

Challenges of Inclusive Tourism in Nepal: A Sociological Review

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John Shrestha*

ORCID: 0009-0007-6978-1393

crazelzon@gmail.com

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Abstract

This paper examines inclusive tourism practices and challenges among stakeholders in the Thamel area of Kathmandu and Gatlang in Rasuwa. Featuring 21 participants, including hotel and trekking company owners, guides, tourists, and community members, the research highlighted issues of accessibility, workforce diversity, and community participation. Key findings revealed limited accessibility for individuals with disabilities due to high costs and poor transportation in remote areas. Although there is some diversity among tourism entrepreneurs, employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities, especially the deaf, remain rare. Despite tourism generating income for local communities, external stakeholders often reap the benefits. Nepal has made progress with traveler-friendly policies, but challenges persist in infrastructure and awareness among operators, affecting services for travelers with special needs. Women and marginalized groups face participation barriers in the workforce, and local communities struggle to maintain cultural heritage amid modernization. Overall, the study concluded that inclusive tourism in Nepal is still developing, with significant improvements needed in policies, infrastructure, and stakeholder awareness to create a more inclusive environment.

Keywords

accessible tourism, inclusive tourism, sociology, sustainable tourism, tourism practices

*John Shrestha holds a Master's Degree in Sociology from Tribhuvan University, Saraswati Multiple Campus, Lekhnath Marg, Thamel, Kathmandu.

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive tourism ensures that all individuals, regardless of ability, age, or background, can fully participate in travel experiences by removing barriers in transportation, accommodation, and attractions. This approach promotes equal opportunities for people with disabilities, the elderly, families, and LGBTQ+ travelers, fostering diversity and social inclusion (Smith, 2019; Johnson et al., 2020; Brown, 2021). My study focuses on the practices and challenges of inclusive tourism in Nepal.

The sociology of tourism highlights the connections between tourism and society, examining social dynamics, cultural interactions, and economic impacts. As travel increases, the need for inclusive practices becomes essential to accommodate diverse travelers and promote empathy and sustainable development. Studies show that inclusive tourism benefits all travelers and society, ensuring accessibility in all travel aspects, like transportation and lodging (Brown 2021; Johnson et al. 2020).

Inclusive tourism enhances the mental and physical well-being of elderly travelers and creates a safe environment for LGBTQ+ individuals, while also boosting economic growth and cultural exchange (Jones, 2018). The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) emphasizes the positive impact of inclusive tourism on local communities, promoting social inclusivity and gender equality (UNWTO 2015).

Implementing inclusive tourism faces challenges, such as the high costs of upgrading infrastructure and training staff, which can deter businesses (Johnson and Smith 2019). Nonetheless, its emphasis on accessibility, comfort, and safety strengthens social cohesion and drives innovation while benefiting diverse groups of travelers.

The concept of inclusive tourism is gaining traction in the global tourism industry, emphasizing sustainable practices that benefit all stakeholders, including marginalized groups. However, in Nepal, inclusive tourism remains largely unexplored. Previous studies

have not delved into the practices among stakeholders or identified implementation challenges. Thus, this paper tries to explore inclusive tourism parameters such as community participation, accessibility, and government policies. The research aims to analyze practices and identify key challenges and opportunities within Nepal's tourism industry.

LITERATURE ON INCLUSIVE TOURISM

Inclusive tourism, also known as accessible tourism, is a conceptual approach aimed at addressing the travel needs of individuals irrespective of their physical or cognitive abilities. This framework seeks to establish universally accessible environments that encompass transportation, accommodation, attractions, and services, as outlined by Darcy and Dickson (2009). Academic literature widely recognizes the significance of inclusive tourism, highlighting its economic, social, and ethical dimensions.

Inclusive tourism goes beyond physical accessibility, emphasizing inclusivity across all aspects of tourism. It has the potential to create a society where everyone, regardless of ability, can fully participate and contribute. Embracing inclusive tourism can lead to a more equitable and integrated world. It involves more than just accommodating individuals with disabilities; it fosters a welcoming, diverse, and socially cohesive environment. Prioritizing inclusivity enhances the overall tourism experience, promotes social unity, and supports economic development (Darcy and Dickson 2009).

By integrating inclusivity into tourism practices—such as providing wheelchair ramps, audio guides, and well-trained staff knowledgeable about inclusive approaches—we create a more accessible and welcoming environment for all tourists. Inclusive tourism is integral to sustainable development, encompassing environmental, social, and economic dimensions. Promoting inclusivity and accessibility contributes to a sustainable future, benefiting individuals, communities, and the tourism industry alike. Recognizing and catering to the needs of individuals with disabilities not only expands the customer base

but also encourages repeat visits, thereby fostering economic growth (Darcy and Dickson, 2009).

Inclusive tourism is pivotal for achieving environmental, social, and economic sustainability. By promoting inclusivity and accessibility, destinations can reduce their carbon footprint and contribute to mitigating climate change impacts. This approach not only benefits the environment but also ensures that future generations can continue to enjoy tourism destinations (Ambrose, Darcy, and Singleton 2019). Embracing inclusive tourism involves integrating accessibility, environmental sustainability, and social inclusion into all facets of tourism. By prioritizing inclusivity, we can foster a more sustainable future for individuals and communities. It is incumbent upon all stakeholders in the tourism industry to strive towards realizing inclusive tourism for all.

Inclusive tourism plays a crucial role in promoting social justice and equality within the travel industry and society overall. By offering equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities to participate in travel experiences, inclusive tourism helps dismantle barriers, reduce stigma, and foster inclusiveness (De Haan and Van der Aa 2009). Empirical research indicates that inclusive tourism positively impacts local economies. Destinations that ensure accessible travel experiences can attract a broader market and contribute to economic growth, especially in developing countries where tourism is a significant source of income (Darcy and Dickson 2009). Moreover, inclusive tourism delivers substantial benefits to individuals with disabilities. It enables them to engage in meaningful travel experiences, enhance their self-esteem and confidence, and acquire new skills. Additionally, it facilitates social connections and a sense of belonging. Inclusive tourism not only benefits individuals with disabilities but also enhances the tourism industry as a whole. Providing equal access to all travelers, regardless of their physical or cognitive abilities, is not only ethically justified but also presents economic opportunities, particularly given the increasing number of tourists with specific access needs. Accessible tourism enhances the quality of life not only

for individuals with disabilities but also for the broader population. By removing accessibility barriers, inclusive tourism allows everyone to enjoy the advantages of tourism (Darcy, Cameron, Pegg, and Packer 2018).

Despite its advantages, inclusive tourism encounters hurdles that must be overcome. Accessibility remains a prominent concern in numerous locations, encompassing both physical barriers and attitudinal obstacles. Cost presents another challenge, with accessible accommodations and activities often carrying higher prices, which can restrict affordability for individuals with disabilities and impede their full engagement in travel opportunities. To address these obstacles, cooperation is essential. Governments, businesses, and individuals need to unite in advancing inclusive tourism. This joint initiative includes establishing and enforcing accessibility standards, offering extensive training to businesses to better serve individuals with disabilities, and actively promoting accessible travel choices.

Social exclusion is a complex process that leads to social disconnection, preventing groups and individuals from engaging fully in societal activities. It affects those who lack essential resources such as stable employment, income, housing, education, legal rights, and social connections. The nature of social exclusion varies across different contexts and times, involving economic, social, and political dimensions. Economic exclusion includes not just poverty, but also lack of access to land and the labor market. Social exclusion pertains to social relationships and access to resources, while political exclusion involves participation in state mechanisms.

Amartya Sen argues that social exclusion is connected to capability deprivation, which means lacking the ability to pursue opportunities one values. This deprivation can be either constitutive, where exclusion itself defines one's capabilities, or instrumental, where exclusion leads to challenges in achieving certain capabilities, such as landlessness affecting a family's stability. Sen also differentiates between active exclusion, like denial of citizenship, and passive exclusion, which

happens due to circumstances like economic downturns.

In tourism, social exclusion refers to barriers that prevent certain individuals or groups from participating in tourism activities due to their economic status, disability, ethnicity, gender, or age. This exclusion means marginalized communities miss out on tourism benefits that others might enjoy. On the other hand, inclusive tourism seeks to remove these barriers to ensure everyone can enjoy tourism experiences. It promotes accessibility, diversity, and equitable opportunities, introducing initiatives like accessible infrastructure and diverse cultural offerings.

The importance of inclusive tourism extends to promoting economic development and social cohesion. By including marginalized groups in tourism activities, it fosters understanding and integration among different social backgrounds. It can also create job opportunities for these groups, leading to social development. The World Tourism Organization emphasizes the need for accessible tourism for individuals with disabilities, encouraging the involvement of disabled persons organizations to advocate for their needs. Sufficient collaboration among governments, businesses, and these organizations is essential to create an inclusive tourism environment.

Studies have shown that inclusive tourism serves as a means for shared prosperity, recognizing the diverse needs of all individuals. It enhances local communities' economic advancement while preserving cultural heritage. Moreover, it is beneficial for individuals with disabilities, facilitating their full engagement in tourism activities. Addressing challenges such as climate change and sustainable development requires innovative strategies for inclusive tourism.

Research points to the positive influence of technology in promoting inclusivity in tourism, making it easier for travelers to find a variety of experiences. Community involvement is also linked to better economic outcomes and cultural preservation. Different regions and countries have shown various successful approaches to inclusive

tourism, suggesting that inclusive practices contribute significantly to sustainable development and local empowerment.

Community-based tourism can foster cultural exchange and generate income for local communities, encouraging more active participation from them. Engaging local communities is fundamental for achieving successful tourism practices, as it supports fair economic distribution and social cohesion. Research in Nepal indicates that inclusive tourism not only boosts household income and infrastructure development but also helps marginalized communities. Collaborative efforts between governments, NGOs, and local stakeholders are crucial for creating more accessible and inclusive tourism experiences, leading to broader economic and social impacts.

Overall, international studies on inclusive tourism show that it generates employment opportunities, enhances standards of living, and promotes social justice by empowering marginalized groups. Research from various regions supports the idea that success in inclusive tourism involves community engagement alongside policy changes that prioritize accessibility and inclusivity. Through these collaborative initiatives, destinations can showcase their diverse heritage and foster sustainable development while creating enriching experiences for all travelers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The investigation focuses on inclusive tourism practices among tourism stakeholders and the challenges they face. Thamel in Kathmandu, a key tourist destination, was chosen as the main study site because it is a hub for various tourism-related organizations, accommodations, and businesses. Gatlang in Rasuwa was also selected to understand local community awareness and practices related to inclusive tourism.

The research uses exploratory methods to gain a full understanding of inclusive tourism and its challenges. It looks at the socio-economic context, evaluates the current state of inclusive tourism in Nepal, and

reviews successful examples to identify opportunities for improvement. The study is mainly qualitative but includes quantitative data on respondents' demographics, such as origin, ethnicity, age, education, income, occupation, and gender. Primary data was collected through interviews and observations, with interviews being the main source of information, allowing direct engagement with knowledgeable individuals.

A diverse group of 21 respondents was selected, including hotel and trekking company owners, tour guides, tourists, and local community members. The study employs interviews and observations for data collection to better understand the physical conditions related to tourism. Data analysis combines qualitative and quantitative methods to interpret the findings concerning inclusive tourism practices. The study emphasizes the roles of tourists and operators, the importance of cultural respect, accessibility, and enhancing tourist experiences, and evaluates parameters such as accessibility, diversity, cultural exchange, and community involvement.

KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES ON ACCESSIBILITY

I inquired about the accessibility of facilities for individuals with disabilities at a hotel in Thamel, owned by a 38-year-old originally from Nuwakot district. He shared his experience:

As a tourism entrepreneur, I love sharing Nepal's beauty and culture. I realized that tourists with disabilities struggled at my hotel due to accessibility issues and insufficient staff training. To address this, I added ramps and elevators, trained my staff, and provided information about accessible attractions. I also worked with local tour operators for accessible options. Inclusivity involves making everyone feel welcome, including diverse marketing and training, which improves guest experiences and benefits society.

The study revealed that the hotel owner acknowledged the importance of inclusivity. They installed ramps, trained staff, and partnered with local businesses. These enhancements improve guest experiences and

advance inclusivity in the tourism sector.

I interviewed a 35-year-old tour guide from Gorkha about his understanding and views on inclusive tourism practices. He responded: As a tour guide, I have seen how inclusive tourism has developed recently. It aims to make travel enjoyable for everyone, regardless of physical abilities or disabilities. Traditional tourism often overlooked disabled individuals, but I have noticed early practices being introduced in Nepal.

The tour guide, who used to take travelers to different UNESCO sites in Nepal, emphasized significant travel trends, particularly in inclusive tourism practices. This emerging aspect holds promise for better tourism services in Nepal.

I asked the situation of accessibility in Nepal to another trekking company owner in Thamel, who has been in the business since 2012 and is 35 years old from Gorkha. He said,

Nepal's tourism sector has potential, especially in adventure tourism. Although famous for trekking and mountaineering, it struggles to accommodate travelers with disabilities. High costs and resource needs limit accessibility, making inclusivity essential for all in adventure tourism. (Interview February, 2024)

Based on his response, the issue of accessibility, especially in adventure tourism in Nepal, is expensive. His insights indicate that numerous tourism areas require upgrades to ensure inclusivity and establish a more welcoming environment for travelers in the future.

I interviewed a 38-year-old male tourist from Canada about the accessibility of tourism in Nepal, and he said:

During my visit to Nepal, I was fascinated by its unique culture, stunning landscapes, and friendly hospitality. I noticed improvements in tourism practices, like wheelchair ramps at Pashupatinath Temple, but remote areas still lack transport

services. Nepal has more to do to fully benefit from tourism.”

From the perspective of international tourists, accessibility to tourist destinations, particularly for the disabled, is available in a few urban and developed areas. However, the availability of transportation services for all types of tourists in remote destinations remains lacking.

Knowledge and Practices on Promoting Workforce Diversity

Inclusive tourism also promotes social equity by managing workforce diversity across various castes, ethnicities, genders, and disabilities.

I asked a 45-year-old hotel and trekking company owner from Dhading about workforce diversity in his company. He said:

“As a hotel and trekking business owner, I implement workforce diversity. In my hotel, 30% of employees are women, and we have individuals from various backgrounds. However, our trekking team mostly consists of the Sherpa community. Embracing inclusivity positively influences tourism.”

This finding showed that respondents are actively implementing and advocating for workplace diversity, serving as a positive model for local tourism entrepreneurs. These efforts empower marginalized communities and women in Nepal, fostering a more diverse workforce.

I posed a similar question to another trekking company owner in the Thamel area, who has been in the business since 2010 and is 45 years old from Kathmandu. He shared:

“As the owner of a trekking company, I see that inclusive tourism helps people with disabilities and marginalized communities, promoting diversity. However, small businesses find it challenging due to costs. It’s important for a welcoming environment.”

This study underscores that the respondent acknowledges the positive

impacts of inclusivity, such as enhancing accessibility for people with disabilities and promoting workforce diversity. However, he has not implemented inclusive practices in his company due to the significant investment costs involved.

I interviewed a 38-year-old male tourist from Canada about the workforce diversity in various hotels and restaurants, particularly in tourist destinations in Nepal, and he said:

“In my exploration of tourist attractions in Nepal, I noticed diverse staff in hotels and restaurants, including local and marginalized communities. However, I found no hotels or restaurants hiring individuals with disabilities, particularly the deaf.”

His response highlighted that many hotels and restaurants in Nepal prioritize hiring marginalized individuals and members of local communities, thereby providing job opportunities.

Knowledge and Practices on Economic Opportunities and Community Participation

I interviewed a 33-year-old trekking guide from Solukhumbu who frequently travels to tourist destinations across Nepal, asking about economic opportunities and community participation.

He responded:

“As a trekking guide, I have witnessed how tourism affects local communities. It can offer economic benefits and cultural exchange, but may also exploit and displace indigenous people. Guides should be aware and promote inclusive practices.”

As a trekking guide, he has observed the impacts on economic opportunities and cultural exchange. While acknowledging the potential negative effects such as cultural exploitation, he emphasized the importance of focusing on the positive aspects of inclusive tourism and remaining mindful of these issues.

Another trekking guide, aged 33 and originally from Dhading, responded to the same question:

“After over ten years in tourism, I’ve seen a trend of involving local communities. On the Annapurna base camp trek, travelers experience local culture in Chhomroung, where the Gurung community hosts guests with dances, showcasing their heritage. This community involvement is vital for inclusive tourism and decision-making.”

His response highlights how a trekking guide discovered the benefits of community participation along the Annapurna Base Camp trek route, illustrating a positive example of engaging with local communities.

When I interviewed a local tamang woman in Gatlang, Rasuwa, a popular tourist destination, aged 42, who runs a local teahouse, about the impact of her business on economic opportunities and community participation, she said:

“We have not fully benefited from tourism because of limited resources, education, and language barriers. Most of the money goes to outside companies, making us feel excluded. Others profit from our land and culture without giving back. We are determined to change that!”

In this research, a resident from Gatlang, Rasuwa, discussed inclusive tourism practices in their community. She emphasized the area’s tourism potential due to its authentic charm, local culture, and unique way of life. Specifically, the renowned Langtang Valley trek presents significant tourism opportunities. However, she noted that most of the benefits accrue to large external companies, leaving minimal financial gains within the local community. Although trekkers contribute to local costs like food and accommodations, the direct benefits to the local area remain limited.

Another male local leader, aged 54, from the same community said:

“Previously, Gatlang had limited development and transportation access. However, after being part of the Tamang

Heritage Trail, the arrival of trekkers brought significant changes. Local businesses and teahouses grew, allowing income opportunities for all, including those with minimal education, driven by inclusive tourism.”

Based on interviews with local community members in Gatlang, Rasuwa, tourism in the area has provided opportunities for locals to engage in tourism sector jobs and generate income. However, the benefits accrued by local community members are overshadowed by those received by tour operators and external hoteliers.

Knowledge and Practices in Implementing Inclusive Policies

I asked a 32-year-old tourist from the United Kingdom about the implementation of inclusiveness in the tourism sector in Nepal, and he said:

“During my recent trip to Nepal, I visited famous places in Kathmandu like Kathmandu Durbar Square and Swayambhunath, along with other heritage sites. I went on the Everest Base Camp Trek and saw improvements in Nepal’s regulations and infrastructure, especially on trekking trails. There were trash bins, many porter houses, and rest points for trekkers and porters. Nepal is making progress in tourism through better policies and infrastructure. I was impressed by the new QR scan codes at Kathmandu’s world heritage sites, which made it easier to access information.”

This finding underscores Nepal’s progressive approach to implementing tourism policies, emphasizing traveler-friendliness and providing comprehensive information. These commendable efforts enhance Nepal’s allure as a welcoming destination for travelers.

Based on the findings related to the knowledge and practices of inclusive tourism among various stakeholders, accessibility for individuals with disabilities is not widely adopted due to the high implementation costs, and transport services remain unavailable for all types of tourists in many remote destinations. While workforce diversity based

on gender, caste, and ethnic groups is largely implemented by tourism entrepreneurs, there is a lack of preference for hiring individuals with disabilities, especially the deaf. Although the tourism sector has provided local communities with opportunities to engage in tourism jobs and generate income, the benefits for local community members are overshadowed by those gained by tour operators and external hoteliers. Finally, Nepal is making progress in implementing traveler-friendly policies.

Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Tourism

A study was carried out among tourism stakeholders to gain knowledge and situation of inclusive tourism practices. The findings uncovered various issues in inclusive tourism, which were further explored through tourism stakeholder interviews. Among the different challenges of inclusive tourism practices, the researcher identified three main challenges such as challenges in implementing accessibility, challenges in implementing workforce diversity, and challenges of infrastructure and other factors.

Challenges of Implementing Accessibility

I asked a 40-year-old hotel owner in Thamel about accessibility challenges, and he said:

“As hotel owners, we aim to create an inclusive experience for all guests, but we face challenges. Many people lack awareness of accessibility needs, which has led to disappointment for guests with disabilities when we cannot meet their requirements. Additionally, making our hotel accessible is costly, especially for small, independent hotels. There are no clear guidelines for inclusive tourism, making it hard to know what changes are needed. Training staff to assist guests with disabilities also requires time and resources, which can be difficult for smaller hotels.”

I asked a 45-year-old trekking company owner from Nuwakot, who has been in the business for over a decade, about the accessibility challenges, and he said:

“I own a trekking company and I’m passionate about giving our clients the best experiences. However, we’ve faced challenges in making our tours accessible for everyone. The biggest challenge is ensuring the safety of all participants, including people with disabilities. We also need to be prepared for emergencies and equip our guides properly. Another issue is the lack of understanding about accessible tourism. Some people have misconceptions about disabilities and may not welcome guests with special needs. We have to educate our staff, clients, and local communities to be more inclusive.”

Another respondent, a 35-year-old trekking company owner from Dhading who has been in business since 2012, discussed the accessibility challenges:

“To make Nepal accessible to all, improvements are needed for inclusive travel. Accessible trips for disabled individuals increase costs and require resources and trained staff, which are currently lacking. The challenge also includes the geographical landscape.”

I also inquired with a 34-year-old tour guide from Gorkha about accessibility challenges, and he said:

“As a tour guide, I enjoy showing the beauty and culture of my country. However, promoting inclusive tourism made me aware of the difficulties people with disabilities face when traveling. Many tourist spots lack accessibility, making it hard to plan inclusive tours.”

From the above findings, it is clear that accessibility is a major challenge in implementing inclusive tourism. Although the concept of inclusive tourism is in its early stages or has just begun to be implemented, hotel owners face significant difficulties in making their hotels accessible for all individuals, especially those with disabilities. These challenges include the high costs of meeting infrastructure requirements, the time needed to train hotel personnel, and the unclear or unannounced guidelines for inclusive tourism in Nepal. The findings reveal that most

people directly or indirectly involved in the tourism industry lack adequate knowledge or awareness of inclusive tourism. Due to the high costs and infrastructure requirements, travel business operators often avoid catering to travelers with special needs. The research identified numerous challenges in enhancing accessibility, not only at tourist destinations but also due to Nepal's geographic structure. Respondents highlighted the persistent lack of well-equipped and trained human resources. This study indicates that Nepal is still progressing toward making all destinations more inclusive and accessible to everyone. Most local destinations and accommodations still need significant improvements to become inclusive for all.

Challenges in Implementing Workforce Diversity

I asked a business owner in the hotel industry and a trekking company owner about implementing workforce diversity and local community involvement. He said:

“In promoting diversity and inclusivity in the workplace, challenges arise. There are few people interested in tourism jobs, and many lack proper training. Despite government policies in Nepal, engagement with diverse communities is limited. While the hotel industry is hiring more, recruiting well-trained workers is difficult. The trekking sector is mainly made up of Sherpas or men, as societal norms restrict women's involvement, revealing significant diversity challenges.”

I asked a similar question to a 33-year-old trekking guide from Dhading, and he said:

“During my visit to Chhomroung village on the Annapurna Base Camp trek, I noticed community engagement through Gurung dance and culture. However, only influential members participate, leaving marginalized groups with fewer chances to connect with travelers. This issue relies on local dynamics. Investing in training and awareness programs for all members is crucial to promote inclusivity and change this situation.”

I asked a 32-year-old female tourist from the United Kingdom about the situation of social equity in the tourism sector in Nepal, and she said:

“During my recent trip to Nepal, I visited places like Kathmandu and the Everest Base Camp Trek. I look for female guides as a solo traveler, but I couldn’t find one for my trek. Solo treks are not allowed in the Everest region, so I hired a local guide. I saw some solo trekkers ignoring this rule, showing inconsistencies in policy enforcement. Fair and transparent implementation of policies is important.”

The study underscores numerous challenges in promoting inclusivity and diversity within Nepal’s tourism sector. Inadequate knowledge, insufficient training, and societal norms hinder women’s advancement, making it difficult to achieve a balanced workforce. Marginalized groups within local communities continue to fall behind due to traditional practices that limit their ability to assume positions of power. Additionally, a female trekker’s quest for inclusive tourism by requesting a same-gender guide in the Himalayas highlights another issue: the scarcity of female guides in Nepal. This shortage creates difficulties and discomfort for female trekkers when accompanied by male guides. Furthermore, tourism regulations are not consistently enforced in the field.

Challenges of Infrastructure and Other Factors

I asked a 32-year-old trekking guide from Rasuwa about infrastructure and other challenges, and he said:

“As a trekking guide, I have seen that physical and social barriers prevent some people from enjoying trekking. I promote inclusive tourism to make it accessible for everyone. Changing attitudes towards inclusive tourism is difficult, and there are issues with infrastructure and resources in remote areas. The tourism industry also lacks training to address diverse needs. I have had to adapt my guiding techniques to help people with different abilities.”

I asked a similar question to a local member from the Rural Municipality of Gatlang, Rasuwa, and he said:

“The Tamang Heritage trail has created opportunities for our village but also brings challenges. Our village’s authenticity is in danger due to modernization, as many houses are changing for increased income. This loss of traditional charm threatens our culture, which visitors come to experience. We must act quickly through awareness programs and government support to protect our heritage.”

I asked a local representative from the community of Gatlang, Rasuwa, aged 42 about the different challenges in the area. He expressed:

“I am part of the community in Gatlang, Rasuwa. Our village is known for its beautiful landscapes and cultural heritage. We have been promoting our village as a tourist destination, eager to share our culture with visitors. However, we face challenges like poor infrastructure and a lack of resources, making it hard for tourists to visit. Additionally, cultural differences complicate sharing our traditions while remaining respectful to visitors.”

I asked a 55-year-old tourist from Spain about the different challenges in implementing inclusive tourism, and he said:

“During my recent trip to Nepal, I was amazed by the country’s beauty and the kindness of its people. However, I noticed the lack of infrastructure for people with disabilities, making it hard for them to visit famous tourist spots in remote areas.”

From the above findings on the challenges of inclusive tourism practices, it is clear that accessibility is a major hurdle in implementing inclusive tourism. Although the concept is in its early stages or just beginning to be implemented, hotel owners face significant difficulties in making their establishments accessible for all individuals, especially those with disabilities. These challenges include the high costs of meeting infrastructure requirements, the time needed to train hotel personnel, and the unclear or unannounced guidelines for inclusive tourism in Nepal. The findings reveal that most people

directly or indirectly involved in the tourism industry lack adequate knowledge or awareness of inclusive tourism. Due to the high costs and infrastructure requirements, travel business operators often avoid catering to travelers with special needs. The research identified numerous challenges in enhancing accessibility, not only at tourist destinations but also due to Nepal's geographic structure. Respondents highlighted the persistent lack of well-equipped and trained human resources.

This study indicates that Nepal is still progressing toward making all destinations more inclusive and accessible to everyone. Most local destinations and accommodations still need significant improvements to become inclusive for all. The study underscores numerous challenges in promoting inclusivity and diversity within Nepal's tourism sector. Inadequate knowledge, insufficient training, and societal norms hinder women's advancement, making it difficult to achieve a balanced workforce. Marginalized groups within local communities continue to fall behind due to traditional practices that limit their ability to assume positions of power. Additionally, a female trekker's quest for inclusive tourism by requesting a same-gender guide in the Himalayas highlights another issue: the scarcity of female guides in Nepal. This shortage creates difficulties and discomfort for female trekkers when accompanied by male guides. Furthermore, tourism regulations are not consistently enforced in the field.

The study also reveals several key insights from an individual who has worked extensively in the tourism sector. Many people from remote areas or trekking regions lack adequate knowledge about inclusive tourism and its implications, making it challenging to educate or convince them on this topic. Additionally, there is a shortage of accessible hotels, restaurants, and trekking trails.

The study explores how local communities risk losing their identity and cultural heritage as they gain access to valuable resources and are influenced by modern lifestyles. For example, Gatlang, a village known for its Tamang Heritage Trail, was once a popular destination

for trekkers interested in experiencing remote lifestyles and traditional homes. However, it has suffered irreversible damage. Such challenges are common among Nepalese communities and pose significant threats to their cultural legacy.

The study suggests that while the Nepalese government and local communities are eager to learn more about inclusive tourism, they face numerous obstacles, including a lack of infrastructure, supervision, awareness, and access to informative programs and training due to their remote locations. Previous tourists who have trekked in these remote areas have realized the challenges of remoteness and how it can hinder the implementation of inclusivity for all individuals.

CONCLUSION

Based on the study's findings, it was concluded that inclusive tourism in Nepal is in its early stages. While some aspects of inclusive tourism have been implemented, significant challenges remain due to lack of knowledge, poor infrastructure, geographical constraints, limited resources, and insufficient personnel. Notably, there is currently no specific governmental provision for inclusive tourism in Nepal. Therefore, adopting sustainable practices is crucial to minimize our environmental footprint and preserve Nepal's exceptional natural heritage for future generations. Inclusive tourism goes beyond being a passing trend; it is essential in our interconnected world, particularly in diverse and vibrant countries like Nepal.

The study extensively explores inclusive tourism in culturally rich and diverse Nepal, emphasizing its profound implications. Inclusive tourism promotes equal opportunities and access for all travelers, fostering economic growth, supporting local communities, and preserving cultural and environmental heritage. Embracing sustainable practices, it encourages tourists to respect local cultures, minimize waste, and engage in social causes. These efforts enhance socio-economic status and ensure long-term prosperity in Nepal's tourism sector, creating a harmonious environment for all stakeholders involved.

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