

Residents' attitude and perception towards Rural Tourism Development: A case remote Humla District of Nepal.

Bishista Shree ¹, Kaustuv Raj Neupane²

¹Department of Rural Development, Trichandra Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University Nepal

Corresponding Author*

Bishista Shree

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Abstract: Local people's attitude towards tourism development is the crucial factor for usefully developing a touristic destination. Nepal, a mountainous developing country rich in nature and cultural diversity is promoting the tourism sector for its economic welfare. In this context, this research investigated residents' attitudes towards tourism in Simikot of Humla, Nepal. Data were collected through 40 households of Simikot through questionnaire methods. With this line, we investigated the attitude, potentiality, and major attributes for tourism and existing infrastructure supportive to tourism. Results indicated most of the residents hold that tourism has a positive effect on the local community. Most of the residents believe nature and cultural attractions are the major attractions for tourism. Considering its potentiality people believe that access to transportation will be the key driver to promote tourism.

Keywords: Tourism development, rural, attitude, Nepal

1. Introduction:

Tourism is among the most quickly expanding sectors and is a significant source of foreign exchange revenue for many developing countries. (Wood, 2002). Tourism is one of the mainstays of the Nepalese economy and it has generated USD 833.8 Million, created 1034 thousand jobs (6.9% of total employment), and contributed 6.7 percent to the Gross Domestic Product of the GDP of the country in 2020(World Travel and Tourism Council, 2020). In recent years with the programs like Visit Nepal 2020, the country is focused on developing new touristic destinations.

In this process of developing a new destination site, understanding the attitude of residents towards tourism residents' attitudes towards tourism development and its determinants in a crucial pillar for designing tourism development strategies to promote sustainable development. Further, local communities play a vital role in tourism development as they are important to provide a good situation, especially for tourists to boost up the number of tourist's arrival as well as improve their quality of life (Mohammadi, Khalifah & Hosseini, 2010). Therefore their active participation and involvement are essential for successful tourism (Kim, Park & Phandanouvong, 2014). Local people's positive attitude towards tourism development and understanding local community knowledge about rural tourism

development, its beliefs, and awareness of its benefits has been found to have positive relation for developing long term sustainable strategies (Kitnuntaviwat & Tang, 2008; Peters, Chan & Lelegerer, 2018).

However, there is a lack of research on tourism development in small areas and have a high potentiality to be developed as a touristic destination. Therefore, the paper aimed to investigate rural community perceptions regarding tourism development in the Simikot region of the Humla district of Nepal. Humla district is one of the remote districts and ranks fourth on the development Index among the worst districts (National Planning Commission, 2014).

2. People attitudes towards tourism development.

Since the 1970s, there has been a substantial rise in the interest and outlook of people towards tourism, and therefore scholars and practitioners have been intensively researching the attitudes of residents (Sharpley, 2014). An attitude is characterized as a tendency to respond positively or negatively to a particular thought, object, individual, or circumstance and causes a person to react to such stimuli (Hockenbury and Hockenbury, 2010).

Scholars have identified both views i.e. positive and negative, attitudes towards tourism development. This is usual as tourism development occurs, its impacts are perceived differently throughout different regions, peoples, and individuals themselves (Mason, 2008). Further, tourism impacts can be positive or negative and followed three basic categories of benefits and costs, namely economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts (Brida, Osti & Faccioli, 2011).

In recent years numerous studies in Europe, Australia, and New Zealand have been undertaken. Zealand, South Pacific, Asia, Africa, and the United States to investigate the attitudes of local people to Tourism and its effect on local societies (Wang et al., 2004; Chandralal, 2010; Lo, Ramayah & Hui, 2014; Bagri & Kala, 2016; Meimand et al., 2017; Eusébio, Vieira & Lima, 2018; Ng & Feng, 2020; Olya, 2020; Rasoolimanesh & Seyfi, 2020; Rua, 2020; Gannon, Rasoolimanesh & Taheri, 2021).

Wang et al., (2004) residents' attitudes can provide theoretical grounds for establishing tourism development planning and a perfect community participation system at tourist destinations. Further, locals' support for tourism development is a function of perceived socio-cultural benefits and costs perceived by the local community and independent of religion, knowledge about tourism, intrinsic motivations, and community attachment (Meimand et al., 2017). Bagri & Kala (2016) studied the potential for tourism development, in Uttarakhand promoted area rural tourism promotion by the Indian Ministry of Tourism revealed that locals wanted to increase tourism gains with corresponding effort to reduce consequences deprived and developed study. Rua (2020) stressed the importance of interactions and relationships between tourists and residents to boost personal benefits from tourism. In Nepal, a study has been carried measure perception of environmental impacts of tourism between residents and managers within a protected area, i.e. Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP), Nepal (Nyaupane & Thapa, 2006), and assessed if community-based conservation model favours the people's attitude around protected areas (Mehta & Heinen, 2001).

However, no study has been carried to analyse people's attitudes and the potentiality of developing tourist destinations beyond the protected areas in the mountain region.

3. Nepal and its tourism

Nepal is a landlocked agricultural country having a mixed economy. The restoration of democracy in 1951 has stimulated further development of different potential areas of Nepal. Being a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-cultural nation, the prospect of tourism development is even on the higher side after the period. The federal democratic republic of Nepal shares the border with China in the north and India in the south. Nepal is well known as the land of visual paradise with magnificent mountain ranges and multi-ethnic groups. The Himalayan country Nepal has more than ninety different languages spoken in the local community as being a multi-linguistic country. Hindu is the major religious group, so Nepal is also recognized as the country of the temple but also consists population of Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians as well. One who visits this country of temple or one can say the mysterious land can find diverse geography with low land and the mighty Himalayas and the unique culture (Christie 2008).

Nepal possessing 8 of the 10 highest mountains in the world, Nepal is a hotspot destination for mountaineers, rock climbers, and people seeking adventures. The Hindu, Buddhist, and other cultural heritage sites of Nepal, and around the year fair weather are also strong attractions.

Nepal is the country of Mount Everest, the highest mountain peak in the world, and the Birthplace of Gautama Buddha- Lumbini. Mountaineering and other types of adventure tourism and ecotourism are important attractions for visitors. There are other important religious pilgrimage sites throughout the country for the followers of various sects and religions.

Tourism in Nepal has been practiced from ancient times. This can be categorized into the three-time frame; first in ancient Nepal which includes travel of Tibetan traders and visit of Hindu saints, second after the unification of Nepal which includes travel of British people and the third and current era of mountain tourism after 1950 A.D. (Upadhyay, 2019). After the successful ascent of Mt. Annapurna I (8091m), in 1950, by Maurice Herzog, many mountaineers were attracted to Nepal. Annapurna I was the first successful ascent among the 14 over-8000m peaks of the world. In 1953, the successful conquest of Mt. Sagarmatha (8848m) by Tenzing Norgay Sherpa and Edmund Hillary was a milestone in the mountaineering history of the world. The successful ascent of Mt. Annapurna I and Mt. Sagarmatha of Nepal were publicized all over the world. In 1956 Nepal established a tourist development Board under the Department of Industry to develop tourism in duty throughout the country.

Nepal further succeeded to get the membership of the different international tourism development institutions such as the International Union of Official Travel Organization (IUOTO), South Asia Travel Commission (SATC), The Pacific Area Travel Association (PATA), and the American Society of Travel agents (ASTA). At first, the national flag carrier Royal Nepal Airlines Corporation was built in the late 1960s.

Systematic tourism in Nepal started in 1966 with the establishment of a few hotels. The industry was further strengthened and established after the formation of a tourism master plan in 1972, which

emphasized tourism market development sightseeing, trekking, eco-tourism and recreational and adventure tourism.

Nepal has been globally represented for community-based conservation (CBC) approach in recent years to manage its protected areas mainly in response to poor park–people relations (Mehta & Heinen, 2001). Further, it has also been seen as a place for adventure tourism (Zurick, 1992) as well a popular destination for religious tourism (Nyaupane, Timothy & Poudel, 2015).

4. Study Area

Humla is a very remote district of Mid-West Nepal in the north-west corner of the country bordering Tibet. It is the country's second-largest district and ranges in altitude from 1,500-7,300 meters. The district Centre is Simikot (2,950m), 10 days walk from the nearest motor road in Nepal and a 6-7 days walk from the road head over the Tibetan border at Sera (near Hilsa). In a composite index of development, Humla district ranked 4th from worst off. In recent years the area has suffered from severe food deficits and occasionally disease epidemics. Gender issues are a major concern - in a ranking of the 77 districts of Nepal, Humla scores lowest in terms of women's empowerment.² Due to its lack of infrastructure, lack of communications, severe cold mountain climate, and difficult walking conditions Humla is a very difficult and unpopular place to work, both for Nepali people and many development workers (whatever their origin). It is the most despised 'punishment post' for government workers who are being disciplined or demoted for any reason. Due to the mountainous terrain, only 1% of the land is available for agriculture and the average landholding size is 0.52 hectares per household. More than 50% of the land is at a slope of more than 30 degrees. Much of north Humla is snow-covered or extremely cold for 5 months of the year. 24% of land cover is high altitude pasture, which accounts for the importance of livestock in the farming system, particularly yaks and local yak-cow cross. Due to the formation of Community Forestry User Groups in the districts to the south, where sheep were traditionally over-wintered, Humli shepherds are unable to find pasture during winter migratory periods and sheep farming is in decline. Also, the import of iodized salt from India has replaced Tibetan salt, though trade in smaller quantities continues. To tackle development in this area is, therefore, an enormous challenge. Being one of the remotest areas with very deep narrow valleys and high Himalayan peaks, trails in Humla used to be amongst the most treacherous in the country. In 1993 the trail improvement, bridge building, and other infrastructure development, conditions have improved. Before the improvement of the Hilsa-Simikot trail. Sheep were the main pack animals used for transportation of salt from Tibet to the mid and lower hills south of Humla. Now the main trail between Simikot and Hilsa is trafficked by numerous mules, yaks, yak-cow crosses, horses, donkeys, as well as sheep and people. The trail is in good condition and suitable for trekking tourism.

Simikot is the Midwestern region of the remote top western district of Humla. It is the district headquarters of Karnali Province and the gateway to numerous treks in the region. Here we can see the people getting the bare essentials and living the simplistic life. Reaching Simikot itself is a challenging task in itself with the airport runway being too short at over 2700m altitude. We can see undiscovered Nepal in all its religious and cultural glory the Simikot to Ralling Gompa Cultural trek is custom-tailored for us. We can also relate the significance of the "homestay" which is located in Brause, (Bhote Gau).

Humla district consists of more than 50 thousand of the total population. Here are the people living in different caste, culture, religion, ethnics, language, etc. In this village Mongolian, Tamang, Brahmin, Chettri, Thakuri. The study was taken in Simikot Rural Municipality Ward no.6 (Maathilo Bazar) and different parts of local areas. There are almost 200-250 houses, with 1200-1300 total population. Here most of the people living here are Brahmin, Chettri, and Dalit Samudhaya. Mainly the caste-like Rawat, Rokaya, and Sunar community live in this area. Here people belong to the Hindu religion, and they worship the Hindu god and goddess. There is a famous traditional temple called 'Kala Sitha' Mandir which is based on Mathilo Bazar. So the study was also taken around this area with the people regarding different cultural values and norms of the society which are related with tourism sectors.

5. Methodology

A descriptive cum exploratory research design was applied to analyses the present situation of the study area about the "prospects and problems" of rural tourism of Humla, Simikot Municipality. It was designed to obtain and address the evidence of the problems logically and effectively. It helped in assessing the observable phenomenon of the study area. On the other hand, this study has attempted to describe things related to rural tourism in the study area and the finding will be exploratory for the first time about this study.

3.2 Universe and Sampling Procedure

A questionnaire was designed to measure the attitude of local people about the development of tourism activities in the Simikot rural municipality. Out of the total of 200 households in Simikot- Humla, 40 of them were been selected as sample by using simple random sampling techniques. Personal interviews were taken from selected households and in each household of Ward no.6, one respondent has been selected for interview based on his/her abilities to provide information. The sampling represents all the groups of the people from 16-65 years and above involved in the tourism industry, tourism policymaking or implementation of the local people engaged in the tourism sector with special focus on rural tourism was interviewed through checklist method. In addition to that, hotels and lodges, tourist guides, tourism entrepreneurs (n=5) were interviewed. Finally, data descriptive statistics was done for the analysis of data.

6. Study Outcomes

Demographic Profile

The majority of the respondents belong to the age group 15-24 years that were identified to 20% and 25-49 years that accounts to 45% whereas 25% of respondents belonging to age group 50-64 years have 25% and the age group belonging to 65 and above have lease representation of 10% in this research. The data shows that the age group of 65 and above as less participation because this age group is called the 25-49 working age group and people from this age group denied responding because they have to work hard for their living and sustenance. Thus, the age-group from 50-64 and above years which is supposed to be retired age responded much because of their free time. Similarly, the number of male respondents (42.50%) was higher than the number of female (57.50%). This is because, at the public gathering, the

number of participants was dominated by females and more than male respondents were a little bit more reluctant to answer the questionnaire like female respondents.

Attitude Towards Tourism Development

The survey revealed that 70% of people wanted tourism to be developed in their area, in another way they stated that tourism is cooperative. Whereas 30% had a negative attitude toward tourism development. The survey also denoted 31.52% of respondents expect the benefit of tourism development by income earning whereas 35.86% says employment opportunity, infrastructure development carries 22.90% and 9.80% says it develops the life standard of the local people. This was the reason for a positive attitude. The least portion also considers tourism can bring negative impact the majority of the respondent has chosen the development of tourism in their region as they consider the negative impact that can be brought on culture and society.

With this data, it can be generalizing that majority of the people are focused on earning their livelihood and setting a better lifestyle whereas very fewer people are focused on the development of their village.

Attitude Towards Potentiality of Tourism Development in the Study Area

37.5% of the respondents rated enough tourism have potentiality in their place. In contrast, 35% perceive the potentiality of tourism is little. For 20%, it is a lot of potential in tourism whereas 7.5% reported not being aware.

The younger generation who were aware of knowledge about tourism was very positive about the potentiality of rural tourism in the area. But those of higher age group were a little negative and ignorant. This rating shows that majority of younger respondents have given their view on the potentiality of tourism in their village area. In general, it can be said that Simikot, Humla can attract the tourist by the majority of positive response.

Understanding the Term “Tourism”

The survey findings revealed that 90% of the respondents are familiar with the term tourism and 10% are not familiar. This is because the regular tourist visits the area. 80% of respondents reported that they see tourism as the beneficial thing to the village. But those who were a little confused on this term were of a higher age group. They neither were clear about the term nor have any positive response of tourism to their village. This indicates that the younger generation is more sensitive and enthusiastic about tourism.

The Role Agency for the Development of Tourism

It was found that the government should play a major role in the development of Tourism in the Simikot R.M Humla. The survey finding revealed that 40.26% of the respondents reported that for the development of the area, the major role is to be played by the government whereas 40.26% denotes that local people should develop their area by themselves. 14.28% of respondents focused their view toward NGO and INGO for the development. Finally, 5.20% respondent says that private-sector travel and tour operator should make the village-based tourism package to develop village Tourism. This shows that people have a high expectation of the government to build their place.

Potential Tourism Attraction Sector

Regarding the major attractions of tourism in the study area, respondents had multiple-choice to their opinion that views hospitable people lead with 16.41%, followed by culture 34.32%, nature 38.80%, and others 10.47% approximately. This survey reveals the fact that the local people are friendly and helpful. So that this village is known as a model village for the community, culture and nature are the following attraction alone with an agricultural attraction. Also, it was reported that the homestay program has high scope in the study area for hosting those who want to study the culture, nature, and agriculture of this model village.

Unique Cultural features of Simikot Rural Municipality

The majority of local people explain their unique cultural features as “Dances of Dhami Naach, Chaital Naach, community.” Thulo Bhailo and Sani Bhailo is also regarded as some of the best Cultural features for Humli people. This dance is done on the festivals during the winter seasons. Moreover, villager images also include fairs and festivals including “Shawin Purnima and Maagh Purnima Jatra” and “Hospitality”.

Unique Factors of Simikot Rural Municipality

The survey findings of Simikot Rural Municipality reveal that is famous for the hospitality, culture, Model of the village for Community people, Vegetables, Tea (Naptang) Bhote chiya, and Coffee production, the oval size greenery valley, spectacular Mountain view. We can find different unique botanica like Katuki, Bhulte, Original Ginger, which re very much famous in Humla. Here polygamy and poly-custom can be seen in Humla Simikot. The majority of People like to explain about the Community based FM Radio as their unique factor because it is the first Radio centre conducted by the Community in this Area.

Existing Tourism Infrastructure

Local people were asked whether they are satisfied with the infrastructural state/ condition. Graph 5.3 shows that 35% of the respondents were satisfied with the infrastructure condition in their respective areas and the remaining 65% are unsatisfied. Majority of the respondent was satisfied with their infrastructural because they think it’s okay for their day-to-day life. But the remaining respondent thought the infrastructure for tourism development is insufficient. So, to develop the study area for the rural tourism destination is required for development on infrastructure.

Regarding the loading and food facility in the region, the majority of the respondents thought the lodging and food condition was okay with their village area. 77.50% of the respondents were responded satisfactory followed by 2.50% excellent and 20% unsatisfied.

This data showed that the local people can keep a visitor at their home however they need to improve their facilities as well as infrastructures. Hence it is a clear fact that Simikot RM Humla can be developed as a Rural Tourism destination.

The key Sector to Promote Tourism Development

38.47% of respondents thought that improvement in Transportation is required in their place. The data is followed by 12.5% in accommodation, 13.47% in communication, 25.96% in sanitation and remaining 9.62% says that there should be a health centre. Also, some of them commented on more development

in overall infrastructure. This shows that the term tourism is incomplete without infrastructures like transportation. Thus, respondents stressed improving transportation facilities.

7. Conclusion

This paper has discussed a local people's attitude towards the development of tourism in Simikot, Humla Nepal. The survey result indicated that local people were positive towards the development of tourism in the region but well known about tourism. The result also indicated that the government should support to develop the Simikot as a touristic destination, and it believes existing natural and cultural heritage is well enough to attract tourists. They think linking transportation facility to Simikot is a prerequisite for tourism development and enhancing the existing lodging and food facility. Last but not least, tourism development can be supportive to enhance the livelihood option of Simikot but due consideration is required on negative consequences on environment, social and cultural sector.

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