

HANDOUT 1-1

FROM TOURISM TO SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Many of the goals of sustainable tourism stem from a United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The agenda addressed sustainable global development for the 21st century, and was adopted by more than 180 countries, including the United States.

A program was drafted on how to address the need to maintain quality of life without compromising the future well-being of the world's people. It called for more public/private partnerships, as well as integrating environmental and economic objectives.

As an increasingly significant factor in global change, the tourism industry decided to define the relevancy of Agenda 21 for its own needs in 1995. In that year, an initiative was launched, entitled "Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry: Towards Environmentally Sustainable Development", which presented a plan of action for achieving industry goals. This publication was co-authored by the World Tourism Organization (representing governments), the World Travel and Tourism Council (representing private industries), and the Earth Council (representing NGOs).

Emphasis initially was placed on how tourism could be used primarily to protect the environment. But, increasingly, many developing nations were pointing to the powerful economic and social contributions that tourism could offer.

In 1999, at the 7th meeting of the U.N. Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD7), governments were urged to "maximize the potential for tourism for eradicating poverty by developing appropriate strategies in cooperation with all major groups, indigenous and local communities" (WTO, 2002).

This message was reiterated by the 49 Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in a 2001 conference in the Canary Islands, with specific reference to the role of tourism. The resulting Declaration stated that:

"for a large majority of least developed countries, tourism development can be an avenue to increase participation in the global economy, alleviate poverty, and achieve socio-economic progress." (United Nations, 2001)

In 2002, the UN "Year of Ecotourism," the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) was held in Johannesburg to assess progress for achieving the Rio Earth Summit's 1992 goals. Above all else, poverty reduction became the major objective, with sustainable tourism seen as an instrument to achieve that objective.

In September, 2005, a comprehensive alliance of international agencies reinforced this point: integrate tourism in national development plans for social and economic gains (Declaration on Tourism and the Millennium Development Goals, United Nations).