

Sustainability in Nepalese Tourism Industry

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DOI: 10.29322/IJSRP.10.01.2020.p9762

<http://dx.doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.10.01.2020.p9762>

Abstract: Ecotourism, a burning issue and is a concern of Nepal. Nepal has attempted it in the industry for sustainability. UN Sustainable Development Goals focuses on sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth. The goal 12 focuses on sustainable consumption and production and specifically calls out a role for Travel & Tourism. In Nepalese perspective, increased graph of tourist arrival indicates that it is the right time to implement the principles of sustainability in the industry.

Nepal Tourism Policy 2009, priorities tourism industry as an important tool for its socio-economic development. Direction of the policy is quality improvement, foreign reserve collection and creating employment opportunities to improve the living standard of Nepalese people. Vision 2020, tourism strategy, focuses on sustainable tourism, expecting two million tourists and creating employment to one million on the year 2020.

Proper use of sustainable tourism principles in Nepalese tourism industry will be very beneficial for its sustainability. Sustainable tourism has been priorities by Nepal government since long and tried to implement its three major aspects but the outcome is not satisfactory. For its sustainability much more has to be done in coming days.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Eco-Tourism, Tourism development.

Background

World Tourism Industry is in a flux. UNWTO estimated in 2018 that international tourist arrivals will increase 6% (1.4 billion) and 3.7% growths in economy. It reached 64million with (+10%) in the Middle East, 67million with (+7%) in Africa. Asia and the Pacific got 343 million and Europe 713 million (both at +6%) growth (UNWTO, 2019).

UNWTO focused 2019 on education, skills and job creation (UNWTO, 2019). UNWTO's long-term forecast published in 2010 predicted that international tourist arrival will reach 1.4 billion by 2020 which was already achieved on 2018. Strong economic growth after recession, affordable air fare and easy visa facilitation around the world has accelerated it (UNWTO, 2019).

Tourism isn't a new phenomenon in the world history. If we study prehistory or protohistory or archeology we will come to know that human beings have been moving from place to place for about 1 million years (Kunwar, 2012.P.17). After the First World War people became anxious to see the effect of destruction which curiosities people to travel on those places (Kunwar, 2012.P.17). International tourism has geared up after the Second World War.

Tourism is not new for Hindus. In Sanskrit literature, there are different types of tourism known as *paryatan* (going out for pleasure and a knowledge), *deshatan* (going to the places of religious importance) etc. derived from root *atan* (Negi, 1982.P. 22).

Till Rana regime Nepal was isolated from international contact because of closed door Rana policy which continued till 1950. The democratic movement of 1951 marked a new era in Nepal. In 1950-51, a popular democratic movement was launched which overthrew the Ranas. After this, changes were witnessed in the country. Nepali people were liberated and Nepal was opened for the visitors (Ojha, 2018: 91). Before 1950's only handful of tourist visited Nepal under strict permission of Rana regime. Now, tourism has been recognized as a highly paying industry and very important source of earning.

Basically, sustainable tourism expects minimum impact on socio-culture and environmental issue. It is expected that principles of sustainability must apply by the stakeholders while visiting. Sustainable tourism is also called a responsible tourism as each and every participant has to take responsibility (Thapa, 2012.P.17).

Ecotourism is a most concerned and a burning issue. Many developing countries like Nepal are trying to achieve sustainability through eco-tourism. Nepal has a lot of opportunities in the industry because of its diversity. Thus the concerned authorities must be integrative, collaborative and comprehensive to achieve real outcome of ecotourism by realizing importance of environmental, social and economic imperatives for its sustainability (Thapa, 2012.P.17).

Vision 2020, an ambitious plan of Nepal government to welcome two million tourist and creating job opportunities for one million people for its sustainability, was already forecasted. Tourist arrival has crossed the estimated target of (1million) in 2019. It seems vision 2020 meets its given target if the situation remained same as 2019 (NTB Press release).

Statement of the Problem

Nepal, a diversified Himalayan country, is a homeland for international visitors. The lowest point 59 meter above sea level in Terai region and the highest point Everest, 8848 meter above the sea level; the two points are in a straight line only 200k.m. apart, can only found in Nepal. Besides, homely environment, friendly people, natural beauty, national heritages, flora and fauna are the other products of Nepalese tourism Industry. Because of such diversity –

1. Tourism is the backbone of Nepalese hospitality industry.
2. Sustainable tourism model has been efficiently practiced in Nepal.

Some national and international articles tried to address on sustainable tourism and its practice in Nepal but they don't cover the overall aspects of sustainability.

This article intends to identify some unidentified problems on sustainability in Nepalese tourism industry.

Research Question

So many such problems have been delt by so many researchers listed in review of literature. There are some areas which are not addressed that are being focused by this research.

The research tries to answer following question,

1. Why tourism is the backbone of Nepalese industry
2. How sustainable tourism is practiced in Nepal

Objective of the study

In order to present the study two main objectives were selected:

1. To analyze the sustainable tourism practice in Nepalese tourism industry.
2. To explore tourism as the backbone of Nepalese industry.

Methodology

This article is based upon a qualitative analysis. Descriptive, analytical as well as informative method has been used in this research. This research consists of present context data but some historical references are cited in the appropriate places. Basic source of information for this research is secondary but primary information has not been avoided in this research. Relevant books, journal articles and government publications have been used properly. Published government data has been used as primary sources. All the information collected has been classified, summarized, analyzed and some reflection will be made for this research.

Review of the Literature

Sustainable Development

A report by World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987) entitled "Our Common Future" is on sustainable development. The commission has defined "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

Eco-tourism as sustainable tourism

Ecotourism is defined as the science of the relationships between organism and environment. The definitions about ecotourism reported in the Travel Industry Association of America's study, *Tourism and the Environment* are as follows:

- Ecotourism is environmentally friendly travel.
- Ecotourism is a tool for conservation.
- Ecotourism is ecologically responsible tourism (Kunwar, 2012:125)

According to (Miller & Ward 2005), (WCED, 1987) suggested that sustainable development is largely a western invention in a widespread perception and a product of the US conservation movement.

"Horochowksi and Moisey(2008) defines sustainable tourism as present benefit with the protection of future opportunities to the people.

These literatures don't support the raised research questions but it is partially helpful to fulfill theoretical aspects of sustainable tourism. Hence, I have reviewed the available literature for this research.

Discussion

193 countries in September 2015 agreed the strategies of UN Sustainable Development Goals. The 17 goals and 169 targets will guide the decisions that countries take over the years to 2030 in order to help them achieve strong economic foundations and a better future. Regarding of revenue, employee count, or geographic reach and even whether they realize it or not, every organization has a sustainability strategy (<https://www.wttc.org>, 2017).

Tourism is in flux. International tourist arrival reached 1.4 billion in 2018 in Europe which is an 6% growth than 2017. Arrivals in South Asia grew 5%, South-East Asia 7% and Oceania 3%. Arrivals to North-East Asia increased by 3%. 217 million international tourists visited The America in 2018 whereas 67 million tourists visited Africa in 2018. The Middle East increased by 10% in 2018 (UNWTO, 2019). 134 million Chinese tourists visited all over the world in 2018 and they spent about \$ 120

billion USD (<http://www.globaltimes.cn>, 2019). In 2017, 2.5 million Chinese tourist visited Tibet. An average expense of the Chinese tourist is 100 thousand per person (Thapa, 2018.P.7) which is encouraging figure in tourism industry. According to World Travel & Tourism Council (2017), the Travel & Tourism generated 10.4 percentage of global GDP and supported 313 million jobs or 9.9% of total employment in 2017, equivalent to 1 in 11 jobs in the global economy (WTTC,2017).

Tourist Trend in Nepal

Trend of tourist arrival was in increased order up to 2012 which declined thereafter. Year 2015 was most shocking in Nepalese tourism industry having decrease by 32 percent compared to 2014(Nepal Tourism Statics, 2016:11). After 2015 it gradually geared up. According to the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) totally 969,287 tourists visited Nepal via air and 203,785 tourists came via land in 2017(NTB Press release, Jan08, 2019). International tourist arrivals geared up in 2018 after the earthquake of 2015 and reached above the one million. A total of 1,173,072 visitors visited Nepal in 2018 which is of 24.77% increment of the same period in 2017(NTB Press release,Jan.08,2019).

Tourist arrival from South Asian countries increased in 2018. Indian increased by 25.1%, Sri Lankan by 55%, Chinese by 46.8%, in 2018. The overall arrival from SAARC countries grew up to 26.4 % in 2018. Similarly, the visitors from Thailand, South Korea and Japan from Asia have also increased by 36%, 8.3% and 8.9% respectively in comparison to 2017(NTB Press Release, Jan08, 2019). The European arrivals increased by 23.3%, American by 16% and Australian 15.1% in 2018 (NTB Press Release, Jan08, 2019).

Tourist arrivals from India in February 2019 increased by 92.5% in comparison to the figures of February 2018 and reached 14,571. Likewise, 14,831 Sri Lankan visitors came to Nepal in February 2019. SAARC countries contribute a growth of 85 % over the same month of 2018 (NTB Press Release, Feb.10, 2019). 16,205 Chinese tourists visited Nepal in February 2019, which is 5.3% more than February 2018. Visitors from Thailand, Japan and South Korea have also increased significantly by 109 %, 20 % and 47.2% respectively in comparison to February 2018(NTB Press Release, March 11, 2019). Official data till February has been published by NTB.

The European arrivals have also geared up in 2019. Arrival from the United Kingdom-5268(+8.7), Germany-3340(+27.9) and France- 1978(+7.6) reached respectively. The total European arrivals in February 2019 reached 17,789 with aggregated growth of 11.6 % (NTB Press Release, March 11, 2019). US visitors to Nepal in February 2019 were 7,133(+5%) than the figures of February 2018. Likewise, the number of Australians visitors to Nepal in February 2019 reached 2,978 which is 17.4% more than in February 2018 (NTB Press Release, March11, 2019).

Though India is the number contributor in Nepalese tourism but interestingly, more visitors came from China and Sri Lanka in February 2019 than from India, which is surprising incident for the industry(the arrivals from India included only those who traveled by air to Nepal) ((NTB Press Release, March 11, 2019).

The above figure indicates that tourism is rapidly growing in Nepal.

Tourist Arrival in Nepal

| Indicators | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|-------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Tourist Arrival by | | | |
| Air | 407412 | 572563 | 760577 |
| Land | 131558 | 180439 | 179641 |
| Total | 538970 | 753002 | 940218 |
| Average Length of Stay | 13.16 | 13.4 | 12.6 |
| Sex | | | |
| Male | 289158 | 399091 | 509598 |
| Female | 249813 | 353911 | 430620 |

(Source-Nepal Tourism Statistics 2018,.P.11)

Year 2019 seems remarkable improvement in tourist arrivals. Early data published by NTB in February 2019 has remarks a continuing growth trend. According to the Immigration Department (and its offices) a total of 124,421 (97,694 by air) and (26,727 overland) international visitors visited Nepal in February 2019 with increment of 39 % over the same period in 2018, is a good sign for Nepalese Tourism.

Eco-tourism as Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism. Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of

tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability (Kunwar, 2012.P.17) which has been practicing in eco-tourism.

Sustainable Tourism Practice in Nepal

Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Programme (TRPAP) is an initiative of the Nepal Government toward eco-tourism in Nepal with technical and financial support from various international development agencies and non-government organizations which is contributing to the poverty alleviation objective of the government through sustainable tourism development that is pro-poor, pro-environment, pro-rural communities and pro-women, making the benefits of tourism reach grass-roots level in the specific programme sites (Ojha,2018:175).

Eco-tourism is the only model that still shown constant improvement for its sustainability. Basic tourism infrastructure and facilities such as clean drinking water, sanitation, transportation system and roadways are fundamentals to attract more tourists for sustainable tourism development in Nepal. If basic infrastructures and facilities are provided into the country, the flow of tourists also increases. If the number of tourist increases, the economy of the local stakeholder will be increased (Ojha, 2018:177).

Recent developments on the major trekking trails especially on the Annapurna and Everest region have been a serious concern to both the environmentalists and locals and for the ecotourism. Because of the increased number of tourist and teahouses in the trekking trails and unplanned road connectivity, indirectly increased the demand of wood and fuel which led deforestation as well spoil the nature. Another problem is the solid waste management. Waste matter such as plastic materials, oxygen cylinder and so on, in the trekking trial has been increasing rapidly without the proper mechanism for disposal (Ojha,2018:177) is a big challenge.

Conclusion

Nepal, a small Himalayan country, sandwiched between China and India is a land locked country. Government data shows that Nepal is importing a lot than its export. Thus, tourism is the backbone for national development which can also fulfill the sort of foreign reserve. If we compare the data of tourist arrivals in last few years we can see Nepalese tourism is heading towards mass tourism. Many tourists mean a big challenge to manage the balance between human and nature. In one hand tourism is creating opportunities and the other hand there is a big challenge for its sustainability. So it is the right time to implement the principles of ecotourism for its sustainability. Ecotourism is the only tool for sustainable tourism development providing maximum benefits for local communities with environmental conservation through maximum involvement of all stakeholders.

Though many national and international agencies have also been continuously supporting the development of ecotourism in Nepal but the outcome is not satisfactory.

Though ecotourism is the high priority of Nepal government and government is trying its best for sustainability but still there are many laps in this industry. Nepal is going to celebrate tourism year 2020, in this very situation, balancing human beings and nature, is a big challenge for its sustainability. Finally, Nepalese tourism has a lot of opportunities as well as a bundle of challenge.

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