



## **SUSTAINABILITY IN TOURISM**

*Making tourism count to communities, ecosystems and businesses*

**Priya Bhalla, Prodyut Bhattacharya**

University School of Environment Management, GGS Indraprastha University

### **Community participation towards ecotourism initiative in Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary, India**

The community based ecotourism destination of Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary is located in the temperate broadleaved forest of the Middle Himalayas, the hill state of Uttarakhand, India. Ecotourism concept has been accepted by the governments of mountain states of India for its potential to provide livelihood opportunities in remote forest areas where otherwise industrial development has limited scope. The contribution of local communities in various ecotourism products – guided nature treks, birdwatching, Himalayan view and home-stays encourages their local guardianship for existing natural resources as heritage. The paper follows the premise that successful community based ecotourism initiatives in Binsar WLS are supported by the partnerships of communities with government, non-government and private sector like the Village Ways Company, forming crucial ecotourism stakeholders. More than a decade has passed since village level community based ecotourism began within and outside Binsar WLS. This study reviews and analyses its experiences in such six villages within the sanctuary. Analysis reveals that direct involvement of local community in day to day management and planning activities not only improves their skills and abilities but also assists in policy and decision making process, adding incentive to conserve its biodiverse rich Himalayan Landscape. Participating communities of Binsar enjoy decentralized system of power and responsibilities by active involvement in ecotourism product designing, developing benefits sharing model, identifying groups and establishing linkages with multi stakeholders. The study concludes that equitable benefit sharing, good governance, positive international relations and policy implementation are necessary in determining the overall practicality and sustainability of the ecotourism enterprise.