Message from the Executive Director

Our Technical Cooperation activities are based on two fundamental pillars of UNWTO’s Programme of Work, competitiveness and sustainability. And it is under these pillars that we provide technical support to our Member States on a wide range of topics.

Looking back at the year 2017 not only has the number of our missions and projects grown compared to previous years, but so has the thematic range of our activities. In 2017 we implemented 17 missions and 40 projects worldwide, providing assistance to Member States on issues such as policy and strategy development; tourism master planning; hotel classification; statistics, marketing and promotion.

The outlook for the coming year is promising thanks to our standing relationships with potential donors and partners and our close bond with Member States. We have identified several new projects for implementation in 2018, along with 20 ongoing projects from previous years. Our aim for 2018 is to consolidate the cooperation with existing partners such as UNDP, the World Bank and Chimelong Guangzhou Ltd., while making efforts to identify new organizations with which we can collaborate to expand and diversify our project portfolio for the benefit of our Member States.

We hope that this newsletter will provide a glimpse of the many activities that were carried out during the second half of 2017 and we convey our special thanks to all Member States and partners for extending their wholehearted support to us and for providing all possible assistance on the ground during the implementation of technical assistance missions and projects.

Shanzhong Zhu
Executive Director
Technical Cooperation and Services
National Tourism Strategy and Master Plan launched at National Conference on Tourism in the Republic of Congo

The first National Conference on Tourism in the Republic of Congo was held in Brazzaville from 17-18 July 2017, organized by the Ministry of Tourism and Environment and with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNWTO. The Conference brought together national administrations, representatives of the private sector and international institutions with the objective to gain support for the country’s tourism sector.

One of the highlights of the Conference was the official launch of the National Tourism Strategy and Master Plan which was prepared in joint collaboration between the Ministry, UNDP and UNWTO. H.E. Mrs. Arlette Soudan-Nonault, Minister of Tourism and Environment, presented the Strategy in the presence of UNWTO Secretary-General Mr. Taleb Rifai and Mr. Anthony Ohemeng-Boamah the Resident Coordinator of the United Nations in the Republic of Congo. With the implementation of this Strategy and Master Plan, Congo hopes to raise the share of tourism to GDP from 3% to 10% by 2021.

The organization of the Tourism Conference was the first step towards the implementation of the National Tourism Strategy and Master Plan as it raised awareness of the priorities for tourism development in the country.

The Conference was highly interactive and participatory. It included panel discussions on several key topics such as The Blue Fund - an opportunity for ecotourism; challenges faced by private sector operators in developing and managing tourism operations; examples of good governance; the involvement of civil society as key to the development of sustainable tourism in the Republic of Congo; and, the integration of Destination Congo in the rebranding of Destination Africa. The country also called upon the commitment of stakeholders to mobilize necessary funding for tourism development.
UNWTO implements the first two of a series of training seminars on tourism and biodiversity in West and Central Africa (June and July 2017)

With the rapid growth of the tourism sector in West and Central Africa, tourism has become an important pillar for local economies. Challenges in preserving the biodiversity in an appropriate manner may in the long run affect visitors’ satisfaction and ultimately result in lower income generation from tourist-related activities. To address this topic, UNWTO launched a capacity building programme, within the framework of the UNWTO/Chimelong Initiative, in West and Central Africa involving five countries, the first beneficiaries of which are Gabon, Benin and Niger.

Home to 13 national parks covering 11% of the country, Gabon has a rich biodiversity including species of global conservation concern such as forest elephants, lowland gorillas and sea turtles. As a result, the country has been identified by UNWTO as the first country to host the capacity building seminar on tourism and biodiversity (20-22 June). Similarly, Niger and Benin, home to the Park W, the largest territory of protected savanna in West Africa, have benefitted from the training, involving participants from both countries (11-13 July).

Taking place in the Pongara National Park, 20 minutes away from Libreville (Gabon) by boat and the W National Park, 2 hours away from Niamey (Niger), the seminars welcomed tourism and environment stakeholders from the public and private sector. With a view to encompassing all the challenges surrounding conservation in these countries, the participants ranged from executives to employees of parks, hotels and tour operators; Gabon hosted 25 participants coming from different parts of Gabon, while Niger welcomed 36 participants coming from both Benin and Niger.

The successful completion of this component of the UNWTO/Chimelong initiative was facilitated by the support of each Ministry led by H.E. Mrs. Madeleine Berre, Minister of Private Investment Promotion, Trade, Tourism and Industry of Gabon; H.E. Mr. Ahmet Botto, Minister of Tourism and Handicrafts of Niger; and H.E. Mr. Ange N’Koué, Minister of Tourism and Culture of Benin. The efforts put forward by these three Governments highlights the importance given to the contribution of the tourism sector in their respective countries to socio-economic development and biodiversity conservation.

Building on this promising start, the other two seminars in the series are taking place in the Republic of Guinea and the Democratic Republic of Congo in November 2017. Subsequently, a regional seminar will be organized in the beginning of 2018 in order to exchange experiences gained by the beneficiary countries and explore possibilities for follow-up activities to build capacities on the link between tourism development and biodiversity conservation.
Updating the Paraguay Master Plan for Sustainable Development of the Tourism Sector

UNWTO’s Regional Programme for the Americas and the Technical Cooperation Programme are collaborating to provide technical assistance to the National Tourism Administration of Paraguay to update the country’s Master Plan for Sustainable Development of the Tourism Sector. The Plan will provide the National Tourism Administration of Paraguay with a growth strategy and an implementation plan to advance the tourism sector as a catalyst for rapid economic development. This new Master Plan will have a timeframe from 2018 to 2025 building on the first Master Plan for the period 2008 – 2012 and its updated version of 2012 – 2018.

The first phase of the Master Plan project was launched in May 2017, when UNWTO fielded a six weeks mission led by an international tourism expert who collaborated closely with national experts and stakeholders from the public and private sector to carry out a situation analysis of the tourism sector and come up with a vision for the period till 2025.

The situation analysis presents a detailed assessment of key thematic areas, such as competitiveness, product and service quality, marketing and branding, human resources, sustainable tourism, and the institutional framework, and identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for each area. Based on this analysis and building on the country’s attractive and diverse natural and cultural heritage, UNWTO has come up with various growth scenarios, and identified selected priority markets.

Upon the approval of the interim report with the situation analysis and vision, the international expert has worked together with national counterparts on the formulation of the strategic recommendations and the implementation and monitoring arrangements for the Master Plan. It is foreseen that the updated Master Plan can be completed and approved by the end of 2017, and serve as a key document to guide the further sustainable development of tourism in Paraguay.
Botswana is renowned worldwide as a destination which combines wildlife conservation and sustainable development with quality tourism services. Nevertheless, under your leadership, efforts are being to diversify the tourism product. Could you elaborate on your Ministry’s plan for expanding Botswana’s tourism product base and could you identify in what areas you believe Botswana can have an increased competitive edge over other destinations?

As you said, the type of tourism we have in Botswana is high value – low impact. We’ve typically adopted this type of tourism model because we found that it is one that is sustainable and manageable. We have realized that there are quite a few more opportunities for tourism and we need to diversify the offer we have. We find that we are now suitably placed to look at youth tourism, adventure tourism, and research tourism. Botswana is made up of four eco-systems which range from the wetlands, salt pans, semi-desert and desert. We want to use these eco-systems to develop a more diverse tourism sector and spread the benefits of tourism to local communities around them. Botswana has a Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBRNM) Policy where a significant number of community-based initiatives are based in the north where the Okavango Delta is. The right thing would be to replicate this in other parts of the country but we need to ensure the right type of tourism model. We are currently looking into these models – these are exciting times and the model for development will dictate success for us. We need fresh thinking.

Apart from consolidating traditional source markets, what measures is the Government taking to attract new and alternative source markets?

We are looking at alternative source markets but what is interesting here is that we are constrained by other Government Departments which need to deliver services to us, for example, air connectivity which lies with the Ministry of Transport, or online visas with the Department of Immigration. There is an interesting trend in Southern Africa where direct flights are transiting through some of our neighbouring countries before flying on to other destinations. We want to capitalize on this trend to look for new source markets. As to which specific markets, the world is our oyster. We want to welcome visitors from anywhere as long as our offering can meet their expectations. We need to provide the best we can, we don’t want to be second best. We want to offer a unique experience – not just of Africa, but an authentic experience of Botswana. We need a consistent level of service from when visitors arrive to when they leave. We are aware of the challenges ahead of us. With the support of UNWTO though, we are confident that we will be able to manage these. It is also worthwhile mentioning that when we look at climate change this affects what we do in terms of developing a sustainable tourism model. More and more now, people are looking for ecotourism initiatives. Botswana has been nominated for its ecotourism initiatives and people specifically come here for these experiences – our hunting ban, the relocation of rhinos, housing the largest population of elephants. We must be doing something right and we need to market this more.

The Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources, Conservation and Tourism is currently implementing a project with UNWTO, in collaboration with the Peace Parks Foundation, for updating the Botswana Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) which was last prepared for the reference year 2009. The new TSA will be for the reference year 2016. What are your expectations with regards to this updated TSA and how this can help you in further planning and development of the sector?

One of the issues we have noticed when we do our national accounts is that the revenue from air transport is not reflected as a benefit from tourism. However, our statistics show that 65% of all air passengers to Botswana are tourists. We also have a very liberal foreign exchange policy so not necessarily all the money that is spent on tourism in Botswana is also captured. This means that there is a gap between the total number of tourists which arrive to Botswana, the total amount of money they spent and the actual revenue generated that we report. Updating the TSA with the assistance of UNWTO will give us actual, rather than perceived, numbers that indicate the direct impacts of tourism. This will also help us in terms of sharing the funding for the implementation of the national development plans. Accurate data will help recognize that this Ministry is entitled for more funding. Tourism is the second highest contributor in terms of GDP to Botswana but in terms of budget allocation it ranks twelfth out of nineteen ministries.

Finally, during the past year, Botswana has played an increasing active role in UNWTO and its activities and participated in several UNWTO events. You also hosted the Annual Conference of the 10YFP programme of the United Nations which is co-led by UNWTO. Can you briefly outline the range of areas in which the Ministry is engaging with UNWTO and why the Ministry has opted to collaborate with UNWTO in this regard.

We are currently engaging with the UNWTO in the updating of our Tourism Satellite Account, strengthening our hotel classification scheme, formulating a new strategy for the Botswana Tourism Organization and we are about to also launch a new collaboration in the preparation of an overall Tourism Strategy for the country. These all relate to a specific standard and ultimately we are looking to see how we can attain the standard we are trying to achieve. For example, we see a need to improve the standards of our urban hotels. I am particularly keen that the Botswana model should be unique. Therefore, part of the reason we want to collaborate with UNWTO is to raise our standards and get the model right. We don’t want to be left behind – we want to be the best at our game.
Interview with Mr. Om Sophana
Executive Director
Mlup Baitong* (Cambodian NGO)

Improving community-based ecotourism in northern Cambodia

The Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Mlup Baitong (literally translated as “Green Shade”) successfully implemented a community-based ecotourism project in northern Cambodia with the financial support of the Spanish Europamundo Foundation. Can you briefly describe the main activities of this project?

The project aims to empower community members, improve their living standard, promote environmental conservation, contribute to mitigation of and adaptation to climate change and advance green development. The project counts with two community based ecotourism (CBET) sites, one in Preah Rumkel and one in Borey Osvay, both in the Stung Treng province in Cambodia.

The main outcomes of the project are: to improve the management systems and capacities of the CBET Management Committees and tourism service providers in Preah Rumkel and Borey Osvay, to renovate tourism facilities in both areas, to improve advertisement/marketing mechanisms and the mechanisms in place for protection of natural resources, especially forest and dolphins.

Can you explain how Mlup Baitong has identified this project and why the organization was keen to develop ecotourism in the area?

We acknowledge community-based ecotourism as a ‘green source’ of income which provides direct benefit to community members. Community-based ecotourism provides employment, contributes to natural protection and serves as catalyst for the expansion of other economic activities. The project actually directly complements the Government’s goals in terms of poverty reduction and sustainable development. With regard to community empowerment, it is especially women who benefit the most. Traditionally being the most economically deprived, they are now able to manage community-based ecotourism by themselves and directly benefit from it. The generated income of the ongoing tourism services clearly contributes to the improved living standards of both communities Preah Rumkel and Borey Osvay.

How has the project and its activities impacted the community and ecotourism activities in the area?

Ever since the project finished, the management committees which were set up during the initial project phase are managing the sites applying their practical experience and knowledge gained. According to the communication with one of the authorized team members both local and international visitors are still interested to visit the sites. The community keeps on generating income from boat renting and food providing services. The overall management of the sites has improved, after initial conflicts of interest and management problems had been solved, and revenues have even slightly increased.

* Mlup Baitong is a dynamic and respected Cambodian NGO. It was first established in 1998 to address the problem of deforestation in Cambodia with a focus on educating the general public on the conservation of natural resources. Mlup Baitong was selected by the Ministry of Tourism of Cambodia to collaborate with UNWTO in the Calls for Proposals of the Spanish Europamundo Foundation. The project proposal “Improving Community-based Ecotourism in Thala Barivat” was finally selected and awarded funding by Europamundo for implementation.
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40 projects, 26 countries and 2 regions

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