

Tourism for sustainable development goals (SDGs) achievement in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

In line with the global goals for sustainable development (SDG goals), UNWTO has emphasized sustainable tourism development for achieving SDGs targets in the member countries. Bangladesh has already identified tourism as a thrust sector for the development of the country. The present study identifies the opportunities and contributions of tourism activities for achieving SDGs in Bangladesh. This study analyses the existing tourism policies and plans, government regulations, reports, and SDG related practices to attain the objectives. It is observed that SDG goals number 8, 12, and 14 are directly related to tourism. Furthermore, tourism can contribute to achieving some other SDG goals, like 3, 11, and 15. The study reveals that the contributions of tourism to GDP and employment are in an increasing trend. Sustainable Consumption and Production practices are encouraging the tourism businesses to include nature and biodiversity conservation in their management plans. Marine tourism development in the Bay-of-Bengal can play a positive role in reducing the negative impact of climate change and sustainable use of the oceans, seas, and marine resources. The study reveals that sustainable tourism development through cultural, religious, and archeological features can make Dhaka a stable and sustainable city. The study shows that sustainable tourism development in protected areas can ensure the preservation of forest areas, protect biodiversity conservation and provide sustainable use of natural resources. Sustainable tourism development can ensure long-term social, economic, and environmental benefits to all stakeholders to contribute a sustainable development in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Bangladesh; development; SDGs; tourism.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the largest economic sectors in the contemporary world. The contributions of the tourism sector in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employment creation are increasing consecutively. During the year 2018, tourism is responsible for contributing 8.8 trillion USD or 10.4% in global GDP. In 2019, tourism creates 319 million new jobs and one job comes from

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tourism in every ten jobs. In the last five years, one job comes from tourism in every five jobs (WTTC, 2019). Therefore, tourism is included as an important substance in the government agenda for economic, social, and environmental well-being. It is also used as a development tool for the governments to protect and conserve the environment from negative impacts (Liu and Wall, 2006). Governments also providing support in tourism for the economic development of the country. This sector is contributing to GDP, foreign currency earnings, income generation, employment creation, community well-being, income sharing, and sustainable development in a country (Bhuiyan et al., 2013).

In 2015, the United Nations has adopted a series of 17 goals and 169 specific targets in its General Assembly in the presence of 193 member countries. These 17 goals are recognizing as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to provide the common sense of sustainable development in the world. These goals are emphasizing sustainable development both in the developed and developing countries through acknowledging the strategic, political, and financial commitments from all the national governments (Allen et al., 2018). The ultimate target of the 17 SDGs is to ensure a peaceful, secure, prosperous, and equitable life for humans everywhere on the earth within 2030 (Blanc, 2015). Bramwell et al. (2017) have addressed on government levels attention in tourism sustainability to achieve SDGs.

After one year of SDG declaration, the UN published the average performance of member countries for SDG achievement in 2016. Bangladesh has ranked 120 out of 157 countries with scores of 120. The country has achieved 56.2 global index scores and 63.3 regional scores. The adjusted GDP growth rate and unemployment rate have exhibited 4% and 4.1% respectively. On the consumption side, municipal solid wastes generate 0.4 kg/capita per year and e-wastes generate 0.8 kg/capita. Moreover, in the ocean health index, the achievement scores of biodiversity, clean water, and fisheries for Bangladesh are 91.7, 36.7, and 38.8 respectively (Sachs et al., 2017).

Bangladesh is a treasure of tourism resources such as forests, beaches, water bodies, hills, wildlife, indigenous life, historical and archeological monuments, cultural heritage, folklore, handicrafts, art, the festival that are attracting tourists from home and abroad (Bhuiyan, 2015). The country is showing a glooming and promising condition in the tourism industry. This industry can contribute to the economy of the country for sustainable development through proper guidelines and suitable strategic plans (Bhuiyan and Darda, 2018).

Tourism can contribute positively to sustainable development and make strong partnerships among the related stakeholders. Moreover, unsustainable tourism development cause emissions, create pressure on natural resources, economic leakages, cultural degradation, and negative impact on local communities. Sustainable tourism ensures necessary actions to align the policies with the SDGs. The tourism policymakers are emphasizing to interlink with other related agencies and stakeholders for enhancing positive

impacts of tourism in achieving the SDGs (UNWTO and UNDP, 2017). The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has emphasized sustainable tourism development for achieving SDGs targets in the member countries in line with the global goals for sustainable development. Bangladesh has already identified tourism as one of the thrust sectors for the development of the country. Sustainable tourism development can contribute positively to achieving the SDGs in the country. It is necessary to measure the necessary scopes of tourism for contributing to sustainable development. The public policies related to tourism also need to focus on the necessary contributions for achieving SDGs. For this reason, public policies, strategies, and government initiatives are needed to review critically. The present study identifies the opportunities and contributions of tourism activities for achieving SDGs in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has been targeted to become a developed nation by 2041. The achievements of SDGs are the important attributes for the country to reach the target. The Government of Bangladesh (GOB) has developed three exclusive tourism zones, increased facilities in the selected tourist spots, and taken several policy initiatives for sustainable development through tourism activities. The present study tried to find out the tourism connectivity in the different plans and policies for achieving SDGs. Moreover, the study provides the directions for related public bodies for contributing to tourism activities to achieve the goals for sustainable development.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The GOB has formulated various plans and policies to ensure sustainable development in the country. The country has committed to achieve SDGs targets through formulating proper guidelines and implement them in development initiatives. In this connection, tourism has been considered one of the prioritized sectors for GOB to achieve SDGs. This study analyses the existing tourism policies and plans, government regulations, reports, and SDG related practices to attain the objectives. The GOB has adopted several policies, strategies, and legislation for tourism development in the country. The mentionable policies are ‘The Tourism Policy 2010’, ‘Medium Term Budget Framework until 2021’, and ‘Seven Five Year Plan Strategy paper (2016-2020)’. Moreover, ‘SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2017’ and ‘Sustainable Development Goals: Bangladesh Progress Report 2018’ also reviewed to evaluate the contribution of tourism for achieving SDGs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The UNWTO has addressed that three SDGs are directly related to tourism. These are SDG-8: promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, and productive employment; SDG-12: sustainable consumption and production (SCP); and SDG-14: conservation and sustainable use of the

oceans, seas, and marine resources. Furthermore, tourism also can contribute to achieving some other goals, like SDG-3: healthy lives and well-being, SDG-11: sustainable cities and communities, and SDG-15: life on land. In the following sections, the government's plans and policies to sustain the above-mentioned SDGs in connection with the tourism sector are critically explored and briefly discussed.

In 2013, capital investment has been reported to be BDT 41 billion and it is only 0.39% of GDP. Bangladesh has earned BDT 8.6 billion of foreign currency from the inflow of tourism in 2013. The total size of the tourism sector was BDT 460.3 billion in 2014. The Seventh 5-year plan (2016-2020) mentioned three predominant types of tourism, such as nature, culture, and religion. The key factor for successful tourism development in the country is private sector initiatives (Khondker and Ahsan, 2015).

SDG-3

This goal deals with ensuring healthy lives and promotes well-being for all age people. Tourism can help to exchange beliefs and cultural harmony among people of different ages and ethnicities. The GOB has taken efforts to the gender equity in society so that healthy lives can be ensured for the people. The Government has been prepared the '8th Action Plan' for road safety in connection with achieving the 2030 Agenda (Bangladesh, 2018). Moreover, necessary awareness for tourism exploration and development has been emphasized by tourism policies (Bangladesh, 2010). These government initiatives are helpful for tourism development to ensure healthy lives and well-being for the people.

SDG-8

Table-1 shows the contribution of tourism to GDP and employment for Bangladesh. Tourism has contributed to GDP by about 4.7% in 2015. According to World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), Bangladesh has secured 165th position in the world based on the contribution in GDP for the year 2015. The contribution of tourism in GDP was 4.4% in 2018. The tourism sector created 2.35 million jobs in 2015 which was 4.1% of total employment. Moreover, the job creation from tourism reached 2.41 million in 2018 with 3.9% of total employment. The projection shows that the employment from this sector will reach up to 4 million by 2024 which will capture 4.3% of the total employment (WTTC, 2019).

Table-1: Contribution of tourism in GDP and employment

Year	Contribution in GDP	Contribution in employment (Million)
2015	4.7%	2.35 (4.1%)
2016	4.3%	1.06 (1.8%)

2017	4.3%	1.18 (1.8%)
2018	4.4%	2.41 (3.9%)

Source: WTTC, 2019

The Tourism Policy 2010 emphasized the effective participation of disabled, physically challenged people and women in tourism activities. The plan directed necessary support to small tourism businesses for tourism development in the country (Bangladesh, 2010). The seventh 5-year plan (7 FYP) set up several targets by the year 2020. These are 1 million tourist arrivals, tourist receipts of BDT 33 billion, tourism direct GDP of BDT 935 billion with tourism investment of BDT 345 billion, and 6 million tourism employment opportunities. The 7 FYP addressed to need for an adequate supply of qualified human capital for fulfilling the demand in this sector. The plan highlights approximately 120,000 additional workforce requirements until 2020. Within this demand, 65% will come from the vocational or certified program and 25% from the diploma program. Moreover, the plan identified that 10% workforce will be required from graduate or post-graduate qualification backgrounds. The plan gives emphasize on decent work opportunities particularly for youth and women. The plan highlights sustainable tourism for creating jobs and promotes local products (Khondker and Ahsan, 2015).

SDG-11

Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh has established in the 16th century during the Mughal Period. This city is one of the oldest capitals in this region. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has declared Dhaka as ‘OIC City of Tourism’ for the year 2019 based on its’ Islamic heritage and attractions. Gazipur, adjacent to the capital is the host city to arrange ‘World Ijtema’ every year. About 5 million Muslims gathered in this event from the globe which is the second-largest gathering after Hajj (Bhuiyan, 2016). Furthermore, every year mentionable number of foreign businessmen are visiting Bangladesh due to the Ready-made Garments (RMG) businesses. Sustainable tourism development through cultural, religious, and archeological features can make Dhaka a stable and sustainable city. The Tourism Policy 2010 emphasized the tourism-friendly environment in the country to attract tourists from home and abroad. The plan guided to arrange fairs, exhibitions, and promotional activities to highlights the tourism potentialities of the country (Bangladesh, 2010).

SDG-12

Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) practices are encouraging the tourism businesses to include nature and biodiversity conservation through proper management. SCP aims to do ‘more and better with less’ by reducing the use of resources, degradation, and pollution along the life cycle of goods

and services, and to enhance the quality of life and well-being for all. It is a holistic approach that encompasses the triple bottom line of sustainable development, thereby aiming to increase efficiency and prevent unnecessary wastes of resources. The Oslo Ministerial Roundtable Conference on Sustainable Consumption and Production in 1994 defined ‘SCP as the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources, toxic materials, and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations’ (UNEP, 2010).

SCP practices are applying globally to maintain sustainable tourism development and ensure the well-being of the stakeholders. In this case, tourism activities can conserve the environment and contribute to local communities’ well-being (Butcher, 2006). Table-2 highlights the various initiatives of GOB intervention in the policies to support sustainable tourism development in the country.

Table-2: Policy initiatives for sustainable tourism development in Bangladesh

Policy Name	Initiatives
Tourism Policy 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relevant stakeholders’ participation in promoting responsible tourism in the country
Medium Term Budget Framework until 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Linkage and co-ordinate with tourism-related organizations locally and abroad ● Develop infrastructure and improving the management of the tourism industry ● Capacity building in the tourism sector
Seventh Five Year Plan on Tourism (2016-2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop an eco-nature integrated resort in the Sundarban area ● Creating a Strait Riviera linking Teknaf to Sundarban ● Promoting the archaeological sites ● Establishing eco-parks in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and Sylhet
Energy Efficiency and Conservation Master Plan 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote efficient energy consumption ● Awareness building and promotional activities among the relevant stakeholders

SCP practices are encouraging the tourism businesses to include nature and biodiversity conservation in their management plans. These practices are increasing awareness and support among tourists to protected areas that can lead to direct financial support or to support for relevant organizations and policies; empower the local communities to take responsibility to protect their environment and natural resources and heritage, and participate in tourism

activities; develop facilities and ensure sustainable infrastructure for tourism sites through the use of energy-efficient design and equipment, respect the natural and cultural heritage and use locally appropriate architectural design in construction; develop and implement soft mobility products in tour packages and activities, i. e. low emissions mode of transports, low emissions in accommodation and activities, less carbon-intensive packages, hire energy-efficient vehicles; arrange tour guide development in sustainable practices through trainings, workshops, consultations, and improving communication skill and abilities; provide opportunities to tourists with environment friendly recreation, education and cultural experiences. More effort should be given to developing sustainable tourism products around the assets of local communities such as arts, music, dance, festivals, health tourism, village tours, eco-lodges, and home-stays (Akenji and Bengtsson, 2014; Lafferty and Hovden, 2003).

SDG-14

Marine tourism is one of the economic sectors covered by the blue economy. It can promote conservation and sustainable use of marine environments and species to generate income for local communities, and respect local cultures, traditions, and heritage. Marine tourism highlights the coastal and ocean-related activities including diving, maritime archaeology, surfing, cruises, and recreational fishing operations. This tourism segment plays a significant role to preserve seas and marine resources through conserving the marine ecosystems, reduce marine pollution, and sustainable use marine resources. Marine tourism is creating employment opportunities and improving the capacity development of local communities, developing local supply chains, and promoting local cultural heritage. It supports the conservation of coastal biodiversity, natural resources, and the coastal and marine environment to maintain long-term sustainability.

Marine tourism becomes one of the potential tourism segments in Bangladesh based on marine resources and natural beauties. Marine tourism development in the Bay-of-Bengal should play a positive role in reducing the negative impact of climate change and disaster risk. Local communities' involvement in the marine tourism value chain can contribute to poverty reduction as well as local economic development. Finally, efficient management, local employment, local product marketing, secure local culture, and environment can enhance marine tourism in Bangladesh. The coastal areas of the country have supports 100 species of migratory birds including 10 globally threatened shorebirds. The GOB has established two marine protected areas in the Bay of Bengal namely 'Swatch of No Ground' and 'Middle Ground and South Patches' to protect oceanic species (DOE, 2015).

SDG-15

About half of the total areas of Bangladesh are wetlands. There are hundreds of rivers, *beels* (lakes), *haors*, *baors* (oxbow lakes) and other permanent and

seasonal water bodies crisscrossed the country which creates a treasure of rich biodiversity, ecosystem, and natural resources. The strategic geographic location makes the country an ecological and biological hub of diverse landscapes, migratory species, and wildlife movements in the region. Table-3 shows the forest areas of the country according to the types of forest.

Table-3: Forest areas of Bangladesh

Forest Types	Area (Million hectares)	% of country's area
Managed forests	1.53	10.54%
Un-classed state forests	0.73	5.07%
Village forests	0.27	1.88%
Total	2.53	17.49%

Source: DOE, 2015

Bangladesh has 38 forest-based Protected Areas (PA) which are managed and preserved by the Forest Department. These include 17 National Parks, 20 Wildlife Sanctuaries, and 1 Special Biodiversity Conservation Area. These PAs are covering about 10.55% of the total forest area which is 1.8% of the total area of the country. Again, a total of 13 wetland areas have been declared as Ecological Critical Areas (ECAs) due to the importance of biodiversity. These ECAs are covering a total area of 384,529 hectares or about 2.60% of the total country. The Government declared Ratargul Forest as Special Biosphere Reserve in 2015. Moreover, a total of 27,717 square kilometers of areas of Sylhet and Khulna regions have been declared as 'Vulture Safe Zones' by Forest Department (DOE, 2015).

Bangladesh can develop the wetlands, water bodies, PAs, and ECAs as lucrative tourism attractions considering their landscape, natural beauties, and tourism potentials. Sustainable tourism development in these natural attractions can ensure the preservation of forest areas, protect biodiversity conservation and provide sustainable use of natural resources.

Tourism can contribute to achieving the SDGs in Bangladesh through the active participation of different public departments of GOB. The Ministry of Civil Aviation and Tourism should play a vital role along with the Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB) and Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) for ensuring the contribution of tourism in the achievement of SDGs. The GOB established the BTB as a national tourism organization in 2010 for tourism development and promotion. The BPC has offered several tourist facilities in the country through hotels, motels, tourist spots, restaurants, duty-free shops, and other promotional activities (Rahman and Zaman, 2020). Moreover, other ministries and public departments also contributing to tourism activities for achieving SDGs. Table-4 highlights the different bodies of GOB for contributing to the achievement of SDGs.

Table-4: Related public bodies for achieving SDGs

SDGs	Related public bodies
SDG-3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges ● Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence
SDG-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ministry of Finance ● Ministry of Education ● Ministry of Labour & Employment ● National Skills Development Council
SDG-11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● City Corporation and Municipality
SDG-12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change ● Ministry of Power, Energy, and Mineral Resources ● Rural Development and Co-operative Division ● Department of Environment
SDG-14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ministry of Shipping ● Department of Environment ● Blue Economy Cell
SDG-15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change ● Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs ● Forest Department

CONCLUSION:

Sustainable tourism development can provide economic enhancement and employment opportunities in the country. It ensures infrastructure development, social cohesions, cultural integrity, and economic well-being in a country. The tourism sector needs skill and semi-skill manpower to meet the demand. Therefore, the employment scope for general people could be extended. Sustainable consumption practices can protect the country's natural beauties, cultural attractions, and historical heritage that may provide sustainable tourism opportunities. Moreover, sustainable management of tourism resources requires collaboration across the public-private sectors and the local communities-entrepreneurs alliances. Finally, sustainable tourism development can ensure long-term social, economic, and environmental benefits to all stakeholders to contribute a sustainable development in Bangladesh.

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