

Tourism Policy of Nepal and Sustainable Mountain Tourism Development in Retrospect

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Abstract

The modern history of tourism in Nepal began with mountain tourism embodying the diversity of nature and culture, diversity, marginality, access difficulty, fragility, niche and aesthetics. Despite huge scope, Nepal has been unable to take full benefits of mountains, due to inadequate policies and fragile implementation. Pedestaled on secondary data, the key objective of this paper is to make a retrospective assessment of tourism policy and sustainable mountain tourism development efforts in Nepal. The sustainable development of mountain tourism relies on the government's plans and policies and the efficient coordination between stakeholders. But the tourism policies have not been able to adequately address mountain tourism, and this has led to unbalanced growth of tourism sector. Despite the implementation of new Tourism Policy in 2008, adequate focus on mountain tourism is still missing. There is a lacuna of adequate driving force in tourism policy and it has failed to address vital areas of mountain tourism. Hence, there is an instant need of specific and separate mountain tourism policy encompassing integrated approach (abiding federal structure and local participation in planning and management) hence making mountain tourism sustainable, responsible and sensitive--ecologically and culturally.

Keywords: *Shangri-La, mountaineering activities, touristification of globe, royalty*

Introduction

Tourism is a movement of financial operation which transfers money from visitors to local place. Visitors exchange money in holiday destinations: therefore tourism is also a sort of transferring operation financially (Escobar, 1994). The economic dimension of tourism is related to interconnection between tourism and economic development of the destination. With the growth of income in different countries after 1970, international travels have grown enormously and consequently tourism has been achieved as an alternative policy by different countries to support economic growth. Tourism has supported in providing foreign exchange earning to aid their import and economic development. Mill and Morrison (1992) argue that other than approaching tourism sector as a tool for development of the whole economy of or country, it brings economic benefits for the settlements; since tourism includes many subsector from transportation to entertainment; from shopping to accommodation. In the 21st century tourism has become one of the fastest growing industries in the world for the socio-economic development of many developed and developing countries. But the growth of tourism is difficult to quantify because few countries collect statistics in a way which separates purely rural from other forms of tourism (Seth, 1999).

Tourism in Nepal is the important source of foreign exchange earnings and has great prospective for the economic development of the country. Due to the bequest of beautiful landscape, natural wealth, cultural, religious and archaeological heritages, Nepal is an important tourist destination in the world. As a country of Mount Everest, the land of world famous climbers *Sherpas*, mystery of the *Yeti*, the land of Lord Buddha, Hindu and Buddhist religious shrines, splendid snow peaks, hills/mountains, rivers, lakes, waterfalls, favorable climate and mysterious charms of *Shangri-La* image, Nepal is a prime destination to foreign visitors. Having the entire key component for *holistic* tourism development, visitors are attracted to visit Nepal that provides foreign exchange earnings, provides employment opportunities at different levels and promotes cottage industries, handicrafts, trade and other services sectors. In the fiscal year 2017, 940,218 tourists arrived in Nepal which was a 24.8% growth in tourist arrival compared to 2016 (*Tourism in Nepal*, 2017).

Mountains of Nepal are the main source of attraction for tourists, trekkers and mountaineers. Of the world's 14 snow-topped high mountains over-8000m in height, 8 peaks are located in Nepal. Hence, mountaineering and trekking are the major tourism products of Nepal's mountain tourism that increases the length of stay of the tourists, support the rural economy and create a pivotal impact upon the entire tourism industry. Mountaineering and trekking in Nepal are mainly concentrated in three areas viz. the Annapurna, Everest and Langtang region because they were popularized by foreign mountaineering expedition teams. At present, mountain

tourism is a part of adventure tourism, revolving around the mountains including mountaineering expeditions, trekking, hiking, rafting, skiing, mountain biking, rock climbing, horse riding, kayaking, mountain sports, golf, ultra light aircraft, paragliding, jungle safari, bungee jumping, canyoning and study of the cultural, social, and economic reflections of the mountain people/community and so on. Therefore, there is a great scope for developing mountain tourism in Nepal for the tourists, trekkers and mountaineers. There are around 3,310 peaks along the Himalayan range of Nepal, of which, there are 1,310 peaks above 6,000m (Shrestha, 2000). The government of Nepal has opened many peaks for mountaineering, but there are still numerous unclimbed peaks.

Samy and El-Barmelgy (2005) argue that the principles of sustainable tourism development are composed of environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects and equilibrium among these three dimensions must be established in order to be successful in the long-term. But, in Nepal, despite natural bequests, the mountains resources have not been harnessed adequately. Sustainable mountain tourism development encompasses different components viz. natural resources preservation on which tourism depends; promoting local communities' life quality; and augmentation of tourist satisfaction. However, there are different problems and hurdles related to these. Tourism policy loopholes, imbalanced growth in tourism, the safety and environmental concerns, tourism infrastructure development, marketing initiatives for promoting mountain tourism, labour migration for abroad jobs, and reposition of Nepal's mountain tourism image in international market are the key concerns. All these have resulted due to the inconsistent policies and lack of participatory planning and lacunae of adequate driving force in policies. For sustainable mountain tourism development, a number of questions have emerged. Have Nepal really been able to exploit its mountain tourism potentiality adequately? Have the tourism policies really contributed to the growth of mountain tourism? What needs to be done to balance development with potentiality? Only if these questions are answered, mountain tourism can be developed in a sustainable manner. In this paper, attempts have been made to assess the importance of tourism plans and policies for sustainable mountain tourism development, and to identify problems concerned and counsel measures for development of mountain tourism in Nepal especially mountaineering expeditions and trekking. Pedestaled on secondary data, the key objective of this paper is to make a retrospective assessment of tourism policy and sustainable mountain tourism development efforts in Nepal.

Historical development of tourism in Nepal

Nepal has a very long history of tourism since the ancient period to modern era. The foundation of tourism was laid during the ancient period.

Tourism in ancient Nepal

Tourists have arrived in Nepal in some form or the other from time immemorial. According to a legend, *Manjushree* from China had made Kathmandu valley suitable for human habitation by cutting the *Chovar* Hill of Kathmandu Valley with his sword and thereby letting the water low out from within the valley (Sharma, 2033 B.S.¹; Bhandari 2030 B.S.). Hence Manjushree can be regarded as the *first tourist* ever visiting Nepal. During the ancient era, Gautam Buddha visited Nepal during the reign of Jitedasti, the seventh Kirat King who ruled Kathmandu (Satyal, 1988; K.C. 1984). The emperor of ancient India, Ashok visited Lumbini, the birth place of Lord Buddha in 3rd century B.C. and built the Ashok Pillar there (Satyal, 1988). The Licchavi period (400-750 AD) is regarded very significant from the tourism viewpoint. The way in which art and culture developed during that period inspired the Chinese travelers to come to Nepal and write about Nepal (Satyal, 1988). The marriage relations between Princess Bhrikuti, daughter of King Amshuverma, and Srong-sten Gampo, the king of Tibet in 592 A.D. led to the establishment of special relations between the two countries (Sharma, 2033 B.S.). Nepal was developed as the only route to visit China via Lhasa and travel from China to India via Lhasa. This led to the increase in arrivals of foreigners in Nepal (Sharma, 2033 B.S., Shakya, 2051 B.S.). Chinese traveler, Huien-Tsang travelled to India in 629 A.D. and returned to China via Nepal in 643 A.D. (Sharma, 2033). He also visited Lumbini. According to Pradhan (2045 B.S.), many prominent Buddhism preachers visited Nepal during Licchavi period. During the Malla regime (750-1480 A.D.), Hindu saints and devotees from India visit Nepal for pilgrimage. Many European Christian missionaries came to Nepal to spread Christianity (Chhetri and Rayamajhi, 2061). In broad-spectrum, the ancient foreign tourists visiting Nepal were Chinese, Tibetan, Indians and Christian missionaries who visited Nepal for religious and commercial motives. Nepalese traders visited Lhasa for business and the Tibetan traders come to Nepal in connection with their business activities. Thus, religious and trading motive contributed significantly to the development of tourism in ancient Nepal.

Tourism after unification of Nepal

Captain Kirkpatrick's book *An Account of the Kingdom of Nepal* published in 1812 helped to introduce Nepal to outsiders. A British Resident was appointed in Kathmandu for developing Nepal-Britain relation after 1816 and there were regular visits of British nationalities in Kathmandu. Rana Prime Minister Jung Bahadur's visit to Britain in 1850-51 brought Nepal into the limelight in Europe. During that time, several British botanists, naturalists and many other personalities visited Nepal. King George V and the Prince of Wales came to Nepal for hunting tigers in the terai forests in 1911 and 1921 respectively (Satyal, 1988). The earliest published record on foreign visitors to Nepal is found in Percival London's book '*Nepal*', where 153

Europeans mostly British are listed to have visited Kathmandu in a period of 44 years from 1881 to 1925 (Gurung, 1978). Despite these developments, the Rana oligarch's despotic policy isolated Nepal from external influence for 104 years. During that period, Nepal was a *forbidden land* for foreigners except for the diplomats, small traders and Indian pilgrims.

Tourism after 1950: An era of mountain tourism

Development of modern tourism in Nepal began with mountain tourism in the Himalayas. 1950s is the most important period in Nepal's tourism development because up to 1949, foreigners were prohibited to enter Nepal and most of mountaineering activities in Nepal Himalayas took place from the Northern side, via Tibet. After the advent of democracy in 1950, foreigners started visiting Nepal and an era of modern tourism started. After the successful ascent of Mt. Annapurna I (8091m), in 1950, by Maurice Herzog, many mountaineers were attracted to Nepal. Annapurna I was the first successful ascent among the 14 over-8000m peaks of the world. In 1953, the successful conquest of Mt. Sagarmatha (8848m) by Tenzing Norgay Sherpa and Edmund Hillary was a milestone in the mountaineering history of the world. The successful ascent of Mt. Annapurna I and Mt. Sagarmatha of Nepal was publicized all over the world (Lama, 2003). All 8000m peaks were successfully climbed in the 50's decade, hence, the decade of 1950's is called the golden era of Nepalese mountaineering history that led to an outstanding growth in mountaineering activities and mountain tourism. Since then mountaineering has emerged as an important facet of Nepalese tourism. The 21st century mountain tourism is related to an era of consumption, ability and economy-- a product of modernity and a force helping to shape it facilitated by globalization, modern transportation and *Touristification of globe*. Supported by large investments--money and effort, it has both advantages and disadvantages--defining who we are by helping to place us in *space and time*.

Nepal's tourism policy in retrospect

Although a very lucrative touristic destination, there was no study, plan and policy regarding tourism in Nepal till 1950s. During First Five Year Plan (1956-61), Nepal Tourist Development Board (NTDB) was formed in 1957. "General Plan for Organization of Tourism of Nepal" prepared by French George Lebec in 1959, was the first tourism plan that suggested making posters, postage stamps of Himalayan peak, flora/fauna, to use films and documentaries for promoting tourism and establishment of separate tourism offices. In 1965 Sir Eric Franklin from USA came to Nepal for the supervision of Tourism Department (Chhetri and Rayamajhi, 2061 B.S.). In 1969 Nepal Tourism Development Committee was established for formulating the tourist policy as well as to draw a long term development plan for this sector. With the joint effort of UNDP and ILO, Hotel Management and Tourism Training Centre

was established in 1972 with a view to produce trained manpower in tourism sector. Further, plans and policies were also defined for creating suitable environment for the growth of the tourism sector. The notable efforts were the Tourism Master Plan 1972, Review of the Master Plan 1984, and defining of Tourism Policy in 1995. For the planned development of tourism, 20-year 'Tourism Master Plan' was prepared in 1972 which recommended a separate Ministry of Tourism that was established in 1977 with a view to enhance tourism. High level bodies like Tourism Promotion Committee and Tourism Council were formed to create the necessary mechanism. These activities contributed to generate market and tourism marched ahead.

Full-fledged tourism policy was announced only in 1995. Before this, the tourism sector was steered by the industrial policy, industrial enterprises act and periodical plans. The main objective of 'Tourism Policy, 1995' was to promote Nepal as attractive destination utilizing its resources and make it a vehicle of national development. This tourism policy included different working policies some of which are- participation of the private sector and general people in tourism infrastructure to be upgraded, popular religious tourism sites to be promoted, to develop Nepal as a centre for adventure tourism, quality of service and security to be upgraded, regional imbalances to be corrected and marketing in tourist originating markets to be strengthened. In this tourism policy, the government's role was limited to the involvement in infrastructure development, coordination and motivation for tourism development and hereby encouraged the participation of the private sector in the overall development of the tourism sector (HMG/ N, 1995). Thus, the tourism policy of 1995 gave special significance to the role of the private sector in tourism development but the policy was partially successful in dealing with the practical challenges embedded with tourism industry of Nepal. Study by Shrestha (1998) reveal that Nepal's tourism policy 1995 was only average and, therefore, they needed attention. For example liberalizing the policies alone was not enough, facilitation and practical support to the efforts/endeavors of the private sector was insufficient, lacking supporting programmes. The policy was not based on pragmatic realities with problems in implementation.

In 2008, a new Tourism Policy 2008 was introduced and in 2012, *Tourism Vision 2020* was announced that shaped the priorities of Nepalese tourism with a slogan *Tourism for peace, people and prosperity*. Tourism vision 2020 envisions guiding tourism development throughout the country complementing the national endeavor of economic reform and incorporating a spirit of inclusiveness for a broad-based enabling environment that sets the pace of gradual but focused change in tourism sector. Following directions set by the policy; effort is to be made for development and expansion of tourism activities, quality improvement of tourism services, increasing revenue and expansion of employment opportunities to improve the living standard

of Nepalese people. Vision 2020 envisions increasing tourist arrival to two million and tourism related employment to one million (NTS, 2016).

The main focus of the new Tourism Policy, 2008 is the need for the distribution of benefits accruing from tourism services to local community and people. Its objective is to expand, promote rural tourism activities through search, identification of new tourism sites, tourism infrastructure development, enhancement of quality of services offered for tourists, increase in accessibility, safe destination, increasing length of stay, etc. It focuses mainly on:

- Leading role of private sector in tourism, partnership approach: Public-Private-People
- Emphasis on Rural Tourism, Community based Tourism and Home-stays
- Formation of Tourism Coordination Committee, Crisis Management Committee
- Activation of Tourism Council (Apex body chaired by the Prime minister)

This policy aimed at tourism development by aligning poverty alleviation and new economic development with foreign exchange earnings, increasing employment opportunities together with raising the living standard of the people. As the qualitative and quantitative development of the tourism sector is not possible with the efforts of the government only, the need was recognized for the joint partnership of the public, community and private sectors in the venture for tourism promotion to new heights for laying the ground for economic change (GoN, 2008). The tourism policy of 2008 has certain objectives in this direction-diversification and extension of the tourism sector for developing self-employment initiatives in the people for eco-tourism and village tourism in line with poverty alleviation to raise the living standard of the people, and prepare a major basis for the national economy, development and conservation of the natural, cultural, and other resources, besides the development of the tourism infrastructure.

The special features of the policy include attracting more tourists and making Nepal an all-season destination for tourists, developing a complete package program aimed at the different categories and levels of tourists and making an air service agreement with a tourist originating market. Promotional programs are to be organized in countries other than the traditional markets. It also talks about giving recognition as *Friends of Nepal* to world famous mountaineers, globally renowned personalities who have positive thoughts about Nepal. As per this policy, steps are to be undertaken for the diversification, expansion and development of mountaineering by making mountaineering more organized and environment-friendly, to make Nepal an excellent destination for mountaineering. The royalty fee is to be waived

for some time for mountaineering in feasible areas which have not come to light. The Himalayan peaks would be gradually opened up for mountaineering expeditions. The peaks that are below a specific height and considered easy by technical standards are to be developed as trekking peaks. The trekking tourism of Nepal, an excellent tourism heritage, would be made safer, reliable and attractive. The trekking related policy-level and other management tasks will come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation with an attempt to attract high-income tourists by making the trekking areas in operation more organized. New trekking routes are also to be identified and developed for which government investment would be given priority. It also talks of making the participation of the local community more effective. Hence from the perspective of mountain tourism, some changes have been made in comparison to the Tourism Policy, 1995, but all the mountaineering-related issues have not been addressed adequately. Also, the proper implementation strategy is lacking to translate the plans/policies in action in order to attain favorable development of mountain tourism. Very little priority has been accorded to product development, presentation and diversification. For sustainable mountain tourism development, proper planning and policy formulation is needed. But, the policy 2008, and tourism vision 2020 did not sufficiently address the issues of mountain tourism in the lack of *separate and specific mountain tourism development policy*.

In the beginning, mountain tourism was not sincerely taken as an important tourism product, but later it was realized as an important tourism product with the dramatic increase in the number of tourists for mountain tourism or trekking/mountaineering, and a decline in the number of tourists coming for holiday/pleasure. For example, in 1965, only 0.4% of the tourists came for trekking/mountaineering but by 2001 the numbers peaked to 100,828 (27.9%). By 2009, 132,929 (26.1%) tourists came with the purpose of trekking/mountaineering (NTS, 2016). In 1965, the tourists coming for holiday/pleasure purpose was 93.9% but which declined to 8.0% in 2009. In 2009, most of the incoming tourists (26.1%) came for mountain tourism. In 2016, out of 753,002 foreign tourists visiting Nepal, 65 % tourists visited Nepal for holiday and pleasure, pilgrimage (11%), adventure (9%), business (3%), official purpose (3%), and conference/meeting (2%). 66,490 (8.83 %) tourists arrived for mountaineering/trekking compared to 9,162 (1.70 %) out of 538,970 tourists in 2015 (NTS, 2016). This confirms that mountain tourism is the prominent tourism product of Nepal and the country can be the market leader in this sector. Hence, it should receive due focus in the future tourism policy with proper identification of mountain tourism products, marketing and appropriate policy for competing with other countries.

Sustainable mountain tourism development: Policy related challenges

Imagining for the management of available resources in such a way that social, economic and aesthetics needs can be fulfilled while maintaining ecological processes,

cultural integrity, biological diversity, and life support systems, sustainable mountain tourism is concerned with meeting the needs of the present tourists and the host community of the mountains while safe-guarding and enhancing the opportunities for future generations. The policy issues related to sustainable mountain tourism development efforts especially mountaineering expeditions and trekking that need to be addressed are complex permit system, royalty fees, weak infrastructure, increasing pressure on popular mountains, overcrowding, pollution, commercialization of mountains, lack of modern equipment for mountaineering, too much ascents each season, accidents, inexperienced climbers, etc.

In Nepal getting the official permit for mountaineering and fulfilling other formalities are quite complex and lengthy. The need to go to various ministries and offices for permits is annoying and time-consuming. If the issuance of various permits required for mountaineering is done through one office at Base camp, the process would not only become simpler but would also be time-saving. Also, the expedition royalty fee in Nepal is very expensive. The operating costs for reaching peaks concerned for expedition teams are also very high. As expedition teams also have to bear the cost of the liaison officer, the expedition costs run high. The deputed liaison officer for mountaineering expeditions to peaks over 6,500m, and restricted trekking areas are usually inexperienced and rapacious, many of whom bargain for allowances and equipment. These make it necessary to make reforms in the present system of appointing liaison officers. This is the reason why despite the maximum number of high peaks in the world, Nepal has been unable to reap the benefits of attracting a greater number of mountaineers. The expedition royalty fees for the shared border peaks are far less in China and India than those fixed by Nepal. The royalty fees for mountaineering in Nepal for 8000m, 7000m and 6000m or peaks below that height are also very high compared to China, India and Pakistan (Shrestha, 2008). According to Nepal Tourism Statistics Report (2016), the amount of royalty received has reduced in 2016 compared to 2015. The main reason is less number of visitors to high royalty peaks. Mount Everest contributes almost 70 percent of the total royalty received. Therefore, it is necessary to make the necessary reforms in the royalty fee structure to attract a greater number of mountaineers to Nepal.

The weak infrastructure in Nepal has made the mountaineering activities time-consuming. Nepal does not have transportation facilities to the Base Camps of important Himalayan peaks like in other countries. As the transportation and other costs are very expensive for transporting the necessary goods to the Base Camps, therefore the operating costs become very high. Transporting goods by porters to the Base Camp and back is expensive as well as time-consuming. Hence, transportation facilities should be improved so that to attract mountaineers to peaks. Small airports, aid posts, refreshments/lodges in places need to be constructed and building new

road networks ought to be speeded up. It is urgent to formulate a policy for the development of the necessary infrastructure for mountain tourism development. Further, the high customs rates on imported vehicles and other goods for tourism purpose make it difficult to provide standard services. The high customs rates, in Nepal, on other goods for the tourism sector has led to a lower standard of services offered to the tourists. The customs duties and taxes levied on mountaineering activities are on commercial basis which has made mountaineering in Nepal very expensive. There is, therefore, the need for liberal customs rates on mountaineering equipment and other goods.

In 2014, in an effort to expand mountain tourism, the government published a list of 104 new peaks open for climbing, that resulted in commercialization of mountains, too many ascents each season, overcrowding and accidents posing a continuous danger for climbers. The melting glaciers and snow exposed more rocks and rubbish along the mountain trail which is detrimental for the diversity of Himalayan ecosystem and local communities as well to the climbers. It has resulted in rising mountain temperatures, pollution and global warming that brought about substantial negative environmental changes in the Himalayan landscape. Mountain Everest has become a mountain of trash and a *pyramid of human excrement* in snow that can be detrimental if leached into drinking water sources down slope to the local Sherpa community. However, the monitoring and supervision of the garbage management by the mountain expedition teams has not been effective in Nepal Himalayas (Shrestha, 2008). The garbage pile up in the Himalayas has increased rather than being on a declining trend which has created a severe environmental crisis in the Himalayas. Therefore, instead of the present Garbage Deposit system, the mountaineering expedition teams should be charged the Environment Fees based on the height of the peaks that they attempt. A special fund has to be created from the fees collected for utilization in garbage management, clean-up works of Nepal's popular mountains. The Garbage Deposit system is irrational because monitoring is difficult, there is more administrative annoyance, and refunding the deposit is complicated.

The mountaineering activities are restricted to the popular peaks; hence pressure has increased on these mountains, while trekking activities are very limited to the major trekking areas. Despite the opening up of other peaks for mountaineering, mountaineering activities are taking place only in few peaks while there is no activity on the other remaining open peaks. The lack of mountaineering and caravan routes to many peaks is the reason why mountaineers have not been attracted to other peaks, besides their publicity and promotion are inadequate. There are many feasible peaks for mountaineering, but they lack appropriate mapping, caravan routes, and have not been named which has resulted in their not being used for mountaineering activities.

Similarly, trekking is confined to specially Annapurna, Langtang and Sagarmatha areas. There are many trekking areas like Poonhill, Gokyo, Upper Dolpo, Kanchenjunga, Makalu, Manaslu, Lower Dolpa, Mustang, Upper Mustang, Dhorpatan Circuit, Kanchenjunga base camp etc but they have not been publicized and promoted. The Rara Lake also called *the nymph of heaven* lacks transportation facilities, high charges of trekking permit fees and has not received publicity/promotion. New trekking sites that need publicity are: Dhudpokhari Khaling Trekking, Jaljala Hill Trek Jaljala, Tsum Valley Trek, Numbur Cheese Trek, Pikey Peak Trail, Rolwaling Trekking, Tamang Heritage Trails in Langtang region. Likewise there are different short treks which need promotion viz. Ghorepani Ghandruk Trekking, Dhampus Trekking, Panchase, Ghandruk, Helambu.

Owing to inexperienced climbers and many other reasons, accidents are common during expeditions. To carry out rescue missions, the use of communications equipment like satellite phone, radio, and walkie-talkie is widespread during mountaineering in other countries and they have a liberal policy for such equipment. But in Nepal, such imported equipment are very expensive due to high custom rates. Thus, for the convenience of the mountaineers, trekkers and adventure seekers, the policy for the import of the communications equipment must be simplified and reforms must be made in custom rates.

Nepal has not been able to garner adequate benefits from the 92 mountain peaks of Nepal bordered with China and India, because many border peaks have not been opened for mountaineering in Nepal, and those peaks which have been opened lack the basic infrastructure to reach the Base Camp, and they have not become attractive destinations because of the lack of publicity and promotional activities. In order to take benefits from border peaks, policy reforms need to be made with necessary infrastructure building including developing transportation, waiving the royalty fees for particular peaks through selection, and need to do publicity for the promotion of border peaks. Both the old peaks and new peaks have to be promoted with adequate safety measures. The Great Himalaya Trail network of existing trails which together form one of the longest and highest walking trails in the world, needs adequate promotion so that to facilitate in the development of the remote and untouched areas. Nepal needs planned promotion of adventure products to get benefit from the flourishing adventure tourism keeping in minds the needs and expectations of modern travelers. It is of vital importance to strengthen the National Flag Carrier and to promote the credibility of Nepali airlines. Sustainable mountain tourism development is not feasible without the greater involvements of local communities; hence their active participations and contributions on participatory decision makings and benefits sharing are essential for the all-inclusive development of mountain tourism, and for the fulfillment of the livelihoods of mountain communities. Hence,

a review on existing tourism policies and regulation and crafting the measures to ensure local participation is necessary for the sustainable development of mountain tourism in Nepal. Protection and conservation of mountains and local communities and attracting more foreign tourists should be the key priority.

Conclusion

Modern tourism in Nepal started with mountain tourism, sector emerging as an important sector--a boon to local and national economy and for sustainable development of mountains. But due to weak policies and fragile implementation efforts, Nepal has been unable to capitalize on the huge possibility of mountain tourism. The tourism policies have not been able to adequately address the appropriate development of mountain tourism, and this has created problems with mountaineering expeditions and trekking. Sluggish, impractical policies/strategies, lack of vision, expertise, harsh bureaucratic norms and procedure is affecting implementation. Political instability is also a contributing factor. As the development of mountain tourism relies on the plans and policies of the government and adequate coordination between all stakeholder-*public and private*, appropriate plans and policies are necessary to make mountain tourism development sustainable. As mountain tourism is the major product, there has to be appropriate plans and policies and their effective implementation. But, there is a lack of specific and separate policy for mountain tourism. In the beginning, there were very few tourists who came with the purpose of mountain tourism; therefore it is possible that this sector was included in general tourism policy. But now, with the raising number of mountain visitors, and mountain tourism as a prominent tourism product, there is a need for an appropriate, specific and separate mountain tourism policy. It is because of this reason Nepal is facing difficulty in competing with other countries which has not led to the requisite development of mountain tourism despite the potentiality. As sustainable mountain tourism is *responsible tourism* which should be both ecologically and culturally sensitive hence an integrated approach to mountain tourism planning and management is now required to achieve sustainable mountain tourism. Abiding by notion of federalism and local peoples participation, a code of practice should be established for mountain tourism at all levels - national, regional, and local. Also guidelines for tourism operations, impact assessment, monitoring of cumulative impacts, and limits to acceptable change should be established. In the process, education and training programs to improve and manage heritage and natural resources should be established by ensuring local participation. It is necessary to develop new types of products and consolidating products that are currently emerging and targeting new high yield markets. The focus and efforts should be on *consolidation* and *expansion* via quality control to maintain the quality improvements that have been achieved.

Concurring to Brown et al (1997) and Shackley's (1996) argument that the environmental and social carrying capacities of tourism in the Nepalese Himalayas have already been exceeded, adequate attention need to be given in tourism policy to environmental dimension of mountain tourism. Though tourism in the Nepalese Himalayas has not been overwhelmingly positive, positive changes for the livelihoods and the environment of the mountain dwellers are slowly taking place and will gain momentum given the right institutional and political setting in the country and support from the international community as claimed by Nepal (2000). For it, there is an immediate need for suitable, specific and separate mountain tourism policy in Nepal adequate enough to focus on maintaining ecological balance, cultural integrity, biological diversity, and life support systems while meeting the needs of the present tourists, the local mountain communities and safeguarding the opportunities for future generations.

Note

1. B.S. or Bikram Sambat is the Nepali calendar 56 years 8 months ahead of A.D.

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