



Unlocking Ecological Potentiality of Kaziranga National Park: Assessment of the Policies of Assam Government

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Abstract:

This paper has highlighted upon the policy making role of Assam government to boost the ecologically covered area of Kaziranga National park. In secured position of ecological scenario of Kaziranga National Park and the challenges for maintaining its ecology, biodiversity and ecosystem have become the common issues for all of us. This UNESCO world heritage site is well known in all over world for the richness of its natural resources and as a tourist attracting site. This park has a lot of potentiality which are undoubtedly recognised by the concerned state government and also the central government. The scope for eco- tourism and revenue generating capacity of this park is very rich. But, now most of the environmental issues and challenges are faced by this national park. Due to the lack of adequate attention from the authority in which an internationally recognised site should get by the concerned central and state government and also due to the inadequate financial and human resources, the maintenance of the healthy existence of this park has become very difficult. This park has been used for certain business purposes by the formal and informal sector. So the concerned state government should have that accountability to provide proper protection to this rich environmental resource. Political interest also involves regarding this park's overall security. The major objectives of this paper are to study about the need of the protection of ecological security of Kaziranga National Park and to examine the effectiveness of the governmental policies towards this park. This paper will fill the gap between the formulation of a policy and its proper implementation regarding this park.

Keywords: Adequate, Authority, Ecology, Environment, Protection.

Ecological Profile of Kaziranga National Park:

Kaziranga National Park represents one of the mostly unmodified natural areas in the north- eastern region. Kaziranga National Park was declared as a national park in the year 1974. It was included in the UNESCO World Heritage Site list as an ecologically sensitive zone of India. Covering 42,996 ha and located in the state of Assam, it is the single largest undisturbed and representative area in the Brahmaputra Valley floodplain. Kaziranga provides various ecosystem services such as habitat preservation, biodiversity conservation, water regulation and cultural values. Kaziranga is mainly famous for its population of the Indian one- horned rhinoceros which is a globally threatened species. The park also supports significant populations of other iconic wildlife species, including tigers, elephants and water buffaloes. This park is home to the migratory birds from various places and it is recognised officially as Important Bird Areas by

Birdlife International. This park also supports the livelihoods of indigenous communities residing in and around the park.

Ecological Importance of Kaziranga National Park:

Conservation of Kaziranga National Park is crucial for preserving biodiversity, protecting endangered species, promoting tourism and supporting the livelihoods of local communities who are dependent on the park's resources.¹As a policy of the state government, Project Tiger scheme was launched in 1973 in Kaziranga National Park by the state government. The main objective of the scheme was to increase the tiger population in this park and to provide proper safety to them. In this biodiversity rich area, Project Rhino was launched in the year 2005 and a specific initiative was taken namely Indian Rhino Vision 2020 with the collaboration of World Wildlife Fund of India and the Assam Forest Department. This project was concluded in the year 2021. The motive of the government to launch this project was to increase the one- horned rhino population in the park and distribute them to other minimum seven protected areas within the year 2020. The main target was to increase the number of rhinos to 3000. Indian Rhino Vision 2020 was a multi-dimensional programme including prevention of poaching, habitat conservation and community engagement. This park can also be called as ecotourism spot. This park is mostly popular and can attract to the national and international tourists. This park is also the major source of revenue generation for the respective state government. But ecological security of Kaziranga National Park now is in a danger position. This shows the weak level of accountability of government at the central level and especially at the state level. Policies of the state government are also not properly implemented due to the lack of sincerity of the officials. Administrative department also do not check the activities of the working staff that are engaged with and have the authority for the protection of the Kaziranga National Park. This park also stands as a testament to both conservation success and the extreme challenges faced in the field. Kaziranga National Park is a shelter for elephants, wild water buffalo, swamp deer and leopards. It is one of the few reserves in the country where tigers and rhinos coexist, making it one of India's richest biodiversity zones. But to the safeguard of wildlife habitats of the park, prevention of any type of anthropogenic activities and industrial activities in the park is necessary. It is the demand from everyone to provide efforts in sustainable forest management and help to guide policy decisions at the departmental level that balance economic development with ecological preservation is mostly required.

This paper has focussed upon the ecological importance of this park and has also determined to examine the policies of Assam Government for Kaziranga National Park. From ecological point of view, this park has failed to give proper protection and to provide proper habitat for wild animals. Due to these reasons, illegal poaching activities, murder of wild animals, human wildlife conflict etc. are becoming the common features of this park. The frontline staff are also not safe and secured. Government has taken various policies and also provide financial assistance for the overall protection of this park. This study will highlight the importance of maintaining ecological security of Kaziranga National Park as a UNESCO World Heritage site of Assam. Moreover this paper will also focus upon the applicability and effectiveness of the policies of Assam government towards the Kaziranga National park.

Issue of Policy implementation of Kaziranga National Park:

Kaziranga National Park is suffered from various environmental and ecological issues which are not the new phenomenon. Smadja (2018) has showed a toxic political environment over the last ten years of Kaziranga National Park through his article. It is a significant environmental space where numerous conflicts have crystallized. Inclusion of Project Tiger in 2007 through the policies of Assam government and also the central government that aimed at increasing the number of tigers in the country has merely intensified it. The protection of rhinos from poaching and the eviction of populations from the park's perimeter have turned

¹Report on quantification and valuation of forest ecosystem services: garbhanga reserved forest (2023-24)

into electoral issues; they feature in political party manifestos and nature protection. Environmentalists are demanding measures to protect nature and voicing the rights of wild animals. They demand for the complete removal of poachers and the eviction of encroachers whose very survival is being threatened by damage caused by wildlife under the park's legislation. These have become outlaws. Kaziranga hosts two- thirds of the world's great one- horned rhinos- there were around forty in 1905, one thousand eight hundred and fifty-five in 2006 and two thousand four hundred and one in 2015 and the highest density of tigers among the world's protected areas. The park also has large breeding populations of elephants, water buffalos and swamp deer (Smadja,2018:1-37). Pandey (2022) has focussed upon one of the major environmental issues of Kaziranga National Park which is continuing now is the Human- elephant conflict. Due to increasing the cases of loss of habitat in forest areas, competition for resource, rise of climate crisis etc. result in the weak position of Kaziranga National Park. Increasing the number of human population leads to resource competition between human and animals. Elephants eat crops, grain stores and damage dwellings. People retaliate, guarding against human- elephant conflict, disrupts normal daily activities and confrontations risk serious injury. The Forest Department which is a major conservation stakeholder is active in mitigating Human Elephant Conflict in the Kaziranga National Park landscape. The study founds 66%of surveyed farmers said the Forest Department helped them in guarding their crops, but only 25% of respondents said that the forest guards patrolled the area all night. Many farmers reported villagers actively guarded crops all night to stop elephants raiding and that crop guarding mainly remained a male responsibility. Patrolling was considered helpful in mitigating Human Elephant Conflict by 96% of respondents. It is important of effective Human- elephant conflict mitigation for achieving Sustainable Development Goals in affected regions. Mitigation of Human- elephant conflict through a compensation policy is an important mechanism to support farmers. Poor communication of the compensation policy to farmers was observed in the study area. Respondents favour physical barriers for Human- Elephant conflict mitigation using solar- powered fences. With scarce resources for allocation, solar power fence installation at landscape level would be the expansive venture which have the potentiality of negatively affecting conservation. The author recommended certain tips like recruitment of a full- time Community Liaison Officer to facilitate access to Human- Elephant Conflict compensation. The Forest Department and NGOs should support local communities in developing alternative livelihood programmes. Proper research and intervention is necessary on the part of the State Forest Department in this context (Pandey et al., 2022:703-714). Rahmat (2015) has stated that policy implementation is a crucial importance for the success of any ruling government. Implementation is essentially about trying to accomplish public objectives, the process by which and the structures through which policy is intended to affect societal conditions and outcomes. No policy can succeed if the implementation does not bear any relationship to the intentions of policy adopters. Implementation requires cooperation, coordination and commitment at all levels of implementing machinery starting with the ministries at the central and state levels. The major problems of policy implementation are- lack of administrative capability in implementation, communication, corruption, lack of motivation, misutilization of funds, no coercive action against defaulters and poor working condition also hinders the implementation process. In case of Kaziranga National Park also, lack of adequate cooperation and coordination of the respective authority results in the increasing number of various environmental issues (Rahmat, 2015:306-311). Biswas (2023) has said in his article that public policy is simply the policy formulated and implemented by the public institutions to serve the interests of the public. Through policy, a particular plan of action is adopted by the government. Policy implementation is the crucial step among all the steps of public policy which refers to the transformation of decision into action. The policy implementation should be rigorously analysed to find the shortcomings and devise the techniques to ensure the success of implementation for the ultimate goal of better governance (Biswas, 2023:02-13). Ghosh (2025) has described in his article about the extreme dangers that are faced by the forest personnel while protecting our natural heritage of Kaziranga National Park. To protect natural resources and to work for them is a perilous

endeavour. Forest rangers and other forest staff are involve in combating violent poaching syndicates, navigating treacherous terrain, confronting dangerous wildlife and enduring harsh climatic conditions. Wildlife attacks contributed to roughly 14% of deaths, predominantly from elephants, rhinos, big cats and other dangerous animals. Recent reports for 2024-25 indicate that annually about 150-175 rangers die worldwide, with causes ranging from homicide and animal attacks to accidents and illness while on duty. Rhino attacks in Kaziranga National Park have claimed the highest number of lives. Wild buffaloes, elephants and even departmental elephants have caused fatalities, reflecting the occupational risk of working so close to unpredictable megafauna. Enhancement of extra and compensation and benefits to the dependents of forest personnel killed in the line of duty on par with other uniformed services like police. Incorporation of advanced technology and equipment in training and fieldwork for better efficiency and safety and improved infrastructure and equipment would also go a long way in helping ease the burden (Ghosh, 2025:4). Gogoi & Hira (2022) have provided a modest and sincere attempt to examine various challenges or threats confronted by the park and the conservative strategies and measures adopted by the park management for addressing such challenges through this academic work. Importance of this park for welcoming international tourism, existence of rich biodiversity of the park and its conservation strategies for sustainability of the park, gradual decline in grassland and wetland in the park, frequent poaching of one-horned Rhino, encroachment, inhuman behaviour on fauna during perennial floods, frequent man- animal conflicts, much commercial activities at the vicinity of the park in the animal corridors, illegal activities of the neighbouring people such as gazing and fishing. These hostile and illegal activities may degrade the high sense of this great venue and the uniqueness of the park. Challenges confronted by Kaziranga National Park are- poaching, encroachment, flood, land erosion, invasive weeds, habitat degradation, gazing by domestic livestock, effluents from numaligarh refinery, land use change, heavy traffic and growth of commercial activities along NH- 37, human- animal conflict, existence of tea gardens, crop raiding, inadequate strength and skills of the working staff. Certain policies for the overcoming of the challenges towards Kaziranga National Park are- establishment of anti- poaching camps to more strengthen with sufficient number of guards and security forces equipped with high quality weapons and equipments, the local people and the concerned guard personnel should be encouraged with additional attractive rewards for fighting against the poaching, the animal corridors along the NH- 37 need to be secured for facilitating the movement of animals to the Karbi Hills, for it, some flyovers may be constructed over the major animal corridors along the NH- 37. The government and the park management should give more emphasis on the eco- tourism practices for the sustainability of the park. The government should adopt appropriate scientific measures to reduce the erosion of the river bank on the northern boundary of the park, the government needs to enhance the resources, basic amenities, equipments and manpower of the park for enabling the park to manage the flood seasons properly, the civil administration, NGOs and local people should provide active hands to the park management in relief and rehabilitation of the flood affected animals (Gogoi & Hira, 2022: 658-673). Barbara (2017) has stated in his article that since 2010, various instances are happening regarding rhino poaching around the iconic Kaziranga National Park, where the animals are hunted down for their horns. Poaching involves a motely cast of characters such as politicians, government officials, smugglers, insurgents, petty criminals and ordinary villagers. Saving the rhino was as viable a commercial enterprise as was poaching. Kaziranga National Park is an embodiment of wildlife and biodiversity that Assam had to present to the world. the rhino's ambiguous relationship with marginalised farmers on the fringes of militarised national park is poised for a transformation under a hyper- nationalist, developmentalist regime. In ignoring the violence that is being perpetrated, ostensibly for the protection of the animal, there arises a parallel risk of the hardening of borders between both animal and human, as well as between different classes of humans in Assam. The rhino- human relationship in Assam- mediated as it is by an increase in violence- characteristic of the militaristic rhetoric that underlines political responses to economic questions about impoverishment and inequality in India (Barbara, 2017:1145-1163). Akhtar (2025) has said in his

writing that kaziranga is under pressure from an ever increasing flow of tourists that has become a challenge in itself for conservation of wildlife. Unbridled tourism activities inside the core areas often violate the National Tiger Authority's Standard Operation Procedures. Kaziranga, a favoured tourist destination renowned for the greater one- horned rhinoceroses, has in the recent years seen alteration in core policies when it comes to 'tourist season'. Wildlife tourism policy unfortunately is aimed basically at revenue generation and ignores important factors like the ecological sensitivity of wildlife habitats, seasonal vulnerability of wildlife, an animal's individual characteristics and also its adaptability to human- induced disturbances. It was expected of the department to weigh Kaziranga more as a protected area rather than a tourist destination while considering actions that impacts wildlife conservation. Although protected areas aim to provide resilience and stability in ecosystems besides other natural services, increasing tourist activities have already had severe impacts on wildlife (Akhtar, 2025:3).

Methodology

This paper is mainly based on secondary data. Datas were mainly collected from books, journals, newspaper, handbook, thesis, official report, internet etc. The method that was used to analyse the collected data was analytical method and descriptive method.

Findings:

1. Through the Indian Rhino Vision 2020 led to the greater one- horned rhinoceros being downlisted from endangered to vulnerable position on the IUCN Red List in 2008, but it cannot be said that this animal is now in a safe position now.
2. IUCN has the global authority which can create a just world to protection and for the conservation of the internationally recognised natural park which can lead to fulfil the Sustainable Development Goals.
3. Front line staff of the park are also not safe. They are facing attack from various illegal poachers and wild animals. It reflects that their safety is not recognised by the concerned department of the state government.
4. Natural disaster like flood has also reached the inside areas of the Kaziranga National Park. Moreover encroachment activities inside the park has led to the decreasing the forest areas under the national park.

Suggestions:

1. This UNESCO listed site is considered as an Eco- sensitive zone from ecological, environmental and biodiversity point of view and to prohibit industries or class of industries and their operations and processes in the said eco- sensitive zone.
2. Forest, open spaces earmarked for recreational purposes in the eco- sensitive zone shall not be used or converted into areas for major commercial or major residential complex or industrial activities.
3. The vehicular movement of the traffic shall be regulated in a habitat friendly manner and specific provisions in this regard shall be incorporated in the Zonal Master Plan.
4. Establishment of new and expansion of existing polluting industries in the eco- sensitive zone shall not be permitted. Pollution prevention technologies and noise barriers should be installed by existing industries.

5. Downlisted from the position of 'endangered' status to a 'vulnerable' status is hopeful. But still it requires continuous protection to this one- horned rhinos to prohibit the potentiality of threatening issues from any type of external factors.
6. Uses of eco- friendly transport, restoration of degraded land/forests/habitat, there shall be a monitoring committee constituted by the central government to scrutinise the activities covered in the schedule to the notification of the government of India in the erstwhile Ministry of Environment and Forest. The monitoring committee shall submit the annual action taken report of its activities for every year.

Conclusion:

It is our privilege to have an internationally recognised environmental site in our state with a lot of environmentally unique characteristics. Kazirana National Park is in the 8th position amongst the internationally recognised UNESCO World Heritage Sites. This park has not got due recognition which it should get. Because in practice, its position is not satisfactory in the current phase. Government's effort is not sufficient to keep the balanced position of this park. Voluntary organisations, environmentalists, the common citizens also have a lot of responsibilities to stand against any type of unethical and illegal activities against this park. To become ecologically sensitive and awareness and also to become environmentally educated are the most preferred conditions to honour this internationally recognised park. Policy formulation by the concerned state government is not adequate and not become complete without its proper implementation. Government should take the responsibility and effective measures when it require towards this park as a state and national interest.

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