

## The Role of Ecotourism in Development of Local Market and Environmental conservation in the Shir-Ahmad wildlife refuge, Iran

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### Abstract

Ecotourism is a fast growing industry in all over the world and there are only few number of people may not know about it. It is usually connected to environmental conservation, economic incentives of local people. Ecotourism is the key of successful management and conservation of protected area and natural resources and it is knotted to the well-being of local people by creating job opportunities and promotion of local market. This paper tends to find out the impact of successful local market fluctuation on conservation of the Shir-Ahmad wildlife refuge in Iran. To find out local people satisfaction regarding selling their product a question has been circulated among them. The result reveal that they are not satisfy with the selling of their products and mostly prefer to find out alternate income like hunting animal species or even cutting vegetation cover from the wildlife refuge.

**Keyword:** Ecotourism, environmental conservation, protected areas, local people market.

### Introduction

Ecotourism is one of the fastest growing sectors (industry) in all over the globe and it increasing become part of local people lifestyle by influencing in their traditional knowledge, live hoods and their culture<sup>1</sup>. Beside that ecotourism business by providing funds and a large related category of job opportunities is a local people economic motivation and incentives<sup>2</sup>. It helps local community to understand the value of the natural resources and emerge them to protect that. Species richness generally increasing with decreasing of latitude<sup>3</sup>. Due to this geographical phenomenon, the pressure on species mostly occurred in the developing countries<sup>4</sup>. Increasing in population and lack of regulation regarding the natural resources could lead to overusing and extinction of flora and fauna.

Ecotourism has become popular tool for biodiversity conservation based on minimizing local threats to natural resource such as agriculture, contamination harvesting of wild plants and animals<sup>5</sup>.

Ecotourism apart from its impression on protected of wild animal and plants, has economic gain for local communities by providing large different related job categories for local people and lead them to this conclusion that for more benefit they have to protect their natural resources (figure 1).

Successful integration of biodiversity conservation and local economic development will be recognition when economic incentives of ecotourism immediate effect on local people as well as this economic improvement help to better threats of local people on their surrounding biodiversity<sup>2</sup>.

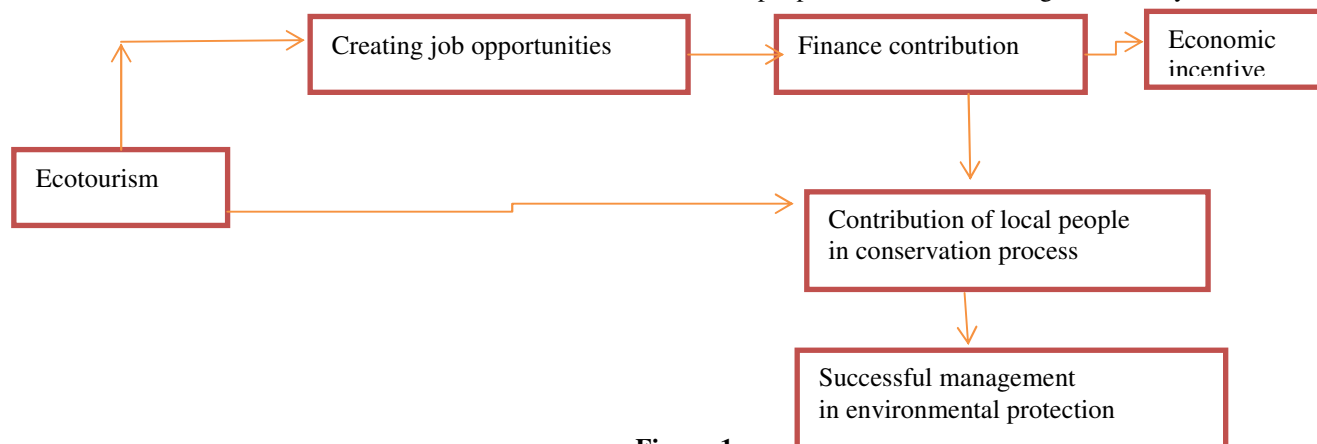


Figure-1

Impact of ecotourism on biodiversity conservation

**Study area:** To understand the impact of economic condition of local people on the Shir-Ahmad wildlife refuge, the researcher has made study on the area. The Shir-Ahmad wildlife refuge situated on North-East of the Razavi-Khorasan province, 15 km far away Sabzevar city in the range of 57° 42'E to 58° 30'E longitude and 36° 00'N to 37° 11'N latitude. Sabzevar and Neyshabour are the biggest cities about this wildlife. Jolein, Saleh-Abad, Nazl-Abad, Cheshmeh-Avash, Ali-Abad, Saqieh, Yahya-Abad, Hashem-Abad and Dowlat-Abad are representing as most important villages and settlements around this region.

### Methodology

The rural area around the Shir-Ahmad wildlife refuge according to the Census (2006) contains 1162 households equal to the population of 3991. Beside this there are 10 villages around the area.

It has been observed that the sample has not any job related to ecotourism business. About 73% of people of the sample engaged in farming and animal husbandry. Approximately 5% of total respondents have governmental or private sector job and the rest are jobless or housewives. Some of them are self-employed and doing business like supermarket, handcraft etc.

There are many studies on environmental awareness and attitude of local people. One of the most important aspects of

ecotourism is natural environment which is to be protected by local people. Therefore their awareness towards the environment should be studied. About 310 questionnaires were circulated among the residents of 9 villages in the vicinity. They were asked the questions related to their knowledge about the environment. Further, the background data regarding gender, education, occupation, age, etc. have been collected.

### Results and Discussion

**Occupational survey:** All the nine villages having population about 3991 shows that agricultural as the main occupation. Agricultural crops green in the area are Wheat, Potato, Onion, Fodder, etc. among these Wheat is green crop. Cattle grazing are also observed in these villages. Sheep, Goat and Cow are meat production. Cows are also used as milk animal. There is no milk processing within the area. The milk sends to Sabzevar city for this kind of processing. This means that the farmer do not benefited of value, addition Pista is low but potential to increase its production which would be useful tourism activity. The Shir-Ahmad has become used for grasses available there. Thus, overall socio-economic condition is poor and if the wildlife resources are used in non-contaminated manner there are scopes for achieving of local people. The survey was conducted to know the occupation of the local people, figure-3.

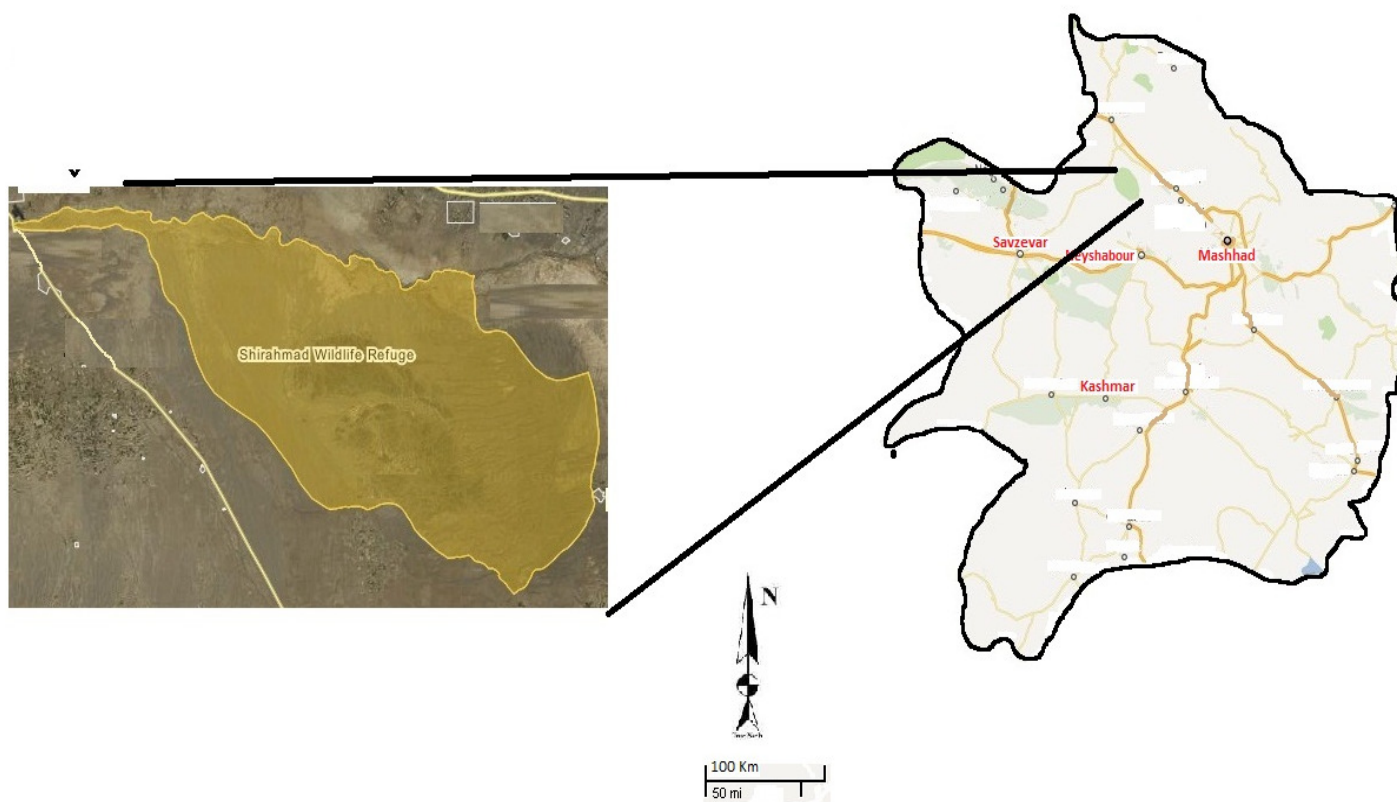


Figure-2  
The Shir-Ahmad wildlife refuge situation

As the results displayed highest portion of the sample (56.1%) that is more than half of respondents are farmers and have agricultural products. Dairy and Meat products is 8% and 8.71% portion of total sample. Carpet, Rugs, Cookies are the other kind of products that local residents have and its only 0.6%, 2.2% and 1.9% of sample portion.

The outcomes in the graph show that mostly local people of 9 villages near the Shir-Ahmad wildlife refuge are farmer or Animal Husbandry and Dairying. There is no any place for

ecotourism business and it may be because they have not enough knowledge regarding ecotourism business and how it is profitable for them.

**Income Wise Distribution of Local People:** Among local people of the Shir-Ahmad 72% of them have income of Rs 12000 per month from their business that mostly its farming and they have to compensate for deficits among the respondents only 5% have income of 30/000 to 50/000 per month, figure-4.

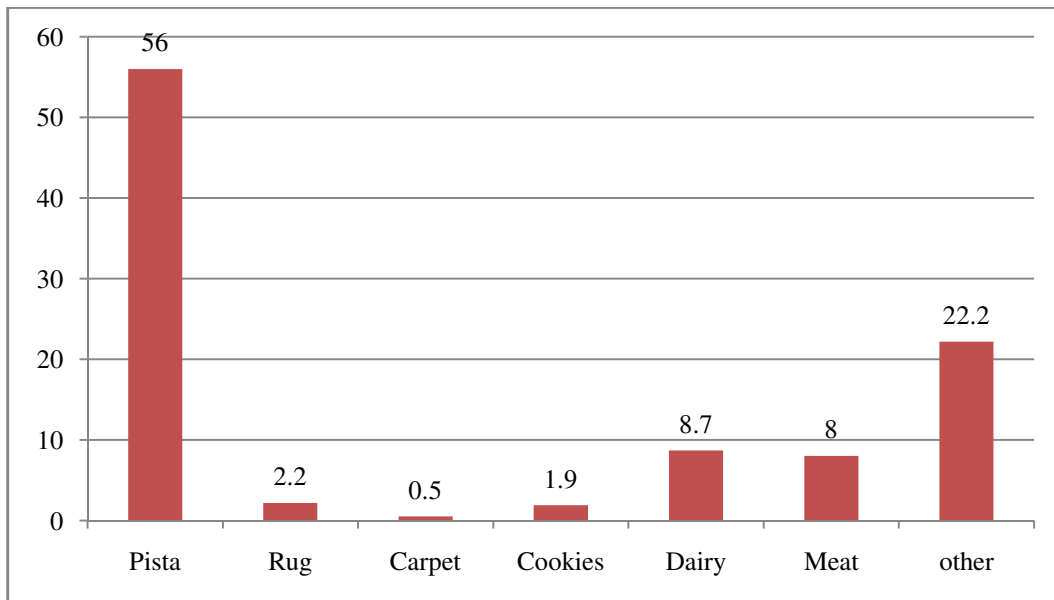


Figure-3  
 Local people business

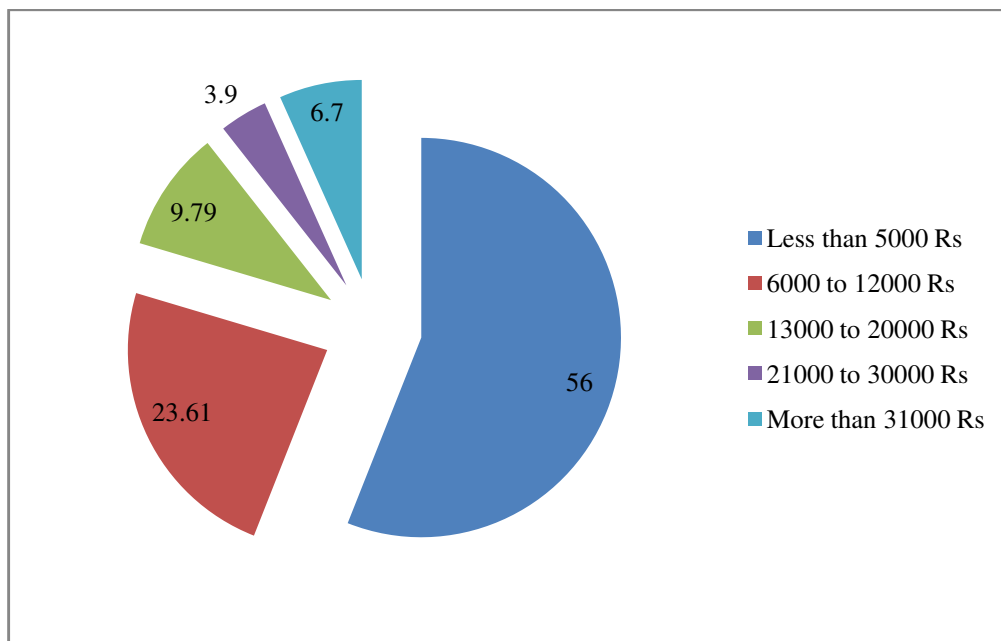


Figure-4  
 Income wise distribution of local people

**Local People Satisfaction Regarding the Selling Prices of Their Products:** The 66.45% of respondents believed that they are not getting any attractive price for their products. Many local products are available in markets near us. These are either locally grown agricultural products or locally made items by local businesses in our community. Local business owners always want to maintain a certain level of expertise for their products. They tend to try and know their customers personally thus provide personalized services to them<sup>1</sup>.

The H1 here may be stated as “local people in any business getting attractive price for selling their products” and H0 in here may be they are not getting attractive prices for selling their products. The Chie-Square test has been conducted and the following results are obtained, (table-1).

The results in the Chi-Square test reveals that local people believed that they are not getting attractive prices for selling

their products and this means that H0 is accepted and H1 is rejected at the level of 0.005. This says that there is no significant association between job of local people and their satisfaction of selling products and in any business they have opinion that the prices are not attractive to them and it’s insufficient for their living coast.

**Hunting of Animal Species:** What is the percentage of local people who have willingness to hunting? This question is addressed to local people by circulating questions related to “Is hunting of species is more beneficially than their business or not?”

The data thus have been classified according educational level and job. Chi-Square analysis has been carried out using SPSS package, table 2.

**Table-1**  
**Testing the hypothesis**

Are you thinking that you get attractive price to sell your product (your income)?	What kind of products do you have						
	Agriculture product	Carpet	Rug	Cookies	Dairy	Meat	Other
	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count
Yes	46	0	3	2	7	9	9
No	125	2	4	4	19	16	36

Are you thinking that you get attractive price to sell your product (your income)?	What kind of products do you have	
	Chie-Square	75.771
	df	6
	Sig	.001

**Table-2**  
**Hunting of species**

What kind of products do you have	Product	is hunting species in this wildlife has more benefit (income) with compare than your product selling?	
		yes	no
		Count	Count
Agriculture product	119	54	
Carpet	2	0	
Rug	5	2	
Cookies	6	0	
Dairy	19	8	
Meat	17	8	
Other	42	12	

Pearson Chi-Square Tests		
What kind of products do you have	Hunting of Species	
	Chi-square	54.907
	df	7
	Sig.	.001

The result of Chi-Square test reveals that ( $H_1$ ) has been accepted at the 0.05 level and ( $H_0$ ) is rejected. This means that respondents with any business have willing to hunting species from the Shir-Ahmad wildlife refuge despite from governmental rules and penalties regarding hunting.

## Conclusion

Need to survey prompt violation flow even when the law prohibited certain practices and activity. Illegal hunting in the Shir-Ahmad wildlife refuge for instance, is a link to income of local people and their poverty<sup>6</sup>. Debility to effort modern agriculture, inadequacy of water resources for agricultural products, lack of suitable market for selling products, low level of environmental awareness between local people in the study region and of course their budget defected may are the reasons that lead them for illegal hunting or give them willingness for this illegal act. Ecotourism as an alternative can be useful for prevent this illegal hunting and it may would be as a key for empowerment of local people and protect this wildlife from illegal hunting and destruction by people<sup>7</sup>. Also it can be helpful to increase local people environmental awareness and lead them to protect their natural resources for absorbing more and more tourists in their surrounding area.

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