

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW**  
**MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES**

**[ISSN 2581-5369]**

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**Volume 5 | Issue 1**

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**2022**

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# Socio-Cultural Impacts of Ecotourism Developments on the Stakeholders in the Great Himalayan National Park: An UNESCO World Heritage Site

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## ABSTRACT

*Himachal Pradesh is known for its breathtaking pristine natural beauty, its sheer topographic diversity, architecture, snow-covered high Himalayan Mountains, temples, dense green deodar forests, rich flora & fauna, etc. and is regarded as a beautiful hill state. The Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) is situated in the Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh. During the 38th meeting of the World Heritage Committee held on 23rd June 2014 at Qatar, the GHNP was celebrated as UNESCO World Heritage Site due to its 'outstanding universal values' adhering to the fact that the park has sustained the protection of biodiversity and nurtured rare natural beauty in the Western Himalayas. The park has been blessed with distinct biodiversity, flora & fauna. The Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP), Kullu, Himachal Pradesh, is one of the best eco-tourism destinations in the state. The GHNP organizes various adventurous activities like trekking, wildlife viewing, bird watching, Rafting, Climbing, Mountain biking, local sightseeing, etc. Stakeholders' involvement is very important for the execution and development of eco-tourism in the destination, and they provide the exact feedback about the improvements and developments in the region. The study is confined to the Great Himalayan National Park Conservational Area (GHNPCA) Kullu, Himachal Pradesh. The study explored the socio-cultural impacts of eco-tourism developments on the stakeholders in and around the Great Himalayan National Park.*

**Keywords:** *Eco-tourism, UNESCO, Bio-diversity, World Heritage Site, Conservational.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) is the most famous/well renowned national park

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which falls under the geographical territory of Kullu district of Himachal Pradesh which is also known for its tourism potential. The GHNP was a joint initiative of British, American, and Indian/state of Himachal Pradesh governments and was constituted in 1984 in the beautiful valley of Seraj. The total land coverage of GHNP was around 754.4 sq kilometers at the time of its inception and was declared as a full-fledged National Park in 1999. Further, to sustain eco-development programs that were supposed to run in GHNP, an area of 265.6 sq kilometers is reserved for the population of around 16000-18000 people, 160 villages, and approximately 2300 families living in the above-mentioned area. Further, two additional wildlife sanctuaries in Sainj and Trithan valleys of Himachal were notified in 1994, covering the area of 90 and 61 sq kilometers and were later added to the total area of the Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area, expanding its previous area from 754.4 sq kilometers to 1171 sq kilometers.



**Source:** Photograph is taken by the researcher during Data Collection

The GHNP was declared as UNESCO World Heritage Site on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2014 due to its 'outstanding universal values' adhering to the fact that the park has sustained the protection of biodiversity and nurtured rare natural beauty in the Western Himalayas.

The managing body of GHNP is focusing strongly on four major areas "to celebrate, to converse, to protect and to respect" nature for sustaining environment as well as eco-tourism in its proximity. To add to its beauty & attraction, the park is surrounded by some rivers out of which Beas, Jiwaji Nala, Tirthan are important and worth tourist attractions.

At present, the GHNP is working upon community-based Eco-tourism methods in which they have engaged and registered local populace/ stakeholders through an NGO, "Bio-diversity Tourism & Community Advancements (BTCA)" in many activities such as food, camps,

porters, cooks, bird-watching guides, eco-tourism guides and experts for adventure activities. The park management earlier supported WSCGs, and its members formed an NGO named "Society for Advancement of Hill and Rural Areas (SAHARA)," which was quite active from 2000 to 2005 and was later replaced by BTCA. The BTCA is playing an active role in helping the local populace by providing them necessary guidance and help in asset building, rationalizing the use of natural resources, socio-economic development, market support, and fundraising.

### **(A) Need And Significance Of The Study**

The Great Himalayan National Park is an important nature-based destination having rich biodiversity, where visitors come to enjoy the natural beauty, landscapes, terrains, flora, and fauna, biodiversity in its purest form. The park has been inscribed in the World Heritage Site list due to the outstanding universal values adhering to the fact that the park has sustained the protection of biodiversity and nurtured rare natural beauty in the Western Himalayas. This status is like a crown to the park and made a value of the destination at the national as well as international level. As a result, a lot of people from different socio-cultural communities are visiting the destination and availing the tourism-related services in and around the vicinity of the national park and intermingling with the locals and other stakeholders. So there is a need to study the Socio-Cultural Impacts of Ecotourism Developments on the Stakeholders in the Great Himalayan National Park Conservational Area (GHNPCA) Kullu, Himachal Pradesh.

### **(B) Literature Review**

A thorough study was done on information about Socio-Cultural Impacts of Ecotourism Developments on the Stakeholders from various research papers, journals, books, news articles, literature, and other related articles. Weaver (2001), in his study, highlighted the socio-cultural impacts of eco-tourism on the destinations. He found that eco-tourism brings a number of adverse impacts mainly in terms of land-use conflicts, hampering of local social relationships, traditional local culture, values, and customs. He also found that unequal distribution of income and existing local inequalities to the community members are recognized as one of the serious costs to eco-tourism. Negi (2002), in his study, described the process of tourism and development through tourism from the point of ecological sustainability. He observed that the Himachal Pradesh government had promoted eco-tourism as an alternative to mass tourism and focused on the identification of aims, objectives, stakeholders, responsibilities, and sustainability of eco-tourism. He described that eco-tourism had been accepted as a new approach as it provides opportunities for the development of communities and advocates the

limited use of resources with emphasis on community development to meet the social, economic, and cultural needs of the community. He concluded that eco-tourism helps in the development of local communities. Soni (2006) observed that tourism is a broader field associated with a number of activities that affect the social and cultural ethos of a country. She firmly stated that tourism help to bring families together when they spend time with each other on vacations. She described that tourism inculcates the social values among the peoples and establishes cordial relations among them. She also said that due respect and importance must be given to the tourism planners, craftsmen, and other stakeholders whose work is helping to promote India's rich cultural heritage. Guha & Ghosh (2007) studied the extent to which tourism improves the livelihood of the local community. They described that local residents are involved in tourism activities as tourism participants, forest dependents & engaged in other economic activities and claimed that tourism participants spend more on food as well as on non-food items as compared to other villagers. They also highlighted the tourism-related income as additional revenue generated by the local residents through eco-tourism practices. They concluded that eco-tourism is mitigating poverty and improving the well-being of the local community. Nyuapane & Poudel (2011) highlighted the benefits of eco-tourism to the local communities. They revealed that eco-tourism involves the local peoples in the tourism activities and helps them to improve their living standards. They explained that the involvement of the local community in tourism activities helps to empower them socio-politically and inculcates respect for different cultures as well as respect for human rights. Eco-tourism develops a positive attitude among the local community peoples towards the conservation of natural resources by providing indirect incentives like infrastructure development, awareness and education, health facilities, and job creations. Andrew Seidl (2014) discussed the marketing efforts of Albania for promoting its World Heritage Sites and other attributes of its cultural heritage, including dances, local food and beverages, tapestries, and even its communist era. In their study, they also highlighted the expenditure patterns, activities, and the assessment of international visitors with a particular focus on natural and cultural tourism. Rasoolimanesh & Jaffar (2016) highlighted the importance of cordial relationships between the community members for sustainable tourism developments in World Heritage site destinations. They observed that establishing connections and sustaining interactions is very important for creating strong bonds and relationships between community members for sustainable development. They described that community involvement is helpful for creating a sense of belongingness, increasing credibility, and establishing trust among the community members. T.Cuuccia et al. (2016), in their study, explored the effects of cultural heritage in fostering

tourism demand. They described the effects of UNESCO World Heritage list inscription on tourism destinations. They observed that while cultural and environmental endowments positively affect the performance of Italian tourists and destinations, the presence of UNESCO sites exerts opposite effects. Josephine & Marilena (2017) described the concept of sustainability of Cultural World Heritage Sites and its controversial relationships with tourism. They observed that in developing countries, the rapid growth of international and domestic tourism had negatively affected the World Heritage Sites due to insufficient management skills and resources. They highlighted the role of UNESCO to acknowledge and protect cultural heritage expressions, sites, and practices. They described that if a site receives this UNESCO badge, it is an acknowledgment of its universal cultural and natural value as well as recognition of the need to protect it from harm. They also described in their study that UNESCO badge is an important marketing tool in world tourism, and its presence ensures many more visitors to a site that is UNESCO recognized.

The GHNPCA has been successful in eco-tourism development by providing alternate livelihoods opportunities in support of conserving biodiversity, creating a tangible impact and as a result, the local villagers have organized themselves through an NGO, Biodiversity Tourism and Community Advancement (BTCA), which is working with the Great Himalayan National Park Management to increase the facilities and service quality for sustainable eco-tourism developments in the study area. The eco-tourism developments in the study area have provided livelihood opportunities and helped in the upliftment of their socio-cultural structure.

### **(C) Objectives Of The Study**

The study was carried to meet the following objectives:

- To examine the status of eco-tourism developments in Great Himalayan National Park, Kullu, Himachal Pradesh.
- To examine the Socio-Cultural Impacts of Ecotourism Developments on the local community and Stakeholders in the Great Himalayan National Park Conservational Area (GHNPCA) Kullu, Himachal Pradesh.
- To suggest measures for eco-tourism development in Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area.

### **(D) Methodology**

The research design is descriptive in nature. This is an exploratory research study that attempts to study the Socio-Cultural Impacts of Ecotourism Developments on the Stakeholders in the

Great Himalayan National Park Conservational Area (GHNPCA) Kullu, Himachal Pradesh. The method of data collection is mainly based on primary data. However, an effort is made to collect the information from competent persons off and on in the study area. A series of field trips were made to the study area, and observations were made by taking the personnel opinion of the local community, Officials of Park management, NGO officials, and other stakeholders in the study area. The present study examined the Socio-Cultural Impacts of Ecotourism Developments on the local community and Stakeholders in the Great Himalayan National Park Conservational Area (GHNPCA) Kullu, Himachal Pradesh.

## II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### (A) Data Analysis & Data Interpretation:

The Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP), Kullu, Himachal Pradesh, was inscribed as the UNESCO world heritage site in June 2014 and is one of the best eco-tourism destinations in the state. In order to study the Socio-Cultural Impacts of Ecotourism Developments on the local community and Stakeholders in the Great Himalayan National Park Conservational Area (GHNPCA) Kullu, Himachal Pradesh, a sample size of 180 respondents from the local community/ stakeholders selected.

**Table 1: Classification of Stakeholders on the basis of Work Profile**

Work Profile of Stakeholders	Number of Respondents	Percent
Govt. officials	40	22.2
Ecotourism Operators	50	27.8
Panchayat Representatives	40	22.2
Taxi drivers, Guides & Potters	50	27.8
Total	180	100

The study was completed with the help of primary as well secondary data collected through structured questionnaires and observations done by the researcher during field trips in the study area. The respondents were members of the local community and other stakeholders from the study area in and around the Great Himalayan National Park conservational area. In this survey, 180 respondents were covered. It is evident from table 1 that out of 180 respondents, 40(22.2%) were Govt. officials, 50(27.8%) were Ecotourism Operators, 40(22.2%) were Panchayat

Representatives, and 50(27.8%) were Taxi drivers, Guides & Potters.

**Table 2: Perception of the Respondents for the Social and Cultural Impacts from Ecotourism development**

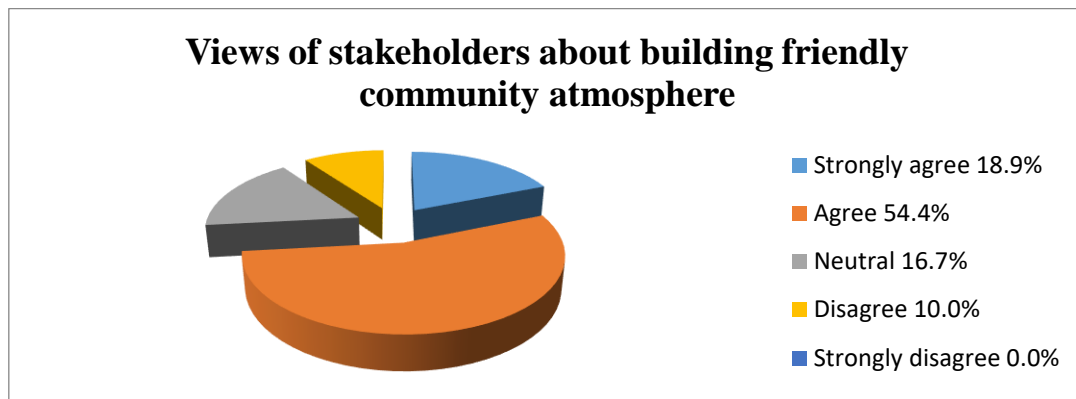
Attributes	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Ecotourism developments has helped to build friendly community atmosphere	18.9	54.4	16.7	10.0	0.0	2.18	0.853	0.632	-0.024
Ecotourism has improved the awareness of culture	15.6	55.6	21.1	7.8	0.0	2.21	0.798	0.535	0.063
Ecotourism has deepened the understanding of culture in local people	15.6	56.7	21.1	6.7	0.0	2.19	0.775	0.531	0.174
Ecotourism has helped to create strong bonds and establish relations among the community involved	16.7	55.6	18.9	8.9	0.0	2.20	0.821	0.592	0.047
Ecotourism has enriched local people	24.4	57.8	8.9	8.9	0.0	2.20	0.832	0.900	0.656
It has made people realize the attractiveness and characteristics of GHNP	26.7	52.2	10.0	11.1	0.0	2.06	0.901	0.816	0.097
It has made people like to work and live in their rural area	47.8	30.0	8.9	13.3	0.0	1.88	1.045	0.961	-0.318

**Source: Data Collected through Questionnaires, S.A. strongly Agree, A. agrees, N. neutral, D. disagree, S.D. strongly disagree**



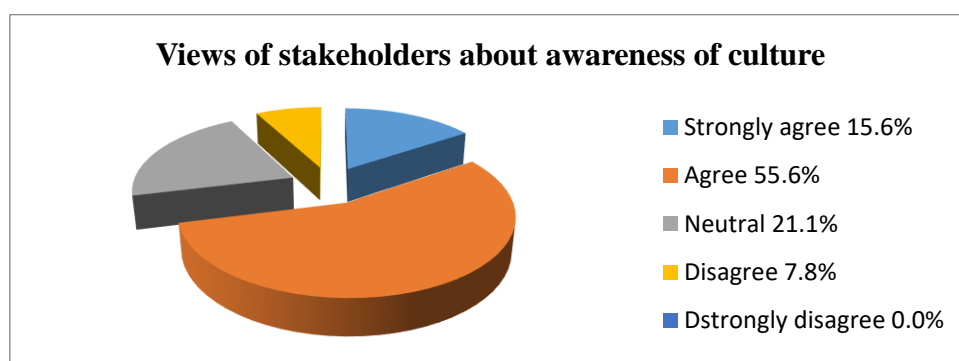
Note- Responses of Respondents are shown in percentage.

**Figure 1: Stakeholder's views about Building Friendly Community Atmosphere**



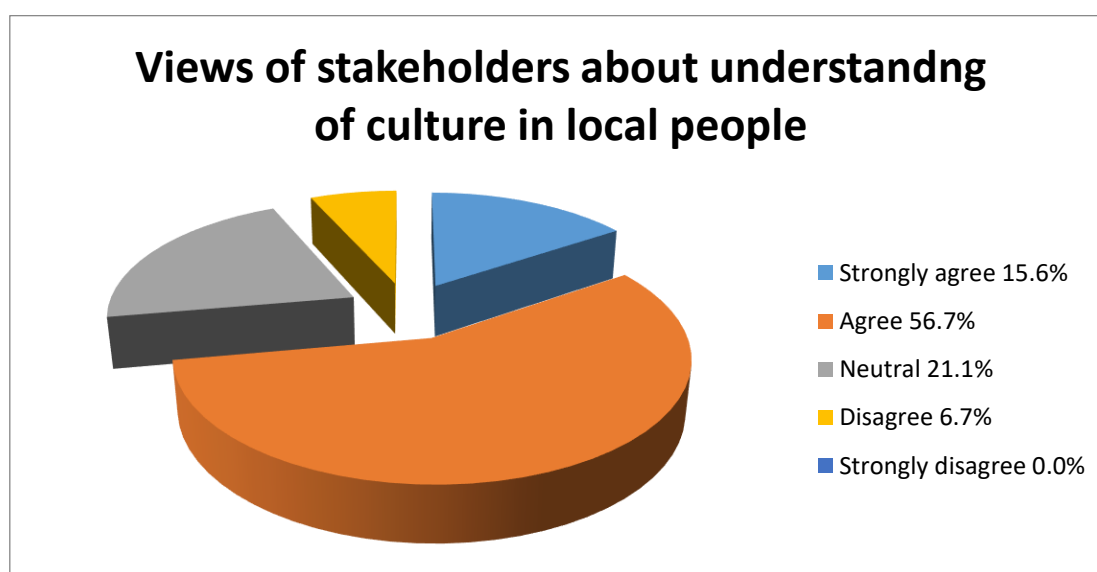
Stakeholder's views about friendly community atmosphere were analyzed, and it is evident from Table 2 and figure 1 that 18.9% of the respondents have strongly agreed with the statement that eco-tourism developments have helped to build a friendly community atmosphere; also 54.4% of respondents have agreed; whereas 16.7% respondents have a neutral opinion; however 10.0% of the respondent have disagreed opinion, and no respondent has strongly disagreed opinion. It is revealed from Table 2 that the mean score to the responses relating to the friendly community atmosphere is on the higher side of the mean, standard score from 2.18 in standard score 3 on a five-point scale. This reflects that their opinion is distributed towards from agreeing to strongly disagree side. The standard deviation 0.853 is on the lower side of the mean score, and the value of Skewness has turned out to be affirmative, indicating that variation has been scattered towards the lower side of the mean. The positive value of Skewness 0.632 denotes the disparity in the responses tends to fall below average. The calculated value of kurtosis -0.024 shows the distribution more towards above of average. It leads to the conclusion that the majority of respondents have agreed with the opinion that eco-tourism developments have helped to build a friendly community atmosphere.

**Figure: 2 Stakeholder's views about Awareness of Culture**



Respondents from Stakeholders were asked about awareness of culture in and around the Great Himalayan National park conservation area, and it is observed from Table 2 and figure 2 that 15.6% of the respondents have strongly agreed with the statement that eco-tourism has improved the awareness of culture; also 55.6% respondents have agreed; whereas 21.1% respondents have a neutral opinion; however, 7.8% respondents have disagreed opinion, and no respondent has strongly disagreed opinion. It is observed from Table 2 that the mean score to the responses relating to the awareness of culture in the park is on the higher side of the mean, standard score from 2.21 in standard score 3 on five-point scale. This reflects that their opinion is distributed towards from agreeing to strongly disagree side. The standard deviation 0.798 is on the lower side of the mean score, and the value of Skewness has turned out to be affirmative, indicating that variation has been scattered towards the lower side of the mean. The positive value of Skewness 0.535 denotes the disparity in the responses tends to fall below average. The calculated value of kurtosis 0.063 shows the distribution more towards lower of average. It leads to the conclusion that the majority of respondents have agreed with the opinion that eco-tourism has improved the awareness of culture.

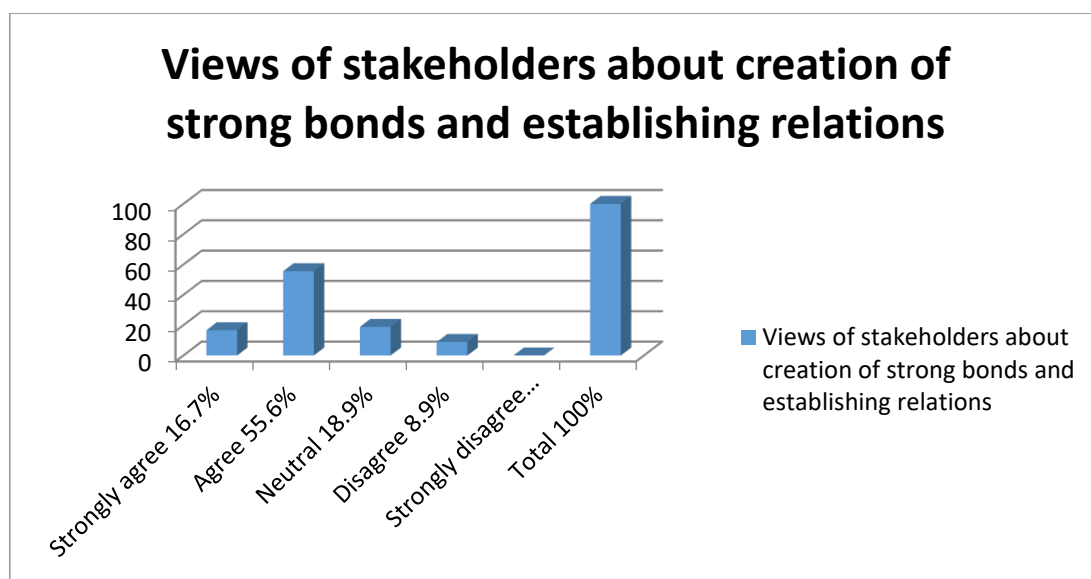
**Figure 3: Stakeholder's views out Understanding of Culture in Local People**



Respondents from Stakeholders were asked about the understanding of culture in local people, and it is observed from Table 2 and figure 3 that 15.6% of the respondents have strongly agreed with the statement that eco-tourism has deepened the understanding of culture in local people; also 56.7% respondents have agreed; whereas 21.1% respondents have a neutral opinion; however, 6.7% respondents have disagreed opinion and no respondent has strongly disagreed opinion. It is observed from Table 2 that the mean score to the responses relating to the understanding of culture in the local people is on the higher side of the mean, standard score

from 2.19 in standard score 3 on a five-point scale. This reflects that their opinion is distributed towards from agreeing to strongly disagree side. The standard deviation 0.775 is on the lower side of the mean score, and the value of Skewness has turned out to be affirmative, indicating that variation has been scattered towards the lower side of the mean. The positive value of Skewness 0.531 denotes the disparity in the responses tends to fall below average. The calculated value of kurtosis 0.374 shows the distribution more towards lower of average. It leads to the conclusion that the majority of respondents have agreed with the opinion that eco-tourism has deepened the understanding of culture in local people.

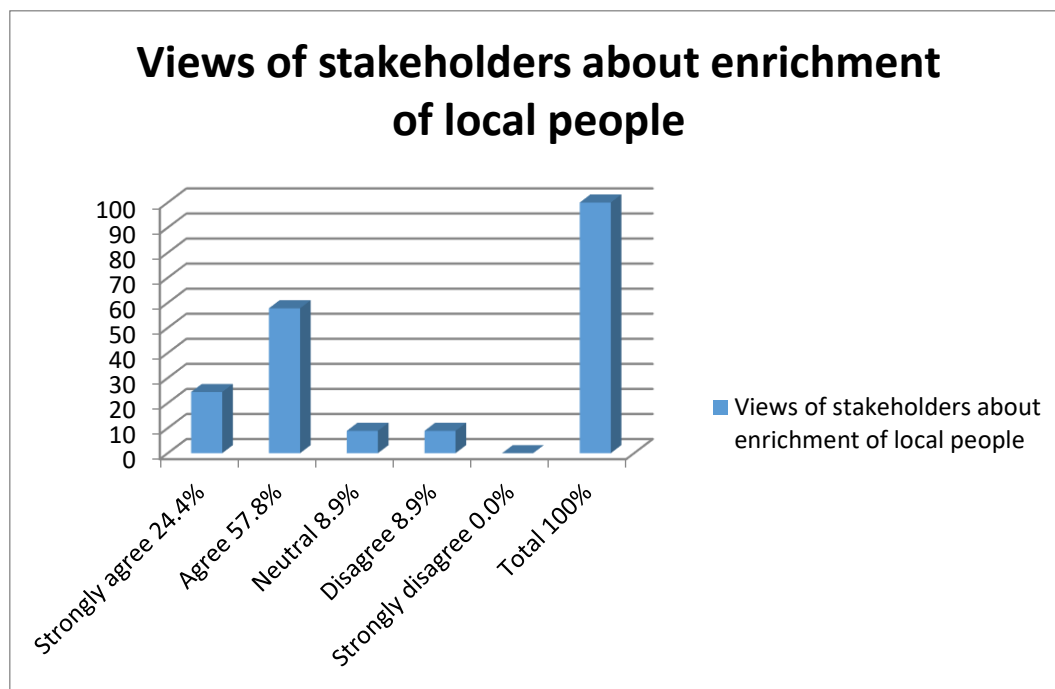
**Figure 4: Stakeholder's views about Creating Strong Bonds and Establishing Relations**



Respondents from Stakeholders were asked about the creation of strong bonds and establishing relations, and it is observed from Table 2 and figure 4 that 16.7% of the respondents have strongly agreed with the statement that eco-tourism has helped to create strong bonds and establish relations among the community involved; also 55.6% respondents have agreed; whereas 18.9% respondents have a neutral opinion; however 8.9% respondents have disagreed opinion, and no respondent has strongly disagreed opinion. It is observed from Table 2 that the mean score to the responses relating to the creation of strong bonds and establishing relations is on the higher side of the mean, standard score from 2.20 in standard score 3 on a five-point scale. This reflects that their opinion is distributed towards from agreeing to strongly disagree side. The standard deviation 0.821 is on the lower side of the mean score, and the value of Skewness has turned out to be affirmative, indicating that variation has been scattered towards the lower side of the mean. The positive value of Skewness 0.592 denotes the disparity in the responses tends to fall below average. The calculated value of kurtosis 0.047 shows the distribution more towards lower of average. It leads to the conclusion that the majority of

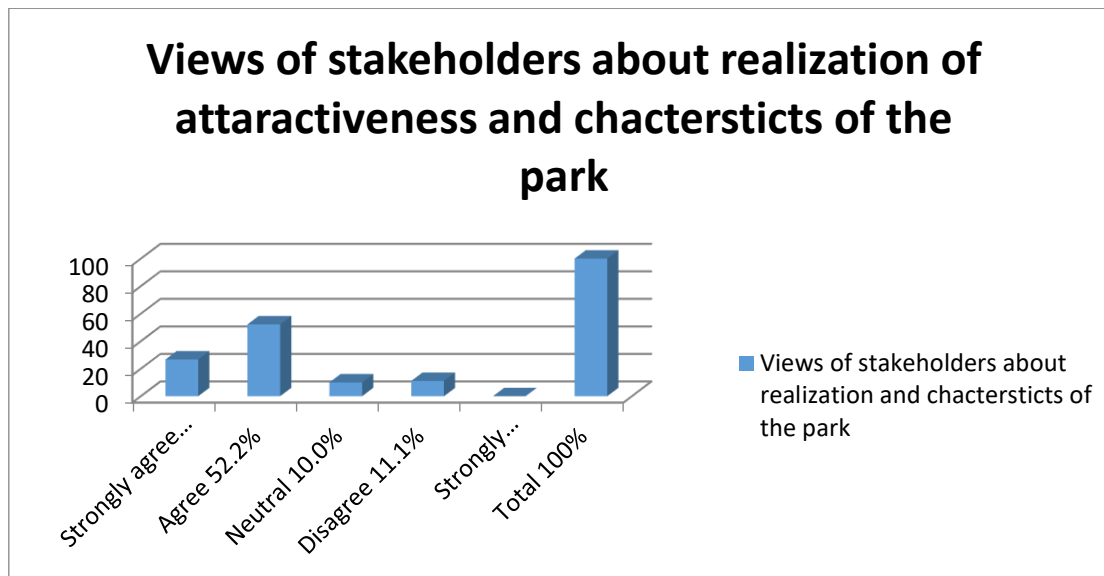
respondents have agreed with the opinion that eco-tourism has helped to create strong bonds and establish relations among the community involved.

**Figure 5: Stakeholder's views about Enrichment of Local People**

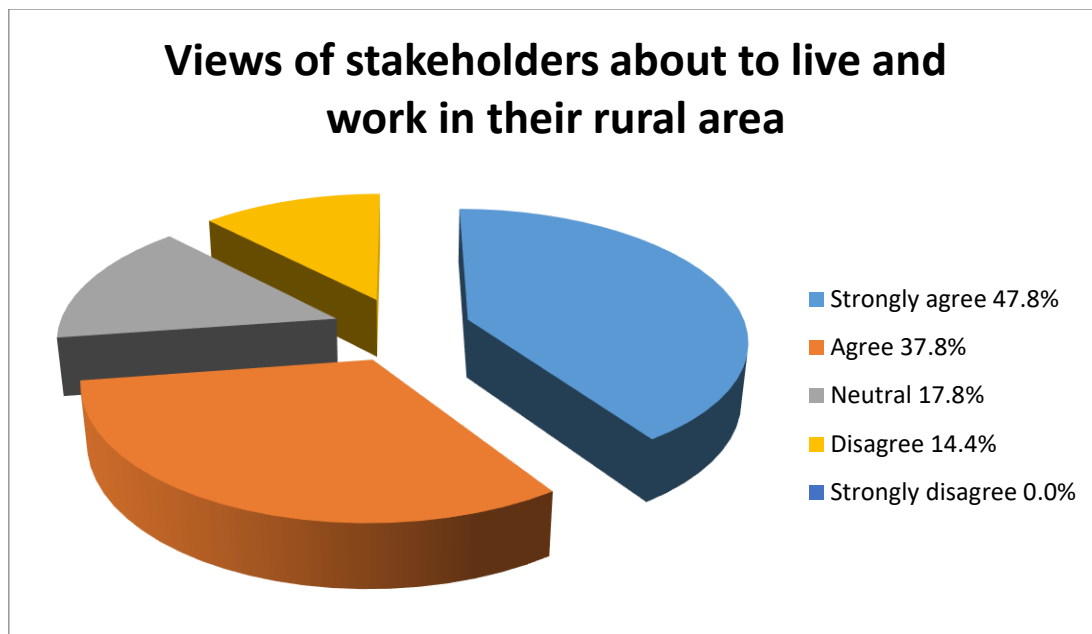


Respondents from Stakeholders were asked about the enrichment of local people, and it is observed from Table 2 and figure 5 that 24.4% of the respondents have strongly agreed with the statement that eco-tourism has enriched local people; also 57.8% of respondents have agreed; whereas 8.9% respondents have a neutral opinion; however, 8.9% respondents have disagreed opinion, and no respondent has strongly disagreed opinion. It is observed from Table 2 that the mean score to the responses relating to the enrichment of local people is on the higher side of the mean, standard score from 2.20 in standard score 3 on a five-point scale. This reflects that their opinion is distributed towards from agreeing to strongly disagree side. The standard deviation 0.832 is on the lower side of the mean score, and the value of Skewness has turned out to be affirmative, indicating that variation has been scattered towards the lower side of the mean. The positive value of Skewness 0.900 denotes the disparity in the responses tends to fall below average. The calculated value of kurtosis 0.656 shows the distribution more towards lower of average. It leads to the conclusion that the majority of respondents have agreed with the opinion that eco-tourism has enriched local people.

**Figure 6: Stakeholder's views about Realization of Attractiveness and Characteristics of Park**



Respondents from Stakeholders were asked about **the** realization of attractiveness and characteristics of the park, and it is observed from Table 2 and figure 6 that 26.7% of the respondents have strongly agreed with the statement that eco-tourism has made peoples realize the attractiveness and characteristics of the park; also 52.2% respondents have agreed; whereas 10.0% respondents have a neutral opinion; however 11.1% respondents have disagreed opinion, and no respondent has strongly disagreed opinion. It is observed from Table 2 that the mean score to the responses relating to the realization of attractiveness and characteristics of the park is on the higher side of the mean, standard score from 2.06 in standard score 3 on a five-point scale. This reflects that their opinion is distributed towards from agreeing to strongly disagree side. The standard deviation 0.901 is on the lower side of the mean score, and the value of Skewness has turned out to be affirmative, indicating that variation has been scattered towards the lower side of the mean. The positive value of Skewness 0.816 denotes the disparity in the responses tends to fall below average. The calculated value of kurtosis 0.097 shows the distribution more towards lower of average. It leads to the conclusion that the majority of respondents have agreed with the opinion that eco-tourism has made peoples realize the attractiveness and characteristics of the park.

**Figure 7: Stakeholder's views about to Live and Work in their Rural Area**

Stakeholders' views about living and working in their rural areas were analyzed. It is observed from Table 2 and figures 7 that 47.8% of the respondents have strongly agreed with the statement that eco-tourism developments have made people like to work and live in their rural area; also 37.8% of respondents have agreed; whereas 17.8% respondents have a neutral opinion; however, 14.4% of the respondent have disagreed opinion, and no respondent has strongly disagreed opinion. It is revealed from Table 2 that the mean score to the responses relating to living and working in their rural area is on the higher side of the mean, standard score from 1.88 in standard score 3 on a five-point scale. This reflects that their opinion is distributed towards from agreeing to strongly disagree side. The standard deviation 1.045 is on the lower side of the mean score, and the value of Skewness has turned out to be affirmative, indicating that variation has been scattered towards the lower side of the mean. The positive value of Skewness 0.961 denotes the disparity in the responses tends to fall below average. The calculated value of kurtosis 0.318 shows the distribution more towards lower of average. It leads to the conclusion that the majority of respondents have agreed with the opinion that eco-tourism developments have made people like to work and live in their rural areas.

### III. CONCLUSION

Stakeholders are those in and around the Great Himalayan National Park who are directly or indirectly affected by the eco-tourism development activities and policies of the park, either by economic or non-economic terms. It is observed from the study that Stakeholders in and around GHNP region have a positive opinion on various impact statements. Stakeholders believed

that World Heritage Designation to the Great Himalayan National Park had boosted tourism in the region, improved the international reputation of the site, and developed eco-tourism in the region. Stakeholders agreed that eco-tourism developments are satisfactory in the region and encourage infrastructure development. Eco-tourism developments are attracting more public and private investments from other parts of the country for infrastructure developments. Stakeholders believe that eco-tourism has created a friendly atmosphere among the community involved and deepened the understanding of culture. Eco-tourism has helped create strong bonds, establish relations, and improve the awareness of cultural heritage in the community involved. Stakeholders believed that eco-tourism had developed a sense to respect, protect and conserve nature. Eco-tourism has helped in the beautification of local architecture and the environment in the region.

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