

Sustainable tourism or ecotourism: Does reality substantiate the myth?

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"Integrated tourism, to be successful, must promote sustainable development by establishing a durable productive base that allows local inhabitants and service providers to enjoy rising standards of living". This was said by Mr. David Barkin in one of his papers in 1996 when the concept of Ecotourism was shaping up and word used for sustainable tourism development was "Integrated" Tourism. Now we are sure that word Ecotourism has taken its place integrating Sustainability, environmental management and ecotourism. Does reality substantiate the myth?" There is no doubt that people consider "Ecotourism" as "sustainable Tourism". Ecotourism for me is a tool which ensures ecological, environmental, economical and cultural friendly tourism. I believe that Ecotourism is activities controlled by local community of any respective area where tourism activities are being generated.

- Can it be possible?
- Are local poor communities of mountain areas being involved in decision making of tourism activities? Who is planning tourism activities for mountain areas?
- Who is getting benefits out of tourism?
- Who is selling tours to mountain areas?
- Who is buying tours to mountain areas?
- Can sustainability be achieved without the active participation of local communities?

These are serious questions that come in my mind when I talk about Pakistan as role Model. Before we see how can integrated tourism be achieved? And what types of policies can be formulated for getting this target; I must say that we should go into detail nature of tourism business in mountain areas. It may be mentioned here that Mountain Areas all over the world have similar problems like deforestation, land utilization, unplanned growth of tourism industry and mushroom growth of accommodations. And most of all brain drain situation due to lack of financial resources and limited job opportunities.

Tourism is marketed internationally but it is "consumed" at the point of production destinations. Integrated tourism or whatever you call is possible when:

- Consumer (tourists) respects for "integrated Tourism".
- Producer (operators) understands threats being faced by area where she/he is planning and operating tours.
- Product (respective areas--destinations) has sense of sustainable tourism and care for ecosystem and cultural norms.

There is no doubt that Tourism has become an important sector for developing countries seeking to maximize foreign exchange earnings, increase employment and secure financial resources to conserve natural and cultural heritage. However, situation is different in Pakistan where mountainous areas are owned by certain influential families who are enjoying almost 70 percents benefits while common people have access to only 30 percent of benefits of tourism. Big tour operators and government sector are also there to take their share. Common people are provided jobs on daily basis or on season basis by tour operators and by Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) that owns biggest chain of motels in Northern Areas of Pakistan and operates Pakistan Tours Limited (PTL).

Tourism industry has also faced another negative situation during the last 2 decades while some investors having huge money from ill-gotten money invested in small hotel and medium hotel industry. These people do not care about basic of tourism because their interest was to whiten their money not to run hotels/motels. In majority of cases, they are not running their hotels rather they have given contracts to other people to run their businesses. In these conditions, people living in big cities are involved in running hotels and they local people only as daily wages workers and management of hotels come from big cities.

There is no law, which can stop this practice, and I do not think that there can be any law to stop this exploitation of local because we are living in open market era.

There is another very important factor in tourism industry that is its marketing mechanism. Decisions made by tourists and the industry in the originating countries can assist or harm local communities who are not being involved when tour is being planned, marketed, sold and bought.

Inappropriate tourism development can result in local people losing access to water, land and communal areas, and to the creation of tourist enclaves and to social pollution. I can give you example of Kalam area where almost 81 percent hotels/motels and accommodations are owned/run by people living in big cities and local have no access to big tour operators. They cannot stop them to send "more people" to their already ruined, polluted and degenerated land.

The positive contribution of tourism is significant, but there are a number of challenges to be met if the potential for sustainable local development and

poverty elimination, through the localization of benefits, is to be realized. These challenges include issues of ownership, economic leakage (from the local economy and through imports), local employment, benefit distribution, social and environmental impacts and dependency. These problems can only be effectively addressed at the destination level with the active participation of the local communities, tour operators and government agencies.

Rapid and sustained tourism growth and the search for new destinations mean that more and more communities will be affected by the tourism industry. This provides opportunities for economic development, but there are also costs to be minimized. The demand side drives the industry; however, the sustainability of the sector at the destination is dependent upon some public control over the effects of the industry on the environment and socio-cultural structure of the area. It is the natural and cultural heritage of the area and the living culture of the local people that attract tourists. The negative impacts of tourism on the environment and local communities need to be managed and the adverse impacts mitigated in order to maintain the asset.

A tourism monoculture adversely affects the inherent quality of the destination and over-dependence on tourism increases the economic vulnerability of the area to decisions made elsewhere by consumers and investors. Tourism development frequently brings with it demands for goods and services which are not produced in the local economy. These goods and services are then sourced outside of the local area, often internationally, and only a small proportion of the expenditure remains in the local economy. This is a particular problem in mountain areas. These leakages reduce the development impact of tourism, whereas the development of linkages results in the creation of more jobs and opportunities to locals.

I am of the view that unless integrated tourism actively incorporates the local society into service planning and provision, and includes programs to meet the fundamental needs for income and employment for all people in the region, the special qualities of the any area may be damaged. We have example of Murree Hills and we would face the same situation in Kaghan Valley very soon. Kaghan is an example of feudal authority on Tourism business where only tow or three families are operating business and are beneficial of tourism while common people are not involved and they do not get benefits of Tourism. They get only landslides due to deforestation, pollution due to massive traffic and degenerated environments due to unplanned growth of motels. Situation could be same in North but international agencies like AKRSP people and other played very positive and effective role to save nature, culture and traditions in Hunza and other areas. In all these areas, tourism was generated, operated, looked after by influential people who had money to operate hotels, transports and offices in big cities for marketing. Common man of these areas was never involved in planning, executing or taking care of tourism activities. However, things are improving here now.

I am of the view that Integrated tourism must do more than to create a series of activities to attract visitors, offering them an opportunity to interact with nature in such a way as to make it possible to preserve or enhance the special qualities of the area while allowing local inhabitants and future visitors to continue to enjoy these qualities. They must also establish a durable productive base to allow the local people and service providers to enjoy a sustainable standard of living while offering these services.

The study of integrated tourism offers many opportunities to reflect on the importance of sustainability, and the possibilities of implementing approaches, which move us in a new direction. But it also suggests that there are significant obstacles. Overcoming these obstacles requires more than well-intentioned policies; it requires a new correlation of social forces, a move towards broad-based democratic participation in all aspects of life. Strategies to face these challenges must respond to the dual challenges of insulating these communities from further encroachment and assuring their viability.

The obstacles are an integral part of the world system, a system of increasing duality, polarized between the rich and poor --nations, regions, communities, and individuals. A small number of nations dominate the global power structure, guiding production and determining welfare levels. The remaining nations compete among themselves to offer lucrative conditions that will entice the corporate and financial powers to locate within their boundaries. Similarly, regions and communities within nations engage in self-destructive forms of bargaining --compromising the welfare of their workers and the building of their own infrastructure-- in an attempt to outbid each other for the fruits of global growth. People who come to Pakistan from rich countries do not go where we offer them to go. They plan their tours and direct us to follow their itineraries. They are much interested in North---the most fragile ecosystem of Pakistan. We have to follow their instructions.

Well educated tourist coming from most advanced nations who cry for "sustainable tourism" should ask their tour operators following questions before they book their tours:

- Do they (tour operators) provide information about endangered species and illegally traded products?
- Are they (tour operators) members of networks and coalitions such as Educational Communications' Project Ecotourism?
- Do they (tour operators) inform their clients about local customs, dress and behavior patterns so that they can be observed?
- Do they (tour operators) evaluate the effects of their trips on the local ecosystems and local inhabitants, and are they willing to share the results?
- Do they (tour operators) transport educational materials to local schools and equipment to mountain clinics?

- Do the trips strictly observe local regulations?
- Are the hotels, transport agencies, restaurants and shops to be patronized locally owned? Do they engage in unethical activities, such as keeping captive animals on the premises?
- Do the newer hotels fit into the local natural settings? Do they reflect cultural motifs in their architectural design? Are they constructed of native materials?

I am of the view that an alternative development model requires new ways to encourage the direct participation of common people and indigenous communities in a program of job creation in mountainous areas to increase incomes and improve living standards. However, things are otherwise in Pakistan. Tour operators sitting in big cities like Islamabad and Karachi and of course in Lahore plan groups and send people to North. They decide the fate of areas with involving local. Local just act as porters, guides, drivers and cooks.

There is no strategy of democratic participation for mountain diversification and productive improvement in Pakistan and newly developed Master Tourism Plan is completely silent about this very important issue. Sustainable development is an approach to productive reorganization that encompasses the combined experiences of local groups throughout the world. The techniques for implementation vary greatly among regions and ecosystems. A single common denominator pervades this work: the need for effective democratic participation in the design and implementation of projects. For organizations involved in projects of sustainable development in mountain areas, the conflict will center on control of mechanisms of local political and economic power, and the use of resources. The struggle to assure a greater voice in the process for peasants, indigenous populations, women, and other underprivileged minorities, will not assure that their decisions will lead to sustainable development. But broad-based democratic participation is the best way to create the basis for a more equitable distribution of wealth, one of the first prerequisites for forging a strategy of sustainable development.

Central to the debate on tourism and development in my opinion should be issues of how employment and other benefits to destination areas can be maximized at the local level, and how negative social and environmental impacts can be minimized.

Since the 1950's Pakistan has received increasing numbers of international tourists, largely from developed countries. In 1996 developing countries had 31% of world international tourist arrivals a gain of more than 2% between 1990 and 1996. Rising standards of living, declining long-haul travel costs, increasing holiday entitlements, changing demographics and strong consumer demand for exotic international travel have resulted in significant tourism growth to developing countries with international visits to the developing world accounting for 25% of the global total. Between 1985 and 1995 average gross

receipts per tourist arrival increased by 117% in developed countries, in the developing countries the increase was only 75%.

Can government policies force people to eat locally made food, jams and bread?

Can government policy force tour operators to plan their tours with the consultation of locals?

I am sure answer of these two questions is one big No as we live in "Open Market" situation. Therefore in my opinion, integrated tourism and its success factors for ensuring local economic benefits in a tourism sector are depending upon beyond the control of governments or their agencies but depend upon the role of tourist, tour operators and market managers. When we see the situation on ground, following questions and answers come on the surface.

Q: Who is planning tourism and tours?

A: people living in Islamabad and big cities are planning tours and tourism.

Q: Who is getting benefits out of tourism?

A: People who have resources and sources to plan and operate tourism and tours. What should be done?

- Government should invest revenues on development of social infrastructure in mountain areas from where the same revenues were generated.
- Existing rules of tour operations must be amended to ensure the maximum participation of local people.
- Tourist groups should understand that they should not visit over sold areas.
- Tour operators should not think about "today's" income but should take care of future as well.
- Local people should develop their "pressure groups" to get their maximum share out of tourism income.
- Public sector (PTDC, STC) should encourage use of local edibles and locally made products in their motels/hotels. They should also provide job opportunities to local instead of "importing manpower from big cities.
- There should be a heavy tax on sale of products of multinational companies in mountains areas to discourage usage.
- There should be complete ban on construction of any building in mountain areas, which is not planned in accordance with local style and material.

- Government sponsored small institutions be opened in remote mountain areas for providing training to local youth in the field of tourism, guide training, house keeping and tour operations. Talking ideally and philosophically, I am of the view that following points should be considered whenever we plan to get positive results:
 1. Which action approach is needed to cope with existing conditions?
 2. The use of Experts.
 3. Informed participation is essential for development planning.
 4. Preventive approach development planning.
 5. Dynamic/ new approaches to planning.
 6. Change for planning to process.
 7. What needs to be addressed, identification of issues needs to be taken up with the help of experts.
 8. Methods for identifications, implementations according to situations.
 9. Well motivated/interested work force.
 10. The new role of the communities.
 11. Coping with "outside influences" brought in by the process itself.
 12. Creation of regional identities.
 13. Development of mechanism for enforcement and implementation.
 14. Strengthen regional identifications and formulation of regional vision.
 15. Technical assessment of projects identified.
 16. Economic viability, continuity of project identified.
 17. Ensure flexibility in the design of plans.
 18. Capacity building at the grass root level.
 19. Good governance.
 20. Formulating policy
 21. Change in attitudes and behavior.
 22. Conformity with land revenue systems in the regions.
 23. Respect for local traditions, values and religion.
 24. The planning process must be in accordance with the devaluation process.
 25. Recognition of the traditional ways with modern day requirements.
 26. Selection of appropriate technologies.
 27. Development of marketing strategies.

If you do not consider above mentioned issues, sustainable development would just myth not reality.

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