



UNIT-18

Sustainable Tourism & Development

Learning Outcomes

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

- ✓ Understand what sustainable development is
- ✓ Identify the need for sustainable tourism and development

Unit 18

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The WTO stated that international tourist arrivals reached 664 million in 1999. 62.1 percent of the total market share came from just 15 countries. In international tourism, total amount of travel-related costs totalled about \$455 billion USD. There were 15 countries which shares US \$286.7 billion, in which the US had the largest share reaching around \$74.4 billion.

These figures are more than just plain numbers and illustrate a number of things. Such massive movements by people demonstrate that there is a high level of consumption of resources, including the natural and manmade, along with additional economic, environmental, or cultural impacts. If this is added to the numbers of domestic tourists, the resources consumed and overall impacts would be mind-blowing. These impacts can be both negative and positive in nature. Where richer nations and regions have resources ready to mitigate the negative impact, developing countries are still struggling to cope.

In both scenarios, the application of the concept of sustainable development is an important topic. Therefore, the development/sustainability debate has been pinpointed as one of the primary themes of this course. This unit will begin by describing the concept of sustainable development, and will move on to explain a number of development approaches with emphasis on tourism development. Some of the questions the unit will address include why the industry should support any efforts for sustainable tourism development, or why the participation of consumers and service providers must be encouraged.

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

Sustainable Development

There are two alternative paths for development, which have always been available: one to live with nature in harmony, the other to exploit it. In today's world, different nations at different times have adopted one of the two paths. Some have also found a middle way. There are many localities that have taken necessary precautions while consuming resources, in order to ensure that future generations are not adversely affected. In such societies, effective decision-making kept both future and present concerns/priorities in mind.

Therefore, the concept of sustainability may not be an entirely new concept for students. There are over 300 different definitions of sustainable development and all of them claim to be "green". 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 to by the concern of environmental degradation and awareness/growth of nature conservation. One of the more widely-accepted definitions of sustainable development, which was outlined by the Brundtland 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.”

The UN established the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1983 that was chaired by Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland. The report of this commission is famously known as the Brundtland 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 the basis of survival. Therefore, the environment and socioeconomic dimensions become the focus of this management approach.

The secondary position is relegated by changes in the views of the community, along with attitudes towards development. The first ever effort made at an 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 the 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 sustainability is considered 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 various geopolitical, technological, socioeconomic 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 7th Meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development, which 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, which came together to speak about their experience through grass-roots interaction in the course of growth of tourism over 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 meanings for different disciplines adopted – which may not be the same, either. For example, a sociologist may be interested in retaining the authenticity of customs, rituals and other 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 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 a historical building, it could be linked to conservation aspects; for destinations it would mean sustaining the attraction. We can also find some similarities 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 the authors (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 means that “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 unspecified period of time. Whereas, sustainable development in the context of tourism is that which is developed or maintained in an area in a way that remains viable over an *indefinite* period and does not degrade or change the environment in which it exists - 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;
- Governmental policies.

None of these four can be explained as statics 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 in the following areas:

- Natural resources and attractions (including man-made);
- Economy;
- Society;
- Culture, etc.

Tourism is an economic activity just like other sector, even if it has a glamorous image. It involves all the international forces that work according to 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. These can be delivered by an organized sector, but in smaller and developing countries, the unorganised sectors also play a crucial role in delivering such products. Tourism products have a lot of components, which are supplied by any number of suppliers who do not have shared/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 promoting tourism for economic reasons, without looking at the effects or costs of doing so. Then there are tourists, who have varying patterns of consumption and are always 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 modern tourist destinations in a time when new customers are emerging. India has always looked at tourism as a major source of revenues. The new consumer is nevertheless more concerned with the issue of suitability than ever before, even though 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 is connected with contemporary tourism in the developmental debate.

These especially include the followings:

- 1) Contemporary tourism involves the movement of 640 million people across various boundaries and millions more within the boundaries – figures that could not be predicted 50 years ago. How can we deliver a sustainable product where eco-systems are breakable, while still attracting tourists?
- 2) How to evaluate, keeping sustainability criteria in view, the conflicts and connections between development and tourism? This assessment has to be done while keeping in mind the development of socioeconomic and environmental resources for improving the wealth and wellbeing of the people.

- 3) The necessity to accommodate current rates of growth vis-à-vis consumption and production is a challenge to the concept of sustainable tourism.
- 4) There is an essential need for policy creativities that would help promote 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 importance given to tourism. Income generation and employment cannot be the only determinants in this regard. Tourism is not a unique 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 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 the Earth's resources, then there are a lot of opportunities for tourism enterprises based on these new ethics. Here yet again, traditional societies like India can have an advantage since they have not yet opened to the neo-liberal market rationality of consumption. They still recycle, renew and reuse their resource, since their overall development is not considered 'complete'. What will happen later is yet to be seen, but late-beginners will have the advantage of being able to use other's experiences.

As globalisation and the WTO remove 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, youths, the elderly, the poor and both sexes, and chiefly original communities whose survival is so closely tied with the survival of our bio-diversity;
- 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, the best practices have also been recognized. However, these should be used to get a guarantee of 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 the 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 ongoing 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 or 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 importance, as the developed areas of the world have established. State connection to ensure a trickledown result is a part of this model. In tourism, reserves, large resorts and state reserves in such projects in partnership with the private sector have been strengthened 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 connects development to exterior forces, where power at the middle exploits the border. An example is the expatriate misuse of India, where British interests influence the path of expansion undertaken in India. International tourism, being concentrated in the West, uses evolving countries as cheap destinations for budget tourists, which perpetuates the gap 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 spending and benefits. In India, domestic tourism is of the volume of 170 million and contributes three-times the revenues 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 challenged the role of the free market. Development through motivations, subsidies and other fiscal encouragements to foreign investors has been broadcasted for developing countries to achieve the same level of travel activity as Europe and North America 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 gauge of these projects often defied 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 poor and deprived, who were the most in need of financial activity that would help to eliminate their poverty;

4. Alternative Development approaches are founded on the fulfilment of basic needs. 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 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 huge business, and the grass roots approach may not bring the benefits desired. The gender perspective, which looks at the issue of women in tourism, also opposes the perpetuation of child abuse and sex tourism, which has also been an area of heavy debate between proponents of substitute tourism and conventional tourism.

As these details suggest 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 partnerships is their answer to the issue of growth in tourism. Liberals are also divided between non-structural and structural economists. The former is the grass-roots approach, while the other favours broad-based reforms for better distribution of 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 the 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 examples 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 new green products.
2. The Industry Approach: Seeing that mass tourism is unavoidable because of tourist demand, the obligation is to make all forms of tourism more maintainable. The Industry method endorses the Product Approach's positive ideals, but believes that it cannot substitute mass-tourism and as Cohen puts it, the purpose should be to help "reform the tourist founding and figure tourism from within" (1989). In fact, no single approach is possible to meet the requirements of sustainability. The subject is further complicated because of the variety in fragility, resilience and other natural structures of the tourism regions, areas or sites which are fighting 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;*
- *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;
3. The Concept of Quality Tourism.

The first takes into account all the elements of environment before moving onto growth, the second takes into account the community’s involvement in planning and the third 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, is: “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 adopted by all tourism workers, projects and establishments that include conventional tourism and the different forms which have emerged in an attempt to share the costs/pressures of bulk tourism around the globe. The WTO gives consultancy on this issue of sustainability. A lot of international organizations have responded with their own 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 irresponsible tourism, it is tourism itself that suffers severely. The losses are the host societies, for the

tourist will move to another unspoilt destination. It is the indigenous industry that will come to harm as the big brand and businesses will move out and do business elsewhere. At many destinations even the host groups, in order to make quick cash, overuse or throw open their assets and atmosphere to be exploited by visitors, businesses or local conferred interests. It is time for them to understand that this is a dangerous path for the industry.

In instruction to move closer to sustainability or to attain sustainable development, every player in tourism has a role, which is encumbered with various duties and responsibilities.

Middleton has mentioned 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;
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 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 the industry has to either contribute to positive change or ignore the inevitable environmental consequences. However, if they go for the second option, they will be the victims, as the initiative and control will pass on to regulators and anti-tourism lobbies. Middleton points out that there are a lot of clear indicators that 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 a self-defeating exercise for the entire tourism industry. Those in the industry who want to contribute towards sustainable practices and growth will enjoy a competitive business advantage. An understanding of this benefit already exists and many tourism industry leaders are making their members conscious of it, implementing and accepting codes of conduct. Here, it's important to remember that the NGO's are playing an energetic role, often through heated conflict, in manipulating the attitudes of the industry as well as the people in the destination areas. The NGO's have also brought to forefront the requirement of changing the conduct and attitudes of the end-users of tourism products.

In a submission to the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, the *Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism* (April 1999) focused 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 apathy stems 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 sustainable practices. Indeed, a newer type consumer is beginning to emerge with varying market demand as mentioned earlier. While consuming 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 lie with one and all - the government, industry, tourists and the locals alike.

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 governments, local bodies and the people in general to sustainable development, which will manifest through practice and not by words/rules on paper alone. At the same

time, workers and trade unions also have a great deal of responsibility in this factor. The international Confederation Free Trade Union 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 sustainability criteria is effect-assessment of tourism. However, scholars, such as, Richard W. Butler, have also gone a step further to advocate the post-impact assessment 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*