

An Assessment of the Impact and Implications of Mountain Tourism in Kalam

In order to assess the impact and implications of mountain tourism in Kalam, interviews were held and a survey conducted to obtain the perceptions of the various groups of people who are affected by tourist activities

Responses on Tourism Impact

The tabulated responses of 31 interviewees (10 full-time residents, 8 tourist service operators, and 13 tourists, of whom 10 were domestic and 3 foreign) to a structured interview requiring responses regarding the impact of tourism on physical plant, economic structure; social, moral, and cultural values; environment; image; and trade-induced government investment are given in Annex 1.

All the questions are related, directly and indirectly, to carrying capacity. The responses relating to impact on physical plant, economy, society, environment, image, and cultural values reveal a mixed picture.

- (a) Most (nearly three-fourths) of the respondents reported that the quality of tourist facilities has improved in the last five years; and the impact on local infrastructure has been negligible to moderate.
- (b) More than half reported a high to very high increase in incomes in the last five years; and two-thirds attributed more than half the income increase to tourism, but the share of income remaining in the area was estimated by most to be below 50 per cent, as few of the tourist facilities are owned or managed by locals. Hence job creation and growth in the consumption of local products had been moderate.
- (c) There had been a negligible impact on society, particularly in the role of females, and on religion. Crime was not perceived as having increased because of tourism. Locals were little shocked by the lifestyle of tourists, and their general attitude towards tourists was positive to very positive.
- (d) The respondents were not expert biologists, or even selected nature observers, yet some weight could be given to their observations that

there was a moderate impact of tourism on fisheries, compared to a negligible impact on terrestrial wildlife.

- (e) The majority of the respondents reported observing a negligible to moderate increase in the pollution of lakes and streams in the present five years; but many attributed a moderate to high share of the otherwise modest increase in air pollution to tourist vehicles.
- (f) Half the respondents observed a high to very rapid increase in wood-cutting and vegetation loss in the previous five years; and nearly one-third of the respondents thought that the fuelwood demand of tourists had played a significant role in the loss of vegetation.
- (g) Most of the respondents reported an adverse or very adverse impact on the image of the area, particularly an increase in the physical and visual density of the population and in noise and disturbance.
- (h) Yet, most acknowledged that locals had benefitted greatly/very greatly from tourism- induced investment, and thought that more tourism would be very good for the area (this included 80% of the local resident respondents).

What can be deduced from these responses? One may hypothesise, as below.

Hypothesis 1: The mixed response reflects the real trade-off between economic gain and loss of social, environmental, and image values.

Hypothesis 2: The mixed response reflect the saturation of certain reception areas (Kalam proper, etc) as resorts over limited periods of time, while most of the potential tourism areas remain grossly underutilised.

Common Inferences

The foregoing analyses lend themselves to the following common inferences.

Inference 1: In the general opinion of local residents, the tourism service industry and tourists, more tourism would be good for the Kalam area, i.e., carrying capacities are far from being exceeded. This is supported by calculations that, over the whole tourism area of Kalam, current carrying capacities (as per WTO standards for relatively underdeveloped areas) are up to one factor of magnitude larger than current peak day tourist flows.

Inference 2: Facts and observations, however, show that, with the current volumes, the image of Kalam proper and its neighbouring villages as calm,

serene, and uncluttered places has already been affected. The number of visitors per peak day to Kalam proper is already close to its objective carrying capacity of 2,500 - 7,500 persons per day, and the situation could rapidly get worse. There is, thus, already a case for better tourism demand management, including more temporal and spatial dispersal of tourist flows to and within the area.

Implications for the Economy

It is clear from the survey that, while tourism causes an increase in income, the income retained in the area is only a fraction of the total amount earned. There are strong leakages of income and benefits. The greater part of the income leaks out of the area. Direct leakages -- first-round leakages -- already account for more than 50 per cent of the income earned. This is followed by the second-round of leakages, i.e., that part of the tourist money earned by locals which, after making a round locally, passes on to suppliers of goods and services outside the local community.

On the other hand, linkages of the tourism sector with the local economy are weak. The structure of the tourism industry is such that the 'trickle down' is minimal and will remain so unless a suitable change occurs in this structure. The result is that there has been only a moderate degree of employment creation and a minimal growth in the consumption of local products. As has been mentioned earlier in the introduction to the case study area, locals are employed in the tourist industry either as watchmen/guards, porters/helpers, or as guides. Only a few are vehicle drivers or engaged in petty business during the season.

As has also been mentioned, whatever change has come about in the production base of the area has been by way of donor intervention. The socioeconomic survey has not detected any particular impact of tourists on the production base.

Are the Kalamites not responsive to tourists' signals? The answer is that the channels through which the tourists' signals pass do not lead to the local people. The linkages are thus faint and the leakages robust.

Implications for the Environment

The study has not noted a clearly discernible increase in the pollution of lakes and streams in the last five years. Responses from the interviews have,

however, attributed a high share of the increase in air pollution to tourist vehicles.

The field teams have also reported tourism's impact on fisheries, which is reportedly greater than the impact on wildlife. The growing number of humans and habitations has adversely affected the tourist image of the area, with an increase in noise and an erosion of the tranquillity that Kalam was famous for.

There is a rising phenomenon of deforestation and vegetation loss. However, tourism must bear only a small brunt of the blame for it. Some of the factors responsible for the phenomenon would have been active regardless of tourism.

Conclusions on Implications and Critical Issues

It is thus obvious that, on balance, tourism has both a negative and positive impact. Tourism has opened up an otherwise remote area, has turned it into a focus of a great deal of investment, income and employment generation, and other forms of economic activity. However, all this has benefitted the local community only marginally.

On the negative side, there has been environmental pollution; loss of pristine vegetation and tranquillity; the passing on of assets belonging to the local community to outsiders and thus the turning of owners into wage-dependent employees; the frustration of hopes linked with tourism regarding improvements in the lot of the common man; local participation; and the social and economic transformation of the area.

It is also obvious that, in its present form, tourism or more tourism can only mean the same or more of the same results. Unless there is a basic change in the structure of the tourism industry, and unless there is a change in the accompanying requirements of human resource development, a share in ownership and the management of assets, modification of the production base in response to tourist needs, and participation in decision-making - in short, in the very design and orientation of the tourism industry - the local community will be sidelined and deprived of benefits. More tourism in that case will only mean more of the negative effects of an exploitative enterprise that uses the habitat of the local people for its own gain and to the exclusion of any benefits for the local community.

And this, in fact, is inherent in the way tourism has developed, and it is set on course to progress further in this area. Tourism was never designed differently;

it is, therefore, vain to expect anything different from it in its present form. If, on the other hand, it is meant to benefit the local community and protect the major tourism assets of the area, it will have to be reconceived. This new conception can take two forms: either to evolve a framework of development for the area as a whole and set tourism within this framework as one of the activities with built-in linkages to and from, or to make tourism the centre-piece and let other activities develop around the tourist enterprise. The 'trickle down' can then be reinforced by forcing linkages with the local production base and stimulating the supporting activities with local participation. The job market can also be oriented towards the locals, with the gaps being filled by skill formation, training, and exposure.

Even so, the effort may still be self-defeating unless environmental care and pollution avoidance are built into it. The involvement of the local community in developing alternative sources of sustenance should be accompanied by their desisting from deforestation and using alternative sources of energy. Such an involvement will also ensure the safety of the social and cultural fabrics, and it may draw whole families - males and females - into the mainstream of activities without eroding the basic institutions of family and religion and such values as privacy, personal pride, and family honour.