Achieving Sustainable Tourism Through WTO Negotiations

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The paper aims to highlight the significance, relevance and importance of sustainable tourism in India through WTO negotiations. The objective of the study is to analyse the impact of international tourism on India before negotiating for further liberalization of trade in services under GATS provision at WTO and to protect domestic tourism sub-sectors in the light of sustainable tourism. The study also finds that sustainable development in tourism, both national and international, can assist India to accelerate its pace of economic growth.

GROWTH IN WORLD TRADE AND IMPACT OF WTO NEGOTIATIONS

Tourism is regarded as the world's largest industry and one of the fastest growing service industry which not only earns enormous foreign exchange but also creates tremendous job opportunity. It accounts for over one third value of the total worldwide service trade. The fastest developing region continues to be East Asia and the Pacific with 14.6% growth and 16% of the total market (WTO). World Travel and Tourism Demand was 4,000 billion dollars and is expected to grow up to 6,000 billion dollars by 2013. The World Tourism Organisation forecasts that international arrivals will reach over 1.60 billion by the year 2020 (WTO: Long-Term Forecast Tourism 2020 Vision).

The growth in international tourism can be attributed to enhanced incomes, longer paid holidays, improvement in transportation technology and improved travel costs. Combined with this was a very positive image of tourism development conveyed by the advocacy platform, and the willingness of the World Bank and other institutions to fund tourism projects.

The exploitation of natural beauty coupled with the lure of earning valuable foreign exchange and providing both direct and indirect

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employment has become an attractive option for developing and least developing countries. Tourism draws upon natural, social, spiritual, medical and cultural resources. For LDCs with limited exploitable natural resource basis in particular, tourism seems to be a viable option offering an important opportunity for economic diversification (World Tourism Organisation and International Hotel and Restaurant Association (WTO & IHRA, 1999).

The GATS definition of tourism includes 4 tourism sub sectors:

- Hotels and restaurants (including catering)
- Travel agencies and tour operator services
- Tourist guide services
- Other

Trade in services implies four modes of delivering services under GATS:

Mode 1: "Cross-border supply" this is the supply of a service from the territory of one Member to a consumer in the territory of another. Some services requiring the physical presence of a service supplier such as restaurants and hotels, or construction cannot physically be remotely supplied across a border, in which case no binding commitment can be made.

Mode 2: "Consumption Abroad" this is when the consumer of the service travels to the service supplier, as is particularly important in the case of tourism where the consumer is a tourist using accommodation and other services abroad.

Mode 3: "Commercial Presence" this is where the service supplier establishes in the foreign market as a legal entity in the form of a subsidiary or a branch.

Mode 4: "Presence of Natural Persons" this covers the conditions under which a service supplier can travel in person to a country in order to supply a service. General immigration rules continue to apply and the rules relating to entry and stay are usually strict, but many countries have still

undertaken to allow certain types of service supplier, in particular intra-corporate transferees, to enter their markets on a temporary basis.

India has committed itself in the two sub-sectors viz. Hotels and restaurants and Travel agencies and tour operator services.

India is endowed with a number of tourist attractions and development options like beach tourism, eco and adventure tourism, spiritual, health, conference, convention and rural tourism. International tourist arrivals in India in 1996 grew by 7.7% over 1995 to reach a figure of 2,287,860. Foreign exchange earnings from tourism in 1996 stood at US $ 2.5 billion, which increased to $ 2,176 billion in October 2002. The Annualized Real Growth in India is expected to be 8.8% during the period 2004- 2013 (WTTC). Although India's share of international tourism market is undoubtedly low but foreign exchange expenditure in the country is the largest source of invisible earnings. According to some relevant studies, the foreign exchange retention rate of tourism is as high as 93 cents out of every dollar earned. Tourism employs 3% of the total global workforce (8% if indirect/informal jobs are included or one in every 12 workers World Travel and Tourism Council). According to UN/ESCAP Study on the "Economic Impact of Tourism in India", 1.2 international tourist visit provides full time employment to one person and for every one person directly employed in the tourism sector, 1.36 indirect jobs are created in other sectors of the economy. This is far too less in comparison to other countries of the world. 17 domestic tourists generate one full-time job in our country.

The Tenth Five Year Plan envisages 3.6 million jobs per year through promotion of domestic and international tourism. Tourism is significant in 11 of the 12 poorest countries of the world, half of the lowest income countries and almost all lower middle-income countries. (DFID: Tourism and Poverty Elimination: Untapped Potential) The income generated by international tourism has increased twenty fold since 1971 (from 21 billion

US $ to 476 billion US $ in 2000 Travel Industry Yearbook).

No doubt, international tourism can accelerate economic development but we cannot ignore its accompanying costs. Article IV of GATS, speaks of a clear obligation to increase the participation of developing countries in trade in services. However, tourism in GATS is far too removed from the local realities in tourism destination. The concept of sustainability, conservation and benefit sharing are not included in the GATS lexicon. The following points highlight not only the impact of present WTO negotiations but also the problem of achieving sustainable development in tourism if further commitments are made without considering certain issues:

- In India the Ministry of tourism and culture formulates tourism policy. India is a signatory to and has ratified the convention on Biological Diversity. However, the mandate to enforce its principles is on the Ministry of Environment and Forests. GATS is seen as a trade issue and the Commerce ministry is authorized to make commitments in the trade negotiations. There is no coordination between these ministries while arriving at national consensus on tourism commitment in the GATS. Furthermore, the sectors being committed are the ones in which the regional governments are jointly responsible. However, the latter are not being consulted prior to commitment leading to ground level problems and confusion.

- GATS aims at gradual removal of all trade barriers, which may make it difficult for "the economic need" of the local man from being fulfilled. For example, in Goa, there is a practice of issuing restaurant licenses only to locals and only those tourist taxis whose owners are from within the village are permitted to park their taxis in front of the hotel in the village. Commitment to GATS makes this practice unfair. However, to "sustain" local benefits this practice is required. Moreover, the Kerala government has devolved substantial powers to local bodies in deciding the kind of development that is appropriate

for their areas including the right to reject excessive tourism development. This may be in direct contravention with the policies of GATS.

- The "sustainability" of present Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in India is threatened by its commitment to GATS. They do not possess cutting edge technologies to get direct bookings and the imposition of labour and environmental standards will ensure their exit from the market.

- Of India's total area of 329 million hectares, more than half, or 175 million hectares, require special treatment to restore the land to productive uses. The land has deteriorated due to water and wind erosion (150 million ha), salinity, and alkalinity (8 million ha). Moreover, the nation's forest wealth has dwindled to 19.5 percent of total geographical area (vs. a goal of 33 percent for plains and 66 percent for hilly regions); coastal and wetland areas are under severe stress; and more than 1500 plant and animal species are endangered (WTO Annual Report, 2001). According to Carter Branden, an environmental economist with World Bank, the cost of environmental degradation in India is annually estimated at 5 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP). Many other countries are probably facing this kind of environmental threat. The information of this sort indicates that steps should be taken to rectify the damage done to the environment before seeking to "develop tourism" by further commitments.

- Development in tourism contradicts sustainability, the simple reason being that mass tourism puts tremendous pressure on local resources such as water, energy and so on, thereby defeating the very concept of "sustainable" tourism development. Furthermore, increased interest for travel to natural areas, unknown, exciting and unexplored

regions have posed a real threat to ecological balance. Depletion of forests to meet the tourism industry's demand for firewood and timber often leaves the local people with firewood crises and also results in increased erosion and land slides. Nature bound tourism is not, by definition, sustainable and it may therefore threaten development in eco-tourism. This issue needs to be carefully deliberated upon and indicators for controlling negative impact of tourism be identified and worked upon to combat the negative consequences of this industry.

• The Multi-National Hotel Corporations, in their zeal to enter India and provide comfort tourist, may monopolize the use of scarce resources putting the locals to a great disadvantage. Increased construction of hotels and recreational facilities may result in deforestation and loss of important minerals, fertile soil, besides causing distress to wildlife and spoiling aesthetic natural beauty. The ecosystems most threatened with degradation are ecologically fragile areas such as alpine region, rain forests, coral reefs, beaches and sea grass beds.

• Air transport has increased its share against road in international holidays; together these two account for 85% of all international trips. Rail and sea transport remain below 8% each (Source : WTO). One study estimated that a single transatlantic return flight emits almost half the CO_2 emissions produced by all other sources (lighting, heating, car use, etc.) (Mayer Hillman, Town and Country Planning magazine, September 1996. Source: MFOE). Transport emissions and emissions from energy production and use are linked to acid rain, global warming and photochemical pollution. Similarly, noise pollution from airplanes, buses, cars, snow bikes etc. cause annoyance, stress and even impair hearing ability of people.

• Moreover, a considerable amount of the earned foreign revenues leaks

out of the host countries. The more the country has to import goods, services, human and physical capital the higher are the leakages. Over 85% of tourism revenues are lost in leakages by the time they reach destinations in Africa and in remote, scarcely developed regions they can amount to 90 percent. The liberalization of global trade and services under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is increasingly undermining the ability of the host countries to control the economic gain from tourism and prevent their leakages. Though the leakages are not high in India but its commitment in the other two sectors and in Mode 3 may lead to higher leakages.

The fragmented nature and the vast scope of this industry preclude any easy answers to these dilemmas/problems. However, one can infer that though tourism can be potentially destructive and can destroy the very resources on which it depends its positive impacts cannot be looked aside and it will continue to a significant global phenomenon. The concept of ensuring sustainability of biodiversity, cultural integrity, life support systems, ecological processes etc. has assumed greater significance. What is required is to resolve the difference between sustainability on one hand, and development on the other.

NECESSITY FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

According to WTO, "Sustainable tourism development meets the needs of the present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing the opportunity for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such as way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled, while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems". Broadly speaking, it covers three aspects namely, environmental, socio-cultural and economic. To fully comprehend the necessity for sustainable development in this field it is essential to fully understand the implications of tourism on environment, socio-culture and economics.

The inability of the environment to cope with the unlimited flow of tourists leads to negative consequences. The tourists can put tremendous pressure on natural resources in already resource scarce areas. Water, food, electricity and other raw materials may already be in short supply, with tourists aggravating this problem further. Tourist mobility calls for increased transportation by air, road and rail. Moreover, sewage management poses a great problem in areas of high concentration of tourists. Wastewater pollutes seas and lakes, damaging flora and fauna. Tourists on trekking -expeditions generate a great deal of waste by throwing garbage etc. in these areas. Some trails in the Peruvian Andes and in Nepal frequently visited by tourist have been nicknamed "Coca Cola trail" and "Toilet paper trail". In the US, tourism consumes 870 billion litres of water per year, produces 317 million tons CO_2 equivalent and generates 11 million tons of suspended solids in sewage (WTO).

The socio-cultured impacts of tourism refer to the effects on host community of direct and indirect relations with tourists. These influences are subtle and cannot be measured effectively. Nevertheless, they are there though hand to identify. Tourist can foster development in or change the socio-cultural value system of the local people. However, their behaviour can also at times damage the fragile sentiments, hurt or damage the values and customs held close to their hearts. Indigenous identity is threatened by interaction with tourists leading to changes in community structure, family relationships, traditional life styles, ceremonies, customs and morality. According to estimates of International Labour Organization, 13 to 19 million children and youth work in the tourism sector. In some countries like Thailand and the Philippines, tourism has led to great increase in prostitution and in sexual exploitation of children.

International Tourism also generates positive impact by fostering peace, strengthening culture ties, creating local jobs to avoid youth relocation. It can accelerate economic growth of a country by providing

employment opportunities to its workforce and also attracting foreign exchange by luring the international tourist to incur expenditure on its airline, hotel, food, local artisan products etc.

Tourism creates many jobs but its creation costs significantly more than that in agricultural or in small businesses. It also destroys jobs by displacing traditional sources of income such as agriculture or fishing.

India should aim at minimizing negative impacts of international trade and maximizing its positive contribution to the country's development.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM : A MYTH OR REALITY

Combining development (inevitably a value laden concept), with sustainability (which is allegedly non-operational and reformist) we thus arrive at the doubly vague concept of sustainable development, only then to focus on one aspect of this dubious process that of sustainable tourism. What makes the matter complex is the fact that the principles of sustainable tourism advocated by World Tourism Organization are very difficult to put into practice. Various questions put forth by Luke (1995, p. 21-22) need to be addressed, "Sustainable for how long: a generation, one century, a millennium, ten millennia? Sustainable at what level of human appropriation, individual households, local villages, major cities, entire nations, global economics? Sustainable for whom: all humans alive now, all humans that will ever live, all human being living at this time, all living beings that will ever live? Sustainable under what conditions: for transnational contemporary capitalism, for low impact Neolithic hunters and gatherers, for some future space-faring global empire? Sustainable development of what: personal income, social complexity, gross national product, GNP frugality, individual consumption, ecological biodiversity?....... Should all existing tourism development be sustained or is it preferable that some be allowed to decline

gracefully to be replaced by other activities?"

These questions though very difficult to answer yet need to be addressed if the ethos of sustainable development is to be applied to tourism.

Tourism does not conform to classical definition of industry and product. The roles played by various stakeholders and their conflicting needs further strengthen the perplexity.

However, this definition leaves out many service activities such as transport, hotel construction, computer reservation system, dry cleaning of apparel, leisure time activities, shopping etc. The Standard International Classification of Tourism Activities (SICTA) of the World Tourism Organization has identified approximately 70 specific activities related to supplying tourism services and in addition, another 70 activities at least partially concerned with the supply of tourism services. Expanding the current GATS definition of tourism would complicate the issue of applying sustainable development to all these diverse industries.

The profit driven tourism industry comes in direct conflict with the objectives of protecting and maintaining social and environmental resources, which makes the concept of sustainability more elusive. Six main stakeholder groups have been identified as having interests in sustainable tourism (Swarbrooke, 1999):

- The public sector This stakeholder group includes supra-governmental bodies such as European Union (EU), national government, local authorities and quasi governmental organization (such as national tourism organizations).

- The tourism industry that includes transport, tour companies, travel agencies services such as retail shopping, banks and insurance, entertainment and leisure and others such as food and fuel etc.

- Voluntary sector organization that includes pressure groups such as

Tourism Concern and tourism professional bodies such as International Association of Travel Agents (IATA).

- The host community Those who reside at the tourism destination and as a result, form part of the tourism "product".

- The media which includes both travel and non-travel media.

- The tourist.

For the concept of sustainability to be successful it is essential these various stakeholders with diverse interest vying for limited resources understand this concept.

ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED BEFORE FURTHER COMMITMENT UNDER GATS

Though there is no strong empirical evidence that sustainable tourism is an achievable goal, however many of the principles of sustainable tourism are valid and play a vital role in drawing attention to the global nature of tourism and its impacts (Sharpley, 2000). One thing is clear that this concept encourages consideration of long-term perspectives, fosters critical evaluation of tourism and calls for cooperation and collaboration between different stakeholders. The following strategies should be kept in mind while India is negotiating for protection versus liberalisation under the purview of GATS.

- A clear definition of sustainability needs to be worked out and spelt keeping our national interests in mind. India has to clearly decide how it can develop its tourism industry and yet sustain the local interests, be they economic, social, cultural or ecological. A clear picture of how we want to perceive this concept in our interest can emerge only after deliberations with various groups like different state governments, hotels and restaurant owners etc. After doing this homework should we participate in the next round of talks under GATS.

- Environmental carrying capacity refers to the degree to which an

ecosystem, habitat or landscape can accommodate the various impacts of tourism and its associated infrastructure without damage being caused or without losing its sense of place (Andrea Moler, 2000). Any particular area can support only a certain number of people effectively. Exceeding this limit endangers its resources (water, energy, accommodations) availability and aggravates its waste disposal problem and threatens to take away the resources meant for local people. It is essential to obtain data pertaining to ecological environment of an area and then subsequently base the tourism policy on it. This onerous task of preservation of ecological carrying capacity can be carried out by local authorities with the help of national governments, NGOs, international oragnisations such as WTO, UNESCO and international investors/donors. These organisations can emphasize upon the promotion of environmentally sound modes of transport, which may call for adopting stringent laws pertaining to control of pollution caused by various means of transportation. Simultaneously, India must accelerate the pace of investment in research and put heavy demands on innovation in this area.

- Creating awareness especially among tourists and local population
  Tourism is no doubt one of the main engines of growth in a globalized world - not only for developed countries from where the major tourism providers originate but for the developing countries as well but that will be sustainable only it sustainability in environment is maintained. This is possible only by creating mass awareness among its stakeholders, who in their lust for economics gains are likely to overlook their responsibility towards maintaining ecological balance. The locals must be made aware of how only the maintenance of its environment will ensure future inflow of tourists. Similarly, the latter should be made to realize the relevance of maintaining the sanctity of the place they visit because "the sanctity" was the reason that brought them there and which through sheer ignorance and careless

they are likely to destroy.

- Local control over resources The local authorities should have control over utilisation of local resources e.g. water and land. They should be empowered to decide when to stop further construction of buildings, infrastructure and other recreational facilities meant for tourists. Furthermore, the inflow of tourists must, accordingly, be regulated.

- Economic sustainability This is only possible if more employment opportunities are created for local population and local youths are trained to take up jobs in tourism industry. Furthermore, the use of local materials, products and services should be encouraged so that it can enhance the earnings of local population. Attention must be given to the impact of entry of foreign companies on the earnings of the national/ local hotel owners/restaurants, guides, tour operators etc. India needs to assess the negative consequences of this action and seek time at GATS meeting for the preparation of its domestic players to become more competitive. Another area to focus is on reducing foreign exchange leakages by limiting the foreign ownership/ shareholdings in tourism facilities. The developing and least developed countries face the leakages much more. Hence, India can join hands with other countries pursuing similar interests while committing itself to the principles of GATS.

- Psychological carrying capacity- The level beyond which the development in tourism would adversely affect the qualities sought by people in certain protected areas (such as closeness to nature, peace, quiet, away from population, etc.).

- Social and Cultural carrying capacity- The level beyond which the tourists can exercise adverse influence on the local communities, their customs, traditions and way of life.

- Awareness about tourist sites Tourists besides putting pressure on

many natural resources generate a great deal of waste e.g. tourists on expedition leave behind their garbage, oxygen cylinders and even camping equipment. Responsible behaviours can emanate from these same tourists if they are made aware of the extent of the damages caused by them and even penalized for such actions. Enhanced awareness among the local community is essential for any kind of success in sustaining the local resources and preserving the aesthetic beauty and minimizing ecological impact. Locals should take the initiative of keeping their region clean and stress the same upon the tourists. They should also make the latter aware of their social and cultural norms to safeguard their erosion. The protection of reef sharks in the Maldives is an example of how awareness can be instrumental in conservation of protected areas. When locals realized the importance of protecting the shark and its environment then the illegal mining and garbage dumping stopped in these areas.

- Focus on diversification within the country Efforts must be exercised to avoid dependence on only certain areas for tourist activities. With a major thrust on adventure tourism, heritage tourism, health and spiritual tourism new areas for tourists like rural tourism must be explored and opened up. This would avoid one-sided mono-structural tourism development.

- Coordination between different ministries and local communities The GATS operates under an economic paradigm that believes that trade liberalization should be pursued under the principles of non-discrimination. However, before committing itself, the national government needs to discuss the matter with all relevant ministries as well as with regional or local governments as each tourist area has its own unique specifications. The impacts of Agreement on Agriculture on farmers, which led to widespread agitations in India with the State Government suing the Central Government for not consulting it before making this commitment, must not be forgotten. Comprehensive

environmental and social impacts must also be assessed before any further commitments. With nature and culture being the catchwords for tourist this business is likely to shift to Asian countries, who must ensure that the GATS does not let the activities in their countries be controlled by multinationals half way across the world.

- Ethical/social/cultural sustainability The local population must be protected against forced eviction and stringent measures must be undertaken by local authorities to protect women and children from sexual exploitation. Abolishing exploitative child labour can safeguard the rights of children. NGOs, media, ILO, Rights of the Child Convention parties and the national government can play a major role in promoting social and ethical cause.Visitors must be sensitized to preserve the cultural and social nuances of the places they visit besides exhibiting responsible behaviour towards ecological balance. For this purpose the tourists can be educated about the qualities and sensitivities of their destination.

- Ecotourism Sustainability: Ecotourism is growing at an annual growth rate between 10% and 30% (TIES: Ecotourism Statistical Fact Sheet) and aims towards conserving environment and improving the welfare of local people. Though ecotourism and sustainability may seem contradictory but the underlying essence of the two can be viewed as being the same. The national government must use internationally approved and reviewed guidelines to develop certification schemes, ecolabels and other voluntary initiatives for sustainability in ecotourism. However, certification system should reflect regional and local criteria. For effective implementation of these schemes, a regulatory and monitoring framework needs to be established.

- Safety for Tourists: If India desires sustainable growth in tourism, then it needs to provide a peaceful and safe stay for its tourists. In the first ten months of 2000, India's tourist industry earned $ 2,176

bn which was 13% less than what it earned in the same period in 2001 (BBC New World Edition).International tourism declined dramatically after the World Trade Tower attacks but countries like India were hit harder due to their proximity with Afghanistan. An attack on India's Parliament House, tension with Pakistan over POK region and riots in Gujarat have scared off visitors causing big losses to Indian guides, hotel and restaurant owners. In total 1.8 million tourists arrived in India as compared with 2.1 million in first ten months of 2001. The WTTC has predicted India would see double-digit growth in arrivals after 2003. However, at present India accounts for barely 0.4% of global tourism market attracting 2.4 million visitors in 2001 (WTTC). India needs to address and resolve the issues of terrorism and rioting both unilaterally as well as with the help of other nations. Sustained growth in any field is possible only in a tension-free country where peace and harmony are "sustained".

- Besides paying attention to the above-mentioned strategies India must also consider the matter of "enlarging" the definition of tourism as given under GATS. SICTA of WTO has identified 70 specific activities and another 70 activities partially concerned with the supply of tourism sector. The developed countries are interested in expanding the current of GATS definition and are active proponents of cluster approach. However, India should oppose this move at present, as it would not be able to apply the concept of sustainable development to these diverse areas and cluster approach will reduce flexibility to undertake liberalization in a sustained manner.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, it is apparent that sustainability in tourism is possible only by facing a number of challenges. It is not possible to achieve it unless the various stakeholders make an integrated and collaborative effort. There is an urgent need for India to assess the impacts of tourism on different

tourist sites and evolve the multilateral and bilateral development organisations in sustainable tourism practices. India should take bold steps towards determining the environmental, economic, social and cultural carrying capacity of its different tourist sites before permitting foreign companies to further enter the arena of tourism industry. There is a need to clarify the meaning and achieve unanimous understanding on the issue of sustainability and develop systems to spell out various activities of tourism. We will need to undertake stringent measures to seek commitment from our domestic stakeholders like hotel/ restaurant owners, tour operators, taxi/bus drivers, media on the issue of sustainability before we table a draft before the GATS forum for negotiations and commitment. It is clear that for tourism to be sustainable needs to be integrated into all aspects of development and WTO's help can be elicited if a concerted effort is made by all the developing countries.

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