

Talk for Change for Making Tourism Sustainable Equitable and Just¹

Regional Consultation on Responsible Tourism in the North Eastern States of India, Gangtok, Sikkim

26 & 27 August 2010

In August 2010, Impulse, Shillong in collaboration with EQUATIONS, Bangalore and Sikkim University, Gangtok organized a "Regional Consultation on Responsible Tourism in the North Eastern States of India". This was aimed at initiating a process of dialogue and perspectives on Responsible Tourism for the North Eastern Region to influence Tourism Policy and practice in the Region.

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Day 1: August 26, 2010

Welcome and Context Setting

Masters Ceremony

Mr. Tashi Raptan Barfungpa, Advocate, HOPE welcomed everyone present on the dais. Members of the Impulse NGO Network presented Khadas to each of the guests. The guests included Shri. Bhim Prasad Dhungel, Hon'ble Minister of Tourism, Government of Sikkim, Ms. Manita Pradhan, Former MLA and Chairperson of S.S. Commission for Women, Member State Planning Commission- Govt of Sikkim, Dr. Ranjana Kumari, Professor of Political Science, Delhi University, Ms. Neiha Bansal, Project Associate for UNODC, Mr. Conrad Sangma, is the current Leader of Opposition in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, Mr Thinley Densappa, Welcome Heritage, Mr. Amit Patro, Editor, Sikkim Express, Ms. Hasina Kharbhih, Founder and Team Leader of Impulse NGO Network, Ms. Aditi Chanchani Coordinator Programmes, EQUATIONS.

Welcome Address

Mr. Patro, Editor, Sikkim Express offered the welcome address, at the end of which he hoped that the deliberations during the 2-day consultation would result in the developing of a regional tourism policy which would be sensitive to issues of women and children who are part of the tourism industry.

Encouraging Responsible Tourism in North East India by Encouraging Stakeholders² - Hasina Kharbhih, Team Leader, Impulse NGO Network:

Ms. Kharbhih then went on to set the context of the consultation by making a presentation titled 'Encouraging Responsible Tourism in North East India by Encouraging Stakeholders'. This presentation outlined the project under which the consultation was held. It included the overall objective, specific objective and expected results. The presentation also detailed the following:

- The people who would benefit from the project
- The strategy to involve different stakeholders
- The monitoring and evaluation process

The objective of the consultation as stated in the presentation was:

"Initiating a process of dialogue and developing a perspective on responsible tourism for the North Eastern Regions including Darjeeling and Siliguri for purpose of influencing Tourism Policy and practice in the region and to adopt measures to combat exploitation of children and women in the tourism industry".

Besides the objective is to review and understand the State Level Policy on Tourism, Code of Conduct for the Protection of children from Sexual Exploitation in Travel and Tourism as developed by ECPAT and UNICEF and Code of Conduct on Safe and Honourable Tourism and other available Policies thereby developing a suitable Code of Conduct for North East India including Darjeeling and Siliguri with respect to the issue concerned."

Message from Christina Albertin, Regional Representative-South Asia, UNODC - Neiha Bansal, Project Associate, UNODC

Ms. Neiha Bansal reading the message that Ms. Christina Albertin had sent in lieu of her presence followed the brief presentation. The message highlighted the massive amount of human trafficking being done in an organised manner in India and Nepal. As an attempt to address this issue, the Ministry of Tourism along with PATA, UNODC and Save the Children – India conceptualised and drafted the code of conduct for 'Safe and Honourable Tourism'. The message strongly urged the group gathered to adopt the code of conduct which was unveiled by the Ministry of Tourism on July 1, 2010, and that all organisations working with children and on issues of tourism, integrate this in their work.

² Annexure 3

Session I: Policy perspectives in relation to tourism in the North East + ground realities and challenges

After the close of the introductory session, the consultation moved to discussing policy initiatives taken by both the central and state governments with respect to the North East Region. This session also included sharing by different individuals on the ground realities and challenges faced with respect to tourism in the region.

An overview on tourism trends and policy perspectives³ - Aditi Chanchani, Coordinator Programmes, EQUATIONS

The session began with a presentation by Ms. Aditi Chanchani on the overview of tourism trends and policy perspectives. The broad issues dealt with in the presentation were:

1. Understanding of Responsible and Sustainable Tourism
2. Tourism within the context of the North East Region Development (primarily in the context of the North East Vision 2020 document of the Government of India)
 - a. What is the tourism vision? What would be the core values and principles on which tourism will be developed?
 - b. What have been the inspirational stories in tourism that can define the tourism path for the northeast?
 - c. Who are the stakeholders, who will benefit, how can they engage?
 - d. Impacts of tourism need to be addressed and to state how this will be assessed?
 - e. What is the role & responsibilities of the State Tourism Departments?
3. Tourism trends in the North East Region
4. Tourism Policies of the North Eastern states are extremely varied in scope and details. States like Sikkim and Assam have tourism policies, where as Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh have draft tourism policy either submitted to State Government for review or awaiting cabinet approval. In Tripura they have eco tourism policy and in Nagaland industrial policy talks about tourism.
5. Issues that need to be looked at in an depth manner
 - f. Tourism's role in peace and conflict
 - g. Single Window Clearance
 - h. Land Banks and Land policies
 - i. Planning, Implementation and Monitoring of tourism policies and the role of communities

What emerged at the end of the presentation was the fact that policy-making processes did not include the communities and other stakeholders of the tourism industry. In addition, while the state tourism policies/ draft policies mentioned a commitment to sustainable (and responsible in the case of Sikkim) tourism, the specific process and plans of action in the document did not reflect this commitment. For e.g. the single window clearance, creation of land banks and the nature of tourism products to be developed. Further, several regions in the North East are seeing armed struggles and tourism is seen by the state as a solution to this problem, which in actuality have no direct linkage to tourism and are more around the issues of identity and development. The presentation highlighted these issues, which the group would need to discuss further to be able to take a clear stand on tourism policies in the North East Region.

Historical perspectives and current trends & challenges of tourism development in the North East - Conrad Sangma, Leader of Opposition, Meghalaya Legislative Assembly (Former Tourism Minister, Meghalaya)

Mr. Sangma started his presentation with the gap between the rich and the poor in the country and suggested that tourism could possibly be one of the ways of reducing this gap. He then went on to stating that it is important to look at quality and not quantity with respect to tourism. He said that it would be preferable to have few tourists contributing a lot of money to the industry, which would have higher returns to investment instead of a large number of low budget tourists. The example he quoted was instead of 100 tourists spending Rs.100 each it would be better if there was 1 tourist who would spend Rs.50000.

³ Annexure 4

In the context of Meghalaya he said that people stay at Guwahati, use Guwahati vehicles and visit Meghalaya for a day therefore spending their money in Assam instead of in Meghalaya, which did nothing to add to the earnings of the state, yet the state would need to invest in tourism so that people could visit. He also shared that Nagaland and Sikkim were the two states in the North East Region that should be looked up to in the context of tourism.

On the North East Vision 2020 statement, Mr. Sangma shared that the statement was far more focussed on the economic aspect and completely ignored the cultural heritage that exists in the North East Region. Also, the fact that there is high political instability in the region which was not taken cognizance of and the role of judicial institutions was not included. He also said that for tourism it is important a Unique Selling Points (USP) be built which can then be capitalised on and through which a trickle down effect of the benefits of tourism takes place. The example he quoted here was that of Kumarakom Lake in Kerala where vegetables grown in the region were consumed by the resorts around the lake. In the case of the North East, all raw materials for food come from the plains therefore incurring leakage of large amounts from the region.

With respect to the tourism policy, he stated that the industry being dynamic, a flexible tourism policy is required. While there needs to be a tourism policy, the presence of a Master Plan (as in the case of Sikkim) is good since this offers the required flexibility. However, in terms of the content of the policy Mr. Sangma was opposed to issuing subsidies and incentives. Most of the players are outside parties who in any case are equipped to make large capital investments. These subsidies are meant for smaller players from within the state who are in the sector and do not have access to them. Since they are used by the larger players from other states and therefore do not further the development of the state. This is the same problem with grants and therefore the state must give soft loans with less interest rate to the people to set up established rather than giving grants.

Mr. Sangma expressed that the most crucial aspect was that of implementation. While speaking on the role of stakeholders, he said that politicians need to create the framework and the NGOs should create awareness in people. However, he also acknowledged that political will would be needed for all this to happen. He ended his presentation with a request that we need to seek ways where people who are implementing the policies and master plans should be made more responsible including hotel owners, travel operators etc.

Tourism and Gender Concerns – Gender based Violence with special reference to Gender Budgeting - Dr Ranjana Kumari, President, Women Power Connect, New Delhi

Dr. Ranjana Kumari started her presentation stating that there are three kinds of perspectives to tourism:

1. Indulgent, Exploitative and Insensitive Tourism
2. Ignorant, Reluctant and Disengaged Tourism
3. Responsible Tourism

She shared that her experience of the North East states was of the second kind, but which has great potential and could therefore achieve Responsible Tourism. For eg. Sikkim was an example to the entire country since it had banned the use of plastics. She also shared that it was important that the states focus on healthy tourism, which is clean and healthy and leading to happiness, which should work both ways – for the country as well as the people.

There is a notion that women are warm and nurturing, and are therefore more involved in tourism and these issues need to be focussed on. She shared that in this context Dilli Haat was a best practice and used as a best practice for promoting arts and crafts, since it was initiated by women artisans and is now doing extremely well. Women in the North East are much more linked with markets and this is an additional reason why their issues need to be highlighted.

In terms of what needs to be done to achieve all this, Dr. Ranjana suggested that infrastructure needs to be developed in the form of a better road network since accessibility needs to highlight the happy side of tourism. There should be a focus on the social – cultural customs, heritage and flora and fauna of the region. She stated that while focussing on the traditions of the region, it should be kept intact and not distorted

The key aspects to be addressed are the issues of women linked to trafficking, there is a need to implement or amend the existing policies to see what can be adopted. Finally, it is critical to make people more responsible.

Address by the Honourable Tourism Minister Shri Bhim Prasad Dhungel, Department of Tourism, Government of Sikkim

The Honourable Minister started his address by presenting a demographic profile of the state. In the context of tourism, he stated that Responsible Tourism is an approach which can be used by planning authorities to adopt, with a focus on economic participation of the people and not just as beneficiaries of charity. Tourism should provide opportunities for employment and procurement practices; it should be such that they support local entrepreneurs and contribute to socio economic development by providing employment to people from the community. Shri Dhungel then went on to speak about the highlights of the Sikkim Tourism policy – the tourism products and the general spirit of the policy (eg. akant vas and agyat vanvas)

Wrapping up of the session – Ms. Hasina Kharbhih

Ms. Hasina summarised the presentations made by the speakers focussing on the fact that like Dr. Ranjana Kumari stated tourism in the North East was Indulgent, Exploitative and Reluctant. She also said that the Honourable Minister had raised an important point of tourism leading to economic participation and which does not result in charity. She ended saying that there was great need to support regional entrepreneurship, an example being that the souvenirs sold these days are sourced from China and Burma instead of from the region.

North East Vision 2010 and North East Tourism Policy with special reference to Sikkim⁴ - Dr Vimal Kahwas, Phd, Associate Fellow, School of Policy and Planning, Sikkim University

Dr. Kahwas began his presentation with a detailed background of Sikkim, its population, regions, its economy and finally stating that tourism has become an important sector in times that are more recent.

Speaking on tourism in Sikkim, Dr. Kahwas, spoke briefly on the number of tourists visiting the state and the state's response to this. He then moved on to a detailed history of tourism policy in the state starting with the Master Plan, 1998 and the Sikkim Tourism Policy, 2010. While focussing on the challenges and realities with respect to tourism he made the following points:

- HIV-AIDS is a rising concern in the state.
- Human trafficking is on the rise. There is no data except in the form of newspaper reports and a serious attempting at investigating this should be done.
- Child Labour is an issue since most households and restaurants employ children.
- Alcohol consumption is high as it is the third highest alcohol consumer in the country. Further, consumption of drugs and prescription medicine is also on the high. For e.g. in the past 7-8 years, there has been an increase in the pharmaceutical manufacturing units that have been set up in Sikkim.
- Suicide is high with Sikkim ranking the 1st in the North East and 4th in the state for suicide rates.

With respect to Responsible Tourism, Dr. Kahwas stated that it would need good field based research, appropriate government policies, plans and legislations and proper implementation to make it a reality in Sikkim.

Discussion

In response to the presentation, certain pertinent questions came up like what is the responsibility of the government with respect to tourism and what was the relationship between tourism and the suicide rate.

In response to these questions, Dr. Kahwas stated that the state had 3 primary responsibilities – Social, Economic and Environmental. He stated that while there seems to be no overt relationship between tourism and suicide rates, it is an area, which needs to be explored.

⁴ Annexure 5

Civil Society Perspectives on Tourism - Ramananda Wangkheirakpam, North East People's Alliance

Mr Wangkheirakpam started his presentation by situating tourism and tourism processes in the wider development of the North East Region. He also said that it was important to look at infrastructure, traditional institutions and other institutions etc and the implications of these in the North East. For e.g. many dams are being built, trade routes being opened, and water being privatised. ADB has been funding urban development project through which land is being acquired. There is also a serious sub regionalisation process going on with respect to the North East. The question then is where do we see tourism in the overall debate of development?

He said that tourism is not context free. It is part of the larger development paradigm. It is about making people think in certain ways about re-orienting people's mindsets. There is a need to understand how society changes. Is tourism completely disorienting? A lot is being done to divert all development towards tourism. Mr Wangkheirakpam also said that it was important to understand how does tourism take away forces of political movements? Will people be made to engage in tourism as economic growth spaces take away from political resistances that are occurring in the region?

Mining, dams etc. are considered the serious ways to development while tourism is considered as a soft path to development. Should we create a diversion from the existing struggles against anti-people development?

There is a need to have a mass discussion with the communities on these issues. ADB has organised meetings on the SASEC tourism plan. However, none of the meetings minutes / information is with people and only with the policy makers. There needs to be public opinion built on this issue and then the building of a movement around this.

Through the raising of these critical questions, Mr Wangkheirakpam ended with saying that processes adopted with the ADB and the Government of India needs to be questioned and a more participatory process where in people and communities are involved should be created and implemented.

Role of Hoteliers in Responsible Tourism Initiative - Mr Thinley Densappa, Welcome Heritage

Mr. Densappa gave a brief background to Sikkim and introduced the state as the 'Land of peace and tranquillity'. He stated that Sikkim had a Natural USP – that of nature. He congratulated the government on the good tourism policy and hoped that the goals as set in the policy would be accomplished.

He stated that it was important that more than the volume of tourists what mattered was the amount that each tourist spends in the region. It would be better to have less people visiting the state but expending large amounts of money. For this to happen there would need to be very high quality services and therefore it is not feasible to have small operators who are unable to maintain the standard of their services. An example he quoted was of the quality of living accommodations and that small players cannot maintain a clean enterprise. There should be less restaurants but quality restaurants.

Sustainability, he said, is most important and therefore the need for ecotourism. To ensure that there is sustainability, certain number of hotels needs to be certified and then granting licenses for construction of more hotels needs to be stopped. He offered Bhutan as an example of a successful tourism model which allows only certain amount of people into the country every year and each of the tourists need to spend a minimum of 230USD else they would have to pay that money while leaving the country. A negative example he gave was the case of Pelling in North Sikkim which has more hotels than required, causing the region to become unsustainable. He also mentioned that it is in the small hotels where child labour and prostitution takes place.

He also stated that there is a myth that the opening of more restaurants and hotels generates employment for people of the state since the employment generated is used by people from the neighbouring states. Sikkim has a high level of education and therefore the youth have higher aspirations, which prohibit them from accessing the low-grade employment generated by the mushrooming hotels and restaurants. An example he quoted here was of his daughter who after having completed her masters' degrees in hotel management would not choose to come back to Sikkim since there are very few good quality hotels where they can work.

Further, if there are quality services, those working in these spaces would also be more educated and therefore more aware of their rights, therefore reducing human rights violations.

Discussion

The presentation was followed by several comments about the fact that not everyone can afford highly priced accommodations. Further, for poor people who set up lower end hotels/restaurants, they cannot afford to take loans if there is an expectation that only high-end enterprises should be set up.

Mr. Densappa responded that the objective of the tourism industry should be to generate high revenues with minimum pollution, landslides etc. Village tourism and home stays would be another way to involve the local community while promoting tourism. He stated that one USP could be to "Go see the Lepchas".

Role of Tour Operators in Responsible Tourism Initiative - Lukendra Rasaily, Managing Director, Travel Agent Association of Sikkim

Mr. Rasaily began by saying that Sikkim was the newest state in the North Eastern Council and that there was a good synergy between the Government and the stakeholders. The Travel Agent Association of Sikkim was instituted 25 years ago and has 3 divisions – Adventure, Hospitality and Ecotourism to help raise issues of the travel agents and tour operators. The Tourism and Hospitality Institute has arrived at a basic minimum standard for trekking therefore protecting both the tourists as well as the tour operators. They are in the process of coming up with their own code of conduct for eco tourism (www.resk.org.in).

He said that it is our duty to help the Government by sharing with them our ideas and thoughts and giving them direction. The travel agent association is now going to adopt some villages where there has been no tourism initiatives and hope to bring at least a 100 more tourists to the region as a part of their CSR initiatives. This he felt was also part of what is responsible tourism. Responsible is not taking care of tourists only but taking care of the people of the region. However, integrating into the country is also important and therefore there is a need to cater to the less privileged rather than only to those who can afford high-end tourism products.

The Association has received funding from USAID to conduct trainings on ecotourism to guides, porters etc. Further, he clarified that the number of academia related visitors are much less and the number of pleasure tourists are larger.

The Association has also formulated an ethics of business, which travel agents sign. While this is not mandatory, it is important. Those who have signed the ethics of business are allowed to display this in their offices and on their brochures, which gets them more business.

On the concept of home stays, Mr. Rasaily said that while this is a good idea, it should be used judiciously. There have been events when tourists have utilised home stay facilities and have looted the villagers of their jewels and other valuables. Therefore, it is not just the community but also even the tourists who need to be educated. The existing laws should be linked to tourism.

Another problem faced by the communities is that of cultural differences between the villagers and the tourists. Some foreign tourists swim naked in the springs of Sikkim (Dzongu) and this is completely against the culture of the people. He highlighted that there is a need for signage's to be placed at such spots making clear accepted and not-accepted behaviours.

With respect to policy formulation, Mr. Rasaily shared that it is important that all stakeholders to be consulted including it being discussed in the Gram Sabhas, by NGOs etc, which will also help the state to be people friendly and take decisions in a democratic manner. He feels that there is no originality and innovation in policy and the states just tend to copy from each other's texts. It is a similar situation with tour operators and there is nothing new and creative emerging in terms of tourism products.

Finally, with respect to infrastructure he stated that it should be planned such that it is safe for the tourists as well as for the people of the state.

Discussion

- An important point that emerged was that there are hardly any Government Representatives at the consultation to encourage Responsible Tourism. While policies might be good in intention, unless the implementation is also done in accordance, it does not fulfil its purpose. Further, since policies are not binding by law they are taken more lightly. Therefore, there needs to be an appropriate legislation for the Tourism Industry.
- It was observed that the speakers are speaking on behalf of the tourists but there is nothing being discussed about the people who are living in these regions for centuries. For e.g. there needs to be a debate on land entitlements of the people. In response to this, Mr. Rasaily stated that since most villages in Sikkim are connected with the tourism routes this was not much of an issue for the state. All the departments like the Rural Development Department, power sector, Urban Development Department are all working in the context of tourism and therefore there is a good coordination between them. All this is happening because the Ministry of Tourism is giving a lot of attention to the North East Region.
- It is important to review the pressure that tourism puts on the resources that are there in the state and how much has been diverted to servicing tourists. For e.g. how much water do the tourists coming to Gangtok consume and how does that affect the availability of water to the people of the town? How much garbage is produced due to tourism and how is that being handled? In response to this, it was shared that the Government of Sikkim has created a Master Plan for 15 years, which ends in 2015 and that the tourist areas are being developed according to that master plan. There was no feasibility study that was conducted in 1990, as it was then not perceived as an important sector.
- It is important to look at regulatory mechanisms especially in the context of the fact the Public Private Partnerships are being encouraged.
- Until now, the consultation has not discussed in detail rural tourism. In response to this, it was shared that the next session was on community based tourism initiatives and that this issue could be discussed in detail at that time.
- Maybe it would be good to discuss what went right with Sikkim, which has seen such a spurt in ecotourism. In response to this, some people shared that it is important to look at the Look East Policy and how this would negatively impact the region.
- Another important outcome of the consultation should be what can we as a group put forward towards protecting people especially in the context of village tourism. What are we doing to protect our culture?
- It was suggested that the consultation should culminate in the declaration of statement against child trafficking.

SESSION II: Critical issues in tourism

Gender Budgeting and Tourism⁵- Dr Ranjana Kumari, President, Women Power Connect

Dr. Kumari highlighted the need to look at issues of gender in the tourism industry. An important part of the gender perspective is the maintaining of the cultural heritage of the region and this should be bought within the policy. She raised the issue of vertical and horizontal segregation of the labour market where men and women are located at different positions and focused on the vertical segregation where women are part of the lower rungs of the hierarchy offering little to no potential of women reaching the higher reaches where decision making is involved. While the industry might seem sensitive when they allow women to work part-time, this affects their salaries and growth trajectories and have less protection from unemployment. While speaking about the linkages in the industry, Dr. Ranjana said that community based tourism is a good entry point for women into the tourism industry. Here marketing becomes a major constraint and access to information by involving all stakeholders would be a good strategy.

In order to protect the interests of women the following would be needed:

- Capacity building for participation
- Strategies of building partnerships
- Proactive initiatives to be taken by tourism boards and government departments
- Prevent sexual objectification of women in tourism
- Stereotyping of women through advertisements

⁵ Annexure 6

Finally, speaking about strategy, Dr. Ranjana shared that the following would need to be done:

- Networking
- Sharing good practices
- Identifying the most gender-responsive aspects of tourism development
- Allocations for training, providing micro –credit and linkages.

Impacts of Tourism on Women and Children – from a legal perspective⁶ - Dr Doma Bhutia, Director Human Rights Law Network

Dr. Bhutia presented a very comprehensive picture of the legislations in place for the safeguard of the women and children in the tourism industry who are by far the most vulnerable to exploitation and abuse largely in the form of sexual exploitation (prostitution, human trafficking, sex tourism, paedophilia) and exploitation of labour (unequal wages for women and child labour).

She presented a series of provisions under the constitutional framework, the Indian Penal Code and the State Laws. With regard to the Sikkim Tourism Policy 2010, the following were her observations:

- The Policy is not emphatically and clearly worded to protect women and children from sexual and labour exploitation.
- The proposed “Responsible Tourism” – does not detail out the possible exploitation in view of “Promotion of Rural/Village Tourism and Home Stay”. It does not go beyond the economic, and to some extent, the ecological aspect of tourism.
- The policy fails to learn from the global tourism impacting the local community in terms of exploitation of the women and children such as in Cambodia, Thailand and Sri Lanka etc. as well as its impact in Goa and other places in India.
- The hope that the tourism industry will self evolve a “Code of Conduct” and “Guidelines for Ethical Practices” is highly misplaced. It leaves the community in the hands of those who merely seek profit out of tourism and are often condoned for generating revenue for the State.

The following were the suggestions that Dr. Bhutia offered towards changes in the Sikkim Tourism Policy, 2010:

- “Code of Conduct” and the “Guidelines for Ethical Practices” shall be evolved by the “Sikkim Tourism Advisory Council” along the lines of the best practices in India and other countries in participation with the stakeholders in the tourism sector of the State.
- The “Code of Conduct” shall necessarily include the set up of “Committee against Sexual Harassment” at workplaces where women are engaged.
- The tour operators and all the stakeholders providing services (enumerated in the Policy) shall necessarily be trained in following the “Code of Conduct” and the “Guidelines for Ethical Practices”, shall make declarations to abide by the same and shall keep documents of the same available at the establishments of the service agencies.
- The protection of women and children in terms of the law of the land (a few of which are discussed above) shall be specifically be the part of the training.
- The training shall begin with the law enforcement authorities, the special tourism police units (as suggested in the Policy) and the village administrative and executive bodies.

Tourism and trafficking related to Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act on the Northeast perspective⁷ - Sushil Huidrom, Centre for Peoples Concern, Manipur

Mr. Huidrom started with presenting the graveness of human trafficking across the world as well as in India. He shared with the group the different protocols and conventions under the UN framework, which can be used by us to our work on the rights of women and children. He then proceeded to share a detailed list of proposed amendments in the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, 1956 keeping in mind the tourism context.

⁶ Annexure 7

⁷ Annexure 8

He suggested that the following would be needed to be accomplished to check human trafficking:

- Prioritization of combating human trafficking
- Strengthening legislation
- Better law enforcement response
- Training and capacity building
- Setting-up specialized Anti Human Trafficking Units

Code of Conduct on Safe and Honourable Tourism, Government of India⁸ - Neiha Bansal, Project Associate, UNODC

Ms. Bansal presented a brief history of UN.GIFT along with its objectives and institutional framework. The focus of the presentation was then on the Code of Conduct for Safe and Honourable Tourism in terms of its objectives and different provisions.

Finally, Ms. Bansal presented the key action points in the following categories:

- Enhancing safety and security of all tourists
- Enhancing safety of local residents

The following were presented as the way forward to achieve the above two key action points:

- Effective adoption and implementation of the code and its provisions.
- Training and capacity building of stake holders.
- Public Awareness

Role of media on critical issues in tourism with special reference to Sikkim – Mr. Amit Patro, Editor, Sikkim Express:

Mr. Patro shared that the biggest hurdle in tourism in the North East is the presence of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) and the Protected Area Permit (PAP), which in his opinion should be removed. Since these permits have been introduced as a protective measure, he suggested that instead the media could be taken into confidence and could help on issues of security.

While there is the darker side to tourism, Mr. Patro suggested that a beginning can be initiated by looking at the positive sides and then the negative aspects can be dealt with later. The media also needs to understand if tourism is being promoted as sector in the North East or if it is being done in an unplanned manner. All those involved in the tourism industry and especially the media, need to be alert to this fact that there is unplanned and exploitative tourism that is taking place in the North East.

In the context of the militancy in the region, he said that one state in turmoil does not mean that the entire region is in chaos. The media could disseminate information on exactly which regions are in disturbed states so that tourists can avoid those regions. The media could also play a proactive role in informing people when normalcy has been established.

The state also needs to take into confidence the media and share their policies with them so that they can work together to achieve the objective of the policies. With media being part of the larger dialogue, they could work at the same level with the government.

Critical Perspectives on Tourism – Mr. Ravindranath, Rural Volunteer Centre

Mr. Ravindranath said that tourism was a sensitive and frightening subject and chose to speak on the contradictions within the State on its various policies indicating that the government was basically pro-corporate and anti-people. A case in point here was the fact that the governments of the North Eastern states are building dams rampantly (there is a plan to generate 1,00,000 MW electricity through dams in the North East specifically in the states of Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland). While doing so, the 'tourist attraction' is at stake since aggregates are mined to build the dams and tourists look for untouched environments.

⁸ Annexure 9

Another dichotomy is that fact that the states are trying to fight human trafficking while creating a situation, which becomes conducive for trafficking. With large tracts of land being acquired leading to the impoverishment of the people, trafficking becomes more possible.

The following were some of the important critical issues that Mr. Ravindranath raised:

- An important question that was raised was the kind of tourism development that is being planned for. There is a plan for large investments for tourism development through the SASEC plan of the ADB. The World Bank also has a role in the promotion of this plan. We however need to understand that these IFIs do not have the best interests of the people in mind and are only concerned about the returns to their investments. What kind of financial implications are we getting into? Who are the parliamentarians who are interested in promoting tourism and what are their stakes in this?
- It is important that the North East learn from experiences from the rest of the country. In other parts of the country land grabbing has been predominant and all in the name of the 5-star hotel culture of tourism as was even discussed earlier in the consultation. Resorts and malls are built and barricaded tourism is being promoted. Infact Meghalaya is already going through this process where campuses with 9feet high walls will be built. There is also the myth of job creation for the local population that needs to be considered since they will not get any employment in the Rs. 50000 per tourist culture that is being envisaged by some members in the group. Are we concerned about issues of land grabbing?
- The local communities (sometimes even called 'primitive') are very often showcased and become exhibits for tourists. What then happens to the culture of the local communities with the setting up of large tourism projects?
- There is a demand that ILP and PAP be withdrawn, however, this needs to be seen in the context of the protection of the people of the states.
- The conditionality for tourism is peace, yet there has been a history of political influence to disturb peace in the North East Regions. This will cause fear in the minds of tourists and they will stay away from the region.
- Poverty tourism is on the increase where people from developed countries like to visit poor regions to witness their pain.
- Policies can function only if the laws are being practiced and followed. However, there has been an increasing degeneration of the law in the North East. While civil society is looking for more policies, we need to understand that it is the corporate houses and banks which are funding these policy initiatives.
- In the name of making the North East Region more accessible and convenient for tourists, trans-boundary roads are being constructed. We need to realise that this is not happening for the welfare of the people of the region. These roads are merely being constructed to create routes for trade and commerce and the region is being envisaged as a buffer zone/ corridor between China and India.
- There had been an earlier discussion of beggary and how this is detrimental to tourism in the North East, but it is dispossession of land traditional occupation which is creating this situation.
- An important question is that of how much tourism and which areas will be open to tourism? Since rural tourism is being promoted in a big way in the North East, how many rural tourism projects are there in the country, from whose experiences we can gain some learnings?
- With respect to food, all over the country there is talk of organic food. However, organic food is very expensive and very few people would have access to that kind of food making tourism more niche and elitist.
- Since many of the North Eastern states are looking at tourism being an important strategy for development in the region, we need to understand the trajectory that the tourism sector takes. Most often, after some years of tourism development there is a saturation and tourism sites move since tourists want to see something new. A good example of this is Goa which has seen saturation and a dropping trend in the number of tourists visiting the region.
- However, fundamentally, dignity of the people is affected along with cultural practices when people are exposed to voyeurism from outsiders.

Critical issues in the Present scenario of tourism development in Mizoram - Mr Vanlalrema Vantawl, Zalen, Vice President of Mizoram Journalists Association

Mr. Vantawl shared the current context of tourism in Mizoram, where he said that tourism initiatives had all gone wrong. While there is great potential, there is no political will. There are absolutely no tourism related initiatives being taken up by the government. The fact that there is prohibition of alcohol in the state further deters tourists from wanting to visit the state. An indication of all this is that there is only 1 tour operator in the whole state with private participation being minimal. There is no product developed for those tourists who do not want to visit religious sites or monuments (for e.g. adventure tourism). The government has also not been able to develop art and culture circuits in the state.

With respect to impacts of tourism, right now that is not an issue since the state sees very little tourism related activity. However, since there is an increasing desire by the state to promote tourism, it needs to be done sensitively so that the potential negative impacts may be mitigated right from the start.

Mr. Vantawl has conducted a study on sex and pornography in the state and one resultant observation is that cab drivers are also doubling up as pimps and they offer Mizo girls to customers. Situations such as this need to be kept in mind while planning for tourism in the state and appropriate measures need to be taken to address these.

HIV-AIDS is high and the state has been marked as a 'highly vulnerable state', 68% is transmitted through sexual activities and the rest through injectibles. This can be a deterrent to tourism since there is a fear that tourists might get infected. In fact in this context Mr. Vantawl suggested that maybe tourism should not be promoted in the state. Also since some states like Sikkim has seen a rise in the tourism industry, Mizoram should learn from mistakes committed by states such as this and take them into account while planning its tourism activities.

Discussion

One intervention was made when the group was reminded to look at India's Look East Policy and the impact it had on Mizoram. Further, the fallout of the 1947 agreement with the Mizo Union Council that the region had the option to secede from India after 10 years and the resultant strife which finally ended with the formation of the Mizoram state in 1987.

Discussion at the end of Session III

The following were the issues that emerged from the presentations and discussions. It was suggested be taken up for further discussion and debate in small groups the following day:

- Policy and the law: Is there need for a Policy or a legislation to regulate tourism
- What kind of tourism does the North East want to see – development for the communities or government and private party oriented tourism?
- ILP and PAP issues. Some members were of the opinion that ILP should not be lifted but others felt that while maintaining ILP, it should be made tourist friendly. A larger debate on ILP and PAP was needed among the group since there were differing opinions especially in the context of PAP.
- Even if ILP is lifted what kind of tourism is being aspired by the people of the North East? If the expansion of tourism will be in the corporate form, will it happen at the cost of the people and their cultures?
- Mass tourism vs. Quality tourism
- Impact of tourism on prices in the state. For e.g. Naga people visiting Sikkim said that the state was very expensive and had to stay on the roads during the period of their visit since they could not afford accommodation in Sikkim. However, for Sikkim tourism it is important to see how these issues are balanced?
- Children are being brought from the North East to the orphanages in the south and this needs to be discussed
- India's Look East Policy and its impact on tourism.
- IFIs and Credit: Especially in the context of the broader developmental initiatives in the North East
- Home stays and its impact on communities.
- Review of tourism related Master Plans of the government.
- Awareness raising on these issues to tourism and local communities.
- In Sikkim has any study been undertaken to understand the water consumption, waste management by tourists etc,

SESSION III: Responses through community based tourism initiatives

Community based tourism initiatives in West Sikkim⁹ - Nima Tashi Bhutia, Chief Executive Officer, Khangchendzonga Conservation Committee (KCC)

Mr. Nima presented 4 case studies on community based tourism: Yambong Singalila Trek, Lachen (Himalayan Heritage Village), Tsomgo Pokhari Sanrakshan Samiti (PSS) and Yuksam – Dzungri

I. Yambong Singalila Trek

This is a trekking trail in West Sikkim. The people who live in this region have been in the past were pastoral nomadic communities. This biosphere reserve has several sanctuaries and very little agricultural lands. While looking at alternate livelihood options for the communities living in this region, tourism was identified as a possibility since these communities have never been agriculturalists, yet because of their nomadic past are familiar with the landscape, plants, animals etc. When the initiative was first started there were no accommodation facilities for the tourists and they started with the setting up of camp sites and some simple accommodation structures. Between the years 2005 – 2007, the initiatives saw several foreign tourists visiting the region and were able to generate an income of approximately Rs.20 lakhs over the 3 years. However, today this initiative does not see any visitors. Some of the reasons that the initiative failed were the following:

- Accessibility was an issue. At that time a road was proposed and which is now being constructed.
- While the group tried doing some publicity work, it never could reach the mainstream and did not feature in any tourist map.
- Due to other players in the region and the resulting competition, the number of tourists started dropping.
- The trail is far away from Gangtok (a full day's journey by road from Gangtok) and at least 3 days are required to complete the trail. The group felt that the tourists were not particularly willing to spend that much time on 1 trail. The group tried introducing handicrafts as well as visits to other institutions like monasteries and museums in the region, however this did not work out.

II. ii. Lachen – Himalayan Heritage Village

Lachen is located in the North Sikkim district and has recently been made accessible by road. Lachen was one of the 36 sites chosen by the Ministry of Tourism and UNDP for their project on endogenous tourism (rural tourism). In the past few years it has seen a lot of construction of hotels since it is being promoted as a tourism destination by the Government of Sikkim. While speaking about the work that The Mountain Institute (TMI) did there, Mr. Nima focussed on the structures that were being built as hotels. Initially the structures were not to have roofs but with the intervention of TMI and discussions with the villagers of Lachen, roofs were added as per the traditional construction of the region and in keeping with the environment there.

III. iii. Tsomgo Pokhari Sanrakshan Samiti (PSS)

The Tsomgo lake is situated in the East Sikkim district. PSS along with The Mountain Institute conducted an exercise of drafting an annual lake conservation plan which conducted de-silting work in the year 2009 along with the 3rd Mile Police Officers.

IV. iv. Yuksam – Dzungri

Mr. Nima, during his work with TMI realised that waste generated was one of the biggest issues in the context of tourism. Typically the waste generated would be dumped in a village (as landfills or in ponds) in the lower regions of the mountain, therefore not only doing nothing towards waste management but also polluting villages who were not the beneficiaries of tourism. While talking about responsible tourism it is important to look at the issue of poorer regions becoming the recipient of waste from the richer regions involved in tourism.

Mr. Nima has started an initiative with students, civil society organisations, tour operators and the government for the management of waste.

⁹ Annexure 10

Today at some tourist sites there are segregation bins, which are located. (9-10 bins in bigger communities and 4-5 bins in smaller communities). Waste is segregated in 20-21 categories (for e.g. there are 8 categories for plastic bottles). Some groups from the nearby villages have approached the group to take some of the waste to make souvenirs out of them. While this is a good idea, a market needs to be created for this. Rag pickers have also accessed the group to collect the segregated waste.

There was a similar experience in the South Sikkim district, which has been declared as an industrial area, from which a lot of waste was generated and dumped in the adjoining areas. With lobbying this practice has now been banned.

While speaking about the tourism policy, Mr. Nima shared that Shri Dungal is the Minister for both Tourism as well as Forest departments and yet there is no coordination between these. The forest department has formed a committee to evolve a tourism policy for Sikkim (Possibly there was an indication towards the formation of an eco tourism policy). What then is the status of the current Sikkim Tourism Policy, 2010 drafted by the tourism department?

He also spoke on the gender issues with regards home stays and rural tourism. There needs to be clearer picture of what rural tourism really means. Rural tourism has not been integrated in the rest of the tourism sector and most community-based tourism is not recognised as mainstream tourism.

There is an example where someone interpreted rural tourism as visiting rural areas, which will help preserve their heritage. However, for the benefit of the tourists footpaths were constructed. Since the cows of the village were causing damage to the footpaths, they were banned in the village. Today the village is consuming milk packaged in tetra packs since they do not have cows for sourcing milk and therefore creating an increase in expenditure while ruining the local heritage.

In addition, the economic benefits of Rural Tourism are suspect since only 20-30% of this reaches the communities. This is because food commodities are purchased from outside the state and there is no policy for local procurement, which affects the farmers of the region and the state.

While infrastructure has been planned, the management for the same in the future has not been discussed. For e.g. waste management has not been incorporated in the infrastructure being planned for tourism.

While ending his presentation Mr. Nima spoke about the existing policies regarding tourism.

The following are the opportunities/gaps that he has identified and which need to be worked on:

- Standardized operation guidelines for Homestay
- Unplanned and no-need base tourism infrastructure with lack of management.
- Community based initiatives fail to be recognized in the mainstream.
- Lack of integrated approach.
- Lack of waste management, urban waste mostly shifted to rural areas, riversides.
- Poor community involvements, inequitable benefit sharing.

Community based tourism initiative in the Dzongu region, Sikkim - Gyatso Lepcha, Concerned Lepchas of Sikkim (CLOS)

Mr. Gyatso spoke about the community-based initiative in the Dzongu region, which is being run by a group of young people. The initiative is largely around home stays. Mr. Gyatso is an activist and is a member of the Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT) a group that is struggling against the dams being planned on the Teesta River. After 3 years, he felt that the youth were being depressed and frustrated due to the lack of response of the government on the issue of the dams as well as the general neglect of work related concerns of young people. Mr. Gyatso started this initiative a year ago in response to this.

The communities who live in this region are driven by their love for nature. The culture and way of life is centuries old and is connected deeply with the mountains and the river (Teesta). The construction of the dams was causing great harm to the river, which is a lifeline for the people, as well as to the conservation of ecology, in turn affecting the culture and tradition of the people. This was where the home stay idea came from. The youth felt that such a venture would be sustainable in nature and would generate some economy but without affecting the pristine nature around them. While the tourists come for home stays, the youth work as guides and drivers.

This initiative does not generate high monetary incomes for the youth, yet it keeps them away from drugs, alcohol and suicide. The youth are also able to influence the tourists who leave the region with a deeper appreciation for nature. Moreover, most importantly this initiative protects the nature and ecology of the region.

Mr. Gyatso urged that the government of the North Eastern States should cease the implementation of fancy and expensive tourism projects and that they need to preserve the mountains, rivers and forests. The State Government needs to reach out to youth and local people, giving them capacity building training and financial assistance to start home stay ventures instead of spending crores of money on large projects since in any case tourists do not travel so far out to see artificial structures.

Mr. Gyatso ended his presentation by saying that all of us share the same sky and walk the same earth and all us therefore need to work together to saving it.

Discussion

A question raised to Mr. Gyatso was about the flow of the tourist population and if the benefits were percolating to the people.

In response to this Mr. Gyatso shared that this initiative was not planned and it just started as an idea which happened to work. He added that it was not about the earnings, but the message that they want to send out to the government that there are other alternate means of development which does not involve the destruction of rivers, mountains etc. He also stated that unfortunately in our country, society based initiatives will not work. There was a time when there were no visitors, but it has picked up again this summer with 40-50 groups visiting of which about 40-50% were international tourists.

How can Rural Tourism be sustained?¹⁰ - Tassaduk Ariful Hussain, Executive Director, North East Social Trust (NEST)

Mr. Tassaduk shared that tourists to Assam are usually interested in the one horned rhinos. A successful example of conservation in the region is that of Kaziranga. In the last year there have been 70000 domestic and 7000 international tourists. People in this region are unable to engage in agricultural activities since the wildlife destroys the crops. Further, once a region was declared a national park all other human interventions are considered illegal. Most of the people living around the Kaziranga National Park are below poverty line. NEST was faced with the question of how the tourism benefits could be transferred to the communities living there directly.

Mr. Tassaduk then went on to sharing India's 10th plan in the context of tourism and then went on to speak about the economic, social and environmental impacts – both positive and negative of tourism.

While working on the Endogenous Tourism Project – Durgapur, NSET followed the following process:

- Software for entry point: Participatory Research, Participatory Rural Appraisal, Motivation Workshops
- Cultural Tourism
- Food Tourism
- Craft Tourism
- Tourism on traditions
- Skills building and planning for sustainability
- Institution building

In terms of challenges, one big challenge has been the perception of the North East being unsafe. He contested the perception by stating that Gujarat has been unsafe for the Muslims, Mumbai has been unsafe due to repeated riots and bomb blasts, Andhra Pradesh has the naxal problem, Delhi and Rajasthan are also unsafe seeing bomb blasts, and caste based riots respectively. While there is insurgency in the North East, there is militancy in the other regions as well. This has been a deliberate attempt to push this region into practicing unhealthy tourism practices. There is a need to therefore see tourism not just as another developmental project but as a livelihood project for the people living in the region.

¹⁰ Annexure 11

Alternative Perspective of Construction using Bamboo – an Impulse initiative¹¹ - Fatima Martin, Architect

Ms. Martin presented on the alternate construction experiment that Impulse is conducting in the village Mawlindep, Meghalaya. The project is based on 4 essential parameters:

- Capacitation programmes: guaranteeing transfer of technologies to local people
- Environmental friendly: selection of materials/ relation with the site
- Low-cost technology
- Local resources

A group of 3 architects from Spain visited Impulse and started this experiment in the year 2009. Impulse was planning to construct a home for children who are rescued from trafficking. The architects met with a psychologist to understand the atmosphere that would be needed to make the children feel safe and comfortable. Further, a site was selected within the village in Mawlindep, where the structure of the home would be in keeping with that of the region and such that it is part of the community, and not as if they were in a shelter home. The community has been a part of all the decision making processes and the women themselves are also constructing the structure with support from the architect. While designing the structure the architect has to also keep in mind the fact that this is in a seismic zone which also experiences strong winds.

Ms. Fatima shared the following reflections that have emerged through this process:

OBJECT/BUILDING	PROCESS/CONSTRUCTION
local "treasures"	involving local people (not U.F.O)
traditional Knowledge	being part of it
men & nature	relation between tourists & local
heavy & resistant not the same	experience not visiting
long lasting vs. Good quality	

Ms. Martin shared that she is also making the presentation in the context of tourist infrastructure. It is possible to construct buildings using bamboo and other low cost regional material. Bamboo is flexible and strong and can also be used in constructing multiple storied buildings. The advantage is that it can be sourced locally and would be in keeping with the culture and tradition of the region. While there is a handicraft industry for bamboo, it has been saturated and people are unable to sell their products anymore. Therefore, it is necessary that other forms of its use and promotion are explored and that the mere presence of Bamboo Boards is not enough.

¹¹ Annexure 12

Day 2: August 27, 2010

The participants were welcomed to the 2nd day of the deliberations. This was followed by a brief summarising of the 1st day and by setting the agenda for the current day's discussions.

While speaking about the important issues to be discussed it was highlighted that infrastructure posed a major problem for tourism. Also the issues of women and children needed to be looked at in an in depth manner. The question of what kind of tourism was raised in the context of the casinos which have come up in Sikkim and that a further deliberation of the precise problems that are peculiar to the North Eastern Region needs to be discussed.

The following was presented as comprehensive summary of the previous day and the specific task for the 2nd day:

Key discussions from the 1st day:

1. Tourism policies perspectives – rethinking on them
2. Law and Policy: Regulation, Mechanisms, Administrative Issues, Look East Policy, Master Plan
3. Nature and form of tourism development - What kind of tourism do we want in the NE? – value or volumes, community based tourism, others models
4. Tourism Impacts – Social, Cultural, Economic and Ecological
5. Women, Child and Tourism – sex work/trafficking/ policy and legislations
6. Development processes, IFIs and Tourism
7. Tourism's role in peace and conflict - ILP, PAP, how can tourism flourish in an unstable situation,
8. Need more information on polices, implementation of them, other projects being undertaken by the state departments and ministries
9. Responsible / Sustainable Tourism

Points for state-wise group discussion for the 2nd day:

1. What are the gaps in the state tourism policies? In states where there is no tourism, policy is it needed? Does each state need to amend the state tourism policy? Is there a need for an overarching law for tourism?
2. Tourism in the context of state realities: How can tourism be made sustainable, equitable and just. What are the 4 major issues in each state with respect to tourism where intervention is needed? (1 year)

Note: Please create a broad action plan and strategies in the context of the above 2 points.

This was followed by an intervention from Ms Bansal who suggested strongly that the state groups look at the Code of Conduct for Safe and Honourable Tourism which has been launched by the Ministry of Tourism with respect to the following 3 aspects:

1. Critical aspects of the Code of Conduct
2. Building Public awareness
3. How do you encourage the industry to implement the code

The group requested that the copies of the state tourism policies be circulated and that the discussion not loose focus on women and children while discussing the broader issues of tourism (e.g. Female escort services in Assam). The Look East Policy also needs to be discussed in the context of tourism. The group also felt that home stays also need to be discussed in detail and suggestions made regarding the exploitation that communities become open to in this context.

The following six groups were formed:

1. Assam, Arunachal and Meghalaya
2. Mizoram and Nagaland
3. Manipur
4. Tripura
5. Eastern State – Siliguri and Darjeeling
6. Sikkim

Presentations:

1. Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya¹²

The USP for North Eastern states is nature. However, to create infrastructure for tourism, there is deforestation taking place. When policies are made, there is a need for multi-stakeholder intervention. All stakeholders need to be responsible for the implementation of the policy including taxi drivers, government as well as corporates. Indigenous interests need to be protected. Local governance also needs to be involved especially the Panchayats. Having said this, the key persons in the region also need to take the initiative and come forward and be a part of the process.

Assam

The Government of Assam has a tourism plan but it needs to be modified. A multi-sectoral approach needs to be adopted and advocacy needs to be done with policy makers and law enforcers. Awareness to the community is needed on tourism and this can be done through electronic and print media. While home stays is a good idea there needs to be some form of vigilance so that the rights of the community and the tourist is not violated. An e.g. of this could be having 'tourism police' as well as 'cyber police'. It was also suggested that the construction of corporate resorts should not be encouraged. While initiating new project for tourism, the ecology needs to be protected. In terms of capacity building all community should go through training on women and child rights.

Arunachal Pradesh

Arunachal Pradesh does not have a tourism policy, but has a vision-mission statement. ILP is also applicable in the state and the group felt that this should not be withdrawn since it protects the indigenous people and their culture. The people of Arunachal have had much less exposure to the outside world and to tourism as compared to the other North Eastern states and the group felt that they are not yet prepared to face the exposure that tourism will bring them. Arunachal has a very diverse culture with about 26 major tribes and 100 minor tribes and therefore, should be treated in a delicate manner. On the issue of monitoring, it is not only the government who should monitor but also the stakeholders. Law needs to be made more accessible to the villages and the community especially for children and women. Currently, tour operators are capitalising on the diverse culture and nothing much is being done to bring the tribes into the mainstream. The tribes need to be taken into confidence and consultations with the communities should be conducted to understand their point of view – this need to be the process in which the tourism policy should be made. ILP should be maintained and the question of PAP needs to be discussed. The group would not like to see drug peddlers arriving in the state and the state being filled with the waste generated by the tourism industry and therefore the government should be cautious while introducing tourism to the state.

Meghalaya

A thorough study of the existing tourism policy is required and the policy needs to be amended accordingly. This needs to be done in a consultative manner with all the stakeholders. Due to climate change, especially in the context of mining, the ecology is being affected. There needs to be guidelines framed for the kind of infrastructure that should be developed in the state. All infrastructures should be eco friendly and the beauty of the nature should not be disturbed. While planning for tourism aspects of forestry, soil conservation, local economy etc. should be taken into consideration. The community, local governance and especially the law enforcers need to be sensitised and capacities need to be built. While there are laws, mechanisms for their implementation are weak and these need to be strengthened. While home stays are important, the community needs to be protected. Certain guidelines, policies, steps to be taken should be circulated to home stays so that they are protected from being violated. Above all indigenous practices and traditional values should not be affected due to the eagerness of promoting tourism.

Discussion

It was shared that for those states who do not have a tourism policy, the North East Vision 2020 has a chapter on tourism and that can be referenced. In fact even the states who do have a tourism policy need to look at the Vision 2020. It was suggested that in depth discussions on tourism policies be taken up during the state level consultations that would follow. It was also suggested that while discussing on the alternative tourism policy that would then be

¹² Annexure 13

recommended to the state tourism departments – the broad framework should be one of safeguards from the harmful impacts of tourism.

There was a clarification that the tourism police are a branch of police with the tourism department and that this is different from the police within the police department who have a responsibility towards protecting the tourists who are usually called tourist police. There is a problem with the tourist police since some of them also act like guides and are involved in earnings through illegal means and by no means protect the community.

2. Mizoram and Nagaland¹³

After making a comprehensive presentation on the background and problems faced due to tourism in the 2 states, the following action plan was presented to the group:

- Need Impulse and EQUATIONS in assisting drafting the policy, which can be presented to the state Government by the concern partners in the state.
- Consultation meeting with policy makers in the states
- Sustained mass awareness campaign and sensitization on pros and cons
- Encourage local food/ culture and indigenous practices

3. Manipur

Due to the topography of the state, there is much potential for ecotourism, but practices of ecotourism need to be followed since there is a lot of diversity in the state's natural resources as well as culture. This needs to be done in a bottom-top approach. There is also a lot of potential for health tourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism and sports tourism. (The polo game has its roots in Manipur)

The following were identified as gaps in the tourism policy:

- The civil society organisations are not aware as to who has drafted the policy and if there were any consultations with the different stakeholders. If the policy needs to be accepted by the people, this would need to be rectified
- Need to explore the feasibility of making tourism sustainable in Manipur
- There is no SWOT analysis in the policy document
- No goal or mission has been articulated in the policy
- There is no reflection of the possible adverse impacts and how they can be mitigated. (e.g. marginalisation of the communities, child labour, sexual abuse, trafficking)

The following are the ground realities of Manipur which has a bearing on tourism in the state:

- Water resources in the state are limited and therefore tourism cannot be made either sustainable or equitable. There is a similar problem with electricity.
- Most of the natural sites of tourism have been taken over by the Indian armed forces and alternate sites for tourism will need to be developed.
- On the one hand AFSPA is implemented in the state while on the other Manipur is being portrayed by the central government as a tourism destination. This is in contradiction. Unless the AFSPA is revoked, there can be no tourism development in the state.
- PAP discourages foreign tourists and needs to be removed. However, ILP should remain.
- There is no tourism development due to lack of political will.

Action Plan:

- State level consultation to understand and critique the state tourism policy
- Strong lobbying with the government to help them understand tourism developments in the other North Eastern states and the changes in policy needed to promote healthy tourism in the state.

¹³ Annexure 14

4. Tripura¹⁴

The group from Tripura made a comprehensive presentation of the historical and political trajectory of the state. The following were the gaps found in the Tripura state Eco-Tourism policy:

- The policy does not speak of making local and indigenous people understand about its benefit and consequences,
- It does not include training of hoteliers and tour operators on waste management and different aspects of laws like the JJ Act, ITPA, Prevent of exploitation of children and women,
- It has not covered the protection of local population from the outsiders posing as tourists,
- The policy does not propose penalties in cases of violation of code of conduct.

The following was presented as ways of making tourism sustainable:

- Participation of local communities during planning and implementation,
- Income generation of local communities has to be ensured,
- Guidelines for protection of environment is a must,
- Immediate intervention for maintenance of peace and harmony as and when required,
- Creation of cells to monitor to enforce the laws,
- Adequate campaign to attract travellers,
- Networking of stakeholders.

The following were identified as key areas for intervention:

- Protection of women and children from exploitation,
- Massive awareness,
- Protection of environment,
- Development of basic infrastructure for tourists.

5. Eastern State – Siliguri and Darjeeling¹⁵

The group primarily focussed its discussion on the Darjeeling region and presented the current scenario with respect to tourism including the negative impacts. The following was presented as steps to be taken to make tourism sustainable:

- Encourage ecotourism where local villagers can engage fruitfully.
- Sensitize all stakeholders on code of conduct, basic ethics both host and guests
- In any policy integrate guidelines, code of conducts, ethics taking into account local context.
- Need capacity building of different stakeholders to be responsible and accountable
- Need good governance support without any political disturbance
- Need all the stakeholders of tourism to work in coordination including government and policy makers
- Certain % revenue generated from tourism should reinvest back to the same sector

6. Sikkim

The group shared that tourism is being developed too rapidly and without the understanding of the consequences of this on the community. Currently tourism benefits are not reaching the community. For e.g. the past few years has a steep growth in the hotel industry but 70-80% of the hotels have been leased to outsiders who are primarily reaping the benefits.

In terms of negative impacts, an example is the fact that Sikkim is the only state which has casinos. We need to learn from Nepal, where there are casinos which bring in the money, but which local people are not allowed to access therefore limiting the negative impacts of gambling within the local community. Sikkim however has no such guidelines.

¹⁴ Annexure 15

¹⁵ Annexure 16

Further, the Sikkim policy states that one of the objectives of tourism would be poverty alleviation. However there is also mention of land banks. On the other hand the positive aspect of the policy is the mention of legal support to the local communities and of effective regulation and of a code of ethics which shall be developed.

However, some members of the group felt that there needs to be a debate on tourism in Sikkim since just like Goa is an example for tourism (both good and bad) for the rest of the country, Sikkim is being used as an example of tourism in the North East.

Another important aspect to look at is in the context of health and safety of the community, since tourism is also bringing in several illnesses.

Further, there needs to be a balance of corporates and the other stakeholders. There was one suggestion that the corporate entities should get permits from the local governance instead of the state government to set up their enterprises. Fundamentally it should be the local governance which should decide what tourism related development should take place in the region. The Forest Department needs to be involved if ecological sustainability is to be ensured. For e.g. recently in Meghalaya, the BSF cut down lots of trees to build barracks and this was conducted as an auction. Such practices in the context of tourism should be discouraged and therefore the Forest Department needs to be part of the stakeholder group.

Finally, it was suggested that an autonomous body, which is neutral, comprising of capacity builders should be set up to train the community and other stakeholders.

This is a report of the consultation. For the actual presentations made by the participants do write to info@equitabletourism.org / impulsengonetwork@gmail.com

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