

REGIONAL SUSTAINABLE TOURISM POLICY AND CYCLE

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The Caribbean is the most tourism-intensive region in the world today. Recent data show that tourism receipts comprise 14.8% of the region's total GDP and are expected to increase to 16.5% of GDP by 2014. Tourism generates 15.5% of total employment today and is forecast to be 17.1% by 2014.

Tourism, the largest economic sector of the world today, plays a vital role in the creation of employment and prosperity across the Caribbean region. Tourism's interdisciplinary sectoral nature translates into development across many different sectors of the involved region. It is also important to the continued growth in other areas such as construction, manufacturing, agriculture and service industries. All involved industries are at risk, should tourism demand soften.

WTTC's recent findings suggest that several important challenges continue to limit the industry's full potential for growth in the Caribbean. These issues must be addressed to ensure the long-term sustainable development of the Caribbean and ensure maximum benefits for all stakeholders. Perhaps the most important and pressing issue: Increasing the level of support for the industry at a national level. The need for a cohesive vision for the development and implementation of regional tourism policy must be recognized.

In recent years, many Caribbean countries have committed significant resources to the study of their national tourism industries. Their research, development, and reporting have developed the recommendations that now make up their tourism agendas. As a result, a good number of Caribbean countries have completed their own tourism policies, strategic and development agendas, and master plans.

Unfortunately as researchers point out, some Caribbean national tourism policies have gone through a long and painful development. Extended waiting periods for the approvals for the implementation of these reports and policy statements have proven to be the weak link in the process. Lack of follow-through is also recognized as a frequent pitfall.

To tackle some of these issues, WTTC has recently recommended the creation of a Caribbean tourism strategy committee. The committee will re-adopt a revised Strategic Plan for Caribbean Tourism, create a Tourism Economics "SWAT team" to assist Caribbean nations in understanding the full economic impact of tourism, and develop a Regional Sustainable Tourism Policy

Framework to maximize benefits and ensure their even distribution across the nations and people of the region.

Issues to be considered for inclusion in the Regional Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework include:

- Tourism Awareness, management and planning capacity;
- Innovation in product development, Marketing and promotion;
- Research and Measurement of industry results; standards and indicators
- Impact on natural and cultural resources; responsible use of resources, ecological balance and biodiversity
- Community development, empowerment and economic linkages;
- Safety, security and health;
- Disaster management, preparedness and communication;
- Investment schemes and industry incentives;
- Land use and carrying capacities
- Trade, taxation and employment;
- Air access and intra-regional travel and transportation
- Cruise tourism
- Information technology and management and acquisition of technological advances;
- HIV, prostitution and the drug trade;
- Crime and terrorism; and
- Human resource, entrepreneurial development and education

Some of these issues were identified in the draft Regional Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework Policy developed by CTO/US AID in May 2000 but require detailed review and update. Active consultation with stakeholders and policy makers will be key to this process. Policy frameworks cannot be static, but rather must be continuously enhanced as part of an ongoing logical process. Policymaking must be viewed within a cycle model process: New ideas and events continue to modify our lives, environments, and needs.

Competition for tourism business will only continue to increase on all fronts. Continued economic globalization, growing interdependence among countries, changing patterns of consumption, emergence of new destinations and innovative tourism products, and new marketing techniques and distribution methods, have all been factors in the development and growth of the tourism industry worldwide. These trends pose a new challenge to regional economies in terms of developing clear policy and direction on particular issues.

A specific aim of regional policy development is to reduce inequality between regions in order to increase each country's economic and social cohesion. Tourism and Travel have been identified as possible agents for this type of sustainable development to take place.

It is apparent that tourism and regional development are closely linked and often tourism is identified as a possible development strategy; however, these linkages

in many regions are complex. They vary not only with the type of regionalization prevailing in a given country and its given political context, but also with the typologies of the different regions (outlying and remote, intermediate or economically integrated), their tourism potential, and the extent of support vowed by national governments for the regional development of tourism.

Collaboration between countries within regions is not always satisfactory. Rather than work together toward regional development, nations often choose to focus on competitive (national) development. International cooperation can bring about complementary tourism strategies, products and services that will benefit all.

CTO has long acknowledged the importance and benefits of sustainable tourism and the need for a policy framework for the balanced, sustainable development of the tourism sector in the Caribbean. The EU funded Caribbean Regional Sustainable Tourism Development Programme's main objective is to make the Caribbean tourism sector more competitive and more sustainable, contributing to economic growth and reducing poverty. CTO is the implementing agency for this programme component.

The programme aims to promote a situation in which a Regional sustainable tourism policy framework is established and adopted by all the countries. The framework can therefore assist national tourism organizations to adapt their own strategies, while strengthening institutions and linkages within the region and contributing to increased business activities as a result.

These Sustainable Tourism Policy Workshop and consultations contribute to this aim by exploring the required links between regional and national tourism policies. Participants are to bring to the table key tourism and sustainable development issues of concern and policy experiences from to their respective countries. This issue paper will be used as an introduction to the presentation to the topic and as basis for discussions to be held during the workshop sessions and roundtables.

Policymakers from Caribbean countries, as well as Sustainable Tourism specialists are invited to take part in the identification, review, and validation of key tourism policy issues that apply both at home and on a regional level. This workshop will draw on recent policy-making experiences of participating nations as well as current policy issues of concern to all.

An initial challenge will be the development of common sense Sustainable Tourism Policies to improve competitiveness and quality of tourism at national and regional levels. These will ensure the sustainable and balanced development of tourism and the improvement of industry performance, making tourism more competitive at national, regional and international levels.

Another challenge will be the reconciliation of tourism development with preservation and renewal of resources and managing impact on local populations and their cultures.

In addition, there are important issues and questions to be addressed during the process for the development of the Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework:

- How should national tourism administrations participate and intervene to support the regional tourism development of the Caribbean?
- If so, should the role be one of guidance, regulation or coordination of regional and national tourism policies?
- How can current sustainable tourism policy good practices be improved and disseminated in the region?
- Are any of the proposed regional tourism policies integrated sufficiently into a multidisciplinary intersectoral vision and plan for regional economic development?
- Which policy-making practices presented and discussed might be implemented at national levels to maximize benefits of this initiative?
- What additional studies and research is required to better understand and promote regional sustainable development for tourism?
- How can policy practitioners improve current tourism policies ?

All things considered, the tourism industry is the primary livelihood for the majority of the Caribbean countries. It would seem appropriate to say that all threats to the sustainability of the industry and the region's environment must be addressed squarely tackled by the application of sound and sensible national and regional tourism policies.

The end result is dependent upon how we manage these prized combination of natural and cultural resources that has made the Caribbean what it is today. The region must maintain its original appeal, while increasing product quality and service, and distributing benefits to all stakeholders and citizens of the region.

In summary, the focus for national and regional policymakers for sustainable tourism development should remain: "The optimal use of natural, cultural, and financial resources for national development on an equitable and self-sustaining basis in order to provide a unique visitor experience and an improved quality of life through partnerships among all stakeholders"*,

*CTO Sustainable Tourism adopted definition since 1998.