

INTRODUCTION

Mountain Tourism in Nepal has brought both positive and negative changes in mountain areas where it is practised. These changes are manifested in nature and environment, in the economy, and in the social and cultural patterns of mountain people. Although negative impacts have also occurred, by and large evidence indicates that positive changes outweigh negative ones. Moreover, the potential for developing tourism in mountain areas is enormous. If properly guided, tourism development in mountain areas can help alleviate poverty and conserve the fragile mountain environment.

However, mountain tourism development (MTD) requires intervention on several fronts simultaneously. Previous studies carried out by CREST for ICIMOD have identified several important issues in the context of MTD.

- A major problem in mountain tourism is the result of a lack of vision and appreciation of the value of the natural resources essential for tourism development. This lack of vision has led to unsustainable tourism practices in mountain areas.
- The conditions under which tourism could be made to play a role in mountain development and the policy environment conducive to such a role remain unexplored.
- In general there has been no spontaneous impact of tourism on the major development concerns in the mountains; namely, poverty alleviation, environmental care and regeneration, and empowerment of local communities. Therefore, deliberate efforts and programmatic interventions needed to be made to link tourism to these concerns.
- Mountain tourism has been entirely demand-led and supply-side planning and management (attraction, promotion, information transport, and services) have been completely ignored.
- This situation has resulted in poor links between mountain tourism and the economic base of mountain areas, resulting in a substantial amount of income from tourism accruing to local communities leaking out of the area.
- Mountain tourism has so far only relied on trekking tourism and there is scope and need to develop new tourism products based on the natural and cultural resources. There is an urgent need to develop and diversify mountain tourism to benefit a wider mountain community.
- A felt need to make the different actors in the tourism policy-programme-action continuum aware and sensitive to the issues of sustainable mountain tourism was perceived.

Based on the findings of the previous studies, thematic areas have been identified in which broadening the knowledge, awareness, and sensitisation with respect to sustainable mountain tourism were required. Some of these areas have been described below.

- Operationalisation of the considerations of carrying capacity in the local context
- Elucidation of the environmental, socioeconomic, and related impacts and implications of tourism and approaches to mitigating negative effects
- A process of participatory planning and the development of institutions for tourism in local areas and communities to manage the same
- Identification of the needs of human resource development at different levels in order to maximise the benefits from mountain tourism
- Development of materials and modules incorporating the above for the training of personnel at different levels of the tourism policy-programme-action continuum.

In other words, institutions at different levels, especially at local level where consumption takes place, are urgently required.