

A Comparative Analysis of Community Participation in the Raimona National Park, Assam

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Abstract:

Since time immemorial, forests and their associated products have remained essential in sustaining livelihoods (Mamo et al. 2007). About 1.6 billion people globally are substantially reliant on forests for livelihood sustenance (World Bank, 2002). Forests are an important natural resource with which humans are directly related in all aspects. Forests have influenced all aspects of food, medicine, livelihood, economy, etc., since ancient times. In addition, forests have environmental benefits, ecosystem services, cultural connections, etc., without which life is impossible. Similarly, there are different opportunities for employment generation in terms of economic development. Tourism provides a market for local products, and cultural development becomes possible also. However, this can also be accompanied by environmental degradation, land-use change, etc. Raimona National Park has a lot of positive potential for conservation due to its location. The Bhutan border to the north, adjacent to Manas National Park, also contributes to its security. However, local awareness can maintain the conservation aspect of a forest. "It is felt by present-day conservationists that without proper participation and a positive attitude of the local people, no protected area can sustain itself in the long run (Nath, Bhriku Kumar 2016)." The residents of a total of 90 villages adjacent to Raimona National Park have played a major role in this regard. In addition, everyone has an emotion about their place of birth and wants to be safe. During the researcher's field study period, villagers reported that Raimona National Park provides almost all their basic needs. To analyse the community participation, the researchers collected primary data using a questionnaire and face-to-face conversation with the localities. A total of 331 respondents were interviewed. The data collection period is October 2023 to September 2024. To analyse the collected data, the researcher used simple statistical techniques.

Keywords: community participation, forest, Raimona National Park.

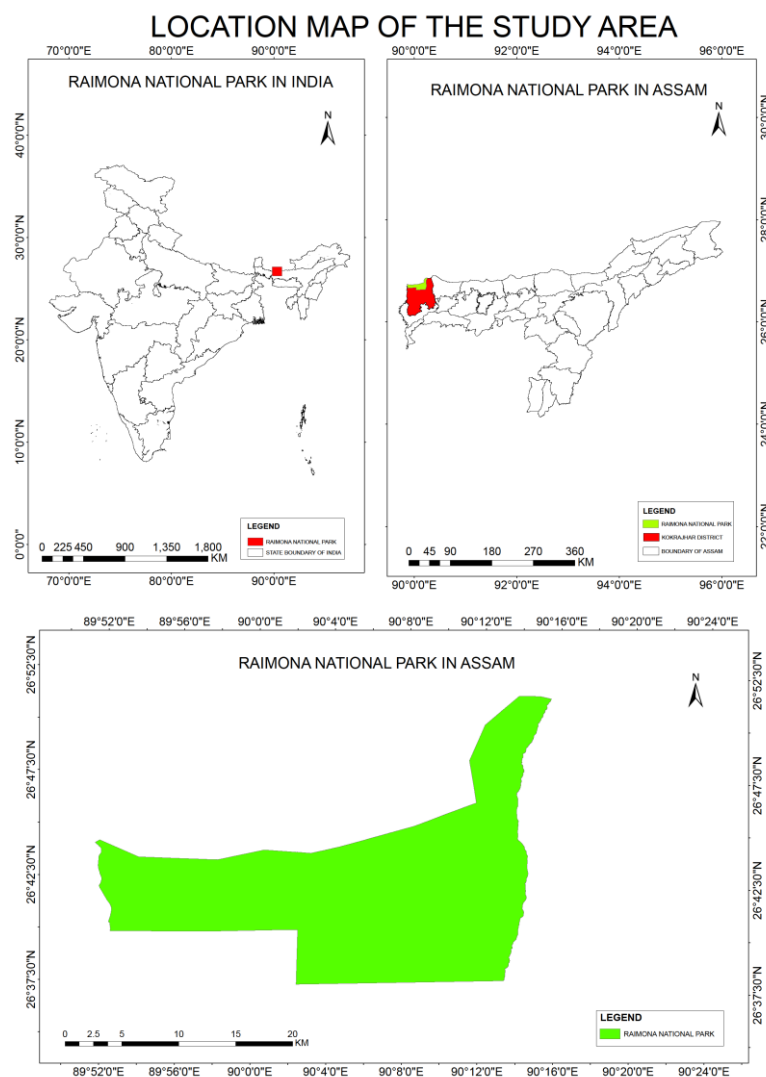
1. Introduction:

Humans are social animals. People cannot live without society. Even during the early nomadic life, people took refuge in caves or forests in clusters. There are also signs of working in groups when hunting or gathering food. Gradually, the use of agriculture also clarified the concept of socialisation. Society means an organised community distinguished by ideas and customs or the system of living together in groups (Gohain, 2014). A society may be regarded as the totality of relationships among the constituent members of it. Man is a social being and loves to live in society (Nath, Bhriku Kumar, 2016). The people living in the study area are directly dependent on the Raimona National Park. Their livelihood, food, settlement, etc., are all based on Raimona. There are several tribal groups living in harmony in all the forest villages in the area. The villages around Raimona are mainly inhabited by Bodo, Kachari, Rabha, and Adibashi people. They are living in the area very harmoniously. These people are mainly agriculturalists, and their culture depends on agriculture. The place has been built since very old times. It is known that the settlement was established after the British era.

Community participation in Raimona National Park means active participation of local people in decision making, for livelihood, sustainable development, wildlife conservation, ecotourism development, etc. Hence, in this study, the researcher tries to analyse the community participation in the Raimona National Park, Assam.

2. Location of the Study Area:

Raimona was declared as the 6th National Park of Assam. It is located in the extreme northwestern part of the state adjacent to West Bengal near the Assam-West Bengal border and comprises the northern part of Ripu Reserved Forest. In the north, there is the international boundary of Bhutan. In the east, there are the Saralbhangra River and the Sonkosh in the west.



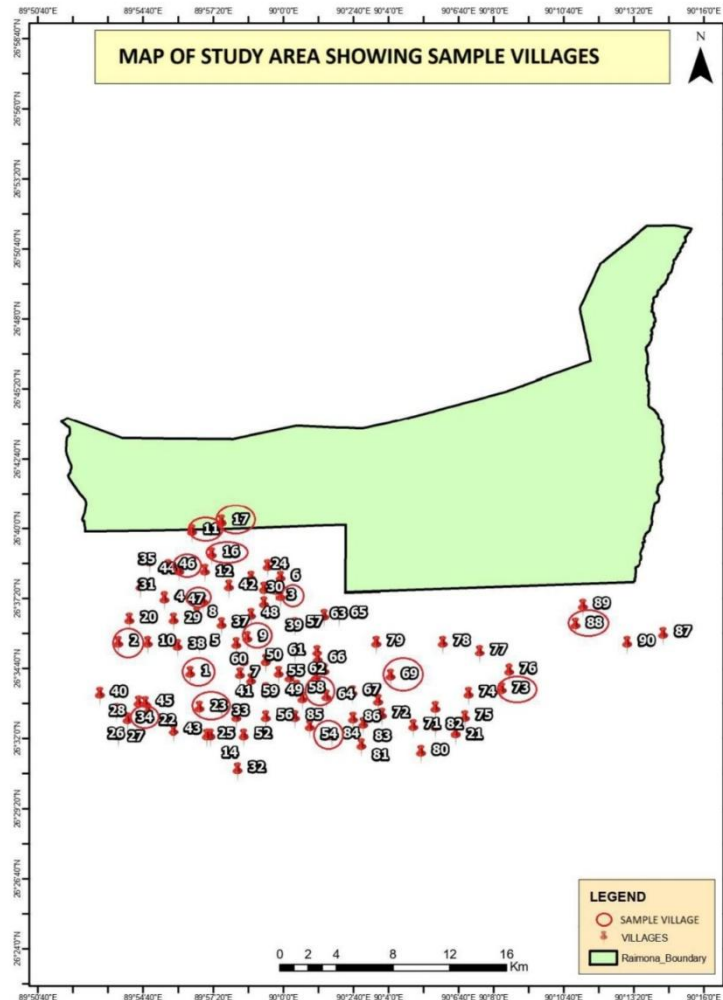
3. Objectives:

To know about the villager's perception towards the park.

4. Methodology:

The study is based mainly on primary data. For observation of community participation in the study area, the researcher conducted a simple random household survey through a pre-planned questionnaire. 16 villages were selected as sample villages from a total of 90 villages adjacent to the

Raimona National Park. Among these sample villages, 331 households were randomly selected as sample collection. After primary data collection, the data were analysed by a simple statistical method. The sample villages, along with adjacent villages, are shown on the map.



Village name accordingly: 1) Sindrihora F.V., 2) Ghaksa F.V., 3) Dumbajhar F.V., 4) Alinagar F.V., 5) Amlaiguri F.V., 6) Amritpur F.V., 7) Upendrapur F.V., 8) Boshabil F.V., 9) Boshgaon F.V., 10) Boroghopa F.V., 11) Bongaon F.V., 12) Bangtijhora F.V., 13) Boshgaon Bazar F.V., 14) Burashara F.V., 15) Jogendrapur F.V., 16) Janaligaon F.V., 17) Choraigaon F.V., 18) Mothambil F.V., 19) Jambuguri F.V., 20) Haldibari F.V., 21) Jiaguri F.V., 22) Kashiabari F.V., 23) Chengmari F.V., 24) Oxiguri F.V., 25) Gaonchulka F.V., 26) Pakriguri F.V., 27) Pokihaga F.V., 28) Lalachor F.V., 29) Lakriguri F.V., 30) Kumguri F.V., 31) Fulkumari F.V., 32) Panowari F.V., 33) Pathorbari F.V., 34) Palashguri F.V., 35) Srirampur F.V., 36) Dalgaon F.V., 37) Suribari F.V., 38) Sundrihora F.V., 39) Ranipur F.V., 40) Simlabari F.V., 41) Harinagar F.V., 42) Raimona F.V., 43) Bhorpur F.V., 44) Soraibil F.V., 45) Ramdeo F.V., 46) Bollamjhora F.V., 47) Kusumbil F.V. and 48) Nasraibil F.V. 49) Ramendrapur F.V., 50) Pokalagi F.V., 51) Salbari F.V., 52) Nayanagar F.V., 53) Joymagaon F.V. 54) Singibil F.V., 55) Rajendrapur F.V., 56) Modhyanagar F.V., 57) Gurufela F.V., 58) Jakati F.V., 59) Lalpur F.V., 60) Katribari F.V., 61) Jaleswari F.V., 62) Hatigarh F.V., 63) No. 1 Lotamari F.V., 64) Nadipur (Gwjanpur) F.V., 65) Thakampur F.V., 66) Lahanpur F.V., 67) New Khagrabari F.V., 68) Kumtola F.V., 69) Kachugaon F.V., 70) Malbhong F.V., 71) Karikor F.V., 72) Bairali F.V., 73)

Islampur F.V., 74) New Islampur F.V., 75) Demdema F.V., 76) Choraideka F.V., 77) Gongia F.V., 78) Nobinagar F.V., 79) Bharatnagar F.V., 80) Aojhorguri F.V., 81) Panbari F.V., 82) Sekadani F.V., 83) Ambari F.V., 84) Kurshamari F.V., 85) Singimari F.V., 86) Bhodeaguri F.V., 87) Athiabari Part – I F.V., 88) Athiabari Part – II F.V., 89) Debargaon F.V. and 90) Sapkata F.V.

5. Discussions:

According to the preliminary field study conducted in these 16 villages, the majority of the people in this area are economically poor. The majority of the villagers are engaged in primary occupations. Along with agriculture, firewood collection, daily wage labourers, etc., are large. The area is mainly inhabited by the Adibashi, Bodo, and Rabha ethnic groups. The villages are very backward in transportation and communication and lack good facilities like pure drinking water, regular electricity, etc. There is also widespread human-elephant conflict in the area. However, recently some people have benefitted financially by engaging in tourism.

5.1 Neighbours Perception towards the Park:

Since time immemorial, forests and their associated products have remained essential in sustaining livelihoods (Mamo et al. 2007). About 1.6 billion people globally are substantially reliant on forests for livelihood sustenance (World Bank, 2002). Forests are an important natural resource with which humans are directly related in all aspects. Forests have influenced all aspects of food, medicine, livelihood, economy, etc., since ancient times. In addition, forests have environmental benefits, ecosystem services, cultural connections, etc., without which life is impossible. Similarly, there are different opportunities for employment generation in terms of economic development. Tourism provides a market for local products, and cultural development becomes possible also. However, this can also be accompanied by environmental degradation, land-use change, etc.

A survey on whether Raimona National Park is necessary for neighbouring villagers showed that 95.17% of people positively accept this and are concerned about it. However, 4.83% of people are not concerned about this, or they deny the need for Raimona National Park. Data is shown in table no.1.

Table No. 1: Necessity of Raimona National Park

Necessity	Respondents	Percent
Yes	315	95.17
No	16	4.83
Total	331	100.00

Source: Field Survey

5.2 Dependence on Water:

Water is an indispensable resource for human survival and socioeconomic development (Wang et al. 2020). All living organisms need water to survive. Water sustains the biological environment, ecosystems, agriculture, industry, economy, society, environment, etc. There is a lot of water in the world, but there are many problems due to lack of fresh water, its uneven distribution, etc.

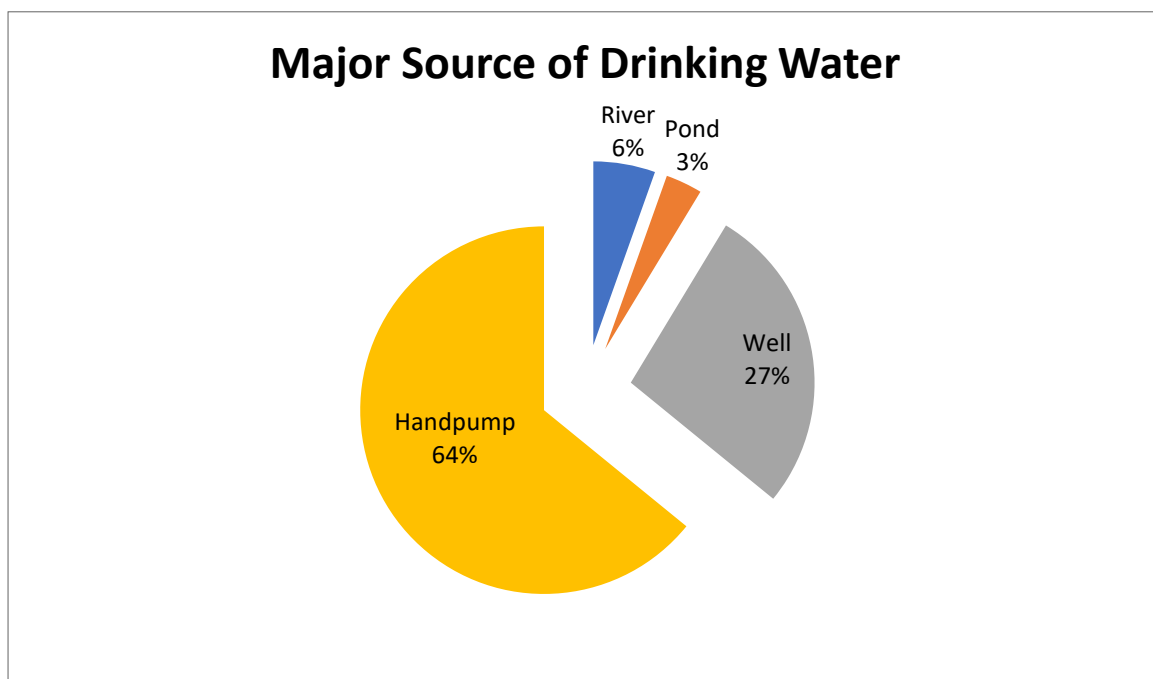
Water dependence in the neighbouring area of the National Park is also required for ecosystem development, tourism development, etc., among other factors. Raimona National Park is located in the Bhabar zone of the Himalayas. The area is also covered with many small and large rivers flowing from

Bhutan, including the Saralbhanga and Sonkosh rivers. Therefore, people living in the neighbouring area of Raimona rely on these surface waters. However, due to the flat condition of the site, groundwater is the most commonly used source of drinking water. The field survey data is shown in table no. 2.

Table No. 2: Major Source of Drinking Water

Number of Respondents (Villagers)	Major Source of Drinking Water			
	River	Pond	Well	Handpump
331	18	11	90	212
Percentage (%)	5.44	3.32	27.19	64.05

Source: Field Survey



Source: Field Survey

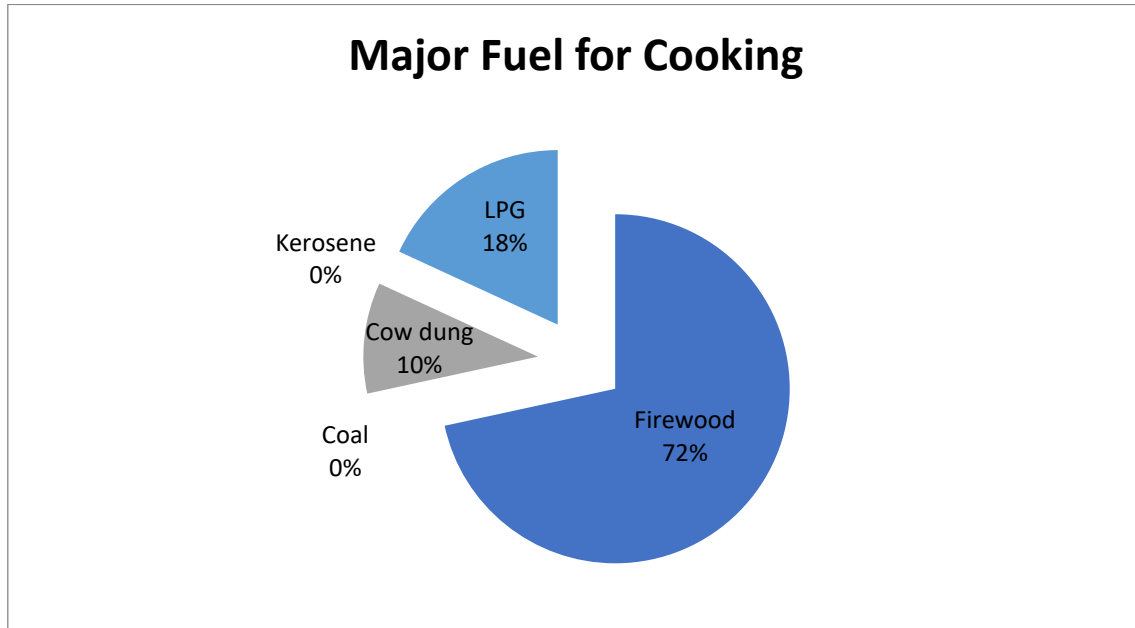
5.3 Dependence on Cooking Fuel:

Daily used fuel is one of the essential commodities. Preliminary data collection showed that the number of firewood users as fuel is high and they collect firewood directly from Raimona National Park.

Table No. 3: Major fuel for cooking

Number of Respondents (Villagers)	Major fuel for cooking				
	Firewood	Coal	Cow dung	Kerosene	LPG
331	237	0	34	0	60
Percentage (%)	71.60	0.00	10.27	0.00	18.13

Source: Field Survey



Source: Field Survey

The number of firewood users in the table is 237, or 71.60%, who use firewood as a major fuel and it is followed by LPG users. Initial investigations showed that all the villagers use firewood as a substitute. The number of kerosene and coal users in the list is zero. This carries an important aspect. There is a desire to reduce the use of kerosene worldwide. Different parts of India are also being made kerosene-free areas because of harmful health effects and the government pushing for a switch to LPG. Thus, the above information is also good for the environment.

5.4 Dependence on Forest Product:

Forest products are all physical goods of biological origin—either plant, animal, or fungi—derived from forests (Belcher, 2003). The people of rural India depend mainly on forest products for their livelihood. Livelihoods in rural areas are directly dependent on nature. These people, who are mainly dependent on primary occupation, are dependent on forests. Timber products as well as Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) are collected from the forest by the local residents. NTFPs include fruits, nuts, medicinal plants, resins, bamboo, honey, fodder, etc., and through which they are earning a livelihood.

The field survey questionnaire asked whether plants were collected from Raimona National Park. Accordingly, 190 out of 331 respondents admitted to collecting for subsistence purposes only. No one is reported to have done such work for income generation.

Table No. 4: Plants collection data

Collect Plants from Forest	Respondents	Percent
Yes	190	57.40
No	141	42.60
Total	331	100.00

Source: Field Survey

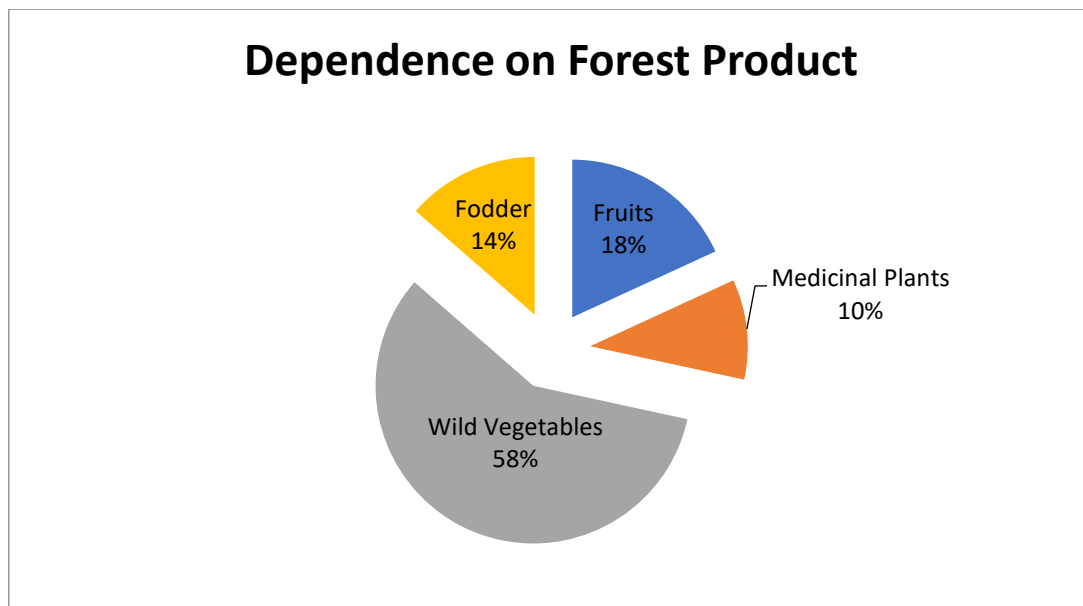
A national park provides a beautiful climate and ecological elements to the residents of nearby villages as well as various natural products and services. Local residents depend on the park to collect daily necessities from the forest as well as feed their cattle and livestock.

The data shown in Table—was obtained from a field survey conducted in neighbouring villages to understand the forest product dependence on Raimona National Park. It was found that out of 331 respondents, 192 showed main dependence on the collection of wild vegetables. 60 people regularly collect fruits from the park. Similarly, 45 people collected fodder, and 34 people collected medicinal plants.

Table No.5: Dependence on edible forest product

Number of Respondents (Villagers)	Dependence on forest product (edible)			
	Fruits	Medicinal Plants	Wild Vegetables	Fodder
331	60	34	192	45
Percentage (%)	18.13	10.27	58.01	13.59

Source: Field Survey



Source: Field Survey

5.5 Agricultural Dependency:

India is an agricultural economy. Agriculture is the backbone of the entire economy. Similarly, Assam is an agricultural state. The culture of Kokrajhar district under the study area is agrarian. The entire Kokrajhar district is a flat alluvial plain, therefore fertile. ‘Agriculture is the main occupation of the people of the district (Census Handbook, Kokrajhar 2011).’.

Field survey data in the vicinity of Raimona National Park shows that the main economic activity of the area is agriculture. Agriculture is the main occupation for 58.31% of total respondents. Details are given in Table No. 6.

Table 6: Source of Income

Number of Respondents (Villagers)	Source of Income			
	Agriculture	Business	Labour	Others
331	193	51	46	41
Percentage (%)	58.31	15.41	13.90	12.38

Source: Field Survey

Agriculture plays a special role in strengthening the rural economy. In addition, livestock, fisheries, agro-based industries, etc., also affect the agricultural economy. Another one of the edible goods from the forest is wild honey. The Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has been conducting green skill development training programs for apiculturists at various times through the Assam Science Technology and Environment Council (ASTEC) for selected local people of Raimona on this wild beekeeping and processing, which is going to recognise Raimona Honey Bee.

5.6 Participation on Tourism:

Tourism is the process of visiting a particular place to relieve the fatigue of daily life. Tourism means temporary relocation. People who travel in this way are called tourists. Tourists choose different places to relieve fatigue. There are many places to visit. People choose tourism as opposed to the environment in which they usually live. For example, people living in the mountains prefer to go to the sea beaches, deserts, or plains with rivers instead of tourism to the mountains. Therefore, it is important to understand the importance of tourism in the life of a person. There has been a lot of interest in tourism since ancient times, but the spread of education and cultural development increased the motivation towards tourism.

For the benefit of local people from a tourist place, the willingness of the people towards tourism is also required. They have to help the tourism industry in various ways. Only then will both tourists and local people benefit. A primary survey was conducted to determine how aware the people of the neighbouring area of Raimona National Park are of tourism or whether they want to make a livelihood through tourism in the future. The data from such surveys are as follows:

Table7: Involvement in tourism activities

Opinion	Involvement in tourism activities	
	No. of Respondent	Percentage
Yes	32	9.67
No	299	90.33
Total	331	100

Source: Field Survey

Without community participation and sense of community, tourism development can not be achieved (Aref, 2011). Raimana National Park is a newly developed tourist destination. Therefore, it is a place with great potential

6. Conclusion:

Forests provide food, clothing, and shelter for people. Therefore, the benefits of forests are immense. From the collection of firewood to medicines for diseases, everything is extracted from the forests. This is also true of the villagers adjacent to the Raimana National Park. They are also dependent on forests for various commodities. In addition, tourism has become an important sector nowadays, through which many people have been earning their living for years. With the development of tourism, various livelihoods have been created, from accommodation to transportation, from photography to tourist guides.

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