Strategy for Developing Sustainable Tourism
1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the world’s largest economic sectors and is increasingly contributing to the growth of several countries GNI, in some cases by more than 10%.\(^1\) Tourism is also a profession that locals in and around protected areas and biodiversity-rich forests can consider as an alternative source of income. But while these options seem promising, the tourism sector is often dominated by investors with high capital. The majority of local people do not have the necessary experience, knowledge and money to establish themselves in the sector. Local people are often reduced to bystanders when an increasing number of tourists passes through their areas and experience their culture and natural wealth.

Many governments in Latin America and Africa have identified tourism as one of the key elements in the economic development of their countries. This prioritization of tourism is part of their overall poverty reduction strategies\(^2\). Unfortunately, governments focus primarily on mass tourism based on international investment where local people, environmental conservation and cultural attractions are not top priorities. This means that the framework for the tourism sector primarily caters to capital-strong investors, and many tourist markets in developing regions are consequently strongly dominated by foreigners. In addition, existing credit schemes, taxes and charges are not designed to allow for smaller entrepreneurs and businesses to compete and establish themselves in the sector.

However, many tourists are looking for local cultures, pristine natural areas and last but not least the tropical beaches as the main attractions during their visits to many Latin American or African countries. In addition, more tourists are showing an increasing interest in meeting and supporting local communities and experiencing the rich natural ecosystems in which they live. The interest of tourists, the appreciation of cultural distinctiveness - especially among indigenous peoples - and natural wealth can help stimulate local identities, senses of pride and economies. This can help strengthen local development and indigenous peoples in their struggle for recognition of their collective rights, as well as provide for young and educated people in rural areas to make a living locally rather than migrating to the bigger cities or other countries.

The development of locally-based sustainable tourism can complement traditional livelihoods, generate income and help build local capital, knowledge and experience and may in the longer term develop into an alternative to extractive economic activities and industries, which in their present form often destroy forests and make their residents loose income and possibilities.

Sustainable tourism is a locally-based form of tourism that takes into account the environmental, economic and socio-cultural conditions\(^3\). Tourism is a profession that involves many different actors who are mutually dependent one upon another to supply their services and products. It involves authorities at all levels, from municipalities across

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1 http://www.unwto.org/index.php
3 http://www.uneptie.org/pc/tourism/sust-tourism/home.htm
provinces to states, while private actors range from farmers supplying food, local guides, drivers, hotel owners and local restaurants to small, medium and large national and international tour operators. Communication and coordination between actors often benefit from collaboration between different interest groups and associations such as local tourism chambers and associations as well as NGOs that manage attractive natural areas or work with local development. Such local NGOs can in this way be key players in tourism development.

Forests of the World see sustainable tourism as a local business opportunity that can be developed in a direction that helps ensure revenues for local populations, conservation of forests and respect for cultural traditions by assigning economic values to forests without clearing and destroying them. This means, among other things, that sustainable tourism must ensure the conservation of nature and cultural identities.

Forests of the World have chosen to operate with an integrated strategy, where relevant actors at different levels are involved in developing sustainable tourism at local levels. The interaction between the various actors must meet the objective of creating locally-anchored development based on the sustainable use and appreciation of natural resources where the economic progress for local populations are a key motivating element and objective. Therefore, it is important to strengthen the local communities so that they build the opportunities and capacity to plan, participate and benefit from tourism activities.

2. Overall goal for the development of sustainable tourism

Sustainable tourism ensures social and environmental improvements and a decent income base for local peoples in and around tropical forests in Latin America and Eastern Africa.

2.1 Specific goals

1. Capacity building of partners and target groups for the development of sustainable tourism
   - Tourism Planning
   - Organizational strengthening of partners and target groups
   - Development of technical capacity for sustainable tourism, including environmental awareness
   - Business development and marketing for small businesses
   - Development of monitoring for sustainable tourism, including environmental impacts

2. Improving national and international rules and conditions for sustainable tourism

3. Capacity building of partners and target groups for the development of sustainable tourism

3. Tourism planning

Forests of the World support tourism planning in the form of:
   - Analysis of the framework for tourism and future potentials in focus areas
   - Analysis and definition of destinations and product profiles
   - Analysis and definition of the market and customer profiles
   - Development and implementation of marketing strategies
Planning and construction of infrastructure for sustainable tourism

Forests of the World launched tourism development based on analyses and clarifications of interests among target groups and relevant actors as well as an assessment of existing and future tourism potentials. However, an important part of the actual effort is detailed tourism planning, which is a kind of master plan with scenarios for a defined period. Based on an analysis of a specific country and site of action, including demography, economy and existing tourist attractions and activities, tourism can be planned. Tourism should be seen in relation to the local population and their existing economy in order to justify what can be done and what cannot be done. Thus, tourism planning differs from location to location, as it should be based on what the local population is predisposed to and willing to do in relation about investments, services, decisions and distribution of goods.

Product development must be based on an analysis of existing offers, so that new products constitute attractive niches that can compete in the sector. The key is producing add-ons to attractions. An add-on may be for example by adding more countries to a vacation offer.

In planning, a background analysis must be followed by the definition of a destination and product profile, which includes what the area can offer in the form of attractions and activities. It can be general products such as a forest, river, beach, an indigenous group or ruins, or it can be niche products such as fishing, bird watching, rafting, diving etc. This profile is important to clarify in order to subsequently define markets and customer profiles for the destination.

Analysis and definition of the market and customer profiles should include tourists who already go to the destination and use existing products as well as tourists who could potentially be attracted to existing and future products. In this context, it is important to keep in mind that the development of a destination should not necessarily be guided by whom it may attract as customers, it is also important to decide who the desired customers would be and plan accordingly. Tourist age, gender, income, education, nationality, travel form (individual, groups, families) and interests (general or niche products) are important for the definition of customer profiles. In sustainable tourism, the number of tourists is not decisive, it is their behavior and financial contribution that are relevant.

With a defined destination and product profile, as well as customer profiles, a marketing strategy can be defined and implemented. However, it is important to recognize that marketing cannot always wait for the definition and development of products and customer profiles, it may be necessary to develop marketing activities for months or years to produce a flow of customers. Thus, initial marketing can be based on existing products and customers.

On the basis of the planning, tourism-related infrastructure such as path systems, visitor centers, etc. can be constructed. It is important to include the maintenance of facilities so that they become part of a long-term plan. At the same time, local people and tour operators should be involved in infrastructure planning so that they are adapted to local conditions and products. Infrastructure can only be worked on in areas where the
ownership of land has been clarified and where the environmental impacts have been investigated and evaluated in advance.

Forests of the World supports tourism planning with the participation of villages that will receive tourists, established companies, authorities and other relevant actors such as NGOs working in the area. Tourism around national parks, protected areas and forests requires a common understanding and planning to create sustainable tourism that does not have negative consequences for forests and nature.

Forests and protected areas are managed in different ways. They may be owned and/or managed by private actors, village organizations, indigenous peoples’ organizations, NGOs, municipalities, provinces and state institutions or different combinations of these. Tourism planning should therefore take ownership issues and management of forest and nature areas into account.

In Nicaragua, Honduras and Bolivia in Latin America, a number of protected areas are managed under co-management agreements where private actors and civil society organizations, in cooperation with local authorities and state institutions, are responsible for managing areas. In practice, however, it is often the private and civil society organizations that fulfil obligations, as public authorities do not devote sufficient resources to fulfilling their responsibilities.

Development and environmental NGOs as well as other civil society organizations working in and around forests have increasingly directed their interests towards tourism. Apart from the fact that the tourism is generally increasing, NGOs are interested in tourism due to the fact that they manage forest areas that are attractive to tourists, that they own attractions with tourism potential or that they see an income opportunity for their target group villages through tourism.

However, tourism is new to several NGOs, traditionally non-profit or environmentally conservative with enthusiastic leaders, employees, and volunteers who have struggled at times to establish protected areas or reduce forest degradation and biodiversity loss. Therefore, they initially did not have the great experience or interest in business development or cooperation with villagers.

On the one hand, experience from Honduras in Latin America shows, for example, that environmental NGOs that manage protected areas in some cases have been in conflict with local populations who have rights to logging, hunting, fishing, farming and cattle farming in the areas. This has meant that these environmental NGOs have to acknowledge that aggressive control and mistrust of local populations should be replaced by financial incentives for the conservation of natural resources in order to secure them in the long term. Thus, they have begun to offer income-generating activities among locals, including tourism activities. On the other hand, experience from Nicaragua shows that environmental NGOs may struggle with government authorities who do not enforce environmental legislation against outside companies that overuse natural resources in an area.

Against this background, participation and involvement of different actors is important in planning. However, since tourism is often a new field for NGOs as well as for the local
population, civil society organizations and other actors in the local area, it requires a long-term effort in relation to attitude preparation, capacity building, training and counseling.

4. Organizational Strengthening of Partners and Beneficiaries
Forests of the Worlds support organizational strengthening of partners and target groups in the form of:

- Capacity building in collective interest studies
- Capacity building in collective strategy development and planning
- Leadership training, representation and fundraising
- Professional networking among partners and target groups

The cornerstone of sustainable tourism is the active involvement of local people, which is why we promote local participation. For this purpose, it is crucial to secure democratic and well-functioning local civil society organizations.

Forests of the World support the establishment and strengthening of local tourism organizations in villages that are interested in tourism and among private sector tourism operators who are interested in sustainable development of such villages. This helps to organize supply and services as well as the actual development effort with participation of people from the villages and relevant actors in the sector. The prerequisite for participating in tourism is local democratic organizations who know the interests, opportunities and limitations of the villages, and which represent these in the activities of tourism development. At the same time, the prerequisite for these activities to be carried out satisfactorily is also good local organization.

The capacity of local organizations also plays a crucial role in relation to the sustainability of the effort. It is their role to further develop and disseminate experiences in the villages and the tourism sector, as well as to ensure social sustainability in the distribution of common goods generated by revenue and knowledge from tourism. As a starting point, tourism is often seen as an individual profession, as the establishment of collective small companies with joint responsibility rarely leads to anyone taking responsibility. This does not mean that tourism cannot provide common goods, but that a system must be created through the local organizations for profit sharing and reinvestment in the industry, which is dependent on village support and cooperation.

5. Development of technical capacity for sustainable tourism
Forests of the World support technical capacity building of partners and target groups in the form of:

- Course activities and training (in languages, services, guidance, communications, cooking, hygiene, health, safety etc.)
- Campaigns, information, social responsibility and environmental awareness

Sustainable tourism services and products must first and foremost be sold. Thus, a system must be created that attract tourists and keep them in an area for several days. This requires that local communities have knowledge of and adapt to what the tourists demand and desire. At the same time, it requires that local communities have knowledge of what they want from the tourists so that they can inform the tourists and make them adapt to
their destinations. In most cases, this requires a training of local communities and community members, many of which have very little experience as tourists themselves.

On the one hand, tourists want to stay in the villages and adjoining areas. Tourism can be described as a theater, where a good scenery must be ensured, which in turn creates satisfied customers. Therefore, among other things, any waste and sanitation problems that are of importance for the appearance of the place as well as hygiene and health conditions, should be taken care of. In addition, local communities and community members are offered courses in, among other things, servicing tourists and taking care of their safety, guiding and dissemination as well as crafts and languages in order to create satisfied tourists.

One thing is to be able to service customers, something else is being able to sell experiences related to local nature, history, culture, values and products. Thus, local populations must have a good knowledge of the local conditions and how these experiences are communicated. The goals are, for example, that guided tours be carried out by committed and well informed guides or that leaflets and brochures be prepared on offers and inform who or what the profits go to.

On the other hand, the local people want tourists to visit their areas, which requires the capacity to influence the behavior of tourists and tour operators and bring sustainable products to the front. This can e.g. take place through campaigns and information on environmental awareness and social responsibility among local people, tourists and other relevant actors. Work will be done on training and providing tools to ensure the dissemination of information on nature conservation and local social activities or the possible consequences for local living and tourism of different activities. Work will also be done to inform tourists about how they are recommended to behave at the destination.

6. Business development and marketing for small businesses
Forests of the World supports business development and marketing for small businesses in the form of:
- Capacity building in business organization and administration
- Training in cost analysis
- Development of products and business plans
- Advice on financing opportunities for production
- Advising and conducting market analyses, marketing and customer contact nationally and internationally

In addition to being able to sell sustainable tourism products, local operators must also make a profit as the goal is to increase income among local people and create alternatives to extractives activities based on forests and natural resources.

To develop tourism, a coherent supply of services that do not require large investments must be established. Unlike many other income-generating activities, tourism has a longer time horizon and requires investments over longer periods of time, which increases the need for capital. To meet this, efforts are being made to support several smaller companies that complement one another and lower the capital requirements of individual operators. The development of several smaller companies as opposed to one or a few bigger companies will also benefit more residents at the village level. In addition,
integrated tourism and village development requires a healthy business environment and competition among individual companies in order to maintain and develop interesting offers at the local area level.

In order to promote entrepreneurship, priority must be given to existing smaller companies in villages, which are relevant for tourists, so that they are offered advice on how to capture some of the tourist opportunities. It is important that relevant market players are involved in the planning of supply of tourism offers at the village level, which is why support is provided for the creation of networks and consortia, where actors with different approaches to tourism collaborate and continually ensure that products be created that are in demand.

Many smaller companies will benefit from a business plan to act in the tourism market. The activities that a company must implement to become successful will often be new and abstract for village residents. Existing local companies, for example, rarely operate with systematic cost analysis, price setting and marketing. Forests of the World is working to develop these capabilities while ensuring that they are tailored to the real needs of the businesses and provide business owners with the tools to evaluate costs and profits.

To ensure that villagers have an interest in investing time and money in tourism businesses, it is important that there is a demand. Therefore, marketing is a key element in the development of sustainable and successful tourism. Since most villagers do not know about the marketing of products, either locally, nationally or internationally, it is important to find ways to sustain such marketing. This can be done by e.g. connecting the offers in villages with tour operators’ offers, establishing tourism chambers and by ensuring that competencies are created locally in the target groups to continue marketing services and products.

Forest of the World supports the capacity building of small business owners so that they can enter into collaborations and operate a profitable, as well as socially and environmentally responsible, business.

7. Development of monitoring for sustainable tourism

Forest of the World support the development of monitoring for sustainable tourism in the form of:

- Collection and analysis of data on environmental and ecosystem impacts
- Evaluation of the quality and timeliness of physical infrastructure
- Training in the preparation and implementation of questionnaire surveys and the collection of data among tourists regarding their satisfaction
- Training in the preparation and implementation of monitoring systems and the collection of data among residents in the villages regarding the socio-cultural situation

The influence of tourists on economic, social and environmental conditions should be monitored systematically and continuously. Monitoring is important in order to be able to register any negative impacts that require changing strategies, as well as in order to improve future services.
Thus, Forests of the World supports the collection and analysis of data on environmental and ecosystem impacts at tourist destinations.

In addition, there will be training in the preparation and implementation of questionnaire surveys among tourists and the establishment of local monitoring systems. It is important to work with simple methods so that local people, guides, business owners etc. can take on the responsibility of collecting and analyzing data.

8. Improving national and international rules and conditions for sustainable tourism

Forests of the World supports improving national and international rules and conditions for sustainable tourism in the form of:

- Capacity building of partners, target groups and indigenous peoples in advocacy, so that they may speak up for themselves and influence law and demand their rights
- Knowledge sharing, technical advice and financial support for local organizations
- Development of standards or certification schemes for sustainable tourism
- Political networking among partners and target groups
- Information sharing on sustainable tourism to influence tourists and travel agents to strengthen the supply and demand of sustainable tourism, which will strengthen, in particular, the environmental and social aspects of the destination.

The overall framework for promoting sustainable tourism in Latin America and Africa needs to be improved. Attractive tourism services and products must be developed for forest and nature areas and infrastructure and public services must be improved. It is also necessary to find solutions to make it easier to create and operate small businesses in the sector. Therefore, Forests of the World support advocacy in order to improve the framework for sustainable tourism.

Target groups and partners must develop their capacities to be able to handle their cases. This is necessary in order for them to successfully demand improvements to general conditions such as roads, electricity, communication, renovation, airports, border crossings and security that affect tourism. It is also necessary in order to handle threats to tourism from other industries such as agriculture, mining, dam construction etc. In addition, in areas with indigenous peoples, there will be a need for a special rights-based approach, focusing on the collective rights of indigenous peoples. In addition to improvements in public services, an important aspect in several countries is that national tourism authorities do not value sustainable tourism initiatives. Work will be done on the development of standards, as additions to existing criteria, for sustainable tourism or certification through existing schemes that respect and value tourism based on specific criteria that could also include corporate social responsibility.

Finally, the focus will be on information on sustainable tourism and its linkages to rights-, civil society- and nature based solutions. Information campaigns at national and local levels will be complemented by information at international levels to influence tourists and travel agencies to prioritize sustainable products and support local development. This is done through participation in conferences and fairs, involving educational institutions that have tourism on their curriculum, collaboration with travel agencies and publishing articles and information material on sustainable tourism.