Sustainable Mountain Tourism Planning and Management

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This chapter covers

➢ The importance of mountain tourism planning and the planning process

➢ The supply components of mountain tourism products and their interrelationship

➢ A framework for monitoring the sustainability of mountain tourism (the visitors, industry, community, and environment or VICE model)

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Introduction: Imperatives of Mountain Tourism Planning

Tourism planning is essential to allocate scarce resources (at the local, regional, or national level) to maximise output, income, and employment; minimise leakages; distribute benefits to wider communities; conserve the environment; and provide visitor satisfaction. Tourism planning must be comprehensive and consider all the relevant components of tourism such as attractions, transport, accommodation, information, and promotion. A tourism plan must demonstrate how tourism functions as a system; how services are provided; how sites are developed and managed; and how tourism products are developed, marketed, and promoted. Clearly, effective planning and management of mountain tourism are essential at the destination and site level, and at the national, regional, and international level, to maintain its integrity and to ensure that unique attractions are protected.

Given the large-scale and rampant poverty in mountain areas, tourism development alone cannot be considered a panacea for poverty alleviation in these regions. Tourism planning must seek to link mountain tourism to mountain community development in areas where tourism can play a leading role. It is essential that the complementarity of mountain tourism and mountain community development is maximised. This means maximising income and employment generation from tourism, on the one hand, and minimising tourism income leakages, on the other. This is possible only when tourism is properly designed and closely integrated with the local economy by establishing backward and forward economic linkages. Income and employment generation must serve as the stimuli for environmental conservation. For sustainability, local institutional development needs to be emphasised and the capacity of local people needs to be enhanced to manage mountain tourism at the local level.

As tourism is governed by international and domestic market forces, tourism planning should be market oriented. The forces of demand and supply must be carefully understood and integrated into a tourism plan. However, this does not necessarily mean that the government has a minimal role to play. In fact, the government has to play a very important role to make mountain tourism sustainable (see Chapter 7).

Although the process of tourism planning is often well understood, there are many barriers to its effective implementation. Unlike other sectors, planning sustainable mountain tourism is a complex

process for a number of reasons, namely the existence of multiple stakeholders with diverse views but fragmented control over the tourism destination; the nature of tourism products that often contain elements of public goods with externalities; the nature of its impacts, that can be both positive and negative, interrelated, and interdependent; the constraints for participation of the poor (e.g., because of low levels of capital); the seasonal nature of tourism, and the peculiar nature of tourism products (see Box 5.1) and the mountain context or specificities (see Chapter 1). Almost all sectors are involved in tourism planning. Coordination across different sectors is therefore a crucial factor in tourism planning and execution (see also Chapter 12).

Box 5.1: Peculiar Nature of Tourism Products

The following characteristics of the industry have to be taken into consideration in planning for tourism.

Intangibility: Tourism products cannot be easily evaluated or demonstrated in advance of the purchase. It is not possible to test out the tourism service before it is purchased.

Perishability: Tourism products cannot be stored for sale at a future time. Tourism services such as a hotel room or aircraft seat left vacant on a particular night or flight cannot be stocked for future use.

Inseparability: Tourism products are often consumed and produced simultaneously. Unlike other products, the production of tourism services and their consumption (by tourists) are inseparable because tourists must be present to consume the service where it is produced. As tourists cannot inspect tourist services before deciding to use them (see intangibility), the risks and uncertainty for consumers are high, and, thus, their need for reliable pre-purchase information is strong.

Heterogeneity: As in other service industries, tourism services are difficult to standardise. Tourism services differ and heterogeneity is a feature of the tourism sector.

Complementarity: As a tourism product is the combination of several sub-products that complement each other, the failure of one sub-product can seriously affect the total attractiveness of the product.

Seasonality: Tourism is influenced by seasonal factors such as agricultural cycles, weather patterns, economic fluctuations, holiday seasons in generation markets, and so forth. This pattern of seasonality can bring problems of unemployment, but can also be a blessing in disguise (i.e., in terms of regeneration of the environment, not colliding with agricultural harvesting seasons, and so on).

Dominant role of intermediaries: In contrast to most other industries where manufacturers have control over design, distribution, and promotion and pricing, travel sale intermediaries such as tour operators, travel agents, and hotel wholesalers play an important role in tourism marketing

Source: Cooper and Wanhill 1993

Components of a Tourism Plan

Supply components of a tourism product

A tourism product is a composite product comprised of five main supply components: attractions, services, transportation, information, and promotion. Figure 5.1 demonstrates how these supply components of tourism are closely interrelated and operated within a system.

- **Attraction:** A tourism product has to be attractive or else visitors will not visit the area. A country's natural beauty, history, culture, and people all determine attraction. Attractions are both natural and man-made. Attractions could be ecosystems, rare plants, animals, or cultural, historic, or heritage products, but they are developed and managed entities. Sustainable planning for tourism must place emphasis on those areas that have the best attractions and can be linked with other services.
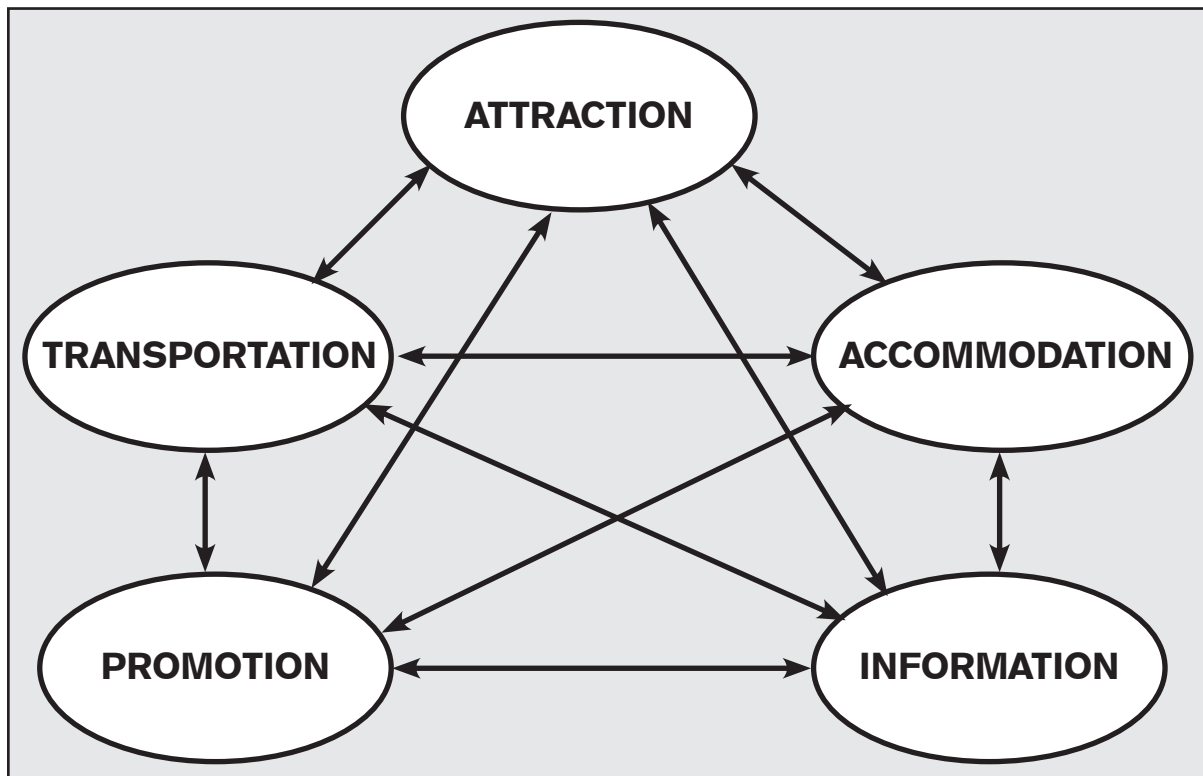
Figure 5.1: Supply components of a tourism product: the tourism system

- **Transport:** A network of efficient transportation is a must for a tourism product as it provides a critical linkage between the market source and destination. As all other supply components of tourism depend on transportation, there should be proper planning and managerial linkages between transportation, decision makers, and tourism developers.

- **Accommodation:** Accommodation complements other components of tourism. Service-oriented businesses (accommodation, food services, travel agencies and business, retail shops, restaurants, and so forth) generate the greatest economic impacts in terms of employment, income, and tax revenue, and they are the source of multiplier effects and linkages through indirect support of other sectors.

- **Information:** In contrast to advertising, which is intended to attract, information is generally descriptive (maps, magazines, articles, guidebooks, videos, and others). The objective of travel information is to provide visitors with an understanding of places and activities. Pre-travel information is as important as en route and on site information. Planned visitor centres offer a combination of information and services (food, retail sales, museum exhibits, publications, and others) to visitors.

- **Promotion:** Promotion generally takes place only after all other supply components of tourism have been developed. It is an important supply component of tourism and seeks to promote all the other components of tourism.

An alternative way to classify the supply components of tourism products is through the use of the 'Destination Mix', also popularly referred to as the 8 'A's. The 8 'A's that form the core of a tourism destination are (Shrestha and Walinga 2003):

- **Attractions:** Broadly categorised as natural resources, climate, culture, and history
- **Amenities:** Facilities and services like information, food, and beverage and infrastructure
- **Activities:** Such as trekking, adventure sports' activities, cultural activities, entertainment, shopping, and so forth
- **Accommodation:** Such as hotels, lodges, teahouses, home stays, camp sites, youth hostels, and so forth

- **Access:** Certain areas in the Himalayas owe their popularity to their accessibility. Many other places in the Himalayas contain great natural and cultural attractions (e.g., Dolpo in Nepal), but tourism is almost absent or very poorly developed due to lack of proper access or transportation. On the other hand, lack of accessibility can increase the attractiveness of the destination to some and offer magnificent views over the Himalayas
- **Affinity:** Hospitality, peacefulness, the friendliness of the population, attitude, and acceptance of tourism by host population and other stakeholders
- **Actors:** Including local communities, government agencies and departments (local and national), international NGOs (INGOs), NGOs, banks and donor agencies, business associations, accommodation and transport providers, restaurants, retail outlets, journalists, guidebook writers, tourists, and tour agents (at the local, national, and international levels), see also Chapter 7
- **Acts:** Rules, regulations, and policies relating to tourism

Tourism being a specialised service industry has a number of peculiar characteristics, which need to be fully understood if a tourism product is to be successfully planned, developed, and marketed.

Planning level or scale

Tourism planning needs to be approached on four different levels or scales; namely, the site scale, destination scale, regional and national scale, and international scale.

- **Site scale:** A site is a land area within a destination zone that has one or more tourist attractions and is usually controlled by one or more individuals, firms, or government agencies. At this level, planning entails planning attractions, facilities, and services for visitors.
- **Destination scale:** A destination zone may be defined as a geographic area containing a critical mass of development that satisfies traveller objectives and which has scope for establishing tourism links with the community. The destination also includes all locations en route where visitors have to halt for the night.
- **Regional and national scale:** Planning at the national level is essential for better integration. On this scale there are more institutions and stakeholders involved. The planning horizon must encompass a longer time frame.
- **Internationals scale:** For transboundary or cross-border tourism projects or initiatives such as the Great Himalayan Trail, Buddhist Circuits and so on, planning and collaboration on an international level are needed and are imperative for its success.

Box 5.1 shows an example of planning for tourism in Myanmar and Box 5.2 an example of the site planning concept and factors to be included in site analysis.

The Tourism Planning Process

Tourism is one of many activities in a mountain community or region that requires planning and coordination. Planning is the process of identifying objectives and defining methods of achieving them. Mountain tourism planning must be comprehensive and consider all relevant components of tourism. It is also part of overall mountain land-use planning. Comprehensive planning considers all of the tourism resources, organisations, markets, and programmes within a region, including the economic, environmental, social, and institutional aspects of tourism development. Maximum community involvement and involvement of the poor and other socially excluded groups (such as women and mountain minority groups) should be ensured in mountain tourism planning and development as well as decision making. The basic steps involved in tourism development planning are well discussed in tourism literature. Box 5.3 provides 10 key questions as essential steps to planning sustainable tourism.

Box 5.1: Planning Tourism for the Mountains – Valuing the Attraction of Mountains in Myanmar

Mountains often play an important role in tourism. As stated in Chapter 3, mountains are thought to be second in global popularity as tourist destinations. The demand for mountain tourism destinations is growing rapidly. Myanmar has acknowledged the value of its mountains and identified several specific mountain tourism destinations.

Mountain Tourism Destinations Identified

Putao District, Kachin State

Mt. Khakaborazi; Putao District, Kachin State

Mt. Punggan Razi; Putao District, Kachin State

Mt. Madoi Razi Putao District, Kachin State

Mt. Victoria (Nat Ma Taung); Kampet, Chin State

Popa Mountain Resort; Mandalay Division

Main Attractions

Scenic natural beauty snowy trails

Mountaineering and adventure trekking

Unique flora, fauna (unique orchids, rhododendrons, medicinal plants, bird species)

Geological features (mountains, volcanoes)

Sacred landscapes (home of Myanmar Nats, supernatural beings)

Culture and traditions of the indigenous ethnic people of Putao district

Recognising the value and attraction of its mountains, Myanmar has taken a proactive stance towards tourism development and conservation by developing a specific mountain tourism policy.

Source: Ministry of Hotels and Tourism Myanmar 2006

Mt. Khakaborazi

Box 5.2: Site Planning Concept: Site Analysis

Site analysis should include both on-site and off-site factors.

On-site factors include the following:

- Construction elements (legal and physical boundaries, existing buildings, bridges, and other infrastructure including historical, cultural and archaeological sites, trails and transportation, existing land uses, zoning regulations, and health codes)
- Natural resources (topography, gradients and drainage patterns, soil types, water bodies, vegetation type – trees and other plants)
- Aesthetic characteristics (views, features, and spatial patterns)

Off-site factors include the following:

- Surrounding land use
- Stream and drainage sources
- Influence of noise pollution

Box 5.3: Steps to Sustainable Tourism Planning

Steps	Process
What do we want to do?	• Define goals and objectives and understand the place/ project context
Who is, could be, or needs to be involved?	• Identify key stakeholder groups and their interests, involve and empower them, and develop effective working relationships
What is known?	• Identify and summarise information available on current and potential tourism markets and determine tourism assets, values, and themes
What makes this region, place, or product special?	• Identify the special value of the region, place, or tourism attraction and recognise their potential
What are the issues?	• Identify and understand key issues affecting the region, place, or product
Analyse issues	• Analyse issues further to clarify and prioritise
Principles or objectives to guide actions	• Develop clear principles or objectives to guide actions and reach agreement in consultation with all key stakeholders
What are your ideas and options?	• Work through ideas and options with key stakeholders and reach agreement on preferred option(s)
How to do it?	• Develop actions to implement ideas, proposals, or preferred options in a clear and logical way • Develop monitoring and evaluation methods
Statement of directions	• Prepare a statement summarising the outcomes of processes and proposals and identifying key tourism assets, issues, and future action

Source: Australian Government, Department of the Environment and Heritage 2004

Although the planning process varies depending on the types of planning and local conditions, it generally follows the following basic steps:

1. **Study preparation:** The first step involves the preparation of the terms of reference (ToR) for the tourism planning study and the selection of a multidisciplinary team.

2. **Determination of objectives:** The objectives that the tourism development is expected to accomplish should be determined in close coordination with community residents, government authorities, and other relevant key stakeholders. Objectives should be clear, unambiguous, and achievable, balancing the three pillars of sustainability: the economic, environmental, and sociocultural.

3. **Feasibility assessment:** Various surveys and studies are essential to establish an inventory and evaluate existing and potential tourist attractions (and other supply components) on the proposed site. Such surveys should cover many elements related to tourism such as existing tourist arrival patterns and potential tourist markets; existing tourist facilities and services; local infrastructure; socioeconomic, sociocultural, and environmental conditions; and existing government development policies and plans.

4. **Analysis and synthesis:** Analysing and synthesising existing and potential tourism markets (demand) based on existing and future tourism attractions and other tourism products (supply) are needed. The common technique is to first identify the target market (the types and number of tourists that can be attracted). This will provide the basis for projecting needs for accommodation, transportation, and other tourist facilities and services and to assess the likely economic, social, and environmental impacts. Equally important at this stage is to establish the carrying capacity of the area based on an analysis of the major opportunities for and constraints to developing tourism.

5. **Policy and plan formulation:** At this stage, the tourism development policy and plan should be formulated based on the elements that have been surveyed and analysed with due attention to the integration of tourism into the overall development policy and plan of the area. The planner should prepare alternative plans and evaluate how well each of these fulfil the tourism objectives, optimise benefits, minimise negative environmental and sociocultural impacts, and, thus, achieve sustainable development. The environmental impact assessment (EIA) provides a basis for a detailed assessment of the likely impacts of each proposed alternative plan and recommends the suitable alternatives for implementation (see Tool 25, Volume 2). It is important to involve all relevant stakeholders in deciding about the most appropriate policy and plan.

6. **Implementation and monitoring:** Implementation techniques should be identified in the planning process. They may include zoning regulations in view of the established carrying capacity of an area, design criteria or guidelines for site development and tourist facilities, tourism product development, diversification and integration with local production system, and institutional capacity building. Finally, continuous monitoring of tourism and the environment is critical to ensure that development is following the plan and that tourism is bringing the desired results. Management should be flexible enough to take corrective action to reformulate or adjust the plan based on the monitoring results.

Box 5.4 shows the tourism vision from the Master Plan of Himachal Pradesh, India.

**Box 5.4: Vision for the Development of Tourism–
The Master Plan of Himachal Pradesh, India**

Tourism Vision of Himachal Pradesh
- To make tourism the prime engine of economic growth in the state by positioning Himachal Pradesh as a leading global destination by the year 2020
- Increased income from tourism on a sustainable basis
- Care for the natural environment

Elements of the Master Plan
Improved infrastructure and better accessibility
- By road
- By rail
- By air
- Public private partnerships
- Town and country planning and special area development authorities
- Tourist police
- Tourist information centres

Upgrade accommodation
- 4 and 5 star hotels
  De-luxe resorts
  Health and fitness resorts
  Meditation and spiritual centres
- Heritage hotels
- Standardised budget accommodation
- Mountain resorts
- Ecotourism camps

Adventure tourism
- Paragliding
- River rafting
- Trekking
- Mountaineering
- Western Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Manali
- Skiing/heli skiing
- Mountain cycling

Religious tourism
- Dharamsala–Buddhist capital
- Buddhist circuit
- Naina Devi–Jval Amukhi–Chintpurni-Chamunda–Part of the Shaktipeeths
- Churches
- Sites of Sikh pilgrimage – Rewalsar, Paonta Sahib

Vision 2020
- World class infrastructure (road, rail, air)
- Tourism contribution to state economy of 20-25%
- At least 15-20, 5 star hotels/mountain resorts of international standard
- Set up 50 heritage villages
- Major one-stop destination for adventure tourism in India
- Set up 2-3 major film cities
- Buddhist tourism capital of the world
- Maharana Pratap Sagar Lake – largest ecotourism destination in India
- 100% privatisation of tourism
- Ropeway state of India
- Tourism Development Board

Source: Himachal Tourism 2006

Framework for Monitoring Sustainability of Mountain Tourism

## What to monitor and accomplish – the VICE model

The agenda of sustainable mountain tourism (see Chapter 4) can be used as a framework, not only for developing policies for more sustainable mountain tourism, but to monitor progress towards, and impacts on, sustainability. There are two ways in which tourism policy can exert an influence on sustainability:

- By minimising the negative impacts of tourism on society, culture, and the environment
- By maximising tourism's positive and creative contribution to local economies, the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, and the quality of life of hosts and visitors

Attempting to make progress towards the sustainability of mountain tourism can be meaningless without some objective way of assessing whether its underlying principles are being respected. As a central component of the planning and management process, indicators can be used to monitor impacts on visitors, industry, community, and environment (VICE) over time in a constant and consistent manner. The VICE model (Figure 5.2) is useful not only for identifying key groups of stakeholders but also for devising a successful monitoring strategy by identifying how to:

- Welcome, involve, and satisfy visitors
- Achieve a profitable and prosperous industry
- Engage and benefit host communities
- Protect and enhance the local environment

Source: Australian Government, Department of the Environment and Heritage 2004
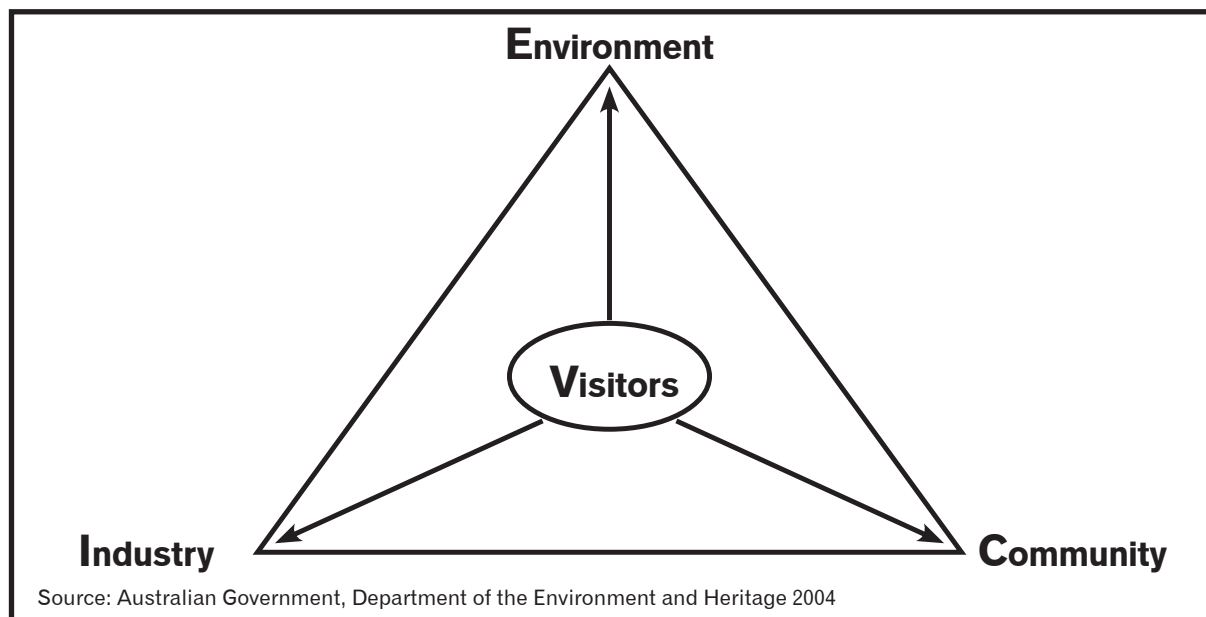
Figure 5.2: VICE model

Monitoring the sustainability of mountain tourism thus involves keeping abreast of the activities, needs, and opinions of key stakeholder groups, which include the following:

- **Visitors:** through site surveys, focus group discussions to check on profiles and levels of satisfaction
- **Industry:** through surveys to check on their economic performance and their perceptions towards tourism impacts
- **Local community:** through household surveys and focus group discussions to check on attitudes towards tourism and concerns about its impacts

- **Environment:** through inventory surveys and carrying capacity assessments (see Volume 1, Chapter 4, and Volume 2, Tool 2)

More information about VICE indicators and monitoring can be found in Volume 2 (Tool 34).

Sustainability indicators and monitoring

Monitoring sustainability involves taking measurements of environmental, social, and economic conditions using selected indicators (see also Chapter 11). A set of performance indicators developed for the VICE model can be used as a check to ensure that the needs of each group of key stakeholders are met. A detailed overview of the sustainability indicators under the VICE model can be found in Volume 2. (Tool 34). A successful example of a model integrating the different aspects of sustainability is given in Box 5.5.

Box 5.5: Integrating Conservation and Development: The ACAP Approach

Traditionally, tourism development models have been spatial and economic. Tourism planning often fails to consider environmental and social issues until well after the economic issues have been dealt with. Accepting the importance of the proper integration of different components in effective tourism planning, the National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC) adopted an integrated approach to planning, developing, and managing tourism in the Annapurna Conservation Area (ACA).
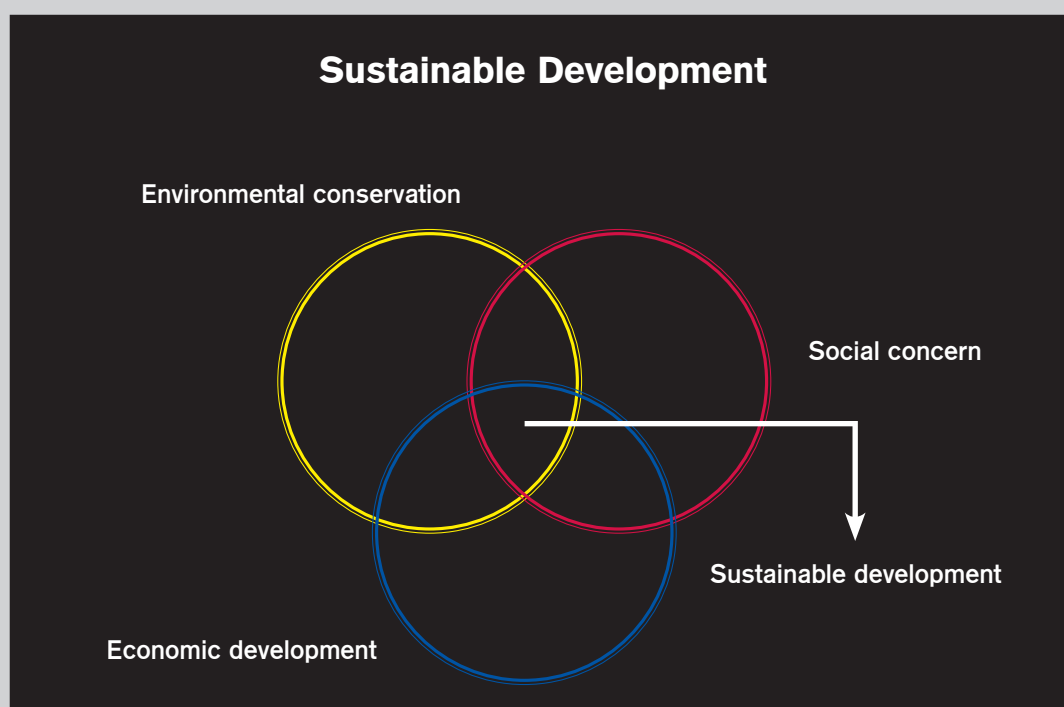
The integrated conservation and development approach in the ACA carefully incorporated all three components of sustainable development. Natural resource conservation is one of the key components of the approach. Natural forest, wildlife, and water resources are conserved through different activities including plantation on degraded land, reducing pressure on forests, reducing disturbance of wildlife habitats, research, and educating major stakeholders. The revenue generated by tourism is reinvested in these activities. Moreover, all the planning, designing, implementation, and management of integrated activities are carried out together with local communities in the ACA. ACA's community-based tourism planning and management model is well known globally.

Source: NTNC 2006