Concept Note on Introducing Elephant Ride as an Enterprise at Teknaf Game Reserve & Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary

Nishorgo Support Project

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Introduction

Nishorgo Program, an initiative of the Forest Department, is striving to maintain the bio-diversity of the PA by reducing stakeholder's dependency on the forests itself. In its endeavor to ensure sustainable conservation of the PAs, Nishorgo is seeking scope for eco-tourism development in the PA areas.

Eco-tourism focuses on local cultures, wilderness adventures, volunteering, personal growth and learning new ways to live on our vulnerable planet. It is typically defined as travel to destinations where the flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are the primary attractions.

The goal of the ecotourism is to enable people to enjoy and learn about the natural, historical and cultural characteristics of unique environments while preserving the integrity of those sites and stimulating the economic development opportunities in local communities.

Teknaf Game Reserve and Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary were established to maintain the natural habitat of wild elephants. Both the PAs form important part of the elephant corridor and homes a significant number of wild elephants. These animals form an integral part of the nature and culture of the areas in and around the PAs.

This concept paper looks into the possibilities on introducing Elephant rides in and around the Teknaf Game Reserve and/or Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary in order to enhance tourist experience during their trip to these PAs and also to increase awareness about their protection.

Source of Elephant

Bangladesh Forest Industries Development Corporation (FIDC) is currently having a few numbers of elephants. Due to discontinuation of requirements, these elephants are not being used anymore. They are interested to offer these elephants to Nishorgo Program if deemed economically viable.

Suggested Use of Elephants

Nishorgo Program will arrange for elephant rides in either or both the PAs. Proposed details of the arrangements are as follows:

- The ride will be of one hour duration.
- Each elephant can accommodate a maximum of 4 people apart from the Mahout
- The ride will along a pre-designed trail in a circular path
- It will be considered as a high-value addition item of a tourist's itinerary during the trip

Price

The elephant ride is considered to add immense value to the experience of a tourist in these PAs. As such, the price structure is to be set at a higher level. A two-tier price structure is suggested considering the nationality of the tourists. A suggested price guideline is given below:

- For Bangladeshi nationals:　　　　Tk. 300.00 per person

- For SAARC country national:　　　Tk. 500.00 per person

- For nationals of other countries:　　Tk. 750.00 per person

The fees will be collected by respective Range Office official prior to the ride. The proceeds of the collection will be used for elephant maintenance and a certain portion (e.g. 5%) will be transferred to the co-management council fund.

Market potential

Elephant rides are available in the country in most of the zoos that home one. However, they do not offer a ride in its natural habitat. Also, tourists that visit the PAs show interest to get an opportunity to ride an elephant in natural forest land and enjoy the surrounding natural beauty. Considering this prospect, the market potential may be vast. It also justifies the high price of the ride. Initial discussion shows that the price should be acceptable given the interest to be created among the tourist to enjoy the ride in natural habitat setting unique to this offering. However, a study may be beneficial to find the actual potentiality of arranging such rides prior commencing.

Employment Potential

The program may generate a limited employment potential around the area. There might be a few people getting involved in collecting/producing elephant fodder. A few others may get involved in related services like photography, etc.

Threats

Both the PAs are inhabited by wild elephants. It is still unclear how the tamed elephants will react if they come into contact with their wild counterparts. Precautionary steps needs to be taken by FD in order to ascertain security of the tourists while taking the ride.

Forward Linkage

Initially the elephant rides may be managed by FD through a facilitator identified discussing with the co-management council. The local beat/range office may supervise the operation. The aim of the operation will be to increase awareness of the prospective tourists about the existence of elephant rides in the PAs.

Once the Elephant Ride is incorporated in the tourist attraction, the process will be outsourced. The elephants will be leased out on a yearly basis. The FD will give the lease to interested local entrepreneur. The lease will have option for a part of the earning (e.g. 5%) going to the co-management fund. The business will be overseen by the co-management council. The entrepreneur will ensure welfare of the elephants and its bearer for the period on a given structure to be set up by the FD.

Conclusion

Introducing elephant-ride can add a new dimension to nature-tourism in the two protected areas. This has good potentiality to increase tourists' experience and can play a role in making their choice about visiting these sites. In the conservation sense, it will increase awareness about endangered elephant habitat in those areas and the importance of safeguarding it for our future generation. Provided FD takes the necessary precautionary measures for the safety of the tourists, this project5 has the potential to be a very successful initiative of Forest Department.