

...Sustainable Tourism: “Bangladesh Context” ...

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Introduction: When we talk about sustainability and strategy policy issues comes first. Strategy relates to setting out policies which help in implementing objectives successfully. Often, different policies are being formulated for specific objective which may eventually create impediments. This takes place when strategy is not made correctly with a view to long term assessment. Without a long term vision and plan the question of sustainability is uncertain. There is no short cut way in realizing long term vision and there are many examples of success and unsuccessful stories.

Overview: Tourism is now one of the largest global industries and its extremely a high growth potential in the Asian region including Bangladesh. In the last two decades the concept of tourism has enormously developed worldwide. Entertainment, Adventure, Business is tied up directly with the tourism industry. Malaysia, Dubai and some of our neighboring countries has become exciting destinations for tourism in different categories i.e. holidays, adventure, education, entertainment, medical, archeological, scientific research, setting up business hub for international conference, business ventures and so on. Proper strategies, policies and long term vision bring success for sustainable developments.

Bangladesh has got extra-ordinary prospects to develop sustainable tourism industry which national and international experts have suggested. Sustainable tourism in Bangladesh was discussed in different forums and most of the discussion took place regarding the hindrances such as, unstable political situation, lack of proper infrastructure and means of communication, social security etc. Civil society has blamed the government and bureaucrats and alleged unlawful, unethical acts and corruptions. Though these issues are true to some extent, it has become an excuse which is creating the major obstacle. We need concentrated efforts to resolve all obstacles to create an atmosphere for sustainable tourism.

Entrepreneurs / stakeholders can be the major contributors for boosting up to materialize the prevailing opportunities. Entrepreneurs in Bangladesh did this with success long ago which is now proven and does not need to look into other case studies. We all know the success story of the apparel and textile industry. If we look back we wouldn't wonder to see there was a time not having proper infrastructure, means of modern communication, favorable government policies etc. Few potential, encouraged, enthusiastic and brave entrepreneurs took initiatives and started their journey notwithstanding many hindrances. Initially, for the export market, few international customers used to know about Bangladesh. Gradually the situation changed. Once this industry started earning foreign currencies, it focused the attention of the government.

Several associations, i.e. BTMA, BGMEA, BKMEA etc. were formed to negotiate with the government in favor of the industry. Meanwhile the infrastructure developed with the intervention of the government which includes EPZ, BSCIC, Power Generation Plants etc. This is how entrepreneurs became major contributor for boosting up this industry and the government formulated policies in favor of the industry and helped in building infrastructure to keep this industry sustainable. Today Bangladesh's major portion of the economy is being controlled by this industry and the largest segment of industrial employment is involved with it.

As far as tourism industry is concerned in the context of Bangladesh, basically we are now living in the early stage of entrepreneurship. The good news is that the process has started and a few local investors/ stakeholders are now well concerned about the potentiality and sustainability of this industry. Our tourism destinations started being developed which can be seen by the recent major local projects at Cox's Bazar and few other locations. In the last 10 years, tremendous positive changes have taken place in setting up international standard hotels and resort. This is indeed encouraging and positive. In the broader perspective, greater investments are required in this sector. Currently it's not significant based on the prevailing scope and requirement.

Bangladesh is a gifted country with vast natural resources that can be developed into a major tourist destination. In short, if we look at the global geographic position of Bangladesh, we can see Bangladesh lies between latitudes 20° and 27°N, and longitudes 88° and 93°E, which is known to be one of the most pleasant weather conditions on earth having all four seasons. The winter is not freezing cold and the summer is not blistering hot. Moreover, Bangladesh being a country of 147,570 km² (94th) 56,977 sq. miles has the world's longest sea beach, world's largest mangrove forest, river, hill tracks and variety of natural beauty. The highest point in Bangladesh is in Mowdok range at 1,052 m (3,451 ft) in the Chittagong Hill Tracts to the southeast of the country, where at the peak clouds travels beneath the walkways. We have amazing natural lake at Rangamati "The Kaptai Lake" with average depth of 100 feet (30 m) and maximum depth is 490 feet (150 m) and about 54000 acres (220 km²) of area and many more virgin beauty of natures. Bangladesh has rich combination of cultures and there are several exotic archaeological and historical sites in the northern parts of Bangladesh.

There are positive initiatives the government has taken, which will support the tourism industry. The Bangladesh government is planning for the construction of the largest deep sea port in South Asia at Sonadia Island. This project will be completed in multiple phases and enable Bangladesh to service the whole region as a maritime transport and logistics hub. Furthermore, a new international airport is under process of construction. The airport is being modeled on Thailand's Suvarnabhumi Airport in size and capacity. To ease the chaotic traffic congestion in the capital Dhaka the government plans to construct more expressways, freeways

and flyovers. There is a plan to build overhead rapid transit system called Dhaka Metro, but the progress is slow and controversial because of contracts and agreements. Recently the government of Bangladesh signed a deal with a Chinese company to provide high-speed modern DEMU trains and is also going to construct metro rail system and high-speed electric powered intercity rail network. More airports, bridges (such as the multi-billion Padma bridge project) national highways are also being constructed to facilitate trade and regional development.

All these projects are extremely important and positive for developing infrastructure which will eventually help in mitigating many problems and will contribute to the development of the tourism industry.

Just like the story of the apparel and textile industry, we should think of the great potential. The tourism industry can create to draw the attention of the investors both local and foreign. Massive investment is needed. Long term strategy with well-planned vision and creating destination wise investor's association may accelerate the process of development. We will talk about possible scope of the strategy that can be adopted in the next issue of this article.