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Tourism planning and a nation's vision: A review of the tourism policy of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

As tourism is a vector of development, governments try to coordinate planning with national development objectives. In Sri Lanka, a post-war country, tourism has been perceived as a tool for post-war reconstruction and reconciliation. A blueprint document; the 'Sri Lankan Tourism Development Strategy 2011-2016', whose objectives are to distribute national economic benefits through tourism to economic development and national social cohesion, is guiding tourism development. Can it really be a bridge for reconstruction? This conceptual paper aims to assess the tourism reality in post-war Sri Lanka in the light of the blueprint document, by reviewing the policy with regards to; public or private tourism development, domestic or international tourism, special interest or mass tourism, tourism supply or resources focusing on the distribution of benefits. It concludes identifying gaps between the government tourism strategy, socio-economic and political situation. It contributes to the literature on Sri Lankan tourism development post-war, notably to review the tourism blueprint in its recognition and helps to build a body of knowledge on understanding tourism policy in the context of national reconstruction and social cohesion.

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1. Introduction

According to Chaudhary (2009), the development of a sector is influenced by the political system of a country, its socio-economic environment and the policy framework. Tourism policy has been discussed and defined by many authors as a statement of intent of a set course of action agreed upon by public body or agency such as the government or a private organization such as airlines or travel operators with regards to aspects of tourism, which

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would act as a reference point for accomplishment (Dye, 1992; Wilkinson, 1999; Mason, 2008; Chaudhary, 2009). As per Hall (2008), policies are studied for mainly three reasons such as; to be aware of the influence of policy decisions and their impacts; to offer feedback useful to be considered into the policy process about practical problems with the policy; and to appreciate the positives and principles concerned in the policy and planning process. As for tourism policies, it is important to study them owing to their practical and theoretical significance especially with regards to the significant role played by the government in the tourism industry of any country. This is stressed by Elliott (1997) who indicates that, “*it is only governments which have the power to provide the political stability, security and the legal and financial framework which tourism requires. They provide essential services and basic infrastructure. It is only national governments which can negotiate and make agreements with other governments on issues such as immigration procedures or flying over and landing on national territory*” (p.2). For developing countries and especially those developing countries that have gone through war or crises, the policy choice or decisions have usually been made in the middle of acute scarcity, especially with regards to infrastructure, facilities, trained and skilled tourism professional and capital (Jenkins & Henry, 1982). Policy choices made in such countries are by and large different from each other and largely depends on the type of crisis, political and socio-economic conditions of the individual country. Nevertheless, as pointed by Liu (2003) the policies need to be well defined, theoretically sound and feasible practically for the purpose of implementation of sustainable tourism plan.

Located close to the Southern part of India, Sri Lanka is an island country blessed with natural beauty consisting of tropical forests, fine biodiversity and varied landscapes, culture and heritage, making it a compact tourism destination. Sri Lanka is also a multicultural island of many ethnicities, religions and languages. The ethnic distribution of Sri Lanka as per census (2011) consists of Buddhist Sinhalese majority (82%), a large minority of Sri Lankan Tamils (4.3%), Indian Tamil (5.1%), Muslim Moors (7.9%) and smaller communities of Malays (0.3 %), Burghers (0.2%) and others (0.2%). A complex intertwining of ethnic, class, political allegiance and external pressure made the conflict between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE) and government a long and ‘dirty’ war of over 30 years with more than 136,000 refugees (UNHCR, 2014) in 65 countries worldwide. It begun with the demand for autonomy by the rebel group LTTE (consisting of a few Tamil Hindu minorities), a globally recognised brutal terrorist network and the governing Sinhalese majority, yet the war was restricted to the North and some part of the Eastern provinces, basically LTTE controlled areas. The extensive civil war in Sri Lanka ended suddenly in 2009, with the death of the LTTE leader and the declaration of more than 4000 LTTE soldiers (Coleman, 2012). Hence the conflict was a military one but not politically or economically settled. Even in 2013, the common wealth meeting held in Sri Lanka was boycotted by Mauritius and Canada which hosts large number of Tamil refugees. The current government in Sri Lanka, who are also the winners of the war; is from the United People’s Freedom Alliance party, wherein majority Sinhalese and few Muslims have been represented, however still less Tamil representation; although, one or two Eastern LTTE militants, who surrendered have also been included in the government. Even though the country faced fierce civil war, it did not deter tourists from visiting its Centre, West and Southern parts. Tourism sector in post-war Sri Lanka saw increased tourist arrivals in 2010, highlighting it as a significant sector that would aid the country’s economic growth. Nonetheless, even during the war, the tourism sector was making its share of revenue though tourism was restricted to the government ruled and protected areas of Sri Lanka. Interestingly the state of tourism in Sri Lanka during the war was more of a rollercoaster with tourist inflow picking up in the 1990s, with the effective image building campaigns by the government and the war being confined to restricted areas of the country. Then 1995 and 1996 saw terrorist attacks in Colombo affecting two five star hotels in the city, namely Hotel Ceylon intercontinental and Galadari; yet Sri Lankan tourism was successful in picking up well quickly until 2001 with more image building campaigns and the fact that the country had diverse tourism products to offer. Yet once again, in 2001, LTTE launched an attack on the Colombo international airport, killing many people including tourists and destroying many passenger aircrafts and for tourism to pick after that was a huge challenge even with never ending peace talk attempts between the government and the terrorist group in 2002 (Beirman, 2003). Jenkins (1987) points out that planning is needed at this post war stage, with clear objectives in place, policies can be formulated which will help in avoiding situations where emergency actions have to be taken and provide stability for any future decisions and operations

Two years, after the war ended in 2009, a Blueprint document was published by the government in 2011. The ‘Sri Lankan Tourism Development Strategy 2011 – 2016’, a five year master plan, wherein the following key areas have been identified and approved by the cabinet as necessary for tourism development: the policy framework, the

infrastructure, service standards, right market segments and the potential of cultural, medical and agro tourism or in words diverse niche tourism. The tourism development strategy document stresses the need to attract the right kind of tourists and poverty alleviation through equal distribution spatially, socially and ethnically. The document derives from vision and philosophy of the larger national development strategy vision developed by the controversial president (President Mahinda Rajapaksha) and called the ‘Mahinda Chintana’ literally meaning Mahinda’s Vision in the Sinhalese Language. Now that the war is over and the country is under reconstruction and tourism development projects are on, the question that arises is; whether state of tourism development is the same across the country? So far until 2009, tourism activities, development and tourist attractions were mostly concentrated in the Western, Central and Southern provinces. What about the Northern and the Eastern provinces? Are they benefiting from the tourism boom? Are the economic benefits distributed equally considering that the north and east are the war torn areas and consists mostly of the minority Tamils and Muslims? This conceptual paper aims to assess the tourism reality in post war Sri Lanka in the light of the blueprint document. In order to achieve the aim, the paper will look at two key objectives; first to demonstrate an understanding of tourism in the Sri Lankan context, and second to contrast the blueprint’s socio-economic and political planning objectives against the socio-economic, ethnical, territorial fragmentation of fractures of the country after three years of implementation. The paper contributes to the literature on Sri Lankan tourism development post-war, notably to review the official five year plan blueprint in its recognition. The discussions in the paper help to build a body of knowledge on understanding tourism development policy in the context of national reconstruction and social cohesion. Furthermore it will be useful to students or researchers studying or focusing on tourism planning and policy in Sri Lanka or South Asian context as a case study. The study will critically review the policy with regards to; firstly public or private tourism development, secondly domestic or international tourism, thirdly special interest or mass tourism, fourthly tourism supply or resources and finally distribution of tourism benefits. The methodology approach utilised is qualitative approach and the policy document would be analyzed through document analysis. The paper concludes identifying gaps between the government tourism development strategy and socio-economic and political situation.

2. Tourism policy framework in post-war Sri Lanka

Post-war, Sri Lanka observed 8% economic growth in 2010 and increased tourist arrivals, prompting the identification and recognition of the tourism Sector as one of the main sectors driving the country’s economic progress (Sri Lankan Tourism Development Strategy, 2011). The benefits from tourism highlight the need to develop the sector in sync with national development in the country. Policy assessment is initiated and necessary mainly by establishing how tourism is included in the national development plan which will depend on the potential of tourism to add to the national income, bring in foreign exchange, employment and economic development (Dieke, 2011). “*The development policy framework of the Government of Sri Lanka is committed to a sustainable tourism development strategy*”, wherein, “*protection of the environment and distribution of economic benefits to the larger cross section of the society are key components of this overall vision*” (Sri Lankan Tourism Development Strategy 2011 – 2016, 2011, p.4). The blueprint aims at making Sri Lanka a model tourist destination by tapping its natural resources sustainably, yet setting a target of 2.5 million ‘high’ spending tourists by 2016. According to tourism statistics maintained by Sri Lankan Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), 2009 saw 447,890 tourist arrivals, mostly ‘budget tourists’ with an increase after May when the war was declared over. In 2010 the arrivals grew to 650,000 tourists and the numbers reached over a million (1,005, 605) in 2012. Given this exponential growth, the document intends to achieve the set aim through key SMART objectives explicitly; to increase tourist arrivals to 2.5 million by 2016; to draw 3 billion US dollars within 5 years as Foreign Direct Investments (FDI); to boost tourism related employment to 500,000 by 2016 from 125,000 in 2010; to ensure that the economic benefits of tourism are equally distributed to larger population and tourism is incorporated to the economy; to enhance foreign exchange revenue to 2.75 billion dollars by 2016 from 500 million dollars in 2010; improve international trade and place Sri Lanka as ‘world’s most treasured island’ for tourism (Sri Lankan Tourism Development Strategy, 2011). The Blueprint document was drafted by the Sri Lanka Tourism Authority under the guidance of largely the Ministry of Economic Development

2.1. A public / private tourism development policy

According to Richter and Richter (1985) a critical decision that tourism policy makers need to make while planning is to what extent and how should the government be included in development of tourism in the country be it complete ownership in all aspects to a blend of public and private involvement. With the long decade of war in Sri Lanka, complete government ownership may not be practical considering the capital needed to rebuild the country's war torn areas. The Blueprint document outlines that a blend of public and private involvement is envisioned in the tourism development with more involvement of private and foreign direct investments. Richter and Richter (1985) also points out that in most South Asian countries, a blend of public and private involvement is common, yet government involvement is designed in a manner to compete as well as support the private sector. The government's plan and role intends to include; facilitating private and foreign direct investments by developing a 'one stop shop' for investors, simple tax regime, licensing procedures, land bank, concessions for Small Medium Enterprises (SME) and land availability for long term lease and sale for investors. Other than that, it also intends to improve infrastructure, facilities and services through the creation of clean city concept, policies integrating other sectors, improve railways, road access, facilities at key attractions, human resources training for the sector, increase number of rooms and introduction of seaplanes, light aircrafts and boats. Furthermore it intends to aid in developing tourism products and environment via simple regulations for tourist activities, tourism guidelines, reduced congestions at immigration counters, tourist police, regularised pricing structure of key attractions; diverse tourism products such as coastal fishing, dolphin or whale watching, Ayurvedic health centres, agro farms, religious festivals, botanical, zoological gardens, conserve biological diversity in the north and eastern provinces. It also plans to promote Sri Lankan tourism through various campaigns in order to target new markets and draw high spending tourists by simple online visa and improved website communication that is attractive, useful, practical and informative (Sri Lankan Tourism Development Strategy, 2011).

2.2. Encouraging international arrivals and promoting domestic tourism

Destinations predominantly focus mainly on international tourism volumes and expenditure, yet international tourism is only one part and certainly in number of arrivals, domestic tourism is several times larger than international. On the other hand the challenge with domestic tourism is tracking movements and expenditures. Yet domestic tourism is significant but mostly invisible part of total tourism. According to Eijgelaar, Peeters and Picket (2008) ignoring domestic tourists makes it difficult to make dependable policies for sustainable development (e.g. poverty alleviation). Also more movement of domestic tourists can also create awareness of the various regions, communities and cultures which has the potential to encourage social cohesion. As per a comparative study conducted in 22 countries, people take domestic holidays more than once per year, yet these are normally large rich countries, endowed with plenty of opportunities for domestic tourism (Bigano et al. 2004). The policy from the blueprint is to simultaneously have both international and domestic tourism. While 2010 saw a good inflow of international tourists post war, the rise in income has lead to an increase in demand for domestic tourism as well. The policy towards attracting international tourism comprises of; offering diverse niche tourism products such beaches, sports, adventure, heritage, wildlife and nature, mind and body wellness, agro tourism, medical, community based tourism business tourism and religious festivals to suit various tourist interests and aim at high end tourist spenders. Other promotional campaigns to attract international tourists with the help of embassies and missions abroad include innovative and useful website, a major international advertising campaign to be initiated in late 2012 or 2013, improving global image through building rapport with international journalists and media, increasing the frequency of flights to Sri Lanka and attract more airlines to operate to Sri Lanka. Marketing campaigns would in addition focus on the new target markets such as America, East Asia, Middle East, Eastern Europe and Australasia (Sri Lankan Tourism Development Strategy, 2011). With regards to domestic tourism, the policy includes; an establishment of the domestic tourism unit to promote and observe change in tourism activities according to age, gender, level of education and wealth of tourists, domestic tourist quotas at discounted prices, setting up of theme and amusement parks, promoting business tourism, bringing in international sports competitions such as cricket, athletics and rugby and creating relaxing environment in main cities (Sri Lankan Tourism Development Strategy, 2011). Whilst tourism has been recognised as major foreign exchange earner, depending too much on it for revenue

can be impractical as the sector is seasonal and there is bound to be fluctuations in revenue especially with the changes in fashion, trends, fear of various factors such as health hazards, terrorism and political instability (Dieke, 2011). Thus a mix of international and domestic tourism ensures more balanced revenue with promotions during the low seasons.

2.3. *Tourism supply: special interest tourism or mass tourism?*

“Tourism in less developed countries depends on the resources available within the countries, whether they are physical, human or capital resources; each type, in terms of availability, quality and competitiveness, is needed for a successful tourism development programme” (Dieke, 2011, p. 26). Through the Sri Lankan Tourism Development Strategy (2011), it can be noted that Sri Lanka has diverse tourism potential and attractions and the aim is to develop and promote diverse tourism products, especially SIT products, targeting high spending tourists. In order to cope with the increase in tourism, improved transportation, trained professional, better services, accessibility and increase in more number of rooms is planned. However there is huge dependence on private and foreign direct investments to develop tourism, which might take time, yet there is a huge potential for tourism in Sri Lanka with so much to offer particularly now that the war is over, the North and East could also be used to tap tourism potential and pave way for development of these war torn areas. Two areas that could have potential in the Northern and Eastern provinces are tourism and fisheries; the beaches in the Eastern province are secluded as well as good for surfing though huge investment is required in terms of hotels, both North and East have rich fishing resources which needs to be modernised (De Silva, 2011). On the other hand, it is important to take into consideration if the residents in the North and East are ready for the increase in tourist flow, since they have suffered and survived through a decade of war, they may find it difficult to co-exist with the visitors who are there for leisure activities. The fact that there are visible differences between tourists and hosts would create resentment amongst the host and may lead to other socio-cultural impacts yet an increase in income and livelihoods is welcome by the host community (Mason, 2008). Shah and Gupta (2000) analysed various case studies from Asia (in the context of developing countries) and concluded that mass tourism related with luxury hotels has major negative social impacts on hosts and does not bring the best returns. Tourism is considered by the blueprint as the way forward, it initiates the need for appropriate tourism forms especially in the war torn areas. Derrett (2001) also indicate that SIT is seen as an alternative tourism approach to the impacts of mass tourism and encourages sustainable tourism development. Special interests tourists tend to have a desire for authentic and real experiences where they would be able to actively identify with hosts in a non-exploitive way (Douglas, Douglas & Derrett, 2001). However, SIT is a vast term comprising of various forms of tourisms, thus an appropriate choice of SIT forms and activities must be identified and developed. For instance dark tourism, which is a type of special interest tourism, where tourist are lured to visit places that have undergone a tragedy such as war zones, natural calamities like Tsunami, terrorist attacks and genocides. Though the blueprint does not mention if dark tourism would be developed in these regions and the government does not promote these sites attractions domestically or internationally through their websites. Still the war museum was inaugurated by the president after the war in 2009. Whilst the war museum dedicated to the soldiers, there are other dark tourism sites that have come up after the war such as a victory monument (an image of military victory) where the terrorist leader was shot; vehicle graveyard or in other words civilian vehicles that were burnt by the terrorist group in the final stages to create distracting smoke while trying to escape; remains of a pirated Jordanian merchant vessel by the LTTE and used as bunkers in 2006; the terrorist leader Prabhakaran's bunker; Sea Tiger swimming pool used to train LTTE and LTTE prisons (Unnithaan, 2013). As per the blue print, more focus in Sri Lanka would be on Special Interest Tourism (SIT) as high spending tourists are being targeted and certain tourism projects wherein most of SIT nature is being planned such as adventure tourism, marine tourism, sports tourism, gaming, agro tourism, home stays or community based tourism, fishing, wildlife and nature, shopping, religious tourism, wellness, heritage, culinary, ecotourism and medical tourism. However the diverse nature of the tourism product, easy hassle free online visa, cheap accommodation could pave opportunity for mass tourism as well.

3. Mahinda Chintana for all? Two years subsequent to blueprint: strong economic progress but social development lagging.

One of the key objectives of the Sri Lankan Tourism Development Strategy (2011) is to ensure that the tourism benefits are equally distributed to a larger cross section of people. According to the ‘Mahinda Chintana’, the eventual beneficiaries should be the people of the country namely; fisherman, farmers, craftsmen, guides and people working in the hospitality and tourism sector. As tourism objectives are framed and policies to apply the objectives needs to be devised (Dieke, 2011). Since tourism development will have multiplier effect in the creation of jobs and sharing of wealth, the tourism development strategy document also stresses the need to attract the right kind of tourists and poverty alleviation through equal distribution spatially, socially and ethnically. Considering that its 2013 and midyear of the five year plan, a mid review of the tourism development would be vital. The blueprint seems to have generated a strong economic urge. Some visible achievement are translated with easy online visa process, roads being constructed connecting the airport, increase in inflow of tourists, boating facilities, relaxation places in the city, opening of the railway to the East, upcoming projects of harbours and airports in the South, tourism development projects in the North and East. Tourists can visit the North and some ‘home stay’ tourism has gained popularity. For a region, that was completely restricted, it is now open to investments, tourist and even a lot of Non Government Organisations (NGOs) have also been allowed to work alongside in the North and East. Some of the NGOs are supported by Sri Lankan celebrity cricket players, who even did a lot of charity, organised cricket matches between youth from North, East and the other parts of the country. Such sports events or sport in general have a great role in peace, enhancing solidarity, understanding, team-spirit and even dialogue (Moufakkir & Kelly, 2010). Sri Lanka also had significant increase in international tourist arrival in 2011 through ‘Visit Sri Lanka 2011’ campaign that successfully promoted Special Interest Tourism products. Other successful promotions as intended in the blueprint are their improved website, e-marketing and the use of social networking sites where they promote a diversified country in Unity. Sri Lanka has also been as No. 1 destination for 2013, by a famous travel guide and media publisher ‘Lonely Planet’ and also rated under one of the top ten destinations to watch for in 2013 by Conde Nast Traveller, a leading travel Magazine. Even a Hospitality Valuation Services (HVS) report (2011) on tourism development talks positively about the tourism potential that “Sri Lanka has with all tourism projects coming up including the ones in the North and East”. The report goes on to predict high demand in tourism in Sri Lanka in the coming years yet also expresses a concern in terms shortage of rooms, skilled and trained hospitality manpower in the future to meet this demand. There has also been an increase in FDI by many countries such China, India, Japan and Korea. Currently the government has sorted lands in the North and a few in the east for development of hotels and resorts which aim to create source of livelihood for the Tamils and aid in the development of that region. Even if the plan cannot be used as a checklist, it still is a vision guideline that be compared with. Given below is a table that reflects this dichotomy:

Table 1. Blueprint (2011-2016) in progress (2014)

Blueprint	Economic	Ethnic	Regional	Marketing
Mentioned Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase foreign exchange earnings - Create employment - Contribute towards improving global trade and economic linkages - Attract FDI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equal distribution of economic benefits of tourism - Using Tourism for reconciliation and reconstruction 	Tourism developed to the whole of the island	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase tourist arrivals by 2016 - Promote Sri Lanka through website - Position Sri Lanka as the world’s most treasured island for tourism
Progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased revenue & Jobs / upcoming projects - Incentives and simpler procedure and hence are attracting FDI’s 	Upcoming projects in North & East are invested by the majority ethnic group / Less empowerment of minority groups (International Crises Group Report, 2013)	Infrastructure & facilities needs to be developed in the North & East.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased tourist arrivals /Improved website, / No. 1 destination for 2013, by ‘Lonely Planet’ & under one of the top ten in 2013 by Conde Nast Traveller.

The development in the North and East has been relatively slow which the government maintains due to land dispute, landmines from the war still posing a threat and the resettlement of displaced Tamils. On the socio-political aspects, a report presented to the parliament by a Tamil political party called the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), suggests that the tourism development projects have seen resentments by the Tamils especially the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who still living in Camps as most of the tourism development lands allocated are given to Southern Sinhalese businessmen who bring in their own Sinhalese labour force from the South to work on these projects (Sumanthiran, 2011). This eventually is robbing them of lands for resettlement, economic benefits from tourism development and livelihoods (Sumanthiran, 2011). The report also criticises the immense military presence in the North who it claims are also robbing the Tamils of their livelihoods by involving in economic and tourism activities such as opening of eateries and small snacks shops on the Jaffna highway, salons and shops. Finally the report evokes other atrocities some of them sexual committed by the military in the North. However this report is challenged by political opponents since TNA is also a pro-LTTE party. There also have been recent reports by media, a UK based TV channel to be precise Channel 4's (Sri Lanka's Killing fields, 2011) documentary, that sexual torture has been used on Tamil detainees at camps in the North to obtain information. However, these confessions made overseas by Sri Lankan Tamils overseas also needs to be investigated for vested interests as its important to note that there is a huge number of refugees living in various countries such as the Australia, United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (USA), Canada, Switzerland and India, who could be asked to return. Media propaganda controversy because it is not settled between opponents and the reality of the post war situations negatively affects the image of Sri Lanka, tourism marketing efforts, the reality of peace and progress. For instance, the issue raised having the commonwealth meeting in Colombo in December 2013, with Canada and Mauritius boycotting due to concerns, tends to portray to the world that the reconciliation is not complete, which makes the international community see the current situation with doubts. Hence it is necessary to understand how it would draw more tourists especially those interested in sustainable tourism. It is also important to document evidences that the communities benefit from their visit especially in the North and East. An added attraction to these regions would also be in the 'War Tourism' interest hoping to see developments and hear the human stories of war, survival and progress. On the other hand Sri Lanka also needs to be given time and support to see development through by international communities as it had gone through a decade of war. Moreover, not only the Tamils, there are over 75000 Sri Lankans Muslim IDPs from north during the 'ethnic cleansing' done by the LTTE, to resettle (UNHCR, 2013).

Nevertheless, the policy does not include sufficient regional plans especially in the North and East to ensure economic benefits would be equally distributed predominantly spatially and ethnically. The Blue print document covers the essentials of tourism development policy as suggested by Jenkins (1991) that a national tourism policy must include the role of the government, ownership and control, investment and scale of tourism development, international verses domestic tourism into consideration. The policies formulated allow flexibility and scope, yet to achieve equal distribution of benefits; they must include the North and East in the process of reconciliation, reconstruction and tourism development. This has been stressed by De Silva (2011) as well, since Tamil areas in the North of the country and the Tamil and Muslim areas of the East are underdeveloped parts of the country. This situation must be kept in mind while preparing policies. Significantly, Tourism can play a role in the encouragement of reconciliation through peace and progress (Moufakkir & Kelly, 2010). Finally, beyond the internal situation, there are also external factors that have an impact on tourism development in Sri Lanka. These include the constant external protests and pressure from Tamil Nadu Politicians in India, on the Tamil issue, stirring the sympathetic Tamil Nadu civilian's emotions, sometimes for their own vested political interests. This affects the Blueprint intentions and damages the image and marketing efforts with Indian tourists to Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan relationships ties with India remains nevertheless positive, and together with China, Pakistan, Japan and Korea is involved in helping the Blueprint objectives with infrastructure projects and are increasingly becoming tourism markets to Sri Lanka.

4. Conclusion

The economic benefits from tourism are visible especially through the excellent increase in tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka. The marketing efforts in promoting Sri Lanka have paid good dividends. With the diverse tourism products that a small island such as Sri Lanka can offer and the opportunity of more tourism products from the untouched North and East, Tamil majority regions, provide a compact package for tourists. Sri Lankan hospitality sector needs to be developed faster to meet the increasing demand. However, social questions or issues still need to be addressed. Positive peace is the way forward, which must include empowerment of the minority communities that have been driven to poverty because of the war. Such inclusion will bring out the positive benefits and reconcile the divided diverse communities in Sri Lanka, instilling trust in the government and aiding progress. For a country that had been savaged by war for over 30 years, the end of the war has been an emotionally draining moment for all sides. Sri Lanka needs reconciliation and can be envisioned through Special Interest Tourism. The increase in tourist arrivals, various investments coming in, its strategic location, infrastructure and development projects all indicate that it has a lot of potential for development, provided that the 'New Sri Lanka's' willingness to integrate, tolerate and mingle. Hence making 'Mahinda Chintana' more than a slogan and the tourism Blueprint successful depends on the combined efforts of commitment from the government and the various communities.

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