

Sustainable Entrepreneurship: Designing Green Practices in Tourism by Ecoplore , A Case Study

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Abstract

With the growing population and aggressively depletion of natural resources impacting environmental degradation at a faster pace, sustainability is not a niche term any more, but a more demanded aspect to preserve the future of the nation. From resource efficiency to reducing carbon footprint, sustainability is an inclusive approach in entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs are now more conscious in choosing the pathway of building products or services which are more aligned to their nation's contribution to a sustainable environment and responsible growth. The purpose of this case study is to inform readers about Ecoplore's, an Eco-hotel booking platform for their notable practices, which include real-world applications of the company's offerings and recommendations that support sustainable entrepreneurship. The study shows how to promote sustainable initiatives by making them more popular with consumers, facilitating the transition easier, and raising awareness of the threat to nature. The study goes on to discuss further distinctive benefits of sustainable entrepreneurship, including long-term economic and national benefits and broad business expansion potential. The key finding of the case study is that it is critical to have clear knowledge of sustainable business goals before implementation for the real purpose of sustainable entrepreneurship.

Keywords : Sustainability, Entrepreneurship, Green Practices, Environment, Tourism

Background

Perna Prasad, Founder & CEO of Ecoplore is a gold medalist graduate in Political Science from Institute for Excellence in Higher Education, Bhopal. She got her journalism diploma from Indian Institute of Mass Communication and completed her Masters in Political Science from Hindu College, Delhi. She is a fellow of WEE Foundation, IIT Delhi, Fellow at 'Women Get Funded' programme by Silicon valley based investor Alicia Castillo Holley and Fellow at Climate Launchpad by European Union. After working for more than 8 years in prominent English news channels like CNN-IBN & India Today, Perna chose the path of entrepreneurship. Combining her love for travel and vision to create an environmental impact, she started Ecoplore. She spent the first 2 years in ground research by visiting different eco-friendly hotels and understanding the real meaning of sustainable tourism. She aims to invest all her income generated from Ecoplore in developing a forest and returning it back to nature. Her venture Ecoplore has been recognised by UN environment programme.

Theoretical Background

Sustainable Entrepreneurship

Sustainable means encouraging use of natural products without damaging the environment for our own good use. It is basically a societal goal so that we as human can safely co-exist on the earth over a long period of time. Humanity is continuously exceeding planetary boundaries and not addressing its effectiveness on major issues like climate change, nature diversity, land degradation, air and water pollution.

Sustainable development refers to processes and pathways to achieve sustainability. It has three dimensions: pillars environmental, economic and social.

A report published by Brundtland on environment and development in 1987 coined the term "sustainable development" and defined it as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Sustainable development has five major components, such as conservation of the ecosystem or environment, conservation of biodiversity of the planet, sustainable development of society, conservation of human resources and population control and management. It was first introduced by Rio Process initiated at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (2015 to 2030) and explained how the goals are integrated and indivisible to achieve sustainable development at the global level. There are 17 SDG Goals

that a country work for for the inclusive growth of the society. Companies can decide the focus work area and support the nation with their structured way of functioning that fulfills either or partial or all criterias of sustainable development. Sustainable entrepreneurship refers to the discovery, creation, and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities that contribute to sustainability by generating social and environmental gains for others in society (Hockerts and Wüstenhagen, 2010; Pacheco et al., 2010; Shepherd and Patzelt, 2011). Persons or organizations contributing substantially to sustainable development with their core businesses can be called sustainable entrepreneurs (Schaltegger and Wagner 2011). Sustainable entrepreneurs promotes conscious business building which protects the environment as well as meets the needs of society and also encourages future generations to meet their own needs.

Introduction

Sustainable entrepreneurship is opportunity-oriented and aims at producing innovative products, policies and processes which reduce the social and environmental impacts and improve the way of living in a substantial way.

Joseph Schumpeter (1934) explained entrepreneurship can be described as creative destruction, whereas sustainable entrepreneurs dismantle the conventional, old-fashioned and unsustainable production methods, products, consumption patterns and market structures with their revived and superior products and processes that support the environment with a single agenda of making life on earth better for all.

The tourism sector is an important pillar of the government initiative i.e. Make in India programme. It plays a significant economic advantage to country by increasing consumption, It is also critical for employment generation. It is estimated that tourism sector will be contributing \$512 billion to India's GDP by 2028 from the current \$ 121 billion and generation of 53 million jobs by 2029 growing at the rate of 10.35%.

In FY20, tourism sector in India accounted for 39 million jobs, which was 8.0% of the total employment in the country. By 2029, it is expected to account for about 53 million jobs, which means while there is a strong wealth creation by industry, it is also going to create a tremendous pressure on the environmental side of degradation, depleting natural resources at a much faster rate than anticipated.

As per the 2018 study, tourism sector accounts for 8% of total carbon emissions in India. How hotels contribute to carbon emissions is an emerging threat to pollution. A negative impact occurs when the load of tourism is more than the local environment can handle. This creates tremendous pressure on soil erosion, discharged to rivers, natural habitat loss, heightened vulnerability to forest species and many more.

Tourism creates great pressure on the consumption of local resources, such as land degradation by increased use of construction activities, damage to nature's scenery beauty etc.

Tourism now accounts for 60% of air travel and, as per a previous study, estimates that a return flight emits almost half the CO2 emissions generated by all other sources such cars, lights etc, consumed by an average person yearly. (Mayer Hillman, Town & Country Planning magazine, September 1996. Source: MFOE).

Other major physical impacts of the tourism sectors are deforestation to build roads and pave the way to bring transport to rarest sites, construction activities to build stay for tourists, increased sewage facilities degrading our rivers etc. Therefore, it is imperative that it is attended seriously to conserve the nature and thus, Ecoplore was born in 2018. Ecoplore is an travel booking platform promoting eco-stays for the travelers who cares for the mother nature. Prerna Prasad, Founder & CEO, Ecoplore, decided to take this initiative and build a sustainable business which not only supports the nation's green objectives but builds strong environmental awareness in multiple ways through consumer outreach. All activities are based on nature centric experience located close to mountains, beachers, forests and rivers. Ecoplore is very sensitive when it comes to choosing a particular hotel while on boarding. For example, plastic use is a big no for them, Eco-stay hotels should harvest solar energy for their electricity requirements, rain water harvesting to store water and generate local employment for local community to prevent migrating run thereby reducing the burden on urban cities.

Problems

India's rich culture and diversity attracts national and international visitors to the country's scenic places to enjoy the beauty of nature and coastal areas. From Spiritual tourism to caves and historic crafts to mountain and peaks, from coolest weather in leh ladakh to hottest and driest in rajasthan, Places in India provides rich options to people across the world to visit and enjoy the leisure. Tourism is not only a big contribution of India's GDP but it is also critical for employment

generation. Initiatives like “Athithi Devo Bhavo”, “Incredible India”, tourism is creating another identity for India, However, in the past years, tourism sector has become the matter of concern with its nature of utilising resources and not supporting environmental progress to the nation. It has many adverse effects, such land degradation, soil erosion, deforestation, construction activities, water pollution, sewage issues, effect on marine life and list goes on. Adverse effect happens when the use of facility is more than the optimum capacity of the resource.

Tourism has direct impact on biodiversity, When tourism growth drives more consumption in places where resources are already scarce, it puts pressure on the environment. One of the most crucial natural resources is water. Typically, the tourism sector overuses water supplies for restaurants, swimming pools, and golf courses and individual tourist use. Rising tourist numbers result in a rise in water demand. As a result of water supply degradation and shortages, respectively as well as producing more waste water. Tourism additional development puts tremendous pressure on the local economy. available resources, including food, energy, and other bare essentials. increased transportation and usage of these resources leads to the negative bodily effects of their exploitation.

Because the tourist sector is primarily seasonal, in the peak season, more people visit numerous places as throughout the off-season. There is a significant demand for these resources to meet the demand for tourism. The strain has intensified due to tourism and recreational facilities on these assets and beautiful landscapes, which has a direct impact on both renewable and nonrenewable natural resources in the region. The usage of land might impact on the availability of tourist amenities for the supply of housing, other infrastructure, and the utilisation of construction materials. Forests frequently experience detrimental effects of tourism through the usage of fuel wood, which results in deforestation land clearance. Another problem arises in customer awareness about sustainable tourism or eco-stay often leads to a notion of low hygiene, no fun and uncomfortable stays creating an issue with customer awareness.

Solution

Sustainable Entrepreneurship is the way forward to bring harmony with growth. Entrepreneurs have to be sensitive to the environment while doing business for profits. Now it is no more about giving profits back to society and managing the damage, but at the first hand, doing business responsibly. Entrepreneurs need to be pro active while choosing their business practices.

Ecoplore

Finding hotels or homestays that are truly eco-friendly is one of the more difficult aspects of trip planning for a responsible traveller. Prerna Prasad encountered a similar problem when arranging a vacation to Malaysia, and it required some research on her part to identify the eco-stays that she ultimately used. This gave her the idea to develop Ecoplore, a centralised resource for tourists to find eco-resorts in India. She started her journey of Ecoplore in 2016, a travel aggregator that has verified eco-friendly services in more than 200 hotels, resorts, and homestays.

During her research, she found that eco friendly term is overly used and sustainable is mere a marketing buzz word in the tourism industry. Travelers have very little information and low ideas on sustainable tourism and practices. They don't find it very attractive, considering it unhygienic, unsafe and less enjoyable.

“In fact, one of my friends. who is a doctor said that there must not be western commode and that there must be water leakage in a mud house,” she shares, adding, “People living in concrete buildings have no idea how these eco-friendly or non-concrete structures are made.”

- Prerna Prasad, Founder & Ceo, Ecoplore

The Ecoplore staff inspects, validates, advertises, and books eco-friendly hotels. She took it hands on and verified each of the property by personally visiting them before on boarding. She sets bare minimum sustainable practice criteria under SDG 12 that Every eco-stay on the property should have at least 30% of its campus covered in greenery, and the majority of its buildings should be made of mud, wood, stone, bamboo, or other natural materials. The accommodations are close to a forest, waterfall, mountain, river, or other picturesque area. The stays feature fruit trees, a lot of activities, and they cultivate their own vegetables etc.

Each hotel on the platform is distinctive and has a special background. For instance, a Tigress gave birth to two cubs on the only private estate in the world at one of Jim Corbett's eco-resorts. And at least 35 kilometres away, there are no inhabited areas in the region. The hotel is located on a hill that is part of a Tiger corridor, and there was animal-human conflict there.

The property owner purchased the entire hill and returned it to wildlife. Less than 5% of the overall land has been developed. Around 650 different bird species in this area. Therefore, it's the ideal setting for anyone who enjoys nature, seeks peace, or wants to conduct creative work while sitting.

Another Eco-stay featured on Ecoplore is a log structure in Himachal Pradesh's Tirthan Valley that is surrounded by fruit-bearing trees like apple, walnut, apricot, and pear.

The Ecoplore's mission is to safeguard the environment. The portal solely advertises environmentally friendly lodgings built of mud, wood, bamboo, stone (but not concrete), and other organic materials. These hotels also use additional environmentally friendly practices, such as composting, waste water treatment, solar panels, and rainwater collection. In addition, Ecoplore helps people construct eco-friendly homes rather than concrete ones. They also promote the idea of supporting the neighbourhood economy through cultivating local food, encouraging regional architecture, hiring neighbourhood residents, and promoting regional art and craft. .

Journey of Prerna at Ecoplore

The company is women-owned and women-managed, hence Prerna also went through certain difficulties, such as no background in sustainable world, She is from a journalism background with a political science degree in her majors. With this disorientation profession of her past, entering into a sustainable world with less knowledge, she did 2 years of research before initiating her startup, Similarly, financial accounting, taxation, startup policies, grants information was something tedious for her to extract information and apply but the overall journey was an experience itself. She specified that any entrepreneur entering into startup world should not enter just to complete their wishful thinking, they should introspect on the problem they are solving and, most importantly, they should have a financial back up to sustain their idea into practical situation. She also stressed that at present moment, investors are not fascinated by the idea of sustainable being a niche area, but she is confident that since it is the future, sooner or later, they will have the focus shift to such startups to bring sustainable growth with the nation's interest. Ecoplore has received a grant of Rs 50,000 as a fellow of Women Entrepreneurship and Empowerment (WEE), a joint initiative of Government think tank Niti Aayog, IIT-Delhi, and the DST under Government of India. Prerna Prasad also won a scholarship by Silicon Valley-based investor Alicia Castilo Holley under the Women Get Funded programme. Ecoplore got recognized as the top startups for Smart Fifty by IIM Calcutta Innovation Park

Results

Sustainable entrepreneurship is all about doing responsible business like Ecoplore where they not only ensure sustainable practices to follow at their listed hotels/stays, but also support their growth, which increases the income of localities prospering in various ways, such local employment reducing burden on cities. Ecoplore has been recognized by United Nations Environment Programme for fulfilling SDG 12. As per study conducted by Known Carbon, a European Union organization, the Carbon emissions by eco stay hotel is only 9 kg per night whereas as average hotel emits 75kg per night and a luxury hotel emits 1000 kg per night. Ecoplore promotes sustainable practices in the hotel and stays they onboard such as property must have solar energy as source of electricity, rain water harvesting system, employment to locals and women and most important property must have a green cover of 33% and only local material such as wood, mud, stone or bamboo are only used in constructions which ensure less electricity in summers and better cooling but also promotes nature stay that exist in harmony with surroundings. To promote such ventures, it is critical that entrepreneurs enroll in various incubators or e-cells to nurture their startup upbringing. With the persistence, Prerna has shown over past years, it is evident that flexibility with persistence is the keyword to stay with the agenda of promoting green practices for overall good use.

Conclusion

Sustainability Entrepreneurship is driven by the intrinsic desire of an entrepreneur to do meaningful growth while keeping the nation's interests at mind. This can only be done when entrepreneur will take a serious note for the inclusive growth in their business ie sustainable growth and practices to be followed. It is also important that the government provides ample opportunities and incremental funding to such startups to boost their business and, in turn, support the nation's objective. Investors are also called to showcase more trust in such initiatives which have a long term growth value. Students are advised to be persistent. In an interview with Fortune magazine, Neil Blumenthal, in commenting on the disruptive nature of the Warby Parker model, suggested, "The best businesses solve real problems. We've created an example of a business that can scale, be profitable, and do good in the world without charging a premium.". This is perfect set example to design sustainable green practices and build a business that has a real meaning of sustainable entrepreneurship like Ecoplore of India.

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