
Raghu Bista

Department of Business Administration
University of Macedonia

A Tourism Plan to Alleviate Rural Poverty in Nepal

In this paper, efforts undertaken through TRPAP (Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Program) are discussed. TRPAP is a program designed to contribute to the poverty alleviation objective of government through demonstrating sustainable tourism development models in rural areas of Nepal. The working modalities and achievements are presented. In the context of growing importance of quality in the tourism sector, recommendations are made to focus on past, present and future visitors' needs and expectation

Key words: poverty alleviation, tourism development, basic infrastructures, quality

By

Raghu Bista
Trainer of Nepal Administration Staff College, Nepal
And Doctoral Student, University of Macedonia,
Department of Business Administration,

Address: 156 Agnatia str., 540 06 Thessaloniki, Greece.
Telephone: 0030 6947508813
Fax Number: 0030 2310 891544
Email: raghu_bi@yahoo.com.

Short biography

Raghu Bista is the Trainer of Nepal Administrative Staff College, one of the reputed management institutions in Nepal. He has been working there since 1998. He completed MBA from Tribhuvan University, Nepal, in 1995. Now he is a doctoral candidate of University of Macedonia, Department of Business Administration, Greece.

Background

Forty-two percent of people live below poverty line in Nepal (CBS, 1996). Poverty is greatest in rural areas. Out of the 86 percent of the total population who live in rural areas, 44 percent live below poverty line, while the figure in the urban sector is 23 percent (NPC 2002). Minorities and lower occupational castes are more affected by poverty.

Nepal has been fighting poverty for many years. It has implemented ten incremental plans. The Tenth Plan (2002-2007) has focused fully on poverty and the plan is named as Poverty Alleviation Strategy Paper. The plan capitalizes on Nepal's attractive natural beauty, unique culture, and heritage, in a program called Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Program (TRPAP). TRPAP was designed to contribute to the poverty alleviation objective of government through demonstrating a sustainable tourism development model in rural areas. The program is pro-environment, pro-rural communities and pro-women (TRPAP 2006a). Its prime aim is to reduce rural poverty by developing tourism products, marketing those products, and encouraging participation by disadvantaged groups of rural areas who live below poverty line. TRPAP is an initiative of His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMG/N). It was launched in September 2001 under the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation with the technical and financial assistance from UNDP/Nepal, (DFID)/ Nepal and SNV/Nepal. Model program sites, with tourism potential are being started in Nepal. The sites have been selected on the basis of various human development index (poverty aspects) and rural tourism potential. The pilot sites are the six districts of Nepal; Dolpa, Lumbini, Chitwan, Rasuwa, Solukhumbu, and Taplejung. Number of VDCs planned to be covered are 48 and total household to be covered are 28337. The total beneficiaries are estimated as 160,732.

Working Modalities

Through the use of the Appreciative Participatory Planning and Action (APPA) process developed by The Mountain Institute (TMI 2006), a community based settlement level tourism development plan is prepared with active participation of local inhabitants. The activities start within these areas by engaging people and to form Community Organisations (COs) and Functional Groups (FGs). They are the grass roots organisation of the TRPAP Programme. Female participation is required. By 2004, 702 COs have been formed with 14,148 members and 157 FGs formed with 1,978 members. Once the COs are formed, the program staff facilitates the local people to carry out the APPA exercise. Then Village level development plans are prepared. TRPAP's tourism and environment awareness programme (TEAP) aims to create awareness for the members of COs and FGs, as well as for local students through awareness sessions and exposure visits. Its Venture Capital Funds (VCP) is major attraction of the programme which help members of COs and FGs to establish small-scale tourism business, by providing them a soft loan. Likewise, TRPAP is providing technical and financial support for sustainable tourism infrastructure development in the program areas. TRPAP has developed new tourism products in all programme areas by determining the expectations of tourists with national travel and tour related organisations. One of the main products developed is Tamang (ethnic people) Heritage Trail and Home Stay tourism of Rasuwa, provides the unique experience of living in a private home to experience Tamang Culture. To achieve the objectives of sustainable rural tourism, there are three level- macro, meso and micro. Macro is the central level where sustainable tourism Development Unit (STDU) has been established by the Nepal Tourism Board. Likewise, in the district (meso) level and micro (village) level, organisations have been established to foster

tourism development. The program has started marketing developed rural products in the national and international market.

Conclusions and Recommendations

TRPAP has shown from its achievement that it's a successful model program - pro-women, pro-rural communities and pro-environmental program that helps reduce poverty. It has sufficiently been customized to match multi-culture rural situations and to give visitors a unique experience in rural setting. Its various monitoring and evaluation reports concluded that the program is well managed and has been implementing the complex and ambitious goals well. As specified in a European Commission Report (EC 1999), TRPAP has been working to deliver special, distinctive features and flavors of rural destination of Nepal. The huge participation of rural poor and disadvantaged group of people and about 50 percent female's participation itself show signs that the program has been embraced by communities. Other contribution of TRPAP includes development of a 15 year Tourism Marketing Strategic Plan (2005-2020) for national level tourism marketing. Also, a poverty reducing Tourism Policy has been enacted to encourage tourism activities in poverty stricken regions of Nepal.

Improvement of quality of service is required for the success of any tourism program and TRPAP as well. Participation of all the stakeholders of Nepal should help Nepal build a quality assured destination. Since satisfied tourists are a reliable means of free advertisement, quality assurance is the basic requirement at the national level, which is possible with a team approach by the stakeholders.

TRPAP while developing tourism services, should focus on needs and expectations of past, present and future visitors. What has been done is insufficient. Market research conducted in Lumbini by TRPAP itself in 2003 shows some different product needs than were originally

anticipated (TRPAP 2006b). The development should be much more customer focused; defining quality through customers' perceptions it is. The design should be changed to measure visitor's expectations, needs, and level of satisfaction in order to place the products in line with demand. Those products and facilities, which satisfy and highlight customers' experiences, should be given priority. Beyond products, providing quality services for visitors is much more important. To attain quality, the practical approach to be followed is setting objectives, working together, understanding visitors, setting standards, obtaining visitor's reactions, making improvements and checking impacts in a continuous way. Measuring and improving quality continuously will bring service excellence. For this, TRPAP should also consider establishing, in its areas, a particular organization, which is tasked with maintaining and assuring quality.

References

- Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS). (1996). Nepal, Nepal Living Standard Survey Report 1995/1996.
- National Planning Commission (NPC). (2002). Nepal, The Tenth Plan Document (2002-2007).
- European Commission (1999). Brussels. Towards Quality Rural Tourism: Integrated Quality Management (IQM) of Rural Tourist Destinations.
- The Mountain Institute (TMI). (2006). Accessed at: <http://www.mountain.org/tmi/appa.cfm>, January 10, 2006
- Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Program (TRPAP). (2006a). Accessed on: <http://www.welcomenepal.com/trpap/>, January 10, 2006

Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Program (TRPAP). (2006b). Annual Report 2003.

Accessed on: http://www.welcomenepal.com/trpap/req/publications_stuff/ar2003.pdf January

10, 2006

Table 1. Nepal at a Glance:

Geography: Situated between China in the north and India in the south.

Area: 147,181 sq. km.

Capital: Kathmandu

Population: 25 Million

Political System: Multiparty democracy with constitutional monarchy

Administrative Division: 14 zones, which are divided into 75 districts.

Per Capita Income: about US \$ 240.