

GOAL 1: END POVERTY



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END POVERTY IN ALL ITS FORMS EVERYWHERE

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ABSTRACT: *We pledge that no one will be left behind (United Nations General Assembly, 2015, p. 1). To achieve sustainable development, alleviating poverty is the number one goal in the 2030 Agenda. Ensuring that “no one is left behind” has been defined as a fundamental guiding principle. Tourism for poverty alleviation has been discussed and promoted by various agencies, often with a focus on the so-called ‘trickle-down effect’ of tourism – the idea that the economic benefits of the industry would eventually also reach the poor (if not the poorest) sections of society. However, experiences from many destinations have shown that tourism may not just fail to deliver on the ‘trickle-down’ promise, but may often even increase poverty due to its inherent inequalities, rather than alleviating it. Across the tourism industry de-regulation and eroding of workers’ rights have contributed to joblessness and precarious work and social inequality. The lives and livelihoods of millions of women and men have become more not less precarious. Without meaningful participation and serious attempts to increase the capacities of the poor, poorest and marginalised, tourism is not an option for alleviating poverty.*

INTRODUCTION

Who are those at risk of being left behind?

‘Extreme poverty’, to be eradicated by 2030 according to target 1.1, is measured as income poverty: the population living on less than 1.25 USD (purchasing power parity – PPP) per day. It is a rather simple indicator which allows for an easy international comparison of data. However, poverty is much more complex and in recent years, increased efforts have been made to build and use indices which include social, economic and environmental indicators. For example, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has introduced (and continues to develop) the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI).

Multidimensional Poverty Index

The Multidimensional Poverty Index for developing countries captures the multiple deprivations that people face in their education, health and living standards. The MPI shows both the incidence of non-income multidimensional poverty (a head-count of those in multidimensional poverty) and its intensity (the relative number of deprivations poor people experience at the same time). Based on intensity thresholds, people are classified as near multidimensional poverty, multi-dimensionally poor or in severe poverty, respectively. The contributions of deprivations in each dimension to overall poverty are also included.

UNDP 2015, p. 205

Countries also apply national poverty lines for national policy purposes. Target 1.2 is aimed at reducing, at least by half, the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.

None of the poverty indicators refers to a static group of people. Shocks and crises (illness, unemployment, rising food prices, natural disasters) affect households and may make them fall into poverty. Similarly, people may get out of poverty when their situation improves. The population at risk of poverty is usually much bigger than the number of the poor (no matter by what measure) at any point in time.

In addition, people who do not have access to certain rights, including a voice in decision-making or to basic goods and services may be among those “left behind”. Women are consistently the majority of people in poverty across the world, and in many countries, indigenous peoples are among the most disadvantaged groups.

Vulnerability

Vulnerability is a key factor that places people at risk of poverty. According to UNDP’s Human Development Report 2014, ‘structurally vulnerable’ groups are more vulnerable than others by virtue of their history or of their unequal treatment by the rest of society. Many of the most vulnerable people and groups face numerous and overlapping constraints on their ability to cope with setbacks. (UNDP 2014, p. iv). The types of vulnerabilities may include vulnerability to disasters, to loss of income, to exploitation, to illness, to violence, or corruption.

Tourism and the poor and vulnerable

Tourism is one of the sectors with a high level of inbuilt inequality, as it creates unequal wealth distribution among local communities in the destinations (>> Goal 10). The exploiting and excluding economic and social power relations that are found in much of tourism practice tend to consolidate and deepen exclusion, exploitation, and poverty. Power relationships between tourists and hosts are always an issue, as the purchasing power of the tourists usually dominates. Tourism activities affect each and every aspect of the lives and livelihoods of the people in the destinations.

Competition for scarce resources

The tourism industry competes with local people for scarce resources, including land, water, energy, utilities, government support, food supply, etc. The poor are by nature of their situation the least able to benefit from tourism, and highest at risk of suffering from the negative impacts of the industry, e.g. in terms of water shortages due to over-consumption by resorts, land appropriation by industry, rising consumer prices, displacement, etc. They are also the least able to defend their rights. The bargaining power of tourism business for tax benefits, subsidies and other incentives diverts scarce resources which could otherwise be used for effective policy measures that would really benefit the poor.

Multiple deprivations and tourism

Tourism is an industry which provides employment for a large number of people (>> Goal 8). Some of the jobs require a high level of professionalism and qualification to meet sophisticated quality standards, not only in terms of amenities, but also in terms of eco-standards and social responsibility. Many jobs, however, are semi- or unskilled and thus more accessible for poorer sections of society. Due to a high level of exploitation and unfavourable working conditions in the sector, jobs in tourism may not be suitable as a way out of the poverty trap.

In community-based initiatives, the involvement of the poor depends upon their ability to provide tourism facilities and services. Poverty is in many cases associated with a lack of resources and skills, such as communication skills and self-confidence, and a low level of formal education (>> Goal 4). The poor may not have the means to achieve certain standards of hygiene and health in tune with tourist expectations. Often, this is due to a lack of access to clean water (>> Goal 6). Their standard of living and housing is usually low, so that they are often not able to provide facilities that would meet the expectations of tourists.

MAJOR CHALLENGES

It has been easy to state that tourism 'can alleviate poverty if we manage it properly', but in practice 'manage properly' remains the key challenge. Direct involvement of the poorest of the poor in tourism is not easy and will not happen automatically. For the poor to be meaningfully involved (whether in mainstream tourism or in community-based projects), there is a need for distinct affirmative action that includes empowerment, capacitybuilding and facilitation.

Reducing vulnerability, strengthening resilience

Tourism as an industry may increase a country's vulnerability, as the sector is easily affected by disasters, epidemics, terrorism and political and economic crises. The same applies at the micro-level for individuals involved in the sector, e.g. vulnerable groups overly depending on tourism (even with menial jobs). To reduce their vulnerability, there is a need for a diversification of income and livelihoods at all levels. Target 1.5 is aimed at building the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reducing their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters. Tourism taken as an additional activity and form of income may play a role in strengthening resilience at household, community and macro-economic levels.

TANGIBLE WAYS FORWARD

To contribute to reaching those furthest behind first, stakeholders in tourism must learn about the dynamics of poverty, marginalization and vulnerability in their country and place-specific context. It is imperative to involve the poor, the vulnerable and marginalised people in decisions on developments that affect their lives. Their rights must be safeguarded and mechanisms for their effective protection strengthened, including grievance mechanisms to deal with cases of human rights violations. Equal rights of men and women must be ensured, in line with target 1.4., taking into account that tourism may affect men and women differently (>> Goal 5).

Setting priorities, allocating resources

In implementing the 2030 Agenda, priorities need to be set and must reflect in policies and resource allocation. Subsidies for a sector like tourism are not in line with this priority. Big infrastructure projects (highway projects etc.) meant to stimulate tourism development often take away resources meant for programmes which would really help in poverty alleviation (>> Goal 9). The public and private sectors need to focus on re-distributive strategies that specifically support the poorest sections in terms of capacity-building, opportunities, social security, and rights. A key challenge is the effective taxation of tourism activities to generate the resources needed for poverty alleviation and development.

Participation of deprived and marginalized groups

The participation of local communities in planning and decision making, tourism business, destination management and monitoring of benefits and detrimental effects of tourism is indispensable. Usually, the privileged sections of societies dominate in decisions and management of tourism. The involvement of the poor remains a major challenge. It requires empowerment and pro-active supply chain management that involves them in a targeted manner. Capacity building, training and skills development are preconditions for their meaningful involvement (>> Goal 4).

Local sourcing

Tourism is the only export sector where the consumer travels to the exporting country which provides opportunities for the poor to become “exporters”, selling foods, drinks and other goods and services to foreign tourists. There is growing concern for the tourism industry to encourage responsible tourism practices by locally sourcing food products. This will create employment opportunities for local farmers who in many developing countries are in the majority and are the poorest (>> Goal 12 responsible consumption and production patterns).

Adama Bah

Tourism destination partnerships

One way forward at destination level is the formation of multi-stakeholder and right holder’s tourism partnerships (with the interests of poor, vulnerable and marginalized communities represented) that will look at minimizing the negative impacts and maximizing the positive ones for communities. The best way forward are policies and strategies of intervention for tourism to contribute to the development of the informal sector, small businesses, community-based tourism initiatives and other businesses run by or benefitting the poor, linking tourism to local production and services.

(Re-) examining the poverty alleviation performance of tourism

Governments and agencies usually use indicators such as tourist arrivals and tourism's contribution to GDP and employment to point out the benefits of tourism. From a poverty alleviation perspective, however, the criteria used to assess tourism need to be different. A more suitable framework needs to include the impacts of tourism on the poor and people at risk of being left behind, whether beneficial or detrimental, by using a comprehensive set of indicators. This would include the impact of tourism on key aspects of human development as such education, health, and standard of living, as well as on people's vulnerability and resilience, and on the fulfilment of their rights and access to basic services. Such an approach requires micro level assessments. To leave no one behind in the 2030 Agenda, it is critical to systematically collect evidence on whether and how tourism does indeed reach those furthest behind.

Strengthen social protection

Social protection, decent work and sustainable livelihoods are economically productive and essential to sustainable development. Social protection helps individuals and societies mitigate against risks of impoverishment throughout a person's life cycle to include situations of sickness, disability, old age (>> Goal 3), unemployment, disaster, general poverty, and social exclusion. However, only 20 percent of men, women, and children (one percent in developing countries and the rest in affluent countries) enjoy social protection. Target 1.3 is aimed at implementing nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and at achieving substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable by 2030. To enhance access to basic services and social protection for the poor, tourism companies need to ensure that they contribute to decent work (>> Goal 8) and also make their full tax and revenue contributions to enable host country local and national governments to be able to run and provide access to comprehensive public services.

Tourism in development cooperation

Target 1.a seeks to ensure significant mobilization of resources from a variety of sources, including through enhanced development cooperation, to implement programmes and policies to end poverty in all its dimensions. Tourism, however, is not beneficial per se and should not be supported with development funding unless this happens against the backdrop of comprehensive analyses of the effectiveness of tourism as an instrument to overcome poverty. Official Development Assistance (ODA) or Aid for Trade (AfT) should not be invested in tourism infrastructure or tourist facilities. Rather, the needs of the people who are to benefit from tourism, especially poor and disadvantaged groups, need to be fully taken into consideration. Development projects need to be specifically targeted at the empowerment of poor and vulnerable groups of the population.

This includes strengthening human rights and participation, as well as traditional sectors such as agriculture, fisheries and crafts, and local sourcing for tourism enterprises and tourists.

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