

Transforming Tourism – Addressing Land Rights and Corporate Accountability in the ‘Re-start’ of Tourism

at AEPF13 18th May 2021

EQUATIONS, India, Tourism Watch @ Bread for the World, Germany and Fresh Eyes, UK together with other members of the Transforming Tourism Initiative co-organized the open space session event ‘**Transforming Tourism – Addressing Land Rights and Corporate Accountability in the ‘Re-start’ of Tourism**’ at the Asia Europe People’s Forum on 18th May, 2021 at 12.30 pm CET.

While tourism has reduced dramatically and workers are suffering all around the world, the development of new tourism infrastructure has not paused. On contrary, in the name of COVID recovery, governments, investors and companies are speeding up for the ‘re-start’ of tourism, continuing to promote an extractive and abusive tourism model often based on the exploitation of local people and our planet. The two hour session addressed the issues of land grabs and displacement in the context of tourism and paved the way for a transformation of tourism, away from the ‘business-as-usual’ model.

The session began with a keynote address from Professor Andreas Neef, author of “Tourism, Land Grabs and Displacement - The Darker Side of the Feel-Good Industry” who gave an overview about the global scope and dynamics of tourism-induced land grabs and displacements. Based on the analysis of 31 cases in Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Pacific, he categories dispossession in the context of tourism into four types:-

- Eviction or physical removal from a place
- Enclosure or placing restrictions of access to resources
- Extraction of natural resources from a place at the cost of availability of the resource to local communities
- Erasure or infringement on culturally important places or destruction of cultural artefacts

Professor Andreas Neef’s systematic analysis of displacement and dispossession was followed by a diverse set of community based experiences from different countries.

Mr. Herman Kumara presented the experience of Colombo Port in Sri Lanka, where a number of changes are being brought to policies and laws to favour the setting up a luxury port city which includes casinos, resorts and spas. The port city affects about 30,000 people who rely on fishing for their livelihood.

Mr. Solano Da Silva presented the experience of Tiracol village, Goa in India, where systematic changes have been made to land records and land use and planning policies, to favour setting up a golf course and luxury resort by taking away land from agricultural tenants. The label of ‘eco-tourism’ has been used to justify the golf course project.

Ms. Susan Herawati presented the experience of the island tourism projects in Indonesia, which have resulted in land and ocean grabbing. One such island is the Mandalika Island, where coercive forces have been used by the Army to displace people.

Mr. Shankar Limbu presented the experience of Chittawan National Park, Nepal, which is one of the most popular tourist attractions in Nepal and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The park is originally home to four indigenous communities. There have been several instances of human rights violations by the Army, which

has resulted in loss of lives, destruction of villages and homes and loss of livelihoods. The indigenous communities in the area of the National Park live in fear every day.

Ms. Signe Leth presented the threat of an expected displacement of Mro indigenous community in Chittagong, Bangladesh. In an area that has a history of armed conflict that has marginalized the Mro people, tourism has added further to this conflict. The Mro people are facing displacement for a five star hotel project that is underway. The project has been set up without free, prior informed consent of the Mro people.

Mr. Macia Blazquez Salom presented the experience of the Balearic Islands of Spain, where housing is being commodified causing displacement of the local people. There has been a systematic commodification of the real estate in the islands over the years as a result of residential tourism.

The session ended with a strategic discussion on ways forward. A number of suggestions and recommendations came forth from the panellists, which have been summarized below:

1. Dialogue and free prior informed consent that encourages people's participation in tourism decision making is a priority.
2. Mind-set of grand ideals of tourism is a common discourse while demonizing small initiatives.
3. Recognition of right of access and control of natural resources of local communities including indigenous people and fisherfolk, particularly women's rights to natural resources.
4. Acknowledgement of indigenous culture and knowledge, including through the law, at the national and international level. Promoting greater solidarity among international organizations.
5. Inclusion of multiple sectors in tourism to create a sustainable and inclusive tourism model.
6. Demystifying tourism as an 'innocent' industry and 'green development' option that does no harm, by acknowledging and understanding the tourism-induced risks and significant challenges to planet and people.
7. A greater need to examine critically grand visions of mega tourism against smaller, more local initiatives that promote inclusion of local communities.

Co-organisers

Equitable Tourism Options- EQUATIONS is research, campaign and advocacy organization working in India and Nepal to bring about sustainable, equitable and democratic forms of tourism.

www.equitabletourism.org

Tourism Watch is a policy desk at Bread for the World, that German Protestant development agency. Together with civil society partners from all around the globe, it advocates for sustainable, socially responsible and environmentally friendly tourism. www.tourism-watch.de/en

Fresh Eyes promotes thoughtful, fair and ethical travel and campaigns for Just and Green Travel as part of a Global Green New Deal. www.fresheyes.org

The **Transforming Tourism Initiative** is an open global network of NGOs, tourism practitioners and academia that demands a transformation of tourism in line with the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. <http://www.transforming-tourism.org>