

**Pilgrimage Tourism and Economic Development:  
A Case Study of Pathibhara Temple,  
Taplejung, Nepal**

**A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Partial Fulfilment for the  
Requirement for Master of Philosophy (MPhil)  
in  
Rural Development**

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**December 2024**

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**Academic Level** : Master in Philosophy (MPhil)  
**Document Type** : Thesis  
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## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Mahendra Sapkota for his supervision while preparing this research. This research would have been never completed without his scholarly support, constant motivation and invaluable guidance. Coming from more commercial and professional background to this academic journey was not easy to me.

I would like to extend my regards to Assoc. Prof. Bishnu Bahadur Khatri, Head of Central Department of Rural Development for allowing me to conduct this research. My thanks also goes to senior faculty members, including Dr. Suman Kharel and staff members of the Department. I would like to acknowledge the constructive comments provided by the external evaluator, Prof. Dr. Kanhaiya Sapkota and the internal evaluator, Dr. Rajan Binayek Pasa. Similarly, I would like to thank all my respondents, leaders, and other concerned persons of my study area Phungling Municipality, who provided me with their important time and shared their feelings, experiences, information, and kind support during my fieldwork.

I am deeply grateful to my family along with relatives, especially my father, mother, wife, daughter, and sons, for their unwavering love, patience, and encouragement throughout this academic journey. I also extend heartfelt thanks to my seniors, whose wisdom and guidance have been invaluable, and to my friends, whose support and camaraderie have been a constant source of strength. Their collective contributions have been instrumental in the completion of this thesis. Despite, my utmost care and sincerity I take full responsibility for errors and discrepancies that might have crept in.

In the end, my sincere devotion goes to Pathibhara Devi Mata!!

Bal Bahadur Tamang

December, 2024

## Abstract

This study examines the contribution of pilgrimage tourism at Pathibhara to the economic development of Phungling Municipality specifically and Taplejung District more broadly. Employing a mixed-method approach, the research prioritized quantitative methods within a QUAN-qual framework, adopting a sequential explanatory design. Pathibhara Temple, also known as Pathibhara Devi Temple, has gained prominence as a significant sacred pilgrimage destination in Nepal. The study utilized a mixed sampling design. Initially, purposive sampling was employed to select four wards from the total 11: Wards 4 and 5 of Phungling Bazaar, and Wards 10 and 11, where the Pathibhara Temple is located, for a rapid questionnaire survey. Subsequently, random sampling was applied to draw samples from these wards, forming four compact clusters.

With a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the study determined a purposive sample size of 120 respondents, all of whom were local residents. Among them, 65 respondents (54.2%) were male, while 55 respondents (45.8%) were female. Findings reveal that while tourism significantly contributes to income and employment generation, particularly in Phungling and surrounding areas, the benefits are unevenly distributed. Infrastructural challenges, such as delays in road and cable car projects, and issues related to syndication in transport and land and name-related disputes in projects, hinder the equitable distribution of tourism benefits. Additionally, the research identifies gaps in stakeholder coordination and highlights the need for improved transparency and stakeholder engagement to enhance the overall tourism experience.

The results from quantitative analysis provide valuable insights into the local community's views on tourism and its effects. The analysis revealed that local community is getting some employment opportunities and income generation activities from tourism in Pathibhara, though not in a highly significant proportion. The data also highlighted that participation in public tourism activities is notably higher during festivals, suggesting seasonal engagement. Furthermore, the potential for market expansion in Pathibhara tourism was viewed positively, particularly in the context of domestic and ecotourism. However, the findings also indicated an unequal distribution of tourism-related benefits, with larger businesses such as hotels and

transport services reaping more advantages than smaller community-based sectors. These results point to the need for a more equitable approach to tourism development and benefit sharing.

The study concludes that strategic improvements in infrastructure, stakeholder collaboration, and professional training are essential for optimizing tourism benefits. Recommendations include developing environmentally adaptive strategies, promoting market extension, and implementing transparent management practices to ensure sustainable growth. These measures are crucial for maximizing tourism's potential and achieving balanced economic development across the Pathibhara region.

*Keywords:* tourism, pilgrimage, economic contribution, Pathibhara, Nepal

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# **Chapter - I**

## **Introduction**

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Tourism is the fastest-growing major industry in the world. The tourism sector plays a robust and pivotal role in the process of economic development in several countries. It is one of the world's largest and booming economic sectors. "Tourism comprises the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, or other purposes" (UNWTO, 2010). At present, traveling is a common phenomenon for people, but it was not so popular in the past due to a lack of inventions in appropriate technology and convenient transportation facilities. As according to World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the travel and tourism sector for 2023 worldwide accounted for 9.1% of GDP; up by 23.2% from the year 2022 and 4.1% less than the year 2019. New jobs in 2023 were 27 million for 9.1% higher than 2022 and only 1.4 percent below 2019 figures. The spending by domestic visitors increased by 18.1% in the year 2023 and was higher than the corresponding figure of 2019 (WTTC, 2024).

Tourism is the pivotal component of the Nepalese economy. This industry is critical for generating income and employment around the world. World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) research report 2024 states that in 2023, Nepal's tourism sector generated \$2.5 billion in revenue and supported 1.19 million jobs. The report also forecasts that Nepal will generate 1.22 million jobs in 2024 (WTTC, 2024). Due to Nepal's rich cultural legacy and variety of natural resources, tourism is a suitable sector. The Nepalese government and the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Civil Aviation have been actively promoting and encouraging the private sector to get involved in the growth and promotion of Nepal's tourism industry. The period 2023-2032 has been designated as the "Tourism Decade," with the aim of increasing per tourist spending to 125 US dollars. The current 16th Five-Year Development Plan (2024/25, 2028/29) of Nepal has also focused on tourism development. In 2023, Nepal welcomed a total of 1,014,876 international tourists, marking a significant recovery in the tourism sector post-pandemic.

Among the total tourists visiting Nepal in 2023, the majority, 62.5%, traveled for recreation/entertainment/tourism purposes. Similarly, 15.9 percent visited for mountaineering/adventure trips, 13.1 percent for pilgrimage, and 9.2 percent for other purposes. Lumbini, the birthplace of Gautam Buddha, remains the most visited destination with 8.54 percent of the total tourists heading there. Tourism is significantly contributing to economic growth through its rich cultural heritage, breathtaking natural landscapes, and numerous religious sites that attract millions of visitors annually.

Nepal is home to world-famous tourism destinations, renowned not only for ecotourism and mountaineering but also for religious tourism. Historically, it has been a spiritual hub where Hinduism and Buddhism remained co-existential and mutually inclusive. The country boasts sacred sites such as Pashupatinath, a key Hindu temple, Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha, and Muktinath, a revered pilgrimage site for both Hindus and Buddhists, which draw millions of visitors annually from across the world. Among the many pilgrimage sites, Pathibhara Temple in Taplejung emerges as a particularly noteworthy destination for both domestic and international tourists (Kunwar & Karki, 2019).

The prominence of Pathibhara as a pilgrimage site exemplifies the synergy between religious traditions and economic development in Nepal. Yet, the development and exploration of pilgrimage sites are less prioritized agenda in Nepal's tourism sector which can create a lifeblood to promote the domestic tourism in particular. The contributions in development in particular economic sector could be another important agenda of research. With this backdrop, the study has assessed a critical appraisal of Pathibhara pilgrimage site of Taplejung by assessing its contribution to the microeconomic development.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

This study theoretically problematizes the issue of the contribution of pilgrimage tourism of Pathibhara in the economic development of Phungling municipality in particular and Taplejung district in general. Literatures on tourism agree that tourism has multiplied effects in the destination (Hall & Lew, 2009; Mason, 2020). Local communities, along with economic development, are widely

acknowledged to play a significant role in revitalizing and sustaining tourism destinations (Mostafa & Mastura, 2006). This study has particularly focused on the analytical indicators of economic development, whether and how they are situated and working in the empirical field of Pathibhara Temple of Taplejung, Nepal. Whether tourism promotes economic development and benefits to destination management and its sustainability, and whether the benefits of tourism services are shared with all the local people along with the satisfaction of tourists, are the scientific issues to be delineated in this study.

Pathibhara Temple (also sometimes referred as Pathibhara Devi Temple or Devi Temple) has gained significant recognition as a sacred pilgrimage site, not only within Nepal but also across borders. Its growing prominence has made it a major destination for religious tourists, especially Hindu devotees from India. The temple is revered for its spiritual significance, with many believers attributing miracles and wish-fulfillment to the goddess. This divine association, combined with the temple's picturesque location amidst the majestic Himalayan range, has enhanced its appeal, drawing both pilgrims and trekkers alike (Kunwar & Karki, 2019). Yet, there are still a number of obstacles in the way of the site's ability to support sustainable tourism, ecosystem management and regional economic growth (Thapa et al., 2018).

The sustainability of pilgrimage tourism in this area is seriously threatened by problems like poor infrastructure, restricted accessibility, and environmental degradation. Furthermore, the increase in pilgrims has put a strain on the region's resources, raising questions about how to preserve the area's natural and cultural legacy. The absence of comprehensive management plans that strike a balance between the site's spiritual significance, the requirements of the surrounding community, and the environment exacerbates these issues. It is imperative that these problems are resolved if Pathibhara is to remain an important center of spiritual and commercial activity in Nepal (Sharma & Shrestha, 2016).

Methodologically, the study further problematizes the particular study of economic facets of tourism. It has thus attempted to examine the existing situation of tourism, the relationship between economic development and tourism, and the contribution of tourism to the economic spheres of people's livelihoods.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

Based on the above-stated research problems, the following research questions have been set as the major research issues in this study:

- (1) What is the current status of tourism in Pathibhara, including the flow of tourists? What types of tourists visit the destination, and what is the religious/pilgrimage importance of visiting this place? (Mostly from secondary literature)
- (2) How do tourism activities contribute to the economic development of Pathibhara in terms of employment generation, income levels, and expenditure patterns? (Primary data dominance)
- (3) How do tourism promotion strategies and stakeholder engagement address opportunities, challenges, and issues in the tourism sector of Pathibhara? (Primary data dominance)

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The study's specific objective is to examine how tourism in Pathibhara has contributed to the economic development in and around the destination site, particularly in the context of the Phungling Municipality of Taplejung district of Nepal. The objectives of the study are further deduced as follows:

- 1) To assess the current status, trends, and characteristics of tourism in Pathibhara, including the flow of tourists, their types, and pilgrimage importance of Pathibhara
- 2) To analyze the contributions of tourism to economic development in Pathibhara, focusing on income generation, employment opportunities, and expenditure patterns.
- 3) To examine the effectiveness of tourism promotion strategies and stakeholder engagement in tourism-related activities, with an emphasis on identifying emerging opportunities, challenges, and issues in the tourism sector

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The present study has a wider scope and is more rational, based on the two perspectives. First, by fulfilling the knowledge gaps in religious tourism studies in general and economic development in particular and answering how the economic status of people and local stakeholders is affected by the tourism sector. The critical review and empirical findings of the study has explored a specific contribution for academia and researchers.

Second, the proposed study has contextualized the policy issues of economic development and tourism-based entrepreneurship in context of Nepal's one of the popular pilgrimage site like Pathibhara. It has traced out empirical issues and then offer some informed recommendations based on local narratives. The recommendations and issues could be beneficial for the government agencies, including the local level of Phungling and other non-government agencies and actors working on the issues of tourism, development, and employment. Moreover, this study has become equally significant for carrying out further studies, particularly in rebuilding people's economic development and livelihood sustainability along with tourism development.

### **1.6 Delimitation of this Study**

Every study has different delimitations due to resources and time availability. In spite of its wider scope and rationality, this MPhil research had some limitations. First, the study only adopted the two prominent issues of scientific research: tourism and its role in micro economic development. Theoretically, this study does not deal with all the domains of tourism contribution or its role in local development in general.

Second, taking only one small administrative unit (Phungling Municipality) and a pilgrimage site (i.e. Pathibhara) as a study site (which lies in the Taplejung district of Koshi Province) is another limitation on the study. It was thus limited by sampling design, which raises some issues of validity in generalization. Being quantitative dominant, the study, yet, did not follow a deductive approach due to theoretical limitations and lacks as envisioned in the review of scientific readings. The study is further delimited with the quantitative-dominant mixed methodological

approach. The samples were delimited only the local community residents (and not the tourists or visitors) due assuming that they would better know and explain the different economic aspects of tourism laid by tourism of Pathibhara Temple in their locality.

### **1.7 Organization of the Study**

The dissertation is organized into five chapters, each with various thematic headings and sub-headings. The reference section and appendix are placed separately at the end of the main text. Each chapter systematically addresses the key components of the study, ensuring a comprehensive examination of the research topic. The chapters are structured as follows:

First chapter is Introduction. This chapter includes the general background, statement of the problem, objectives of the study, significance of the study, and the organization of the study. The second then follows with the chapter of literature review. This chapter focuses on a theoretical and empirical review of the existing literature relevant to the study. Third, it is the third chapter of research methodology. This chapter explains the research methodology employed in the study. The chapter fourth is result and discussion. This chapter presents the analysis and interpretation of the collected data. The final chapter is about summary, conclusion, and recommendations. This chapter provides a summary of the findings, conclusions drawn from the study, and implications based on the research.

## **Chapter – II**

### **Review of Literature**

#### **2.1 Conceptual Understanding of Tourism**

Tourism is a travelling activity along with different purposes, goods, services, motivations and products. However, it has been defined broadly and different approaches have been proposed in terms of duration, locality and purpose. The term "tourism" was derived from the French word "tourisme," which has a simple meaning related to travel. The word "tourism" is simply concerned with tourists. The industrial revolution in the 19<sup>th</sup> century gave birth to travel largely in western society (Bhatia, 2002). Accordingly, tourism can be attributed as principle of 3-A principle comprising Attractions, Accessibilities and Amenities. These attributes are considered as foundational for tourism goods and services, though 2-‘A’s have been also added in recent studies including Activities and Accommodations (Niñerola et al., 2019).

Largely, it is now agreed that tourism is not only a holiday affair only, and it includes more than this, including different economic, political, socio-cultural, psychological and environmental dimensions. The definition of World Tourism Organization (WTO) is considered as the most cited definition of tourism which is recited as "travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure and not less than 24 hours, business and other purposes" (UNWTO, 1995, p. 10).

However, limiting to this time and purpose is also criticized as a narrower perspective of tourism which therefore calls as broader perspective in the changing political context including globalization and emergence of new socio-economic strictures. The history of travel and truism dates back along with the rise of different civilizations in the world. Tourism can be described as the totality of activities and interactions that occur between tourists, businesses that provide services, host governments, and local communities. These interactions arise as part of the efforts to attract, accommodate, and engage visitors and tourists. This process involves a dynamic relationship between all stakeholders, contributing to the overall experience of tourism (Sharpley & Telfer, 2014).

## 2.2 Pilgrimage Tourism

A pilgrimage is a journey, often into an unknown or foreign place, where a person goes in search of new or expanded meaning about their self, others, nature, or a higher good through the experience. It can lead to a personal transformation, after which the pilgrim returns to their daily life (Reader & Walter, 2016). A person who makes such a journey is called a pilgrim. In simple terms, people who engage in pilgrimage walks have psychological, social, and spiritual benefits. Moreover, Collins-Kreiner (2020) has examined the development of pilgrimage tourism as a research topic, highlighting the importance of re-examining our contemporary usage of terms in order to allow for broader interpretations of different phenomena in the field of tourism.

Pilgrimages frequently involve a journey of or search of moral or spiritual significance. Typically, it is a journey to a shrine or other location of importance to a person's beliefs and faiths, although sometimes it can be a metaphorical journey into someone's own beliefs (Collins-Kreiner, 2018). Many religions attach spiritual importance to particular places: the place of birth or death of founders or saints, or to the place of their "calling" or spiritual awakening, or of their connection (visual or verbal) with the divine. There are different pilgrimage sites in the world in different religions, faith and belief systems including Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

For example, in Hinduism, importance of tourism has been given due importance to regret and dilute to sinful activities and get maximum blessings from the God. This is called tirthatan as well. According to Karel Werner's *Popular Dictionary of Hinduism*, "most Hindu places of pilgrimage are associated with legendary events from the lives of various gods.... Almost any place can become a focus for pilgrimage, but in most cases they are sacred cities, rivers, lakes, and mountains (Collins-Kreiner, 2020; Werner, 1994). The popular Hindu pilgrims include Kumbha Mela, Char Dham (Four Holy pilgrimage sites including Badrinatha in the north, Dwarka in the west, Rameswaram in the south, and Puri in the east), Old Holy cities/ temples per Puranic Texts: Pashupatinath/ Kathmandu, Varanasi/ Kashi, Prayag/ Allahawad, Haridwar-Rishikesh, Mathura-vrindaban, Kanchupuram, Dwarka; Shakti Peethas (Kalighat, Guhesswari and Kamakhya).

In case of Buddhism, it offers four pilgrimage sites to be visited at least once in life. They include Lumbini (Buddha's birthplace in Nepal), Bodh Gaya (place of enlightenment, Bihar, India); Sarnath (place of first sermon/ diksha, Uttar Pradesh, India), and Kushinagar (place of death/ mahaparinirvana). Moreover, Christian pilgrimage was first made to sites connected with the birth, life, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. It is primarily the pilgrimage site of Holy Land, which usually refers to a territory roughly corresponding to the modern States of Israel and the Palestine territories. On the other hand, the Hajj to Mecca is considered as main pilgrimage by the Muslims of Islam religion. Another important place for Muslims is the city of Medina which also lies in Saudi Arabia (Long, 2011).

Religious tourism and pilgrimage tourism differ primarily in motivation, behavior, and experience. Religious tourism is characterized by a broader scope, where individuals visit religious sites for cultural, historical, or recreational purposes rather than personal devotion or spiritual transformation. Tourists engaging in religious tourism may admire architecture, explore local religious traditions, or learn about the historical and cultural significance of sacred places. For instance, visiting St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City often revolves around its artistic masterpieces and historical relevance rather than purely spiritual reasons. Similarly, exploring Angkor Wat in Cambodia is motivated by its architectural grandeur and heritage, while tours of Buddhist monasteries in Bhutan attract those curious about local religious culture, blending sightseeing with cultural immersion (Durán-Sánchez et al., 2018; Timothy & Olsen, 2006). In this form of tourism, the experience is largely educational, cultural, or aesthetic, with the spiritual aspect being secondary.

In contrast, pilgrimage tourism is more focused on personal devotion, spiritual fulfilment, and transformative experiences. While religious tourists may approach religious sites with curiosity or leisure in mind, pilgrims undertake journeys with profound faith, often engaging deeply in religious practices and rituals. Pilgrimage tourism, therefore, emphasizes the transformative and emotional connection to sacred places, as opposed to the more secularized or observational nature of religious tourism (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Rashid, 2018). For example, pilgrims visiting Mecca for Hajj or undertaking the Camino de Santiago in Spain do so with clear religious intentions, seeking spiritual growth and inner fulfilment. Thus, the key distinction lies in the

depth of personal engagement and the purpose driving the visit, shaping the experiences and behaviours of participants in both forms of tourism.

### **2.3 Theoretical Bases**

There are various theories and models of tourism which describe and link different issues, including causes, determinants, motivations, and nature of tourism. Some popular theories include Doxey's Model, Butler's Theory of tourism development, Stakeholders Theory, Plog's Theory, Cohens's theory, Alternative theory of tourism, Maslow's Theory and Push Pull Theory. These are largely sociological in nature. For my research problem as discussed in the chapter 1 (section 1.2), the few theoretical studies to explore the contribution of tourism in economic development of the destination. In particular, it is believed that tourism increases foreign exchange earnings, which in turn can be used to finance imports, it encourages investment and drives local firms toward greater efficiency due to the increased competition, and it alleviates unemployment, since tourism activities are more people oriented (Antonakakis, et al., 2015).

The economics of tourism is an emerging theoretical discipline in social sciences. It is concerned with the allocation of resources as tourism requires the organization of a destination management. It is also about to satisfy consumers' demand for tourism and with the impact of tourism at the macroeconomic and microeconomic levels (Candela, et al., 2012). Collins-Kreiner (2020) explores that future trends in tourism research should include economic perspective research which goes with transdisciplinary approach. Tourism as an industry itself a composite of various goods and services, including accommodation, transport, agency services, food and souvenirs.

While the existing literature (e.g. Ahmad et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2018) has treated the demand for tourism in depth, the literature on the supply of tourism has tended to focus on certain sectors, mainly hotel accommodation, air transport and the tour operator sector, because of the fragmented nature of supply. The literature on the demand for tourism has examined the motivations for tourism, estimating the responsiveness of demand to different determinants and providing forecasts of future levels of demand. The supply-side literature has focused on the structure of tourism-

related sectors. The demand- and supply-side characteristics of tourism combine to provide assessments of the wider impacts of tourism, ranging from measuring the size of tourism with input-output models, to quantifying the impact of additional tourism demand through computable general equilibrium models and assessing the importance of tourism in economic development (Sinclair et al., 2003).

Regarding the economic contribution of tourism, there is a prominent debates between macroeconomics vs microeconomics (Pablo-Romero & Molina, 2013). As argued by Morley (1992), current models of tourism demand based in economic utility theory assume a two-stage decision process, with the choice of tour independent of the prior decision to travel or not. In this article, a more comprehensive model is developed that incorporates the decision to travel or not and the time and budget allocations, as well as the choice of tour in one utility function with non-tourism goods.

The Theory of Economic Capital in the context of tourism development emphasizes the role of financial and material resources in fostering the growth and sustainability of tourism industries. Economic capital refers to the tangible assets, including money, infrastructure, and other financial resources, that are invested in developing tourism facilities, services, and marketing strategies. According to this theory, the availability and strategic allocation of economic capital are crucial for creating tourism products, enhancing visitor experiences, and promoting destinations. The theory suggests that regions with greater economic capital are better positioned to develop competitive tourism industries, attract more visitors, and generate higher economic returns. Additionally, reinvestment of economic capital into tourism infrastructure, such as hotels, transportation, and cultural sites, can lead to sustainable tourism growth and contribute to broader economic development. The Theory of Economic Capital underscores the importance of financial investment in tourism development and highlights how economic resources drive the expansion and success of the tourism sector (Bourdieu, 1986; Liu & Wall, 2006).

Input-output analysis is now widely used to examine the economic impact of tourism (Briassoulis, 1991; Zha, et al., 2022). The input-output analysis is the standard method for measuring the spread effects of changes in the final demand for the product of an industry or sector. It also includes forward and backward linkage

effects. Various studies on tourism has explored the usefulness of this analysis to study the economic impact of tourism. It looks at the practical applications of this method of analysis and draws upon examples of tourism-based input-output models to demonstrate the flexibility of this type of model and the level of detail which can be achieved (Los, & Steenge, 2010).

This study does not follow a single theory in particular context of Pathibhara. However, as scientific readings suggest, the best theory to explain religious tourism is the Theory of Religious Capital. In sociological studies, this theory is much advocated by Iannaccone (1990), and Stark and Finke (2000). Religious capital refers to the value individuals derive from their participation in religion, which can include both tangible and intangible assets that shape their behavior, identity, and social networks. This theory in tourism posits that religious tourism is driven by the accumulation and utilization of religious capital, which refers to the spiritual, cultural, and social resources that individuals acquire through religious participation and practices.

Religious capital includes the knowledge, rituals, beliefs, and emotional connections associated with a particular faith, which motivate individuals to undertake pilgrimages or visit sacred sites. Religious tourism is thus seen as an investment in spiritual well-being and social identity, where the act of visiting holy places reinforces one's religious capital and strengthens community ties. The Theory of Religious Capital effectively explains why individuals are motivated to engage in religious tourism, as it encompasses both the personal and communal aspects of spiritual journeys (Stark & Finke, 2000; Rinschede, 1992).

#### **2.4 Empirical Studies in Global Context**

People travel during their energetic, productive, and curious periods. Traveling and visiting new destinations are in our nature as human beings. From the very beginning of human civilization, people started traveling. As industrialization increases, trade and commerce also increase, which results in travel. Three significant changes, including the rise in industrial society's affluence, the construction of transportation infrastructure, and the organization of travel, have led to an extraordinary rise in global tourism during the past 50 years (Kunwar et al., 2006). Over 900 million tourists travelled internationally in 2022, which is almost double of

2021 though still 37 percent fewer than the tourists who visited in 2019. It has been expected to have further recovery of tourism statistics in 2023 (UNWTO, 2023).

Some of the most popular pilgrimage sites in the world include Mecca in Saudi Arabia, a sacred destination for Muslims during Hajj; Vatican City in Rome, where millions of Christians visit St. Peter's Basilica and the Pope; and Varanasi in India, considered one of the holiest cities for Hindus. In South Asia, Bodh Gaya in India, where Lord Buddha attained enlightenment, and Sri Pada (Adam's Peak) in Sri Lanka, revered by Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims alike, are notable pilgrimage destinations. Kashi Vishwanath Temple in India and Kataragama in Sri Lanka also hold significant religious importance for Hindu devotees (Singh, 2022). These sites not only attract millions of pilgrims annually but also reflect the rich cultural and religious diversity of the regions.

Taking the case study of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) countries, Rasool et al. (2021) reflects that tourism, financial development and economic growth are co-integrated in the long run. They followed a panel ARDL co-integration test. Further, the Granger causality analysis demonstrates that the causality between inbound tourism and economic growth is bi-directional, thus validates the 'feedback-hypothesis' in BRICS countries. The study suggests that BRICS countries should promote favorable tourism policies to push up the economic growth and in turn economic growth will positively contribute to international tourism.

Similarly, in a study conducted by Smeral (2008) econometric methods have been followed to estimate how tourism demand reacts to increased economic growth. Three models are introduced and used in the illustration of the effects of a 1% increase in growth on real revenue from tourism in nine European countries. Supportive to this, Milne and Ateljevic (2011) review the complex links that exist between the tourism industry and processes of economic development. A brief overview of the industry's economic role at the international and national scale leads us into a discussion of local and regional involvement in the tourism industry.

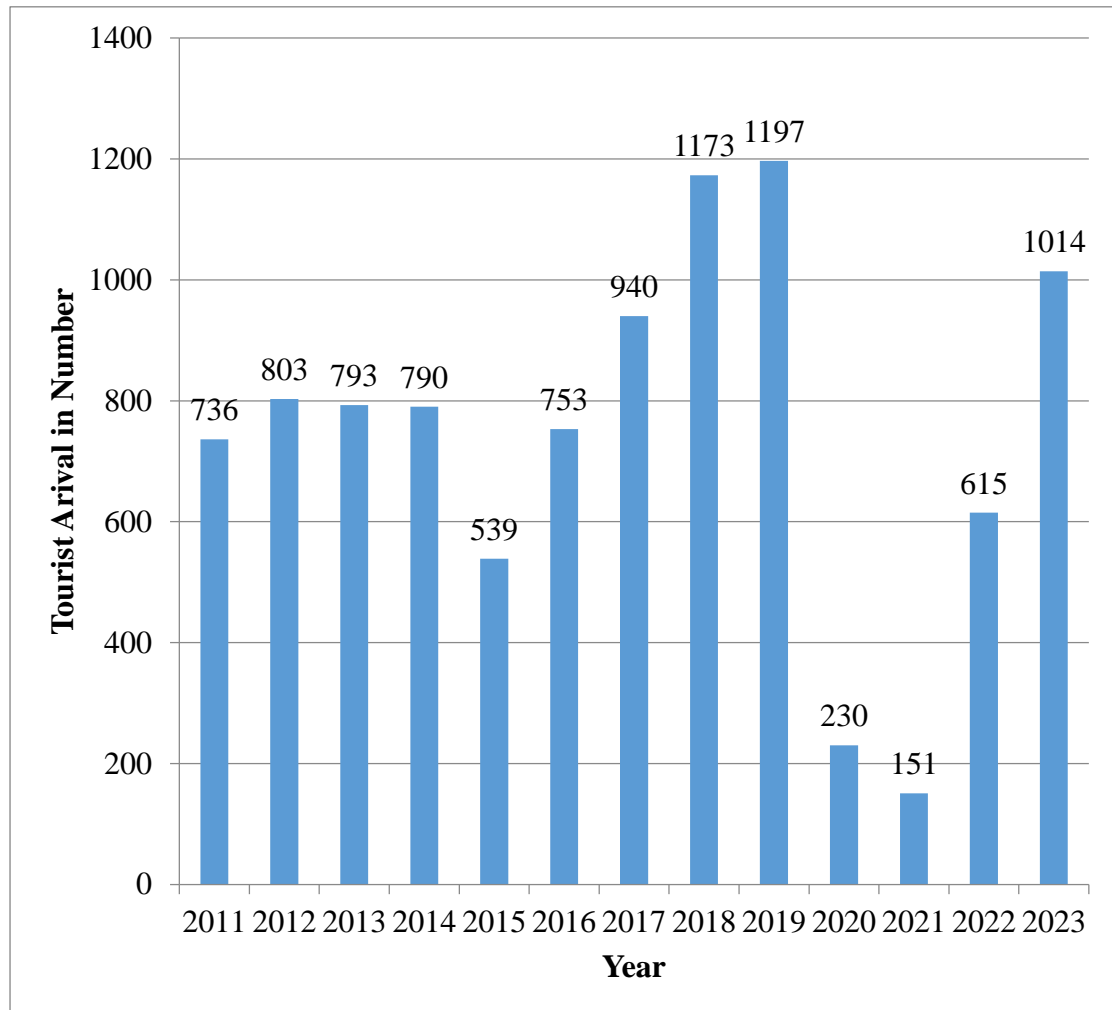
Tourism studies in recent literature has incorporated diverse perspectives on pilgrimage tourism across different cultural and religious contexts, providing a broad

understanding of the phenomenon on a global scale. For example, Egresi and Kara (2014) examine the pilgrimage tourism to Alevi holy places in Turkey. It explores the motivations of pilgrims, the economic impacts on local communities, and the challenges of managing these sacred sites within a secular tourism framework.

Olsen (2013) focuses on pilgrimage tourism to Lourdes, one of the most visited Catholic pilgrimage sites in France. The study investigates the different scales of motivations, including religious, spiritual, and cultural, that drive tourists to this site. In Indian context, Singh (2006) explores pilgrimage tourism in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, home to many significant religious sites like Varanasi and Ayodhya. It analyzes the socio-economic impacts of pilgrimage tourism on the region and discusses the management of these sacred spaces. Similarly, Terzidou (2018) investigates pilgrimage tourism in Greece, focusing on the complex motivations of pilgrims visiting sacred places. It highlights the interplay between religious vows, personal visions, and cultural heritage in shaping the pilgrimage experience.

## **2.5 Tourism in Nepal: Fact, Figures and Trends**

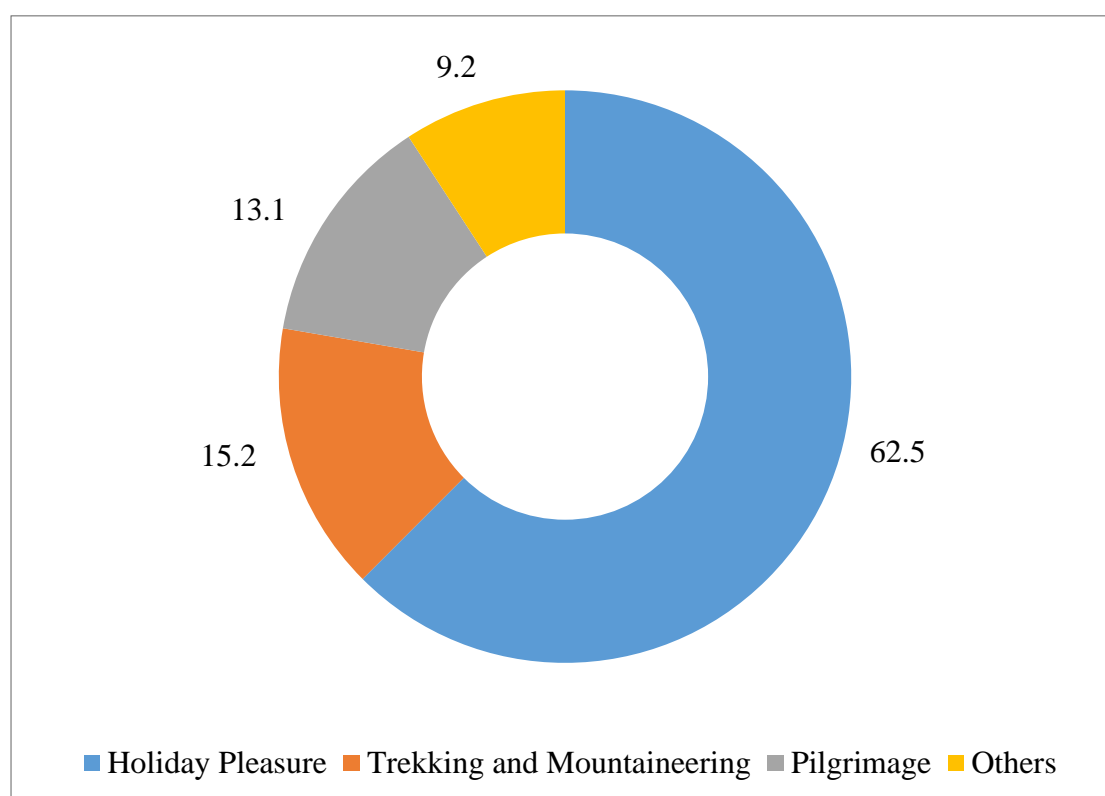
While talking about Nepal, a total of 614,148 foreign tourists visited Nepal in 2022, indicating a strong recovery in the country's tourism sector as compared to 230,085 tourists who visited the country in 2020 and 150,962 in 2021. However, the arrivals are yet to recover to the pre-pandemic level, when around 1.2 million (i.e. 1197191) tourists visited Nepal in 2019, the most populous visit to Nepal over the recorded history of travel and tourism (NTB, 2023). However, tourist arrival in Nepal in 2023 is revitalizing. As the latest data of NTB, the arrival of international tourists crossed 1 million, reaching 1,014,885. The highest number of tourists came from neighboring India (estimated at 314,000) while China and the US followed with 60,000 and 100,000 tourists, respectively (NTB, 2024). The figure 2.1 summarizes the tourist arrival in Nepal since 2011 till last year, which shows a positive remark, though not a sufficient.

**Figure 2.1***Tourist Arrival in Nepal in Thousands (2011-2023)**Source: Tourism Statistics (NTB, 2023)*

While analyzing from the purpose of visit (Figure 2.2), international tourism in Nepal is dominated by holiday celebration (62.5%) rather than allowing specific purposes. Only 13.1 percent visitors arrived in Nepal in 2023 for pilgrimage purpose though this country deserves two prominent pilgrimage sites (even listed in UNESCO Heritage Site) representation Hinduism (Pashupatinaath) and Buddhism (Lumbini).

**Figure 2.2**

*Purpose of Tourist Arrival in Nepal (International) in 2023 (in %)*



*Source: Tourism Statistics (NTB, 2023)*

Yet, the weakness of Nepal's database system is that this data does not represent the number of domestic tourists which has becoming increasingly popular in recent years. The primary legislative framework governing tourism in Nepal is the Tourism Act, 1978 (amended several times, most recently in 2016). The act establishes the legal and regulatory framework for the development, management, and promotion of the tourism sector in Nepal. This Act is responsible for overall legislation and management of tourism activities in Nepal. However, the Act is less focused on the domestic tourism. Another weakness of this act is its insufficiency to address different types of tourism potentials, opportunities and challenges that have come into the thrust of federal governance system of Nepal. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation (MCTCA) has already prepared the strategic framework for the Nepal Tourism Decade 2023-2032 which is planned to be implemented in four phases (Table 2.1). This is expected is to contribute in integrated approach of tourism development.

**Table 2.1***Four Phases Implementation Plan of NTD 2023-2024*

<b>Phase 1 (2023)</b>	<b>Consolidation:</b> Consolidating the gains made during the previous phases, and on ensuring that Nepal remains a competitive tourism destination.
<b>Phase 2 (2024-2027)</b>	<b>Preparation:</b> Developing and implementing marketing and promotional campaigns, and on improving infrastructure and services.
<b>Phase 3 (2028-2031)</b>	<b>National Focus:</b> Promoting Nepal as a year-round destination, and on attracting more tourists from new markets.
<b>Phase 4 (2032)</b>	<b>Consolidation:</b> Consolidating the gains made during the previous phases, and on ensuring that Nepal remains a competitive tourism destination.

In this prefix, it is also evident that Nepal's tourism sector is largely characterized with different pilgrimage sites including the Pashupatinath, Lumbini, Muktinath, Khotang Halesi, Baraha Chatara, Siddhababa Dham, Janakpurdham and Pathibhara. Exceptional to Lumbini, They are largely domestic tourist sites though few proportion of the tourism flow is also covered by Indian tourists (Bhattarai, 2017). According to Upadhyaya and Shan (2011), numerous nations have attempted a variety of efforts to advance the tourist sector as a tool for economic development. Due to Nepal's economy's lack of industrialization, another alternative must be discovered that can initiate and promote the industrialization process for quick economic development. With particular regard to tourism, he has claimed that the sector has enormous potential for transforming Nepal's lagging economy into a growing one.

### **2.5.1 Studies on Pilgrimage Sites of Nepal**

Nepal is recognized for its numerous sacred pilgrimage destinations, which hold immense religious, cultural, and historical significance. These pilgrimage sites not only draw domestic visitors but also attract international devotees, especially from neighboring countries like India, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka. Prominent pilgrimage sites, such as Pashupatinath, Muktinath, Lumbini, Swargadwari, Chataradham, Janakpurdhaam, and Dakshinkali, play a pivotal role in promoting religious tourism within the country (Wenan et al., 2020). These sacred sites are intertwined with the

beliefs and practices of both Hinduism and Buddhism, attracting pilgrims seeking spiritual fulfillment. These sites not only attract pilgrims from Nepal but also from neighboring countries, contributing significantly to religious tourism. Research on these pilgrimage destinations highlights their spiritual importance, while also addressing challenges related to infrastructure and sustainable tourism development. The government's ongoing efforts to enhance these sites will likely further bolster Nepal's reputation as a global hub for religious tourism.

### ***Pashupatinath Temple***

Located in Kathmandu, the Pashupatinath Temple is one of the holiest shrines for Hindus globally, dedicated to Lord Shiva in his manifestation as Pashupati, the "Lord of Beasts." It holds the distinction of being a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is a primary hub for religious tourism in Nepal. According to research by Thapa et al. (2016), the temple attracts large numbers of pilgrims, particularly during the Maha Shivaratri festival, where attendance can reach up to one million. The temple complex serves as a central site for religious rituals, including cremations along the sacred Bagmati River (Thapa et al., 2016).

The Pashupati Area Development Trust (PADT) oversees the management and governance of the temple and its surrounding area. A study by Maharjan (2018) highlights the economic contributions of Pashupatinath to the local community, noting how religious tourism supports vendors and adds significantly to Kathmandu's tourism revenue. The site not only attracts Hindu pilgrims but also international visitors intrigued by the temple's architectural and spiritual significance (Maharjan, 2018).

### ***Muktinath Temple***

Situated at the foot of the Thorong-La mountain pass, Muktinath Temple is another major pilgrimage destination revered by both Hindus and Buddhists. For Hindus, it is considered one of the 108 Divya Desams (sacred Vishnu temples), while Buddhists revere it for its connection to Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava). Studies reveal that Muktinath is a crucial site for cross-border religious tourism, attracting devotees from India, Tibet, Bhutan, and Nepal (Shrestha, 2017).

A study by Gurung and Kunwar (2020) explores the logistical challenges of pilgrimage to Muktinath, especially given its remote, high-altitude location. The research emphasizes the importance of sustainable tourism practices, as the region also draws trekkers along the Annapurna Circuit. While the temple's spiritual significance remains the main attraction, the development of eco-friendly tourism infrastructure can help balance the needs of both pilgrims and adventure tourists (Gurung & Kunwar, 2020).

### ***Lumbini***

Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha, is among the most significant pilgrimage sites for Buddhists worldwide. Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, it is part of the global Buddhist pilgrimage circuit, drawing devotees from countries such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Japan. Mishra (2018) underscores the global religious importance of Lumbini, which attracts pilgrims seeking spiritual growth and meditation (Mishra, 2018).

The Lumbini Development Trust (LDT) manages the preservation and promotion of this sacred site. According to a report by the World Bank (2019), infrastructure improvements have enhanced accessibility to Lumbini, facilitating better accommodation and transportation for the growing number of visitors. These efforts have enabled Lumbini to develop into a major religious tourism destination, reinforcing its position as a global pilgrimage hub (World Bank, 2019).

### ***Swargadwari***

Situated in the Pyuthan district, Swargadwari is another revered pilgrimage destination in Nepal, believed to be the meditation site of Maharshi Swargadwari, a Hindu sage. Pilgrims visit the temple to participate in the Yagya (sacred fire ritual), which has been continuously burning for centuries. Shakya (2020) highlights the spiritual significance of Swargadwari, noting that its remote location adds to its mystical appeal, attracting not only religious tourists but also trekkers looking to combine spirituality with natural beauty (Shakya, 2020).

### ***Chataradham***

Located in eastern Nepal, Chataradham is emerging as an important pilgrimage site, particularly during the Maghe Sankranti festival, when devotees gather to bathe at the sacred confluence (Triveni) to cleanse their sins. Dahal (2021) emphasizes the cultural importance of Chataradham, noting its increasing popularity among Hindu pilgrims. The study suggests that Chataradham has the potential to become a regional hub for religious tourism, especially if its infrastructure is developed to accommodate the growing number of pilgrims (Dahal, 2021).

### ***Dakshinkali Temple***

Located near Kathmandu, the Dakshinkali Temple is dedicated to the goddess Kali and is one of the most important sites for animal sacrifices in Nepal. During festivals like Dashain, thousands of devotees visit the temple to offer sacrifices and seek blessings from the goddess. Rana (2019) explores the religious and cultural importance of Dakshinkali, highlighting its role in attracting both local and international pilgrims, particularly from India. The temple's significance is further elevated by its role in fostering local economic activity, driven by religious tourism (Rana, 2019).

### **2.5.2 Glory and Mythology of Pathibhara Mata Temple**

The Pathibhara Devi Temple continues to be a symbol of faith and cultural unity, where myth and history intertwine to create a sacred space that holds profound religious significance for many. The Pathibhara Devi Temple, located in the Taplejung district of Nepal, is a revered religious site with a rich tapestry of myth and history that draws both Hindus and Buddhists from across the region. The temple is dedicated to the goddess Pathibhara, believed to be a powerful manifestation of Shakti, the divine feminine force in Hinduism (Sharma, 2017).

This site holds profound spiritual significance, revered by both Hindus and Buddhists, and serves as a vital locus of pilgrimage tourism in the region. The temple draws pilgrims seeking blessings and spiritual fulfillment, contributing not only to the religious tourism sector but also to the broader local economy by generating employment opportunities and supporting cultural preservation efforts. The

description provided about the Pathibhara Temple is primarily based on local legends, oral traditions, and general historical knowledge associated with the Pathibhara Devi Temple.

However, references to the myth and historical significance of Pathibhara Devi Temple can be found in very few scientific studies or valid sources (Kunwar & Karki, 2019). According to local legends, the origin of Pathibhara Mata is unknown, though there are some narratives about the power, existence and mystery of the Devi Mata in this region. To share a reflection as of the main Priest (or pujari) of the temple:

Once upon a time, Goddess Pathibhara fulfilled the wishes of shepherds who had lost their sheep while grazing in the surrounding hills. Desperate, the shepherds prayed to the goddess for the safe return of their flock, offering a ritualistic sacrifice. Miraculously, their sheep reappeared, and the shepherds believed that the goddess had intervened on their behalf. This incident is said to have established the site as a place of immense spiritual power, where devotees come to have their wishes granted. It is believed that Pathibhara Devi blesses those who offer sincere prayers, and over the centuries, countless devotees have reported miraculous outcomes after visiting the temple. Some indigenous nationalities believe that the Goddess Pathibhara nature related God, what has been worshiped in the name of 'Mukumlung' by Limbu community in this region. *(Based on personal conversation with Dilli Acharya, main pujari of Pathibhara Temple, Date; 2080/8/15)*

Historically, the Pathibhara Temple has been a site of pilgrimage for centuries, with its origins shrouded in the mists of time. The temple's importance grew over the years, and it became a significant religious center not only for the local Limbu community but also for people from other parts of Nepal and neighboring regions. The temple is also significant for the Kirat people, who hold the goddess Pathibhara in high regard within their cultural and religious practices. The temple has seen various phases of development, with contributions from different rulers and local communities, enhancing its infrastructure to accommodate the growing number of pilgrims.

Pathibhara Temple and its surrounding area is located in the Kanchenjunga region, a major section of the Great Himalayan Trail (GHT) in Nepal. Spanning the length of Nepal, the GHT is one of the longest walking treks and also one of the most physically and culturally geographically diverse treks in the world, which shows up in one of the greatest opportunities for distinct ways of cultivating intimate relationships between Nature and cultural peoples and terrains. The GHT stretches around 1,700 km, traversing several of the Nepalese Himalayan belts from Taplejung in east to Darchula in the west. Many trekkers hiking the Low Route (Cultural Trail) of the GHT will choose to include Pathibhara Temple in their itinerary to appreciate its spiritual significance and engage with local Limbu community. The region faces challenges such as unpredictable weather patterns, landslides, and threats to biodiversity, necessitating sustainable tourism practices and environmental conservation efforts to preserve its religious and ecological significance. In the policy context, Nepal's Local Adaptation Plan of Action (LAPA) and National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) are also critical interventions to address climate change challenges in regions like Pathibhara.

### **2.5.3. Local Myths about Pathibhara**

Myths and beliefs of the Limbu community, the indigenous peoples of the eastern Nepal (who are the indigenous nationality of the area of Taplejung and in Pathibhara region), are deeply associated with the name Pathibhara. "Pathibhara" is a derived name of Goddess Pathibhara Devi regarded as a Shakti and fulfiller of aspirations in local mythology. The myths about her origins and her shrine's naming are as compelling as they are symbolic. According to a local community and Gurung myth, Pathibhara was named with a story which seems worth-mentioning. This includes the following narrative history:

- **The Disappearance of Livestock:** The story begins with a group of herders who grazed their livestock in the lush meadows near the current temple site. One day, their livestock mysteriously disappeared without any trace, leaving the herders in despair.
- **Divine Revelation:** While searching for their lost animals, the herders prayed to the local deities for guidance. In response, a goddess appeared in their dreams and instructed them to perform a ritual

sacrifice in her honor. The goddess revealed herself as Pathibhara Devi, the guardian of the land.

- **Reappearance of Livestock:** Following the goddess's instructions, the herders performed the prescribed rituals, which involved offering animals and other items to appease her. Miraculously, their livestock reappeared unharmed, reinforcing their faith in the divine power of the goddess.
- **The Naming of Pathibhara:** The word “Pathivara” translates to “a gracious protector” or “a deity who grants wishes.” Over time, this name evolved into Pathibhara as the shrine gained prominence among other communities. The goddess Pathibhara Devi is believed to protect the region and its people, granting blessings and fulfilling the prayers of those who seek her guidance with devotion.

Moreover, the Limbu community considers Pathibhara Devi one of their clan givers (Yuma Samang) and believes that the deity belonged to their ancestral traditions and spirituality. It is revered as Mukkumlung. The term translates to the "place of origin" or "ancestral land" in the Limbu language. It holds deep cultural, spiritual, and historical importance, symbolizing their identity, heritage, and connection to their ancestors. To this day, the shrine is a holy pilgrimage centre for the Limbu community, who come there to offer worship and sacrifices to the goddess to bless them with wealth, fertility and health. (See Annex- 5).

Following this, another common legend exists in Pathibhara is that Didi Pathibhara and Bahini Pathibhara are religiously and culturally important places. These destinations are known for their religious significance, natural beauty, and distinct spiritual journeys. Pathibhara Temple (Pathibhara Devi; also called Didi Pathibhara (Elder Pathibhara), the main temple of Pathibre Devi, which represents fulfillment of wish. This study is focused predominantly at this site. Bahini Pathibhara is also known as ‘Sano Than’, it means "Younger Pathibhara" or the “sister shrines”, a lesser Hall (smaller Temple) of this exact same district, Taplejung area, located near the Mathillo Phedi, a route to the main temple of Pathibhara. The Bahini Pathibhara is just five-seven minute far from the Mathillo Phedi. This small temple has spiritual relevance as per the local mythology but is less popular and less visited destination

than Didi Pathibhara. The walking distance from Kanchhi Than (sister Pathibhara) to the Thuli Than (elder sister or main temple of Pathibhara) is around one and half to two hour. It is said that the connection between Kanchhi Than and Pathibhara Temple is inseparable. According to legend, pulling a thread from Kanchhi Than to Pathibhara Temple fulfills one's vows. In the past, bamboo strips were placed from the lower Kanchhi Than to Pathibhara Temple to mark the path, ensuring pilgrims would not lose their way, especially as the area was densely forested at the time. Though these practice are deeply rooted in religious faith, are now gradually eroding in recent years.

From Pathibhara Temple, one can see the rocky hill of Manabhara, located in the Swadin area of Phaktalung Rural Municipality. It is far from the Hilly area where Pathibhara Temple is situated. The name "Pathibhara" might have originated from the goddess residing on a hill resembling a large measuring vessel (*pathi*). Similarly, "Manabhara" might refer to the goddess on a hill resembling a smaller measuring vessel (*mano*). As these two hills are situated opposite each other, the faith in the deities of both temples is likely interconnected and inseparable. However, another Mana Bhara Temple is also found in Manang district of Nepal, a western mountainous region, specifically in the Mana village. The temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva, and it is one of the significant religious sites in the area, attracting both local devotees and trekkers. It is located near the famous Annapurna Circuit trekking route, offering a combination of religious significance and scenic beauty (See Annex- 5)

## **2.6 Research Gaps and Conceptual Framework**

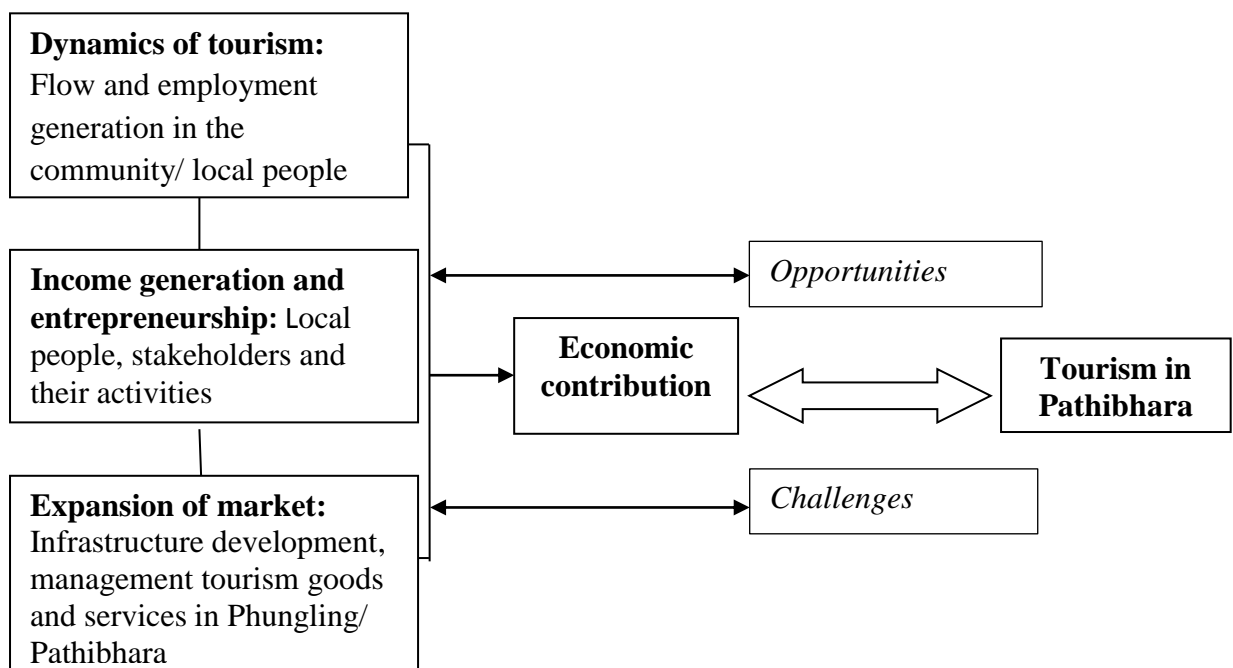
As reflected in the statement of problem (Chapter 1.2) and review of literatures (chapter 2), it is revealed that the economic contribution of tourism is not a new phenomenon, yet its exploration is context-specific. However, the major issue is its less theorization in academic discourse. Nevertheless, it loudly rings in Nepal where possibility of pilgrimage tourism from domestic tourism perspective has been largely realized since the history. It has become alternative mode of tourism in crisis times and emergencies which we witnessed along with the tragic of hazardous earthquake in 2015 and the rise of pandemic of COVID-19.

To saturate the proposed research questions and objectives, the researcher has adopted the following conceptual framework (Figure 2.3). The framing of research is

neither purely deductive nor inductive in nature. This type of mixed method is done while the data collection/ analysis cannot be purely qualitative or quantitative in any specific stage of research process. Linking both theoretical and empirical gaps from the review, this framework has incorporated basically four theoretical components: a) employment opportunities; b) income generation and entrepreneurship; and c) expansion of market, infrastructure and tourism goods and services in study site.

**Figure 2.3**

*Conceptual Framework for the Study*



The framework of generation and entrepreneurship, in conjunction with the growth of the market, infrastructure, and products and services related to tourism, elucidates the complex effects of tourism development in Pathibhara Temple and its surrounding. Tourism has the potential to greatly boost a region's economic development through creating jobs, encouraging entrepreneurship, opening up new markets, building infrastructure, and improving tourism offers. This conceptual relation is imperative to oversee the expansion of tourism of Pathibhara in a sustainable manner.

## **Chapter - III**

### **Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Philosophical Position**

Research is largely guided by philosophical approaches and paradigms. This study followed a pragmatic perspective. From the ontological perspective, pragmatics is the best strategy for the mixed method which follows post-positivist worldview assuming that no single method is perfect and final, rather they are potentially instrumental to reach and access the reality (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Both subjective and objective realities have been portrayed and explored as evident in the economic contributions of tourism in Pathibhara. For pragmatists, the individual's interpretations of reality are motivated and justified by considerations of their efficacy and utility in serving the researcher's interests and needs. It is behavioral and contextual approach, as tends to declare that truth could be judged by its consequences (Weaver, 2018).

Following this, the study stands with a mixed-method approach of reasoning, i.e. neither purely a deductive nor an inductive approach for reasoning. A single theory of tourism was not followed due to theoretical limitation, while the objective was also not to develop a tourism model by theorizing narratives of grounded methodology.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

Research design is the road map and mind map of a systematic research process. The study followed a mixed method design. This QUAN-Qual mix method approach allows the researcher to reflect subjective and interpretive realities (qualitative) and objective and critical realities (quantitative) (Leech et al., 2010). Though the study was mixed in nature, the quantitative method was dominant and prioritized (see research question first and second) as compared to the qualitative (with reference to third research question).

Therefore, the study was quantitative dominant, i.e. QUAN-qual approach allowing to be sequential explanatory. The quantitative type of data collection and analysis was first employed just before the Dashai Festival (2080 Kartik, i.e. Second

week of October, 2023) followed by qualitative data collection (2080 Mansir, i.e. third week of November, 2023). Major issues regarding the research questions were identified during the rapid questionnaire survey which are more explored and triangulated in the qualitative data collection and analysis in the late phase. The quantitative design was rooted with the objective and quantified measures of tourism (descriptive) while the qualitative design was embedded with analytical approach to trace the perceptions and experiences of local people/stakeholders of Pathibhara what they perceive and how they react the subjective world.

Some kinds of quantitative data (e.g. tourist flows, revenues etc.) have been derived with the secondary source in consultation with local authorities/ stakeholders. Primary data on local residents and stakeholders were gathered through interviews and questionnaires. This follows a host approach of tourism rather than going guest approach. In this research, economic development is treated as a dependent variable, while the other four factors—tourists flow, income status, infrastructure development, employment/ entrepreneurship opportunities and market stability—were measured and assessed as independent variables with some associated factors.

### **3.3 Nature and Sources of Data**

The nature of data employed in the study was characterized both with primary and secondary. The primary data was derived with the real-field context of Phungling municipality's outlying community and Pathibhara Temple, Taplejung district. Key informant interviews, rapid questionnaire surveys, consultation with the targeted stakeholders were the specified scientific tools used to obtain primary data. On the other hand, majority of the secondary data used in this study is supplemental to the primary data. The secondary data was gathered and consolidated from trustworthy and credible sources, including tourism survey reports, government publications, research papers, previously published researchers, and other concerned materials.

### **3.4 Pathibhara as a Study Site and its Rationale**

One of the 14 districts in Province Koshi, Taplejung is located in the Himalayas in eastern Nepal. In terms of land, Taplejung is Nepal's third-largest district with the area of 3,646 sq. km. There are 127,461 people living in Taplejung as per the 2011 Census. As per the Census 2021, Taplejung has reached a population to

120590 (and 7798 HHs) along with 50.4 percent of male and 49.6 percent female. Taplejung is divided in total nine local level bodies, in which only Phungling is an urban municipality otherwise all other local level bodies are rural municipality (CBS, 2023).

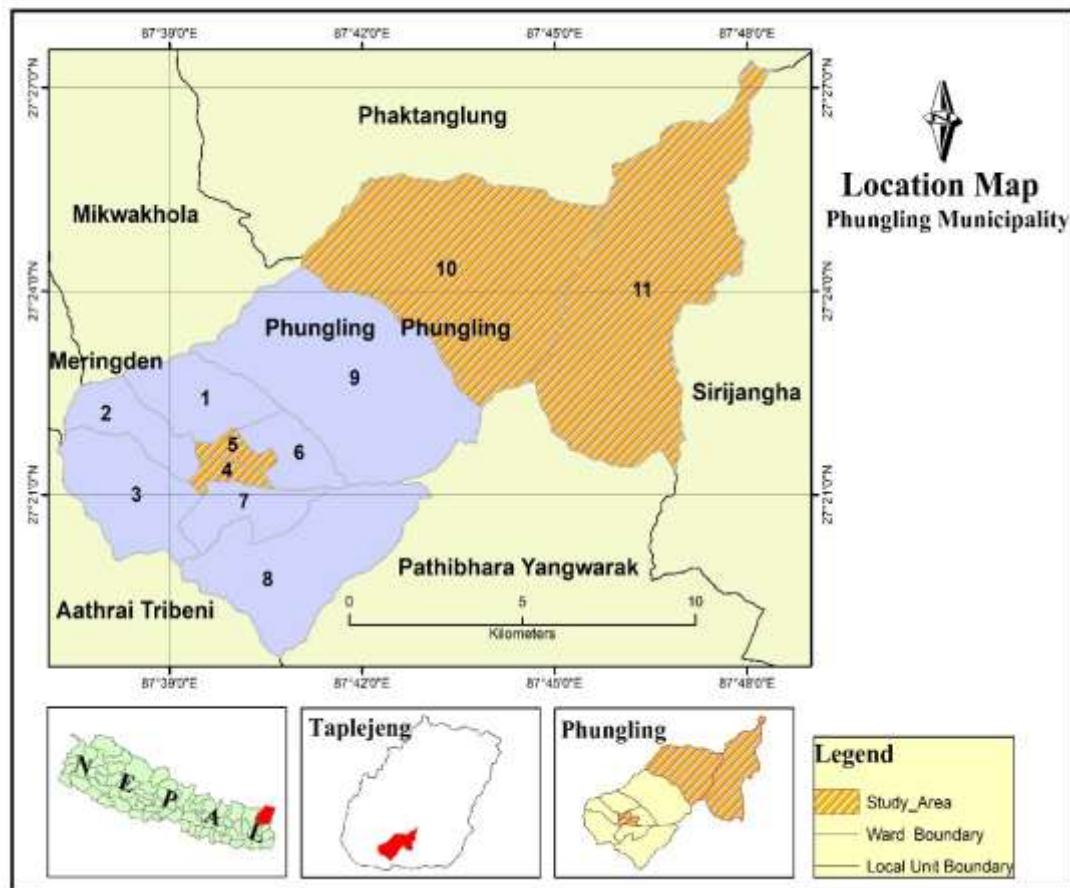
In the Limbu language, Taplejung literally means "a fort of King Taple." King Taple built a fort there in the middle ages, and it was there that it was located. Pallo Kirat Limbuwan, which translates to "distant region," was the name given to Taplejung and its environs before the unification of Nepal. The Limbu monarchs of Limbuwan ruled over this territory, which they termed Pallo Kirat Limbuwan. Taplejung became a part of the sizable Dhankuta District during the unification of Nepal. The three thums (counties) of the sizable Dhankuta district independently founded a new district called "Taplejung" when the conventional old 32 districts were divided into 75 in 1962 (DCC Taplejung, 2020).

One of the major attractions of Taplejung is the Pathivari Devi Temple, which is called Mukkumlung in Limbu language. This attracts tourists seeking spiritual fulfillment and blessings from the powerful Pathivari Devi. Hindus as well as Buddhists reach the temple for celebrations during special occasions and in normal leisure periods as well. The trek to Pathivara (3794 m) combined with the natural and cultural experiences of the region make the visit a unique exhilarating experience. It takes a single day to reach the temple of Pathivara on foot from Sanophedi(Kaflepati). On the way to the temple one can find many species of Rhododendron (the nation flower of Nepal) . The shrine of the Pathibhara Devi temple is located on a mountain at 3794 meters in the Far East of Nepal (Municipality Profile, Phungling, 2021).

The core area of this famous Pathibhara Mata temple lies in the vicinity of three local levels of Taplejung: Phungling municipality, Srijanga rural municipality and Phaktanglung rural municipality. However, the major parts align to the Phungling municipality itself in ward 10 and 11. This municipality was initially formed in 2014. On March 10, 2017, Nepal restructured the old administrative system into 753 new local level bodies; thus, Hangdeva, Phurumbu, and Phawakhola VDCs merged with the then-Taplejung municipality and renamed it Phungling Municipality with 11 wards. After merging more VDCs into the old Taplejung municipality, the total area increased to 125.57 sq. km and the total population became 26,406 in census 2011

which further counted as 28449 (male 49.1% and female 51.9%) in census 2021 (CBS, 2023). The site map of Phunling municipality has been presented in Map 3.1.

**Map 1: Study Site Map of Phunling Municipality, Taplejung**



Source: Location map of Phunling Municipality showing the study site

The study has purposively taken the empirical site of Phunling Municipality and Pathibhara temple area as the study. The rationality of selection can be illustrated as following causes. First, Pathibhara temple as one of renowned Shakatipeeth of Nepali pilgrimage destinations. It is well respected holy area of Hindu as well as the Buddhists. Second, there is an equal possibility of indigenous cultural tourism as the municipality is the populous resident of different indigenous groups including Limbus, Sherpas, Tamangs, Gurung, and other Hindu cast groups. Moreover, possibility of ecotourism (beautiful natural landscape) along with flora and fauna in the way of Pathibhara is another rationality of this site selection. The Pathibhara Temple is also a side route to the Kanchanjunga Base Camp Trek. Third, Phunling

bazar its municipal area has a larger scale economic activities as compared to the other local levels in the district (district headquarter, DCO Taplejung, 2020).

### **3.5 Justification of Case Study Method**

The case study method applied to tourism at Pathibhara Temple seeks to explore the complex dynamics between religious tourism, community involvement, and economic development in the region. This approach focuses on in-depth analysis of the Pathibhara Temple as a focal point for both spiritual tourism and adventure tourism, emphasizing the interactions between local stakeholders, pilgrims, and tourists. The case study method allows for a comprehensive understanding of how the temple attracts visitors from diverse backgrounds, exploring the roles of religious significance, natural beauty, and local cultural practices in shaping tourism experiences. This approach also investigates the impact of tourism on the community's socio-economic development, including employment opportunities, local entrepreneurship, and infrastructure growth.

The case study of tourism at Pathibhara Temple focuses primarily on the host community's perspective, examining the economic well-being and regional development of Phungling Municipality and Taplejung District. Using a rapid questionnaire survey method, the study gathers insights from local residents to understand how tourism has influenced their livelihoods, local businesses, and overall economic growth. The findings highlight both positive impacts, such as increased employment opportunities, small business growth, and improved infrastructure, as well as challenges, including concerns over income inequality, dependence on seasonal tourism, and the strain on local resources.

Additionally, qualitative Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and stakeholder consultations provide a deeper understanding of the concerns from various stakeholders, including local community leaders, religious figures, tourism operators, and policymakers. These consultations reveal worries about the sustainability of tourism, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the balancing act between economic development and environmental conservation. Stakeholders also express concerns about the potential for over-tourism, which could undermine the spiritual integrity of the temple and impact local traditions. By combining quantitative and qualitative data,

this case study offers a comprehensive view of how tourism at Pathibhara Temple affects both the economic and socio-cultural fabric of the community, and highlights the need for sustainable tourism practices to ensure long-term benefits for the region.

### **3.6 Universe and Sampling**

The citizens of Phungling Municipality served as the universe/ population for this study. The study followed a mixed method of sampling design. First, in the purposive sampling approach, four wards out of total 11 wards were selected for rapid questionnaire survey (ward 4 and 5 of Phungling bazar; and wards 10 and 11 whereby the Pathibhara temple is located). Then the random sampling method was employed to select the samples from these wards by allowing four compact clusters. Assuming 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error, the study followed a purposive sample size of 120 respondents (local people). This size was considered reasonable for a population where each of the sample unit is assumed that they were either directly or indirectly engaged with tourism related activities in the study site.

Each settlement (cluster) has had 30 individuals sampled (120 total / 4 settlements), which was sufficient for within-cluster analysis and comparisons. It can be justified by a combination of statistical reasoning, proportional representation, logistical feasibility, and practical constraints. This sampling method can be further justified with the pragmatist worldview given priority to the context of the field, rather than the researchers' predefined theoretical constructs (Morgan, 2014).

Second, qualitative tools adopted purposive sampling method, e.g. KII and stakeholder consultation, which were conducted in the main routes of Pathibhara temple (Phungling bazar, Suketar (airport), Deurali and Sanophedi (Kaflepati). Initially, only four interviews were planned to be taken from the specified key informants, one from each ward. However, predefined number of KIIs in given locality was insufficient to saturate to research objectives by allowing the triangulation to quantitative research findings. Then, following the principle of theoretical saturation, this study needed more KIIs to conduct, not only being confined the geographic locus of the selected wards, but being more flexible to allow more coverage of the stakeholder's engagement in tourism-related activities of Pathibhara.

### 3.7 Tools and Techniques of Primary Data Collection

To collect reliable and authentic data, the researcher has employed various research tools and techniques, both from qualitative and quantitative approaches in a mixed design of triangulation. The summary of research methods and tools for primary data collection have been presented in the Table 3.1 and discussed in the subsequent sections:

**Table 3.1**

*Summary of Research Methods for Primary Data Collection*

Methods	Tools	Sample size	To whom
Quantitative Research	Questionnaire survey	120	Individual level (60 at Taplejung bazar; i.e. ward 4 and 5), and remaining at the ward 10 and 11 having 30 HHs for each ward
Qualitative Research	Key Informant Interview	16	Informed persons, duty bearers, and religious leaders
	Stakeholder consultation	3	Local Stakeholders; Ward levels (2) and municipal level (1)

#### 3.7.1 Rapid Questionnaire Survey to the Local People

A rapid questionnaire survey (RQS) is increasingly used in mixed method design for quick and immediate action plan of data collection. It is more accessible and efficient quantitative survey design in the field context (Fowler, 2019). This type of survey along with the closed structured questionnaires. It employed pertinent information about the exploration of demographic characteristics of the sample population, and socio-economic aspects of tourism in the study site. Likewise, it also endorsed some additional questions to find out the future possibility of tourism activities in the Taplejung and Phungling Municipality areas. This was conducted in the purposively selected three wards of the municipality out of the total eleven. The sample size for this was 120 in total which includes 60 at Taplejung bazar (wards 4 and 5), and remaining at the wards 10 and 11 having 30 HHs for each. A detailed questionnaire for the rapid questionnaire survey has been presented in Annex 1).

### 3.7.2 Stakeholder Consultation

During the time of field work, some sorts of stakeholder consultation/discussion with respondents was held. These kinds of consultations was conducted among the different stakeholders which largely followed the principles and strategies of Focused group discussions (FGDs). At the beginning, at least five mixed type of consultations had been planned on the different routes/ market centers on the way of Pathibhara from Phungling bazar. These places include Phungling bazar, Suketar (airport), Deurali, Sano Phedi(Kaflepati), Baludanda and Mathillofedi. However, as shown in Table 3.2, three consultations were conducted in the study site during the field visit, one in ward 4 and 5 jointly while another one with the stakeholders together from ward 10 and 11. It was due to very close proximate clustering area of wards 5 and 6 and wards 10 and 11. Another consultation was conducted at municipal region allowing a think tank table discussion allowing diverse sector of stakeholder participation in tourism development of Pathibhara temple.

**Table 3.2**

*Summary of Research Methods*

	Coverage	Nature of the group
Consultation-1:	Phungling Municipality (Wards: 4 and 5 joint)	Mixed (hotel business holders, grocery shop owners, vehicle owners and workers)
Consultation-2:	Phungling Municipality (wards: 10 and 11, Joint)	Mixed (hotel business holders, grocery shop owners)
Consultation-3:	Phungling Municipality (municipal level, covering the whole municipality)	Nature of group: Political representatives, policy makers and civil society

There were eight people in minimum and 12 in maximum. The representative sample for such consultations with the stakeholders include local traders and business owners; Hotel Association; Transportation service providers; Trade and business persons or groups; Travel and trekking service providers including trekking guides; Religious groups of Pathibhara; Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FNCCI), Taplejung; Pathibhara Area Development Committee, and Tourism specialists or entrepreneurs. A check list for the discussion was earlier prepared which allowed the

consultation to be systematic and specific (see Annex 2 for questionnaire and Annex 4 for the profile of each of the stakeholder consultation).

### **3.7.3 Key Informant Interview (KII)**

Unstructured interviews with the key informants was also conducted to get more information about the issues and prospects of tourism in Pathibhara. Indeed, interviews with different people was conducted in different corners based on the subject matter. Besides, the interview schedule (guide) was also in used in an open ended checklist format. It has facilitated to get the proper perspectives and experiences of the respondents on the pilgrimage tourism of Pathibhara. The sample of interview was not pre-determined as per the ward wise. Rather, it was theoretically defined, and continued till the data was saturated and repeated answer started to come. In total, sixteen KIIs were conducted during the primary data collection as specified below (see Annex 3 for interview guide and Annex 4 for the profile of each of the participants of KII):

- Mayor/ Deputy Mayor, Phungling Municipality -1 (employed with Mayor)
- CAO, Phungling Municipality-1
- Ward chairpersons-2 (employed with Ward chair-5 and 10)
- Ward secretaries-1 (employed from ward 4)
- ED of Pathibhara Xetra Bikas Samiti-1
- Chairperson of Shree Pathibhara Devi Mandir Xetra Samraxan Tatha Sambardhan Samiti-1
- Mulpujari (priest) of Pathibhara Temple
- Pathibhara Mukumlung Cable Car Company representative-1
- Representative of Transport wyawasayi sangh-1
- Representative of Uddhog Vanijya Sangah/ FNCCI-Taplejung-1
- Representative of Hotel Association, Taplejung-1
- Sawari (helper of visitors)-tirthayatri sahayogi-1
- Trade and business representatives-3

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

Indeed, analysis of data is quite tricky task than the collection. Following Flick (2013) and Humerman and Miles (2002), the researcher compiled and consolidated

relevant primary and secondary information/data required drawing findings and furnishing recommendation. The qualitative data from the field was analyzed with transcribing, encoding and generating the evidences/ categories for the analysis. Following Goertzen (2017), the quantitative data derived from institutional survey was endorsed for simple statistical measures of SPSS. Though the proposed study was quantitatively dominant (i.e. QUAN-Qual) in methodological nature, the data analysis was conducted sequential (Quan-led-qual) and not chronologically or concurrently. The analysis was thus integrated to form the analytical dimensions based upon the research objectives or chapter outlines. As suggested by many scholars this would be better used for data triangulation (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011). The researcher has employed a simple coding method of analysis for qualitative data in terms of themes and categories either to support or contrast (i.e. triangulate) the research findings derived from the quantitative assessment.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

Adoption of ethical issues has been highlighted as an unavoidable part of social science research (Emmerich, 2016). This study followed certain principles and work standards that could guide the research in ethical and professional ways. The researcher has followed a due commitment to maintain strictly an integrity of professionalism and confidentiality.

The principles of child protection and gender-responsive behavior and ‘Do No Harm’ were strictly followed. The researcher used a respectful language and positive worldview towards the local culture. It contributed to maintain him a good personal rapport with politeness and trust. Respect of personal dignity and mutual respect was another ethical standard. He was committed with further moral dedication to avoid plagiarism. Moreover, confidentiality (secrecy and anonymity) of the data was ensured which will be maintained in future days too. None of the personal information is/was/will be presented individually. They have been (and will be) used only for the purpose of this study.

## Chapter – IV

### Result and Discussion

This chapter explores key results and discussion on the basis of research findings. The chapter first presents sample characteristics in terms of socio-economic variable and then explains other tourism related issues subsequently on the basis of research objectives.

#### 4.1 Results on Objective I: Trends and Status

##### 4.1.1 Sample Characteristics

Although there are more males than females, the distribution is relatively balanced, with neither sex overwhelmingly dominating the sample. As the table 4.1 reveals, out of the total 120 respondents, 65 are male, making up 54.2 percent and on the other hand, there are total 55 female respondent constituting 45.8 percent.

**Table 4.1**

*Sex of the Respondents*

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Male	65	54.2
Female	55	45.8
Total	120	100.0

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

In terms of religion, the distribution of religions suggests a diverse cultural and religious landscape within the sample. As the Table 4.2 reflects, however, Hinduism is the predominant religion in this sample, representing just over half (51.7%) of the individuals. Kirat, with 29.2% of the sample, is a significant minority group. Buddhism is also notable, comprising 16.7% of the sample. Christianity and other religions are represented by very small portions of the sample, at 1.7% and 0.8% respectively.

**Table 4.2***Religious Faiths of the Respondents*

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Hinduism	62	51.7
Buddhism	20	16.7
Kirat	35	29.2
Christianity	2	1.7
Atheist	1	0.8
Total	120	100.0

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

Table 4.2 highlights the caste composition of the sample reflecting a diverse cultural composition with a significant representation of different caste/ ethnic groups. It indicates a predominance of Hill Janajati, with significant minorities of Hill Brahmins/Chhetri and Hill Dalits, and minimal representation of Tarai Caste Groups. Hill Janajati constitutes the majority in this sample, making up 59.2% of the individuals. This indicates that more than half of the sample belongs to this group who are dominantly Limbu, Rai and Gurung. Following this, Hill Brahmins/Chhetri are a significant minority, representing 29.2% of the sample. This is nearly one-third of the total population surveyed. Moreover, Hill Dalits account for 10.0% of the sample. The Tarai Caste Groups, including Janajati and Dalits, have minimal representation, with only 1.7% of the sample.

**Table 4.3***Caste/ Ethnicity of the Respondents*

<b>Caste/ ethnicity</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Hill Brahmins/Chhetri	35	29.2
Hill Janajati	71	59.2
Hill Dalit	12	10.0
Tarai Caste Groups (including Janajati and Dalits)	2	1.7
Total	120	100.0

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

Similarly, as the result indicates, the majority of the sample has attained Secondary level education (9-12), making up 41.7% of the sample. This indicates that nearly half of the individuals have completed up to the higher secondary level. A significant portion of the sample, 35.0%, has completed only up to the Basic level (1-8). This suggests that a large number of individuals have limited formal education. Not to utter, 14.2% of the sample has never attended school, highlighting a notable segment of the population without formal education. The presence of individuals who have never attended school suggests potential challenges in literacy and skill development for a segment of the population.

Following this, only a small percentage of the sample has attained higher education. College level (Bachelor) education is held by 6.7%, while those who have completed Masters and above make up only 2.5%. The low percentages of higher education degrees suggest limited access to or completion of higher education within the sample. Educational qualifications are closely tied to employment opportunities and economic prospects. The high percentage of individuals with only basic or no formal education might correlate with limited job opportunities and lower income levels.

**Table 4.4**

*Educational Qualification of the Respondents*

<b>Caste/ ethnicity</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Never attended school	17	14.2
Basic Level (1-8)	42	35.0
Secondary (9-12)	50	41.7
College Level (Bachelor	8	6.7
Completed Masters and Above	3	2.5
Total	120	100.0

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

Socio-cultural dimension of tourism development is unavoidable which is largely theorized within the discipline of 'sociology of tourism'. It includes religious values, faith systems, gender values, caste/ ethnic structures, language, food and dressing habits, culture of hospitality along with other local narratives of livelihood in

the destination. It further correlates the society and culture of place of origin with that of the place of destination. This is widely contributed research problem of study in tourism how do the cultural and social factors associate with the development of tourism (Apostolopoulos et al., 2013; Cohen & Cohen, 2019; Wood, 2018).

#### **4.1.2 Nature and Frequency of the Visit**

The result presented in Table 4.4 highlights the trends in tourist visits and revenue collection at Pathibhara over recent years. While there is no comprehensive database to track the names and addresses of visitors, efforts are underway to maintain records of the number of tourists and the revenue generated from them. According to data provided by the Pathibhara Xetra Bikash Samiti, the majority of visitors (84.2%) frequent Pathibhara regularly, indicating its popularity as a religious destination. Only 15.8% of visitors rarely visit, showing a relatively low proportion of infrequent tourists. The narrative reflection presented below is also illustrative in this regard:

Many people visit Pathibhara driven by their faith, deeply believing that their desires and vows will be fulfilled through the Darshan of Devi Mata. The number of visitors to Pathibhara has been steadily increasing each year during the normal seasons. Although the COVID-19 pandemic caused a temporary decline in travel, the area quickly rebounded with a significant influx of domestic tourists. Despite the existence of other temples, which are considered offshoots or smaller versions of Pathibhara—located in Ilam, Jhapa, Terhathum, and Lalitpur—Pathibhara remains a major draw, particularly the Mandir in Terhathum, which has gained considerable popularity. In fact, a single day this year (2080 BS) saw a record of 10,000 visitors to the sacred Pathibhara temple. Alongside its religious significance, Pathibhara attracts tourists with its natural landscape, captivating environment, views of the snow-capped Kanchenjunga Range, trekking routes, and rich biodiversity.

*(Based on personal conversation with Chairperson of Shree Pathibhara Devi Mandir Xetra Samraxan Tatha Sambardhan Samiti, Phungling Municipality, Date; 2080/8/7)*

The data illustrates a consistent increase in the number of tourists from 2076 to 2080, except for the absence of data in 2077, likely due to disruptions such as the

COVID-19 pandemic. Tourist numbers rose from 230,600 in 2076 to 356,005 in 2080. Correspondingly, revenue collection from visitors also increased steadily, with NPR 3,065,000 recorded in 2078, NPR 3,798,605 in 2079, and NPR 4,795,568 in 2080. This upward trend reflects the growing appeal of Pathibhara as a prominent pilgrimage site, attracting visitors from diverse backgrounds who hold religious faith in the deity.

**Table 4.5**

*Trend of Visiting Pathibhara and Revenue Collection by the Tourists\**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Tourists</b>	<b>Revenue in Cash (NPR)</b>
<b>2076</b>	230,600	NA
<b>2077</b>	NA	NA
<b>2078</b>	280,119	3,065,000
<b>2079</b>	310,408	3,798,605
<b>2080</b>	356,005	4,795,568

*Source: Pathibhara Xetra Bikash Samiti (\*estimation as per official record)*

Indeed, there a challenge of keeping actual record and data base of tourist arrival, their stay, expenses and motivations of the visit to Pathibhara. Every year, more than 300,000 devotees visit the Pathibhara Temple. It is customary to maintain records at Thulo Phedi. Currently, the Koshi Province Tourism Police have also started keeping records at Tallo Phedi, specifically at Kafle Pati. Pathibhara is not just a religious site but also holds significant importance from a tourism perspective. The initiation of record-keeping by the administration is a sign of improved management, which will help enhance the convenience and overall experience of the devotees.

The results of the study presented in Table 4.5 represents the classification of tourists into domestic and international categories. As per the data of Pathibhara Xetra Bikas Samiti, for the year 2080, the overwhelming majority of the respondents (98.3% out of 356005) are domestic (350,060), indicating that Pathibhara is primarily a destination for local visitors. A very small proportion (1.7%. i.e. 5,945) are international tourists, suggesting limited international recognition or accessibility. The data shows that Pathibhara predominantly attracts domestic tourists, with very few international visitors. In this context, the argument of Liro (2021) is relevant who has

analyzed motivations and behaviors at pilgrimage centers by using push-pull perspectives. Another remark is made by Reader (2007) who claimed that a destination of pilgrimage tourism is affected by different factors, including historical, economic and socio-psychological.

**Table 4.6**

*Types of Tourists Visiting Pathibhara\**

<b>Type of Tourists</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
International	2	1.7
Domestic	118	98.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100.0</b>

*Source: Pathibhara Xetra Bikas Samiti (\*estimation as per official record)*

Regarding a local perception of the types of tourists, it is evident that the community is ready to provide its best hospitality to any types of tourists who visit to Pathibhara. However, due to pilgrimage tourism dominantly exist in this area, Pathibhara is less common destination as like Pokhara and Chitwan. To reflect a perception of local stakeholder's representative:

Both domestic and international tourists visit Pathibhara, though the number of domestic tourists is overwhelmingly higher, with visitors coming from various regions of the country. Foreign tourists, particularly those from Western countries, are rarely seen, and those who do visit usually come for trekking in the high-altitude areas. Their Christian faith may also play a role in discouraging visits to this Hindu pilgrimage site. However, many visitors from India, who share Hindu beliefs, are more commonly seen, along with a smaller number of tourists from Malaysia. *(Based on a personal conversation with Mahendra Bista, Ward-11, Phungling Municipality, Date: 2080/8/3).*

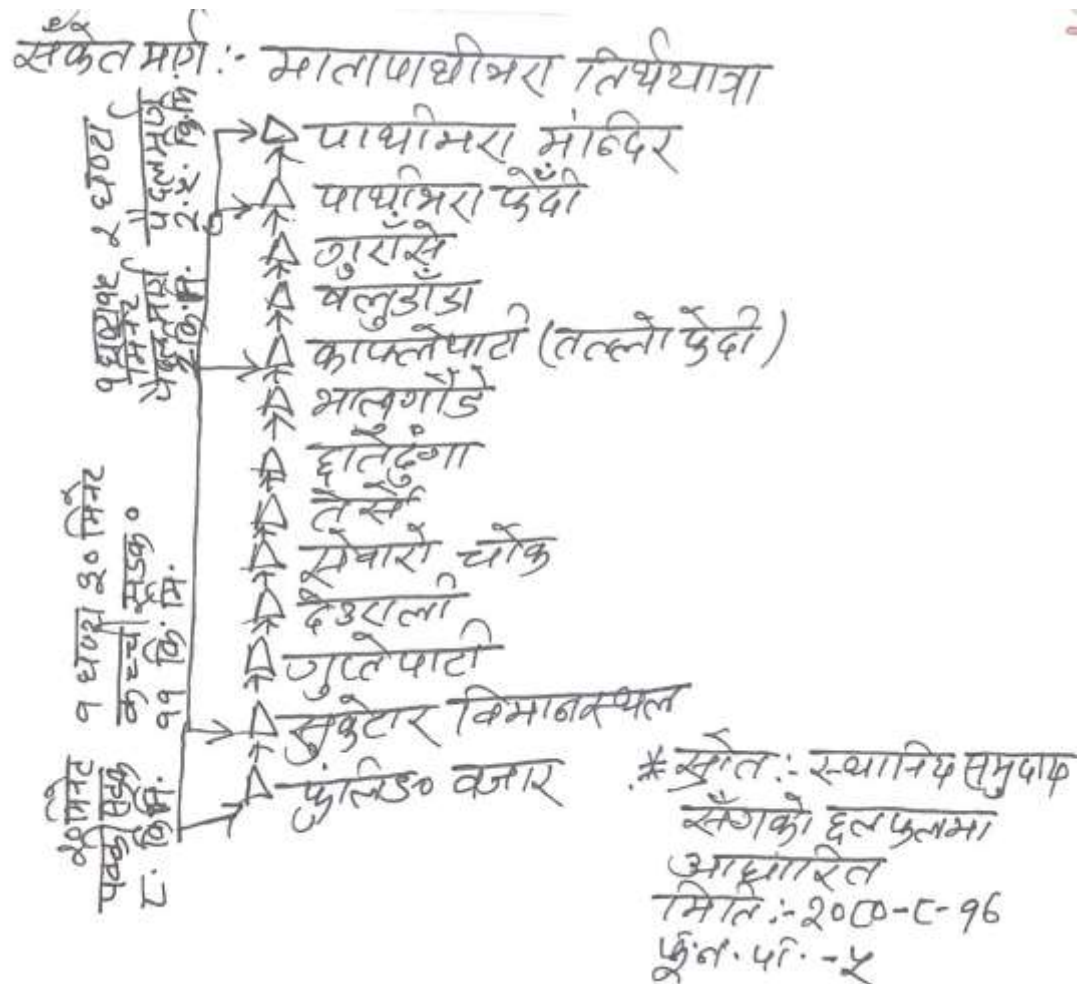
As the reflection from KII with local respondents reveal, the majority of the tourists visit Pathibhara throughout the year, suggesting that the destination has a consistent flow of tourists regardless of the season. Following this, only few numbers of tourists visit Pathibhara during specific seasons, indicating that there are certain times of the year when tourist activity is higher. It suggests that Pathibhara attracts tourists consistently throughout the year, with a higher frequency of visitors not

restricted to specific seasons. This might be due to unconditional popularity of the Temple. Some of the representative pictures also reveal how the region is deserving for tourism (See Annex – 5).

Despite the rough and difficult topography, the Pathibhara can be accessed by diverse modes of visiting. By road, one can reach Phungling, Taplejung by accessing three ways. They include Mechi Highway, Tamor Corridor, and Madan Bhandari Lokmarg. According to local practices and personal experience of this researcher, one can reach the Pathibhara Temple in following ways:

- By air route (aero plane to Suketar Airport and again travelling by vehicle and then again on foot)
- By helicopter directly either to Suketar Airport or to the base of the Pathibhara Temple
- By walking and trekking (complete walking from Phungling to Pathibhara, though it is a lengthy and time-consuming)
- Travelling by vehicle up to Tallo Phedi and again by trekking on foot
- By using sawari of porter, often called ‘tirthayatri sahayogi’ (seating over the supportive head, shoulder or in a doko)

Among the many routes to Pathibhara Mata, the local people of Phungling often emphasize that the best way to reach the temple is through deep devotion to the Goddess. This devotion serves as a powerful driving force, inspiring travelers to make the journey for Darshan, regardless of their origin, caste, gender, age, or name. Although the path from Phungling Bazaar to the Pathibhara temple is not the shortest, visitors must traverse several small areas with residential settlements, including Deurali, Sewaro, Kafelpati, Talli Phedi, Mathillo Phedi, Tesre, Chate Dhunga, Bhalugaude, and more. This route was graphically described during a stakeholder consultation held jointly in wards 10 and 11 on 2080/8/13.



Local residents along the trail provide food and lodging services. In addition to this, basic accommodations are available for pilgrims close to the temple grounds. However, the temple resides in high altitude difficult terrain and all times are not suitable to visit it. Local and domestic tourists can adapt the situation to some extent, though the international tourists and domestic tourists from lowland areas frequently face many problems. The ideal times to visit the temple are during the pre-monsoon period (March to June) and the post-monsoon period (September to November). This is also supported by the narratives of local people. They perceive that there is no single day they witnessed without seeing the visitors to the Temple, given exception to adverse climate. To reflect one of the representative experience:

The Pathibhara Mata Temple is a sacred site that many feel compelled to visit. However, it's not accessible year-round due to various challenges. Located at an altitude of approximately 3,800 meters above sea level, visitors may encounter difficulties such as oxygen shortages, limited medical care, and

transportation issues. While the temple is open during certain seasons, visitor numbers are typically low during the monsoon months of Ashar and Shrawan. The pilgrimage season gains momentum starting with the Dashain festival, particularly during the worship of Nava Durga. The best time for sightseeing and enjoying the snow is during Mansir, Poush, and Magh. However, these scenic experiences are increasingly affected by climate change. Additionally, the unpredictable weather conditions at high altitudes can quickly change, potentially leading to adverse situations. *(Based on personal conversation with ED of Pathibhara Xetra Wikas Samiti, Date; 2080/8/15)*

## **4.2 Results on Objective II: Income and Employment Generation**

Economic dimension of tourism development is fundamental. It includes marketing, employment, income, along with other small-scale activities of livelihood in the destination. It further links with the economic viability of both the place of origin and place of destination. Taking this unavoidable context, contemporary research in tourism also establishes the notion of ‘economics of tourism’. This is widely contributed area of study in tourism (Bianchi, 2018; Song et al., 2012; Vanhove, 2022). With this background, some of the empirical findings related to this economic attributes of tourism in Pathibhara have been presented in the sections below.

### **4.2.1 Main Market Area**

Tourism marketing is one of critical dimensions of tourism service and product. It has been an unavoidable component (Font & McCabe, 2019; Vinzenz et al., 2019). A tourism destination cannot survive as a marketing hub. In tourism, marketing does not only incorporate the economic site where business and trade are done, but it is the place where the people are frequently meet, visit and travel for different purpose. In this study, the respondents were inquired about main market area of tourism in Pathibhara. Most of them identified Phungling as the main market area for tourism in Pathibhara. The findings suggest Phungling market area is a commercial center for tourists in Pathibhara. It might be due to the cause that Phungling is the entry point of this pilgrimage destination. It is also the district headquarter and major market area for the surrounding hinterlands. There are number

of hotels and accommodation facilities in the main market area of Phungling that could help promote the tourism in Pathibhara. Phungling bazar surrounds with Tallo Phedi and Suketar. which are also associated with the marketing of tourism.

On the same ground, the respondents of the study were also worried about addressing identified challenges such as political-administrative issues, environmental concerns, and unplanned development is crucial. Effective management and resolution of these issues will likely support to develop Phungling as a hub of market by creating a more sustainable and attractive tourism environment. According to the local narratives, Phungling bazaar is the entry point of the journey for Pathibhara and again it becomes the resting destination. It serves as the primary hub for tourism in the Pathibhara region. Visitors often stay in hotels here, enjoy recreational activities, and plan visits to other nearby attractions. Those returning from the Pathibhara Temple can purchase a variety of gifts and local products in Phungling, such as churpi, alainchi (cardamom), honey, akbare khursani (hot chili), allo (nettle fiber), Dhaka topi, turmeric, and other indigenous goods. Puja samagri, including flowers, incense, holy water, and oil lamps, can be bought at small shops in the upper areas near the Pathibhara Temple, such as Tallo Phedi and Mathillo Phedi. After visiting the temple, visitors typically follow the same route back to Phungling Bazaar.

Pathibhara holds immense religious importance as a revered pilgrimage site, attracting thousands of devotees seeking blessings and fulfillment of their vows. Alongside its spiritual significance, the temple offers a breathtaking panoramic view of the majestic Himalayas, lush green valleys, and surrounding landscapes, making it a perfect blend of natural beauty and cultural appeal. This growing allure has also led to an increase in film shootings and music video productions in the area, further establishing Pathibhara as a scenic destination. Such activities should contribute to the local economy by requiring filmmakers to pay fees to the local authorities, ensuring that the revenue supports conservation and community development initiatives.

#### **4.2.2 Employment Status**

Tourism research has extensive scholarship in employment issues. The example of scientific studies can be referred to few as, the process of tourism sustainability through employment opportunities (Burns, 2024), role of economic

growth and employment opportunities (Manzoor et al., 2019) and nexus of challenges and opportunities of tourism for employment (Tosun et al, 2023). Regarding this particular study context, Table 4.7 reflects information on the employments status of respondents (i.e. local residents) during last year. A small proportion (8.4%) of the respondents were not employed in any sector during the last year. This group might include students, retirees, or others not actively engaged in tourism. The vast majority (89.2%) of the people were employed in the tourism sector, indicating a strong connection between their employment and the tourism activities in Pathibhara. This suggests that the host community at the study site may have a professional interest in tourism or are directly involved in this industry. However, a very small proportion (2.5%) were employed in sectors other than tourism, might be in agriculture and service. This indicates that the host community's engagement in non-tourism sectors is rare.

**Table 4.7**

*Employment Status of Local Residents during Last 1 Year*

<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Not Employed in any Sector	10	8.4
Employed in Tourism Sector	107	89.2
Employed in Other than Tourism	3	2.5
Total	120	100.0

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

The data suggests a strong dominance of individuals employed in the tourism sector among the local host community to Pathibhara. This could imply that Pathibhara is a significant location for those working within the tourism industry, either as a site of professional interest or as a common destination for those working in this field. At a closer, micro-level observation, it becomes evident that small grocery shops, traders of puja samagris, and human carriers (locally known as *sawari* or *tirtha-yatri sahayogi*) are among the most benefited from tourism in the upper areas of Pathibhara. In contrast, in lower areas such as Phungling Bazaar, the hotel and transport businesses are the primary beneficiaries. However, the experiences and challenges faced by the *sawari* are rarely documented or acknowledged outside the

local community, highlighting the need for an in-depth anthropological study. One *sawari* shared his perspective:

There are around 400 *sawari* people like us, though the Samiti has registered approximately 600 *sawaris*. We become more active and earn more during the peak pilgrimage season to Pathibhara. We charge Rs 200 per kilogram for carrying people and their goods from Uppallo Phedi to the Pathibhara temple. On a good day, a *sawari* can earn up to Rs 5,000-7,000. This income is crucial for our livelihood. However, no one considers our health issues. We don't have any insurance coverage, and some visitors treat us poorly, like slaves or mere porters. Unfortunately, the municipality and the Samiti ignore our concerns. *(Based on personal conversation with Sawari/ tirthayatri sahayogi, Pathibahra, Phungling, Date; 2080/8/5)*

#### **4.2.3 Impact on the Employment Opportunities and Income**

The perception analysis of 120 respondents, as presented in Table 4.8, highlights the impact of tourism activities on employment and household income in Pathibhara. A significant majority (88.3%) of respondents reported an increase in employment opportunities due to tourism activities. Only 4.2% experienced a reduction, while 7.5% observed no change in employment conditions. This could be due to various factors such as displacement or seasonal employment issues. The data suggests a predominantly positive perception of the impact of tourism on local employment opportunities, with the majority of respondents acknowledging an increase in job availability.

Similarly, when asked about household income, 81.7% of respondents indicated an increase, reflecting tourism's role in boosting local economic conditions. However, 3.3% reported a reduction, and 15% stated they observed no change in their household income. There are many studies about the income opportunities due to tourism related activities in the destination (Raza & Shah, 2017; Rudež, 2018). The respondents when inquired about household income of people portray positive perception regarding change in household income. Overall, the data indicates that tourism is perceived to have a predominantly positive effect on household income among local people, with the majority experiencing an increase in income.

**Table 4.8**

*Perceptions of Respondents Regarding Growth in Employment and Income due to Tourism*

<b>Local Perception about</b>	Increased (%)	Reduced (%)	No Changes Observed (%)	Total (%)
Employment	88.3	4.2	7.5	100.0
Household Income	81.7	3.3	15.0	100.0

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

This cross-tabulation underscores the positive role of tourism in Pathibhara. The high percentage of respondents acknowledging an increase in both employment and household income reflects tourism's contribution to local livelihoods. However, the minority reporting no changes or reductions in income and employment suggests room for improvement in the equitable distribution of tourism benefits. Future strategies should focus on addressing these disparities to ensure inclusive economic growth driven by tourism activities. This kind of quantitative assessment is further triangulated with the narrative reflection during the stakeholder consultations. The participants did not reflect contrasting viewpoints. Rather, they shared an optimistic worldview regarding the economic activities and employment generation of this region due to tourism in Pathibhara. One of the percept of stakeholder consultation is presented as below:

Phungling, the district headquarters of Taplejung, boasts various economic activities and development infrastructures, including road networks, hydroelectric projects, and rich biodiversity. However, the region is primarily known for its pilgrimage site, most notably represented by the Pathibhara Mata Temple. This spiritual significance draws many visitors from across the country and beyond, creating a demand for tourism-related goods, services, and marketing, which in turn has contributed to employment generation. Tourism has boosted economic activities, particularly in trade and commerce, benefiting local businesses in the hotel and transportation sectors. Despite these economic gains, community participation remains limited, with economic activities largely concentrated in the market areas of wards four and five, while the more remote and sparsely populated wards ten and eleven see

much less economic development. (*Based on group conversation during stakeholder consultation-1, Phungling Municipality, employed jointly for wards 4 and 5, Date; 2080/8/17*)

The study further employs an information about the presence and development of income-generating tourism projects in the locality. The result is presented in Table 4.9. Out of the total 120 sample respondents, a significant majority (63.3%) of respondents report the presence of income-generating tourism projects in their locality. This indicates that many areas have already established tourism projects that contribute to the local economy. Following this, a notable proportion (24.2%) indicate that tourism projects are currently being developed in their locality. This shows ongoing investment and growth in the tourism sector, with new projects potentially enhancing future economic benefits. However, a small proportion (12.5%) report that their locality does not yet have income-generating tourism projects. This suggests that there are still areas where tourism development has not taken place.

**Table 4.9**

*Availability of Income Generating Tourism Projects in Locality*

<b>Local Perception about</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes (having)	76	63.3
No (not having yet)	15	12.5
Being Developed	29	24.2
Total	120	100.0

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

The data suggests that a majority of localities have income-generating tourism projects, and there is ongoing development in a significant number of areas, reflecting a dynamic and expanding tourism sector. Given that 81.7% of respondents report increased household income and 88.3% perceive increased employment opportunities, the presence and development of tourism projects likely play a crucial role in these positive economic outcomes. Since 98.3% of tourists are domestic, the development of income-generating projects is likely tailored to cater to the needs and preferences of domestic tourists, further driving local economic growth.

#### 4.2.4 Motivation for Investment in Tourism Sector for Host Community

Motivation is crucial part for the sustainability of tourism which is also unavoidable for investment. However, international level investment and large-scale funding is more discussed in tourism studies while the local context is less explored (Shayakhmetova et al., 2020). The Table 4.10 provides information on the encouragement for locals to work and invest in tourism. A significant proportion (62.5%) of respondents feel encouraged to work and invest in tourism. The host community wants to engage in tourism sector in long-term basis. This indicates a positive sentiment towards the tourism sector among a substantial part of the local population. However, a considerable proportion (37.5%) of respondents report that there is no encouragement for them to work or invest in tourism. This highlights a gap where further support and incentives might be needed.

**Table 4.10**

*Encouragement for Local to Work and Invest in Tourism Sector*

<b>Perceptions</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes (Encouraged)	75	62.5
No any Encouragement	45	37.5
Total	120	100.0

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

The data shows a mixed perception regarding encouragement for locals to engage in tourism. While a significant number feel encouraged, there is also a notable proportion who do not feel supported, and some who do not find it relevant. While making comparison with the previous statistics (Figure 4.4), given that 63.3% report having income-generating tourism projects and 24.2% report projects being developed, the encouragement to invest and work in tourism should ideally be higher. The 37.5% reporting no encouragement suggests a need for better promotion and support mechanisms. It could have economic impact too. Since 81.7% report increased household income due to tourism, and 88.3% perceive increased employment opportunities (Table 4.10), more targeted encouragement could further enhance local economic benefits.

The discouragement for local people to engage in tourism-related work in Pathibhara may be attributed to several underlying factors. One significant reason is the migration trend, where individuals from Taplejung increasingly relocate to Kathmandu, the Tarai region, or seek foreign employment opportunities. This migration is often driven by the perception of better economic prospects and improved living conditions outside the region.

Another contributing factor is the relatively low income generated from domestic tourism activities. While tourism in Pathibhara attracts a significant number of visitors, the revenue and employment opportunities it generates may not be sufficient to provide sustainable livelihoods for local residents. This income disparity further motivates individuals to explore alternative sources of income outside the local tourism industry, thereby reducing community engagement and investment in tourism development. Addressing these issues will require strategic efforts to enhance local tourism's economic viability and create more inclusive opportunities for residents.

However, there is another perspective of not having the encouragement for small-scale investors and entrepreneurs. To them, the encouragement and motivation for high level investors and property holders is good, but this is not equally applicable to the general public. To reflect the viewpoint of a respondent:

Tourism-related activities have generated considerable enthusiasm among the people of Taplejung, contributing to the district's distinct identity. However, participation in economic activities often requires substantial cash investment, which remains limited due to widespread poverty. While small grocery shops and hotels are prevalent, the establishment of larger hotels and services requires significant capital. These larger enterprises can offer attractive packages and substantial discounts, making it challenging for smaller businesses to compete. In this regard, a further concern in Pathibhara is the presence of a syndicate controlled by powerful individuals and investors in the transportation sector. This monopolistic control undermines the economic welfare and sustainable livelihoods of poorer individuals, as it restricts their ability to participate equitably in the benefits generated by the tourism

industry. *(Based on personal conversation with ward chairperson, Phungling Municipality-5, Date; 2080/8/5)*

### **4.3 Results on Objective III: Promotional Activities in Tourism**

Promotional activities in tourism activities are not considered as prerequisite but as supportive essentials. They largely include advertisement, training and workshops, tourism awareness, promotional campaigns, travel subsidies and attractive packages, and other things depending upon the nature of particular destination. Entrepreneurship activities, collective performance and group works for tourism development are much consulted issues in tourism studies (Ateljevic & Page, 2017; Kallmuenzer et al., 2019). Some of the empirical findings regarding this have been detailed in the sections below:

#### **4.3.1 Entrepreneurial Training Activities**

The study has employed an inquiry about whether there were entrepreneurial training activities among locals or not. As presented in Table 4.11, when asked if there are any entrepreneurial training activities among the local people, a minority (25.8%) of respondents report having received entrepreneurial training activities. This suggests that there is room for expansion in providing skills and knowledge related to entrepreneurship in the tourism sector. However, a majority (74.2%) of respondents have not received such training. It might be due to the perception that goods and services for domestic tourists and low-spending visitors do not require high skill training and hospitality in Pathibhara. Another cause is the lack of professional stakeholders and quality service providers, including hotels and travel agencies. This indicates a potential gap in preparing locals for entrepreneurial opportunities within the tourism industry.

Therefore, the data highlights a need for increased focus on providing entrepreneurial training to locals, which could potentially enhance their engagement and effectiveness in the tourism sector. Given that 40.8% feel encouraged to work and invest in tourism, and only 25.8% have received entrepreneurial training, there is an opportunity to align encouragement efforts with training initiatives to empower more locals to participate in the tourism economy. Similarly, training could complement the

development and presence of income-generating tourism projects (63.3% having projects), ensuring that locals are equipped with the necessary skills to capitalize on these opportunities (as was evident in Table 4.11).

**Table 4.11**

*Entrepreneurial Training Activities for the Host Community*

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Received	31	25.8
Not received	89	74.2
Total	120	100.0

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

### 4.3.2 Participation in Tourism Events

The information about the participation of local respondents in tourism related events (such as seminar, programs, *Jatra*, *Parba* and workshops) during last one year is presented in Table 4.12. About 31.6% of the respondents have participated in seminar programs, *Jatra Parba*, or workshops related to tourism. This suggests an active interest or involvement in educational or cultural activities related to tourism. On the other hand, the majority (68.4%) of visitors have not participated in such programs, indicating either a lack of awareness, interest, or opportunity to engage in these activities. Overall, the data indicates a moderate level of participation in tourism-related educational and cultural activities among the visitors to Pathibhara. This participation could potentially contribute to their understanding and engagement with tourism in the region.

**Table 4.12**

*Participation in Tourism Events*

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Got the opportunity for participation	38	31.6
No opportunity for participation	82	68.4
Total	120	100.0

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

The data can be further compared with other statistical attributes. While the tourism activities in Pathibhara are frequent in some exceptions of adverse winter seasons, not significant portion of local people have participated in tourism-related seminars or workshops. It might be due to two reasons: first, there are limited opportunities for jattras and parbs for host community involvement, as cultural and religious celebrations are fixed and predetermined. Another reason might be that people tend to participate in such programs only when immediate benefits are apparent. Together, this indicates that the culture of tourism is yet to be institutionalized in Pathibhara, unlike in places like Patan (Lalitpur) and Thamel (Kathmandu), where host communities have embraced tourism practices more effectively.

#### **4.3.3 Benefit Sharing of Tourism in Study Area**

Benefit sharing is the measure of sustainable tourism. Literature review suggest that some critical elements play crucial role in this regard, for example: how the local people and stakeholders are being benefitted, what about the gaps of perceived benefits and actual benefits, and whether there is transparent process of benefit sharing or not. Collaborative work, good governance and community participations are important factors for benefit sharing (Dredge & Gyimóthy, 2015; Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2016). The equity-based participatory sharing is the fundamental strategy for benefits sharing. The result and analysis below highlight the key findings related to benefit sharing in tourism of Pathibhara.

Table 4.13 provides information on the perceived benefits of tourism to local people. The respondents were asked to choose best three out of five options, where it was found majority (30.91 percent) believe tourism helps build local economy and create job opportunities for the local people, suggesting a strong economic benefit perceived by the community.

**Table 4.13***Perceptions about the Benefits of Tourism to Local People*

<b>Perceived Benefits</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Develops local community sentiment	7	5.76
Helps to promote cultural exchange	32	26.67
Builds local economy and creates job opportunities for the people	37	30.91
Preserves the local heritages	13	10.91
Increases the local people's awareness	31	25.76
Total	120	100.00

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

A notable percentage (26.67%) believe tourism helps promote cultural exchange, highlighting the interaction between visitors and local cultures. Almost equally, 25.76 perceive that tourism increases local awareness, potentially about environmental, cultural, or social issues. Around 12% recognize tourism's role in preserving local heritages, emphasizing the importance of tourism in heritage conservation efforts. To the least proportion, only 6% respondents believe that tourism helps to develop local community sentiment, indicating a sense of belonging or pride among locals due to tourism activities. As an inference, the local people believe there are multifaceted benefits of tourism to local people, including cultural exchange, economic growth, heritage preservation, community sentiment, and awareness.

The table 4.14 presents the distribution of tourism-related benefits to the local community, based on the responses from 120 individuals. A significant portion of respondents (32.5%) believe that the benefits of tourism are properly distributed for all, indicating a positive perception of the equitable distribution of tourism-related gains. However, 25% of respondents view the benefits as only reaching big hotels and the transport sector, suggesting that a notable portion of the community feels excluded from the benefits. Additionally, 15.8% perceive the benefits as being elite-centric and politically biased, while 13.3% each feel that the benefits are not distributed at all or are restricted to small traders, small hoteliers, and *Sawaris*. These findings suggest

mixed perceptions about the distribution of tourism benefits, with a clear divide between those who see it as equitable and those who feel left out or disadvantaged.

**Table 4.14**

*Perception about the Distribution of Benefits Related to Tourism to Local Community*

<b>Perceptions</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
It is properly distributed for all	39	32.5
Not distributed at all	16	13.3
Elite centric and political bias benefits	19	15.8
Benefits only for big hotels and transport sector	30	25.0
Benefits only for small traders, small hoteliers and <i>sawaris</i>	16	13.3
Total	120	100.0

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

The mean value for the distribution of benefits to the local community is 3.5. This means that, on average, the benefits are seen as moderately well-distributed, likely in the middle of the scale between properly distributed and benefits only for small traders. This result is further illustrated in the local people's sharing during the stakeholder consultation. It informs that the benefits should be decentralized and ensured to the local community including poor and disadvantaged section of the society. To reflect:

The benefits of tourism in the Pathibhara region are indeed multifaceted. The entire district of Taplejung, along with its surrounding areas, has gained recognition and benefits from the presence of the Pathibhara Temple. The district might not have achieved such prominence without this sacred site. Notable advantages include increased economic activities, improvements in drinking water infrastructure, the expansion of road networks, and investments in hydroelectric projects. However, the involvement of local people in reaping the benefits from these projects remains minimal, potentially impacting equitable benefit distribution. While wealthy individuals and large investors are poised to gain long-term benefits, poorer residents receive only a small share of the advantages, highlighting the need for more inclusive benefit-

sharing mechanisms. *(Based on personal conversation with Ward Secretary, Phungling Municipality-4, Date; 2080/8/13)*

The result indicates a mixed perception regarding the distribution of benefits related to tourism within the local community. While a notable percentage feel that benefits are properly distributed, a significant proportion also express uncertainty or skepticism about the distribution. It suggests a significant lack of awareness or uncertainty among respondents regarding how tourism benefits are distributed within their local community. Critical issues for proper benefit sharing in tourism involve several key factors that need to be addressed for sustainable and equitable growth.

First, quality services are essential, as without well-trained local service providers, tourism may not generate significant value for the community. Income opportunities should be diversified to include not just big hotels and transport sectors, but also small businesses, local artisans, and service providers. Additionally, infrastructure development is crucial, particularly in remote areas, to ensure accessibility and enhance the overall tourist experience. The active participation of the host community in tourism planning and decision-making processes is vital for inclusive growth. Tourism awareness programs are needed to educate local residents on the long-term benefits of tourism and how to capitalize on opportunities. Moreover, implementing tourism-friendly policies and ensuring good governance are fundamental to creating a supportive environment that encourages responsible tourism while addressing the needs of the local population. Effective management of these aspects will contribute to a more balanced and fair distribution of tourism benefits.

#### **4.3.4 Service Providers and Infrastructures in Pathibhara**

Goods and services and infrastructure development are considered as a prerequisite of tourism promotion in a destination. Many empirical studies have been done in this regard. For example, Mandić et al. (2018) argue that tourism infrastructure, recreational facilities and tourism development are unavoidable; Giampiccoli and Saayman (2017) maintain that the relationship of community-based tourism, responsible tourism, and infrastructure development for poverty reduction is pivotal, and Kanwal et al. (2020) urge that road and transport infrastructure development and community support for tourism are important to assess the role of perceived benefits, and community satisfaction. The section below will deal about the

empirical evidences and results that the study in tourism of Pathibhara delve about the infrastructure development.

This table 4.15 categorizes the various tourism service providers along with their respective numbers. The data indicates that small hotels dominate the tourism service sector, with 55 establishments, suggesting that they play a pivotal role in accommodating tourists. This could be due to the affordability and accessibility of small hotels, which may cater to a broad range of visitors. On the other hand, there are only 4 big or star hotels, which highlights a gap in the luxury accommodation market in the area. The lack of high-end accommodations may limit the appeal of Pathibhara to upscale tourists, presenting an opportunity for future development in the luxury hotel sector. The presence of 3 transportation companies and 5 travel agencies indicates that there is some infrastructure to support the tourism logistics; however, these numbers suggest that more services could be required to meet the demands of a growing tourist population.

**Table 4.15**

*Major Tourism Service Providers in Pathibhara*

<b>Tourism Service Provider</b>	<b>Number</b>
<b>Small Hotels</b>	55
Big/Star Hotels	4
Transportation Companies	3
Travel Agencies	5
Information Center	2
Recreation Services	0
Trekking Agencies	3

*Source: Phungling Municipality, 2024*

Additionally, the region seems to have limited facilities for tourist information and recreation. With only 2 information centers and no dedicated recreation services, this could hinder the overall tourist experience and limit the development of the area as a well-rounded tourist destination. While there are 3 trekking agencies, which shows some capacity for catering to adventure tourism, the lack of other leisure activities could restrict the diversity of experiences available to visitors. Overall, the

data points to a reliance on basic accommodation and services, with significant room for improvement in infrastructure, recreational offerings, and higher-end accommodations, which could enhance the region's attractiveness as a tourism destination.

In this study context, table 4.16 outlines the perceptions of local community about the need of major infrastructures and services in the Pathibhara area that would contribute to tourism promotion. The majority of respondents (45.8%) identify hotels and lodges as the most significant needed infrastructure for tourism promotion. This underscores the critical role of accommodation facilities in attracting and retaining tourists in the region. Following this, 25.8% of respondents perceive the need of travel and transport services, including vehicles and trekking paths, as crucial. This encompasses the availability and quality of vehicles for tourist movement and well-maintained trekking routes, both essential for convenient and enjoyable travel experiences.

**Table 4.16**

*Perceptions about Major Infrastructures/ Services Needed in the Pathibhara*

<b>Perceived needs</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Need of quality hotel and lodges (accommodation)	55	45.8
Need of travel and transport (vehicles and treks)	31	25.8
Need of professional human carrying service	8	6.7
Need of cable car service (being made)	26	21.7
Total	120	100.00

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

Similarly, the ongoing construction of a cable car service is seen as an immediate need by 21.7% of respondents as a significant future asset for tourism. Once completed, this infrastructure can greatly enhance accessibility and attract more visitors by offering a unique and convenient travel option. However, the construction of cable car is a debated and contested idea and some of the formalities are still to be commenced out. Fourth, a smaller portion (6.7%) of respondents mention human carrying services are also needed but in professional format. This traditional mode of

transportation can be important in areas where modern transport is not feasible, particularly in rugged terrains.

To sum, the data indicates that accommodation facilities (hotels and lodges) are considered the most crucial infrastructure for promoting tourism in the Pathibhara area. This is followed by travel and transport services (vehicles and treks), the prospective cable car service, and human carrying services. Indeed, the importance of infrastructure aligns with the factors identified for boosting tourism, such as involving local people and promoting local stakeholders. Improving and expanding these infrastructures can support overall tourism growth. Another issue here is the market expansion. Enhancing these infrastructures can also facilitate market expansion by making the region more attractive and accessible to a broader range of tourists. Yet, as shared in a group conversation during stakeholder consultation-2, Phungling Municipality, jointly conducted for wards 10 and 11 in 2080/8/13), there are different issues and challenges in this regard. For example:

***Issue 1:*** In the Pathibhara region, the construction of vehicle roads and trekking routes is ongoing, but the work is often poorly executed due to contractor negligence and potential collusion with government bodies. Similarly, electricity supply issues persist, exacerbated by natural geographical challenges and adverse climatic conditions such as thunderstorms.

***Issue-2:*** Drinking water management also presents significant challenges. Problems with water pipe airlifting are compounded by unreliable electricity, while issues with water management and distribution further complicate the situation. Health infrastructure is inadequate, particularly in the upper ranges of Pathibhara, where no private health posts are available. The high altitude poses health risks, making the establishment of a well-equipped health desk and medical team near the temple an urgent need.

***Issue-3:*** There are no formal financial institutions such as banks in Tallo Phedi, Mathillo Phedi, or the vicinity of the temple. Institutionalizing financial services in these areas is essential to support visitors and local economic activities.

In the context of accommodation facilities in Phungling, the study reveals a rather pessimistic situation. While establishing a high-quality hotel in Pathibhara is feasible and could enhance accommodation standards, this remains a largely untapped opportunity. To reflect more in the words of research participant:

Specifically, Phungling, the district headquarters of Taplejung, lacks any hotels rated three stars or above. Furthermore, the availability of even small hotels in the Pathibhara region is limited. The region is deficient in high-quality, professional hotels that can cater to international tourists. Existing hotels are generally expensive and not affordable for domestic tourists, who often opt for smaller, budget accommodations or stay with relatives due to financial constraints, short visit durations, and limited options. Consequently, the average length of stay and expenditure for domestic visitors is relatively low. Investors are reluctant to invest in establishing star-rated hotels due to the associated risks. Currently, there is only one medium-scale resort operational in the area. Additionally, hotel owners and entrepreneurs are not unified, and the Hotel Association of Taplejung has not effectively addressed strategies to attract a broader range of visitors. *(Based on a personal conversation with the Chairperson of the Hotel Association, Taplejung, Date: 2080/8/9).*

Given the identified key infrastructures such as hotels, transport services, trekking paths, human carrying services, and the upcoming cable car service, the positive majority suggests that these are effectively contributing to tourism promotion. However, the concerns raised by the minority suggest that continuous development and improvement are necessary. There are yet some potential areas of improvement. For the 39.2% who see insufficiency, potential areas of improvement could include upgrading existing facilities, expanding accommodations, improving road and trek maintenance, enhancing transport services, and ensuring the completion and operation of the cable car service.

Local stakeholders are somewhat discouraged and fatigued by the current investment environment, as projects are frequently delayed and contested. Responsibility for these delays is often unclear, with both contractors and the local government—specifically Phungling Municipality—falling short in addressing the issues independently. Additionally, party politics and internal group dynamics further

complicate the situation, although these factors are difficult to predict and manage. To share further:

Taplejung is home to approximately 30 major projects, primarily focused on hydroelectric power and road construction. Key energy projects include the Mewakhola Hydro Project, Mewa Hydro Project, Gunsa Khola Hydro, Sanima Middle Tamor Hydropower, UPPER Tamor Hydropower, Kabheli Khola Hydro, Remit Hydro, and so on. Another significant initiative is the Tamor Corridor Road, which aims to connect Indian border Jogbani to the Chinese territory of Olangchung Gola via the border at Tiptala Bhanjyang. These projects are expected to have substantial impacts. However, local support for these projects is challenging to secure, and issues such as project contamination and delays persist. Similar difficulties are evident in the proposed cable car construction in Pathibhara. Overall, the investment climate is not conducive to attracting private sector involvement, hindering the development of these high-impact projects. *(Based on group conversation during stakeholder consultation-3, Phungling Municipality, employed jointly for the duty bearers, leaders, experts, and tourism entrepreneurs Date; 2080/8/14)*

#### **4.3.5 Contested Issue of New Cable Car Construction**

The cable car is considered one of the mega projects in Taplejung which can catalyze the tourism of Pathibhara. However, there have been disputes concerning the cable car project in Pathibhara, primarily concerning its name and construction. Issues have arisen regarding the naming of the cable car, with disagreements among stakeholders about its branding and significance. Some local communities are protesting against the cable car project, saying "No Cable Car.". Additionally, construction delays and local opposition have been notable, often linked to broader concerns about environmental impact, project management, and community involvement. These disputes reflect broader challenges in project implementation, including the need for better coordination among stakeholders and addressing local concerns to ensure successful development and operation.

The table 4.17 shows respondents' awareness of the recent development of a cable car in the Pathibhara area. The majority of the respondents (63.3%) reported receiving well information and consultation about the recent developments of the cable car. This indicates that information dissemination efforts have been effective for the majority. Following this, a significant portion (32.5%) of respondents felt they did not receive proper information, suggesting there are gaps in how information is being communicated. However, only a small percentage (4.2%) reported not receiving any information, which is relatively low but still noteworthy. This indicates there is a small group that is entirely out of the information loop.

**Table 4.17**

*Information about Recent Development of Cable Car*

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Well information and consultation	76	63.3
No proper information	39	32.5
Not any information	5	4.2
Total	120	100.0

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

The data suggests that although most respondents are well-informed about the recent cable car developments, a significant minority feel they lack adequate information. To address this information gap, it is important to enhance communication efforts to ensure all stakeholders are fully informed. This may involve refining consultation processes and employing a variety of communication channels to effectively reach all respondents. As assured by the company owner of the cable car:

The company aims to consult with local residents; however, their opinions are fragmented, and there is no consensus on what constitutes an authentic and valid perspective. Although all legal procedures and formal agreements with the government have been completed, fieldwork remains stalled due to various demands and claims from the local population. In response, the company has modified the cable car's name to "Pathibhara Mukumlung," incorporating the customary deity of indigenous groups. Despite this adjustment, progress on the

project remains slow, which could lead to business losses due to the diminishing value of the investment over time. (Based on a personal conversation with a representative staff member of Pathibhara-Mukumlung Darshan Pvt Ltd; Date: 2080/8/13)

While the majority of the local community is aware of the cable car construction in Pathibhara, some issues remain concealed and less discussed. In this context, this research examines the cable car project through a stakeholder consultation. The major themes and perceptions emerging from this consultation are outlined below (*Based on group conversation during stakeholder consultation-3, Phungling Municipality, employed jointly for the duty bearers, leaders, experts and tourism entrepreneurs Date; 2080/8/14*):

**Debate on the ‘name’ and ‘identity’:** The majority of locals support the construction of the cable car, with only a few opposing it. The primary contention centers around the methodology of the project's implementation. Initially, there was debate regarding the cable car's name, whether it should be "Pathibhara Cable Car" or "Mukumlung Cable Car." Mukumlung is a local name derived from the indigenous Limbu belief system associated with Kirat identity. This polarization does not fully encompass all identity-based groups. Recently, no festivals or celebrations have been held under the name Pathibhara; instead, events have been organized as "Taplejung Mahotsab." The naming dispute was resolved last year, leading to an agreement to designate the cable car project as "Pathibhara Mukumlung Darshan."

**Land related dispute:** Most of the land used for the construction project was community land owned by the government, which did not present significant issues as all land was leased for 30 years. Approximately 80 percent of the forest cover on this land has been cleared. However, a small portion of 30 Ropani of privately owned, registered land, particularly in Tallo Phedi, was also involved. This private land was purchased by the operating company through brokers. The current issue revolves around the land rate. Initially, the rate was set at 7 lakh per Ropani, but brokers and local elites now contend that the land was underpaid. They have significantly increased the rate to 70-80 lakhs per Ropani, despite the fact that ownership has been legally transferred to the company. This dispute has led to conflicts among a few elites and local residents, with group disputes and altercations being reported.

**Issue as observed by the company operator:** In our observation, the issues related to the project are not substantial. We secured this project through a competitive process and are committed to serving both the Pathibhara Mata and the local community. However, some confusion persists. A few local elites appear to be playing a dual role, simultaneously provoking issues on behalf of the community while also benefiting from our company.

**Issue related to solution:** There is a notable lack of coordination between the Cable Car Company and the local community, leading to dissatisfaction among locals regarding land acquisition issues. Additionally, the operating company has been criticized for its lack of transparency and attempts to withhold information. To address these concerns, it is essential for both the operating company and the local community to understand the operating principles and guidelines clearly. Despite these issues, it is confirmed that the construction of the cable car will proceed in the near future. The project is expected to enhance tourism activities in Pathibhara, similar to the impacts seen with the Manakamana Cable Car in Chitwan/Gorkha and the Chandragiri Cable Car in Kathmandu.

**Recent development:** In 2023, the cable car project was renamed to “Pathibhara Mukumlung Darshan,” a name that is considered more representative, inclusive, and tactful. The bidding process has been completed, and a contractor has been selected. The project is expected to take approximately 18 months to complete, provided that all work is carried out according to the action plans. The cable car will span approximately 2.5 kilometers, starting from Phungling and ending about 500 meters before the main Pathibhara Temple. The destination will include only a small office (for the ticket counter), a coffee shop, and a bathing center, with no additional buildings planned. This cable car project has the potential to significantly transform the socio-economic landscape of Taplejung. It is anticipated to increase visitor numbers, offer recreational travel packages, and foster the expansion of tourism-related trade and business.

#### **4.3.6 Tourism Products and Human Resource in Pathibhara**

Use of local resources, products, human resource, indigenous knowledge and appropriate technology is considered for the sustainable tourism. Different scholars

have highlighted this issue in diverse way, including Ndivo and Cantoni (2016) for rethinking local community involvement; Kapera (2018) for the importance of effective role of local governments; Andersson et al. (2017) for food production and destination development; Baum (2018) for sustainable human resource management as a driver in tourism policy and planning; and Brata and Pemayun (2018) for competency development in human resource management. Picking two pertinent local issues from Pathibhara regarding this, following section will deal about the empirical findings.

The data in Table 4.18 reveals that a significant majority of respondents (67.5%) perceive the use of local tourism products in Pathibhara to be predominantly local, with only a few outside products being used. This indicates that the area has a strong reliance on locally sourced products for tourism-related activities. However, a smaller portion of respondents (25.8%) feel that tourism in Pathibhara involves a mix of local and external products, suggesting some integration of outside goods and services in the local tourism market. A very small group (6.7%) believes that the products used are entirely external, indicating that there may still be some dependence on external supplies, though it is minimal. Overall, the data highlights a relatively high preference for local tourism products, with room for increasing local sourcing and reducing reliance on external products.

**Table 4.18**

*Perception of People about the Use of Local Tourism Products in Pathibhara*

<b>Perceptions about the use</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Not at all local and only outside products	8	6.7
In some extent but most outside products	31	25.8
Most local products but few outside products	81	67.5
Total	120	100.0

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

The data indicates that a majority of respondents perceive a significant utilization of local tourism products in Pathibhara, with a notable portion indicating that local products are used in most cases. This suggests effective efforts to incorporate and promote local offerings within the tourism sector. The findings has

two implications. First, increasing the use of local tourism products supports the local economy by benefiting artisans, businesses, and communities. It also enriches the cultural authenticity of the tourism experience, making it more attractive to visitors. Second, for the minority who perceive limited usage, there are opportunities to further promote, diversify, and integrate local products to enhance the overall tourism experience in Pathibhara. In this regard, the following qualitative reflection is relevant:

Tourist products used for religious purposes at Pathibhara are primarily sourced from local regions, including flowers and prasad. However, items such as tika and mala are imported from outside. Locally available products include milk, ghee, potatoes, green vegetables, and herbs like chiraito. The region has limited agricultural land, much of which is covered by forest. Recent trends show increased outmigration to Kathmandu and other urban areas, leading to a decline in the prioritization of agriculture. As a result, Pathibhara is not self-reliant in agro-products. Nevertheless, the region is noted for its meat, dairy products, and herbal goods. *(Based on personal conversation with Chair of FNCCI, Phungling Municipality, Date; 2080/8/9)*

The data from Table 4.19 reveals that the majority of entrepreneurs in the Pathibhara region (66.7%) are local, primarily engaged in low-investment businesses such as small hotels and transport services. These businesses are crucial for the local economy, catering to the community's basic needs and contributing to employment opportunities. However, the low level of investment in these ventures may limit their scalability and ability to compete with larger, more capital-intensive projects. The local entrepreneurs' focus on smaller-scale operations also indicates a more conservative approach to business development, driven by the resources available within the community.

**Table 4.19***Nature of Entrepreneurs and Human Resources in Pathibhara*

<b>Perceived nature</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Cannot be identified	5	4.2
Mostly are local entrepreneurs	80	66.7
Mostly from the outside	35	29.2
Total	120	100.0

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

On the other hand, a notable portion of entrepreneurs (29.2%) are from outside the district, often involved in high-investment projects like star hotels and luxury vehicles. Their ventures bring external capital and expertise, adding diversity to the local economy. Sometimes, joint ventures between local and external entrepreneurs occur, fostering collaboration that combines local knowledge with external resources. This dynamic mix of local and external entrepreneurship creates opportunities for business growth, but the relatively smaller proportion of external entrepreneurs suggests there is room for further investment and expansion, particularly in high-end services, to stimulate broader economic development in the area.

This finding underscores the substantial role of local entrepreneurs in the tourism sector, reflecting their active engagement in small-scale businesses such as hotels, transport, and other tourism-related services in Pathibhara. The first implication of this finding is about the economic benefits, i.e. involving local entrepreneurs supports the local economy by creating job opportunities and income generation within the community. The second issues lie about the community development. Increased employment of local individuals can foster community development and empowerment, contributing to sustainable tourism practices. Amidst this, local people also perceive that the use and exploration of local products, resources and knowledge are essential for tourism development. However, it needs a crucial intervention as suggested by one of the respondents during KII:

The literacy rate in the region is commendably high; however, attainment of higher education is relatively uncommon. Additionally, there is a notable lack of professional training in tourism and hospitality across all stakeholder groups, including both governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Consequently, the workforce primarily comprises low to medium-skilled individuals employed in hotels, grocery shops, and the transportation sector. The "sawari" system (human carriers to the temple) also relies on low-skilled labor, with workers depending on physical strength rather than technological advancements. This situation highlights the current state of the region's workforce and infrastructure. To address these issues, it is essential to enhance the adoption of modern technology in tourism services. Skill development opportunities and training programs should be introduced to improve tourism in Pathibhara. This need for advancement spans from the Mayor to community members and directly involves human resources engaged in tourism services. *(Based on personal conversation with Shankar Basnet, Hotel entrepreneur, Phungling Municipality-5, Date; 2080/8/15)*

#### **4.3.7 Stakeholders of Tourism in Pathibhara**

Stakeholders are the pillars of the tourism development to institutionalize the tourism related goods, services and benefits. They are different organizations, enterprises, governmental and non-governmental agencies, activists and policy makers, conservation and heritage practitioners and service providers related to lodging, fooding, accommodation, travel and guide. There are various studies in stakeholder related empirical contexts. They include: the role of local stakeholders in tourism development (Duarte Alonso & Nyanjom, 2017); an inclusive and accessible tourism through stakeholder collaboration (Nyanjom et al., 2018); stakeholder as power holders for making tourism sustainable (Saito & Ruhanen, 2017); role of social networks or organizations in sustainable tourism development (Nguyen et al., 2019); and an application of stakeholder theory to advance community participation in tourism planning (Khazaei et al., 2015). In this regard, some of the empirical insights from Pathibhara have been discussed.

Stakeholders in tourism are those agencies or organizations (sometimes individuals) who are involving or might have some positive/ negative impacts in production and supply of goods and services of tourism. Tourism activities at Pathibhara have various types of stakeholders as shared during KIIs and stakeholder consultations:

- *Shree Pathibhara Devi Mandir Xetra Samraxan Tatha Samraxan Samiti* (it was formed in 2048 BS and registered in 2050 BS as community level

organization. The Samiti was responsible for the collection of bheta, dan or donation in Pathibhara Temple till 2054)

- *Pathibhara Xetra Wikas Samiti* (formed in 2054 BS by a Gathan Aadesh, i.e. Formation Ordinance, 2053 BS. Nowadays, this Samiti is responsible for collection of bheta by a specific unit of Bheta Pati Wyawashtpan Samiti)
- Hotel Association (Hotel Waywasayi Sangh)
- Government levels (Local, Provincial and Federal)
- Uddhog Banijya Sangh (FNCCI)
- Pathibhara Darshan Prali (Cable Car Company)
- Construction companies/ contractors (Hydro projects, roads, drinking water, electricity, etc.)

The data in Table 4.20 underscores a strong public perception in favor of collaborative efforts between government and non-government stakeholders in tourism development in Pathibhara. A majority (64.2%) of respondents believe that both types of stakeholders should work together to maximize the region's tourism potential. This viewpoint reflects an understanding that tourism requires the combined strengths of policy-making, infrastructure development, and resource allocation by governmental bodies, alongside the flexibility, innovation, and specialized expertise often provided by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private entities. Such synergy could ensure a more holistic approach to tourism development, balancing economic growth with sustainability and community welfare.

**Table 4.20**

*Perception of People about the importance of different types of Stakeholders in Tourism in Pathibhara*

<b>Perceptions</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Governmental bodies are important	36	30
Non-governmental stakeholders are important	7	5.8
Both government and non-government should go hand with hand	77	64.2
Total	120	100.0

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

On the other hand, a smaller percentage (30%) of respondents prioritize governmental bodies alone, indicating a reliance on public sector institutions for leadership and oversight in tourism activities. This may stem from expectations around regulatory frameworks, funding, and large-scale project management traditionally associated with government involvement. Only 5.8% of respondents see non-governmental stakeholders as independently significant, which suggests their perceived role is more complementary than central. The findings highlight the importance of fostering public-private partnerships to address both infrastructural needs and innovative practices, ultimately enhancing the tourism in Pathibhara.

The data suggests that both governmental and non-governmental bodies play significant roles as stakeholders in the tourism industry of Pathibhara. While governmental bodies are perceived as prominent stakeholders, there is also acknowledgment of the complementary roles played by non-governmental entities in tourism development and management. The result informs two indications. The first is about the collaborative effort and second about the policy and advocacy. The involvement of both governmental and non-governmental bodies underscores the importance of collaborative efforts in addressing challenges and promoting sustainable tourism practices. Governmental bodies can focus on policy formulation and infrastructure development, while non-governmental bodies can advocate for community involvement, environmental conservation, and cultural preservation. In reflection of Mayor of Phungling:

All levels of government play a crucial role in tourism development. The federal government, as well as provincial and local governments are integral to the process. Prior to the implementation of federalism and the new constitution, several major tourism projects were initiated by the central government. However, the provincial government has been less visible, despite having elected representatives in the Koshi Province Assembly. The role of local government remains significant. Frequent meetings and discussions with representatives of Phungling Municipality and various wards highlight the importance of local engagement. While there is dissatisfaction with the municipality's performance, it is acknowledged that elected leaders are actively involved and supportive of tourism initiatives. They have the

potential to improve tourism-related goods and services in Pathibhara. Nevertheless, the working modality of Phungling Municipality still requires improvement. Efforts are ongoing to bridge gaps, engage with the community, and attract substantial investments to boost tourism and increase visitor numbers in Taplejung. *(Based on personal conversation with Mayor of Phungling Municipality, Date; 2080/8/1)*

#### 4.3.8 Participation of Local Community in Tourism Activities

The study investigates the respondents' participatory activities in tourism. It includes the host community's engagement in health and sanitation, awareness raising, religious campaigns, and waste management, etc. The data in Table 4.21 highlights varying levels of local participation in public tourism-related activities in Pathibhara. A majority of respondents (63.3%) report participating in these activities occasionally, particularly during festivals. This seasonal engagement suggests that many locals view their involvement as event-specific rather than a consistent responsibility. Such periodic participation may contribute to temporary improvements in areas like sanitation, awareness, and waste management, but it limits the potential for sustained progress and long-term benefits in tourism management.

**Table 4.21**

*Participation of Local People in Public Activities of Tourism Activities*

<b>Participation extent</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Not at all	11	9.2
In some occasions (e.g. Festivals)	76	63.3
Yes, in most of the cases (in all seasons)	33	27.5
Total	120	100.0

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

Conversely, only 27.5% of respondents indicate active participation in most public tourism activities throughout the year. This group likely plays a critical role in maintaining consistent standards for health, sanitation, and environmental awareness, which are vital for attracting and retaining tourists. On the other end of the spectrum, 9.2% of respondents report no participation at all, reflecting potential barriers such as lack of awareness, interest, or resources. The data underscores the need for targeted

interventions to encourage consistent community engagement, such as awareness campaigns, capacity-building programs, and incentives for active involvement, to foster a more sustainable and inclusive tourism ecosystem in Pathibhara.

Indeed, community ownership in tourism could enhance sustainable tourism. Increased participation of local stakeholders can lead to greater community ownership of tourism initiatives, fostering economic benefits and cultural preservation. Engaging local stakeholders in decision-making and implementation can contribute to more sustainable tourism practices and better management of natural and cultural resources.

The table 4.22 provides insights into the types of stakeholder participation in tourism activities in the Pathibhara region. The majority of respondents (75%) identify stakeholders involved in activities aimed at promoting national and international exposure of Pathibhara. This category emphasizes efforts to market and showcase Pathibhara on broader platforms. Following this, this category includes stakeholders involved in smaller-scale tourism programs and production activities. It represents 12.5% of the responses, indicating a segment focused on local initiatives and productions. Third, this category includes stakeholders primarily focused on profit-making activities or benefiting from tourism infrastructure. It represents 9.2% of responses, indicating a segment focused on economic aspects of tourism. Fourth, at the minimum proportion, these stakeholders engage in fundraising activities from various sources to support tourism initiatives. This represents 3.3% of responses, highlighting efforts to secure financial resources for tourism development.

**Table 4.22**

*Type of Stakeholder Participation in Tourism*

<b>Engagements</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Small type of program and production	15	12.5
Fund raising from different sources	4	3.3
National and international exposure of Pathibhara	90	75
Involvement just in profit making and benefit taking activity or infrastructure	11	9.2
Total	120	100.0

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

The data suggests a diverse range of stakeholder participation in tourism in Pathibhara, with significant emphasis on promoting national and international exposure. There are also efforts in local program production, fundraising, and economic activities related to tourism infrastructure. This finding reveals two implications. First issue lies at the promotion and exposure while second issue informs local development and sustainability. Stakeholders focusing on national and international exposure play a crucial role in attracting tourists and enhancing Pathibhara's visibility. Stakeholders involved in small-scale programs and fundraising contribute to local development and sustainability of tourism initiatives.

Amidst this, there is an ongoing debate regarding the operational strategy and fare structure for transportation between Phungling and Tallo Phedi. The road is motorable, yet concerns about pricing and system management persist. Two contrasting viewpoints from research participants illustrate this:

**Claim 1:** There is a perceived syndicate system in place for transportation, which restricts travel to only registered vehicles and excludes private or non-registered vehicles from operating between Phungling/Suketar and Tallo Phedi. This situation has led to high fare rates, which are viewed as exploitative and discouraging for tourists visiting Mata Pathibhara from various regions. (Based on personal conversation with Sabin Bista, local resident, Pathibhara, Phungling-11, Date: 2080/8/3)

**Claim 2:** The transportation system is claimed to be formal and regulated, similar to systems used in other pilgrimage sites like Muktinath Darshan. The organization of transport operators and the municipality are seen as needing to collaborate to create more visitor-friendly policies and reforms. (Based on personal conversation with Bus Byawasayi Sangh, Phungling, Date: 2080/8/9)

#### **4.3.9 Challenges and Threats of Tourism Promotion**

Despite of having diverse opportunities, a destination should consider about the scientific issues of challenges and threats that could hinder the tourism promotion. Most literatures in tourism studies suggest that challenges are multidimensional including socio-cultural, economic and infrastructure related, political, environmental, geographical, and technological. For example, some of scientific literatures for those challenges are reflected as of economic (Duarte Alonso & Nyanjom, 2017; Onete et al., 2018; Pan et al., 2018); social and cultural (Budeanu et al., 2016; Streimikiene et

al., 2021) and ecological/ environmental (Bac & Aksoz, 2017; Holden, 2019).

Regarding this, the section below highlights some important insights from empirical context of Pathibhara.

Table 4.23 outlines the perceived major challenges of tourism development in Phungling in different dimensions. The largest group (40.8%) highlights political-administrative challenges as the primary hindrance. This might include bureaucratic hurdles, lack of supportive policies, political instability, and ineffective governance. Following this, environmental challenges are seen as a major issue by 26.7% of respondents. This could relate to issues like pollution, habitat destruction, and sustainability concerns.

**Table 4.23**

*Perceptions about Major Challenge of Tourism Development in the Region*

	Number	Percent
Socio-cultural and religious challenges	16	13.3
Economic & infrastructure-related challenges	23	19.2
Political- administrative challenges	49	40.8
Environmental challenges	32	26.7
Total	120	100.00

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

Third, around 19.2% of respondents identify economic and infrastructure-related challenges as significant. This could involve lack of funding, poor infrastructure such as roads and transport facilities, and inadequate tourist amenities. Fourth, a relatively small proportion (13.3%) of respondents sees socio-cultural and religious challenges as the major obstacles to tourism development. This could include issues related to maintaining cultural integrity, respecting religious practices, and managing cultural conflicts. The data suggests that political-administrative challenges are perceived as the most significant barrier to tourism development, followed by environmental, economic & infrastructure, and socio-cultural & religious challenges.

While the Pathibhara region benefits from a diverse range of stakeholders, the primary challenge lies not in the quantity but in the quality of coordination and responsibility among them. Effective benefit-sharing and community engagement are

crucial for successful tourism development. A critical perspective highlights several issues:

The core issue is not the number of stakeholders, which are numerous and accessible, but rather their ability to coordinate effectively in an integrated approach to planning and development for Taplejung and Pathibhara. Stakeholders often exhibit a lack of transparency, and delays in project completion, as well as issues such as bargaining and intimidation of local residents, exacerbate the challenges. Problems related to roads and transportation, as well as the construction of significant infrastructure like the Tamor Corridor and Madan Bhandari Highway, are indicative of these challenges. Additional issues include a lack of pure drinking water, debates over the naming of the cable car (Pathibhara or Mukumlung), health concerns at high altitudes, geographical remoteness, unreliable electricity, transportation issues in the upper ranges of Pathibhara, and inconsistencies in hotel service rates. These factors collectively hinder the promotion and growth of tourism in the region. *(Based on personal conversation with Chief Administrative Officer, Phungling Municipality, Date: 2080/8/1)*

The Table 4.24 outlines the perceived major threats of tourism in the community referring to multidimensional issues. The data indicates that the threats are relatively evenly distributed, with environmental degradation, unplanned development, local government's failure, and socio-cultural change and conflict all seen as significant issues by a substantial portion of the respondents. This suggests that the community is concerned about multiple facets of tourism's impact.

**Table 4.24**

*Perceptions Regarding the Major Threat of Tourism in the Community*

<b>Perceived threats</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Environmental Degradation	32	26.7
Local government's failure	29	24.2
Unplanned development	31	25.8
Socio-cultural change and conflict	28	23.3
Total	120	100

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

The largest proportion (26.7%) of respondents identifies environmental degradation as a major threat posed by tourism. This includes issues such as pollution, loss of biodiversity, and other negative environmental impacts. Following this, a significant portion (25.8%) of respondents points to unplanned development as a major threat. This can lead to poorly managed infrastructure, overcrowding, and detrimental impacts on the community and environment. Third, about 24.2% of respondents see the failure of local government as a significant threat. This might involve ineffective governance, lack of proper regulations, and inadequate support for sustainable tourism practices. Fourth, to a smaller proportion but not significantly less, 23.3% perceive socio-cultural change and conflict as a major threat. This could involve the erosion of local traditions, customs, and identities, and potential conflicts arising from cultural differences due to the influence of tourism.

#### **4.3.10 Suggestive Measures for Tourism Promotion**

Local perceptions and suggestive measures for sustainable tourism promotion have been placed prime importance in tourism studies in recent studies. How do the local people feel, how do they motivate and what they expect are pertinent questions in this regard. The literatures suggest that local people and stakeholders might have diverse opinions and suggestive measures for tourism promotion. For example, those factors include hospitality development (Aladag et al., 2020), policy reforms and interventions (Dredge & Jamal, 2015) and community participation in tourism (Reindrawati, 2023). In this context, Pathibhara has following two critical observations:

The Table 4.25 outlines the factors that respondents believe could boost the tourism industry in the Pathibhara region. A significant portion (25.0%) thinks involving local people in the decision-making process is important. This inclusion can lead to more sustainable and accepted tourism policies and practices. Following this, 14.2% of respondents believe that equal sharing of costs and benefits among stakeholders is crucial for boosting tourism. This approach can ensure that all parties, including local communities, gain from tourism development. Third, 15.0% of respondents feel that empowering the local government is key. Local governments can better manage resources, implement policies, and address community needs when they have sufficient authority and capabilities. Fourth, 12.5% of respondents believe

promoting local stakeholders (businesses, entrepreneurs, etc.) can boost tourism. Supporting local stakeholders can enhance the local economy and provide more authentic experiences for tourists.

**Table 4.25**

*Perceptions about the Factors of Boosting Tourism Industry*

<b>Boosting factors</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Equal sharing of cost and benefits	17	14.2
Involve local people in decision making	30	25
Empower the local government	18	15
Promote local stakeholders	15	12.5
All of above	40	33.3
Total	120	100.0

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

However, the largest group (33.3%) thinks that a combination of all the above factors is necessary for boosting tourism in the Pathibhara region. This holistic approach ensures that multiple aspects of the tourism industry are addressed simultaneously. In similar tone, the research findings during qualitative assessments suggest a multi-faceted approach involving equal sharing of benefits, local participation, local government empowerment, and stakeholder promotion is perceived as the most effective strategy for boosting tourism in Pathibhara. This suggests that an inclusive and comprehensive strategy is favored by the majority. This is how shared by a respondent during KII.

We do not require many changes, but a few key measures are essential. First, we need to implement a proper management system, ensuring transparency and good governance. Donations collected at the Temple should be managed and utilized transparently. Additionally, developing attractive tour packages can significantly boost tourism in Pathibhara. The transportation syndicate should be eliminated to ensure fair access. Tourism-related training, skill development, and hospitality strategies must be promoted among the local population. Regular stakeholder consultations are also urgently needed. The cable car construction should be managed effectively, maintaining the trust of

the local community. Collaborative efforts between Pathibhara Xetra Wikas Samiti and Shree Pathibhara Devi Mata Xetra Tatha Samwardan Samiti are necessary. Financial institutions and health desks should be established in the high-altitude regions of Pathibhara, including Mathillo Phedi. Enhancing the local economy through commercial farming—such as the production of cereals, cash crops, poultry, and dairy products—is crucial. Industrialization and the professional production of local products will play a significant role in tourism development. (Based on personal conversation with Chairperson of FNCCI, Phungling Municipality, Date: 2080/8/9)

#### 4.3.11 Possibility of Market Extension

When respondents were asked about whether there is any possibility of market expansion of tourism through Pathibhara, significant number of respondents believed there is some extent of possibility for market expansion (Table 4.26). This indicates a moderate level of optimism but with varying perceptions of market expansion possibilities for Pathibhara tourism. A majority of respondents (59.2%) believe there is some potential for expansion, primarily targeting surrounding areas and domestic tourists. This view aligns with Pathibhara's current exposure and accessibility, which might limit its appeal to broader markets. Focusing on domestic tourism could be a practical starting point for growth, leveraging local cultural and religious significance to draw visitors from nearby regions. However, this perception also underscores the need for enhanced marketing and infrastructure to tap into larger markets.

**Table 4.26**

*Possibility of Market Expansion of Pathibhara Tourism*

<b>Perceived possibilities</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Not at all (as the tourism of Pathibhara is not exposed so much)	11	9.2
To some extent (in surrounding areas and domestic tourists)	71	59.2
Yes, in most of the cases (in national and international contexts, also for ecotourism in the region)	38	31.7
Total	120	100.0

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

Interestingly, 31.7% of respondents express optimism about Pathibhara's potential for substantial market expansion, envisioning opportunities on both national and international scales. This group highlights the area's potential for ecotourism, leveraging its natural and cultural assets to attract diverse tourist demographics. In contrast, 9.2% of respondents see no market expansion possibilities, attributing this to Pathibhara's limited exposure. This disparity in perceptions emphasizes the need for strategic efforts, such as improved promotional campaigns, better accessibility, and investments in sustainable tourism practices, to unlock the untapped potential of Pathibhara as a tourism destination.

Indeed, a tourism destination can be revitalized through the revitalization of its market (Beirman, 2020). This approach may be particularly relevant for destinations experiencing a significant decline in tourist flow due to various factors. While this logic may not fully apply to Pathibhara, it is worth noting that the market of Phungling holds both religious and ecological value for tourism promotion. Additionally, the demographic composition supports this potential, as Phungling has a relatively high population density, although the areas along the route to the Pathibhara Temple are less densely settled. One of the respondents shares this idea:

There is potential for market expansion in Pathibhara. Areas such as Suketar and Deurali are more suitable for development compared to the higher altitude regions like Mathillo Phedi, primarily due to their more manageable land conditions. However, the rough and challenging geographical conditions, along with adverse climatic factors at the high altitudes, pose significant obstacles. To address these challenges, it is essential to adopt an environmentally adaptive strategy. A scientific approach to tourism development is needed to ensure the provision of quality goods and services, attract visitors, conserve biodiversity, and improve infrastructure, including drinking water and road networks. Additionally, international exposure and strategic advertising can enhance tourism in Pathibhara. Planning a "Visit Year" for Pathibhara with attractive packages could also be beneficial. (Based on personal conversation with Mayor, Phungling Municipality, Date: 2080/8/1)

#### **4.4 Discussion of the Findings**

The tourism sector in Pathibhara presents a complex interplay of opportunities, challenges, and economic potential, particularly in terms of religious tourism. This discussion addresses three key objectives: the current status and trends of tourism, its impact on income and employment, and stakeholder engagement in promoting tourism markets.

##### **1. Assessing the Status (Trends and Characteristics) of Tourism in Pathibhara**

Pathibhara Devi Temple has emerged as a significant pilgrimage site in Nepal, drawing a steady increase in tourists, especially during religious festivals and special occasions. Recent studies indicate that the temple attracts both domestic and international pilgrims, particularly from India, contributing to its rising prominence in Nepal's religious tourism landscape (Sharma & Gurung, 2020). However, tourism to Pathibhara is highly seasonal. Monsoon seasons often see a decline in visitors due to challenging road conditions and limited infrastructure. Empirical studies highlight that inadequate transportation and accommodation facilities, especially during peak tourist seasons, pose a major hurdle to sustaining a consistent flow of visitors (Gurung & Kunwar, 2020). Theoretical frameworks like Push and Pull Theory can help explain the trends, where religious motivations (push factors) drive tourists, while factors like natural beauty and cultural significance serve as pull factors (Dann, 1981).

From a policy perspective, the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) and local authorities have recognized the need to develop infrastructure and provide better services. This is necessary not only to attract more visitors but also to ensure that Pathibhara remains competitive among Nepal's many religious tourism sites (NTB, 2022). Moreover, sustainable tourism strategies must be prioritized to prevent overcrowding and environmental degradation, which are growing concerns in the region.

##### **2. Analyzing the Contributions of Tourism to Income and Employment Generation**

Tourism in Pathibhara has become a vital driver for local economic growth. The region, traditionally dependent on agriculture, has seen a shift toward tourism-

driven economic activities. A study by Rai (2021) shows that nearly 40% of local household income is now derived from tourism-related services such as hospitality, guiding, and the sale of religious souvenirs. In terms of employment, tourism provides both direct and indirect job opportunities. Direct jobs include roles in accommodation, restaurants, and guiding services, while indirect employment involves supply chains, such as food production and handicrafts. Shrestha (2020) found that many local youth, particularly those who were unemployed or engaged in low-income agricultural work, have transitioned to tourism-related roles, significantly improving their livelihoods.

The Multiplier Effect theory helps explain how tourism generates widespread economic benefits in rural communities like Pathibhara. This theory suggests that money spent by tourists circulates through the local economy, creating jobs and further economic activities (Sharpley, 2018). However, policy interventions are required to ensure the equitable distribution of tourism income and to prevent the exploitation of local workers. Developing training programs for locals to enhance their skills in hospitality and tourism management would be one such approach (Nepal Ministry of Tourism, 2021).

### **3. Examining the Promotion of Tourism Markets and Stakeholder Engagement**

The promotion of Pathibhara as a tourism destination has largely relied on word-of-mouth and religious networks. However, as tourism becomes increasingly competitive, a more structured marketing strategy is essential to enhance the site's visibility on international platforms. According to Rana (2020), digital marketing and collaboration with international travel agencies remain underutilized tools for promoting Pathibhara. Tapping into the larger religious tourism networks in neighboring countries such as India and Bhutan offers a significant opportunity for growth.

The role of stakeholders, including local governments, religious authorities, and tourism operators, is crucial for the sustainable development of tourism in Pathibhara. Empirical evidence suggests that while these stakeholders are involved, their efforts lack coordination, resulting in fragmented and sometimes conflicting initiatives (Poudel & Acharya, 2019). For instance, while some local businesses have

benefited from the influx of tourists, others have struggled due to a lack of infrastructural support and promotional outreach.

The Stakeholder Theory provides a useful framework for understanding the importance of collaboration among different actors in the tourism sector. Successful tourism development, particularly in religious sites like Pathibhara, depends on the active involvement of all stakeholders, including government bodies, private businesses, local communities, and tourists themselves (Freeman, 2010). Without a unified approach, the site risks missing out on opportunities to further enhance its appeal.

From a policy perspective, public-private partnerships (PPP) could provide the necessary platform for coordinated efforts between local authorities and private tourism operators. Additionally, the government should implement regulatory measures to address environmental sustainability issues, as the growing number of tourists could lead to environmental degradation if not properly managed (Nepal Ministry of Tourism, 2021). To conclude, the discussion of tourism in Pathibhara underscores the importance of infrastructure development, stakeholder collaboration, and sustainable marketing strategies. While the economic benefits of tourism are clear, especially in terms of income generation and employment, the need for policy interventions remains critical.

Empirical and theoretical perspectives highlight both the opportunities and challenges that tourism brings to the region, particularly in managing resources and ensuring equitable benefits. Effective stakeholder engagement and government support will be a key in shaping the future of tourism in Pathibhara. The analysis draws on both empirical data and theoretical frameworks, with attention to policy implications.

## **Chapter – V**

### **Summary, Conclusion and Implications**

This chapter synthesizes and summarizes the study findings, navigating core conclusions as the main thesis. It also offers implications of the study, which will enhance the future arena of tourism studies.

#### **5.1 Summary of the Research Findings**

This study problematizes the issue of the contribution of pilgrimage tourism of Pathibhara in the economic development of Phungling municipality in particular and Taplejung district in general. Though the study was mixed in nature, the quantitative method was given the most priority, i.e. QUAN-qual approach allowing to be sequential explanatory. Pathibhara Temple (also sometimes referred as Pathibhara Devi Temple or Devi Temple) has gained significant recognition as a sacred pilgrimage site in Nepal. The study followed a mixed method of sampling design. First, in the purposive sampling approach, four wards out of total 11 wards were selected for rapid questionnaire survey (ward 4 and 5 of Phungling bazar; and wards 10 and 11 whereby the Pathibhara temple is located). Then the random sampling method was employed to select the samples from these wards by allowing four compact clusters. Assuming 95% confidence level with a 5% margin of error, the study followed a purposive sample size of 120 respondents (local people). Out of the total 120 respondents, 65 are male, making up 54.2 percent and on the other hand, there are total 55 female respondent constituting 45.8 percent.

The data underscores the pivotal role of small hotels in the tourism service sector, with 55 establishments identified as key players in accommodating tourists. This highlights the dominance of small-scale enterprises in Pathibhara's tourism ecosystem. Additionally, when respondents were asked to rank the benefits of tourism, a significant portion (30.91%) identified its ability to build the local economy and create job opportunities as the top advantage, emphasizing the perceived economic benefits within the community.

A notable 63.3% of respondents reported the presence of income-generating tourism projects in their locality, further reinforcing the economic relevance of

tourism in Pathibhara. The findings also reveal a strong dominance of individuals employed in the tourism sector among the local host community. This suggests that Pathibhara is not only a focal point for tourism activity but also a significant hub for employment, either directly through tourism services or indirectly through related industries, showcasing its critical role in supporting local livelihoods.

The analysis of survey data provides valuable insights into the dynamics of tourism development in Pathibhara. Regarding the nature of entrepreneurs, a majority (66.7%) of entrepreneurs in the region are locals engaged in small-scale, low-investment ventures such as small hotels and transport services, whereas 29.2% are external entrepreneurs focusing on capital-intensive projects like luxury accommodations and transport. Interestingly, occasional joint ventures between local and external stakeholders are observed, indicating a potential for collaborative growth in the tourism sector.

When considering the perception of stakeholders' roles, 64.2% of respondents emphasize the importance of joint efforts by governmental and non-governmental stakeholders for effective tourism development. Only 30% prioritize government agencies alone, while a mere 5.8% consider non-governmental stakeholders independently significant. This highlights the community's recognition of the need for partnerships to foster comprehensive and sustainable tourism growth.

The survey also reveals local participation trends in tourism-related public activities, with 63.3% of respondents participating sporadically, especially during festivals, and 27.5% engaging actively throughout the year. However, 9.2% report no involvement, pointing to potential gaps in awareness or accessibility. Lastly, perceptions of market expansion potential show that 59.2% of respondents see moderate opportunities focused on domestic and nearby regions, while 31.7% express optimism about national and international expansion, particularly through ecotourism. This indicates both challenges and opportunities for promoting Pathibhara as a prominent tourism destination.

The results from quantitative analysis provide valuable insights into the local community's views on tourism and its effects. The analysis revealed that local community is getting some employment opportunities and income generation

activities from tourism in Pathibahra, though not in a highly significant proportion. The data also highlighted that participation in public tourism activities is notably higher during festivals, suggesting seasonal engagement. Furthermore, the potential for market expansion in Pathibhara tourism was viewed positively, particularly in the context of domestic and ecotourism. However, the findings also indicated an unequal distribution of tourism-related benefits, with larger businesses such as hotels and transport services reaping more advantages than smaller community-based sectors. These results point to the need for a more equitable approach to tourism development and benefit sharing.

## **5.2 Conceptual and Theoretical Insights**

This study explores the multifaceted impact of tourism on the Pathibhara region in Taplejung, examining its economic, social, and infrastructural dimensions. The research highlights the significant role that the Pathibhara Mata Temple plays in attracting both domestic and international tourists. This pilgrimage site has not only heightened the visibility of Taplejung but has also spurred a range of economic activities, including the operation of small grocery shops, puja samgrai traders, and local human carriers (Sawaris) (Beirman, 2020). However, the benefits are not evenly distributed, with persistent issues of poverty and inadequate investment, particularly in remote areas of the region (Ly et al., 2022).

The study reveals a stark contrast in the economic benefits derived from tourism between different areas of Taplejung. While Phungling, the district headquarters, enjoys considerable benefits from tourism-related trade and commerce, remote areas like Mathillo Phedi experience less economic growth (Thakuri & Nepal, 2018). This disparity is attributed to limited infrastructure and weak community participation in the economic benefits. Despite the opportunities presented by tourism, local engagement remains weak, and the benefits are concentrated in more accessible market areas, leaving remote communities underserved (Takaendengan et al., 2022).

Challenges related to tourism infrastructure are evident, particularly in the construction of roads, cable cars, and other facilities. Issues such as project delays, subpar construction quality, and lack of transparency in financial transactions have been reported (Junaid, 2021). For instance, the construction of the cable car project

has faced difficulties due to disputes over land acquisition and fare pricing. Local perceptions of transportation syndicates and fare discrepancies further complicate the situation, highlighting the need for better coordination and transparency among stakeholders (Beirman, 2020).

The study also notes deficiencies in tourism-related infrastructure and services, including limited high-quality accommodation and inadequate professional training for local stakeholders (Mura & Wijesinghe, 2023). The lack of skilled human resources, coupled with inadequate technological adaptation, impacts the overall quality of tourism services. Recommendations include enhancing skill development, providing tourism-related training, and adopting modern technologies to improve service quality and visitor satisfaction.

Local narratives indicate a mixed sentiment regarding the efficacy of stakeholders and their coordination. While the presence of multiple stakeholders is beneficial, their fragmented approach and lack of transparency hinder effective planning and development (Stone & Nyaupane, 2016). The study emphasizes the need for improved governance, stakeholder collaboration, and strategic planning to address these issues. This includes transparent management of temple donations, elimination of transportation syndicates, and establishment of financial institutions and health services in high-altitude regions (Thakuri & Nepal, 2018).

Market extension is feasible in lower altitude areas like Suketar and Deurali, despite challenges posed by difficult geographical conditions in higher regions. A strategic approach to tourism development is crucial for enhancing the quality of services, conserving biodiversity, and improving infrastructure (Junaid, 2021). International exposure and strategic marketing, along with the implementation of attractive tourism packages, are recommended to boost tourism and create sustainable economic growth in the Pathibhara region (Beirman, 2020).

The assessment of tourism trends and characteristics in Pathibhara reveals a complex landscape where the spiritual significance of the Pathibhara Mata Temple acts as a major draw for visitors. Despite its potential, tourism's benefits are unevenly distributed across the region. While Phungling and surrounding areas experience increased economic activity and visibility, remote areas such as Mathillo Phedi face

significant challenges in realizing these benefits. This disparity is exacerbated by infrastructural issues, including delays in road and cable car projects, and the lack of adequate services. The high altitude and difficult geographical conditions further complicate market extension and infrastructure development, highlighting the need for tailored, environmentally adaptive strategies to promote sustainable tourism growth.

In terms of economic contributions, tourism has indeed generated income and employment opportunities, particularly in sectors such as hospitality and transportation. However, the benefits are concentrated among a few stakeholders, with limited engagement from the broader local community. The prominence of syndicates and disputes over fares and land purchases has created barriers to equitable benefit distribution. This situation underscores the necessity for better stakeholder coordination and transparency to maximize the economic potential of tourism. The promotion of market and stakeholder engagement in Phungling is crucial for enhancing trade and business opportunities, but this requires addressing existing conflicts and improving the overall business environment.

Overall, this study underscores the need for a coordinated effort between various stakeholders, improved governance, and targeted strategies to realize the full potential of tourism in Pathibhara. By addressing existing challenges and leveraging opportunities, the region can achieve sustainable development and enhance its attractiveness as a major tourist destination (Mura & Wijesinghe, 2023).

### **5.3 Conclusion**

The study concludes that while tourism in Pathibhara has the potential to significantly boost the local economy and enhance regional visibility, there are critical challenges that need to be addressed. The presence of the Pathibhara Mata Temple has indeed attracted considerable tourist traffic, benefiting Phungling and surrounding areas. However, the economic advantages are unevenly distributed, with remote areas such as Mathillo Phedi struggling to realize substantial gains. Issues related to inadequate infrastructure, suboptimal stakeholder coordination, and insufficient local engagement undermine the full realization of tourism's potential benefits. Additionally, infrastructural problems such as road and cable car construction delays,

along with disputes over land and fare pricing, further exacerbate the challenges faced by the region.

For tourism to be more effectively leveraged in Pathibhara, a strategic, coordinated approach is essential. Improvements in governance, stakeholder collaboration, and infrastructure development are crucial for addressing current deficiencies. Enhanced skill development and professional training for local stakeholders, along with the elimination of transportation syndicates, can improve the quality of services and visitor satisfaction. By adopting a more transparent, inclusive approach to planning and development, and by leveraging international marketing strategies, Pathibhara can better capitalize on its tourism potential and achieve sustainable economic growth.

The study highlights that while tourism in Pathibhara offers significant potential for economic development and increased visibility, several challenges need to be addressed to fully realize these benefits. The uneven distribution of tourism's economic impact, coupled with infrastructural deficiencies and stakeholder conflicts, poses substantial barriers to sustainable growth. Effective management strategies, improved stakeholder coordination, and enhanced infrastructure are critical for overcoming these challenges. By focusing on these areas, Pathibhara can better leverage its tourism assets and ensure that the benefits are more broadly and equitably distributed.

The findings of this research underscore the importance of a strategic, inclusive approach to tourism development. Efforts should be directed towards enhancing local infrastructure, providing professional training, and fostering transparent stakeholder engagement. Addressing these issues will not only improve the quality of tourism services but also contribute to the overall socio-economic development of the region. This holistic approach is essential for promoting sustainable tourism and ensuring that the economic benefits are realized across all levels of the community.

## **5.4 Novelty of Research and Study Implications**

This study particularly contributes to the tourism studies from the viewpoint of development studies. The following four-fold remark explores its implications in more scientific way:

### **Conceptual Contribution**

This study advances the conceptual understanding of tourism development in remote regions by integrating both economic and socio-cultural dimensions. It emphasizes the interplay between tourism's potential and the practical challenges faced by local communities, particularly in terms of infrastructure and stakeholder dynamics. By focusing on Pathibhara, a region with a unique blend of religious and ecological tourism, this research contributes to the theoretical discourse on how such destinations can harness their distinctive characteristics for sustainable tourism development.

### **Methodological Contribution**

The application of a quantitative-dominant qualitative mixed-method approach provides a robust framework for analyzing tourism impacts in a complex setting. This methodology not only captures numerical data on tourism trends and economic contributions but also incorporates qualitative insights from local stakeholders and policymakers. This dual approach offers a comprehensive understanding of the tourism landscape, addressing both statistical trends and nuanced perspectives that are often overlooked in purely quantitative or qualitative studies.

### **Practical Contribution**

The study offers practical recommendations for enhancing tourism management and stakeholder engagement in Pathibhara. It identifies specific areas where improvements are needed, such as infrastructure development, stakeholder coordination, and the elimination of transport syndicates. These insights are valuable for local authorities and tourism operators seeking to optimize tourism benefits and ensure that economic gains are more equitably distributed. By proposing actionable

strategies, the research provides a practical guide for policymakers and practitioners working in similar tourism-dependent regions.

### **Future Research Contribution**

The study highlights several areas for future research, including the need for longitudinal studies to track the long-term impacts of tourism interventions and the exploration of additional factors affecting tourism sustainability, such as climate change and cultural preservation. Future research could also investigate the effectiveness of specific interventions recommended in this study, such as stakeholder engagement practices and infrastructure improvements, to further refine strategies for enhancing tourism development in remote and ecologically sensitive areas.

## Appendices

### Annex-1: Questionnaire Survey

#### Informed Consent

Namaste! My name is **Bal Bahadur Tamang**, an MPhil-PhD Scholar at the Central Department of Rural Development, Tribhuvan University, Nepal. I am conducting a research on 'CONTRIBUTION OF TOURISM FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: AN APPRAISAL OF PATHIBHARA, TAPLEJUNG'. The main objective of this research about to assess the trends and characteristics of tourism in Pathibhara; to analyze the contributions of tourism in income and employment generation activities of the study site; and to explore the promotion of market and engagement of stakeholders in trade and business in Phungling due to the tourism in Pathibhara.

We are inviting you to be a participant in this study. We value your opinion and there are no wrong answers to our questions. We will use approximately 20-30 minutes of your time. There will be no risk as a result of your participating in the study. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time. All information gathered will be strictly treated as confidential and will be used only for the study purposes.

If you need further information, you can contact me (**Bal Bahadur Tamang**) at **9851020864** or at the **Central Department of Rural Development**, Tribhuvan University Kirtipur (at Ph. No. 01-4331383).

Your participation will be highly appreciated.

Are you willing to participate in the study?                      0. No                      1. Yes

#### **खण्ड A: Background Information (आधारभूत जानकारी)**

001. Date of interview (मिति): \_\_\_\_\_

002. Local level (ठेगाना): Phungling Municipality, Taplejung

003. Ward and tole/place (वार्ड र टोल) \_\_\_\_\_

004. Household ID: \_\_\_\_\_

005. Contact Number (सम्पर्क फोन नं): \_\_\_\_\_

006. Interview Code \_\_\_\_\_

**खण्ड B. Demographic Information (जनसांख्यिक तथ्यांक)**

S.N.	Question to the Respondents	Response
1	Age of the respondent?	..... Years
2	Sex of the respondent?	<input type="radio"/> Male.....1 <input type="radio"/> Female.....2 <input type="radio"/> Other.....3
3	Religion of the respondent?	<input type="radio"/> Hinduism .....1 <input type="radio"/> Buddhism..... 2 <input type="radio"/> Kirat.....3 <input type="radio"/> Christianity.....4 <input type="radio"/> Prakriti.....5 <input type="radio"/> Islam .....6 <input type="radio"/> Other .....7
4	Respondent's caste/ethnicity status?	<input type="radio"/> Hill Brahmin/Chhetri....1 <input type="radio"/> Hill janajati .....2 <input type="radio"/> Hill Dalit.....3 <input type="radio"/> Tarai caste groups (including janajati and Dalits)....4 <input type="radio"/> Muslim.....5
5	What is your main occupation?	<input type="radio"/> Agriculture/Livestock/Poultry.....1 <input type="radio"/> Wage employment.....2 <input type="radio"/> Salaried worker (govt/ private).....3 <input type="radio"/> Self-employment/business.....4 <input type="radio"/> Non-earning.....5 <input type="radio"/> Student.....6 <input type="radio"/> Retired.....7
6	What is the highest grade/level you have completed?	<input type="radio"/> Never attended school....1 <input type="radio"/> Basic level (1-8).....2. <input type="radio"/> Secondary (9-12).....3 <input type="radio"/> College level (Bachelor).....4 <input type="radio"/> Completed Masters and above....5

**खण्ड Section C: Objective 1 and 2 related**

(To assess the status (trends and characteristics) of tourism in Pathibhara (partly by primary data and partly by secondary sources); to analyze the contributions of tourism in income and employment generation activities of the study site)

S.N.	Question	Response
<b>7. Tourism characteristics</b>		
7.1	The trend of visiting Pathibhara by the tourists	<input type="radio"/> Secondary data to be collected
7.2	Nature of tourists visiting Pathibhara	<input type="radio"/> Secondary data to be collected
7.3	Main seasons of tourists in Pathibhara	<input type="radio"/> Secondary data to be collected
7.4	Caste ethnic dominance of visiting	<input type="radio"/> Secondary data to be collected
7.5	Gender nature of visiting	<input type="radio"/> Secondary data to be collected
<b>8. Economic dimension (income, employment etc.)</b>		
8.1	Your employment status (during last 1 year)	<input type="radio"/> Not employed in any sector...1 <input type="radio"/> Employed in tourism sector---2 <input type="radio"/> Employed in other than tourism....3
8.2	Do you feel that employment opportunities for local people due to tourism activities in Pathibhara increased or not (your perception)?	<input type="radio"/> Increased.....1 <input type="radio"/> Reduced .....2 <input type="radio"/> No any changes I observed.....3
8.3	Do you feel that household income increased due to tourism for local people?	<input type="radio"/> Increased.....1 <input type="radio"/> Reduced .....2 <input type="radio"/> No any changes I observed.....3
8.4	Do you have any kinds of income-generating projects associated with tourism in your locality?	<input type="radio"/> Yes (having).....1 <input type="radio"/> No (not having yet).....2 <input type="radio"/> Being developed .....3
8.5	Do you feel that there is an encouragement for local people to work and invest in the tourism sector (job, business, guide etc.)?	<input type="radio"/> Yes (encouraged)....1 <input type="radio"/> No any encouragement...2 <input type="radio"/> Not relevant.....3
8.6	Are there any entrepreneurial training activities (among the local people)?	<input type="radio"/> Yes....1 <input type="radio"/> No ...2 <input type="radio"/> Not relevant.....3
8.7	Do you have any attendance in tourism events (e.g. seminar, programs, jatra, parba and workshops? (during last one year)	<input type="radio"/> Yes....1 <input type="radio"/> No ...2 <input type="radio"/> Not relevant.....3
<b>9. Benefits, opportunities and challenges</b>		
9.1	What are the benefits of tourism to local people in	<input type="radio"/> Helps to develop local community sentiment.....1

	your areas? Tick the best three options.	<input type="radio"/> Helps to promote cultural exchange....2 <input type="radio"/> Builds local economy and creates job opportunities for the people.....3 <input type="radio"/> Preserves the local heritages....4 <input type="radio"/> Helps to increase the local people's awareness....6 <input type="radio"/> Other specify.....7
9.2	How the benefits of tourism are distributed to the local community?	<input type="radio"/> It properly distributed....1 <input type="radio"/> Not distributed at all.....2 <input type="radio"/> Distributed but to some extent only....3 <input type="radio"/> The benefits are totally elite captured.....4 <input type="radio"/> I don't know.....5
9.3	What do you think about the major challenge of tourism development in this region?	<input type="radio"/> Socio-cultural and religious challenges...1 <input type="radio"/> Economic & infrastructure-related challenges....2 <input type="radio"/> Political- administrative challenges ....3 <input type="radio"/> Environmental challenges.....4
9.4	What is the major threat of tourism in your community?	<input type="radio"/> Environmental Degradation...1 <input type="radio"/> Local government's failure....2 <input type="radio"/> Unplanned development....3 <input type="radio"/> Cultural change...4 <input type="radio"/> Outside control....5 <input type="radio"/> Others (specify).....6
9.5	How do you perceive the role of different levels of governments in tourism promotion of Pathibhara? (Rank Qns, give 1, 2 and 3 with priority)	<input type="radio"/> Role of local government (फुलिङ्ग).... <input type="radio"/> Role of provincial government (कोशी)..... <input type="radio"/> Role of federal government (नेपाल).....
9.6	In your opinion, how can be the tourism industry boosted more in this region?	<input type="radio"/> Increase Community's participation...1 <input type="radio"/> Equal sharing of cost and benefits....2 <input type="radio"/> Involve local people in decision making process ...3 <input type="radio"/> Enhance and increase to build local leadership...4 <input type="radio"/> All of above ...5 <input type="radio"/> None of above...6

<b>10. Market related issues</b> infrastructure, tourism goods, stakeholders and services in Phungling/ Pathibhara		
10.1	Which is the main market area for tourism in Pathibhara?	<input type="radio"/> Phungling.....1 <input type="radio"/> Others .....2
10.1.1	Do you think that is there any possibility of market expansion of tourism through Pathibhara (beyond Phungling)	<input type="radio"/> Not at all.....1 <input type="radio"/> In some extent.....2 <input type="radio"/> Yes, in most of the cases.....3
10.2	What are the major infrastructures/ services in the Pathibhara area?	<input type="radio"/> Hotel and lodges----1 <input type="radio"/> Travel and transport (vehicles)....2 <input type="radio"/> Roads and treks.....3 <input type="radio"/> Suketar airport.....4 <input type="radio"/> Human carrying service.....5 <input type="radio"/> Cable car service (being made).....6 <input type="radio"/> Heath and medical services.....7 <input type="radio"/> Information services.....8 <input type="radio"/> Sanitation and wastage management.....9 <input type="radio"/> Services of Pathibhara temple management committee....10
10.2.1	Are these infrastructures are enough and well-developed in this area?	<input type="radio"/> Yes....1 <input type="radio"/> No----2
10.2.2	Strongest infrastructure (from above list, give number code)	<input type="radio"/> .....
10.2.3	Weakest (from above list, give number code)	<input type="radio"/> .....
10.2.4	Are you also known about the recent development of Pathibhara Cable car in this region?	<input type="radio"/> Yes....1 <input type="radio"/> No----2
10.3	How do you see the use of local tourism products in Pathibhara?	<input type="radio"/> Not at all....1 <input type="radio"/> In some extent.....2 <input type="radio"/> Yes, in most of the cases.....3
10.4	How do you see the use of local human resource (e.g. in business and supporting services) in tourism activities of Pathibhara?	<input type="radio"/> Not at all.....1 <input type="radio"/> In some extent.....2 <input type="radio"/> Yes, in most of the cases.....3
10.5	Major stakeholders in the tourism	<input type="radio"/> Governmental bodies....1 <input type="radio"/> Non-governmental actors....2 <input type="radio"/> Both .....3
10.6	Participation of local stakeholders in tourism	<input type="radio"/> Not at all.....1

	<b>[If 'No', stop further asking]</b>	<input type="radio"/> In some extent.....2 <input type="radio"/> Yes, in most of the cases.....3
10.7	What type of stakeholder's participation in tourism do you observe?	<input type="radio"/> Policy making .....1 <input type="radio"/> Small type of program & promotion.....2 <input type="radio"/> Fund raising from different sources.....3 <input type="radio"/> National and international exposure of Pathibhara.....4 <input type="radio"/> Involvement just in profit making and benefit taking activity or infrastructure.....5

**\*\*Thank you very much for your valuable kind cooperation \*\***

## Annex-2: FGD Consultation-Questionnaire

Date: .....

Place:.....

### Respondent's profile(उत्तरदाताको विवरण)

SN	Name	Age	Sex	Profession/organization	Contact
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					

#### **Theme- I: Tourism characteristics**

(Main inquiry)	Major Reponses
1. The trend, importance and nature of tourism in Pathibhara	

#### **Theme- II: Economic dimension (income, employment etc.)**

मुख्य प्रश्न (Main inquiry)	प्राप्त उत्तर )मुख्य बुँदामात्र( major Reponses
1. Employment or participation status community in relation to tourism	
2. Do you feel that there is an encouragement for local people to work and invest in the tourism sector (job, business, guide etc.)?	
3. Are there any entrepreneurial training activities (among the local people)?	

**Theme- III: Benefits, opportunities and challenges (फाइदा ,अवसर र चुनौतीहरु(**

मुख्य प्रश्न (Main inquiry)	प्राप्त उत्तर )मुख्य बुँदामात्र( major Reponses
1. Benefits of tourism to local people in your areas	
2. Distribution of the benefits of tourism to the local community	
3. Major challenge of tourism development in this region	
4. Discussion about the role of different levels of governments in tourism promotion of Pathibhara?	
5. Different opinions about the ways of boosting tourism industry boosted more in this region?	

**Theme- III: Market related issues including infrastructure, goods, stakeholders and services in Phungling/ Pathibhara**

Main inquiry	Major Reponses
1. Main market areas for tourism in Pathibhara and its possibility of further exploration?	
2. Major touristic infrastructures/ services in the Pathibhara area?	
3. Issues about the recent development of Pathibhara Cable car in this region?	
4. Issues about the use of local tourism products in Pathibhara?	

5. Issues about the use of local human resource (e.g. in business and supporting services) in tourism activities of Pathibhara?	
6. Major stakeholders and their challenges in the tourism	
7. Any further remark of the group discussion?	

धन्यवाद सहित (with thanks)

**Annex-3: List of KII Participants and Their Profile**

SN	Name	Representation/ Profession	Date of interview	Contact
1	Amir Maden	Mayor, Phungling Municipality	2080/8/1	-
2	Jaya Narayan Khanal	Chief Administrative Officer, Phungling Municipality	2080/8/1	9852622111
3	Sojit Shrestha	Ward chair-5, Phungling Municipality-5	2080/8/5	9842635292
4	Manmani Kafle	ED of Pathibhara Xetra Wikas Samiti, Pathibhara	2080/8/7	9862698765
5	Tara Ghimire	Chairperson of Shree Pathibhara Devi Mandir Xetra Samraxan Tatha Sambardhan Samiti, Pathibhara	2080/8/7	9852672480
6	Rudra Paudel	Representative of Pathibhara Mukumlung Cable Car Company, Phungling Municipality	2080/8/8	9851035229
7	Saran Labung	Representative of taxi/ bus wyawasayi sangh, Phungling Municipality	2080/8/9	9852660567
8	Narayan Thapa	Representative of Uddhog Vanijya Sangah/ FNCCI-Taplejung	2080/8/9	9852660045
9	Dinesh Khawas	Representative of Hotel Association, Taplejung	2080/8/9	9852660236
10	Ramkumar Limbu	Sawari (helper of visitors)-tirthayatri sahayogi	2080/8/5	-
11	Dilli Acharya	Mul Pujari of the Pathibhara Temple	2080/8/15	9861590855
12	Mahendra Kurmar Bista	Trade and business; Phungling -11	2080/8/3	9842792574
13	Santosh Limbu	Ward Chairperson; Phungling -10	2080/8/14	-
14	Sabin Bista	Hotel and transportation; Phungling -11	2080/8/3	9841371802
15	Shankar Basnet	Trade; Phungling -5	2080/8/15	9842756125
16	Ranjana Tamang	Ward Secretary; Phungling -4	2080/8/13	9842946606

### **Annex-4: List and Profile of Participants in Stakeholder Consultation**

#### **Consultation-1**

Phungling Municipality (Wards: 4 and 5 joint)

Nature of group: Mixed (hotel business holders, grocery shop owners, vehicle owners and workers)

Date: 2080/8/17

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Contact</b>
1	Yuvraj Mahatara	40	M	Trade	024460035
2	Wishnu Kumari Shrestha	35	F	Trade	9842642479
3	Kewal Maden		M	Hotel	9842663753
4	Baburam Shrestha	42	M	Transportation	
5	Winod Bharati	33	M	Transportation	9862634826
6	Shankar Basnet		M	Hotel	
7	Dipak Basnet		M	Social worker	9852681295
8	Ganesh Kumar Shreshtha	47	M	Cooperative	9844652610
9	Ganeshbabu Niraula	45	M	Hotel	9842660555
10	Suresh Singad	42	M	Hotel	9842660318

**Consultation-2**

Phungling Municipality (wards 10 and 11: Joint)

Nature of group: Mixed (hotel business holders, grocery shop owners)

Date: 2080/8/13

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Contact</b>
1	Indra Narayan Bhattarai	50	M	Hotel	9842642802
2	Mahesh Gurung	45	M	Hotel	-
3	Rajndra Mahat	47	M	-	9852681360
4	Sita Bhattarai Karki	42	F	Hotel	9844618933
5	Dipak Basnet	31	M	Hotel	-
6	Pemba Sherpa	40	M	Hotel	9842660426
7	Suresh Limbu	55	M	Social worker	9742658458
8	Keshav Gurung	43	M	Hotel	986425202
9	Khagendra Bhattarai	35	M	Social worker	9806021106
10	Bhim Kumar Bista	42	M	Hotel	981799240

### Consultation-3

Phungling Municipality (consultation with municipal level)

Nature of group: Political representatives, policy makers and civil society

Date: 2080/8/14

	Name	Age	Sex	Profession	Contact
1	Liladevi Bokhim	-	F	Hon. Member of HR	9842660646
2	Narayan Thapa	49	M	President of Uddhog Baniyya Sangh	9852660045
3	Dawa Lama	40	M	Ward 4 chairperson	9842660022
4	Durga Palunwa	38	M	Ward 5 chairperson	9842743912
5	Sojit Shreshtha	39	M	Pathibhara Chetra Wikas Samiti	9842635292
6	Chetraj Ghimire	44	M	Hotel entrepreneur	-
7	Bimal Bhandari	44	M	NGO federation	9852660931
8	Harichandra Poudel	43	M	Cooperative	9844668568
9	Santosh Limbu	32	M	Ward 10 chairperson	9842625837

## Annex – 5 : Photographs

### 1. Temple Periphery of Pathivhara Mata



### 2: Backside of Temple Periphery of Pathibhara Mata, also called Manobhara (photograph taken by the researcher)



3. Main Temple Image of Pathibhara Mata (photograph taken by researcher)



4: Different Mountain Peaks around the Pathibhara Temple (Photo credit: Municipality Website, Phungling)



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