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# Tribal Inclusive Ecotourism: Policy Recommendations to Boost Ecotourism in Chhattisgarh

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**Abstract:** *The present paper examines Chhattisgarh's potential for tribal inclusive ecotourism particularly in the Boramdeo Wildlife Sanctuary. A variety of research techniques are used in this study, including structured surveys, interviews, group discussions, and literature reviews. Important discoveries emphasize how little the indigenous tribal populations participate in ecotourism. In order to solve this, the paper makes policy proposals that include building partnerships, improving infrastructure, promoting local culture, and increasing community awareness. By promoting tribal-inclusive ecotourism, these policies hope to foster local community development, economic expansion, and ecological restoration.*

**Keywords:** *Ecotourism, Livelihoods, Policy Recommendations, Ecological Restoration, Economic Growth.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a rapidly growing sector and contributes significantly to GDP and Employment in India. Among various forms of tourism, ecotourism within Tourism industry plays an important role in preserving environment, while at the same time contributing to inclusive development of local communities. Ecotourism started through contributions of different environmentalists such as Hector Cebbalos, Megan Epler, Dr. Martha Honey in the 1970's and 80's. Ecotourism in India developed in the 1970's and 1980's. With rich diversity in topography, natural resources and climate, a wide range of national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, marine protected areas, biosphere reserves, conservation reserves and community reserves, it provided a perfect destination for promoting eco-tourism.

Community based ecotourism stood contrast to mass tourism and called for participation of local communities, employing residents, and creating local economic benefits. Some of the



principles that have emerged on community-based ecotourism include protection of identity, roots and customs, ecological consciousness, and harmony, ensure local control and work towards sustainable economic development. <sup>[1]</sup>

Eco-tourism is often driven by the need to increase the tourist flow based on the natural beauty and surroundings of a region. Often the specific benefits which can be meted out to locals particularly in relation to livelihoods and more specifically to marginalised communities is often not considered. The study undertaken with Ministry of Planning; Government of Chhattisgarh intended to explore the potential of tribal inclusive eco-tourism potential in Kabeerdham district.

## **2. STUDY METHODOLOGY**

Chhattisgarh state in India is an ecologically rich area with rich cultural heritage and natural diversity. Boramdeo Wildlife Sanctuary located in Kabirdham district is one of those destinations with potential for building ecotourism. With richness of natural beauty and cultural authenticity with presence of baiga community, it offers potential for eco-tourism. The current study tries to explore its potential as a location for promotion of tribal inclusive eco-tourism.

The broad objective of the study is to explore the potential of tribal inclusive eco-tourism in Kabirdham district by assessing the current livelihood situation of forest dwelling communities, their current engagement with employment and enterprises in eco-tourism, exploring possible sub-sectors and economic activities and recommend policies and institution support mechanisms for absorption of local tribal communities into eco-tourism based livelihoods. The study involved a review of secondary literature, discussion with local households and stakeholder consultations through applying a variety of tools namely structured questionnaires, Interview scheduled, focused group discussion (FGD) guides were used.

### **Findings of the Study**

#### **a. Overall Livelihoods and Eco-Tourism as Source of Income**

The tribal population in Bodla block is 72,761 with a sex ratio of 1,020. Literacy rate stands at 56.5%. Working population of tribal population stands at 52.6% which is similar for men and women. In terms of occupational distribution, about 48.1% are involved as cultivators, 46.8% as agricultural cultivators, 0.7% are in household industry and 4.5% are engaged as other workers. Among the 180 respondent households interviewed, about 75.6% were scheduled tribes, 16.7% other backward castes and 7.8% belonged to scheduled castes (SCs) and other castes. The family size stood at 5.98 with 3 males and 2.98 females. By educational levels, 37.2% were illiterate. Only 17.2% were educated high school & above indicating a low educational status.

In terms of livelihoods, Agriculture and Wage labor are the primary sources of livelihood. About 86.1% households pursued agricultural activity and 85% were dependent on wage labor. 23.9% of the households also had animal husbandry as a source of income. About 5% households had a member of their household in government employment and 5% households



a member of their household in private employment. Only 0.6% households was engaged in employment in sanctuary.

Livelihoods are diversified and households are primarily dependent on agriculture. Average land size is about 2.5 acres. Paddy is the major Kharif crop followed by kodo-kutki, maize, red gram which are in upland areas. In Rabi seas, crops such as mustard, gram, pie, lentil, linseed and vegetables are grown. Agriculture in the area is subsistence driven. Agriculture suffers from issues such as poor quality of land, traditional farming practices, poor investment capacity, lack of access to quality agri-inputs and technologies, poor facility for irrigation, soil erosion and depletion of water resources. In plain areas, cultivation of cash crops such as sugarcane and banana is increasing rapidly due to development of irrigation facilities.

The households pursue Dairy, Goatery, Poultry and Fishery activities. Households undertake cow rearing and milk produced meets household milk requirements and provides organic manure. It is not taken on a commercial scale. Households possess 2 to 5 goats. It provides cash income in lean periods and emergency. Desi breed is reared and yields lower income. Backyard poultry is in practice, but efforts to given it organized form hasn't been taken. Fishery is not in practice due to lack of major ponds though Aquaculture is promoted in Sarodha dadar dam.

Households rely on NTFPs. They collect Mahua, Sal seed, Chironji, Tendu leaves, Harra, Baheda from forests and village commons. They provide cash income and food security during lean period. NTFPs are sold in local market and weekly market after primary processing such as drying and cleaning. Distress selling is prevalent in case of NTFPs due to poor holding capacity of primary collectors.

Traditional tribal handicraft is prevalent and also spread among non-tribal communities. This however remains at a limited scale. New enterprises such as hotels& tea stalls, auto-mobile repairing, mobile repairing, kirana shops etc., are growing. Youth are interested in enterprises but they find it difficult to run due to poor investment capacity. Awareness on skill & entrepreneurship schemes is low. Labor activities provide major source of livelihood security. Many work in sugarcane fields and jiggery industry for 3 months.

Only in 4.4% houses, eco-tourism is a source of income and the household members were involved in resorts, sight-seeing based services and others. Employment of locals in tour operations, home stays, adventure activities, safaris, taxis, sale of ethnic items was absent. In terms of skills, only 3.3% households had members engaged as semi-skilled and skilled workers as Temple security guard, gardener and cook in eco-tourism. Household engagement in non-economic conservation activities was found to be active through involvement in wood related works 16.7%, 25.6% in selling roots & shrubs and 14.4% in vigilance activities to prevent loss of wildlife.

While November to March period is considered to be a tourist season, only 62.8% were aware of the same. In relation to activities preferred by tourists, 90.6% mentioned that tourists prefer sightseeing, 76.1% mentioned temple visit, and 50% picnic and only in 19.4% cases safaris



was mentioned as a purpose. Ecotourism and enjoyment of nature is still less of a motivational aspect for tourists. The benefit of eco-tourism as pointed by 53.9% households was that it led to infrastructure development, 20.6% mentioned in increased trading activities, 17.2% mentioned it led to emphasizing the need for creating and absorbing local community in Job in the area. 12.2% felt it empowered local community. Among economic benefits from eco-tourism, the top three economic activities which was pointed included sale of forest based medicinal produce (27.8%), forest-based services (21.1%) and travel and sightseeing (16.7%). In relation to benefit sharing with community, only 4.4% pointed that there was hardly any benefit sharing with local community through eco-tourism-based activities. Among the suggestions on services to be extended to households, 75.6% households pointed the need for training of youth and women (skills, micro-enterprise), 74.4% felt the need for benefit sharing with local community and 70.6% felt a need to support to community-based enterprises.

#### **b. State of Eco-Tourism Sector in Boramdeo**

##### **• State of Infrastructure**

While protection of heritage structures and sites of national importance acquires importance, conservation activities of certain monuments can be improved for the heritage monuments. The services offered at monumental sites related to food cuisines, toilet facilities, light and sound show could be added. Improvements through provision of a variety of accommodations can be improved. The Gypsies which provide safari services has come down and this can be improved further.

##### **• State of Inclusion**

While eco-tourism calls for inclusion of local communities, in practice the inclusion happens only for menial jobs as cooks, gardeners, servers, cleaners etc. In relation to different enterprises operational in the area related to food and tourism, most of the workers are from outside. A non-tribal mindset of looking down upon the tribal communities exists. Some tribal youth do work in hotel industry as cooks and servers. However, they cannot aspire for other jobs i.e., skilled employment and self-employment in absence of access to skill & entrepreneurship trainings.

In relation to enterprises run by local communities such as small food outlets, their size and services are limited. Due to absence of access to capital, they cannot increase the size of the enterprise. While forest department engages local communities in activities such as pasture development, fodder development, pond restoration works, tree cutting, inclusion in eco-tourism activities is limited. Efforts to create homestays have not taken off. Institutions are less open and institutions such as Banks are less coming forward to support local communities such as Baigas. The benefits which get generated through visits by foreigners, profits generated in hotel industry hardly goes to the tribal communities.

An important part of tourism is local food cuisine. Experiments to engage local SHGs in providing local food cuisine services to SHGs have not taken off effectively in Sarodanagar. Internal conflicts, deviation from norms by SHG members, non-cooperation by hotel management led to end of the experiment. While such experiments did not work out, still a scope for food cuisine as an enterprise has potential. While there are farmers who produce food



grains and vegetables, hotels hardly buy the same from the local community. It is brought from faraway location rather than the neighbouring villages. There is a need to create linkages among local food producers and the hotel industry.

The area comes with rich knowledge of indigenous medicines such as herbs, indigenous medicines and Ayurveda. However, the knowledge of local communities and creation of wellness based enterprises has not been explored.

Households are dependent on multiple sources of income for pursuing their livelihoods. While they do get wage work, the educated youth find it difficult to work commensurate with education. In grains and NTFPs, business activities are dominated by outsiders and benefits do go to the outside traders.

Presence of Baigas near pilgrimage locations, ecotourism spots are limited. In Bhoramdeo temple area, while there are about 50 small shops dealing with decorative pieces, devotional items, toys, Prasad etc, none of these belong to youth. While it was started, they were closed down.

Non-tribals are found to be less sensitive to tribals and which affects the inclusion of tribal communities. A need to understand the culture and language of tribal communities can help in building acquaintance and understanding of communities and facilitate in better inclusion. Newer communication methods needs to be devised.

### **c. State of Tourism Ecosystem**

Motivational dimension of tourists shows that tourists are more oriented towards fun and pleasure and less towards love for nature. Ecotourism needs a desire and love for nature, wild-life and culture. To accommodate such interests, an entrepreneur developed a package for 50+ age group who wanted to experience authentic village life. To bring eco-tourism benefits as a sanctuary or tiger reserve, this needs improvement of roads, infrastructure and promotion-based activities. Training of Baigas would further the process of more inclusive ecotourism growth.

Sanctuary provides a range of experiences but are less marketed. The sanctuary has good trekking routes, butterfly sites, a variety of birds, muddy pond and salt lake. It has a wide variety of wildlife. It also has waterfalls, watchtowers etc. However, the focus in terms of marketing of tiger and temple.

There are limited enterprises which provide authentic tourism experiences. A dimension of eco-tourism is to expose the tourists to nature as well as culture and people of the area. Similar initiatives have been started by entrepreneurs and providing experiences such as tribal tourism, rural tourism, home stays, tribal market and tribal music. Tourism packages need to be marketed with a range of product mix incorporating specificities of nature, culture, people, flora and fauna.

There is a need to strengthen human resources. Training need to be organized on eco-tourism and responsible tourism. Currently the principles of responsible tourism is being lacked by tour





operators. Such trainings need to be extended to tourism industry as well as community based organizations.

An aspect is tourism is who controls. Mostly the control is by outsiders and the local community lacks control. Democratic tourism has to incorporate the aspect of people's control over tourism activities. Eco-tourism has to integrate Jan – Van – Vanyaprani (People, Forest, Wildlife). Inclusive tourism has to be community owned and community controlled. It has to be built on local strengths.

In the current situation, the potential of registered private tour operators is not being utilized properly. They find it difficult to book through Tourism board. Footfall to Tourism information centers is limited.

A greater orientation towards nature has to be inbuilt in eco-tourism. Tourists prefer short duration and short distance packages. There is a tendency to cover maximum places and minimum time. Temple is the main preference. In case of limited time, spots are skipped.

#### **d. State of Eco-Tourism Centric Schemes**

In relation to schemes related to mud-houses there has been low utilization for stay purposes. Instead, it has been given out on rent. The potential of SHGs has been less utilized in eco-tourism based micro-enterprises. Availing of loans for starting or running ecotourism-based enterprise is hardly seen.

#### **e. Community Concerns**

Bhoramdeo locality also has people who fear displacement and dispossession from their lands, if declared a Tiger reserve. Some of those displaced from Kanha reside in Bhoramdeo area and this makes them believe they will also be displaced similar to them.

An important part of eco-tourism is community control over tourist behaviour. However, it was found in Ranidahra waterfall, that JFMC could hardly exercise control over their behaviour such as throwing away alcohol bottles at the tourist locations, throwing of plastic bottles, chips packets etc. They feared complaint by tourist to forest department.

#### **Review of Community-Based Ecotourism Models**

There have been some successful community tourism models in the country. Some of these include Kabani community tourism, which has been applying concept of responsible tourism and has come out with its own version of responsible tourism practices in which community is empowered to take decisions, share benefits with local communities, treat tourism only as a supplementary activity, integrate environmental conservation, and treat people as a centre of cultural exchange.<sup>[2]</sup> Mountain shepherds' initiative in Nanda devi has trained over 70 youth in responsible adventure tourism. Community engages in direct employment as well as in sale of carpets and woolen products, homestays, mule services for treks, porters / guide services.<sup>[3]</sup> In Camp Hornbill, at village 'Kyari' infrastructural material is sourced locally, repurposed and recycled from discarded material. In Manglajodi, fragile ecosystems are being protected by local community. Once poachers have turned into protectors. Cottage, Dormitory facilities and



simple local food is being offered.<sup>[4]</sup> In Periyar tiger reserve, local people take up maintenance works, upkeep of Amaltas resorts. SHGs run canteens employ women in canteens and housekeeping. Village eco-development committee takes care of eco-friendly practices. Himalayan ark is a social enterprise, run by a team of women led by women of the region.<sup>[5]</sup> Dzuleke ecotourism board provides an authentic experience of Naga culture. Activities such as paddy field walks, agri-tourism, fishing, berry picking and trekking in wild is organized.<sup>[6]</sup> While some good models on eco-tourism exists, policy remains silent on integration of conservation and sustainable livelihoods and equitable share of income, awareness creation on conservation, local institutional set up and community ownership. It is important to look into some national and state level ecotourism policies.

### **Review of National and State Ecotourism Policies**

The National Policy on Ecotourism aims to promote sustainable development and protecting natural resources and calls for focusing on community involvement, conservation of natural and cultural heritage, and education and awareness. Some of its highlights are that it a) encourages community participation and ownership in ecotourism projects; b) promotes the conservation of natural and cultural resources through responsible tourism practices; c) supports capacity-building and training for local communities and stakeholders; d) ensures that ecotourism initiatives are economically viable and financially sustainable; e) facilitates the development of appropriate infrastructure and services for ecotourism and f) promotes research and monitoring of ecotourism impacts.

Similarly, some of the state governments have also come out with their own ecotourism policies. The Kerala Tourism Policy 2021 aims to promote sustainable and responsible tourism in the state, with a focus on ecotourism. Key features of the policy include the development of eco-friendly accommodations, the promotion of community-based tourism initiatives, and the establishment of a sustainable tourism monitoring and assessment system. The Himachal Pradesh Tourism Policy 2019 emphasizes the importance of preserving the state's natural and cultural heritage while promoting tourism. The policy encourages the development of ecotourism initiatives that are community-led and environmentally sustainable and provides support for capacity-building and training for local stakeholders. The Uttarakhand Tourism Policy 2018 emphasizes the need for sustainable and responsible tourism in the state. The policy encourages the development of ecotourism initiatives that promote conservation and community participation and provides support for capacity-building and infrastructure development.

Chhattisgarh Tourism Board too has come out with Ecotourism policy and aims to promote sustainable tourism and creating employment opportunities in rural areas. The policy focuses on the development of eco-friendly tourism infrastructure, involvement of local communities, and conservation of natural resources and wildlife.

Both the national and state policies have some gaps. They do not have specific targets and measurable outcomes to evaluate the success of ecotourism initiatives. While the policies talk of community involvement, there are no detailed guidelines on how meaningful participation of local communities would be achieved. While the state policies talks of financial and



technical support, they do not specify the amount of funding or the process for accessing it. While the policies recognise the need for regulation and monitoring, no specific guidelines and mechanisms for the same are mentioned.

Hence ecotourism policy should set specific targets and measurable outcomes which helps in evaluating success of ecotourism initiatives such as the number of visitors come, revenue generated, and impact on local communities and natural resources. It should specify ways in which community involvement would be ensured such as ensuring meaningful participation and benefits for local communities, such as revenue sharing, capacity building, and decision-making power. It should facilitate the development of appropriate infrastructure and services such as lodges, tent camps, and homestays that can be developed in natural settings and rural areas to provide visitors with a unique and authentic experience while minimizing the impact on the environment. It should specify the funding support that can be provided or create mechanisms for exploring alternative sources of funding such as public-private partnerships and ecotourism taxes. It should provide mechanisms for strengthening regulation and monitoring such as certification schemes, environmental impact assessments, and regular audits. It should create education and awareness programs to inform tourists and locals about the importance and the ways of practicing sustainable tourism.

Taking into account the gaps in central and state policies and taking corrective actions as mentioned, ecotourism in Chhattisgarh can be strengthened.

### **Recommendations**

- Eco-Tourism presents a unique opportunity to achieve the triple objectives of ecological restoration, economic growth and development of the local people. In accordance with the principles of responsible tourism in Boramdeo Wildlife Sanctuary (BWS), 5 Ps – Physical Infrastructure, Policy, Practices, Processes and People are being emphasized.
- Physical infrastructure to emphasize on improving accommodation & stay facilities, new facilities such as wellness centers, undertake restoration activities, initiate new activities such as light & sound shows
- Policy, Practices and Processes to be based on principles of Responsible tourism whereby there is increase in cultural and environmental awareness & behaviour of visitors and hosts, creating financial benefits of conservation for the communities and rights and beliefs of local communities are emphasized
- People to emphasize on inclusion and empowerment of local communities at several stages through expanding existing livelihood systems through value chain and institutional interventions with conservation values, integrating these sectors to hotel and tourism industry, skill development of skilled workforce for tourism sector.
- Creating enterprises of local communities which are either individually owned or community owned and managed in tourism related service activities such as tours & travels, art & craft, hotel and restaurants, NTFPs processing, etc.

### **Inclusive Eco-Tourism Development**



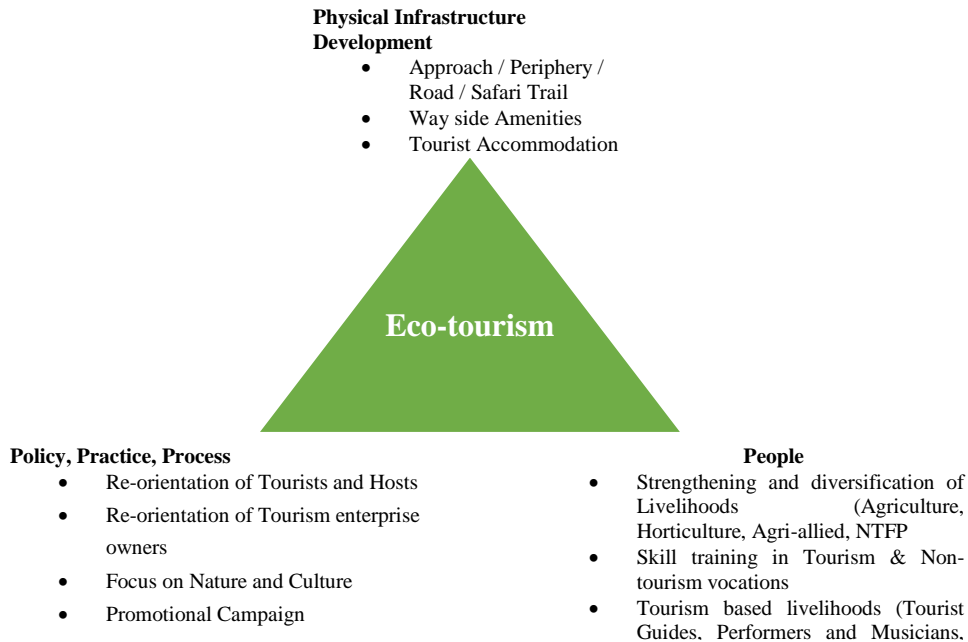


Figure 1

Inclusive Eco-Tourism Development Model

Challenges	Suggested Intervention / Policy Recommendation
Low community awareness on sustainability dimensions of ecotourism	Organizing mass campaign/ awareness camps on nature conservation, preventing use of high-volume sounds, plastic use and other harmful activities in nearby area, health and hygiene, sensitivity towards tourist, wildlife, and nature conservation, etc.
Low exposure for tourists to Baiga culture and local flora and fauna	Promotion of local cultural activities in form of folk dance, shows on Baiga life, Baiga craft, Baiga tattooing, etc.  Develop Interpretation centre to depict Flora and Fauna connected to tribal lifestyles  Cues to be taken from Hornbill cultural festival in Nagaland
Lack of authentic tourism experience for tourists	Incorporation of multiple tourism related activities such as heritage tourism, nature tourism, agriculture tourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism such as trekking, cycling, rock/hill climbing, paragliding, jungle safari & camping, water sports, etc.
Unexplored potential of local cuisine and linkage of restaurants, resorts to producers	Development and incorporation of local cuisines in food menu.  Linkage of local food producers to hotels, restaurants and resorts



Lack of branding and marketing for Boramdeo Sanctuary	Branding and marketing of Boramdeo Wildlife Sanctuary as eco-tourism spot around 3 Ts – Tiger, Temple, Tribal
Lack of capacities of community to run eco-tourism	Develop system for planning and management of eco-tourism involving local communities
Lack of partnerships in ecotourism	Organizing multi-stakeholder workshop for eco-tourism development
Lack of USP for eco-tourism	Building an USP for attracting national and foreign tourists. Focus on 3 B's – Butterfly Park, Baiga Culture and Boramdeo temple
Lack of brand building of Boramdeo	Marketing of Tourism as a whole - Engage travel writers in writing travelogues on Boramdeo – make documentaries – Use brand ambassadors – develop national / international networks like IATA / UFTAA
Lack of entry to Kanha from Boramdeo sanctuary	Opening of Sukhpar Gate which in turn can also increase flow in Boramdeo. Open Sukhpar Gate of Boramdeo Sanctuary which can connect Boramdeo to Kanha National Park – Discuss with Department of Forests Madhya Pradesh on the same
Lack of infrastructure – roads, amenities	Development of approach roads within and outside sanctuary areas with signage. Development of Way Side Amenities such as Highway Treats on tourist circuits and
Lack of accommodation facilities	Development of tourist accommodations i) private resorts, ii) homestay, iii) Govt. facility
Lack of other amenities towards food, sanitation, recreation	Development of basic amenities such as restaurant/cafeteria, resting place, drinking water, toiletries, parking, children play area, first aid, ATM, etc., at tourist sites
Lack of development of tourist spots	Identification and development of new tourism spots for nature tourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism, agriculture tourism, etc.
Lack of orientation of responsible tourism	Responsible Tourism Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re-orienting the Tourists and the Hosts on eco-tourism</li> <li>• Orientation of Tourism enterprise owners (public &amp; private) on Tribal culture, arts &amp; crafts, music etc.</li> </ul>
More focus on fun and less on nature	Development of love for nature <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on Nature and Culture of the area and not merely one animal and one temple for attracting tourists</li> <li>• Promotional campaign to sell the concept of overall natural beauty, culture, and lifestyles of the area</li> </ul>
Low focus on culture and diversity	Development of love for culture and diversity



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on lifestyles and cultural practices of tribal communities</li> <li>• Build respect and appreciation of tribal culture and values of sharing, conservation among tourists</li> <li>• Focus on immersion experiences with culture of tribal communities</li> </ul>
Low incentives for private entrepreneurs in ecotourism	<p>Incentivize private entrepreneurs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Land to be provided on lease for 30-40 years to develop properties</li> </ul>
Low human resources in tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skill development for supporting eco-tourism</li> <li>• Skill building and placement under Eco-tourism initiative-</li> <li>• Orientation and induction of youth on skill and employability under eco-tourism</li> <li>• Skill development on i) tourist guide, ii) driver, iii) auto repairs, iv) hospitality &amp; housekeeping, v) musician &amp; performer, vi) taxonomist/ethnobotanist, vii) Baiga healers, viii) yoga trainer, ix) tattooing, x) cook, etc.</li> </ul>
Lack of promotion of Baiga medicine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting Baiga medicine</li> <li>• Promoting Baiga Medicine around menstrual disorder, jaundice, Asthma, snake bite, T.B., Bone fracture, kidney stone</li> </ul>
Lack of enterprises around local food, local health practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enterprises around local food, health living practices through involving SHGs. Develop local cuisine-based enterprises to provide a taste of local food</li> <li>• Food chain of local entrepreneurs providing local cuisine to be set across different locations of the district</li> </ul>
Lack of enterprises around wellness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enterprises around wellness and health</li> <li>• Develop Ayurvedic healing centres to deal with lifestyle diseases such as Blood Pressure, Sugar, Stress, Pains etc.</li> </ul>

### 3. CONCLUSION

There is a need to investigate current opportunities and gaps both at policy and practice level and come out with solutions. Through focusing on 3Bs, 3Ts ecotourism in Boramdeo sanctuary area can be promoted. This would be in the larger changes that can be brought in 5 Ps, which include in the areas of physical infrastructure development, policy, process, practices and people.

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