



RESEARCH ARTICLE

ROLE OF HOMESTAY TOURISM ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL PEOPLE IN NEPAL

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ABSTRACT

Background: Homestay tourism has been practiced in many developing countries as a model of socio-economic empowerment of the people in rural villages. The government of Nepal has also prioritized homestay tourism as one of the major pillars of the rural economy. Currently, there are hundreds of homestays and thousands of people have been involved in homestay tourism in Nepal. Homestay tourism might have different impacts on the households of homestay operators and their communities in rural villages in Nepal. **Objective:** This study aims to examine the role of homestay tourism on the socio-economic empowerment of rural people in Nepal. **Methods:** This study has adopted mixed-methods research. Quantitative method is the main method used in the study, however, qualitative methods have been used to triangulate and supplement the results of quantitative methods. The data were collected using individual interview from 73 homestay operators of seven different community homestays initiated before 2017 in Kaski District, Nepal. **Findings:** This study has revealed that the homestay tourism has created part-time employment opportunities and generated income in the households of the homestay operators, thereby, increasing the access of rural people to better food, health services, education, clothes, and in maintaining social responsibilities. It has also helped in empowering rural women with more employment opportunities and incomes. Homestay tourism has also encouraged the youths to migrate back to their rural villages. The amount of investment and the increased capacity of the homestays seem to return more income. The homestays have also increased the social network, social involvement, knowledge and prestige of the homestay operators and their families as well as improved the sanitation in the household and community as a whole. **Conclusion:** The homestay tourism has been instrumental in generating employment and income opportunities in the families of the homestay operators, thereby inducing socio-economic empowerment of the people in the rural villages in Nepal.

INTRODUCTION

Homestay tourism has been an emerging model of tourism in developing countries. The concept of homestay tourism refers to the kind of tourism where the visitors live in a home of the local people as a member of the family by sharing the utilities and facilities that the family has in a relatively low cost. Lynch (2005) defined homestay as “a type of accommodation where tourists or guests pay to stay in private homes, where interactions with a host and/or family, who usually live on the premises and with whom the public space is, to a degree, shared” (Lynch 2005:528, quoted in Muslim, Numata and Yahya 2017:65). In many developing countries, it has been practiced as a model of socio-economic empowerment of the people in rural villages. Many studies conducted across the world have revealed a multitude of effects of homestay tourism on the lives of the people.

Homestay tourism has created opportunities for self-employment, generated additional income, increased household savings and expenses in the household, improved living standards, widened the horizon of knowledge of the people, improved lifestyles and cleanliness, increased social pride and involvement in social activities, increased women empowerment, conservation of local traditional cultures and customs, improved community relationship thereby amplifying the socio-economic wellbeing of the homestay operators and their families (Bhuiyan, Siwar and Ismail 2013; Kannegieser 2015; Kimaiga 2015; NRB 2015; Thakuri 2016; Subedi 2016; Kimaiga and Kihima 2018; PA and KT 2018; Karki, Chhetri, Chaudhary and Khanal 2019). In the context of Nepal, the concept of homestay tourism is also gradually developing since the 1990s. *Sirubari* is known as the first village that initiated homestay tourism in Nepal on 2054 BS (BS refers to *Bikram Sambat* in Nepalese Calendar System, which is 57 years ahead the English Calendar System) (2054BS = 1997AD) (Bhadgaule 2073BS). Currently, there are hundreds of homestays and thousands of people have been involved in homestay tourism across the country.

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Gandaki Province of Nepal has also identified tourism as one of the most vital pillars of the economy in the province. The First Five Year Plan Approach Paper (2076BS) has aimed to achieve the goal of a well-fortified economy in the province increasing production and employment through sustainable tourism in the province. Furthermore, to materialize the aforementioned goal, the approach paper has aimed to establish interlink between tourism and agriculture, develop tourism infrastructure and tourism products thereby increasing employment and income of the people (GPPPC 2076BS). However, there are very few studies conducted assessing the role of homestay tourism on socio-economic empowerment of rural people in Kaski, Nepal. Homestay tourism might have different impacts on the households of homestay operators and their communities in rural villages. In this context, this study has assessed the role of homestay tourism on socio-economic empowerment of rural people in Nepal.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study has been conducted in Kaski district, which is one of the districts in Nepal having a multitude of tourism potentials. It is known as one of the best tourist destinations in Nepal. Kaski district is also popular for homestay tourism. There are several well-known homestay villages in Nepal such as Kalabang, BhujelGaun, DhitalHemjakot, Lwang, Ghalel, Mirsa, and Tangting, where hundreds of households have homestay facilities and are popular as domestic and foreign tourist destinations for the beautiful scenery of mountain, lakes, diverse weather, food, culture and customs (NTB 2073BS). This study has adopted mixed-methods research. The mixed-methods comprise of quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative method is the main method used in the study, however, qualitative methods have been used to triangulate and supplement the results of quantitative methods. This study was conducted in seven community homestay villages of Kaskidistrict namely Kalabang, BhujelGaun, DhitalHemjakot, Lwang, Ghalel, Mirsa, and Tangting. These are the villages popular for community homestays in Kaski district that were started on or before 2073 and are currently registered at the local unit of the government such as Municipality. Of the total 87 households involved in community homestays, the data have been collected from 73 households by adopting a kind of De Facto Method of Census. All the homestay operators who were present at the household during the period of data collection were interviewed. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect the data for this study. The researcher himself also collected data through observation and key informant interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristics of Homestay Operators

The demographic characteristics of homestay operators comprise of gender, age, caste/ethnicity, and education of homestay operator. The characteristics of homestay operators are described below.

Gender: Different societies and cultures assign different roles and responsibilities to males and females. Traditionally, females are more involved in domestic chores, which have generally low economic value or are not paid cash for their labour, meanwhile males tend to involve in public domains that have high economic value and are paid cash for their labour.

This study has observed that over two-thirds of the homestay operators (68.5%) are female, whereas the share of male operators is less than one-third (31.5%) (Table 1). It indicates that females mostly operate the community homestays. It has stretched the access of females in the economic domain.

Age: Age indicates the time that an individual has completed after birth. It is also associated with experiences as well as the capability of an individual. In the context of this study, the minimum age of homestay operator is 21 years and the maximum is 79 years. The average age of the homestay operators is 48.4 years (Table 1). The interesting fact here is that over one-fifth of the total homestay operators surveyed for this study (21.9%) are of 60 years and above. A significant number of people of 60 years and above, even up to 79 years, are still economically active in homestay tourism. It was also observed during the data collection from the field that some of these homestay operators are even retired from the job and receive pensions. They are still contributing additional income to the family through the homestay. For some of the elderly homestay operators, it has been an opportunity of interacting with other people meanwhile earning some money to manage their livelihoods since they live alone in the rural villages.

Caste/Ethnicity: Caste/ethnicity refers to a traditional stratification of human society. Nepalese societies are full of castes/ethnic diversity. There are around 125 castes/ethnic groups in Nepal (CBS 2014b). This study has observed that among the homestay operators, the highest percentage comprises of *Janajati/Adibasi* (90.4%) followed by *Brahmin/Chhetri* (8.2%) and *Dalit* (1.4%) respectively (Table 1). There must be some reasons behind significantly greater involvement of *Janajati/Adibasi* in homestay tourism in Nepal. Some of the reasons could be related to the culture of the particular caste/ethnic group. People in *Janajati/Adibasi* caste/ethnic groups have higher-level communal feelings and are friendlier to visitors to their community. They involve in communal works and follow communal rules and regulations. The first homestay that was started in 1997 (2054BS) in *Sirubari* village in Syngja District of Nepal (MoITFE 2019) was also initiated among *Gurungs*, which is a caste that belongs to *Janajati/Adibasi* group. However, there are few *Dalit* households as well. Few of the *Dalit* especially *Damai* are engaged in welcome, farewell and pottering only, but not in homestay tourism (Thapa 2010). However, the homestay is among Gurung caste only.

Education: Education is one of the major sources of knowledge and skills. Education is believed to have a significant influence on the awareness and behaviours of an individual thereby affecting the performance of the activities they are engaged in. This study has observed that a large majority of the homestay operators have attended formal education (65.7%). Among them, over one-third of them (35.6%) have attended secondary level education (grades 9 to 12). Over one-fourth of them (24.7%) have attended basic level education (grades 1 to 8). A few of the homestay operators have also completed the undergraduate level of education (4.1%). On the other side, about one-fourth of the homestay operators (24.7%) have attended elderly education which is called "*ProudhSikshya*" in Nepali. *ProudhSikshya* is a literacy program of the government targeted to provide minimum literacy to elderly people in Nepal. Very few of them are literate only (2.7%). Similarly, a few of the homestay operators are illiterate (6.9%) (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of homestay operators

Variables	N	Percent
Gender		
Female	50	68.5
Male	23	31.5
Total	73	100.0
Age		
20-29	6	8.2
30-39	11	15.1
40-49	25	34.2
50-59	15	20.6
60 and above	16	21.9
Total	73	100.0
<i>Descriptive Statistics: Min: 21, Max: 79, Mean: 48.425, SD: 12.375</i>		
Caste/ethnicity		
Janajati/Adibasi	66	90.4
Brahmin/Chhetri	6	8.2
Dalit	1	1.4
Total	73	100.0
Education		
Illiterate	5	6.9
Literate	2	2.7
Elderly Education (<i>ProudhSikshya</i>)	18	24.7
Basic level (Grade 1-8)	19	26.0
Secondary level (Grade 9-12)	26	35.6
Undergraduate level	3	4.1
Total	73	100.0
<i>Descriptive statistics: Min: 0, Max: 13, Mean: 5.630, SD: 4.662</i>		
<i>Note: 0 = Illiterate, 13 = Undergraduate Level</i>		

Source: Field Survey 2019/2020

Main Source of Livelihood of the Family of the Homestay Operators:

Different communities have different sources of livelihood. The major sources of livelihood in Nepal are agriculture, job, business, remittance, pensions, wage, and so on. Among them, agriculture is known as the backbone of livelihood for the majority of households in Nepal (Piya, Maharjanand Joshi 2019). This study, despite being about homestay operators only, has also observed that a relatively higher percentage of homestay operators (41.1%) consider agriculture as the main source of livelihood followed by homestay (26.0%), job (9.6%), pension (8.2%), foreign employment (6.8%), daily wage (2.7%), business (1.4%) and others (4.1%) respectively (Table 2). The results indicate that homestay is the main source of livelihood for over one-fourth of the total homestay operators (26.0%), which is a significant percentage contributing in generating self-employment and income to run livelihood of the family in rural villages of Nepal. Furthermore, the results also depict that homestays have become helpful to aid on the livelihood of the people from a wide range of occupations such as agriculture, job, foreign employment, business, daily wage, and so on in the rural villages of Nepal.

Table 2. Main source of livelihood of the family of homestay operators

Main Source of livelihood	N	Percent
Agriculture	30	41.1
Homestay	19	26.0
Job	7	9.6
Pension	6	8.2
Foreign Employment	5	6.8
Daily Wage	2	2.7
Business	1	1.4
Other sources	3	4.1
Total	73	100.0

Source: Field Survey 2019/2020

Homestay Tourism and Socio-Economic Empowerment of Rural People:

In this study, the role of homestay tourism on socio-economic empowerment of rural people have been assessed in terms of employment opportunities, income generation, access to food, health, education, knowledge, social network expansion, traditional and cultural preservations, households and community sanitation, and so on, which are discussed below.

Employment Opportunities: Employment opportunity is one of the most important motivating factors of homestay operators to involve in homestay tourism. This study has observed that most of the homestays have created part-time employment for the member of the family of the homestay operators. The average employment rate in a household of the homestay operator in 2018/2019 is 2.151 persons with a minimum of zero and the maximum of five persons. However, the results also indicate that some of the households of homestay operators did not provide service to any guest in their homestay in the year 2018/2019 (Table 3).

Table 3. Employment creation in the households of homestay operators (2018/2019)

Employment (Persons)	N	Percent
0	1	1.4
1	14	19.2
2	37	50.7
3	16	21.9
4	4	5.5
5	1	1.4
Total	73	100.0
<i>Descriptive Statistics: Min: 0.00, Max: 5, Mean: 2.151, SD: 0.892</i>		

Source: Field Survey 2019/2020

Gender-wise Distribution of Employment:

The study has revealed that a large majority of homestay operators (68.5%) are female (Table 1). Moreover, this study has also observed that the average employment rate of female in the households of homestay operators is greater than the male counterparts (1.274 versus 0.890). Similarly, the maximum employment rate in the households of homestay operators of females is greater compared to males (3 versus 2). The minimum statistics being 0 in both female and male indicate that there are some homestays where no guest visited in 2018/19. Furthermore, the study also observed that among the total employment created by homestay tourism in the households of homestay operators, the employment of females (58.9%) is relatively higher than the male counterparts (41.1%) (Table 4). It indicates that the homestays are more effective in creating employments, though mostly part-time, for females than for males, thereby, contributing to relatively greater empowerment of women in the rural villages.

Table 4. Gender-wise distribution of employment opportunities created by homestay (2018/2019)

Gender	Total Employment	
	N	Percent
Female	93	58.9
Male	65	41.1
Total	158	100.0

Descriptive Statistics: Female: N: 72, Min: 0.0, Max: 3.0, Mean: 1.274, SD: 0.534; Male: N: 56, Min: 0.0, Max: 2.00, Mean: 0.890, SD: 0.591

Source: Field Survey 2019/2020

Income Generation Opportunity: Income generation opportunity is one of the most important motivating factors of homestay operators to involve in homestay tourism. This study has observed that in 2018/2019 a homestay operator earned on an average about NRs. 91,790.822 from the homestay. The maximum income from homestay is about NRs. 600,000 per year, which is a significant income in the context of Nepal. In the observation of researcher, such maximum income generators from homestays are the homestay operators who after long experiences of working in hotels and restaurants in the urban area migrated back to their rural village and started homestays. Homestays are the fulltime business of these homestay operators. They have also invested a significant amount of money in the construction of homestays. These homestays also have more facilities as well as provide relatively more professional services to the guests. They seem to receive new guests referred by the previous visitors. They might have also utilized the network they had developed while working in the urban area. Nevertheless, some homestay operators could not generate even a single rupee in the year 2018/2019. The standard deviation statistics being greater than the mean statistics of income (*Mean: 91,790.822 < SD: 112,332.270*) tells that there is a huge variation in the annual income among the homestay operators (Table 5). Among the households of the homestay operators surveyed for this study, about half of them did not have more than NRs. 50,000 annual income from the homestay in 2018/2019. About one-fourth of the homestay operators (23.2%) had up to NRs. 100,000 annual income from homestay in the same year. Less than one-fifth of the homestay operators generated income more than NRs. 200,000 in 2018/2019. Less than one-tenth of them had income annual income between NRs. 150,000 to NRs. 200,000 during the same period (Table 5).

Table 5: Income generated from homestays in the households of homestay operators

Income (2018/19) (In NRs.)	N	Percent
0.00	1	1.4
Up to 50,000.00	37	50.7
Up to 100,000.00	17	23.2
Up to 150,000.00	2	2.8
Up to 200,000.00	4	5.5
Above 200,000.00	12	16.4
Total	73	100.0

Descriptive Statistics:
Min:0.00,Max:600,000.00,Mean:91,790.822,SD:112,332.270

Source: Field Survey 2019/2020

Change in Employment and Income Between 2017/2018 and 2018/2019: Analyzing the rate of employment and income generation of homestays over the years could be very vital to understand the future of the homestay. This study has observed a positive change in both employment and income generated by the homestays in the households of the homestay operators. The average employment created by homestay in a household in 2017/2018 was 2.123, which slightly increased to 2.151 in 2018/2019. But, the minimum and maximum statistics of employment did not seem to vary over the years. The standard deviation statistics of employment variables in both years being less than respective mean statistics indicate that there is not much variation in employment among the homestay operators. The skewness and kurtosis statistics being less than one indicate that the data are normally distributed (Table 6). The average annual income generated by the homestay in a household of homestay operator in 2017/2018 was NRs.

62,658.082, which increased to NRs. 91,790.822 in 2018/2019. This result indicates that the annual number of visitors and/or the amount of spending has increased over the years. The maximum amount of annual income over the years has also increased. In 2017/2018, the maximum annual income was NRs. 300,000.00, which increased to NRs. 600,000.00 in 2018/2019. The standard deviation statistics of income variables in both years being greater than respective mean statistics indicate that there is huge variation in the income from homestays among the homestay operators. The skewness and kurtosis statistics being greater than one indicate the absence of normal distribution in the data (Table 6). Furthermore, in this study, Paired Samples T-Tests have been run to assess the significance of the change in employment and income over the years. Since income variables of both 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 were found to violate the assumption of normal distribution (Table 6), both the variables of income of 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 were transformed into the log using $\ln()$. After transforming the income variables into the log, the variables were found to satisfy the assumption of normality of data. The Paired Samples T-Test, did not confirm the significance of the increase in the average employment in the homestays between 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 ($T=1.000, p>0.05$), but the test confirmed the significance of the increase in the annual average income from homestays between 2017/2018 and 2018/2019 ($T=5.483, P<.001$) (Table 7). This result confirms that the income generated by homestays has significantly increased over the years.

Contribution of Income from Homestay on the Various Aspects of Livelihood of the Family of the Homestay Operators: Income from homestays have impacts on different aspects of livelihood of the family of the homestay operators. This study has discovered that a significantly great percentage of the homestay operators (95.7%) spend the income from homestays in food followed by health (73.9%), education (63.8%), clothes (44.9%), festivals celebration (44.9%) and others such as attending *Argho* (*Argho refers to the mourning period in Gurung culture after the death of a person in Gurung community. During this period, relatives and neighbours visit the family of the deceased person and express heartfelt condolences to the family as well as provide food and/or some kinds of donations to the family of the deceased person*), and marriage ceremony of the relatives and neighbours in the villages (4.3%) respectively (Table 8). This result indicates that homestays have become instrumental in assisting rural people in managing necessities of their lives as well as in strengthening the social relations of homestay operators. In other words, it can be also inferred that the homestays have contributed to improving the situation of human development in rural villages.

Social Empowerment of Rural People: Homestays have also made some impacts on the social lives of the homestay operators. In this study, perceived change in the social network, social involvement, knowledge of the homestay operators, household sanitation, community sanitation, and the change in the social prestige of the homestay operators before and after involving in homestay tourism. This study has disclosed that almost all of them have perceived that their social network (98.6%), social involvement (98.6%) and knowledge (97.3%) have increased after involving in homestay tourism. Similarly, homestay tourism has played a vital role in maintaining the sanitation in households as well as the communities.

Table 6. Change in employment and income of homestays over years

Variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
						Stat.	Std. Err.	Stat.	Std. Err.
Employment									
2017/2018	73	.00	5.00	2.123	.927	.394	.281	.763	.555
2018/2019	73	.00	5.00	2.151	.892	.539	.281	.845	.555
Income									
2017/2018	73	.00	300,000.00	62,658.082	80,350.531	1.656	.281	1.456	.555
2018/2019	73	.00	600,000.00	91,790.822	112,332.270	2.007	.281	4.894	.555

Source: Field Survey 2019/2020

Table 7. Paired samples T-Test statistics

Variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness		Kurtosis		T-Test
						Stat.	Std. Err.	Stat.	Std. Err.	
Employment 2017/2018	73	.00	5.00	2.123	.927	.394	.281	.763	.555	1.000
Employment 2018/2019	73	.00	5.00	2.151	.892	.539	.281	.845	.555	
Income 2017/2018 (log)	69	8.52	12.61	10.4260	1.17470	.322	.289	-.941	.570	5.483**
Income 2018/2019 (log)	72	7.60	13.30	10.7112	1.31837	-.202	.283	-.616	.559	

Note: ***p<.001 Source: Field Survey 2019/2020

Table 8. Use of income from homestays

Items	Responses		
	N	Percent	Percent of Cases
Food	66	29.2	95.7
Health	51	22.6	73.9
Education	44	19.5	63.8
Clothes	31	13.7	44.9
Festivals Celebration	31	13.7	44.9
Others (<i>Argho</i> , Marriage)	3	1.3	4.3
Total	226	100.0	327.5

Source: Field Survey 2019/2020

Table 9. Social empowerment of rural people after involving in homestay tourism

Variables	Highly Decreased	Somewhat Decreased	Neither Decreased nor Increased	Somewhat Increased	Highly Increased
<i>Social network of the homestay operator increased</i>					
N	-	-	1	30	42
Percent	-	-	1.4	41.1	57.5
<i>Descriptive Statistics: N: 73, Min: 3, Max: 5, Mean: 4.562, Std. Dev: 0.527</i>					
<i>Social involvement of the homestay operator increased</i>					
N	-	-	1	31	41
Percent	-	-	1.4	42.5	56.2
<i>Descriptive Statistics: N: 73, Min: 3, Max: 5, Mean: 4.548, Std. Dev: 0.528</i>					
<i>Knowledge of homestay operator increased</i>					
N	-	-	2	35	36
Percent	-	-	2.7	47.9	49.3
<i>Descriptive Statistics: N: 73, Min: 3, Max: 5, Mean: 4.466, Std. Dev: 0.555</i>					
<i>Household sanitation of the homestay improved</i>					
N	-	-	-	24	49
Percent	-	-	-	32.9	67.1
<i>Descriptive Statistics: N: 73, Min: 4, Max: 5, Mean: 4.671, Std. Dev: 0.473</i>					
<i>Community sanitation improved</i>					
N	-	-	-	30	43
Percent	-	-	-	41.1	58.9
<i>Descriptive Statistics: N: 73, Min: 4, Max: 5, Mean: 4.589, Std. Dev: 0.495</i>					
<i>Social prestige of the homestay operator heightened</i>					
N	-	-	4	38	31
Percent	-	-	5.5	52.1	42.5
<i>Descriptive Statistics: N: 73, Min: 3, Max: 5, Mean: 4.370, Std. Dev: 0.589</i>					

Source: Field Survey 2019/2020

All the homestay operators surveyed for this study (100%) also agreed that the household sanitation and community sanitation have also improved after starting homestays in the community. Furthermore, a great majority of the homestay operators (94.5%) have also perceived that their social prestige in the village has increased after involving in homestay tourism (Table 9).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that homestay tourism has been instrumental in generating livelihoods of the families in the rural villages in Nepal. It has created part-time employment opportunities and generated income in the households of the homestay operators. It has also

helped in empowering rural women with more employment opportunities and incomes. Homestay tourism has also encouraged the youths to migrate back to their rural villages. Based on the analysis of all the data and information obtained from the community homestays surveyed for this study, the following recommendations can be made to the homestay operators as well as the government and non-government organizations involving in this sector. Investment on the homestays appears to have positive effects with income from homestays, therefore, the homestay operators are suggested to invest in increasing the capacity of the homestays as far as possible.

- The significant increase in the income after involving in the homestay tourism compared indicates that the homestay tourism can be instrumental in the economic empowerment of the rural people, therefore, the government or non-government organization can adopt promotion of homestay tourism in the rural villages as a strategy to fight against rural poverty and/or for the empowerment of the rural people.
- Some of the rural youths, who were grownup in the city and had an experience of working in hotels and restaurants in urban, have been migrated back to their rural villages and are involving in homestay tourism seem to be more successful than others. Therefore, this study suggests government or non-government organization working in this sector of tourism to initiate specific policies to encourage such youths migrate back to their rural village (place of origin) and involve in homestay tourism. For example, the government or non-government organizations can conduct free training and workshops on homestay tourism such as housekeeping, hospitality, business, accounting, marketing, first aid, and so on, for such youths. This would also help in creating self-employment for youths.

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