Guidelines for Tourism Development in the Region

Introduction

Tourism development in the region requires a complete set of institutional, environmental, and technology-related inputs which are coherently knit to benefit from the natural conditions. Such a process has to be designed to benefit local communities. In such a situation, where significant structural changes have to occur, it is necessary to first identify a minimal set of actions which are feasible, as tourism development has implications for various sectors in the economy. Thus, the following guidelines are not a substitute for the fundamental structural changes required in the economy.

Policy Aspects

It has been pointed out in the overview report that tourism development is impacted by a number of policies in interlocked areas, and the evolution of policy perspectives for tourism itself has been incoherent. It is essential to establish a policy base for mountain tourism, and it would be expedient at the national level to develop it on the basis of area and ecological region. The policy criteria for sustainable mountain tourism should include the following aspects.

1) A clear statement of objectives to express the role of mountain tourism in the context of the region, for example:

   - enhancing the quality of life of mountain communities by creating equitable opportunities;
   - directly addressing the concerns of environmental degradation at specific destinations as well as in the region as a whole;
   - directly addressing the question of poverty in areas where such intervention is necessary; and
   - promoting and conserving the local cultural ethos.

2) The policies governing mountain tourism development should be transparent about the Government's role. Among the various aspects, emphasis must be laid on the following aspects:

- the ground rules for private sector operations, including specific criteria to enable enterprise development, e.g., considerations regarding carry-ing capacity, the role of local people, and the scope for expansion;
- the process and practice of allocating resources despite implementation through different sectoral agencies;
- the role of the Government in minimising conflicts over resource use, particularly in designated protected areas;
- the role of the Government in coordinating the mobilisation of resources from the private sector, including financial agencies that can support private and non-government initiatives; and
- the precedence of different sectoral policies that affect tourism, including regulations.

3) The policy on mountain tourism must evolve in association with state governments, the NGOs working in the region, and the representatives of local communities, so that there are fewer discrepancies between the Centre and the state, or between either of them and the local perceptions about the role of mountain tourism.

4) The fundamental role of institutional development and the need for proper information systems need to be emphasised.

Programme Formulation

Programme formulation must consider the carrying capacity of each destination and route being promoted as well as those destinations where tourism already exists. Carrying capacity evaluation must be dynamic, and programme formulation must be on the understanding that it is a tool to continuously assess the development of tourism; and it must be used as the most important feedback for reviewing policy, programmes, and specific projects. The most important aspects that need to be considered, in developing criteria to evaluate carrying capacity, are as follow.

1) The critical factors that affect carrying capacity have to be considered, and the limiting factors have to be identified. The limiting factors could be the timespread available for tourist activity. They could also include socioeconomic, cultural, ecological (including bio-diversity) considerations, infrastructure, institutions, perceptions of tourists about their experience, and visitor behaviour patterns. The limiting factors, in some cases, are the government regulations, including legislation, which could restrain certain classes of tourist.

2) It is important to internalise and also, if necessary, reconcile local and visitor perceptions of carrying capacity. While carrying capacity is the cornerstone of tourism development, the options should not be closed down for tourism development in any region in the mountains.

3) Critical zones must be identified on the basis of the established policy criteria, the nature and type of and timespread for tourism, and the actual and perceived impacts.

The parameters for visitor satisfaction in critical zones must be clearly identified, and unobtrusive and appropriate mechanisms must be designed to promote acceptable tourist behaviour.

4) Programme formulation must take into account the complementary nature of the development infrastructure and tourism and identify synergies that can be derived in the creation of facilities. This should be carefully analysed in creating new access, services, and production systems, and it must be reflected in all facets such as skill development, technology choice, and resource management.

Planning

Planning must be considered for both the long-term effects of carrying capacity and short-term returns to the local community. The planning process must involve local communities and must include all aspects of local development. Only such an approach can help identify the role tourism can play in any particular place. This necessitates a number of aspects.

1) Institutions must be created and strengthened to design and carry out various tasks for sustainable mountain tourism development. The institutional base should enable participative planning at local and regional levels and be able to feed into the national plan processes.

2) It should also have a strong spatial and programme focus, so that specific outcomes can be monitored for the various aspects that need to be changed through the development of tourism in the region.

3) Plan formulation must be a coordinated effort of the Government, non-government organisations, research institutions, the private sector, and local communities, in order to reflect the variety of influences on tourism development in the region.

4) Settlement planning must be an integral part of the tourism development process. The management of a built environment will be an essential aspect of this activity, and the plan should identify ways for the long-term sustenance of the service systems.

Private enterprises, at all levels, should have broader goals in their areas of operation rather than be narrowly guided by short-term gains. This is becoming very important as the wider economic changes are causing unscrupulous entrepreneurs to swiftly change their lines of trade for the sake of immediate gain. Local enterprise has the dual role of fuelling the local economy and keeping a watch on such profit raiders.

Non-government Organisations

Non-government organisations can play a significant role in various facets of the community development process. They can help local communities to resolve conflicts about the use of resources and also enable a more rational and sustainable use of resources. They can also help local enterprises by providing the necessary technical assistance. They can be involved in a creative partnership with local institutions to evolve new tourism products and solve existing environmental problems.