

# Development of Tourism Industry through SME: A Study on Comilla

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## Abstract

*Tourism, one of the crucial industries in Bangladesh, can contribute a lot to the economy. But this sector fails to give desired output due to inappropriate policy and operation of SME. There is lot of entrepreneurs in tourism industries who suffers small financial crisis for the proper development. This study aims at describing the way by which the tourism industry can be addressed with SME. Facilitation of institutional financing to the tourism SME can do ultimate development of the country's economy.*

**Keywords:** Tourism, SME, Economic Development, Community based Tourism, IT.

## 1. Introduction

Bangladesh is a country of natural beauty. She is blessed with endowment of almighty. The seven, Bangladeshi divisions offer a variety of natural and cultural micro-destinations suitable for tourist attractions. The tourism industry is a sector which effect the entire society in many ways and has a profound impact on our social, cultural and economic life Negrusa and Gica (2008). At the world level, the industry of tourism and travels represents the most dynamic sector of activity and, at the same time, the most important generator of jobs (Tiberiu, 2008). Travel and Tourism contribute to the country in different sectors of economy and society. As per World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) report (2011), the total contribution of travel & tourism to GDP was BDT 381.6bn (4.7% of GDP), and was forecasted to rise by 7.6% in 2012, and to rise by 6.5% pa to BDT 773.0bn in 2022. In 2011, travel & tourism directly supported 1,329,000 jobs (1.9% of total employment). This was expected to rise by 3.6% in 2012 and rise by 2.9% p.a. to 1,840,000 jobs (2.0% of total employment) in 2022. Despite of

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having more potentialities of tourism industry in our country, it was not developed to the expectation yet. The persons along with industries that are directly or indirectly related to the tourism industry are facing more challenges as well as obstacles as for the improper care and facilities provision by the authorities. Most of the enterprises that are linked to tourism are micro, cottage, meso, small and medium enterprises. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) face a number of obstacles both in terms of their original establishment as well as in their ongoing operations. There must be recognition that the small-scale tourism related businesses can have an important impact on poverty reduction (Walter, 2004). The persons who are involved with SME in tourism industry are less skilled and deprived of the facilities comparing to other industries. This study aims at strengthening the SMEs in tourism industry in Bangladesh.

## 2. Rationale of the Study

Bangladesh has basically three sectors of generating revenue: agriculture, industry and service (Anonymous, 2010). Tourism is one the most prominent service sector having more potentials in our country where different scope of tourism exists. In this country, the scope of nature based tourism, culture based tourism, and eco-tourism is quite evident (Shamsuddoha, 2004). Most of the organizations that serve tourism industry is under the SME like micro, cottage, small and medium enterprises (Bangladesh Bank, 2013). Most of the owners of these enterprises face different problem like sudden and unforeseen changes in demand, lack of skill and training, limitations of the finance and long procedure to get loan etc. SME contributes in others sectors but in tourism industry, it contributes little as expectation. There is also a gap of research in tourism sector that motivates this study.

## 3. Objectives of the Study

Bangladesh is a country of heritage and history with large natural tourism resources. Livelihood and inherited peoples' hospitality attracts the tourists. But the industry is not yet ready to explore all potentialities. So, the following objectives have been determined to study the development the tourism through SME in Bangladesh context.

- Exploring the potentialities of SME in tourism industry in Bangladesh.
- Identifying the present status of tourism SME
- Revealing the constraints of SME and fostering through tourism industry.

#### 4. Literature Review

Tourism is one of the largest industries in the world which is an important source of income, employment and wealth in many countries (Anonymous, 2002). Tourism has been changed into a worldwide industry and the competition between tourism destinations in the world is increasing. Growth of tourism is due to the performance of global transportation and, consequently, reduction of costs of transportation and growth welfare of a major part of world population. United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimated that international trips of 565 million in 1995 would reach to more than one and a half billion in 2020 (Anonymous, 1999). While human resource development issues are fundamental to improving SME competitiveness, an SME development strategy should also address issues such as sustainable use of natural resources.

Agriculture and agro-processing, including use of forest and marine resources and tourism figure predominantly among the industries where developing countries have comparative advantages (Anonymous, 2004). Tourism is seen to be an important part of the economic agenda, the arguments advanced in favor of targeting small tourism businesses are similar to those for SME in general, namely: their ability to create new jobs at a time when major operators are downsizing; improvements to industrial relations and working environment; diversified and flexible structure; stimulating competition, leading to an energetic enterprise culture; and their creativity in introducing new service products. They can also be part of the output experience for the tourist through their ability to effect introductions to their neighbors, advising visitors about itineraries, providing narratives on local history, culture, folklore and landscape, as well as playing an active role in the advancement of the community (Stephen, 2002).

The Romanian tourism is largely dominated by SME, with more than 99% of the firms employing fewer than 250 people. Putting aside the fact that in many remote and rural areas, as well as urban locations, tourism is seen to be an important part of the economic agenda, the arguments advanced in favor of targeting small tourism businesses are similar to those for SME in general (Negrusa and Gica 2008). Because the tourism market will have a higher level of integration, it will become more important for SME to match different quality levels. Tourism SME can also be a source of innovation and help shape destination development. There are celebrated cases internationally where small businesses have created an identity for a destination that has subsequently been harnessed by local municipalities. Moreover, many municipalities in socially or economically deprived areas of most established member states have also developed expertise in accessing European Union (EU) resources to support

tourism SME programs that is usually as part of a wider social/regional development agenda ([www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)). It has been suggested that small tourism enterprises form a natural amalgam, because the fortunes of the local destination and the firms are closely intertwined (Buhalis and Cooper, 1998). Although research indicates that tourism SME tend to cooperate rather than compete by formulating value-added networks of product and service delivery that enhance the tourist satisfaction, e.g., by referring customers to each other (Greffé, 1994). SME play a key role in transition and developing countries. It is typically account for more than 90% of all firms outside the agricultural sector, constitute a major source of employment and generate significant domestic and export earnings. As such, SME development emerges as a key instrument in poverty reduction efforts (Anonymous, 2004). SME cooperation is needed at the destination level in order to increase the competitiveness of SME and their respective destinations as well as to facilitate higher customer satisfaction (Buhalis, 1999).

With the advent of electronic distribution channels, visitors are searching and booking online, customizing their packages according to their individual needs (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2006). Enterprises are seldom, if ever, self-sufficient and they need to exchange resources in order to survive (Ahrne, 1994). SME intending to expand are often held back because of a lack of appropriate resources (Holmlund and Kock, 1998). In more advanced developing countries, where there is reasonable progress in the fundamental institutions, SME may still face challenges in accessing formal finance in the form of bank loans, guarantees, venture capital, leasing and so on. For instance, although SME are by far the largest group of customers of commercial banks in any economy, loans extended to SME is often limited to very short periods, thereby ruling out financing of any sizable investments (Anonymous, 2004). Shaw and Williams (1990) noted in their study that family enterprises are of two kinds: firstly, the self-employed who use family labor, have little market stability, low levels of capital investment, weak management skills and are resistant to advice or change and secondly, the small employer who uses family and non-family labor, has a better business foundation, but can share similar behavior patterns to the self-employed and are therefore equally vulnerable. The vulnerability of tourism SME is also highlighted in the work of Morrison, Rimmington and Williamson (1998). Small and micro tourism enterprises, however, face enormous difficulty competing with their larger counterparts. Competition is made more difficult because many small and micro tourism enterprises are often located in peripheral regions where access to skills support is limited (Hollick, 2003). Despite the fact that the tourism industry has been long established it is still based on SME, a factor that hinders its dynamism to adopt new marketing models (Kotler, *et al.*, 2006).

Tourism SME often have severe limitations in respect of marketing, delivering quality, price policy, cost control and re-adjustment ability (Wanhill, S., 2002). SME do not proactively engage in networking. Micro and small tourism operators tend to be lifestyle entrepreneurs, who often do not even consider themselves part of the industry (Braun & Hollick, 2005). Other barriers to entering industry networks have been put down to cultural factors on the one hand and lack of resources (time, staff, opportunity) on the other. Small and micro firms tend to limit their external contacts to compulsory contacts, e.g., local government and tax agencies and direct support actors and agencies, e.g., customers, accountants and banks (Evans, 1999).

In order to avoid marginalization of tourism SME in the knowledge economy, tourism communities, industry players and policy makers seeking to advance the role of tourism SME in the global economy would do well to address core industry standards and performance practices (Gretzelet et al, 2000). The majority of SME in developing and transition countries, however, has been less able or unable to exploit the benefits of globalization and, to add to the situation, are frequently under pressure on the local or domestic markets from cheaper imports and foreign competition (Anonymous, 2004). SME, due to their size, are particularly constrained by non-competitive real exchange rates, limited access to finance, cumbersome bureaucratic procedures in setting up, operating and growing a business, poor state of infrastructure and lack of effective institutional structures. The removal of these constraints is a daunting task calling for holistic SME support, i.e., an enabling environment for SME development consisting of functioning macro and micro level institutions (Anonymous 2004). SME identify financing, especially medium to long-term finance, as their topmost obstacle to growth and investment. These obstacles come at two levels. In least developed economies, and in some transition and developing economies deficiencies in both the macroeconomic and microeconomic environments pose challenges: high budget deficits and unstable exchange rates and legal, regulatory and administrative environment poses major obstacles to access of SME to financing. In more advanced developing countries, where there is reasonable progress in the fundamental institutions, SME may still face challenges in accessing formal finance in the form of bank loans, guarantees, venture capital, leasing and so on. For instance, although SME are by far the largest group of customers of commercial banks in any economy, loans extended to SME is often limited to very short periods, thereby ruling out financing of any sizable investments (Anonymous, 2004). The SME development strategy has to be inclusive and build on a consensus on SME challenges, goal and broad policy direction among key SME stakeholders. The strategy has to concert and coordinate efforts of

institutional structures that make or affect policy (the parliament, provincial councils and political parties), the administrators of policy (line ministries, local government authorities and regulatory structures), and public support organizations (SME, export, investment, regional development, public sector education and training institutions and financial institutions (White, 2002), guiding enterprises, bicycle rental operations, small restaurants, retail operations meeting the diverse needs of the tourist, the creation of small transportation outfits and providing accommodation are a few examples of SME that can be created. The accommodation business provides several opportunities for poverty reduction. Initially development can be in the form of a homestay where a portion of a dwelling is rehabilitated to meet the accommodation needs of tourists. This can be expanded possibly into a stand-alone small-scale inn or lodge (Walter, 2004).

## 5. Research Methodology

The research is qualitative in nature that is based on primary and secondary data. Primary data have been collected by interviewing from stratified random samples of the owners of cottage, micro and SME entities using a structured questionnaire. The discussion guide focuses on the experience of the owner, demand of the tourism destination along with their services, major constraints in running the business from different view point like financial, operational skill and technological knowledge and promotion facilities, knowledge of promotional activities etc. The sample frame for the survey is the existing owner of SME in the Comilla where the famous Shalbon Bihar, Comilla University are located. The sample size for the study is 60 (sixty). The survey is conducted from January to February 2013. Secondary information is gathered from various sources like journals, books, websites, brochures, magazines, and newspapers etc. The research procedure includes preparation of questionnaire, pre-testing of questionnaire, survey, data decoding, data analysis, interpretation and findings. SPSS 17 version is used to analyze the primary data. Mainly the descriptive statistics is used to analyze the survey data.

## 6. Results and Discussion

Tourism is the 5th thirteenth sectors amongst 32 as per the National Industrial Policy 2010 published by the Ministry of Industry, Bangladesh. Tourism SME bears more prominent role in the economic development of country even developing one. Industry needs proper SME interfering for the development of tourism that can give the opportunity in gaining destination competitiveness.

Tourism product is often a heritage or an attraction of local community that exists in the micro-destination. Business activity in tourism industry includes development and promotion aspects of attractive and sellable of local community, non-native people transportation into local community, hospitality management and directing activity of visitors and providing goods and services for tourists to be able to purchase goods during their residence (Afsaneh Pourjam). There can be little doubt that small and medium-sized enterprises play an important part in destination competitiveness (www.oecd.org). Tourism is a multidimensional sector belongs to many subsectors. There are more direct and indirect components related to tourism industry. More SME are needed to be established in this sector to flourish this dynamic industry. In developing countries the manufacturing, service and trading functions are largely dominated by small and medium sized enterprises (Kendall *et. al.* 2001).

The survey includes some specific questions to identify the potentialities and constraints of the tourism SME in our country which includes gender of the SME owners, knowledge of SME, business types, initial capital management, destination role in employment of local people, financing facilities, and training of the SME owners, Knowledge of SME and Use of IT in their business, promotional knowledge, involvement in community based tourism and cooperative in tourism industry.

Our Survey indicates that 38% of the SME owners are engaged with micro business, 22% with cottage industry, 24% with small industry and the 14% of the people are engaged with medium size enterprises.

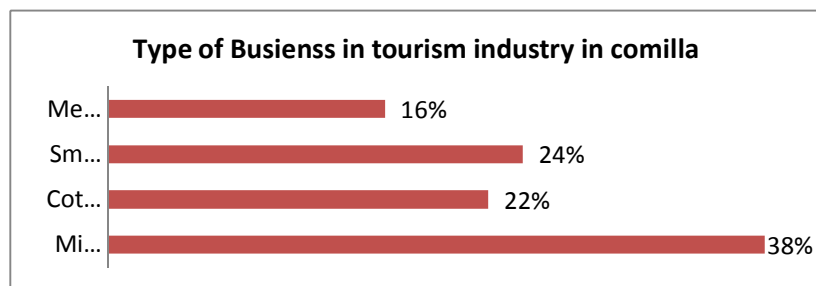


Figure: 1. Types of SME in Comilla

Our survey indicates that 90.4% of the owners are male and others 9.6% female are involved with SME in tourism sector. People are involving with different types of business like transportation, restaurant, accommodation, recreation and

others types of business. Here the Table:1 shows that only 1.20 % of the female involve with the accommodation business and 4.8% of the female are involved with restaurant business and the rest are dominated by the male . The survey indicates that the female contribution is less than expectation.

Table: 1. Male and female participation in different types of business

Types of business	Gender of Respondent		Total
	Male	Female	
Transportation	11	0	11
Restaurant	19	3	22
Accommodation	4	1	5
Recreation	5	0	5
Others	17	0	17
Total	56	4	60

Source: Survey Result

In fact, women entrepreneurship development is a challenging phenomenon in Bangladesh as women are lagged behind (economically and socially) compared to men (Haque and Itohara, 2009; Rahman, 2009).

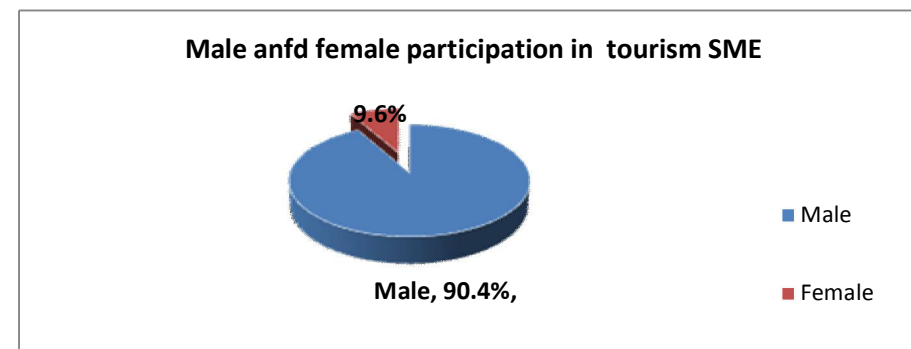


Figure: 2 Gender of SME owners

The initial capital is a major fact to start the business. Our survey finds that most of the initial capital comes from the personal and family sources following the other two sources which are financial institutions and friend. Thirty seven percent respondents said that they started the business with their own capital and 36% started business with the capital from the family, 14% owners started the business borrowing money from friends and others got help from the financial

institutions. The access to financial institutions is very difficult in our country that demands for long and complicated procedures.

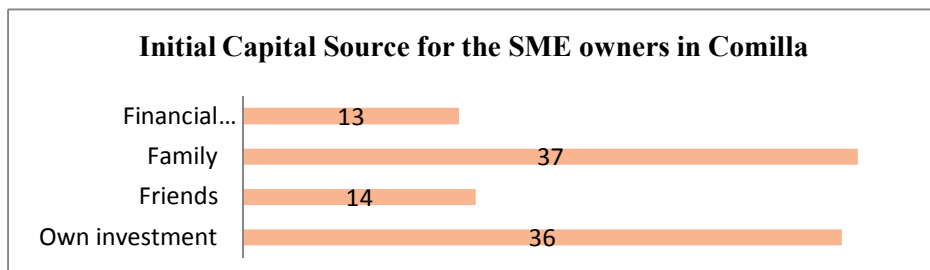


Figure: 3 Sources of Initial Capital for SME in Comilla

Reliance on the financial institutions to get access to fund is not all that popular, as the financial intuitions put SMEs in tight credit constraints due to stringent collateral requirements (Meagher, 1998).

The question regarding the destination role in employment of the local people indicates that destination has a major effect in the employment of local people that is found in our survey. 38.33% the respondents and 43.33% of the respondents said they are strongly agree and agree with the statement of destination plays a vital role in the employment of local people. which indicates that SME can play a vital role in utilizing resources what are existent in the every micro destination of our country. Developing countries in the world are considering this tourism industry as a vital source economic growth and employment opportunity. Like any other global industry, tourism business activities can greatly influence the process of local development (Afsaneh Pourjam). Tourism continues to account for a dominant source of employment (Miller and Henthorne, 1997). The Cuban travel and tourism sector employment is estimated at 587,000 jobs in 2007, 11.2% of total employment, or 1 in every 8.9 jobs. By 2017, this should total 715,000 jobs, 13.4% of total employment or 1 in every 7.5 jobs (Anonymous, 2007).

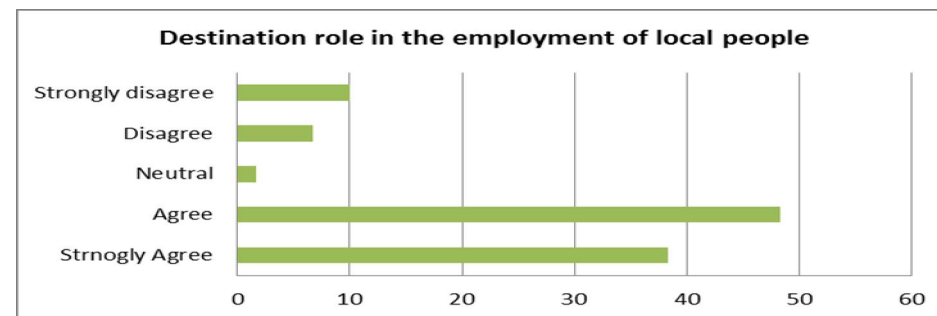


Figure :5. Destination Role in the employment of local people

Globalization has made the world like a village in which we cannot ignore the modern information technology (IT) in developing our business by promoting the business through IT and adopting with the modern IT facilities within business.

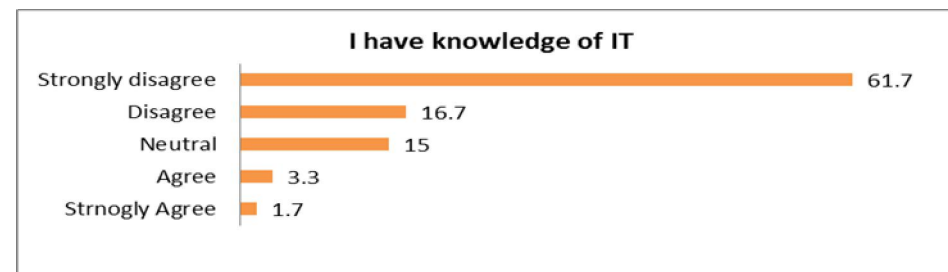


Figure : 6.Knowledge of Information Tecnology.

Our survey reveals that knowledge of IT is rare in the owners of SME in tourism industry. Eighty percent respondents have no knowledge of IT where only 5% know about IT, but they cannot apply in their business. On the above mentioned context it is evident that small businesses are slow to apply technology to improve their competitiveness as they are affected by their sheer small size and limited resources (Quaddus and Hofmeyer, 2007). With increasing information and communication technology (ICT) literacy of prospective customers, consumer expectations on product information are rising. In light of this development there is general agreement that tourism enterprise managers of the future will need to have both business acumen and skills in ICT if they want to exploit its full potential.

Our survey reveals that the training provision is so poor in this sector. We asked the respondents about the formal training on SME.

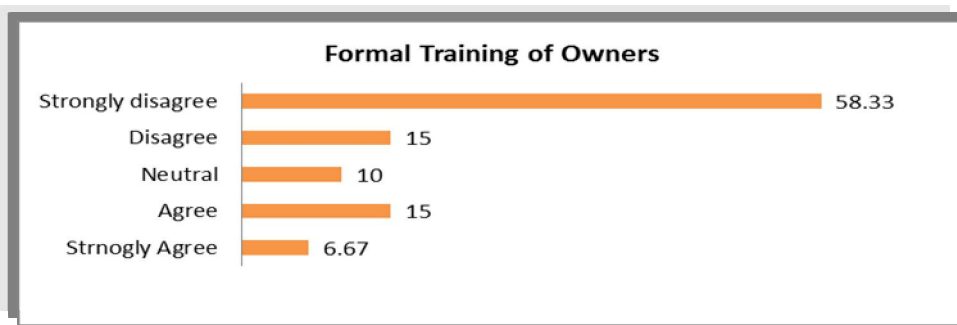


Figure : 7. Formal training to SME owners.

The figure indicates that 73% of the respondents have no formal training regarding their business operation, management, promotion and use of IT. The training can help the owners to gain competitive advantage which is always lacked by our SME owners in tourism sectors. The training materials have been designed so that tourism SME who attend workshops or access the Toolkit directly are able to create a set of plans to take a more strategic outlook on the development of their business. For example, in each module SME can develop a business plan, a marketing plan, an IT and ecommerce strategy, and a set of policies and plans to improve their environmental practices. It is obvious that to be a successful entrepreneur education and skill are the main component. Entrepreneurs must have knowledge about the industry, managerial skill and technological knowledge to be a successful one (Anonymous, 2012)

Our survey reveals that the accessibility of the SME owners to the financial institutions is very difficult. The respondents say that sometimes they have to follow a long and formal procedures to get the loan from financial institution that ultimately creates obstacle to get the loan from the financial institutions. The following figure indicates that 83.33% of did not get the financial support from any financial institutions as for not matching their requirement. Reliance on the financial institutions to get access to fund is not all that popular, as the financial intuitions put SMEs in tight credit constraints due to stringent collateral requirements (Meagher, 1998).

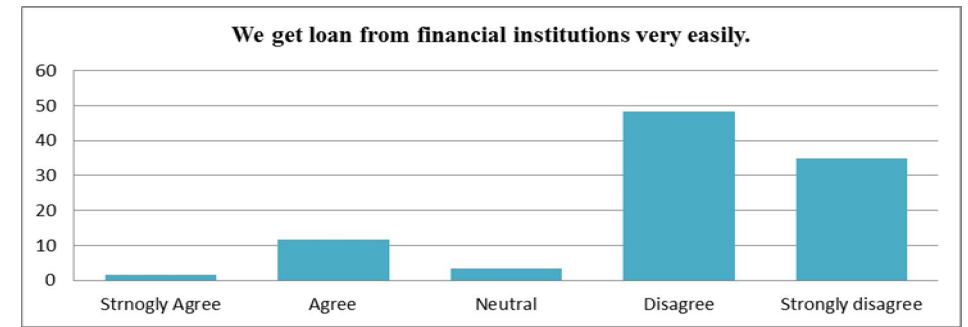


Figure: 8 Loan provision by financial institution to SME owners.

**Table: 2 Major Barriers for Getting Loans**

<i>Barriers to SME owners in getting loan from institutions</i>	<i>% of Responses</i>	<i>% of Cases</i>
High Interest Rate	19.2	85.2
High collateral Requirement	17.1	75.9
Financial institutions tendency to provide small term loan	7.9	35.2
Too much paperwork and bureaucracy in the banking system	14.2	63.0
Lack of long standing credit history with the	5.8	25.9
Lack of special client relationships with the bank	6.3	27.8
Lack of knowledge about the requirements	6.7	29.6
Lack of information regarding how to pre	4.6	20.4
Lack of management and banking skills	4.6	20.4
Lack of access to foreign banks	.8	3.7
Lack of FDI	1.7	7.4
Lack of access to non-bank equity capita	1.7	7.4
Lack of institutional investors and government	2.9	13.0
Lack of knowledge about the customer	3.8	16.7
Others	2.9	13.0
Total Responses	100.0	444.4

**Source:** Haque, E. A. K. and Mahmud, S. (2003). Economic Policy Paper on Access to Finance for SMEs

Cooperatives, community based tourism relationship among different parties is needed for the development of an industry. Our survey reveals that the cooperation and relationship among the entire stakeholder related to tourism industry. Our covers two questions which are that about cooperative in this industry and community based tourism. But the result is unsatisfactory.

**Table: 3 Cooperative and Community based tourism (CBT) in Comilla.**

	Community based tourism	Cooperative of tourism
Strongly Agree	6	0
Strongly Agree	3	4
Neutral	7	2
Disagree	16	17
Strongly disagree	28	37
Total Respondents	60	60

**Source:** Survey Result, 2013

Table-3 indicates that majority of the respondent disagreed with the statement “we have tourism cooperatives’ and there is community based tourism is practiced in our locality. Out of 60 respondents, only 44 disagreed with the statement of tourism cooperatives and 54 disagreed with statement of community based tourism.(Sharpley, 2008) believe that local community involvement will not be sustainable unless people themselves have a tendency to get the control of their destiny.

It is widely recognized that Bangladesh is very rich by the natural beauty and panoramic views, what a tourist wants to enjoy. But there is lack of effective initiatives, proper management plan, and quick & sincere effort of government (Akther, 2001). But this industry is not developed to the expected level as for improper care and provision of facilities. In general Tourism is experiencing a skills gap and the lack of qualified labor represents together with increased competition on quality a vicious circle. It is obvious that for the sustainable and ensured economic development of Bangladesh’s SME must give intensive emphasis. Development from the grass root level needs to be ensured. And the tourism is only one multidimensional sector which constitutes more sub sector and more prospects in every sub sector of tourism that can be achieved by the proper initiatives to develop the industry. Tourism is an industry of providing services. It could not be isolated from other sectors; rather it depends on some combined effort of other service sub-sectors like hotel and motels, transports, foods, security, guide etc. These facilities are the infrastructures of tourism which is still far behind from satisfactory level (Rajib, 2012)

## 7. Findings

- A. Majority people are engaged with cottage and micro business where involvement with small and medium enterprise is not significant.
- B. Women participation in tourism sector is at the unexpected level comparing to other sectors.
- C. The owner of the SME in tourism industry has limited knowledge of their business regarding business set up, management and operation.
- D. Promotional knowledge, skill and facilities are limited to the SME owners in tourism industry.
- E. Knowledge of information technology as well as application of IT in tourism sector is scarce.
- F. Procedures of tourism SME loan are long and difficult.
- G. Training is not provided by the respected authorities to SME owners and employee in tourism industry.
- H. Young and educated entrepreneur are not involved in tourism SME like other SME sectors.
- I. Absence of community based tourism is in our country.
- J. Long and difficult procedures to access to the finance.

## 8. Conclusion

SME play prominent role in the socioeconomic development of the country especially to the developing country like Bangladesh in which some of the prospective sectors like tourism industry have not explored to the expectation. Tourism is a multidimensional service industry belong some direct and more indirect sub-sectors. So, well-developed tourism SME is a prerequisite to attain higher growth of tourism. The prospect of SME in this sector is huge through which development of entrepreneurship, enhancement living standard of the local rural people, and poverty reduction by engaging more people in the industry is possible. But the diagnosis of pros and cons of tourism sector can link to investment, skills, unexploited potential of technology, and unawareness of the local people regarding tourism.



## 9. Recommendations:

The concentration is needed in the following matters for the development of tourism SME in our country.

1. Initiatives of public and private sector should be taken to explore the potentialities of tourism SME of every micro destination in Bangladesh.
2. Entrepreneurship development in tourism industry should be introduced caring by local government.
3. Education and training initiative for employees and employers must be taken for developing appropriate soft and hard skills.
4. Use of information technology in tourism SME create a real vertical growth. So, it should be popularized with priority basis.
5. Investment should be with nursed with incentives and institutional financial policies should be reviewed.
6. Women participation should be specially welcomed in tourism SME for high growth.

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