

**Tourism in the Himalayas: Seizing the opportunity in gender and tourism:
Women's involvement in tourism planning and management**

Vasami Gupta and Kishore Shah

UNED, UK

1999

Keywords: highlands, tourism, gender, gender issues, women, women's issues, Himalayas, India, Nepal.

Contents

Key Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations of Study

Abstract

Introduction

Tourism Activities in the Region

The Stakeholders

Initiatives for Change

Gender Issues

Lessons learned and pointers for the future

**Key Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations of Study A)
Recommendations for Policy Makers**

I) Local/National

- It is important to evolve strategies for dispersing tourist destinations if gains for local communities are to be maximised.
- Nepal shows that tourism and conservation can reinforce each other, especially if strategies and processes to ensure the gains of local institutions are put in place.
- The development of local institutions such as lodge owner associations, women's groups, forest protection and management committees should be the cornerstone for all future strategies, planning and intervention.
- A sectoral approach to tourism addressing all issues related to all forms of tourism and their impact would ensure important areas, such as urban planning, would not be sidelined.

II) International

- Recognition that the demarcation of protected areas produces tourism demand and associated impacts. This needs to be planned and budgeted for.

B) Recommendations for Stakeholders

- Local NGOs should provide training for all levels of the industry in informal and formal sectors and in urban and rural contexts.
- Formulate strategies for easier access to credit and markets.
- Promote activities that are indirectly linked to tourism such as printing, dying and folk-arts.
- International NGOs should provide funding and training.
- Local community should form alliances between groups and tap the potential of mountain culture as a tourism resource.
- Tourism industry can play an important role in ensuring that local communities gain more from tourism if a sector approach is taken.

C) Recommendations for Community Tourism Initiatives aiming to replicate the success of this model (ACAP)

- Standardise prices and hygiene level between lodges, physical facilities level between lodges.
- Provide training for better lodge management, including physical facilities, book-keeping skills and spoken English
- Encourage energy efficiency and provide and promote alternatives to wood fuel.
- Revive traditional systems of forest management and protection and take up a planning programme.
- Build institutions at the local level.

Abstract

Travel has long been an important part of the life in the mountain villages of the Himalayas. Political and economic developments disrupted the traditional trading activities across the Himalayas and the movements of shepherds from the middle of the century, resulting in a significant negative impact on the economy of the region. Modern tourism, which began to pick up in the region in the sixties, has helped to fill the gap in some parts of the region. This paper is based on the experience of the authors of working in the Indian Himalayan region and on a large number of existing studies on tourism for Nepal and the Indian states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. It examines the various forms of tourism that have emerged in the region with the advent of modern tourism and the initiatives that have helped in maximising gains for the local host communities and minimising the potential of negative impact. It emphasises that these initiatives have succeeded in linking conservation issues and tourism in and around protected areas and that there are important lessons to be learnt from their experience. Whilst not focusing on a specific gender project, this paper examines the various gender issues highlighted by the studies. It concludes with recommending a sector approach, addressing issues

related to all forms of tourism and their impact rather than just concentrating on interaction between tourism and conservation.

Introduction

Modern tourism has come into vogue in the Himalayan region at an appropriate juncture in its history. It started just when the consequences of the political and economic developments in mid twentieth centuries were beginning to be felt. The creation of Pakistan as a separate state and the conflict between India and China had an impact on the seasonal migration patterns of nomads and shepherds, especially near the border regions. These changes also disrupted traditional trading activities across the Himalayas. Trading and nomadic herding have historically been important livelihood resources for the mountain villages in the region all the way from Tibet to the Himalayan foothills in India. Over the centuries, the villagers have developed sustainable systems of livelihood that encompassed farming, animal husbandry, trading and providing hospitality to pilgrims and other tourists.

Modern tourism came with a promise to fill the gap when limits were imposed on trading and the movement of livestock. People in all popular destinations of the region have made economic gains from it. The extent of gains has varied. Some ethnic groups, notably the Sherpas and Gurungs of Nepal and the people of Lahaul and Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh, seized the initiative at the very outset. They had the enterprise as well as the capital to spare. Other communities were left behind as outsiders, from both within and outside the mountain region, took the lead in building the infrastructure to accommodate tourists. Kathmandu and the eastern foothills of Nepal and Shimla, Manali Massourie and other hill resorts in India exemplify this trend. Even here a large section of the local communities have made economic gains. They just have not been able to gain the maximum mileage from this new opportunity of income generation.

In the pilgrim trails in the hill region of Uttar Pradesh the local communities lost their traditional place as hosts. With the development of a road infrastructure and motorised road transport, the pilgrims started coming in larger numbers, but they were no longer trekking through the area, spending their nights in the traditional 'chattis' built by the villagers and accepting their hospitality. They now travel in buses, taxis and cars and spend the nights and have their meals in small towns where the government and the private sector have built accommodation and catering facilities. The local communities have gained as the number of tourists has increased many folds and tourism continues to constitute about half the GNP of the region. The gains would have been spread out over a much greater population if the local villages had been able to retain the initiative that they earlier had.

Tourist activities in the region can be classified into three broad categories: recreational, mountain tourism and pilgrimages. There are the inevitable overlaps but by and large you find that each area tends to have a distinct focus. A fourth, which could also be classified as a sub-category of recreational tourism is just beginning to emerge and may represent a new growth area with a high potential; enjoying the mountains with a prolonged stay in a mountain village without the strain of treks or rushed tours. This is also an area where innovative inputs would probably be most relevant and an area from which local communities stand to gain the most if the developments are properly guided.

In all the three categories, the gains for the local community have come from the informal sector and from linkages rather than from direct advantage from the formal sector. The direct gains have come from lodges, guesthouses and teashops ran by self-employed villagers and from providing transport and carrying luggage and goods needed for tourists. The indirect gains have come from an increased demand for food products and from the crafting and sell of handicrafts. The women have gained a little from the formal sector but tend to play a more important role in the informal sector. In the hills of Uttar Pradesh, the women having become more economically independent than ever before, have been at the forefront of several movements of social change, including pushing forward a demand for independent statehood within the Indian Union for this region. Economic gains from tourism have played a significant role in making them more independent.

The economic and other gains have been accompanied by certain major losses. The deterioration of the natural environment, as a large number of tourists flocked into favourite destinations, has been a major cause of concern. The international community and the people and government of Nepal responded as alarms were raised and the deteriorating natural environment began to have an impact on the region's unique biological diversity. The Seventies saw the beginning of the creation of protected areas, often coinciding with the major tourist destinations within the region. The focus in the beginning was on the conservation of the natural environment. It was only gradually that the impact that the deteriorating environment had on the people's livelihoods was acknowledged and attempts were made to address problems faced by the people as a consequence of modern tourism. Interaction between widely divergent cultures often to the disadvantage of the local culture, and inflation as prices have risen in response to tourist demands are issues that have not received similar attention.

Slowly processes, which enable the local communities to maximise gains from tourism and minimise the impact of tourism on the natural environment, have begun to evolve in the region. The process has been accelerated as lessons learnt from one part of the region are applied in other parts. The strategies that have evolved still reflect a bias towards the initial goal, the preservation

of the natural environment. Local community issues directly related to conservation and tourism are being acknowledged and addressed, but planned efforts which centre around making tourism an important vehicle for local development tend to remain on the margins as have efforts to address the problems of rapid urbanisation in the area.

This paper has tried to examine and analyse existing case studies from Nepal and the mountain regions of Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh in India to document and draw lessons from the various initiatives and actions that form a part of the ongoing process. The paper focuses on community initiatives and enterprise by local residents to use the opportunity presented by boom in tourism to their advantage and on development projects by external agencies that have helped them in this endeavour.

Tourism Activities in the Region

Recreational tourism accounts for the highest traffic in Nepal and the Hill resorts of India such as Shimla and Massourie, a remnant of the British Raj period, and new resorts such as Manali. In Nepal the number of tourists visiting the country for recreation was in the range of 60 to 75 per cent in the late eighties and early nineties (CREST 1995(a)). The proportion of tourists visiting hill resorts such as Manali, which have gained primarily for recreation, would be higher. Recreation holidays tend to be short, often just a weekend. Tourists visiting Nepal for recreation spent about six days in the country on an average. Accommodation and catering tends to be dominated by the formal sector, ranging from 5 Star hotels to economy class hotels and guesthouses. Many hotels, especially luxury class hotels in prime have been built with heavy subsidies and tax incentives from concerned governments during the seventies and eighties when earning foreign exchange was a major focus of tourism promotion programmes. The investments, the entrepreneurs and the staff tend to come from outside the local area, and open from outside the region, especially in the case of the hotels at the top range.

On the fringes, there are houses providing accommodations at dirt-cheap rates, mostly catering to backpackers from western countries and an increasing number of salesman and representatives of small business who travel to the area to cash in on a growing economy. These tend to fall outside the formal regulated sector, an important source of income for the local residents, but also creating a significant impact on the local culture and the environment.

Local communities have gained the most from mountain tourism in Nepal where it caters to about a sixth of the tourists (CREST 1995). It is just beginning to catch on in the Indian Himalayas. Mountaineering and trekking are the main attractions. The stays are longer, from a week to ten days in the case of trekking tours and three weeks or more for mountaineering expeditions. The

tours and expeditions are often organised by private agencies, which have mushroomed in the last quarter of this century.

Kathmandu is an important centre for the tour agencies, which in turn have established links with tour and travel agencies in developed nations from where the bulk of the travelers come. The tour agencies try to be self sufficient, providing their own accommodation in tents, preparing their own food and recruiting their own army of guides, porters and mules in Kathmandu or smaller emerging townships such as Pokhara, Namche Bazaar and Lukla. They do use local facilities, but selectively. Stay in local lodges is often combined with stay in camps. Hiring out camp-sites is another important source of income for the local communities. Fresh foods and dairy products are purchased from the villagers.

Mountain tourism though is not a monopoly of these agencies. Independent travelers, finding their way around, often through informal networks, are the main source of income for the local lodge and teashop owners and porters. Almost half of the travelers who come to enjoy trekking in the Nepal Himalayas make their own travel arrangements. In certain more accessible trekking regions such as Annapurna and Langtang about two thirds of the visitors come as independent travelers (CREST 1995 (a)). Women play important roles in managing the lodges and teashops that cater to the independent travelers. Often they are the managers. A research in the Dhampus village of the Annapurna region published in 1995 found that women managed 5 out of 14 lodges and 8 out of 15 teashops. In the same village women were also employed for carrying loads from the road head to the lodges and teashops (Gurung, D 1995).

Mountain tourism in the Himalayas is a modern phenomenon. Pilgrim traditions in contrast have been around in the region for millenniums. For many Indians, the Himalayas are synonymous with the sacred, with penance and spiritual seeking and with pilgrimages. Hindus, Buddhists and Jains revere Mount Kailash in Tibet from where the three major Himalayan systems originate. Nepal has several sites popular with Hindu and Buddhist pilgrims. The Indian Himalayas have strong associations with religious legends and it is difficult to disassociate travel to these regions from pilgrimages even when the main purpose is recreation. The Hidimba temple near Manali, associated with the Mahabharata epic is a major attraction for all tourists visiting this modern resort. The UP Hills continue to be the major attraction for Hindu pilgrims. A visit to the four important pilgrim centres (Char Dham) located here is considered important for gaining salvation. In traditional pilgrimages women played an important role. They were often the sole managers of lodges, especially lodges for women, and chefs and managers for other lodges when their husbands migrated for work. This expertise and the special knowledge of the local areas and legends associated with pilgrimages have now fallen into disuse. With access to Nepal becoming easier an increasing number of Indians use pilgrimages as an excuse

to visit Nepal. Indians constitute about half the number of tourists to Nepal, traveling mainly for recreation and pilgrimages (CREST 1995(a)).

The building up of road networks has opened up access to the main pilgrim centres to a much larger number of people. This has changed the economy of the major pilgrim routes. At another level, access to air travel and the exposure of the Tibetan Buddhism has raised the number of pilgrims from across the world visiting Buddhist monasteries and historic sites associated with Buddhist history. Buddhists from Japan, the emerging economies of East Asia and from the west attracted by Buddhism form an important segment of visitors to Nepal.

The forth kind of tourism, enjoying mountain life at ease, without the rush of hurried tours and treks, staying longer at individual destinations and enjoying the Himalayan environment and its fascinating culture at a leisurely pace is probably the next growth area. The beginnings of a trend can be discerned at Kinnaur, an area that was opened up only in 1992 when travel restrictions to the area because of security reasons were relaxed. A small sample survey of incoming tourists was conducted in 1994. It found that the guesthouse accommodation built as extension of their houses by local apple orchard owners had become popular for longer stays than is normal in re-sorts such as Manali. Kinnaur is also popular for return visits. Only a quarter of the visitors interviewed by the research were visiting for the first time. For 55% it was a third visit another 10% had already visited the area three or more times. Remarkable, especially when viewed in the context of only two years of tourism (AME 1995(b)). Nepal is exploring ways of promoting this form of tourism, especially in areas that are yet to become popular with tourists. Finding activities that travelers can be engaged in while they spend a week, few weeks or even more in a village or a small town is the main challenge, which needs to be faced while developing this form of tourism. Then of course there are villages in these areas, which could attract visitors with their unique style of living alone and do.

The Stakeholders

The major players and stakeholders in tourism in this area can broadly be classified into four, the tourist industry that provides the basic services, the government and the local community and the international community. Before discussing the stakeholders in the context of various forms of tourism, it would be useful to understand the context of women's role in the villages of these regions. In Nepal as well as in the Indian Himalayan region, men often migrate to other areas for work leaving the women to manage the farm, collect the fuel and fodder from forests, and generally manage the house. If the family owns a lodge or a teashop, then they manage these as well. Things have improved now, but only about twenty years ago, the economy of these regions was classified as being money order economy, depending on cash remittances sent

by male members of the family who migrate to the plains, the cities and even abroad. Many men are now also leaving their homes, seasonally, or for extended periods, to serve the tourist industry within the region, as hotel staff, tour operators, guides, chefs and porters. Old men, children and women are often left behind. Women manage the affairs at home. Over the years, dependence on remittances seems to have declined. A study of the Everest has even shown a reverse trend, with migrants coming in from further down in peak agricultural seasons. As it has become harder to recruit local labour, these issues have been inadequately researched.

The formal tourist industry dominates recreation tourism. The major hotels are often owned or financed by people from outside the region. Two examples, legends, in the region are a Russian from Calcutta who pioneered modern tourism in Nepal and a hotel employee from Shimla who has created international chains of his own.

The majority of the senior staff in most luxury hotels also comes from outside the region. The situation begins to change with lower level staff of the luxury hotels and with the ownership and staffing of hotels in the middle and lower ends. Two different trends are evident here. There are a number of entrepreneurial communities from within the region, such as the Lahaulis and Tibetan refugees in Himachal Pradesh in India, and the Sherpas and Gurungs in Nepal, who have the capital and entrepreneurial skills to set up and manage hotels away from their villages and local areas.

The dynamics of this trend is well illustrated in a study on the Saureha, which has developed into a small township within a short span of about twenty years. Located at one of the entrances to the Royal Chitwan National Park, Sauraha had migrants moving in to the area to develop farms, these migrants also became lodge and hotel owners when the Park was created and the first tourists began to arrive. They were soon joined by fresh waves attracted to the commercial potential of tourism. The original inhabitants of the area, the Tharus, a tribal community, have been slow to catch up. The younger generation of Tharus is fully involved in tourism activities, usually at the lower levels and as guides. As the marketing of accommodation sector began to get centralised in Kathmandu, the more resourceful hotel owners of Sauraha have opened their booking offices there. (Towell, P et.al).

This brings us to a second set of stakeholders within the industry who play a dominant role, the tour and travel agencies. The agencies located mostly in Kathmandu and in the major cities of India control a major segment of the market for the domestic and regional tourists and for handling most of the tours of the international tour and travel agencies. The latter includes metropolitan cities such as Delhi and Mumbai and smaller regional cities such as Chandigarh and Shimla. They compete fiercely with each other, to the advantage of the international agencies. They are experts at driving down the

prices of their suppliers, especially the middle range of hotels and the lodge owners, both of whom are often competing with each other to get an adequate share of the market. This is especially the case during the lean season.

The tour and travel agencies form a strong alliance when it comes to defending or promoting common interests. A number of studies have indicated that TANA, the leading national association of tour agencies played a key role in formulating rules for tourism to Upper Mustang, an old kingdom within Nepal that was opened up to tourism in 1992. Only organised tours are allowed. The rules allow little room for local communities to make direct economic gains from tourism, all in the name of protecting the cultural heritage and the unique environment of this region. Studies show that there has been a greater negative impact due to the inability of the local entrepreneurs to be able to participate actively and independently in the commerce of tourism than because of tourism itself. The owners of traditional inns that formerly catered to traders passing through the area formed a co-operative. As a group they made a proposal that would have enabled the tour operators and the inn owners to work in a mutually co-operative way and to the advantage of both and the tourists (Shakely, M. 1994). But it seems, too little avail, seems like the interests of Kathmandu prevailed. In a sense it was inevitable as in all the three regions studied the main hotels, the travel agencies, the luxury coaches and sometimes even the taxis are owned by the power elite of the states and the countries.

Lodge and guesthouse owners represent another set of stakeholders from within the private sector. A unique trademark of mountain tourism in the region, these lodges and guesthouses are sometimes classified as being part of either the formal sector or the informal sector. In the present analysis they have been assumed to be a part of the informal sector. Most lodges are family establishments, the role of employees in managing these establishments being marginal. In Nepal, there seems to have been a spontaneous development, spurred on by the sudden flow of travelers to the remote areas of Nepal that began in the Sixties and the Seventies. There are several anecdotal accounts of how it all began in a particular village or an area, with the travelers requesting farmers for a place to spend the night and a meal.

As the flow of tourists increased, those with the inclination and capital built up facilities specifically to cater to this demand. It was common, and in some places it still is common not to charge for the accommodation. It came free with the meals. The lodge owners had to cut corners to make a semblance of a profit. The sanitation facilities, if they existed at all, tended to be very basic. The menus for food, if they existed at all, varied from lodge to lodge and from day to day. And so did the demands of the tourists. Haggling was not uncommon. Gradually standards and systems have been developed, especially in those areas where there has been an active intervention from external agencies. The intervention by the leading conservation NGO of Nepal, the King

Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC), in the Annapurna region has set out a path for others to follow upon and improve.

In the Indian Himalayas where lodges and guesthouses have not been as successful, the government has tried to promote the development of homestays by subsidizing farmers for building extra rooms. The results have been mixed in Himachal Pradesh, as the programme has not received the priority it deserves from government departments. A study for Uttar Pradesh has reported that for the most part, the subsidies have been used to extend the size of the house and have rarely been used for providing accommodation to tourists (AME 1995(a)). In the Himalayan region of Uttar Pradesh a state owned enterprise is an important provider of accommodation facilities. In addition private charities have also set up lodges, known as dharamshalas, providing accommodation at highly subsidised rates. These dharamshalas often cater to pilgrims from within a particular state of the country.

Lodges and teashops is probably the most visible form of participation by local communities in the tourist trade. Porters are another group of stakeholders that have gained visibility through media attention. Sherpas are known internationally for this activity, but they are not the only ethnic group involved in it. Carriage of personal baggage and all the paraphernalia needed for mountain tourism by porters and mules has been an important source of income for the poorer sections of the local communities in both India and Nepal, especially in areas where mountain tourism is popular.

The local communities tend to gain more from these activities from independent travelers than from group travelers. In the case of group travelers, the teams to accompany the groups are organised in Kathmandu or at towns from where the trekking or mountaineering begins. The people who are hired are often not from the communities through which the tourists will trek. The porters and other staff accompanying these tours and expeditions have also caused significant environmental damage, through the use of firewood for cooking and keeping warm. Porters accompanying independent travelers tend to be from the local area and do not make an additional demand on the natural resources of the area. They are also fewer in numbers and are generally well cared for by the travelers who employ them.

Collection and sale of firewood from forest areas is another major occupation through which local communities have made economic gains from mountain tourism. A study in the Pagboche, a small Sherpa village conducted in 1979 estimated an annual gross income of 120,000 rupees from the sale of fuel wood alone, probably constituting a very high proportion of the total income of the village (Jefferies B.E. 1982). Timber requirement has also gone up with increased construction activities as a result of the growth of the tourist industry. As discussed below, the exploitation of the forest for wood fuel and timber has also been a major cause of concern for the environment and for the

women residing in these communities. As the forests degrade, the women have to spend longer and longer hours for collecting fuel for their own needs. It has also impacted other livelihood sources such as the availability of fodder, forest foods and medicinal herbs.

Indirect gains to the local communities are more difficult to assess than direct gains. In the case of the Himalayan region these have come mainly from the production and sale of food products and handicrafts. A study conducted in 1995 found that the lodge owners of Ghandruk and Ghorepani, two villages in the Annapurna region purchased about 80% of the vegetables locally. However, they relied heavily on imports for the supply of eggs, milk and fruits (CREST 1995 (b)).

Departments of tourism in this region are essentially a product of the sixties and seventies when tourism was being promoted as a way of earning foreign exchange. They have generally been biased towards the formal sector, and within that, in favour of luxury hotels. These, it was assumed will attract the foreign tourists and their dollars. As the thinking in developed nations about development aid has changed over the years, there has been pressure on these departments to be more responsive to the needs of host communities. The response, in most cases, has not been very dynamic.

The Himachal Pradesh Tourist Department, for instance, has started a process of formulating strategies, which reflects the concerns of local communities better than it did earlier on. Planning and implementation based on these strategies, however, is yet to become an important part of the department's work. The neighbouring state of Uttar Pradesh is even more behind. The rhetoric is there but not the strategies (AME (a)). The department here has done a commendable job of providing tourism services to cater to highly accelerated flow of pilgrims in the past couple of decades, especially by providing accommodation and organising tours at very reasonable rates. But this is more in the nature of a state enterprise and has little to do with local communities. The attitude of the government seems to have been that these are places of spiritual value for Hindus and food, accommodation and transport should be made available to all pilgrims at affordable rates. If it came at a cost to the local communities and their sources of livelihood and the environment, it was considered to be affordable till the effects have become too big to be ignored. In Nepal, regulating tourism and collecting fees from tourists seems to have become a major preoccupation. An attitude that they are fulfilling their responsibility to the local communities by ploughing back a part of the revenues from tourists seems to prevail.

However, the departments concerned with forestry and wildlife have played a more active role in promoting community action for developing more responsible forms of tourism in Nepal. The process started in the seventies with the demarcation of protected areas. It was perhaps not a coincidence that all

the major destinations for mountain tourism were classified as protected areas. Biodiversity, natural beauty and splendour and tourism do have strong links. Alarm was raised at the international level when the impact of tourism in fragile regions became highly visible. A protected area network was created and bilateral and multilateral aid agencies and international conservation NGOs such as the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) came in funds and human resources to retrieve the situation. Conservation has been the driving force for the process of change described in the next section. Concern for tourism issues has only followed as an adjunct.

Initiatives for Change

Sagarmath National Park: The Khumbu region around Everest was the first protected area to be declared as a protected area and the New Zealanders who helped in developing the Sagarmatha National Park (SNP) played a very positive role in trying to involve the Sherpas community in developing the conservation area. This was before the days when participatory development had become a fashion. What seems to have gone down particularly well is training and putting Sherpa officials in charge of park management activities, establishing a visitor's centre and coordinating with the Buddhist monasteries in the region. Five local people were trained in recreation and park management in New Zealand. Three of them subsequently served as SNP wardens (Jefferies B.E 1982 and Rogers 1998).

At a later date, the traditional systems whereby communities managed their forests were reintroduced. These and other consultative processes developed over the years have gradually reversed the process of forest degradation in the Everest region. The forests where the rate of deforestation had reached alarming proportions with the advent of tourism are now being rehabilitated with success. Given the climatic conditions of the region, it is bound to be a slow process. But it has started.

The SNP and the Nepal government have also taken a lead in solving the problem of litter and garbage disposal, a problem that, at one point seemed to defy solution. Regulations making tour organisers responsible for garbage and litter disposal and involving local communities in disposal activities have both played important roles. The local communities, with women's groups often taking the lead, are gradually becoming experts in the art of sorting and recycling garbage and finding solutions for non-biodegradable garbage. It also generates an income as regulations make it mandatory for tour and expedition organisers to be responsible for the disposal and the communities are paid for the enterprise. The Khumbu region is still not litter and garbage free. A way forward, though, has been found and is being pursued.

The Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee, a local NGO, has played a key role in this development. The resentment to the creation of the Park that was initially there has not disappeared totally. The presence of some 200 army personnel to 'protect' the park is a major point of contention. There are also complaints that the business elite of the region dominates decision making within SNP and that the poorer sections of the local community, especially women from the more marginal villages find it hard to confide or consult with SNP staff (Rogers, 1998).

Annapurna Conservation Area Programme: The lessons learnt at SNP were followed up more systematically and imaginatively in the Annapurna Conservation Area. It also saw the beginning of the tourist industry, especially the lodge owners, beginning to play a key role in addressing conservation issues. The programme here had several major advantages. The Conservation Area had been planned with a multiple use perspective. Planning for conservation took cognisance of the fact that human use could not be excluded from protected areas. This was a major breakthrough. The planning and implementation was entrusted to an NGO, giving the programme flexibility and the capability to respond to community needs more effectively than a government department. The promise of spending the revenues from the fees collected from trekking and mountaineering fees in the Annapurna area itself and was a major incentive for facilitating participation by local communities.

There are several lessons to be learnt from the success of the Annapurna Conservation Area Programme (ACAP), especially in the context of involving local stakeholders for improving the environment and the hospitality. These include:

- Checking price wars between lodge owners by setting standards and prices. The practice of providing free accommodation with food has now been stopped. Lodge owners at different locations have agreed to standardised prices for accommodation and standardised menus. Independent assessment has shown that the level of adherence to these rules is high. Setting and promoting standards for hygiene and sanitation. Clean, well-maintained latrines have now become a norm (CREST 1995(b) and Banskota and Sharma 1998(a)).
- Providing training for better lodge management. This has included training in better planning of physical facilities, catering, and general hospitality. This has included training in basic housekeeping skills required for better lodge management, accounting and bookkeeping skills, general administrative skills and tips on how to be better hosts. Learning basic spoken English has been a popular part of the training for women. It has helped them in regular dealing with their customers. Women have been major beneficiaries of the training programmes. This has included training for starting and managing enterprises. The original design of the training programme was changed to suit the needs of

these women. (CREST 1995(b), Gurung, D 1995 and Banskota and Sharma 1998(a)).

- Encouraging energy efficiency and providing and promoting alternatives to wood fuel. The combined back boiler has become a remarkable success. It allows the same energy to be used for space heating, cooking and heating water for showers. Studies have shown a decline of 23 % in fuel wood consumption by lodges. It has also allowed the lodges to provide better services at lower costs to themselves. Solar water heaters appropriate for the conditions in the Annapurna region have been designed. ACAP provides a small subsidy to lodge owners, free transportation and installation. The lodge owners pay the for cost of the water heater and are able to recover this cost within two to three years by charging the tourists for hot showers. Local communities have contributed about half the cost of constructing and installing electricity plants with capacity as large as 100Kw. They have also taken up the responsibility for managing them. (CREST 1995(b)).
- The reduction in the use of wood energy has been accompanied by better forest management, achieved mainly through involving the village communities in forest protections by reviving traditional systems of protection that had been abandoned and by taking up a major programme of tree plantation.
- Institution building at the local level. The CDC (Conservation and Development Committee) and Women's group. Regulating lodge activities improved forest management, tree plantation and upgrading treks has been a popular activity with these institutions. Lodge owner's have played a major role in strengthening both institutions, as they perceive that their business will be sustained and thrive with better services and better conservation. Without it the tourists will start abandoning Annapurna as a destination. With it the numbers will increase without leaving a major impact on the environment. With experience they have learnt that the word of mouth plays a big role in the marketing of a tourist destination. (CREST 1995(b), Gurung, D 1995 and Banskota and Sharma 1998(a)).
- The ACAP has also tried to cater to the larger community not directly involved in tourism activities through assisting in improving basic services such as health and education and by promoting indirect economic linkages. The success has not been as brilliant. The number of people being benefited from tourism through indirect economic activities such as horticulture, dairy and handicrafts continues to be low. (CREST 1995(b), Gurung, D 1995 and Banskota and Sharma 1998(a)).

In Dhamphus where a gender specific study was conducted, it was found that training women in activities directly related to tourism had a significant impact. The same however could not be said to be true of training and other support activities for entrepreneurial activities that are indirectly related to tourism. A study on the Laltang National Park area has come to similar

conclusions. This is partly due to competition from other regions of Nepal and even from India for dairy and horticultural products. Various studies and reports have also shown that it is easier to buy handicrafts from India and Tibet than Nepalese handicrafts at Nepalese tourist centres. This is partly due to the longstanding programme for developing the production and marketing of handmade fabrics and handicrafts of the Government of India. Almost every town in India and a large number of villages have a centre for the production and marketing of these goods. These include villages in the Himalayan villages, known for their woolen products. This has been a popular way of giving work to women. Sad to say that even though these centres are big employers of women, they do not fully tap the innovative and entrepreneurial potential of these women. This could be an important adjunct of the tourist industry.

An important part of the Nepal experience is that there has been a concerted attempt to replicate lessons. What succeeded in the Annapurna region, a pilot setting and with an NGO taking the lead role is now being internalised by implementing similar programmes through government agencies. The initiation of the Makalu Barun National Park and Conservation Area project in 1991, in an area adjoining SUP to the east was an important step in this direction. Park authorities in the Langtang National Park located in the Kathmandu Valley which is another popular destination have sent lodge owners and leaders of women's groups to the ACAP for study tours. This enabled a rapid replication of the successes that were achieved in the Annapurna region. In the Royal Chitwan National Park, KMTNC is acting as an effective bridge between the Park authorities and the local communities. In Upper Mustang, KMTNC has been successful in community development activities, but less so in promoting the participation of local enterprise in tourism activities. It was fighting against a powerful vested interest, the association of tour agencies.

Gender Issues

There are a number of gender issues that have emerged. Women in both Nepal and India have acted to maximise gains and minimise the negative impact of tourism. Sometimes the initiative for these actions has come from external interventions. More often, though, it is the women themselves who have taken the initiative, as entrepreneurs or as organised groups.

- The women of the region have gained relatively little from the formal sector. A UNDP/ILO supported survey published in 1991 showed that only 17 % of the employees in the formal sector of tourism in Nepal were women. About 90% of these women were employed in the accommodation and catering sector. A large proportion of this employment was at low un-skilled levels, housekeeping accounting for about two fifths of moments. (CREST 1995 (a)). In a study conducted in two villages near Manali, the research found that only one woman was employed by the formal sector, as a clerk in a hotel. In contrast, a large

number of men from these villages found employment in the formal sector, mostly with tour agencies. (Berkes et. al. 1997). In the pilgrim centres of UP Hills the formal sector has re-placed the dominance of the informal sector, leading to a loss for women.

- Gains for women have been most prominent for mountain tourism in Nepal. The growth of gains for women has been a spontaneous phenomenon. It has been very well documented in Dibya Gurung's study on Dhampus. These gains have received further impetus with planned interventions from externally aided projects. Women's programmes have received special attention in the Annapurna region and elsewhere in tourism related programmes in Nepal.
- Women's groups are a common phenomenon in tourist destinations. Playing an important role in running independent businesses has made the women involved in tourism trade outward looking. This in turn has helped them take a lead role in organising the activities of the women's groups. Study tours have helped women from one area learn from the successes of other areas. There is little evidence, however, of active networking between the women's groups. Development of women's group tends to continue being project led rather than being a spontaneous activity. There is also little evidence yet of women taking a very active role along men in institutions that are not gender specific, such as the Conservation and Development Committees of Nepal and the Forest Management Committees of India
- Inflation is a major issue in popular tourist areas. This makes it difficult for women not earning a significant income from tourism to balance the household budgets.
- There are complaints of increased workloads, especially for women engaged in tourism related activities. The evidence from the studies analysed shows a mixed picture. The women managing lodges in Dhampus reported that their loads had become lighter as they were no longer bound to back breaking farm work. The same village had women who were engaged as porters, to carry goods from the road head to the lodges and teashops, many of which are located on the ridge, a steep climb from the road. In another study, also conducted in the Annapurna region, 44% of the respondent perceived that the workload of women had been reduced, mainly due to tourism. About 50% felt that there had been no change in women's workload and only 4% felt that the burden had increased.
- Deforestation, associated with all forms of tourism, has had a major impact on the women. In Himachal Pradesh it has led women to play a lead role in checking the deforestation. Women groups in the villages adjoining or near Manali have been the most vocal and effective in taking action against forest use for collection and sale of fuel wood and harvesting of trees to cater to the demand of the tourist industry. They did this even when the men of the village were making money through these activities. Men have followed the lead and joined forces. They

- have gone further than taking localised action; regulation for harvest of timber for local use was changed through political action. The rights were being abused to build guesthouses or supply timber for the construction of hotels. The active role being played by local groups in checking forestation has also been an important factor in the success of the Joint Forest Management (JFM) programme. JFM enables the local communities play a much more active role in
- The management of forest resources and also in gaining a better access to benefit from the forests. The villagers had already shown an initiative by stopping illicit felling triggered and supported by the tourist industry in several of the forest areas that were taken up for the pilot programme to test the scheme.
 - Common land has often been diverted for building hotels and resorts. This has an impact on women, especially women from poor households who have a significant dependence on common land resources.

Lessons learned and pointers for the future

- Recreation tourism tends to be concentrated in pockets and controlled by external investments. Economic gains for the local populations tend to be limited. The potential for economic gains can be fully realised by dispersing tourism destinations. To an extent this has happened in Nepal where mountain tourism has become popular. In India, where mountain tourism is yet to catch on, the reverse trend has taken place in the pilgrim routes of the UP Hills. The places where the tourist stay and have their meals are now concentrated in small towns, instead of being in villages at walking distance from each other. It will be important to evolve strategies for dispersing tourist destinations if gains for local communities are to be maximised.
- The experience in Nepal has shown that tourism and conservation can reinforce each other especially if strategies and processes to ensure gains to local communities are put in place. Starting with a concern for conservation, the process in Nepal moved on to assist local communities to maximise gains from tourism, realising that this could be a major incentive for involving these communities in conservation activities.
- Developing and strengthening local institutions such as lodge owners associations, women's groups, forest protection and management committees and village councils have played an important role in making conservation and tourism programmes effective. This should be cornerstone for all future strategies, planning and intervention.
- There are three areas where women can play a significant role, providing hospitality, providing indirect inputs through horticultural, animal husbandry and handicrafts and minimising the impact of tourism on natural resources. Participation for providing hospitality and for improving the natural resource base has either happened spontaneously or has been easy to promote. Promotion of activities that are indirectly

linked to tourism has not been that easy. It would be important to understand the causes. It may be that in popular destinations activities directly linked with tourism bring the best returns for capital and enterprise, and people turn to other activities only when entry into the tourist industry is restricted or when the potential from tourism is fully exhausted. It might help to take a broader perspective and look beyond the immediate periphery of popular tourist destination while planning to promote economic activities as backward and forward linkages to tourism. Handicrafts have been neglected as a part of tourism development programmes, especially in Nepal. Whether it is printing or dying or even private folk arts, women are actively involved in it if not the main producers. In many areas a revival of these would add to their attractiveness.

- Owners of luxury hotels, tour organisers and travel agents and tourist departments can play an important role in ensuring that local communities gain more for tourism than they do at present. With an overriding concern for conservation pushing the process, these stakeholders have remained in the periphery of the process. This can be overcome if a sector approach to tourism, putting tourism rather than conservation at the centre of the process is pursued.
- Training and formulating strategies for easier access to credit and markets should be an important part of the sector approach. Apart from training the potential managers of lodges in rural areas it should also include training for women and men from villages and the poorer section of urban centres for serving in the formal sector. It should also provide training and other support for those engaged in the lowest rung of the informal sector, such as porters, dishwashers and itinerant vendors. It should also include a constructive strategy for addressing child labour issues.
- A sector approach would also ensure that several important areas related to tourism that are now being ignored get adequate attention, such as better urban planning in areas of tourist importance. Tourism has been responsible for putting several towns such as Manali, Pokhara and Namche Bazaar on the map. Others such as Kathmandu have grown beyond recognition with the tourist boom of the last three decades. There are major environmental issues that need to be addressed in all these towns. Yet one hears little about strategic planning or participatory processes being used for designing master plans for these urban areas. With a sector approach issues concerning pilgrimages and domestic and regional tourism can also be addressed. These have tended to be ignored in the past due to the emphasis on developing tourism as a vehicle for earning foreign exchange.
- There is a vast potential for tapping the mountain culture as a tourism resource. Efforts to incorporate the cultural traditions, the changing life style of the mountain villages, and their endeavour to catch up with the modern world without losing their cultural strengths have been few and

far between as part of tourism programmes. Cultural shows remain restricted to local people. An advertisement of the shows to the tourists and some performances especially for the tourists, as long the cultural context is retained, would not go amiss. The Dusshera festivals of Kullu in Himachal Pradesh and Varanasi in the Gangetic plain of India, both distinct in their characteristic attract huge crowds. There is a growing attraction in the day to day life in the mountain villages. Each valley has a distinct social and cultural identity. The very geography of the steep mountains has dictated this. Each region also has its own calendar. Almost every area has its sheep fairs, cattle fairs and harvest festivals. There are other attractions, such as the Khampas in parts of Nepal who are great horseman. This can and should be emphasised.

Acknowledgement:

We thank Martin Price, Environmental Change Unit, University of Oxford, UK, for helping us with access to literature.