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## Article

# A growing dilemma of tourism diffusion and sustainability: Wows and woes for Bangladesh eco-tourism

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# **A GROWING DILEMMA OF TOURISM DIFFUSION AND SUSTAINABILITY: WOWS AND WOES FOR BANGLADESH ECO-TOURISM!**

**Muhammad Shoeb-Ur-Rahman<sup>1</sup>**  
**Rokeya Binte Shahid**

## **Abstract:**

Tourism is one of the emerging and fastest growing industries in the world today. It is well said that every twelve tourists creates a new job. Current study discusses the diffusive nature of tourism that demands an inclusion of the concept “sustainability” which in turn creates the impression for “ecotourism”. Afterward the study tries to find out ecotourism possibility to explore and potential challenges with special context of Bangladesh tourism industry. The concept of ecotourism adds the concern for environment as well as socio-economic status. Ecotourism must be promoted for sustainable development by establishing a durable productive base that allows the local inhabitants and ecotourism service providers to enjoy rising standards of living and environmental conservation. This paper provides an idea of how different tourism destinations, especially ecotourism become an effective tool for the sustainable development in Bangladesh. Secondary data were used to address the objectives in this study. However, some marketing strategies are pointed out as recommendations based on which several action programs could be taken for establishing as well as standardizing Bangladesh as an eye-catching ecotourism destination.

*Keywords:* Tourism diffusion, sustainability, eco-tourism, Bangladesh, wows, woes.

*JEL classification:* L83; N55; O13

## **INTRODUCTION**

Tourism and environment are inter-dependent. The physical environment provides lots of attractions for tourists. So the diffusion of tourism comes up with some obvious benefits and costs in terms of environment, society, culture and so on. The potential benefits must outweigh the costs or the negative impacts should be minimized to a considerable level. Here we find the ultimate necessity of ecotourism.

Eco-tourism activities have been expanding rapidly over the past two decades worldwide and further growth is expected in the future. Recognizing its global importance, the United Nations designated the year 2002 as the International Year of Eco-tourism (IYE). The UN general assembly has moreover sought to draw the attention of governments and the international community to the potentialities of this

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dynamic segment of tourism industry to generate effective impacts, both positive and negative on the environment, on biodiversity and its conservation and on the social and cultural structures of the communities, where this type of activities takes place (UNWTO 2001, 9).

International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defines Ecotourism as:

*“Environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations”.*

Bangladesh is the world’s largest green delta filled with gorgeous natural wonders and untouched and unspoiled reserves, is a tremendous destination for ecotourism having unique and magnificent creatures. Ecotourism in Bangladesh is increasing in popularity as more people come to appreciate the stunning landscapes, fascinating wildlife, as well as biodiversity of plants found in this beautiful country.

With hills, valley, forests, beaches, lakes and rivers ecotourism in Bangladesh is ideal. Although this is a relatively new form of tourism in Bangladesh, ecotourism is becoming an emerging platform to promote it in the country. Bangladesh is enjoying the pride of having the world’s biggest mangrove forest ecosystem, expensive pristine beach, impressive hilly districts a massive marine world and the largest manmade lake. Certainly these vital ecosystems contribute greatly to the potential of ecotourism in Bangladesh. It is important to remind that ecotourism is being promoted in the way as the environment does not become over exploited or damaged.

The study of ecotourism offers many opportunities to reflect on the importance of sustainability and the possibilities of implementing approaches which move us in a new direction (Barkin 1996).

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Tourism is a well planned means for developing the economy of many developing as well as underdeveloped countries of the world. As there is a strong co-relationship exists in between tourism and economic development the topic holds attention of the researchers and policymakers. Since the late 1980s, alternative forms of tourism began to attract the interest of governments, communities and scholars alike. Among the alternative forms, the term “eco-tourism” has become prominent to the scholars (Noor Islam 2003, 108–129). It aims to minimize environmental and cultural damage and maximize long-term economic growth for a nation or region. As our understanding increases of the close relationships between itself and environmental conservation and local people, researchers are calling on eco-tourism to incorporate economic development as a fundamental element of conservation (DeGraaf and Miller 1996, 407–507; 595–611). In Bangladesh, there is immense opportunity to develop ecotourism, which in turn ensures economic development while minimizing social and cultural impacts. But unfortunately only few studies are conducted on this issue. So the current study will hopefully unleash the necessity, opportunity and potentiality of ecotourism in the sustainable development of tourism industry of Bangladesh.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Arsenijevic and Bohanec found that the term ecotourism must be understood in association with five criteria: nature conservation, low impact, sustainability, meaningful community involvement and environmental education. Furthermore, according to the concept of sustainable development, the tourism can be "sustainable" if development meets the needs of present tourists and locals while protecting future opportunities.

Etsuko Okazaki (2008) showed that community participation in the tourism planning process is advocated as a way of implementing sustainable tourism. This paper reviewed the principal theories used to discuss community participation including the ladder of citizen participation, power distribution, collaboration processes and social capital formation.

It is identified in a study of Faruq and Bhuiyan (2003) that tourism now-a-days is one of the main sources of earning foreign exchange for many countries. They highlight a good number of aspects regarding problems and prospects of the tourism industry in Bangladesh. As the tourism industry is problematic but has high potentiality, they also recommend few suggestions to improve the industry in Bangladesh.

Mitra (2005) described that Bangladesh does not have enough effort to promote the country as a tourist destination. He argued that Bangladesh has to make aware the tourists about what to see, where to stay and what to eat. He emphasized for the development of tourism industry, Bangladesh need to develop the infrastructure like hotels, resorts, promoting more places and there should have a link of the government tourism organization with the private sector to boost up the promotional activities for the same. So a coherent interdepartmental support and effective promotional campaigns are advisable to boost up the sector.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to find out ways so as to use ecotourism as a tool for sustainable development which promotes strong future growth and diversification as developing tourism destination in Bangladesh. Some specific objectives are as follows:

- To control the diffusion of tourism by implementing the concept of sustainability.
- To help define the potentials and challenges to the development of ecotourism and prescribes some suggestions for implementation.
- To provide some strategies to enhance the marketability of ecotourism destinations.

## METHODOLOGY

Secondary data were used to address the objectives in this study. The necessary data from secondary sources were collected through document analysis. For this purpose a thorough literature survey has been conducted. In order to obtain the reliable secondary data various journals, periodicals, books, acts, regulations, policies of Bangladesh, websites, annual reports, papers of different agencies were consulted carefully.

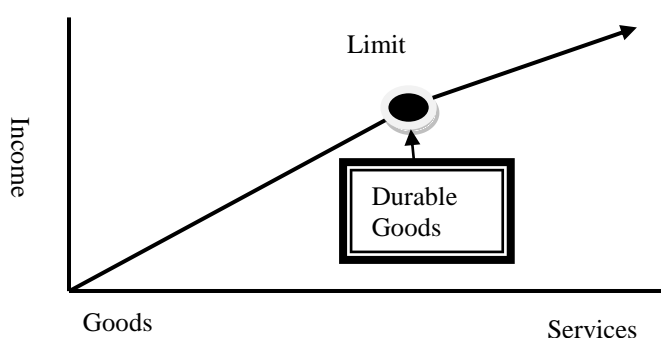
## DISCUSSION

On a global basis, tourism frequently reaches and outshines appropriate limits to growth with little notice, planning, or response from decision makers. In recent years, policy makers have begun to advocate sustainable destination planning for tourism which comes with a set of management approaches that can help to ensure that tourism is not environmentally damaging, contributes to conservation and local community development, and provides opportunities for enhanced conservation and sustainable development. So our discussion will range from the diffusion of tourism to the ultimate possibility of Bangladesh as a successful ecotourism destination; in between these two, another concept will come as sustainability.

### The diffusion of tourism in the post modern era

The term postmodern is used to designate an approach of the late-20<sup>th</sup> century that calls for a multitude of trends in the arts, philosophy, religion, technology, communications, music, sociology, architecture, film, recreation, travel and many other areas that come after and deviate from the many 20<sup>th</sup> century movements which constituted modernism. In general, the postmodern view is cool, ironic, and accepting of the disintegration of contemporary subsistence. Postmodernism coincides with the emergence of post industrialism; a situation where longstanding landmarks of the industrial era such as steel, auto-mobiles declined and service businesses like hotels, travel agencies, restaurants, medical and health care organizations, sports, real estate provided the growth sectors of the economy.

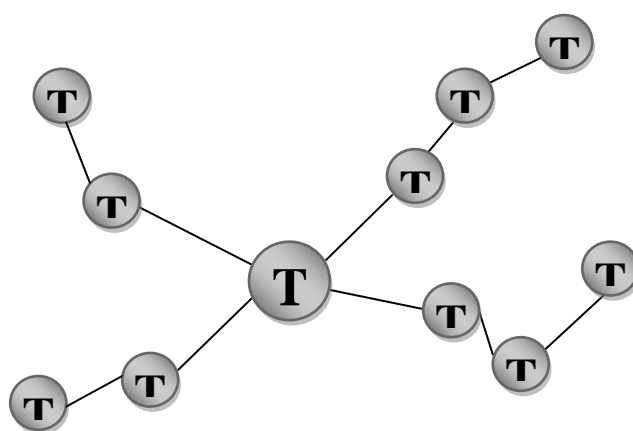
Tourism is essentially a service which is intangible in nature; we can feel it intrinsically at the moment of production as well as consumption. For consumption pattern, there is no specific data to be presented. When income increases, up to a certain point, we spend more on durable goods then with the increased income, consumers tend to concentrate on services, e.g. better education, better medi-care, dining out side, traveling and recreation. Graphically it can be showed as:



**Figure 1.** Generic consumption pattern

The post modern era is experiencing with higher per capita income than past. Consequently, a growing dependence on services is apparent for post modern society. Likewise, the diffusion of tourism is a matter-of-fact for post modern era.

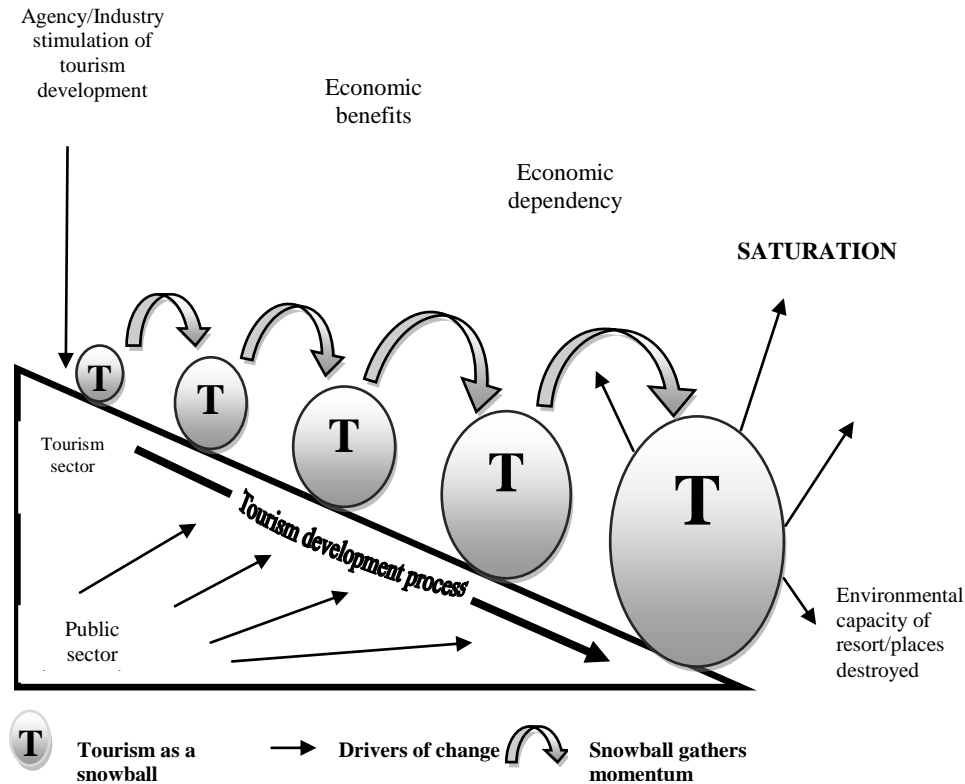
The way in which tourism grows and expands might be illustrated with the concept of “amoeba” as propounded by Stephen J. Page (2003, 347–350). The amoeba, as a single-cell life form, has the ability to reproduce itself. Once the initial amoeba is welcome to a locality, it starts to replicate. The ability of tourism to duplicate itself and then adapt and change to meet customer needs in certain cases means that, like the amoeba, it keeps producing new entrepreneurs as innovation and change lead to more development. Accordingly, the diffusion process continues.



**Figure 2.** Extracted and modified from Stephen J. Page (2003, 348)

Sometimes facts and figures speak clear than thousand words. Statistics shows by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), more than 255 million people earned their livelihood from tourism in the year 2006. According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), the tourism industry accounts for 11% of total global employment. It is said that every twelve tourists creates a new job (Goeldner and Ritchie 2006, 461–493). A brief overview of United Nations World Tourism Organization’s official website (<http://www.unwto.org.en>, <http://www.barom.unwto.org>, *UNWTO World Tourism Barometer*) confirms that the world has experienced a healthy growth of international tourism demand in the first half of 2011. The total number of arrivals reached 440 million, up 19 million on the 421 million in the same period of 2010, thus the arrivals grew by 4.5%. In terms of monetary revenue, in 2010, international tourism generated US\$ 919 billion (€ 693 billion) in export earnings.

The continual diffusion process might contribute to the environment negatively. So there is an inverse beneficial relationship exists between the growth and development of tourism especially when unplanned. This scenario might be well described by “snowball concept” which states that a snowball begins to gather momentum as it rolls down. The agents of change that have the preliminary idea of stimulating tourism development as a small snowball do not envisage the rapid transition and consequent exploration to mass tourism.



**Figure 3.** Extracted and modified from Stephen J. Page (2003, 347)

Public sector tries to keep control over the situation but the pressure creeping up from entrepreneurs, tour operators and other stakeholders which makes the situation almost unstoppable and out of control. Hence, the public sector will work around the edge of the problem to try and control the uncontrollable phenomenon. Despite local antagonism grows, tourism cannot be restricted owing to the inevitable political fallout because of employment issues. The dependency will grow as the process continues and a time will come when it has the potential to saturate and destroy the destination and its resource base. Thus we need to be concerned of sustainable development of tourism.

### The concept of sustainability

Sustainability is the property of being sustainable, the condition where human activities may be continued indefinitely without affecting and damaging the environment and where the needs of all peoples are met equally.

The search for sustainability involves a dual strategy: on the one hand, it must involve unleashing the bonds that restrain people from strengthening their own organizations or creating new ones, to utilize their scanty resources to search for an

alternative and autonomous resolution to their problems. On the other hand, sustainable development strategy must contribute to the forging of a new social pact cemented in the recognition that the eradication of poverty and the democratic incorporation of the disenfranchised into a more diverse productive structure are essential (Barkin 1996).

Sustainable development involves maintaining the current rate of development while leaving suitable resources untouched for later generations to continue to develop. Agenda 21- a blueprint for sustainable development aimed at providing high quality environment and economy for the people of the world.

We find the basic dimension of sustainability is three wheeled: economic, environmental and social. The economic approach pinpoints maximizing income while maintaining constant or increasing stock of capital. The ecological approach suggests maintaining the flexibility and healthiness of biological and physical systems. Lastly, the socio-cultural approach implies maintaining the stability in the social and cultural systems. These three are frequently referred to as the triple bottom line, and are used to weigh the success of a particular development project.

According to Farrell and Twining-Ward (2005) sustainable development must be viewed as “an evolving complex system that co-adapts to the specifics of the particular place, and especially to the aspirations and values of local people.” Yet, there are cases where the pillars of sustainable development may be inconsistent.

Sustainable development is an approach to productive reorganization that encompasses the combined experiences of local groups throughout the world. The techniques for implementation may vary greatly among regions and ecosystems. Sustainability is not possible as long as the expansion of capital enlarges the ranks of the poor and impedes their access to the resources needed for mere survival. Therefore, profound changes are required to facilitate a strategy of sustainable development.

Sustainable development, however, also involves a political struggle to control over the productive apparatus. It requires a redefinition of not only what and how we produce but also of who will be allowed to produce and for what ends. So the concern of political environment is another aspect of sustainability. In order to ensure a sustainable outcome we need to give equal attention to each component or dimension of sustainability. This balance becomes obvious when each component is examined in isolation.

### **The rise of ecotourism: a wing of sustainable tourism**

In the 1980s, alternative forms of tourism began attracting the interest of governments, communities and scholars alike. These were named as nature tourism, responsible tourism, green tourism and ecotourism but among all ecotourism have become prominent. In order to lessen the negative impacts on environment these alternative forms of tourism came to flourish.

Now-a-days in real pursuit we feel tourism with a prefix i.e., sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism in its purest sense is an industry which attempts to make a low impact on the environment and local culture while helping to generate income, employment and the conservation of local ecosystems. It is responsible tourism that is both ecologically and culturally sensitive.



[http://www.italyluxurytours.com/ethical\\_tourism.htm](http://www.italyluxurytours.com/ethical_tourism.htm)

Here in the self-explanatory diagram we find the proponents of sustainable tourism which consists of three different forms of tourism namely nature-based tourism, sun and beach and urban tourism. Nature-based tourism is any type of tourism that relies on experiences directly related to natural attractions and includes ecotourism, adventure tourism, extractive tourism, wildlife tourism and nature retreats. The term urban tourism is meant to travel or vacationing in revitalized inner-city and other urban areas. Sun and beach tourism essentially means to travel to sea beaches and have an experience of sun-bath for recreation purposes. As nature prevails everywhere so we see here an interactive attitude of nature-based tourism with both urban as well as sun and beach tourism. On the other hand, for the very static nature of sun and beach urban tourists flow show a unidirectional pattern toward experiencing sun and beach tourism.

There is a little difference exists between eco-tourism and nature based tourism the later one is concerned with just traveling to natural places whereas the former one provides local benefits environmentally, culturally and economically.

From the figure it is perspicuous that nature or environment is the raw asset of tourism which is sometimes considered as the heart of tourism and we need to protect it. But we know disaster is quite uncertain. It could happen anytime and might disrupt the nature which in turn might distract the essence of tourism i.e., attracting more visitors. This is why tourism is considered as the most fragile industry.

We could not control the unforeseen situation but we could make the necessary arrangements or become conscious about the happening of any calamity. Hence, the concept of eco-tourism comes forward.

A brief theoretical review and study of World Tourism Organization's (WTO) views convey us with the following inclusion regarding the term ecotourism:

- Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people
- Environmentally friendly travel that emphasizes seeing and saving natural habitats and archeological treasures
- A tool for conservation
- Ecologically responsible tourism.

However, the findings indicate that all the people who implement and participate in eco-tourism activities should adhere to the following principles:

- Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation
- Provide financial benefits and empowerment for the local people
- Raise sensitivity to host countries' political, environmental, and social climate
- Support international human rights and labor agreements
- It should promote moral and ethical responsibilities and behavior towards the natural and cultural environment by the stakeholders.

### **Developing ecotourism: woes for Bangladesh**

*Geographical Importance:* Being the gateway of south-east Asia, Bangladesh is connected by air and sea and by surface. It has tremendous geographic advantages that obviously help the country to be an ideal ecotourism destination. Bangladesh is situated in geographical nerve point.

*Topographical Advantages:* There are six seasons in Bangladesh such as summer, rainy, autumn, late autumn, winter and spring in Bangladesh. In every season, nature beautify her in different and unique ways which is exclusive in the world. So the delight of nature is a great source for eco-tourism.

*Ecological Specialization:* Ecologically Bangladesh has beautiful landscape. There exist lots of natural as well as ecological places all around the country which have the immense power to attract the colorists. This is an essential component of environmental education.

*History and Heritage:* Many historical and archaeological sites are situated in Bangladesh. Ancient mosques, temples, church, pagoda, shrines, historical buildings, different monuments are best examples of them. So it will be possible to attract eco-tourists in these historical sites.

*Natural Resources:* Bangladesh boasts to having magnificent natural resources with green valleys, large forests, longest beaches, hills, lots of lakes and rivers. Certainly these vital ecosystems contribute greatly to Bangladesh's ecotourism potential. The travelers can gain environmental education from these natural resources.

*Culture and Life Style:* The ethnic life style of indigenous people of Hill Tracts and various religious and cultural shows are good forms of cultural diversity which might act as a powerful component of eco-tourism.

*Developing Zone:* By dividing the whole country into different tourist zones Bangladesh could emphasize on eco-tourism oriented advantages.

### **Developing ecotourism: woes for Bangladesh**

In real term, tourism in Bangladesh is essentially at its infant stage. Although the world tourism is experiencing phenomenal growth but Bangladesh is gaining a tiny portion. There are a lot of flaws exist on the way of tourism development. At the highest level

Bangladesh Government lacks powerful independent body to formulate the long-term strategy to development this industry. In 1992, government made a council headed by the than prime minister declared National Tourism Policy for the systematic development of tourism. But the council has only arranged three meetings for last 18 years. However, some other drawbacks might be pointed out as follows:

- Lack of initial and psychological knowledge about ecotourism
- Lack of analyses on the existing miserable conditions
- Lack of basic facilities
- Lack of publications and research on the issue
- Conflict between the tribal and other people
- Massive deforestation by different people
- Negative image of the country as well as of the national airline
- Various destructive and unaware activities by the tourists like left-over food scraps and drinks
- Poor infrastructures inhibit tourists to a smooth access and lasting experience
- Lack of effective promotional campaign both locally and internationally
- Lack of enough peripheral products
- Shortage of professional and well-educated guides
- Frequent natural calamity like flood, sidr, iila and so on.

Above all, the country lacks a national policy guideline on eco-tourism which adversely affects the coordination and integration of public and private sector activities. Nevertheless, the implementation of different policy requires stable workforce which is typical for Bangladesh due to political instability. We should get out from this short of attitude and think for the betterment of the country.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING MARKETABILITY OF ECOTOURISM DESTINATIONS IN BANGLADESH

Countries and regions where the economy is driven by the tourism industry and where there is a growing dependency on tourism are becoming increasingly concerned with the environmental, as well as the socio-cultural problems associated with unsustainable tourism. As a result, there is now increasing agreement on the need to promote sustainable tourism development to minimize its environmental impacts and to ensure more sustainable management of natural resources. However, in order to gain a sustainable development and prepare the destinations marketable the possible allocation of responsibilities may be:

**Table 1.** Modified from Goeldner and Ritchie (2006, 471)

Level/Organization	Responsibilities
Host Community/Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defining the tourism philosophy and vision for the community/region</li> <li>• Establishing social, physical and cultural carrying capacity for the host community/region</li> <li>• Encouragement/acceptance of tourism within the parameter of Sustainable Development (SD) plan</li> </ul>

Table 1. (*continued*)

Level/Organization	Responsibilities
Destination Management Community-Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordination of implementation of community Sustainable Development (SD) plan</li> <li>• Monitoring of levels and impact of tourism in the community/region</li> </ul>
Individual Tourism Firms and Operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fair contribution to implementation of SD plan for tourism</li> <li>• Observance of regulations, guideline and practices for SD</li> </ul>
Visitors/Tourists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acceptance of responsibility for minimal self-education with respect to values of host region</li> <li>• Acceptance and observance of terms and conditions of host community SD plan for tourism</li> </ul>

The above table points out multi-stakeholders responsibilities toward the attainment of ultimate benefit from tourism. The host community should clarify the ecotourism philosophy, vision as well as the capacities in terms of social, physical and cultural phenomenon. Nevertheless, the community should grow a welcoming attitude toward the visitors or tourists. On the other hand, visitors should adhere to the standard policies developed by the host community. This could be ensured through a self-learning process with respect to the values of host region by the tourists themselves. The host community organizations which act as destination management firms should synchronize the implementation of sustainable development plan as well as ensure the monitoring of implementation at each and every level. Individual tourism firms which act independently must contribute fairly and adhere to the rules and regulations developed under the sustainable development plan.

Visibly, promotion and advertising play a very momentous role in establishing a product or service in the marketplace successful. It is a matter of great regret that Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation yet doesn't have any marketing unit to promote the country's tourist product and service as tremendous destination to the local inhabitants as well as to the international tourists. Now it is the high time for us to represent our country to all over the world as a fantastic tourism destination. Nevertheless, through promotion we need to make our people conscious and responsive to the importance of ecotourism.

Broadly speaking, the main policy areas regarding eco-tourism development in Bangladesh are:

- ✓ The promotion of national strategies for sustainable tourism development, including the decentralization of environmental management to regional and local levels,
- ✓ The use of both regulatory mechanisms and economic instruments,
- ✓ The support for voluntary initiatives by the industry itself, and
- ✓ The promotion of sustainable tourism at the international level.

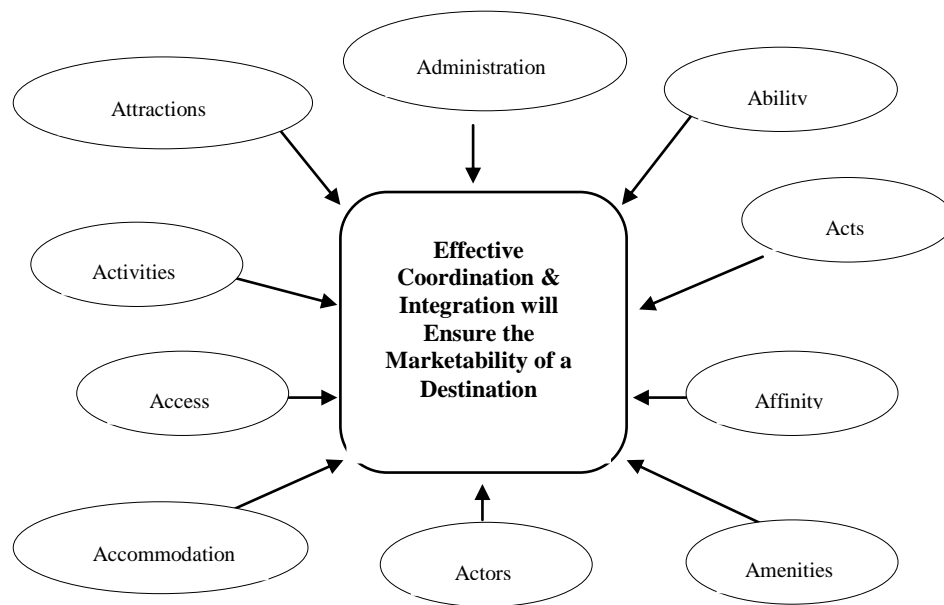
Results from the UN World Tourism Organization Ecotourism Summit indicated that one of the major barriers to planning tourism with respect for the conservation of biodiversity was the lack of governmental coordination, particularly between the Ministries of Environment and Tourism. Successful coordination between government departments and agencies can result in effective planning and policy development as well as implementation. Thus we need to develop an integrated approach which in turn

requires a high degree of intersectional and interdepartmental coordination at all levels of government, from the national to the local level.

The establishment of effective coordination on tourism and biodiversity across government requires raising awareness to improve the understanding, among government officials involved in tourism and biodiversity issues, of the roles that the different government departments and agencies need to play in order to promote sustainable development through tourism activities and development, and to ensure tourism is balanced with biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.

In particular, within government it will be valuable to establish inter- and intra-departmental and inter-organizational structures and processes, if they do not already exist, to guide policy development and implementation for the integrated management of tourism and biodiversity. These arrangements help to improve coordination and to clarify responsibilities and operational practices.

In short for sustainable tourism development and makes a place marketable we need to emphasize on the following model of 10 A's which in turn calls for a high degree of interdepartmental involvement as well as the clear understanding of the situation and policy by the multi-stakeholders and their participation must be ensured:



**Figure 4.** Marketability of an Ecotourism Destination

The overall sustainable development plan should reflect each and every aspects of the above diagram and a system must be developed that will ensure the effective coordination and integration of 10 A's.

## CONCLUSION

More and more the world is experiencing a positive growth in service, so the pressure is creeping up for tourism demand. Consequently, the environment and bio-diversity is in threat. Thus the world is now more conscious and dependable on environment friendly form of tourism i.e., sustainable or eco-tourism.

The potentiality and sustainability of eco-tourism in Bangladesh largely depends on steady arrival of visitors to the destination without flattening the natural resources. It is important to ensure the satisfaction of visitors while the natural areas should not be degraded and environment must remain sound and free from pollution. It is also to be ensured that the quality services are being provided. However, the benefit of local people must be put into consideration in terms of employment generation, business opportunities, education, infrastructure and superstructure development etc. in order to make Bangladesh a money-spinning eco-tourism destination we must guarantee political stability, positive approach of the Government and people's participation as well as smooth and effective promotional campaign both in local and international level. It's a matter of hope that recently the Government of Bangladesh in its latest industrial policy has listed tourism as a thrust sector.

In fine, it should be noted that integrated and concerted efforts from different bodies have to be initiated with especial focus on coastal destinations and leisure islands, mountain regions and winter tourism, and nature based destinations. The various activities related to tourism industries such as transportation, tour operation and accommodation must also be regulated so carbon emissions are controlled. Above all, a better understanding of environmental knowledge is more essential to link up tourism and environment especially for the decision makers so that the fragile nature of tourism could be cool managed.

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