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STAKEHOLDERS' ROLE IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF NORTH EAST AND LADAKH

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ABSTRACT

Tourism acts as a backbone for majority of nations especially the growing economies while the adverse impacts of tourism on the environment and the socio-cultural are not ignorable. The tourism sector, if driven well in the right direction, can play a holistic process of economic, social and environmental sustenance as well as development. Sustainable form of tourism not only ensures the profitable income but also contribute in employment for local stakeholders as well as local community with its minimal stress on environment and traditional value system. To understand the concept of sustainable development and its contribution towards local community development for Himalayan Indian States, the case studies of North Eastern region and Northern most Himalayan Region of Ladakh are well-suited. Furthermore, the present study is also an attempt to address the key determinants of sustainability of tourism industry in the North Eastern India and to establish the importance of local entrepreneurship or local community participation in ensuring sustainable tourism development. It focuses on three major aspects of tourism industry like sustenance including region-specific sustainability considerations; entrepreneurial awareness towards sustainability and suggestive measures to ensure sustainable norms in tourism development in the region.

KEYWORDS

Sustainable Tourism Development, Region specific sustainability norms, Tourism awareness, Strategic entrepreneurial focus, Local entrepreneurship, Community Participation.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of sustainability has its origin in the growing environmentalism of 1970s. As defined in the Brundtland Commission Report (1987), sustainable development is the 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations' to meet their own needs' (WCED, 1987, p. 43). The report categorically stated that sustainable development is a dynamic process of changes which 'are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations' (WCED, 1987, p.46). Since then, many authors have developed their own definitions and adopted varying stances on 'sustainability' and 'sustainable development'. Due to all these notions, the systems approach may be considered as one of the approachable ways of interpreting sustainable development. Linked with system dynamics, sustainability may be interpreted as a framework for managing change (Bakkes, 1997; Bell and Morse, 2003). The causal connection among the system elements leads to holistic conceptualisation of interdependent dynamics. On similar stances, the concept of sustainable tourism development has also been tried to be compounded with a plethora of definitional debates (Butler, 1999; Page & Dowling, 2002). Some of the prominent conceptualisations are: Maintenance of tourism viability in an area for an infinite period of time (Butler, 1993, p.29); tourism is to be truly beneficial to all concerned (Eber, 1992, p.2); long-term viability of tourism development (Bramwell and Lane 1993); 'sustainable trinity' approach of the integration of economy, society and environment (Farrell, 1999); forces of social change driving sustainable tourism (Prosser, 1994).

However, there is a strong need of determining a comprehensive methodological framework for attaining sustainable development. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 1996) defines sustainable tourism as Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. 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, biological diversity and life support systems.

The WTO in its guidelines to sustainable development determines nine core principles of sustainable tourism development. These include – participation of resident community in controlling tourism development; stakeholders' involvement in developing community inputs; local ownership of resources; creation of local business linkages to restrict 'tourism leakages'; sustainable resource base with equitable distribution of costs and benefits of tourism development over generations; ascertaining community goals; cooperation between local attractions, businesses and tourism operators; determination of carrying capacity; monitoring and evaluation under standardised codes of practice; accountability of the management and use of public goods; training for better human resource development; and promoting appropriate uses and activities to reduce poverty and draw from and reinforce landscape character, sense of place, community identity and site opportunities.

However, the definition is criticised as sufficiently flexible to adopt a variety of approaches and interpretations of the concept of sustainability. As pointed out by Liu (2003), the key issues which are crucial in sustainable tourism considerations are:

1. Due attention is to be paid to tourist demand, especially at the destination level.
2. The complexity and dynamism in resource sustainability should be appreciated in terms of needs, preferences and capabilities of society.
3. Intra-generational equity of costs and benefits should be given importance while emphasizing on international equity.
4. The evident socio-cultural transformation in the host locality due to tourism expansion should not be considered stagnant.
5. The ensuing problems of tourism development should also be addressed.
6. Alternative forms of tourism (e.g., ecotourism, community tourism etc.) are not the best answers to sustainable tourism.

Tourism development of a region endorses overall economic progress and a crucial boost for local entrepreneurial activities. As such, entrepreneurship in tourism is generally considered as means of local business development under sustainable tourism paradigm. However, there is a difficulty of applying conventional model of entrepreneurship in tourism business. The modern tourism entrepreneurs are beyond classical economic definitions. They are keenly associated with social and cultural values as 'success' factors, rather than just 'development and business growth' (Dewhurst & Horobin, 1998). To quote, 'life-style entrepreneurship' (Kurako and Hodgetts, 1998; Andrews, Baum and Morrison, 2001), 'ethnic entrepreneurship' (Ram et al. 2000; Collins, 2000), Micro (Lynch, 1999; Greenbank, 2001) and 'social entrepreneurship' (Shaw, Shaw and Wilson, 2002; Smallbone et al., 2001) etc. are some of the elements of new entrepreneurial dimensions of tourism ascertaining the principles of sustainable growth.

CASE STUDIES**NORTH EASTERN REGION OF INDIA**

The North East province of India situated in the rich biodiversity confluence of Indo-Malayan, Indo-Chinese and Indian bio-geographical regions has excellent scope for tourism development. This enthusiasm is validated by the possibility of projecting the region as the eastern doorway of India to the South East Asian Nations under the 'Look East Policy' initiative. However, the euphoria of growth of the industry over the years without strategic emphasis on sustainability requirements may be catastrophic for the region. As such, it is imperative to have insight of the major issues of sustainable development of tourism in the region to take judicious decisions for well-planned development of the sector.

The North Eastern Region of India is located between latitude 21.57°N - 29.30°N and longitude 88°E - 97.30°E covering an area of 262185 Sq. Km. The McMahon line separates North East India from Tibet. This region is connected with the rest of India only through a narrow corridor in North Bengal, having an approximate width of 33 km on the eastern side and 21 km on the western side. This narrow corridor is popularly known as the "Siliguri neck" or the "Chicken's neck". Geo-politically, the North East covers 98% of international boundary of India. It shares its boundary with China and Bhutan through its North and North-West, Myanmar and Bangladesh on its East, South and South West. North East India is mostly hilly; it has plains on both sides of the river Brahmaputra and the Himalayan range around it. The flora and fauna of this region is numerous and varied. The region accounts for 7.9% of the total land space of the country. Hill ranges forming part of the Himalayas guard the northern side of the region. The area is made up of mountains above the snow line and plains a little higher than sea level. (NER Databank, 2010) <http://db.nedfi.com/content/general-information> retrieved on 15.12.2010)

The entire NER is said to be the 'unexplored paradise for the tourists' for its rich natural resources and ethnic diversity showing vast potential for tourism. It can develop cultural, lifestyle (tea), adventure and eco-tourism. It has a variety of wildlife and bio-diversity with unique cultural and ethnic diversity (Planning Commission, India, 2003). Tourism has emerged as one of the prospective sectors of industry in the Northeast. Expert foresees a more explosive growth in this sector in the coming decades. In order to further accelerate the development of the sector, the thrust areas pursued during the Ninth Five Year Plan were: (a) development of infrastructure; (b) product development; (c) development of trekking, winter sports, wildlife and beach resorts, (d) exploring new source markets in regions and countries having cultural affinity; (e) environmental protection and cultural preservation of natural heritage projects; (f) launching of national image building and marketing plan in key markets; (g) providing inexpensive accommodation in different tourist centers; (h) improving service efficiency in public sector corporations; (i) streamlining of facilitation procedures at airports; (j) human resource development; (k) monitoring and evaluation; (l) strengthening of organization; (m) creating awareness and public participation and; (n) facilitating private sector participation in development of infrastructure etc.

However, development of sustainable tourism system in the region is associated with a number of strategic issues. Some of the major indicative issues are outlined below:

- Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) has identified the region as a centre of rice germplasm (Chatterjee et al, 2006).
- National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR), India, has highlighted the region as being rich in wild relatives of crop plants. It is the centre of origin of citrus fruits (Chatterjee et al, 2006).
- WWF has identified the entire Eastern Himalayas as a priority Global 200 Ecoregion (Chatterjee et al, 2006).
- Conservation International includes the entire NER in the Indo Burma Biodiversity Hotspot (Myers, 2000) based on the high endemism of higher plants, vertebrates and avian diversity. The hotspot is the second largest and next to the Mediterranean basin with an area of 2, 20, 60,000 sq. km. among the 25 identified global hotspots.
- The International Council for Bird Preservation, UK identifies the Eastern Himalayas as an endemic Bird Area (Bibby et al., 1998).
- At least 353 new species have been discovered in the Eastern Himalayas between 1998 and 2008, equating an average of 35 new species every year for one decade. The discoveries include 242 plants, 16 amphibians, 16 reptiles, 14 fishes, 2 birds 2 mammals, and at least 61 new invertebrates (Thompson, 2009).

Under the given circumstances, the North Eastern economy must make judicious steps to develop its tourism economy. The urgency is deeply felt under the context of growing possibilities of border trade of India with the ASEAN nations through the NER as the Eastern gateway of Indian foreign trade under the much awaited opening of historic trade routes of India with ASEAN nations. These will definitely human traffic in the region creating additional needs for developing tourism trade. Entrepreneurial actions in this context are detrimental.

In an attempt to examine the importance of local entrepreneurship in ensuring sustainable tourism development this study focuses on three major aspects of tourism industry sustenance including region-specific sustainability considerations, entrepreneurial awareness towards sustainability and suggestive measures to ensure sustainable norms in tourism development in the region.

CONCEPT OF HOME STAYS IN LADAKH (NORTH INDIA)

Ladakh has a mountainous landscape, general traveling maps showing the roads and tourist sites are commonly available in India and abroad. No special permit is required to visit most of Ladakh including Leh and Kargil towns. Permits are required for both domestic and foreign tourists to visit the "Inner Line" areas, i.e. Nubra Valley; Panggong Lake and the Durbuk Block that it lies in (i.e. north of the Changla Pass); Tso-Moriri and Tsokar Lakes and the area along the Indus River east of Upshi; and Dha-hanu and the area along the Indus River northwest of Khalatse. These permits are easily available in Leh town from the local authorities and do not need to be acquired while applying for an Indian visa.

Permits are not available, and foreigners are not allowed, in the far reaches of each of the above-named areas close to the borders (or Line of Control, etc) with Pakistan and China. For example, foreigners can go to the edge of Panggong Lake and Maan and Merak villages, but not along the edge of it to Phobrang or Chushul villages; they cannot proceed east up the Indus from the Mahe Bridge; and in Nubra, they can only go as far as Panamik to the north and Turtuk to the west. There are no border crossings open between Ladakh and neighbouring regions of Baltistan (under Pakistan) or Tibet (under China).

Himalayan Home stays was started in Ladakh in 2002 by the Snow Leopard Conservancy, The Mountain Institute, local tour operators and villagers living in important snow leopard areas. In 1999, local people had expressed an interest in generating income from increasing numbers of visitors that passed through their villages and wanted to offer a tourism experience that would benefit visitors, hosts and the local environment. The first Homestays were established in Hemis National Park, "snow leopard capital of India," in 2002 and later-on more villagers joined from Sham, another important snow leopard area. We hope that more communities in Ladakh will join the Himalayan Homestay network in 2004. Home stays generate additional income for local people – helping offset unavoidable income losses from livestock depredation by snow leopards and other predators. With income from tourism that highlights wildlife viewing, local people have a reason to conserve predators which may threaten their herds, especially since poaching and retributive killing of snow leopards are the major threats across the Himalaya to this rare and beautiful cat.

HOMESTAY SERVICES

Selected villages along the Markha and Sham trekking routes have been given Himalayan Home stay training by the Snow Leopard Conservancy with support from The Mountain Institute and UNESCO. These settlements are situated in excellent habitat for the endangered snow leopard and its prey. One can see the cat's sign and herds of blue sheep or ibex.

The followings are provided to a visitor:

- a clean, comfortable room (with candle or solar light), furnished in the Ladakhi style
- traditional Ladakhi meals, cooked hygienically using eco-friendly methods
- clean solar-boiled spring water to drink
- a clean traditional dry-composting toilet
- the opportunity to enjoy the rhythm of life in a village where farming and livestock herding has been the way of life for centuries

In some sites there are local guides who can take you wildlife watching and on village walks. Expect to be a little breathless even before you reach Ladakh's biggest town Leh. The stark, stunning beauty of Ladakh will impress even the seasoned travellers as you drive or fly over snow capped mountains. The Himalayan

region in northern state of Jammu and Kashmir is bound by the Karakoram in the north and the Great Himalayan range in the south and also has the Ladakh Range and the Zaskar Range traversing it. Ladakh, also known as Little Tibet, consists of two districts Leh and Kargil which are governed by the Autonomous Hill Development Councils.

Considered among the most extreme of environments, Leh with its gorgeous mountains, its arid desert terrain sprinkled with ancient Buddhist monasteries and its dignified poplar trees are sparsely populated. Its natural beauty is perfectly complemented by the unassuming generosity of its people. Primarily Buddhist, with a small population of Shia Muslims, people here stay preoccupied with agrarian responsibilities during the warmer months. In winters temperatures can drop to -20 deg Celsius forcing livestock and humans to stay indoors. Many of Ladakh's traditional and religious festivals, however, take place during winter.

With the exception of wildlife enthusiasts patient enough for the elusive snow leopard, most people visit the place between the relatively warmer months of May to October. Situated on the banks on the Indus River, Leh itself has a few attractions to offer. Dominated by the 17th century, nine storied Leh palace, the small town has at its heart a marketplace of curio shops and cafes. A few hours outside of Leh, are the Thikse and Spituk monasteries and the Tibetan village of Choglamsar. Leh is best served as base camp to explore the rest of the region. For nature and adventure lovers, the place has a range of options for which both equipments, guides and travels is easily arranged. Mountain trekking, rafting, wildlife spotting and hiking on frozen rivers in winters are some of the activities that can be undertaken once visitors get acclimatized to the thin, high-altitude mountain air. Amenities are generally basic, luxuries limited but the experience is truly unforgettable.

Between the mountains of the Great Himalaya and the formidable Karakoram lies the high altitude kingdom of Ladakh. Ladakh lies at altitudes ranging from 2,750m to 6,670m, covering an area of 90,000sq.km. Today's high altitude desert was once covered by an extensive lake system, the remains of which can be seen in the large lakes in the south-east. The population of eastern and central Ladakh is predominantly of Tibetan origin and follows Buddhism. Further west people are Muslims of more mixed origin. The area's landscape and unique cultural heritage have been major attractions since Ladakh opened to tourists in 1974. In 2003, some 30,000 tourists visited Ladakh during June to September for a variety of activities including trekking, rafting, and sightseeing. Tourism related activities have grown rapidly over the past two decades, especially in and around the capital Leh that serves as the base for most visitors.

The primary destination for trekkers and other nature-based visits is Hemis National Park (HNP). In 2003, over 6,000 tourists trekked through the National Park during the summer months. The park is located south of Leh and covers 4,400 sq.km. and has a population of herders that share the area's natural resources with the wildlife. The Park is divided into three valleys, namely Rumbak, Markha and the Shang valley that remain cut off from each other during winter by the Gandala pass (4,900m) and Kongmrula pass (5,150m) to the south. There are 15 villages with approximately 100 households in these valleys. Apart from the unique landscape and harsh beauty, the mountains are home to a variety of cultural resources such as local homes, monasteries, etc, and support a high altitude ecosystem with rare and endangered flora and fauna. The area is considered the best habitat in India for the elusive snow leopard (*Uncia uncia*) – an attraction for visitors whether you see one or not.

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The involvement of various stakeholders in regional economic generation of North eastern region and the role of entrepreneurial fraternity in tourism development were well appreciated. The case study is well justified the overall involvement of local community in furnishing the tourism sector there. The ninth five-year plan played a significant role as far as tourism development and especially the sustainable tourism development is concerned. No tourism policy or plan will ever sustain without the active involvement of local community and in the case study of North eastern states, the sustainable tourism development was possible after the active involvement of host community.

In recent times, the home stay model of accommodation is becoming increasingly popular with both the allocentric and psycho-centric travel markets as the rejuvenating travel experiences organized in community sites to study life style, culture and manufacture of locality with home stay referred to living place, since it is one type of tourism based on living place centered. Various activities are provided for serving the tourist's needs, simple way of life in which the travelers are interested in cross cultural activities, management of rural areas and as an alternative in the local market which is not a competitor of hotels and resorts. If this co-existing concept of home stay gets its due recognition from track-one agencies, sustainable peace being promoted all over the world shall not remain as elusive as it often plays the game of hide and seek immediately after the initiative exhibitions and conferences get over. These happy tourists then enhance the scope of the process as peace ambassadors by virtue of their on ground first hand experiences beyond the travel advisories and news datelines. The much undermined home stay concept has not only peace and harmony in the offing it also has a positive bearing on local economy and ecology. The home stay concept is a very powerful peace initiative and this paradigm builds upon the theory of social exchange and inters contact dynamics producing a sleeper effect on the participants. As the idea is not to see through each other but is to see each other through. It is pertinent to mention here that it is high time that the policy makers now initiate a comprehensive method so that the home stay concept becomes as popular and more importantly accepted on a macro level as in Ladakh among the civil society of the other two regions of the State viz. Jammu and Kashmir for the tourists to experience the cultural and natural marvels off the beaten track also.

CONCLUSION

To further enjoy the dividend from tourism sector, the need to aware both the local masses and the stakeholders is must rather than to force the sustainable development code of conduct on them would prove to be of no use. The harsh rules and regulations always give birth to future agitation while to involve the local community by educate them regarding the enormous dividends from tourism sector easily push them to accept the all-important of concept of sustainable tourism development. Promotion of entrepreneurs in the desired direction should be the top most priority. This necessitates the emergent obligation for the society to help in properly conduit the entrepreneurial power in the most profitable and efficient way. One of the ways to ascertain the requisite development of the sector is to have a consistent and integrated approach to develop the micro as well as macro environments for entrepreneurship development along with creating the supportive facilities. This will persuade the new generation entrepreneurs to actively take part in the societal as well as in environmental developmental process. The entire process of the formation of an enterprising society is holistic in nature requiring contributions from every corner of the society in one form or the other. This is, in fact, a growing necessity of all the developing nations in the age of global economic transformation. Loss of indigenous identity of the smaller socio-economic communities seems to be inevitable in the face of the giant global competition, if appropriate measures have not been adopted well ahead of time.

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