

The Impact Of Excessive Tourism In Mount Everest

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Abstract

Mount Everest has the highest peak in the world. Since Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary first climbed the mountain over 60 years ago, over 3,000 people have proudly stood on its summit. Every year, thousands of climbers ascend the mountain, which is 8,848 meters high. Climbing the mountain has become an adventurous industry. Different records have been put, such as the first Saudi woman to climb the mountain in 2013, the first wedding, the first Harlem shake, and the first video call, among others (Anup, 2017). However, excessive tourism has brought both positive and negative impacts on the mountain, with the most significant impact on the environment. However, though tourism has had a tremendous economic impact due to the foreign exchange earned, it has negatively affected the environment, mainly because of the garbage left on the mountain.

1. INTRODUCTION

Transformation of the economy

Increased Employment Opportunities and Affluence

The Nepal government has encouraged tourism growth to secure more foreign exchange and stimulate economic growth and development. The increased tourists have led to better living standards and prosperity of the Sherpa or the village where Everest is located. The Sherpas are involved in high attitude jobs that earn \$7,000 annually, which is way above the national average (Anup, 2017). They have adopted the tourism income-generating activities such as trekking, mountaineering, pottering, and cooking. However, women's participation in such employment has been low as they are only employed as cooks, camp crews, and drivers. The mountaineering is an excellent source of foreign exchange as a team of seven people pays a royalty of \$50,000 and an additional \$20,000 if a team wants to access the mountain from the Eastern Ridge (Rai, 2017).

Increased inequality

Tourism-based economic activities are only available to the households along with Mt Everest. However, the families in the village are significantly low-income earners. With Nepal being listed among the world's poorest countries, inequality is massive (Lelpo et al., 2016). Many people from the village have migrated mainly to the towns to tap the high earning jobs. The migration has caused social issues that are related to overcrowding.

Effects of Tourism on the Land Use

Before tourism flourished in Khumbu, subsistence farming was the main activity where the Sherpas cultivated potatoes, wheat, and barley. After tourism dominated the place, the households abandoned subsistence farming to join tourism-based jobs. Agriculture was primarily left to women, who were forced to hire workers from low-

lying areas to fill the void left by men (Nepal, 2016). Food for tourists was mainly brought from the low attitude region.

Tourism has also affected pastoralism in the area. Initially, people kept female Yak called Nak for dairy products, manure, and dried dung to prepare fuel. With tourism, the Sherpas mainly kept Using Zipkin, a cross-breed of yak and Tibetan bull. The shift to UrangZopkio is because many mountaineers and trekkers use them to transport tourists stuff (Lelpo et al., 2016). The increased UrangZopkio has led to intensified grazing that has reduced forest vegetation and increased soil erosion.

Deforestation

Increased tourism has increased demand for firewood as it is the primary fuel energy source used in campfires, cooking, and heating. Thus, the thinning of trees has been very high in Khumbu, and some people have consistently violated government regulations to protect the forests. Additionally, the government has banned firewood use by tourists, trekkers, and mountaineers and has instead advised using kerosene stoves (In, 2001). Cutting trees for construction purposes has also been restricted. However, excessive tourists have reduced the government's ability to monitor compliance, and locals continue to sell firewood to tourists for a profit.

The Garbage Problem

According to Nepalese authorities, the number of tourists in Sagarmatha Nation Park, where Mt. Everest is located, has tripled for the last twenty years. The increasing number of tourists has brought a large amount of rubbish left behind the mountain. Lelpo et al. (2016) noted that Mount Everest's debris mainly includes climbing gears, beer cans, oxygen cylinders, steel food containers, food wrappers, whisky bottles, dead bodies, and plastic cans, among others. The biggest problem with this waste is that it does not biodegrade because of the mountain's frigid temperatures (Stevens, 1991). The other problem is that when the waste is burnt, it releases a toxic chemical into the air, and when buried, it contaminates the underground water (Aubriot, 2019).

According to estimates, about 50 tonnes of garbage has been dumped on Mount Everest in the last sixty years. The mountain has been nicknamed 'the world's highest garbage dump' (Fletcher et al., 2017). The garbage has been left mainly by inexperienced, unprepared, and unprofessional climbers who want to save energy so that they can reach the summit and return alive. Some climbers like Reinhold Messner have proposed closure of access to the mountain for some years to clear the mess and allow the region to recover.

Attempt To Correct the Garbage Problem

The Nepal tourism ministry has made several legislations that ensure that the mountain climbers do not leave their garbage on the mountain. One such progressive regulation was developed in the year 2013, where every climber going beyond the base camp was required to come back with not less than 17.6 pounds or 8 kilograms of personal waste, which was to be handed over to officials stationed at the various locations (Nepal, 2016). The eight-kilogram waste was reached out as the government estimates that an exhausted climber discards as such (Fletcher et al. 2017). The directive was to ensure that no new garbage was to be left on the mountain.

The new garbage rule was a good idea, but it lacked clear instructions. First, it was not clear at which point the garbage should be brought back. There was also no proper documentation showing which camp brought down its waste and weighted how much. Additionally, the tourism ministry was to take legal action against any climber who does not

bring their trash, but the legal action was not explicit. The ministry's control was that every camp had to leave a deposit of \$4000 or 2900 euros to be refunded after proving that no garbage has been left in the mountain (Dang, 2003). Otherwise, the implementation of the garbage rule has been complex.

The garbage rule is a good concept, but its enforcement is difficult. For example, it means the authorities have to measure everyone's garbage after they descend the mountain. However, if a person's waste has not reached eight kilograms, it is unclear whether they should collect other rubbish to gain the required weight. Besides, if a person struggles to come down alive, he might not think of carrying the garbage rather than saving his or her own life (Dang, 2003). It is not human to take legal action against a person whose garbage collection would have caused an injury.

Many rules have not been implemented to avoid the reduction of tourists in the area. Surprisingly, the Nepalese tourism ministry has reduced fees to attract more climbers. Plans have also been in place to fix additional ropes and ladders to reduce congestion at the mountain bottleneck areas, such as the Hillary Step (Stevens, 2003). The government is indifferent about reducing the number of tourists because its economy is highly dependent on tourism (Stevens, 1993). For instance, Nepal earns over \$3.3 million each year as climbing fees. The mountain climbers also create employment opportunities for thousands of hotel owners and trekking guides who entirely depend on the tourists to earn a living. Since Nepal was ranked among the world's poorest countries, tourism is an important economic activity to boost the livelihoods of its citizens.

2. CONCLUSION

To correct the environmental problem that has been experienced in Mount Everest, it has to take the combined efforts of the mountain climbers, the local people, and the Nepal government. The mountaineers should take it as a personal responsibility to bring down the waste they carry to the mountain. The locals should help clean the garbage by having publicized clean-up expeditions, while the government should develop rules and regulations to prevent further dumping. The policies should be implemented even if it means a reduction of tourists so that the government can spare the natural site for future generations. However, it should ensure that all the garbage currently in place is collected.

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