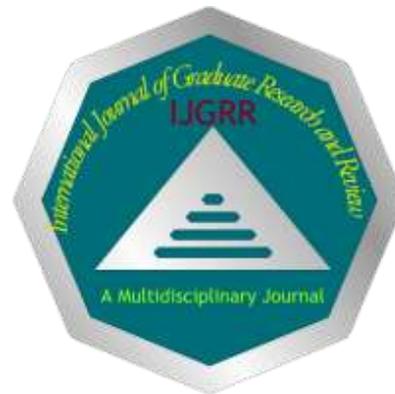


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Agritourism: A Step Further for Economic and Sustainable Development in Nepal

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Abstract

Agriculture is the major occupation of Nepalese people that provides employment opportunities to two third of the total population. It also contributes one third of the total national GDP. Agriculture is indispensable part to bolster national GDP and thus a key for the development of national economy. Nepal has a huge flow of tourist every year. Tourists are attracted to the immense natural beauty, diversified landscapes, suitable climate, rich cultural heritage, and friendly people of the country. People are seeking for connectedness with nature, and Nepal could be the best destination which is rural and remains intact today and unspoiled from urban bustle, modernity and pollution. It opens huge scope for potential growth and expansion of blended mixture of two industries; agriculture and tourism, the agro-tourism. Despite of agriculture being the primary occupation of the people, the country is lacking beyond its self-sufficiency and farmers are not getting satisfactory revenue from their occupation. The world today seeks for more scientific, technological and innovative kind of thinking in every sector. Agro-tourism can become an alternative way that provides additional income and creates greater employment opportunities to the rural small holder farmers but also encompasses sustainability in agriculture. Agro-tourism requires innovative thinking, addresses rural participation and ensures sustainability. Agro-tourism has a great potential to foster in Nepal. Enterprise development should be motivated among rural small holder farmers for agro-tourism. Hence, combining these two industries, agriculture and tourism can become the two wheels of a vehicle to drive economy of Nepal forward. This article is the review of opportunities and potential benefits of agro-tourism in Nepal from different sources.

Keywords: Agritourism; economy; GDP; sustainability; enterprise development

Introduction

Agritourism is a term that is widely gaining its popularity in recent years in Nepal. Agriculture is the major occupation of Nepalese people and provides 66% of employment to Nepalese population. Around 33% of total national GDP is contributed by agriculture sector. Tourism has also become an increasing part of the country's economy. Nepal falls among the top tourist countries over the world and there is numerous flow of tourist every year. According to the Annual Economic Impact Research Reports tourism accounts for 7.5 percent of Nepal's GDP in 2017 and the total contribution of travel and tourism to employment was 6.4% in 2016. (Travel and Tourism Economic Impact 2017 Nepal, 2017) Agritourism is a compilation of two

industries, agriculture and tourism. Agritourism is "a commercial enterprise at a working farm, ranch, or agricultural plant conducted for the enjoyment of visitors that generates supplemental income for the owner." Agritourism, itself, is a newest form of tourism in the world, which is also known as agricultural tourism, Agritourism, agri-ecotourism, farm tourism, farm based tourism, vacation farms, farm stays and others. (Kokko, 2011) It is variant to other forms of tourism such as ecotourism, rural tourism, etc. Ecotourism is a broad term that covers all tourism experiences centered on wild or natural environments whereas rural tourism broadly may defined as entire tourism activities in rural areas. (Keane, 1992) Particularly, farm-based tourism in rural areas is Agritourism. It includes "a set of activities that occur when people link travel with

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products, services and experiences of agriculture” (Maetzold, 2002). Basically it is the activities of hospitality by entrepreneurial farmers that they must remain complementary to farming activities.

Importance of Agritourism

Agritourism is a profitable and social part of farm stay economy providing number of economical, educational and social benefits to producers, consumers/tourists and to overall community. The operations of agro-tourism, producing, processing and activities of hospitality create jobs and support local economy through bringing new visitors who are willing to spend money. Agritourism provides opportunity to farmers to diversify operations, increase farm gross income, generation of cash flow, spread financial risks and helps maintain family involvement in production. Farmers could generate additional income to support during off seasons and thus enhance economic viability. *Agriculture tourism* helps to promote local agricultural product in the world. (Agricultural Tourism-Sustainable Agritourism in Nepal). Agritourism can be used to motivate and encourage farming communities to raise their crops in an eco-friendly manner and to conserve the biodiversity of farms (Ranabhat, 2007)

Agritourism enterprises open the opportunity in rural areas for exposure to outside world through increasing contacts and visitors engaging with community as a centre of giving and receiving. As a result, different spillover economic development opportunities occur further adding economic upliftment of community. Agritourism can also contribute in the conservation of rural environment and cultural heritage of the area. Thus, Agritourism can provide sustainable ways to care for farmland, forest land and valuable heritages ensuring future generations have the opportunity to visit, learn, engage and experience in conventional rural life.

Agritourism provides recreational, educational and on hand farms experiences that they carry for their lifetime. Many people nowadays desire to engage into pleasant rural experiences by connecting themselves with nature and environment. Breathing of fresh air, touch of the village soil to their feet's, taste of apples and berries direct on farm, and viewing of scenic beauties are what people really crave for. Farms can be a good place for visitors to restore, renew, reactivate and regenerate in a best way. Farms can also provide educational opportunities to know how and where the food is produced, and industry's contribution to local quality of life.

Agritourism in Nepal

Nepal is situated along the southern slopes of Himalayas, in 80.060W to 88.200E latitude and 26.360N to 30.430S longitudes in between India and China. It rises from as low as 60m to 8848m altitude and climate varies from warm to

freezing temperatures within the short distance. Due to this unique geographical feature, altitude variation, variety of climates and difference in pattern of rainfall favors wide range of agro ecological zoning.

Nepal is enriched with natural resources, range of climates, diversified landscapes and huge biodiversity. It is a country of multiethnic, multicultural groups and having abundance in potential natural resources, forests, lakes, rivers, mountains, holy sites along with hospitable people and above all diversity in agriculture. Agriculture holds high potential to have relatively wider impact on poverty reduction and inclusiveness. (Nhisutu, 2014) In fact, the community-based tourism with homestay programme is one of the new tourism programme in Nepal, which is the sustainable since it has created positive impacts on rural village development, rural women development, local economy, environment and entire community (Lama, 2013).

Most of the area is rural which remains intact and unspoiled from urban bustle, modernity and pollution. In Nepal agriculture sector includes farming, forestry, fishery, hunting etc. In Nepal Agritourism activities occurred from the past in some or the other way. The eastern part of Nepal, Illam is recognized as one of the tea states holding tourism importance. Different projects have been developed in Himalayan parts of the country, and organic farms targeted to attract tourists. Similarly, handicraft industry is also one of the important part. Different types of enterprise to suit tastes of range of visitors can be made into operation for Agritourism activities in different agroecological zones. For example; crop production area, livestock farms like ostrich farm, cattle and buffalo farm, fishing activities in lower plains of terai, fruit and vegetable cultivation activities in hills and apple orchards, tea and coffee production and processing farm in high hills. Moreover, the Eastern and Western Nepal also varies in terms of agroecological forms. This signifies there is a tremendous opportunity to make Nepal among top destination for agro-tourism.

Different research and studies have been conducted on Agritourism in different parts of the world. Studies reveal that Agritourism have been part of farming in Europe for centuries. It has also been found that it is one of the fastest growing segment in the US in recent years. Many countries have improved their economy developing the tourism potential of the country. In relation to other countries, the agri-tourism industry in Nepal remains relatively underdeveloped. There are NGO's and organizations which have shown keen interest in farm based tourism activities in rural areas. Various tourism development projects and plans have been formulated, developed, and implemented in different parts of the Himalayas to promote sustainable mountain tourism – some on a state and national scale, others set up as (sub) regional collaboration projects.

(ICIMOD, 2007). One of the objectives of tourism vision 2020 of Nepal is to prioritize the new investment in creating new tourism facilities, products and services. It has given emphasis on promoting new tourism products, extend tourism activities in remote and rural areas of the country and development of human resources through public and private educational institutes such as NATHM, Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (Dongol, 2007). Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), Tourism for Rural Poverty Alleviation Programme (TRPAP), Nepal Academy of Tourism & Hotel Management (NATHAM), Namsaling Community Development Center (NCDC), Local Initiatives for Biodiversity Research and Development (LIBIRD), are some of the organizations working on agritourism related activities.

Potential Obstacles

There are different obstacles in the way of agro tourism. The farming system is of subsistence type and most of the farms are of small scale unsuitable for conducting agritourism activities. Farmers lack awareness on agritourism activities and possess little knowledge about the subject. They lack poor level of entrepreneurship and management skills and suffer from economic shortages and low accessibility of resources to start up agritourism business. Similarly, there is low level of value addition in farm products and lack standard quality. Tourism is also greatly affected by frequent political instability of the country. Another major constraint is the lack of infrastructure, road facilities, electricity, mills, industries etc. Many villages of the rural that possess potential for agritourism have been emptied due to migration to lower plains, and active population leaving the country for foreign employment. Around 14% of population resides abroad for foreign employment. (A Status Report for Nepal: 2014/2015, 2015) This is very saddening and prevailing present situation. There is also lack of support and concern from government sector in development of agritourism. Some NGO's have tried to expand agritourism activities but the involvement is low. Involvement of private sector is negligible. Formulation of policies, rules and regulations to improve agritourism is also lacking. Increasing urbanization of rural areas have created impact by changing natural landscapes of the area.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Agritourism has a great potential to flourish in Nepal. Agritourism can further play a role in taking forward the economic development of a country along with sustainability Tourism development have been greatly emphasized by government and it would be better to take the development of agriculture sector along. Different Farm based tourism activities are occurring in different forms, however they are not seen from the lens of agritourism. Entrepreneurship in agritourism is almost nowhere. Apart from the individual farmer, agricultural cooperatives institute, agricultural Universities, agricultural colleges, private organizations and other agencies can start agritourism centre. Entrepreneurship development should be motivated and establish agritourism as a business model. Furthermore, agritourism must be emphasized and it has a potentiality to establish itself as a successful business for the economic upliftment of nation as well as in attainment of Sustainable development goals.

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