

Expert Group Meeting on Sustainable Tourism: Ecotourism, Poverty Reduction and Environmental Protection

29-30 October 2013,

New York, United Nations Headquarters, Room S-2727

Background

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in June 2012, emphasized in its outcome document “The Future We Want” §§ 130-131, that “sustainable tourism, well managed and designed, can make significant contributions to sustainable development. It has the potential to contribute to a green and inclusive economy if creating decent jobs and generate trade opportunities and income. However, to enable such positive synergies, capacity must be build to promote environmental awareness, understanding of impacts and conditions for the conservation of biodiversity, flora and fauna, wildlife and ecosystems. Likewise an understanding of the linkages between impact of tourism, local communities and cultural diversity is necessary to promote holistic positive outcomes of tourism activities.”

The Rio+20 outcome document further encouraged investments in sustainable tourism, including in ecotourism and cultural tourism, small business creation and facilitating access to finance, including through micro credits issued to local communities, the poor, and to indigenous peoples. The decision stressed the need to establish appropriate guidelines and regulations in according with national priorities and legislation, with the aim of promoting sustainable tourism.

The General Assembly, at its 67th session (2012-2013), adopted a resolution on the promotion of ecotourism for poverty eradication and environmental protection (A/RES/67/223), which further elaborated on the close linkages and potential for ecotourism to contribute to poverty alleviation and sustainable development. In this regard, it invited the UN-system and other relevant international organizations, the public sector, private companies and other stakeholders to create capacity for well managed ecotourism with minimal negative environmental and cultural impacts, through dissemination of good practice, tools and guidelines.

Objectives

The objectives of the EGM are to:

1. take stock of development in ecotourism promotion and management and its contribution to sustainable development;
2. discuss options, ways and means to promote eco-tourism that is economically viable (for public and private investors), socially and economically beneficial (for employees and small-scale entrepreneurs), and environmentally benign (minimal environmental impacts);
3. propose recommendations of good practice (for project developers, planer, and financiers);

4. identify critical issues and priority areas of intervention in order to address unsustainable trends in tourism development.
5. identify potential areas or projects for international cooperation and partnerships.

It is expected that the recommendations emanating from this meeting will be of value to participating countries aiming to develop eco-tourism potentials, including, among others, Small Island Developing States as well as other countries with coastal, mountainous or forest, lake or desert tourism attractions/resources.

Participation:

Participation in the ad hoc EGM is by invitation. Participation is free of charge, but participants are responsible for their own travel costs. Some funding is available to support participation of experts / resource persons from developing countries on a first-come-first-served basis. Interested experts or organizations interested to participate are requested to contact the organizers listed here below.

Participants in the EGM will include:

- National experts involved in promotion of sustainable tourism,
- Private sector representatives from the tourism industry, including representative of independent eco-loges and hotels, hotel chains and tour operators,
- Representatives of relevant business associations and international partnerships,
- UN-system entities engaged with promoting sustainable tourism,
- Representatives of international organizations promoting and facilitating investment in eco-tourism, including through providing appropriate financing, such as the World Bank Group (IBRD, IFC), the German International Cooperation Agency (GIZ), The International Ecotourism Society (TIES, Washington. D.C.) and other organizations.

Participating experts/speakers/panelists may include ecotourism planners/ agents/ lodging and tour companies from selected developing countries, possibly including China, Costa Rica, India, Indonesia, Isl. Rep of Iran, Madagascar, Morocco, Samoa (Pacific Islands), Rep. of Korea, Thailand, or Southern Europe and the Caribbean region.

Organization

The ad hoc Expert Group Meeting will be organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and its Division for Sustainable Development at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, in close collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), and other UN partners. Please also see the names of contact persons and focal points listed below.

Other UN funds and programmes and specialized agencies implementing projects or activities related to eco-tourism are also welcome to join the EGM as additional collaborating partners.

Tentative Agenda

An initial outline of the provisional programme is presented here below. A detailed provisional programme is under preparation and will be circulated among participants in due time ahead of the meeting.

Opening session:

Introductory overview and keynote presentations: Setting the stage

- Eco-tourism and sustainable development: trends and issues
- Challenges and opportunities for sustainable (eco)tourism in developing countries, small island developing States, and in the European Union
- Enabling (eco)tourist to make informed choices: The role of modern media
- Authentic eco-lodges and eco-tourism destination in developing countries

Session 1: Developing the market for sustainable (eco)tourism services

- Perspectives and experiences of the corporate sector: Visions, concepts, investments and innovations in eco-lodging services in developing countries
- Financing hotel, resort and eco-lodge investments: Balancing economic viability, social benefits and environmental considerations
- Voluntary eco-certification programmes of hotels and tourism services

Session 2: (Eco)tourism planning, marketing and destination management

- Planning for economic diversification and sustainable tourism development
- Planning, developing and managing sustainable (eco)tourism destinations
- Country / municipal presentations and tourism planning, marketing and destination management (e.g. South-Eastern Europe, China, Indonesia, Isl Rep of Iran, Madagascar, Rep. of Korea, or others)

Session 3: Assessing socio-economic benefits, employment generation and poverty reduction from sustainable (eco)tourism

- Policy recommendation for enhancing poverty reduction
- Methods and models for assessing socio-economic benefits of tourism for the poor
- Assessing tourism potentials and their socio-economic benefits in selected areas

Session 4: Enhancing environmental protection through sustainable (eco)tourism

- Planning for sustainable tourism development in national parks
- Heritage protection and sustainable (eco)tourism
- Sustainable (eco)tourism and biodiversity conservation

Session 5: Partnerships for international cooperation

- Trans-boundary cooperation in sustainable tourism and destination management
- Effective multi-stakeholder cooperation and international partnerships
- Compendium of good/best practices in sustainable (eco)tourism

Closing session

Language:

The Ad-hoc Expert Group Meeting will be conducted in English only.

Proceedings

The Meeting will be conducted in a “paper smart” manner. All presentations and other materials presented at the meeting will be made available to participants in electronic format. The electronic proceedings of the meeting will be published on the webpage: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org> .

Logistics

A separate circular for information of participants will be issued approximately six weeks ahead of the Meeting.

Contacts:

Mr. Ralph Wahnschafft
Senior Economic Affairs Officer, SIDS, Oceans and Climate Branch
E-mail: Wahnschafft@un.org/ Tel. +1 (212) 963 8598

Ms. Birgitte Bryld Alvarez-Rivero
Senior Sustainable Development Officer
E-mail: alvarez-riverob@un.org/ Tel. +1 (212) 963 8400

Logistical matters:

Ms. Juanita Llanto-Barnett
E-mail: llanto-barnett@un.org/ Tel. +1 (212) 963 0391

**SIDS, Oceans and Climate Branch
United Nations Division for Sustainable Development
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
405 East 42nd Street, 26th floor
New York, NY. 10017, USA**

[Draft as of 28082013]