



Mid-Western University
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Masters in International Cooperation and Development

TOURISM AMBITIONS AND COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A Webinar by MICD-MWU

Summary Report

A webinar on “Tourism Ambitions and COVID-19 Pandemic” was organized by Master in International Cooperation and Development (MICD) under the Mid-Western University (MWU) on 4 May 2020. The event was graced by the newly appointed Vice-Chancellor of MWU, Professor Dr Nanda Bahadur Singh. There were more than 90 attendees including academicians, MWU officials, faculty members, experts, practitioners, and graduate students. Taking interest at the time of pandemic, the participants represented four continents: Africa, North America, Asia and Europe of the world. The virtual seminar had three invited speakers sharing their views on the topic followed by a question and answer session.

At the outset, moderating of the webinar Dr Dinesh Raj Bhujju, Hon. Professor and Academic Head of MICD-MWU warmly welcomed the invited guest, speakers and participants. He highlighted the need and importance of organizing the webinar in this hour of COVID-19 pandemic. He emphasized the pandemic will definitely have social, economic and environmental impacts in the society. And the tourism sector will mark a huge impact. In this regard, he depicted the uncertain future by putting the question in the floor- “What will happen in the post-COVID-19 period still unknown?”

Delivering his opening remarks, Professor Dr Singh thanked the organizer upon bringing the attendees from four continents in one virtual room in order to brainstorm on ‘Tourism ambitions and COVID-19 pandemic’ which is very important and timely in the context of Nepal. Sharing the statistics of Tourism in Nepal, he said Nepal had to postpone the Visit Nepal 2020 aiming to welcome two million tourists because of the outbreak of COVID-19 across the world. Moreover, he accentuated ‘natural and cultural/ethnic diversity of Nepal’ while attracting more tourists in the country, also presents a proper place for research including on the impact of Coronavirus.

Invited speaker Dr Dhanajaya Regmi, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB), discussed the ongoing plans and actions of NTB during the COVID-19 crisis. NTB has successfully rescued 5,500 stranded tourists of 60 countries in Nepal and supported them to return back to their home country

Webinar on Tourism Ambitions and COVID-19 Pandemic by MICD-MWU



Clockwise: NB Singh, DR Bhujju, D Regmi, COVID-19 Data, GB Parigi and B Thapa. Photo: Webinar Zoom

safely. The board is currently collecting data and information from the concerned bodies in order to devise the appropriate response strategy and is trying to establish collaboration with I/NGOs to revive the tourism in Nepal. As tourism industry employs considerable number of people in Nepal, the main priority of the tourism officials, at the moment, is how to retain the jobs in the industry. The CEO highlighted the tourism revival strategies as:

- Domestic tourism promotion: NTB is lobbying with government to include the actions and allocate the resources to increase internal tourism in the upcoming budget and policy of Nepal government. For this, NTB is proposing the government to allow at least 10 days travel holidays to the working population. This is will ensure surge in internal tourism.
- Remain ready to jump into the international market as soon as WHO announces the world is safe from the COVID-19. In this regard, the first priority of tourism sector of Nepal will be to host Chinese and Indian tourists.

Lead presenter of the webinar, Dr Brijesh Thapa, Professor in the Department of Tourism, Hospitality and Event Management at the University of Florida (USA), was the key speaker of the webinar. Dr Thapa said tourism is one of the main pillars of Nepalese economy and has nine percent contributions to the National GDP. Moreover, tourism employs a considerable number of Nepalese youths across the country. He shared the pertinent questions that tourism sector has been facing in the contemporary world which is equally important in the context of Nepal - "If you build it, will they come?" "Are they coming to your destinations?" In this regard, the government has to be focus on right product and right place. Dr Thapa identified the areas that Nepali government needs to invest/focus in order to boom the tourism industry are: improve and develop infrastructure, ensure better connectivity, increase mobility aspects, guarantee the safety and security and develop better communications/ITs. At this particular juncture of time, he threw the question in the floor: How does Nepal guarantee the idea of safety to the visitors? This related

to the consumer demand as the tourists want to return back safely. Elaborating COVID-19 pandemic affected the human psychology that goes beyond the tourism; Dr Thapa provided the suggestions to the Nepali government to revive the tourism industry. They are:

- Government needs to immediately work on developing resilient planning approach that should be participatory. For this, Ministry of Tourism and NTB are responsible.
- High level tourism recovery taskforce should be formed. Private sector has to be brought in (included in the taskforce). Moreover, the basic principle of the task force should be public-private partnership.
- Tourism has never been the same. This is a resilient industry. The question at the moment is 'how does Nepal get from survival to revival'. The better strategies are required in this line. The best practices and lessons learned across the world should be the basis to start with.
- Nepali tourism needs to adjust with the 'New Normal'. New normal means digital checking, social/physical distancing, and necessity of mobile app for the public health and health and hygiene concerns. What is the plan for new normal? In post-COVID-19, idea of public health and safety will be the top priority of the consumers. Nevertheless, Nepal is placed in 106th position out of 140 countries in the health and hygiene index of tourism in the globe.
- Short-term vacation and trips should be planned for the survival of the tourism industry.
- Domestic travel and tourism should be the immediate preferences.
- ICTs must be used for the marketing strategy in the post-COVID-19 context.

Invited commentator of the webinar, Dr Gian Battista Parigi, Professor of Department of Diagnostic, Pediatric, Clinical and Surgical Science and President of Center for International Cooperation in the University of Pavia (Italy) began his presentation by saying "I am not a tourism expert but a health surgeon. I am a good traveler and tourist". He shared the tourism statistics of Italy and briefed how the COVID-19 pandemic has been affecting the tourism industry in Italy. Dr Parigi updated Italy's initiations to support the tourism sector and key words that tourism sector currently in use.

Italy's initiations to support the tourism sector	Key words that tourism sector currently in use
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leave and extra allowances • Protection and social shock absorbers • Support for business • Voucher for travel agencies and accommodation facilities • Reviving the image of Italy in the world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilience • Stayaction (stay around home) • Under tourism • Individual trips • Digital planning • Responsible travelling • Poor tourism
Source: Presentation by GB Parigi	

In the final session of the webinar, Professor Thapa and Professor Parigi responded to the couple of queries of the participants. Before conclusion, Mr Rabin Malla, program coordinator of MICD-MWU proposed Vote of Thanks.

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