

## Sustainable Tourism Development in Bangladesh: Strategies and Guidelines

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### Abstract

*Tourism is one of the world's largest and fastest growing industries, this continuous growth will place great stress on remaining biologically diverse habitats and indigenous cultures. Current study discusses the stressful nature of tourism that demands an inclusion of the concept "sustainability" which attempts to find a balance between these impacts to create an improved quality of life for the host community and the destination. This paper deliberately attempts to portray the strategies and tactics for developing environmental, economic, and socio-cultural sustainability in tourism industry of Bangladesh. Afterward the study tries to find out potentials and constraints to the development of sustainable tourism in Bangladesh. The write-up also suggests that an integrated approach to tourism planning and development is required for a notable sustainable growth of tourism sector that will able to meet the needs of the present tourists without compromising the future tourists in the country. If done so, it is expected that the industry would be able to fulfill its objectives, develop to a considerable extent; the sector will very soon emerge as a major contributor to the economy of Bangladesh. Thus Bangladesh tourism will enjoy a bonanza within a reasonable period of time.*

**Keywords:** Sustainable tourism, sustainability, strategy, integrated approach.

### Introduction

Bangladesh is gifted with tremendous variety of tourism products both natural and manmade. From the time immemorial this land has had its own Geo and Bio-diversity. That is why this featured landscape with lush green field, seashore with long beach, hills with scenic beauty, forests with flora and fauna, heritage and archeological sites, hundreds of years of long practice of norms and values have supported its specialty. From tourism point of view all these are the valued products and saleable to the tourists either domestic or international. ICLEI (1999) claimed that, tourism in natural areas can be a major source of degradation of local ecological, economic and social systems. The intrusion of large numbers of foreigners with high-consumption and high-waste habits into natural areas, or into towns with inadequate waste management infrastructure, can produce changes to those natural areas at a rate that is far greater than imposed by local residents. These tourism-related changes are

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particularly deleterious when local residents rely on those natural areas for their sustenance. Resulting economic losses can encourage socially deleterious economic activities such as prostitution, crime and child labor. So tourism products should be protected and developed in a sustainable way. To protect the potential tourism products mainly based on nature and culture needs substantial measure should be taken. This implies that the damage done by tourism activities should be minimized by way of practicing 'Sustainable Tourism'. This is the tourism that has nominal impact on the environment and culture of the host country. So, it refers to a level of tourism activity that can be maintained over the long term because it results in a net benefit for the social, economic, natural and cultural environments of the area in which it takes place.

In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (also known as the Earth Summit or the Rio Summit) focused on developing Agenda 21, a strategy to aid the public and private sector in the implementation of sustainable development. Subsequent initiatives, such as the Globe 90 conference in Vancouver and Agenda 21 for Travel and Tourism (WTO 1997), drew on the WCED report and Agenda 21 to introduce a new development paradigm for tourism: sustainable tourism. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) provides the following explanation:

Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity 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 (WTO 1997:30).

The United Nations-World Tourism Organization (UN-WTO) has defined sustainable tourism as 'an enterprise that achieves an effective balance among the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development in order to guarantee long-term benefits to recipient communities'. That means the aim of Sustainable Tourism is to ensure that development is a positive experience for local people; tourism related companies or organizations; and tourists themselves. So an integrated approach to tourism planning, development and management is required for a notable sustainable growth of tourism sector that will be able to meet the needs of the present tourists without compromising the future tourists in Bangladesh.

### **Objectives of the study**

To identify the strategies and tactics for developing environmental, economic, and socio-cultural sustainability in tourism industry of Bangladesh.

To identify the constraints to the development of sustainable tourism in Bangladesh.

To highlight the potentials of sustainable tourism development in Bangladesh.

### **Methodology of the study**

Secondary data were used to address the objectives in this study. The necessary data from secondary sources were collected through document analysis. For this purpose a thorough literature survey has been conducted. In order to obtain the reliable secondary data various journals, periodicals, books, acts, regulations, policies of Bangladesh, websites, annual reports, papers of different agencies were consulted carefully.

### **Limitation of the study**

The findings of this study can be generalized after considering certain limitations. Though the study is mainly based on reliable secondary data, existing literature on the sustainable tourism development in Bangladesh and even on the overall marketing aspects is not adequate.

### **Literature review**

Arsenijevic and Bohanec (2011) found that the term ecotourism must be understood in association with five criteria: nature conservation, low impact, sustainability, meaningful community involvement and environmental education. Furthermore, according to the concept of sustainable development, the tourism can be "sustainable" if development meets the needs of present tourists and locals while protecting future opportunities.

Deegan and Moloney (2007) observed for Ireland west that strong correlation of the tourist success to economic growth and employment. In the context of overall macroeconomic activity there is good reason to believe that tourism can be a significant contributor to economic development in the years ahead if an appropriate emphasis and strategy is developed.

Researchers noticed that developing countries are deprived of benefits derived from tourism and suggested proper planning that includes the socio-cultural, economic and environmental factors Butler (1974); de Kadt (1979); Edelman (1975); Hyma & Wall (1979); Jafari (1974); and Sadler & Archer (1974). Subsequently, tourism practitioners and international organizations started working with tourism and began to use it as an effective tool for poverty alleviation. Etsuko Okazaki (2008) showed that community participation in the tourism planning process is advocated as a way of implementing sustainable tourism. This paper reviewed the principal theories used to discuss community participation including the ladder of citizen participation, power distribution, collaboration processes and social capital formation.

Ansari, Akter, Huq (2006) opined that Tourism activities in the Island( St. Martin's Island) have both positive and negative impacts on the natural as well as social environment of the island. The positive and negative impact of tourism on the host destination's socio-cultural structure has been an issue for a long time. Lundberg (1980); Foster (1985); Inskip (1991); Witt (1991); Cooper (1989); Friges (1996); Matheison and Wall (1982) all contribute to the account of Social Positive and Negative Impacts on the host destination. In the words of Matheison and Wall (1982), social impacts can be thought of 'as changes in the lives of people who live in destination communities, which are associated with tourist activity' in regard to moral conduct, creative expressions. Cultural impacts can be thought of as the changes in the arts, traditional ceremonies, customs and rituals and architecture of people that result from tourism activity. Witt (1991) claimed that the greater the difference between the host community and the tourists, the greater will be the affect of tourism on society. This presents a challenge to decision makers in regard to the type of tourism that a destination is trying to attract. Ostom et al (1999) and Eber (1992) suggest that this can be minimized with the involvement of local participants in decision making for sustainable tourism development.

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## **Analysis and Findings of the Study**

### **Strategies and tactics for developing environmental sustainable tourism in Bangladesh**

Any form of industrial development brings impacts upon the physical environment in which it takes place. In view of the fact that tourists have to visit the place of production in order to consume the output, it is inevitable that tourism activity is associated with environmental impacts (Cooper et al., 1998). Depletion of natural resources can result in water shortages; create great pressure on other local resources like energy, food, etc., that already might be in short supply or destroy beautiful scenic landscapes. Solid waste and littering in the nature despoils the natural environment. To mention more physical impacts are degradation and loss of wildlife habitats and of scenery, and disturbance and erosion of the local ecosystem caused by clearing forested land and construction of tourism facilities and infrastructure (UNEP, 2001). However tourism could be positive for the preservation of natural areas. In many tourism projects the conservation of the natural, cultural and built environment is an important motivation for the initiation of the project. Generally speaking, the main priority for national and regional Governments is to incorporate tourism planning and development effectively into overall sustainable development strategies. For instance, regional development strategies for areas containing water resources that are potentially attractive to tourism, should carefully consider the availability of those resources in an integrated manner that considers all potential water users. Government policies to promote the domestic tourism industry and to attract foreign direct investment should also ensure that tourism is properly planned and managed so as to minimize adverse environmental impacts and its use of natural resources. Since the environmental impacts of tourism development are primarily felt at the local and regional levels, national Governments need to promote decentralization of public environment management to the regional and municipal levels.

Visitor management system is must to avoid damage in areas of high landscape value or where biodiversity may be especially vulnerable. Visitors can be managed through limiting number of visitors, length of stay, encouraging use of other areas, charging a flat visitors fee, eliminating facilities/ attractions in problem areas, improving facilities/ attractions in alternative areas, encouraging off-trail travel, discouraging camping in problem areas and segregating different types of visitors. Water consumption of visitors can be minimized through restricting water hungry facilities such as swimming pools, golf courses, and artificial snow cannons. Reusing and recycling of water can be taken as better solution, like use of greywater to irrigate parks and gardens. As transport is one of the most sources of environmental pollution resulting from tourism, it is necessary to work together to promote the use of more environmentally friendly forms of tourism transport. Use of environmentally damaging chemicals used by hospitality industry should be eliminated through careful purchasing policies and promoting organic products.

Governments at all levels can greatly benefit from working in partnership with all major stakeholders, including local communities, to ensure their active participation in tourism planning, development and management, as well as in the sharing of benefits. Participation of local communities in decision-making and sharing of benefits also helps to generate better

awareness of the environmental costs of tourism and thus provides strong incentives to conserve natural resources and protect local environmental assets (Wunder, 2000). Governments, together with the tourism industry and other stakeholders, should also promote or support various efforts to raise public awareness about the impact of tourists on destinations, to promote respect for local communities and their cultures and to protect the environment. Such public awareness campaigns often succeed in promoting positive behavioral changes not only in tourists, but also in tourism workers and host communities as a whole.

### **Strategies and tactics for developing economical sustainable tourism in Bangladesh**

Tourism represents a very complex and multidimensional phenomenon that produces numerous positive economic as well as non-economic effects in the receptive tourist countries. As a result of the positive effects, the sustainable tourism can be treated as a means for eliminating poverty and increasing the standard of life, especially on long term. The sustainable tourism can bring higher and faster economic development and decrease poverty in more ways. That can be extremely important for all the countries in the world, especially for the least developed ones (Dimoska, 2008). In Bangladesh, most of the tourism destinations of the country are city-based while the tourism business of Bangladesh is dominated by rich and elites. Owners of luxurious hotels, restaurants, cottages, motels are the rich people of the society. Few lower category jobs of waiters, housekeeping, guards, and bearers are opened for the local poor people. The wealthy tourism business people are compelled to employ the local poor because of surplus cheap local labor. Moreover, most of the lower category positions are temporary, so in the off-season there is high unemployment. A wide range of barriers exist for the poor that restrict them from becoming involved in tourism. The poor people have least knowledge and understanding regarding country's tourism development. In some destinations local poor are even completely unaware of tourism (Islam & Carlsen, 2012). To develop economically sustainable tourism in Bangladesh it is must to develop strong linkages between tourism and other economic sectors including agriculture, fisheries, manufacturing, construction and crafts production of Bangladesh. If the tourism industry purchases from domestic industries, it strengthens them and provides additional revenue and jobs, at the same time reducing the import content and foreign exchange leakage from the tourism industry. Tour operators should be encouraged to use locally based service providers and products that are most likely to benefit local communities. Service providers should be encouraged to undertake an audit of sources used (such as food producers) and to seek to maximize the proportion of local suppliers. Using local products can greatly enhance the authenticity of the tourist offer and the multiplier effect of tourism in local economies. Achieving a consistent supply of high quality local goods can be a challenge, but is necessary to reduce the need for imported goods and thus reduce leakages. Policy should encourage clusters and networking of businesses. Hotels and tour operators need to work with local communities and local government to develop forms of tourism, which bring sustainable pro-poor local development and provide a richer experience for domestic and international tourists. New development projects should be assessed not by their contribution to growth in international arrivals or contribution to gross

revenues alone but by their effect on local pro-poor sustainable development. In existing destinations, hoteliers and tour operators, local government and local communities all need to be empowered to take control of their destination within the context of the domestic and international tourism market. A greater variety and richness of local attractions and activities in a destination will increase the propensity of travelers to visit the destination and may extend the length of stay and increase visitor expenditure. The established tourism destination may offer complementary products such as tourist services (like guided walks and the performing arts) and goods particularly crafts and other local communities can often engage in the provision of complementary products because it requires less capital investment and is therefore less risky. Seasonality problem of tourism can be reduced through arranging festivals, developing special interest products, attracting seminars and conventions, and pricing policies, specially addressing senior citizens who have more flexibility to travel in the low season. It is necessary to encourage tourism enterprises to provide skills training programs and career advancement in local community and work with national technical and vocational schools to improve their standards and outreach. It's all about a decisive and inclusive plan is inevitable recognizing the importance of sustainable tourism at every level of tourism destination.

### **Strategies and tactics for developing socio-cultural sustainable tourism in Bangladesh:**

The ability to define and quantify the various socio-cultural impacts of tourism on the local communities helps to create effective strategies that avoid potential conflicts between guest and host (Daye, 1997; Brunt and Courtney, 1999). Additionally, this may lead to a reduction in the possibility of disruptive differences among the stakeholders and strengthen their relationships. The benefits will be passed on to the visitors and possibly lead to an increase in the numbers of visitors in the near future. The attitudes of those local people who maintain misconceptions of tourism may also be changed by the ongoing impact of the presence of tourists in their locality. This involves a change of mindset, largely from a reluctance to engage with the tourism industry to being able to see the benefits of increased employment and income from tourism. It is therefore important for tourism decision-makers to be fully aware of these local attitudes and conceptions so that they can take the appropriate actions to attempt to satisfy the desire of the local people to improve both their standard of living and quality of social welfare (Williams and Lawson, 2001; Dogan, 1989).

Socio-cultural sustainable tourism can be developed in Bangladesh through ensuring effective management and conservation of cultural and historic heritage sites. Policies in this area should focus on securing more money from visitors for conservation. It is necessary to utilize income from tourism to support social programs such as education, health and social welfare. Tourism investment in remote area can result in the provision of additional services, such as water, electricity and health care, which can be of particular benefit to disadvantaged communities. Disadvantaged people often gain access to visitors and seek to earn income from them through activities such as street trading, personal guiding services or providing simple accommodation, etc. This can be strengthened through capacity building, attention to

quality, licensing, better information for tourists, etc. High priority need be given to the creation of jobs for locals that are stable, permanent and full-time, and that provide fair salaries and benefits. Promoting mutual use of facilities and services by residents and tourists will help to reduce potential conflicts between guest and host which can be achieved through arranging inexpensive holiday packages for disadvantaged groups.

Cultural richness can be strengthened and interpreted through developing interpretative programs and events based on the heritage and distinctiveness of the area; furnishing in tourism establishments, local cuisine in restaurants, traditional designs in architecture, and art and sculpture in public spaces; conceiving creative, sensitive and viable visitor attractions where local culture and traditions can be showcased.

### **Constraints to the Development of Sustainable Tourism in Bangladesh**

In Bangladesh Sustainable tourism initiatives exist and demand is increasing, but sustainable tourism management is not widespread in the sector. Adoption and maintaining sustainability depends on some of the factors such as understanding sustainability of the host community, policy makers and the visitors; readiness of the tourism resources; existing type of usage of the resources by the local community and long term vision of the policy makers. As a developing nation Bangladesh has to face several challenges such as lack of awareness of the locals about conservation of tourist resources, lack of policy guidelines of the Government, density of population in this region are vulnerable to the external factors, tourism products are often offered for both mass & niche, over expectation of rapid growth damaging the potentials in developing sustainable tourism. However, some other drawbacks might be pointed out as follows:

- ✓ Lack of consistent tourism strategies and policies
- ✓ Lack of tourism investments and related infrastructures
- ✓ Lack of technical know-how and weak promotional activity
- ✓ Difficulties in influencing consumer behavior to promote sustainable tourism
- ✓ Unqualified jobs and foreign exchange leakage
- ✓ Decreased access to natural resources for the local communities
- ✓ Increasing cultural erosion and disrespect for human rights
- ✓ Problems associated with climate change
- ✓ Problems in managing dynamic growth
- ✓ Lack of proper marketing strategy of sustainable tourism product
- ✓ Lack of coordination and integration of public and private sector activities
- ✓ Lack of political stability of the country
- ✓ Shortage of professional and well-educated work forces
- ✓ Conflict between the tribal and other people

Above all, after 18 years of previous policy Government of Bangladesh (GOB) declared National Tourism Policy 2010 for the systematic development of tourism. It is limited in papers but there is no implementation. Bangladesh Tourism Board has failed to become a member of Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria which ensures the increased benefits, market access and competitive edge.

### **Potentials of Sustainable Tourism Development in Bangladesh**

Bangladesh is an ideal destination for sustainable tourism. Being the gateway of south-east Asia, Bangladesh is connected by air and sea and by surface. It has tremendous geographic advantages and ecologically beautiful landscape with green valleys, large forests, longer beaches, hills, lots of lakes and rivers that obviously help the country to be an ideal ecotourism destination. In Bangladesh there are many ancient mosques, temples, church, pagoda, shrines, historical and archaeological sites. The ethnic life style of indigenous people of hill tracts and various religious and cultural shows are good forms of cultural diversity which might act as a powerful component of developing sustainable tourism in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh adopted National Tourism Policy 2010, main objective of which is to develop ecotourism- a wing of sustainable tourism through conservation of natural resources and promote wellbeing of the community and preservation of cultural values of the local community and their participation and sharing benefits. Government of Bangladesh launched an act of 'Protected Areas of Tourism and Special Tourism Zone Act -2010'. Government has decided to withdraw all duties from solar energy equipment to encourage use of solar energy, especially in the remote and economically backward locations. The National Board of Revenue (NBR) has decided to provide customs duty waiver on import of different machinery and other equipments for newly-established international standard luxury hotels in a bid to promote the hospitality industry and tourism sector in the country. To explore the benefits of community-based rural tourism Government has initiated 'Tourism Awareness Program 2013' locally. In order to develop sustainable tourism in Chittagong Hills Government have taken necessary steps to sustain the socio-cultural authenticity of tribal communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance. In Bangladesh sustainable development is one of the main policy objectives of Five Year Plan (FYP). Let there be no doubt that Bangladesh tourism sector has indeed potentials and a sustainable tourism development in Bangladesh is possible if will, knowledge, action and investment are amalgamated.

### **Conclusion**

Evidence suggests that it is high time to develop tourism which is, environmentally and ecologically sustainable, economically viable and socially and psychologically acceptable. The benefits that are received from tourism should be fairly distributed, and then only will tourism be participatory, and, thus, the rights of local residents will be properly recognized, and tourism will be responsible and sustainable. If all these development, promotional,



managerial strategies along with policy issues implemented in a coordinated manner by Government and different role-playing-agencies, tourism sector in Bangladesh would definitely yield a positive result in terms of exploration of future potentials, maximization of foreign currency earning, employment generation, and social and cultural development. But it should be remembered that Bangladesh does not possess any magic lamp and not in a position to provide or create or undertake international standard tourist products and facilities, infrastructures, good images, effective promotional measures, enough security measures to a greater extent overnight within the limits of our resource constraints. However, Bangladesh should at least start the process of improving these aspects immediately. If done so, it is expected that the industry would be able to fulfill its objectives, develop to a considerable extent; the sector will very soon emerge as a major contributor to the economy of Bangladesh. Thus Bangladesh tourism will enjoy a bonanza within a reasonable period of time.

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