

The Potential of Agritourism in Nepal

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Abstract

Agritourism activities are increasingly seen as a diversification strategy for agricultural entrepreneurs and as a form of support for revitalizing the rural economy. This paper aims to provide both theoretically based information and contextual study for evaluating the present situation and trends to explore the possibilities of developing agritourism as one of the key contributor for socio-economic development of rural area. Balthali is a popular rural tourism destination and an agro based settlement. A questionnaire survey was conducted in Balthali with twenty five respondents using non-probability sampling method and snow balling technique. The descriptive and pre-emptive analysis of the data thus collected was done. Based on the analytical study, the possibility to establish agritourism as an alternative source of income, means to gain economic prosperity and tool for increased labor force, high yield and increment in revenue generation is known. The purpose of this analysis is to give answers on the questions that are increasingly being asked within the agricultural economics profession as demand, supply and policy concern shift away from food towards a broader spectrum of rural goods and services in the form of the tourism and leisure market in contributing to the economic activity in areas that suffer from decrease in farm numbers and agricultural production.

Keywords

Agriculture, Tourism, Potential, Sustainable, Rural Development

1. Introduction

Nepal is endowed with agro-biodiversity and adorned with the geographical tranquil sight and landscape. Being an agriculture country there is delimited scope of the agrotourism [1]. Agro-ecotourism, a combination of agro-tourism and ecotourism plays a critical role in Nepal by using diversified resources, both natural and man-made, landscape, bio-diversity and cultural heritages [2]. It forms the amalgamation with the farming system and other ongoing activities involve in local level of production and management. More than two-thirds populations in Nepal reside in the rural area and most of them depend on agriculture. Subsistence form of agriculture is common in Nepal. Rural Area and agriculture are interrelated; like two parts of the same coin. Agriculture is the major sector of Nepalese economy. Therefore, the development of the agriculture sector is key to the development of the national economy [3].

About 65% of the total population is employed in agriculture. GDP from Agriculture in Nepal increased to 274188 NPR Million in 2019 from 267540 NPR

Million in 2018 [4]. GDP from Agriculture in Nepal is expected to reach 265962.00 NPR Million by the end of 2020 [5]. Agricultural development in Nepal is crucial to provide daily needs to those hardworking farmers, slow down imports, increase trading, solve the unemployment and provide raw materials to industries that can be mutually and thoroughly achieved with Tourism as Agro-tourism [6]. Evidence from the production and price fluctuations during last three to four decades in both conventional agriculture sector with intensive production of rice, vegetables, and other subsistence crops and plantation agriculture sector with intensive production of tea, rubber, coconut, coffee, etc shows that they are highly vulnerable to external factors such as internal and international politics, climate change and whether pattern changers, market and trade slumps, etc. Sudden and unanticipated influences of these external factors cause higher risks in sustainability of agriculture sector and it results in the collapse of both micro and macro economies in a country [7].

Furthermore, the UNWTO in 2013 also identifies that poverty reduction is a major challenge globally, more

acute in developing country like Nepal and confirms tourism as among the most feasible and sustainable economic development choice. Tourism in Nepal began in 1950 when the country was declared open to outsiders. Tourism's contribution to Nepal's GDP is about 4%, and it creates more than 2,50,000 direct and indirect jobs [8]. Tourism is a major tool for socioeconomic transformation in the developing countries like Nepal. Nepal is shown as a well-known destination in the world in the tourist map. Concerning the current situation of agritourism in Nepal it does not exist [9]; however, in the eastern part of Nepal (near to Darjeeling and Sikkim, India), the tour to tea garden is becoming popular within the domestic tourists. Further, agri tourism will motivate and encourage farming communities to raise their crops in eco-friendly approach and to conserve the biodiversity of farms which will minimize the internal risk factors of farming such as pest and disease outbreaks, soil degradation, etc [7]. It is directly or indirectly linked to other forms of tourism such as rural/village tourism, ethnic or cultural tourism, sport tourism, adventure tourism and many others after all food comes from agriculture sector for all forms of tourism. Since the nation is searching for new tourism packages and destination, agritourism can be stand-alone tourism package for the tourism industry in Nepal which will definitely extend the length of international tourists' stay and provide diversity in the domestic tourism of Nepal. [10].

2. Literature Review

Agrotourism is an intricate network, an opportunity maybe today to this contemporary society to assure both farmer's assets and national Gross Domestic Product. It provides additional income source and employment opportunities to the traditional farmers which is a better alternative way than migrating to the Gulf countries in search of employment. The fashion of welcoming tourists, the hospitality of villagers, sharing their customs, working with tourists are the basic features of a rural society which develop keenness for visiting Nepal repeatedly and this helps for the flourishing of agrotourism. Homestay in the village can be run satisfactorily in which the whole member of the society accommodates to entertain the tourist. It provides appropriate paths to protect natural habitats, natural resources, special places, and naturally beautiful scenic areas [11]. Therefore, agrotourism is a feature of today's changing

countryside's worldwide, since it has been promoted as a policy instrument in many countries; a way to rejuvenate rural and regional economies and to preserve traditional rural societies and landscapes [12]. Governments in different countries and continents have adopted a variety of policies towards farmers and rural landholders. In Europe and North America, there are complex and well-funded programs to preserve farm landscapes and to support farmers and rural communities [12]. Thus, for example, about one-third of all farm businesses in the United Kingdom are now engaged in non-traditional agricultural enterprises, and farmer involvement in agrotourism in France and Italy is even higher. To better exploit such evolution patterns, farmers and other organizations have started organizing themselves in rural networks deploying alternative business models aimed to guarantee competitive advantages, to improve farm revenue streams, to resume taking an active role in the agri-food system, and to develop new consumer market niches [13]. Such models are characterized by a re-connection among producers and consumers with these explicit ethical and political goals: re-vitalization of territory identity and rural community relations to local food and agriculture, linking with sustainable agriculture, economically viable, and socially responsible practices [14]. In fact, consumers are paying more and more attention toward viable practices like the "zero kilometers" approach, where the supply and consumption of food products to consumers occurs in the same location (or nearly) as the production [15]. These networks aim at shortening the physical and social distances between producers and consumers by minimizing the number of intermediaries in the food supply chain, having the potential to positively affect the sustainable development of rural areas along all the three pillars of sustainability (economic, environmental, and social) in agricultural systems.

Rural and agro tourism was pioneered in Nepal by Late Amrit Bhadgaule and Jhalak Thapa. They both worked being based in Gandaki Province and developed various resources and new manpower for promotion of agrotourism in Nepal [16]. Climate Smart Agriculture Programme from Fiscal Year 2067/68 helps to facilitate both agriculture and tourism in Nepal. Various foreign experts will visit Nepal to share their knowledge experiences in Nepal regarding climate smart technology which ultimately will lead to promotion of agro tourism in Nepal [16]. The Agriculture Ministry is planning to develop five

such villages across the country this fiscal year at places such as: Ghodaghadi in Kailali, Machhamara in Sunsari, Rautamai in Udaypur, Patle in Solukhumbu and Kakani in Nuwakot [17]. Government is launching the community-based agro tourism village program for the first time in Nepal and will gradually increase the number of such villages depending on the response, says Shankar Sapkota, Deputy Spokesperson of the Ministry [17]. Under the program to be promoted as 'Modern Green Tour Village', each selected firm will be granted Rs 2.5 million for developing basic infrastructure such as sanitation, roads and accommodation facilities in the targeted areas [17]. Few private firms like Banana Resort in Tikapur, Ostrich Nepal in Rupandehi and some tea farms in Ilam have been successful in establishing the agro tourism concept [18]. Out of the 17 SDGs, agritourism is beneficial in achieving the targets of two of them. These two goals are as stated below:

Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

Local development frame has an important role in the functioning of country networks, which contribute to the spread of development from the level of intraregional and regional poles to the local level. The importance of these poles comes from their function of redistributing information in the subordinated rural space. Growth centers are represented by rural settlements, which by the economic activities they hold, transform into development engines for the highly disadvantaged rural spaces. The territorial cohesion represents the capacity of a polycentric network's components to stay together by means of developing and multiplying the relationships between them. The polycentric center development approach is based on several decision levels: the national resource capacity, regional development strategy, intraregional development (growth) poles, and local development framework [19].

3. Methodology

Interpretivist paradigm is the way by which the prosperity of agritourism in rural environment can be studied effectively. Mix method is used to approach the research objective. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are used to get the information from the respondents. For the quantitative study, primary data was collected. Survey method has been

used to collect primary data. Non-probability sampling, including purposive sampling, was used to select potential villagers from the study site for interviews followed by use of the snow-ball technique to select other participants. Twenty-five local residents were selected for close ended questionnaire survey. Three national level experts were selected for unstructured interviews. Those selected were from governmental, nongovernmental and private organizations involved in tourism and agricultural planning and development such as the Nepal Tourism Board, Homestay Association of Nepal, and Village Tourism Promotion Forum. The data collection from rural area and farm condition was done by active observation and data recording through photographs, video recording, mobile ethnography and imagery analysis. Different qualitative methods used for data collection purpose are interviews, observation and open-ended questions. Other data were furnished from related articles, different research papers, report, and 10th plan document of government of Nepal, websites of the government of Nepal, reports of UN, newspaper and internet sites.

For the study, the agro based village environment having operational tourism on the nearest proximity from the Kathmandu valley was selected. At first, pilot survey was done. Then, on the basis of the data collected the objectives were reviewed. The field survey was carried on larger number of respondents in the similar site to meet the revised objectives. Pharping is selected as the field for pilot survey. The questionnaire survey was done on Balthali to understand the local inhabitant's knowledge and views on modeling their village into agritourism destination. After returning from the field, the information collected from the site was recorded in computer aided software called formplus which digitally encoded the report in the form of graphical representation. A descriptive and pre-emptive analysis method is used to analyze the data. On the basis of the findings, data was analyzed to meet the objectives of the research.

4. Agritourism in Balthali

Balthali is a village development committee in Kavrepalanchok District in Bagmati Pradesh of central Nepal. At the time of the 1991 Nepal census it had a population of 2473 and had 496 houses in it [20]. Balthali Tour (Trek) starts in a small village named Balthali Village which is a small sleepy

settlement, lying at the junction of Roshi and Ladku Khola River, the Balthali village stands on a plateau which is just beyond Khopasi, 40km away from Kathmandu, the Capital of Nepal and the area is surrounding by thickly forest with plentiful floras, colorful rhododendron and Sal trees [20]. The Balthali village has endless trails leading to some ethnic tribes thus, offering excellent short hikes and many of the sacred and ancient temples and monasteries such as Namo Buddha, Indreshwar Mahadev, Brahmayani temples are the major attraction of the Balthali village [21]. From hiking and horse-riding to fishing in nearby streams the choices are plenty in Balthali. In fact; the Lonely Planet describes the Balthali trek to be among the ‘world’s best short hikes without altitude’ [22]. This exceptional hamlet stands at an outstanding place of isolation and relaxation amidst a surround of typical Nepali countryside with terraced rice fields and ochre thatched farmhouses. With snowy peaks of Dorjee Lhakpa, Langtang and the whole range of mountain rest clear and bright on the northern horizon whilst the backyard is dominated by high hills and lush green forests of the Maharabharat Range [23]. There are a number of excellent short and long hikes from a day to 8 days within Balthali Village Resort and its surrounding gives you ample opportunity and time to explore this quaint natural heaven [20].

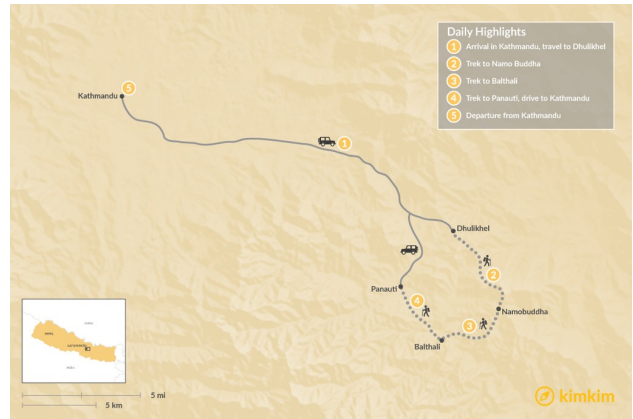


Figure 2: Map showing hiking route from Dhulikhel to Panauti
(Source: Google Image)

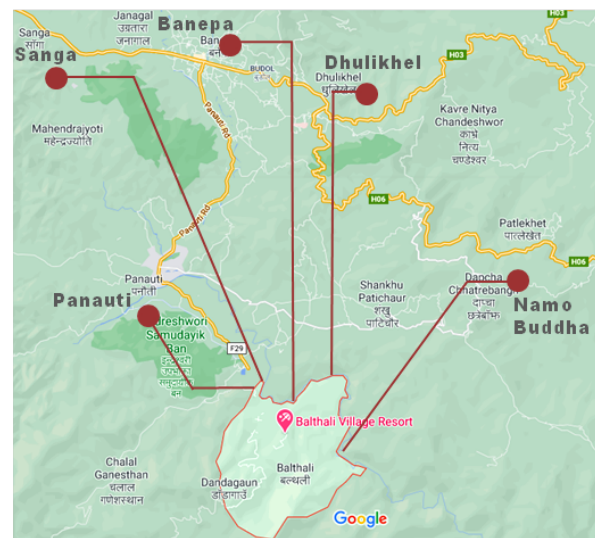


Figure 3: Proximity map showing neighboring areas of Balthali

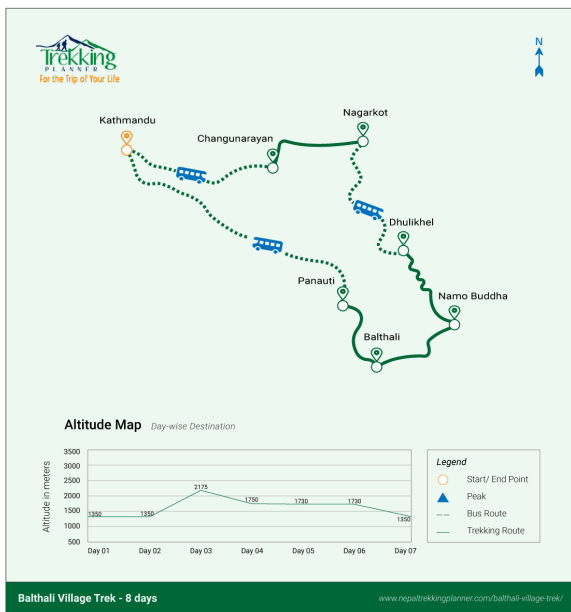


Figure 1: Map showing hiking route from Changunarayan to Panauti
(Source: Google Image)

The major attraction point within Balthali is the hike to the confluence of the two rivers Rosi and Punyamati which is regarded as a sacred place, water mill and Ladkeswor Temple which is situated inside a cave. Continuing the excursion, walk around Nepane Village where the life of a typical Tamang community can be seen. Then hike along Ladku River to the way back. The access to Balthali from Panauti can be made via pick up from Khopasi either by using vehicular mode of transportation or by hiking for 30 to 45 minutes. The hiking trail is connected by bridges and gravel road going up and down the hill. Agriculture in Balthali is done in a subsistent way. Potato, maize, rice, wheat, barley, orange, pomegranate are some of the crops, vegetables and fruits grown in Balthali. The market of these

agricultural productions is Panauti and Banepa. There is a major problem of irrigation for crop production due to which it has led to low productivity and limited varieties of crops are produced in Balthali.

Balthali is in close proximity of some important culturally and historically significant places. Banepa and Panauti are medieval Newar settlements and economic growth centers. Sanga, Dhulikhel and Namobuddha are famous tourist hubs. Polycentric development model can stimulate the development of Balthali by forming a network with neighboring growth poles.

5. Analysis and Findings

Impact of tourism on agriculture

The respondents were moreover asked to indicate the impact of tourism on agriculture. 60% of the respondents stated that more tourist in-flow will increase the demand of ethnic food and opportunity for market expansion will be increased. Additionally, 60% of them declared that there is no threat to social harmony as a consequence of tourism activities till date in Balthali.

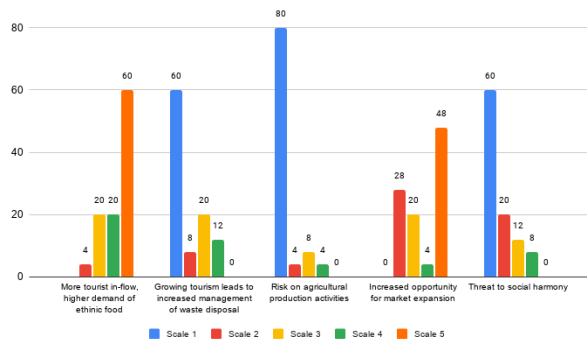


Figure 4: Impact of tourism on agriculture

Education level Vs Willingness to operate agritourism in their farm

The study indicates that 50% of the respondents having higher education strongly agree on having willingness to operate agritourism in their farm. The respondents having vocational or lower level of education stated that they are willing to operate agritourism on their farm if they receive financial, technical and governmental support. There was duality in the opinion of the respondents having secondary level of education with 71.43% of them strongly agree to operate agritourism in their farm and

the remaining 28.57% disagree to do so. Among male, 68.42% strongly agree about having benefit from tourism. Among female, 50% agree on having benefit from tourism and 16.67% disagree about the possible benefits.

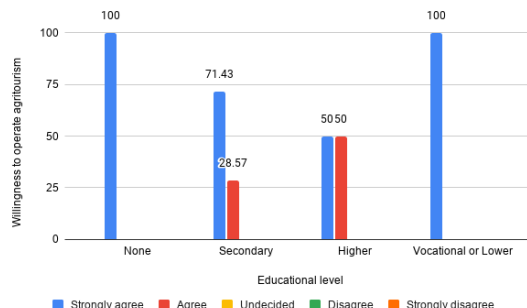


Figure 5: Educational level Vs Willingness to operate agritourism

Occupation Vs Determinants inducing the respondents to resist from operating agritourism

The respondents were asked to indicate the reason that induces them to resist from operating agritourism. The 57.14% of the farmers stated that due to lack of money and 42.86% stated they do not have sufficient knowledge and skill about agritourism. The 50% of the respondents who were involved in private sector indicated that the reason to resist from operating agritourism since there is no possibility of accommodation at the preferred facility. The study showed that the 11.11% of the teacher saw no need or desire to start agritourism. The government officers had varied opinions. In their perspective, 75% of them stated that no sufficient knowledge and skill and 25% stated no need or desire are the root causes due to which agritourism is not been operated though people have high willingness to operate it in their farm.

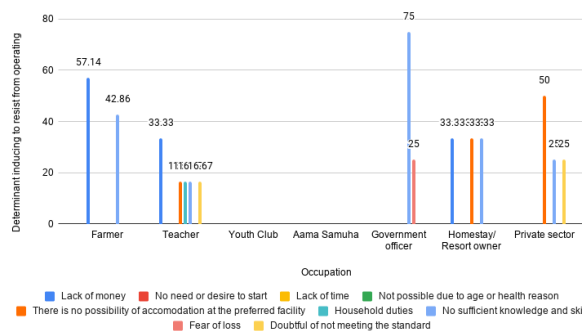


Figure 6: Occupation Vs Determinants inducing to resist from operating agritourism

The level of understanding about the requirement for operating agritourism farms

During the study, the respondents were asked about the topic to know their level of understanding regarding agritourism. The 32% of the respondents declared that they are very well aware about obtaining certificate for starting a business. Additionally, the result of the study showed that they do not have knowledge about adopting the guideline and the incurring cost at all. However, they have moderate knowledge about setting agritourism.

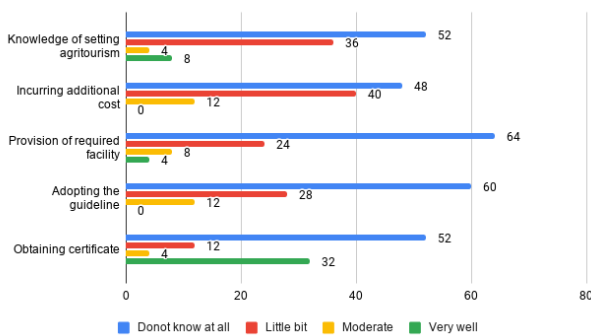


Figure 7: The level of understanding about operating agritourism

Reasons for choosing agritourism farm as a holiday destination

Further study was conducted to know the reason for choosing agritourism farms as their holiday destination. The 92% respondents declared that the desire for peace and interest in the natural environment as a very important reason for choosing to visit Balthali for agritourism activities. 80% of them also indicated that pro health values of rural areas as moderately important reason for choosing agritourism for their holiday destination.

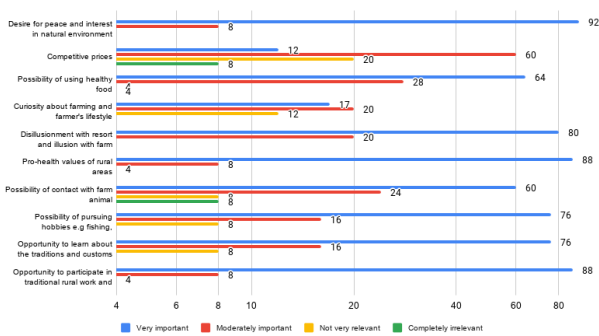


Figure 8: Reasons for choosing agritourism farm as a holiday destination

The study indicated that 60% of the respondents claimed that competitive prices are completely relevant reason as the selection of holiday destination is primarily determined by the quality of services and facilities.

Perception about operating agritourism as a cooperative extension

During the study, the respondents were asked about their perception about operating agritourism as a cooperative extension. The 56% of the respondents declared that cooperating with others gives them access to more resources that they need and 68 % claimed that helpful for operating small business and organization.

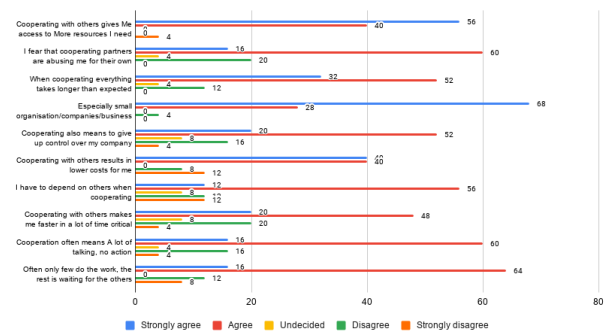


Figure 9: Perception about operating agritourism as a cooperative extension

Analysis and findings of the key informant survey

Based on the key informant survey, the findings have been derived describing agritourism as a community based small enterprise. It operates in small clusters in a composite way. This is a micro level project that is generally governed and mobilized by the local government. Rural tourism is more liked by international tourist but they are lesser in number. They are satisfied with the available services mainly because their expectation is different while opting to visit such places. Moreover, while operating tourism activity, the outlook, quality, comfort and standard of facilities and humble welcoming gesture depicts rural identity and hospitality at its par excellence. It is a concept of commercializing agriculture. For agritourism to flourish there should be good farming practices. It can be initiated by adopting homestay modality. Tourist will get an opportunity to have farm to market experience. While doing so, there will be change of value in the land, customs and rural

environment. It helps to reduce dependency on manpower, material, goods and commodities. Rural cooperation, women's saving, citizen investment fund highlights the presence of an agritourism rural network in supporting the activities of the agritourism farm. The level of understanding about agritourism of the farmers is low. However, the success story of similar community tourism can set an example for other potential areas. Also, the contribution of tourism expert for the promotion and local government's subsidy provision has a major role to play for the successful operation of agritourism.

At present, subsistence farming is done in a traditional way. Agriculture is vulnerable to climate change and natural hazards. The agricultural practices are not mechanized and modernized. There is a need of high production in a sustainable way so that to bring transformation and improve the rural livelihood. Agriculture in Nepal is at risk due to its dependency on monsoonal rain. Nowadays, there is increasing demand of healthy organic food. People in search of unique experience in terms of taste and culture will find solace in agritourism destination. In regard to cultural expectations, agriculture provides diversity of food culture. Different geographical region has different tradition, culture, and cuisine to offer. The visit can also be made for educational purpose. The tourist will get adequate knowledge about production. Nepal has diverse biophysical, ecological and cultural aspects. The availability of market information through mass media and advertisement is an important influencing factor. The connectivity such as the access of road and other infrastructure and digital media plays an important role in influencing market. Also, the consumer behavior, product and market price can make significant difference in determining market trend. Traditional architecture and crop production technique can help to attract tourists. Thus, consideration in the design that is indigenous is essential to conserve our heritage. In most places, the logistic facility and homestay are not available and there is lack of package tours and infrastructure. For this, the development of tourism infrastructure, provision of training programs, availability of technical support, fund and promotion campaign will guide and encourage the rural people to set rural setting eligible for operating tourism market. To initiate agritourism in rural region, it is essential to increase awareness and capacity building. Focusing on hygiene and sanitation, for waste management, the bio-degradable and non-degradable waste needs to be

sorted out so that the bio-degradable waste can be used as manure. The non-biodegradable waste should be properly disposed. The economics polluter's politics about imposing fine as a legal mechanism will check the habits of locals as well as tourists so that they do not pollute the rural area. The use of solar dryer, hydro based water lifting for irrigation, hydro-electricity and bio gas are some of the energy efficient practices of the rural region. Hydroelectricity can promote tourism and low energy bio-gas helps in recycling of waste and simple conversion mechanism for cooking and lighting purpose. For the operation of agritourism, design mechanism should be farm friendly and supportive of traditional methods. In this way, length of tourist stay can be prolonged, the number of tourists' in-flow can be increased, the rural enterprise can be made cost effective and revenue flow can be made sustainable.

Promotion of agro-based bio-diversity, socio-ethnic diversity and different agriculture production system, food culture is to be done. Provision of homestay and farm resort is also on the list. The government support and subsidy are also of prime importance. The campaign linking nature tourism and education programs should be started. There is a need of graduate and post graduate courses related to the topic. The promotion of ecological production system linking to tourism is essential. Farmers are willing to cooperate with other rural network of agritourism if an enabling environment is provided. NTB can guide in making norms and policies. It is responsible to set visions and goals. ViTOF plans to establish agritourism as a selfemployment model. It is conducting seminar and promotion programs inside and outside the country.

6. Conclusion

Agritourism is the platform for the expansion of tourism sector in an existing farm. It deals with getting started by arranging feasibility study, investment and resources and management, understanding visitor's expectation for an agritourism destination, customer's relation, income sources, liability, clarity with insurer, marketing enterprise, preparing checklist, formation of a committee and amending policy. It encourages the local produce for purchase and provides opportunity to market their produce. It merges with nature & adds new dimension in the tourism sector. It helps to increase GDP by reducing oversea shipments. 86.8% of labor-power is

available in rural area [24]. The study shows that the new generation can be encouraged through insurance in the agriculture sector, by conducting training, promotion and awareness programme, formation of a committee & setting proper vision and goals. Further, provision of funding, consulting, facilitating, providing aid in registration and other legal procedure will help to recognize it as a strong prospect for long term growth. The social indicators are determined by the ways and condition of capitalization of local skills, community involvement, development of community entrepreneurship, involvement of both male and female for different activities, women empowerment, community cooperation, skill enhancement and team work spirit. The economic indicator such as work efficiency, yield status, manufacturing of qualitative and competitive products, product recognition in market, increment in market outreach, capital investment and revenue generation, stakeholder interest, influence and adoption of alternative and clean energy acts as a litmus test. The findings helped to formulate diversified strategies for marketing and branding of business environments. The rise in value and increment in supply and standard shows the socio-economic growth, abundance and financial prosperity in rural communities. At the end, this article identifies that by increasing income generation from existing farm resources, diversifying farm revenue streams, expanding market, farm brand awareness, smoothing seasonal fluctuations in farm revenue that are customary in many forms of agriculture can be an effective strategy for developing agritourism in rural area. An integrated approach and collaboration between government agencies, local councils, tourism activity organizations and community is necessary for agritourism development. Assigning urban planners in curbing the land use and making optimum use of land profile, topography, orientation and site morphology to best suite the tourism activity on a rural context is essential. The overall outlook of the agritourism site should be true to its context. Adding locally available technique and materials in a modified way to meet the present day need, choice and comfort is of utmost importance. The forms and designs must be innovative and represent the sense of place in every element of commodity. Landscape design and management is a crucial part for flourishing an agritourism market so the proper study of agro products, site, adaptive and additive measures of interventions that can be applied on the site must be done.

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