

Mondal, Md. Sanaul Haque

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SWOT ANALYSIS AND STRATEGIES TO DEVELOP SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN BANGLADESH

Md. Sanaul Haque Mondal¹

Abstract

Bangladesh is a small country with enormous natural beauty and cultural attractions. These gorgeous natural and cultural traits make this country as one of the important tourist destinations in the world but, this potentiality has been overlooked. The tourism industry is facing several challenges, and development efforts of this industry are not sustainable. This paper maps out a way to sustainable growth of the tourism industry in Bangladesh using the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) model and a derived matrix out of it. The data used for this study were derived from multiple sources, including literature review and interviews with professionals. To analyze strategic factors of the tourism industry in the country, internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats were determined to be followed by development of strategic planning based on the SWOT matrix. Results showed that existing tourism activities in Bangladesh are unsustainable. To develop a sustainable tourism industry to attract tourists, this study suggests different WT (weaknesses- threats) strategies such as ensuring safety and security of tourists, effective planning for sustainable economic benefits, strict implementation of environmental regulations for ecological sustainability, alerting people about the importance of sustainable tourism development, and infrastructure development. Perhaps the findings of this study would be important in the effort to develop and promote a sustainable tourism industry in beautiful Bangladesh.

Keywords: weakness, threat, internal factor, external factor.

Jel Classification: L83

INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is a country of natural beauty that covered around 147,570 km² (BBS 2015) with evergreen hills, luxuriant tropical rain forests, and rich cultural heritage and ethnic diversity (Islam and Nath 2014). The country is rich with prolific biodiversity and ecosystem. From a tourism perspective all these ecological and cultural products are marketable and saleable to both domestic and international tourists. But the fast-growing

¹ Md. Sanaul Haque Mondal, Lecturer, Department of Social Relations, East West University, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

tourism industry is also a major source pressure on the environment and natural resources (UNEP 2005). This is especially true for developing countries where tourism development is taking place rapidly in ecologically fragile areas with modest concerns on the environment (Aminu et al. 2013). Being a developing country with a density of 1236 population per sq.km (World Bank 2017) and fragile ecosystem, Bangladesh is at high risk to grow unplanned tourism industry. In fact tourism was viewed as a ‘clean’ industry during the twentieth century that could generate capital for countries (Hanna et al. 2015), latter on mass tourism became a concern for environmental sustainability. As a result the concept of sustainability in tourism emerged which is ascribed as a remedy for all the problems of contemporary tourism (Butowski 2012) to reap optimum benefit for present without jeopardizes the need and demand of future. Sustainable tourism can become a useful tool to generate employment, combat poverty and simultaneously protect biological diversity and cultural environment involving local communities (UNEP 2005).

World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines sustainable tourism as tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities (UNWTO 2017). This is not a type of tourism instead a condition of tourism that is based on the principles of sustainable development (UNEP and UNWTO 2005). This concept has gradually become an important determinant of tourism development, nevertheless it is considered as more important for destinations that depend on nature as their major tourist attraction (Larson and Herr 2008). Sustainable tourism approach may offer a higher quality tourist satisfaction, improved quality of life for local citizens, conservation of environment, and enhancement of cultural pride (Ap and Crompton 1998; Higgins-Desbiolles 2004; Levy and Hawkins 2009).

Literatures on sustainable tourism in Bangladesh are very scanty. Most of literatures emphasized on economic aspect of tourism. Rahman et al. (2010) studied on identifying problems, potential and future prospects of tourism industry in Bangladesh. Haque et al. (2016) emphasized on developing for developing sustainable ecotourism inside the Sundarbans Reserve Forest, Bangladesh. Salam, Lindsay and Beveridge (2000) in their paper proposed for using geographical information systems (GIS) technology to minimize adverse impact of tourism in the reserve forest of Sundarbans. Ishtiaque (2012) proposed a model of tourism development in Bangladesh. Rahman et al. (2013) conducted their study to understand the visitors perceptions at Kaptai National Park in Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. Rahman (2010) in his dissertation explored socio-economic impacts of tourism in Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh. Wakil (2014) studied on how environmental sustainability can be achieved through developing ecofriendly tourism industry in coastal zones of Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh. From the existing literatures, despite of studies on tourism industries in Bangladesh, SWOT analysis and sustainable tourism development in Bangladesh never carried out concurrently. With this view this study was an effort to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of tourism industry in Bangladesh using SWOT matrix. Reihanian et al. (2012) studied on developing sustainable tourism in Boujagh National Park of Iran using SWOT analysis. Using the SWOT matrix they proposed some strategies such as strengths- weaknesses, strengths-threats, weaknesses- opportunities, and weaknesses-threats strategies for sustainable growth of tourism industry. Miandehi and Masrouri (2013) used SWOT model to assess tourism industry development in Bandar-E Anzali of Iran. Using SWOT approach, Sabokkhiz and Sabokkhiz (2010) developed sustainable tourism in desert region.

1. OBJECTIVE

Bangladesh has enormous potential to earn from tourism industry. Tourism industry in Bangladesh is not a well developed, rather a growing industry (Alam, Furukawa and Akter 2010), and is treated from an economic viewpoint only. Development of this industry requires extensive research and planning. Without proper strategy, the benefit from this industry cannot be equally distributed among all segments of tourism related stakeholders. Therefore, it is quintessential to develop sustainable tourism to resolve social and economic problems of the country. Considering the above urgency it is necessary to examine different strategic factors of tourism industry using a sophisticated tool such as SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis. SWOT analysis is an important tool for decision-making (Wheelen and Hunger 1995). It involves systematic assessment of an organization's internal strengths and weaknesses, its opportunities for growth and improvement, and the threats the external environment presents to its survival (Harrison 2010). SWOT analysis is a most useful tool as a first step before detailed assessment of sustainable tourism (NOAA 2016).

2. METHODOLOGY

Data were collected through structured interviews with academicians who are engaged in teaching tourism related courses at university level. The concept and development of sustainable tourism is relatively new for Bangladesh, therefore the author purposively selected academicians only to conduct this study. The questionnaire had four sections: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of tourism industry in Bangladesh. These strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were identified through in-depth review of literatures and empirical observations by author in different tourist spots of Bangladesh. Finally, each question assigned by level of agreement of Likert scale in five point scale (with the highest possible score of 5) (Vagias 2006). The interviewees were required to select the level of agreement or disagreement with each of the questions as set in the questionnaire. Responses of each question were given numerical score that truly replicated the attitudes of individual's. A database was developed in Microsoft Office Excel 2010 environment and the respondent's total score were computed by summing all statements of the questionnaires and each question were converted into percentage.

3. SWOT MODEL

The SWOT Analysis generally investigates the strengths and weaknesses inside the system, as well as the opportunities and threats from the external environment to facilitate the decision makers find out the best strategy, thus to maximize the strengths of the system itself and minimize the weaknesses of the system and threats from outside (Wang and Zheng 2015). This study used SWOT approach combined with the internal factor evaluation matrix (IFEM) and external factor evaluation matrix (EFEM) to assess strategic factors for decision. The SWOT analysis of this research was based on two major categories:

- a. Analysis internal factors: Analyze relevant strengths and weaknesses presented by internal environment. Strengths and weaknesses constituted factors within the system that enable and hinder the organization from achieving its goal, respectively (Wasike et al. 2011);
- b. Analysis external factors: Analyze relevant opportunities and threats presented by external environment. Opportunities and threats were considered as exogenous factors that facilitate and limit the system in attaining its goals, respectively (Wasike, et al. 2011).

Identifying internal and external factors is a useful strategic decision making tool for development of an organization. This research used SWOT method to develop sustainable development of tourism industry in Bangladesh. At the outset, internal factor were grouped as strengths (S) or weaknesses (W) and external factors were grouped as opportunities (O) or threats (T). Consequently, a list of strengths (Ss), weaknesses (Ws), opportunities (Os) and threats (Ts) were prepared. All those factors were then tabulated as internal factor evaluation matrix (IFEM) and external factor evaluation matrix (EFEM) and assigned weight to calculate final score. The subsequent sections illustrated steps of scoring processes of internal (strengths and weaknesses) and external (opportunities and threats) factors:

- a. Each internal strength and weakness was assigned a weight ranging from 0.0 (low important) to 1 (most important). The more effective the factor, the higher the assigned weight. The sum of all weights of all internal factors should equal 1;
- b. Each factor was rated between 1 and 4. Rating assigned whether the factor represented major weakness (rating =1), minor weakness (rating =2), minor strength (rating =3) and major strength (rating =4);
- c. To calculated weighed rate of each factor, its weight was multiplied by its rate;
- d. Finally, total weighted rate of IFEM was calculated by summing weighted rate of each factor;
- e. If this score was less than 2.5, it meant that the strengths were less than weaknesses; if it was more than 2.5 strengths were more than weaknesses (Reihanian et al. 2012).

All these five steps were reiterated to determine the total weighted rate of EFEM. It is noted that rating for EFEM was assigned whether the factor represented major threat (rating =1), minor threat (rating =2), minor opportunity (rating =3) and major opportunity (rating =4). If this score well below 2.5, it meant that the opportunities were less than threats; if it was more than 2.5, opportunities were more than threats (Monavari, Karbasi, and Mogooee 2007; Reihanian et al. 2012).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Analysis of internal and external factors

Based on the results of questionnaires survey, SWOT analysis was run through internal factor evaluation matrix and external factor evaluation matrix to determine the priorities.

4.1.1. Internal factor evaluation matrix

A total of 14 internal strengths and weaknesses were weighted for the IFEM. The weight assigned for 6 strengths ranges between 0.0484 and 0.0886. Unique biogeolophysical diversity and archaeological places received the highest priority. On contrary, 8 weaknesses were assigned weight ranges between 0.0584 and 0.0877. Safety and security of tourists, high profit oriented business development by tourism related business professionals, inadequate management of tourist spots and hotels, lack of knowledge and poor infrastructure received maximum weight. The total weighted rate of IFEM was 2.230137. The result of IFEM was summarized as internal factors evaluation matrix in Table 1.

Table 1. Internal factor evaluation matrix (IFEM)

| | Weight | Rating | Weighted rate |
|---|--------|--------|---------------|
| <u>Strengths</u> | | | |
| S1:Unique biogeolophysical diversity with seasonal rhythm | 0.0886 | 4 | 0.354338 |
| S2:Renounced for unique archaeological and historical places | 0.0868 | 4 | 0.347032 |
| S3:Local people are very hospitable and tourist friendly | 0.0776 | 4 | 0.310502 |
| S4:Positive attitude of government to promote tourism | 0.0621 | 3 | 0.186301 |
| S5:Unique traditional handicrafts and handlooms | 0.0484 | 3 | 0.145205 |
| S6:Abundant young labor force supply | 0.0630 | 3 | 0.189041 |
| <u>Weakness</u> | | | |
| W1:Lack of knowledge on developing sustainable tourism product | 0.0731 | 1 | 0.073059 |
| W2:Safety and security of tourist | 0.0877 | 1 | 0.087671 |
| W3:Tourism marketing and supply chain is not well developed | 0.0584 | 1 | 0.058447 |
| W4:Absence of community representation in tourism decision related making | 0.0648 | 2 | 0.12968 |
| W5:Shorter length of stay at destination due to inadequate management of tourist spots and hotels | 0.0731 | 1 | 0.073059 |
| W6:Highly profit motive attitude of tourism related business professionals | 0.0858 | 1 | 0.085845 |
| W7:Poor infrastructure and weak investment base | 0.0712 | 1 | 0.071233 |
| W8:Inadequate funding for conservation of natural and cultural heritages | 0.0594 | 2 | 0.118721 |
| | 1 | | 2.230137 |

Source: Compile from the survey

4.1.2. External factor evaluation matrix

Similar to IFEM, 15 external opportunities and threats were weighted, among them 7 factors were opportunities and 8 factors were threats. Increasing trend in domestic tourism, employment generation, and conservation of natural ecosystem got maximum weight as opportunities. In contrary, political instability, fragile natural environment, and extraction of natural resources received maximum weight as threats. In total the sum of all EFEM was 2.496338. The analysis of EFEM was shown as external factors evaluation matrix in Table 2.

Table 2. External factor evaluation matrix (EFEM)

| | Weight | Rating | Weighted rate |
|--|--------|--------|---------------|
| <u>Opportunities</u> | | | |
| O1:Develop nature tourism | 0.0683 | 4 | 0.273393 |
| O2:Conservation of natural ecosystem and developing efforts to minimize adverse environmental impact | 0.0732 | 4 | 0.292921 |
| O3:Increased interest of local citizens in domestic tourism | 0.0797 | 4 | 0.318959 |
| O4:Develop explicit marketing strategies to sell the tourist product for both local and foreigners | 0.0610 | 3 | 0.183076 |
| O5:Pilgrim and festival tourism | 0.0627 | 3 | 0.187958 |
| | | | 163 |

Table 2. (continued)

| | Weight | Rating | Weighted rate |
|---|--------|--------|---------------|
| O6:Favorable government policies to promote tourism industry | 0.0651 | 3 | 0.195281 |
| O7:Employment generation and direct benefit for local community through developing community level entrepreneurship | 0.0749 | 4 | 0.29943 |
| Threats | | | |
| T1:Excessive natural resources extraction to meet the demand of tourists | 0.0724 | 1 | 0.072417 |
| T2:Fragile natural environment and recurrent natural disasters | 0.0724 | 1 | 0.072417 |
| T3:Conversion and degradations of natural landscapes and land use changes through executing mega tourism projects | 0.0602 | 1 | 0.060212 |
| T4:Political instability and other externalities | 0.0797 | 1 | 0.07974 |
| T5:Tourists transport demand mismanagement | 0.0553 | 2 | 0.110659 |
| T6:Destroy ethnic and grassroots culture | 0.0545 | 2 | 0.109032 |
| T7:Lack of awareness among mass people to reap the benefits from developing sustainable tourism | 0.0602 | 2 | 0.120423 |
| T8:Huge investment may fail optimum return | 0.0602 | 2 | 0.120423 |
| | 1 | | 2.496338 |

Source: Compile from the survey

4.2. SWOT matrix and strategy formulation

External and Internal Factors add to the SWOT matrix (Tahernejad, Ataei, and Khalokakaei 2013). Then four different categories of strategies can be considered: (a) SO- strategies: internal strength(s) can be used to realize external opportunity (ies) (ideal case), (b) WO-strategies: reduce internal weakness (es) or develop missing strength(s) to realize external opportunities, (c) ST-strategies: internal strength(s) are used to minimize external threats and (d) WT-strategies: reduce the internal weakness (es) to avoid external threats (only defensive strategy, worst case scenario) (Rauch 2007).

Table 3. SWOT strategies

| External factors | Internal factors | |
|--|--|---|
| | Strengths (S) | Weaknesses (W) |
| | S1:Unique biogeolophysical diversity with seasonal rhythm | W1:Lack of knowledge on developing sustainable tourism product |
| | S2:Renounced for unique archaeological and historical places | W2:Safety and security of tourist |
| | S3:Local people are very hospitable and tourist friendly | W3:Tourism marketing and supply chain is not well developed |
| | S4:Positive attitude of government to promote tourism | W4:Absence of community representation in tourism decision related making |
| | S5:Unique traditional handicrafts and handlooms | W5:Shorter length of stay at destination due to inadequate management of tourist spots and hotels |
| | S6:Abundant young labor force supply | W6:Highly profit motive attitude of tourism related business professionals |
| | | W7:Poor infrastructure and weak investment base |
| | | W8:Inadequate funding for conservation of natural and cultural heritages |
| Opportunities (O) | SO strategies | WO strategies |
| O1:Develop nature tourism | 1. Develop nature, heritage and pilgrim tourism (S1, S2, O1, O5) | 1. Improving safety and security of local and foreign tourists to encourage tourism (W2, O3, O5, O6) |
| O2:Conservation of natural ecosystem and developing efforts to minimize adverse environmental impact | 2. Engage youth pool in tourism industry (S6, O7) | 2. Establish sustainable marketing strategies of tourism industry so that all tourism stakeholders will get maximum benefits (W1, W3, W5, W6, O4, O7) |
| O3:Increased interest of local citizens in domestic tourism | 3. Develop community based sustainable tourism (S3, O6, O7) | |
| | 4. Emphasize on domestic and inbound tourism (S4, O3) | |

Table 3. (continued)

| Opportunities (O) | SO strategies | WO strategies |
|---|---|---|
| O4:Develop explicit marketing strategies to sell the tourist product for both local and foreigners | 5. Encourage communities and local industries to develop attractive tourist products (S4, S5, O4) | 3. More efforts to provide quality services with minimum spending of tourist (W1, W3, W5, W6, O4) |
| O5:Pilgrim and festival tourism | | 4. Allocate sufficient fund to conserve natural and cultural heritages (W8, O1, O2, O6) |
| O6:Favorable government policies to promote tourism industry | | |
| O7:Employment generation and direct benefit for local community through developing community level entrepreneurship | | |
| Threats (T) | ST strategies | WT strategies |
| T1:Excessive natural resources extraction to meet the demand of tourists | 1. Improving political commitment to reduce political instability (S4, T4) | 1. Ensure highest level of security to tourists by the state even with political instability (W2, T4) |
| T2:Fragile natural environment and recurrent natural disasters | 2. Develop sustainable tourism to reduce environmental impacts in natural and cultural heritages (S1, S2, T1, T2, T3, T6) | 2. Appropriate planning so that local communities, ethnic minorities, businessmen and tourists will get optimum economic benefits from tourism (W3, W6, T7) |
| T3:Conversion and degradations of natural landscapes and land use changes through executing mega tourism projects | 3. Creating awareness among mass people especially young people to inform about the benefit of sustainable tourism (S4, S6, T6, T7) | 3. Strong environmental regulations to ensure sustainability of nature (W8, T1, T2, T3) |
| T4:Political instability and other externalities | | 4. Educate people including local communities on sustainable tourism development (W1, W4, T6, T7) |
| T5:Tourists transport demand mismanagement | | 5. Infrastructure development (roads, hotels, tourist spots) to attract tourists (W5, W7, T5) |
| T6:Destroy ethnic and grassroots culture | | |
| T7:Lack of awareness among mass people to reap the benefits from developing sustainable tourism | | |
| T8:Huge investment may fail optimum return | | |

Source: Developed by the author

The weighted rating of IFEM was 2.479688, therefore strengths were less than weakness. On contrary; the weighted rating of EFEM designated 2.436127, so that threats were more than the opportunities. This is indeed weaknesses and threats dominated in tourism industry of Bangladesh and this industry is not still well developed. From this discussion it can be generalized that unsustainable tourism will never benefits to communities as well as environment. Consequently, it is quintessential to develop sustainable tourism in Bangladesh. Based on the total weighted value of IFEM and EFEM, WT strategies would be the appropriate strategies to develop sustainable tourism in Bangladesh. The suggestive WT strategies are as follows:

- Ensure highest level of security to tourists by the state even with political instability;
- Appropriate planning so that local communities, ethnic minorities, businessmen and tourists will get optimum economic benefits from tourism;
- Strong environmental regulations to ensure sustainability of nature;
- Educate people including local communities on sustainable tourism development;
- Infrastructure development (roads, hotels, tourist spots) to attract tourists.

It is noted that the above WT strategies were recommended based on the results of this study on a specific period (in 2016) and those strategies are not everlasting solutions. Since the environment (internal and external) is dynamic, changes need to be examined (Tahernejad, Ataei, and Khalokakaei 2013) and based on the modification of internal and external environment, strategies in different time periods need to be scrutinized through rigorous research.

CONCLUSION

SWOT analysis provides an overview of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of tourism industry in Bangladesh. The present tourism activities in Bangladesh are unsustainable. In this study, exiting weaknesses and threats of tourism industry were critically analyzed and based on those and weaknesses and threats a list of WT strategies were suggested for the future development of tourism industry in sustainable way. The current *weaknesses* such as safety and security, high profit motive business design, shorter length of stay due to improper management of tourist destinations, poor infrastructure, weak investment, lack of local community participation in tourism development and improper marketing strategies, and *threats* such as Political instability, fragile natural ecosystems, uncertainty of return from investment, lack of awareness, degradation of natural environment, mismanagement in tourist demand management and entry alien culture can be materialized through ensuring highest level of security for tourists, appropriate planning so that all tourism related stakeholders will get optimum economic benefits from tourism, strict environmental policy to ensure sustainability of nature, educate people on sustainable tourism development and infrastructure development to attract tourists. The findings of this study will help the policy makers and other tourism stakeholders to analyze present problems of tourism and find out the most realistic and time-fitting actions for sustainable development of tourism industry in Bangladesh.

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