



PROCEEDINGS OF THE INTERACTION WORKSHOP ON

Planning for sustainable tourism in Namkha Rural Municipality, Humla

7 February 2021 | Nepal Tourism Board, Kathmandu

SECTION 1

Introduction

Namkha Rural Municipality lies in Humla district in far western Nepal. The municipality is considered the gateway to Mt Kailash and attracts many tourists and pilgrims every year. It is part of a region endowed with rich and unique natural and cultural heritage, with high potential for cultural and ecotourism.

A five-year sustainable tourism plan was drafted for Namkha Rural Municipality with support from the [Kailash Sacred Landscape Conservation and Development Initiative](#). An interactive workshop was held in Kathmandu, Nepal on 7 February 2021 with the purpose of sharing a draft of the five-year plan with stakeholders. The objectives of the workshop were to validate the findings of the plan, receive feedback in order to finalize the plan, and to garner support from relevant stakeholders for its implementation.

SECTION 2

Key points from the sustainable tourism plan

Ram Chandra Sedai presented a summary of the draft sustainable tourism plan. He discussed the potential of Namkha Rural Municipality as one of the most competitive gateways to Mt Kailash in comparison to other places in the Himalaya. In addition, he shared that Namkha has huge potential for becoming a tourism destination in its own right, given its unique culture, outstanding landscapes, and rich biodiversity. He provided an overview of the current scenario of tourism infrastructure – existing tourism and trekking routes, accommodation facilities, connectivity and internal access, communication and tourist information, and key market segments of Namkha.

He shared the vision of the draft plan and said, “Namkha Rural Municipality will become a unique and most attractive tourism destination and a vibrant international gateway leading to inclusive economic growth, greater social harmony, and sustainable conservation of cultural and natural heritage.”

The goal of the plan is “to contribute to bringing inclusive economic growth in Namkha Rural Municipality while contributing significantly to the conservation and safeguarding of its outstanding cultural and natural heritage and offering unique tourism experiences to visitors.”

SECTION 3

Discussion

Promoting tourism through the private sector

Participants acknowledged the tourism potential of Namkha Rural Municipality and the need to promote it in the global tourism market. Khum Bahadur Subedi, President, Trekking Agents Association of Nepal (TAAN), stressed the need for dialogue between the local government of Namkha and tour operators to develop a strategy to promote Namkha as a tourist destination. He stressed the important role the private sector can play in implementing the plan.

Participants also discussed the strong linkages between the private sector and tourism development. They noted that the draft plan should also focus on private sector engagement and subsequent benefits to local communities.

Immigration and permit facilities

Gagan Bista, Immigration Officer, Department of Immigration, shared that in order to ease visitor entry and movement, the department has started issuing electronic permits which tourists can get from trekking agencies. Even though digital payment for visas is not yet in place, tourists can send a picture of the receipt from Hilsa and provide a hardcopy of the voucher once they reach Kathmandu. With reference to establishing an immigration facility at Lapcha La, he said that this would require a bilateral agreement as such facilities must be established on both sides of the border.

Promoting Namkha as a ‘destination’

Participants emphasized that Namkha should not be limited to serving as a transit point and that it must be developed as a tourist destination in its own right. Mani Raj Lamichhane, Director, Nepal Tourism Board, stated that Lapchya La can be promoted as a vantage point for viewing Mt Kailash.

In addition, participants stated that tourism development should support economic empowerment and modernization of the local community while helping them maintain and preserve their unique traditions and culture. Participants discussed how the local community can benefit from showcasing their culture and tradition.

The focus should be not only on bringing tourists to Namkha but also on parallel development of human resources to provide standardized services. It is important to maintain hygiene and sanitation as well as to develop a proper waste management system. Hari Prasad Pandey, Under-Secretary, Ministry of Forests and Environment, mentioned that these elements are necessary as increased tourist numbers result in increased negative impacts on the environment. Participants highlighted the need to develop a mitigation strategy for the negative impacts of tourism on biodiversity.

Coordination between province and local governments

Anju Choudhary, Section Officer, Ministry of Industry, Tourism, Forest and Environment, Karnali Province, shared that the Karnali Province has developed a master tourism plan, and that coordination and consultation is required between the province and Namkha Rural Municipality to avoid duplication of work. Likewise, coordination between the two government bodies is important while allocating resources for tourism development activities, especially given the limited budget.

Tourism infrastructure development

Participants stressed the importance of developing basic infrastructure in the region. They mentioned the need for roads and trekking trails. They also talked about upgrading accommodation facilities and providing hygienic food services to tourists. They said that as the bordering towns of the Tibet Autonomous Region, China have advanced in infrastructure development, development activities mentioned in the tourism plan for Namkha should also try to catch up. The tourism plan should be competitive, they noted, as there are alternative routes to Kailash.

Closing remarks

Chhakka Bahadur Lama, Member of Parliament-Humla, stated that even though Humla is a beautiful place, its people face numerous challenges and hardships in their daily lives. Tourism can play a significant role in improving the economic wellbeing of local communities. He said that central-level interaction was needed not only to receive feedback from relevant stakeholders, but also to make policymakers and stakeholders aware of plans and policies required for developing Namkha as a tourist destination. He stressed the importance of coordination among central, provincial, and local governments while developing and implementing the plan.

In his closing remarks, Jeevan Bahadur Shahi, Provincial Member of Parliament-Humla, called for a change in policy regarding the 'restricted area' designation for Humla, noting that this causes

inconveniences for tourists visiting Humla. Another challenge for tourists is the lack of regular flights for Simikot. He said that Namkha is currently not prepared for large numbers of tourists as there is a lack of trained and skilled human resources, hence emphasis should be placed on capacity building programmes. He mentioned that the plan should include a strategy for proper resource mobilization. He recommended that the tourism plan focus on achieving two or three major activities for good impact at the start rather than attempting too many diverse activities.

In his vote of thanks, Bishnu Bahadur Lama, Chairperson, Namkha Rural Municipality, thanked the participants for their active involvement in the interactive workshop. He said that tourism is an action area for the development of Namkha Rural Municipality. He mentioned that central-level interaction would help to strengthen and finalize the sustainable tourism plan. He also requested all stakeholders to support Namkha Rural Municipality during the implementation phase of the plan.

Additional event information and materials are available at:

<https://www.icimod.org/event/planning-for-sustainable-tourism-in-namkha-rural-municipality-humla/>



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