



## Sustainable Tourism & Development

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Understand what is Sustainable Development
- ✓ Discuss the need for Sustainable Tourism and Development

## Sustainable Tourism & Development

The WTO stated that the international tourist arrivals reached a 664 million figure in 1999. 62.1 percent of the market share was of 15 countries in it altogether. In international tourism, the total amount of travel-related costs totalled about \$455 billion USD, there are 15 countries which share US \$ 286.7 billion in which US has the largest share reaching up to \$74.4 billion. These figures are more than just plain numbers and depict a number of things. Such massive movements by people demonstrate that there is a high consumption of resources, including the natural and manmade along with some leaving behind impacts such as economic, environmental, or cultural. If this is added to the numbers of domestic tourists then the resources consumed and impacts would be mind-blowing. These impacts are negative and positive in nature. Where the rich nations and countries have resources ready to mitigate the negative impact, third world countries are still suffering.

In both scenarios, the application of the concept of sustainable development is a hot topic. Therefore, the development debate has been selected one of the primary themes of this course. The unit will begin by describing the concept of sustainable development and will move on to explain some development approaches with emphasis on tourism development. Some of the questions which the unit will try to answer are like why should the industry support any efforts for sustainable tourism development or what role of consumers and service providers must be encouraged.

The Unit will also try to discuss different views of WTO on the important issue of sustainability in tourism development. The learners are expected to put all that is learned in this Unit into real practice.

### Sustainable Development

There are two alternative paths for development, which have always been available for human beings: firstly, to live with nature in harmony or to exploit it. In the world, different nations at different times have adopted one of the two paths. Some have also found a middle way to both. There are many village societies that have taken resources precautions while consuming resources in order to ensure that future generations are not adversely affected. In such societies, decision - making kept both the future - and present - views in mind.

Therefore, the concept of sustainability may not be a new concept for students in the history. There are over 300 different definitions of sustainable development and all of them claim to be “green” and thus, defining sustainability in the context of development is not an easy task. The emergence of this concept in the modern sense has been contributed by the concern of environmental degradation and awareness or growth of nature conservation. One of the widely accepted definitions of sustainable development, which was outlined by the Brundt land Commission in 1987 is: “a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technology development, and institutional changes are made consistent with future, as well as, present needs” and as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

UN established the World Commission on Environment and development in 1983 that was chaired by Norwegian Prime Minister named Gro Harlem Brundt land. The report of this commission is famously known as Brundt land Report 1987. It is true that suitability is an integrative concept because it looks at the humanistic use, as well as, management of resources in a way that will not disturb or destroy the habitat which is basis of survival. Therefore, the environment and socio - economic dimensions become the focus of this management approach.

The secondary position is relegated by changed in the views of the community along with its attitudes towards development. The first ever effort made at the international level was in 1990 during the Globe 90 Conference held in Vancouver, Canada, to link together travel and tourism with sustainable development. The Tourism Stream Action Strategy Commission of the conference arranged an Action Strategy for Sustainable Development. Furthermore, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development came forward with a known Rio declaration (June 1992).

The following are some of the highlights of declaration:

- To accomplish sustainable development, the environmental defence should constitute an essential part of the development procedure and cannot be considered in segregation from it. (Principle 4).
- All States and all people shall collaborate in the vital task of eliminating poverty as a crucial requirement for maintainable development, in order to decline the disparities in standards of living and better meet the essentials of the bulk of the people of the world.

## Sustainable Tourism and Development

The concept of suitability is regarded as a fundamental issue in tourism development and growth especially after the debate that took place at Rio Earth Summit in 1992. Witnessing the quick changes in tourism and world trends, we are now looking at geopolitical technological, socio – economic, and environmental impacts of modern tourism.

It was concluded that tourism has to have an agenda of its own and it should not be a part of the entire post structural adjustment process. This conclusion was reached in the 7<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development – that was devoted to tourism impacts all over the world in 1999. This happened thanks to the efforts of NGOs working in various parts of the world that came together to speak about their experience through grass roots interaction in the course of growth of tourism in the past two decades. Therefore, it has become a part of implementation of Agenda 21 set at Rio evaluation. The concept of sustainability can be interpreted in many ways when applied to tourism.

Sustainability for attractions, cultures, infrastructure, economies, or environments, etc., will all have varying meaning for different disciplines adopted – which may not be the same, either. For example, a sociologist may be interested in retaining the custom authenticity or rituals and such aspects of culture, which are now used as tourism attractions. In such a case, sustainability can be attained by retaining the authenticity and therefore both the concepts can also be inter-linked. Similarly, in the case of natural

resources, such as, hills or forests, it can be linked to consumption patterns; when it comes to historical building it could be linked to conservation aspects; for destinations it would mean sustaining the attraction. We can also derive some similarity in the issue.

According to Victor T.C. Middleton and Rebecca Hawkins:

“Sustainable tourism means achieving a particular combination of numbers and types of visitors, the cumulative effect of whose activities at a given destination, together with the actions of the servicing businesses, can continue into the foreseeable future without damaging the quality of the environment on which the activities are based.”

The possibility of environment in this definition is quite great and according to them (Practical Environmental Policies in Travel and Tourism, 1994) for all real decisions as far as tourism is concerned environment could mean the “quality of natural resources such as landscape, air, sea water, fresh water, flora and fauna; and the quality of built and cultural resources judged to have intrinsic value and be worthy of conservation.” Attaining sustainability for tourism, according to them needs “the cumulative volume of visitor usage of a destination and the associated activities and impacts of servicing businesses should be managed below the threshold level at which the regenerative resources available locally become incapable of maintain(ing) the environment.”

Here it is important to take note of Richard Buller’s view in 1994, which distinguishes between sustainable development and tourism in the context of tourism. According to him, sustainable is alone in a form which can maintain its viability in particular areas for an unannounced period of time – whereas, sustainable development in the context of tourism is that which is developed or maintained in an area in a way which at a scale that remain viable over an indefinite period and does not even degrade or change the environment in which it is existing one a degree that it prohibits the development of other activities and processes. It can be said that for sustainable tourism development, the environment conservation and management of visitor usage and services businesses are all interlinked concepts.

They are susceptible to the effects of:

- Tourist behaviours and attitudes;
- Changes in technology;
- The policies of the servicing businesses; and
- The governmental policies.

None of these four can be explained as static and therefore, the management of sustainable tourism is a dynamic activity. When sustainability criterion is applied to the manner in which the tourism industry operates and in the manner in which the products are consumed by the tourists, our attention gets drawn to tourism impacts on the following destinations:

- Natural resources and attractions (including man-made ones);
- Economy;
- Society; and

- Culture, etc.

Tourism is an economic activity, just like other sectors even if it has a glamorous image. It involves all the international forces that work according to the global laws. This also means that the development debate has to agree with the sustainability of international tourism, regardless of its complexities. Tourism has a number of products to offer, which range from low impact products to high impact ones. These can be delivered by an organized sector but in little and developing countries the unorganised sectors also play a crucial role in delivering such products. The tourism products have a lot of components which are supplied by a number of suppliers who do not have common standards.

Tourism represents a number of interests. At destinations, the local people benefit from tourism with divided costs. Then there is also the industry where the organized and unorganised sectors have variations and national, as well as, multinational companies can face conflicts of interest. Governments are prone to promote tourism for the economic reasons without looking at the effects or costs of doing so. Then, there are tourists who have varying patterns of consumption and are expecting different levels of service.

For the developmental debate, therefore, it is important to engage in a multi-stakeholder process to check how to resolve real conflicts and respect all the aspirations of the stakeholders involved in the activity. The challenge for a country, such as, India is to see how it can be a part of a global market for latest tourist destinations in a time when new customers are emerging. India has always looked at tourism as a major source of earning foreign exchange – even if we have not has foreign exchange crisis in a decade. The new consumer nevertheless are more concerned with the issue of suitability even as they consume more than their fair share of tourism resources in the different corners of the world. In fact a lot of issues exist that speak about the concept of suitable tourism and how it has rained in contemporary tourism in the developmental debate.

These especially include the followings:

- 1) Contemporary tourism contains movement of 640 million people across boundaries and millions within the boundaries – figures that could not be abstracted 50 years ago. How can we deliver a sustainable product – predominantly where eco-systems are breakable and yet, a lure for the tourist's gaze?
- 2) How to evaluate, keeping the sustainability criteria in view, the conflicts and meeting between development and tourism? This assessment has to be done keeping in view the development of socio-economic and environmental resources for swelling the wealth and wellbeing of the people.
- 3) The necessity to accommodate the current rates of growth vis-à-vis consumption and production is a contest to the concept of sustainable tourism.
- 4) There is an essential need for policy creativities that would help to promote an awareness of the fact that contemporary tourism influences go beyond the helpful aspects and can also be very harmful as growth and effectiveness are pursued.

### 5) Specific pressures of tourism on specific resources have to be evaluated.

This requires newer terms of legitimatising the crucially given to tourism. Income generation and employment cannot be the only determinants in this regard. Tourism is not a different phenomenon. There are many types of tourism just like there are market segments like niche tourism/niche markets. There is also a need for establishing a good balance between tourism and all other existing activities.

Again, merely endorsing sustainable tourism while continuing the mass tourism; will ensure that the costs or profits disappear in the future. There is also uncertainty but it gives a challenge to us. If tourism gives response to societal changes and global changes while conforming to main principles of conservation of Earths' resources then there are a lot of opportunities for tourism enterprises on these new ethics. Here yet again the traditional societies like India can have a benefit since they have not opened to the neo liberal market rationality of consumption concept. They still recycle, renew and re use their resource since the integration with money or market global economy is not complete. What will happen later on is yet to be seen but the later beginners will have an advantage of using other's experiences.

As globalisation and the WTO removes protective barriers, we need to renew our commitments to:

- 1) The preservation and enhancement of ecological processes and set our primacies so that, in the New World Order, we may not be subject to non-tariff barriers;
- 2) The defence of our bio-diversity, as the death of any species, is the first alarm call for human survival, as well;
- 3) Inter- and intra-generational equity, which includes the rights of children, youth, elderly, poor and women, and chiefly original communities whose survival is so closely knotted with the survival of our bio-diversity; and
- 4) Mixing of economic, social, political, cultural, and environmental causes, which will help to bring about an all-inclusive model of tourism that characterises our ethics and culture. As ecological and economic issues are becoming more symbiotic, tourism policy makers and facilitators have to ensure that the new model of sustainability becomes a chance for target groups and clusters and not a danger to their survival. Just as the worst influences of tourism have been recognised, so also the best practices have been recognized. However, these should be used to get a promise for sustainability, not only as a political motto but also as an investigative tool.

## Approaches

Development has different meanings to different people. It is a combination of varying values both ethical and material. It also covers the future along with present but it also uses the past to show the way to compare and evaluate the nature of social change that includes economic or technological changes as well as the cultural or geo-political context of change. Therefore apart from an occurring debate on structure of development, different approaches have been suggested to measure how

tourism and its impacts can create perspectives that express the evolution of development, growth, and balance.

To make the debate accessible to a group, four broad approaches to development can be recognized. These are modernisation, dependency, neo-classical, and neo-liberal counter-revolutions and lastly, alternative development.

1. Modernisation theories see civilizations passing through a series of stages, from lower to higher levels of progress. The highest level is where the role of invention and free enterprise is of great position, as the developed areas of the world have established. State connection to ensure a trickledown consequence is a part of this model. In tourism, reserves and large resorts and state reserves in such projects in partnership with the private sector have been fortified in all developing countries. In India, the state owned Ashok group of western style hotels in metros, city areas, and even, remote terminuses was a part of the transformation model;
2. The Dependency Theory contacts development to exterior forces, where power at the middle exploits the border. An example is the expatriate misuse of India, where British interests resolute the path of expansion undertaken in India. International tourism, being focussed in the West, uses evolving countries as cheap destinations for budget tourists, which continues the symmetry between the rich and the poor. The response to this attention of wealth and power is to help domestic markets, be independent and substitute domestic tourism for global tourism to have control of the spending and benefits. In India, domestic tourism is of the volume of 170 million and donates three times the pays of international tourism. National tourism is only now being documented as the basis of tourism development, rather than worldwide tourism;
3. Neo-Liberal or Neo- Classical replies to the oil crisis and the debt crisis of the '70s and '80s have harassed the role of transfer and the free market as a solution. Development through motivations, subsidies, and other fiscal encouragements to foreign investors has been broadcasted for developing countries to grasp the same level in travel activity as Europe and North America have attained in the post war period. The World Bank has been a major advocate of this approach, along with other non-governmental worldwide organisations like the UNDP and the ADB, which have subsidized major tourism platforms in developing countries. The gage of these projects often defied the local ambitions and conditions. This led to the advent of the movement of local NGOs, who assessed the impacts of such expansions. Their deductions were that such forms of tourism did not help the deprived who were the most in need of financial activity that would help to eliminate their poverty; and
4. Alternative Development Approaches are founded on basic needs fulfilment. Has the resort progress at Kovalam or Goa resolved the issue of food, clothing, housing, health and education needs of the local people? This method provides a grass roots outlook, where local requirements and peoples control are the major development inputs.

Eco-tourism, nature tourism, suitable tourism, ethical tourism, and answerable tourism are some of the perceptions that have emerged from this approach. These concepts often intersect and are not very detailed. Critics contend that tourism is giant business, and the grass roots approach may not bring the welfares desired. The gender perspective, which looks at the issue of women in tourism and also, opposes the elevation of child abuse and sex tourism, which has also been a quarrelsome area between proponents of substitute tourism and conventional tourism.

As these details tell and indicate, the tourism development debate is a political and ideological debate. Conservative politics favours the open market with little state control in tourism. The top down approach with strong private-public partnership is their answer to the issue of growth in tourism. Liberals are also divided between non-structural and structural economists. He former urge is the grass roots approach while the other favours broad based reforms to make a better distribution of their wealth. The Marxist approach, which is in favour of class structure, has a way to distribute power and wealth sees that global tourism has seeds of neo-colonialism.

It advocated social travel or state subsidies for admission to tourism for the bulk of people. However, the Marxian Approach is also experiencing changes. The growth of tourism in China for financial gains, in Cuba, for image elevation and economic benefits and the appearance of Kerala under a Marxist government as a foremost tourism state in India are instances in this respect.

Within the concept of sustainability, Kerry B. Godfrey (*Towards Sustainability in Harrison and Husbands (ed.) Working Responsible Tourism*, New York, 1996) has mentioned what the two schools of thought on this are:

1. The Product Approach: In this approach, sustainability is viewed as an alternative to or standby of conformist mass tourism by making of new green products.
2. The Industry Approach: Seeing that mass tourism is unavoidable because of the tourist demand the obligation is to make all forms of tourism more maintainable. The Industry method endorses the Product Approach's positive makings but believes that it cannot substitute mass-tourism and as Cohen puts it, the purpose should be to help to "reform the tourist founding and figure tourism from within" (1989). In fact no single approach is possible to meet the test of sustainability. The subject is further complicated because of the variety in fragility, toughness, and other natural structures of the tourism regions, areas or sites which are embattled for sustainable growth.

## Views of WTO

The World Tourism Organization has been debating the cause of sustainable tourism development. It has mixed in Global Code of Ethics for Tourism sustainable tourism as Article 3. It has published many books on this theme, such as:

- *What Tourism Managers Need to Know: Indicators of Sustainable Tourism;*
- *Sustainable Tourism Development: Guide for Local Planners;* and
- *Sustainable Development of Tourism – a Compilation of Good Practices.*

Apart from this, its publication on National and Regional Tourism planning says that:

“One of the important benefits of tourism is that, if it is properly developed based on the concept of sustainability, tourism can greatly help, justify and pay for conservation of an area’s natural and cultural resources. Thus, tourism can be an important means of achieving conservation in areas that otherwise have limited capability to accomplish environmental protection and conservation objectives.”

In order to achieve sustainable development and growth, it also places stress on the following three aspects:

1. An Environmental Planning Approach;
2. Community – Based Tourism; and
3. The Concept of Quality Tourism.

The first takes into view all the elements of environment before moving on to the growth , the second takes in account the community’s involvement in planning and the last one refers to the following: “tourist attractions, facilities, and services that offer good value for money, protect tourism resources, and attract the kinds of tourists who would respect the local environment and society.”

The basis of sustainable tourism, as defined by WTO in 1988, were: “envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social, and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems.” These principles must be adopted in all types of tourism. They should be adapted by all tourism working, projects and establishments that include conventional tourism and the different forms which have come about as a try to share the costs of bulk tourism around the globe. The WTO gives consultancy on this issue of sustainability. A lot of international organizations have come around with their codes in this respect.

### Roles and Responsibilities

“Ignorance, politics, and economics seems to work contrary to the attainment of the goal of sustainable development as far as tourism is concerned,” wrote Richard W. Butler (*“Pre and*

*Post-impact Assessment of Tourism Development”* in Pearce and Butler (ed) *Tourism Research*, London 1993). As a result of the tourism, which is worsening, lures and resources, it is tourism itself which suffers severely. The losses are the host societies, for the tourist will move to another untouched endpoint. It is the indigenous industry that will agonize as the big troupes will also move out and do commercial business away. At many endpoints even the host groups, in order to make quick cash, over use or throw open their capitals and atmosphere to be subjugated by the visitors, businesses or local conferred interests. It is time for them to understand that this is an unhappy path for the terminus.

In instruction to move near the trail of sustainability or to attain sustainable development, every actor in tourism has a role, which is encumbered with heavy errands and responsibilities.

Middleton has mentioned five reasons for the collective action by different players in tourism on the environment issues in his book, *Sustainable Tourism*, 1988:

1. Size and Growth Potential
2. Prosperity;
3. Global Reach;
4. The Market's Demand; and
5. The Competitive Business Advantage.

All five aspects are interlinked. For example, the size and growth potential will depend on the quality of environment of tourism areas and increasing responsibility has to be given away in this respect. The physical environment and different cultures as the core resources of tourism needs to be treated by the industry in practice "in the same way as commercial assets, needing continuous maintenance, refurbishment, and investment" along with being collectively protected for their intrinsic values.

Tourism is a global activity and that industry has to be in either vanguard of change and influence and control events or it needs to ignore the process of environmental change. However, if they go for the second option, they will be the victims as the initiative and control will pass on to the regulators and the anti-tourism lobbies present. Middleton points out that there are a lot of clear indicators that the market demand is only for the products "which offer clean air, clean beaches and bathing water, pristine mountain slopes (which are) uncongested; crime and pollution-free destinations. One can add to this many other attributes like authenticity of crafts, customs (i.e., cultural aspects) and the demands of "green tourists," etc.

Therefore, ignoring these aspects of the market demand in product-design, business operations, and marketing strategies will be self-defeating exercise for the entire tourism industry. Those in the industry who want to contribute towards the sustainable practices and growth will have to be in a competitive business advantage. An understanding to this consequence is already there and numerous tourism industry relations are making their members conscious and accepting codes of conduct in this esteem. Here one must recollect that the NGO's are playing energetic role, often through fights also, in manipulating the attitudes of the industry as well as the people in the endpoint areas. The NGO's have also brought to forefront the requirement of changing the conduct and attitudes of the patrons of tourism products.

In a submission to the UN Commission on *Sustainable Development*, the *Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism* (April 1999) strived on swaying consumer performance towards sustainable tourism:

"From a sustainability perspective, feeding tourist fantasies and demands for familiarity and comfort is a costly business. In the typical destination area, the natural eco-system is levelled, paved, and then landscaped with lawns and a handful or two of nursery-grown tree and flower species; landmarks and neighbourhoods central to the local community's sense of place are replaced by cookie-cutter hotel and recreation developments; scarce water is diverted for swimming pools and tourists' long, hot showers. Ecological thresholds are routinely crossed, and in many southern destinations, international human

rights standards are daily violated. Indigenous peoples are particularly vulnerable to market-driven tourism, losing their customary lands and resources, religious freedom, and ultimately their cultures and capacity for self-sufficiency. Women and children are also at high risk, where tourism economies are built upon exploitative labour practices, and where sex tourism occurs. The average consumer resists acknowledging this dark side of tourism. The apathetic systems largely from our Northern worldview, which promotes individualism, with purchasing power the measure of success. However, it is also reinforced by our consumer savvy business and political systems. Both, together with the media, deliver abbreviated interpretations of global crisis, alleviating any direct sense of complicity. Consequently, there is little impetus for consumers to address in any meaningful way the exponential costs of tourism, like climate change or the loss of biological and cultural diversity.

In the North, most customers and consumers are ignorant of the righteousness between human activities and ecosystems or related issues like equity that we live in a monetary society that is often detached from the places and people that actually sustain us. Tourism involving a highly buffered and short term experience of all other locales is prone to reinforce this perspective as well. As tourists, we can easily play and then leave and not care about any negative impacts at the local level. We can suspend common sense or good codes of conduct without holding ourselves accountable for what is damaged and who can be hurt.”

Thus, it is important to make the consumer of tourism products well aware of all the sustainable practices. No doubt a newer consumer has beginning to emerge with varying market demand that is mentioned earlier. While consuming the tourism resources, this consumer is also concerned with the issue of sustainability. However it cannot be denied that it is a herculean task to ensure that every tourism consumer, business or service provider contributes fully towards sustainable tourism development. The responsibilities in this aspect lies with one and all the government, industry, tourists, and the locals.

Middleton mentions two important dimensions in this aspect:

- “Improving sustainable practice at the destination chosen by visitors,” and
- “the way the businesses within the travel and tourism industry conduct their development and operational decisions.”

We can add commitment of government, local bodies as well as the people to sustainable development which will show through practice and not by conferences on a paper alone. At the same time, the workers or trade unions also have a dire responsibility in this factor. The international Confederation of Free Trade Unions and Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD’s background paper for the commission on Sustainable Development states the following:

“Trade Unions are well placed to play a role in making sustainable tourism a reality ... tourism workers have the potential of becoming active agents of change amongst the tourists they are paid to serve ... however, it can only be achieved with the cooperation of employers, governments, and NGOs.”

A vital tool for monitoring the sustainability criteria is effect assessment of tourism. However, scholars, such as, Richard W. Butler also have gone a step further to advocate the post impact assess of all tourism projects. (Pearce and Butler, Tourism Research, 1993)

### Further Reading:

- ✓ *Trevor H. B. Sofield, (2003), Empowerment for Sustainable Tourism Development*
- ✓ *Rob Harris, Peter Williams, Tony Griffin, (2002), Sustainable Tourism*
- ✓ *David Weaver, (2006), Sustainable Tourism*