

Social Tourism: An Alternative Tourism in Nepal

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Abstract

Tourism, an expanding worldwide phenomenon is one of the largest industries and all countries are keenly interested in promoting tourism, although with different objectives. Social tourism is one of the least unexplored area in Nepal, if implemented promptly, would contribute significantly in economy and employment. The government should have social tourism policy so that it can be implemented and the activities of tourists and host organizations can be monitored. The policy should outline the role and responsibility, accountability, criteria and minimum standard of tourists and host organizations, and visa policy for the social tourists.

Key words: *Dimension, rights, leisure, responsible, ethics, policy, stakeholders.*

Background

Tourism has long been familiar with Nepal. Tourism is an expanding worldwide phenomenon, and it has been observed that by the next century, tourism will be the largest industry in the world. All countries are keenly interested in promoting tourism, although with different objectives. Developing countries take tourism as a means for generating revenue for overall development, while developed countries take it as an essential part of leisure activity. Tourism is an education about sharing by different kinds of people as well as understanding those aspects of history and art which connect not only people living close to each other, but also those coming from a long way. Tourism is an activity generating a number of economic and social benefits to the country with foreign exchange earnings, and creating employment directly and indirectly. Today, tourism is also the subject of great media attention and the media obviously promote tourism. Tourism is a socio-economic phenomenon comprised of the activities and experiences of tourists away from their home environment and serviced by the stakeholders of the host destinations. People started to travel from

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one place to another, leaving their dwelling place, with different motives. However, people traveled for pilgrimage and trading purpose in the ancient time. They were impelled by the innate human desire to explore their surroundings, discover the unknown and seek new experiences.

There are various types of tourism such as pilgrimage, mountaineering, sight-seeing, cultural, historical, adventurous, educational, recreational etc. One of the potential sectors to achieve social and economic benefit is social tourism. In several European countries (for example France, Belgium, Spain), social tourism (mostly in the form of low-cost and national holidays) is supported by public funding. In Britain and the US, social tourism for low-income groups is a less well-known phenomenon, and rarely supported by government funding. This can be linked to the fact that these are liberal and more “individualized” societies, where without clear research evidence of the benefits of social tourism for society, no public funding can be justified (Minnaert et al., 2009a, 2009b). Social tourism is the new phenomenon in the context of Nepal. It has not been institutionalized and no specific policy thrust from tourism stakeholders. The prime objective of this paper is to make social tourism an integral part of tourism business in Nepal. This initiative holds a huge potential in Nepal. However, this concept allows people to travel in a cost-effective and affordable way. Social tourism leads to social prosperity and attracts more social tourists. This paper brings together the dimensions, prospects, benefits, problems, challenges and developmental strategies of social tourism in Nepal. The multi-faceted aspect of social tourism from different parts of the world, national initiatives and international comparisons make the phenomenon viable and operational.

Methodologically, this research is based on both primary and secondary sources. Several research works obtained from internet search have been reviewed. The author visited and interacted with officials of Social Welfare Council, Ministry of Labour and Department of Immigration, Nepal. The data obtained from those organizations are also included in the paper. Social tourism has been institutionalized phenomena in Europe. However, this concept is less explored, practiced and adopted in Nepal. It could be one of the important categories / purposes of Nepalese tourism. This paper is based on policy and operational perspectives of social tourism in Nepal. While developing policy, there are several issues related to social tourism to be answered. They are: How does social tourism differ from other types of tourism? What are the dimensions of social tourism in Nepal? What are the aspects of social tourism policy? Does it differ with the European concept in the context of Nepal? What are the benefits of social tourism? How to operate it? This paper attempts to address those issues.

Origin of Social Tourism

The concept of social tourism has not emerged simply out of current discourses and concern for individuals and families on low incomes, as the state has taken an interest in these matters since the end of the nineteenth century. Rather it has emerged

from a broader developmental process that has enabled articulation of modern concepts such as social tourism, wellbeing and quality of life which can be used as tools in public policy and revised as a result of changing circumstances and contexts. The trend towards debates around social tourism in public policy is related to the emergence of modernity and the specific development of modern capitalism and welfare (Placa & Corlyon, 2014 p 68). Modern tourism only appeared from the 19th century. At that time, it was accessible to a high society elite only since the laws ruling labour did not include holidays for employees, who had to go to work every day. Therefore, possibilities for most of the population to go on holidays were very limited. The actions of social tourism started in 1936, when the International Labour Organization (ILO) agreed on the holiday with Pay Convention (Convention no. 52). The substance of this convention has also been mentioned in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, where it is said that “everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay”. Consequently, it is said that social tourism was born with an ethical demand. This demand was claimed by activists, who justified their legitimacy with a specific rights. Nevertheless, some historians believe that social tourism was born with the development of holiday camps for underprivileged children and the creation of youth hostels at the beginning of the 20th century (ISTO, 2014). The human right is far from being universally accepted, the subjugation of leisure and tourism to the service of human needs must be vehemently pursued along the trail already blazed by social tourism, whose primary goal has always been access to travel and leisure opportunities for all (BITS, 2006). Social tourism is a form of tourism directly related to the evolution of economic development, the degree of civilization of the people, the establishment of rest days, paid holidays, etc., stages that prerequisites "democratization of holidays and tourism" (Chauvin, 2002; in Maria, 2012 p. 195). The Britain formed the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Social Tourism with an informal cross party group of MPs and Lords in 2010. The purpose of the group was to investigate and promote the social and economic benefits of social tourism. The research contacted several organizations for an inquiry. Some organizations were unaware of their work that came under the umbrella of social tourism. Sam Littlechilds of the Youth Hostel Association explained: “For more than 80 years we have tried to give people the opportunity to get involved in social tourism – even though perhaps we did not know that we were. If the new parlance is social tourism, we have done it successfully” (APPG, 2011 p.6). Social tourism could play a very important role in all areas of accessible tourism, industry associations having the purpose of linking partnerships with public and private authorities, trade unions, businesses and so on, in order to enable all segments of the population, especially those with modest incomes to benefit from a holiday (Minnaert et al., 2009a; Maria, 2012 p. 195).

Across the developing world, alternative tourism has surfaced as the flagship concept for new tourism (Rogerson, 2001; in Stoddart, & Rogerson, 2004). Volunteer

tourism, as part of alternative tourism, has so far received only limited attention in terms of tourism scholarship (Stoddart, & Rogerson, 2004). Young (2008; in Wearing, & McGehee, 2013) writes 'volunteer tourism is certainly an expanding sector of the tourism industry in many countries in both the developed and developing world'. Initially, much of the research in volunteer tourism took an advocacy stance, defining the phenomenon and promoting it as an ideal activity with few negative impacts (Broad & Jenkins, 2008; McGehee, 2002; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004; in Wearing, & McGehee, 2013). Volunteer tourism can play a valuable role for the development of community in rural areas. The ability to empower and involve host communities through acknowledging the valuable contribution they make will enable planning for community. The basis of volunteer tourism was developed initially from a need of finding alternative ways to undertake tourism and perhaps channel the altruism inherent in a portion of the tourism market. Volunteers can provide the resource to sustain community projects that are not tourism related and assist communities to maintain other types of development (Wearing & Grabowski, 2011).

Definitions and Interpretations of Social Tourism

Social tourism is interpreted and implemented in various ways across. To incorporate these different perspectives, social tourism is defined as 'tourism with an added moral value, of which the primary aim is to benefit either the host or the visitor in the tourism exchange'. This definition highlights the social benefits of social tourism for the tourist themselves, and the economic benefits for destinations and society more broadly. Hunzicker (1951) describes social tourism as 'the relationships and phenomena in the field of tourism resulting from participation in travel by economically weak or otherwise disadvantaged elements in society'. Hunzicker added a comment regarding the nature of social tourism provision, defining the concept as 'a particular type of tourism characterized by the participation of people with a low income, providing them with special services, recognized as such (Hunzicker, 1957; in Minnaert et al., 2011 p. 404). These two early definitions highlight the complexity of the concept of social tourism.

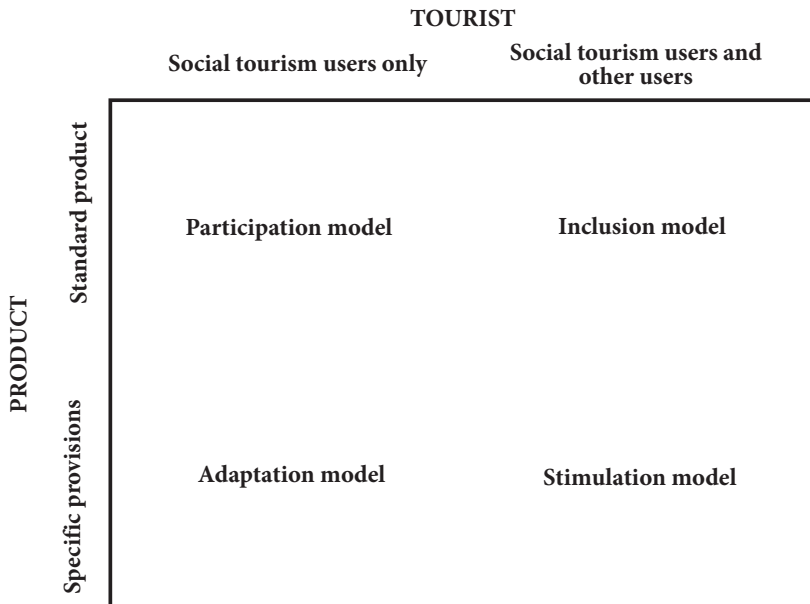
Minnaert et al. (2011) write these two early definitions highlight the complexity of the concept of social tourism, as they allow for four different interpretations that is apparent in social tourism schemes in Europe:

- Social tourism is tourism that specifically encourages the participation in tourism activities of persons who are economically weak or otherwise disadvantaged. Social tourism initiatives in this category aim to offer tourism experiences that are already accessible to a majority of persons to groups who are excluded from them, usually for financial or health reasons. The disadvantaged are especially and actively targeted to encourage participation of children with disabilities or senior citizens with complex health needs. These types of initiatives will be referred to as the participation model.

- *Social tourism is tourism that encourages participation in tourism by all, including persons who are economically or otherwise disadvantaged.* In this category, social tourism initiatives aim to encourage tourism participation for many or most members of the society through subsidized schemes such as holiday vouchers. These types of initiatives will be referred to as the inclusion model.
- Social tourism is tourism that is specifically designed for persons who are economically or otherwise disadvantaged. These social tourism initiatives offer a product that is specifically adapted for social tourism users through the selection of specialist accommodation or the provision of support services. These could include facilities for persons with mobility problems or the organization of specially designed activities to achieve particular social benefits. Participation in this type of social tourism is limited to the targeted users. These types of initiatives will be referred to as the adaptation model.
- Social tourism is tourism that provides economic opportunities via travel and tourism for persons who are economically weak or otherwise disadvantaged. In this interpretation, social tourism initiatives are mainly focused on providing economic benefits for the host community. The target users are seen as any potential client group that can be attracted during the shoulder season and increase sales and employment opportunities in the destinations. A specific social tourism product (such as an all-inclusive group holiday) is proposed to attract participants in these initiatives, but selection criteria for participation are less rigid, as the schemes welcome both those who cannot participate in commercial tourism and those who can, but who opt for social tourism schemes instead. These types of initiatives will be referred to as the stimulation model.

Each of the above interpretations find an expression in social tourism practices today. In the participation model, social tourism is clearly targeted towards socially or otherwise disadvantaged persons in the society, but it is not necessarily characterized by specialized products or services. The inclusion model is also based on tourism products and services that are standard (the same for all participants, disadvantaged or not), but here the programme is not limited to disadvantaged target groups. The adaptation model applies to programmes that offer a product with special provisions for social tourism users, which is thus specifically adapted to the needs of disadvantaged target groups, and where participation is limited to these disadvantaged target groups. The stimulation model differs significantly from the ones described above, as in this model the social benefits created for the destination are a key motivation for provision. The model proposed in this article offers a visual representation of the different types of social tourism models in operation in Europe today, but, of course, the boundaries between different categories can be blurred (Minnaert et al., 2011).

Figure 1: Social tourism schemes (Source: Minnaert et al., 2011, p. 405)



The UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has confirmed the mission and objectives of social tourism in its Manila Declaration. UNWTO defined social tourism as: it is the phenomena to make leisure tourism accessible to the majority, including youth, families and elderly people, by providing an exceptional economic opportunity. UNWTO focuses on the developing world regarding this issue, there is also a need to understand social tourism in wealthier countries (BITS, 2006). Social Tourism is the provision of quality holidays at reasonable packages for the benefit of all. It encompasses all traditional benefits of tourism to the social workers involved in various areas such as health, education, awareness, inclusiveness, gender and many more. However, for Nepal it also means the creation of actual holiday packages for specific groups of families, employees, volunteers and individuals who otherwise would not be able to afford such an activity. Currently millions of people worldwide are welcomed by the social tourism that appeals to all budgets and age groups. Such tourism is seen as a promoter of economic growth, offering an exceptional economic opportunity and generating a continuous flow of investment and people, which, in turn, contributes to regional development, encourages the transfer of resources from rich economies to poor countries and promotes national and international wealth. Social tourism is aimed at benefiting the whole community by contributing to the economic and social development of regions and citizens as the whole (Gheorghe et al., 2012).

The universal right to the tourism is supported by criterion of value, which form the ground for development of social tourism:

Table 1. Criterion of Value of Social Tourism

Criterion	Description
A right of majority to use tourism	Number of people, who can currently enjoy their vacations, have significantly arisen due to popularity of tourism in the world. But there are still groups of people, for whom vacations are unavailable due to various reasons: lack of money, lack of attention of authorities for usage of social funds, passive actions of community organizations and nonprofits organizations
A contribution to a social integration	Tourism is an active means of social integration, which allows to open relations with other cultures, to get familiar with places, traditions, to perform cultural exchange, and to spend your leisure time meaningfully. Social tourism can efficiently assist in creation of civil Nepal, i.e. to perform a role of a society creator
Creation of stable tourism structures	Social tourism is supported more by social preconditions than by economic ones, can assist in creation or preservation of touristic areas considering economic, social and environmental stability criteria. Management of various types of tourism is the main factor of stability of touristic areas. In fact, stability is a balance of different aspects of human activity, though in lots of underdeveloped countries, where tourism is considered to be the economic activity able to help them to deal with poverty, social tourism is just a criterion of development
Contribution to employment and economic growth	Whilst developing their activity, companies and organizations, managing travel business, should rely not just upon economic criteria of profit, but also criteria of social welfare: creation of stable, high-quality jobs, solution of seasonality and employment problems, cooperation of public and private partnership
Contribution to the world development	For majority of communities social tourism can provide an opportunity to overcome economic gap, crises and deal with difficulties in activity of various economic sectors. After communities will be able to live on the income received from tourism, local economics will become stronger and social stability will occur. Social tourism can and should be strengthened; it should help to provide equality, justice, democracy and welfare in the whole world, which are to establish conditions for solidary development of all people in the world.

Source: International Bureau of Social Tourism, 2001; in Kinderis, 2010 p.9.

Kinderis (2010 p.9) writes that definition and conception of social tourism remains problematic due to diversity of opinions and different methods (e.g. statement of contents, expected results, aims and ideas) of defining social tourism aims. However, despite of different definitions, essence of social tourism remains the same for everybody, including those, who are at odds, has a right to rest and leisure after work every day and every year. It is the universal right to the tourism, which is provided following principles of solidarity, stability and affordability. Social tourism is distinguished by certain peculiarities and it has some exclusive characteristics: trend, exclusive sources of finance, organized nature and wide popularity, specific product features and instruments for creation and implementation.

Foundation of Ethical Views of Social Tourism

From an ethical point of view, there is possibility of two distinct positions on the duty of the stronger strata in society toward the weaker strata. Some ethical theories agree that every citizen has the same rights in society and is equal before the law. All members of society should have opportunities to develop their life to an acceptable standard; it is even the duty of the state to make sure that they have these opportunities. However, some theories particularly stress how society can be seen as a combination of actors, with each actor shaped by their environment. The duty of society is to bring out the best in every member. If every citizen looks out for their fellow citizens, and the stronger strata support the weaker ones, society automatically reduces the inequality between its members and, it is argued, becomes stronger. Supporting and emancipating the weaker strata can thus be described as an a priori predominant moral principle within this view of society. Alternatively, there are ethical theories that do not support this a priori obligation for the stronger economic strata to support the weaker ones: they mainly stress that the opportunities provided to one person should never limit the opportunities of another. Furthermore, four ethical approaches Christian ethics, Marxist ethics, Kantianism and Utilitarianism, and their links to social tourism have been outlined. (Minnaert ,2007; Minnaert et al., 2006).

In most industries, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) standards and practices have been developed by the private sector to respond to external pressure. In tourism, however, the use of codes of conduct and certification is not widespread and is not based as yet upon agreed international standards. It is difficult to make generalizations about CSR without first examining the context in which sustainable tourism operates, its demand and also assessing the numerous certification schemes, codes of conduct and best practices within the industry. The definition of corporate social responsibility (CSR) has many similar elements to sustainable tourism in that both focus on how stakeholders should be identified and engaged and that initiatives should be measured to determine their impact on others. Whereas CSR relates to a company's obligation to be accountable to all of its stakeholders in all its operations and activities with the aim of achieving sustainable development not only in the economical dimension but

also in the social and environmental dimensions, sustainable tourism was first seen mainly from an environmental perspective and has only recently incorporated social and community aspects (Dodds & Joppe, 2005 p 9). Social tourism is specifically mentioned in Article 7(3) of Global Code of Ethics for Tourism. This Article stresses the role of social tourism as facilitating “widespread access” to tourism, and also emphasizes the responsibility of public authorities to support, encourage and facilitate it. Thus, as a part of the general right to tourism, social tourism works as a “way of putting into practice this universal right to participate in tourism ...” (EESC, 2006; in Moufakkir, 2010 p.49).

Social Tourism in Tourism Policy of Nepal

Tourism Policy (2008) has categorized 13 different type of tourism in Nepal. Tourism stakeholders were disappointed when social tourism was not a part of the tourism category in the tourism policy of Nepal. Social tourism is not mentioned in any of the strategies that are currently being developed. Unless this subject is embraced by the government it will be difficult to encourage wider participation. In several European countries (France, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Italy) social tourism is a part of public policy. Implementation forms vary and include voucher schemes, subsidies for the construction of holiday facilities, public-private partnerships and subsidies for targeted disadvantaged groups. In UK, no specific social tourism policy exists, although some organizations provide holiday grants on an individual basis, and public funding is available for respite breaks. It is not crucial that people who are normally excluded from taking a holiday have to do so at peak times. In Spain, this system enables spare capacity in the off-peak accommodation sector to be utilized, thus enabling more employees to stay in work through a longer season (Minnaert et al., 2009a; APPG, 2011).

Tourism master plans and policies are useful tools for identifying areas with tourism potential, determining tourism strategy and structuring the provision of infrastructure, investment promotion and financial and other incentives. Government needs to ensure that master plans, policies and tourism development strategies should address the local economic development goals, the geographic distribution of tourism activities and poverty reduction. Social tourism can be one of the best way to empower and get benefits from tourism development as most of them are involved in wellbeing of the poor and development of nation. Government agencies can promote the empowerment of communities in planning and managing tourism assets by initiating partnership approaches that include poor people.

Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation and Nepal Tourism Board are the main responsible bodies for policy formulation and tourism development in Nepal. As a tourism entrepreneurs or NGO's/INGO's, their role is also to support government bodies and provide quality service to the tourists. The government of Nepal started a leave tourism policy in 2013 for government employees to promote domestic tourism

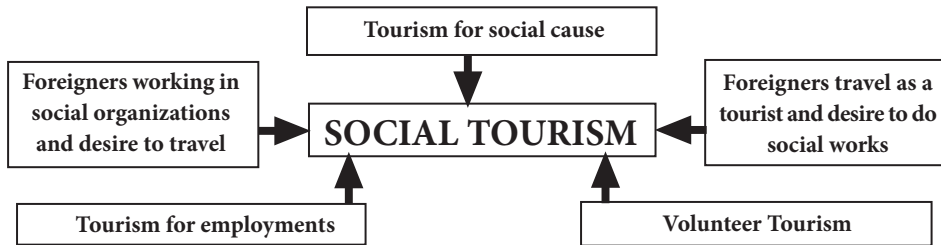
(MoCTCA, 2013). It is one of the examples of social tourism in Nepal. In the competitive market place in which they work with limited available resources, every stakeholders are unlikely to have the capacity to develop this sector. There will be greater awareness of the social tourism opportunities amongst some of the commercial operators that specialize in the low-cost holiday package and may have agreements with local authorities for accommodation provision. It therefore indicates that a national initiative to develop a strategy for social tourism is likely to be welcomed.

Dimension of Social Tourism in Nepal

Social tourism in Europe has been basically focused to the employees, elder citizens, disable people and economically poor. However, following dimensions of social tourism has been adopting directly or indirectly with the belief and practices in Nepal:

1. Foreigners working in social organizations and desire to travel: This category includes employees working in social organizations/UN/diplomatic missions/expat community etc. They are not treated as tourists by law/visa category. However, they travel different parts of the country with different touristic purposes such as trekking, rafting, pilgrimage, adventure, mountaineering, sightseeing etc.
2. Foreigners travel as a tourist and desire to do social works: This category includes tourists who travel different parts of the country with various purposes such as trekking, rafting, pilgrimage, adventure, mountaineering, sightseeing etc. When they travel, sometimes they are influenced by various socio-economic, educational, health, conditions in rural area and involve themselves in various social works.
3. Tourism for social cause: This category includes the senior citizens, marginalized/poor/minority group, social workers, national heroes etc. They might have desire to travel but can't afford it. The government and tourism stakeholders need to develop separate economical packages for them.
4. Tourism for employee: This category includes employees working in government, public and private organizations. The employers should give holiday to travel and travel voucher for it. If employees do not travel, they won't be eligible to get it.
5. Volunteer tourism: This category includes volunteers working in various organizations/institutes

Figure 2: Dimension of Social Tourism in Nepal



As mentioned above, foreigners working in social organizations and desire to travel and foreigners travel as a tourist and desire to do social works are very prominent dimensions of social tourism in Nepal.

Benefits of Social Tourism

The benefits of social tourism are enormous. The benefits are as follows (ISTO, 2014; APPG, 2011; Maria, 2012; Eusebio et al., 2012):

- Individual (Physical and Psychological) benefits: Social tourism leads to increase in self-esteem, expansion of social networks, skills development, improvements in mental health, physical and mental relaxation, rejuvenation, escape from stress, improvement of quality of life.
- Learning/ evolution benefits: Social tourism develop personality, discover and foster cultural enrichment and self-knowledge.
- Family benefits: Social tourism cultivate closer family ties, changing parenting styles, adaptation to new family structures, better socio-economic condition of host family and earnings from the agricultural products, handicrafts and creative arts.
- Societal benefits: Social tourism can lead to participation in education and paid work, pro-active and positive attitudes towards other forms of social intervention, such as health, marriage counseling, awareness and encouragement to attend school, social interaction/participation, increase of social capacities and could be a fundamental instrument that consider seniors and disables to do touristic trips.
- Socio-cultural benefits: Social tourism promote arts, culture and traditions; respect, preserve and develop traditional culture; improve infrastructures that includes good roads, hotels, restaurants, airports, airlines, efficient communication channels etc., value endogenous products; aware on education, environment, safety, health and sanitation; set up schools and other institutions of learning to equip the locals with the skills needed and gives a platform for interaction/exchange of different cultures between tourists and locals.
- Economic benefits: Social tourism can be the best option during off season and decrease of seasonality in touristic activity, more demand of tourist products,

increase of income by earning foreign currency, increase of employment, increase of company and state revenues, attracts financiers both locally and internationally who offer a variety of products and services.

It is well documented that the benefits of social tourism are huge. Both physically and mentally, a break from the 'normal routine' gives holidaymakers an uplift that can boost general personal wellbeing. The planning, the anticipation, the journey and the memories have positive lasting benefits for all. Social tourism is community based tourism which enables tourists to discover local habitats and wildlife, celebrate, respect traditional cultures, rituals and wisdom. The community will be aware of the commercial and social value placed on their natural and cultural heritage through tourism, and this will encourage community to conserve these resources. Tourist can immerse in the day-to-day lives of local and indigenous people while helping them to preserve their environment and cultural heritage by sharing ideas and knowledge. In return tourist gets opportunities to experience local communities in a low price instead of paying high price for the hotel and resort. Social tourism could benefit the whole community by contributing to the economic and social development of regions and citizens as the whole.

Strategies to Promote Social Tourism

Measurement of the current economic impact of social tourism and analysis of the future opportunities would be an important step in developing a strategy. Understanding the potential market size would help to shape the best way to reach both market participants and social tourist visitors. It is not unreasonable to state that the understanding of the dynamics of social tourism market amongst the majority of tourism businesses is low. It is often an 'afterthought' as the majority of organizations are focused on economic growth and the social tourism sector is perceived as low value. One priority therefore for the promotion of social tourism must be to involve community themselves.

It is recommended that a consistent approach to this sector should be adopted. Social tourism will encourage visitors to undertake an element of travel which is likely to cross local political boundaries and therefore an inconsistent policy and approach could hinder the growth of social tourism. Social tourism function should be valued equally throughout the country by the government bodies, NGO's and INGO's, public and private organizations, and the community as well. The government should have a key role in championing the social tourism agenda. The government should develop a framework that outlines the key principles of social tourism development and support the key research projects. The government should bring together the social, environmental, educational and health services in discussion with the tourism sector to evaluate potential cost savings and incentives that could provide the catalyst for a thriving and rewarding social tourism agenda. The tourism stakeholders are likely to be the major solution provider and needs to be at the heart of these discussions.

Research evidence has shown that social tourism can be a cost-effective form of intervention – to be used independently or supported by other interventions - to tackle a wide range of welfare issues. Social tourism is the concept that builds up a quality relationship between the host and the visiting tourists. It is in fact community based tourism that enables tourists to discover the local habitats and wildlife, preserve traditional arts and cultures. Social tourism provides an opportunity to combine travel with a community-based social cause, which increases community awareness of the commercial and social value placed on their natural and cultural heritage, and it also encourages the community to conserve these resources (Minnaert et al., 2011).

Social tourism serves as a catalyst in the social transformation process. Communities in Nepal suffered with deep-rooted problems such as health, education, gender, cast, discrimination, mass poverty and creating deplorable living conditions. In this case, social tourism can cornerstone in transforming the marginalized community and repositioning them into the mainstream of the development process. With the help of social tourism, communities are introduced to the concept of participatory tourism, where community members actively take part in transformation processes and gain added knowledge, ideas, and motivation from the social tourists. This certainly produces a new momentum in the socio-economic transformation of the communities (STDRE, 2014).

The major issue of concern is the proper identification of the true beneficiaries of social tourism and the appropriate distribution of benefits from the process. It is natural to question whether the process focuses mostly on benefiting the hosts, not creating any value for the guests (STDRE, 2014). Every community in Nepal has its own unique feature (touristic or otherwise) that helps make the stay in that community worthwhile and enjoyable to the guests. Consequently, the travelling experience serves the guests' touristic goals as well as their humanitarian and social goals. Therefore, the process optimizes the value of the traveling experience, which would not have been realized through the traditional form of travelling. The experience can in fact become a source of pride to the visiting tourist as he/she becomes a part of the socio-economic transformation of the host community. Following are the possible social tourism activities in Nepal:

- Educational tourism activities
- Conservation and development activities
- Human resource development activities
- Agro tourism activities
- Eco tourism activities
- Welfare tourism activities
- Social work education activities

Designing programs and projects that involve the active participation of the host communities to ensure specific social works. This involvement of the host community is essential for maintaining social work ethical principle of self-determination and the establishment and respect for human relationships between the tourists and the host communities. This approach is important in view of the limited financial resources faced by social services agencies in the developing countries.

Responsible Tourism/Sustainable Tourism

The government intervention is necessary to enhance the contribution of tourism to socio-economic development and poverty reduction. One of the principal roles of government is to set policy and legislative frameworks for all kinds of tourism development. Two main reasons why governments should formulate tourism development strategy are:

- tourism can offer major opportunities for economic development, which can enhance the positive effects of tourism on local socio-economic development and poverty reduction. In most of the countries tourism has been identified as one of the major vehicles for generating employment, foreign currency earning and promoting sustainable livelihoods.
- the tourist industry has many negative externalities, in particular negative social and environmental impacts that need to be regulated and managed at national or local levels. The responsible tourism guidelines encourage tourism operators to grow their businesses whilst providing social and economic benefits to local communities and respecting the environment.

Once we are promoting the social tourism we should not forget to talk about responsible as well as sustainable tourism. Responsible tourism is that creates better places for people to live in, and better places to visit. The concept of responsible tourism can be understood through sustainable tourism, the goal of both being the same – sustainable development. While sustainable tourism points at the obvious need for sustainability, responsible tourism means taking the initiative, understanding actors involved, studying the impacts and benefits and spreading them out equally. In other words, spreading the responsibility for both impacts and benefits thus ensuring the ability of all levels of actors to act accordingly – be government, tour operators, hospitality industry and even individuals such the tourists themselves.

Social tourism has been the pioneer concept in building up a quality relationship between the host and the visiting tourists. It is in fact community based tourism; it enables tourists to discover the local habitats and wildlife along with the celebration of traditional cultures and wisdom. Social tourism provides an opportunity to combine travel with a community-based social cause, which increases community awareness of the commercial and social value placed on their natural and cultural heritage, and it also encourages the community to conserve these resources. Therefore, we say that

travelling for social well-being is social tourism. Also on an organizational level, the term “social tourism” can be used to describe a variety of different initiatives, commercial and non-commercial, governmental and private: these initiatives range from small charities organizing holidays for children from low-income backgrounds, over government plans improving accessibility in hotels, to private hotels offering a package holiday to senior travelers in the shoulder season. Sustainable tourism development is about making all tourism more compatible with the needs and resources of a destination area. Tourism needs to take into account a holistic and comprehensive approach that balances tourism development with other activities yet tourism is made up of many sectors and is very fragmented, therefore effects and monitoring processes through one company or mechanism has been difficult (Dodds & Joppe, 2005 p 10).

The Clients of Social Tourism

The clients of social tourism could be diverse in nature. However, employees of social organizations and INGO's, volunteer, families, young people, senior citizens, disable people. Usually, INGO employees have good earning have a tendency to travel. Large number of foreigners have been involved in various social works as a volunteer either associated with social organizations or individually in Nepal. Family holidays are still an important choice of holidays as they make up for a special moment to revive and strengthen home ties. Young travellers (16-30 years) make up for more than 22.6% of international tourist arrivals in Nepal in 2012. Today, the seniors' tourism makes up for a real market which is however not homogeneous. Seniors (61 and above) make up for more than 13.6% of international tourist arrivals in Nepal in 2012. According to the data from the European Commission, about 70 % of people with disabilities could travel under favorable conditions – after adjustment of tourism infrastructure. Disabled people tourism has become an increasingly consequent market, as it is based on a growing demand due to the number of people with a disability, and therefore the number of potential clients, is huge; disabled people usually travel with a friend, a relative or a social worker, and the number of potential clients can be doubled. The tendency to go on holidays is very often influenced by income more than by any other factor. Social tourism can help them to go on holidays, especially during low season, through implementing programs in partnership with the private sector.

Challenges of Social Tourism

The term ‘social tourism’ sometimes make policy makers nervous of receiving unwanted and unwarranted criticism for supporting ‘holidays for the poor’ or disadvantage groups. A proper policy is required to overcome these presentational challenges. A recent EU survey shows that, even in the most developed economies in Europe, about 40% of the population does not go on holidays, mainly for financial reasons. This data concerns any population age group, but more especially numerous young people and students who have a limited purchasing power, families with a

modest income who cannot manage to set aside a consequent enough holiday budget, and also a great proportion of the elderly who have a lot of time, but whose financial resources are sometimes very limited as well (ISTO, 2014). Solidarity is a challenge which, on a national level, requires to allow people in economic, family or physical distress, to be able to exercise concretely their right to holidays and tourism. Although social tourism is not limited to tourism for the poor and the disabled, it must be clear that the policy is not indifferent to the less protected and the most underprivileged social layers. Supervision and monitoring is another important challenge of social tourism. Foreigners with various purposes come to Nepal and work in various organizations. They plan their visit in different part of country and involve in various social sectors as well in their own interest. Now, the question is who supervise/monitor their activities? If we take an example, one foreigner attended mass meeting of a political party and advocated against the Constituent Assembly election 2013 in Nepal. Is he allow to do such? This matter was highly criticized. Likewise, many foreigners are cut red hand because of their involvement in smuggling. Threats to personal security come in many forms these days and travelers need to be hyper-vigilant and prudent. Careful consideration should be given before deciding which areas offer safer options for international service. As with all of our choices, each one comes with risks and rewards. You can stay home, but remember more people die in bed at home than in traveling aboard. The work of peace building is not for the fearful and those unwilling to take risk. Visa policy is another challenge for development of social tourism in Nepal. Social workers come to Nepal with one purpose and their duration of stay is stated in the visa. If those social workers want to travel as a tourist the government should grant them tourist visa. Alternatively, if a tourist wants to do social work, the government should grant them social worker visa.

Lessons from Europe and India for the Development of Social Tourism

Stakeholders from Europe provided extensive evidence of best practice in three countries with contrasting social tourism initiatives. In Spain the government invests €125 million a year in the IMSERSO scheme, but for every €1 invested it receives €1.5 in extra tax revenue and cost savings for the Spanish health service. Up to 80,000 people enjoy employment as a result of its activities. It is one of the most powerful examples of social tourism's economic potential presented to the inquiry. ANCV in France is a public agency that provides holiday vouchers to 3.4 million workers, subsidized in part by employers or social organizations. Vouchers can be used to pay for accommodation, meals, transport, sports and cultural activities. Every year €1.3 billion - worth of vouchers are distributed, and it is estimated that they generate €5 billion for the wider economy. Similar voucher schemes exist in Switzerland, Poland, Cyprus, Italy and Hungary. The Flanders Tourist Board in Belgium runs a Holiday Participation Centre. This provides maintenance and construction grants to accommodation providers who agree to offer reduced rates to low - income and

disadvantaged groups. The center helps 100,000 people a year in this way, as well as maintaining the integrity and accessibility of its accommodation infrastructure. The European Union runs the €3 - million Calypso programme that is investigating the economic and social benefits of social tourism and providing funds for innovative social tourism projects (APPG, 2011 p. 3).

Sikkim Now writes a total 600 senior citizens of Yangyang-Rangang constituency were taken for a day-long pilgrimage tour to four major religious pilgrimage centers of South Sikkim in India. Senior citizens of 60 years and above of the constituency were taken on this free tour which was organized by the Panchayats and SDF party youth leaders of the constituency. More than 70 vehicles were deployed to ferry the senior citizens to the pilgrimage centers and back to their respective places. Likewise, to provide relief to the senior citizens of Uttarakhand, a joint scheme of tourism and transport authority of the state has launched the provision of free pilgrimage visit to Char Dham to people over 65 year of age (Sacred Yatra, 2014). Samachar.com writes Rajasthan government signed an MoU with the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) Ltd for a scheme which will bear all the expenses for senior citizens to go on select pilgrimages. The duration of the trip is from five to eight days and selected persons can visit any one pilgrimage center out of those designated as part of the scheme. "Special trains will be available at each divisional headquarters to ferry 1,000 people at a time. Medical services along with one attendant will be there in each coach," an IRCTC official said after the signing of the MoU. Arrangements for meals, accommodation and road travel would be made by the IRCTC for those availing the scheme. Puri, Gaya, Rameswaram, Vaishno Devi, Tirupati, Varanasi, Amritsar, Dwarkapuri, Bihar Sharif, Shirdi are among the pilgrim destinations covered under the scheme.

Matter of Discussion: Way Forward and Advocacy of Social Tourism

Social work is a profession concerned with helping individuals, families, groups and communities to enhance their individual and collective well-being. It aims to help people develop their skills and their ability to use their own resources. Primarily, social work is concerned with individual and personal problems however, in a broader sense social workers are involved to address the social issues such as poverty, unemployment and domestic violence. Social workers work in a variety of settings: family services agencies, children's aid agencies, general and psychiatric hospitals, schools, correctional institutions, welfare administration agencies, federal and provincial departments. An increasing number of social workers work in private practice as well. The duties performed by social workers vary depending on the settings in which they work. Employment opportunities in Social Work do exist. Most social workers work full-time although it is possible to work part-time. Social workers providing direct services spend most of their time with clients in their offices or in the client's home. They also spend time in consultation with other professionals such as psychologists, teachers,

Tourism has been identified as an effective means to take part in the global economy and reduce poverty. Tourism is a collective phenomenon and can be a key ingredient in the development of any country. Tourism is increasingly a major source of economic growth, employment and revenue for many of the world's developing countries. Tourism would not be just a focus of economic development strategy based on its job creation, revenue, millions of capital investment, but it has a deep impact on the social and cultural life of Nepal (Ghimire, 2013). Through demonstrating the social welfare benefits to individuals and the economic benefits to the Nepalese tourism industry, social tourism could be an ideal sector for social enterprise development. This radically different business model would allow social organizations to utilize social welfare budgets instead of being dependent upon charitable donations. The expanded practice of social tourism would demonstrate its benefits and lead to greater awareness, increasing both the supply and demand of social tourism.

At this stage, the issue is what role should the government/NTB play in the development of social tourism. The government/NTB should work as a facilitator. There are organizations that are willing and able to make social tourism happen in Nepal. The government/NTB should formulate a proper social tourism policy and develop various packages for different target groups. Having the support and commitment of government to this process would help enormously and enable social tourism to move from being a small scale, charitable initiative toward becoming a valuable social enterprise, fit for the current social and economic environment. A network with government, NTB, SWC, INGO's/NGO's, other social organizations and diplomatic missions can formulate social tourism policy, implement and monitor social tourist's activities.

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