

SUPPORT SMES COMPETITIVENESS IN THE TOURISM SECTOR THROUGH THE USE OF ICT

E-tourism: A Tool for Sustainable Tourism Development and Autonomy of Destinations

BACKGROUND

As the technology advances, so do the opportunities. E-tourism enables those developing countries that are in a position to exploit it to bypass some of the stumbling blocks associated with more traditional tourism marketing and distribution channels, and to tackle the market dominance of developed country tourism suppliers.

This implies efforts to develop the relevant human resources and encourage tourism specific entrepreneurship, through sensitization and financial and technical support, especially for small enterprise development.

For communities with small enterprises, access to the market can be difficult or impossible. E-tourism offers a viable means of access. It can represent a crucial step on the path to empowerment, growth and distribution of wealth. While tourism can enable countries to alleviate poverty and diversify their economies, **E-tourism can go one step further**, encouraging destinations to take ownership of their brands and products in order **to plough more revenues into the local economy**.

E-tourism is more than just flashy websites; it allows local suppliers to structure their products in such a way as to make them visible, accessible and competitive in the global marketplace. **E-tourism makes it possible for niche products to reach niche markets**.

The potential and benefit - for both backward and forward linkages is therefore enormous.

OBJECTIVES

In a nutshell, the **E-tourism Initiative** promotes ICT-driven growth through a participative strategy - networking and competitive collaboration - for the tourism sector of developing countries. It is a comprehensive assistance package, aimed at enhancing the competitiveness of beneficiaries - particularly SMEs - on the market. **Local consensus is the key for the adoption of viable e-business**



solutions. Three elements are crucial in this regard: the participation of the private sector, including SMEs; support from the public sector; and the use of Information and communication Technology (ICT) as a core of a system facilitating cooperation among the different stakeholders. Governments should adopt such policies and take actions to gather, around the I.C.Ts, the SMEs and other partners active in this field. Incentives should be put in place to encourage the pooling of resources, the development of partnerships and strategic cooperation within the tourism sector.

The implementation of the Initiative relies on the three components of UNCTAD work: research and analysis, consensus-building and technical assistance.

- Country case studies to provide updated analysis and input to the capacity-building courses
- Training courses and validation seminars
- Recommendations and plan of action through a comprehensive, participative and consensual process
- Development of customized open-source based electronic platforms to enable local actors to tap directly the international market

REALIZATIONS AND FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES

Since 2007, E-tourism capacity building activities have been carried out in countries such as Cambodia, Costa Rica, Lao PDR, Mali, Madagascar, Malaysia and Sri-Lanka.

Designed for both public and private audiences, a new capacity-building tool is now available. This training package aims at building local consensus on e-business solutions in the tourism sector of developing countries and equipping local stakeholders with behavioral, organizational and technological tools that are required for a successful implementation of suitable e-business models.

A capacity-building package for:

- Understanding the benefits of ICTs for tourism destinations
- Developing an attitude of public-private partnership and know-how
- Strengthening the local knowledge of different practices in promotion, positioning and marketing of the destination on the Web
- Evaluating and choosing most relevant management models and most appropriate ICT applications
- Starting to collect data with the UNCTAD Electronic Tourism Platform (ETP) Free Open Source System Based (FOSS) Data Collector. In accordance with the standards defined by organizations such as the Open Travel Alliance, the innovative open-source approach selected enables a free distribution of the software code and make it possible for beneficiaries to customize and improve the tool according to their own evolving needs and wishes.

As from April 2009, a first series of capacity building activities is planned in Benin, Guinée, Ghana, Mauritania, Burkina-Faso and Mali. Those sessions aim at strengthening the capacities of various public and private stakeholders in the development of sustainable tourism. In parallel, in partnership with UQAM (University of Quebec in Montreal) and the Ministry of Tourism of Québec (Canada), UNCTAD continues to develop the ETP, as well as providing advisory services on e-tourism issues. Furthermore, a new release of the ETP will be available for implementation at the end of 2009.

OUTCOMES

E-inclusive strategies and tools can increase sustainable revenues from tourism in developing countries by:

- Developing local capacity that encourages ownership and autonomy as well as branding
- Efficient private and public IT-centric networking collaboration schemes;
- Enabling local stakeholders to increase their competitiveness on the tourism market
- Increasing the visibility for the destination countries

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