

National Stakeholder Workshop on Ecotourism, 6-7 March 2018, Beirut

FINAL WORKSHOP REPORT

Background

As a part of a **National Green Export Review** (NGER) project supported by **UNCTAD** (the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) and Lebanon's **Ministry of Tourism**, a National Stakeholder Workshop on Ecotourism was convened on 6-7 March 2018 in Beirut. Over 50 stakeholders representing government, nature reserves, ecotourism tour operators, women's associations, artisans, SMEs, academia and civil society.

In accordance with the Programme of the National Stakeholder Workshop on Ecotourism, and following the presentations of national experiences on 6 March, the participating stakeholders met after lunch, divided themselves into three Working Group sessions (each participant choose the Working Group he or she was most interested in), and discussed recommended actions deriving from stakeholder consultations relevant to their group. After intensive discussions, they decided and agreed, each group apart, on a set of actions and reported them accordingly on the following day, 7 March, duly signed by Working Group members.

At the end of the workshop during the final session on the 7 March and following comprehensive discussions, the three Working Groups decided to abridge their previously selected topics and collectively agreed to prioritize main objectives (for the first phase of implementation) and adopt them in the National Action Plan for Ecotourism (NAP) through the following actions:

Legislations and institutionalization of Ecotourism

- Devise a framework of national standards for ecotourism sector, advocating institutional support.
- Regulate the work of eco-tour operators and their licensing requirements, legalizing their status.
- Regulate the responsibilities of local tour guides and their scope of action, prioritizing their vocational training.
- Legalize the work of rural accommodations and devise a classification system for guesthouses and eco-lodges according to their location, amenities, services and rating policy.
- Devise a national labeling scheme based on environmental performance and stakeholders' compliance with responsible tourism principles.

Product development of Ecotourism

- Encourage visitors to enjoy the beauty of natural landscapes and undisturbed environments, interact with local communities and share countless variants of ecotourism activities while contributing to the economic and social regeneration of rural areas, the conservation of nature and the preservation of local culture.
- Strengthen linkages between ecotourism and related rural goods and services businesses.
- Strengthen value-added chains in the agro-food and handicrafts industry and promote fair trade and direct access to markets for farmers, agro-food producers and craftsmen.

Marketing and promotion of Ecotourism

- Enhance linkages with local and international media for targeted promotional campaigns.
- Activate ecotourists' use of information technology through e-promotion, mobile applications, social media and GPS location services.
- Develop partnerships with international ecotourism societies, diaspora networks and foreign embassies.
- Create online platforms for different ecotourism sites to publish promotional news items.
- Promote the culture of ecotourism and raise environmental awareness within schools, universities and religious communities.
- Promote the Hima community-based approach for environmental conservation and cultural sites preservation with municipalities and local authorities.

Ad-Hoc Committee

Finally, an Ad Hoc Committee was formed to manage follow-up for NAP implementation, comprising the following members:

- Ministry of Tourism Representatives Ms. Claudia Karam / Ms. Rania Abdel Samad
- Shouf Cedars Reserve Mr. Nizar Hani
- Nature Conservation Center AUB Ms. Syrine Abi Kheir
- WADA Women's Association Mrs. Dunia el Khoury
- Fair Trade Lebanon Ms. Mona Bouazza
- Responsible Mobilities Mr. Pascal Abdallah
- Vamos Todos Mr. Mark Aoun
- Arcenciel / 33 North Mr. Gilbert Moukheiber
- NGER National Ecotourism Expert Dr. Jacques Samoury