

# Potentiality of Homestay Programs in Bangladesh: A Case Study of Paharpur Homestay

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***Abstract:** Tourism is a promising economic sector in Bangladesh and many localities of the country has introduced homestay program as an initiative for promotion of tourism, as well as for rural economic development. The government of Bangladesh considers homestay as a tool of community development. This paper discusses the potentiality of homestay programs in the country and proposes a model for Homestay program. The Paharpur Homestay Project is the pioneer in the country and attracts much attention of the tourism stakeholders. The project has been used as a case study for this paper.*

***Keywords:** Homestay program, village tourism, community based tourism (CBT), women empowerment, economic empowerment.*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the Study

With a contribution of nearly \$6 trillion to the world's economy tourism is one of the fastest growing industries, as well as the single largest industry in the world (UNWTO 2010). Bangladesh has ample opportunities to develop the tourism sector to contribute to the growth of national economy. Bangladesh is a playground of natural beauty and she possesses the Sundarbans - the largest mangrove forest in the world, Cox's Bazaar - the longest sandy beach in the whole planet, the exotic tea gardens and hill tracts, centuries old Buddhist monasteries, how declared UNESCO heritage sites, and all around eye-soothing greeneries and the most hospitable. The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has declared tourism a priority the people of country are exceptionally sector and included it in all programs under Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). According to the National Tourism Policy 2010, the community based tourism will be especially promoted in the country to ensure local economic development and preservation of local culture, tradition and crafts. Under the same policy, the GoB declared to use 'homestay' projects as a tool of community based tourism (CBT).

The term 'Homestay' has diverse meaning in different places and in different times. In Australia the term is associated with 'farmhouse accommodation' for tourists while in the United Kingdom it is often associated with staying at a local family house to learn the

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English language. Lanier and Berman (1993:15) describe homestay venues as “private homes in which unused rooms are rented for the purposes of supplementing income ... can be used as an alternative accommodation in popular tourist destinations”. In the United Kingdom, homestay has become a form of business diversification to the farmers (Davis and Turner 1992). The idea of the homestay program is to accommodate tourists in a village with a local family, thus enabling the tourist to learn about local lifestyle, culture, nature (Louise Gai Hjulmand et al., ARBEC 2003). The official definition of the homestay program according to the Ministry of Tourism of Malaysia is “. . . where tourist stay with the host’s family and experience the everyday way of life of the family in both a direct and indirect manner” (MOCAT, 1995).

Homestay is a combination of tourism and recreation and it is now used by many countries to promote community based tourism with an end to economic upsurge of village people plus to promote sustainable tourism with an end to conserve environment. (Yahaya, 2004 : 66). In general, homestay is a form of tourism where tourists can experience the local cultures and heritage of any destination, especially rural area, enjoy local food, lifestyle, festivals and traditions, and thus contribute directly to the rural economy as well as support the community in environment conservation initiatives (Devkota, 2008).

Homestay projects as a part of CBT are aligned with the social business philosophy. In many countries homestay programs are running as individual or community businesses and are often supported by the government policies and authorities. Governments, corporations and non-profit organizations together may not be sufficiently able to ensure social well being and social business models may be the missing middle among the three to contribute innovatively towards economic development through solving social problems in a business-way. Homestay tourism can be used as a social business model to achieve economic goals of the rural people. Hence the author looks for developing a social business model for homestay program which can boost up the rural economy in Bangladesh. The Paharpur Homestay Project is the pioneer in the country and attracts much attention of the tourism stakeholders.

## **1.2 Rationale of the Study**

One of the basic goals of community development program is to address poverty as a mainstay of different sources of social problems like poor health condition, illiteracy, social discrimination etc. Homestay program, as a tool of CBT, can contribute effectively towards sustainable economic development of rural people by ensuring their economic empowerment. It is also connected with women empowerment and environmental conservation. Homestay program as the latest phenomenon in the tourism industry in Bangladesh can be a unique business model to be applied for sustainable economic development in rural areas. The Paharpur Homestay Project matches the philosophy and

principles of social business and can be used as a social business model for many rural areas near tourist attractions of the country. In this context, the present study analyzes the potentiality of homestay programs in Bangladesh, as well as in other least developed countries of the world.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The paper intended to propose an effective business model based on a sustainable homestay program in Bangladesh and to find out its potentiality in terms of contribution to rural economic development and environmental conservation. The author has one objective to find out potential outcomes of Homestay program. Another objective is to describe the inception and operation of The Paharpur Homestay Project as a case study.

### **1.4 Research Methodology**

The paper is descriptive and qualitative in nature and uses both primary and secondary data. To collect the primary data the author has used two tools: case study analysis and focus group discussions. The author conducted a literature review for developing a proposed 'homestay business model', which is expected to be innovative and exploratory and based on a theoretical context.

The paper also describes the effectiveness of homestay program as a tool of CBT, discusses ins and outs of Paharpur Homestay program and proposes recommendations on the potentiality and applicability of a homestay business model at home and abroad.

## **2. Review of Literature**

Homestay program has sensitized the tourism sector as an element or tool of community based tourism (CBT), because it tries to ensure the community's economic empowerment as well as its direct involvement in tourism development. The CBT concept evolving since 1990 has been at the forefront of the promotion of rural development, both in developed and developing countries (Honey, 2008).

Community Based Tourism (CBT) originated for sustainable tourism development and aims to build the local communities' capacity by consuming local resource wisely and helps to protect the environment. The concept of sustainable tourism development is "consistent with the tenets of sustainable development" (Stabler & Goodall 1996, 170). Sustainable development is a development strategy that manages all assets, natural resources, and human resources, as well as financial and physical assets, for increasing long-term wealth and well-being. Sustainable development, as a goal rejects policies and practices that support current living standards by depleting the productive base, including natural resources, and that leaves future generations with poorer prospects and greater risks than our own (Tosun 2001, 290.) It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while

maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, and biological diversity, and life support systems. (Cooper, Fletcher, Fyall & Gilbert 2008, 218). Thus, in alignment with the concept of sustainable development, World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism as “...meeting the need of present tourist and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future”.

Homestay as defined by the Ministry of Tourism, Malaysia (Malaysian’s Rural Tourism Master Plan 2007) as : ‘...where tourists stay with host families to interact and experience the daily life as well as experiencing local culture’. In home stay tourism visitors get a chance to spend time with the family observing their customs, values and culture, which gives them the opportunity to feel the taste of rural life (Devote, 2010). Homestay offers the traveler a unique local experience and possibilities of interaction with the host family. It offers the chance to experience new and untapped places which has enabled the government to popularize new tourist destinations, and provide alternative source of income to the rural folks (Gangotia, 2013).

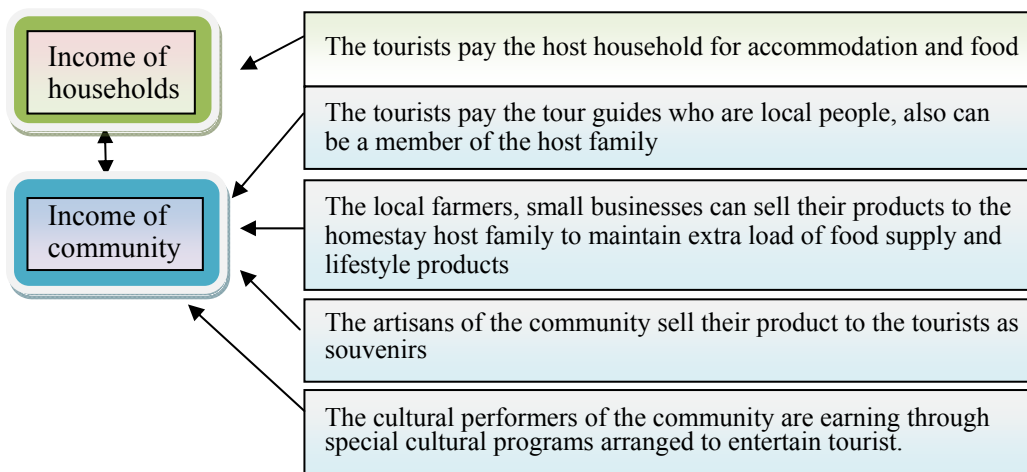


Figure 1: Income Generation through Homestay Programs

Ministry of Tourism, Malaysia expressed in the Malaysian’s Rural Tourism Master Plan 2007 that the income generated by Homestay Program benefits not only the homestay operators but also the whole community when they engage in cultural activities, selling of souvenirs and participate in handling tourist packages and the Malaysian homestay experience provides the local community with alternative incomes and becomes a poverty reduction tool. Income generation through homestay programs occurs in different ways as shown in Figure 1.

The homestay programs can contribute to preserve the ecological sustainability, generate self-employment and initiate economic growth in the rural communities (Devkota 2008).

Homestay can create a mind-shift of the local people towards environment conservation. Primarily a homestay program helps to preserve natural structure of any destination because it encourages tourist accommodation in village-homes rather than any resort or hotel built up destroying agricultural land or forests. Additionally it can directly involve rural people in the tourism and providing them with extra income which make them more conscious about conserving the natural resources like streams, lakes, forests which are tourist attractions. Another important outcome is that the local people become more conscious about waste management and maintenance of a clean and peaceful environment.

Devkota (2008) have identified a list of positive impacts of homestay programs on local economy and society which are:

- it can address to build up the quality life of indigenous people of the village area
- it makes rural people capable of accessing the benefits created by tourism industry, i.e. employment and income generation etc.
- it helps to expose the rural culture and nature to the outside world
- it contributes towards protection against environmental degradation
- it induces the increased use of natural and human resources of the rural areas for rural development
- it is a way to decentralize the national economy through promoting local agricultural and other industries

Most authors expressed their positive opinion in favor of homestay program indicating that it has shown the preliminary positive impact on rural village development, rural women development, local economy, environment, and the entire community and have increased awareness among the local people about the cultural and heritage preservation. (Tsonis, 2009; Logar, 2009 ; Devkota 2008).

Osman, Hazlina Ahmad, Ariffin Ahmad, Husin, Bakar & Tanwir (2008) studied the women run homestay enterprises in Malaysia and found homestay a great way towards women empowerment. Additionally they concluded that economic and social benefits were more rewarding to women entrepreneurs than environmental benefits. This is because almost all the time the homestay programs are vastly dependent on the adaptation of the women member(s) of the host family who are responsible for food preparation and serving, housekeeping, cleaning etc.

Lama (2013) tried to analyze and explore the contribution of homestay programs for sustainable tourism development in Nepal. Her study found that the homestay programs are contributing significantly for economic sustainability and natural sustainability of rural community as well as helping preservation of local traditions and cultures.

Kumar, S. Gill & Kunasekaran (2012) jointly studied the contribution made by tourism towards poverty eradication in selected rural areas in Selangor, Malaysia where the local government adopted homestay as a strategy for poverty eradication. There is a growing recognition of homestay tourism as a tool for development and for formation of Pro-poor Tourism (PPT) approach. Homestay program is identified as a very strong tool to remove poverty in rural areas not only by Malaysia but also by many other countries (Siwar et al., 2011). Pro-Poor Tourism strategies are aimed at empowering the target groups economically, socially and psychologically. Thus it is essential that homestay programs should emphasize on increasing household-level plus community-level income and revitalization of cultural practices and traditional crafts- making (ECER Master Plan, 2007).

In recent time, involvement and participation of local communities has been regarded as a central focus of sustainable tourism development (Murphy, 1985; Richards and Hall, 2000) where homestay program can ensure the community involvement in economic decision making and thus provide them the opportunity of economic empowerment (Tosun, 2000; Stronza and Gordillo, 2008; Scheyvens, 2002). Psychological empowerment is also possible in this case which refers to enhancement of self-esteem and pride in local cultures, traditional knowledge, and natural resources (Scheyvens, 1999).

A Study on Dallagaon Homestay and its Sustainability conducted by Banking Development and Research Unit of the National Bank of Nepal in 2015 has some interesting findings. The study found that additional to income generation, Homestay program contributes to development of a better social conviction, improve mutual cooperation and reduces conflict among village people. It could increase the democracy-sense among the village inhabitants through allowing them to participate in different committees related to the homestay project. The study found that homestay programs decrease family-quarrel in the households and increased aesthetic sense of local people.

Recently experts opine that there is a necessity of social enterprises which should focus on engaging community members in the provision and development of their own economic, social and cultural futures, valuing principles of engagement, mutual benefit, and people before profits (Lukkarinen, 2005; Quarter, 2000). The general objective of the homestay/CBT are parallel to those social enterprise objectives, which aim at creating community benefits broadly defined as economic, social, and cultural benefits through a bottom-up process of local involvement in decision making, capacity building, and neoliberal economic diversification (Blackstock, 2005; Koster & Randall, 2005; Mair, 2006).

### 3. Potential Outcomes of Homestay Programs

Community Based Tourism (CBT) has dimensions of poverty alleviation, reduction in unemployment and environmental conservation. Through CBT we should try to fight poverty and inequality as well as promote sustainable development including climate change and environment sustainability. There is a need for nurturing innovative ideas and harnessing emerging technologies to achieve the above social goals. Homestay for Community based tourism (CBT) is a novel idea for country like Bangladesh.

CBT, by definition, is aimed at involving local rural people in economic decision making directly. As a tool of CBT homestay program will use the existing household for food and accommodation of tourists rather than allowing construction of hotel, motel, restaurant, resort etc. The tourist will create increased demand for the products produced by the local farmers, craftsmen and small businesses. When a large hotel company comes from urban area and provides tourist accommodation in tourist destination, the income or employment generation becomes offset due to negative effects created through destruction of cultivable land or forest. Additionally that hotel does not create any economic empowerment or involvement by the local people. So from this perspective, ‘homestay’ can be the solutions of social, economical, ecological problems created by traditional tourist accommodations (resort/hotels).

The goals of CBT can be achieved with the application of the homestay programs in the following ways:

**Table 1: Alignment of CBT goals with the outcomes of Homestay Programs**

	<b>CBT goals</b>	<b>Outcomes of Homestay Programs</b>
1	to overcome poverty	Homestay can create income generation as a source of extra income for host family and increased income for local farmers, businesses, craftsman, cultural performers etc. plus can create employment generation for local people, most commonly as tourist guides.
2	to achieve financial and economic sustainability	Homestay can provide opportunity to improve economic condition of the whole community and also can empower them economically (allowing them making economic decisions about production and buyers).
3	to ensure environmental preservation	Homestay can provide alternative accommodation (existing village homes rather than hotels/resorts), not destroying local ecology (forest, farm-land) plus can create environment-consciousness among local people and tourists.

The pro-poor approach translated through homestay (CBT) is the most important match between social business philosophy and that of homestay. Additionally homestay can achieve many social goals and create a ‘social transition’ as a combined effect of women empowerment, reduction of family and group conflict, preservation of local traditions and cultures and so on.

On the basis of our discussion we can propose a social business model development process for establishing homestay in the rural areas near to any prominent tourist attraction as well as in the tribal villages within the naturally beautiful hilly regions (see Figure 2). Additional tourist accommodations if are established here, like traditional hotel, resorts etc. might be replaced with the eco-friendly ‘homestay’ which have numbers of community benefits identified so far.

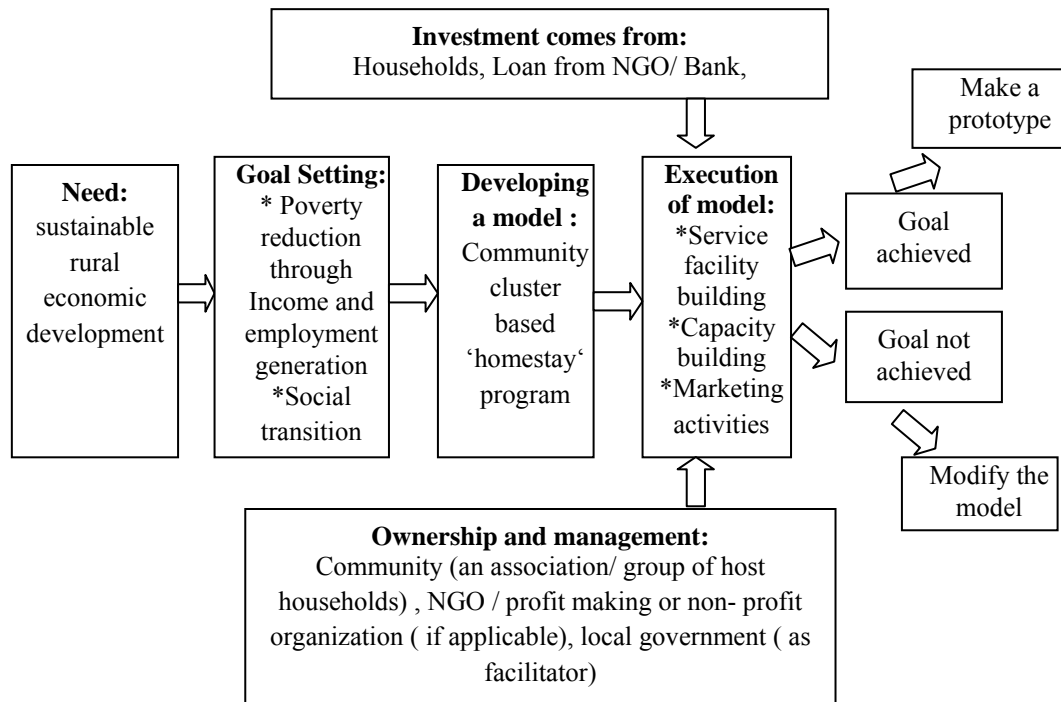


Figure 2: A Proposed Business Model for Homestay in Bangladesh (supported by a model developed by Rahman, 2014)

There is need in the rural areas for creation of employment and generation of income. Many village residents shift to the cities to find job, which eventually leads to a loss to rural economy. In the context of acute social problem, a social business model can be created to address the problems. The proposed model of Homestay program will be a cluster business. In this model the host-households will earn as individuals but should work as a cluster within the structure of a group or association and will share some



common resources (tourist attractions, infrastructures, craft centers, cultural performers, social or cultural functions/festivals etc.). The partner investors like the households, their group (a group fund), the local government, the NGOs, banks together can create a organizational structure for smooth operation of the business. In Malaysia, Nepal and India, such organizational structures have been created to run homestay businesses (Devkota 2008). As cluster they might create some infrastructure (a community center) in the spot with their combined fund. The household may invest in the program to establish service facility (sanitary toilet) and for this they can take loan from bank or NGO.

The government and for-profit/non-profit organizations, who can become investors in homestay program, may also participate in:

- Production activities through providing capacity building like training for food preparation, housekeeping, health and hygiene maintenance etc.
- Management functions through providing advice and consultation to aid managerial and financial planning
- Marketing functions through proper advertisement and networking

Marketing function will play a crucial role in success of this business model. It is applicable in any kind of tourism based business. Also, business partners like government and for-profit/non-profit organizations to play their to make the social business model successful.

### **3.2 Case Study: Paharpur Homestay**

#### **Location**

The village where the Paharpur Homestay Project is being implemented is Malancha which is situated down the South-East corner of the Paharpur Buddhist Monastery. The monastery is among the best known Buddhist viharas in the Indian Subcontinent and is one of the most important archeological sites in the country. It was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985. It is less than five minutes' walk to the monastery from the houses of the homestay project. The nature bestowed the village with lashing greenery and fertile soil. Farming is the main livelihood of the villagers. The village is surrounded by multi type crops fields, poultry farms, livestock farm and few fish farming also. Different tribal communities (Saontal, Orao, Mahalo, Karmokar, Makali etc.) and some traditional professional communities (blacksmith, potter, carpenter etc.) live around this village. One road through Paharpur bazaar and another road through Jamalganj bazaar connected Paharpur Monastery with the national highway through Malancha village. The villagers' life style has been changed now-a-days due to the impact of rural electrification process and the economic activities facilitated by it.

### Cluster of Host-households

Six households of this village of Paharpur have been primarily selected for the homestay purpose under the Paharpur homestay project. Head of three households are farmers and of the three other families are doing miscellaneous jobs in this village. All the six families are lower middle class, their houses are made of bricks, mud and corrugated tin sheets. Each house has an open yard and has separate toilet attached bathing place across the yard. The homestay houses are equipped with some furniture such as bedstead, dining table, television and electric fan. Such a family house consists of 03 or 04 rooms, one kitchen house, an open house for cattle (cows, buffalo or goat), one small house for chicken or duck and one granary. Traditional form of mud hearth is being used to cook food. Two persons can be accommodated in a room at each of these houses. The younger members of the families are mostly student and most women stay at home as house wife. The young members can play effective role in communication as they can speak English. Additionally they can escort tourists in and around the village and to the tourist attraction spots.

The households have been named to be identified as:

#### 1. Gaud, 2. Barendra, 3. Samotot, 4. Rarr, 5. Pundra, and 6. Somapura

The above mentioned houses have been assigned to provide a clean and affordable place for tourists and offer an opportunity for foreign tourists to stay with Bangladeshi families to experience local customs and traditions and relish authentic Bangladeshi cuisine.

The following table presents summary of information about the households:

**Table 2: Household information of Paharpur Homestay**

Household Name	Head of the Family	Profession	Details of Family Members	Accommodation
GAUD	Abdul Hakim	Electrician	Father (electrician), mother (housewife), son and daughter (student) and grandmother.	1 room for 2 persons with well conditioned sanitary toilet
BARENDA	Md. Abdur Rauf	Farmer	Mother (housewife), daughters (student) and grandmother	same
SOMAPURA	Md. Hasan Ali	Service holder	Father (service holder), mother (housewife) and 2 small kids	same
SAMOTOT	Nazrul Islam	Farmer	Father (farmer), mother (housewife) and son (student of Engineering)	same
RARR	Md. Mizanur Rahman	Service holder	Father (service holder), mother (housewife), 2 daughters (student)	same
PUNDRA	Md. Erfan Ali	Farmer	Father (farmer), mother (housewife), son (service holder) and daughter (student).	same

### **Homestay Tourist Attractions**

The homestay program at Paharpur offers lots of tourist attractions where sight-seeing is blended with memorable life-time experience gathered through enjoying unparallel life-style and culture of village in Bangladesh:

1. Main attraction of the Homestay is Paharpur Buddhist Monastery (Sompura Mahavihara), built in the 3rd century; it is the oldest Buddhist archeological site of the Indian sub-continent.
2. Night view of the Monastery is exotic, especially in the full-moon nights, plus evening chatting with villagers at a tea shop in the local market place.
3. Life style of the tribal people and their cultural show can be an unavoidable attraction; the tribes have their own language, rituals, customs, clothing, songs and crafts.
4. Life style of the local professional communities and their craft-making activities.
5. Local social functions and festivals like
  - a. traditional marriage ceremony,
  - b. harvesting time festivals such as village stage-plays (jatra), food festivals ('nobanno' feast with food using newly harvested grains and fruits), village fair
  - c. village sports such as 'kabadi (a form of wrestling), stick-fight (lathi khela), cock-fight etc.
  - d. occasional music programs, tribal music and dance programs.
6. Farming activities, especially sowing seeds, harvesting and processing crops attract much attention of foreigners
7. Fishing, dairy and poultry activities
8. Cycling along the village streets
9. Roaming in the lakes with boats and enjoying festive boat-rowing contest

### **The School of Homestay**

1. Traditional form of cooking can be learnt at the homestay households
2. Local way of fishing can be learnt from villagers
3. How to eat by the hand (south Asian style) can be learnt from host-family members
4. How to wear traditional dress of Bangladesh (saree, lungi and panjabi) can be learnt from host-family members

### Project SWOT Analysis

The project is a pioneer one in the sector. Its features, however, come up with some unique strengths and opportunities, yet not free from weaknesses and threats.

**Table 3: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) of the Paharpur Homestay Project**

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unique tourist attractions like the centuries old Buddhist Moneastery</li> <li>2. Village culture supplemented with tribal culture</li> <li>3. Host household members leading simple life with friendly behavior and inquisitiveness</li> </ol>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Language barrier creating inconvenience in cultural exchange</li> <li>2. Poor families of the community with communication skills and manners to deal with strangers</li> <li>3. Lack of skills in marketing household products</li> </ol>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Homestay is totally unexplored but have lots of potentials</li> <li>2. Homestay is becoming more popular day by day and tourists are more likely to experience local life and culture rather than just enjoy scenic beauty</li> </ol>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cultural shocks</li> <li>2. The apprehension that the money spent may not be worth the value generated</li> </ol>

### The Investors

The investors of the project are four-folds, Journey Plus (a tour operator frequently visiting the area with foreign guests), households, DMSS (Dustho Manobota Seba Shongho, a local NGO), Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB, as facilitator). BTB and Journey Plus together arranged a training program for the household members concentrating in the areas of attitudes of hospitality, hygiene, housekeeping, communicative English and cooking. The household heads have created a committee working with some organized ideas.

### Project Operation

The village Malancha has 63 households plus 26 tribal families as inhabitants. The homestay host-households are a very small portion of the population. The host-households charge \$18-20 per night from the guests. The tour guides, generally a member of the host family, charge a nominal \$ 3 per day.

The project has been working for one year and has served only five groups of guests so far. The guests have positive feedbacks and the household members also seemed enthusiastic.

The source of additional income created with the homestay project has created a sensation in the village and other residents are convinced with the idea.

#### **4. Recommendations**

The homestay program has just been started in Bangladesh. To be successful the program needs to be run several years and the model should be proved to have achieved its goals. There are several challenges and possible solutions which have been identified by the author. They are:

##### **Challenges of Homestay Tourism**

1. Basic communication can be a problem because not all people in village in Bangladesh have skill in communicative English
2. Marketing and promotion are necessary for survival of the homestays, where households must rely on others, like government body or an NGO
3. Capacity building in hygienic environment maintenance, healthy cooking, housekeeping etc. are to be established
4. Lack of coordination and supervision (government organization, travel agencies)

##### **Possible Solutions to Address the Problems**

1. Loan or subsidy for housing and management and infrastructural support from local government
2. Special provision for infrastructure from Village Development
3. Capacity development training
4. Networking and communication skill development and access to medias for promotional activities
5. Marketing and promotional support from different stakeholders

#### **5. Conclusions**

Community Based Tourism (CBT) itself is a revolutionary idea to bring micro-economic improvements of the deprived and poor people in the world. CBT comes with the philosophy for rural community development. The idea of socially focused business model in the form of homestay can introduce a new era in the tourism sector in Bangladesh. The strength of rural Bangladesh is growing in the context that the people are more literate, women are more empowered and sanitation of the villages are dramatically improved.

In Bangladesh electricity is available in rural areas now, most of the girl children are school going, and internet facilities have reached the rural areas with implementation of the government program on 'Digital Bangladesh'. So we have lots of potentiality in developing homestay tourism. However the author feels that further studies are required to assess the successful implication of the model and proposes that the future researchers should conduct longitudinal study to appropriately assess the success and failure of homestay models to develop policy suggestions.

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