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# Eco-Tourism in the Chepang Hill Trail in Nepal

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## **Abstracts**

*The Chepang hill trail is one of the important hill trails of Nepal. It is located in Dhading and Chepang district. The study analyzes situations and impacts of the trail in eco-tourism. Eco-tourism brings social, economic and cultural changes in the study area through promoting business, enhancing infrastructure, however, waste management, sanitation problem is going to increase due to tourism and overall ecosystem and eco-tourism will face problem in future. In this context the study concentrated on the situation and impacts of ecotourism in the surrounding area of the Chepang hill trail. Main objective of this study is to analyze the respondents' perception on the situation and impact. The study followed quantitative and qualitative research design and analyzed the issue by using both primary and secondary source of data. Primary data were collected from the field study. Interview schedule and observation checklist was used to collect information from the field and collected information was managed through paragraph description and tabulation. On the basis of data interpretation, it is found that respondents have neither bad nor excellent perception about the impacts eco-tourism in study area.*

**Keywords:** *Tourism, Nepal, trail, Socio economic.*

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## **Introduction**

This study analyzes the role of enhancing eco-tourism through the Chepang hill trail. Chepang hill trail is one of the important cultural trails introduced in Nepal in 2001 with the financial support of rural tourism and poverty alleviation project. The trail passes the foothill of Mahabharat and across the plain land of Chitwan valley. Because of its geographical setting the trail covers the large part of ecological zone where tourists can enjoy with hundred types of flora and fauna. Main purpose of the study is to analyze how the trail support to promote ecotourism in Nepal and other purpose is to the further enhancement of eco-tourism in the periphery of the Chepang hill trail. Like that the study searches the answer of the research questions as what is the situation of the Chepang hill trail and how does it play role to enhance eco-tourism in peripheral area of the Chepang hill trail. After analyzing the objectives and research questions it is found that waterfalls, cave, dense forest of rhododendron, bird watching centre, ponds and streams are the main attraction of tourists in the trail which is important for eco-tourism. The trail covers heights 1945-meter height to 192 meters height. The trail is famous of natural destination. Due to vivid attraction plants from rhododendron to lake plant like Pistia stratiotes, natural beauty like highest peak of Chitwan Sirai hill top to lowest place Kayar basin. Diverse nature and natural beauty of surrounding area add unique features of trail that open the new viability for eco-tourism in the hill trail.

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## Theoretical Reviews

Tourism is known as a visit from one place to another place for the purpose of entertainment, however, it is known as economic activities and used as business that Nyan (1967) notes, "Tourism is perhaps the only sector of economic activity in which the principles of free trade still apply more important" (1). Tourism is known as economic activities; however, International Union of Official Travel Organization defines it as "any person on a trip between two or more countries or two of more localities with his/her country of usual residence WTO, framework for the collection and publication of tourism statistics" (p.4). World Tourism Organization also defines tourism as traveling phenomena related to the activities of recreation and entertainment. Nepal Tourism Board (2020) defines tourism as, "Tourism is the phenomena of traveling from one place to another place with various purposes" (p.3). Tourism is nothing more than travel from place to another place.

Eco-tourism is the tourism related to ecology and environment. In modern times natural tourism like ecology and environment also attracts people to visit the area which is known as eco-tourism. Eco-tourism is popular in modern times because of the desire of people to enjoy with nature. Kunwar, (1999) defines the term eco-tourism as, "Eco-tourism in both these but it must go a step further; it must be a force for sustaining natural resources, so tourism is nature travel that advances concentration and sustainable development efforts" (p.54). In the same line Ziffer (1989) defines ecotourism as "A form of tourism inspired primarily by the natural history of an area, including its indigenous culture and the ecotourism visitors' relatively undeveloped areas in the spirit of appreciation, participation and sensitivity" (p.235). In Nepal eco-tourism is defined as "any style and type of tourism that has the potential to bring benefits to the local economy whilst contributing to natural and cultural resources" (NTB, 2001, p.2). Eco-tourism Association of Australia (1992) also defined the term eco-tourism as, "Ecologically sustainable tourism that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation" (p.5).

## Reviews of Literature

Eco-tourism is one of the main types of tourism that plays an important role to enhance the overall tourism sectors of the nation. Natural beauty and cultural diversities are the main attraction of tourism that Adhikari et al. (2018) "Role Due to the rich natural, religious, cultural, and aesthetic resources in the Panchase area, it can be a vital tourism destination adjoining Pokhara (Similar to most other nature-based tourism destinations of Nepal, it is particularly popular for short trekking in addition to pilgrimage tourism by devotees during *Bala Chaturdashi* festival" (p.42). Including natural beauty and cultural diversity also plays an important role to promote tourism in Nepal. Bhusal, (2014) highlights the situation as, "tourism industries of Nepal have been influenced by various factors such as infrastructure development, development of hospitality industries and security situation" (6). In some cases, natural disasters like flood, earthquake and pandemic like COVID-19 also create problems in tourism business that Ghimre, (2015) highlights, "Earthquake of 2015 brings great challenges in tourism business in Nepal because many old monuments and hill trails were damaged by earthquake" (p.5). Various hurdles are in tourism sectors of Nepal; however, cultural diversities and natural beauty minimize the hurdles and open the new possibility of tourism in Nepal.

In eco-tourism, there talks about natural environment, ecological and cultural sustainability and local religious belief and local interpretation of tourist spot. Valentine, (1991) explained that ecotourism is an umbrella term that refers to the use of culture, nature and adventure for tourism purpose. In this context Chauhan (2004) notes:

Eco-tourism has benefited the environment by stimulating measures to protect physical features of the environment historic sites and monuments and wildlife; nature areas are becoming major attraction and constitute the basis for what is now known as nature tourism or 'ecotourism'.

Eco-tourism specially refers to the nature-based tourism related to jungle safari, mountain climbing, hiking, trekking, bird watching, fishing and other activities related to ecology. Figgis (1992) notes, "Travel to remote or natural areas, which aims to enhance understanding and appreciation of the natural environment and cultural heritage while avoiding damage or deterioration of the experience for others" (p.6). Eco-tourism always focuses on sustainable tourism that encourages people to save environment. King D Stewart (1992) highlights nine characteristics such as maintain positive ethic toward environment, save environment, preserve and main both internal and external values of environment, focus on sustainability and eco-friendly tourism, think the first hand counter of natural environment, contribute to valorize the natural beauty, emphasizes on nature based adventure tourism and create leadership to enhance the ecotourism and sustainability on tourism. Eco-tourism covers overall socio-cultural and economic aspects of the tourism. Eco-tourism tried to minimize ill aspects of tourism that Jha, (1999) notes, "In developing countries, tourism has accelerated begging problem, and some beggars have under taken it as a profession" (p.1). Eco-tourism plays important role for total development of tourism and open the new horizon of economic development. Ziffer, (1989) highlights, "Eco-tourism potentially offers national, regional and total economic benefits similar to those of other types of tourism activity. Full economic potential at different aspects of economy is yet to be substantiated by specific studies" (p.4). For economic development eco-tourism plays important role because nature or environment is one of the important assets of eco-tourism.

## Policies Reviews

To promote tourism as well as eco-tourism in Nepal government has prepared various programs and policies. Constitution of Nepal 2015 focused on tourism as main policy article 51, policy no 13. Like that Nepal government has prepared tourism policy in 2005 that also emphasizes on eco-tourism. Nepal government introduced Nepal tourism board in 1995 to promote the tourism business in Nepal. After establishment of tourism board, there had organized visit Nepal 1998. After establishment of republic system of government new tourism policy had lunched in 2008 and again destination Nepal organized in 2011. Policy of Vision 2020 has also introduced in 2015 with declaration of tourism decade 2016 to 2025. Government bring policy to visit 2 million tourists in 2020, however COVID-19 pandemic badly disturbs the policy and programs related to tourism.

The Chepang hill trail was introduced by Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Program (TRPAP) in 2001. The trail covers hill area of Chitwan district; however, it begins from Hugdi River of Dhading district.



**Map of the Chepang hill trails**

**Source: <https://maps.google.mapadopted> in January 2023:**

## Methodology

The study followed the qualitative and quantitative research design and data were collected through primary and secondary sources. Library research was used to collect secondary data. Books, articles, journals, research reports are the main source of library research. Primary data were collected through interview schedule and observation. Primary data were collected from the Kalika municipality ward no 9 and Ichhakamana rural municipality ward 6 and 1 were selected as study area where Chepang hill trail is located. 25 individual respondents were selected for interview. Simple random sampling method was used to select the respondents from the field. Respondents were selected from various socio-economic backgrounds.

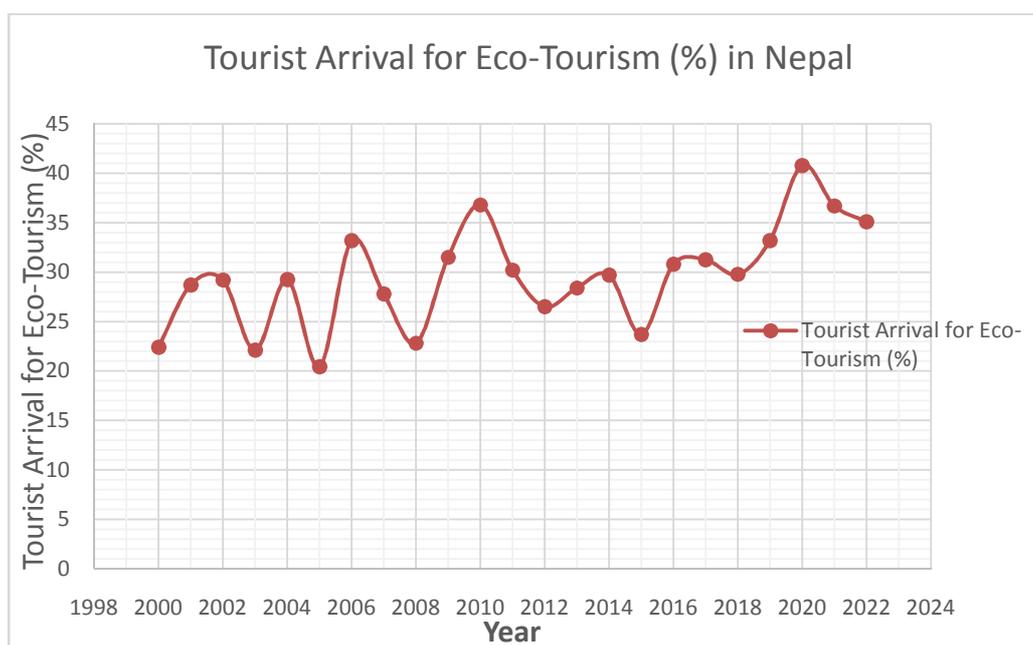
## Study Area

Surrounding area of the Chepang hill trail is the study area of this study located in Kalika municipality wards no 9 and Ichhakamana Rural municipality ward 1 and 6. The area is traditional homeland of the Chepang as well as historical sites of Chitwan district. The study area is not only important for culturally and historically but also significant for eco-tourism. The area covers both mountain and Churehill so that it is the home land of diverse kinds of flora and fauna. Chisapanitar, important bird watching site and rhododendron forest are located in the area.

The area is famous for bushy plan and shrubs plants. The area is homeland of various birds and insects. Rigdi, Nagdi and Hugdi rivers are located in the path of hill trail that is famous for fishes

and other water animals and plants. Hill trail covers the 40 Km length from Hugdi, (Around 180 Km far from KTM) and end in Tandi. Home stay, hotels and restaurants are located in the different points of the hill trail.

**Figure: 1 Tourists Arrival in Nepal for the Purpose of Visit Ecological Zone (2000 to 2022)**



**Source: Tourism Statistics 2022 (Nepal Tourism Board)**

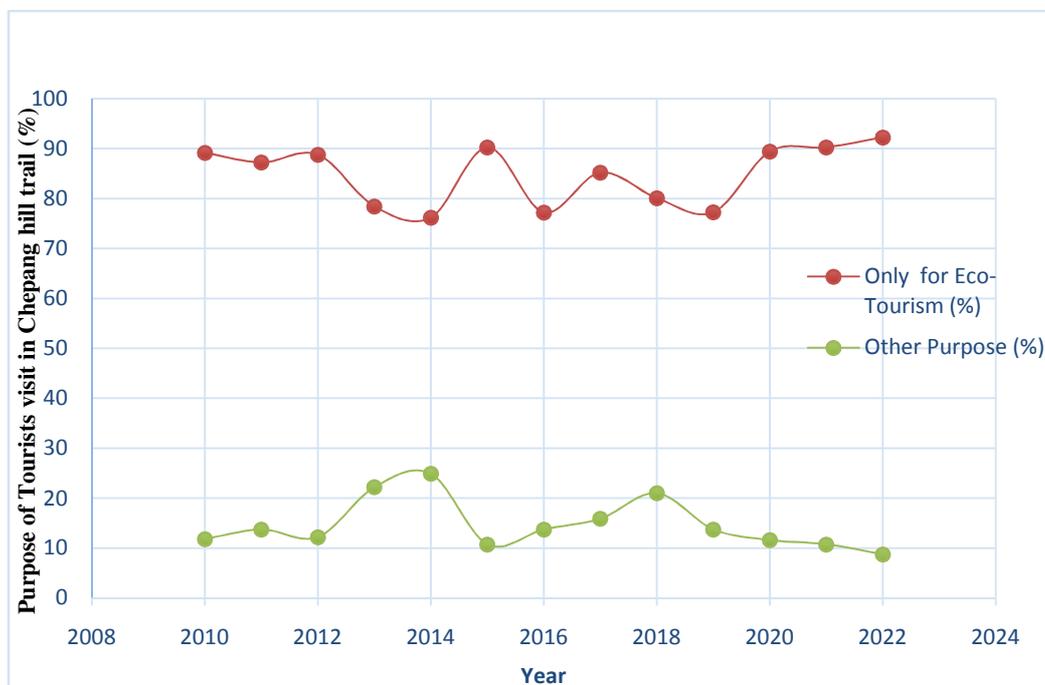
Note: tourists arrive in Nepal for trekking, mountaineering, jungle safari is included as eco-tourism)

Above figure shows the Nepal is one of the exotic places for nature so around 1/3 tourists visit Nepal to take entertainment from eco-tourism. The number of tourists' arrival is increasing trend in ecology. In 2000 only 22.4% tourists had visited Nepal to take entertainment with nature. At that time situation of road transportation was not so well so that the percentage also low in eco-tourism. Now eco-tourism covers 35% to 40% portion of total tourism because infrastructure development, advertisement, value of eco-tourism and conservation play role to enhance the number tourists in eco-tourism sector. In 2020 eco-tourism covered 40.8% tourists in total. In last year 2022 also, eco-tourism covers 35.1%. It shows that the value of eco-tourism is increasing day by day in Nepal. Federal, province and local government are jointly working to promote eco-tourism in Nepal. Like that Bagmati province declared hill area of Chitwan as special Chepang zone and brings programs and policies for tourism development.

## Eco-Tourism in the Chepang hill trail

Chepang hill trail was introduced in 2001 with as main cultural hill trail of mid hill. It is located in Chitwan districts; however, it begins from BenighatRorangRural Municipality and ended in Tandi, east-west highway. It is located in Ratnagar municipality. The hill trail was introduced with the purpose the promoting Chepang culture, traditional and indigenous knowledge through tourism, however, the area is famous for eco-tourism. Waterfall, cave including various types of birds, animals and insects play role to become attraction for eco-tourism.

**Figure: 2 Tourists visit in Chepang hill trail (2010-2020)**



Source: Chepang hill trail, Information Centre, 2022

The figure mentioned above the situation of eco-tourism in the Chepang hill trail. More than 80% portion the tourism covered by eco-tourism in the trail. Waterfall, highest peak, rhododendron forests, caves and sight scenes are the main attraction of hill trail. The numbers of visitors are increasing in the trail.

To analyze situation of eco-tourism in Chepang hill trail it analyzes the opinions of the respondents who are directly and indirectly involved in tourism business in study area. 25 individual respondents were participated in this study and questions about the situation of eco-

tourism were asked to them. The views of the respondents have tabulated and describes on the basis of the title and objectives.

## Socio Economic Status of the Respondents

Respondents from different socio-economic background were participated in this study. The following table shows the socio-economic backgrounds of the respondents.

**Table: 1 Socio Economic Status of the Respondents**

S.N.	Sex	No.	%	Age	No.	%	Ethnicity	No.	%	Religion	No.	%
1	Male	13	52	20-30	6	24	Brahmin	2	8	Hindu	11	44
2	Female	12	48	30-40	15	60	Chhetri	8	32	Buddhist	9	36
3		Total	25	100	40-50	3	12	Ethnic	14	70	Christian and other	5
4	-	-	-	Above 50	1	4	Dalit	1	4			

Above table shows that socio cultural status of the respondents. Data indicates those 52 % males and 48% females. While analyzing age composition of the respondents it has found 24% are aged group 20- 30 years, 50% are 30 to 40 years age group, 12% are between 40 to 50 years age group and only 4% are above 50 years age group. In the same way, 8 respondents are Brahmin, 32 % are Chhetri, 70% are ethnic community people and only 4% are Dalit. Similarly, 44 % respondents are belonging to Hindu, 36 % Buddhist and next 20% are belonging to Christian and other group.

## Information of Tourists and Tourism

Chepang hill trail is one of the most accessible hill trails of Nepal. The trail located near to Shahuraha famous tourist spot of Nepal. The climate of the hill trail is suitable for all age people both male and female. Tourists visit the trail to take enjoy from with nature and culture. The following table shows the visit purpose of the tourists arrive in the trail.

**Table: 2 Purpose of Visit**

Purpose of Visit	Total number	Percentage
Pleasure and relax	3	12
Adventure	5	20
Pilgrimage	1	4
Study	2	8
Business assignment	1	4
Project assignment	2	8

To gain health	1	4
Village people and culture / nature	10	40
Total	25	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

## Length of Stay

Tourists visit the Chepang hill trail while visiting Sauraha so that they can stay one or two days in the trail. Tourists can use vehicle like car, jeep, motorbike and van to travel. In hill trail, however, there is separate trail for walking. In walking path historical fort, bird watching station and waterfalls are located. One can travel the area in a single day. If one can take interest to view sun rise scene at morning there should be stay whole night at trail.

## Favorable Season to Visit the Study Area

One can visit the area in all season; however, spring and autumn are the best seasons for visiting. In spring season visitor can observe rhododendron flower in Chisapani forest area. In autumn season visitors enjoy with waterfall and beautiful sight scene.

## Facilities of the Chepang Hill Trail

Tourists can get basic facilities in the Chepang hill trail. There are facilities of accommodation, hotels, restaurants, facilities to see sight of Himalaya range and beautiful scenery of Chitwan valley. Tourists enjoy with homely environment and culture foods item. More than the tourists can study distinct flora and fauna.

**Table: 3** Current Situation of Infrastructure Facilities in Chepang hill trail

S.N.	Total	Excellent	%	Good	%	Don't know	%	Poor	%	Very Poor	%
1	Water supply	5	20	15	60	2	8	3	12	-	-
2	Communication	4	16	10	40	5	20	4	16	2	8
3	Electricity	10	40	5	20	6	24	4	16		
4	Road	12	48	6	24	6	24	1	4	-	-
5	Health service	10	40	7	28	3	12	5	20	-	-
6	Solid waste collecting and disposal system	5	20	8	32	2	8	5	20	5	25
7	Cleanliness of place	7	28	9	36	4	16	5	20	-	-
8	Security	6	24	10	40	4	16	3	12	2	8
9	Drainage system	10	40	4	16	2	8	5	20	4	16

10	Street lighting	5	20	10	40	3	12	2	8	5	20
11	Hotel	4	16	10	40	4	16	3	12	4	16
12	Restaurant	2	8	11	44	4	16	5	20	3	12
13	Toilets	10	40	10	40	5	20	-	-	-	-
14	Service	5	20	12	48	6	24	2	8	--	-
15	Conservation and promotion of natural and cultural assets	7	28	8	32	5	20	5	20		
16	Behavior of local people	6	24	10	40	4	20	5	20	-	-

**Source: Field Survey, 2022**

Excellent = Women a particular facility over supply

Good = When a particular facility is abundant.

Don't know = When respondents don't have idea about a particular facility.

Poor = When a particular facility is in short supply and difficult to use.

Very Poor = When a particular facility is very difficult to use or not available.

Table 3 shows overall situation of the infrastructure available in the study area. Data shows that there are moderate types of facilities perceived by the respondents. In most of the facilities providing situation majority of the respondents are satisfied and noted excellent and, in few facilities respondents, negatively response. Physical facilities are normal in the hill trail, however, there problems of street light, waste management and security are the problematic in hill trail.

## **Involved in tourism**

According to the record of municipality (2022), 550 people are directly involved in tourism and more than 5000 people are indirectly involved in tourism sectors. Eco-tourism adds the values of tourism in the hill trail. More than one 0.2 million people annually visit the site indifferent season. Tourists love to enjoy with nature and culture and adventure in the study area. Due to tourism agriculture and animal husbandry sectors bring drastically changes in the study area. Local market is created in the study area due to tourism.

## **View of Local Respondents in the impacts of tourism development**

The following table shows the views of local respondents on the impacts of tourism development as:

**Table: 4 Impact of Eco-tourism on study Area**

S.N.	Impact Description	Positive effect		Negative effect		Total	
		No	%	No	%	No	%
1	Employment opportunity	16	64	9	36	25	100
2	Business opportunity	20	80	5	20	25	100
3	Animal husbandry, horticulture and vegetable forming opportunity	22	88	3	12	25	100
4	Development of cottage industry	12	48	13	65	25	100
5	Conservation and promotion of natural and cultural assets.	15	60	10	40	25	100
6	Development of infrastructure	20	80	5	20	25	100
7	Proper disposal of sewerage and cleanliness	5	20	20	80	25	100
8	Price rise in services and commodities	10	40	15	60	25	100
9	Increase in moral and social values	5	20	20	80	25	100
10	Community awareness	10	40	15	60	25	100

**Source: Field Survey, 2022**

Tourism brings positive impacts on animal husbandry and agriculture. 88% respondents noted that tourism helps to increase business and animal husbandry in study area. Like that 80% mentioned about the positive impact on business and 60% said Chepang hill trail help to promote cultural and conservation tourism. Chepang hill trail not only bring positive impacts on study. It brings some negative impacts like does increase social values. Traditional value system has changed. Cottage industries are replaced by modern goods. Tourism brings certain negative impact on environment like waste management, sanitation etc. Respondents noted negative opinion on this issue.

### **Future Pattern of Eco-Tourism Development in Study Area**

During the period of introducing the Chepang hill trail in Chitwan, people had high expectation from tourism; however, people haven't got opportunities from tourism in beginning phase. After COVID -19 pandemic, the trail again takes new step for tourism development. Local governance and province government also invest in the area. Infrastructure and other facilities are increasing in the hill trail. For future improve various reforms will be needed. In the course of field visit I have asked the respondents about future improvement with attractions that mentioned as follows:

**Table:5 Attractions of Eco-Tourism**

S.N.	Products description	Preferences					
		Excellent	%	Good	%	Poor	%
1	Sightseeing of movements, market area and tribal villages	15	60	6	24	4	24
2	Scenic beauty of Himalaya, mountain sunrise, sunset, the river basin	20	80	5	20	-	-
3	Adventure of trekking rock climbing, caving and para-gliding	21	84	4	16	-	-
4	Bird watching	20	80	5	20	-	-
5	Wildlife viewing	15	60	5	20	5	20
7	Quiet and peaceful place for relaxing and gaining health	20	80	5	20	-	-
8	Local people hospitality	10	40	10	40	5	25
9	Cultural tourism	12	48	8	32	5	20

Source: Field Visit, 2022

Above table noted the respondents' opinions about the attraction of eco-tourism in study area that play important role in future development. Data indicates that 80% respondents noted that the area is excellent in scenic beauty of Himalaya, mountain sunrise, sunset, and the river basin. Like that 80% highlights on bird watching and 84% noted that eco-tourism plays role in adventure of trekking rock climbing, caving and para-gliding. In the same 80% highlights that eco-tourism plays role on peaceful place for relaxing and gaining health.

## Conclusion

Eco-tourism is one of the emerging concepts of tourism in Nepal. It is related to sustainable tourism. Eco-tourism is related to nature-based tourism. The Chepang hill trail also focuses on nature and culture. The trail is located in mid hill of Nepal. It covers their local bodies (Benighat Rorang, Ichhakamana rural municipality and Kalika municipality). The trail specially goes through the bushy forest of Low Mountain and upper Chure range. The trail is famous for Chepang culture; however, it is peripheral area of Chitwan national park. Disappearing birds and animal's species are main attraction of the area where many birds and animals' species have migrated from national park area during summer season.

Eco-tourism of the hill trail brings various socio-economic changes in local level. More than 5000 people are directly or indirectly involved in tourism business in study area. Tourism plays significant role on creating job and enhancing business in local level. Production of agriculture and animal husbandry easily got market in local level. Local people feel positive changes in occupation and infrastructure development; however, tourism brings some negative changes in waste management and sanitation management.

Respondents have mixed perception about impacts of eco-tourism in study area. Eco-tourism brings hope on local people for bright future, however, local; province and federal government should bring programs for tourism development.

## Recommendations

- Positive attempt should be needed for the improvement of ecotourism in study area. Local people, local governance, province government and federal governance should bring programs and policy for enhance the situation of eco-tourism in study area. There is problem of telephone network, electricity, sanitation and waste management so that government should bring program to address these problems.
- There is lack of cottage industries and recreation centre, so that government and public sector should think about to manage recreation centre and cottage industries.
- Road transportation brings certain types of problems on wild animals and birds so that should make policy to regulate vehicles in the trail area.
- Government and public jointly work to save flora and fauna that are going to disappearing.
- In some area, there is high risk of landslide so that government make policy and program to control landslide
- Training should be provided to the local people to enhance the skills of local people on tourism and hospitality management
- Financial institution and local government provide economic support to business men who had faced crisis during COVID-19 period.
- Local people should think about nature and environment protection while continued tourism related activities.

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