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Is Sustainable Tourism a New Idea?

The World Tourism and Travel Council estimates that the tourism sector will grow at a rate of 7% annually over the next decade, an estimate that may well be somewhat conservative. The sector can also generate significant demand for transportation, resource-heavy infrastructure and energy-intensive activities leading to undesirable ecological damage and climate-related impacts and disparity and inequity in the local population – making the rich richer and the poor poorer in most cases.

However, well planned and properly designed tourism, with adoption of carefully framed policies and practices can greatly minimise the environmental and social cost of tourist-related impacts. The concept now garners global acceptance and is commonly known as Sustainable Tourism. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation defines Sustainable Tourism as:

"Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities".

The concept can be visualised coherently, as in the given figure. It is an overlap stemming from environmental conservation,



community ownership and decent livelihoods. According to The International Ecotourism Society (TIES), the ultimate goal of ecotourism, which is a major component of sustainable tourism, is to ensure economic and social well-being of local people, in addition to maintaining natural resources in their current state.

Sustainable tourism is garnering global acceptance and popularity with many small-scale, social initiatives

being funded and promoted by philanthropists and impact investors. The global giant, World Bank is leading sustainable tourism initiatives such as the Global Wildlife Programme (GWP) that works towards achieving wildlife conservation by investing in tourism that benefits local wildlife and communities in 19 countries across Asia and Africa.

Developed nations have even recognised ecotourism labels ('Nature's Best' in the case of Sweden) to defend ethical values and create valuable travel experiences. Nature's Best, primarily the Swedish Ecotourism Association's brainchild, has an elaborate set of guidelines and principles to be followed by the applying agency. The label mandates essentials such as:

- Inclusion of the local population so as to provide economic benefits to them through renting accommodation, buying products and services etc.
- Making the operators' activities environmentally sound, such as guidelines for shared transport, sustainable lodging, waste management practices etc.
- Respecting limitations of the destination

**Sustainable
Eco-tourism**

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The monthly newsletter on issues of sustainable development.

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Ecotourism - Potential Opportunity for Women Empowerment

Recently, I travelled to a quiet hamlet Thatta located on the way to Lake Prashar in Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh. The village, located in a small valley surrounded by snow-capped mountains, is so picturesque that the surroundings cast its spell as soon as one steps in it. The first thing that struck me is the quantum of tourism potential the area holds. On further exploration, it was revealed that the industrious village women of Thatta take care of agriculture, livestock rearing and even make handicrafts like mats, baskets and other products from locally available grass besides taking care of their household chores. If there can exist so many Tuscany winery tours, why can't there be some Himalayan trails exploring the lives of the people, local cuisines, festivities and nature?

But being a proponent of sustainable development, I cannot advocate tour operators and corporates from hospitality industry to pound on these little places stripping off their pristine way of life and indiscriminately exploiting them commercially. Eco-tourism or responsible tourism can be a plausible answer.

The tourism sector in India clocks one of the fastest growth rate in contributing towards our national GDP making us the third largest tourism economy in the world. I view eco-tourism to be the vehicle of growth in the coming time due to the abundance of natural beauty in India and the growing demand for using natural resources responsibly. India is full of colours and fragrances and the only thing we need to do is package them and sell them to the world in a sustainable manner.

Coming back to Thatta, it can be developed as an eco-tourism spot, with women of the village taking the lead role, where the tourists can come



and stay in the village in home-stays developed in the local houses. Women of the village could be trained to introduce the tourists to local cuisine, local agricultural practices and other leisure activities like trekking, vegetable cultivation, local sports and even making handicrafts. Since the women are well acquainted with the locally available medicinal and aromatic plants, they can introduce the tourists to them as well. This will not only increase the income of the women but also empower them socially. Eco-tourism can thus augment women empowerment.

The dream for Thatta, can be replicated in numerous rural areas throughout the length and breadth of India. The day is not far when women of the villages of India will be an empowered lot both financially and socially and eco-tourism will certainly play a big role in translating their dreams into realities. □

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Is Sustainable Tourism a New Idea?

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- Actively contributing to natural and cultural conservation
- Promoting sharing of local knowledge and the joy of discovery in the area
- Quality of experiences and safety of all involved

Though India lacks in having such precise systems in place, some remarkable ecotourism initiatives are being demonstrated by Desia (Odisha), Ecosphere (Spiti) and Green People India (Uttarakhand). These effectively overlap responsible tourism with promotion of culture and local livelihood skills which often include agriculture, animal husbandry, horticulture, crafts and cuisine. Social and economic benefits for the community are additional high value outcomes.

Such functional models are proving to be emancipative for the communities, both socially and economically, whilst also supporting the ecology of the area. The Green People India Initiative, successfully running in the mountains of Uttarakhand, diligently works towards a responsible agro-tourism movement. They work with impoverished, marginalised farmers to get better prices for indigenous products such as horse gram, red rice, amaranth, mandua, rajma etc. These crops have been traditionally grown and consumed in the area, and bringing them to a bigger market supports the small farmers by excluding all middlemen. The initiative has also collaborated with local people to set up non-luxury, local-run home-stays for the adventurous traveler, giving them an opportunity to soak in the inherent pace of life on the mountains, enhanced by local food and culture experiences. The initiatives, in general, have been instrumental in working towards rehabilitation after the post 2013 floods and also addressing the problem of abandonment leading to creation of ghost villages in the state. The next step here would be to link them to international accreditation bodies (for organic, ecotourism labels) or setting up an Indian equivalent to earn them

more credibility and respect in the market.

Data from a survey by an e-commerce agency also supports the claim that most travellers always or often opt for responsible travel. They are also known to be willing to shell out extra money, in this case at least 15% more to ensure a low impact on the environment around them. The sustainability aspect adds a positive experience to the trip, which is usually through buying local-made products, staying in eco-stays and indulging in local food at neighbourhood eateries.

Various aspects of the sustainable tourism model are implemented all over the world as per the community needs and existing policy support. Developmental tourism, for once, is the most widely accepted model as it usually results in quick, visible results of economic betterment. The concern thus becomes a lack of attention to social equity and environmental issues.

To address such deep issues, Development Alternatives recently got involved with the National Mission on Himalayan Studies on developing ecotourism clusters in two Himalayan states. The interventions in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh aim to nurture two sustainable tourism clusters, that involve communities to provide nature and local skill-based livelihoods, while also conserving the ecology of the area by exploring sustainable measures. The integrated development model also aims to address some cross-cutting issues of concern across the two regions and India at large. These are:

- 1. Involvement of women and youth:** With an objective of focusing on harnessing potential of women and the youth in the community, there will be directed attempts to create livelihoods based on skills that they already possess. These may range from culinary skills, trekking expertise, craft mastery and skills for hospitality and management of homestays.
- 2. Better communication:** To highlight a beautiful, unexplored place on the state's tourism map, we aim to introduce the

community to the power of social media and knowledge products for sharing their wisdom and heritage with the world.

- 3. Climate change:** Introducing the community to impacts of climate change is crucial as the Himalayan ecosystem is fragile and vulnerable to disastrous manifestations of the phenomenon. It would also be an additional resilience measure to promote and adopt local crops and low-impact lifestyle patterns that have been a natural choice for their ancestors.

While we understand that preserving nature in its pristine form is crucial in today's world, we certainly see sustainable tourism as a harbinger of change and betterment for communities in some of these inhabited areas. Intervening with the right livelihood options for the people and sensitising them to the fragility of the environment on which their livelihoods depend would be paramount to sustaining the developmental model.

There is a national policy focus on the subject too, with state governments drafting their own ecotourism policies that propose collaboration between the departments of tourism and forest. Many states such as Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan have policies or draft guidelines on the subject.

We are hopeful the movement will gain momentum in the country with more beautiful, responsibly managed destinations welcoming sensitised and curious travelers for exploration! □

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The Mountain Echo of Eco-tourism

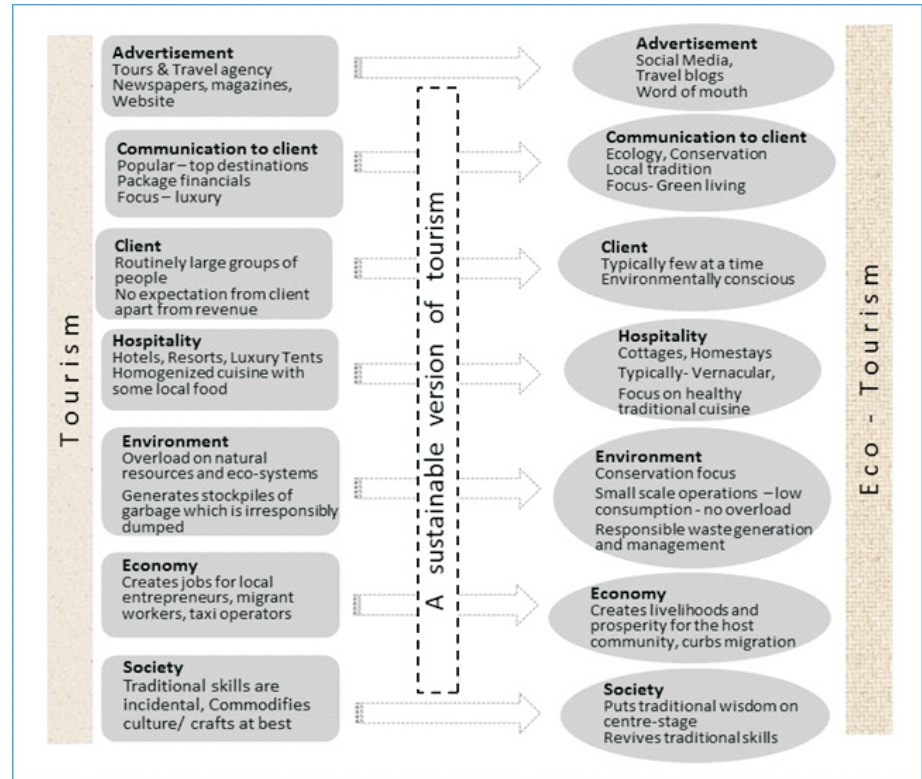
Mountain - the word instantly conjures a feeling of goodness and well-being. Mountain tourism, simply by virtue of the 'mountain', has the potential to make tourism a much more wholesome experience. It holds promise of unforgettable experiences for all kinds of travellers. Spectacular treks and mountaineering challenges for the adventure seekers. Temples in uniquely spiritual settings for the religious-minded. Or simply a rejuvenating pause for urban folk to wash away the grind and grime of daily life. However, it can also be limited to travel to a popular place, with its familiar tropes of sight-seeing en-masse and formula hospitality, irrespective of the 'mountain' destination.

By default, tourism acquires great economic significance for mountain areas where regular avenues of development remain limited because of geographical and demographic constraints. While the tourist and service providers continue to be engaged in an economic relationship, the larger impacts of this economic activity have mostly been taken for granted which ultimately proves to be unsustainable for the activity itself. Most notably, these impacts relate to environmental damage caused to the fragile mountain eco-systems, over-exploitation of resources and socio-cultural shifts among the local community.

Concept of eco-tourism

It goes without saying that tourism, the way it is practiced today, needs to wake up to its adverse impacts and take steps to protect the very assets that are its foundation. Eco-tourism is a sub-set of tourism which arises out of this concern. As a movement, eco-tourism began to take shape in the 1980s where it was defined as 'tourism to areas of ecological interest (typically exotic and often threatened natural environments), especially to support conservation efforts and observe wildlife; so as to have the least possible adverse effect.'

Over the years, the concept of eco-tourism has expanded beyond nature-



conservation. Centre for Responsible Travel (CREST), defines eco-tourism as, 'Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, socially and economically sustains the well-being of local people, and creates knowledge and understanding through interpretation and education of all involved (including staff, travelers and community residents).'

Because eco-tourism principles generally apply to areas where natural eco-systems are fragile, these initiatives are largely located in regions where rural communities provide the essential services. It is important therefore to make the distinction that, apart from positive impacts on ecology, eco-tourism must also create concrete financial benefits for the host rural communities.

Eco-tourism in mountain areas

The application of eco-tourism in mountainous regions creates a win-win scenario. While on one hand, it offers an experience of living lightly to the traveller, on the other, it is a genuine

driver for socio-economic transformation of communities living in far-flung areas. The latter is perhaps the greater cause of eco-tourism. Lack of employment opportunities for the young is a critical issue in sustainable mountain development. The more than 700 'ghost villages' of Uttarakhand where close to 1.2 lakh people have left their homes in search of livelihoods, is testament to this issue. Eco-tourism creates a dependable income-generating mechanism for rural youth which is rooted in their environment and lifestyle and draws upon local resources. This will in-turn trigger improvement of basic facilities in health and education. It creates a genuine platform for traditional knowledge, skills and craft to be documented and propagated. It also offers the best incentive for responsible management of solid waste which is one of the most visible fall-outs of tourism today. □

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Small is Beautiful

According to the International Eco-Tourism Society, “Eco Tourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people.”

World Tourism Organisation defines tourism as involving travelling to relatively undisturbed areas with the specified object of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural aspects [both of the past or the present] found in the areas.

Eco-tourism as an activity covers the entire spectrum of initiatives from small scale, locally owned and managed initiatives to large corporate tourist industry setups. The sector has developed into various spheres like natural, cultural, community-based tourism, rural tourism, village tourism, responsible tourism etc. The growth of tourism in general has also expanded the envelope for tourists seeking authentic natural and cultural experiences.

In the late eighties, eco-tourism evolved as a strategy to make conservation compatible with development in ecologically sensitive areas. With the potential to generate economic benefits locally, ecotourism emerged as a good incentive for conservation by all stakeholders.

This, coupled with environmental awareness, better transport facilities, has allowed people to travel further, seek new experiences in holidays, be it staying with local people in

developing countries to adventure sports in some of the world's most remote and wild areas.

As a business proposition however, eco-tourism is a high-risk activity vulnerable to marked seasonality, high staff to client ratios and need for specialised marketing. Like any other activity, especially one involved in exposure to vulnerable communities, ecosystems and habitats; eco-tourism raises legitimate concerns on the need to balance profits with conservation. Unplanned and unregulated tourism growth in natural areas can lead to pronounced negative environmental and cultural impacts.

In 2002, my involvement in the WII and US FWS Interpretation collaborative project on developing interpretative facilities in Corbett National Park identified Jim Corbett's *Chotti Haldwani*, as a site with community-based tourism potential. In 2002, the first training course on “Interpreting Jim Corbett's Heritage” was conducted. Extensive surveys were done to understand visitor's needs and identify gaps.

Since then, the community has taken the lead in developing the village, as perhaps, the first sustainable rural tourism initiative of the state. The community has evolved over the past seventeen years from a small village with forgotten identity to a village which is taking forward the legacy of the legendary hunter turned conservationist Jim Corbett. The community has registered itself as a society and named it the Corbett *Gram Vikas Samiti* with various activities under its umbrella. There are home stays, community dining facilities with traditional food, activities of bird watching and butterfly identification, nature guides etc. Heritage conservation too forms a part of their mandate. The heritage structures identified with Jim Corbett have been preserved and heritage trails developed. Additionally, the community preserves its music and dance forms and undertakes

performances and demonstrations for the visitors.

The community participates in several conservation activities like organic farming, vermi composting, tree plantation of indigenous varieties and fodder trees. To get the next generation involved in conservation, a nature club with ongoing activities on conservation has been formed. Women too have been trained on various aspects of conservation and linkages to livelihood.

It has been a long journey with the community to build their capacities and empower them in taking decisions. The community has proved itself and have experimented with many things over the years. The souvenir shop, run by the Samiti, which was once a tea shop of one of Jim Corbett's aides, is now an example of a budding enterprise. They have introduced many new products like tea, spices, bags, souvenirs which are doing well. They have also extended support to the local artists through the shop and various other activities.

The environment education programme extends its outreach to other adjacent villages. The real test of the community coming together was the celebration of 100 year of *Chotti Haldwani* in 2015. It was a delight to see the entire village join and participate in various activities of the centenary celebrations. Though I have been instrumental in initiating this project, the bottom line has been the various consultations we have had within the community to set a very strong foundation for Corbett *Gram Vikas Samiti*. I attribute this to the success of this truly community-based project of Uttarakhand. It would be amazing to see many such *Chotti Haldwanis* in Uttarakhand where the communities are empowered to run their own shows and make a difference to the environment and support their livelihoods. □



A view of Chotti Haldwani with signages enriching visitor experience

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Responsible Tourism and SDGs

Travelling is the one of the high rated get-aways that many of the urban dwellers share as a hobby and a passion. All age groups – youth, young couples and families show substantial enthusiasm for travelling. Motivation for and style of travelling are multi-fold. Motivations vary from adventure, de-stressing, family get-togethers, experiencing culture and traditions, religious pilgrimage, nature and wildlife sightseeing, business amongst many others.

Quite evidently, tourism in India accounts for 7.5 per cent of the GDP estimated to be USD 47 billion in 2016. It is expected to reach USD 160 billion by 2026. In 2016, India ranked 3rd among 184 countries in terms of

travel and tourism's total contribution to GDP.

Tourism is a potent engine for inclusive social economic progress through its forward and backward linkages (Ministry of Tourism, 2015-16). This article will throw light to highlight in what ways can tourism contribute in achieving Sustainable Development Goals and what can tourists, government, businesses and stakeholders do to ensure responsible tourism.

Tourism and Sustainable Development Goals

Typically, tourism creates both opportunities of local development as well as pressure on the local

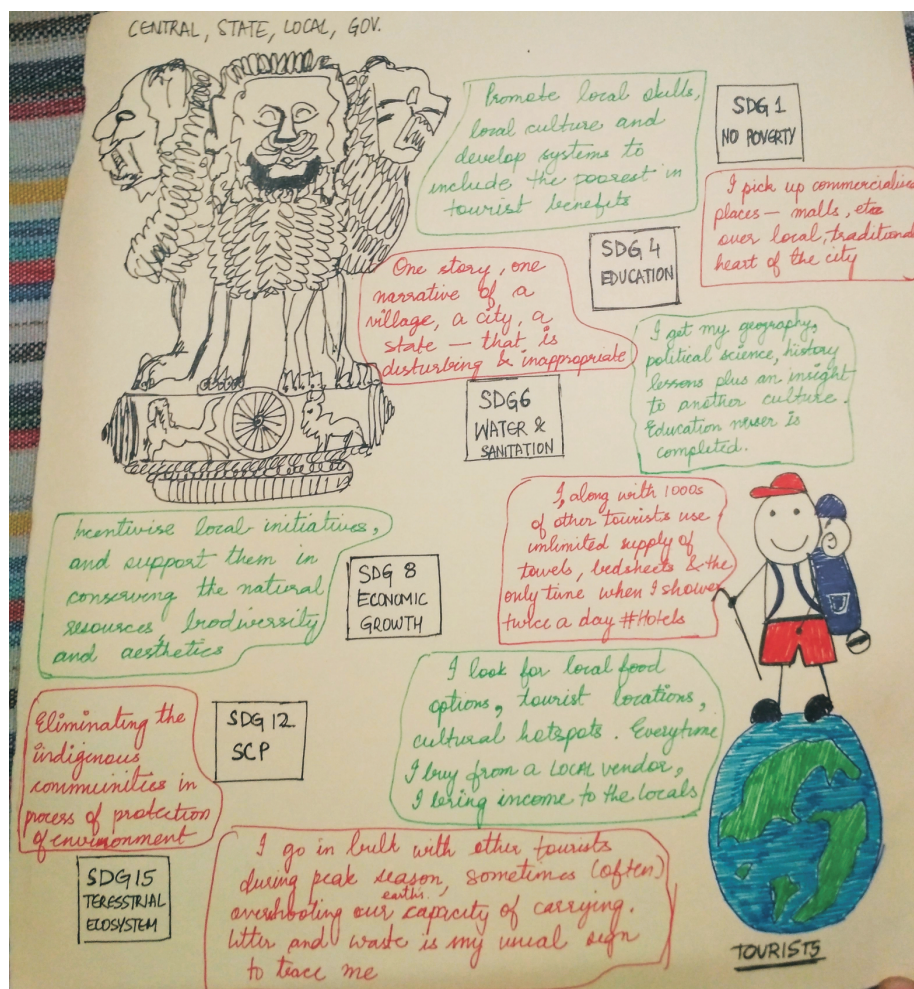
ecosystem of the region. Some of the commonly identified linkages of tourism with SDGs are elaborated below:

SDG 1: End poverty in all forms, everywhere

Tourism in any region provides jobs and income at the local and community level. Enhanced tourism can enable local economic development and support the poor in seeking income opportunities. But this is not always the case. It is not definite that higher tourism will always support poverty reduction. On the contrary, certain moves to enhance tourism in the region can work towards removing the poor instead of removing poverty. Instances of land acquisition for entry of large hospitality set-ups, 'beautifying' the city by shifting the slum population/regions to the periphery are some common ways of eliminating poor from fruits of tourism.

SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all

As a tourist, one gets the opportunity to experience real knowledge. Travelling, in that sense can become an instrument of learning – much effective than traditional schooling systems. There are geographies, culture and historical context of different regions that can be experienced first-hand. Tourism can potentially allow us to know what we share in common and what more can we learn from communities that we meet. Like the previous goal, travelling and tourism will not educate everyone equally. It depends on the extent and nature by which you pursue the activity. An important aspect of education is when you can put off your biases, unlearn what textbooks and urban cities have taught you and open yourself to the culture and knowledge of local regions.



SDG 8: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all

Tourism sector is one of the largest employment generators in India and plays a very significant role in promoting inclusive growth of the less-advantaged sections of the society. The travel and tourism sector in India is estimated to account for 9 per cent of the total employment opportunities generated in the country in 2016, providing employment to around 38.4 million people during the same year. The number is expected to rise by 2 per cent per annum to 46.42 million jobs by 2026 (IBEF).

For every one million invested in tourism, 47.5 more jobs are created directly and around 85-90 jobs indirectly. In comparison, agriculture creates only 44.6 jobs and manufacturing a mere 12.6 jobs (Kurukshetra, 2012). There is high scope for profuse employment generation and related activities in the form of accommodation projects, food-oriented projects, amusement parks and water sports etc. (Ministry of Tourism, 2015-16).

SDG 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

The tourism sector needs to adopt sustainable consumption and production modes, accelerating the shift towards sustainability. Tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for tourism include energy use, water consumption, waste management and biodiversity conservation and job creation which will result in enhanced economic, social and environmental outcomes (UNDP & UNWTO, 2018). This would imply that tourists, local businesses, government must design systems for efficiency and sufficiency of resource use.

SDG 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Tourism contributes to and is affected by climate change. Tourism stakeholders should play a leading role in the global response to climate change. By reducing its carbon

footprint, in the transport and accommodation sector, tourism can benefit from low carbon growth and help tackle one of the most pressing challenges of our time (UNDP & UNWTO, 2018). It might be useful to opt for greener means of transport to keep a check on carbon emissions.

SDG 15: Protect, restore, promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems and halt biodiversity loss

Rich biodiversity and natural heritage are often the main reasons why tourists visit a destination. Tourism can play a major role if sustainably managed in fragile zones, not only in conserving and preserving biodiversity, but also in generating revenue as an alternative livelihood to local communities (UNDP & UNWTO, 2018). Tourist regions should be designed such that floating tourist population can contribute in enhancing incomes of the local communities but without compromising the environmental conservation and preservation standards maintained by the locals.

Tourism Policy Choices

The main objective of the tourism policy in India is to position tourism as a major engine of economic growth and harness its direct and multiplier effect on employment and poverty eradication in a sustainable manner by active participation of all segments of the society. Apart from marketing and promotion, the focus of tourism development plans is also on integrated development of tourism infrastructure and facilities through effective partnership with various stakeholders. The role of government in tourism development has been defined from that of a regulator to that of a catalyst (Ministry of Tourism, 2015-16).

The Indian government has realised the country's potential in the tourism industry and has taken several steps to make India a global tourism hub. Some of the major initiatives taken by the Government of India to give a boost to the tourism and hospitality sector of India are as follows:

- The Union Cabinet has approved a MoU between India and South Africa, aimed at expanding

bilateral cooperation in the tourism sector through exchange of information and data, establishing exchange programmes and increasing investments in the tourism and hospitality sector.

- The Ministry of Tourism plans to revise its guidelines to exempt homestays from service tax or commercial levies and make their licensing process online, which is expected to encourage people to offer homestays to tourists.
- The Union Cabinet has approved the signing of Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Tourism of India and the Ministry of Trade Industry and Tourism of Colombia in order to boost cooperation in the field of tourism between the two countries.
- The Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY) action plans for eight mission cities including Varanasi, Mathura, Ajmer, Dwaraka, Badami, Vellankini, Warangal and Amaravati have been approved by HRIDAY National Empowered Committee for a total cost of Rs 431 crore (US\$ 64.27 million).
- Under 'Project Mausam' the Government of India has proposed to establish cross cultural linkages and to revive historic maritime cultural and economic ties with 39 Indian Ocean countries.

These initiatives by the Government of India promote tourism and thus employment generation. Ecologically safe tourism however, is still not primary focus of the governments and businesses, apart from few pilot projects. It is important that elements of sustainability are also incorporated in the design of tourism policy in India. □

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Empowering Women through Eco-Tourism

Ceballos-Lascurain (1996) suggests that eco-tourism is environmentally responsible, enlightening travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations".

Very recently, I visited an eco-tourism site in Assam, India, where women were involved but not beyond hospitality services. After seeing their passive involvement in decision making processes, my concerns were the same as they were thirteen years ago when I started researching on eco-feminism. From a development perspective, many eco-tourism ventures have progressed in these thirteen years with inadequate regard to the changes that could be brought about in gender roles and access of women to natural, economic and social resources. From the limited literature on women in eco-tourism, we found that it runs the risk of disadvantaging and marginalising local women from the development process.

Biggest challenge is that, the current eco-tourism projects are not venturing into further opportunities that can be created for women. There is also lack of research on how women could provide better results by providing specialist knowledge and skills on natural resource management. Most of the projects give emphasis on creating jobs for tour guides which is not that comfortable for rural women to do. Here, the greatest concern is that women may miss out from the overall decision making process in eco-tourism projects which may lead to poorly managed eco-tourism



A woman busy on her loom preparing a traditional shawl in Kamad Region, Uttarakhand

programmes not giving enough importance on sustainable natural resource management as it is the women who have a deep concern for the sustainable use of the natural resource base which can actually benefit eco-tourism activities.

How ever if promoted in a more inclusive manner, eco-tourism can empower the local community, especially women by providing awareness on natural resource management and sustainable use of natural resources for their own development. Empowerment speaks about a process by which a community can acquire the ability to act and take decisions for their own lives. Eco-tourism will be successful if it can involve the local community especially the women actively.

Involvement of women in eco-tourism for empowerment

In recent years, eco-feminist groups

and environmental research groups have given emphasis on gendered analysis in tourism research. However, the impacts of eco-tourism as an alternative form of tourism and its potential impacts on women has rarely been studied. There is an urgent need to relook at social dimensions of eco-tourism. For instance,

- How caste, class and gender play a role in it.
- Why would any agency which promotes eco-tourism give importance in bringing women as active agents for eco-tourism.

For answering that we need to go deeper into our social system and caste, class and gender roles. If we look at the reasons why women can play active roles and how, there are a number of reasons. In a country like India, especially in fragile ecosystems, women and girls play

greater roles and interaction with the natural environment than their male counterparts. Therefore, women's cooperation is needed to create a base for eco-tourism and community development work. Also if we look at migration data across all the states of India, the male population usually migrates in search of better livelihoods in urban areas. Women, children and old age people are left behind. Women acquire special knowledge by spending time and creating a special bond with the natural environment.

But if we look at the eco-tourism initiatives, planning and decision making parts are taken care of by male members. This has to change. We need to bring more women to this space of eco-tourism where women can share active roles in the development processes. Women can play an important role in ensuring good natural resource management which protects key resources upon which eco-tourism is based. As mentioned earlier, eco-tourism promotes empowerment of the local community and empowerment can be seen in four aspects – economic, social, political and psychological. To understand these four aspects, we need to understand first whether a community has control over an eco-tourism initiative or not. If the venture provides opportunities for developing new skill sets, confidence, self-esteem, respect that is psychological empowerment and if it enhances social cohesion among communities that is social empowerment and if it has created many jobs and livelihood options for all the community members then that is economic empowerment. A good eco-tourism project cannot overlook all of these four dimensions of development and cannot ignore active involvement of women.

If we look at the Himalayan states, where eco-tourism is flourishing, women and girls are most connected with nature and natural resources. They are the ones who have been involved in income generation activities based on forest and forest

Lessons from Africa

Sandy Beach Women's Cooperative - A story of how the Maasai Women from Belize in Africa have become empowered through eco-tourism.

This women's collective works in bringing nature lovers, not mass tourists to the beach area and helps in creating consciousness for conservation by allowing tourists to spend time in nature and experience the local culture. Their package of local attractions includes the beautiful seaside setting, an adjacent wetland area of interest to birdwatchers, hiking and tours of the village. These women contribute to their household incomes (economic empowerment) by earning from this eco-tourism enterprise they have created. The women have also gained valuable skills in business management and marketing, as well as a deepened knowledge of environmental issues. Training in environmental education has been an important component of capacity building for the Sandy Beach women. The cooperative women have also gained respect (psychological empowerment) in their family and in the community because this initiative is promoting local culture and conservation of natural resources.

products. In many parts, the women and girls are the ones who have been involved in creating crafts and craft products, medicines, natural herbs, etc.


Women's collectives as decision making agencies

Economic empowerment through collective decision-making processes can enhance skills and build capacities of women as a group. As a women's collective, they can work together to challenge existing gender roles and supplement and enhance their family income. The women can promote local culture, conserve natural resources, sell craft products by selling local food, can perform local cultural songs and dance without travelling to other locations as there are restrictions on women's mobility across Indian societies. In this way, they can retain their hold over management of the eco-tourism industry.

Eco-tourism can provide sense of self pride in local women

Women are very optimistic and have faith in local traditions and culture. By providing livelihoods to women in which they are involved in promoting local culture and tradition, women feel quite satisfied. For example, The Mountain Institute in Himalayan region promotes participation of women in all their activities, including

conducting workshops on local culture, study tour, etc.

It is concluded that community participation is a must for eco-tourism development. Women should be encouraged to get involved in such initiatives in decision making roles to organise and manage sustainable eco-tourism projects. 

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When Communities Demand Sustainability from Tourists

In a pristine area in the lap of the Himalayas is the beautiful, clear and holy Gurudongmar Lake. It is the biggest glacial wetland in Sikkim, considered sacred by many local communities.

Lachen in Sikkim, is an overnight stopover for about 15,000 tourists who visit the lake annually. The village has about 300 households, thirty of which function as hotels and some have converted to homestays. As the number of tourists visiting Sikkim has risen over the last two decades, the tourist hotspots have witnessed some major littering and solid waste management challenges. Data shows that the estimated number of tourists that visited Sikkim rose from 5.52 lakhs in 2011 to 13.75 lakhs in 2017, a staggering increase of 149% in 6 years. It consequently became common place to see heaps of plastic bottles, tetra packs and plastic packaging of commercially available food items in the villages and along boundaries of the Gurudongmar lake, worshipped by the natives. The choked drains and littered spots became aesthetic and drainage hazards, to counter which the Lachen Tourism Development Committee (LTDC) conducted routine clean-up drives at the end of the tourist season annually.

The initiative, though well-intended, ended up in adding toxins to the air because burning was the sole option to manage the non-biodegradable waste. In 2012, WWF-India then took a pioneering step, in collaboration and with support from the Lachen Dzumsa (local administrative body) and the LTDC, to exercise a complete ban on the use and sale of



source: © Priyadarshinee Shreshta/WWF-India;
https://www.wwfindia.org/about_wwfi/?7380/Zero-Plastic-Water-Bottles

packaged/bottled drinking water in Lachen. The Dzumsa legislation has been majorly successful because the Lachenpas (the native Lachen residents) have dedicatedly arranged for safe, alternative provisions for drinking water for the tourists. With financial support by the USAID Asia High Mountains programme, WWF-India distributed water filters to some hotels, stalls and homestays to ease the transition for the tourists and those who earned livelihoods by hosting them.

The LTDC and WWF-India also made it mandatory for testing the available drinking water at a facility set up by the State Institute of Rural Development, to certify it as fit for human consumption. At many cafes and hotels in Lachen, the certificate is displayed to evoke trust and a sense of security in the tourists. The ban has undeterred cooperation from the hotels association, taxi drivers union and the local police who also help monitor inflow of plastic bottles into the territory. At the Lachen entry check-post, the police personnel check all tourist vehicles for plastic bottles and sensitise tourists by organising awareness drives and distributing stickers.

With immense motivation and a hugely positive feedback to this milestone initiative, the Dzumsa has now also planned development of a waste recovery centre in the area, with support from the state's Rural Management and Development Department and WWF-India; and is constantly expanding their eco-tourism offerings by developing nature trails, training bird guides etc. to provide sustainable livelihoods to the local people. At the waste recovery facility, the plan is to develop a segregation centre and dispatch the non-biodegradable material to a nearby waste trader and enable reuse wherever feasible, such as for filling in cushions and pillows and knitting into bags and bins.

The Gurudongmar-Lachen tale is a strong depiction of communities ushering in transformative change for betterment of the society and the environment, wherein they garnered tourist cooperation because the requisite alternatives were provided. □

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Past Events

Round Table Consultation on 'Making Rural Housing Sustainable'

A Round Table Consultation (RTC) on 'Making Rural Housing Sustainable' was organised by Development Alternatives (DA) on 31st July, 2018 in DA's head office at Delhi; supported by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and the Green Economy Coalition. The objective was to explore pathways to strengthen the rural housing scenario in India based on principles of sustainability, inclusion, resilience and efficiency. DA took an initiative in looking at linkages of rural housing with Sustainable Development Goals and streamlining the process of tracking and improving the rural housing development in India. The RTC witnessed

representation from different Ministries of the Government as well as experts from CSOs, Training Skill Development Sector and Building Technology experts and academicians. The stakeholder group realised the importance of indicators for measurement in order to track progress in the rural habitat sector.



Dr Ashok Khosla conferred with Degree of Doctorate of Law by the Simon Fraser University, Canada

Dr Ashok Khosla, Chairman, Development Alternatives, is an internationally renowned pioneer in environmental sustainability, who has developed conceptual frameworks and global systems for promoting a sustainable future that has had profound impacts in India and around the globe. Dr. Khosla has been conferred with Degree of Doctorate of Law by the Simon Fraser University, Canada

Stakeholder Consultation on Suhana Safar – A Skilling Supply Chain Initiative

Development Alternatives has been working on skill development with truck drivers and helpers on WASH, Road Safety, Financial Inclusion etc. through a unique initiative called 'Suhana Safar' with support from the Maersk Group. It has reached out to more than 8500 beneficiaries in the past 2.5 years. In order to share the experiences, learning and findings of the 'Suhana Safar' Programme; explore pathways to strengthen the programme and work towards future approaches for the larger benefit of the truck drivers and helpers' communities, a stakeholder consultation was organised on 3rd August 2018 at Development Alternatives, Delhi. The theme of the stakeholder consultation was "Suhana Safar: A skilling supply chain initiative to explore & influence approaches to benefit truck drivers & helpers' communities".

The objective behind this consultation was to have a discussion with stakeholders with an overarching view of discussing the learnings of 'Suhana Safar' Programme and work towards future policy actions for the larger benefit of the target group. This consultation brought together various like-minded people from different arenas of development working towards a similar goal. Among the attendees of the event, there were people from government representing sector skill councils, CEOs of various foundations, civil service organizations, health organizations, researchers, professor, businesses and media. The agenda was to discuss the status and way forward for the policy measures taken and future policy imperatives for promoting awareness on health, road safety and enforcement of safety law as part of National road safety policy by Ministry of Road transport and highways. Other themes discussed were importance of financial inclusion, physical fitness and life skills for truck drivers and helpers' community.

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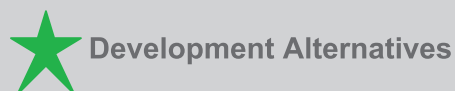
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