



WATSAN issues affecting sustainable tourism

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THE HISTORY OF population movement is as old as human civilization. People have to travel for various reasons including survival and development. But the pattern of human travel is rapidly changing both in magnitude and speed in the recent years. This has been even further enhanced, especially in view of the ongoing globalization process. People often travel with a purpose, while travel under compulsion is also common. For the purposes of trade and commerce, official missions, pilgrimage and recreation people travel with an intention and plan. But for wars and natural disasters people travel under compulsion. However, irrespective of the types, travel is always associated with health risks. Both traveling and hosting population are equally exposed to such risks. The health issues associated with travel under compulsion are of highly complex in nature, hence kept out of the purview of this paper. Considering close relationship with water-sanitation sector, this paper will discuss some of the issues related to health risks of intentional travels and few strategies for their management.

In 1998, World Tourism Organization reported about 625 million international tourists' arrival. 50 million travelers each year visit developing countries, where the hygienic and epidemic conditions are fundamentally different as compared to where and how these travelers normally live in. This tremendous growth of international travel greatly influences lifestyles and values in these countries.

Income generation and employment potential are powerful inducers for enhancing travels through tourism, which the developing countries cannot overlook at all. Therefore, many countries find it an attractive way for boosting their economy and undertake promotional drives and aggressively increase tourism activities. Host countries (developing), with scarce resources, as a result, often and obviously have to confront with the difficulties to manage the already overloaded health and supporting infrastructures.

In the developing world, water pollution, sanitary disposal of human waste, garbage disposal and deforestation are already of major environmental concerns. Added to that the load of international travelers, which not only influences the health of the local population but also pose threats to the travelers' health and acts as a vehicle of spreading diseases even to other countries. Tourism also exposes the hosting population to potential alien infections. Enhanced tourism activities may, therefore, jeopardize the very consideration of boosting economy if health impacts due to influx of tourists are not seriously thought of beforehand. While both of these implications are asso-

ciated with the hosting countries, there are chances of tourists carrying infections to their home countries, which may not have adequate preparedness to combat with the imported infections.

Evaluation study carried out in Indonesia in 1997 shows that 25% hotel did not conform to requisite standards of sanitation, while hygienic conditions of 65% swimming pools and 61% tourist places was below acceptable levels. Another survey carried out in 1995/96 reveals that sanitation and hygienic conditions of tourism supporting infrastructures, such as transports, restaurants, visiting places and objects largely influence the tourists on health ground. It is therefore, no wonder, that Indonesia witnessed a decrease in tourist arrivals in the recent years as reported in the Travel Health Conference in Bali, July 21 – 23, 2000.

Sudden cancellation of planned travels has serious economic implications. Tourists' health safety has direct bearing on the sustenance of tourism efforts. There are evidences of 'failing tourism season' due to environmental degradation affecting human health. Plague incidence in India in 1993 and prolonged haze problems in the South-east Asia in 1998 are still fresh in our memory when the countries of the region suffered tremendous economic loss due to cancellation of scheduled trips of the tourists. Examples also are very common that the planned tours had to be cancelled due to sudden outbreaks of communicable diseases. It is therefore imperative that the health implications of tourism and planned travels are well understood and suitable strategies are developed to combat them.

The common health problems, which are of great concerns of tourism, are travel diarrhea, helminthic infection, malaria, dengue, yellow fever etc. Grossly all of them are associated with water-sanitation sector interventions and associated behaviors and practices. Few strategies what have been tried out in this connection are:

Ecotourism: fosters environmental and cultural understanding through appreciating local limitations of infrastructures and conservation of resources towards achieving ecologically sustainable tourism.

Healthy tourism: integrates health interventions covering both tourists and local people, which can positively influence tourism.

The water-sanitation sectoral interventions, which feature in main features of these strategies, are:

- **Hygiene infrastructure and services:** These include accommodation, waste collection, sanitation, and sewage. The focus is on the adequacy of the infrastructure

that would help in health protection, and environmental prevention.

- **Food hygiene and food safety:** food production, prevention, mass catering, imported food quality etc are critically looked at. With respect to each of these aspects, criteria for the assurance of the quality are devised.
- **Environmental considerations:** The focus is on the preservation of environment for promoting human health. Aspects such as the quality of drinking water, indoor and outdoor air quality, pollution control in fishing areas, recreation water quality, cleanliness of

recreational area, beach cleanliness, vector control etc. are of highest consideration.

The strategies recently adopted along these lines on pilot scale have started showing positive results. However, it is necessary to provide more attention for further strengthening this effort for sustaining the tourism activities, which many developing countries consider important for economic reasons.

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