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Eco-tourism and Sustainability - Opportunities and Challenges in the Case of Nepal

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**ECO-TOURISM AND SUSTAINABILITY - OPPORTUNITIES AND
CHALLENGES IN THE CASE OF NEPAL**

BY

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Abstract

Ecotourism is very burning issue and one of the fastest growing sectors in current world tourism industry. Especially in many developing countries like Nepal are trying to use ecotourism as a tool to achieve sustainable development. The paper mainly considers current opportunities of ecotourism in Nepal where tourism is one of the fastest expanding industries which has been leaving various negative impacts in different areas. It is aiming to study about the current state of ecotourism in Nepal. The paper also attempt to give critical analysis of ecotourism impacts and challenges in the case of Nepal and point out some recommendations for better practice of ecotourism. The paper tries to answer the following question: Is ecotourism opportunity or challenge in Nepal? How is ecotourism practised in the country? Can ecotourism be a beneficial tool for sustainable development of the country? How can ecotourism be very effective means of development and conservation?

Nepal has abundance of opportunities of ecotourism industry. But its effective practice and implementation is not promising due to lack of commitment of governmental policy and planning strategy with combination of integrated conservation and development. Thus to run ecotourism project properly, principles and theories of ecotourism must be considered a major base while make its policy and planning. Policy must be integrative, collaborative and comprehensive to achieve real outcome of ecotourism by realizing importance of environmental, social and economic imperatives.

Key Words: Ecotourism, Nepal, Opportunities, Challenges, and Sustainable Development

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABUC - Aqua Birds Unlimited Camp

ACAP - Annapurna Conservation Project

CBS – Central Bureau of Statistics

CCODER – Centre of Development Research

DFID – Department for International Development

DNPWC – Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation

EIA – Environmental Impact Assessment

EIBIM – European Inceptive and Business and Travel and Meeting

GEC – Global Ecotourism Conference

HAAN – Hotel Association of Nepal

**ICIMOD – International Centre for Integrated Mountain Tourism
Development**

**IUCN – International Union for Conservation for Nature and Natural
Resources**

KEEP – Kathmandu Environmental and Educational Project

KMTNC - King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation

MoCTCA – Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation

NARA – Nepal Association of Rafting Agents

NTB – Nepal Tourism Board

UNDP – United Nations Development Project

UNEP – United Nations Environment Programme

**UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural
Organization**

WWF – World Wildlife Fund

Chapter 1 – Introduction

If we consider the history of tourism development, humans have travelled since the beginning of time when ancient people used to move from one place to another. The purposes of travel were trade, religious obligations, economic benefits, war, migration, and many others. According to Theobald, in the Roman period, wealthy aristocrats and high government officials also travelled for pleasure (Theobald, 2005). In this way, the origin of tourism is really very old. Stronza estimates that the history of modern travel and tourism is about a century old and that by now humans have to travel to most corners of the planet (Stronza, 2008) and even beyond the planet, known as space tourism. Tourism has emerged as a gigantic industry which contributes an estimated 3 billion US dollars in annual revenue and about 10 percent of all employment (Honey and Rome, 2000). Furthermore, due to the rapid process of globalization and with the help of new technologies in different sectors, the figures will definitely increase in the future. According to The International Eco-tourism Society (TIES, 2002) and World Tourism Organization (WTO, 2004), by 2010 tourism will have increased to more than 1 billion international arrivals per year and is projected to increase further to 1,6 billion by 2020 (Holden, 2008, TIES, 2005) (see Figure 1.1)

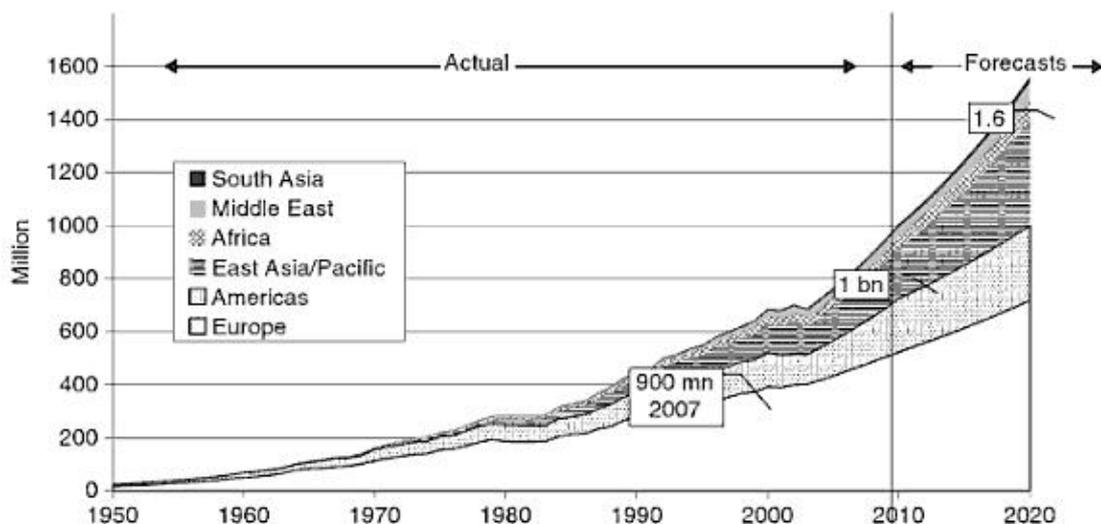


Figure 1.1 Actual and projected international arrivals from 1995 to 2020 (from UNWTO, quoted in McCool and Moisey, 2008)

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2003), world travel and tourism is the biggest industry in the world in terms of economic value, including gross output, value added, capital investment, employment, and tax contribution (Theobald, 2005). Tourism has become the largest business sector in the world economy, responsible for over 230 million jobs and 10 percent of the gross domestic product globally (TIES Global Ecotourism Society Fact Sheet, 2005). Based on these overall reviews, it is clear that the trends of mass tourism have been contributing the considerable impacts on local communities and the natural environment of the host destinations. Mass tourism has also brought environmental and cultural degradation and also economic disruption in many pristine sites of the world. In this context, Stronza and Durham express their views that there is both

promising and worrisome aspects of tourism since it has direct contact with the host environment and people having a significant impact on them (Stronza and Durham, 2008). Therefore, Holden (2008) also agrees that tourism has both problems and opportunities.

Tourism is a system that brings together many interrelated issues such as society, nature, and environment. It is also true that studying tourism means relating its different components and analysing its outcomes – both positive and negative. However, many scholars have come to agree that the mass tourism of 21st century is becoming unsustainable. Problems introduced by mass tourism of this age include overcrowding and disrupting of local communities, massive commercial exploitation of cultural heritage, social conflicts, disturbance to natural heritage and wildlife, increased economic dependency, the emergence of black markets and increased illicit trade in every item from exotic pets to drugs and sex (Butler and Hinch, 1996; Desmond, 1999; Chambers, 2000; Wearing and Neil, 2003; Williams, 2004; Holden, 2008). The rapid growth of tourism during the last three decades has led to an increasing concern related to its impacts. And the great environmental movements of 1970's and 1980's also contribute to consider critical towards the mass tourism. These have been the major components which forced people to think about more responsible tourism, which has become known under different names like sustainable tourism, eco-tourism, green tourism, soft tourism, adventure tourism, nature-based tourism, agro-tourism, village tourism etc. (Butler, 1991). These alternative tourisms differ from the mass tourism in different ways that the alternative tourism is labelled in various types like 'eco', 'responsible' and 'sustainable' tourism to check the negative impacts of mass tourism and support sustainable development by maximizing the positive contributions to destination where there is a number of social and environmental challenges. In this way, ecotourism has been very popular in many developing countries like Nepal where it is believed that it might be proved as the best way of practising tourism in the time of modern age when traditional tourism has been losing its charm and its core values. This Paper is trying to explore how ecotourism is practising in Nepal and also to see critically its potentialities and challenges when it has become a strategy for supporting sustainable development in the context of the country. It is also believed that ecotourism in Nepal can be the best model of achieving the real sustainable development when all actors cautiously plan and implement its principles. Ecotourism is regarded as responsible and quality tourism which undertakes to contribute balance between conservation and development, provide maximum incentives for local people and tourists as well, promote local culture and economy, and increase the maximum local participation. Although it seems a challenging in Nepalese tourism, it is also true that Nepalese tourism can only be made more responsible and sustainable though the real implementation of ecotourism that will surely provide real income and benefits in both national and local level.

1.1 Objective

The main objective of this report is to investigate the status of ecotourism in Nepal and see whether it has become opportunities or challenges for achieving sustainability. Following are some specific objectives:

- To present ecotourism principles and theories as guiding lines for sustainability
- To study how ecotourism is practising in Nepalese tourism industry
- To study potential of ecotourism in natural and cultural heritages of Nepal
- To analyse ecotourism impacts and challenges in the case of Nepal
- To study ecotourism policy implementation and deficit in Nepal
- To critically examine the role of ecotourism to support sustainable development.

1.2 Methodology and Material

The study is primarily based on secondary data. The sources used to complete the paper are previously published and unpublished articles and journals, study reports, progress reports, and books in ecotourism subject. An extensive internet search has also been used to gain more recent information on ecotourism. Visiting different libraries in Uppsala is also another important method to gather information. Some books such as *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development* by Martha Honey (2009), *The Encyclopaedia of Ecotourism* by David B. Weaver, and *Ecotourism in Nepal: actors and Projects and implementation* by Elin Carlsson (2001) are very significant sources of information to accomplish the paper.

1.3 Delimitation

The main constraint of this study was the lack of empirical study and entirely dependency on secondary data. The entire report is based on previously published or unpublished study reports, journals, books and other relevant resources on the topic.

Owing to economic and time constrain, it was not possible to make field visits to collect first hand data which I can be proved as key process for the scientific analysis and improve the discussion part of the paper.

1.4 Disposition

The paper includes total nine chapters. A short introduction in chapter first is talking about historical background of tourism and rapid growth of modern tourism with its impacts. Chapter 2 includes theories that mainly focus on sustainable development and theories and principles of ecotourism. General challenges and opportunities of ecotourism have been presented in chapter 3. Likewise in chapter 4, I attempt to account for details facts of tourism and its sources in Nepal. The major concern of Chapter 5 is to explain impacts of ecotourism in three dimensions (social, economic, and environmental) of sustainability. Major potential ecotourism sites in Nepal have presented in chapter 6. In chapter 7, I try to explain application of ecotourism policy implementation and its deficit. Chapter 8 of the paper includes all the findings and result analysis from various literature reviews. In chapter 9, I also attempt to suggest some specific measures and further research as major recommendations for better practice of ecotourism in Nepal. Lastly, conclusion is in the chapter 10.

Chapter 2 - Background: Theories

2.1. Sustainable Development and Tourism /Ecotourism

The genesis of sustainable development can be traced back to the 1970s when the need for conservation of environment was felt prominently for the first time. The conventional thrust was much more anthropocentric, which neglected other life systems on the Planet and then there was a first environmental meeting in Stockholm in 1972 which helped to set a foundation for sustainable development. In 1987, the concept of sustainable development was defined in the publication, *Our Common Future* by World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED, 1987) and also known as the Brundtland Commission. The Commission defines sustainable development as “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, p. 43). But over the years, many new dimensions were added and the concept was redefined, embracing the principles that sustainable development “should be more economically viable, socially just, environmentally appropriate, culturally and ethically conscious, and institutionally effective” (Payne and Raeburn: 154 quoted in Upasana, 2005). Also there were many meetings and discussions (from Bruntland to Rio meeting 1992 and Johannesburg 2002) in which all tried to put in practice of real principle and theory of sustainable development. Three pillars of sustainable development have been defined:

Ecological: According to ecological sustainability there must be efficient management and conservation of natural resources and it also includes maintenance of biodiversity, atmospheric and other ecosystems by creating appropriate policies and awareness among people (Maskay, 2000).

Economic: Economic sustainability must exist under a system in which resources are rationally and efficiently allocated so that the system must be able to produce goods and services efficiently in the long term and maintain a balance between governmental income and expenditure (Maskay, 2000 and Harris and Goodwin, 2001).

Social Sustainability: Social sustainability constitutes various issues which are very essential for sustainable development. Socially sustainable development is overloaded with different social, cultural and historical values. It needs to focus on the availability of food, shelter, health, education, work, income, security, and working condition for all equally. According to Maskey, 2000, “equity, nonviolence, fair play, and justice are concepts deeply ingrained in culture, history, and social systems of the people concerned (Maskey, 2000).” Furthermore it should also account other significant social issues such as gender equity, human right, respect of labour, equal participation, and conservation of cultural and biological heritages to enhance the sense of connectivity for social harmony and mutual cooperation through the way of promoting overall social wellbeing (Harris and Goodwin, 2001). Sustainable development, therefore, can be used to address the 20th century burning issues of inequality, poverty, hunger, climate change, and other forms of environmental and human catastrophes.

According to Maskey, sustainable development advocates:

- Conservation of resources and efficiency,
- Autonomous and self-motivated participation of all stakeholders,
- Social and economic justice and
- Respect for all forms of life

The relationship between sustainable development and ecotourism as a responsible tourism is very deep because ecotourism as a sustainable tourism advocates for the integration of social, economic, and environmental considerations in order to meet the need of both humans and the environment (Buchsbaum, 2004). As above mentioned, the concept of sustainable development also primarily based on the integration and interdependence of three key dimensions – environment, society, and economy. Thus ecotourism can be the best tool to achieve true sustainable development if it is successful to address all dimensions of sustainable development balance way.

2.2. Sustainable Tourism Development

Tourism is very beneficial industry in various ways if it is managed carefully. It is implicit that properly managed tourism will support economic growth and uplift the standard of lifestyle and also excel other forms of development in the host communities. If it is not carefully handled, it will become the major cause of various hazards in the host communities. That is why mass tourism has been recognised as a key factor that has left undesirable environmental and social impacts on host realms. The negative impacts of mass tourism are environmental social degradation, economic inflation and leakage, loss of habitats, rain forest, and species and wild-lives, and various social ills and problems. In 1992, Rio World Environmental Summit, the impacts of tourism were discussed and addressed in the Agenda 21 (McCool and Moisey, 2008). According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO, 1995) the meaning of sustainable tourism, stated in Agenda 21 for travel and tourism industry, that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunity for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems” (Sirakaya et al., 2001 p. 412, quoted in Bachsbaum, 2004). During the 1990s, the new concept of sustainable development was applied in different fields, including tourism (Hajdu, 1999). According to Hajdu (1999), the World Conference on Sustainable Tourism in 1995, organized by UNESCO, on the island of Lanzarote, produced the charter for sustainable tourism which declared that:

“Tourism development shall be on criteria of sustainability, which means that it must be ecologically bearable in the long term as well as economically viable, and ethically and socially equitable for local communities” (Gormsen, 1997, quoted by Hajdu).

In this way tourism development has been striving towards the path of sustainability, just as other current forms of development through the process of adopting principles of sustainable tourism. According to Blamey (2001), principles of sustainable tourism are: sustainable use of resources, minimum negative impacts in nature and society, maintain ecosystem, use of

holistic tourism planning strategy, promotion of local economy, maximum participation of all stakeholders and locals, excel capacity building, educating both tourists and locals about responsible tourism, and regular undertaking research. These are very essential theoretical formulas that should be implemented in the practical field then we are able to attain tangible sustainable tourism that can support required sustainable development in the context of many developing world where there is potential of ecotourism.

These days tourism has become a major part of the discussion of sustainable development because tourism has significant impact in different sectors like ecology, economy, society and culture. So tourism must respect the principles of sustainable development which can make tourism more sustainable and responsible. According to WWTC 1995, sustainable tourism development is the tourism development that meets the needs of present tourists and host realms by protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. In this way, sustainable tourism should be economically viable but doesn't deteriorate natural ecosystems and resources on which the future tourism will depend, notably the physical environment and the social fabric of host community (Swarbrook, 1995).

In the same point Wight adds:

“Tourism as it relates to sustainable development is tourism which is developed so that the nature, scale, location, and manner of development is appropriate and sustainable over time, and where the environment's ability to support other activities and the process is not impaired, since tourism cannot be isolated from other resources activities..... At the heart of sustainable tourism is a set of implicit values related to striving to integrate ecological, economic, social, and culture goals” (Wight, 1997, p. 77).

Hence the concepts of sustainable tourism as complex as sustainable development because it is a holistic way to manage all kinds of resources carefully to meet the need of ecological, social, economic, and aesthetic imperatives with encompassing other various life support systems.

Figure 2.1 shows how the integration of key components of sustainability can be made in tourism.

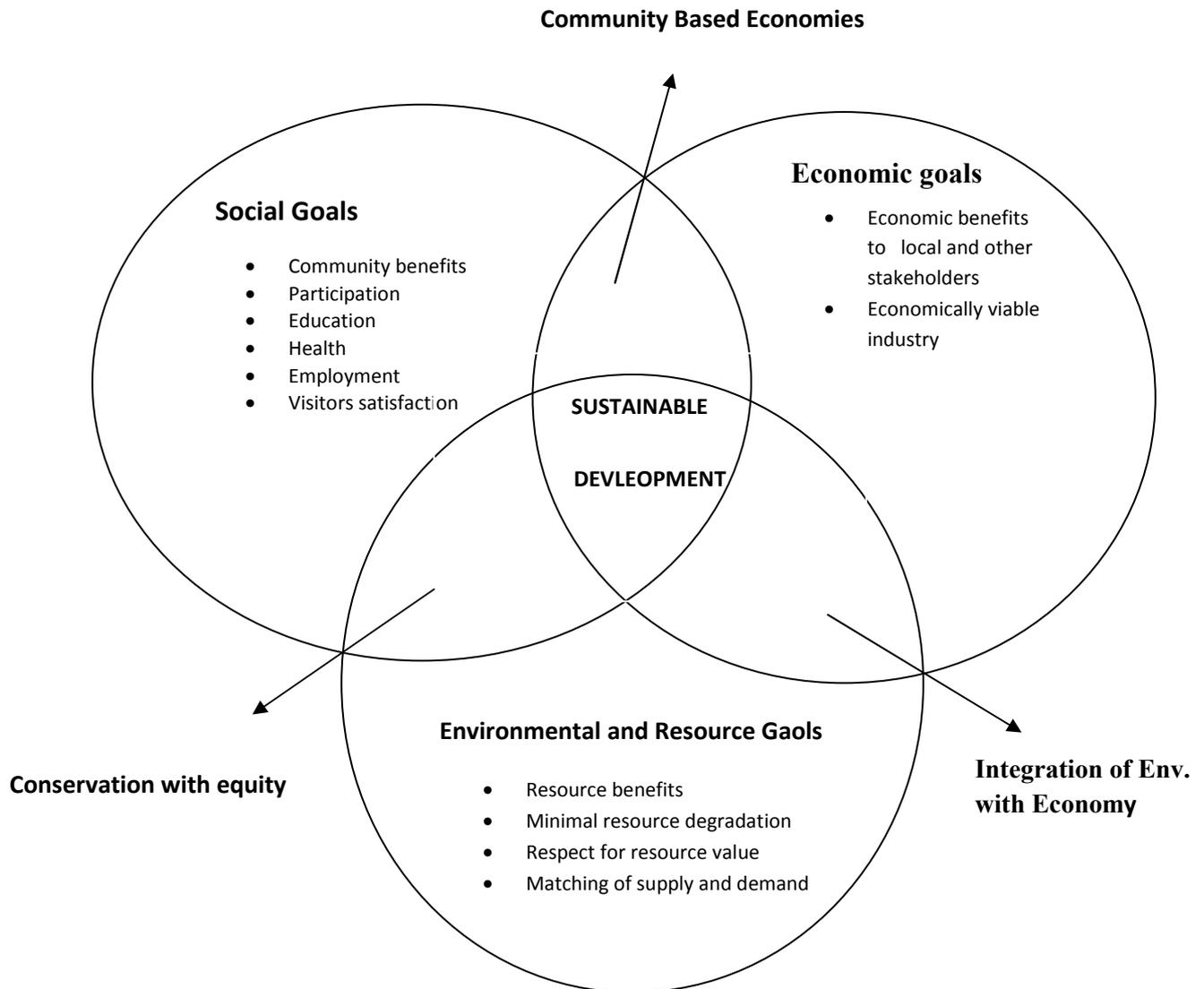


Figure 2.1 A Model of Sustainable Tourism Values and Principles

Source: Murphy and Price, 2008

2.3. Ecotourism: A Path to Sustainability

Regarding the inception of ecotourism, Blamey writes that the term ‘ecotourism’ was first used by Hetzer in 1965 when he wrote his book *Environment, Tourism, and Culture*, and came to identify four principles of responsible tourism that include – minimizing negative environmental impacts, respecting host cultures, maximizing the welfare of and benefits to the local people, and increasing tourists satisfaction (Blamey, 2000). The concept of ecotourism – born ‘within the womb’ of the environmental movement in the 1970s and 1980s

(Honey, 1999) - is a very significant alternative concept standing against mass tourism, which had created a sense of dissatisfaction and various negative impacts in environmental and social realm. The conventional tourism always focuses on income and growth instead of conservation environment and culture of destination. In many places in the world, in the name of tourism, mass of forest destruction, various pollutions, cultural decay and other many problems have been emerged. Many countries have been facing serious environmental and social disorders due to mass tourism which only insists on quantity rather than quality tourism, number rather than sound economic benefits to the place and people of the destination. Mass forest and wildlife habitat destruction in Brazil, Indonesia, and some African countries, Sea beach pollution in America, Asia, and Africa are major concern of mass tourism bi-products that contributes loss of many valuable species of ecosystem and displacement of many indigenous people from their own living places (Honey, 2008). Moreover the conventional tourism degrades local culture owing to invasion of westernization and economic disruption due to capitalistic practice and inflation. In this way alternate tourism hopes to lead the tourism in responsible way. Unlike the mass tourism, alternative tourism, albeit various in types, is in small scale, low impact, community and local based, very low leakage, very holistic and long-term. There are so many types of alternative tourism have come into existed. They are nature-based tourism, responsible tourism, adventure tourism, green tourism, village tourism, culture tourism, and other many which are regarded as better tourism than mass tourism that has already caused various undesirable and deleterious impacts. However according to Wearing and Neil(2008), in general sense, alternative tourism can be broadly defined as a form of ecotourism that sets out to be consistent with natural, social, and community values that contribute more conservation understanding, and appreciation of the environment and culture and also maximum satisfaction to both guests and hosts. Some important forms of alternative tourism are described below:

- *Nature-based Tourism*: Tourism entirely based on nature such as trekking, mountain climbing, surfing, rafting and other many activities including adventure tourism are known as nature- based tourism in which tourists should respect the intrinsic value of nature.
- *Cultural Tourism*: Tourism based on various cultural elements such as arts, music, dance, language, songs, cultural and religious heritages, traditional customs, skills and handicrafts of indigenous and local people that visitors enjoy with them and promote them.
- *Wildlife Tourism*: Tourism based on various wild-species in terrestrial, marine and arial which tourists recognize the real value of these biological assets in ecosystem of the planet.
- *Educational Tourism*: Tourism run by educated and responsible tourists about the importance of nature, culture and ecosystem and also support for nature conservation.
- *Agri-tourism*: Tourism run basically by natural attraction on private farms comprising various traditional and indigenous farm activities like cattle herding, cowboy activities, sheep searing, dairy farming gardening, horse riding and other many more.

- *Scientific Tourism*: Tourism primarily based on scientific research and other various study purposes which help to collect scientific information to acquaintance the current state of the field and support for the betterment.

The following figure is illustrating the mass tourism and major alternative tourism.

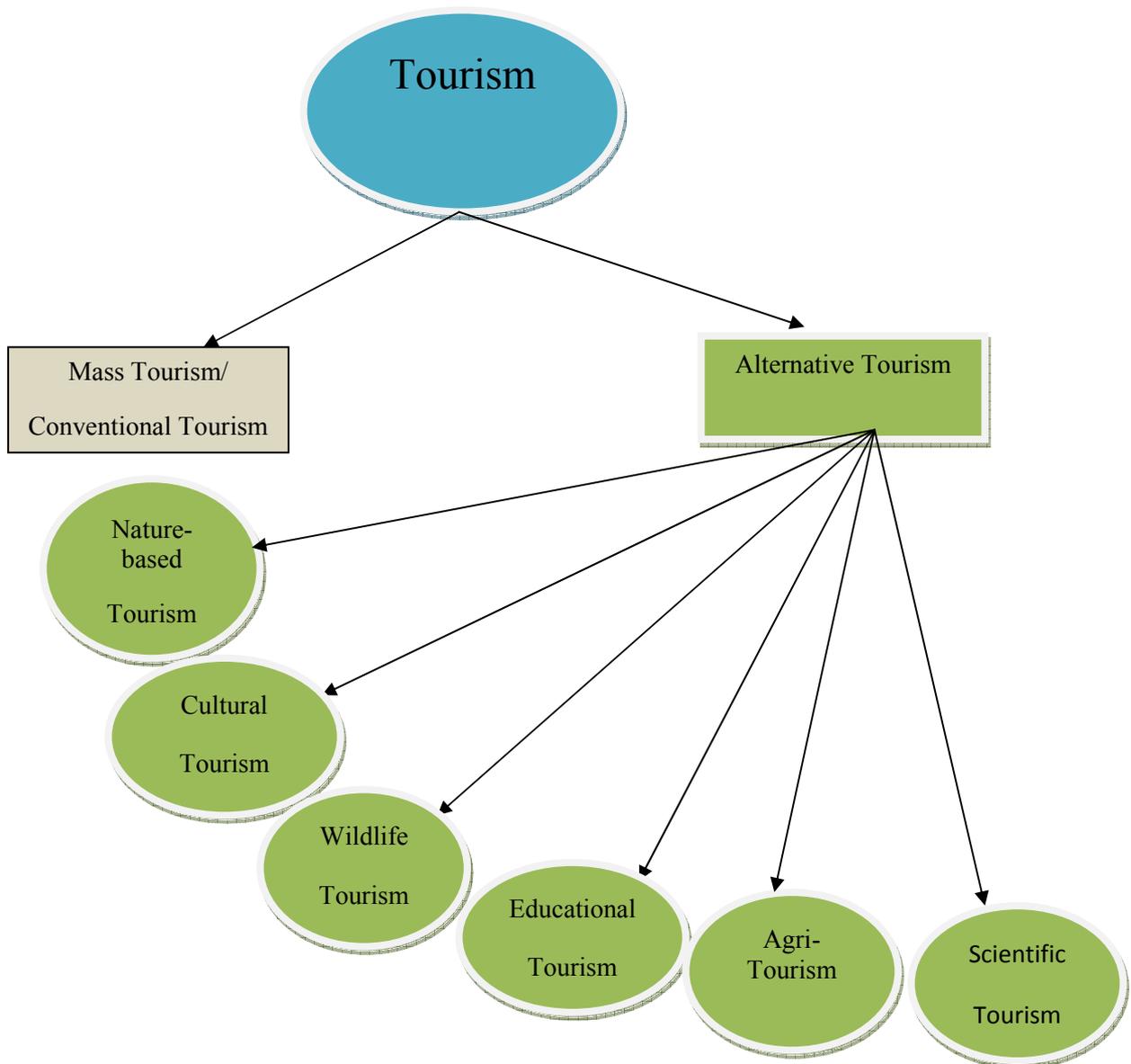


Figure 2.3 Mass Tourism and Alternative Tourism (Wearing and Neil, 2008)

These all alternative tourisms respect the principles of ecotourism because the concept of alternative tourism came into practise against mass tourism to practise responsible tourism based on conservation and development principles. Furthermore the following table shows the basic difference between mass tourism and ecotourism:

Table 2.1 Major Difference between Mass Tourism and Ecotourism

| Mass Tourism | Ecotourism |
|---|--|
| Large scale | Small scale |
| Mass building of infrastructures | Small building of infrastructures |
| Formal relation with people and place | Informal relation |
| Insensitive to local people and cultures | Sensitive to local people and cultures |
| Hedonistic | Responsible |
| Dominant economic activities (capitalistic) | Social and environmental welfares |
| Unspecific in location | Very specific in location |
| Sectoral | Holistic |

Since the late 1990s, ecotourism has become a major subject of discussion at many conferences and in professional journals, books and project reports (Weaver, 2001). Also at the same time in both the developed and developing worlds, the realization came that ecotourism could be a means of sustainability in tourism and fulfil both conservation and development goals. Honey expresses similar views regarding the importance of ecotourism in his book, *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development: Who Owns Paradise?*

“Around the world, ecotourism has been hailed as a panacea: a way to fund conservation and scientific research, protect fragile and pristine ecosystems, benefit rural communities, promote development in poor countries, enhance ecological and cultural sensitivity, instil environmental awareness and social conscience in the travel industry, satisfy and educate the discriminating tourist, and some claim, build world peace” (Honey, 1999).

From above quotation we may guess real need of ecotourism in this time when conventional tourism has been already unsustainable creating some negative impacts. When we discuss ecotourism, we cannot do so without linking it to the concept and principle of sustainability and sustainable development. In fact they are very interrelated issues. As sustainability is based on three aspects, sustainable ecotourism is also based on the balance of social,

economic, and ecological goals (Wight, 1993). Bramwell and Henry (1996) point out four basic principles of sustainable development and sustainable ecotourism tourism development:

- i) Holistic and strategic planning
- ii) Conservation of essential ecological system
- iii) Conservation of both human (cultural) and natural heritage
- iv) Long term development and productivity for the future generation.

So both sustainable tourism and sustainable development focuses on the same key issues of ecology, society, and a systemic process of development that is guided by strategic planning. The International Ecotourism Society (TIES, 2009), furthermore, issues its following principles of ecotourism: leaving minimum impact, raising awareness to the importance of environment and culture, providing maximum benefits and satisfaction to both tourists and hosts, contributing direct financial benefits for the promotion of conservation, Emphasizing for capacity building and empowerment of local people, Making aware about sensitivity of host countries' reality.

So, it seems that ecotourism can be an important tool of sustainable development that inevitably involves a balance between economic, environmental and social goals and ethical values and principles to limit in scale and minimize the environmental and social impacts of tourism (Dawson, 2008, Cristina, 2009). However the concept sounds a bit challenging in its effective practice because it has diverse roots, principles, and multiple actors. To practise ecotourism objectively, there should be a great deal of experimentation and creativity among all stake holder and the principles it has embraced. So genuine ecotourism “demands a more holistic approach to travel, one in which participations strive to respect, learn about, and benefit both the environment and local communities” (Honey, 2009). Again Honey defines ecotourism incorporating its key principles:

“Ecotourism is travel to fragile, pristine, and usually protected areas that strives to be low impacts and (often) small scale. It helps educate the traveller, provide fund for conservation, directly benefit the economic development and political empowerment of local communities, and foster respect for different cultures and human rights” (Honey, 2009).

Although it seems a kind of ideal thought, it can be made very realistic and tangible; if all principles of ecotourism have been acknowledged by all actors and put into practice seriously then it will definitely support spirit of sustainable development. However, we should also acknowledge its herculean challenges which may prevent ecotourism's success, if they are not meticulously managed. Like everything, ecotourism cannot be escaped away from its demerits. So some scholars are very critical to ecotourism and its negative impacts expected because it is based on so sensitive and pristine ecological and socio-cultural realm. According to McLaren (1998), “At its worst, eco-travel or ecotourism is ecologically destructive, economically exploitative, culturally insensitive, and green-washed travel.” More clearly the following table shows both positive impacts or benefits and negative impacts of ecotourism:

Table 2.2 Positive and Negative Impacts of Ecotourism

| Types of Impacts | Positive impacts/Benefits | Negative Impacts |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| <i>1. Environmental</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provides Maximum incentive for conservation of natural areas - Advocates for conservation with development - Educate both tourists and local about environmental ethic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indirect damage of vegetation - Decay of habitats - Disturbance of wildlife - Pollutions – air, noise, and waste - Invasion of new species -Massive commercialization of natural resources |
| <i>2. Economic</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Major means of foreign earnings -Balance economic development with proper income distribution in local communities -Increase job opportunities for local people -Sustainable infrastructures building -Promoting of local economy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Leakage of income -Inflation -Increase unhealthy economic competition and economic gap among locals |
| <i>3. Socio-cultural</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Promotion and conservation of various local cultures, traditions, arts, music, and other historical and religious heritages -Education for the importance of culture -Diversification of cultural activities -Cultural exchange | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Risk of cultural degradation due to western invasion -Various social problems -Affect of seasonality -Undesirable commercialization of cultural and religious assests -Crowd and undesirable behaviour of visitors |

Source: Neth, B. (2008), *Ecotourism as a Sustainable Rural Community Development and Natural Resource Management*

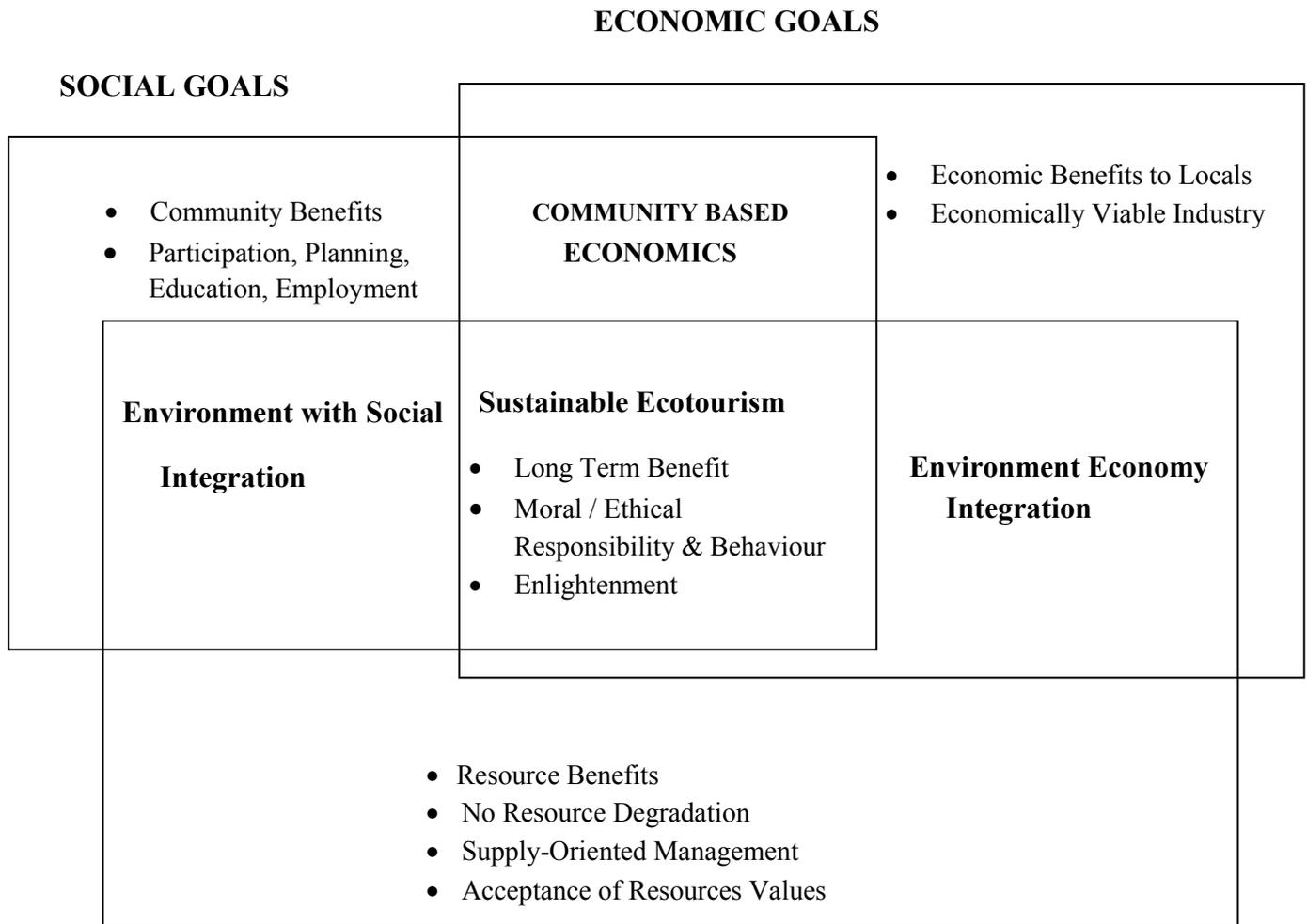
After going through these above mentioned various principles of ecotourism, we, therefore, now can say that ecotourism could be an effective way of building sustainable community development in many developing countries like Nepal where there are various problems. Nepal is aiming to practise more sustainable ecotourism to solve various rooted problem of the country like poverty, social inequality, and degradation of ecosystem. Furthermore Nepal has maximum potential of ecotourism that can contribute for better use of natural resources, economic prosperity, and social wellbeing in local community level. But it has not been yet proved as efficient as it is expected or envisioned because there is lack of commitment and implementation deficit. There are many countries in the world which have very successful story about ecotourism as the best model to achieve true sustainable development with better conservation of ecosystem and perfect community development.

Cambodia, after long political instability, has adopted community based ecotourism, as an integrated development tool to conserve protected areas and other biological and rural destinations of the country. According to Neth (2008), “with this frame, ecotourism in Cambodia, has become a promising tool for promoting protected areas’ objectives in providing incentives to maintain ecosystem integrity, biodiversity, and improving the livelihoods of local communities. (2)”

Ecotourism contributes to conserve pristine ecotourism and biodiversity efficiently with the help of revenue. It is proved by an ecotourism project in The Kakum canopy walkway with rainforest in Kakum National Park, Ghana, which was designed and built by Conservation International. Its contribution for reforestation and rehabilitation of visitation and other system is so remarkable from 2,000 in 1992 to 70,000 in 1999. Now it has become a luring centre for both tourists and researchers (Conservation International, 2000).

A real model of ecotourism is a combination of conservation and development in which all stakeholders and actors of the industry sense sustainable development by uplifting the overall life standard of local people (Cristina, 2004). Although we can define ecotourism in different ways, the major criteria for ecotourism are the activities, which must be environmentally and culturally sensitive so that there must be conservation as well as maximum benefits for local communities and also it must be self sustaining within the context of the natural and cultural habitats in which it takes place (Goodwin, 1996: 338; cited by Himberg, 2004). The following model displays sustainable ecotourism values and principles along with major issues that should be taken into account:

Figure 2.2 Sustainable Ecotourism Values and Principles Model



ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS

Sources: Wight (1998) in Swarbrooke (1999)

Although there is lack of common definition of sustainable ecotourism, ecotourism basically emphasizes the integration three key goals of sustainability-environmental, economic and social goals. Above figure also illustrates the same integration with major focus given in various values linking with main goals of sustainability. Owing to its complex integration with various values, ecotourism is a bit challenging in its objective practice.

Chapter 3 - Ecotourism: Challenges and Opportunities

3.1 Challenges of ecotourism

Day by day the importance and scope of ecotourism is expanding globally because the sustainability dimension of ecotourism doesn't only advocate for safeguarding of the biodiversity but also incorporates many areas like social, cultural and economic issues. The ecotourism concept, which was incepted in the 1960s, became a key issue of discussion for ecologists in the 1970s, accepted by tourism researchers in 1980s and considered as a fast growing sector of tourism in the 1990s, has been considered theoretically sound but hard to implement (Weaver, 2001 and Fennell, 2002 quoted in Higham, 2007). Blamey (1997) also agrees that most ecotourism definitions are too abstract and a challenge to its operation.

The world tourism is continuously and rapidly growing while the world's natural capital is under threat, due to for example rapid loss of biodiversity and unfavoured global climatic fluctuation. Many local and indigenous communities have also been critical to tourism and the effort to support them has been inadequate. Nevertheless, WTO, UNEP, and other international agencies stress that ecotourism has achieved a great deal in the last five years and believe that it is a good idea even if it is striving with many challenges (Global Ecotourism Conference, 2007):

3.1.1 Complex Concept: The concept embraces various issues with a complex web of stockholders that must be addressed carefully to practice true ecotourism. And it also overloaded with environmental, social and economical imperatives. So it seems very broad area that should be handled with care to achieve sustainability. Considering these all issues, sustainable ecotourism is not as easy as it is envisioned. Supporting these ideas, Honey (2009) also says, "it is a set of interconnected principles and theories whose full implementation presents multilayered problems and challenges that are needed be deeper investigation, more rigorous analysis, and more careful theatrical work."

3.1.2 Misuse of the Term: The term 'ecotourism' today unfortunately sometimes used so loosely that all travels qualify (Shore, 1996). Due to this abuse it cannot be anchored with its core value. Honey also adds " In many cases, opposite trend is dominant: the principles underlying ecotourism are being 'green- washed' by superficial, feel-good rhetoric and minor cost saving modification that do not transform tourism into a tool that protects the environment, benefits local communities, and educate the tourists" (Honey, 2009 p. 33). So according to Global Ecotourism Conference (GEC, 07), the ecotourism community faces significant challenges in awareness building and education and should actively work together against adverse impacts of tourism industry.

3.1.3 Lack of Certification: Although the concept of ecotourism is one of the most significant issues today, there is no clear standard set of guidelines for ecotourism, and no formal system accreditation by which green businesses can be rated (Lindsay, 2003). It's a great challenge for ecotourism certification to include the complexity and apply broad standards to local context, and it also needs effective enforcement through up to date inspections from reliable authorities. Therefore Honey (2009) has also pointed that "to

standardize green tourism certification programme” is a major challenge since the current crop of tourism certification programmes is spread unevenly around the world.

3.1.4 Leadership and Strategy Formulation: Concrete strategies for ecotourism development in various developing countries are, in fact, challenging issue. In addition, to encourage the active participation of all interested stakeholders – local people, tourism organizations, state bodies and tourists themselves is not an easy task (MOPE, 2004). To accomplish the main goal of ecotourism, there should be concrete leadership and a strategy that can help to facilitate the communication among stakeholders, access to development resources, local support and participation, local capabilities to maintain ecotourism development and development power and control over natural resources (Neth, 2008).

3.1.5 Capacity Building: The next challenge of ecotourism development is capacity building in local communities and other interest groups who should be capable with knowledge, money and skills. Generally, capacity building in ecotourism development in many developing countries like Nepal is run by different NGOs, and is very short and entirely fund dependent. In order to be able to run the programme on a long-term and autonomous basis, it should be local and community based.

3.1.6 Implementation Deficit: Problems with the implementation of ecotourism seems very common in this age. To implement effective ecotourism development is a great challenge, because we have to take into account in various issues like eco-business and eco-marketing strategy, sustainable energy systems, proper waste management, respect of human and animal rights, women’s empowerment, sustainable consumption systems, political instability and controlled corruption, power and benefit sharing among rich and poor, management of conflict among interest groups and controlling social problems. Undertaking all these issues for the best ecotourism implementation is a kind of Herculean task. Swarbrooke, therefore, writes that ecotourism as a tool of sustainable development is an impossible dream and an irrelevant issue because according to him today’s ecotourism will ultimately turn into “mass tourism guided by ego-tourism” (Swarbrooke, 1999).

Chapter 4 - Ecotourism in Nepal

4.1 Background

Figure 4.1- A map of Nepal with National parks, Wildlife Reserves, Conservation areas and Mountain peaks, Highways and Airways



Source-www.astrek.com/asiantrekking/nepal_intro/nepa...

Nepal, a small landlocked country, has an area of 147,181km² (0.3% of Asia) and lies between two giant nations- China in the north and India in the south, east and west. Nepal has very typical topography which is occupied by 83% mountains and hills and 17% plain or lowland (CBS, 2006), which is also known as Terai that is very fertile and feeds the whole country. The plain also has some popular wildlife sanctuaries and culturally significant places like the birth place of Lord Buddha.

The population of Nepal is about 27 million (CBS, 2006) that mainly derives from Indo-Aryan and Mongol race (Thapa, 2005). The country, after being republic, has been declared as secular in religion. However, still Hinduism and Buddhism are two key religions which have great impact in the social and cultural fabric of the country.

Currently, for administrative purposes, the nation is divided into 5 development regions, 14 zones, 75 districts, but upcoming constitution may bring great change in this division. Although Nepal is tiny in its size, it has vast diversity in its topography with great climatic variations (from tropical to tundra), and diversified natural ecosystems, biological and

social settings. Since long ago, due to the fascinating majestic Himalayas, breath-taking natural beauty and enchanting cultural heritage, Nepal has been a destination centre for tourists from of all over the world.

Nepal's protected areas are vast repositories of priceless biodiversity, which includes 863 species of birds, about 640 species of butterflies, 6500 species of flowering plants, 175 mammal species and other important plants species and herbs of medicinal use (DNPWC, 2009). Nepal's protected areas, which include nine National Parks, three wildlife reserves, three conservation areas and many buffer zones and hunting reserves are the prime sources of tourist attraction in the country. The total area of the protected area occupies 28999km², 19.70 percent and 50 percent visitors come to visit protected areas and it is also believed that 60 percent tourists' activities related with ecotourism (DNPWC, 2008). According to the annual report of DNPWC 2007-2008, total of 265082 tourists visited in different protected areas and the revenue collected was 1.6 million US dollar (DNPWC, 2009).

The aforementioned trend towards mass tourism in Nepal is starting to produce adverse impacts in socio- cultural and environmental realm of the host destinations. Thus it is very crucial time to take action against these impacts by promoting and practising ecotourism as responsible tourism in the main tourism sites of the country. Realizing these sentiments, Nepalese government and other tourism authorities have introduced various environmental and ecotourism projects have been involving in the protected areas of the country. The main motives of all projects are to preserve unique ecosystem with valuable and endangered flora and fauna and cultural heritages that are regarded as main constituents of ecotourism. The following paragraphs are the brief account of major protected areas of the country:

- **Chitwan National Park:** It is one of the heavily visited parks in the country. Its area is 932 km² and includes various special flora and fauna, including endangered species. The park is inhabited by 570 species of flowering plants, 40 species of mammals, 486 bird species, and 17 species of reptiles this diversity attracts visitors' attention in different ways. Endangered plants of the park are tree fern and screw pine, and endangered fauna is the one horned rhino, royal Bengal tiger, wild elephant and sloth bear (Kunnar, 2002). The park was declared as World Heritage site in 1983.
- **Sagarmatha National Park:** It is one of most popular parks owing to the Mt. Everest (8848masl.), next to it, and the park that also includes the Sherpa communities, well-known for climbing and a small lake with migrating birds and many other important species of flora and fauna such as musk deer, the Tibetan wolf, and some 36 breeding bird species. It is also in the list of the World Natural Heritages (Thapa, 2004).
- **Makalu-Barun National Park:** The National Park (1500 km²), which is surrounded by a conservation area (830 km²), has unique physical setting with all kinds of ecological regions ranging from tropical to alpine and it is also the area

with the highest rainfall and many animals and plants species (Thapa, 2004). Thapa presents that the area inhabits 27 forest plants with 3128 species of flowering plants including 56 endangered plants, 421 bird species, 88 mammals, 43 species of reptiles, 16 amphibians and 315 species of butterfly.

- **Shey-Phoksundo National Park:** Being the largest National park (3555 km²), the park is also known as the Trans- Himalaya region which is varied in terms of its topography and climate and a place of more diversified animals and plants species including snow leopard and 105 bird species as compared to other national parks of the country.
- **Royal Bardia National Park:** The Park lies in the western plain area of the country with the area of 968km². Like other national parks, it is also full of biodiversity such as dense Sal (strong wood) forest with tiger, elephant, rhino, deer, crocodile, and some rare Gangetic dolphins.
- **Annapurna Conservation Area:** It is the largest conservation area (7629 km²) which contains some of the highest mountain peaks and deepest valleys, for example the Kali Gandaki River Valley, some popular trekking destinations, impressive waterfalls and many exotic scenes. Having a diversified climate, the area is also inhabited by diversified flora and fauna including endangered species. The park has 22 species of forest type with 1226 plant species 101 species of reptiles, 22 species of amphibians, 478 species of birds (UPZRS and EU, 2009).
- **Kanchenjunga Conservation Area:** It is an important conservation area which includes the third highest mountain of the world and also is inhabited by many significant animal and plant species including some endangered animals like snow leopard. The area is also very famous for Hindu and Buddhist cultural heritage sites such as a century old Tibetan monastery and Hindu pilgrimage site
- **Manasulu Conservation Area:** The area covers 1663 km² where there are 2000 species of plants, 110 kinds of birds, 33species of mammals including endangered snow leopard, musk deer, blue sheep and Himalayan thar (Thapa, 2004).

Beside these above mentioned protected areas, there are other National Parks and Wildlife Reserves, hunting zones and buffer zones which are also making significant efforts for developing ecotourism with conservation programmes in which the Department of National park and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) is playing key role (DNPWC, 2009).

4.1.1 Tourism Trends of Nepal

Regarding the history of tourism in Nepal, it was pioneered by mountain tourism, beginning in 1949, which is also the year Nepal opened for tourists (Uppadhaya, 2009). The connections through direct flights to Nepal from different Asian and European countries made Nepal a feasible destination for the tourists around the world. Currently, the tourism industry in Nepal is growing very fast owing to the development of all necessary infrastructures such as an international airport in Kathmandu, full-fledged international level hotels, well- connected domestic air and road traffics and establishment of public and private agencies in the field of travel and trekking. All these activities were an instrumental force to the development of tourism in the country. The Nepalese government also regards tourism development as an important support to the national economy. Tourism contributes with 4 percent of GDP and 16 percent of total foreign exchange earnings of the country and more it also gave direct and indirect employment to 257,000 people in 1998 (Economic Survey of Nepal from 2007 to 2008). The growth of tourism has been fast in Nepal: in 1960 there were only 4017 tourists, while the number reached 491,504 in 1999 and is expected to reach one million in 2011 (Thapa, 2008 and MoTCA, 2009). The following table reflects the current trends of tourist arrivals of the country:

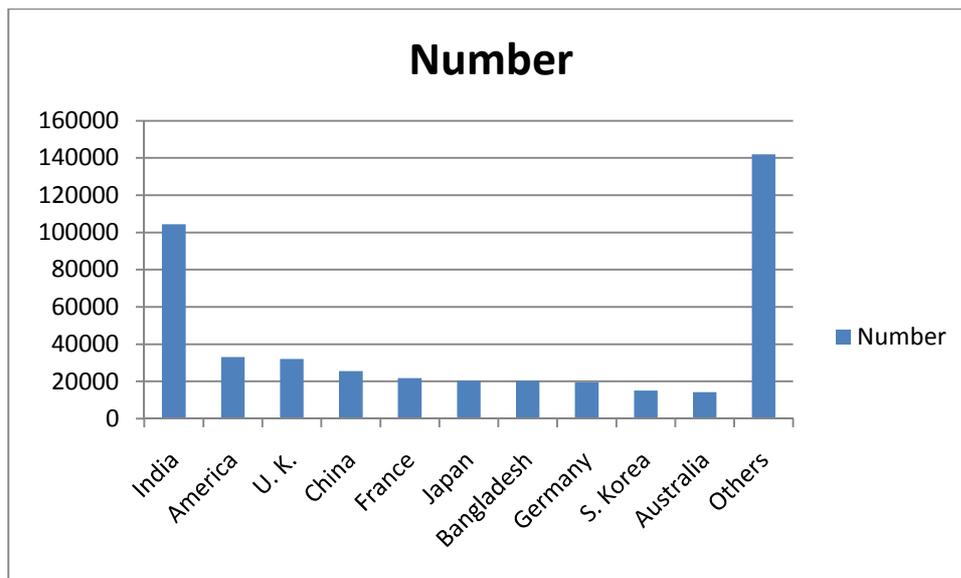
Table 4.1- Annual Tourists Arrivals in Nepal, 1995-2009

| Year | Total No. | Arrival by Air | Arrival by land | Average length of stay | Average growth |
|-------|-----------|----------------|-----------------|------------------------|----------------|
| 1995 | 363,395 | 325,035 | 38,360 | 11.27 | 11.3 |
| 1996 | 393,613 | 343,246 | 50,367 | 13.50 | 8.3 |
| 1997 | 421,857 | 371,145 | 50,712 | 10.49 | 7.2 |
| 1998 | 463,684 | 398,008 | 65,376 | 10.76 | 9.9 |
| 1999 | 491,504 | 421,243 | 70,261 | 12.28 | 6.0 |
| 2000 | 463,646 | 376,914 | 86,732 | 11.88 | -5.7 |
| 2001 | 361,237 | 299,514 | 69723 | 11.93 | -22.1 |
| 2002 | 275,468 | 218660 | 56,808 | 7.92 | -23.7 |
| 2003 | 338,132 | 275,438 | 62,694 | 9,60 | 22.7 |
| 2004 | 385,297 | 297,335 | 87,962 | 13.51 | 13.9 |
| 2005 | 375,398 | 277,346 | 98,052 | 9.09 | -2.6 |
| 2006 | 383,926 | 283,819 | 100,107 | 10.20 | 2.3 |
| 2007 | 526,705 | 360,713 | 165,992 | 11.96 | 37.2 |
| 2008 | 500,277 | 374,661 | 125,616 | 11.78 | -5.0 |
| 2009 | 510283 | 378,712 | 131,571 | 12.1 | 2.0 |
| 2011* | 1000000 | 700000 | 300000 | 15.00 | 50.0 |

Source-Annual Tourist Statistical Report of the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2008,*expect.

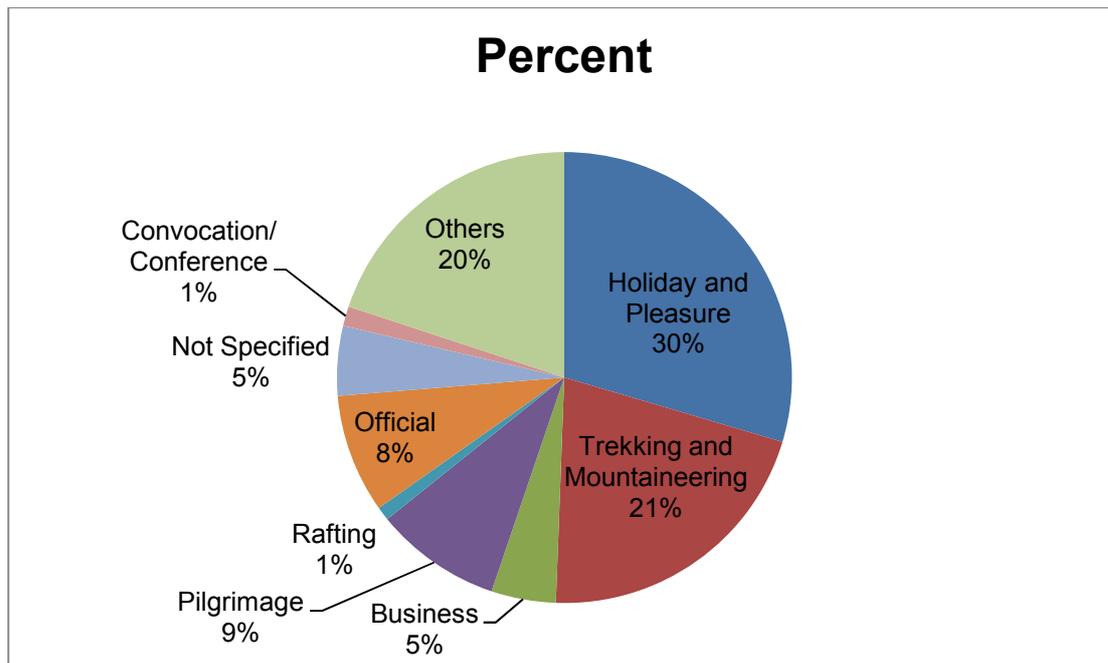
In Table 4.1, we see the heterogeneous growth rate of tourism in Nepal, which is due to different reasons like a decade long (1996-2006) Maoist insurgency, political instability, terrorism threats, and international economic depression. However, although post conflict Nepal is embracing a fragile transition, the Nepalese government is attempting to lead tourism more effectively, with a new tourism policy to increase the growth rate (The Himalaya Times, 2009). This includes declaring 2011 as ‘Nepal Tourism Year’, expecting to host about one million tourists and carrying out feasibility studies to open new trekking and mountaineering routes (The Kathmandu Post, 2008). According to the immigration department of international airport, Nepal, there are 448769 international arrivals from different countries in Nepal by air in year 2010. This is 18 percent increment of last year arrivals that is 379322 in the same way. Furthermore from the data the repetition rate is about 40 percent (The Kantipur Daily National Newspaper, 2011). This is very good sign for the upcoming year, 2011 that has been already declared as tourism year expecting to host a million tourists.

Figure 4.2-Tourists Arrivals from Major Ten Destination Nationalities by Air, 2010.



Source- Annual Tourist Statistical Report of the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2010

Figure 4.3- Tourist Arrival by Purpose of Visit, 2008



Sources- Annual Tourist Statistical Report of the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation, 2008

4.1.2 Principal Tourist Activities in Nepal

Nepal is a “playground” for tourists with different activities which are described briefly below:

4.1.2.1 Rural Tourism: Nepal is a rural village based country where majority of people are residing in remote, very remote villages with various ethnicities where tourists can get a real sense of the unique life style and culture. Also village tourism supports different significant activities such as forestation, transformation of agriculture, conservation, income generation, exchange of culture and knowledge etc. (NTB, 2008).

4.1.2.2 Mountain Climbing: Nepal is famous for its unique mountain landscape which is the reason that many tourists visit Nepal. Out of 1792 mountain peaks, as many as 1310 are above 6000 metre high, but only 326 peaks are open for climbing (TAAN, 2008).

4.1.2.3 Trekking: Nepal also possesses wonderful trekking destinations with beautiful scenic vistas that attract tourists more and convince them to stay more days.

4.1.2.4 Visiting Religious and Cultural Sites: Nepal has many important religious and cultural sites with historic and artistic significance particularly in Hinduism and Buddhism.

UNESCO has listed ten cultural and religious sites of Nepal as 'World Heritage Sites' (NTB, 2008).

4.1.2.5 Rafting: In Nepal, there are numerous rivers, among which some are very fast flowing rivers which are excellent for rafting purposes. Through rafting tourists can also explore the natural and cultural beauty of the country.

4.1.2.6 Bungee Jumping: Nepal has many thrilling Bungee jumping sites that provide tourists with great adventurous experiences with fun in life. Bhoite Koshi site is the main site for these activities.

Besides these, there are so many other activities, such as **rock climbing, mountain biking, jungle safaris, paragliding, hot air ballooning, mountain flights, visiting museums, shopping indigenous products, meditation,** etc. These activities are more or less related with ecotourism in the form of nature, wildlife and culture based tourism. However the proper management of all activities is always remain major consideration for effective practice of ecotourism in Nepal.

Besides various benefits of tourism, tourism also has severe adverse effects such as unwanted pressure on natural resources, environmental pollution, loss of natural habitats and deterioration of natural vista, depletion of water resources, cultural erosion, and increases use of drugs and growth of criminal activities. So tourism needs to be developed while embracing the twin goals of local development and environmental conservation. In this point, ecotourism could be a tool to curb or check the adverse effects of the mass tourism. The tourism industry in Nepal also eventually has adopted the principles of ecotourism as its key issues in developing responsible and advantageous tourism in the country.

4.1.3 Efforts of Ecotourism Development in Nepal

From above mentioned trends of tourism growth in Nepal it is easy to speculate that tourism in Nepal is gradually heading towards mass tourism. So it seems the right time to implement the principles of ecotourism in the growing field of tourism so that it can help to conserve natural ecosystems and promote local culture while protecting generation old cultural and religious heritages by curbing the fast growth of tourism. Ecotourism could provide maximum benefits for local communities with environmental conservation through maximum involvement of all stakeholders of the tourism industry to aware the need of ecotourism as a responsible tourism to promote balance development in the country.

It is no doubt that proper use of ecotourism can be very beneficial in various aspects. Nepal is blessed with various resources for attracting tourists in different ways. These resources need to be utilized properly, and ecotourism can be the best vehicle to deliver socio-economic enhancement of remote and rural areas and also to safeguard the environment of host community (K.C., 2002).

Nepal has long experienced the need of ecotourism since there has been an increased flow of tourists and its adverse impacts started to be felt different fields. So Nepal aims to develop ecotourism as a key vehicle supported by different national and international agencies

focusing in environmental conservation and poverty alleviation. There are various national and international organizations such as a Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC) mainly involved in developing ecotourism and other international agencies like World conservation Union/ International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), and International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development(ICIMOD) have also been persistently supporting the development of ecotourism in Nepal (Carlsson, 2001 and Thapa, 2002).

Nepal enacted the Natural Park and Wildlife Conservation Act in 1973. DNPWC is an important agency, working with a network of 9 National Parks, 3 Wild life reserves, 3 conservation areas and one hunting reserve together with 11 buffer zones around National parks occupying a total area of 28,999 km² or 19.70 percent of the total land of the country (DNPWC, 2008).

It is hard to say exactly when ecotourism had started. But it is generally believed that the importance and necessity of ecotourism was realized significantly with the enactment of the National Park and Wildlife Conservation Act in 1973 and establishment of various natural Protected Areas in the hope of conservation of ecosystem and development in community and other sector in an integrated way. Furthermore the establishment of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC), coordinating the networks of all protected areas with various ecotourism programmes, excels more for the promotion of ecotourism in Nepal. Later other many significant efforts such as establishment of Annapurna Conservation Area Project in 1986 and special focus on ecotourism in Ninth Five Year Plan (1997- 2002) also paved the way to flourish ecotourism in the Nepalese tourism industry. ACAP is one of the most successful ecotourism projects in South Asian region that support nature based ecotourism with other various conservation and development programmes efficiently (Thapa, 2004). The Industrial Enterprises Act, 1992 and Environmental Protection Act, 1996 also help to aware people about environmental protection and eco-friendly activities. Now ecotourism gets heightened every single tourism activities. However to achieve its objective implementation, in the context of Nepalese tourism industry, much more has to be done in days to come.

4.1.4 Ecotourism in Nepal

4.1.4.1 Annapurna Conservation Area Project: This project is established in 1986 covering vast area of almost five district of western development region of the country. The project, supported by many national and international organizations, is well-known for its outstanding model for natural resource conservation and community development (MoCTCA, 2002). Its principal objectives are:

- Sustainable resource management
- Maximum participation of local people
- Promoting alternative energy to minimize the negative impacts of tourism
- Poverty alleviation

- Integrated agriculture and livestock development
- Environmental awareness for both host and guest communities.
- Agro- forestry and community development
- Heritage conservation with control tourism
- Self-sustaining tourism

4.1.4.2 Ghalegaon – Sikles Ecotourism Project (GSEP): It is also one of the successful ecotourism projects of the country, established in 1992, designed by KMTNC and ACAP, and funded by Asian Development Bank for tourism infrastructure development. The main aim of the project is to contribute conservation of natural resources and local community development through responsible tourism. The project has been doing various significant tasks in the field of nature conservation such as foot trail construction, forest zoning, river training, sustainable forest harvesting, promoting alternative energy device from solar, micro hydro projects and fuel efficient ovens (Basnet, 2003).

The project also actively involves with other various activities like sustainable infrastructure development, school education, community toilets and drinking water programmes, various trainings related with tourism, vegetable production and leadership training. It also focuses on capacity building of locals with maximum participation for promoting local cultures and environmental preservation. According to MoCTCA (2002), the project also support for various research works for identifying important and rare flora and fauna and non-timber forest items, socio-economic survey, and biodiversity conservation research with for utilization revenues collected from entry fee from the tourists

4.1.4.3 Kanchenjunga Community Based Ecotourism Project: The project initiated its major plan since 1998 with 84 tourists. However it facing overcrowd with trekkers whom leave out much garbage and rubbish. Thus the project has major duty to manage wastes and conserve natural environment with the help of maximum involvement of locals. In the area, there two major projects, the Kanchenjunga conservation project and Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation programme which are working together for sustainable development of infrastructure, nature and culture conservation, ecotourism development, agro-forestry, and capacity building for local people (Basnet, 2003).

4.1.4.4 Manaslu Nature Based Ecotourism Project: The project was established 1999 with special purpose of conservation and community development. The area is now being managed by KMTNC to develop the area as Annapurna Conservation Area Project model to manage the area effectively for the promotion responsible tourism to provide the maximum benefit to local people through their genuine involvement (Basnet, 2003). To conserve the area and develop ecotourism in the park, there is a project named Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Programme which is working for environmental conservation, participation of local people, supporting local economy, development of infrastructures, and supporting disadvantaged gender, ethnic groups (Basnet, 2003).

4.1.4.5 Upper Mustang Biodiversity Conservation Project: It is established in 2000 with key aim of preserving biodiversity and cultural heritages through sustainable tourism management. The project also basically focuses on capacity building of local for their active participation in planning, management, and monitoring of the project which can enhance the lifestyle of local people and conservation of local environment (Basnet, 2003). The project was supported by ACAP in various aspects to gain the required success of the projects. The key achievements of the project are:

- Training for local people to enhance their skill in plantation, wildlife management, survey techniques and biodiversity database arrangement
- Conducting awareness about importance of ecosystem and cultural heritages and cleanliness
- Training for various aspects related with responsible tourism for generating income
- Encourage both tourist and locals to respect local environment and culture.
- Maximum local involvement of local people

4.1.4.6 Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Program (TRPAP): The project is funded by great international organizations such as UNDP, DFID, and SNV keeping major goal of alleviating poverty in Nepal through sustainable tourism development policy. Project's major focus on basically disadvantaged and underprivileged men and women, lower castes, and marginalized ethnic groups. The programme also emphasizes for maximum participation of grassroots for decision making in policy making so that they can get maximum benefit. The programme is always aiming to design such remarkable tourism model in various touristic areas to promote sustainable development by enhancing local economy through promoting various ecotourism activities such as tour guide, local products, home - stay, cottage industry etc. the project has been successful in its objective in various tourism sites like Pokhara, Chitwan National Park where local people are more active in their income generation.(Bajracharaya, 2007)

4.1.4.7. Simikot, Humla Development Package: The project mainly emphasizes on conserving Buddhist cultural and religious heritages and natural resources of north- western region of the country which comprises trekking route to Mt. Kailash and Mansarovar Lake – a centre of pilgrimage. The package is getting financial support from Netherland Development Organization (SNV) and local networks in Humla to run various significant works such as paving the trails, management of waste, sanitation and drainage, improving different lodges and religious heritages. And it also conducts skill development training to village guides, porters, local lodge owners to increase the involvement of locals (KMTNC, 2001).

4.1.4.8 Others: There are so many other ecotourism projects which are effectively through various way to support ecotourism directly or indirectly. They are **Makalu Barun Development Package, Tansen Development Package, Dolpa Development Package, The Partnership for Quality Tourism Project** etc. are other more ecotourism projects work in various natural and tourism sites for promoting ecotourism effectively.

4.1.5 Who are the key actors?

4.1.5.1 State

The role of the state is significant in the promotion of ecotourism in Nepal. The Nepal government has a special ministry named Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation (MoCTCA) and the National Planning Commission, which are responsible for major duties related to tourism, including developing planning and analysis, implementation, execution and promotion for the industry. But the ministry's budget is insufficient to handle the programmes effectively (Carlsson, 2001). Furthermore, the government has a policy to coordinate all stakeholders and promote ecotourism in Nepal to get real benefits and conservation side by side. Thus recognizing the importance of ecotourism, the ministry has a vision to make its diversified scope to achieve maximum gains from its dynamic and creative utilization.

4.1.5.2 Nepal Tourism Board (NTB)

Nepal Tourism Board, designed as a partnership between the government of Nepal and the private sector travel industries of Nepal, has been empowered to work as a major national tourism organization (NTB, 2009). The major functions of Nepal Tourism Board are:

- To develop Nepal as internationally popular destination
- To promote, expand, and develop responsible tourism enterprises
- To make strategic policy for earning maximum foreign exchange with maximum jobs
- To conduct scientific research for quality tourism
- To develop all infrastructures of tourism sustainably

In 1999, NTB got the “Green Business Award, 99”, given by the European Incentive and Business and Travel and Meetings EIBTM in Geneva Switzerland. The motivation stated: “For developing and sustaining tourism through environmentally friendly and strongly promoting ecotourism” (Carlsoon, 2001)

4.1.5.3 Department of National Park and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC): The department is a governmental organization which is dedicated to conserving the country's major ecosystems, unique natural and cultural heritages. The department has now the responsibility for 9 National Parks, 3 conservation areas, 3 wildlife reserves, one hunting reserve, and 11 buffer zones. DNPWC also gives protection to the valuable and endangered wildlife species and it also promoting scientific research for the preservation of wildlife genetic diversity. One of the specific activities of the department is to regulate ecotourism to improve the socio-economic condition of local people (MOPE, 2004). The department is undertaking some guiding principles such as- i) Conservation of Biodiversity; ii) Promote

ecotourism to enhance the socio-economic condition of local community; iii) Scientific management of National parks, Wildlife reserves, and Buffer zones around the protected area; iv) Creating awareness to all stakeholders through capacity building process; v) Sustainable development of infrastructures in the protected area (DNPWC, 2009).

4.1.5.4 King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC): This is an important national autonomous non- governmental and non- profit organization, although some projects are either funded or integrated by the Nepalese government. The main objectives of KMTNC are to assist the government of Nepal in promoting, conserving, enhancing, and managing protected area management systems, to promote and conduct applied wildlife research in parks, reserves, and conservation areas, and to raise funds to support conservation efforts in Nepal (Carlsson, 2001; MOPE, 2004). The Trust's activities are spread from the tropical plains of Chitwan and Bardia in the low lands to the Annapurna and Manaslu regions of the high Himalayas encompassing the Trans Himalaya region of upper Mustang and Manag. Among these project activities, Carlsson says "ACAP might be considered as most important and also most well- known conservation project in Nepal" (Carlsson, 2001). ACAP mainly focuses on the three areas of namely community, tourism development, and conservation. Some of the major achievements of the project, according to Carlsson, are the installation of 482 back boilers, 569 solar heaters, 40 space heaters, and 708 improved stoves at private lodges and households with the aim of reducing the stress on forest resources (Carlsson, 2001). The project also supports various other fields such as education, cultural promotion, infrastructure improvement and health.

4.1.5.5 INGOs, NGOs and Grass-roots organizations: Various INGOs and NGOS are also key actors for promoting ecotourism in Nepal. Some of the most important international organizations are the World Conservation Union (IUCN), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the SNV Nepal, WWF Nepal, and International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD). These have been playing a pioneer role continuously in the development of ecotourism through their various conservation and development activities (Carlsson, 2001; Thapa, 2004). These organizations are also dedicated to enhance the quality of tourism, which means improvement of tourism products, services and other infrastructure and reducing negative impacts on Nepal's natural, social cultural environments.

Besides above mentioned organizations, WWF- Nepal has also been supporting various conservations programmes in Nepal during the last decades. Today WWF focuses on integrated and developmental programmes that emphasize sustainable human development. It also works to address the issues of pollution and environmental hazards. Although WWF doesn't have any particular 'ecotourism projects' in Nepal, it indirectly supports and benefits ecotourism development.

4.1.5.6 International Lending Agencies

There are many international lending agencies which have been supporting ecotourism in Nepal for a long time. The major agencies are The World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and USAID which are lending big amounts for supporting various projects of tourism,

and especially ecotourism, in Nepal. Recently the Asian Development Bank has sponsored an ecotourism project planned together with Nepal Tourism Board. The aim of the project is to invest in conservation and development by restoring existing and building basic sustainable infrastructure such as roads, bridges, eco-lodges, schools, hospitals, training centres airports, parks etc. to promote the numbers of tourists and make their access to new destinations easier. This has a clear focus of decentralization of tourist destination.

Besides aforementioned key actors of ecotourism, there are many other actors who are also playing significant roles for supporting ecotourism projects in Nepal. They are Aqua Birds Unlimited Camp (ABUC), Centre for Development Research (CCODER), Nepal River Conservation Trust (NRCT), Kathmandu Environmental and Education Project (KEEP), and Sagarmatha (Everest) Pollution Control Committee (SPCC). Furthermore the tourism industry itself has formed into more than 20 different industry associations that contribute to lead the industry into wider scale. There are other NGOs such as SNV-Nepal, DFID, Mountain Institute and TRPAP that are actively working in promotion of ecotourism in the country. And other very key institutions are Trekking Agents Association of Nepal (TAAN), Hotel Association of Nepal (HAN) and Nepal Association of Rafting Agents (NARA). Finally, tourists, local communities, and the media are also part of the list of key actors of ecotourism because without their support ecotourism development cannot be done.

Chapter 5 - Impact of Ecotourism in Nepal and Challenges

Impact of ecotourism is diverse and the attempt is made to the impacts in both ways: positive and negative impact in relation with mainly three dimensions of sustainability – economical, social, and environmental.

5.1 Economic Impacts and challenges

5.1.1 Income and Employment: In Nepal, tourism is playing a main role for generating income through foreign exchange and employment opportunities. It contributes more than 16% of foreign exchange and 4% percent to GDP and also provides direct and indirect employment for more than 200,000 people of the country (NTB, 2008). In 2002 tourism generated more than 170 million US dollar, creating 714,991 jobs or about 7 percent of total national employment. Moreover it is expected that by 2012 the number of jobs to be increased up to 1,115, 670 or about 8 percent of total national employment (NTB, 2008). Particularly ecotourism has a special focus on promoting local business and industry and also the money to be used for the enhancement of local community development. One target of ecotourism in the case of Nepal is to promote cottage and small local industries that can run by locally available resources – forest product, local agriculture products, animal herding etc can be appropriately utilized. Ecotourism in Nepal can provide various jobs and business opportunities to local communities close to national parks, mountain climbing routes, and trekking routes. For example Sherpa are famous for working as tour guides and porters, and also some businesses like hotels, lodges, guesthouses, restaurants and shops around the destinations are also owned by local people who are economically benefitted. However ecotourism in Nepal is not able to provide that much benefit to local residents due to maximum leakage of the income which must be acknowledged by policy makers.

Besides economic value of ecotourism, there are challenges such as risk of economic leakage and inflation. Although it seems that there is high tourism expenditure, it doesn't strengthen the local economy as much as it is anticipated because the majority of tourism revenue in the mountains and protected areas goes to large, urban-based entrepreneurs with insignificant contributions to poverty alleviation in the targeted areas where labour injustice is also prevalent in major touristic destinations (Kruk and Banskota, 2007). For instance, pottering and trekking guides are poorly paid jobs in many tourism areas of Nepal. More in hotel and restaurant worker are also not well paid. The same situation was expressed in the case of Chitwan National Park by Bookbinder et al, (1998), that the benefit to local people and the conservation is less effective than the ecotourism goal. In the Park there are many tourism related businesses that are run by outsiders and there no effective authority working for the justice. And also in many areas there is little linkage with local production, which is suppressed by the import of outside production. In Ghandruk, for instance, there is about 70% leakage from tourism earning and 76% import rate in Ghorepani and similar trends in other tourism destinations (Sharma and Banskota, 1997 quoted in Kruk and Banskota, 2007). And Swarbrooke also states the similar situation that “the need to import food and household items to meet tourists' demand has caused local inflation and introduced non-nutritious diets and ultimately extinct of local products and arts and artefacts” (Swarbrooke, 1998).

Another challenge of ecotourism in economic impact is high inflation rate that increases the prices of goods and services. According to Kruk and Banskota, high inflation rate is the major problem of the most popular mountain tourist destinations of the country (Kruk and Banskota, 2007). One hand, there is less benefits to the local people from tourism owing to their less involvement in it and on the other hand, there is fast price increment of goods to meet the standard of visitors from rich countries.

Thus if ecotourism is not seriously planned, it will not be different from mass tourism which can only bring very marginal financial uplifts to local people but serious environmental and social ills (Honey, 2009).

5.1.2 Regional and Community Development: According to Honey (2009), “ecotourism had become a significant economic activity, especially in developing countries, and was being used as a tool for conservation and community development.” Ecotourism, in case of Nepal, can be used as a tool for regional and community development which is very essential for the sustainable development of the country where there has always been problem with regional variation and discrimination. Proper practice of ecotourism can contribute to fill the gap between different regions of the country and all people will experience development equally. And dynamic promotion of ecotourism, rural community development can be easily facilitated by encouraging local investment, enhancing agriculture and empowering socio-economy (MOPE, 2004). For example the impressive economic growth of Pokhara, the development of Annapurna region and fast developing communities around the trekking and protected areas are the precise examples of how ecotourism play a vital role for fast community development. However there is always a risk for rapidly developing communities on the basis of tourism since tourism is not year-round business – it is very seasonal and susceptibly volatile in relation with national and international situations and scenarios. There are many factors that determine sustainable tourism development such as security issues, natural disasters, terrorism, political situations, and economic depression.

5.1.3 Marketing and Green Washing: Effective and sufficient marketing is the backbone of any business and especially in the tourism industry. “The tourism industry has come to view eco-travel as a marketing tool to attract the growing number of environmentally and socially conscious travellers (Honey, 1999, quoted in Buchsbaum, 2004).” In recent years many tourists prefer to support environmentally friendly tourism companies which accept the need to practise eco-friendly business and attempt to conserve the environment. So Honey also agrees in these ideas that in recent years, webs of community- based ecotourism projects have become increasingly important tools for marketing small ecotourism businesses, which are feasible in every aspect (Honey, 2009). Nepal has potential for many such small scale ecotourism businesses that can truly help to enhance the overall status of local communities. Family home-stays, local business, locally- based industry, indigenous products etc., are key components of ecotourism industry, which can be viable sources of income of local community. However, there is a lack of a proper marketing strategy to promote such

important components of ecotourism development and also they are unable to compete with intruders from outside markets. Honey also has the similar ideas:

“Although ecotourism strives to empower and benefit local residents and rural communities, community and rural projects tend to lack the knowledge, business skills, and resources required to market their products, and thus often required outside support from either government or intermediaries in order to be success” (Honey, 2009).

In addition, “exploitive ecotourism marketing” and “green washing” are also the major problems in the Nepalese ecotourism industry. So ecotourism in Nepal is becoming more capitalistic regardless of the core principles of ecotourism. Many companies involved in it seem only superficially interested in its genuine practice. The tourists who truly desire to promote ecotourism are easily misled by half - truths and exaggerations about ecotourism. Thus in this case, Nepalese local ecotourism projects are always at risk.

5.1.4 Other Threats: Tourism is a process through which very remote communities of the world are linked and exposed to a fast growing global economy. If the economy of the communities is entirely depending on tourism it is a problem since it is a notoriously volatile economic activity (Buchsbaum, 2004; Honey, 2009). Ecotourism is much more sensitive than conventional tourism. In Nepal, all types of tourism is also seasonal, ever fluctuating, and fund based which can anytime affect the tourism. Tourism of Nepal is massively affected by internal political instability that causes lack of national political commitment for proper tourism policy. Nepal also has been facing several political strikes which directly affect Nepalese tourism. Nepal tourism was also badly dropped during Maoist civil war. And the bad image still has not been repaired. Tourism is very sensitive industry which affected by various natural and manmade factors such as security issues, natural disasters, terrorism, political situations, and economic depression. Thus there are always threats to local communities which are primarily depending on any kind of tourism.

5.2 Environmental Impacts and Challenges:

5.2.1 Conservation of Biodiversity: The prime goal of ecotourism is to preserve environment and improve the welfare of local people. That is why it is also believed that ecotourism can be a “tool for overall environmental preservation in the areas where there is weak presence of government” (Wunder, 2000 quoted in Buchsbaum, 2004). In Nepal there are many tourist destinations with pristine and fragile natural ecosystems, where there is a poor presence of the state and only some private and local level efforts through ecotourism processes have been made for conservation that are prone to environmental degradation due to tourism activities. For example some ecotourism projects in protected areas and other tourism destinations are very effective in their attempts at conservation and sustainable community development. They are Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP), Ghalegaon- Sikles Ecotourism Project, The Upper Mustang Biodiversity Conservation Project (UMBCP), Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee (SPCC), Kanchenjunga conservation Area Project (KCAP), Eco-Himal, Kathmandu Environmental Education Project

(KEEP), Partnership for Quality Tourism Project (PQTP), Lumbini Development Project (LDP) and many other projects that are contributing for the development of ecotourism in Nepal, although there are many challenges in their path. Besides these significant contributions, ecotourism is also having various negative impacts. Ecotourism generally occurs in areas that are environmentally sensitive and fragile. Mountains, protected areas, and cultural and religious sites are very popular destinations of eco-tourists. Like traditional or mass tourists, eco-tourists have caused both on-site and off-site negative impacts to the visited areas. Deforestation for fire wood, water pollution by sewage, soil pollution due to non-biodegradable wastes, and visual pollution are major environmental problems. According to Kruk and Banskota, mountain ecotourism experts, environmental problems in many mountains including Mt. Everest seem to be very severe (Kruk and Banskota, 2007). Due to the crowd of trekkers and mountaineers, the Everest Base Camp has been badly affected by wastes left behind. The wastes generally includes garbage, oxygen cylinders, trekking and mountaineering instruments and human wastes which threaten the whole realm of this unique site which has also been known as main tourism destination. And one more serious problem of the Everest site is trail erosion due to the overflow of tourists. In same way Honey (2009) also adds:

“During 1980 to 1991, the number of trekkers increased by 225 percent and the impact on this Himalayan Kingdom’s fragile environment has been tremendous. Careless trekkers wander off trail, destroy vegetation and leave behind tin cans, packaging, and other litters... Ridges once covered with rhododendrons are now barren, and deforestation is destroying the natural habitats of rare snow leopard and red panda.”

Ecotourism in Nepal strives to preserve forest but it still the rate of deforestation is rapid in different tourist areas because the forests are used as firewood for cooking and as timber for construction. So it contributes to wildlife habitat destruction and soil erosion.

Furthermore, unplanned settlements around the protected areas and trekking routes also create environmental stress and deterioration of the pristine natural attractions. These kinds of problems are also prevalent in ecotourism sites of Nepal that it also contributes environmental pollution, deforestation and destruction of natural habitats by the process of human encroachments which is continuously exceeding local carrying capacity. The local carrying capacity is in fact a complex phenomenon which is very difficult to gauge and the continuous exceeding of local carrying capacity creates an even more complex issue. According to Bachsbaun (2004), in the case of developing countries, like Nepal, many are sceptical of ecotourism’s real contribution to sustainable development.

Ecotourism is ever advocating low impact activities, controlling the number of visitors, and care for local people, place and biodiversity. But there is lack of proper planning and strict implementation of policy at the practical level. Ecotourism in Nepal is also victim to the same problem. In the case of Nepal, Carlsson (2001) points out explicitly that the Nepalese government doesn’t have any plans to control the number of tourists to Himalayas since it is the country’s highest income source. Likewise there are many challenging measures to curb the environmental impacts. They are – i) environmental educational for all stakeholders, ii)

ethically conscious tourists who travel for preservation of planet, iii) effective law enforcement for conservation, iv) use of tourism revenue in conservation. Thus Lindsley (2003) writes

“Finding a compromise between preservation and development is often challenging and ecotourism can generate additional environmental problems for the very region it was intended to protect” (Lindsley, 2003).

5.3 Social Impacts and Challenges

Like impacts of ecotourism on environment and economy, the socio-cultural dimension cannot remain untouched from the impact of ecotourism. Ecotourism has both negative and positive impacts on socio-cultural issues. And socio-cultural impacts of ecotourism usually occur slowly over time in an unspectacular fashion that is also invisible and intangible. Generally these impact are negative rather than. However ecotourism can be a key tool for conservation of socio-cultural heritages which are considered as essential base of ecotourism (Swarbrooke, 1998). It includes valuable human values in relation to history, religion, culture and ethnicity. Ecotourism, indeed, also is based on various socio-cultural attractions of different indigenous and traditional people. Thus it is essential for ecotourism to preserve local cultures, which is considered a delicate issue since it is always a matter of risk with the invasion of foreign cultures. Furthermore ecotourism also advocates for other issues like human rights, animal rights, labour justice, gender and democracy which are considered as important parameters for social sustainability.

In the case of Nepal, ecotourism is playing an important role for the enhancement of various factors of the communities lying around tourist destinations, especially in mountain trekking and protected sites (Carlsson, 2001). Ecotourism in Nepal helps to develop various infrastructures, promoting local cultures, conserving important historical, cultural and religious sites which are also regarded as main attraction of tourists in Nepal. For example many museums, cultural heritages, traditional arts and crafts of Nepal are being preserved and promoted by the process of ecotourism development (Kruk and Banskota, 2007). It is also apparent that Nepalese communities are inspired to hospitality, which is popular in Nepal as “Atithi Devo Bhava” (which means the guest is respected as God). “Home-stay”, a recent ecotourism policy doesn’t only provide economic incentives but it also helps to benefit Nepalese communities by exchanging culture and knowledge between visitors and hosts.

Ecotourism also mainly focuses on stakeholder participation and community involvement to solve problems, which can make communities feel more responsible, create effective conservation process, and avoid conflicts among stakeholders. For example ACAP and other many ecotourism projects run by communities are very effective in their mission, though they have some challenges in the way they are walking ahead.

5.3.1 Capacity Building: Generally capacity building, related to empowerment, is a process to develop one’s own potentiality in order to enhance performance (Chapagain, 2004, p. 33).

Capacity building is a process through which we can bring multi-dimensional positive changes, such as organizational, financial, intellectual, practical, social, political, cultural, and physical changes. Ecotourism also aims to enhance the long-term prospects of communities and provide them with maximum opportunities to excel in well-being (Bachsbaum, 2004). The goal of ecotourism can be achieved through capacity building process which primarily focuses on empowerment, competencies enhancement, development, facilitation, and sustainability. Ecotourism in Nepal launches capacity building programmes in different tourist destinations to enhance the capacity of local people over all dimensions. Annapurna Area Conservation project (ACAP) is the most well-known for its performance in community and tourism development symbiotically on the one hand and effective conservation programme on the other hand (Carlsson, 2001). However, it is also very true that effective capacity building in many developing countries like Nepal is very challenging due to poor policy making and its implementation.

Beside these positive social impacts of ecotourism in Nepal, there are some negative social impacts which are invited due to lack of commitment and policy implementation deficits in the tourism industry. Cultural deterioration is a complex impact of ecotourism because by definition, ecotourism often involves seeking out the most pristine, uncharted, and unpenetrated areas of the planet and these are often the home to isolated and fragile human civilizations (Martha, 2009). And Swarbrooke (1998) also agree with Martha and adds more that there is “no hiding place from the eco-tourists who are thus driven to seek out ever more remote, obscure destinations with ecosystems and cultures wholly different from their own” Swarbrooke (1998). In this way ecotourism is more likely to degrade this delicate social and environmental niche through its invasive and exploitive encroachment. And this ultimately leads to a conversion of very old traditional and cultural norms and behaviour, lifestyle, customs and costumes, perversion of religious values, and even in family and whole social structures (Kruk and Banskota, 2007). And more due to ecotourism, there might be some serious social problems like illegal businesses, crime, murders, prostitution and drugs. So it is very essential to handle ecotourism responsibly.

The Sherpas in Khumbu region, for instance, are not only economically affluent but have also experienced a big cultural transformation. The same is true for the Tharu community around the Chitwan National Park, Gurung, in Annapurna Conservation Area, and other ethnic and indigenous people in various tourist destinations, who have found fast changes in their lifestyle and culture, which mean they are more capitalistic and modern rather than cultural and spiritual (MOPE, 2004; Bookbinder et al 1998 and Kruk and Banskota, 2007). In Nepal “commodification of culture” is one of the main problems of ecotourism. This means a risk of perversion in arts, music, dance and crafts, if ecotourism is not responsibility handled. Even in some tourist destination areas of Nepal, many local food items are replaced by imported foods which might not be feasible in terms of economy, environment, and health for the host communities. The practice of ecotourism needs holistic local knowledge which can be utilized through capacity building processes. Local people should be educated and aware of ecotourism through skills oriented training and workshops, meetings and discussions which can make them competent to handle both development and conservation effectively.

Although there are many organizations working in Nepal in capacity building in various sectors including ecotourism, the impact in the people of their capacity is not that high because there are so many factors such as illiteracy, political instability, massive corruption, high poverty rate, and lack of policy and scientific research in the field which are other challenges that impede ecotourism. However, Nepal is persistently focusing on the practice of ecotourism to attain sustainability in poor villages and remote areas.

Chapter 6 -Some Potential Ecotourism Sites in Nepal

There are so many areas which can be developed as ecotourism destinations but due to lack of strategic ecotourism policy and scientific research, political instability and feeble economic and social integration, they are lagging behind. As Ninth Five Year Plan (1997- 2002) recognized the importance and need of ecotourism, since then ecotourism has been influential issue in Nepalese tourism industry. After realizing the negative impacts of conventional tourism, Ministry of Tourism and Nepal Tourism Board also focused on the application ecotourism in other regions apart from major touristic sites like Kathmandu Valley, Chitwan National Park, Pokhara and other major trekking routes. In collaboration with various international organizations especially with ADB, Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) conducted research and feasibility study for the criteria of ecotourism practice in various potential sites in the country. Some major of them are listed as potential sites which, it can be hoped, will be developed very soon in the year to come by the government with efficient action plan. According to report published by NTB and organizations working in ecotourism field, some major sites have been highlighted as potential ecotourism in the paper bellow:

6.1 Antu Danda and Adjoining Areas: This area (1,703km²), lies in eastern part of Nepal, has an abundant of spectacular natural, cultural and historical sites and also vast repository of biodiversity due to geographical and climatic diversification (MOPE, 2004). The area has also spellbinding scenic vista of Mt. Everest, Kanchenjunga, and Makalu with sunrise and sunset views. Therefore, concerned authorities should plan to develop the area as an ecotourism destination that should not to suffer of any negative impacts for long time (MOPE, 2004).

6.2 Basantapur and Adjoining Areas: Being very rich in cultural items and different ethnic groups with 21 different languages and variety of religious and cultural events, the area is also very rich with natural and biological diversity. The area is also famous for its surrounding sites which have immense potential for ecotourism development.

6.3 Dhanusha Dham and Adjoining Areas: The areas lie in the eastern lowlands of the country. The area is very popular and of religious significance because the place is believed to be the birth place of Sita, wife of Lord Rama, according to Hindu mythology. And the area also contains the very famous Janaki Temple, which is well-known as religious destination for all Hindu people. Dhanusha Dham areas have maximum potential for both cultural and village tourism which will promote Maithali culture and community (MOPE, 2004). Around the area there are many potential ecotourism sites. These include the Dhanusha Forest and the Ram Janaki temple and other many temples of various Hindu gods and goddess.

6.4 Tansen and Adjoining Areas: Tansen, a beautiful place, has many promising tourism resources, and lies in the middle part of the country. There are various cultural and religious events and festivals that make the place attractive as an ecotourism site. The area has potential for ecotourism activities like boating, rafting, camping, rock climbing, bird watching, and many more (MOPE, 2004).

6.5 Khaptad National Park and Adjoining Areas: This area is the far-western part of Nepal. It is in a remote region having complex geo-physics and unique ecosystems with rich flora and fauna. The place has religious and spiritual significance. Although the park has minimal tourists' facilities, the place is full of potential tourist activities such as camping, village walks, cultural visits, rafting, bird watching, skiing, horse riding, trekking, historical tours etc. Many sites around the park can be developed as ecotourism sites.

6.6 Chitwan and Adjoining Areas: Chitwan, most popular tourist destination, lies in the central plain part of the country that is linked with all kinds of transport system. Owing to the park the place has various opportunities for ecotourism development like village tourism, nature tourism, canoeing, cultural tourism, wildlife watching, jungle safari, elephant ride etc. Like other areas, it has also potential ecotourism sites around it.

Chapter 7 - Policy implementation

Policies are the action plans architected and adopted by governments and business industries to achieve a main goal. To achieve objective or main goal, policies should be very strategic with incorporation of different levels- from micro (local) to meso (regional) to macro (national) level. This can help to incorporate all required components to formulate innovative and dynamic policy. Government is a policy maker that has to take into account different issues and components before shaping a final policy format.

Ecotourism is the fastest growing sub-sector of the tourism industry. So ecotourism needs to be guided by very holistic policy for its effective practice to achieve real sustainable ecotourism that can be a more beneficial to local communities, safeguard to natural and cultural environments, and advantageous to tourists and other stakeholders. But ecotourism policy in various countries is not sufficient to address all sectors and components and it becomes ineffective in many ecotourism destinations (Fennel and Dowling, 2003). Therefore to make an effective and dynamic ecotourism policy, the concerned authorities, especially government bodies, should to consider a holistic approach to gear towards successful ecotourism. Unfortunately, however, according to Fennel, “the main factor constraining effective ecotourism development for the industry is the lack of common consensus on how to define the concept and identify a process in which to classify ecotourism products” (Fennel and Dowling, 2003). It is also essential to consider that superficial ecotourism policy is very harmful to the all phenomena on which ecotourism is based. In this point, Carlsson (2001) also adds, “The department or the team, that is responsible for policy formulation, should prepare alternative policies and outline plans and evaluate how well each fulfils the tourism objectives, optimize economic gains, minimize environmental and socio-cultural impacts, all in accordance with country’s general development policy.” At the same time measuring the sustainability of ecotourism is also very significant in order to link ecotourism with sustainable development. In the process of making ecotourism policy, there must be included a device through which sustainability indicators can be developed to support and enhance ecotourism development by identify the real commitment implementation of different actors with their activities (performances).

To lead all important duties and responsibilities effectively, government ecotourism planning and policy play a significant role to regulate and monitor the activities of all stakeholders of the industry by implementing a balance for maintaining conservation and encouraging all sectors for development. This means, according to Carlsson, “a balance between development and conservation, supply and demand, benefits and costs, and people and environment” (Carlsson, 2001, p. 16). He also focuses on the key role of government in providing finance, efficient management skills, training and knowledge to get effective supports and cooperation from private sectors in development of ecotourism industry (Carlsson, 2001). But many developing countries, like Nepal, have big problems with policy deficits like contradiction in ecotourism policies, neglecting local community participation, lack of effective monitoring and enforcement of principles of ecotourism, no concrete ecotourism accreditation systems, and lack of scientific assessment, research and information dissemination.

Environmental planning and tourism planning are the two major phenomena that should be primarily considered while formulating ecotourism planning. Environmental planning primarily includes environmental protection, resource conservation, and environmental assessment and tourism planning involves the development of tourism areas and social assessment. At the same time there are important issues which should not be missed to include the national planning. They are periodic reviews of the planning, further research and evaluation of impacts. Moreover the national ecotourism planning should also incorporate economic, environmental and social dimensions with comprehensive policies and strategies. Thus effective ecotourism planning and policy is very challenging because there are many complex issues that should be included so that the goal of ecotourism can be attained easily.

7.1 Ecotourism Policy in Nepal

The tourism Ministry in Nepal is primarily responsible for tourism planning and policy and other important tasks like licensing, regulations and overall monitoring. Another important institution is Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) which also has a significant role in the development of tourism in Nepal by conducting planning, research, and developing products and marketing for sustainable tourism. The National Planning Commission (NPC) is also a key institution which has significant influence in tourism policy formulation. The commission has regarded tourism as a key sector for economic benefit and poverty alleviation in its five yearly plans.

It is very implicit that tourism in Nepal is one of the main economic contributors of the country. Therefore it should be managed scientifically through the formulation of effective planning and policy to support sustainable development. Respecting this idea, the Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-1997) had given main emphasis on tourism to boost the national economy by maximizing foreign exchange earnings and the Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) also envisaged the policy and implementation strategy for establishing Nepal as a 'premium tourist destination of the world' with introduction of ecotourism including the strategy of developing village tourism, new trekking sites and other required tourism infrastructure (NPC, 2003; MOPE, 2004). Furthermore the plan also gave stress to review of tourism policies, related regulations, institutional arrangements and coordination, and overall assessment of tourism impacts (ibid).

Also acknowledging the negative impacts of tourism, government of Nepal has also developed a strategy to promote ecotourism and introduced a legislation of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in the industry. But the Ninth Plan states that tourism policy development and implementation is not as easy as it is envisioned in the plan. Thus, Banskota and et al. (1995) say that the tourism policy and institutional framework is not effective and the consequence of this brings lack of coordination of supply and demand in which private sectors of tourism generally aim to earn much more income than on the conservation side (Banskota and et al, 1995). Lack of policy implementation, especially in the case of ecotourism in Nepal, creates major problems in the whole industry as well as in other sectors.

7.2 Policy Deficits

- a) Though poverty alleviation is the main objective of ecotourism policy in Nepal, the objective is very insignificant in reality. There is an unusual distribution of tourist income where a few people, who are not usually locals, own major tourism business in the ecotourism destinations such as Khumbu, Annapurna, Chitwan National Park, where local and indigenous people are deprived of the real income and opportunities of tourism (MOPE, 2004; Carlsson, 2001). Tourism contributes inflation which causes a rise in the prices of goods and services (Honey, 2009) and the policy remains helpless to control this issue. Low paid wages and safety measures for porters and other workers on treks and expeditions are major problems that have not been addressed and implemented strictly by ecotourism policy.
- b) Policies and strategies for tourism have failed to address effectively in many factors of ecotourism like environmental planning, urban and rural planning, waste management proper traffic regulations, and energy utilization. Ecotourism is a multifaceted sector and the government of Nepal has been unable to formulate a strategic policy that could integrate all factors of ecotourism. There remain many environmental and socio-cultural hazards of tourism - for example deforestation, pollution, eroding cultural values, and these - are prevalent in various tourism areas of Nepal (Carlsson, 2001).
- c) Although the government of Nepal has been advocating a lot for the development of quality tourism, the policy of tourism is effective in the practice to promote quality tourism. In the name of quality tourism, many businesses only provide low levels of services without meeting the standards of quality, because the regulation has failed owing to corrupt bureaucracy. Overcrowded and unplanned tourism businesses therefore continuously deteriorate the image of tourism (Carlsson, 2001).
- d) It has been stated in an earlier section of this paper that Nepal has various places with ecotourism potential. However, owing to policy deficits, tourism is merely confined to three major sites – Kathmandu, Pokhara, and Chitwan- which receives more than 70 percent of the tourists of the nation (Carlsson, 2001). In fact, tourism sites such as Khaptad, Sheyphoksundo, Rara, Dhorpatan, Shukhlaphanta, have been neglected, although they have maximum potential of ecotourism development.
- e) The tourism policy has not planned effectively to utilize tourist revenue for the development of tourist destinations. For example, according to Carlsson, Annapurna, Everest, and Lamtang are the tourist destinations where a very low percentage of tourism revenues have been used for the welfare of the regions. And the problem of leakage of tourism income is also common where barely 10 percent of the incomes has been retained in these areas. (Raj, <http://www.nssd.net/country/nepal/nep07.htm>).

Thus, the policy generally fails to implement regular impact assessment, awareness and capacity building programmes, accreditation and certification, and research and information dissemination.

Chapter 8 -Concluding Discussion

Tourism industry has been growing very fast with the rapid development of different advanced new technologies. The increment of tourism has given both negative and positive outputs. Some negative outcomes (impacts) are very serious injuries to natural and social scenarios. In fact, the idea of ecotourism was incepted as alternative to mass or conventional tourism which has been thought of as environmentally polluting, economically disruptive and culturally insensitive (Honey, 2009). So ecotourism came into practice with its key theories and principles to safeguard environment and local culture by benefiting local communities as well as tourists. The definition of ecotourism principally focuses on economic and social development and ecological conservation. The concept was developed with a prime goal of achieving sustainable development through responsible tourism in various remote areas on the planet. However, it doesn't seem easy to achieve the goal because in many places true ecotourism remains a matter of ideal only and the policy and planning of ecotourism seem to fail to address all key issues appropriately. According to Higham, (2007), "inappropriate ecotourism development degrades habitats, landscapes, depletes natural resources, disturbs economic systems, and generates wastes and pollution." Therefore it is essential to keep social, environmental, and economic responsibility the first priority in policy and planning of ecotourism to promote sustainable development through successful ecotourism practices.

The main problems of ecotourism development, in developing countries, are economic insufficiency and lack of resources to plan and properly implement it. Honey (2009), also adds, "In all developing countries, a common issue there is movement away from government-owned and government-run tourism projects due to the popular trends of free trade and foreign investment." (Honey, 2009, p. 446) In Nepal many ecotourism projects are based on international tour operators, INGOs and their fund and experts as 'big bosses' who only focus on profit of their own. In this situation, hoping to get benefits from ecotourism to people at the grassroots is not reliable. So many developing countries like Nepal, having maximum potential of ecotourism, should focus on a true application of ecotourism by increasing maximum participation and capacity building for promoting ecotourism to support sustainable development that can provide maximum benefits to locals.

The tourism industry is one of the main sectors that support the national economy of Nepal by the income from foreign exchange and also generates employment opportunities. But because of the weak management of tourism, it doesn't benefit all people. So it is necessary to diversify the ecotourism sector with other sectors of economic activities such as agricultures, cattle farming, local based cottage and tourism industries, sustainable infrastructure building, and conservation projects.

There are some ecotourism projects working in different tourism sites of Nepal. However these are usually supported by INGOs and NGOs and the question of their long term running and sustainability is a great concern. Carlsson (2001) is also doubtful if these projects can be considered actual ecotourism in the Nepalese context in which there is lack of master plan with national political commitment that discourage efficient participation of grassroots level. Therefore local people's genuine participation and involvement must be excelled in every

stage, from policy and planning through development, monitoring, implementation and ownership to achieve real practice and tangible benefits of ecotourism.

Ecotourism is complex a concept which comprises many issues that must be taken into consideration in a balanced way. In this way, actual practice of ecotourism is much more challenging in developing countries like Nepal where there have already existed many problems such as poverty, political instability, poor education and health and corruption, which constrain ecotourism practices the country. Furthermore implementation and challenges of ecotourism in Nepal might be different from site to site and stakeholder to stakeholder because Nepal has diversified topography with diversified ecosystems and human communities. Therefore ecotourism planning strategies should be innovative, collaborative, comprehensive, and adaptive enough for the effective application of ecotourism in different situations and communities. But I don't think Nepal is dedicated to develop such a policy and planning strategies for effective ecotourism practices.

After reviewing various literatures about ecotourism in Nepal and other countries, it seems that almost all governments give more emphasis on number of tourist rather than impacts and quality of tourism. In 2011, Nepal is going to celebrate 'tourism year 2011' which only focuses on the number, one million tourists but not on other important issues that should be taken into account. Can ecotourism be practised efficiently in this governmental policy which merely focuses on quantity rather than quality? The strategies have not given that much focus on maximizing the total per capita expenditure of tourists with their duration of stay. In this issue, neighbouring Bhutan can be taken as good example that strictly controls the number of tourists who are required to spend around USD 200 per day while Nepal receives only around USD 4 per day from its tourists (Carlsson, 2001). Ecotourism in Costa Rica is very effective that encourages tourists to spend even better more than USD 300 than in Bhutan (Buchsbaum, 2004). In the same way, even in Cambodia, ecotourism is progressing much more than in Nepal where there is maximum possibility to practise. In this way many countries like Bhutan and Cambodia, having lesser potentiality, are doing better and receiving much better tourist revenue than Nepal with limit of tourist number and the adverse environmental and cultural impacts of tourism.

Tourism in Nepal is centralized, which may cause over concentration in certain places, which has and have various negative impacts on both environment and human societies. But there are no special planning strategies of decentralization of tourism to open up new sites. However there have been both negative and positive impacts of opening new tourism sites. Negative impacts can be minimized and positive can be maximized, if policy and planning are designed and implemented cautiously.

Ecotourism in Nepal is based on air transport which is one of the most damaging impacts in connection to climate change. Nepal doesn't have concrete policy to address and decrease the impacts caused by this issue. However, according to Carlsson (2001), some critiques argue that air transport can be accepted in the ecotourism industry, if environmental tax is included in every flight. But there is lack of exact environmental assessment so that it remains unknown and un-researched scientifically that how much carbon emission is done by tourism

in different ways. Moreover the matter of the effective use of environmental revenues for conservation purpose is also a major concern in Nepalese tourism sectors where policy deficit is common due to lack of regulation enforcement and high rate of corruption.

The word ecotourism has been very popularly used in the Nepalese tourism industry. Everyone prefers using the prefix 'eco' in their business whether they meet the standard of ecotourism or not. Inappropriate marketing of ecotourism is prevalent in the Nepalese tourism industry owing to lack of ecotourism accreditation. According to Carlsson, (2001) "the participation survey showed that all tour agencies in Chitwan National Park seem to sell more or less the same kind of package, whether they are called ecotourism tours or traditional tours, although there is great potential for ecotourism with proper planning and management strategies." To be so called environmentally responsible tour operators all prefer to keep 'eco' in their every activity of tourism industry.

Ecotourism in can be a panacea for both people and place, if it is handled carefully and it can also be a pitfall if it is handled with careless and superficial planning and management. Currently in the case of Nepal, ecotourism is not panacea for different problems because ecotourism in Nepal is still in its adolescence that has to walk a long way with careful footsteps to reach an adulthood of better performance. However it can be a too hasty generalization if it is said that ecotourism doesn't provide any benefits or it is harmful only because ecotourism is a field that needs to be researched and investigated more in the context of Nepal. Research and investigation has been done very little in this field in Nepal. But what is truth is Nepal that has ample opportunities of ecotourism. If the Nepalese government realize this and manage all the tourism resources responsibly, the tourism industry could prove to be a phenomenal instrument to achieve the goal of sustainable development of the country by supporting various aspects like economy, environment, culture and conservation.

Thus whether genuine ecotourism is implemented in Nepal is a matter of question but it is very clear that the main motive of ecotourism practice in Nepal is to provide maximum benefits to local residents, satisfaction to visitors and conservation of natural and social environment by controlling the negative impacts of mass tourism. Tourism seems to be an ever increasing phenomenon, which means that the travelling of people will increase and be faster in the days to come. But it depends on 'a choice of road taken' by future tourists for the condition of whole tourism industry in Nepal.

Chapter 9 – Recommendations and Future Research

Nepal has abundance of potential for ecotourism development which could help to enhance the local economy and alleviate poverty. Furthermore, - if ecotourism planning and policy are designed and implemented properly, it will significantly contribute to sustainable development by supporting rural development, environmental conservation, social empowerment, and especially women's empowerment. But there is a policy deficit in the field of ecotourism promotion in Nepal due to political instability, corruption in the administrative network, lack of proper education and awareness planning, and feeble law enforcement. The recommendation of this study is therefore:

9.1 Holistic Planning Approaches

Ecotourism is an integrated system in which various elements and issues are interconnected and interdependent. In this way ecotourism is as complex concept as sustainable development. To promote ecotourism in developing countries like Nepal – having various social and political problems- is very challenging. So it needs holistic planning with incorporation of an integrated and collaborative approach to include various actors, stakeholders, decision makers, and implementers. Thus it is essential to link all ecotourism components and parameters in developing ecotourism policy. For effective ecotourism practices, according to Honey, (2009), “the government should design such a policy that has to encourage all ecotourism travellers, practitioners, professionals, educators and proponents who need to understand the major problems and challenges confronting ecotourism as well as how ecotourism fits within the tourism industry and within country's development strategy.” Ecotourism can be a very promising industry in Nepal if the government is able to develop an integrated and innovative ecotourism policy and planning to address all existing problems and encourage all key actors for commitment in its implementation.

9.2 Making Sustainable Ecotourism

Ecotourism cannot be separated from sustainable development. According to Swarbrooke (1998), “ecotourism can be a way to facilitate the sustainable development of economies and societies in developing countries.”

To make ecotourism successful and to achieve sustainable development in Nepal, it very essential to consider its major principles and carefully linking with different issues like environmental, political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions that are also called sustainability parameters. Nepalese ecotourism policy should focus that some percents of revenue from tourism must be allocated for the purpose of conservation. But the policy has not been working as successfully as envisioned. Sustainable ecotourism should aim to increase local community involvement in the planning mechanism that can support economic development, environmental conservation, social and cultural awareness, capacity building, and effective policy implementation. Ecotourism can be a supportive tool for sustainable development in the Nepalese context, if ecotourism is diversified to link with other economic sectors such as agriculture (farming tourism), promotion of indigenous arts and crafts, cottage industries, and livestock herding.

9.3 Innovative Leadership

Without active and creative leadership, ecotourism is hard to practice in developing countries like Nepal where there are challenging situations. Government is the main leader that has to design strategic policies to maximize local participation and genuine involvement of all levels. Strategy also should focus on marketing and business aspects of ecotourism in the destinations. It should also emphasize regular monitoring and feedback systems that can help to evaluate the situation of ecotourism and also help to promote the real spirit of ecotourism development. Furthermore, the government has a main role to establish peace, safety, and security that are basic requirements for promoting ecotourism in the destinations. However, unfortunately, Nepal's ecotourism policy fails to deliver on these aspects. So ecotourism is remaining just a dream in many areas where there are maximum opportunities.

9.4 Further Research

Ecotourism, in many countries, is still a new concept. In the case of Nepal, ecotourism is in its adolescent stage, which needs to be studied, investigated, and rigorously analyzed in its practices and overall impacts. Better research helps to get a real understanding of important information about the field. Ecotourism can only be made better in its theory into practice, if scientific research has been done. However, Nepal has lacked technical and skilled manpower that restrains the genuine research activities in a wider perspective (Carlsson, 2001). And also the policy failed to lead such research in the country. To conduct the research, case studies of various ecotourism sites should be prepared and qualitative and quantitative data should be collected.

Chapter 10 – Conclusion

Ecotourism is very fast growing sector in the world tourism industry. Nepalese tourism industry also cannot stand without embracing ecotourism. Although the history of ecotourism in Nepal is not that much long, its importance in Nepalese tourism industry is inevitable because it can be regarded as one of the best approaches to promote sustainable development that can be helpful to alleviate poverty by developing local economy and society and also conserving environment. Furthermore ecotourism in Nepal can be proved as boon for rural development, social empowerment especially for marginalized groups. Ecotourism principles basically focus to increase local community involvement in the planning mechanism that can support economic development, environmental conservation, social and cultural awareness, capacity building, and effective policy implementation. At the same time it is also necessary to consider critically that ecotourism also creates many problems such as environmental and cultural degradation and even economic imbalance (due to inflation and leakage) in local scenario.

Nepal is unique land of abundance of tourism resources which can only be used properly through ecotourism. Tourism has been the main foreign income sources of the country and it also supports the economy of the country. So ecotourism can be a promising industry in Nepal, if Nepalese government is committed to develop integrated and innovative ecotourism policy and planning that must address all the existing problems and challenges for better implementation. Nepal needs effective ecotourism because whole mass tourism of the country has been creating various adverse impacts such as environmental and social pollutions, deforestation, and other many and they can only be checked properly if there is ecotourism practices with holistic planning and innovative leaderships of concerned authorities. Furthermore ecotourism in Nepal always needs more scientific studies and researches and evaluation of ecotourism practice and scientific eco-certifications and accreditation system to the institutions and originations involving in the field. But it seems that Nepal still practises traditional tourism in the name of ecotourism due to massive policy deficit and various internal problems that prevent effective application of qualitative tourism which should emphasize for the ethical encouragement of all stakeholders including tourists, locals, and tour operators for the promotion of genuine ecotourism. And also there is no special strategy for conservation and tourism development.

Thus besides various challenges and problems in the fields of ecotourism, it can be a great opportunity for Nepal if all tourism resources are handled and utilized responsibly and it can be phenomenal instrument to achieve real sustainable development of the country by promoting different aspects and sectors – economy, environment, culture, and conservation procedure.

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