

Tourism Stimulated Prosperity and Peace in Provincial Destination: An Appraisal of Far West Nepal

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Abstract

Tourism thrives in peace. It is a major beneficiary of peace. Nevertheless, it is also be a benefactor to peace if it is planned, developed and managed from the perspectives of building socio-economic foundation, environmental wellness and socio-cultural contacts and communications. Such elements of peace through tourism are applicable to all destinations including provincial, national, local or international. This paper presents the general conceptual foundation on tourism stipulated prosperity and peace and relates this feature with Far West Nepal which is a newly established provincial destination in Nepal. It argues that peace related objectives of tourism can be achieved through planned development, operation and purposeful management of tourism directed to enhancing socio-economic foundations and intercultural relations. The responsibilities for such aspects lie at all actors (hosts and guests) and all levels of government like local, national and provincial. This aspect is truly applicable in Far West a newly growing regional tourist destination where the provincial government is on board with people's mandate and necessary resources.

Keywords: *Tourism, prosperity and peace, socio-economic foundation, far west destination*

Introduction

Conceptual foundation on tourism stimulated prosperity and peace

Global tourism, arguably the world's most-important economic sector, has drawn growing inspiration and hope for achieving prosperity and peace. Tourism stimulated prosperity and peace comprises a number of a crucial thematic areas (issues and elements) such as strengthening socio-economic foundations, inter-group communication and socio-cultural contacts, political framework, security, responsible corporate engagement (business sector and others) and reconciliation and justice to peace in their complex interdependent relationships (Castañeda & Burtner, 2011).

Economically, tourism has a wide range of positive impacts to support peace building. It contributes directly to sales, profits, jobs, tax revenues, and income in direct (formal) as well as indirect (informal) actors like hotels, restaurants, transportation, airlines, travel agents, trekking agencies, paragliding companies, tourist book shops, cyber cafes, trekking equipment shops, embroidery and garment shops, tourist taxi, dairy and agro products, etc. It also affects most sectors of the economy through the changes in economic activity from subsequent rounds of re-spending of tourism money (multiplier effects) (Leong, 2008). However, the potentials of tourism for prosperity and peace are confined not only in economic values but these can go beyond it through spreading the diversity of varied positive consequences. Thus tourism can offer social-cultural and environmental benefits that add to its allure. Tourism can contribute to preserve culture in spite of the globalization induced cultural homogenization, restore and conserve environments through eco-tourism, and promote cross-cultural understanding between people, etc. It is argued to contribute to the well-being of tourists by giving them restorative holidays that fulfill many human needs. It can be an important force for the restoration or conservation of environments through ecotourism endeavor (Richardson, 1993). Thus tourism is undoubtedly one of the most important forces that can shape our world for lasting prosperity and peace at the start of new millennium (Cohen and Kennedy, 2000). In Nepal, Far West is a new provincial tourist destination. In spite of its position at the beginning of its tourism growth life cycle, this destination indicates high potential for tourism led local prosperity and peace.

Methodology

This study has adopted the eclectic approach based descriptive and analytical method to assess the present condition of tourism in Far West Nepal. Information is generated through both primary and secondary source of information. A total of one hundred one persons associated with varied tourism professions in nine districts of Far West, were interviewed with structured and unstructured questionnaires in

relation to the observatory field visits to nine districts in Far West. Aforementioned methods are integral part of carrying out an assignment by the author on 'identification of a sustainable business model for the Tourism Development Society as a destination marketing organization and support in formulation of policy and institutional structure for a provincial tourism board in the Far West' during the months of November 2018 to January 2019. This assignment was offered by the Inclusive Development of the Economy Programme (INCLUDE). INCLUDE is a joint Nepali-German initiative under the guidance of the Ministry of Land Management, Cooperatives and Poverty Alleviation, Government of Nepal. Technical assistance to the programme is provided by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. INCLUDE programme focuses its intervention in a selected number of districts of Karnali Province and Province Five and Far-West in West Nepal. The development of the tourism value chain in West Nepal is a core intervention of INCLUDE

The author and his team worked closely with the GIZ INCLUDE core team which entailed regular contacts and, where appropriate, jointly participate in selected activities like interaction and sharing workshops with provincial Ministry of Industry, Tourism, Forest and Environment and Tourism Development Society (TDS) core team. TDS is a nongovernmental organization involved in the field of tourism in Far West. It has the record of accomplishment of working for Far West tourism awareness, advocacy, development and promotion for five years since its inception. Through building and standing on its own achievements, TDS envisions scaling up its position as a Destination Management and Marketing Organization (DMMO) for Far West province while strengthening its financial position as a self-sustaining business entity.

The author also worked closely with destination level elected leaders, tourism associations like Nepal Association of Tour and Travel Agents Far West, Tourism Action Group of nine districts, West Nepal Tourism Alliance (a loose network of tourism related stakeholder in West Nepal) members, Small and Medium Tourism Enterprises (hotels, travel agencies, rafting agency, homestays, tourist type restaurants, etc.) and Tourism Professional Associations in Dhangadhi and Tikapur for aforementioned assignment.

Far West Nepal as a Provincial Tourism Destination Area

The Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal was divided into seven provinces as per the new constitution of Nepal which was adopted on 20 September 2015. Far West (the term 'Far West' is used frequently for Sudurpashchim Pradesh in the article) is one of the seven new provinces, which is constituted as per the new constitution of Nepal 2072 BS. Spread over 19,153 Square kilometers and located towards Far West in

Nepal’s map, this province was formulated by covering nine districts namely Achham, Baitadi, Bajhang Bajura, Dadeldhura, Darchula, Doti, Kailali and Kanchanpur (Far West, 2018).

Figures 1 and 2: Location of Far West in political map of Nepal and its administrative division in nine districts

Source: Survey Department



This province borders the Tibet Autonomous Region of China to the north, *Karnali Pradesh* and Province number 5 to the east, the Indian states of Uttarakhand to the west and *Utter Pradesh* to the south. Initially known as Province number 7, the newly elected Provincial Assembly adopted *Sudurpashchim Pradesh* as the permanent name for the province in September 2018. As per a 28 September 2018 Assembly voting, the city of Godawari (adjacent to Dhangadhi Sub-Metropolitan city) has been declared the capital of the Far West. The province is coterminous with the former Far-Western Development Region, Nepal.

This *Pradesh* has geographically covered Himalayan, mountains and Terai regions. The altitudinal variations on the landscapes of this province has caused great diversity in topography, geography, climatic conditions (tropical monsoon to tundra), vegetation (sub tropical rain forest to alpine desert), people and their local traditional culture (lower area resided Tharu people to Saukas in upper land of Byas in the foot hill of Api Himalayas).

A brief overview of Far West Nepal is offered in the table below.

Table 1: General overview of Far West in nutshell

Location	Far-west spread between 28°.22” to 30°.09” northern latitude and 80°.03” to 81. 25” eastern longitude
Area	19539 Sq. km (13.28% of Nepal’s total area) Mountains region = 7932.834 (40.6%), Hills = 6,748.7706 (34.54%), Terai = 4857.3954 (24.86%)

Population	2,552,517 (9.63% of Nepal's total area) (2011 Census) Mountains = 462,345 (18.16%), Hills = 862,215 (33.78%), Terai = 1226,957 (48.06%)
Geography	Inner Madesh, Terai, Hill and Mountains
Altitude range	109 m (kailali) to 7132 m (Darchula, Api Himal)
Political administrative division and governance system	
Capital	Godavari (adjacent to Dhangadhi)
Zones & districts	Seti (Kailali, Doti, Achham, Bajhang & Bajura) and Mahakali (Kanchanpur, Dadeldhura, Baitadi, & Darchula) <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 45%;">Mountain districts: Darchula, Bajhang and Bajura</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 45%;">Hill districts: Doti, Dadeldhura, Acham and Baitadi</div> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 45%; margin-top: 10px;">Terai districts: Kailali and Kanchapur</div>
Political constituencies	No. of House of Representative Constituencies = 16 No. of Provincial Constituencies = 32
Governance system	Chief Ministerial government system in provincial governmental level Mayor – council government system in local government units
Total provincial sector ministries	6
Total local governmental units	88 (1 Sub-Metropolitan city + 33 Municipalities + 54 Village Municipalities) which is 12% of total 753 local governmental units in Nepal
Provincial borders	→ East: Province number 5 (Bardia) & Karnali (Surkhet, Dailekh, Kalikot & Mugu) ← West: Pithauragadh district, Utterakhand India ↑ North: Tibet ↓ South: Lakhimpur district, Utter Pradesh India
Language	Nepali and local languages
Distance from Kathmandu	740 km
Distance from New Delhi, India	350 km

<p>Identical cultural dance & music</p>	<p>Kailali = Sakhiya and mungrahawa dances, Kanchanpur = Jhijhi (Tharu) and Hori (Ranatharu) Acham = Hori and Chudke, Doti = Jorail Chaulo, Bajhang = Bhuwacholi, Bajura = Bhuwa baja Dadeldhura = Badal, Baitadi = Chaliyabaja, Darchula = Dhirbaja</p>
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Source: Fieldwork

This province is located on the close proximity from the major domestic tourist hubs like Bardia and Banke National Parks (Province no. 5), Krishnasar Conservation Area (Province no. 5), and through trail-based connectivity with Rara National Park and Rara Lake. Far West Nepal is with the most inherent sites for natural mountainous landscape, precious flora and fauna, wild life, rivers, medicinal herbs, trekking routes, cultural and heritage sites, religious sites, pilgrimages, etc. This reflects its touristic appeal and potential (Ayer, 2003; Joshi, 2009 and 2015; Joshi, 2013; KTY 2075 MOC, 2018; Ojha, 2003; Pandit, 2013; Thapa, 2013).

Picture 1: Mountain landscape of Far West viewed from Khodpe with a highway on left passing to Bajhang



Source: Author

A brief overview of Far West province as tourist destination is offered in a table below which reveals about the existing and potential tourists spots.

Table 2: Existing and potential tourist spots in Far West

Major tourist spots (attractions)	Potential tourist spots
Suklaphanta National Park, Khaptad National Park, Tikapur Park, Api Nampa Conservation Area, Great Himalaya trekking routes [Mountain (Mt.) Api and Mt. Saipal Base Camp Treks), 7 sister goddess temples (Badimalika, Melauli Bhagawati, Niglasaini, Sahileshwori, Surmadebi, Tripurasundari and Ugratara), 5 shiva <i>dham</i> s (Shivpuridham Dhangadhi, Baijanatha dham Safebagar, Parsuram dham Amargadhi, Godavari dham Godavari, Tribeni dham Khaptad), Siddhababa temple, Karnali river and bridge, Khanidanda hill (Mahabharat Parbat), dolphins and Golden Mahseer in Karnali and other rivers, Dungri debi temple, Linga landscape, Dodhara Chandani suspension bridge, Aircraft museum, Homestays (Bhadagaun Tharu Kailali, Jhingrana Doti, Khar Darchula and Majhgaun Ranatharu Kanchanpur), Socio-cultural appeal of Tharu and Khas Chhetri people, etc.	Transit way to Mansarovar as the abode of Lord Shiva, Kailash Sacred Landscape, Budhinanda devi, Patal Bhumeswar cave, Raula Kedar, Aquatic spots (Ghodaghodi lake as a simsar site, Surmasarovar lake, Ramaroshan area, Dallek, Chapari, Jhilmila lake , Bedkot lake, Ali lake), Archeological [Ajaymeru <i>kot</i> (fort), Amarsingh <i>ghadhi</i> (fort), Betkot, Uku place remaining], Byas Himal, Bundar <i>Chahara</i> (waterfall), Nepal Government's identified fourteen priority destinations in Sudurpashchim out of 100 new destinations countrywide, and Dhangadhi as City of Cricket being famous for Dhangadhi Premier League

Source: Field visits and review of literatures

Though Far West occupies 13.8 percent of Nepal's total land area but the total arrivals of tourists is less than 2 percent (except Indians) in comparison to Nepal's total. Thus, Far West is by far the most unexplored part of Nepal. A total 452,781 international tourist visited Far West in 2017. Out of it, 450,000 tourists were from India. Amidst these Indian arrivals, 95 percent tourists' purpose of visit was for pilgrimage at places like Beheda baba, Shivpuri dham, Khaptad, Siddhababa temple, etc. and also health purpose to diagnose and treatment of eye at an eye hospital located at Geta in Dhangadhi (TDS, 2015).

The Interlink-age between Tourism and Peace in Far West Provincial Tourism Destination

The interlink-age between tourism and peace in Far West provincial tourism destination is stated from the perspective of socio-economic foundation in succeeding paragraph.

Table 3: Tourism created economic implications as supportive for peace building

Name of place	Number of accommodation		Economic implication as supportive for peace building	
	Hotels/ Lodges	Homestay	Local employment	Linkage in value chain
Dhangadhi (Kailali)	200	-	1240	Various supply linkage
Bhada gaun	-	1 (as community)	5	Various supply linkage
Mahendranagar (Kanchanpur)	50	-	300	Various supply linkage
Ranatharu Homestay	-	1 (as community)	3	Various supply linkage
Amargadhi (Dadeldhura)	20	-	70	Various supply linkage
Gothalapani (Baitadi)	11	-	54	Various supply linkage
Khalanga (Darchula)	15	-	55	Various supply linkage
Safebagar (Achham)	7	-	28	Various supply linkage
Mangalsen (Achham)	8	-	36	Various supply linkage
Dipayal (Doti)	14	-	66	Various supply linkage
Silgadhi (Doti)	3	-	11	Various supply linkage
Chainpur (Bajhang)	20	-	48	Various supply linkage
Bajura (Martadi)	14	-	28	Various supply linkage

Source: Field trip

As per table above, supply linkage in value chain includes dairy products, vegetables, fruits. Apart of socio-economic foundations, arrivals of international and

domestic tourists in Far West have offered immense opportunities for cross-cultural interaction and exchange between hosts and guests.

Conclusion

With the high profile of tourism as one of the world's largest industries coinciding with the multiplicity of its benefits, the global aspiration of tourism associating with its potentiality for socio-economic foundations and peace building is also at a soaring state. Economically, tourism has a wide range of positive impacts and supports peace. Tourism development is itself a positive force that addresses unemployment, poverty, underdevelopment, conflicts, etc. by developing economic opportunities and growth. Tourism plays vital role for the economic development and is one of the most prioritized industries of Nepal. Far West Nepal is a new provincial destination in Nepal. The great combination of its exotic landscapes in terrain, hills and mountains, unique culture, history, traditional and religious beliefs offer enormous importance for tourism. Tourism in Far West is a labour-intensive sector creating many employment opportunities for youth and women. Tourism led socio-economic foundations and subsequent implications on permanent and season employment creations and linkages in local value chain have paved roadmap for prosperity and peace. However, there is need to scale up tourism led prosperity and peace on this approach on sustainable way through the joint effort and appropriate plan and management by all stakeholders at provincial level and well coordination of province with local and national levels.

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