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# SUSTAINABILITY OF THE WASTE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN TOURIST DESTINATIONS OF NAGALAND: A CRITICAL REVIEW

AIENLA RESEARCH SCHOLAR DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION TEZPUR UNIVERSITY NAPAAM

DR. T. R. SARMA

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

TEZPUR UNIVERSITY

NAPAAM

## **ABSTRACT**

Tourism is a multi faceted area with its several activities impacting the ecology, economic, social and cultural dimensions of the destination and its elements. The sudden spur of growth of the industry in the India has led to the need for retrospection and to conjure up effective policies and strategies to ascertain its sustainability and long term expediency. The state of Nagaland blessed with its inherent natural panoramic beauty and rich cultural heritage has become one of the most sought after tourist destinations in this part of the country. With huge potentials of eco-tourism, adventure-tourism, agro-tourism and culture-tourism, the State Government has identified Tourism as one of the 'Priority Sectors' under the State Industrial Policy of Nagaland-2000. However the tourism sector in Nagaland has witnessed a rather stifled and sluggish growth in contrast to the vast prospects present. The lack of comprehensive planning and effective implementation coupled with poor foresight of the long term sustainability aspect has hampered the quality of the industry. Proper waste management being one of the crucial determinants in driving sustainable development has been a grossly overlooked matter in the tourist destinations. The paper aims at projecting critically, the present waste management system followed in the tourist destinations of Nagaland as unsustainable and ecologically detrimental, thus in urgent need of policy intervention. The paper also attempts to expound on the possible solutions for adopting a robust integrated waste management system that is efficient, reliable, applicable and relevant enough to be implemented in the Tourist Destinations of Nagaland.

#### **KEYWORDS**

Nagaland tourism, Waste Management, Sustainable tourism.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

ourism has become one of the largest industries in terms of employment and share of global gross domestic product over the years. As stated by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), Tourism has experienced continued growth and deepening diversification to become one of the largest and fastest growing economic sectors in the world, over the decades. Tourism is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and its several activities in a community or region affects the ecology, economic, social and cultural aspects and therefore, requires precise planning and coordination among the different elements. For an effective sustainable tourism, meticulous planning and adaptation of the principles of sustainability are required to gain maximum long-term economic benefits, stakeholder's satisfaction, while also managing the natural resources and maintaining the beauty of the destination.

Any form of development if intended for long term purpose, should follow the sustainability principles and has to be well planned. Tourism is an industry which impacts many aspects of the destination and its elements; hence in order to lessen the negative consequences, a comprehensive and well rounded plan for tourism development should be in place. Sustainable tourism is tourism development that avoids damage to the environment, economy and culture of the locations where it takes place. As illustrated in Wikipedia, "the aim of sustainable tourism is to ensure that development is a positive experience for the local people, tourism companies, and the tourists themselves" ("Sustainable Tourism," 2008). Sustainable tourism, therefore, is an attempt to improve the impacts of all types of tourism, and this implies seeking ways to build partnerships between tourism companies and local government or managers of resorts and hotels etc. Research has indicated that profits may be increased simply by adopting some general environmental principles, such as recycling waste, planning for long-term sustainability, and seeking local partnerships for resort management. If these actions result in cleaner, less crowded, holiday resorts, then they are in effect sustainable tourism without being labelled so (Forsyth, 2002).

Tourism that focuses on the natural environment with its inherent beauty and surroundings is a large and growing part of the tourism industry world-wide. While Tourism can contribute in a positive manner to socio-economic development and environmental protection, uncontrolled tourism growth can also cause environmental degradation, destruction of fragile ecosystems, and social and cultural conflict, undermining the basis of tourism (United Nations- Division for Sustainable Development, n.d.).

## **TOURISM IN NAGALAND**

The prospect of Nagaland as a Tourist hot-spot with its inherent panoramic beauty and abundance of flora and fauna is evident. Known as 'The Land of Festivals', the state of Nagaland is noted for its rich cultural and traditional heritage, backed by its natural scenic beauty. The state is blessed with varied topographies and beautiful natural landscapes with pleasant climatic condition throughout the year and possesses a huge potential for eco-tourism, adventure-tourism, rural and village tourism, community based tourism, agro-tourism and culture-tourism etc. In spite of all these favourable factors present, the state has witnessed a rather slow pace of developmental progress in the tourism sector in comparison to the scale of scope for potential growth at hand.

However, there has been a very steady improvement in the tourism development front along with the increase in the number of both domestic and international tourists' inflow into the state over the years. The State Government has also identified Tourism as one of the 'Priority Sectors' under the State Industrial Policy of Nagaland-2000, keeping in mind the huge Tourism potentials and future prospects in the state (Government of Nagaland [GoN], Department of Industries and Commerce, 2000). The annual Hornbill Festival of Nagaland organised by the State Government, showcasing and celebrating the state's multi cultural traditions and rich heritage, has become a huge crowd drawer and has been over the years, attracting an array of tourists from all around the world.

Notwithstanding the efforts of the State Government and the Tourism Department in developing and moulding the present fragile system, there is a serious need to access, establish and build the key elements which are the basis to a sustained and stable future of the state's Tourism Industry. Certain requirements mandatory for the growth and stability of this industry needs to be addressed, for which, strong policies and strategies for Tourism developmental activities in the state should be formulated to confront and solve the fundamental issues pertaining to long term sustainability.

Questions like how far is the state's infrastructure equipped to support and sustain tourism growth in the near future, are the communities and the denizens well prepared and trained to handle the transition, are the socio-cultural as well as the ecological balance sustained and preserved at the same time that it is being celebrated and shared etc, needs to be pondered upon deeply.

#### THE SUSTAINABILITY ISSUE

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) defines sustainable tourism as "Tourism that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. The objective of sustainable tourism is to retain the economic and social advantages of tourism development while reducing or mitigating any undesirable impacts on the natural, historic, cultural or social environment." This can be achieved by balancing the needs of tourists with those of the destination, i.e. all the elements involved should not be at lose whether it is the host community, their culture and heritage, the environment or the tourists themselves.

Nagaland lies in the ecologically sensitive region of North-East India and hence conservation and maintaining the ecological balance of the region should be of top priority while practising all the Tourism activities in the state. Insensitive and haphazard developmental activities with poor planning along with improper waste management practices will destroy the sanctity of the natural heritages and leave the environment in jeopardy. Since most of the tourism activities in the state is associated with nature and hence hugely dependent on the environmental health of the destinations, protecting and prolonging the sustainability of the basic resources should be the basis of the state's Tourism division.

Pradhan (2008) noted that "mountainous regions in developing countries face additional challenges in waste management, in terms of their highly fragile environment and difficult terrain." He also stressed that solid waste is the number one threat to the fragile ecology of the mountainous environment. Besides this, seasonal tourist inflow adds significantly to the demands on resource base and contributes considerably to the amount of wastes generated.

According to the findings of the Department of Tourism Market Research division, Trends & Projections of Tourist Arrivals for 20 years at the major Tourist Destinations of Nagaland shows an annual average inflow of 33000-45000 tourists by 2017-2021 (Ministry of Tourism And Culture [GoI], 2003). Hence the requirement for developing adequate infrastructure and a sustainable system to complement the need becomes all the more imperative.

Sustainable practices are intrinsic for the sustained future of tourism in Nagaland; hence a conscious and methodological effort involving all the stakeholders is critical. Waste management is one of the core issues related to tourism activities that need to be addressed immediately in the region, taking into account the present scenario in Nagaland. Adopting a proper integrated waste management system that is well equipped to control the generation of waste at source and combat the increasing amount of waste thus generated, keeping in mind the environmental, social and economic factors of the destinations is intrinsic for the state's tourism industry to thrive and sustain.

## **WASTE MANAGEMENT: A MATTER OF CONCERN**

The importance of a proper waste management practices in the tourism sector has been stressed time and again due to its direct impact on the environment and general aesthetics of the tourist destinations. Improper tourism management can result in the deterioration of the environmental and cultural resources that attracted tourists in the first place. Therefore, the tourism industry has a vested interest in protecting natural and cultural resources, reducing environmental impacts and preserving the beauty of destinations (Tribe et al. 2000; WTTC, WTO and Earth Council 1996).

Literature review and field verification at several tourist destinations of Nagaland makes it evident that there is no proper waste management practises adopted in the region. Nor has there been any attempt or substantial work carried out in devising and designing a standard waste management system in these destinations. Only a few cases like that of Khonoma Green village and Touphema Heritage Village etc, some effort in maintaining the village aesthetic and surroundings taken up by the communities are observed, to a certain extend. There is an acute need for developing a sustainable waste management system that will be able to counter the amount of wastes produced especially during peak season, and minimize the adverse effects of wastes on the aesthetic and natural ecology of the destinations.

The amount of waste generation in these tourist destinations is increasing in parallel to the increase in the flow of tourists and visitors to the state. The lack of any standard and sustainable waste management system followed in these destinations is a big concern and should not be overlooked or neglected any further. One of the cases which can be cited is that of Kisama Heritage village at Kohima where the Annual Hornbill Festival of Nagaland is held every year from 1<sup>st</sup> December to 7<sup>th</sup> December. The number of visitors to the festival site alone, comprising the domestic and international tourists along with visitors from across the state total to about 20,000 approximately per day. The amount of waste materials thus generated from all the food stalls and other facilities provided for the guests and the visitors in the vicinity can well be imagined. Added to this is the increase in wastes produced at the places where accommodations and lodging facilities are provided for these visiting tourists. The modest initiatives of the Tourism Department like distributing of waste bins to the stall owners and placing garbage bins around the heritage village is negligible and basic. More initiatives like educating and sensitizing the public and tourists themselves, training the workers, while encouraging the minimum possible generation of waste should be propagated.

## **COMMUNITISATION: THE CONCEPT**

Along with the recognition of the Tourism Industry as one of the priority sectors of Nagaland, the State Government has also tried to encompass tourism into its 'Communitisation Policy'. The State Government, recognizing the need for community participation as a fundamental requirement to achieve health and sustainable development, initiated measures to harness its rich social capital to vitalize the public institutions by launching this policy with the enactment of Nagaland Communitisation of Public Institutions and Services Act in 2002 (Department of Planning and Coordination [GoN], 2009).

Communitisation is a form of partnership between the Government and the people through which administrative powers and responsibilities are delegated to the community for the management of public institutions, so that the performance of the public utilities can improve for the good of both parties, and become sustainable in a meaningful way. "It also demands ensuring accountability of government employees posted at the service delivery level to local communities and control of government assets by village committees including the responsibility for maintenance, amelioration and augmentation of assets. As such Communitisation is based on the triple 'T' approach. Trust the user community. Train them to discharge their newfound responsibilities and Transfer governmental powers and resources in respect of management" (Equations, 2010). Several villages in Nagaland has been the beneficiaries of this venture and were adopted as Tourist Villages where community participation, with the help of the Village Council (VC) and Village Development Board (VDB) is sought in the overall administration and maintenance of the village and the resources available.

## EFFECTIVE WASTE MANAGEMENT THROUGH COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION: A POSSIBILITY?

By tradition, the Naga society has rich social bonding and strong community spirit and hence the initiative of Communitisation was taken up. Village community bonds and cooperation are maintained through traditional institutions which are organised, effective and participatory. "The Nagaland experience of Communitisation is the first in the world. Thus, with the introduction of Village Councils, the Village Development Boards, and Communitisation of essential services in the areas of health, education, power, rural tourism, rural water supply, etc., the Government is gradually reserving for itself the role of facilitator and enabler. With this, the 'trickling down' concept of development has been effectively abandoned and it is hoped that there would be a 'bubbling up' of development from the grassroots, that is equitable and suitable to the unique context of Nagaland" (Department of Planning and Coordination [GoN], 2004).

A unique case where waste control through community participation has been put into practice is that of Khonoma Village which has a "Khonoma Green Village

A unique case where waste control through community participation has been put into practice is that of Khonoma Village which has a "Khonoma Green Village Project" (KGVP) under its wings with the support of the Union Ministry of Tourism and Culture, and the Nagaland State Department of Tourism. This project is driven under the aegis of the Khonoma Village Council and Khonoma Tourism Development Board (KTDB). Proper waste management is given due consideration along with the other activities taken up by the community for tourism development in their village. The Village Youth department organises social works on

holidays to clean and clear the village and the surrounding areas. Also, waste bins made from bamboo is seen all around the village and strict monitoring and instructions are given not to litter around the village premises.

In spite of all these, there is no standard form of a waste management system that operates in the village through which the waste management function is carried out in a sustainable and methodical manner. The collected waste is mostly collected and dumped in the nearby forest area or is burned at a facility provided just beyond the village. Segregation of waste or reduction at source etc which are the fundamentals of a proper waste management system is overlooked, mostly because of the lack of expert knowledge and ignorance of the people about the hazards of improper waste handling. Hence the modest initiatives taken up by the community in handling the waste situation in the village is rather trivial and unsustainable in the light of long term sustainability of the village's ecology and surroundings.

However, Communitisation programmes do come with their own share of hitches and setbacks if not implemented and managed efficiently. Community led waste management initiatives can be a good alternative especially in the tourist Villages of Nagaland but should be backed by adequate skill and knowledge training, awareness and by providing appropriate infrastructure facilities to the community along with proper planning and monitoring. Creating a sense of awareness and ownership of the natural resources encourages the communities to adopt sustainable ways to utilize the limited available resources. All these are possible only if the local authorities as well as the state authorities are proactive and are willing to support, provide and channelize whatever is essential. Hence an integrated approach to effective waste management which involves and calls for the active participation of all the stakeholders in the tourism industry is vital.

#### INTEGRATED WASTE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM: THE WAY FORWARD

Integrated Waste Management is a comprehensive sustainable waste management approach which integrates the waste management hierarchy approach to reduce, reuse, recycle and recover and for safe disposal of waste through the most appropriate and efficient means available. It also encompasses the involvement of all the stakeholders along with adopting appropriate technology and practices for efficient minimization of waste. The implementation of an efficient integrated waste management system should be interlaced with proper research on the destination, strategic planning and involvement of all stakeholders; the local community, the Tourism authorities, the tourism service providers and the tourists themselves.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency [EPA] (n.d.), Integrated Waste management involves evaluating local needs and conditions, and then selecting and combining the most appropriate waste management activities for those conditions. Tang (2004) explained that an integrated approach to Solid Waste Management (SWM) involves the diverse set of interconnected activities and issues related to SWM instead of just the simple transfer of waste to disposal sites.

For adopting an effective and efficient system of waste reduction and management in tourist destinations, a systematic approach consisting of the 4R/D steps can be employed as a guideline- Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Recover and Dispose. In other words, the proper hierarchy for effective waste management focuses on reduction of waste at source rather than finding ways to dispose waste after it has been generated. Systematic methods along with the incorporation of appropriate technology for proper waste management should be incorporated so that non-hazardous wastes materials are put to the optimum use while hazardous wastes are disposed off safely.

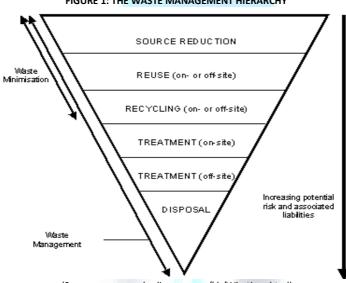


FIGURE 1: THE WASTE MANAGEMENT HIERARCHY

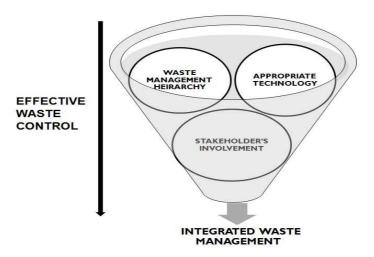
(Source: www.cambodian-cpc.org/kh/Whatiscp.html)

Furthermore, the involvement of all the stakeholders in an integrated waste management system gives more dimensions and makes the waste management task more meaningful and efficient since everyone involved is aware of the role they play. The benefits of an integrated approach to waste management include: lower costs, better cost management and cost recovery, fewer health hazards, less environmental pollution, conservation of natural resources, better coordination and performance, greater impact at the local level, improved public participation, better image, and more income from tourism (Tang, 2004; van de Klundert and Anschutz, 2001).

The participation of all the stakeholders concerned is an integral part of an integrated waste management programme. The State Government should be sensitive enough to comprehend the importance of curbing and handling waste and should initiate and formulate stringent strategies and policies at the state level in order to deal with this grave issue. The support of the Tourism department is crucial as appropriate technology, expertise knowledge and input, infrastructure and funding etc has to be channelized through them.

Winning the support and cooperation of the local communities, service providers and the tourists should be given priority. This can be achieved only if they can realise the magnitude of the problem and understand the adverse effects of improper waste management in the long run. Hence awareness campaigns and sensitisation of the issue should be propagated while showing the right approach through which the problem can be mitigated. Trainings and capacity building of the stakeholders at all spheres should be undertaken in order to equip them with the essential skills, techniques and knowledge for self sufficiency, problem solving and decision making etc.

#### FIGURE 2: AN INTEGRATED WASTE MANAGEMENT (IWM) MODEL



(Source: author's)

#### AN INTEGRATED WASTE MANAGEMENT MODEL

The European Recovery and recycling Association (ERRA) defined Integrated Waste Management (IWM) as an approach to design, continuously improve and monitor the solid waste management system for a community, or region. IWM can be used by waste management designers and operators to ensure that waste management systems are environmentally effective, economically affordable and socially acceptable for a particular region and circumstances. IWM includes a range of different waste management techniques and processes used to achieve a sustainable and effective waste management policy.

Taking into account all the fundamental principles of an Integrated Waste Management system, an IWM model is proposed where three main elements namely (i) The Waste Management Hierarchy, (ii) Use of Appropriate Technology and (iii) Stakeholder's Involvement, complement and co-exist in a mutually beneficial setting. The roles inter-played by each of these components will result in the effective control and minimization of waste and for optimum efficiency and sustainability, their performance and functions should be constantly monitored and upgraded according to the changing need.

#### (I) THE WASTE MANAGEMENT HIERARCHY

One of the waste management concepts that is been widely used to minimize and regulate waste is the Waste Management Hierarchy, which is represented by a chain of priorities that can be adopted while carrying out the waste management practices. This principle gives emphasis on avoidance of waste generation at source so as to significantly reduce the amount of waste handling at the later stages till the final disposal. Avoiding waste at source includes taking conscious and meticulous efforts to practise activities and utilize products that would result in minimum creation of waste. Reduction of waste can be achieved through taking steps like purchasing products in bulk to reduce the packaging waste, buying refillable items etc. Products that can be re-used for another purpose should be done so, for example reusing empty glass jars, card boxes etc. Recycling makes and creates used materials into new useful products, therefore saving cost and energy on extracting raw materials. Recovery of waste implies that waste material that would otherwise be disposed off is put to a beneficial use, which saves the use of other materials. Waste disposal is the final and least preferred option which most often means landfill, and the purpose is to get rid of waste in a safe and environmentally sound manner.

The successful implementation of the waste hierarchy requires the participation of all the stakeholders in the tourism sector. For this, mass awareness of all the stakeholders from the waste management perspective is a mandate.

#### (II) APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY

Finding appropriate waste management techniques that is feasible and applicable in the local and regional context is important, taking into consideration the climatic and environmental conditions, existing waste management practices, resources and budget availability. This involves the whole process of choosing the appropriate methods for waste collection and segregation, recovering of waste materials, safe and proper disposal of wastes etc.

Joseph (2006) defined integrated solid waste management (ISWM) as the combination of different techniques to combat the SWM problem, which requires consideration of the technical, environmental, managerial, legal, economic and financial aspects. He pointed out that "Mere availability of technology/tools is no guarantee that waste management would be undertaken in a proper manner. There is an urgent need to give priority to environmental protection, to educate and empower the local communities to monitor their own environment and to manage their wastes to the levels desirable to them."

## (III) STAKEHOLDER'S INVOLVEMENT

For the successful implementation of a waste management system in a tourist destination, the participation and involvement of the local community, local and state authorities, the tourism department along with the facility providers, as well as the tourists themselves, is imperative. Stakeholders should be sensitized and educated through environmental awareness campaigns, training programmes etc. Making them willing to contribute and participate is crucial in bringing about a successful integrated waste management program.

Wilson and Tomrin's study (as cited in Joseph, 2006) stressed on the contribution of the stakeholders to the waste management plan. "It is not an easy task to plan and implement an action plan to achieve these objectives without active participation of various stakeholders. Efforts should be made at all levels to minimise generation of wastes and manage the generated wastes in an environmentally sound manner."

## **CONCLUSION**

There is an urgent need to recognize and identify that a proper waste management system is a prerequisite for maintaining the sanctity of a tourism destination and furthermore, sustaining the tourism industry of the state itself. Tourism activities spans across various sectors and its affects are felt throughout different levels of the society and its paradigms; hence there is a need to build strong synergy, collaboration and coordination among the different elements- public and private players, the indigenous people, tourists and the various departments of the state government etc so as to work towards a sustained and meaningful future of the state's Tourism Industry.

Maintaining an efficient waste management system not only improves the health of the tourist destination but also gives a healthier surrounding and cleaner environment for the community, improves and maintains the natural beauty and aesthetics of the destination and thereby increases the overall satisfaction and experience of the tourists to a great extent. This also ensures increasing the lifetime of the tourist destination and hence makes the tourism industry more sustainable in the long run.

While carrying out any activity for facilitating and promoting tourism, the sanctity of the environment which supports the whole system should not be disturbed or displaced. Waste Management being one of the basis for sustainable tourism practices, has to be given due importance and an efficient integrated system for waste management is the need of the hour in an ecologically sensitive area like Nagaland, with its brisk and newly developing tourism industry.

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