stall, Tiffin Centers, and Kirana Stores. In the age factor, the majority of local community people i.e., 20 to 30 years (08), 31 to 40 years (06), 41 to 50 years (07), and above 50 years (06) have been working as Auto Rickshaw/Cab Drivers and earning money from pilgrims and tourists. The rest of the age group community

people have involved in other livelihood business centers like *Tiffin Centers, Tea Stall, Hotel, Kirana Shop, and Handicraft Centers*. The marital status figure indicates that, in hotel business highest married respondents have settled (19) and small number of married respondents i.e., 08, have settled in handicraft making business. In the same lines, the highest number of unmarried respondents (12), have leading the life in Auto Rickshaw/Cab Driver field and small number of unmarried respondents have settled in Tea Stall business.

The majority of community people (26) have pursued good studies and settled in hotel business i.e., High School (02), Intermediate (08), Diploma (06), Degree (06) and School Middle Drop (04). The hotel business requires educated work force to offer tasty and hygienic food services to fulfill the visitor expectations. The researchers have brought into light that, around 42 local community people (31.57%), have involved in intercity transportation business as Auto Rickshaw/Cab drivers. Surprisingly the local community people's initial investments in livelihood business, the majority of them (30) have invested in transportation business i.e., Below Rs. 200000/- (04), Rs. 200000 to 400000 (06), Rs. 400000/- to Rs. 6,00000/-, Rs. 600000 to Rs. 800000, and above Rs. 800000 (06), followed by Hotel, Kirana Store, Handicraft, Tiffin Centre and Tea Stall business. Finally in the assessment of local community people earning of average annual income, the handicraft making people (34) have earned the huge income i.e., below Rs. 100000/- (13), Rs. 100000 to Rs. 200000/- (12), and Rs. 200000 to Rs. 300000 (09), followed by Auto Rickshaw/Cab drivers (30), Hotel (20), Kirana Store (19), Tea Stall (18), Tiffin Centre (12).

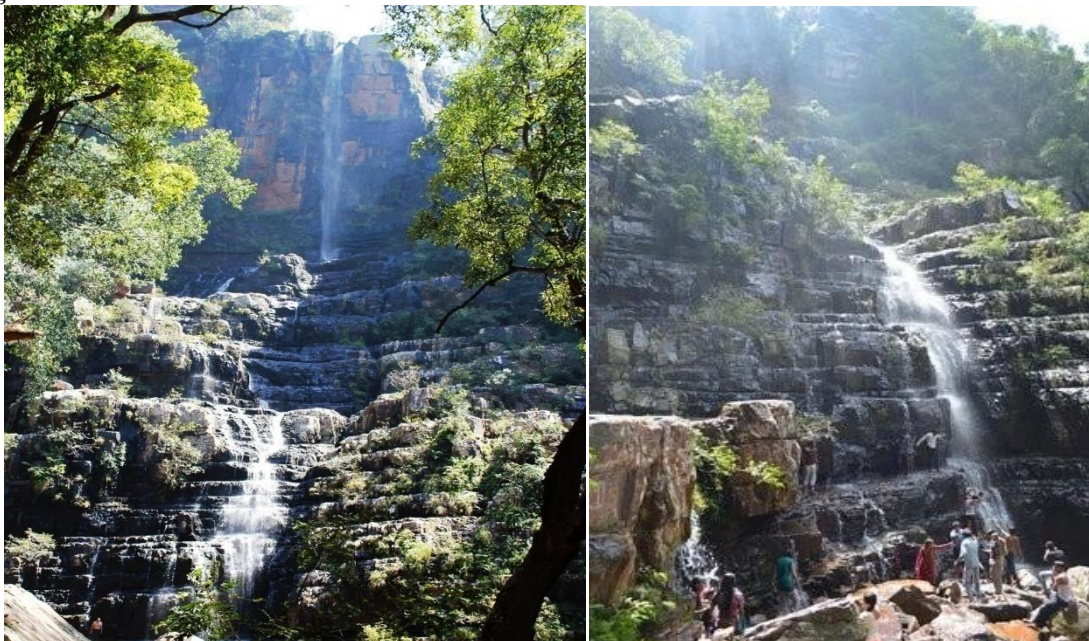
Economic sustainability basically is a measure of the economic contribution to the local community as far as the destination specific studies are concerned measured on the basis of number of employment created during a particular year, how many entrepreneurial operations are initiated and the indirect socio economic benefit derived by the community. The pilgrims and tourist flow to Talakona waterfall is an upward trend every year as per the below table.

Table – 2
Pilgrims and Tourists Arrivals to Talakona Waterfalls

Year	Arrivals		Total
	Pilgrims	Tourists	
2018	642	486	1128
2019	804	674	1478
2020	73	102	175
2021	197	137	334
2022	508	729	1237

Source: Forest Deputy Range Office

Images of Talakona Waterfall



Source: Self taken Photos

The researchers have approached 321 pilgrims, 218 tourists and collected the relevant information. The respondents have patiently filled the questionnaire and extended their huge co-operation.

Table – 3
Motivating Factors of Pilgrim & Tourist Arrivals to Talakona Waterfall

SL No	Motivating Factors	For Pilgrim Arrivals & their Frequency	%	For Tourist Arrivals & their Frequency	%
01	Impressive Forest Department Amenities and Facilities	39	12%	13	06%
02	Easy Accessibility	42	13%	21	10%
03	Memorable Boating and Bird Watching	17	05%	30	14%
04	Regular Promotional Activities & Advertisements	48	15%	24	11%
05	Popular Recognition	36	11%	28	13%
06	Jungle Safari rides	44	14%	12	05%
07	Holy and Spiritual Ambiance of Seshachalam Hills	62	19%	42	19%
08	Charismatic beauty of Waterfall	33	10%	48	22%
	Total	321	100	218	100

Source: Primary Date

In the above table, majority of the pilgrims (19%) have expressed their view on due to holy and spiritual ambiance in Seshachalam Hills, they regularly visit this ecotourism destination. The majority of tourists have opined (22%) that, because of charismatic beauty of waterfall they visit Talakona in good number.

H01: Talakona waterfall is not a potential ecotourism destination.

Chi Square Test:

Pearson Chi Square	Table Value	Calculated Value	df	P Value	Remark
	19.07	17.92	09	0.001	Highly Significant

It is noted that in the above table the Calculated Value is 17.92 which is less than the Table Value 19.07 and hence the result is highly significant. The null hypothesis ‘Talakona waterfall is not a potential ecotourism destination’ is rejected. The above analysis finally showcases that Talakona is a potential ecotourism destination based on its charismatic beauty and mesmerizing attractive landscape.

H02: There are no possibilities for economic enhancement of local community people in Talakona waterfall ecotourism destination.

Pearson Chi Square	Table Value	Calculated Value	df	P Value	Remark
	21.00	15.68	09	0.003	Highly Significant

It is noted that in the above table the Calculated Value is 15.68 which is less than the Table Value 21.00 and hence the result is highly significant. The null hypothesis ‘There are no possibilities for economic enhancement of local community people in Talakona waterfall ecotourism destination’ is rejected. The above analysis finally explains that there are huge possibilities for economic enhancement of local community people in Talakona waterfall ecotourism destination based on its potentiality.

VII. RESEARCH FINDINGS:

The researchers have found the following findings in the study.

1. The Tanakona Waterfall is one of the potential ecotourism destinations of Tirupati district in Andhra Pradesh.
2. This is a multifaceted ecotourism destination, which attracts the nature lovers, archeologists, adventure enthusiasts, and life science/social science students and scholars around the year.
3. The local community people have been gaining the huge economic benefits on the arrivals of pilgrims and tourists.
4. The economic empowerment can be seen here and a gradual growth in the local people living standards has been found.
5. This ecotourism destination is an iconic model to other such destinations in the name of livelihood sustainability of local community people.

VIII. SUGGESTIONS:

The following are the important suggestions for the more effective economic enhancement practices among the local community people in Talakona ecotourism destination.

1. Need the special training for local community people for more impressive assistance and informative interactions with tourists, and pilgrims.
2. The adequate publicity programs and campaigns has to take place by concern State Government department authorities to attract more nature lovers to Talakona.
3. Need to recruit more forest department employs, even on outsourcing basis to assist tourists.
4. The pilgrims and tourists have to strictly follow the Do's and Don'ts in this ecotourism site.

IX. CONCLUSION:

Eco-tourism is one of the most attractive forms of tourism which includes the travel to various naturally endowed areas and for the past half decade, tourists rush was increasing at eco-tourist destination all over the country due to polluted environment, busy life, etc. Talakona waterfall is a potential ecotourism destination of Tirupati district in Andhra Pradesh. The local community people's economic conditions and living standards have been changing rapidly due to tourist and pilgrim huge arrivals and purchases. The iconic image of economic empowerment among the local community people can be seen at Talakona waterfall ecotourism destination.

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