

Rural Tourism for Community Empowerment and Poverty Alleviation

The United Nations estimates that 83% of the global population living in poverty resides in rural areas¹. When compared to their urban counterparts, people in rural communities face noticeable challenges. They are twice as likely to be under informal employment²; the number of people with no access to electricity in rural areas is five times higher³, the number of people with access to Internet is half⁴ and almost 40% of rural populations lacks access to safely managed drinking water as compared to 24% in urban areas⁵. Despite progress, the current trend shows that by 2030 some of these gaps will persist, maintaining rural areas behind their urban counterparts⁶.

Rural areas are also home to invaluable cultural and natural heritage, the conservation and promotion of which is often under threat. Traditional economic and cultural systems are put at risk by depopulation, biodiversity loss and climate change. In 1950, the United Nations estimated that 70% of the population lived in rural areas. By 2020, this share came down to 44%; by 2050, it is projected that only 32% of the world's population will live in rural areas⁷.

The development of rural tourism opens opportunities to promote inclusion, fight poverty and build a more sustainable future for communities by stimulating economic diversification, complementing traditional sources of income, and creating opportunities for small-scale businesses. Tourism in rural areas can particularly benefit traditionally disadvantaged groups such as women – who make up 54% of the workforce in the tourism sector, compared to 39% for the whole economy⁸ - youth and indigenous people.

Examples of how rural destinations can create economic opportunities while promoting and preserving cultural and natural assets, values, products, and rural lifestyle, are also showcased in the **Best Tourism Villages by UNWTO Initiative**⁹. Since 2021, this initiative highlights those villages where tourism contributes to preserve cultures and traditions, celebrate diversity, provide opportunities, safeguard biodiversity and empower communities.

We welcome India's National Strategy and Roadmap for Development of Rural Tourism as well the focus on the role of rural tourism in advancing community empowerment and poverty alleviation under India's

¹ United Nations Development Programme, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (2022), '2022 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI): Unpacking deprivation bundles to reduce multidimensional poverty'. New York.

² International Labour Organization – ILOSTAT (2019), 'Not in employment education or training: the reality for many young rural women', available at: <https://ilostat.ilo.org>

³ United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination (2021), 'Tackling inequalities in public service coverage to "build forward better" for the rural poor. Policy brief by the HLCP Inequalities Task Team', UN, New York

⁴ International Telecommunication Union (2020), 'Internet use in urban and rural areas', (online), available at: www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx

⁵ World Health Organization and the United Nations Children's Fund (2021), 'Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene 2000–2020: Five years into the SDGs'.

⁶ United Nations – Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Social Policy and Development (2020), 'World Social Report 2020: Inequality in a Rapidly Changing World (Report No. ST/ESA/348)', UN, New York.

⁷ United Nations Population Division (2018), 'Urban population (% of total population)', World Urbanization Prospects, 2018 Revision, World Bank, Washington, D.C.

⁸ World Tourism Organization (2019), 'Global Report on Women in Tourism – Second Edition', available at: <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/book/10.18111/9789284420384>

⁹ More information about the initiative in <https://www.unwto.org/tourism-villages/en/>

G20 Presidency. The side event under this theme organized on the occasion of the First G20 Tourism Working Group Meeting highlighted opportunities for rural tourism, including new consumer behaviors and growing interest in new destinations. It also explored main challenges, particularly with regards to digital and non-digital infrastructure, the empowerment of local communities and skills development. The event stressed that the sustainability of tourism in rural areas is dependent on a comprehensive planning strategy is adopted and implemented based on a multi-action and multi-stakeholder participatory approach. Furthermore, it was noted that rural tourism requires the support of regional and local governments, the private sector, industry associations, civil society, communities and tourists.

A successful governance for rural tourism will only be possible through Public-Private-Community Partnerships (PPCP) that empower and engage communities through a transparent and permanent consultation process for planning, designing, and managing tourism. All this complemented with adequate training geared towards creating capacity in local communities to understand and manage tourism and its impacts as well as ensuring they are active and benefit from the tourism value chain. Moreover, community empowerment fosters a sense of ownership and pride, making rural destinations more authentic and appealing to visitors.

Finally, the *Goa Roadmap as a Vehicle for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*¹⁰, developed under India's G20 Tourism Working Group in partnership with the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) offers important insights that can also guidance rural tourism in progressing the SDGs by building upon the five priority areas of the Tourism Working Group - green tourism, digitalization, skills, tourism small and medium enterprises and destination management.

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¹⁰ World Tourism Organization (2023), *Goa Roadmap for Tourism as a Vehicle for Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals*, UNWTO, Madrid, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284424443>