

BRIEF NOTE ON LIMITS OF ACCEPTABLE CHANGE

The Encyclopaedia of Ecotourism¹ defines Carrying Capacity as “the amount of tourism-related activity that a site or destination can sustainably accommodate; often measured in terms of visitor numbers or visitor-nights over a given period of time, or by the number of available accommodation units; management techniques such as **site hardening** can be employed to raise a site’s carrying capacity”.

Over a period of time, the carrying capacity framework has come up for criticism especially in the context of wildlife/nature based/ecotourism. One of the major criticisms being that the carrying capacity model does not take into account the social implications while arriving at the number of visitors allowed entering a protected area.

Over the past approximately 10 years, the concept of Limits of Acceptable Change has evolved and found to be far more relevant to ecotourism.

The definition of Limits of Acceptable (LAC) as defined by the Encyclopaedia of Ecotourism is “a land management philosophy that identifies specific indicators of environmental quality and tourism impacts, and defines thresholds within which the conservation goals of a **protected area** are met”.

The LAC is a planning model and does not merely look at the level of use and impact of tourism but on identifying the desirable environmental and social conditions for visitor activity. The process entails the listing of existing conditions and identifying the optimal limits for both physical and social conditions.

The model involves a 9-step process, which have been articulated differently by different policy making bodies across the world. Below is the 9-step process as propounded by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)²:

1. Identify special values, issues and concerns attributed to the area
2. Identify and describe recreation opportunity classes or zones
3. Select indicators of resource and social conditions
4. Inventory existing social resource and conditions
5. Specify standard for resource and social conditions in each opportunity class
6. Identify alternative opportunity class allocations
7. Identify management actions for each alternative
8. Evaluation and selection of a preferred alternative
9. Implement actions and monitor conditions

What is important to note is that the model uses a process which is systematic, explicit, defensible and rational and involves public participation, this last element being most important if benefits of ecotourism are to accrue to communities.

It is suggested that the Ministry review the LAC model and adapt/arrive at a model to suit the realities of forest and protected areas in India.

End Notes

¹ David B, Weaver (Ed.) (2001), “ The Encyclopedia of Ecotourism”, CABI Publishing, U.K.

² Eagles, Paul F.J., McCool, Stephan F & Haynes Christopher D (1998) “Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas: Guidelines for Planning and Management”, UNEP <http://www.unep.fr/shared/publications/other/3084/BP8-6.pdf>