

UN Symposium: Mainstreaming Sector Policies into Integrated National Sustainable Development Planning: Enhancing Sustainable Tourism, Urbanisation, Resource Efficiency, Biodiversity and Environmental Protection
Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 14-16 October 2014

Statement of Conclusions and Recommendations

The Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran (ICHTO) and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations (UN-DESA) co-organised the *United Nations Symposium on Mainstreaming Sector Policies into Integrated National Sustainable Development Planning: Enhancing Sustainable Tourism, Urbanization, Resource Efficiency, Biodiversity and Environmental Protection* in Tehran, Iran from 14-16 October, 2014.

Opening Session

The Symposium was attended by over 200 participants from international and domestic tourism organizations, governments, researchers and academia, business associations, mostly from developing countries, as well as by representative of the local media.

The Symposium was opened by welcome remarks by Mr. Morteza Rahmani Movahed, Deputy for Tourism, ICHTO. Also, Mr. Gary Lewis, UN Resident Coordinator in Iran made some welcome remarks. He said: “If Iran wishes to embrace tourism as a significant generator of income and jobs, it needs to plan well [...] Let us plan to use development models which consume fewer resources – and less water. Let us consider ecological and environmental carrying capacity of Iran in our investments. Let us adopt participatory approaches for tourism which ensure that the revenue is utilized for local community development.” Then, Mr. H.E. Mr Masoud Soltanifar, Vice-President and Head of ICHTO and H.E. Mr. Wu Hongbo, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations, as co-organisers of the event addressed the Symposium. H.E. Ms. Masoumeh Ebtekhari, Vice-President of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Head of the Department of Environment, also made some remarks.

Mr. Soltanifar Head of ICHTO stated that managing and attaining tourism’s benefits will be critical to achieving the SDGs and implementation the post-2015 Development agenda. Sustainable Tourism Industry can materialize MDGs particularly women empowering and gender equality, poverty eradication and environmental sustainability. Mr. Wu Hongbo noted that sustainable tourism must be seen as an integral ingredient of national sustainable development planning. Underlining the cross-sectoral nature of tourism, Mr. Wu recalled the provision contained in the “The Future We Want” and the SDGs recognizing the contribution of sustainable tourism to sustainable development, if designed and managed properly. Mr. Wu also added: “Tourism has tremendous potential for business, employment, infrastructure development, and poverty alleviation. But it can also enhance dialogue amongst cultures and

civilizations of the world. It is no coincidence that Iran initiated the global idea of “Dialogue Amongst Cultures and Civilizations” several years ago. Indeed, increased international cooperation in sustainable tourism can help advance this much-needed global discourse. It can help avert extremism and violence around the world, and advance peace and stability at all levels.”

The Symposium was also honoured by a key-note speaker, H.E. Mr Eshaq Jahangiri Kouhshani, First Vice-President of Iran. His Excellency Mr. Jahangiri stated that tourism should not be viewed from an economic and income generation perspective only. Rather, security and social gains of tourism are far higher than its economic and financial benefits. He underlined that development of tourism strengthens social solidarity, tolerance and respect for local traditions amongst nations. Tourists do not fall into extremism and violence.” He added that Iran is one of the safest countries in the region for attracting tourists and cultural exchanges.

The technical part of the Symposium included presentations and discussions in four plenary and six parallel group sessions. The panellists addressed many issues, including trends and issues in sustainable tourism development, strategies, methods and tools for integrated tourism planning, concepts for promoting investments and employment in the tourism sector, as well as strategies for conserving cultural and natural heritage, the environment, as well as biodiversity.

Participants recalled the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in June 2012, and its consensus statement 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 built to promote environmental awareness, understanding of impacts and conditions for the conservation of biodiversity, flora and fauna, wildlife and ecosystems.*” (“The Future We Want” §§ 130-131).

Participants also acknowledged the United Nations General Assembly (21 December 2012). landmark resolution recognizing ecotourism as key in the fight against poverty, the protection of the environment and the promotion of sustainable development.

Participants also noted that the Outcome Document of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals called for sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, *full and productive employment and decent work for all (Goal 8.7), which may be achieved through various measures, including (by 2030) through the design and the implementation of policies that promote sustainable tourism which creates jobs, promotes local culture and products.*

The UN Symposium exchanged information and discussed options for integrated planning of tourist destinations and for tourism policies and strategies that can enhance sustainability at global, regional, national and local levels. A number of practical recommendations were made during the presentations and discussions.

The following points summarize some of the main conclusions and recommendations adopted at the closing session of the United Nations Symposium.

Conclusions

Trends and issues in tourism: employment generation, poverty reduction and sustainable development

- ***Projected continued growth and economic importance of tourism:*** Tourism is a growing service industry. In 2012, tourism and travel contributed to over 9% of the global GDP. Around the world, tourism accounts for 1 in 11 jobs. Tourism creates many business, employment and poverty reduction opportunities.
- ***Increasing demand for (sustainable) tourism:*** Consumer demand for leisure activities, travel and tourism is an integral dimension of economic growth. Demand for tourist activity and tourist consumption is influenced by many factors, including economic diversification, specialization, productivity development, technological progress, population growth and urbanization. Most tourism occurs within and between industrialized countries. However, in many developing countries, domestic and outbound tourism demand is emerging and rapidly growing, too.
- ***Tourism development potentials in Western Asia:*** The participants underlined that the countries of Western Asia have a particular cultural and natural heritage which deserves and requires conservation programmes, and which at the same time offers unique opportunities for commercial sustainable tourism and ecotourism development, offering new business, employment and income generation opportunities.
- ***Tourism can be sustainable*** if it (a) economically and socially benefits the local host communities, (b) protects the national and local cultural and natural heritage which often forms the main tourist resource base and attraction, and (c) seeks to reduce avoidable water, air or soil emissions, as well as wasteful consumption of scarce resources.

Integrating tourism sector policies into national and local development planning

- Sustainable tourism development requires ***coordinated development planning*** between the various concerned Government Departments, as well as public private partnerships. Various models are available for enhancing inter-institutional cooperation and coordination at national, as well as at local levels.
- ***Tourism and socio-economic (re)development of old towns and urban areas:*** Conservation of urban heritage and (re)development of historic sites, including old town centers, market halls, former warehouses, ports and other industrial sites, can increase authenticity and generate tourism demand. Urban (re)development and tourism can have significant positive synergies.

- ***Tourism and socio-economic (re)development of rural areas:*** In many developing countries, as well as in several industrialised countries, there is a widening gap in economic activities and income opportunities between metropolitan, urban and rural areas. Lack of income opportunities and lack of access to basic services can cause rural to urban migration. A planned development of tourism and the related infrastructure and services can contribute to a reinvigoration of rural economies.

Local public participation in sustainable tourism development

- ***Local public participation in sustainable tourism development:*** Tourism development and investment projects must take into consideration needs and concerns of local communities and offer adequate employment opportunities.
- ***Public-private-community-partnerships*** can provide a useful basis for tourism development projects. Effective management and marketing of tourist destination should include support for local small and medium tourism enterprises.

Policy options and measure to increase public revenues from tourism whilst managing environmental impacts

- ***Various policy options and regulatory measures exist for increasing public revenues from tourism whilst managing environmental impacts:*** Unique travel experiences and quality of services can provide a basis for high-value tourism products, as well as for public revenues from tourist taxation, licensing or other fees. Options for local environmental protection include limiting the number of tourist visitors, establishing terrestrial and/or marine parks, rigorous environmental impact assessments and the enforcement of appropriate zoning and other regulatory measures.

Promoting investments and public-private sector partnerships

- ***Public and private investments in the tourism sectors:*** Participants highlighted the need of public infrastructure investments, in particular for transport (airports, ports, roads and rail, as applicable), but also for water and energy supply, as well as sanitation and waste management.
- Participants underlined ***the importance of private sector investment in accommodation and other tourism-related services.*** Resort and destination planning requires coordinated public and private investments. Infrastructure development in decentralized and remote locations can be costly.
- ***International Financial Institutions*** may consider lending more support to the integrated tourism planning for sustainable development and to the financing of infrastructure for sustainable tourism.

- Several participants emphasized that a *conducive and pacified business climate* is essential for the flow of foreign direct investment to developing countries, in particular for the financing of investments in the tourism sector.
- *The role of government differs between countries.* The main challenge for policy makers is to find the right combination of tourism policies and measures. Monitoring and evaluation mechanism were also emphasized.

Promoting resources efficiency and environmental protection

- *Promotion of a “greener” hospitality and tourism industry:* Participants exchanged information on national and local programmes aimed at improved energy efficiency, greater use of renewable energy sources, enhanced water conservation, appropriate local waste water treatment and waste minimization. National eco- and sustainability certification schemes can also contribute to a “greener” tourism economy.
- *Tourism and climate change:* Participants recognized that some forms of tourism can involve high levels of unsustainable resource consumption and emissions. The participants welcomed the increased efforts of the tourism industry to improve resource efficiency, to reduce emissions, and/or to more substantively contribute to the off-set of CO₂ emissions, where possible.
- *Promotion of environmentally sustainable tourism:* The participants emphasized the promotion of recreational activities which have low environmental impacts.

Training of human resources and *capacity-building*

- *Effective and sustainable development of requires specialized national educational training, and capacity building programmes.*
- Human Resources Development (HRD) will underpin the future development of tourism. *Training initiatives targeting existing and prospective staff in the hospitality industry* must be developed and institutional capacity strengthened in all aspects of formal and informal training and skills development. Several participants presented and discussed national and local level capacity building needs.
- Participants called for new bi- and multilateral cooperation between interested collaborating partners, including North-South, South-South, and Triangular North-South-South technical and financial cooperation in sustainable tourism development.

National parks, cultural heritage and biodiversity

- ***National parks have a particular important role to play in balancing the various needs, interests and concerns*** with regard to the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, and the provisional of public access to these resources.
- ***Vulnerability to natural disasters:*** Delegations drew attention to the particular vulnerability of some developing countries with regard to severe weather events, natural disasters and future impacts of climate change.

Importance of regional co-operation in tourism development

- Participants underlined the importance of the work of ***regional tourism development organizations and professional networks.***
- The participants encouraged the ***inter- and intra-regional networking of concerned organizations*** to facilitate and promote the development of international tourism and related services at the regional level.

Outlook and perspectives for international cooperation in tourism

- Participants were informed of ongoing consultative processes in the context of the 69th session of the United Nations General Assembly towards to adoption of a proposed resolution on ***Promotion of sustainable tourism, including ecotourism, for poverty eradication and environmental protection.*** The participants welcomed this initiative.
- ***Participants expressed their appreciation of the generous hospitality and support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization (ICHTO) and the associated national and local co-organizers.***
- ***The participants recommended that the co-organizers consider transmitting this summary of conclusions and recommendations for information to the High Level Political Forum of Sustainable Development at it next session.***

Recommendations

- The participants emphasized the important roles of multi-stakeholder collaboration amongst the government, the private sector, and the local communities, in achieving a coordinated and sustainable development of tourism. They also recommended increased efforts of international cooperation.
- The participants underlined the importance and the necessity of an integrated approach towards attaining objectives of sustainable tourism within the context of sustainable development.

- To enhance sustainable tourism, it is crucial to learn from the principles of ecolodges where indigenous/local communities are empowered to plan, design and construct accommodations for guests. In this regard, hotels and lodges need to be focused on local communities, their cultures, their architecture, folklore, food music and handcraft: This local community-based approach will eventually lead to reverse migration.

- Achieving Sustainable tourism requires a culture of commitment to the principles of sustainability and “ethical” values that form the core basis of ecotourism and ecolodges. Participants proposed that ecotourism principles be used to make traditional tourism more sustainable.

- The participants appreciated the presentation made by the representative of the EC on the Eden project, and the presentation made by GIZ on its technical cooperation program in the developing countries, and expressed interest to receive more detailed information about the projects. Further information will be provided by EC and GIZ to the participants through DESA.

- The importance of “capacity building” and human resource development, and the need for government as well as international support was emphasized.

- The participants underscored the crucial role of regional and international cooperation, and support to realize the potentials of developing countries in the areas of Sustainable Tourism. The regional cooperation organizations such as ECO, D-8, and the UNWTO were cited as examples of regional and international cooperative frameworks.

- Iran expressed interest and willingness to cooperate with the EC in different areas of sustainable tourism, including Eco-tourism. The representative of the EC showed similar willingness to consider ways of mutually beneficial cooperation in those areas.

- It was also recommended that a technical delegation could be exchanged between ICHTO and the EC to explore ways and means of establishing such collaboration.

- Both ICHTO and the EC agreed that UNDESA can facilitate on the above ideas, as appropriate.

- Participants emphasized the importance of following up on the recommendations contained in this Statement and requested UNDESA and UNWTO to propose ways and means for that purpose for consideration of ICHTO.
