
CHAPTER - VII

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TOURISM, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CONSERVATION

Introduction

Sikkim Himalaya is a site of high biodiversity value, and one that is facing growing threats from a variety of sources including commercial logging, farming practices and tourism. As concern grows over the loss of both natural and cultural heritage in this region, attention is turning to strategies, which seek to link conservation with tourism development and generate incentives to conserve the resources on which economic benefits depend. Sikkim is growing in popularity, and likely to attract increasing numbers of tourists in the visiting area's cultural sites and protected areas of high biodiversity value. The economic significance of tourism industry is multifarious. Tourism development has a great deal of appeal for its role in the economic development of remote mountain regions and its impact on local society, economy, and the environment. The most important economic benefits of tourism are the earnings of convertible foreign exchange (Malhotra 1998). But the criticism of tourism parallels a general paradigm shift away from purely growth-oriented economic development towards more sustainable forms of development (Friedmann *et al.* 1980; Redclift 1987 and Brookfield 1988). The new paradigm requires programs that limit the negative effects of economic behaviour

on local environments and cultures. It proposes linkages between economy, culture and ecology in what Norgaard (1984) calls "Co-evolutionary development" and what others have termed "eco-development" (Farvar & Glaeser 1979). Lee (1988) observes "there is no other international trading activity which involves such a critical interplay among economic, political, environmental, and social elements as tourism". Bröckelman (1988) and Mckean (1989), view tourism as a way to foster meaningful cross-cultural relationships as well as to promote environmental conservation and a more equitable distribution of tourism earnings.

This chapter describes tourism in Sikkim, where tourists visit remote natural and cultural settings and discusses its contribution to the state and local economy. This chapter specifically links tourism in mountain regions with sustainable development by examining how tourism connects different stakeholder with wider economic development and act to conserve valuable biological resources.

7.1 Methods

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) approaches and methods were used to generate the information. The study made use of a range of PRA tools, including key informant interviews with elderly people, group discussions, and transect walks. The techniques were modified to a great extent and many other innovative approaches were included during the

study period at both the sites. Participants were involved in skill development training program right from the initial stages of the planning process for conservation management. The secondary data were generated from government departments.

The study included visits to various government and private agencies for information on national/state tourism policy and travel industry promotions.

7.2 Tourism and Development of Local and Regional Economy

Tourism is a multifaceted economic asset. By itself, it is an smokeless industry and is a representation of a cross section of the whole economy. As such, it is an effective tool of economic growth as far as the tourist places are concerned. A popular tourism attraction is a bonanza for a place. Thus tourism attractions are distinct and unique economic resources. Therefore, the people of Sikkim have oriented their economy towards tourism. Since 1990, involvement in tourism related activities increased in most part of the State. Most of the tourism earnings come from organized pack tour. Some people work exclusively for Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI) training courses as pack animal porters. However, employment opportunities for women are negligible in trekking and mountaineering courses. A small number of women working in tour operators offices as receptionist. Employment in trekking and mountaineering is seasonal. Most porters, pack-animal operators and

cooks work not more than four to five months a year, but most men are employed on a long-standing basis by Gangtok-based tour operator. The same situation is also prevalent in the Nepal Himalaya (Adams 1992). Skilled tour guides and cooks receive salaries year-round, even though they work less than half the year. This employment has little opportunity cost; other wage-earning employment in Yuksam and Khecheopalri is scarce, and it is mainly low-paid day labour.

Yuksam people began to establish tourism business in 1960s, and by the 1998 about 69% of all households operated lodge/hotels and shops and porters. These establishments offer visitors, snackfood, canned goods, and souvenirs. Lodges have become an increasingly important part of the regional economy. An immensely popular investment in tourism since 1990s is purchasing and keeping packstock for trekking and mountaineering courses.

The multiplier effects of the cash earned in tourism have both increased non-tourism employment and enlarged the market for local agricultural products. The net State Domestic Product (SDP) of Sikkim at constant prices significantly increased from Rs 3316867904 in 1991-92 to Rs 5856043839 (Personal Communication, Bureau of economics and Statistics, Government of Sikkim).

The sectoral distribution indicates that the tertiary sector predominates, contributing nearly 43% of the total SDP. The annual

economic growth rate has been below the national growth rates over the past few years. Thus tourism is a major sector and should be considered the prime area for promoting sustainable development initiatives.

7.3 Government Investments

The ninth five-year plan of the Sikkim Government had only Rs 40 million directly allocated to the tourism sector. However, with the ushering in of the present regime in 1995, a greater focus on tourism has been witnessed. A specific tourism “Master Plan” for five years, beginning that year, with an anticipated budget of over Rs 30 crores , has been drawn up, to develop tourism industry as a sustainable economic activity. The department prepared five-circuit project report, in which two on religious/heritage trails and three on for nature trails. The Government of India allotted Rs 20 million and the State Government Rs 12 million for infrastructure development, promotion and refurbishment of monasteries and heritage sites (Anonymous 1997).

The investment in key infrastructure development by the State Government was Rs 41715000 in 1998-99. The thrust of the State investments means to foster and develop tourism. Out of the total investments, major portion (50%) for accommodation and transport services, followed by 12% in advertisements, 5% in event organizations, 1% each in printing and public relations and 30% for other purposes (Anonymous 1997).

Assistance from the Central Government is often less available than anticipated. One case that is illustrative is the development of Helicopter services in the State. The State Government expected the Centre to provide almost full assistance.

7.4 Components of Ecotourism and Conservation

The study focuses its work in three key areas that link conservation with ecotourism enterprises. As part of strategy of biodiversity conservation, increase stakeholder participation in tourism development and natural resource conservation through activities in the investigated areas. The hypothesis is that if income generation is dependent on the continued availability of biodiversity, then those entrepreneurs and stakeholders will have to act upon economic incentives to conserve the resources (protected areas and other natural features) on which income depends.

7.4.1 Participatory ecotourism planning

Innovation and empowerment through learning and skill development feature strongly in the Sikkim Biodiversity and Ecotourism project. Participants in community ecotourism plans, training courses and conservation management are all using and developing new participatory learning tools that build upon best practices and positive attributes of Sikkim's natural and cultural heritage. A combination of Appreciative Inquiry and modified Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) tools

provides the basis for planning, implementing and evaluating community ecotourism activities (Sharma, *et al.* 2000).

A critical element of planning and subsequent actions in ecotourism is a focus on appreciative inquiry, finding and building upon positive attributes and values in local environments and groups of stakeholders. In May, 1996, participatory community ecotourism planning was conducted in Yuksam and Khecheopalri lake area by Sikkim Biodiversity and Ecotourism Project (Plate 3e & 3f). The participants gathered information and generated site-specific ideas for linking tourism-related income-generating activities to conservation efforts, with a view to encourage visitors to extend their stay in the village and conserve natural resources in the area. Local community members felt that the opportunity for increased income generation lay in trying to extend the stay of visitors to the area.

The critical element of planning and subsequent actions in ecotourism is the focus upon positive attributes and values of local environment. All participants were asked to "Discover" the elements in their environment and community that represent the best of what they are and what they do. In addition to the activities identified in May, in October, 1996, 28 village members organized their own clean-up campaign of the major trekking route, generating a small initial amount of funds for further activities through recycling bottles and tins. Yuksam and

Khecheopalri residents have readily accepted the principle of local contributions to conservation activities and enthusiastically attended the training courses, as well as showed a keen interest in enterprises such as low-cost covered vegetable production. As a result of the lodge operators training, participants have developed an agreed tariff and standardized menus. Operators now maintain visitors' registers and issue receipts to customers. Community-wide events connected with income-generation through extended visits, such as clean-ups and afforestation, were particularly well attended. During May to December 1996, a series of project and other events catalyzed community members to form a local conservation organization, the Khangchendzonga Conservation Committee (KCC). KCC has developed a Code of Conduct for visitors and tour operators to follow the ethics of conservation in the area (Table 7.1). Signboards with the code and paid for by KCC have been erected in Yuksam, and visitors now receive a copy of the code at the lodges/hotels. Yuksam community members participated as resource persons for a community ecotourism planning effort at Sacred Khecheopalri Lake site.

The Code of Conduct (COC) was broadly divided into seven points. The compliance of code of conduct were measure in a five-point scale ranging from "strongly agreed", "agreed", "neutral", "disagreed", and "strongly disagreed". Table 7.1 reveals the details of the indexing and response rate of the tour operators complying with the COC. Among all

the issues it has been observed that 58% of the tour operator strongly agreed for complying properly the COC.

7.4.2 Participatory conservation practices

Despite all the claims of good governance and sustainable management, it is clear that the tremendous growth of nature-based tourism has not been matched by official efforts to adequately plan, implement and monitor developments through an administrative and legal mechanism. A community based conservation approach to achieve the sustainable tourism is being tested in the study sites. This program can foster changes in local attitudes towards conservation and ultimately have the intended result. A critical element developed by the community participants during participatory planning was conservation-related activities, viz. clean-up campaign, site beautification and tree plantation in and around their village. In the first phase, a local clean-up of the village was done by school teachers, children, and community members (Plate 4a & 4b) while during the second phase, villagers proposed to raise funds for garbage management and environmental awareness drive for visitors as well as for the community members. The positive reaction generated among the village community members was evident as shopkeepers and Sunday market hawkers collected their trash and burned all the refuse. The shops have been advised to minimize the use of plastic bags, mineral water bottles and to keep trash bins for collection of

garbage. In addition to the activities identified by the local community members, the Khangchendzonga Conservation Committee organized their own clean-up campaign of the major trekking route, generating an initial fund for further activities through the sale of bottle and tins collected during the clean-up campaign (Table 7.2).

In order to beautify the surrounding locality, indigenous fruit and flower-bearing species were sorted out and planted with the active participation of schoolchildren and the village community. The choice of the species was participatory. At Tshoka, along the trekking trail, the village community contributed significantly in constructing a toilet, mainly for the porters and trekking support staff. The evaluation of these activities that were done annually reflected the pride taken by the local people and ensured their continuity.

7.4.3 Skill development training program

Ecotourism programs are based on tourism management plans developed in consultation with the local people. The community identified the different training programs and these were designed at the project sites with inputs from different stakeholder groups. Some of the major training imparted by the project to the local people and the operators were naturalist guides training, lodge operation, trek cooks and porters and ecotourism product marketing exclusively for the operators (Table 7.3 & Plate 4c & 4d).

The porters' training highlighted the responsible role played by the porters in trekking and mountaineering and how they could significantly contribute to conservation by observing and practicing. The impact of the porters' training was quite significant as porters adopted responsible practices and earned recognition by the government, tourists and different stakeholders. In a particular incident, a porter-cum-guide refused to collect firewood for a group of trekkers up in the mountains. He was a trained person and hence his conservation effort was later appreciated and highlighted in the national papers.

Trek cooks' training emphasizes menu planning, incorporation of indigenous food in the trekking menu, use of alternative fuel, safety, hygiene and sanitation. Lodge operators were trained in house-keeping, managing the accounts, menu planning, use of alternative fuel for heating and cooking purposes, hygiene and sanitation and preparation of local cuisine. To boost the local economy of the farmers, ply-house technology, bio-composting and vegetable seed production training was imparted.

7.4.4 Study tours and exchanges

Study tours and exchange have been a very effective means of learning the positive and negative impacts of tourism and protected area management. The Sikkim Biodiversity and Ecotourism project organize several such tours within and outside Sikkim for different levels of

stakeholders. The farmer's exposure trip at St. Alphonsus at Kurseyang, boosted the enthusiasm and knowledge of the farmers who later successfully adopted some of the techniques.

To understand the various impacts of tourism on mountain environments, to learn about the cultural and traditional practices of a similar site in Nepal, a mixed group of community participants from Sikkim was taken to Langtang, Nepal. The trip was successful as the participants could learn how the people of Langtang had devised mechanisms for conservation of their natural and cultural resources. A policy-level study tour was also organized in early 1998 to Buxa Tiger Reserve and Royal Chitwan National Park in Nepal where the group comprised government officials from the Planning and Tourism Departments, the private sector and community members. This was an opportunity to learn about conservation and tourism related issues in and around the protected areas. The visit provides an excellent opportunity for interaction among the participants to learn about community forest management for ecotourism purposes and to meet the natural resource requirements of the people.

As part of the hypothesis to increase income from responsible ecotourism, the trade association of Sikkim and Travel Agent Association of Sikkim (TAAS) were encouraged to build links with an equivalent association in Nepal, The trekking Agent Association of Nepal (TAAN)

(Plate 4e). Two reciprocal visits were organized for TAAN and TAAS where on both occasions workshops were held on mountain tourism management.

7.4.5 Tourism policy

The sectoral approach of different departments was inadequate in addressing the management aspects in holistic manner. The various private sector stakeholders who were engaged in tourism operation had their own problems and expected incentives from the government. The local community, which is an integral component of ecotourism development, had a limited approach with the government, but this was significantly strengthened during the implementation of Sikkim Biodiversity and Ecotourism project. In due course of time the local community-based conservation group KCC has been empowered by various agencies to monitor and implement conservation activities. Workshops and meetings organized by Sikkim Biodiversity and Ecotourism project have increased the level of public and private sector interaction and awareness of tourism and conservation-related issues. The State Government has incorporated some of the policy issues in the master plan and establishing Tourism Development Corporation has moved a step towards privatization for sustainable development.

Conservation requires a range of interventions, and while the enterprise approach will be a key component of future programs in

Sikkim, it will not necessarily be the only one. For entrepreneurs to undertake and continue conservation actions that support their livelihoods, it seems critical that they have some level of decision-making power over the resources in question. It appears that unless this is possible, economic benefits from an enterprise are unlikely to be effective as incentives to conserve. In Sikkim, there was little decision-making power over natural resources among the range of entrepreneurs, thus there would seem a little chance of economic incentives turning into actions to conserve biodiversity on which tourism depends. In Sikkim, the natural resources have for the most part been managed by the State Government with permits and rights for subsistence extraction given by State departments. Little exists in the way of community management of forests. But, by engaging stakeholders in a debate over the value of biodiversity in the State economy and the most efficient way this can be conserved, local stakeholder at the study sites are now participating in the on-going discussions over how biodiversity conservation can be conducted. The traditional decision-makers, such as government, are now increasingly highlighting the important role that local institution can play. In Sikkim, the most important features of the enterprise-based approach was to provide a framework in which to analyze and develop the potential of tourism for more than one type of stakeholder. Furthermore, it provided a means to argue that long-term benefits from tourism would be

possible only if those, whose income depended on the activity, had a greater decision-making power in natural resource management. As the numbers of visitors both domestic and foreign increases, the need to be proactive on promoting and supporting a responsible tourism ethic among consumers, suppliers and producers alike is imperative. A number of activities have been identified and presented in Table 7.4. The players in sustainable development and management are tourists, tour operators, government authorities, and the general publics are therefore called on to find new forms of coexistence and the right solutions for themselves for the survival of the industry. Sikkim has a great potential to increase its revenue through planned tourism if adopting policies suitable for tourism development.

7.5 Suggestions for Future Management of Tourism

After making an inventory of various tourist attractions, their important features, historical, religious, social and cultural and scenic aspects, and discussing various other significant considerations of tourism and its related phenomenon. Its existing and potential resources, problems and prospects can be analysed for the overall planned development of tourism and also for the betterment and maintenance of the sites and heritage. It is important to have an overall evaluation of the tourist resources in the light of the market potentiality.

A number of potential suggestive measures for the management of tourism in mountain areas are as follows:

- ☛ Consider applying for the entire study area to be scheduled as a World Heritage Site and implement the site management strategies that this would necessitate. Such a designation would protect the sites, act as a stimulus for high-quality tourism, have considerable publicity value and result in increased tourism revenue.
- ☛ Complete a detailed survey of religious sites in the region with an architectural survey. No records currently exist of the contents of most of the major *Gompas* in the study sites. Funding should be sought for stabilization and restoration of important *Gompas* frescoes, which are often in poor condition and have suffered from *ad hoc* treatments. There is a major tourism resource of the area and as such should benefit as soon as possible from part of the tourism revenues or else they may not survive.
- ☛ Consider limiting visitor numbers, raising the royalty and implementing a ban on camping-based tourism combined with investment in upgrading existing traditional inns to provide unique visitor accommodation. During peak season, a paying guest system may be introduced. This can be done with the co-operation of the local communities, which will enhance their income.

- ☛ The higher per capita consumer surplus value and willingness-to-pay by the foreign tourists indicates that an increase in the existing entrance fee for foreign tourists is not likely to affect their visitation rates. Rather, this could generate a considerable income to the park and Lake Authorities. The foreigners are willing to pay a higher entrance fee and other charges. This will be evident from the income and expenditure statements of hotel/lodges at Yuksam. The hotel/lodges are highly profitable and their demand is ever increasing. The existing entrance fee for foreign tourists may be enhanced.
- ☛ Improve the existing facilities of interpretation center at Yuksam in association with any proposed museum development. Such a center could brief visitors on the unique social and cultural heritage of the region, especially if displays include ethnographic material and if a trained person is available to discuss and interpret material for visitors.
- ☛ High quality tourism in both the sites could be self-sustaining with minimal environmental and cultural damage if a sensible management plan were to be implemented. However, continued enforcement of the present policy will result in destruction of the unique character of the area with the result that visitor numbers (and revenue) will fall. Wisely managed tourism in both the sites could provide sustained economic benefits.

- ☛ Revenue generated from tourism in protected areas be channeled into the protection and management of the resources.
- ☛ Limiting visitor numbers has been exceptionally successful in Bhutan and could be equally so in Sikkim as well as in the study sites, but government policy must be clearly established and consistent in order to project an image of a well-managed “quality” industry. Ill-advised pressure from trekking agents in Sikkim should be avoided.
- ☛ It would be possible to smooth out the seasonality of visits to Sikkim by increasing trekking royalties during the popular (March to May and October to November) period or extend, the “Shoulder period”, by organize special attractions in the off-season, for example, organizing promotional fairs, cultural shows, music festivals, and tea festivals etc. Offering fabulous discount on accommodation and meals, rebate on shopping prices is another way of attracting tourists in off-season. Moreover, collective advertisements with press release to Embassies and travel trade showing all these benefits to a tourist will prove much fruitful. The other method of attracting the tourist in off-season is to arrange and offer special rates for conventions, conferences and seminars, games and tournaments in various educational institutions.
- ☛ It was widely proved that local people should be enabled to play a major role in protected area management and that the appropriate partners for protected area tourism would indeed usually be local

communities. This may also offer some compensation for local people, especially if they have been displaced or if their access to resources has been reduced or curtailed. In such circumstances compensation may take the form of capital assistance to develop the tourism venture.

☛ There is a delicate relationship between the lake ecosystem and community beliefs. The religious and cultural practices have high value in local communities. The traditional and cultural practices have to be linked while drawing up a management and restoration plan. The ecotourism favors the concept of cultural, biological and nature conservation, and also stresses on the economic benefits going down to local community. Therefore, Khecheopalri Lake being an important tourism and pilgrimage destination be developed in a participatory way by implementing activities related to ecotourism.

☛ Monitoring is a key tool, but one that is poorly or infrequently used. Monitoring the quality of experience of visitors or the use made of protected areas by local communities should include, and in the following order: identification; analysis for a particular site; placement of this in a regional context; and monitoring over time.

Table 7.1. Perception of tour operators on compliance of Code of Conduct (%)

Code of Conduct	Strongly agreed	Agreed	Neutral	Disagreed	Strongly disagreed
Conserve Sikkim's natural and cultural heritage					
Do not trample high altitude vegetation, do not pick any flowers or medicinal plants	27	33	15	15	10
Do not disturb wildlife or its habitats	21	30	15	24	10
Do not allow clients to purchase endangered animal parts or antique cultural artifacts	58	21	18	3	-
Support local conservation efforts and income generation activities	43	18	27	12	-
Avoid use of fuelwood; use alternative fuels					
Use kerosene, L.P.G. (or other non-wood fuel) for all purpose by all the group members	12	27	27	31	3
Discourage campfires, encourage camp fun	-	13	10	46	3
Follow safely rules when carrying, storing and using kerosene and gas	7	21	30	39	3
Leave all camps and trails clean					
Dispose of litter and all non-biodegradable materials	3	10	6	42	39
Use toilet tents on all treks in an environmentally friendly manner	10	21	6	45	18
Use established campsites and avoid trenching around tents	6	18	3	24	49
Practice Conservation					
Avoid fuel-consumptive menu items, e.g. backed foods and large menu selections	10	15	30	24	21
Re-package food into reusable plastic containers to reduce wastes	6	18	9	24	43
Reduce waste by disposing and repackaging also	-	12	42	46	-
Practice proper hygiene and sanitation					
Teach all staff about personal hygiene, sanitary, kitchen and camp routines	3	33	15	34	15
Properly treat the drinking water and uncooked vegetables for clients	12	45	33	10	-
Dispose of washing and bathing water well away from streams, use biodegradable soaps	4	33	15	33	15
Take responsibility for staff and porter welfare					
Provide adequate warm clothing and other essentialities	3	18	10	69	-
Periodically train staff in first aid, guide responsibilities and sanitation etc.	6	24	7	45	18
Properly brief clients before leaving on a trek					
Address cultural do's and don'ts	3	18	9	70	-
Plan days for proper altitude acclimatization	7	24	6	45	18

Table 7.2 Participation of local communities in conservation related activities in the study sites

Activities	Yuksam-Dzongri-Goechha La trekking Corridor			Khecheopalri Lake		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Clean-up campaign	61	44	105	15	11	26
Tree plantation	104	43	147	10	7	17
Trail maintenance	28	11	39	-	-	-
Lake clean-up	7	3	10	7	6	13
Renovation of monastery	-	-	-	21	4	25
Total	208	101	309	53	28	81

Table 7.3 Skill development training program organized in the study sites and number of participants

Training Type	Duration (day)	Participants		
		Male	Female	Total
Porters	2	120	4	124
Cooks	8	31	4	35
Trek cooks	4	20	-	20
Lodge operators	7	26	14	40
Green vegetable production	4	7	2	9
Seed production and vegetable growing	4	13	10	23
Naturalist guide	6	17	2	19
TAAS guide	4	11	2	13
TAAS marketing course	2	13	3	16
Institutional strengthening	2	6	4	10

Table 7.4 Components and responsibility for sustainable tourism

Components of responsible tourism	Travel Agencies and Tour Operator	Government Authorities	Lodge/Hotels and Restaurants	Local Community	Tourists
Information for the tourists	Encourage code of conduct that respects the wildlife and culture in the destination	Provide information about the area's natural and cultural values	Provide information on public transport and complementary activities	Organize activities that provide a chance to get to know local values	Find out about local values and problems
Safeguard Destination	Guides are well acquainted with natural values and local environmental problems	Area planning follows environmental criteria and respects the architectural heritage	Carry out environmental impact studies; put restoration before new construction	Plan activities so that they do not have a negative impact	Choose offers that do not have an environmental impact; do not expect star facilities
Maintain Biodiversity	Destinations whose biodiversity is threatened or vulnerable are not offered	Protect and signpost valuable on vulnerable areas	Buildings and grounds are planned to blend with landscape	Always avoid risking disturbance or damage	Respect animals and plants; do not buy them as souvenirs
Culture	Guides have a good knowledge of the culture and religion of the host place	Maintain cultural identity; plan tourism so that it benefits all local residents	Provide comfort in keeping with local living standards; offer traditional food	Help integrate tourists in the local way of life	Meet the local population; buy traditional arts and crafts
Save Energy	The visits on offer are nearby and/or accessible by public transport and encourage alternative for fuel wood	Facilitate public transport rather than motor cars; protect pedestrian areas	Adopt energy saving measures and encourage clients to collaborate	Avoid activities that consume fossil fuels	Use public transport, trek; discharge campfires, encourage alternatives to fuel wood
Save Water	Destinations with problems of water shortage or purification are not offered	Install treatment plants and promote economy measures	Install economy mechanisms and encourage clients to collaborate	Avoid activities that squander water or that have an impact on water resources	Save water and avoid wasteful activities
Solid waste	Advertising leaflets; use recycled paper; provide solid waste disposals	Organize selective collection and recycling; carry out awareness campaigns	Reduce the use of non-recyclable materials	Use equipment and materials that do not generate waste	Avoid non-recyclable containers; always use litter baskets