

Impact and Implications of Tourism

This section describes the impact of tourism as perceived by the host population, namely, households and lodge owners in the Annapurna region, who together form an important part of the supply side of tourism. For an assessment of the impact of tourism in mountain areas, reference to tourism alone will not suffice vis-a-vis the broader issue of "tourism for local community development," as has been extensively discussed in Chapter 2. All three aforementioned aspects, namely, Himalayan Environmental Resources (HER), Mountain Community Development (MCD), and Mountain Tourism Development (MTD), have to be addressed simultaneously, and the carrying capacity of the mountain environment must be assessed. Since the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) is endeavouring to bring about positive changes in nature conservation as well as in the quality of life of the mountain people, the discussion below will constantly refer to cases of ACAP intervention. Also, tourism has been playing an important economic role in the area, and ACAP has been attempting to strengthen the link between community and tourism development. On the demand side are the visitors, and

any intervention must be able to improve the visitor's experience and simultaneously conserve HER and promote MCD. This chapter addresses these issues on the basis of surveys carried out in Ghandruk, Ghorepani, and Ulleri, as well as secondary sources. Also discussed in this chapter is the carrying capacity issue elaborated in Chapter 2.

An earlier volume has discussed extensively the more visible types of impact of mountain tourism in Nepal, which also apply to the Annapurna region (Banskota et al. 1994). This chapter will not deal with the same issues but with the perceptions of the host population and the visitors. ACAP, directly or indirectly, through its intervention or policies and programmes, affects both the groups.

The Annapurna Area of the Past

Besides traditional activities, such as farming and animal husbandry, tourism has become an important activity in generating income and employment in some areas of the Annapurna region.³ Tourism has been possible because of the unique and rich endowment of the Himalayan Environmental Resources (HER) referred to in Chapter 2. Besides tourism, the local community also depends very much on HER to meet their needs for food, firewood, fodder, grazing, etc. When tourists began visiting the area, the local people responded to meet their needs. This demand-induced tourism characterised the development of tourism in the area before ACAP. There was virtually no supply management for tourism. Lodges were built, for which trees were harvested and firewood extracted to meet the needs of the tourists. Forests in many parts were rapidly degraded due to the increasing pressure on HER to meet the demands of both locals and tourists. Additionally, campgrounds, trails, villages, base camps, etc became littered. Lodge owners competed with one another, price wars broke out, and profits were not reaped from their business. There were many other types of negative impact as well.⁴ There were visible signs that the carrying capacity of the area was deteriorating under the increasing demand for HER from both the host and tourist populations.

This situation resembles the one described in Figure 2 where the carrying capacity of the mountain environment was not taken into consideration in any programme or policy formulations. There was perhaps some concern for

³ Trade with Tibet, which once used to be a thriving business in this region, has dwindled over the years and is no longer as important as it used to be.

⁴ See Banskota and Sharma (1994a) for more details.

carrying capacity, but it was not invoked. Community and tourism (areas 2 and 3 respectively) both intensively encroached on HER (area 1). Although links between tourism and community development existed (area 4 in Figure 2), the link seems to have been weak and unsustainable. Price wars between lodges, the lack of a code of conduct, the lack of community infrastructures, littering, the lack of environmental awareness and so on were all important factors during this period in the Annapurna area. There was considerable leakage of income earned from tourism from the area with the largest benefits likely going to tour operators (area 6) who brought tourists to the area. The wider mountain community (areas 2 and 5) remained uninvolved or had no opportunity to participate in community or tourism development, and, at the same time, HER were constantly overused. There was no vision regarding mountain development, nor was the value of HER appreciated, and, as a result, there was no effort made to develop and link tourism with community development for the conservation of HER.

In general, this was the state of mountain tourism in the Annapurna region prior to ACAP. It is precisely for this reason that the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) was implemented through the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation (KMTNC) by a royal directive, namely, to develop ways and means to improve the carrying capacity of the Annapurna region.

Tourist-Related

This section will report host and visitor perceptions of the types of tourist-related impact and the broader areas of community development and environmental conservation as well as ACAP programmes. The host population includes both the lodge owners and households whose links with tourism are indirect.

Impact Perceived by Host Population-Households. The quality of life of rural households encompasses both objective and subjective information on their perception of living conditions. 'Living conditions' was defined to subsume a broad range of issues: cleanliness and sanitation, environmental conservation, cultural preservation and promotion, poverty alleviation, employment and income generation, skill improvement, and women's development. Each of these broad categories was broken down into more detailed attributes. Respondents were asked to state whether the existing situation on the attributes of living conditions had **improved**, **was the same as before**, or **had worsened**. Additionally, households were asked to comment on factors they

perceived to be responsible for bringing the change. The choices offered to households were tourism, ACAP, both tourism and ACAP, population growth, educational development, improved skills and management, and so on. Population growth, education, and improved skills or management have been grouped into the category others-1, because of their low response rate. Others-2 refers to factors not in the choice given to the households.

Environment. Village and Neighbourhood--Householders' perception of the cleanliness and sanitary conditions of their villages in general was that water sources, trails, schools, scenic spots, and public places were felt to have improved, as indicated by a large percentage of households. With regard to personal health, a large majority (92%) perceived improvement, with a smaller percentage either perceiving the same standard (6%) or a worsening (4%) situation in health (Table 4.40).

As for factors responsible for the changed conditions, a large majority of the households indicated that ACAP was responsible. A smaller percentage indicated tourism to be the cause, and a still lower percentage cited other factors. For example eight per cent of the households stated that tourism was the cause of the improved cleanliness and sanitary conditions in the villages, 48 per cent attributed them to ACAP, and 36 per cent attributed them to both tourism and ACAP. The percentage of households that attributed the improved situation to ACAP varied between 37 per cent in the case of cleanliness in schools and 48 per cent in the case of personal health. In other words, 43 per cent (scenic spots) to 49 per cent (personal health) of the households appeared to be aware of ACAP intervention in relation to cleanliness and sanitation in the survey area. Other results are summarised in Table 4.40.

Forests, Watershed and Habitats--Protection of environment (forests, watersheds, pastures and wildlife, and the general awareness of the environment) was perceived variedly by the host population surveyed. For example, almost all surveyed households reported having perceived that the forest and wildlife situation had improved. Again, ACAP was identified as the major factor responsible for this improvement in the case of forests (78%) and wildlife (69%). The percentage of households that perceived tourism, ACAP and tourism both, and other factors to be responsible for the improvement was comparatively low.

Regarding the protection of pastureland, household perception was also mixed. Those who perceived pasture protection to have improved represented 38 per cent of all questioned. About 36 per cent perceived pasture protection to be

the same, and 20 per cent perceived it to have become worse. Of those who felt pasture conditions had become worse, 80 per cent attributed it to ACAP interventions.

About 54 per cent of the households perceived improvement in watershed conditions, another 30 per cent perceived the situation to be the same, and only two per cent perceived it to be worse than before. While ACAP was cited as the main contributing factor to the improved watershed conditions, the lack of management (others-1) was the main reason stated for the same or worsening situation of watersheds (Table 4.41).

A large majority of households perceived that the general awareness of the environment and environmental issues had improved (90%), and 87 per cent attributed this change to ACAP. At the same time, the four per cent who perceived awareness to have become worse all felt ACAP to be responsible.

Culture. Households' perceptions regarding the preservation of cultural sites, particularly of sacred places and monuments in the study area, were mixed. The proportion of households experiencing no change in the preservation of sacred places (40%) and monuments (44%) was relatively higher than those who perceived an improved situation among these cultural entities. However, households were unable to pinpoint the factors responsible for this situation, although in the case of sacred monuments about 18 per cent perceived their deterioration to be due to the lack of education and management (others-1) (Table 4.42).

Tourism, it is often argued, brings changes in the religious values of a society. This, however, does not appear to hold firmly in the case study area, as a large majority (74%) of households perceived no change in the religious values of their community, and 16 per cent even perceived them to have improved. Those who perceived an erosion of religious values totalled about 10 per cent. Households also indicated that neither tourism, ACAP, nor factors such as education were responsible for maintaining religious values, as about 74 per cent of them identified other causes for the present situation.

In the case of cultural values, the situation was different. The percentage of households perceiving an improved, unchanged and worse situation for cultural values were respectively 16, 70, and 10 per cent. A very few households identified ACAP as being responsible for either improving cultural values or maintaining them. However, 60 per cent of the households believed tourism to have worsened the situation. Also, a large percentage (94%) perceived

other factors (others- 2) they could not identify to be maintaining cultural values in their society.

About 66 per cent of the sampled households perceived an improved situation in their village life, with tourism (49%) and education and management (42%) being identified as the main contributing factors. The majority of households (54 per cent) also felt that their family ties had improved mainly as a result of improved educational status (85%).

A large majority of the households perceived that crime and theft in the community had either improved (i.e., lessened) or remained the same. Although only 13 per cent perceived tourism to be responsible for the change, a large majority felt that there were other factors responsible for this situation. Also, 28 per cent felt that the crime and theft situation had worsened, and tourism was considered to have brought on this change (93%).

Regarding the preservation of cultural assets, such as dances and music, 26 per cent of the households reported noticing some improvement or promotion of local dances and music. Tourism was the major factor identified in such an improvement, followed by ACAP and education. About 50 per cent of the sampled households perceived the status of dance and music as being the same as before, and out of these, 84 per cent indicated factors other than those identified as being responsible. Another 18 per cent, however, perceived a negative effect on local dances and music, due mainly to tourism (93%).

A promotion of local handicrafts was perceived by only about four per cent of the households, which attributed the improvement to tourism only (100%). Another 50 per cent perceived the situation to be unchanged. Of the 12 per cent who thought that the situation was worse, 50 per cent indicated that tourism was responsible. Whatever preservation there is under the category (i.e., same), a large majority of the households (84%) indicated other factors to be responsible.

The situation with respect to family planning was perceived by 60 per cent of the households to have improved, by 16 per cent to have remained the same, and by four per cent to have worsened. In general the majority of households could not identify factors responsible for either the improved or the *status quo* situation.

Economy. Perceived impact on *poverty* also varied widely among the sample households, although a majority (64%) stated that poverty had been reduced

(improved situation) mainly due to tourism (84%). No change in poverty was perceived by 16 per cent of the households, and factors other than those offered were indicated by them to be responsible. Finally, of the 10 per cent who thought that the poverty situation had become worse, 60 per cent singled out tourism as the main reason (Table 4.43).

The vast majority of households in the study area (76%) reported that *employment opportunities* had improved. Ninety per cent of the households identified tourism as responsible for generating employment. Only a small per cent of the households felt that employment opportunities had either remained the same (16%) or become worse (8%).

As with employment, the large majority (72%) of households reported that *incomes* had improved in the area. Tourism was perceived to be the main contributing factor, as indicated by almost 90 per cent of the households. Households that did not perceive any enhanced income opportunities accounted for 22 per cent and the six per cent that indicated a worsened situation identified other factors as being responsible. However, despite the large majority of households that experienced improvement in their income levels as a result of tourism, there has been no indicated change in their level of savings and investments.

Rapid growth in *land prices* and *labour shortages* was the other perceived negative impact in the community. About 68 per cent of the households indicated that land prices had worsened (increased), and 62 per cent noted labour shortages. Tourism was identified as being responsible for increased land prices (worse) by about 85 per cent of those who thought land prices had increased. Likewise, among those citing labour shortages, about 77 per cent indicated tourism to be the cause.

When asked whether there had been any improvement in the *self-reliance* of households, a majority of households (60%) stated that their own self-reliance had improved relative to the past. Tourism was identified as the single key factor (67%) for the development of self-reliance. Perhaps the positive impact of tourism on employment and income may be the factor that has helped the community improve their self-reliance.

Finally, the *migration* situation was reported to have eased (improved) by only about 18 per cent of the households. Another 62 per cent did not perceive any change in the situation. Among those that perceived an improvement, 89, 20,

and 16 per cent identified ACAP, tourism, and other factors respectively to be responsible.

Impact on Women. Of the 58 per cent of the respondents who perceived an improvement in skills, about 72 per cent attributed it to ACAP. Only 26 per cent indicated that the situation had remained the same and cited unnamed factors as responsible for this (Table 4.44). Both positive and negative types of impact of tourism on women are often discussed in the literature. The extent to which mountain tourism helps minimise the work burden of women depends on the nature and extent of fuel- efficient and other labour-saving technologies that can be promoted and made accessible and affordable to households. In some villages of the Annapurna area, the work burden of women may have been reduced due to the promotion of such technologies. Introduction of electricity, rice mills, fuel-efficient technologies, and drinking water projects, as well as improved management of forests have been noted as factors that have reduced this work burden. At the same time, women are also forced to take over male responsibilities, as male members often leave home for employment for prolonged periods of time. Some related types of impact perceived by the respondents regarding the work burden of women, their education, and income in the case study area are summarised in Table 4.45.

A fairly high percentage (44%) of the respondents in the study area perceived that there had been an improvement (reduction) in the work burden of women, due mainly to tourism (59%). A higher percentage (50%) indicated the situation had not changed, but only four per cent indicated an increase in the work burden. Among those who indicated that the burden had decreased, about 31 per cent attributed this to tourism, while all those that indicated no change were uncertain as to what factors were responsible for the *status quo* situation.

A large majority (82%) of the sampled households perceived that women's education had improved over the years, although there was no one single responsible factor that households identified as being responsible. The 16 per cent who perceived no change cited factors other than tourism and ACAP.

The impact on women's income was found to be strongly positive, as 48 per cent of the respondents claimed their income situation had improved. However, 46 per cent indicated that the situation was the same as before, but only two per cent stated that it had become worse. Of those indicating an improved situation, 71 per cent identified tourism to be the cause, and some

(21%) found both tourism and ACAP to be the cause. The 46 per cent who perceived women's income to be the same could not identify the cause.

Community Development. This section summarises household perceptions towards community development activities such as infrastructure, forest conservation, alternative energy, income generation, and training (Table 4.46). Respondents were asked to state facilities that existed in the community and then to indicate whether their conditions were better, the same as, or worse than five years earlier. They were additionally asked what the responsible factors might be and what group of households in the community had benefitted.

Regarding the physical infrastructural facilities, the large majority of households reported that the situation was better than five years before. Community and tourist facilities, such as trails, bridges, campgrounds, lodges, and drinking water, were perceived to be better by a large majority of the households. A significant percentage of households, however, stated that there had been no improvement in the situation of bridges (20%), post offices (22%), veterinary services (42%), and marketing facilities (100%).

With regard to institutional development, households indicated a generally improved situation compared to five years' earlier, except in issues affecting women where the situation was not as good. For example, the current status of women's skilled training was perceived to be the same (31%) or even worse off than before (18%).

Not all the sample households reported having access to income-generating opportunities involving food and cash crop production and livestock, horticultural and handicraft development. For example, about 48 per cent of the sampled households did not have access to livestock and handicraft-related income-generating activities. Even among those who had access to such opportunities, a majority of them (58%) perceived business to be the same as before. Those who were in vegetable farming (88%) indicated that the situation had improved, but 27 per cent also indicated that income from vegetable farming was the same as five years' earlier. That income-generating opportunities have not improved is also supported by the response made by households on the lack of development in marketing. Although a large percentage of households did indicate that incomes had increased, this was mostly attributed to tourism rather than other aspects of community development. This clearly indicates a weakness in income-generating activities.

Establishment of both private and public nurseries has been one of the conservational programme activities of ACAP. However, 30 per cent of the sampled households in the study area were not aware of a public nursery, while over 90 per cent of respondents claimed the non-existence of private nurseries. Among those who reported the existence of both types of nurseries, the majority felt the situation to be better now than before.

Regarding alternative energy programmes, such as improved stoves, rural electrification, back boilers, solar heaters, and gas and kerosene uses, over 90 per cent of households, the majority of whom were from Ghandruk, perceived a better situation, while a small percentage were unaware of such facilities in their villages and thus reported a lack of them.

When asked what were the major factors responsible for the change relating to different aspects of community development, household perception varied, but, in most cases, ACAP was identified as the key positive factor for change or community development. More specifically, respondents were given five choices, namely, (a) tourism, (b) ACAP, (c) both, (d) government, and (e) villagers' own initiatives, and asked to select which of these factors they perceived were responsible for the changes in community development. The results are summarised in Table 4.47.

The majority of the respondents identified ACAP as the positive factor for improved situations in sanitation, forest conservation, alternative energy programmes, environmental awareness, women's development, lodge management, and training. Similarly, the government was pointed out as the main mover for the improved drinking water situation. Tourism was reported by the majority of the respondents as a key factor for development of markets (50%), lodges (90%), and camp grounds (80%).

Finally, household perception about the distribution of benefits is reported in Table 4.48. In response to most questions, a majority (83%) of the households thought that benefits had accrued to the villagers. About 12 per cent felt that only those households engaged in tourism had benefitted in any substantial way. Other results are summarised in Table 4.48.

A major conclusion that emerges from the analyses of community development is that the level of community satisfaction concerning community development is quite positive, with the majority of respondents crediting ACAP with being responsible. Second, the results indicate that distribution of benefits is fair, as very few households thought the richer section of the

community had unduly benefitted; the majority felt that benefits accrued to all villagers. Third, income-generating programmes have not been effective and need to be enhanced. The link between community and tourism development is weak.

Impact Perceived by the Host Population Lodge Owners. Lodge owners were asked about their awareness of various community development programmes and to indicate whether selected issues in their community had changed (improved, remained the same or had gotten worse) over the previous five years. The same areas were covered as for the households. The results are summarised in Tables 4.49 to 4.51.

With regards to basic development infrastructures, the majority of lodge owners indicated that the situation had improved or was better than five years' earlier in both Ghorepani and Ghandruk. A negligible percentage indicated the situation had become worse. With regard to other types of infrastructure too, a large majority of the lodge owners indicated that the situation was similarly better (Table 4.49).

The lodge owners were also asked why they thought the situation had changed (Table 4.50). With regard to basic development infrastructure, the opinion of the lodge owners was found to be fairly divided. In Ghorepani, about 32 per cent felt tourism had induced the change, whereas only about 19 per cent of the lodge owners in Ghandruk attributed the change to tourism. On the other hand, a lower percentage (10%) of lodge owners in Ghorepani attributed the change to ACAP, whereas about 23 per cent of Ghandruk lodge owners attributed the change to ACAP. A similar percentage of lodge owners in Ghandruk attributed the change to the government, but, in Ghorepani, this percentage was smaller (14%). Lodge owners also attributed the change brought about in infrastructural development in the community to the villagers. A fairly large percentage (30%) of the Ghorepani lodge owners who indicated that the infrastructural situation was better than five years' earlier were, however, unable to decide to whom to attribute the change. Lodge owners in Ghandruk were more sure in this respect. In both the areas, ACAP was cited as the main cause for bringing improvements to the health situation, but more so in Ghandruk (70%) than in Ghorepani (57%). Lodge owners do not seem to credit the government with the change indicated in most of the issues, as may be seen in the Table, and this is more true of lodge owners in Ghorepani than in Ghandruk (Table 4.50).

In human resource development, income generating activities, and conservation, lodge owners in both the areas credited ACAP with the positive changes that have been realised. In Ghorepani, a larger majority attributed the positive change in human resource development and conservation to ACAP than in Ghandruk. In other areas, namely health and income generation, it was the lodge owners in Ghandruk who were more willing to attribute the positive change to ACAP. The results indicate that villagers have also been credited by the lodge owners with bringing about positive changes in their community in all areas except human resource development (Table 4.50).

A final question asked concerned the opinion of lodge owners on who was receiving the benefits from the various forms of development. The lodge owners, who in the questionnaire were themselves categorised as being 'tourism-related', felt that more of the local community had benefitted from the various community-level programmes (Table 4.51). The results based on the information obtained from the field indicate the important role ACAP has played in improving the community's well-being. Tourism has brought income to lodge owners, but growth in lodge owners' income is unlikely to spill over to the community unless concerted efforts are made to link these two sectors.

Impacts Perceived by the Visitor Population-Demand Side. The majority of the visitors surveyed (63%) perceived the prevailing trekking permit fee to be fair. The trekking permit fee was reported to be high by about 29 per cent of all trekkers, the majority of whom were FITs. With regard to the conservation area fee, only 24 per cent of the independent trekkers indicated that the fee was high, with a larger percentage (76%) stating that it was between fair and low. Similarly, visitors' perceptions regarding porter wage rates varied according to the type of trekker. While two-thirds of the independent trekkers thought porter wages were fair, a majority of group trekkers (57%) perceived porter wages to be low.

Despite the low level of expenses for local products, the contribution of the FITs to the local economy was relatively higher than that of the GT. It should be recalled that GT spent about two weeks, whereas as FITs spent only about a week, in the area. On a per day basis, therefore, FITs spent more time than GT visitors. Also, a large part of the GT expenditure paid to travel agents actually is not spent in the area, since most food purchases are made outside.

About 40 per cent of the visitors reported that the information on maps of the conservation area were helpful and adequate, another 45 per cent reported the

information was helpful but inadequate, and about 15 per cent considered the information not helpful (Table 4.52).

When asked whether the code of conduct is obeyed by trekkers as well as local people, the large majority of the visitors surveyed indicated that most trekkers and local people obey the code of conduct. However, 30 per cent of the visitors reported that most local people do not obey the code of conduct. Among the visitors who indicated that they themselves do not obey the code of conduct 27 per cent indicated that it was the FITs and only six per cent GT (Table 4.53).

Information was also solicited from the visitors regarding their perception on congestion or crowding in the conservation area. When asked whether the number of visitors permitted to visit the area was too many, adequate or not a problem, a small per cent of the visitors (13%) perceived "too many" visitors (congestion) in the area, while another 50 per cent thought, that the number of trekkers currently permitted in the area was adequate and should not exceed the current level. Those who perceived that the current number of visitors was not a serious problem comprised less than 38 per cent. Visitors' perceptions of congestion, however, varied between FITs and GT (Table 4.54). Based on the results, it may be argued that the area is reaching a point beyond which the experience of the visitors will perhaps begin to deteriorate if more trekkers begin to use the same number of facilities and services. In other words, additional visitors may result in congestion, so that planners should begin thinking of additional infrastructural development, products, and area diversification.

Information was also collected from the visitors regarding their perceptions of garbage, littering, and sanitation conditions in the different places within the region. Table 4.55 summarises the results. The majority of visitors perceived the garbage and littering situation on campsites to be good, while 47 per cent reported being satisfied with the sanitation on the campsites. Along trek routes and scenic spots 35 per cent of the visitors perceived littering and sanitation conditions to be good. Regarding lodges, only a small percentage of visitors reported sanitation conditions to be good. Garbage, littering and sanitation conditions in homes and villages were found to be unsatisfactory by visitors. Sanitation conditions in schools were perceived by a large majority of the visitors to be good. The details are provided in Table 4.55.