

Forum: 2ND Committee (Environmental and Cultural)

Issue: Development of Ecotourism as a Form of Environmental Protection and Path to Eradicating Poverty

Student officer: Anastasia Pinchuk

Introduction

Tourism is expected to resume its rapid growth in the near future. Active tourism to sensitive natural areas without appropriate planning and management can threaten the integrity of ecosystems and local cultures. This growth can be harnessed not only for the enjoyment of tourists themselves but for maximizing economic benefits and thus increasing the living standards of host communities and countries. At the same time, unless corrective measures are taken, it is bound to have negative environmental and socio-cultural impact on those communities.

The increasing number of visitors to ecologically sensitive areas can lead to significant environmental pollution, destruction and degradation. What is more, local communities and cultures can be harmed in numerous ways by an influx of foreign visitors and wealth. In such circumstances ecotourism is becoming more and more popular for several reasons. First of all, it provides financial benefits and creates new job opportunities for local people. What is more, it can provide an important economic development alternative for local communities and raise the level of education among children. It respects local culture and provides direct financial benefits by using park entrance fees, the services of tour companies, hotel, airline and airport taxes and voluntary contributions.

Definition of key terms

Ecotourism

Environmentally responsible travel to fragile, pristine, and relatively uninhabited natural areas that have low impact and are the alternative to mass tourism.

Ecotourism usually has an educational element in order to make travel more responsible. It is intended to offer tourists insight into the impact of human beings on the environment, and to foster a greater appreciation of our natural habitats.

The main goals of ecotourism are promotion of active community participation, conservation of the environment, and providing funds for ecological conservation in order to improve the welfare of local people and support local cultures. It focuses on

environmental sustainability and usually involves travel to destinations where flora, fauna, and cultural heritage are the primary attractions.

Background Information

Since the 1980s ecotourism has been considered a critical effort by environmentalists, so that future generations may experience destinations relatively untouched by human intervention. Since 1983, the term ecotourism continues to gain popularity and evolve in its message and influence. Large organizations like the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) and the UN (United Nations) have adopted ecotourism as both a term and a strategy for sustainable travel and environmental conservation. It is increasingly realized that promoting greater community participation in tourism development not only provides stronger incentives to conserve natural capital, but can also lead to a more equitable sharing of benefits and thus greater opportunities for poverty alleviation.

Major countries involved

For many countries, ecotourism is not simply a marginal activity to finance protection of the environment, but is a major industry of the national economy.

For example, in several developing countries like Costa Rica, Ecuador, Nepal, Kenya, Madagascar, and territories such as Antarctica, ecotourism represents a significant portion of the gross domestic product and economic activity. The majority of the ecotourist population comes from developed states like the United States, Canada, Australia, and countries of Western Europe. National ecotourism certification programs have been put in place in countries such as Costa Rica, Australia, Kenya, Estonia, and Sweden. Some of the programs of involving poorer people in ecotourism are beginning to be implemented in several developing countries, such as Ecuador, Namibia, Nepal, and Uganda. It appears to have made a significant contribution towards poverty reduction.

UN Involvement

The United Nations Millennium Declaration has placed combating poverty at the center of the international development agenda. It can be argued that sustainable tourism development should go beyond the promotion of broad socio-economic development and give greater priority to poverty reduction. This priority shift would also address a somewhat ignored recommendation of the seventh session of the Commission on

Sustainable Development which urged Governments “to maximize the potential of tourism for eradicating poverty by developing appropriate strategies in cooperation with all major groups, and indigenous and local communities”. There are several reasons why tourism development could be a particularly effective tool of poverty reduction. As discussed earlier, tourism offers considerable employment opportunities for unskilled labor, rural to urban migrants, and lower-income women.

The main aim of UN and other international organizations is to enhance the participation of and opportunities in ecotourism for the poorer segments of society and to provide adequate training to enable them to use these opportunities properly. It is important to implement policy reforms in developing countries which will provide capacity building in negotiations with relevant government agencies and the mainstream tourist industry, the private sector and poor people by enhancing participation of the poor in planning, development, and management of tourism goods and services.

Possible solutions

Even though ecotourism is becoming more and more popular all around the world, and has been recognized as one of the ways both of environmental protection and poverty eradication, it is still implemented differently all around the world, and is having different impacts on local communities and cultures as a result. Therefore, it is important that general ways of ecotourism implementation should be developed in order for all those States willing to use the strategy, to have clear guidelines on how to do that.

While discussing the issue, it is important to keep in mind the following aspects: sustainable use of the resources, maintenance of biodiversity, support of the local economies and involvement of local communities, consultation of stakeholders and the public, training staff, and undertaking research and monitoring the implementation of the strategies.

Reliable useful web links

- 1) Nature.org [What is Ecotourism](#)
- 2) [United Nations Environment Programme](#)
- 3) [UN World Tourist Organization](#)
- 4) [UN Millennium Declaration](#)
- 5) [International Union for Conservation of Nature](#)