

## Local Community's Perception about Impact on Ecotourism by UNESCO World Heritage Site Status in Great Himalayan National Park

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.33980/ajabs.2020.v08i01.005>

(Received 02 Apr, 2020; Accepted 13 June, 2020; Published 24 June, 2020)

**ABSTRACT:** The Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) is situated in the kullu district of Himachal Pradesh. The park have been blessed with distinct biodiversity, flora & fauna; and is inscribed in the UNESCO world heritage site list in June, 2014. The Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP), Kullu, Himachal Pradesh is one of the best ecotourism destination in the state. The GHNP organizes various adventurous activities like trekking, wildlife viewing, bird watching, Rafting, Climbing, Mountain biking, local sightseeing etc. Local community involvement is very important for the execution and development of ecotourism in the destination and they provide the exact feedback about the improvements and developments in the region. This paper tries to analyze the local community's perception about impacts on ecotourism by UNESCO world heritage designation in Great Himalayan National Park..

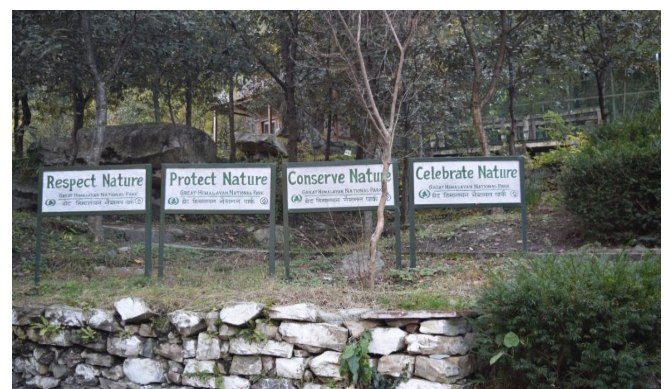
**Keywords:** Ecotourism; Local community Perception; UNESCO; Bio-diversity and World Heritage Site.

**INTRODUCTION:** The most famous/well renowned national park of Himachal known as The Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) falls under the geographical territory of Kullu district which is also known for its tourism potential. The GHNP was a joint initiative of British, American and Indian/state of Himachal Pradesh governments and was constituted in 1984 in the beautiful valley of Seraj. The total land coverage of GHNP was around 754.4 sq kilometers at the time of its inception and was declared as full-fledged National Park in 1999. Further, to sustain eco-development programs which were supposed to run in GHNP, an area of 265.6 sq kilometers is reserved for the population of around 16000-18000 people, 160 villages and approximately 2300 families living in the above mentioned area. Further, two additional wildlife sanctuaries in Sainj and Trithan valleys of Himachal were notified in 1994 covering the area of 90 and 61 sq kilometers and were later added in the total area of Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area expanding its pervious area from 754.4 sq kilometers to 1171 sq kilometers.

During the 38<sup>th</sup> meeting of World Heritage Committee held on 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 2014 at Qatar, the GHNP was celebrated as UNESCO World Heritage Site due to its 'outstanding universal values' adhering to the fact that the park has sustained the protection of biodiversity

and nurtured rare natural beauty in the Western Himalayas.

The managing body of GHNP is cherishing four key areas which are to celebrate, converse, protect and respect nature for the sake of sustaining environment as well as ecotourism in its area. To add to its attraction, the park is surrounded with some rivers out of which Beas, Jiwwaji Nala, Tirthan are of importance and worth of tourist attraction.



**Picture 1: View at Sai Ropa Complex GHNP, Banjar.**

At present, the GHNP is working upon community based Eco-tourism methods in which they have engaged local populace through a NGO "Bio-diversity Tourism & Community Advancements (BTCA)",

registered in 2008, in many activities such as food, camps, porters, cooks, bird-watching guides, ecotourism guides and experts for adventure activities. The park management earlier supported WSCGs and its members formed an NGO named "Society for Advancement of Hill and Rural Areas (SAHARA)" which was quite active from 2000 to 2005 and was later replaced by BTCA. The BTCA now help the local populace by providing them necessary guidance and help in asset building, rationalizes use of natural resources, socio-economic development, market support and fund raising.

## **MATERIALS AND METHOD:**

**Area of Study:** The study is confined to the Local community's Perception about the impacts on Ecotourism developments by UNESCO World Heritage Site Status in Great Himalayan National Park Conservational Area (GHNP) Kullu, Himachal Pradesh. The study explored the local community's perceptions, satisfaction level for Ecotourism developments, facilities and services quality level in the study area as a result of world heritage inscription to the park.

**Need and Significance of the Study:** The Great Himalayan National Park is an important nature based destination having a rich biodiversity, where visitors come to enjoy the natural beauty, landscapes, terrains, flora and fauna, biodiversity in its purest form. The park have been inscribed in the World Heritage Site list due to the outstanding universal values' adhering to the fact that the park has sustained the protection of biodiversity and nurtured rare natural beauty in the Western Himalayas. This status is like a crown to the park and made a value of the destination at national as well as international level. So there is a need to study the impacts on ecotourism developments by UNESCO World Heritage Site Status in Great Himalayan National Park Conservational Area (GHNP) Kullu, Himachal Pradesh.

**Review:** A thorough study was done on information available about impacts of UNESCO World Heritage inscription from various research papers, journals, News articles, literature and other related articles. Shackley (2000) in his study described the impacts of entering the Sites in World Heritage List with their cultural heritage zones. He observed that being on World Heritage Site does not bring the regular funding but the main benefits which the site gets are recognition on the international map, easy accessibility to the conservation funds from UNESCO and various other associations and the status. Aas Ladkin, & Fletcher (2005) and Su & Wall, (2014) highlighted the importance of community participation for the development of Heritage tourism and conservation of World Herit-

age Sites. They observed that when any site is included in World Heritage Sites list by UNESCO, it enhances the Site's international visibility and helps to boast tourism developments. They also described that development of a World Heritage Site into a tourism destination also helps to increase the financial and public support for the conservation of site's heritage. Cros (2007) observed that when a heritage site gets inscription into UNESCO world heritage list, it becomes a tourist attraction all over the world. It develops the curiosity among the peoples about the destination for different cultures and results in increasing the numbers of visitors to the world heritage site and leads to strengthen the country's economy. He also observed that it also help to increase the new job opportunities and improve the social life of the local community. he also suggested that by improving the quality standard and proving better advertisement opportunities, number of tourists and their stay at the destination increases to a large extent. Jimura (2011) in his study discussed the impacts of world heritage site designation on local communities by taking a case study of Ogimachi, Shirakawa-mura, Japan. They explained that objective of world heritage list inscription is the preservation of natural and cultural heritage of outstanding relevance for the future generations and to establish a balance between sustainability, conservation, and development in the destinations where UNESCO world heritage is located. They concluded that success in achieving in all these objectives depends on the degree of involvement and awareness of local community as well as other stakeholders. Lisa Yong Yeh Moya and Charuwan Phongpanichanan (2014) highlighted the various opportunities provided for the state of Melaka being the UNESCO world Heritage City to attract the Chinese tourists. They also highlighted the importance of advertisements and promotional activities to create awareness about the UNESCO World Heritage Sites to attract the tourists. They also suggest the various ways to improve the quality of services and to meet the expectations of the tourists. Allan et al. (2017) studied threatens to the Natural World Heritage Sites from human pressure and forest loss. When any site gets designated as Natural Heritage Site by United Nations, they are globally recognized as containing Earth's most valuable assets and gets attentions all over the world. It becomes necessary to understand the ecological changes at the sites for their preservation. They observed that human pressure increased faster and more forest loss occurred in the areas surrounding Natural World Heritage Sites. They suggested the World Heritage Committee to access the status of these sites, which they analyzed as the threatened, and suggested the urgent conservation intervention to save many of these sites

for the sustainable ecotourism development. Santa-Cruz & Lopez-Guzman (2017) observed that the recognition of a place as a World Heritage Site (WHS) by UNESCO is fundamental to preserve its historical, artistic inheritance and at the same time it also encourage tourists to visit that area. They successfully explained the relationship between WHS designation and cultural tourism under sustainable character of the destination, through the presentation of the results of research conducted in the city of Cordoba (Spain). They explained that granting a certain destination the classification of World Heritage Site by UNESCO means cultural recognition of the area as well as the obligation of its preservation by different public administrations and private companies, an important attraction for promoting destination in relation to a certain type of tourist, implies the need of correct management of the area, giving priority to the development of area and above all safeguard and maintenance for future generations. T. E. Jones et al. (2017) evaluated the impacts of listing the recreational values of one UNESCO world heritage site and investigated the spatial and temporary pattern of consumer surplus in every zone. In their study they also described the expectation of correlation between World Heritage Site listing and increase in added recreational values by testing the pre- and post-inscription structural changes.

The GHNPCA has been successful in ecotourism development by providing alternate livelihoods in support of conserving biodiversity, creating a tangible impact and as a result, the local villagers have organized themselves through an NGO, Biodiversity Tourism and Community Advancement (BTCA) which is working with the Great Himalayan National Park Management to increase the facilities and service quality for sustainable ecotourism developments in the study area.

**Objectives of the Study:** The study was carried to meet the following objectives:

- To study the status of ecotourism developments in Great Himalayan National Park, Kullu, Himachal Pradesh.

- To study the perception of local community about impacts on ecotourism developments by UNESCO World Heritage Site status in the Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area.
- To suggest measures for ecotourism development in Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area.

**Methodology:** The research design is descriptive in nature. This is an exploratory research study which attempts to analyze the perception of local community about impacts on ecotourism activities and status of ecotourism developments in Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area by UNESCO World Heritage Site inscription. The method of data collection is mainly based on primary data. However, an effort is made to collect the information from competent persons off and on in the study area. A series of field trips was made to the study area and observations were made by taking the personnel interviews of local community, Officials of Park management, NGO officials and other stakeholders in the study area. The present study examined the perception of local community about impacts on ecotourism developments in and around Great Himalayan National Park by UNESCO World Heritage Site inscription.

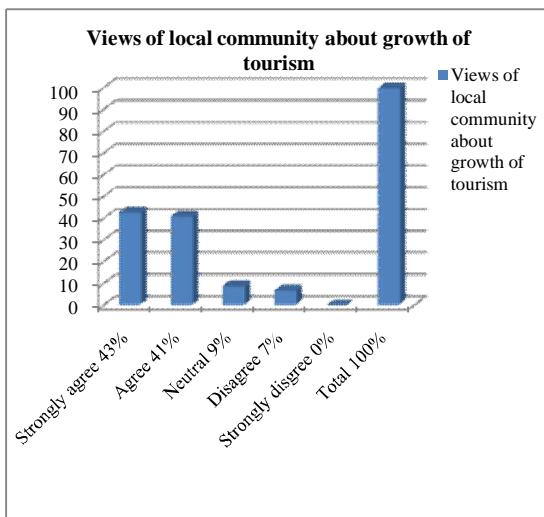
**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:**

**Data Analysis & Data Interpretation:** The Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP), Kullu, Himachal Pradesh is inscribed as the UNESCO world heritage site in June, 2014 and is one of the best ecotourism destination in the state. In order to study the perception of local community about impacts on ecotourism developments in Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) by UNESCO world heritage site status, a sample size of 200 respondents from the local community selected. The study was completed with the help of primary as well secondary data through structured questionnaires and observations done by the researcher during field trips in the study area. The respondents were members from local community in the study area in and around the Great Himalayan National Park conservational area.

**Table 1: Perception of Local Community for the Impacts of UNESCO World Heritage Designation.**

Attributes	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
World Heritage designation has helped in the Growth of tourism	43.0	41.0	9.0	7.0	0.0	1.80	0.874	1.040	0.511
World Heritage designation to GHNP has improved the international reputation of the Site	48.0	35.0	11.0	6.0	0.0	1.75	0.878	1.051	0.365

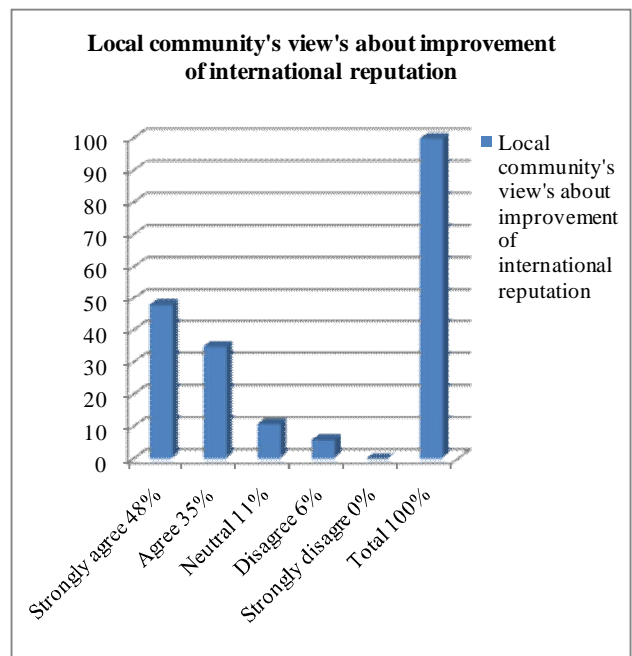
World Heritage designation has helped to attract more tourists	43.0	38.0	11.0	8.0	0.0	1.84	0.916	0.958	0.128
World Heritage designation has helped in the Protection of the region	35.0	41.0	18.0	6.0	0.0	1.95	0.878	0.637	0.324
World Heritage designation has Positive impacts on local business	39.0	40.0	12.0	7.0	2.0	1.93	0.985	1.098	0.820
General evolution of tourism developments at GHNP region are satisfactory	22.0	51.0	18.0	8.0	1.0	2.15	0.890	0.739	0.387
Current ecotourism developments at GHNP are satisfactory	27.0	42.0	23.0	6.0	2.0	2.14	0.951	0.707	0.291
There are more positive benefits through ecotourism developments	32.0	54.0	8.0	5.0	1.0	1.89	0.825	1.182	1.972
State Government should Continue to promote ecotourism development	59.0	36.0	3.0	2.0	0.0	1.48	0.657	1.470	2.646



**Figure 1: Local Community's views about Growth of Tourism.**

Local community's views about growth of tourism in and around the park were analyzed, and it is observed from the Table 1 and Figure 1 that 43% of the respondents have strongly agreed with the statement that world heritage designation has helped in the growth of tourism in and around the park; also 41% respondents have agreed; whereas 9% respondents have neutral opinion; however 7% of the respondent have disagreed opinion and no respondent have strongly disagreed opinion. It is revealed from the Table 1 that mean score to the responses relating to the growth of tourism in and around the park is on higher side of the mean standard score from 1.80 in standard score 3 in five point scale. This reflects that their opinion is distributed towards from agree to strongly disagree side. The standard deviation 0.874 is on lower side of mean

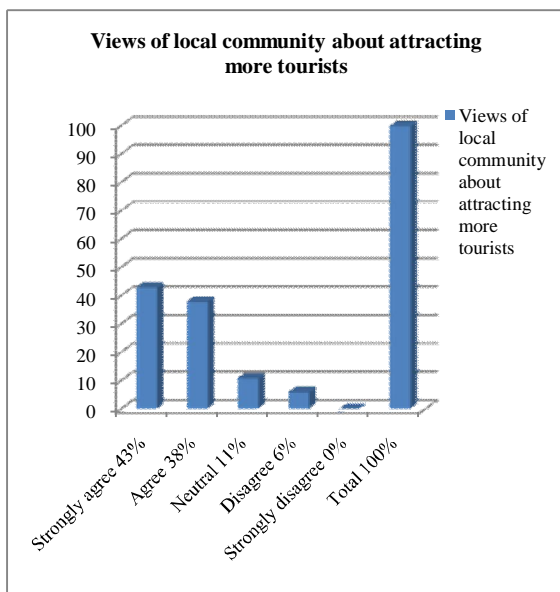
score and the value of Skewness has turned out to be affirmative indicating that variation has been scattered towards the lower side of the mean. The positive value of Skewness 1.040 denotes the disparity in the responses tends to fall below average. The calculated value of kurtosis 0.511 shows the distribution more towards lower of average. It leads to the conclusion that majority respondents have agreed opinion that world heritage designation has helped in the growth of tourism in and around the park.



**Figure 2: Local community's views about Improvement of International Reputation.**

Local community's views about improvement of international reputation of the park were analyzed, and it is observed from the Table 1 and Figure 2 that 48%

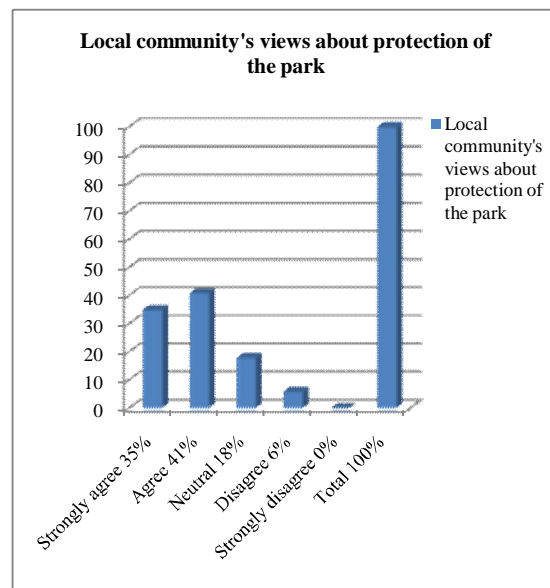
of the respondents have strongly agreed with the statement that world heritage designation to GHNP has helped in the improvement of international reputation of the park; also 35% respondents have agreed; whereas 11% respondents have neutral opinion; however 6% of the respondent have disagreed opinion and no respondent have strongly disagreed opinion. It is revealed from the Table 1 that mean score to the responses relating to the improvement of international reputation of the park is on higher side of the mean standard score from 1.75 in standard score 3 in five point scale. This reflects that their opinion is distributed towards from agree to strongly disagree side. The standard deviation 0.878 is on lower side of mean score and the value of Skewness has turned out to be affirmative indicating that variation has been scattered towards the lower side of the mean. The positive value of Skewness 1.051 denotes the disparity in the responses tends to fall below average. The calculated value of kurtosis 0.365 shows the distribution more towards lower of average. It leads to the conclusion that majority respondents have agreed opinion that world heritage designation to GHNP has helped in the improvement of international reputation of the park.



**Figure 3: Local Community's views about Attracting More Tourists.**

Respondents from local community were asked about the weather world heritage designation have helped to attract more tourists to the Great Himalayan National park, and it is observed from the Table 1 and Figure 3 that 43% of the respondents have strongly agreed with the statement that the world heritage designation have helped to attract more tourists to the Great Himalayan National park; also 38% respondents have agreed;

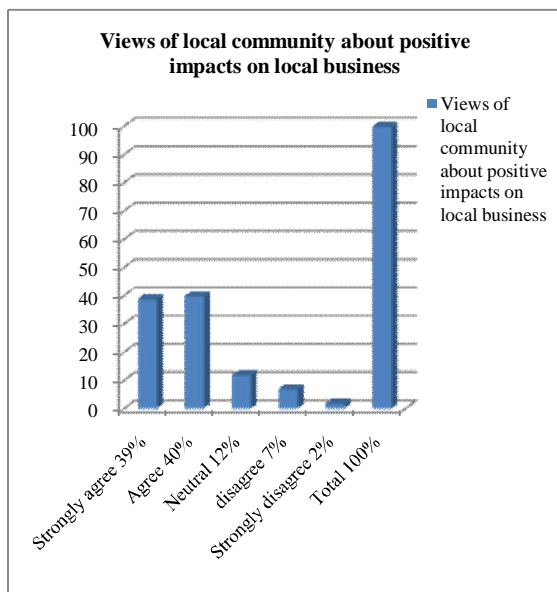
whereas 11% respondents have neutral opinion; however 6% respondents have disagreed opinion and no respondent have strongly disagreed opinion. It is observed from the Table 1 that mean score to the responses relating to the attracting more tourists is on higher side of the mean standard score from 1.84 in standard score 3 in five point scale. This reflects that their opinion is distributed towards from agree to strongly disagree side. The standard deviation 0.916 is on lower side of mean score and the value of Skewness has turned out to be affirmative indicating that variation has been scattered towards the lower side of the mean. The positive value of Skewness 0.958 denotes the disparity in the responses tends to fall below average. The calculated value of kurtosis 0.128 shows the distribution more towards lower of average. It leads to the conclusion that majority respondents have agreed opinion that world heritage designation have helped to attract more tourists to the Great Himalayan National park.



**Figure 4: Local Community's views about Protection of the Park.**

Respondents from local community were asked about the protection of Great Himalayan National park, and it is observed from the Table 1 and Figure 4 that 35% of the respondents have strongly agreed with the statement that the world heritage designation have helped in the protection of the park; also 41% respondents have agreed; whereas 18% respondents have neutral opinion; however 6% respondents have disagreed opinion and no respondent have strongly disagreed opinion. It is observed from the Table 1 that mean score to the responses relating to the protection of the park is on higher side of the mean standard

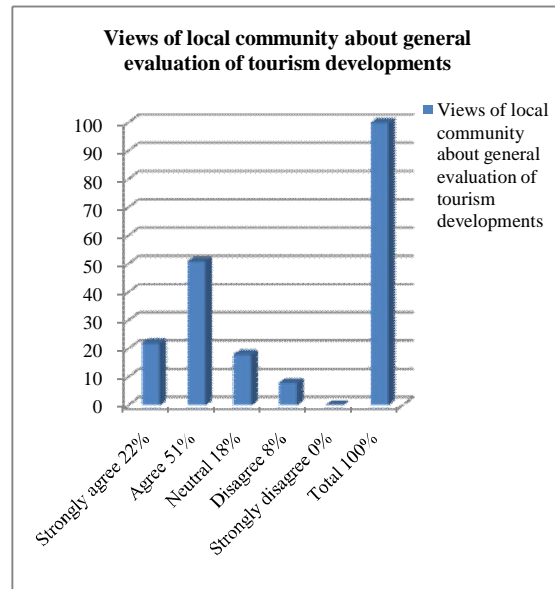
score from 1.95 in standard score 3 in five point scale. This reflects that their opinion is distributed towards from agree to strongly disagree side. The standard deviation 0.878 is on lower side of mean score and the value of Skewness has turned out to be affirmative indicating that variation has been scattered towards the lower side of the mean. The positive value of Skewness 0.637 denotes the disparity in the responses tends to fall below average. The calculated value of kurtosis 0.324 shows the distribution more towards lower of average. It leads to the conclusion that majority respondents have agreed opinion that world heritage designation have helped in the protection of the park.



**Figure 5: Local Community's views about Positive Impacts on Local Business.**

Local community's views about positive impacts on local business were analyzed, and it is observed from the Table 1 and Figure 5 that 39% of the respondents have strongly agreed with the statement that world heritage designation to GHNP has positive impacts on local business; also 40% respondents have agreed; whereas 12% respondents have neutral opinion; however 7% of the respondent have disagreed opinion and 2% respondent have strongly disagreed opinion. It is revealed from the Table 1 that mean score to the responses relating to the positive impacts on local business in and around the park is on higher side of the mean standard score from 1.93 in standard score 3 in five point scale. This reflects that their opinion is distributed towards from agree to strongly disagree side. The standard deviation 0.985 is on lower side of mean score and the value of Skewness has turned out to be affirmative indicating that variation has been scattered

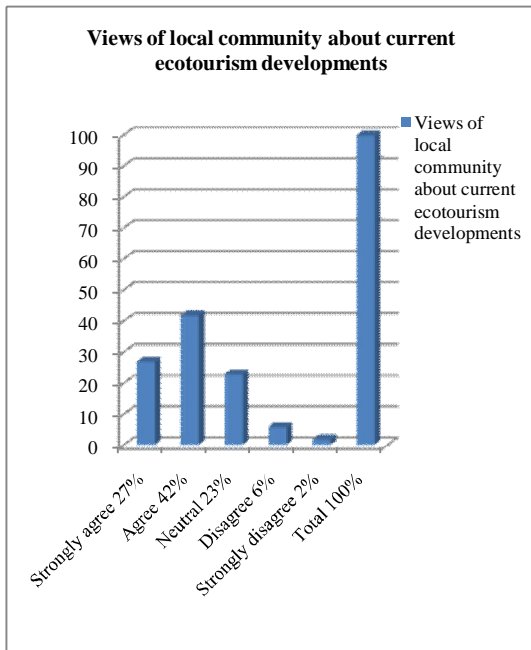
towards the lower side of the mean. The positive value of Skewness 1.098 denotes the disparity in the responses tends to fall below average. The calculated value of kurtosis 0.820 shows the distribution more towards lower of average. It leads to the conclusion that majority respondents have agreed opinion that world heritage designation to GHNP has positive impacts on local business.



**Figure 6: Local Community's views about General Evaluation of Tourism Developments.**

Local community's views about general evaluation of tourism developments were analyzed, and it is observed from the Table 1 and Figure 6 that 22% of the respondents have strongly agreed with the statement that general evaluation of tourism developments at GHNP region is satisfactory; also 51% respondents have agreed; whereas 18% respondents have neutral opinion; however 8% of the respondent have disagreed opinion and no respondent have strongly disagreed opinion. It is revealed from the Table 1 that mean score to the responses relating to the general evaluation of tourism developments is on higher side of the mean standard score from 2.15 in standard score 3 in five point scale. This reflects that their opinion is distributed towards from agree to strongly disagree side. The standard deviation 0.890 is on lower side of mean score and the value of Skewness has turned out to be affirmative indicating that variation has been scattered towards the lower side of the mean. The positive value of Skewness 0.739 denotes the disparity in the responses tends to fall below average. The calculated value of kurtosis 0.387 shows the distribution more towards lower of average. It leads to the conclusion that majority respondents have agreed

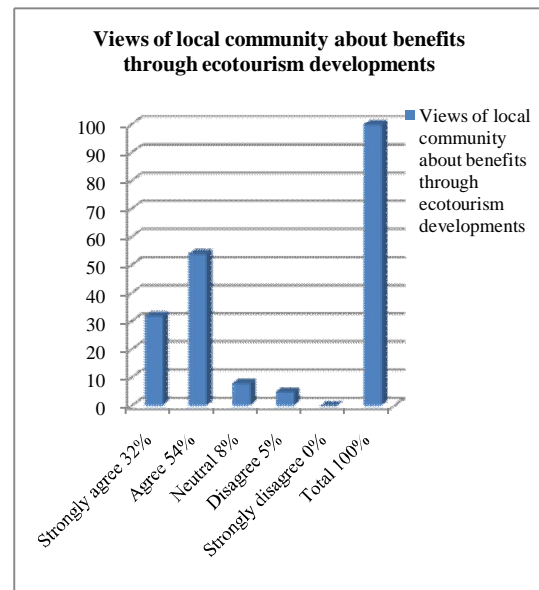
opinion that general evaluation of tourism developments at GHNP region is satisfactory.



**Figure 7: Local Community's views about Current Ecotourism Developments.**

Respondents from local community were asked about the current ecotourism developments in Great Himalayan National park, and it is observed from the Table 1 and Figure 7 that 27% of the respondents have strongly agreed with the statement that current ecotourism developments in the study area are satisfactory; also 42% respondents have agreed; whereas 23% respondents have neutral opinion; however 6% respondents have disagreed opinion and 2% respondent have strongly disagreed opinion. It is observed from the Table 1 that mean score to the responses relating to the current ecotourism developments in the park is on higher side of the mean standard score from 2.14 in standard score 3 in five point scale.

This reflects that their opinion is distributed towards from agree to strongly disagree side. The standard deviation 0.951 is on lower side of mean score and the value of Skewness has turned out to be affirmative indicating that variation has been scattered towards the lower side of the mean. The positive value of Skewness 0.707 denotes the disparity in the responses tends to fall below average. The calculated value of kurtosis 0.291 shows the distribution more towards lower of average. It leads to the conclusion that majority respondents have agreed opinion that current ecotourism developments in the study area are satisfactory.

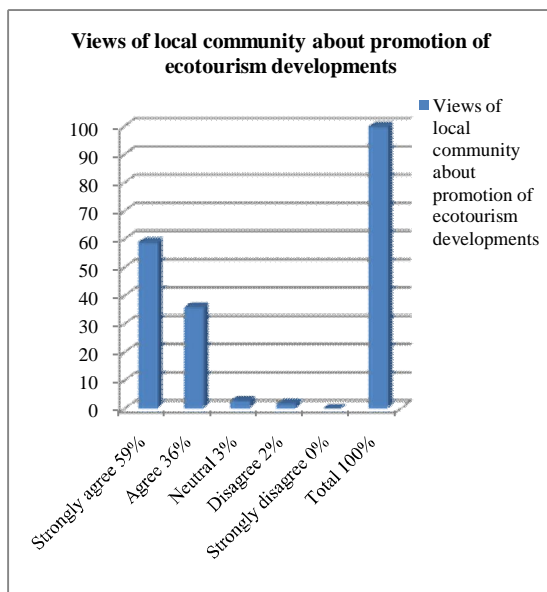


**Figure 8: Local Community's views about Benefits through Ecotourism Developments.**

Respondents from local community were asked about the benefits through ecotourism developments in and around Great Himalayan National park, and it is observed from the Table 1 and Figure 8 that 32% of the respondents have strongly agreed with the statement that there are more benefits through ecotourism developments in the study area; also 54% respondents have agreed; whereas 8% respondents have neutral opinion; however 5% respondents have disagreed opinion and no respondent have strongly disagreed opinion. It is observed from the Table 1 that mean score to the responses relating to the benefits through ecotourism developments in the study area is on higher side of the mean standard score from 1.89 in standard score 3 in five point scale. This reflects that their opinion is distributed towards from agree to strongly disagree side. The standard deviation 0.825 is on lower side of mean score and the value of Skewness has turned out to be affirmative indicating that variation has been scattered towards the lower side of the mean. The positive value of Skewness 1.470 denotes the disparity in the responses tends to fall below average. The calculated value of kurtosis 1.972 shows the distribution more towards higher of average. It leads to the conclusion that majority respondents have agreed opinion that there are more benefits through ecotourism developments.

Respondents from local community were asked about the promotion of ecotourism developments, and it is observed from the Table 1 and Figure 9 that 59% of the respondents have strongly agreed with the statement that state Government should continue to pro-

mote ecotourism developments; also 36% respondents have agreed; whereas 13% respondents have neutral opinion; however 2% respondents have disagreed opinion and no respondent have strongly disagreed opinion. It is observed from the Table 1 that mean score to the responses relating to the promotion of ecotourism developments is on higher side of the mean standard score from 1.48 in standard score 3 in five point scale. This reflects that their opinion is distributed towards from agree to strongly disagree side. The standard deviation 0.657 is on lower side of mean score and the value of Skewness has turned out to be affirmative indicating that variation has been scattered towards the lower side of the mean. The positive value of Skewness 1.470 denotes the disparity in the responses tends to fall below average. The calculated value of kurtosis 2.646 shows the distribution more towards higher of average. It leads to the conclusion that majority respondents have agreed opinion that state Government should continue to promote ecotourism developments.



**Figure 9: Local Community's views about Promotion of Ecotourism Developments.**

**CONCLUSION:** The Great Himalayan National Park is one of the pioneer ecotourism destinations in Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh. It was constituted in 1984 and was formally declared a national park in 1999. The Great Himalayan National Park had been declared as UNESCO world heritage site in June,

2014 due to availability of distinct biodiversity, flora and fauna in the area. It is observed that it is a perfect place for ecotourism.

It is observed from the study that World Heritage Designation to Great Himalayan National Park has worked as a blessing to the destination. Majority of respondents from different gender, age groups, marital status, educational qualifications and income have agreed opinion that Ecotourism developments in the Great Himalayan National Park are satisfactory. It is concluded that World Heritage Designation to Great Himalayan National Park have a lot of positive impacts on the ecotourism growth in the study area. It is also observed from the study that although ecotourism is growing in the study area and people from local community are satisfied with the ecotourism developments, but government needs to work on improving the basic amenities like roads, drinking water, electricity etc. as the number of tourists are increasing day by day.

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