

# **A Case Study of Corona Effect in Annapurna Circuit Trek, Nepal**

## **Master's Thesis**



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## **Abstract**

The Corona Virus has caused a huge impact on the entire tourism sector of Nepal. This dissertation aims to understand the effect of Corona on the trekking sector of Nepal, with a specific focus on the social sustainability of the Annapurna Circuit Trek communities. The communities around the Annapurna Circuit Trek depend on tourism, especially community-based tourism (CBT) for survival. When Corona Virus started spreading all over the world initially, countries including Nepal were on lock-down, meaning there were no visitors allowed. The Corona Virus has affected people's social life; businesses have gone down, people have lost their jobs and life has become more challenging. The social sustainability of the people around Annapurna Circuit Trek is determined by what those people do to earn a living, of which they rely on tourists' who are locked in their countries. To meet the objective of this research and answer the research question, the qualitative interview was conducted with the locals around the Annapurna Circuit Trek, the trekking agencies in Nepal as well as TAAN. A sample population of six participants was chosen and the study findings were analyzed using the thematic analysis method. Recommendations for further studies have been provided to counter the limitations of this study.



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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Overview

The Corona Virus affected a lot of businesses around the world. However, the tourism industry was the most hit sector because of the travel restrictions that almost all countries employed to curb the spread of the virus. Most businesses in the tourism sector have been disappointed with huge losses because of lack of tourists. The World Health Organisation gave various directives that travelers were supposed to adhere to (WHO, 2020). Many countries were on lock-down and after lock-down. This means that not only was international tourism affected, but domestic tourism too. Nevertheless, domestic tourism was not majorly affected like international tourism, but they were all affected at the end of the day. Those employed in the tourism sector lost their jobs, some travel destinations were closed, and even others were closed with no signs of coming back (Coibion, Gorodnichenko, and Weber, 2020). For this research, the focus is narrowed down to the impact of the Corona Virus in Annapurna Circuit Trek. The researchers chose this topic area as they have trekked the Annapurna route, hence their interest was to understand how Corona Virus affected the place and the community around. The Annapurna Circuit is also of the most visited trail area in Nepal, meaning it is important to know how the restriction of movement affected it, as well as the social sustainability of the local community.

The Annapurna Circuit is a trek within the mountain ranges of central Nepal with a total length of the route varies between 160 to 230 km. This trek crosses two distinctive stream valleys and encompasses the Annapurna Massif. The Annapurna Circuit Trek begins counter-clockwise from Lamjung region central command, Beshisahar, closes at Pokhara in Kaski. A report published on 4th March 2020 by New Business Age about the "Corona Effect All-Pervasive in Annapurna Trek" shows that the Annapurna trekking route has seen no human mobility because of dread coming from the worldwide scourge of Corona Virus. Based on the publication, there used to be an immense inflow

of tourists to the trek during the season in previous years; however, the trek in the season that saw the Corona Virus pandemic is by all accounts void.

In countries like Nepal, adventure tourism enterprises have consistently led organizations with their eyes zeroed in on worldwide tourism patterns. Since the worldwide economic downturn that saw a decrease of 40 million tourists between the year 2008 (920 million tourists) and 2009 (880 million tourists), global appearances have quickly extended to 1.46 billion every 2019 (Nepal, 2020). This is for sure a momentous development that the tourism businesses in numerous nations are intently following. At that point, the Corona Virus pandemic occurred tourism went to a total halt. Even though the Corona Virus pandemic may have impacted businesses both in good and bad ways, the Circuit Trek was majorly affected negatively. Since most tourism-related jobs do not require a particularly high level of skill or specialized knowledge, local residents easily establish themselves as accommodation providers, operate restaurants, and provide recreational or entertainment activities (Rasoolimanesh and Jaafar 2016). With no trekkers arriving at Circuit Trek, the local communities who depend on the tourism sector had no jobs, hence resulting in loss of income. As well, trekking agencies who concentrate on the site had no customers, hence lost profits.

## 1.2 Social Impact on the Community (Annapurna)

The Corona Virus pandemic has prompted an emotional loss of human existence worldwide and presents an extraordinary test to general wellbeing, food systems, and the job environment. The social disturbance brought about by the pandemic is obliterating: a huge number of individuals are in danger of falling into outrageous poverty, while the number of undernourished individuals, as of now assessed at almost 690 million, could have risen by up to 132 million before the year it was over (WHO 2020). Casual economy workers are especially vulnerable in light of the fact that the dominant part does not have social insurance and access to quality medical care and has limited access to productive resources. Specifically, those within the tourism workforce



(local community members) are at more risk of being negatively affected than those who deal with other sectors within the society. Sah et al. (2020) reference World Bank forecasts that show approximate 31.2% of Nepalese being at risk of falling into extreme poverty, primarily because of the collapse of the tourism industry, reduced remittances from overseas workers, foregone earnings of potential migrants, job losses in the informal sector, and increased cost of essential commodities, all as a result of COVID-19. Without the way to procure an income during lockdowns, many could not and cannot take care of themselves and their families. For most, no income implies no food, or, best-case scenario, less food, and less nutritious food. This was the case and might continue to be the case as long as the Corona Virus continues to spread as more lockdowns and travel restrictions will continue to be imposed to minimize the spread of the virus.

The social impact of Corona on the well-being of the people living around Annapurna depends on how people who were earning income could not do so because of the lack of tourist arrivals on the trek site. As Nepal (2020) writes, communities around the world that are heavily dependent on adventure tourism are particularly vulnerable as their livelihood is threatened in unprecedented ways. The communities around the Annapurna Circuit Trek are perfect examples of communities that fully depend on adventure tourism. The concept of sustainable tourism takes full account of tourism's current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities (Harris, Williams, and Griffin 2012). Those who live around the Annapurna Circuit Trek depend heavily on tourism for economic survival. However, tourism activity often depends on the social and cultural maintenance of the community. A study conducted by Dahal (2020) shows that Nepalese leisure travelers are very willing to travel, once the government of Nepal relaxes restrictions related to travel and mobility. What makes some regions in Nepal especially the mountain areas more attractive to tourists is the diversity of culture. This

is an indication that the tourism organizations that depend on such cultural communities should ensure their wellbeing.

When Corona Virus was declared as a pandemic and travel restrictions enforced among other health safety measures, most tourists lost confidence in traveling and the tourism industry had no customers (Uğur and Akbiyık 2020). Those who were employed in the tourism industry lost their jobs as many organizations closed down, either temporarily or permanently and others received pay cuts (Coibion, Gorodnichenko, and Weber 2020). According to Ulak (2020), the pause of tourism mobility for months due to an abrupt halt of transportation in Nepal meant shuttered borders and stay-at-home orders by the government brought adverse effects on Nepal's tourism industry and its stakeholders. The spill-over impacts of the pandemic in Nepal are not only on the socio-cultural structure but also touch on human psychology and the global economic system where the tourism industry is no exception. All these things happening at once affected many communities especially those who fully rely on tourism activities. Trekking agencies, as the key tourism organization that this research will rely on, had a key role in ensuring that the communities around Annapurna Circuit Trek were handling the situation accordingly. Even as the Corona Virus continues to spread, the local communities need help from relevant organizations to handle the situation well.

### 1.3 Significance of the Project

This project is significant at the personal levels and business levels. At the personal level, we will gain more knowledge on how the pandemic has affected the trekking sector of Nepal. As we have had a great opportunity to trek in Annapurna Circuit Trek at one point and also our aspirations to visit the same place in the future, we will understand the risk factors that can be managed in the future in case of another similar crisis. At the business level, the project will offer possible solutions to those who operate in the trekking sector on how they can work amidst a pandemic to reduce the negative effects. Businesses will also gain from this project as they will have a chance to understand risk

assessment techniques and their importance for their future survival, as well as how they can help the local communities to survive a crisis like Corona. This is original research because no other study has so far been conducted to understand the impact of the Corona pandemic in the trekking sectors, particularly in Nepal's Annapurna Circuit Trek.

### 1.4 Aim of the Study

The general aim of this dissertation is to understand the effect of Corona on the trekking sector of Nepal, with a specific focus on the social sustainability of the Annapurna Circuit Trek communities.

### 1.5 Research Question

Based on the literature around community-based tourism, how is the Corona Virus pandemic influencing the social sustainability of the Annapurna Circuit Trek communities?

#### **Sub-questions**

1. How can the future social cohesion and well-being of the communities be restored?
2. How can the knowledge of this study finding be used to minimize the effects of similar pandemics on the social sustainability of local communities?

#### 1.5.1 Research Objectives

- To review the literature around community-based tourism.
- To collect data concerning the social sustainability of the Annapurna Circuit Trek communities during the Corona Virus pandemic.

- To analyze the effects of the Corona Virus pandemic on Annapurna Circuit Trek communities based on the concept of social sustainability of local community members from the review of the literature.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This section provides a review of the literature to understand how the Corona Virus pandemic influenced the social sustainability of the Annapurna Circuit Trek communities. To this, the focus has been on identifying several articles that talk about community-based tourism and the social sustainability of community-based tourism.

### 2.1 Community Based Tourism

Witchayakawin (2020) defines community-based tourism as "a type of tourism based on the alternative development approach to minimize negative impacts and maximize community well-being that owns and operates at a community level by community participation to ensure environmental, social and economic sustainability" (p. 76). Similarly Thokchom (2014) defines community-based tourism as "tourism in which residents (often rural, poor and economically marginalized) invite tourists to visit their communities with the provision of overnight accommodation" (p. 16). According to Baniya, Shrestha, and Karn (2018), community-based tourism is perhaps the most perceived device for community improvement particularly poverty easing through community advancement. The local residents acquire pay as land administrators, business visionaries, administration and produce suppliers, and workers. Community-based tourism gives freedoms to local individuals to get pay and furthermore to acquaint their way of life with guests (Spenceley and Meyer 2012). Furthermore, as the local community is effectively associated with running and driving the undertaking, they can have self-sufficiency and settle on choices that are ideal for their community.

Community-based tourism activity is a "project or program, or collective action of a group of people that belong to a community that decided to participate in, or develop together a small to medium scale local tourism industry" (Yanes 2019, p. 2). Participation is a critical idea in community-based tourism advancement. As Suansri (2003) says, participation may ease back the capacity to act, but it permits the



individuals from a certain community to acquire insight and learn together. It is a type of deliberate activity wherein people access opportunities and obligations of citizenship, like self-administration, reaction to external choices that impact their lives, and community work on aggregate issues (Yanes 2019). A basic segment of this participation is the acknowledgment of the native information that individuals have in advancing their livelihoods (Giampiccoli and Hayward Kalis 2012). One of the significant points of community advancement is to energize the participation of the community in general. In fact, community improvement has been characterized as a social interaction coming about because of resident participation.

Nonetheless, not a wide range of participation in tourism is similarly valuable for communities. Underestimation of such information sabotages individuals' capacity to coordinate their own turn of events and making the most of their own space and opportunity of articulation (Giampiccoli and Hayward Kalis 2012). From a strong perspective, participation gives the genuine chance of tracking down a shared view of relative uniformity with different partners to settle on the advancement destinations of the community (Reimer and Walter 2013). In the weakest point of view, participation is restricted to partaking in arranging and the board exercises however with no genuine chance of affecting significant choices and results (Reimer and Walter 2013). As indicated by this origination, participation vacillates between two limits: individuals either can impact choices or are only observers of the interaction.

According to Salazar (2012), it should be noted improvement of community-based tourism is frequently not something that can be handily settled by local individuals and afterward executed. It requires an acknowledgment from powerful, multi-dimensional, and in numerous examples, against participatory partners that rule local individuals. As per Giampiccoli and Hayward Kalis (2012), local culture ought to be considered inside community advancement and at the grassroots level; the local social setting should be thought about and utilized as a beginning stage in community improvement projects.

The issue of power relations is integral to impartial and sustainable community-based tourism improvement. Power connection is additionally an indivisible attribute of a strategic plan.

In Nepal, individuals in more than 3,000 towns rely upon rural tourism (Regmi 2016). For example, Jomsom is a famous town that is frequently visited with a stay objective for trekkers performing the Annapurna Circuit Trek. In the midst of the majority of the pathetic improvement results, tourism has arisen as one of only a handful few promising areas of the Nepalese economy, and whenever favored with whatever else, Nepal is enriched with magnificence and with the potential to be one of the world's most noteworthy vacationer displays. Tourism development in Nepal has been conceived as an advanced instrument in animating tourism development just as in lessening rural poverty (Pandey, 2011). In the setting of Nepal, it is clear that poverty is far and wide; its intensity is much higher in the rural/mountain regions (Thakur, 2013). In many approaching regions, tourism is acknowledged as a medium to utilize local communities in the better return zones by connecting to business interaction and showcasing chain past borders. Perceiving this benefit, the public authority of Nepal has given the most extreme priority to advancing community-based tourism and it has likewise been evident that this sort of tourism can assume a pivotal part in the turn of events (Pandey, 2011). With an unmistakable agreement that, this is work producing industry, it is required to tackle the joblessness issues as well as affect the general prosperity of individuals and the community. Because of these destinations, the public authority as a team with both private areas and local community has attempted to create community-based maintainable rural tourism with more extensive goals of local upliftment and prosperity.

As indicated by Mayaka et al. (2019), the center of community-based tourism is the improvement of the community through tourism where its worth stretches out past economic advancement. A study conducted by Mottiar, Boluk, and Kline (2018) claims

that although the connection between community improvement and tourism in the community has been questioned, it has been recommended that community-based tourism brings assorted positive results. Such results can incorporate yet not restricted to financial turn of events, local community proprietorship, human resource improvement, community strength and solidarity, and environmental commitment/preservation, all of which can lead to the sustainable development of the local community (Mottiar, Boluk and Kline 2018).

Nepal offers a lot of choices with regards to procuring true local encounters and leaving a positive effect on the community while undertaking the experience treks and visits. Other than views and assorted climatic zones, the Annapurna Circuit trek is wealthy in its real Himalaya culture that furnishes ideal freedoms to connect with different ethnic gatherings, their way of life, and witness their ways of life and work (Nepal 2020). For this situation, community-based tourism has gotten an extremely critical and well-known propensity among trekkers, explicitly for those considering genuine encounters and social association in and among local communities. Research by López-Guzmán, Sánchez-Cañizares, and Pavón (2011) shows that there are many ways that trekkers can uphold the community for instance through buying their crafted works, engaged with various community administration projects, trek to cultural heritages, eating local food, and spending the night in a family-claimed and community-run tea-house cabin or home-stay. This will assist the community with flourishing by producing greater business and help to protect and offer exposure to culture and local food and at last help the practical improvement of trekking objections.

In the modern era, tourism is clarified as an instrument that leaves a tremendous effect on the facilitating community and the country overall. Any type of tourism, from its root, should leave a sensational positive effect (Nepal 2020). The capability of community-based tourism to change lives appears to be limitless. Each trekker visiting the community or trekking courses help to assemble openings for local individuals to

have elective methods for help and upgrade their expectation for everyday comforts (López-Guzmán, Sánchez-Cañizares, and Pavón 2011). While explorers will encounter an area in a real manner, locals' advantage too as each money-related commitment goes into elevating them both socially and monetarily. The experience of community-based tourism offers explorers the chance to truly submerge themselves in an extraordinary lifestyle. It is a mindful method to travel as well.

## 2.2 Social Sustainability of Community Based Tourism

Social sustainability is “a process for creating sustainable successful places that promotes wellbeing, by understanding what people need from the places they live and work” (Ånstrand 2006, p. 7). Albeit the knowledge about community-based tourism has not been thus adequately uncovered, a few studies exist that have inspected this sustainable type of tourism and its qualities. An empirical study conducted by Han et al. (2019) claimed that sustainable tourism is one of the most important topics in the global tourism industry. Sustainability is frequently viewed as competitiveness in tourism objections as tourists are progressively mindful of the favorable to social or supportive of ecological issues (Han et al. 2019). Community-based tourism is a significant sort of sustainable tourism.

Social sustainability requires an even-handed appropriation of advantages, with attention on easing poverty and other positive outcomes such as the development of cultural heritage, enhancing community development, and increasing conservation of the natural environment (Giampiccoli and Hayward Kalis 2012). There is an accentuation on local communities, keeping up and reinforcing their life emotionally supportive networks, perceiving and regarding various societies, and evading any type of misuse. One of the critical components in field tourism improvement is to move more extensive local community inclusion to fill in as an establishment for the sustainability of the tourism objective and industry thereof (Mearns and Edwards 2009). Although writing recommends that local communities assume a few parts in local tourism improvement,



next to no consideration has been given to build up how local communities feel about their contribution.

All things considered, a community association is a basic part of tourism sustainability. According to Mearns and Edwards (2009), community-based tourism is more reasonable as it permits the inclusion of the less privileged groups in society, like ladies and there is an inescapable conviction that the grassroots ought to be associated with the request to accomplish community strengthening. Along these lines, community-based tourism tries to allot full or fractional rights, possession as well as authority over resources to a part of the entire local community (Sebele 2005). The intent is to help income streams and livelihoods for the poor locals in rural regions through better administration, strengthening, and expanded economic gets back from tourism and characteristic resource the executive's activities.

In his book, Singh (2008) argues that in any community-based tourism undertaking there will be direct and indirect beneficiaries and participants. Whereas direct beneficiaries would be the employees, crafts producers, guides, porters, and so on, the indirect beneficiaries would be community members all in all as beneficiaries who get the advantages of advancement projects, instructive activities, training, and different projects subsidized by the tourism incomes (Singh 2008). Socially, tourism impacts the host social orders in that it very well may be both a wellspring of worldwide friendship, harmony, and understanding and a destroyer and defiler of native societies, a wellspring of environmental destruction, an attack of individuals' security, dignity, and realness (Mirbabayev and Shagzatova, 2002). In this way, social contacts among tourists and local individuals may bring about common appreciation, tolerance, family bonding, understanding, and awareness. Local communities are taught about the rest of the world without leaving their homes, while their guests fundamentally find out about a particular culture (Mirbabayev and Shagzatova, 2002). If local culture is the base for

pulling in tourists to the region, it assists with saving the local practices and crafted works which perhaps we're on the connection of the extinction (Shahmirzadi 2012).

With the situation of COVID-19, the tourism sector has been highly affected most negatively. Communities that relied on the tourism industry have lost income and putting the livelihood at stake. Various researchers have so far examined some of the social consequences of the virus on tourism communities. For instance, according to Bakar and Rosbi (2020), the Corona Virus pandemic has extended across the world by making shocks in practically all sorts of businesses because of the limitations, curfews, remain at home and work-from-home order, and isolation protocols. Folinas and Metaxas (2020) argue that the tourism industry in the world is the greatest victim caused by Corona Virus. The health emergency brought about by the pandemic has been of such greatness that the drop-off in socio-economic and vacationer movement in many nations is producing an economic emergency with results that are as yet hard to quantify. A study by Kumudumali (2020) featured the negative effect of the Corona Virus flare-up on the tourism business and the decay of supporting areas, for example, the air travel and hospitality industry in a global setting. Through the review of literature related to the impacts of the pandemic on the general tourism industry in Nepal, the study will analyze the results based on the literature to understand how the Annapurna Circuit Trek was impacted by the pandemic.

Attributable to its different normal and social resources, Nepal has cut a name for itself among the top vacationer locations of the world (Dahal 2020). Voyaging is the most engaging approach to meet outsiders and investigate new places if the course is liberated from an ailment, wrongdoing, and disasters. Be that as it may, more often than not, with the correct expertise, the dangers can be limited or alleviated, and the movement journals top off with life-changing encounters. Plagues and pandemics are two of the most terrifying news for explorers or organizers (Kumudumali 2020). In such cases, it could be troublesome or difficult to keep away from the sickness. Additionally,

the explorers as well as others they are in contact with during the excursion are in danger. Travelers assume a genuine part in the exchange of pestilences or pandemics between areas. Lately, the world is centered on pandemics because of the development of another mutant of the Corona Virus.

Globally, the COVID-19 episode causes a more dangerous situation in the tourism business. As numerous administrations force travel limitations, the tourism business confronted wretchedness over different areas on the planet (Kumudumali 2020). A few highlights of the tourism area make it extraordinarily vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic. To start with, in contrast to different administrations, tourism and its connected exercises require actual vicinity for the help to be conveyed and used. As indicated by Kampel (2020), tourism is a basic area for some nations since it produces business and unfamiliar trade. It is likewise quite possibly the most powerful economic area, with significant in reverse and forward linkages and multiplier impacts across numerous profitable areas and exercises in the tourism esteem chain. Its workforce offers huge freedoms for reliable business, abilities advancement and business, particularly for ladies and youth, minimized populations living in rural territories and SMEs. Specifically, it empowers the local inexperienced workers who can become services exporters: from offering local escort services to social encounters to giving home lodging accommodation (Kampel 2020). Suitably, the sector can be a tremendous driver of a feasible economic turn of events.

In the tourism business, the Corona Virus has made a frenzy among the public, adding to bring down demand (Bakar and Rosbi 2020). The demand has gone down in light of the fact that potential tourists will in general delay or drop their arrangements for an objective that is tormented by a pandemic, particularly when its primary highlights are scant of powerful antivirus medications and antibodies, the quick spread of the virus and the harm that can cause to wellbeing. The individual travel themes of the potential voyagers address one of the conclusive components throughout the movement choice.

In any case, because of the practically perpetual assortment of conceivable travel objections of current tourism, potential explorers frequently settle on their decision for an objective, principally relying upon the impression of having a sense of security and security at the favored objective.

The Corona Virus has presented a worrying situation for all businesses in the world, particularly the tourism business to an extent of exceptionally low or no mobility (Uğur and Akbıyık 2020). The tourism sector is sensitive and effortlessly influenced by global emergencies such as COVID-19. The crisis that began with the rise of COVID-19 turned into the point of convergence of explorers, in any event, when it was as yet in local measurements. This negative part of these emergencies is that it requires some investment for voyagers to get back to their old versatility even after the emergency has finished. Individuals are influenced by the climate of dread, nervousness, and instability for quite a while and they become acquainted with remaining still and local. This pattern further expands the tourism business' restoration time.

### 2.3 Literature Review Summary and Conclusion

From this literature review, the main concepts that will frame the analysis of this study are sustainability and community-based tourism. The literature about community-based tourism and social sustainability will inform the analysis by backing up the data acquired to compare and contrast the existing findings and the new knowledge. Based on the literature review, it has been revealed that community-based tourism is a key player in community development in terms of poverty reduction, enhancing social interactions, development of cultural heritage, enhancing community development, and increasing conservation of the natural environment.

By creating a sustainable success around the Annapurna Circuit Trek, the social well-being of the people around that area will be promoted. This social sustainability, for those communities around the Annapurna Circuit Trek, will depend on how the

community-based tourism is performing. Along these lines, these communities' based benefits to the local communities have been affected by the novel Corona Virus that has disrupted the tourism industry in its entirety. With lock-downs and other health and safety protocols that were given to reduce the spread of COVID-19, the tourism industry suffered through a lack of tourists.

The reviewed literature has identified a research gap that needs to be addressed in terms of how Nepal's tourism industry has been affected, especially community-based tourism in the country. To address this research gap, this study will explore the effect of Corona on the trekking sector of Nepal, with a specific focus on Annapurna Circuit Trek. This is motivated by the fact that no single study has been conducted to investigate how Corona Virus affected this particular area.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

In this section, Saunders's research onion will be utilized to systematically show how the research will be conducted. The research onion describes the various decisions that a researcher makes when developing a research methodology. The different layers of the research onion include research philosophy, approach, strategy, methodological choices, time horizon, and techniques and procedures. In order to meet the objectives of this research and answer the research question, the following research methodology will be followed.

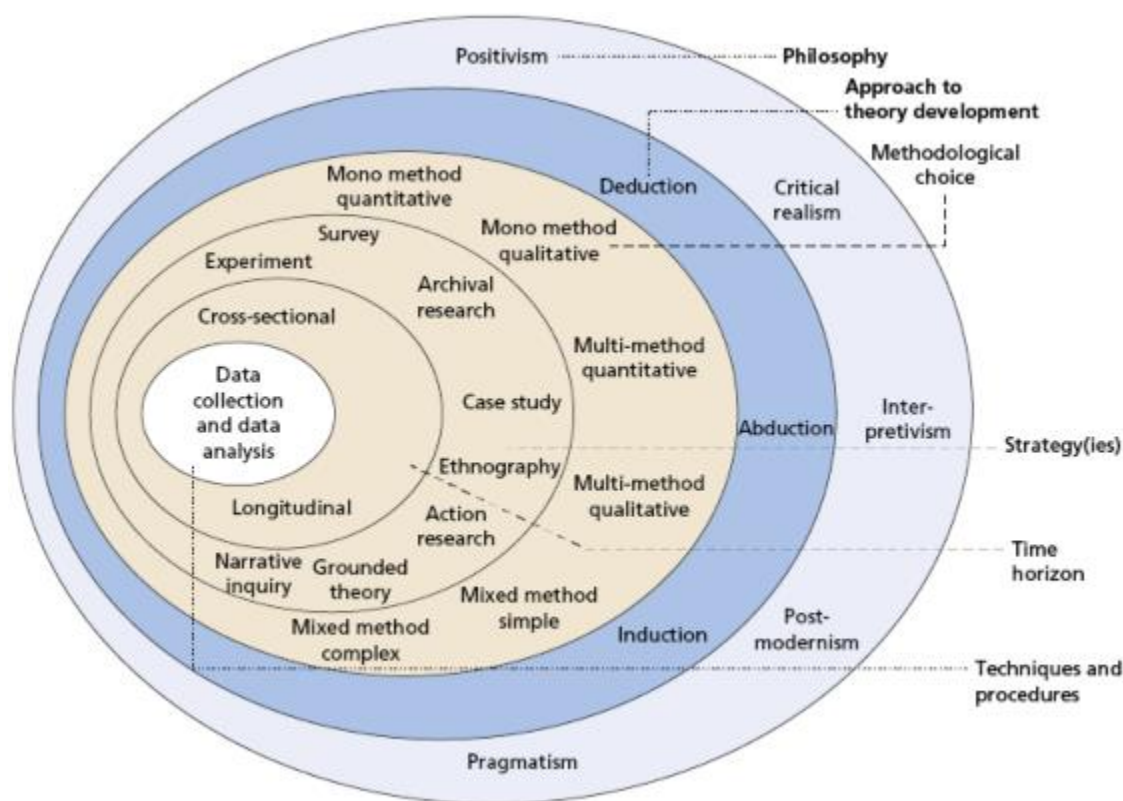


Figure 1 Saunders Research Onion (Saunders et al. 2007).

### 3.1 Research Philosophy

This is the first or the outer layer of the research onion and represents the foundation of any study. Research philosophy describes the beliefs that the research will be built

upon, and can either be described based on the assumptions of the researcher or from an ontological or epistemological point of view (Saunders et al. 2007). While ontology is about the nature of reality and what the researcher knows and understands, epistemology is “how the researcher obtains that knowledge and come to understand what reality is” (Creswell and Creswell 2017). In this regard, three common research philosophies operate on different ontological and epistemological beliefs including positivism, pragmatism, and interpretivism.

This study will follow interpretivism philosophical positions. This philosophy has been chosen as it will help the researcher find acceptable knowledge and address facts according to that. In the case of this project, the acceptable knowledge is that COVID-19 has affected the tourism industry and indirectly affected people's livelihood, especially communities that depend on the tourism industry for survival. It is therefore important to understand to what extent the Annapurna Circuit Trek and the community around were affected and how they dealt with the Corona Virus pandemic. This approach will make the research more specific and qualitative, as the obtained results will be more in theory because of the opinions of people.

### 3.2 Research Approach

This is the second outer layer of the research onion and informs the decision that the researcher makes concerning the collection and analysis of data. There are two research approaches; inductive and deductive approach. While inductive approaches involve the generation of theories from research, deductive approaches begin with theory and the aim to test or build it through the research (Saunders et al. 2007) For this research, an inductive approach is the most suitable in order to gain information on the Annapurna Circuit Trek community, thus leading to the formation of theories. Interpretivists' phenomenology holds that understanding social reality should be grounded in people's experience of that social reality (Gray 2013). Hence, the researcher has to lay aside any prevailing understanding of phenomena and revisit the immediate experience of them



so that new meanings may emerge of which the result will be new meaning, fuller meaning, or renewed meaning (Gray 2013). The new meaning, in this research, will be obtained from the locals living around the Annapurna Circuit Trek and how they have been affected by COVID-19.

### 3.3 Research Case Study

From the various research strategies offered in the research onion, this study will utilize a case study strategy. Creswell and Creswell (2017) defined a case study as an in-depth or rather a detailed study of a single subject, by analyzing the subject to gain an in-depth understanding of the issues in a real-life setting. According to Saunders et al. (2007), it is important to consider the cultural as well as the social context when conducting a case study research, therefore making this type of research qualitative in nature and also following the inductive approach and interpretivist philosophy. The Annapurna Circuit Trek is the particular case study that will be analyzed to gain an in-depth understanding within the context of the study. This place was chosen because it is a famous area in Nepal and the fact that we wanted to focus on a specific area to understand community-based tourism and how the issue of Corona Virus impacted the place and the society around.

### 3.4 Research Choices

Research choices relate to the researcher's decision to use qualitative or quantitative types of data. Their researcher can use one method (mono-method) or use a mixture of both (mixed and multi-method) depending on the objectives of the study. When the researcher chooses to use a mono-method, it means either qualitative or quantitative data type will be used (Creswell and Poth 2016). This study will use the mono-method to obtain qualitative data. This design is the most appropriate as the obtained data (through interviews) will be in descriptive words that can be examined for patterns or meaning through the use of coding. According to Sutton and Austin (2015), coding will

allow the researcher to categorize qualitative data to identify themes that correspond with the research questions and to perform analysis.

### 3.5 Time Horizon

There are two options when it comes to time horizon; it can be cross-sectional or longitudinal. While longitudinal time horizon involves collecting data for a prolonged period, cross-sectional time horizon involves collecting data at one point in time (Saunders et al. 2007). For this study, the cross-sectional time horizon is the most appropriate as qualitative data will be collected for a short period of time. Although cross-sectional study designs allow researchers to compare various variables at the same time, their limitations are many. For instance, one downside of cross-sectional studies is that they may fail to provide positive or definite information in cases where there are issues about cause-and-effect relationships (Wang and Cheng 2020). This usually happens because such studies consider only what they find at that given moment, without taking into account what happens before or after the snapshot is taken.

Cross-sectional study designs are also disadvantageous as they often need to select a sample of subjects from a large and heterogeneous study population (Sankoff 2008). This implies that cross-sectional studies are susceptible to sampling bias.

### 3.6 Research Techniques and Procedures

At this stage, the researchers have to decide on what data will be collected and what method will be used to collect and analyses that type of data. Required in this layer also is the sampling technique, explaining about the process used to sample the population.

### 3.6.1 Data Collection Method

The primary data in this study will be collected through semi-structured interviews. In a qualitative study, a semi-structured interview is a data collection strategy whereby the researchers follow an interview guide prepared in advance to ask informants predetermined but open-ended questions (Newcomer, Hatry, and Wholey 2015). The purpose of conducting semi-structured interviews is to collect qualitative and open-ended data, explore informant's opinions and beliefs about a particular topic and delve deeply into sensitive issues that may be affecting the chosen study population. This method has been chosen because it is the most appropriate and easy to acquire the required data. Semi-structured interviews will also provide reliable, comparable qualitative data questions (Newcomer, Hatry, and Wholey 2015). An interview will be conducted with the manager/owner of two trekking agencies in Nepal, an official from Trekking Agencies Association of Nepal (TAAN), and local community members at Annapurna Circuit Trek, some employees, and also some local community members who have been benefiting from the Annapurna Circuit Trek. The obtained data will be audio recorded to be transcribed later for analysis. The study will use qualitative data analysis.

The content of the interview guide will be informed by the research question and aims, as well as the literature review findings. The conversation will aim to understand how communities around the Annapurna Circuit Trek, especially those who relied on the site for income, understand how Corona Virus has impacted their livelihoods. TAAN and some trekking agencies will be involved in collecting data to understand their views on the Corona Virus and how it affected the social sustainability of the people of Annapurna Circuit Trek. Our intentions throughout the interview will be to understand how the locals were affected by Corona Virus and understand how they have dealt with the situation.

### 3.6.2 Sampling

To meet the objectives of this research, a purposive sampling technique will be utilized where informants will be selected intentionally based on their role concerning Annapurna Circuit Trek. This means that the respondents will be people who have a direct relationship with the Annapurna Circuit Trek, and that is the local communities around that area, trekking agencies around the area, and the agency that is associated with trekking (TAAN). This sampling technique will allow the researcher to obtain specific knowledge about the issue of the Corona Virus and its effect on the people around.

### 3.7 Research Ethics

Research ethics govern the standards of conduct for both researchers and participants. Researchers need to adhere to ethical principles in order to protect the rights, dignity, and welfare of each participant involved in research (Agunloye 2019). Besides, researchers must adhere to research ethics because they promote the aim of the research, support the values required for collaborative work, and fact that it is an essential part that wins public trust. A researcher who adheres to ethics can be held accountable for their action, and this highly promotes the transparency of the research. In this regard, there are several ethical issues that this research is aware of. One of them is informed consent. The research participants will be made aware of both the benefits and risks involved in participating to agree or disagree to be involved. All the information that can affect their participation decision should be provided to them, including but not limited to the purpose of the research, how long the interviews will take, what method will be used (Agunloye 2019). The participants will also be informed about their rights to not participate or leave the study at their convenience.

These researchers are also aware of academic integrity and honesty. According to Hyland and Paltridge (2011), researchers need to report their research honestly, including a clear description of the methods used, the data, results, and originality.



Hyland and Paltridge (2011) also advise researchers to avoid making up data or doing anything that can be understood as trying to mislead anyone reading the research. Following academic integrity, this researcher is aware that the study should follow elevated professional standards in terms of trust, honesty, fairness, and dissemination.

Overall, this research aims to promote social good. Objectivity or bias should be avoided in all elements of the study including research design, data analysis, and interpretation (Žukauskas, P., Vveinhardt and Andriukaitienė 2018). All the responses will be provided along with the final research to promote openness. All materials borrowed from outside sources are adequately referenced to avoid plagiarism or using other people's work without acknowledging their efforts. This is an important ethical consideration as this research is founded on the work of other scholars; hence, they need to be credited properly.

### 3.8 Data Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to how researchers establish that the findings are credible, transferable, conformable, and dependable (Korstjens and Moser 2018). This is done because qualitative research does not involve instruments about validity and reliability, making it important for the researcher to address how the findings will be trusted (Tracy 2010). By doing this, the researchers support the argument that the research findings are worth paying attention to, most important when utilizing thematic analysis because themes are created from raw data in absence of a theory-based categorization matrix.

#### 3.8.1 Credibility

Credibility establishes whether the study findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' original views (Tracy 2010). It is the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the

research findings (Tracy 2010). When a researcher designs the study, he or she also determines which of these strategies will be used, because not all strategies might be suitable.

### 3.8.2 Transferability

In qualitative research, transferability is synonymous with generalizability, or external validity, in quantitative research (Golafshani 2003). Solutions (2017) describe transferability as the degree to which qualitative study findings are transferred or generalized in the context of other studies. From a qualitative perspective, transferability is primarily the responsibility of the one doing the generalizing. The concept of transferability is developed by showing readers that the results of a research study can be applied to other environments, circumstances, periods, and populations. The qualitative researcher can improve transferability by thoroughly outlining the research background and the core assumptions of the study (Golafshani 2003). The individual who wants to "move" the findings to a different context is then in charge of determining if the transfer is reasonable.

Since a researcher cannot guarantee that the results of a research study would be useful, it is his responsibility to provide proof that they may be useful to potential users. (Golafshani 2003). This can be done by providing a thick description or a robust and detailed account of the researcher's experiences during data collection (Solutions 2017). This entails discussing the location of the interviews as well as other aspects of data collection that contribute to a deeper and more complete understanding of the study environment (Solutions 2017). This information aids the reader in constructing the scene that surrounds the research study, from the participants' daily lives to how implicit biases can influence their responses. It's useful to place what participants say to the researcher in the light of the social and cultural contexts in which the research is conducted (Solutions 2017). This encourages outside researchers and readers to make their own decisions about transferability.



### 3.8.3 Dependability

This refers to the stability of findings over time (Korstjens and Moser 2018). Dependability refers to participants' assessments of the study's conclusions, interpretations, and recommendations, all of which must be confirmed by the evidence collected from study participants. It involves outlining the research steps from the start of a project to the development and reporting of the results in a straightforward manner (Korstjens and Moser 2018). Throughout the report, records of the research strategies and paths are maintained.

### 3.8.4 Confirmability

This refers to the degree to which the findings of the research study could be confirmed by other researchers (Poortman and Schildkamp 2012). Confirmability is concerned with demonstrating that the data and interpretations of the results are clearly derived from the data and are not the product of the inquirer's imagination. Qualitative researchers must show that data analysis was carried out in an accurate, reliable, and exhaustive manner by documenting, systematizing, and reporting the methods of analysis in sufficient detail to allow the reader to decide if the process is credible (Golafshani 2003).

## 3.9 Data Analysis Method

Thematic analysis will be the best analysis method that will be followed. Thematic analysis is a method used in qualitative studies to analyse qualitative data. It is usually applied to a set of texts; such as interview transcripts (Nowell et al. 2017). In this type of data analysis, the researcher follows a step-by-step process that starts closely examining the data to identify common themes which can be topics, ideas, or patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly in the texts. Usually, there are six steps when conducting a thematic analysis. The steps are:

**Step 1: Familiarization:** The first step in any qualitative analysis is reading, and re-reading the transcripts to get to know the data (Maguire and Delahunt 2017). It is important to get a thorough overview of all the data collected before starting to analyze individual items. At this stage, it is important to make short notes and rough notes.

**Step 2: Coding:** Well known as generating initial codes, whereby the data is organized in a meaningful and systematic way (Braun and Clarke 2006). Coding reduces lots of data into small chunks of meaning. There are different ways to code and the method will be determined by individual's perspective and research questions. This means highlighting sections of some texts usually phrases or sentences and coming up with shorthand labels or "codes" to describe their content (Braun and Clarke 2006). In this case, researchers are concerned with addressing a specific research question and analyzing data. When coding customer feedbacks, the researcher has to assign labels to words or phrases that represent important themes in each response (Castleberry and Nolen 2018). These labels can be words, phrases, or numbers. For this study, coding was completed manually where different terms, words, and phrases were used to represent. The codes were formed manually from the data sets as shown in Appendix B.

**Step 3: Generating Themes.** According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), a theme is a pattern that captures something significant or interesting about the data or research question. In this stage, the researchers look at the codes created, identify patterns among them and start coming up with themes. Themes are generally broader than codes. A theme is characterized by its significance (Braun and Clarke 2006). In this case, the researchers have to examine the codes and some of them clearly fitted together into themes. The next stages are all about working with potential themes which are later reviewed to get an overarching theme of the study. At this point, it is important to address not only what is present in the data, but also what is missing from the data (Castleberry and Nolen 2018). At the end of this phase, there should be many candidate themes collected throughout the data processes. It is crucial to avoid discarding themes

even if they are initially insignificant as they may be important themes later in the analysis process. The tables below show how the codes were used to generate themes.

*Table 3.9.1: Local community member A1*

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Generated themes</b>
Guiding trekkers Tip Earning Income, loss, or no income No international tourists Government restrictions Corona challenges Effect of Corona on tour agencies, porters, and guides Normalcy Families Local shopkeepers No tourists	Corona affected families and workers in the tourism sector, Normalcy.

In table 3.9.1, various codes were used to generate possible themes from the data obtained from the local community member A1. The themes generated were based on what the codes mean, that is, various codes were combined to generate one theme.

*Table 3.9.2: Local Community member A2*

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Generated themes</b>
Employees Loss of salary Jobs	Importance of CBT, the impact of Corona on locals, government support

CBT Service and equipment provider Earning extra money Businesses Families Family sustainability New ventures Sectors linked to tourism The mental and physical impact of Corona Lockdown Normalcy Government intervention	
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Table 3.9.2 also represents the coded data that was used to generate the shown themes. The data was drawn from interview responses given by the second local member (A2) of the community interviewed. The data helped to generate three key themes that are relevant considering the research question and aim.

*Table 3.9.3: Local community member A3*

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Generated themes</b>
Jobs /employment Pay cuts Earning Importance of CBT Culture Local business operations Local restaurants Source of money	Importance of CBT, normalcy, local residents, government support



Local shopkeeper	
Local shop closure	
Lack of buyers/tourists	
Vaccine	
Normal	
Demand	
Social life	
Stress	
Lack of money	
Government support	

In table 3.9.3, the last local member around the Annapurna Trek Circuit interview was coded. Based on the identified codes, themes were generated to give meaning to the data.

*Table 3.9.4: Trekking Agencies in Nepal A4*

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Generated themes</b>
Goods and services	Tourism stakeholders, recovery and normalcy, vulnerability
Source of income	
Earning	
Jobs	
Tourism stakeholders	
Lack of tourists	
Income	
Culture	
nature	
attraction	
economy (CBT)	
business closure	



vulnerability	
government intervention	

Table 3.9.4 shows the codes as well as the generated themes from the data set obtained from a Trekking agency in Nepal. The codes as well as the themes were manually generated.

*Table 3.9.5: Trekking Agencies in Nepal A5*

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Generated themes</b>
CBT activities Generate income Loss of income/salaries No clients/visitors/tourists Shutting down businesses Laying off workers Effect on family sustainability Preparedness Customer preference Demand Economic contribution Local culture New strategies Government support	Sustainability of families, negative effects of Corona, preference, government collaboration.

In Table 3.9.5, an interview with another trekking agency was conducted and the data set was used to come up with the shown codes and themes.

*Table 3.9.6: Trekking Agencies Association of Nepal (TAAN) A6*

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Generated themes</b>
Income money Jobs No tourists Tourism promotion Normalcy Revenue generation Government support Access to loans Social life Accommodation/ lodges/in-house Community culture Restriction in traveling Business closure Lockdown	Normalcy, negative effects of Corona

Table 3.9.6 shows the codes identified from TAAN's representative interview. Through the codes, various themes were identified. All the themes identified in all the six datasets will be reviewed for refining in the next step.

**Step 4: Reviewing themes.** During this phase, individuals review, adjust and modify the preliminary themes that were identified in the previous step (step 3) (Braun and Clarke 2006). At this point it is important to gather together all the information that is relevant to each theme therefore at this stage or phase what is needed from the researcher is to check the initial themes against the coded data and the entire data set. This stage allows further expansion on and revision of themes as they develop. At this point, the person involved with reviewing should have a set of potential themes, as this phase is where

the reworking of the initial themes takes place (Castleberry and Nolen 2018). Some themes may be condensed into smaller units; some existing themes may collapse into each other or let go altogether. From the generated themes as shown in the tables in step 3, the following are the final themes that have been identified after serious reviewing and modifying the themes:

- Importance of CBT
- Annapurna attraction
- Normalcy
- Negative effects of Corona
- Family sustainability
- Government support
- Tourism stakeholders

**Step 5: Defining and naming themes.** This is the final refinement of themes and the aim is to identify the essence of each theme is all about so defining themes involves formulating what it means by each theme and figuring out how it helps us understand the data while naming themes involves coming up with an understandable name of each theme (Castleberry and Nolen 2018). Here, one creates an overall narrative with all the data, analyzing each theme and its individual narrative. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), one has to identify whether or not any of the themes contain sub-themes therefore at this point one should officially name the themes. By the end of this phase, one should identify what the themes are and what they are not.

**Importance of CBT:** CBT coding meant “Community Based Tourism”. This theme was identified to tell a story about what the respondent think are the benefits of community-based tourism both at the individual and business level. The importance of the CBT theme was developed from several codes such as jobs, income, CBT, salaries, money, employment, economy, and earning. Generally, this theme focuses on how

community-based tourism impacts local cultures and the people who depend on it, like the people of Annapurna Circuit Trek.

**Annapurna attraction:** This theme explains the importance or what makes Annapurna an attractive site. The theme also explains to what extent trekking agencies and other related bodies encourage people to visit the area. It also explains why local communities think that the place is attractive and what makes it appealing to tourists. Codes used to develop this theme include attraction and nature.

**Normalcy:** This is a state of normalcy, routine, or expectation? When something returns to its natural state, it is going back to how it should be. It is a synonym for normality or the new normal in the context of this study. A new normal is a condition in which an economy, culture, or other entity settles after a crisis, as it varies from the situation that existed prior to the crisis's onset, such as COVID-19. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the word "new normal" was increasingly used to describe the changes in human behavior that occurred during or after the pandemic. Many people's daily lives are expected to be affected by the pandemic. In this theme, the story behind it is whether people think that things will be back to normal in the tourism industry after Corona Virus. Some of the codes used to develop this theme are vaccine, normal, demand, and normalcy.

**Negative effects of Corona:** The theme highlights all the negative impacts Corona has had on the entire tourism industry but the main focus is given to the Annapurna Circuit Trek and the people associated with the place. In this theme, codes such as loss of jobs, jobs, income, employment, revenue, accommodation, earning, salary, no international tourists, no clients/visitors/tourists, business closure/shutdown, and effect of Corona on tour agencies, porters and guides.

**Family sustainability:** This is a major theme that will help in answering the research question. The theme pertains to the concept of sustainability which that humans must

engage with the environment in such a way that future generations will have enough resources. Via a series of family-chosen, family-directed initiatives, Sustainable Family Development applies the three foundations of sustainable development (social justice, economic viability, and environmental conservation) to families. In this analysis, family sustainability will be used as an aspect of social sustainability in the Annapurna Circuit Trek region. By recognizing what people require from the places they live and work, social sustainability is a process for building long-term successful places that foster well-being.

**Government support:** This theme will be used in the analysis to explain how the government of Nepal can help the tourism industry to get back to normal after the Corona Virus. For the industry to stabilize the shock of the pandemic, more will be required in terms of government interventions to cushion the sector.

**Step 6: Writing up.** This final phase involves weaving together the analytic narrative and data extracts and contextualizing the analysis in relation to existing literature (Nowell, Norris, White, and Moules 2017). Usually, the final part or stage of a research is writing a report on findings. The researcher should include a methodology section, describing how they collected the information or data, for instance, one may have used semi-structured interview or open-ended survey question hence explaining how they conducted the research. This sixth step is continued in the next chapter which includes the analysis.

## Chapter 4: Analysis

### 4.1 Overview

This section majorly focuses on the findings of the study, consisting of synthesis and interpretation of data based on the literature review. The main findings consist of interpretations, relationships, and themes. This study aimed to understand the effect of Corona on the trekking sector of Nepal, with a specific focus on the social sustainability of the people around Annapurna Circuit Trek. Based on the ideas from the review of literature, the analysis of the data obtained from the interviewees is analyzed to understand the effects of the Corona Virus pandemic on Annapurna Circuit Trek communities. The interview questions used to guide data collection are presented in Appendix A involving data collection from three local community members, two trekking agencies in Nepal, and one interview from the Trekking Agencies Association of Nepal. The data presented in appendix B is the responses obtained, plus the coded text. Discussed below are the key findings of the study, which entail interview excerpts from the responses.

### 4.2 Importance of CBT

As described in the fifth step of the thematic analysis process, the importance of CBT (community-based tourism) was an important theme identified to show what the respondent think are the benefits of community-based tourism both at the individual and business level as well as understand how community-based tourism impacts local cultures and the people who depend on it, like the people of Annapurna Circuit Trek. Interviewees representing the trekking agencies in Nepal were asked to name the most famous community-based tourism activities that visitors want. The findings show that travelers mostly book for mountain adventure and trekking. As one of the respondents representing the trekking agencies in Nepal said "as they trek through the mountains they get to meet people of Nepal where they interact and learn about different cultures.

The other finding regarding the most common CBT activities in Nepal was "hiking and other adventure activities such as climbing and expeditions, mountain biking and motorcycling". The participants revealed that the importance of community-based tourism is that it has helped stimulate the local economy of the country in terms of tourist inflow, enhancement of the historical heritage, culture, traditions, and so on. The study also found that community-based tourism is important as it:

*"Promotes local tradition, generate income by promoting local entrepreneurship and produces. When local communities in Nepal participate in community-based tourism, they play a role in generating movement in the elements of production and exchange of goods and services in a given region" (Interviewee A5).*

Based on the literature review, the concept of community-based tourism highlights that a powerful device for community improvement mostly through reduction of poverty. The above quote shows how the reduction of poverty is done through income earned when visitors travel to Annapurna Circuit Trek. Local entrepreneurship and produces are some of the sources of community wealth that when the demand for the service is high, can support many families financially. What usually drags those ideas of poverty reduction through community-based tourism is lack of community participation in tourism planning, as the review of the literature revealed.

The interview involving the community members asked five questions in regard to community-based tourism. One of the questions sought to know how the respondents, some community members around Annapurna Circuit Trek, benefit from community-based tourism in Nepal. Based on the responses, community members around the Annapurna Circuit Trek benefit from community-based tourism through interaction with international tourists who offer them tips when they show them direction, guide them on where to trek, offer them accommodation, food, and other stuff like craft gifts. There are local residents around the area who survive only on what tourists give them. As a

result, all the community members believe community-based tourism is one of the most important around that area, and in their lives, since it gives them some money they can use for survival. Another question was related to whether the community members perceive community-based tourism as important in their life.

The participants from the local community members were also asked how often they have participated in community-based tourism, even if it meant how often they have encountered trekkers at the Annapurna Circuit Trek who need local member's help. Finally, local community member respondents were asked whether they have ever or if they usually earn a living out of community-based tourism. This was elaborated for them in that they could earn a living as a porter or guide, a local shopkeeper, or from participating in any tourist-related activities around the Annapurna Circuit Trek. Interestingly, one of the local community members at Annapurna Circuit Trek was a former employee of a trekking company in Nepal, but now operates his own business which offers trekking and hiking services. For this respondent, the number of times he has participated in community-based tourism is uncountable. As the interviewee said:

*"I cannot count the number of times I have participated in community-based tourism; maybe I can say it in terms of years. For instance, two years as a guide for a trekking company and five years as a service and equipment provider for trekkers and hikers at Annapurna Circuit Trek. In those years, I have encountered international tourists who are interested in learning a lot about the areas they are trekking or hiking through. So for years, I have lived to bring places such as Annapurna Circuit Trek to life by sharing stories, persona passion and knowledge about the place and the cultural context of it"*  
Interviewee A2.

The above quote relates to the idea of using community-based tourism as a means to elevate the economic standards of a community. Those who have businesses operating in the local areas benefit both the tourists as well as the locals who work for them as

employees. For instance, when a local community member owns a trekking firm, offering jobs to his or her fellow community members makes that community more dependent on the resources available for them in their area of residence.

In addition, interviewee A3 majorly participates and benefits from community-based tourism as he sells local crafts, clothing, and food products to tourists. The as well relates to the above-mentioned concept of community-based tourism as a tool for economic elevation within a local community that depends on tourism. The respondent has a shop that sells clothing and crafts that tourists can buy as gifts or something they can display in their homes for memories. He also has a shop around the Annapurna Circuit Trek that sells snacks and other cooked food products where tourists can have freshly cooked Nepalese food packed for them when they going for trekking. This allows the respondent to earn a living for his family, provide jobs for others in the community, and provide interesting services to the tourists. As a result, more community lives are improved and the economic status also changes.

### 4.3 Annapurna Attraction

The trekking agencies of Nepal participants were asked to give their opinion on what they like about Annapurna Circuit Trek. Based on the findings, the respondents like Annapurna Circuit Trek because of its natural amusement and the fact that the treks around the area are less demanding as shown in the responses below:

*“We like Annapurna Circuit Trek is a moderate kind of trek; neither very demanding nor less demanding and customers prefer it the most.”*

*“Annapurna Circuit Trek is an amazing trek. It offers tourists and visitors a wide variety of natural amusement that Nepal has to offer. Immersed in forests and diversified villages, Annapurna allows visitors to have a good exploration of the beauty that lies in the towering pinnacles of Annapurna panorama. Our clients encounter the temples,*



*monasteries, and some fascinating landscapes for natural and cultural fantasies. The acquaintance with the rural lifestyle and unique tradition of the ethnic group of people always inspire tourists for living with joy.”*

Given the concept of community-based tourism which thrives on the community resources, what makes a destination attractive also determines the quality of life of those who live around it. This means that people strive to keep an attractive destination it is, especially when it comes to community-based tourism or adventure tourism as most past studies show. The literature reviews show that visitors prefer to visit a place where they have been recommended by friends or where they have ever had an experience. As a result, it can be observed from the above data that Annapurna Circuit Trek needs people who are focused on making it a destination that it should be.

It was also found that trekking agencies often recommend their clients to have an experience of the Annapurna Circuit Trek. According to one of the respondents for trekking agencies of Nepal, in as far as the agency encourages visitors to try the experience of Annapurna Circuit Trek, even the customers themselves refer to visit Annapurna Circuit Trek when they are given a list of places they can trek in Nepal. This helps in identifying and satisfying the demand that clients have because what they want is known by the service providers. It will also help the promotion of the area post-COVID-19.

#### 4.4 Negative Effects of Corona

Corona Virus had a lot of negative impacts on the tourism industry of Nepal. People in the tourism sector lost their jobs, businesses were not in operation, and demand was almost zero. In this study, the interview sought to explore how the local community members coped during the Corona Virus pandemic, which is still not over when there were no international tourists allowed in the country during the first phase of the virus spread. As interviewee A6 highlights, stakeholders in the tourism industry are losing a

lot of money they should be making if things were normal. This research found that there were a lot of instabilities on how operators in the tourism industry were functioning. For instance, one local community shopkeeper was closing the shops during the pandemic since there were no buyers. As the shopkeepers say:

*"There is a period I closed for two months consecutively when the country was on lockdown. The various restrictions imposed by the government were not friendly for a business so it was better to close till things become a little cooler. It was not easy for me given the fact that I have several employees who work at the food shop because I had to pay them even when they were not working. It was the only thing I could do because they have families at home who depend on them, but I had to cut some money from their salary which I hope to compensate once things get back as they were" (Interviewee A3).*

From the above quote, closing the shops meant that there was no income, employees could not be paid and families would suffer for lack of basic necessities. According to the concept of social sustainability, the well-being of the community must be ensured for a successful provision of for the local communities. The literature further shows that whereas direct beneficiaries would be the employees, crafts producers, guides, porters, and so on, the indirect beneficiaries would be community members all in all as beneficiaries who get the advantages of advancement projects, instructive activities, training, and different projects subsidized by the tourism incomes. This negative effect of COVID-19 was felt by the entire tourism industry in Nepal with the different sectors being affected in different ways. For instance, one community member respondent said that:

*"I guess the entire tourism industry was affected just the same way my business was affected. That is, due to lack of tourists, tourism-related businesses closed down, some people lost their jobs, others were put on pay cuts and so on" (Interviewee A3).*

Specifically, the above quote implies that the trekking sector, as the respondent representing the trekking agencies in Nepal said, was affected by a lack of visitors thereby resulting in loss of income. The study found that some trekking agencies closed down until when the industry stabilizes. To be specific, the community around Annapurna Circuit Trek was affected by Corona Virus as there were no tourists to occupy the community lodges that have been built to provide the local community with all the benefits. This means that the promotion of social sustainability within the community was hard given the closure of businesses and loss of jobs.

*“...The local villagers run the lodges and the purpose is to ensure that the whole community shares the benefits from the income coming from tourism. In some of the villages, tourists may be put up by a family in their home as an alternative for lodge accommodation. This is a great way to get a close insight into how the local people live and experience the culture and life of the community. When the Corona Virus hit, there were no tourists to occupy those lodges or purchase local produce, so people lost income and their jobs as well” Interviewee A6.*

Overall, the above quotes show that the main impact of the Corona Virus pandemic on the tourism industry in Nepal is the lack of tourists, both domestic and international. This leads to other problems such as the closure of businesses that depend on tourists, laying off workers, workers receiving pay cuts, loss of salary, income, and loss of employment. Although direct beneficiaries would include workers, crafts manufacturers, guides, porters, and others, indirect beneficiaries would include community members as a whole who benefit from advancement programs, instructive events, training, and other projects subsidized by tourism revenues.

*“...We mostly rely on international tourists but with the advent of the Corona Virus, there have been no arrivals. Even the local tourists are very minimal” (Interviewee A4).*

This quote can be described from the dimension of both the concept of community-based tourism as well as the social sustainability of tourism. In terms of community-based tourism, those who earned income through international tourists were not operational. This means there was a redundancy in the sectors. In terms of social sustainability, the pandemic served as a litmus test for the community's resilience and ability to recover from the epidemic. Local communities should not feel compelled to give up anything for tourism; they should not feel compelled to adjust themselves solely to meet tourist demand. They must maintain their cultural identity and depend on tourism as a secondary source of income. That has been shown by the current crisis. Communities that follow this definition and do not change as a result of tourism will be able to thrive. Their lives will not be destroyed and they will continue to be able to rely on their main non-tourism source of income. However, some communities that rely heavily on tourism for income and adapt themselves to tourists in order to increase tourism revenues will face significant challenges.

#### 4.5 Family Sustainability

The local community member participants were asked to give their views on how the social sustainability of the local communities around the Annapurna Circuit Trek was affected. All the respondents agree that the social sustainability of the people around Annapurna Circuit Trek was affected. People around this area need tourists to work and earn something. When the earning group of people could not earn any more, others had to look for an alternative to make money. However, others had no alternative they could pursue. Since those people support their families with what they used to earn from tourists, they must have found it hard to cope without any source of income, especially those who had no alternative source of income. Sustaining their families must have been a little bit challenging because of a lack of income.

With no visitors, those people had only the locals to offer their products and services. The locals do not have money so their spending power is low. This means most of the families around have been living without some basic needs because they do not have income.

#### 4.6 Government Support

Based on this study, government intervention will be required if the tourism industry in Nepal is to recover fully from the pandemic. To strengthen the trekking sector, the respondents think that trekking agencies can work incorporation to present their challenges to the government and relevant bodies like NTB, TAAN, and so on to have a long-term solution to what hinders the sector from growing. All those are bodies that work with the government of Nepal to ensure every sector in tourism is well covered. TAAN, as the body that represents trekking agencies of Nepal in the national government, should also support the sector to recover through their power in government. After the hit of the Corona Virus, the trekking sector will have new challenges and will need team efforts to address them. As the research found out, the trekking sector is vulnerable and that is because it usually entails small business enterprise. The government can support the tourism sector so that it can recover without struggling.

The respondent representing TAAN suggests that since was no other way the government of Nepal could have helped to ensure community-based tourism was not negatively affected by the Corona pandemic other than first locking down the country, those business owners in the tourism industry could have been given access to interest-free loans to serve their employees so they would not suffer from loss of income and jobs, but in the long run, it could not be a great solution. TAAN respondent promises that the key role of the body will still stand even after the Corona Virus pandemic and will act as the lobby group that is meant to be, by ensuring that they suggest to the

government on several issues to promote the Nepali tourism industry and develop tourism as a revenue-generating industry.

#### 4.7 Normalcy

The study also revealed that people have hoped that the trekking business will be back to normal and fully recover after the Corona Virus pandemic ends. However, the respondents were doubtful about how tourism business owners should re-strategize and refocus their goals because when the Corona pandemic ends, there will be new demand and customers will need to see value for their money. To meet the new demand for traveling customers, new strategies have to be used; tourism products have to be improved to attract visitors. One of the interview questions for the local community members asked the interviewees whether they hope for the industry to get back to normal when the virus is gone, especially now that a vaccine against the virus has been developed. The respondent answered:

*“I really hope things go back to normal. People are suffering, especially those whose only source of income was tourism. We cannot hope for anything else as of now, but hope for the tourism industry to recover” Interviewee A1.*

*“Yes, I hope so...What gives me hope that the industry will go back to normalcy is that people will be craving to travel when all this craziness is over... We can just hope for the best” Interviewee A2.*

*“The tourism industry will for sure get back to normal after Corona Virus. The development of the vaccine has given us hope and encouragement that we will get back to our normal life. I know most tourists are eager to travel as they have been staying indoors for so long, of which some were not used to such kind of life. I am hopeful there will a boom in tourism demand and that is exactly what is important for this industry to go back to normal, and even become better” Interviewee A3.*

These results show the positivity of the local community that their source of income will recover even after experiencing the worst. The results imply how important the tourism industry is for the local community members around the Annapurna Circuit trek given the rate of their positivity and hope. Retrenchment, or redundancy, was a natural reaction. If the crisis represents an opportunity to reconsider how tourism communicates with our economies, other economic sectors, natural resources, and ecosystems; to properly quantify and manage it; to ensure an equal distribution of its benefits, and to accelerate the transition to a carbon-neutral and sustainable tourism economy.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Perspective

This chapter offers a discussion about the study findings as well as interpretation of data. Based on the study findings, the government will have to fix everything in the country to go back to normalcy especially the tourism industry. Those in the tourism sector including the local community business people who depend on tourism will need any kind of support for the government to get back on their toes. However, studies show that things might never get to normal like before even after the Corona Virus pandemic ends. The society that will emerge from the Corona Virus pandemic has already begun to be discussed. The Covid-19 recovery presents an opportunity to forge a new kind of 'normal,' one that can help restore confidence in the state while also reaffirming critical economic and social rights. Recovery plans are already being debated, with an emphasis on the financial support that will be needed to aid economies in their recovery. But, in order to recalibrate social values and provide a more sustainable underpinning for the future, a structural transformation is needed that goes well beyond financial instruments.

### 5.1 Social and Economic Sustainability

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is a bottom-up approach to sustainable development that is being used in developing countries like Nepal to improve natural resource protection, conserve traditional culture, and generate revenue at the local level. When groups manage and operate their own tourism programs, the benefits accrue to the participants rather than to outside companies or tour operators (Dangi & Jamal. 2016). It provides travelers with a more educational experience while also allowing them to form closer bonds with the local people and culture. Tourists leave with a better understanding of the community's complexities as well as a contribution to the local economy and entrepreneurs.

At least a portion of the visitor revenue is set aside for programs that support the whole city. Community-based tourism allows visitors to learn about local landscapes and wildlife while also honoring and respecting traditional traditions, customs, and knowledge (Han et al., 2019). Tourists leave with a better understanding of the community's complexities as well as a contribution to the local economy and entrepreneurs. According to the literature reviews, eradicating poverty would require community-based approaches to economic development in order to be truly sustainable and realized.

Residents of the area may become tour guides and provide services to tourists through community-based tourism. It also gives communities the chance to contribute to the movement of elements of production and exchange of goods and services in a given area. The study result shows that most local community members around Annapurna Circuit Trek take part in community-based tourism.

## 5.2 TAAN and Promotion of CBT in Nepal

The Trekking Agencies Association of Nepal (TAAN) is a Nepalese umbrella organization for trekking agencies. It was founded in 1979 by a group of trekking agency owners who thought it was past time to develop sound business principles and regulate an industry that was expanding at a breakneck pace (TAAN 2020). They also saw the need for a powerful lobby group that could make recommendations to the government on a variety of issues to encourage Nepali tourism and grow it as a revenue-generating industry.

Although Nepal Government has allowed 44 types of industries to operate, the tourism sector is still closed and is affected the most (TAAN 2020). Every economic sector of the world has suffered the after effects of COVID-19. In Nepal tourism being as an important industry for the country's economy, and is now affected by COVID-19. It is obvious that tourism entrepreneurs are facing challenges and workers will continue to lose their job.

It is estimated that increasing international flights and tourism-related activities will take another year. It is important to ensure that trekking, hotels, restaurants, and other areas can operate safely. Other industries that were closed as a result of the lockdown may be able to reopen quickly, but tourism-related industries may take longer than six months to reopen.

The Corona Virus pandemic has directly impacted the tourism industry and is predicted to have long-term effects. The tourism sector has been paralyzed by the outbreak during the tourist season. With the launch of its campaign Visit Nepal 2020 in January, the country planned to attract two million visitors, but the ambitious campaign was canceled due to the Corona pandemic, destroying the tourism industry. Following the announcement of the Visit Nepal Year 2020 initiative, tourism entrepreneurs made significant investments, but these investments are now at risk of failure. As a result, there is no way to increase the amount of money invested. The government must place a high priority on the tourism sector to turn today's dark day into tomorrow's bright day. As a result, TAAN has asked the Ministry of Tourism to make the repayment of installments and interest on a bank loan easier.

In addition to pressuring the government to interfere, TAAN should develop a new strategy for promoting community-based tourism. Community-based tourism emerges as a viable option for rural communities looking to cross the social and economic divide. It is appropriate for communities looking to supplement their everyday economic activities by using the region's cultural, natural, and local resources (Orozco 2015). Poverty reduction by community growth is a widely supported agenda around the world. Community-based tourism has long been regarded as one of the most effective resources for such endeavors.

Community-based tourism is not only a precursor to development; it can also have profound effects on individuals, communities, and society as a whole, leading to a

momentous transformative service movement. Community-based tourism involves a more participatory approach to tourism and has the potential to become a successful tourism product; however, for this potential to be realized, there must be a strong partnership between public and private sector strategies, as well as community expectations for the development of tourism in the region (Orozco 2015). Residents of the area may become tour guides and provide services to tourists through community-based tourism. It also gives communities the chance to contribute to the movement of elements of production and exchange of goods and services in a given area.



## Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter presents the summary of the research and recommendations for further research.

### 6.1 Summary and Conclusion

The objective of this research was to review the literature around community-based tourism alongside collecting data concerning the social sustainability of the Annapurna Circuit Trek communities during the Corona Virus pandemic. Through an extensive review of literature, the aspect of community-based tourism in Nepal was studied and its social sustainability. The review of the literature found that community-based tourism is a key player in community development in terms of poverty reduction, enhancing social interactions, development of cultural heritage, enhancing community development, and increasing conservation of the natural environment. Along these lines, these communities' based benefits to the local communities have been affected by the novel Corona Virus that has disrupted the tourism industry in its entirety. With lock-downs and other health and safety protocols that were given to reduce the spread of COVID-19, the tourism industry suffered through a lack of tourists. A research gap was therefore identified after reviewing the literature. The identified gap concerns how Nepal's tourism industry has been affected, especially community-based tourism, by the Corona Virus pandemic. To address this research gap, this study explored the effect of Corona on the trekking sector of Nepal, with a specific focus on Annapurna Circuit Trek. This was motivated by the fact that no single study has been conducted to investigate how Corona Virus affected this particular area.

One of the key objectives of this dissertation was to analyze the effects of the Corona Virus pandemic on Annapurna Circuit Trek communities based on the ideas from the review of the literature. The findings of this research show that community-based tourism is a critical contributor to social sustainability for the people who live around



the Annapurna Circuit Trek. The collected data also revealed that the Corona Virus has affected the trekking sector to an extent no one would have ever imagined. Trekking companies even the bodies that protect the trekking agencies never thought of a time they will have to shut down or lay off workers because of the total lack of clients/tourists. The local communities also never imagined a time they would have no income because there are also no visitors. However, the Corona Virus pandemic has made all that possible, and trekking companies have lost income, the local communities who depend on the tourism industry have lost their jobs so they also have no income to support their families. The local communities have been left devastated because they cannot sustain their families with no salaries. Government intervention, through TAAN and other tourism bodies, ensures that the industry recovers fully after the pandemic.

## 6.2 Further studies

One of the key limitations in this research was reliance on data from interviews only. The interviews provided all the information and are quoted as the only source of primary data. Further studies can therefore combine interviews with many other sources of data. The interview sample could also be expanded to include many local community members to have diverse views. Using various tools allows the researchers to compare and analyze data to obtain a complete understanding of the research areas. In mixed-method research, for example, standardized questionnaires and semi-structured interviews can be used to produce confirmatory findings despite variations in data collection, analysis, and interpretation processes.

Future research can also be done as a case study of another local area that tourists visit, to understand if the results can be compared. This is because as an alternative to mass tourism, community-based tourism is gaining popularity all around the world. This new form of tourism encourages interaction with the local community as well as the exploration of various sensations. It is also necessary to investigate how the community as a whole participates in the development of the area as a tourist destination, owing to



the perception of tourism as being based on an assessment of the local community's attitude toward the environment, infrastructure, and events, as well as the belief that the local community's participation model has a significant impact on the tourist industry. This kind of study should be carried out with post-COVID-19 tourism in mind.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview guide

#### **Local community individuals around Annapurna Circuit Trek**

The purpose of this study is to understand how the Corona Virus has pandemic impacted the trekking sector of Nepal as well as the social sustainability of the Annapurna Circuit Trek communities. You have been selected to participate in this study as a member of the communities around the Annapurna Circuit Trek. It is important to state that you are free to leave the research at any time because it is voluntary to participate. In addition, the interview will take a maximum of 1 hour and there are no known benefits or risks associated with participating in this study. Finally, your identity will remain anonymous and confidential, but the limit of confidentiality is limited in case the research supervisor asks for the identity to be revealed. Let's start:

1. As a community member around Annapurna Circuit Trek, how did you benefit from community-based tourism in Nepal?
2. Do you perceive community-based tourism as important in your life?
3. How often did you participate in community-based tourism, for instance, did you ever encountered trekkers at the Annapurna Circuit Trek who need local member's help?
4. Did you earn a living out of community-based tourism? Could be a porter or guide, a local shopkeeper, or you could have earned something from participating in any tourist-related activities around the Annapurna Circuit Trek?
5. How did you cope or manage during the Corona Virus pandemic, which is still not over, when there were no international tourists allowed in the country during the first phase of the virus spread?
6. Please give your opinion on how the Corona Virus pandemic affected the entire tourism industry in Nepal?

7. Now that a vaccine has been developed to fight against the Corona Virus, do you hope for the industry to get back to normal when the virus is gone?
8. As we finish, kindly give you views on how the social sustainability of the local communities around the Annapurna Circuit Trek was affected.

### **Trekking Agencies in Nepal**

1. As we started, kindly introduce yourself.
2. How old is your trekking agency?
3. What are the most famous community-based tourism activities that visitors want?
4. What do you like about Annapurna Circuit Trek?
5. Do you often recommend your clients to have an experience of the Annapurna Circuit Trek?
6. What is the importance of community-based tourism in Nepal?
7. What was/is the impact of the Corona Virus pandemic on the tourism industry in Nepal?
8. How was the trekking sector of Nepal affected by Corona Virus?
9. How did the Corona Virus pandemic impact the social sustainability of the people living around the Annapurna Circuit Trek?
10. Do you think the trekking business will be back to normal after Corona Virus?
11. What do you think should be done to strengthen the trekking sector of Nepal?
12. Anything you would like to add concerning the effect of the Corona Virus on the trekking sector of Nepal as well as the social sustainability of the local communities around the Annapurna Circuit Trek?

### **Trekking Agencies Association of Nepal (TAAN)**

1. For how long have you been the president of TAAN?
2. In the tourism industry of Nepal, to what extent do you think the Corona Virus impacted community-based tourism?
3. Did you foresee that the Corona pandemic could take the tourism industry of Nepal in the direction it has taken?



4. One role of TAAN is to develop and promote mountain tourism in Nepal. During the pandemic, did you promote domestic tourism in Nepal? How did it turn out?
5. In terms of social sustainability, how did the Corona Virus pandemic influence the social sustainability of the Annapurna Circuit Trek communities? To what extent do you think the Annapurna Circuit Trek communities were affected?
6. What do you think was the effect of Corona on the trekking sector of Nepal in general and on Annapurna Circuit Trek?
7. Do you think there was a way the government of Nepal could have helped to ensure community-based tourism was not negatively affected by the Corona pandemic?
8. How do you intend to preserve the rights and promote Nepal's member trekking agencies during and after the Corona pandemic?
9. Thank you for participating. Do you have anything else to add, regarding how the Corona Virus affected the social sustainability of the communities around Nepal's Annapurna Circuit Trek?

#### Appendix B: Interview Responses (coded)

Local community member A1	List of codes
<p><b>As a community member around Annapurna Circuit Trek, how did you benefit from community-based tourism in Nepal?</b></p> <p>I am a resident of Manang district and here we encounter a lot of trekkers. For instance, here in the Manang district, when tourists visit, anyone can show them directions and the trekking routes. Most of the tourists, especially those who come from outside countries offer us tips and that is what we depend on to survive.</p> <p><b>Do you perceive community-based tourism as important in your life?</b></p> <p>Yes, as I have said, I have encountered some international tourists several days around Manang, and I have helped them to find the</p>	<p>Guiding trekkers</p> <p>Tip</p> <p>Earning</p> <p>Income, loss, or no income</p> <p>No international tourists</p> <p>Government restrictions</p> <p>Corona challenges</p> <p>Effect of Corona</p>



<p>trekking trails, not on one occasion or two. Those tourists usually give tips to locals who help them as a form of appreciation. Sometimes you can get more than trekking trips which will earn you more tips.</p> <p><b>How often did you participate in community-based tourism, for instance, did you ever encountered trekkers at the Annapurna Circuit Trek who need local member's help?</b></p> <p>Yes, several times.</p> <p><b>Did you earn a living out of community-based tourism? Could be a porter or guide, a local shopkeeper, or you could have earned something from participating in any tourist-related activities around the Annapurna Circuit Trek.</b></p> <p>Yes, I have mostly earned a living from community-based tourism. Although I have not seen any trekkers needing help around of late, hiking has been one of my most important sources of income.</p> <p><b>How did you cope or manage during the Corona Virus pandemic, which is still not over, when there were no international tourists allowed in the country during the first phase of the virus spread?</b></p> <p>The Corona Virus just made everything around here impossible. No tourists from outside countries meant that we were all sent home to wait till when the borders open to allow tourists in. Even the locals did not want to come for trekking or hiking because of the restrictions that were enforced by the government. I understand it was a much-needed restriction and that is what the government had to do, but those who depended on tourists for survival had it rough because there was no money to spend on family needs. But we are</p>	<p>on tour agencies, porters, and guides</p> <p>Normalcy</p> <p>Families</p> <p>Local shopkeepers</p> <p>No tourists</p>
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still managing even when tourists seem not to arrive.

**Please give your opinion on how the Corona Virus pandemic affected the entire tourism industry in Nepal?**

I think everything that is connected to tourism was affected. There are tour agencies that used to bring tourists here and connect us with the tourists so that we can guide them, that is if the agency has none of its own guides and porter. Those agencies completely had no tourists. Like there is one tour agency that I mostly rely on, they had to close down till further notice when Corona Virus hit Nepal and the government issued travel restrictions.

**Now that a vaccine has been developed to fight against the Corona Virus, do you hope for the industry to get back to normal when the virus is gone?**

I really hope things go back to normal. People are suffering especially those whose only source of income was tourism. We cannot hope for anything else as of now, but for the tourism industry to recover.

**As we finish, kindly give your views on how the social sustainability of the local communities around the Annapurna Circuit Trek was affected.**

Obviously, so many families around Annapurna Circuit Trek rely on the tourism industry for income. Some offer guide services to tourists, others have shops around the area where tourists buy their snacks and many more. Without any visitors, those people had only the locals to offer their products and services. The locals do not have money so their spending power is low. This means most of the families around have been living without some basic needs because they do not have income.



<b>Local community member A2</b>	
<p><b>As a community member around Annapurna Circuit Trek, how did you benefit from community-based tourism in Nepal?</b></p> <p>I worked for a trekking company here in Nepal and as a guide, where I was earning a salary. After I quit the job, I became an independent entrepreneur but still focusing on the same trekking and hiking services.</p> <p><b>Do you perceive community-based tourism as important in your life?</b></p> <p>I do perceive community-based tourism as important in my life because I have spent my entire career life participating in community-based tourism.</p> <p><b>How often did you participate in community-based tourism, for instance, did you ever encounter trekkers at the Annapurna Circuit Trek who need local member's help?</b></p> <p>I cannot count the number of times I have participated in community-based tourism, maybe I can say it in terms of years. For instance, two years as a guide for a trekking company and five years as a service and equipment provider for trekkers and hikers at Annapurna Circuit Trek. In those years, I have encountered international tourists who are interested in learning a lot about the areas they are trekking or hiking through. So for years, I have lived to bring places such as Annapurna Circuit Trek to life by sharing stories, personal passion, and knowledge about the place and the cultural context of it.</p> <p><b>Did you earn a living out of community-based tourism? Could be a porter or guide, a local shopkeeper, or you could have earned</b></p>	<p>Employees</p> <p>Loss of salary</p> <p>Jobs</p> <p>CBT</p> <p>Service and equipment provider</p> <p>Earning extra money</p> <p>Businesses</p> <p>Families</p> <p>Family</p> <p>sustainability</p> <p>New ventures</p> <p>Sectors linked to tourism</p> <p>The mental and physical impact of Corona</p> <p>Lockdown</p> <p>Normalcy</p> <p>Government intervention</p>



<p><b>something from participating in any tourist-related activities around the Annapurna Circuit Trek.</b></p> <p>Yes, as a trained tour guide, I had a chance to work with a trekking agency for about two years, but resigned to focus on offering hiking trips and services as an individual. So what I have been doing is that I purchased all gear and equipment required for hiking or trekking. I rent that equipment to trekkers be they local or international. So I earn a living from offering such services to trekkers around this place. Sometimes I guide them to earn extra money if trekkers need such services.</p> <p><b>How did you cope or manage during the Corona Virus pandemic, which is still not over, when there were no international tourists allowed in the country during the first phase of the virus spread?</b></p> <p>As a business owner, I can say that Corona Virus has negatively affected people from business to family-wise. Personally, I had to venture into other things other than offering tourism services in order to sustain my family through the pandemic. I could not wait till the government opens the border for international arrivals when I had zero income. Specifically, I ventured into small-scale farming, and that is what has been keeping me going together with my family.</p> <p><b>Please give your opinion on how the Corona Virus pandemic affected the entire tourism industry in Nepal?</b></p> <p>It is obvious that the tourism industry was the most affected because there were no tourists. From what I observed, domestic tourists were very few to an extent that even a week could pass without seeing any of them. In general, all those sectors linked to</p>	
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<p>the tourism industry, from transport, hotel and restaurants, accommodation and others were not in business. I have friends in the hospitality sector who lost their jobs because of the pandemic. I have others who received big pay cuts without any guarantee on how long those pay cuts will last.</p> <p><b>Now that a vaccine has been developed to fight against the Corona Virus, do you hope for the industry to get back to normal when the virus is gone?</b></p> <p>Yes, I hope so. It will take the intervention of different bodies to support the tourism sector given the magnitude of the effect of the Corona Virus. What gives me hope that the industry will go back to normalcy is that people will be craving to travel when all this craziness is over. As of now, they may be worried if they travel they can contract the disease, not forgetting that some areas are on lockdown. We can just hope for the best.</p> <p><b>As we finish, kindly give your views on how the social sustainability of the local communities around the Annapurna Circuit Trek was affected.</b></p> <p>I think this pandemic has affected people mentally and physically. People around the Annapurna Circuit Trek mostly relied on tourists for income, but with the current pandemic, they are not able to earn anything. People around this area need tourists to work and earn something.</p>	
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<b>Local community member A3</b>	
<p><b>As a community member around Annapurna Circuit Trek, how did you benefit from community-based tourism in Nepal?</b></p> <p>One way I can say I benefited from community-based tourism is earning when tourists visit this area. Community-based tourism has also provided employment for people so close to me such as friends and family.</p> <p><b>Do you perceive community-based tourism as important in your life?</b></p> <p>For me, community-based tourism is important. And I think it is not only important to me but also for the locals around this area because all we do is to help tourists on a community-based tourism mission to accomplish their work through our support as locals. The tourists learn something new from us and we also learn something from them, culturally.</p> <p><b>How often did you participate in community-based tourism, for instance, did you ever encountered trekkers at the Annapurna Circuit Trek who need local member's help?</b></p> <p>The only way I have participated in community-based tourism is through selling local crafts, clothing, and food products to tourists. I have a shop that sells clothing and crafts that tourists can buy as gifts or something they can display in their homes for memories. I also have a shop around the Annapurna Circuit Trek that sells snacks and other cooked food products to tourists. Tourists can have freshly cooked Nepalese food packed for them when they going for trekking. Those who want to be served at the shop can also do so at their convenience.</p>	<p>Jobs /employment Pay cuts Earning Importance of CBT Culture Local business operations Local restaurants Source of money Local shopkeeper Local shop closure Lack of buyers/tourists Vaccine Normal Demand Social life Stress Lack of money Government support</p>



<p><b>Did you earn a living out of community-based tourism? Could be a porter or guide, a local shopkeeper, or you could have earned something from participating in any tourist-related activities around the Annapurna Circuit Trek.</b></p> <p>Yes, I have earned a lot as a local shopkeeper around here. It has been more than twenty years operating two shops, so I can associate most of my income and entire working life to community-based tourism benefits. When visitors come here, they do not fail to eat, others cannot go back without purchasing a special craft, and so on. So community-based tourism has been a real source of money for me.</p> <p><b>How did you cope or manage during the Corona Virus pandemic, which is still not over, when there were no international tourists allowed in the country during the first phase of the virus spread?</b></p> <p>During the pandemic, most of the time I was closing the shops since there were no buyers. There is a period I closed for two months consecutively when the country was on lockdown. The various restrictions imposed by the government were not friendly for a business so it was better to close till things become a little cooler. It was not easy for me given the fact that I have several employees who work at the food shop because I had to pay them even when they were not working. It was the only thing I could do because they have families at home who depend on them, but I had to cut some money from their salary which I hope to compensate once things get back as they were.</p> <p><b>Please give your opinion on how the Corona Virus pandemic affected the entire tourism industry in Nepal?</b></p>	
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I guess the entire tourism industry was affected just the same way my business was affected. That is, due to lack of tourists, tourism-related businesses closed down, some people lost their jobs, others were put on pay cuts, and so on.

**Now that a vaccine has been developed to fight against the Corona Virus, do you hope for the industry to get back to normal when the virus is gone?**

The tourism industry will for sure get back to normal after Corona Virus. The development of the vaccine has given us hope and encouragement that we will get back to our normal life. I know most tourists are eager to travel as they have been staying indoors for so long, of which some were not used to such kind of life. I trust there will a boom in tourism demand and that's is exactly what is important for this industry to go back to normal, and even become better.

**As we finish, kindly give your views on how the social sustainability of the local communities around the Annapurna Circuit Trek was affected.**

I think the social life of people around the Annapurna Circuit Trek was negatively affected. The locals were stressed about how they will survive the virus without money. Since most of the people around Annapurna Circuit Trek depend on tourists to earn the money that they use in their daily lives, it was a bit hard and depressing for most of them when they had no alternative. What was sustaining them came to an unexpected halt and they had to cope. I believe the government not only in Nepal but also in other countries will support the industry to recover from the effects of the



pandemic.	
<b>Trekking Agencies in Nepal A4</b>	
<p><b>As we started, kindly introduce yourself</b></p> <p>Hello, I am Pradip Karki - Managing Director at Peregrine Treks and Expedition Pvt Ltd.</p> <p><b>How old is your trekking agency?</b></p> <p>The company was established in 2002. So it has operated for around 19 years now.</p> <p><b>What are the most famous community-based tourism activities that visitors want?</b></p> <p>Customers mostly book with us for mountain adventure and trekking &amp; adventure because that is what we mostly focus on. I believe as they trek through the mountains they get to meet people of Nepal where they interact and learn about different cultures.</p> <p><b>What do you like about Annapurna Circuit Trek?</b></p> <p>Annapurna Circuit Trek is an amazing trek. It offers tourists and visitors a wide variety of natural amusement that Nepal has to offer. Immersed in forests and diversified villages, Annapurna allows visitors to have a good exploration of the beauty that lies in the towering pinnacles of Annapurna panorama. Our clients encounter the temples, monasteries, and some fascinating landscapes for natural and cultural fantasies. The acquaintance with the rural</p>	<p>Goods and services</p> <p>Source of income</p> <p>Earning</p> <p>Jobs</p> <p>Tourism stakeholders</p> <p>Lack of tourists</p> <p>Income</p> <p>Culture</p> <p>nature</p> <p>attraction</p> <p>economy (CBT)</p> <p>business closure</p> <p>vulnerability</p> <p>government</p> <p>intervention</p>



<p>lifestyle and unique tradition of the ethnic group of people always inspire tourists for living with joy.</p> <p><b>Do you often recommend your clients to have an experience of the Annapurna Circuit Trek?</b></p> <p>Yes of course. The experience at Annapurna Circuit Trek is amazing and we always like our customers to enjoy the same.</p> <p><b>What is the importance of community-based tourism in Nepal?</b></p> <p>From what I have seen, community-based tourism has helped stimulate the local economy of the country in terms of tourist inflow, enhancement of the historical heritage, culture, traditions, and so on.</p> <p><b>What was/is the impact of the Corona Virus pandemic on the tourism industry in Nepal?</b></p> <p>The key effect is that no visitors are coming to Nepal during this pandemic. We mostly rely on international tourists but with the advent of the Corona Virus, there have been no arrivals. Even the local tourists are very minimal.</p> <p><b>How was the trekking sector of Nepal affected by Corona Virus?</b></p> <p>Mostly, the trekking sector was affected by a lack of tourists. Some laid-off workers because they could not pay them. Some trekking agencies have closed down so far as they wait for the industry to stabilize after Corona Virus.</p> <p><b>How did the Corona Virus pandemic impact the social sustainability of the people living around the Annapurna Circuit Trek?</b></p>	
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<p>The locals who live around the Annapurna Circuit Trek depend on tourists for their income. Those people offer goods and services to tourists when they visit the place. Since those people support their families with what they earn from tourists, they must have found it hard to cope without any source of income, especially those who had no alternative source of income. I guess sustaining families must have been a little bit challenging because of a lack of income.</p> <p><b>Do you think the trekking business will be back to normal after Corona Virus?</b></p> <p>I just hope everything will be back to normal. The trekking business will hopefully recover.</p> <p><b>What do you think should be done to strengthen the trekking sector of Nepal?</b></p> <p>One thing about trekking is that it is vulnerable because it is a small business enterprise. This pandemic has affected the sector and the most possible way to strengthen it after the pandemic is through government intervention. The government can support the tourism sector so that it can recover without struggling.</p> <p><b>Anything you would like to add concerning the effect of the Corona Virus on the trekking sector of Nepal as well as the social sustainability of the local communities around the Annapurna Circuit Trek?</b></p> <p>Yes, I can add the fact that the whole tourism industry has been affected together with its stakeholders. From the transport sector to the hospitality to the local community, all have been affected because there are no visitors in the country. Without visitors, it</p>	
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means there is no income to support our living standards.	
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<b>Trekking Agencies in Nepal A5</b>	
<p><b>As we started, kindly introduce yourself</b></p> <p>My name is Prem Khatry and I am the managing director at Ace the Himalaya.</p> <p><b>How old is your trekking agency?</b></p> <p>Ace the Himalaya has been in operation since 2012.</p> <p><b>What are the most famous community-based tourism activities that visitors want?</b></p> <p>The most famous community-based tourism that our visitor's wants are trekking and adventure activity such as hiking and other adventure activities such as climbing and expeditions, mountain biking and motorcycling.</p> <p><b>What do you like about Annapurna Circuit Trek?</b></p> <p>We like Annapurna Circuit Trek because it is a moderate kind of trek; neither very demanding nor less demanding and customers prefer it the most.</p> <p><b>Do you often recommend your clients to have an experience of the Annapurna Circuit Trek?</b></p> <p>Yes, even the customers themselves refer to visit Annapurna Circuit Trek when you give them a list of places they can trek here in Nepal. So because we have identified where the</p>	<p>CBT activities</p> <p>Generate income</p> <p>Loss of income/salaries</p> <p>No clients/visitors/tourists</p> <p>Shutting down businesses</p> <p>Laying off workers</p> <p>Effect on family sustainability</p> <p>Preparedness</p> <p>Customer preference</p> <p>Demand</p> <p>Economic contribution</p> <p>Local culture</p> <p>New strategies</p> <p>Government support</p>



demand is, we mostly encourage even new customers to try the experience of the Annapurna Circuit Trek.

**What is the importance of community-based tourism in Nepal?**

Community-based tourism in Nepal promotes local tradition; generates income by promoting local entrepreneurship and produces. When local communities in Nepal participate in community-based tourism, they play a role in generating movement in the elements of production and exchange of goods and services in a given region.

**What was/is the impact of the Corona Virus pandemic on the tourism industry in Nepal?**

Corona Virus has affected tourism in Nepal because there are no tourists allowed in the country. In my knowledge, tourism contributes a lot to the country's economy, which means there are other aspects of Nepal's economy which are also affected by the pandemic. The tourism sector mostly lost through loss of income.

**How was the trekking sector of Nepal affected by Corona Virus?**

The Corona Virus affected the trekking sector of Nepal also through lack of visitors, which lead to loss or lack of income.

**How did the Corona Virus pandemic impact the social sustainability of the people living around the Annapurna Circuit Trek?**



Those living around the Annapurna Circuit Trek and relied on tourism to earn a living have been the most affected population in the area. Since there are no tourists, they have nothing else to get money from, something that can affect their social life since they have to provide for their families.

**Do you think the trekking business will be back to normal after Corona Virus?**

Yes, the trekking business will be back to normal, the only thing that I know tourism business owners should do is to re-strategize and refocus their goals because when the Corona pandemic ends, there will be new demand and customers will need to see value for their money.

**What do you think should be done to strengthen the trekking sector of Nepal?**

I think trekking agencies can work in the corporation to represent their challenges to the government and relevant bodies like NTB, TAAN, and so on in order to have a long-term solution to what hinders the sector from growing. After Corona Virus, we will have new challenges that will need team efforts to address them.

**Anything you would like to add concerning the effect of the Corona Virus on the trekking sector of Nepal as well as the social sustainability of the local communities around the Annapurna Circuit Trek?**

Yeah, the Corona Virus has affected the trekking sector to an extent we would have never imagined. Companies never



<p>thought of a time they will have to shut down or lay off workers because of a lack of clients. The local communities also never imagined a time they would have no income because there are also no visitors. Well, the Corona Virus pandemic has made all that possible, and trekking companies have lost income. The local communities have been left devastated because they cannot sustain their families with no salaries. All these tell us one thing, that there is a need to be prepared for uncertainties that are beyond our control.</p>	
<p><b>Trekking Agencies Association of Nepal (TAAN) A6</b></p>	
<p><b>Kindly introduce yourself.</b></p> <p>My name is Nabin Trital, Senior Vice President of TAAN.</p> <p><b>For how long have you been in the tourism industry?</b></p> <p>I have been engaged in the tourism business for more than 17 years now and I have contributed a lot to the promotion of the Nepalese Tourism Industry across the globe. I aim to provide the best services to our guests and so I have been working round the clock to fulfill all the expectations of the guests and provide the best hospitality.</p> <p><b>In the tourism industry of Nepal, to what extent do you think the Corona Virus impacted community-based tourism?</b></p> <p>COVID-19 has affected the tourism industry of Nepal because there are no tourists, and so companies and stakeholders in the tourism industry are losing a lot of money they should be making if things were normal.</p> <p><b>Did you foresee that the Corona pandemic could take the</b></p>	<p>Income</p> <p>money</p> <p>Jobs</p> <p>No tourists</p> <p>Tourism promotion</p> <p>Normalcy</p> <p>Revenue generation</p> <p>Government support</p> <p>Access to loans</p> <p>Social life</p> <p>Accommodation/</p> <p>lodges/in-house</p> <p>Community culture</p> <p>Restriction in traveling</p> <p>Business closure</p> <p>Lockdown</p>



**tourism industry of Nepal in the direction it has taken?**

No of course, but when Nepal was locked down, we definitely knew that the situation was becoming serious. We also witnessed many countries were on lockdown and so there were no international travels. The whole industry was dormant and still it is as there are no visitors yet.

**One role of TAAN is to develop and promote mountain tourism in Nepal. During the pandemic, did you promote domestic tourism in Nepal? How did it turn out?**

First, COVID-19 got everyone in shock and so it was not easy to identify what is the right decision and what is not. But one thing for sure, we encourage people to stay indoors and avoid traveling as much as possible for their safety. Instead of promoting even domestic tourism in the country, we were advising people against visiting places they had planned to visit.

**What do you think was the effect of Corona on the trekking sector of Nepal in general and on Annapurna Circuit Trek?**

There are accommodation services in community lodges that have been built to provide the local community with all the benefits. The local villagers run the lodges and the purpose is to ensure that the whole community shares the benefits from the income coming from tourism. In some of the villages, tourists may be put up by a family in their home as an alternative for lodge accommodation. This is a great way to get a close insight into how the local people live and experience the culture and life of the community. When the Corona Virus



hit, there were no tourists to occupy those lodges or purchase local produce, so people lost income and their jobs as well.

**Do you think there was a way the government of Nepal could have helped to ensure community-based tourism was not negatively affected by the Corona pandemic?**

I do not think there was anything the government could have done other than focusing on the health and safety of the people of Nepal and the international tourists. Maybe, those business owners in the tourism industry could have been given access to interest-free loans to service their employees so they'd not suffer from loss of income and jobs, but in the long run, it could not be a great solution.

**How do you intend to preserve the rights and promote Nepal's member trekking agencies during and after the Corona pandemic?**

Even after the Corona Virus pandemic, our key role will still stand and we will act as the lobby group that we are, by ensuring that we suggest to the government on several issues to promote the Nepali tourism industry and develop tourism as a revenue-generating industry. We will push for the agenda of trekking agencies and ensure that the government offers the support needed to ensure the sector recovers fully.

**Thank you for participating. Do you have anything else to add, in regard to how the Corona Virus affected to the social sustainability of the communities around Nepal's Annapurna Circuit Trek?**



<p>What I can add is that the Corona Virus has affected people's social life, businesses have gone down, people have lost their jobs and life has become very challenging. The social sustainability of the people around Annapurna Circuit Trek is determined by what those people do to earn income, of which obviously they rely on tourists who are locked in their countries. The Corona Virus has to a great extent disrupted every aspect of human life as well as business life but everything will be under control soon.</p>	
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Interview	codes	Generated themes
A1	<p>Guiding trekkers</p> <p>Tip</p> <p>Earning</p> <p>Income, loss, or no income</p> <p>No international tourists</p> <p>Government restrictions</p> <p>Corona challenges</p> <p>Effect of Corona on tour agencies, porters, and guides</p> <p>Normalcy</p> <p>Families</p> <p>Local shopkeepers</p> <p>No tourists</p>	<p>Corona affected families and workers in the tourism sector, Normalcy.</p>
A2	<p>Employees</p> <p>Loss of salary</p>	<p>Importance of CBT, the impact of Corona on locals, government support</p>



	Jobs CBT Service and equipment provider Earning extra money Businesses Families Family sustainability New ventures Sectors linked to tourism The mental and physical impact of Corona Lockdown Normalcy Government intervention	
A3	Jobs /employment Pay cuts Earning Importance of CBT Culture Local business operations Local restaurants Source of money Local shopkeeper Local shop closure Lack of buyers/tourists Vaccine Normal Demand Social life	Importance of CBT, normalcy, local residents, government support



	Stress Lack of money Government support	
A4	Goods and services Source of income Earning Jobs Tourism stakeholders Lack of tourists Income Culture nature attraction economy (CBT) business closure vulnerability government intervention	Tourism stakeholders, recovery and normalcy, Vulnerability
A5	CBT activities Generate income Loss of income/salaries No clients/visitors/tourists Shutting down businesses Laying off workers Effect on family sustainability Preparedness Customer preference Demand Economic contribution Local culture	Sustainability of families, negative effects of Corona, preference, government collaboration.



	New strategies Government support	
A6	Income money Jobs No tourists Tourism promotion Normalcy Revenue generation Government support Access to loans Social life Accommodation/ lodges/in-house Community culture Restriction in traveling Business closure Lockdown	Normalcy, negative effects of Corona

