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### ECOFRIENDLY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN BANGLADESH

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**Abstract:** The study explored a connection between stakeholder perspectives on tourism development and the mechanism of sustainability integration in tourism industry, where the 'Cox's Bazar' had been assessed as a role model for popular and prime tourist destination in Bangladesh. The number of daily tourists to Cox's Bazar was about 30,000 during the study. A comprehensive analysis conducted through a case study, including some in-depth interviews of the selected stakeholders. In the investigation of current and future realities of tourism system, the study was based on a robust conceptual framework 'FSSD'- Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development. With the framework, a generic vision of success had been defined in the tourism industry along with exploring the sustainability integration mechanism in tourism development in Bangladesh. Sustainable tourism development required a process of the community level participation at earlier of policy formation and adaptation locally. Finally, the research sought out some indications of barriers and prospects of present tourism features in Bangladesh, where some appropriate policy measures by both public and private sectors could ultimately be formed in moving towards a sustainable tourism destination.

**Keywords:** Development; Sustainable development; Sustainable tourism; Strategic planning; Tourism.

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### INTRODUCTION

Tourism development of developing countries is still on the way to bringing the economic return mostly from foreign exchange, employment and other business related issues (Kibirige, 2003). As a result, the traditional tourism development concept of the third world countries is blamed for the countries' destruction of traditional lifestyles, culture as well as overexploitation of the resources in industrial development (Butler, 1992; Duffy, 2002; Mbaiwa, 2004). In the context, the different stakeholders of tourism industry have an influential capacity for tourism development, whether it may belong to the sustainable practices. In principle with the stakeholder perception, The UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) says that the knowledge

gap can be a major point among different stakeholder groups like tourists, tourism hosts, and others. Towards the sustainable tourism journey, a simultaneous platform could be formed among all types of stakeholders in aiming to share the required sustainability practices in the industry. Sustainability performances of a tourism industry can be explored directly by the stakeholder management (Lyon, 2017). However, different stakeholders can control about 85-90% of traditional tourism mechanism where all branches of tourism services must be influenced by the stakeholders' performance (Budeanu, 2005). The following diagram (Figure 1) shows the respective controls of stakeholders- the leverage function within the tourism boundary.



Figure 1. Stakeholder influences on a tourism function

However, the using of the concept might be a good platform to explore many dimensions of tourism research in line with the sustainability management (Ashley et al 2006). In this regard, some small scale projects can minimize the negative impacts of tourism, which is less than 5%, but the process does not suggest achieving overall sustainability in the industry (Budeanu 2005). Economic growth has shown stable trends when poverty rate is becoming low and population growth rate also going down (Roy and Roy, 2015). As a model tourist destination of the study, 'Cox's Bazar' is considered because of its most attractive tourist location in Bangladesh. According to the BPC (Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation), the average number of daily tourists of Cox's Bazar is about 30,000 (thirty thousand). Around 300 hotels (including motels and guest house) have already been established in Cox's Bazar. Thousands of local, non-local and foreign citizens are employed here for tourist services. The development initiatives are taken here by both public and private entrepreneurship. Sustainable tourism development is very much inadequate (Roy and Roy, 2015) in terms of international standard, conservation practices of natural resources, exploration and tourism development. Therefore, the investigation of

stakeholder perspectives has become an important issue for tourism development in Bangladesh. However, the study investigates the prospects of tourism in Bangladesh addressing the sustainability framework. The barriers and drivers of the industry are perceived through developing perceptions of different stakeholders. The main issue of the paper is to originate the ground for implementing sustainability approach based on the model of Cox's Bazar. The overarching research will answer the question - *how can sustainability integration approach contribute to transform tourism development in Bangladesh?*

### Conceptual Model and Proposition

Based on literature reviews and the study objective, a conceptual model can be drawn to elaborate the expected outcome over stakeholder perspectives about tourism sustainability (fig 2). Particularly in literature, there are no extensive observations focusing on sustainable tourist destination in Bangladesh. But, a general perception of the stakeholders on tourism development has been figured out for building the theoretical guidelines of sustainable tourism development in the country.

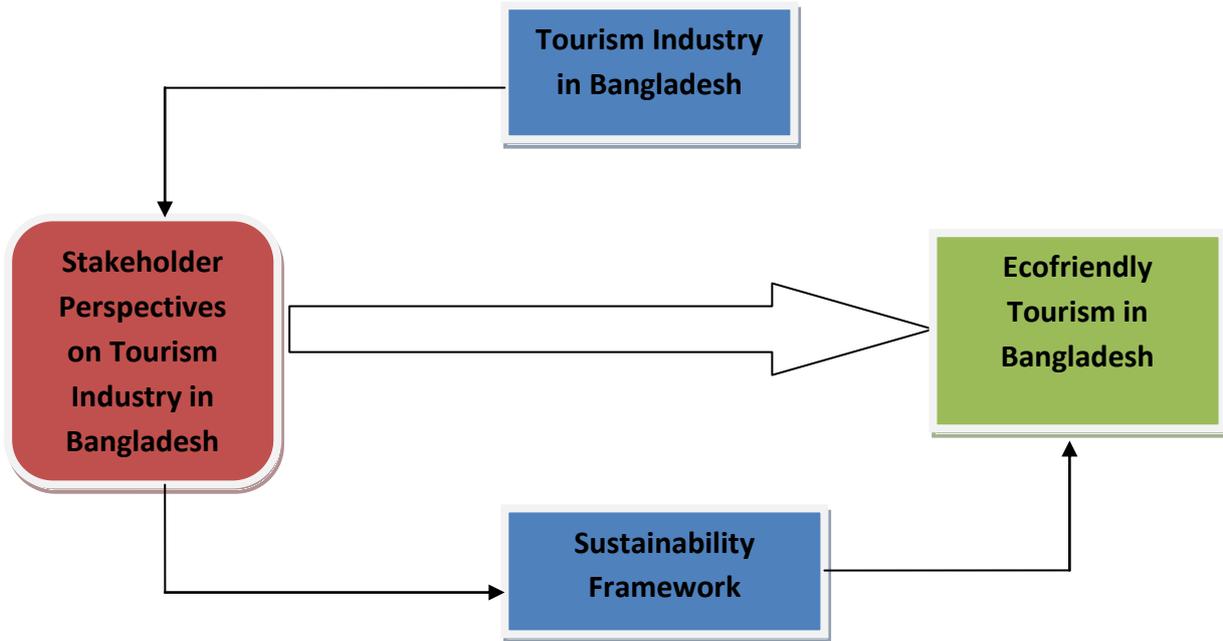


Figure 2. The Theoretical Framework of the Study

**EXPERIMENTAL**

Cox's Bazar was considered as the study experimental unit. Representatives of a total 15 stakeholder groups were selected for the Key In-depth Interviews (KII). Official websites of the stakeholder groups were also used as data sources to validate the data. Identification of key

stakeholders was a concern of right approach for an interview as well as the steps forward to a sustainable tourism destination. To develop the study outcome, the study considered the perception of key representatives of different stakeholder groups (Figure 3).

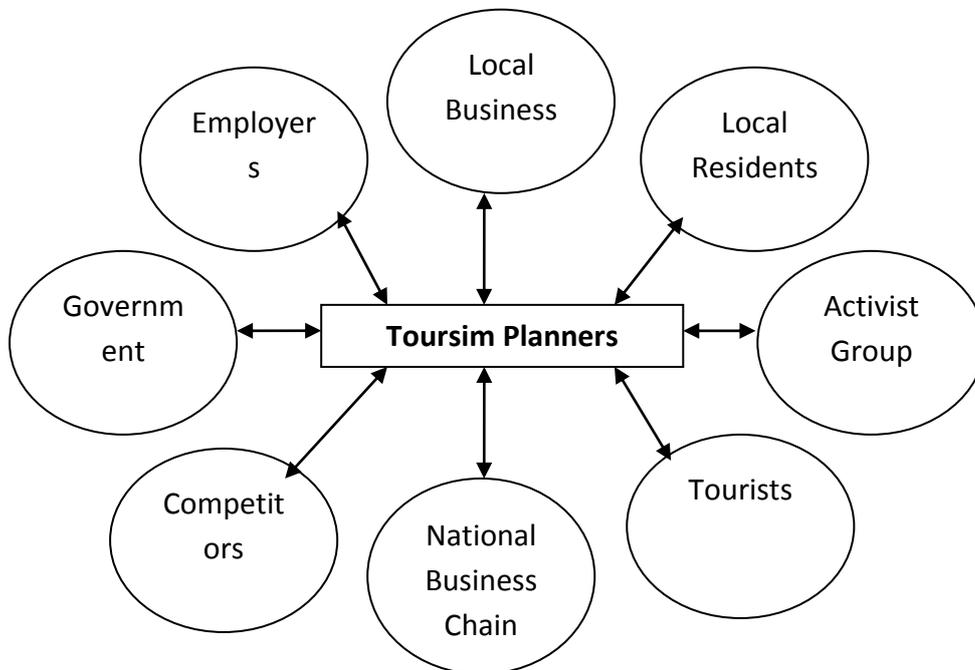


Figure 3. Key Stakeholders' Groups of Tourism Industry (Adapted from Sautter and Leisen, 1999)

Considering the research context, the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD) was approached to

respond research question. The FSSD was designed for strategic sustainability planning in a complex system, where the existing tourism

industry had been considered as a case analysis for its 'system, success, strategy, actions and monitoring tools' (Broman and Robert, 2017). The qualitative data were gathered within the stakeholders' operational movement and analyzed for planning towards a sustainable tourism destination. An analysis of the current reality of the tourism industry was planned through the FSSD approach where the 'backcasting from sustainability principles' is incorporated in defining the success (Robert 2000). The designated of these four sustainability principles for the FSSD were as follows:

In a sustainable society nature is not subject to systematically increasing:

- I. Concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth's crust,
- II. Concentrations of substances produced by society,
- III. Degradation by physical means.  
*and, in that society:*
- IV. People are not subject to conditions that systematically undermine their capacity to meet their needs.

These non-overlapping principles were created for a common understanding of social and ecological systems and their interdependence. The principles provided a concrete process of decision making with a shared vision model in the system (tourism industry) when working for a sustainable society (Ny *et. al.*, 2006, Robert *et. al.*, 2001).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Approaching with the FSSD- System

Considering a context of tourism complexity, the characteristics of tourism industry was interlinked with different sectors of a country, where the challenging development issues were like geographical locations, cultural heritage, environmental condition, landscape, political matters etc. Besides these key factors of the industry, many externalities were also considered as the challenges for the tourism development. The challenging externalities were mostly climate change legislatives, plane fare and value of money/exchange rates. A report of the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) was published in 2007, where the details of these externalities were explained as well. However,

the most common problems had been identified with the current realities of Bangladesh context considering the selected respondents' views as follows:

- Over centralization of tourism planning activities and improper practice of public administration: this problem was common not only for Cox's Bazar tourism, but also at most of the tourism locations in Bangladesh.
- Tourism development planning was rigid and inflexible. The existing planning usually dominated implementers in fixed decision rather than considering a common ground to access the stakeholders' feedback in the implementation process.
- Plans were not comprehensive enough and not prepared in an integrated manner. It was found that the current tourism development was not planned considering all about sociological perspectives of development initiatives in Cox's Bazar destination.
- Lack of community-based approach: sustainability integration should be community-based approach in the required system, whereas the process was not yet found in the existing development system of Cox's Bazar.
- Tourism development planning was dominantly supply oriented: the existing planning was not found as an integrated manner in line with the sustainability framework where it traditionally focused economic sustainability only.
- Tourism development planning was highly driven by the market: policy planners of tourism development were biased with income generating activities in the tourism market.
- Lack of consistency and continuity in planning the policies: political instability was found as the main reason for consistency of existing planning. The knowledge gap between policy makers and its implementers was found.
- Myopic approach in establishing goals of tourism development: self-centeredness of the owners was commonly found in hindering such robust tourism development where planners were not independent to show their maximum creativity in making the policy.

- The plans were difficult to implement: most of tour operators thought that their tourism development policies were not planned considering the reality at field level.
- Poor maintenance of the tourism market and enterprise: the country's economic stability was not strategic for tourism development in terms of optimum use of tourism resources.

*“With the sustainability manner, the mission of the Tourism System should incorporate the entire linkage of all activities within the biosphere and understanding each activity of any sub-system of the tourism industry.”*

### Approaching with the FSSD- Success

In a conceptual assessment (with FSSD approach) of the study, four sustainability principles were designed to assess the systematic violations of these principles by tourism activities. Especially, the assessment was conducted with the sampled tourism service providers (TSP) in Bangladesh. It mentioned that the step forwarding towards ‘success’ of the industry was at the second step of the FSSD approach identifying the violations of four sustainability principles. Some key violations of the sustainability principles were shown in the Table 1, which also included also current operational activities and strategic area of development of the largest tourist destination ‘Cox’s Bazar’ in Bangladesh.

**Table 1. Systematic violations of the sustainability principles in tourism industry**

Sustainability Principles (SPs)	Tour Operators’ Activities	Planning Area to Minimize Violations
SP 1: ...concentrations of substances extracted from the Earth’s crust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More dependency on fossil fuel oriented transportation</li> <li>• Non-renewable energy sources for lightening, heating, air-cooling etc</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy sources</li> </ul>
SP2: ...concentrations of substances produced by society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase of supply chain activities which were not controlled and/or monitored properly</li> <li>• Increase of wastage, packaging materials, sewerage etc</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raw materials production</li> <li>• Dematerialization and substitution of the raw materials</li> </ul>
SP3: ...degradation by physical means	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extensive use of land and cutting mountain</li> <li>• More drinking of water and food consumption</li> <li>• Extensive use of swimming pool and cloths</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conservation of land, water body and other natural resources</li> <li>• Potentiality of the carrying capacity</li> </ul>
SP4: ...subject people to conditions that systematically undermine their abilities to meet their needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence of customer’s behaviors and choices</li> <li>• Cultural clashes</li> <li>• Destroying ethical practices</li> <li>• Loss of indigenous values and identity</li> <li>• Increase of local prices of different products</li> <li>• Increase of one side dependency (economic dependency) of the local people</li> <li>• Creation of seasonal jobs only</li> <li>• Various crime and drug addiction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethical practices</li> <li>• Respect to others</li> <li>• Controls of sharing</li> <li>• Security, control and check</li> </ul>

### Approaching with the FSSD- Strategy

In the next approach with the FSSD, the market needs or desires of Cox’s Bazar were identified in

line with a connection between strategic objectives and its implementation of the stakeholders as shown in the Table 2.

**Table 2. Strategic objectives of sustainable tourism and its implementation stages**

Strategic Objectives	Implementation Stages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing a platform for continuous dialogue process among all relevant tourism stakeholders.</li> <li>• Making opportunity to receive the support from other players of sustainable development.</li> <li>• Receiving support from the key stakeholders for the specific projects and activities.</li> <li>• Increasing awareness of sustainability among all stakeholders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperation and coordination of the stakeholders.</li> <li>• Identification of a mutual and agreed way of stakeholders' movement.</li> <li>• Agreed action plan between tour operators and other relevant stakeholders.</li> <li>• Prioritizing the strategy based on tourist destination perspectives.</li> <li>• Cross checking of strategic ideas with others who were working for sustainability management into their products.</li> </ul>

### Approaching with the FSSD-Actions

Stakeholders' misconceptions regarding sustainability management were identified, which was as a created tourism problem rather than initiating a community based solutions. In this regard, the study had selected some strategic actions upon sharing with the respective stakeholders as follows:

- Information availability and access: As much as possible, it should gather the information between tourists and service providers mainly. The form of information gathering could be through brochures, reports and leaflets, produced by the tour operators as well as all relevant stakeholders. Even, the process did not stimulate the sustainability integration actively, but it carried the stakeholder values and identity for building of sustainability awareness and the requirements of sustainability.
- Capacity building: This process was done through education (both formal and informal), training, workshop, seminar etc. The theme was related to tourist destination matters that covered the understanding of sustainability practices among different stakeholders.
- Performance criteria in existing practices: Continuous monitoring had been raised by the concerned stakeholders to measure the performance criteria of different existing actions. The approach would ensure the proper consumptions of all environmental resources like water, soil, energy etc. The whole supply chain management was considered in making the criteria.
- Environmental Management Systems (EMS) and others: Many management tools were used to protect the environmental

degradation in the industry. These tools were performance oriented tools and could be either administrative or technological. Even the ISO 14001 EMS was not the tool of sustainability management, but a revised EMS could provide the perfect designs of sustainability for the stakeholders (Saha and Seal 2012). Other monitoring tools could be used to check the internal management, e.g. human resources development.

- Investment and return on investments: The sources of funding were very necessary in the approach of the study. The available sponsorship or investors could improve all the performances of sustainability. Because of this, it was also urgent to check good return on investment in the industry and ensure the funding sources as well.
- Continuous Dialogue: The dialogue process on any matter was a solution to political instability, customer dissatisfactions or any other negative impacts of the tourism. The continuity of this approach should be organized for better result in a specific time interval as needed for all kinds of relevant stakeholders.

*“The best practices in the strategic actions are to comply with the success (four sustainability principles); develop more sub-principles in line with the main principles into the corporate policy, and; manage the monitoring impacts of all actions in the tourism industry.”*

### Approaching with the FSSD- Tools

The tools of the FSSD were usually used in an industry considering the nature of the industrial products. Among many other tools, some were

more specific for tourism like eco-labeling, integrated coastal area management and carrying capacity assessment (Hunter 2002). However, the study found the lack of using a tourism specific tool for the stakeholders except some of the users to EMS in Bangladesh. On the other hand, the tour operators should use which one- a vital question to them depending on the purpose and circumstances of the tool. In the competitive tourism market, this problem certainly hindered the process to achieve sustainability in the sector. But the specific nature of the tourist destination could explore many answers to this question. In addition, the tour operators could grow the extended partnership with the international organizations besides some local partners. The international partners could be, especially with the UNESCO, UNEP and UNWTO, to manage the monitoring impacts for continual improvement. In another way, the tour operators might rely on some specific case studies to establish a suitable tool that would be effective for the requirements of sustainable tourism industry.

*First, it is needed to assess all existing tools considering the tourist destination and then choice for the best. The main purpose of the tools is to minimize the violations of sustainability principles through continuous monitoring and manage of the tourism impacts.*

### **Analysis of current situation**

The first three levels (system, success and strategy) of the FSSD approach might have influenced the tour operators directly in making their own policy for actions- fourth stage of the framework. Consequently, the way of making such policies would be highlighted on the current realities to enhance the future planning of tourism industry. The case on Cox's Bazar were summarized as the suggestive tasks which could enhance a tour operator of Bangladesh leading towards integrating sustainability in tourism business. In a current situation analysis of Cox's Bazar, the study observed many positive aspects for the future tourism destination in Cox's Bazar, which were as recommended according to the stakeholders' operational findings:

- i. The tourism industry of Bangladesh was not focused on the way to the joint efforts of all active stakeholders in both policy initiatives and implication at the field level. Collaboration among different level of public departments was required to support the tourism industry strongly.
- ii. Local community should be engaged in tourism development policy. If the benefit of tourism was distributed in a fair way, social condition of the destination would develop subsequently and visitors would get positive feedback from the host community. This process could ultimately favor revisiting the place of the tourist.
- iii. Cox's Bazar was not focused as a coastal tourism destination at the time of considering policies, particularly with the issues of available resources, use and conservation of resources, multiple use of resources, users of resources, etc.
- iv. Measures should be taken according to the nature of tourist destinations. Types of coastal tourism problems could be different from other destinations.
- v. Host communities should be engaged more to take the better part of tourism development in tour guides, small restaurants, local transport, local food production and local materials selling. Small trade in the tourism destination should be controlled by the locals.

### **Prospects of market needs/desires of Cox's Bazar tourist destination**

Revenue earnings were conducted through only job creation in different services bypassing to conserve local natural resources. The earnings from tourism could be utilized for conservation and protection of environmental resources like mangrove and marine parks reserve. This type of protection and preservation of natural resources could ensure sustainable development of tourism (Islam, 2010). There were huge contradictions among the respondents when asked about how Cox's Bazar could be developed through a sustainable process. Local tourist claimed that tourism development in Cox's Bazar had not been well organized according to management perspective. Stakeholders mostly blamed each other and avoiding their own responsibilities.

Most of the respondents of private sectors argued that it should under the public sector who could lead sustainable tourism activities in Cox's Bazar. Some respondents had given importance on cooperation and correlation among stakeholders in the context of sustainable management. They also demanded participation of stakeholders in policy making for sustainable tourism. It could be a controversial in area mapping of necessary contribution of government and stakeholders. As mentioned by Jeffries (2001), "tourism was an activity sustained mainly by private initiative, and governments had traditionally played a key role in its development". It also argued that the government had acted as a key player in doing almost all activities regarding tourism facilities; but after a long time, when the tourism industry grew up, government contributions were limited to policy and regulation of the industry. In the case of most developed countries, sustainable tourism development was led by the private sectors. Successful sustainable tourism development was needed active involvement of all stakeholders in all stages of tourism management and public sectors would have to work regionally, locally, or even at the community level (Jeffries, 2001).

### **Defining and envisaging sustainability**

In satisfying the research objective, one of the main mechanisms was investigated to create a common understanding of sustainability in the tourism industry. The cooperative based approach of different stakeholders might have possibly led to a common goal for sustainability in the tourism industry. Therefore, stakeholders cooperative approach was a future process on the way to continuous dialogue for defining sustainability based goals. In the process, there was already a guidance for envisioning sustainability in the tourism market, for example the aims of UNWTO and UNEP towards sustainable tourism. But some overlapping problems were found in the case of creating a common vision of the stakeholders when the envisioning process works with the specialized institutional guidelines like UNWTO or UNEP. These guidelines could be used for some particular sustainability projects (UNEP 2002). However, the study showed a path in order to create a common sustainability goal when a

process of sustainability integration happens in tourist destinations, tourists and the tour operators. The scientific and distinct four sustainability principles were the driver of this framework which could define and measure, or plan for the success during the integration in a system. The objectives of the sustainability principles provided a creative autonomy needed to the stakeholders for envisioning the sustainable future.

### **Actions and Tools**

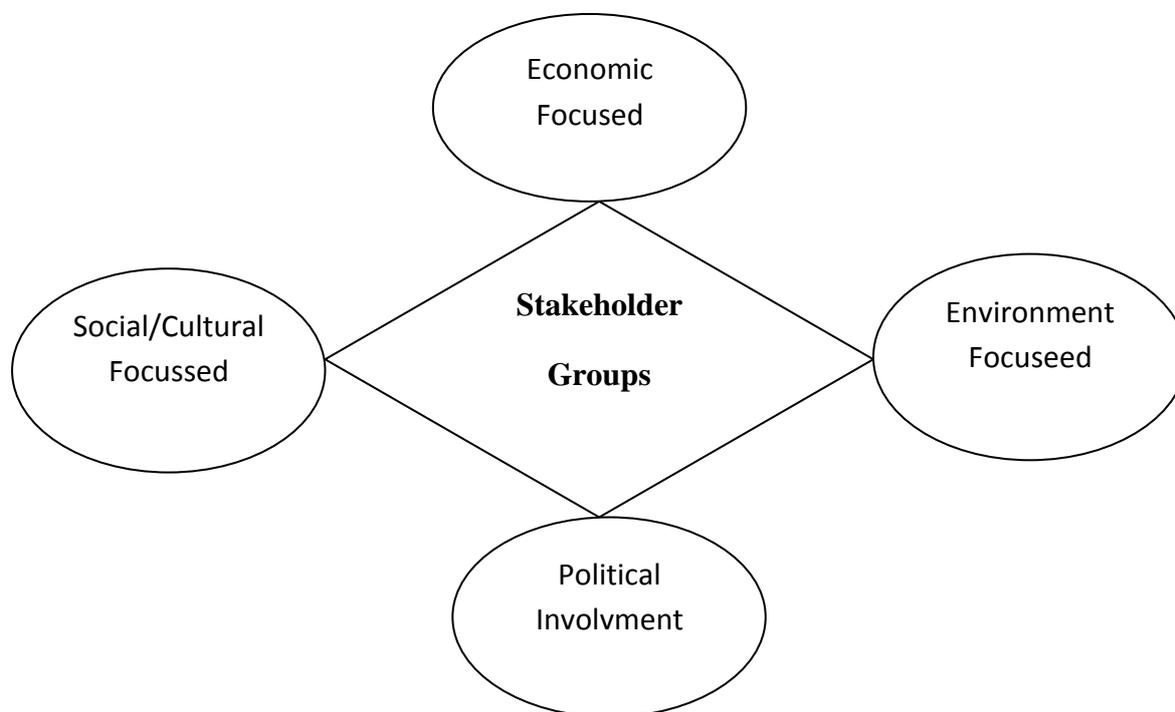
The analysis of the tour operators' initiatives was conducted mainly through the first three levels of the FSSD framework. Then the combinations of the analytical findings commenced some relevant sustainability actions as required for each tour operator. A set up of relevant 'action' areas were not same, even the analytical part of the framework was same to all the stakeholders. Therefore, a strong measure of sustainability problems could produce the implementable actions for the stakeholders. On the other hand, a rigorous tool might come from the overall check and balance of the framework approach, which should indicate the repeated monitoring and check of all actions before finding a perfect sustainability tool in hand.

### **Stakeholders' analysis**

Generally, it was a process of gathering information methodically from the sources whose interests and/or involvement were taken into considerations in the study. Since, the conformity of the stakeholder perceptions was essential in the analysis, therefore the right way of the stakeholder selection and a uniformity of the collected data from the stakeholders were also a vital to develop programs or policy in the study. The analysis consisted of the stakeholders' characteristics of relevant knowledge of the tourism industry. In reality, all the stakeholders had the interconnections and interdependencies among themselves. However, the study had shown a model of the stakeholders who were engaged in interviews and a case study, and the relevant data of the study had been collected from one or more representative respondents out of these diversified stakeholder groups. The study had selected the stakeholders' perception in analysis considering their knowledge based

profile from the four sides of sustainability pillars, as shown in Figure 4. For example, 'Eco Resort' was an environmental based tourism developer in Bangladesh, which was the selected

respondent in the study because of its environmental concern in the tourism industry.



**Figure 4. Stakeholders from four Groups of knowledge concern**

Similarly, a government organization entitled 'Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation' had been selected owing to its political biasness or issues involved in the tourism development in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) and some private Tourism Service Providers (TSP) had been selected from the social and economic points of view respectively.

## CONCLUSION

The stakeholders are agreed on a point where Cox's Bazar is a huge potential towards establishing an international tourism destination either geographically or economically. Therefore, the expansion of tourism business claims for its sustainable management since a competitive demand for tourism industry is increasing in Bangladesh. The study finds out 'Cox's Bazar' as the sustainable tourist destination because of its attractive location surrounded by plenty of natural resources. As a coastal tourism place Cox's Bazar deserves its significance to the tourists coming from both home and abroad. However, the study analytically explained the tourism

sector of Bangladesh underlying a sustainability framework and shows how the framework can be integrated in the tourism development process. But the matter of sustainability integration in tourism is not easily understood by the stakeholders. This condition ensures that the required indicators of sustainability can be initially developed by adopting the FSSD in tourism development planning. The local community is also not well aware of sustainable practices due to their traditional socioeconomic and educational background. Stakeholders from private organizations have a little understanding about the prospects of sustainability of their business. But a joint enforcement is essentially required between public and private developer of the tourism industry, and then the process may ensure the optimum benefits as the consequences of using the sustainability framework in a tourism industry. Therefore, a public-private stakeholder partnership can be approached in a conventional development where the sustainability integration may enhance the process towards moving a sustainable

tourism destination in Bangladesh and to restoration of existing environmental conditions.

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