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Community Participation in Rural Tourism- A Study in Nameri National Park, Assam

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Abstract

The local people or the communities living in the forest villages of Nameri National Park are directly or indirectly involved in rural tourism. Offering a variety of goods and services to visitors or tourists coming to the park, local people take part in the activities of rural tourism. Local people showcase their beautiful culture in terms of dance and music, tradition, ethnic food, lifestyle etc. in front of the tourists. 60% respondents strongly agreed that community participation in tourism is providing substantial financial assistance to local people. 43% of the people strongly agreed that socio-cultural development is taking place due to community involvement. Communities are able to generate additional revenue during the tourist season, which is the off-agricultural season, by participation in rural tourism. 61% respondents strongly agreed that the local communities of Nameri National Park are getting an alternative livelihood option from community participation in rural tourism.

Keywords: Rural tourism, Nameri National Park, Assam

Introduction

Rural tourism is responsible for the sustainability of a protected area, places with natural beauty. Rural tourism can grow in tourist friendly environment (Das, 2001). Prime goal of rural tourism is to modernize by minimizing the poverty of the rural people (Holland et al., 2003). Rural tourism is dependent on the nature, so it is very much necessary of conservation of nature or the nature based rural tourism resources. Conservation is helpful in the sustainability of the rural tourism for future (Honey, 2008). Rural Tourism is heterogeneous in nature and also linked with modification of the economy of an area (Sharpley and Sharpley, 1997). The increase of ethnic tourism, ecotourism, biodiversity conservation, and rural area development are all attributed to rural tourism (Potter and Burney, 2002). Rural tourism as tourism activities highlight local history, heritage, arts and crafts, and culture, as well as attractions that are primarily found in rural areas, benefiting the local community (Ruiz-Real et al. 2020). The attitudes, actions, and abilities of locals and company owners are just as significant as a destination's physical resources, particularly when it comes to developing competitive tourism offerings and experiences (Hogstrom, et al., 2010). Rural tourism is an example of sustainable tourism and "sustainable tourism through the development of its many forms of concrete manifestation, ensures the natural and economic integrity of the environment and rationally capitalizes on natural and cultural resources, but retains the necessary potential for future generations and is practically identified with a dynamic equilibrium of supply and demand, which outlines any modern tourist market" (Kataya, 2021). Natural rural environment might quietly modify regional cultural norms (Xu and Sun, 2020). In rural tourism development, the participation of people is always necessary. Without participation, it is not possible to grow rural tourism in an area. The participation will be of two types- direct (Owning camps, providing adventure sports etc. to the tourists) or indirect (providing raw materials of food to the eco-camps etc.) (Vivanco, 2002). Forecasting people's preferences and alternative choices, and whether different choices could yield quantitative indicators of the relative significance of the features of tourist destinations, goods, or services, to determine travelers' readiness to pay for different services (Raffaelli et. al, 2022). Community involvement creates several opportunities for locals and permits employment in sustainable tourism (Inskip, 1994). By creating jobs, community involvement in tourism boosts household incomes and eventually contributes to the growth of the tourism industry (Cole, 2006).

Local communities engaged in tourism have been urged to encourage the growth of tourism in their communities on numerous occasions (Simmons, 1994). The idea that locals' participation in tourism-related activities will affect their attitudes and perceptions of the industry is further supported by Caneday and Zeiger (1991). The degree of local knowledge regarding tourists, tourism, and its effects is referred to as community knowledge about tourism, or local tourism awareness. (Saarinen, 2010). Economic development, humanitarian attitudes, the environment, social values, and knowledge are some of the variables that influence the growth of rural tourism (Poostchi, 1986). Local residents who are informed about tourism development initiatives can lower the poverty rate in their area (Zapata et al., 2011). This is the case because people who are aware of the

costs and advantages of tourism will be able to identify them (Andereck et al., 2005). Participation in decision-making, knowledge exchange, and community commitment are all examples of community involvement, which will ultimately lead to visitor satisfaction and the growth of sustainable rural tourism. (MacDonald & Jolliffe, 2003). Community involvement is essential to maintaining the growth of rural tourism. (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Nicholas et al., 2009). The World Tourism organization notes that within 2025--2030, range of products on offer to tourists seeking the rural experience is to increase significantly. There is a clear trend in growth of rural tourism. India's vast, rural diversity and heritage offer tremendous potential for tourism in rural areas. Approximately 75% of rural residents of India are involved in rural tourism. Rural tourism is a significant source of income for people living near rural areas (Chaudhry and Gupta, 2010). Rural tourism in India is envisioned to generate employment opportunities, sustainable livelihood for the local community (Kar and Sahoo, 2016). Rural tourism is observed in many protected areas including Nameri National Park in Assam, India. Situated in the foothills of eastern Himalayas, Nameri National Park is famous for scenic beauty and wildlife. Identification and documentation of issues related to community participation in rural tourism in the park is not available. The objective of the present work is to study community participation in rural tourism and related issues in Nameri National Park Assam, India.

Methodology

Study Area: The area of Nameri National Park is 137 km². The national park extends from latitudes 26°51' N to 27°04' N, and longitudes 92°39' E to 92°59' E in the Sonitpur district of Assam, India (Fig 1). The nearest airport is Saloni and the park is 36.5 km away from Tezpur, district head quarter. The park was declared as wildlife sanctuary in 1985, as a national park on 15th November 1998 and also as a tiger reserve in 2000. The park is characterized by abundant rich tropical evergreen, wet deciduous, cane, bamboo semi-evergreen forests and grassland. Ecotourism, adventure tourism, ethnic tourism, and other types of rural tourism are all practiced by the residents of Tarazan village and Dharikati forest village, located in the buffer zone of the national park. Tourists visit Nameri National Park mainly in the months of September, October, January, February, March and April. The villages located in the buffer zone of the park are well-known for a variety of adventure sports, including as bird watching, river rafting, trekking, and fishing. Although agriculture is the main source of income for maximum families, local people look at rural tourism as a source of income after farming, i.e., between October and March. Rural tourism has become a viable alternative source of revenue for the local communities.

Dharikati and Tarazan villages are selected for present study (Fig 2). Since population as well as number of people engaged in rural tourism are more in these two villages. There are 210 and 860 residents in Tarazan and Dharikati villages respectively. To collect information from the villagers, structured interview schedule was made. The researcher randomly chose one adult respondent from one family. There were 120 responses from Dharikati Village and 90 from Tarazan Village.

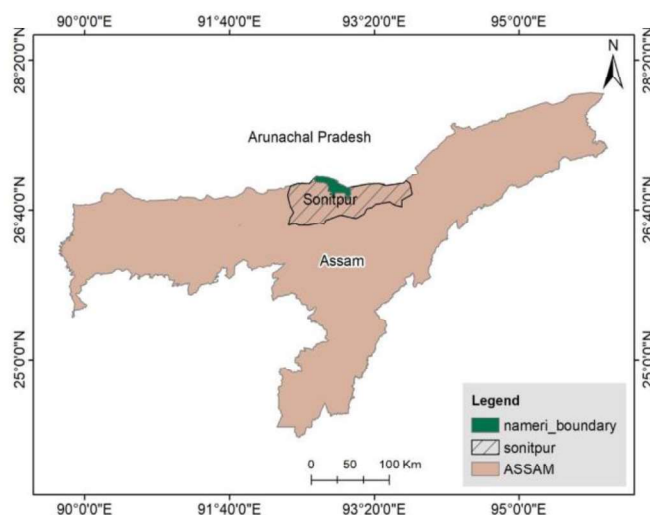


Fig1: Map of Assam showing Nameri National Park

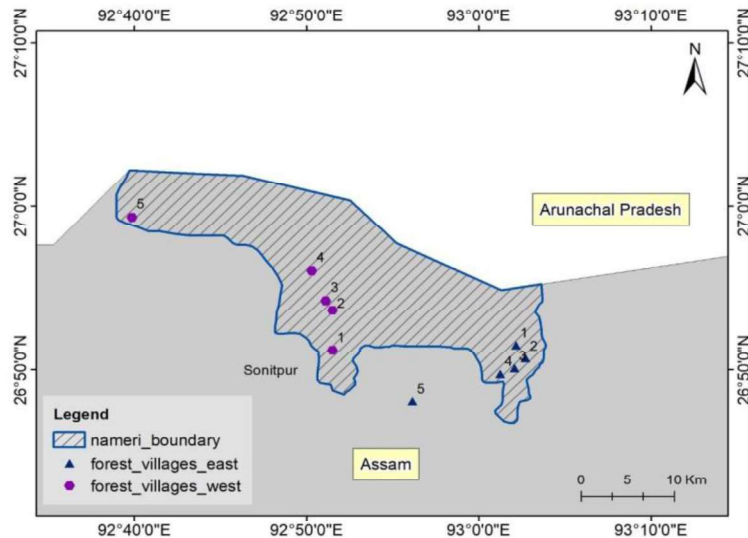


Fig 2: Map of Nameri National Park and forest villages

(Western Forest Villages: 1. Dharikati Village 2. Tarazan Village 3. Sotai Village 4. Gamani Village; **Eastern Forest Village:** 1. Selaikhati Karbi Village 2. Selaikhati Bengali Village 3. Selaikhati Kachari Village 4. Morisuti Missing Village 5. Sikham Taungya Village)

Variable Identification:Following variables related to the community participation were identified:

- Villagers' Involvement (VI)
- Villagers' problem (VP)
- Rural tourism Potentialities (RTMP) and
- Villagers' Satisfaction (VS)

The above mentioned identified variables are dependent on the some parameters which are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Variables, Parameters and the statements against Villagers' Involvement, Rural tourism Potentialities and Villagers' Satisfaction

Sl. No	Variables	Parameters	Statements
1.	Villagers' Involvement (VI)	VI1	You are involved to the park directly or indirectly
		VI2	You are socially developed due to community participation
		VI3	The socio- cultural involvement is increasing due to rural tourism
		VI4	By community participation, you are showing the Assamese tribal or non- tribal food, culture, tradition, cloth, language etc in front of tourists
2.	Villagers' Problem (VP)	VP1	You are facing many problems from the tourists.
		VP2	You also faced many challenges in the lockdown.
		VP3	You also faced problems after the lockdown.
3.	Rural Tourism Potentialities (RTMP)	RTMP1	Rural tourism is showcasing the cultural landscape of the area

		RTMP2	The tourists visit the villages frequently
		RTMP3	Community participation is also there
		RTMP4	Rural tourism is the alternative livelihood option for the villagers
		RTMP5	By adopting certain steps, the inflow of tourists to the park can be increased
		RTMP6	The cultural landscape is beneficial factor for the development of rural tourism in the park
4.	Villagers' Satisfactions (VS)	VS1	You are getting many benefits from rural tourism
		VS2	You are satisfied with the tourists' behavior.
		VS3	The development of rural tourism is minimizing the financial problems
		VS4	You are satisfied with the present condition quality of the transport service
		VS5	You are satisfied with the inflow of the tourists
		VS6	You are happy by the amount of income generated by rural tourism

To establish the relationship between variables and the parameters, researcher has calculated the weightage of the independent variables through 5 point Likert Scale from the responded through structured questionnaire distributed among the villagers during the period of May 2023 - October 2023. The relations between variables and parameters had been calculated by using SPSS software.

Results and discussions

Demographic pattern of the villagers

There are 860 numbers of people living in Tarazan and Dharikati village, out of which 628 are in Tarazan village and 232 are in Dharikati village.

210 respondents (one adult from one family) were approached with the questionnaire. There were 88 respondents from Dharikati village and 122 respondents from Tarazan village. Out of the respondents, 53 (25%) are female, and 157 (75%) are male. There are 58 respondents (28%) are between the ages of 21 and 30; 122 respondents (58%), are between the ages of 31 and 40; 26 respondents (18%) are between the ages of 41 and 50; 12 respondents (4%) are between the ages of 51 and 60; and 2 respondents (1%) are from more than 60 years. In case of educational qualifications of 210 respondents, 159 are under-metric, 44 are metric (10th standard) passed, and only 7 are higher secondary (10+2 level) passed (Fig 3). 23 families (11%) rely on government employment as their primary source of income, 21 families (10%) rely on private employment as their primary source of income, and 15 families (7%) rely on other enterprises as their primary source of income. 96 families, i.e., 46% of the total, agriculture is their primary source of income. For 55 families (26% of 210 families), tourism is their main source of income (Fig 4). Annual income of 99 families is than one lakh rupees a year. 105 families earn between two and three lakhs rupees per year, while 6 families earn between four and five lakhs rupees.

Out of the 210 families of the respondents, 111 (47%) are actively involved in the park, while 99 (53%) are indirectly involved (Fig 5). Level of involvement of villagers are different. 99 people work in management, 55 sell clothes, 75 sell various traditional items, 95 work as employees in lodging facilities, 20 run their own lodging facilities, 59 work in adventure tourism, 30 work as tourist guides, 75 work as guides, and 75 work in other capacities (Fig 6). Contribution of family income of respondents from involvement in tourism are shown in Figure 7. 58 families earn 41%–60%, 49 families earn 61%–80%, and 28 families earn 81% –100% of total income from tourism.

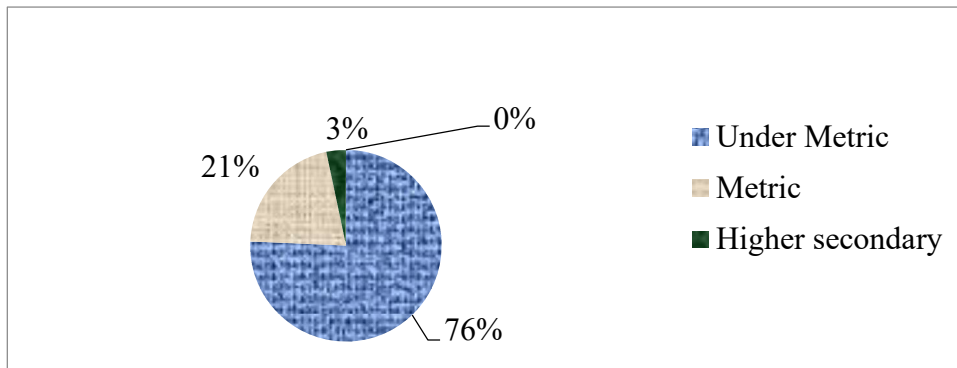


Fig 3: Respondents' educational qualification

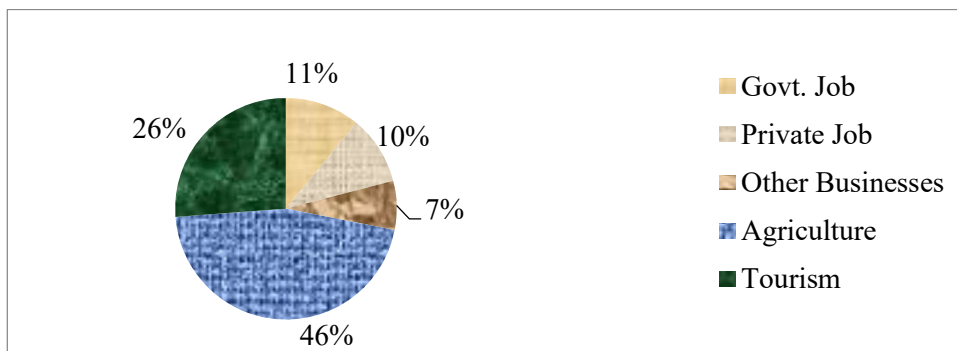


Fig 4: Prime livelihood of the families

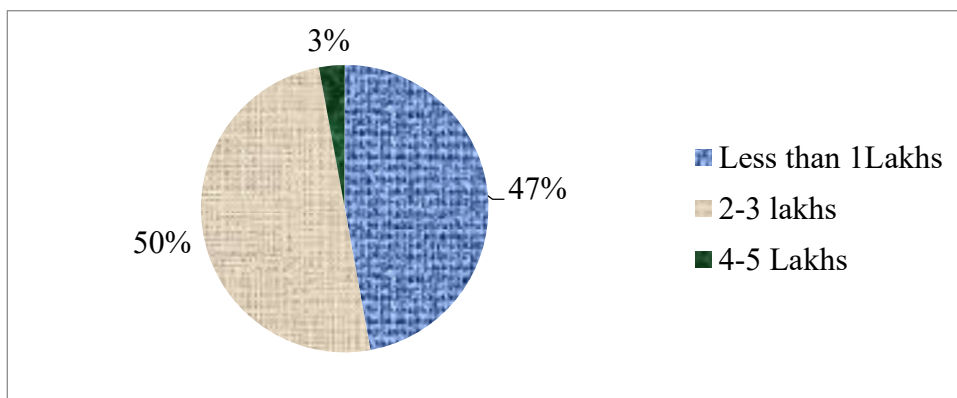


Fig 5: Yearly income of the families (in rupees)

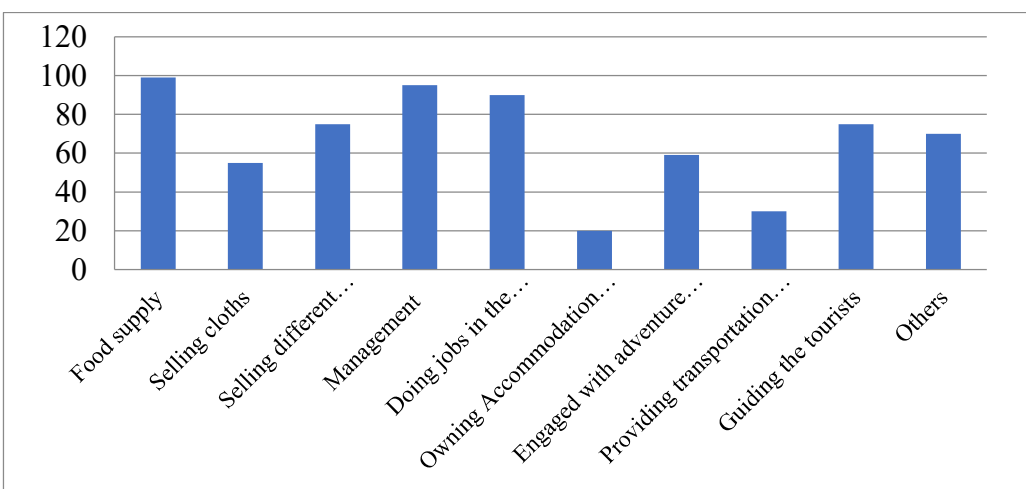


Fig 6: Different ways of earning money from rural tourism

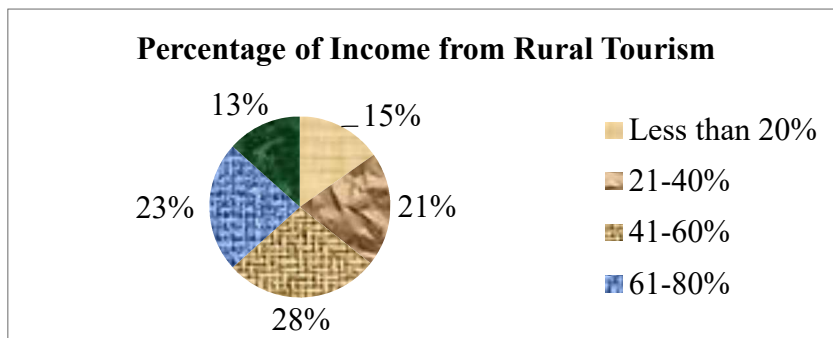


Fig 7: Income from rural tourism in percentage

Involvement of the Villagers in rural tourism:

The people living in the villages of Tarazan and Dharikati are either directly or indirectly involved in the tourism industry; they run eco-camps, sell or supply the camps with raw materials, guide visitors, help tourists in adventure sports, etc.

The value of the mean of parameters VI1, VI2, VI3 and VI4, are almost same. It ranges from 4.59 (for VI1 and VI4) to 4.61 (for VI2). The differences are not big as the respondents are only 210 (Table.2).

Table 2: Table for frequency and mean of the variable ‘Villagers’ Involvement’

	Villagers’ Involvement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Frequency	V1	0	1	4	80	125
	VI2	0	2	1	85	122
	VI3	2	14	31	73	90
	VI4	0	0	1	84	125
Parameters	VI1	VI2	VI3	VI4		
Mean	4.59	4.61	4.60	4.59		

- 125 respondents, or 59.52% of the 210 respondents, strongly agreed with statement VI1, which reads, "You are involved to the park directly or indirectly."
- The statement VI2, which reads, "You are socially developed due to community participation," was highly agreed with by 122 respondents (58%).
- The statement VI3, "The socio-cultural involvement is increasing due to rural tourism," was highly agreed with by 90 respondents (42.85%).
- The statement VI4, which reads, "By community participation, you are showing the Assamese tribal or non-tribal food, culture, tradition, cloth, language etc. in front of tourists," was strongly agreed with by 125 respondents, i.e., 59.52% of the sample.

Problems and Challenges in Rural Tourism

With the development of science and technology, the rural tourism is also developing day by day. Due to this development, different types of problems have occurred in the regions of the rural tourism destinations. Those problems are like social, environmental. So, it is very much necessary to develop the rural tourism in a sustainable way. The mean value for VP1,VP2 and VP3 are almost same and it ranges from 4.11 to 4.56(Table3).

Table 3: Table for frequency and mean of the variable Villagers' problem

	Villagers' Problem	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Frequency	VP1	0	1	4	80	125
	VP2	0	2	1	85	122
	VP3	2	14	31	73	90
Parameters	VP1	VP2	VP3			
Mean	4.56	4.54	4.11			

- The statement, "You are facing many problems from the tourists," was highly agreed with by 59.52% of the respondents. Due to congestion, pollution of the villages, etc., some tourists occasionally cause issues for the locals.
- The statement, "You also faced problems in the lockdown," was highly agreed with by 58.09% of the responders.
- The statement, "You also faced problems during and after the lockdown," was highly agreed with by 125 respondents. The rural tourism industry was completely shut down during the lockdown, which caused mental and financial difficulties to the locals also.

Potentialities of Rural tourism of Nameri National Park

There are different types of potentialities rural tourism like developing community participation, development of cultural landscape etc. The mean value for all the parameters RTMP1, RTMP2, RTMP3, RTMP4, RTMP5 and RTMP6 are almost same that it ranges from 2.24 to 4.70 (Table: 4).

Table 4: Table for frequency and mean of the variable Rural Tourism Potentialities

	Rural Tourism Potentialities	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Frequency	RTMP1	0	0	6	78	126
	RTMP2	0	0	4	85	121
	RTMP3	0	0	3	73	134
	RTMP4	0	0	4	78	128
	RTMP5	0	1	3	77	129
	RTMP6	0	0	3	74	133
Parameters	RTMP1	RTMP2	RTMP3	RTMP4	RTMP5	RTMP6
Mean	4.42	4.62	4.68	2.24	4.70	4.46

- Of the 210 respondents, 124 (60%) strongly agreed with the RTMP1 statement, which reads, "Rural tourism is showcasing the cultural landscape of the area."
- The statement RTMP2, "The tourists visit the villages frequently," was strongly agreed with by 121 respondents.
- Of the 134 responders (63.8%) strongly agreed with the RTMP3 statement, "Community participation is also there."
- The statement RTMP4, "Rural tourism is the alternative livelihood option for the villagers," was highly agreed by 128 respondents (60.95% of the sample).
- The RTMP5 statement, "By adopting certain steps, the inflow of tourists to the park can be increased," was highly agreed by 129 respondents (61.42%). There is need of some initiatives to attract more tourists and development of rural tourism in the study area.
- The statement "The cultural landscape is beneficial factor for the development of rural tourism in the park" was highly agreed by 133 respondents (63.33%).

Benefits and satisfaction of the respondents

The tourists benefit the villagers in a variety of ways, including socially, psychologically, and financially. Villagers' satisfaction is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Table for frequency and mean of the variable Villagers' Satisfaction

	Villagers' Satisfaction	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Frequency	VS1	0	0	0	80	130
	VS2	0	0	5	66	139
	VS3	0	0	3	87	120
	VS4	50	79	79	2	0
	VS5	0	0	6	82	122
	VS6	0	0	7	76	127
Parameters	VS1	VS2	VS3	VS4	VS5	VS6
Mean	4.61	4.63	4.55	2.15	4.55	4.57

- Of the 210 respondents, 131, or 62.38%, strongly agreed with the statement VS1, which reads, "Rural tourism offers numerous advantages."
- The statement VS2, "You are satisfied with the tourists' behavior," was strongly agreed with by 140 respondents, or 66.66%.
- The statement VS3, which reads, "The development of rural tourism is minimizing the financial problems," was strongly agreed with by 120 respondents, or 57.14%. The statement VS4, "You are satisfied with the present condition quality of the transport service," was not strongly agreed with by any responder.
- The statement VS5, "You are satisfied with the behavior of the tourists," was highly agreed with by 122 respondents, or 58.09%.
- The statement VS6, which reads, "You are happy by the amount of income generated by rural tourism," was highly agreed with by 126 respondents, or 60% of the sample.

Conclusion

The local community of study area is either directly or indirectly involved in rural tourism. Rural tourism brings the visitors to the unique culture and society of the local communities. The result is an increase in socio-cultural participation. Community participation in rural tourism of the Nameri National Park helps the tourists to know about the environmental, social background of the area. 61% respondents strongly agreed that due to the community participation in rural tourism, the local communities of Nameri National Park are getting an alternative livelihood option. Community participation is helping the local communities to showcase their beautiful culture, tradition, food habit, lifestyle, dance music etc. in front of the tourists. Community participation also helps the tourists to know about rural tourism potentialities of the forest villages of the park. 60% respondents strongly agreed that community participation in tourism is providing financial assistance to local people. 43% of the people strongly agreed that socio-cultural development is taking place due to community involvement. It is often recognized that rural tourism in forest settlements needs to be developed to attract more tourists.

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