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**UNCTAD's contribution to the preparatory process of and to the
Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, 2011**

Proposals stemming from the International High-level Meeting of Experts on Sustainable Tourism for Development in the Least Developed Countries

Caen, France, 12–14 October 2010

UNCTAD event in the context of the preparatory process of UNLDC-IV

I. Sustainable tourism

1. The growing importance of tourism-related activity has been a prominent feature of economic specialization among least developed countries (LDCs) over the past decade. The sector is now the first or second source of gross export earnings in 20 LDCs, and demonstrates fairly steady growth in at least 10 others. A related, notable change is that sustainable tourism development has become an important development objective, if not a priority, in a majority of these States. Tourism has been the main engine of socio-economic progress for many LDCs.

2. National stakeholders increasingly recognize the capacity of sustainable tourism development to reduce poverty – first through employment creation in the tourism industry, and secondly through the wealth of economic opportunities that arises from linkages with local suppliers of goods and services. Equally important is the catalytic impact of sustainable tourism development on the wider economy. The elements of progress which tourism development implies, notably in human capabilities and infrastructure, are foreseen as factors of wider structural transformation and, in some cases, of convergence with more advanced economies. It is also recognized that utmost attention should be given, from the early stages of development of the sector, to the paramount goal of sustainability, notably with regard to the preservation of cultural and environmental assets.

II. Suggestions

3. Participants made the following suggestions for the consideration of LDCs at the national level and their development partners at the international level, in their actions to promote sustainable tourism development.

A. At the national level

1. Create a safe and stable enabling environment to encourage sustainable tourism development. Encourage investment by relevant domestic and international stakeholders, including investors and suppliers of goods and services, in the wider tourism economy;
2. Mainstream sustainable tourism development as an important poverty reduction avenue in all national development strategy documents, and recognize the critical role which local authorities and communities, as well as other stakeholders at the local level, can play in supporting sustainable tourism development initiatives to enable them to fully benefit from tourism development;
3. Harness product specialization and branding to strengthen market position of LDC tourism destinations in light of the evolving international, subregional and domestic demand for tourism services. Pay more attention to the preservation of environmental assets and of natural and cultural, both tangible and intangible, heritages, including through the adoption of legal frameworks at the early stage of product development. Build productive capacities relating to these assets for product differentiation, quality and attractiveness;
4. Promote domestic tourism to support the viability of the local tourism industry;

5. Promote decent work and respect the rights of the individual in the wider tourism sector with an emphasis on the most vulnerable groups, i.e. women, youth, children and migrants;
6. Adopt and implement investment, tourism and trade policies that support national strategies for sustainable tourism development;
7. Strengthen linkages and create synergies between tourism and other economic, environmental and cultural sectors for poverty reduction, including through creating opportunities for small and local suppliers of goods and services, and through establishing a process of dialogue among all national stakeholders;
8. Develop national mechanisms to support tourism enterprise viability and competitiveness, including the access to finance, development of small and medium-sized enterprises, and access to global information and distribution systems;
9. Design and implement strategies, as an integral part of sustainable tourism development, to enhance the efficiency of various means of transport, including through cost reduction and taking into account social, economic and ecological considerations to, inter alia, make tourism sites more easily accessible;
10. Enhance the human resources potential for tourism activities through improved general education, vocational training and appropriate capacity-building measures.

B. At the international level

1. Support the national initiatives of the LDCs, including those mentioned above;
2. Establish a joint cooperation mechanism between LDCs and their development partners to promote sustainable tourism in LDCs; strengthen technical and financial assistance to LDCs in the area of sustainable tourism development, particularly for infrastructure development, and also for diversification of tourism products, institutional capacity-building, human resources and skill development, tourism enterprise creation and competitiveness, and marketing of tourism products; and encourage foreign direct investment with developmental impact to the tourism industries in LDCs;
3. Explore modalities of international support for the creation of national or subregional entities that will be able to extend development services to small tourism enterprises;
4. Explore the possibility of creating an international venture capital fund or other specialized mechanisms to finance private or public investment projects in the field of tourism in LDCs;
5. Support LDCs' efforts to access knowledge and relevant and environmentally-friendly technology to protect and develop their biodiversity, cultural and natural heritages, and to mitigate and adapt the adverse impacts of climate change;
6. Encourage decentralized cooperation options through which subnational authorities in partner countries would share their experiences with LDC

authorities on sustainable tourism initiatives, including through innovative partnerships such as, for instance, South–South and triangular North–South–South exchanges of best practices;

7. Encourage regional or subregional integration programmes of direct relevance to sustainable tourism development for the benefit of the LDCs. Initiate and promote cooperation and synergies among stakeholders at local and national as well as at regional and international levels;
8. Enhance collaboration among the various international organizations, including with United Nations agencies, to ensure synergy in supporting sustainable tourism development in the LDCs. UNCTAD and the World Tourism Organization are called on to work together to explore way and means to make the tourism sector more resilient vis-à-vis external shocks.

4. The participants wish to thank the Government of France and the Regional Council of Basse-Normandie for their generous support and hospitality.
