

Micro and Small Enterprises Engagement in Pro-poor Tourism: Challenges and Solutions

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Abstract

Pro-poor Tourism (PPT) emphasizes sustainability and development issues, particularly the benefits that can be drawn from these. Again, Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) in tourism have been documented as a remarkable source of employment, and generator of income, which significantly impact the livelihoods of underprivileged local communities. Even though PPT is documented as a substantial approach towards reducing poverty, inadequate attention has been given to understanding the relationship between poor local communities and their challenges while being engaged in tourism MSEs. This study, therefore, investigates the challenges surmounting the engagement of local communities in tourism MSEs to implement the PPT initiative in the context of Bangladesh. A qualitative approach was adopted to explore the comprehensive information of the study. A total of 25 interviews were conducted to collect data using a semi-structured in-depth interview. The findings yielded insights into the challenges faced by poor communities and the process of how to overcome these challenges, such as initial capital investment, deficiency of technical skills and tourism knowledge, administrative exploitation, conservativeness of the society, expensive living cost, and the threats posed by seasonality. The implications for managerial practice and local communities are also discussed.

Keywords: Pro-poor Tourism, Micro and Small Enterprises, Challenges, Solutions, Local Community.

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Introduction

Despite the leading purpose of the PPT approach is to enhance the net benefits to the indigent community, numerous challenges exist in advancing the PPT approach. These challenges include access of the poor to the market, commercial feasibility, indispensable support from different stakeholders, and the challenges facing the execution of the approach (C. Ashley, Roe, Goodwin, Environment, & Development, 2001). Over the past few decades, attention to pro-poor tourism (Hall, 2007) has been predominantly enhanced in the light of poverty alleviation attempts, with a comprehensive effort from the respective stakeholders of the tourism industry, by minimizing the deleterious impacts of tourism (Briedenhann, 2011); Shah, Gupta, and Boyd (2000) report that the negative impacts of tourism have to be minimized with proper initiatives, which includes mitigating the increases in living costs at tourism destinations, curbing deforestation for infrastructural development, and prevention of drug-related violence, prostitution, cultural dilapidation, snatching, and robberies. They argued that a small tourism enterprise must impact the indigenous inhabitant in a sustainable way. However, it is difficult to find the expected relationships between different enterprises in tourism and the indigent community, especially in developing nations, because of inequality in social and economic perspectives (Fu, Okumus, Wu, & Köseoglu, 2019; Gascón, 2015). Meanwhile, these aspects of inequality create a very intricate setting for the engagement of the impoverished inhabitants in the tourism businesses (Mowforth & Munt, 1998).

In addition, initial capital is highly essential to set up a tourism enterprise. This is a significant challenge for indigent people to surmount, as financial limitations for expanding businesses are considered a common constraint in most tourism destinations (P. Chowdhury, 2012; Page et al., 2017). Likewise, political pressure complicates the participation of members of the indigent community in tourism-related activities, thereby limiting the implementation of PPT (C. Ashley et al., 2001; M. K. Hasan & Neela, 2021; F. Islam & Carlsen, 2016). In implementing a pro-poor tourism approach, it is imperative to overcome the challenges associated with indigent communities and required to create business linkages so that they can get involved in tourism enterprises (Weerasinghe & Madurapperuma, 2020). However, scholars have paid inadequate attention to supporting and linking micro and small enterprises with different potential economic sectors and indigent communities (Zhao, 2009). Where relevant skills and adequate capacities are required to engage in tourism MSEs, these are significantly absent in local indigent communities. Only a few studies have been carried out on poverty alleviation perspectives (Gascón, 2015; Manwa & Manwa, 2014; Wasudawan & Ab-Rahim). Hence, it is pertinent to study tourism MSEs to help indigent communities find their sources of livelihood and advance the PPT initiative. Rationally, the current study aims to understand the barriers in engaging micro and small enterprises and identify its solutions in pro-poor tourism in the context of Bangladesh by addressing the following research questions. These would also be the main contributions of this study:

1. What are the challenges faced by poor communities which prevent them from getting involved in tourism MSEs?
2. How can these challenges in implementing the PPT initiative in Bangladesh be mitigated?

Research Background

Pro-poor Tourism (PPT)

The term pro-poor tourism was conceptualized in 1999 by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) in a report that aimed to improve the livelihoods of the poor through tourism (Briedenhann, 2011; Harrison, 2021; Saito, Ruhanen, Noakes, & Axelsen, 2018). Since the late 1990s, PPT approaches have been promoted by only a small cohort of academics and applied by many aid agencies emphasizing the linking of the poor with tourism enterprises (Espiner, Stewart, & Lama, 2017; Harrison, 2021).

Pro-poor Tourism is a form of tourism that produces net benefits for the poor by inspiring local involvement, partnerships, and procurement (Espiner et al., 2017; Gascón, 2015). It seeks to confirm that tourism progression contributes effectively to poverty reduction (Bakker & Messerli,

2017). In the 1970s, attention in tourism has been growing as a tool for development, particularly with growing awareness of its significance in alleviating poverty towards the end of the 1990s (Gascón, 2015). Since then, it has been rapidly acknowledged as 'pro-poor tourism' under the broader perspective of sustainable tourism (Harrison, 2021; Saayman & Giampiccoli, 2016). PPT strategies seek to unlock opportunities for the poor in terms of economic achievement, livelihood welfares, and participation in decision-making, apart from being a product or sector of tourism (C. Ashley et al., 2001; Gascón, 2015; Saito et al., 2018).

Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) in Tourism

Micro and small enterprises (MSEs) can be delineated in accordance with staff headcount and turnover or total annual balance-sheet, which significantly vary among countries, based on economic status (Brouder & Eriksson, 2013; Cuervo & Cheong, 2017; Page et al., 2017). Similarly, various measures can be used to identify the size of a tourism business viz. number of employees, total salaries and wages paid in a specific period, amount of capital, sales revenues, number of rooms/beds, provision of facilities like conference, banqueting, and restaurant halls and their capacities, the existence of ancillary services like swimming pool, car parking, shops, etc. All these can be listed as significant bases for classification. Among them, the number of employees is the most widely accepted and used measure (Akbaba, 2012).

Micro and small tourism businesses are well known and accepted globally as a major contributor to economic development, job creation, innovation, income generation, and tourism development (Akbaba, 2012; Dias, Patuleia, Silva, Estêvão, & González-Rodríguez, 2021; K. Hasan, Abdullah, Islam, & Neela, 2020). In the age of globalization, the role of tourism related to micro and small enterprises in poverty alleviation is significant (Borden, Coles, & Shaw, 2017; Scheyvens & Russell, 2012). It is a fact that most of the visitors rely on tourism enterprises, preferably with the smaller business structure, as these provide customized, quality tourism services. Hence, if micro and small enterprises of a region operate their businesses collectively for connecting the poor into their businesses, the comprehensive impact of such linkages could be substantial.

Tourism MSEs and PPT Progression in Bangladesh

An extensive review of the extant literature indicates that tourism can promote pro-poor economic growth by enhancing the diversification of local economies and creating opportunities for micro and small enterprises by offering customized services to the visitors at the destinations like food, crafts, and guide facilities (Caroline Ashley, Boyd, & Goodwin, 2000; Borden et al., 2017; Scheyvens & Russell, 2012; Zhao, 2009). Similarly, tourism enterprises like hotels and motels can offer a market for employment and products of the micro and small enterprises. Akbaba (2012) clarifies that the tourism industry comprises various businesses that provide different services for tourists. It includes businesses such as transportation, accommodation, tour operators, travel agents, tourism promotion and advertisement, insurance and finance, food and beverages, entertainment, nature parks, zoos, special event organizers, translation and guiding services, trading, and so on and so forth. Furthermore, the tourism business includes the various functions that offer tourists services, such as accommodation (i.e., homestays, budget hotels, boutique hotels) and the catering sector; transportation; food and beverages; entertainment; and other necessities (D. Chowdhury, Al-Alawi, Syzdykova, & Abubakirova, 2021; Sajilan, Tehseen, & Adeyinka-Ojo, 2016). Tourism enterprises in Bangladesh are generally managed by their proprietors with full control of the business in terms of decision-making and implementation as regards the firm's activities. A small tourism business at Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh usually provides employment to the local people, inspires economic diversity and constancy, propels the region's progress, and helps enhance social advancement by contributing to poverty alleviation (M. K. Hasan, S. K. Abdullah, T. Y. Lew, & M. F. Islam, 2019b; M. F. Islam, 2012). Hence, it is more beneficial for local suppliers in the tourism industry when local people own traditional tourism enterprises. This indicates that there is a higher likelihood of the purchase of local supplies, which eventually enhances the participation of the poor (Bakker & Messerli, 2017; Briedenhann, 2011; Saito et al., 2018; Shah et al., 2000). However, the tendency of female participation in tourism MSEs in Bangladesh is minimal because of the prevailing social aspects in terms of their legal rights, education, economic independence, empowerment, and equality as well as the roles the woman plays in her family and society (M. K. Hasan, S. K. Abdullah, T. Y. Lew, & M. F. Islam, 2019c; F. Islam & Carlsen, 2016; Paul, Sarkar, & Naznin). Besides, participation by the poor community in tourism MSEs in

Bangladesh is often viewed as a challenge to them, since infrastructural access is limited and the cost of living is high at these destinations (F. Islam & Carlsen, 2012). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the inevitable challenges faced by the indigent inhabitants to participate in tourism MSEs to mitigate the unfavourable issues in view of the enhancement of PPT.

Research Design

The qualitative case study has been chosen as the research approach for this study which is widely used in tourism research and education (Mao, 2015; Page et al., 2017; Tahir, Khilji, Hussain, & Hussain, 2016). A set of semi-structured in-depth interviews was undertaken to collect primary data relating to MSEs in tourism from the different stakeholders at this destination. As the researcher was unfamiliar with the participants prior to undertaking this research, the snowball sampling procedure was used (Minichiello, Aroni, & Hays, 2008; Rice, Alquist, Penuliar, Donato, & Price, 2021). Formal letters were sent to the participants outlining the main aim of the study to obtain their approval before arranging the interviews, and each participant was contacted over mobile phone at least one day prior to the interview. Finally, a total of 25 interviews were conducted with tourism stakeholders in relevant MSEs, at which point the interview data reached a saturation stage. All the interviewed transcripts were used for the final analysis.

Data Analysis

In this study, computer assisted qualitative data analysis software NVivo12 has been applied for analyzing the collected in-depth interviews. Moreover, the researcher used own analytic rationale for analysis and interpretation of collected interviews (Rice et al., 2021) for responding the research questions and meeting the research objectives. Admonitory steps were adopted to ensure trustworthy coding and interpretation of data in accordance with the clear transcripts. The transcripts were then sent to the participants for cross-checking after the interviews to ensure the accuracy of their statements.

Findings and Discussions

The main objective of this study was to understand the challenges confronting the engagement of MSEs and identify the solutions in PPT in the context of Cox's Bazar beach in Bangladesh. The study found that the MSEs are commonly operated by the indigent local community at the study destination. MSEs in tourism-related ventures play a vital role in creating livelihood opportunities for the poor in comparison with large-scale tourism organizations (M. K. Hasan, S. K. Abdullah, T.-Y. Lew, & M. F. Islam, 2019a; Scheyvens & Russell, 2012). Large-scale tourism organizations prefer well-educated employees who are capable of diversified aspects and simultaneously limit opportunities for the poor who are less educated, uneducated and/or incompetent. Nevertheless, without increasing the benefits for the poor through tourism activities, the PPT approach cannot be implemented (Espiner et al., 2017). Tourism MSEs serve as the absolute platform for the indigent community to explore the opportunities underlying this destination as it is a less formal type of business and can be effortlessly initiated. However, several challenges need to be complied with and surmounted for involving MSEs in tourism to ensure PPT by the local community at this destination. Based on the research findings, the main challenges related to the tourism MSEs at this destination are clarified in the following sections along with comparative discussions with respect to the existing evidence of this area of literature.

Lack of Initial Capital and Financing Support

The initial crisis of capital and subsequent financing support for the tourism MSEs are revealed as crucial challenges for the indigent community of Cox's Bazar. Though it does not require a large amount of money to set up an MSE in the tourism sector, these cannot proceed without a minimum amount of investment. The findings show that local people struggle against poverty; hence, initial capital collection is hardly possible for these members of the community. According to the government report of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics Monetary, as this is a poverty-

stricken area of Bangladesh, it is beyond their financial capability to manage initial capital for launching a business. Consequently, they also seek engagement options in the tourism MSEs, either as a salesman or initially as a worker. Afterwards, they gain more experience and can set up tourism businesses for themselves. A tourism MSE operator at Cox's Bazar said:

To start such a business, we need a minimal amount of money as capital. However, I did not have sufficient capital for this business. Initially, in 2007, I was involved in an MSE as a salesperson. My primary motivation was to do something independently, thus, I used to save money from my little income. Even though it was not easy for me, I did it—and now, this is my outlet. (Interview No. 01)

On the other hand, financial support is mandatory to operate a business smoothly regardless of the size of the enterprise. Proper financing sources for the entrepreneur propel the growth of the enterprise over time. From the field visits, it was perceived that the entrepreneurs would start a business with the aim to provide services to tourists at this destination after a long struggle. Consequently, they realize the deficiency of financing for shaping the business in accordance with tourists' requirements. Since these MSE owners are poor and have limited capabilities, and lack the backing of financial institutions, NGOs or governmental organizations usually differ to approve loans for their businesses. Extracts from several participants' statements clearly illustrate this:

When a tourism MSE owner intends to expand the business, it is required to have loan facility which is hardly possible for us because of high interest rates. If we get low interest loans from the government, it would be positive for tourism development. (Interview No. 15 & 17)

The findings from the statements of the key participants revealed that the inadequate initial capital and financing support for the poor community are critical challenges in tourism MSEs while implementing the PPT approach at this destination. This finding is quite similar to the existing literature, which agrees that these factors are a great challenge for small tourism businesses (Dias et al., 2021; Thomas, Shaw, & Page, 2011; Zhao, 2009). This study confirms that to comply with the changing demands of the tourists, more amounts of money have to be invested, which leads to more financing sources being sought by the MSE-owners (Gascón, 2015). Hence, inadequate initial capital and financing sources for the tourism MSEs are on-going challenges for the local indigent community at this destination.

To mitigate this crucial problem for the MSEs in tourism, government-owned financial institutions should play the pivotal role. These institutions might provide micro loans with a minimum interest rate to the poor entrepreneurs in order to enhance the PPT initiative. Alongside governmental initiatives, private sector players and existing NGOs can provide more support in this respect by minimizing the rate of interest of the loans they provide, considering the urgency of the development of PPT at the Cox's Bazar beach destination.

Lack of Technical Skills and Knowledge of Tourism

The lack of technical skills and knowledge of tourism has been revealed to be a crucial challenge for the indigent community of Cox's Bazar for getting involved in tourism MSEs. A multi-cultural community lives in the Cox's Bazar region of Bangladesh, including tribal communities; most of them struggle against poverty. These impoverished communities lag well behind in terms of fulfilling their fundamental needs. It was observed that provisions of education for children were complicated for them and beyond their financial capability. Consequently, the indigent inhabitants of this destination remain illiterate and do not have proper knowledge of tourism, which might prove crucial for reducing poverty. Vocational education is quite suitable for them as it can place them in the mainstream of society. Unfortunately, there is minimal scope for technical education in this area too. Since the local community do not have skills in maintaining a particular MSE, they have to work as subordinate employees in the MSEs for extended periods. The views of tourism MSE-owners are presented in the following statement:

I have no academic certificates and formal technical knowledge as my parents did not have the financial capacity to send me to school. From my childhood, I started to work as a hotel boy at this beach destination and tried to learn the business. Eventually, I left that job and started out in the conch products business as a hawker. However, very few government agencies, NGOs, and/or voluntary tourism organizations offer skill development programmes at this beach

destination. These are important for the local poor but rather insufficient, given the demand. (Interview No. 09, 12)

The findings from the participants' interviews revealed that the limited scope of technical and vocational education hindered the poor from participating in tourism activities, which makes the PPT approach questionable. This finding also corroborates the existing literature sources; the lack of education is a challenge for the indigent to get involved in the tourism business since it is necessary to deal with diversified tourists at this destination (Briedenhann, 2011; M. K. Hasan, Ismail, & Islam, 2017; F. Islam & Carlsen, 2016). Meanwhile, Misango and Ongiti (2013) emphasized human resource development for reducing poverty by considering the advancement of tourism sector so that it benefits the poor community directly and indirectly. Capacity building of human beings is necessary to ensure the PPT approach at any cost (Gascón, 2015; Weerasinghe & Madurapperuma, 2020; Zhao, 2009) stated that the lack of education and training was a significant challenge for the indigent when they wanted to be involved in the tourism sector. This study, therefore, perceived those inadequate technical skills and knowledge of tourism on the part of the poor community prevails because of a lack of vocational training opportunities. This is a significant challenge when they wish to be engaged in tourism MSEs at this destination.

To overcome this obstacle, it is necessary to develop professional training opportunities for the indigent inhabitants who are engaged in tourism MSEs at this destination. Awareness development programmes about the benefits of tourism should be organised among the poor communities through the proper training system. Principally, the NGOs should extend more cooperation since they work at the grassroots level and can disseminate awareness. In addition, the government can establish more human resource development institutions focusing on the tourism-related businesses with a view to propelling the development of PPT forward at this destination.

Political and Administrative Exploitation

From the interviews, it was clear that political and administrative exploitation is a common phenomenon in Bangladesh. This is one of the most crucial challenges for the indigent community to operate their businesses. It is also prevalent in various forms at the Cox's Bazar beach destination. Tourism MSE operators at this destination are often victimized as the mentality of the locally influential political leaders is to dominate them. These leaders were found to force the MSE owners to pay subscription fees to run their businesses and compel the business operators to obey their instructions. Such illegal demands by the political leaders adversely affect the businesses, ruining the hopes of the poor. Several tourism MSE operators at the Cox's Bazar beach said:

Compulsory subscription must be paid by the poor MSE owners during the celebration of different National Days of Bangladesh, which is something shocking for the community. Though the tourist police are present here, they cannot take steps against them because of political issues. Government should effectively monitor this to stop such practices. (Interview No. 02, 06 & 17)

Moreover, it is evident from the participants' statements that there are many illegal business syndicates that are controlled by the members of the political parties and influential businessmen. As a result, the access of the poor community to the tourism MSEs turns passive, a factor which is very crucial when the PPT approach is implemented at this destination. Every tender offer related to MSEs in tourism in this beach destination is won through deception by these influential political leaders with the collusion of the government agencies, which limits the indigent people's incomes and accessibility. Eventually, the indigent community is bound to work under their projects with a nominal payment despite their potentials and hardships.

Likewise, administrative corruption at Cox's Bazar beach destination has significantly discouraged the indigent community from getting involved in the tourism businesses. It was found that it is mandatory to obtain approval from the authorities to operate any business at this beach destination. It is also necessary to renew the licence of the business annually by paying the fees and taxes imposed by the government. Although this process seems straightforward, this study found that an illegal syndicate in the administrative authority makes it problematic for the poor community, as they are neither aware nor knowledgeable. Some key informants at Cox's Bazar said:

Administrative corruption is severe at this destination. For example, if a photographer wants to get permission to do his work, he may have to pay BDT 25,000, whereas the government only charges BDT 5,000 as a fee. This extra money will have to be paid as a bribe to the syndicate. (Interview No. 4, 7, 17 & 19)

Findings revealed that the local indigent community is compelled to compromise with political and administrative authorities to get approval for their businesses paying extra charges. Although extant literature sources recognized political exploitation as a critical challenge for the poor community to be involved in tourism enterprises (C. Ashley et al., 2001; P. Chowdhury, 2012; F. Islam & Carlsen, 2016), administrative exploitation towards the poor is yet to be investigated. In this respect, administrative exploitation and abuses yielded a significant new finding for the PPT approach that hinders the participation of the poor local community at this destination. However, to implement PPT through tourism MSEs, there is no alternative other than including members of the local indigent community by mitigating social and political exploitation (Caroline Ashley & Roe, 2002). This study confirms that political and administrative affiliations are highly required to create scope for the poor, which draws them into the mainstream and enhances the PPT approach at Cox's Bazar beach destination. This finding is considered a unique contribution of this study.

To ameliorate this severe problem, it is necessary to ensure transparency and honesty in all aspects relating to tourism MSEs at Cox's Bazar. Local government should be more stringent in maintaining law and order in the country so that the poor can operate their businesses smoothly.

Inadequate Infrastructure Development

From the interviews and field visits, it was apparent that inadequate infrastructure is a great challenge for the local indigent community while operating tourism MSEs at the Cox's Bazar beach destination. At this destination, the basic communication systems, constructions, electricity, gas supplies, and pure water supplies are beyond their reach, but these are highly necessary to operate an MSE in the tourism-related business. Unfortunately, at the Cox's Bazar beach destination, these facilities are available only to the large-scale tourism organizations via private investment since they have greater financial capability. However, it was observed that the indigent community that operates such tourism MSEs must perforce suffer from these deficiencies, which impacts negatively on their business. Moreover, MSEs in the tourism sector at Cox's Bazar are fragmented, which is not favourable for the enterprises as well as for the tourists' accessibility. Notably, transportation is quite a problem for tourism stakeholders to comfortably reach the beach. Although the railway is a popular transportation mode in terms of safety, time, and cost, Cox's Bazar is still out of the rail network, which causes difficulties for the indigent community to participate in tourism MSEs at their locality. Key informants stated that insufficient infrastructure at this destination limiting the participation of the poor in tourism MSEs:

and we have minimal permanent shops to operate businesses compared to the number of MSEs. Most of us can only do business during daylight hours. There is a need to build a categorized market. We are out of water supplies and sanitation facilities, which are primary requirements for any long-term business. (Interview No. 14)

The findings revealed that the lack of infrastructural development is an on-going challenge for the poor community in operating their businesses at this destination whereby the local indigent people become unemployed. This finding is similar to the current literature sources, since insufficient infrastructure is mentioned as the reason why people remain below the poverty line (Kabeer, 2006). Due to the unavailability of the necessary infrastructure, the indigent community is compelled to leave their urban places, even though this area offers more significant employment opportunities in terms of tourism MSEs (M. F. Islam, 2012); Kabeer (2006). also stated that business opportunities are available in the urban areas, but the poor are excluded because of inadequate infrastructure for their living needs as well as business outlets.

Although a few NGOs, along with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and government units, have endeavoured to boost the infrastructure at this destination, they still lag well behind to ensure accessibility to infrastructure for the poor at an acceptable level. Caroline Ashley, Roe, and Goodwin suggested that upgraded infrastructure encourages the poor to participate in tourism-related activities. The government should, therefore, invest more in developing infrastructure at this destination by prioritizing the accessibility of the poor community;

also, such infrastructure development should be very structured, as in other tourism-dependent countries.

Conservative Outlook of the Society

Another challenge for the local poor that was identified, and which curtails their involvement in tourism MSEs, is the conservative outlook of the society in Bangladesh. It was found that people tend to follow strict rules in terms of lifestyle and behavioural patterns regardless of the social class at this destination. To some extent, Bangladesh is a male-dominated country, where women hardly involve in work outside of their residences. It is highly applicable in the case of poor communities, especially those who have no education. In tourism activities, there is great scope for women's involvement, which would be vital for reducing poverty at the destination and conducive for implementing PPT (Misango & Ongiti, 2013) However, this study found that the social ties and the negligent attitude towards women in the society create obstacles for implementing the PPT approach through tourism MSEs at this destination. According to a tourist:

For women in our society, it is a challenge to be engaged in MSEs compared to men as we belong to a conservative society that is tied to religious beliefs. In our community, women are neglected, and we fear to work outside of the home. (Interview No. 23)

Again, when asked whether this mind-set should be changed for improving tourism and alleviating poverty, a local resident and travel agency service provider replied:

Of course, it should be changed. Our women should be supported to work independently. When men and women can work together, I think development will be no longer being far off. I believe there is a lack of counselling and understanding, which are the main barriers to women's direct involvement in tourism. (Interview No. 05)

On the other hand, at Cox's Bazar, there are no bars or pubs, massage parlours, or reflexology outlets, except in a very few five-star hotels, because of social restrictions, although tourists are highly interested in such facilities. People come to this beach destination for purposes of entertainment. However, tourists have to remain satisfied only with the natural beauty of the beach, which is the outcome of a conservative approach on the part of the society. The views of a homestay owner at Cox's Bazar beach are presented in the following statement:

Tourists always look for hard liquor since they wish to enjoy themselves, and international tourists, in particular, get disappointed when they do not find such services. (Interview No. 10)

The findings revealed that the conservative outlook of the society in Bangladesh is a major challenge for women to get involved in work, thereby limiting the scope of MSEs in tourism. This finding agrees with literature sources that tourism MSEs is an effective option for women's involvement compared with other sectors of business (Caroline Ashley et al., 2000; Zhao, 2009). However, women are neglected and undervalued at work, although the government of Bangladesh emphasizes equal opportunities (M. K. Hasan & Neela, 2021; RAHAMAN, LUNA, MITE, ISLAM, & WAFIK, 2021). This research showed that the participation of women in the tourism MSEs enhances the PPT strategy by giving benefits to the poor.

On the other hand, allowing entertainment facilities, e.g., bars and massage parlours for tourists, is the need of the hour, as it creates job opportunities for the poor (Mao, 2015). Unfortunately, at Cox's Bazar beach destination, such opportunities are prohibited, which demotivates tourists and limits the scope of tourism MSEs. Consequently, the scope for the involvement of poor people in tourism MSEs is shrinking. Notably, domestic tourists prefer to visit countries like Malaysia, Thailand, Nepal, and Bhutan, because such facilities are available there. Similarly, the international tourist arrival rate remains static, and Bangladesh is losing an opportunity to earn foreign currency. This is a new finding and a new contribution to the PPT approach, showing the obstacles that are created, and prevent the poor from capitalizing on the benefits of the tourism MSEs. The existing literature focuses only on the employability of women in tourism enterprises. Still, it is yet to investigate the effects of the narrow viewpoint of the society that restrains their participation in

tourism activities (Misango & Ongiti, 2013; Wasudawan & Ab-Rahim; Zhao, 2009). This study found that the conservative approach of the society not only restrains women's participation in tourism MSEs but also shrinks the scope of a new business opportunity, which discourages tourists from visiting this destination. Thus, it is a significant challenge for the indigent community to get involved in tourism MSEs and in advancing the PPT approach.

To overcome this challenge, it is essential to enhance social respect towards each other and, at the same time, disseminate information about the necessity of the participation of both men and women in tourism enterprises. Besides, to attract international tourists to earn foreign currency, it is necessary to ensure the facilities they expect are available, even to a limited extent—after taking the culture of the country into consideration.

High Cost of Living

The high cost of living at this tourism destination is a vital challenge for the local poor to become involved in tourism MSEs. A micro-enterprise owner [Interview No. 04] stated that since there is a lack of infrastructural development in Cox's Bazar in terms of transportation, it is difficult to stay outside the tourism destination for both the tourism MSE owners and their employees. Apart from several benefits for this beach tourism destination, there are also some deleterious effects, such as higher living expenses compared to the non-tourism-based areas. One of the significant challenges for the local indigent community is to pay the higher prices of essential commodities at this destination. According to a resident allied with the voluntary tourism organization TOAC:

Owing to the tourism destination, our costs of living are high compared to other parts of Bangladesh. Regardless of the financial condition of a person, we must pay more for the same product, and accept the increased price. (Interview No. 17)

Despite numerous benefits from tourism destinations for the poor community, the high costs of essential commodities are a big challenge. However, when asked about the impacts of, and remedies for, high living costs for the poor owners of MSEs and associated people, a local participant commented:

Eventually, high living costs are sometimes considered a reason why poor people move out from this destination. If the authorities enforce a rule so that the local community can get products at a reasonable price, it would be lifesaving for us. (Interview No. 22)

The findings show that the high costs of living at Cox's Bazar are critical for the tourism MSE owners and employees as well, which leads to the exclusion of the poor from tourism activities. This finding appears to corroborate the current literature sources that the high living costs at the destination erodes the benefits of tourism for the poor (K. Hasan et al., 2020; M. F. Islam, 2012). This view is also consistent with Tao (2018) and Saito et al. (2018) that the increased prices of essential commodities at the tourism destination limits the perceived benefits for the poor and impedes the smooth implementation of the PPT approach. To implement the PPT initiative, it is vital to ensure net benefits for those members of the indigent community who are associated with tourism activities (Manwa & Manwa, 2014; Tolkach, Pearlman, & King, 2012). Simultaneously, this study found that the high cost of living to some extent demotivates the inclusion of the poor in tourism MSEs, particularly those who stay close to this beach location.

Threat of Seasonality

Though Bangladesh is a land of six seasons, owing to climate change, there have been four seasons in recent years. The monsoon is considered a critical challenge for the poor community at the Cox's Bazar beach destination, especially for those who are dependent on tourism activities. Interviewing a local transport service provider [Interview No. 19], this study found that during the monsoon period, tourists are reluctant to visit because of the inclement weather. There is a tourist attraction named Saint Martin's Island at the south of Cox's Bazar beach. It is accessible only via the sea. Unfortunately, in the rainy season, shipping services are closed because of the choppy sea waves, which significantly reduce the flow of tourists. A local resident [Interview No. 22] stated that most business outlets are compelled to close during the monsoon period from May to August every year. The poor community has to struggle during this period since its members are involved in tourism businesses and, to some extent, are unable to get involved in other types of

work. A local transport service provider stated:

We cannot be active round the year because of the monsoon period. Practically speaking, it is difficult for the poor MSE owners like me to survive, as tourists do not come. Meanwhile, we cannot pay our employees as our income falls sharply. The authorities should establish more exciting options for the tourists. (Interview No. 02)

Along with the effects of seasonality, natural calamities are expected because of the geographical location of this destination. Very often, the poor are affected by such incidents, since they are entirely dependent on tourism MSEs, either as owners or as workers. A participant said:

As they live in the coastal area, natural calamities are common, and the number of tourists drops significantly at this destination. Consequently, they become unemployed, which impacts their life, and they must live hand to mouth. (Interview No. 21)

The findings show that the threat of seasonality and natural calamities significantly appears as a challenge to the poor at Cox's Bazar. The people who are connected to various tourism MSEs are greatly affected for this reason at this destination. As these people cannot go in for other types of work during such periods, turn them unemployed in these crucial periods. This study has provided empirical evidence to show that the threat of seasonality discourages tourists from visiting this place during the monsoon. Consequently, the local indigent community is compelled to close their tourism MSEs and become unemployed. Though tourism MSEs appear to provide employment opportunities for the poor community at this destination (M. K. Hasan et al., 2019c; Hossain, Quaddus, & Shanka, 2013; F. Islam & Carlsen, 2016), seasonal effects demoralize them and, to some extent, force them to seek other livelihood options.

This finding appears to be a potential contribution to the PPT approach in terms of the challenges faced by the poor community involved in tourism MSEs at Cox's Bazar. The existing literature still cannot identify this crucial issue, which hinders the momentum of the PPT approach through tourism MSEs (Caroline Ashley & Roe, 2002; Thomas et al., 2011). Though these studies have highlighted the challenges faced by small tourism businesses, no research has been conducted yet to investigate the effects of the season that influence visits of tourists to this tourism destination. However, this study found that in the dull season (i.e., the monsoon period), tourists are reluctant to visit Cox's Bazar beach. This tendency on the part of the tourists impacts the local indigent communities, which are entirely dependent on MSEs. Hence, this is a challenge for the community associated with tourism MSEs at this destination.

To diminish this issue at this destination, it is necessary to establish more amusement opportunities for the tourists so that they can visit this destination round the year. Basically, Cox's Bazar still lacks entertainment facilities other than the world longest beach and Saint Martin's Island. If more attractive arrangements are ensured for the tourists, MSE owners could continue their business on a regular basis. Eventually, the threat posed by seasonality at this destination could be mitigated, and the development of PPT would then take place.

Conclusions, Implications, and Future Research Directions

This study intends to explore the challenges faced by tourism MSE owners and the indigent community, and their solution in the beach tourism sector at Cox's Bazar. The constraints confronting tourism MSE operators at this destination have a significant impact on the livelihoods of the local poor. From the managerial point of view, it is essential to have a transparent knowledge of why indigent communities are involved in tourism MSEs and the challenges they have to face in respect of this participation, so that the authorities can mitigate these challenges (Caroline Ashley & Roe, 2002; Borden et al., 2017). Since MSEs in tourism are viewed as a significant source of employment for the poor in Cox's Bazar, tourism stakeholders should pay full attention to support MSEs in view of the PPT approach. Hence, the findings of this study have significant implications for the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism, Bangladesh Parjatan (Tourism) Corporation (BPC), Bangladesh Tourism Board as well as the National Tourism Organization (NTO), Cox's Bazar Development Authority (CoxDA), NGOs, trade unions of tourism MSEs and

policymakers in Bangladesh dealing with tourism development.

It was found that these constraints have hampered the implementation of PPT through tourism MSEs at this destination. At the same time, the administrative exploitation, the conservative outlook of the society and the threat of seasonality have appeared as new observations, which are also considered superior contributions of this study. As such, it can be concluded that the challenges faced by the tourism MSEs should be taken into consideration by the relevant stakeholders to mitigate the crisis of the poor in view of the successful implementation of the PPT approach at this destination.

Apart from adding a new avenue to the existing PPT literature by capitalizing on tourism MSEs, this study offers an opportunity to extend the scope for future research. As this study only focused on the engagement of tourism MSEs in the PPT approach, future research could adopt all tourism activities that are linked to poor local communities, including the large-scale tourism enterprises. Besides, future researchers can endeavour to apply the quantitative approach to explore the significance of the tourism MSEs and stakeholders' supporting strategy to advance the PPT approach, which yields net benefits for the local indigent community at the destination being studied.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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