

The background of the cover features a close-up of a tiger's head on the right side, with its distinctive orange and black stripes. On the left side, there is a bamboo shoot with its green, pointed leaves. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent white background.

BHOPAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM 2013

TOURISM: AN ENABLER
FOR CONSERVATION,
LIVELIHOOD AND
SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Printed and published in 2014 by the
Ecotourism Society of India (ESOI)
Flat no. 98, 2nd floor, DDA Flats
B2, Safdarjung Enclave,
Opp. Ambedkar Market,
New Delhi - 110029, India

BICST 2013

This is a compilation of the proceedings at the Bhopal International Conference on Sustainable Tourism 2013 - Tourism: Enabler for Conservation, Livelihood and Sustainable Growth, held on April 18-19, 2013. It was organised by the Ecotourism Society of India in partnership with the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation. This was the 12th event organised by ESOI.

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Price: **Rs. 350**

Conference Concept and Design by: Krishna Kumar Singh and Rohini Chaturvedi

Edited by: NR Management Consultants Pvt. Ltd

Designed by: Ragini Letitia Singh, Rangini Enterprises

Printed by: **Madhyam (GoMP publishing agency)**

For an e-version of this publication, kindly contact the ESOI office.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APCCF:	Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests
AECO:	Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators
BICST:	Bhopal International Conference on Sustainable Tourism
CCF:	Chief Conservator of Forests
EIS:	Environmental Impact Statements
ESOI:	Ecotourism Society of India
FRA:	Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006
GSTC:	Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria
HEC:	Human Elephant Conflict
IAATO:	International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators
JFM:	Joint Forest Management
LAC:	Local Advisory Committees
NDD:	Nature Deficit Disorder
NTCA:	National Tiger Conservation Authority
NWAP:	National Wildlife Action Plan
PATA:	Pacific Asia Travel Association
SEZ:	Special Economic Zone
STCI:	Sustainable Tourism Criteria of India
TOFT:	Travel Operators for Tigers
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNWTO:	United Nations World Tourism Organization

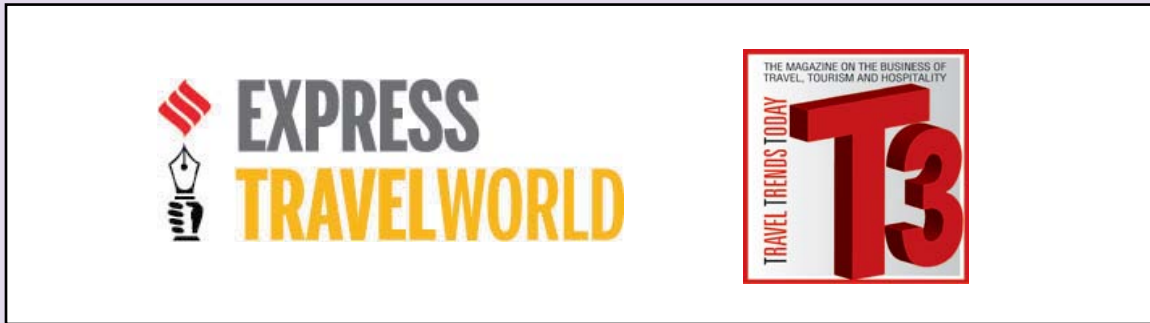
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

From
The President,
Ecotourism Society of India

On behalf of all of us in the Ecotourism Society of India, I have the great pleasure in releasing our Society’s second publication that contains the presentations and proceedings of our tenth workshop held in Guwahati, Assam on March 23-24, 2012 and of our eleventh workshop held in Aurangabad, Maharashtra on April 27-28, 2012. Both workshops focused on the topic ‘Responsible Tourism – Issues and Practices’. This is a continuation of our journey with the vision to conserve our tourism heritage assets by establishing responsible tourism practices for all stakeholders, especially targeting inclusive growth, waste management, efficient energy uses and minimizing the ecological footprint.

This publication is also intended to provide key reference sources to tourism entrepreneurs, managers, local communities, central and state government representatives, including the forest departments, training faculty and students.

For us, every workshop has raised the level of awareness, while being a learning experience as we incorporate local issues specific to the venue and region of the workshop. We are greatly encouraged by the response from our partners, resource persons and participants, who have enriched the outcomes with unique ideas, issues and solutions, thereby drawing appreciation across tourism industry.

This publication also contains a brief on the Ecotourism Society of India objectives, its founding members and current members.

I thank our resource persons who offered their professional experiences to this initiative and contributed immensely. I urge all stakeholders in the tourism industry to obtain this publication, and to join our endeavour for strengthening sustainable tourism practices in India that can be replicated globally.

With best regards,

Mandip Singh Soin, FRGS
President & Founding Member
Ecotourism Society of India

INTRODUCTION

The Ecotourism Society of India (ESOI) continues its series of workshops on responsible tourism issues. Following the aim of spreading awareness and orienting tourism service providers, local government officials and other relevant stakeholders on the urgent need to ensure sustainable tourism practices, ESOI has so far conducted eleven workshops in various states.

This book contains the outcomes of ESOI's tenth and eleventh workshop – in Guwahati, Assam in March 2012 and in Aurangabad, Maharashtra in April 2012 respectively. Whereas both events focused on the overall topic of “Responsible Tourism – Issues and Practices” the detailed discussions and lessons learnt are more region-specific.

The North Eastern States of India represent relatively pristine and unexplored nature and are also home to a great number of indigenous tribes. The Guwahati workshop highlighted issues related to biodiversity conservation and involvement of local communities in tourism. Topics discussed included amongst others eco-sensitive architecture, sustainable use of resources and community-based tourism initiatives.

Cultural and build heritage as well as rural communities are vital assets of tourism in Maharashtra. Accordingly, the presentations and discussions in Aurangabad emphasised on successful initiatives and the need for further action in the areas of conserving build heritage, strengthening living culture and empowering local communities through rural ecotourism and agritourism.

Thanks to the valuable contribution of all speakers this book introduces the reader to a wide range of successful ecotourism initiatives in India. It also highlights challenges that have to be addressed to make tourism practices in India more sustainable and advantageous for those involved.

Seema Bhatt
Honorary Secretary, ESOI

ESOI: WHO WE ARE

The Ecotourism Society of India (ESOI) was established in 2008 under the advice and support of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, by environmentally responsible and sensitive individuals in senior positions in the tourism industry, as well as, in the government.

ESOI is registered under the Societies Act XXI, 1860, under Regn. No. S/61047/2008 as a non-profit organisation. The mission of ESOI is to educate and sensitise tourism service providers in the organised and unorganised sectors to follow sustainable tourism practices. As the national body for responsible tourism the society's primary objectives are:

- (i) Advocacy for tourism service providers and visitors to adhere to sustainable tourism practices
- (ii) Facilitating the formulation and implementation of sustainable tourism policies at the national, state and local levels that harmonise tourism with the environment, local communities, and
- (iii) Helping stakeholders with sustainable tourism certification

ESOI envisions tourism as a vehicle for furthering conservation and generating community benefits. In an effort to facilitate the practice of ecotourism, ESOI has been engaging with tourism stakeholders through discussion and dialogue, publications and training programmes.

Towards its initiatives for spreading awareness of sustainable tourism practices and their implementation with a code of ethics, ESOI launched a series of workshops. So far, ESOI has successfully conducted eleven workshops in six states, with the support of their state tourism departments and the PATA India Chapter, as well as, with WWF-India as a knowledge partner. The 1st International Conference on Sustainable Tourism (BICST 2013) was held in Bhopal in April, 2013 with over 150 participants and international experts as speakers. The theme of the conference was ‘Tourism: An enabler for conservation, livelihoods and sustainable growth.’

The society will continue its series of workshops across various states. The Ministry of Tourism, Government of India has officially declared ESOI as their partner in helping them develop policy guidelines, code of conduct and ethical practices for sustainable tourism, to position India as a global ecotourism destination.

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*List as of October 2013

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CONFERENCE SUMMARY

Background to the Conference

The Indian tourism industry caters to more than 800 million international and domestic tourists every year. These numbers are enormous, and impacts of these increasing numbers of tourists on the destinations have to be monitored and controlled. Practicing sustainable and responsible tourism is a step towards achieving this.

On July 24, 2012, the Supreme Court banned tourism inside the core areas of all tiger reserves in India. This ban was put in place in response to the claims that increasing numbers of tourists contribute to degradation of these areas and also adversely impact the conservation effort. The ban was overturned after the government announced new rules aimed at allowing tourism to co-exist with conservation through ecotourism. The National Tiger Conservation Authority's (NTCA) comprehensive guidelines on tiger conservation and tourism emphasizes on eventually converting all tourism inside Protected Areas (PAs) into ecotourism. Ecotourism entails responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of the local people. Ecotourism would require the tourism industry to adopt a community-sensitive approach with a focus on conservation as well.

The NTCA guidelines also prescribe restricting any new infrastructure development for tourism in core areas and shifting from mere tourism to a responsible, sustainable form of tourism. The guidelines also mandate developing the buffer areas so as to ease tourism related pressures from the core sink areas. The buffer areas need to be developed with a focus on making them analogous to core areas in terms of wildlife presence. The management challenges of these non-Protected Areas needs to be addressed with and a possibility of the private industry to step in and develop these areas needs to be explored. In such a context the Bhopal International Conference on Sustainable Tourism, 2013 was organized on 18th and 19th April, 2013, with a strong focus on highlighting and promoting ecotourism's role in sustainable development. It aimed to strengthen the industry's commitment to the recent UN resolution, "*Promotion of Ecotourism for Poverty Eradication and Environment Protection*", which recognizes ecotourism's positive impact on sustainable community development efforts.

Session: Ecotourism Solutions and Strategies: Reflections on Global Experiences

Several global models in the tourism sector were presented on the first day of the workshop that addressed numerous problems facing the ecotourism industry. The tourism models being implemented in Africa and presented in the workshop used modification of land use along with sharing part of the profits with the community as one of the strategies for making tourism conservation and community-centered. The strategy includes influencing land use patterns proposed by the government to facilitate establishment of wildlife reserves in consultation and agreement with the community. Another strategy in the African models was translocation of wildlife from high wildlife density or areas of frequent human-wildlife

conflict to community lands. These community lands were then converted to game reserves, providing avenues for tourism and part of the profits from them was shared with the people. The models also provided for temporal and spatial separation of livestock from the wildlife allowing the communities to graze their animals in the forest.

While a success in African context, these models' applicability in the Indian context was considered uncertain. Participants pointed out that a landscape based approach to conservation has been lacking in India and the wildlife reserves have become conservation islands that are under threat from the growing demand, largely for development purposes. Moreover, there is a high opportunity cost and procedural difficulties in diverting private or community land for conservation purposes as well as legal issues in permitting livestock grazing in Protected Areas.

Closer home, in Sri Lanka, backed by strong scientific research, landscape level land use planning was used to create conservancies to arrest human elephant conflicts (HECs). The Sri Lankan situation is very similar to India, with small land holdings amongst people and the demand for forest land for development.

Some good practices and models in bringing standardization for ecotourism and responsible tourism sectors were presented during the first day of the workshop. Evolution of these models and practices is necessary to identify and regulate genuine operators in the ecotourism sector. The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) and EcoLuxury certification models are a step in this direction. Whereas the GSTC provides a holistic approach towards applying principles of sustainability in tourism activities, EcoLuxury certification model is based on continuous improvement towards achieving a sustainable tourism operation. India's own Sustainable Tourism Criteria (STCI), which was rolled out recently by Ministry of Tourism, is developed on the lines of the GSTC⁸ as it was felt that the GSTC may not be completely relevant in the Indian context.

Leads can be taken from the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO), the Antarctic model of self-regulated tourism discussed in the session. This model has a well-defined framework for deciding on the particulars of tourism activities that go on in the Antarctic region. The model is based on strong scientific research. All breaches of the rules are dealt with in a strict manner by IAATO. Efforts are currently underway to extend the IAATO model to the Arctic. In the Indian context, the Arctic model of tourism regulation makes much more sense as it is spearheaded by a government, but still is rooted in scientific research to decide on the details of tourism activities in eco-sensitive areas. The Indian tourism industry operates under an almost similar environment but the enforcement of restrictions is poor and breaches of rules are not dealt with stringently. The participants expressed that either a command and control mechanism by the Government or a self-regulatory model is needed for such criteria to be successfully incorporated in the Indian tourism industry.

In the discussion amongst the delegates on the day's sessions there was a feeling that all stakeholders need to work together to achieve sustainable tourism. The discussions led to some clarifications on the presentations and revealed a need for a national institution for

sustainable tourism. Other issues that were of importance to the Indian tourism industry were that of introducing self-regulation in the industry, concentrating on community involvement in ecotourism projects and dealing with tiger-centric and mass tourism.

Session: Ecotourism Framework in India: Law, Policy and Politics

The federal structure of India deeply affects the formation of any laws and policies that concern either state or concurrent subjects. The lack of a clear majority at the central government level in the past two decades has led to the negotiations between the states and the center being skewed towards the states. This is important in the context of ecotourism since a majority of potential ecotourism activity areas also hold high mineral wealth and development has taken precedence over conservation in many states. The legal landscape concerning tourism in India is also governed by many different and segmented laws. There is no clear policy or one law that deals with ecotourism specifically. Clarification of complexities surrounding the legalities in the ecotourism sector would better facilitate running of an ecotourism business as would the establishment of a national level institution for ecotourism. Unification of the miscellaneous laws and piecemeal policies into a national policy for ecotourism is the need of the hour. Along with a simplification of the legal complexities, it is necessary to inculcate a sense of nature connectedness amongst all stakeholders to sensitize them towards ecotourism. There is a shortage of funds for protection and management of PAs in the country. Most of the PAs across the country are funded by the Government of India. Generally, what states fund is actually the salary of the staff and maintenance of the infrastructure, rest of the fund is given by GOI which is insufficient.

Session: Ecotourism framework in India: Stakeholder Experiences of Challenges and Opportunities

From the community's perspective, the Indian tourism industry does not seem to be inclusive of the needs and aspirations of the local communities. The framework on community involvement in tourism highlighted that the current relationship between the community and the tourism industry was merely tokenistic. Instead, the interactions between tourism industry and community have to be more involved and seek to forge partnerships between the two. Real sustainability in the tourism sector is incomplete without achieving social justice in its true form. Some private agencies have set examples that other tourist operators would do well to replicate. For example, the Taj Safaris group has taken numerous efforts in involving community within the scope of their business model. A number of these solutions exist but were not being tried out by other lodge owners. A major issue is bringing together all stakeholders in the tourism sector and then enforcing a regulatory framework whilst ensuring compliance of such regulations.

A need therefore was also felt for spreading awareness about ecotourism and responsible tourism to various stakeholders. Self-regulation by the tourist agencies was also suggested for the tourism sector by some of the conference participants. Another key suggestion from the session was the need to redefine parameters based on which hotels are evaluated and inclusion of sustainability as criteria for star ratings of the hotels. Marketing ecotourism was

considered difficult as the ecotourism as a product is susceptible to change due to changes in dates of closure of the parks, visitor timings and the extent of area allowed to be visited. To address this issue, timely and efficient planning and communication is required by different stakeholders.

Session: Ecotourism Framework in India: Exploring Potential for Stakeholder's Collaboration in Madhya Pradesh

According to the Chief Secretary of Madhya Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh Tourism is at the crossroad, and ecotourism is seen to be the right way to move forward. To do this, best practices that are available within and outside the state should be used to build a framework that can be articulated in the form of a good policy which consequently will be translated into guidelines and action.

The current conservation model of forming PAs was seen as similar to creating ecosystem islands. The NTCA guidelines envisage development of the buffer areas as alternate tourism destinations to ease tourist pressure from core areas of wildlife reserves. Tourism can be an enabler for conservation, livelihood and sustainable growth, but the current policy landscape needs to undergo a broad change. The industry on its part has to actively concentrate on various issues affecting sustainable growth to ensure that social justice, environmental protection and economic growth is achieved along with development of tourism and specially the ecotourism sector.

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

Conference Background

India is home to more than one billion people. With almost 60 per cent of the population depending on agriculture for their livelihoods, the primary issue in India has been one of poverty⁸. While, of late, there has been a growing trend of urbanization and diversification away from agriculture, farm-based sectors still continue to be major employer of rural workforce in India. However, farming sector has not grown as was envisaged to create employment, and employment growth in non-agriculture sectors has also not been enough to sufficiently reduce the population dependent on agriculture⁹. In this context, the Planning Commission of India’s approach paper for the next five-year plan (2012-2017) emphasizes on creating an environment in which the economy not only grows rapidly, but also enhances good quality employment/livelihood opportunities to meet the needs and aspirations of the youth.

Tourism industry in India accounts for one-third of the foreign exchange earnings for the country and also gainfully employs the highest number of people compared to other sectors¹⁰. World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) deems Indian tourist economy as the second-most rapidly increasing (8.8 per cent) in the world and according to the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), by the year 2020, it is expected that India will become the leader in the tourism industry in South Asia, with about 8.9 million arrivals¹¹.

With enormous diversity in topography, natural resources and climate, and around 5 per cent of its geographical area under Protected Area Category, India has immense potential to develop tourism with an ecotourism approach¹². Emphasizing the role of ecotourism in fight against poverty and the protection of the environment, UNWTO passed a resolution on 21 December, 2012 calling on UN Member States to adopt policies that promote ecotourism highlighting its “*positive impact on income generation, job creation and education, and thus on the fight against poverty and hunger*”. The resolution further recognizes that “*ecotourism creates significant opportunities for the conservation, protection and sustainable use of*

*biodiversity and of natural areas by encouraging local and indigenous communities in host countries and tourists alike to preserve and respect the natural and cultural heritage*¹³”.

Ecotourism in India is a fledgling sector which has immense potential for growth and providing employment to the rural population. While there has been some encouraging progress in the ecotourism sector in India with Ministry of Tourism rolling out Sustainable Tourism Criteria of India in April, 2013, there have also been some setbacks like the Supreme Court of India banning Tiger Tourism for a brief period before the Government of India promulgated guidelines on Tiger Conservation and Tourism in and around Tiger Reserves. The guidelines restrict the area for tourism in the core area of the Tiger Reserves and affect ecotourism in many states including Madhya Pradesh.

In order to deliberate on these issues and decide on a way forward an International Conference on Sustainable Tourism was held on April 18-19, 2013 in the city of Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. The conference is an annual affair that focuses on the advancement of sustainability goals for the tourism industry and offers an opportunity for stakeholders in ecotourism sector to discuss ideas and solutions that inspire change. Bringing together a group of over 100 leaders from the industry, government and NGOs the conference aimed to strengthen the industry’s commitment to the recent UN resolution on ecotourism that recognizes ecotourism’s positive impact on sustainable community development efforts.

The conference was spread over two days and comprised presentations and open discussions. On the first day, the presentations were given by international speakers as part of two sessions titled “Ecotourism Solutions and Strategies: Reflections on Global Experiences”. An open discussion at the day’s end to evaluate the validity and applicability of the various solutions followed the first two sessions. On the second day, the first session dealt with the ecotourism framework in India in terms of law, policy and politics while the second session comprised presentations from the challenges and opportunities faced by the tourism industry stakeholders. This was followed by a multi stakeholder dialogue on exploring potential for stakeholders’ collaboration in Madhya Pradesh.

This Conference Proceedings document was written based upon the presentations by speakers and the input by all the participants in the discussions.

8 Ministry of Finance Government of India, The Economic Survey 2012-13
9 Planning Commission, 2012, Faster, Sustainable and More Inclusive Growth – An approach to the Twelfth Five Year Plan, Government of India
10 http://www.ficci.com/sector/40/Project_docs/Tourism-profile.pdf accessed on May 9, 2013
11 Ibid
12 Ecotourism is defined by UN WTO as
a. All nature-based forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the observation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas.
b. It contains educational and interpretation features.
c. It is generally, but not exclusively organised by specialised tour operators for small groups. Service provider partners at the destinations tend to be small locally owned businesses.
d. It minimises negative impacts upon the natural and socio-cultural environment.
e. It supports the maintenance of natural areas which are used as ecotourism attractions by:
• generating economic benefits for host communities, organisations and authorities managing natural areas with conservation purposes,
• providing alternative employment and income opportunities for local communities

13 <http://media.unwto.org/en/press-release/2013-01-03/un-general-assembly-ecotourism-key-eradicating-poverty-and-protecting-envir> accessed on May 9, 2013

Welcome Address

Mr. Mandip Singh Soin: President, Ecotourism Society of India and Chairman, Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), India Chapter

Mr. Mandip Singh Soin opened the conference with a warm welcome to all speakers and delegates with the charge that the conference participants as a travel fraternity must envision change and strive for a higher purpose to achieve sustainability in their endeavors. He also recollected his journey over the years towards formation of the Ecotourism Society of India (ESOI) in 2008.

As early as 1979 the concepts of ecotourism and sustainable tourism were unknown. In 1982, there was a big bang – almost akin to the Indian tiger situation – when the Nanda Devi Sanctuary, a beautiful pristine area, was closed forever to the tourists due to adverse environmental impact of climbers and trekkers. This was the first sign of what could happen if tourism was not managed responsibly and sustainably. Individual actions alone were not sufficient in such circumstances and the need for a committed group of like-minded people was realized.

During 1980s, several experiments on ecotourism were undertaken in India, for example in Kerala where the model of poachers converted into wildlife guides became a proven success. In Kashmir, communities started earning alternative livelihood in the lean winter season, due to eco-tourism efforts by the Ministry of Tourism and Government of Jammu and Kashmir. The Indian government also responded and together with the Ministry of Tourism and the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) India Chapter – the only entity driving responsible tourism at that time – was able to enjoin the tourism industry to sign an environmental pledge in 1992. This was the first instance where many doyens of the Indian tourism industry came forth to show their commitment towards responsible action in the tourism sector. Khonoma, near Kohima in Nagaland, was another example where the state government was taken into confidence to turn poachers into guides and naturalists. In Andaman, a White Paper was brought to identify steps to reduce the impact of tourism on the islands. The paper concluded that the existing tourism facilities were not being managed responsibly and the Nicobar Islands should not be opened up for tourists. The emphasis was on informing the government and the industry that it was not numbers of tourists that mattered but the quality of tourism, which should be leveraged to have net positive outcomes from the tourism activities.

The next big thing in this journey was a handbook on ecotourism, published by the Ministry of Tourism in collaboration with the PATA India Chapter. This made the tourism industry and tourists aware about ecotourism, eco-lodges and jungle resorts, and the relevant rules to follow for ecotourism. A huge knowledge gap was plugged as the Ministry published 10,000 copies and made it available free of charge to the industry.

For Mr. Mandip Singh Soin, the year 1989 was a turning point when he had the opportunity to study the ozone hole in the Arctic and the impact of pollutants from industrial waste. One of his initial efforts was to partner with Himalayan Environmental Trust; resulting in self-regulation by tour operators by not having campfires for the guests so as to not affect fuel wood availability for the local communities' need.

The ESOI was formed in 2008 at the end of an Indo-Australian workshop in Delhi. The workshop identified the need for a specific national body that can drive sustainability in tourism. The vision for the body was to be responsible for sustainable tourism and travel in the country and help the government in tourism policy and action. The thirteen founding members of the ESOI became, in a sense, the watchdogs for the tourism industry. In order to make it an inclusive body, the membership of ESOI was not restricted to small lodges and resorts or small tour operators but included large hoteliers as well.

During past few years, ESOI has been working to educate industry stakeholders on what is good for the environment and communities. To achieve this, ESOI has launched campaigns and workshops across India, which included sessions on environmental law to make key stakeholders aware about relevant policies and their rights and duties. Some of the society members were also part of the 12th Five Year Plan for Tourism, which recommended a budget to undertake carrying capacity studies for prime geographic regions of India. It is expected that the models emerging from these studies will then be replicated in other parts of the country.

The ESOI has also undertaken a project with Madhya Pradesh Tourism Corporation in the Chambal area to provide alternative livelihood to the communities in the tourism sector. There are also plans of declaring the region as a world heritage site.

Many of the society members are also involved in developing Sustainable Tourism Criteria of India (STCI), which was rolled out at the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Conference on Sustainable Tourism held at Hyderabad from 12th to 14th April 2013. The STCI has been provided to the industry with the hope that the industry at large will accept it and take it up in its work voluntarily. The ESOI is also looking for options to incentivize the uptake of criteria by the industry players.

Underlining the importance of Ecotourism Conference, Mr. Soin appealed to the Government of Madhya Pradesh to make the Bhopal International Conference on Sustainable Tourism (BICST) an annual event which will attract attention not only in India but also from abroad. A biannual mart attached to the event may also push commerce through the event. He hoped that the dialogue resulting from this conference would be termed as the Bhopal Dialogue.

Conference Overview

Mr. Krishna Kumar Singh: Chairman, Bhopal International Conference on Sustainable Tourism (BICST) 2013

Mr. Krishna Kumar Singh emphasized on the conference's objectives that seek to find if tourism can enable conservation, livelihood and sustainable growth. He shared the format of the two-day conference and introduced various topics and business models that were to be showcased by the speakers of BICST.

The BICST was born out of the need to seek solutions to the numerous problems faced by the ecotourism industry. The aim of this conference is to look at the larger context within which the ecotourism sector operates and not be limited to a particular state or a particular sanctuary. One of the agenda of the Bhopal conference is to deliberate on issues facing the ecotourism sector in India and bring out solutions to these issues through discussions.

The 24th July 2012 Supreme Court order banning tourism in tiger reserves sparked a nationwide debate on the tourism industry. In effect, this was a sign of the problems plaguing the industry for a long time. The debate portrayed industry as a spoiler for conservation and community benefits, and conservationists including many in the Forest Department blamed tourism for destroying wildlife. The Non-Governmental Organizations pointed out that the industry was not fulfilling its responsibility towards the community from whom it was deriving benefits. The industry's responses to these allegations were considered selfish since there was an inherent self-interest at play.

This conference is an effort to bring all stakeholders on a common platform to debate on the following key questions:

- Has the tourism industry gone wrong in its efforts in conservation and community development?
- Is the tourism industry responsible for the community?
- How can all stakeholders come together to make a difference in conservation and for the community?

Opening Address

Mr. R. Parasuram: I.A.S Chief Secretary, Government of Madhya Pradesh

Mr. R. Parasuram's opening address emphasized that a way forward for tourism in India is to follow in the form of ecotourism. He emphasized on the need to incorporate community participation in the tourism activities.

Mr. Parasuram agreed to the idea that this conference can be an annual or biennial event and assured the conference organizers that all the departments of the state government would provide complete cooperation towards this event. He saw himself as an outsider to the sector but at the same time not uninitiated in the domain of tourism. Ecotourism, according to him, meant breaking barriers between those who live within and around forests and those who live in hotels and lodges. Ecotourism enhances participation and is beneficial for the livelihoods of the community. It promotes partnerships at the institutional and individual levels between the community and other stakeholders involved in tourism activities. It also enhances the value of overall tourism experience.

There is a perception of disconnect between the tourism industry and the local community at large. This perception has been only accidentally formed because heritage and wildlife is always talked about in terms of tourism but never from community's perspective. Ecotourism brings community back into this discussion. There is also a need to take into account the urban dimension of ecotourism. In the context of rapid urbanization, tourism sector will face new challenges.

The expected outcomes of the conference are:

- Achievement of a connectedness with nature
- Conservation of heritage and improving livelihoods and exploring linkages with nature
- Development of a framework on ecotourism in partnership with all the stakeholders

He saw tourism in Madhya Pradesh being at a cross-road and ecotourism as the vehicle that will drive the tourism sector in the state forward. In conclusion, Mr. Parasuram appreciated the audience for participating and promised full cooperation by the Government of Madhya Pradesh for all ecotourism activities.

SESSION I: ECOTOURISM SOLUTIONS AND STRATEGIES: REFLECTIONS ON GLOBAL EXPERIENCES – 1

Chair – Mr. Ravi Singh: Founding Member ESOI, CEO WWF India

Ecotourism and sustainable tourism strategies from around the world were presented in this session. Some of these solutions can be contextualized and modified for application in the Indian tourism industry. These models of sustainable tourism provide pointers for the tourism industry by showcasing a certification model for luxury ecotourism tour operators, a self-regulatory model for the entire Indian tourist industry to simulate and a holistic model of wildlife reserve management that aims at attaining sustainability in tourism.

CAN TOURISM BENEFIT BOTH CONSERVATION AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES? A BEYOND CONSERVATION MODEL

Les Carlisle

Mr. Carlisle provided an overview of a radically different model for the introduction of wildlife in the areas outside the Protected Areas. The model envisages creation of corridors and allowing tour operators to provide benefits from tourism back to the community. &Beyond has a global presence and the issues of conservation are the same in most of the places. The challenge is to find innovative solutions to resolve these issues. The key stakeholders in ecotourism like Forest Department, Tourism Department, Government, communities, tour operators, etc. are the ones who should be responsible for bringing about this change.



&Beyond follows a model of tourism that facilitates conservation benefits and community benefits that are driven by tourists (guests). The model is similar to the ones followed in India. It functions on the principle that if no profit is made then tour operators would be unable to help anyone and therefore the guests are the key to this model. Moreover, wildlife tourism needs

strong management in the parks and a stronger forest department. Communities have the choice of either impacting the wildlife reserve in a negative way or supporting it, and the tourism department has to facilitate the communities to choose to support the reserves. If communities show their acceptance of the reserves, take benefits from the ecotourism activities in the reserves and are interested then the tour operators can also develop and work on ecotourism models on community lands. The &Beyond model uses community land but without any land use change. In the model, cattle farms were leased from the community and converted to game reserves.

Care of the Land, Care of the Wildlife and Care of the People are the three pillars that &Beyond believes are key to a successful sustainable tourism activity. With less than 800 beds in all their lodges combined, &Beyond directly influences 350,000 ha of private, community and forest lands. Thus there is a large influence of &Beyond model if measured on per bed basis.



To have world class ecotourism operations, the tour agency has to be involved in conservation management and to improve it. &Beyond has converted large tracts of previous cattle populated grazing lands into wildlife lands and translocation of wild life from high density, human-wildlife conflict areas that has been a fundamental part and a success of the &Beyond model.

In India, &Beyond has been operating for the past 7 years and is aware about the numerous challenges faced by the Forest Department in taking decisions related to translocation of wildlife, and the constraints faced by the department in managing forest lands. However, Madhya Pradesh has progressive policies and Mr. Carlisle was involved in the first Gaur relocation project in which 50 Gaurs were relocated from Kanha to Bandhavgarh.

One of the major issues of Indian wildlife is human-wildlife conflict in agriculture areas. To avoid this, there is a need to secure the National Parks' boundaries and to use local resources for chain linking or making ditches to form physical boundaries. Also it is possible to translocate wildlife from such areas to areas where the chances of human-wildlife conflict are minimal. For example, India is producing 150 tigers every year from the various core areas, but once they disperse there is no tracking mechanism in place and the tigers usually disappear. A solution to this problem is by translocating the animals from the area where they are in conflict with humans.

This translocation is in effect a mechanical dispersal as it reduces the risks that tigers encounter as they sneak through the developed areas trying to get to a safe haven or protected area. In Bandhavgarh, a chain link has been used to fence the conflict areas of the reserve, which benefits the communities as well as the wild animals. The people are no longer in conflict with the tiger and the cattle pressure on the park has eased considerably. The success of the Gaur relocation is directly dependent on the chain link fence. There is an existing infrastructure available in India in the form of wildlife reserves and national parks to contain dispersal of tigers if they need to be translocated. It is time India starts accounting for the 150 or more dispersed tigers produced each year.

Pressure can also be taken off the national parks by creating facilities outside the parks, in buffers and corridor areas where tourists can come and be able to see breeding populations of dispersal tigers. This model has proved to be very successful in Panna Tiger Reserve. The concept of an “Ultimate Tiger Reserve” is opined as this can be specially designed with high density tourism infrastructure and populated with dispersal tigers initially. If this is done really well, it will provide conservation with a short term solution to dispersal tigers, an additional breeding populations and a model for connecting protected areas. It will for the first time provide guests with a high probability of seeing tigers in the wild in specifically designed and effective way, that will reduce the pressure on existing national parks that are not designed for high density tourism. In order to develop such a model, public private partnership is essential.

&Beyond in collaboration with the Africa Foundation has taken up initiatives for the community. These initiatives have ensured community participation in conservation efforts. &Beyond as a part of these initiatives has partnered with the Department of Education to provide physical infrastructure to teach children and has added conservation lessons along with existing common state curriculum. The tourism industry’s connections with the community and the realization in the community (especially children) that wildlife conservation is benefiting them is very important.

He concluded by sharing that significant interventions benefiting the community through ecotourism have also been undertaken in India that can showcase the importance and effectiveness of community engagement in ecotourism.



*Despite his lack of formal education, **Les Carlisle** has successfully translocated more than 40,000 animals, influencing conservation in many part of the world, including most recently India, where he was involved in the first mass translocation of Gaur. Les’s long history with &Beyond started in February 1991 with the creation of &Beyond Phinda Private Game Reserve. Les has reintroduced predators and other species into the Reserve, and managed all of the game translocations that were required to get the reserve up and running.*

He also established the initial community relationships and development committees. As Group Conservation Manager, Les represents &Beyond on the Boards of two conservation areas, assists the PR team with hosting media, and advises the company on the proper management of conservation areas.

RESPONSIBLY MANAGED TOURISM: A POLAR PERSPECTIVE

Dr. Lynn Woodworth

Dr. Woodworth held a presentation about the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators’ (IAATO) responsible tourism operations in the Antarctic and the regulatory activities for tourism in the North Pole.

IAATO demonstrates a model wherein the tour operators work with the governing bodies to successfully manage and administer ecotourism zones for the long term good of all stakeholders; including local people, businesses, wildlife and ecosystems.

Antarctica is managed by numerous treaties under the Antarctic treaty system. The system is dedicated to the operations of peace and science but not tourism. Sixty one member countries including India are signatories to these treaties. In the early 1980’s, science and tourism were in conflict due to the perception that tourism activities were causing environmental damage in the Antarctic. IAATO was founded in 1991 to address the impact of tourism activities on environment and to maintain and protect the environment. In its early years IAATO lobbied and gained respectability within the science fraternity of the Antarctic and today it has 105 members from travel industry.

IAATO is a unique management system created by commercial tour operators allowing inputs from all interested parties. Tourism in Antarctica is driven by Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) through the country of origin of each tour operator. Enforcing strict rules and safety rescue plans are fundamental to the IAATO system. No tourism can take place in the Antarctic without IAATO approval. Following are the stakeholders in the IAATO system:

- Relevant governing bodies
- Science & research groups
- Commercial & private tour operators

Tourism is limited to the “maximum that the environment can sustain” without significant long-term damage. EIS is driven by tour operators, and IAATO ensures that only minor and transitory damage to the environment is allowed through:

- Scheduling
- Staff training
- Collation of operation requirements



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- Operational guidelines
- Observers
- Reporting for tracking changes and potential impacts

The success of IAATO can be attributed to the fact that it follows a participatory approach wherein all stakeholders play a role in the decision making process. Over the years IAATO has grown to become an advisory body for governments and international authorities for tourism in Antarctica.

IAATO model in the high arctic

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The Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators (AECO) is the IAATO equivalent organization regulating tourism in the arctic regions. It is an inside out model of the IAATO and is primarily driven by the Norwegian government. AECO emerged as a result of the need for more effective regulation, accountability and communication by the tour operators. It is linked to the local governments and

operates in an environment with complex cultural issues. The systems and ethos employed are similar to its Antarctic counterparts and AECO is attempting to drive tourism companies towards a self-regulation regime.

Dr. Woodworth concluded by sharing that the presence of these two regulatory bodies has contributed to improved tourism and increased professionalism in the operations of tourism industry in these two fragile ecosystems. The organizations have achieved success in controlling damage to the environment and have played a role in effective communication and education amongst the stakeholders.

While IAATO has ensured a reduction in government regulation, breaches to regulations do occur and managing disagreements regarding operational protocols is a major issue. Breaches of regulations are managed through IAATO and are documented and reported. There are several layers of severity of the breach of regulations. The companies breaching the regulations may be fined or threatened with license revocation.

A breach also means that the company is breaking national regulations and their own government can threaten them with action, expedition leader can be removed if the rules are breached more than once, etc. If a company is banned then it does not get an opportunity

to work in Antarctica anymore as many nations are signatories to the Antarctica agreement. Such a system ensures that the company has strong interest to not to breach the rules.



Lynn Woodworth is a Senior Antarctic Expedition Leader and Polar Operations Manager, with 16 years of experience as a senior manager of a commercial tourism operation working under the international guidelines of IAATO and AECO. She also has a background as a Conservation Biologist, and many years of field experience working in tourism in more than 10 different countries.

DISCUSSIONS ON THE PRESENTATION

Q. How is the quality of wilderness experience maintained?

A. People want to see wilderness and operators schedule visits in rotation after fine detailing. Ships' sailing paths don't cross each other which makes business look better and ensures quality of wilderness.

Q. How is tourism carrying capacity ascertained and new operator entry controlled?

A. 1) All operators book slots six months in advance through an online auction for specific landing sites. No preference is given to existing operators.

2) Carrying capacity is site specific and the number of people is decided on the basis of various season dependency factors such as the impact on penguin colonies, the number of ships per day, hours of stay, etc. There are never more than 100 passengers ashore at any given time.

LUXURY LODGE AND SUSTAINABILITY IN TOURISM

Enrico Ducrot

Mr. Ducrot provided an overview of the EcoLuxury hospitality brand and how it had created an ecotourism model with examples in the Italian and the African tourism industry.

EcoLuxury is a global endorsement and classification brand with 100 members spread across the globe. Viaggi dell' Elefante is the global promoter of this business model in tourism and hospitality sector.

It is a marketing brand and a commercial tool that promotes businesses of its members globally by facilitating development of tour packages with a philosophy of sustainability. The brand also supports governments, parks, reserves, private companies, etc. to start new hospitality projects, fund raising for projects and properties, and provides consulting to hotels.

The EcoLuxury Business Model in hospitality includes:

- Small and light eco-lodges
- Highly responsible quality service and experiences
- Business margins to support community and responsible project regularly and continuously
- Yearly lodge and project standards upgrades

EcoLuxury is an attempt at inculcating best practices amongst its members by instituting an EcoLuxury Best Practices system. The system is designed to recognize partners who are compliant and innovative in reducing their environmental impact. It is termed as the Golden Tent rating system.

The Golden Tent rating system follows a three tier approach in which the lowest level in the hierarchy is one golden tent. The ratings are given to hotels that comply with the EcoLuxury best practices by actively introducing steps to reduce their environmental impact and lower their consumption level.

Two Golden Tents are awarded for compliance with the EcoLuxury best practices by significantly reducing and monitoring their environmental impacts and progressively implementing policies to improve their operating systems and benefit land & people. Three Golden Tents are awarded for compliance with the EcoLuxury best practices by being a



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global leader in protecting environment. These lodges contribute to the global standards and innovations in the future global developments of technology, programs, and policies. The EcoLuxury consulting services are provided to hotels that seek to improve their rating of EcoLuxury tents by improving their compliance level. This is achieved by better management of natural resources, energy, waste, protection of cultural resources and local heritage.

Three hospitality “laboratories” where Ecoluxury is consulting

Matera - Grotte della Civita in Italy is a cave city in the Mediterranean. It is an UNESCO heritage site. Cave areas in the city were dilapidated earlier and were transformed through restoration activities. Restoration was carried out in collaboration with the archeological department and ecological conservation department and general life of the city was taken into consideration for the restoration work. The hotel was inaugurated in 2010 with 19 rooms and has become the most successful hotel in Matera.

Santo Stefano di Sessanio Italy - The village inside the Gran Sasso National Park was abandoned in 1950s when villagers migrated to main cities for economic activities and only 2-3 families remained in the village. Some 10 years ago a local person found the place exciting and bought some part of village. He restored the houses according to traditional architectural systems and opened it up for tourism. Initially, the national park authorities paid no heed to this development but by 2009 many villagers started returning to the village and the village once again started flourishing with 30 bed and breakfast by then. Unfortunately, after an earthquake the newly constructed structures that used cement and concrete were destroyed and the people were again forced to leave the village. However, the hotel remained unaffected as it used local materials for construction and refurbishing activities. At present the park authorities are allowing linking of the project with the national park and the environment, and one third of the village is still operating and open for tourism.

Metundo Island - This project is being planned on 800 hectares in pristine Quirimbas archipelago north of Mozambique. While planning the project, the locals were taken into confidence and their issues were resolved by the hotel management. The Metundo Island does not have any fresh water source and drinking water is brought in from the mainland by yachts called “Dhows”. The hotel took over the responsibility of providing fresh drinking water to the locals.

In all the above examples EcoLuxury has helped the projects in scaling up by offering a strong platform for sustainable tourism. The certification has been able to offer global exposure and also help solve problems faced by individual lodges.



Enrico Ducrot is the CEO of the tour operator, Viaggi Dell' Elefante and EcoLuxury, Italy. By the time he was 15, Ducrot had already completed two extensive trips covering Central Asia, Afghanistan, Kashmir and Ladakh. While studying for his degree in Near Eastern Archaeology and History of Art at the University of Rome, the author felt the urge to roam. In 2001 Enrico helped set up a camp in a Baja California park for which he received the Environmental Recognition Award at World Travel Market 2003. The Eco Luxury project started in 2001 and has developed due to the positive acceptance in the market place.

DISCUSSIONS ON THE PRESENTATION

- 1. Community involvement is essential for tourism and nature conservation. For instance, in the case of Dal Lake restricting usage of the lake by people instead of involving them in conservation activities is a wrong way to go forward. Also, the Indian tourism industry can take a cue from the diffusion concept of hotels and implement it in the abandoned villages of Rajasthan.

Q. Is EcoLuxury also a brand which is managed? Comment on the UNESCO criteria on world heritage sites.

A. Villages in Italy are connected with delicate economies, which existed over a millennium. The economic slump destroyed these economies and the population migrated to the cities. The owner of Diffusio Santo Stefano now owns properties in 11 villages and is going to restore the abandoned villages, Matera is a big town and Diffusion is interlinking separate architecture in a sort of an association of hotels and there is no link with the government. Through EcoLuxury, investment was being brought in. On the question of UNESCO heritage site selection criteria, Italy has the largest number of UNESCO sites but more strict UNESCO control is needed on the use of these sites.

The Chair, Mr Ravi Singh summed up the session by stating that a large diversity of work and experience is available around the world which has been exemplified by the presentations. Some concepts from the presentations can be taken forward while some others are difficult to be implemented in India but can be applied to other countries. He also pointed that there is a need for classification of ecotourism practices in India.

SESSION 2: ECOTOURISM SOLUTIONS AND STRATEGIES: REFLECTIONS ON GLOBAL EXPERIENCES – 2

Chair – Mr. Steve Borgia, President, ESOI and Managing Director, Indeco Hotels

THE USE OF LIVESTOCK TO PROVIDE CONSERVATION SPACE IN SUPPORT OF ECOTOURISM

Richard Vigne

Excluding other productive land uses to accommodate wildlife represents a prohibitively high “opportunity cost” for conservation. Conversely, finding ways to integrate productive land use with wildlife reduces opportunity costs and makes conservation easier which in turn provides a platform for alternative revenue streams such as ecotourism. Mr. Vigne presented a radical concept of managing wildlife conservancy through livestock management in such a way that the livestock aids in making the conservancy profitable. The concept also

involves the community in management. Overall productivity of the conservancy has increased through this concept in a manner that it does not have any negative impact on conservation.

OlPejeta Conservancy in Laikipia County in Kenya is spread over 360 square kilometers in size and is the largest black rhino sanctuary in East Africa. The total annual operational costs for managing the Conservancy amount to \$5 Million of which 80-85 per cent is the fixed costs. Wheat farms on 4000 acres in the south pay for about 4 per cent while tourism pays for 70 per cent of the total operational cost. While searching for a source of income to meet the remaining 26 per cent costs, the owners decided to take up livestock as a complementary enterprise.

The livestock is exploited commercially as well as used to create considerable ecological variability in the landscape.



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The livestock are separated spatially and temporally from the predators and provided adequate night time protection. The herdsman are given incentives to look after the cattle. The ecological variability is created by concentrated grazing of the cattle in particular areas which boosts the overall population and diversity of herbivores in the park. Circular ‘Bomas’ or livestock enclosures are used to remove old grass cover by intensive grazing, enrich soil through dung, etc. After introducing the cattle based livestock management model predator numbers had increased and involvement of the communities has resulted in increased security and better implementation of community development programs.

Mr. Vigne provided two examples of successful implementation of this model.

Mutara Ranch

The Mutara Ranch in Kenya had always persecuted wildlife in order to protect cattle. The owners were interested in wildlife-based tourism but felt that they would have to get rid of the cattle to set up a tourism enterprise. The opportunity cost was too high for the ranch owners, but now using OIpejeta’s integrated model of leveraging cattle for conservation they have set aside 20,000 acres of land for wildlife.

Laikipia

Wildlife-based tourism is an increasingly important part of the economy in Laikipia district of Kenya. Wildlife is not seen as a threat to the cattle anymore by the community and with protection and judicious use of cattle wildlife is better tolerated. Consequently, population of various wild animals like lion, cheetah, hyena and wild dog have increased.

A contingent approach is used to manage land in Laikipia in a conservation friendly manner. The trade of up to 3,000 cattle heads per annum has returned US\$ 1.3M to the community conservancies in 5 years. Tourism is developing on the back of increasing wildlife population. The model in Laikipia has demonstrated that conservation and livestock keeping are not incompatible and if managed together the model can lead to improved land productivity and higher profits.

The livestock management technique in the model is based on Alan Savory’s concept of holistic management. Holistic management is an emerging science based on the premise that



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across Africa large herds of wild herbivores existed for thousands of years and in the absence of these herds cattle can play a similar role. In the savannah different species of herbivores feed on different types of grass. For example, some herbivores exclusively feed on short grass while some on long. By using variations in the grazing habit of cattle is it possible to facilitate increase in the range of grass species on the ranch and the landscape.

Several other holistic management practices have been adopted in the model. For example, in Africa a 7 year cycle of grass burning is usually followed so that old grass can be cleared to allow new growth. In the current model, grazing by closely packed bunch of cattle was being used to achieve the same effect. In another practice, grass is stored for cattle so that the cattle can be moved out of the savannah earlier leaving more grass for the wildlife in the dry season.

Occasionally there are conflicts, but these have been managed by making the herder a partner in the cattle operations. This is done by incentivizing herder’s stay with the livestock and linking the rates of predation of cattle to his stake in the cattle herd. Due to this the cattle predation rates have stayed the same despite carnivore population quadrupling. Answering a query about Kenyan wildlife protection laws Mr. Vigne shared that not many wildlife protection laws govern private ranches. Management of private ranches is based on relationships maintained with the government. This causes a problem when government changes. In Kenya 2/3rd of wildlife exists outside national parks and the wildlife protection act is still pending in the parliament.

Mr. Vigne concluded by sharing that livestock can be used as an ecological management tool to support conservation and to reduce opportunity costs of conservation; thus providing more space for wildlife.



Richard Vigne is Chief Executive Officer, OIpejeta Conservancy which holds the single largest population of black rhino in East Africa and receives over 80,000 visitors per year. After attaining a BSc in Zoology from Newcastle University in England, Vigne returned to East Africa and worked as a small partner in a safari company across Uganda and what was then known as Eastern Zaire. After an MBA from UK, he took over his current position and now also sits on the Board of the Laikipia Wildlife Forum, the Northern Rangelands Trust and the Pembroke House School, respectively. Vigne believes that he is a committed conservationist

**ECOTOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM – TRAVEL FOREVER GLOBAL
SUSTAINABLE TOURISM COUNCIL**

Guy Chester

Mr. Chester is the Founder and Managing Director of EcoSustainAbility, an ecotourism consultancy firm. He presented the journey ecotourism had taken from the early 1980's to reach its current form and also provided a brief overview of the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria.



as a principle reference for the development of many sustainable tourism and ecotourism certification programs around the world.

Tourism is a business of selling experiences. Principles to be followed by ecotourism are natural area focus, interpretation, and environmental sustainability with a cultural component contributing to conservation and to communities. Ecotourism should preserve culture, provide customer satisfaction and indulge in responsible marketing with a minimal impact on nature whilst enforcing a strict code of conduct.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC)

The GSTC was created with inputs from experts, groups and companies from around the planet. It defines sustainable tourism in a way that is actionable, measurable and credible. GSTC has criteria for hotels, tour operators and destinations. These criteria were developed in an inclusive manner after large number of stakeholder consultations. Following were the various stakeholders involved in the process:

- UNEP, UN Foundation, UNWTO, IUCN
- Rainforest Alliance, Conservation International
- Expedia, Travelocity, Sabre, Fairmont, Marriott
- IH&RA, ASTA, Travelife, Travel Weekly

The GSTC has a clear set of guidelines and criteria which acts as the minimum criteria that tourism businesses and destinations need to follow in order to sustain the world's natural

and cultural resources, while ensuring tourism's potential to alleviate poverty. As a measure of the impacts of tourism, Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) have been proposed over the earlier concept of carrying capacity studies. LAC assesses risks or the impacts to the community and the environment.

The GSTC apply to developing countries as well. Inputs for framing of GSTC were taken from a variety of developing nations as well at the time of design of the criteria. There are representatives from developing countries as well on the committee. The GSTC major criteria for hotels and tour operators are as follows:

- Demonstrate effective sustainable management
- Maximize social and economic benefits to the local community and minimize negative impacts
- Maximize benefits to cultural heritage and minimize negative impacts
- Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts
- Conserving resources
- Reducing pollution
- Conserving biodiversity, ecosystems and landscapes
- The GSTC criteria for tourism destinations include:
- Demonstrate effective sustainable management
- Maximize economic benefits to the host community and minimize negative impacts
- Maximize benefits to communities, visitors, and cultural heritage and minimize negative impacts
- Maximize benefits to the environment and minimize negative impacts

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council is also involved in the accreditation of Certification Systems, developing criteria and indicators and membership outreach. The GSTC is also a member of the UNWTO and the PATA Agreement.

In response to some queries about Indian mass tourism, Mr. Chester shared that it is not the number of tourists but the quality of tourism management that is important. An example in this regard is Sichuan province of China, where a large number of tourists visit a world heritage site every day, but because of excellent management of these sites, the impact of tourism activity is extremely low. He suggested that proper management of a tourism destination is the way through which Indian mass tourism can be successfully managed.



Guy Chester is the Founder and Managing Director of EcoSustainAbility, Australia and has extensive experience in tourism, ecotourism and natural resource management planning. Chester has developed highly regarded tourism strategies for Australian icon tourism regions for Fiji, Papua New Guinea and the Peoples Republic of China. He has worked in six World Heritage Areas, including Lorentz, Kakadu, the Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics. Chester was also the inaugural Vice President of the Ecotourism Association of Australia and instrumental in the establishment of the EcoCertification Program in Australia. He was a founder of the Alliance for Sustainable Tourism and a Director of the Rainforest Cooperative Research Centre. Recently, he was recently elected to the Board of the Global Sustainable Tourism Council and chairs the Standards Committee.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM OR REGENERATIVE TOURISM

Heidi Bernsdorff

Ms. Bernsdorff provided a brief overview of the global tourism sector and highlighted issues that need to be addressed for the sector to move forward. She shared her belief that it is necessary for the tourism sector to look beyond sustainability.

The average tourist does not spend much time in thinking about the harm they may cause to the social, cultural and environmental aspects of the country they visit. She highlighted that sustainable tourism had three angles; environmental, social and economic and tourism, which is probably the largest industry in many countries and has the potential to do a lot of good for these countries.

She also suggested that along with visa, some information on the culture of the visiting country can be provided to avoid cultural clashes between locals and tourists. These cultural tensions happen not only at the international level but also at the national level as well due to marked difference between the urban and rural cultures. Some amount of sensitization can help avoid such clashes that may otherwise lead to security issues for the tourists.

Overcrowding of prominent tourist spots is another issue which needs to be addressed. There was a need to look at regenerative tourism, which had the basic tenet that the tourist pays for what he destroys. Regenerative tourism sees humans and human development, social structures and cultural concerns as an inherent part of the ecosystems. It also seeks to create or restore capacity of ecosystems and bio-geological cycles.



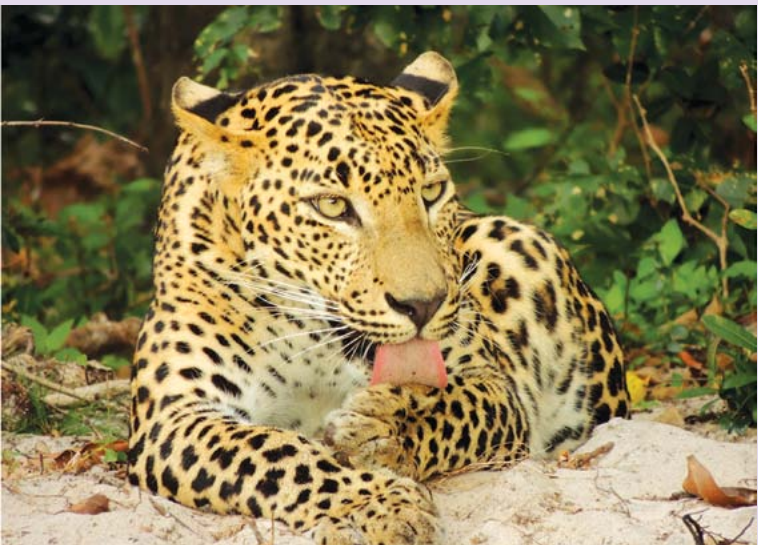
Heidi Bernsdorff is a travel journalist. She has worked as a teacher for many years and specialises in environmental education of teachers. In addition, Bernsdorff has been a horse and travel journalist, having been instrumental in forming an association called the Indo-German Marwari Society to save the breed of Marwari horses from extinction, of which she is president. She has travelled across India in the last 30 years, delivering lectures at various establishments. Bernsdorff is also on the Board of Directors of the sponsors association of the Ethnological Museum of Hamburg.

CREATING CONSERVATION LANDSCAPES IN A DEVELOPMENT DRIVEN ECONOMY

Manori Gunawardane

Ms. Gunawardane presented a Sri Lankan perspective on conservation and integration of tourism beyond Protected Area boundaries. While there has been a lot of dialogue in Sri Lanka on sustainable development in the last two years, there is still a need to address the larger development paradigm and to integrate various forms of tourism in it.

Landscape based conservation approach is an essential tool for adaptation to climate change, particularly in ensuring diverse and viable biodiversity in a changing landscape. The approach includes strengthening local economies and agriculture and developing the health and social benefits of the environment. The landscape approach entails understanding of the character of the landscape and how it functions to support internal and external communities, cultural heritage and development, local and macro economies, and wildlife and natural resources of the area. The key to this approach is identifying the landscape level at which the conservation initiatives are carried out and to take into account past, present and future human elements of the landscape.



Sri Lanka has a total land area of 6.5 million hectares. Forest cover amounts to approximately two million hectares representing 32 percent of the total land area. The forest areas are populated by elephants and leopards, and many elephants reside outside Protected Areas. Agriculture in Sri Lanka is not carried out on a large scale and major cash crops include tea and coffee. The State is the major stakeholder in conservation through the Department of Wildlife Conservation, Forest Department and the Mahaweli Authority. Due to development activities, three districts have lost significant forest cover over a remarkably short period of time. The following table shows the area lost in the three districts in a period of five years.

Districts	Area Forested	Area Lost since 2005
Vavuniya	49%	14.50%
Polonnaruwa	35%	12.30%
Hambanthota	11%	5.70%

Due to the degradation of forests, Elephant herds were driven out of their home ranges and restricted to Protected Areas where their population exceeded carrying capacity of the PAs and the elephant population suffered high morbidity and mortality. Though elephants are best

conserved in Situ but after being driven out of their areas they have become more aggressive resulting in enhanced Human Elephant Conflict (HEC).

One of the examples of this trend is seen in the Hambanthota area where a new airport has come up and where more than 400 elephants still remain. The elephants often stray on the runway of the airport leading to HEC. Clearing land for the airport inadvertently made the habitat extremely suitable to peafowl; as a result bird hits have increased as well. In concordance with the authorities a new zoning map of the Hambanthota area was prepared to preserve the current wildlife in situ in a better way.

In Sri Lanka there is no clear definition of tourism. The Forest Department lacks capacity to handle large number of tourists that are visiting the parks. The current approach to mitigate impacts by carrying out greening activities will not work as it does not contribute to conserving wildlife habitats. Mass tourism must move out of Protected Areas as eventually conservation tourism must become the biggest driver for growth. Community is a major stakeholder that can be engaged in a co-existence model for developing tourism. There is a need to add scale as one of the criteria in the planning process of the Forest Department to conserve habitats in the long term. It is also important to note that the concept of carrying capacity is not understood at all by the government stakeholders in charge of park management.

Park visitors are satisfied with the wildlife experience but there are several issues with tourism. For example:

- Traffic congestion in parks
- Inadequate facilities
- Lack of clean toilets
- Proper functioning bungalows
- Lack of visitor centre
- Lack of knowledgeable guides
- Bad driving and behaviour of jeep drivers

When asked about the Sri Lankan government's understanding of tourism carrying capacity, Ms. Gunawardane replied that a figure of 1 million tourists per year for the entire country has been arrived at without any scientific basis. But the role of Wildlife Department is changing and soon a proper definition of carrying capacity would be arrived at. She concluded by stating that 'scaling up' conservation across larger landscapes through cooperation at various levels was extremely important. Sri Lanka needs to be more visionary, as an opportunity exists to plan a landscape that answers the needs of both people and wildlife in a crowded island.



Manori Gunawardane is the Director of Environment Foundation Ltd, the oldest public interest litigation group in Sri Lanka. She is a Wildlife Scientist, Eisenhower Fellow, Associate Scientist at Dilmah Conservation and Associate Scientist at Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institution. Gunawardane has done landmark research on the Asian Elephant habitat, ranging behavior and social organization based on radio telemetry and satellite/GPS tagging, based on which the National Elephant Conservation and Management Policy 2006 was formulated. She is also engaged with the Ministry of Economic Development to incorporate conservation landscape based approaches in developing tourism strategies for the wildlife sector.

SESSION 3: OPEN DISCUSSION: ECOTOURISM SOLUTIONS AND STRATEGIES: LESSON FOR INDIA

Chair – Mr. Sujit Banerjee, Retd. IAS and Former Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India

Mr. Sujit Banerjee summarized the day's sessions with the thought about the meaning of sustainability and conservation in the context of one billion tourists travelling across the world. Addressing the tourism industry he said that a big responsibility lies on their shoulders.

Highlighting the issue of resource scarcity, Mr. Banerjee said that only 0.5 percent freshwater resources are there on earth and issues concerning such resources will affect all the sectors of the economy including tourism. If preventive measures are not taken, 2.5 earths will be needed to fulfill the current level of desires and goals. There were many good practices presented during the day and it is important to learn from the solutions and apply them in the Indian context.

He noted that the ideas presented in the day's sessions, such as self-regulation by the Antarctica tourism industry and using profits earned from tiger tourism to operate schools and clinics for locals are applicable to the Indian scenario. Ecoluxury as a certification mechanism for ecotourism operators can also take root in India. The landscape approach being followed in Sri Lanka and the cattle aided wildlife management must be evaluated in the Indian context where human-animal conflicts are common.

Mr. Banerjee shared some issues that were not discussed in the previous sessions but were vital to the Indian context. These issues include:

- Poaching – The best practices and laws governing them
- Safe and honourable tourism – The need for a code of conduct
- Water and energy conservation
- More to wildlife tourism

The Open Discussion drew comments from both speakers and participants. The key points are detailed below.

Mr. Guy Chester pointed that for conservation there is a need to focus on activities that requires large amount of resources. For example, in hotels large amount of water is consumed in gardens and kitchens and the conservation efforts need to be focused there. Explaining GSTC, he said that the GSTC is set up as a benchmark criterion for tour operators and currently it is in its second version that applies to the tourism industry. Country specific criteria can be developed within the context of the GSTC. Currently, new indicators are being developed and

work will be completed by June 2013 for the third version of GSTC. He also said that there is a formal process to review any other sustainable tourism criteria against GSTC.

Dr. H.S. Pabla noted that while considering the costs incurred in visiting national parks, the accommodation and travel costs are usually higher than the entry fees. He suggested that different costs for visiting a PA can be worked out for low-income and high-income visitors. He also suggested that the STCI guidelines need to be debated and discussed.

Ms. Swathi Seshadri noted that the livelihoods of unorganized sector are dependent on the kind strategies adopted for tourism such as high value low volume tourism. She also questioned if self-regulation is a feasible alternative in the Indian context.

Mr. Hashim Tyabji suggested that a nuanced perspective on tourism is needed and that trust between the government and private players is missing in the present context. He said that nuanced management is possible only when interactions between private and public players like the BICST happen on a regular basis. He also suggested establishing a national body for responsible tourism in India.

Mr. Mandip Singh Soin was of the opinion that responsible tourism intonation needs to be applied to global travel industry. He also suggested that sustainability aspects should be included in the star grading system for hotels and a system of incentives and penalties for breaking rules and regulations should be implemented.

Several other points were raised by the conference participants. Some of the suggestions were:

- To set up a national body for ecotourism and for the tourism industry to engage with Protected Area management.
- Including Forest Department in the discussions for ecotourism lest the discussions should not come to fruition.
- It takes a lot of time to engage with Park authorities. For example, many innovative ways were tried to engage with the Protected Area Management in Australia but it still took 10 years to engage with them. In the current situation five out of nine Protected Area managers give preferential treatment to agencies with eco-certification.
- Forming draft rules for self-regulation. It was opined that even if 20 big tourism players in India can come together and agree to these rules then that would be a great start. Some of the norms that can be discussed are:
 1. Use of locally available material and local architecture which is in consonance with surrounding area for setting up a new lodge or resort.
 2. Per capita consumption of water and energy is high in hotels and lodges. A mechanism must be developed for the tourist to be incentivised for low consumption of energy and water.
 3. Awareness campaign needed for ecotourism related issues.
 4. Involving local community in management of natural areas and ecotourism
- Preparing an ecotourism master plan for the state and including different places with potential for ecotourism in the plan.

SESSION 4: ECOTOURISM FRAMEWORK IN INDIA: LAW, POLICY AND POLITICS

Chair – **Mr. Avani Vaish: Retd. IAS, Former Chief Secretary, State of Madhya Pradesh**

KEY REQUIREMENTS FOR ECOTOURISM AS AN ENABLER FOR CONSERVATION

Erach Bharucha

Dr. Erach Bharucha spoke on the need for awareness generation amongst the general public. The key issues facing the tourism industry, he said, were sustainable tourism management, eco-development for local livelihoods, and education and interpretation for tourists. He also

explained that ecotourism could only be taken up by involving local people in the management of Protected Areas.

There is a need to make tourists experience a connection with nature – termed as ‘connectedness to nature’. It can be done either through personalized guides or through interpretation centres. Many successful examples exist for the first option, where poachers have been

transformed into guides and for the second option, the technology is available today to make sophisticated interpretation centres.

There is a need to answer several questions regarding the carrying capacity of an area that affect tourism, such as overburdened Protected Areas, increasingly tiger centric tourism, the ability to manage within the carrying capacity framework, and need to disperse tourist loads to satellite destinations. Ecotourism interventions require coordination of the Forest Department with the Tourism Department and the tour operators. It is also necessary to assess how the benefits accrued from these interventions reach the intended beneficiaries.

Action programs for educating and sensitizing various stakeholders have to cater to the different needs expressed by each stakeholder. The following groups comprise different stakeholders in the ecotourism sector in India:



- Tourists
- Local schools
- Local people and forest staff
- Local village communities

A different action program must be established for each of these stakeholders. Tourists need to be educated about the necessity of conservation. Local school students can be trained as nature guides and their knowledge of local biodiversity must be enhanced; they can maintain nurseries of local plants and carry out plantation drives of indigenous trees. Knowledge of the local people can be leveraged to make biodiversity registers and local Biodiversity Management Committees as prescribed by the Biodiversity Act, 2002. Sites outside of the Protected Areas can be managed with the help of forest staff to increase the site's biodiversity. Local village communities can profit from leveraging home stays as an alternate ecotourism activity. Capacity building activities can help transform these locals into village guides.

Nature Education and Interpretation

Nature education must be given to these stakeholders. The interests of children, average tourist and the specialist tourist such as wildlife enthusiasts are diverse and nature education through innovative programs may be provided.

A study conducted amongst the urban population points towards a Nature Deficit Disorder (NDD). NDD means that the city dwellers' connection with nature is lacking. Nature connectedness involves the following activities:

- Exploring ecological connections
- Imbibing a sense of personal discovery
- Inculcating a realization of the threat to nature
- Getting the visitors to contribute to conservation

One such program targets children and works by asking them to use their five senses of touch, smell, hearing, sight and taste to explore the forest ecosystem. Children are also taught about the numerous ecosystem linkages that exist in the wilderness. Dr. Bharucha concluded by stating that nature is the doorway to biodiversity conservation and nature connectedness is the way forward if biodiversity and fragile ecosystem linkages have to be conserved.



*A surgeon by profession, **Dr. Erach Bharucha** has been active in various fields of wildlife and nature conservation over the past 45 years. Some of his publications include 'The Biodiversity of India' and 'Textbook on Environmental Studies'. A well-known wildlife photographer, over the last three decades, he has traveled and studied Indian National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries extensively. He has worked as a consultant to the Government and Non government organizations on conservation issues and has reported on various programs and projects. He has been a member, an executive functionary and advisor for the Bombay Natural History Society, Worldwide Fund for Nature, Wildlife Institute of India, Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Wildlife Trust of India and Central Zoo Authority. He is currently Director of BVIEER and teaches ecology and biodiversity conservation.*

DISCUSSIONS ON THE PRESENTATION

Tourism is one of the largest economic sectors in India. The Supreme Court had banned tourism in core areas till the time management plans are prepared for all the Protected Areas. The participant suggested that instead of having piecemeal management plans, the states need to work on a holistic policy for tourism. Another view was that the expectations of the tourist like seeing a tiger on his visit to the Protected Area are also important and the tourism industry should work towards meeting such expectations.

POLICY AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR ECOTOURISM IN INDIAN PROTECTED AREAS

Suhas Kumar

Mr. Kumar's presentation on the policies and laws that have guided tourism development and conservation in India's Protected Areas sought to identify common grounds and the possibility of collaboration between the private and government entities. National parks have been around in the world for a long time but the concept of sustainability of conservation efforts was introduced only when a threat was perceived to the protection offered by these PAs.

In India, the Wildlife Protection Act was enacted in 1972 and Tiger Reserves were set up in 1973. The Act facilitated creation of many PAs, and today the number of PAs in India stands at 102 national parks and 515 sanctuaries. However, large PAs like the ones in Africa (for instance, the 30,000 sq. km. wide Kruger National Park) cannot be formed in India and the average park size in India is only 264 sq. km.

The National Wildlife Action Plan (NWAP), 1983 has a strong conservation bias. It has provisions for creation of a Protected Area network and improvement of degraded habitats outside PAs. The plan also talks about eliciting public support for eco-development around the PAs. Many people are dependent on national parks and some form of joint activity with the support of the Forest Department, tourism industry and the locals can be undertaken to aid the livelihoods of community.

The key missing element in the Protected Area network is that the PAs are not inter-connected; however the Tiger Task Force and the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) are in the process of identifying corridors and buffer zones between these areas. The



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core zone of tiger reserves is either a national park or a wildlife sanctuary, and the whole or part of the buffer zone is considered a Protected Area only if it is a notified sanctuary. It is to be noted that the purpose of Protected Areas in India is only conservation. The objective of a tiger reserve is the conservation of the entire biotope of which the tiger is a part and to undertake specific interventions for habitat improvement in the tiger reserve. Such interventions help PAs to become source of dispersal tigers.

However, there are numerous impediments in conserving wildlife especially long-ranging mammals. These include:

- Small size of Protected Areas;
- Rapid fragmentation of forests;
- Scarce land and large development pressures;
- Paucity of frontline forest staff;
- Meagre funds for protection and management of most Protected Areas;
- Tough working conditions of frontline forest staff



Large mammals survived in Indian forests earlier because of large stretches of contiguous forests. These forests are now fragmented and have led to islands of source populations. Tigers move out of these areas because of competition from fellow tigers but are unable to survive outside in unsuitable habitats. This situation can only be improved by a strengthened network of corridors.

NWAP provides detailed guidelines for regulated low-impact tourism and clearly states that in case of a conflict, tourism is subservient to the need of conservation. Revenue earning should not be the main aim of conservation tourism and it must also benefit local community.

The law and original mandate of Project Tiger do not prohibit tourism in core areas of tiger reserves. In fact, initial Protected Areas did not have core and buffer zonation at all; they were merely managerial descriptions. It is the NTCA guidelines that restrict activities inside the core of the Protected Area.

Ecotourism is needed to be understood in its entirety to implement the sustainability aspect. The three pillars of ecotourism include:

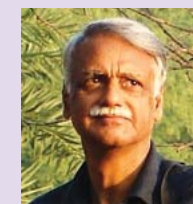
1. Protect the resource
2. Protect the environment
3. Provide benefits to the local people

Findings of a study on Tourism in Kanha, Pench, Bandhavgarh

- Rules and guidelines for ecotourism are present but not followed.
- Tigers are tracked in two parks of Madhya Pradesh; this practice is not followed anywhere else in India.
- There is a spurt in number of tourists visiting Pench Tiger Reserve and the forest staff is not geared to handle such large numbers of tourists. A similar scenario exists in Kanha and Bandhavgarh.
- Many hotels have been constructed or are under construction at Kanha and Pench, in the corridor area.
- Only 9 percent of the people interviewed in 32 villages had some kind of tourism business; the average annual income of households is around Rs. 10,000.

Recommendations

- In areas that are not critical for conservation it is beneficial to have collaborations with the private sector for tourism and conservation. Linkages with private players and markets will also augment community's economy.
- Recreational use in tiger reserves need to be managed and the PAs should not be used only for tiger shows.
- Number of tourists is not that important as the management of the park. The impact of tourism activities must be managed for sustainability.



After specialising in Wildlife Conservation and Management from the Wildlife of Institute of India (WII), **Suhas Kumar IFS** served as director of newly constituted Pench national park in Madhya Pradesh for five years. He has headed the extension faculty of WII, Dehradun; visited several parks and sanctuaries in USA to get an exposure to tourism in protected areas, and has trained at the Centre for Conservation Education, Cheltenham UK. Kumar has served as Conservator of Forest at the wildlife head quarters at Bhopal for five years where his major responsibility was to oversee and guide the management of national parks and sanctuaries of the state. He has participated in a study tour to Australia to understand the principle and practices of 'Ecotourism', and has undertaken a study to understand the present tourism management vis-a vis the management objectives of tiger reserves of Madhya Pradesh. Kumar has written a book for the guides working in the national parks and Sanctuaries of Madhya Pradesh on nature interpretation, in addition to several papers, articles and poems. Presently he is Additional Principal Chief Conservator (Wildlife), Madhya Pradesh.

ECOTOURISM, LAW AND THE COURTS – THE EMERGING CHALLENGES

Sanjay Upadhyay

Mr. Sanjay Upadhyay remarked that the theory over the past three years has not changed much but the practice of tourism has undergone a huge change. He provided an overview of the Indian enviro-legal landscape and provided a snapshot of the level of complexity of this landscape.

In India, policies follow acts and not the other way round as is the case in other countries. This anomaly must be corrected. The National Environmental Policy of 2004 emphasizes on various ecotourism services that are available from the Protected Areas. It also has provisions for the creation of Conservation Reserves and Community Reserves, to derive both environmental and ecotourism benefits. Natural heritage sites which include endemic 'biodiversity hotspots', sacred groves and landscapes are repositories of significant genetic and ecosystem diversity, and the landscapes are also important for ecotourism. The policy provides clues about charismatic species of wildlife that embody 'Incomparable Values', and at the same time, comprise a major resource base for sustainable ecotourism.

The policy environment has not undergone a big change over the past few years and the following needs to be done to deal with issues in the present tourism scenario:

- New national guidelines for tourism need to be formulated, particularly in Protected Areas, in a manner that is compatible with the objectives of wildlife conservation and management.
- A Tourism Management Plan for each Protected Area needs to be developed to provide due safeguards against the negative impacts of tourism.
- Regular monitoring of the impacts of tourism on soil, water resources, vegetation, animal life, sanitation or waste disposal, natural surroundings and cultural environments.
- Protected Area interpretation and visitor centre should only be provided in buffer areas, or adjacent to Protected Area boundaries.
- Frame and circulate rules and regulations of visitor conduct among tourists and tourist agencies and prominently display these on notice boards in and around PAs.
- Commission on evaluation of impacts of tourism in selected Protected Areas should be established.

The entire Indian policy landscape is interspersed with mention of tourism in policy documents that are not specific to tourism or ecotourism. Different State policies also define and deal with tourism in their own



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way. Ideally the sequence of policy, strategy, an action plan within the frame of act, rules and statutory notifications should have been followed to create a proper comprehensible framework for varied aspects of tourism. The main issue has been concentration of control with the Central Government which leads to a complete distrust in the system for the State.

Areas where ecotourism can be practiced have been classified in a variety of legal documents, each having a different legal implication. Areas such as biosphere reserves, elephant reserves, natural heritage sites, critical wildlife habitats, biodiversity heritage sites etc. are just some of the nomenclature used for cordoning off areas. Each of these has a different management prescription in place. These management prescriptions lead to the creation of multiple plans for every area. The legal implication of practicing ecotourism is very complicated and this creates barriers in the smooth running of businesses.

Integration of all these varied plans is necessary to create a healthy environment for practicing ecotourism activities. The process of setting up a business in these areas is complex and involves administrative as well as court initiated rules and regulations. The process needs to be streamlined and a single window system where a detailed but one-stop solution can be provided needs to be established for every region.

The Supreme Court has not commented on the legal validity of the tiger tourism guidelines. It is to be seen if the guidelines are intra-vires or ultra-vires. The guidelines categorically address the issue of wildlife tourism and replace it with ecotourism, especially community-based ecotourism as the way forward.

Mr. Upadhyay concluded by pointing out there were immense opportunities in the ecotourism sector but a lot of homework still remains to be done on the part of the business enterprise, due to the complexity in the legal landscape. There are numerous emerging challenges and opportunities in the legal aspects of ecotourism which would require another workshop.



Sanjay Upadhyay is a Supreme Court Advocate and the founder and managing partner of the India's first environmental law firm, Enviro Legal Defence Firm. He has been practicing environment and development law since 1993. Upadhyay has served as an environmental and development law expert to institutions including World Bank, IUCN, FAO of United Nations, UNDP, AFD, DFID, ILO, SDC, IC, IIED, ODI, WWF, Green Peace, HBF, TERI, WINROCK, MOEF, MOPR, MOTA, MNRE, IIFM, ICFRE, IEG, WII, IIPA, NIRD, University of Cambridge and Duke University to name a few. His areas of expertise is environment and development law, and more specifically the legal and policy dimensions of Natural Resource Management including ecotourism, Ecodevelopment, Wildlife Conservation, National Parks and Sanctuaries, Biodiversity and Forestry. He is also a visiting resource person to most premier environmental institutions and law schools in India.

FEDERAL POLITICS OF CONSERVATION IN INDIA

Rohini Chaturvedi

The aim of Rohini Chaturvedi's presentation was to place the issue of conservation and ecotourism in the larger context of development-environment debates and the attendant politics of conservation policy. She highlighted the politics of conservation in two respects, viz., the trade-offs between conservation and development and the differing interests of the Centre and the State governments. The considerable overlap between forests, minerals, poverty and tribal populations makes choices between conservation and development inevitable. Development too is of different types; local aspirations for basic development cannot be ignored. A greater threat to conservation is large development projects including mining, irrigation, power projects etc. The uneven distribution of forest resources across the states implies that the costs associated with conservation are borne more by some states than others. The politics of conservation therefore concerns decisions on (a) what is public interest: conservation or development and what kinds of development; (b) who decides on public interest and (c) how can the benefits as well as the real and opportunity costs of conservation be equitably distributed between the local, the State and the national levels.

The prioritization of development and particularly large developmental projects is evident in prevalent narratives of economic growth. The PM himself has emphasized, more than once, that while protection of the environment is important, it cannot be at the cost of economic development. For example, even with the enactment of forest conservation laws and their seemingly stricter application since the involvement of the Supreme Court in the Godavarman Case, the rate of diversion of forest land for development purposes has been steadily increasing. Estimates from the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) reveal that rates of forest diversion have doubled since 2008; in the last decade forest diversion reached its highest levels in 2009, when the PM held the portfolio of Minister for Environment and Forest. Much of the forest diversion since 1980 has been for large development projects; less than 6 percent diversion of forests has been for social sector projects such as village roads, schools, primary health centers etc.

A second dimension of the federal politics of conservation concerns 'who decides'. The jurisdiction for conservation law and policy making is shared between the Centre and the States with the former enjoying greater powers in this respect. In reality however, policy making involves negotiations and bargaining between the Government of India and the State governments. The rise of regional parties and coalition politics has increased the bargaining strength of the states who are able to successfully negotiate their policy positions. The increased involvement of the Supreme Court had disempowered both levels of governments but attempts are underway to regain lost ground.

Finally, individuals in key decision making positions at the Centre and the States play an important role in the timing, direction and content of policy. Bureaucrats who are on deputation from the states, to the Government of India have been quite influential, as people from MP have already experienced. In highlighting the uneven distribution of costs and benefits from conservation, states have been arguing for and have successfully negotiated financial incentives from the Government of India. Environmental criteria are now included in the Planning

Commission's formula for transfers to the states, and successive Finance Commissions have been extending conservation related grants. Whether these transfers compensate for the costs of conservation or are sufficient for incentivizing conservation is debatable.

Dr. Chaturvedi concluded by stating that federalism did add to policy disarray but also created increased opportunities to intervene at different levels. Advocacy at the level of Centre and the States was essential along with an active engagement with the political and economic dynamics of the federal system. Finally, while difference in the views of 'conservation for whom' and 'how to conserve' are inevitable, a unified constituency for conservation is essential for withstanding loss of forests and wildlife for development.



Dr. Rohini Chaturvedi has been engaged with conservation policy and resource governance in India, for several years. She has recently completed a doctoral degree from the University of Cambridge, where she looked at forest federalism in India and the negotiations between Government of India and state governments on accommodation of environment and development interests in policy. Prior to this programme of doctoral study, Rohini was involved with research and consulting on a range of environment and governance issues including payments for ecosystem services and incentive based mechanisms for conservation, participatory natural resource governance, eco-development in and around protected areas, rural poverty and livelihoods, decentralised governance and tribal self-determination, as well as access to justice and the right to information. In the context of recent developments related to tourism in tiger reserves in India, she has been engaged with research on protected area approaches for conservation and the emerging salience of tourism therein. She is particularly interested in understanding divergent perspectives on ecotourism in India and their accommodation within conservation policy and practice in the country

DISCUSSIONS ON THE PRESENTATION

- One of the participants viewed that due to disperse populations in the forest areas, legislatures do not engage with communities in these areas on local issues. The panel countered this view by saying that it is not completely true and it depends on the nature of incentive for the legislatures to engage with a particular group or community. Forest Rights Act is seen to benefit the disenfranchised but it is still in the initial phases of implementation in many states.
- One of the suggestions to improve management of forests was to shift the subject of forests to the State List from the Concurrent List to enable the states to develop their own criteria for the development of forests.
- A single window system for clearing tourism projects in and around forest areas is required at state or district level
- No need to have central guidelines on everything; states can evolve their own guidelines. It should be decided if ecotourism is good for India and then have laws and policies to this effect. But these should not be treated as sacrosanct and should be changed if necessary.
- Tiger tourism is not bad but should be conducted properly and tigers should not be harassed in the name of tourism. Everyone must have an opportunity to see a tiger, but this should not infringe on the tiger's space. NTCA guidelines offer some solutions that need to be relooked at. One of these is to restrict tourism in certain zones. Alternatively, tourism should be allowed around the parks to achieve a thin spread of tourists and to keep tourist densities low and provide higher level experience to the tourists.

SESSION 5: ECOTOURISM FRAMEWORK IN INDIA: STAKEHOLDER EXPERIENCES OF CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Chair – Mr. Rakesh Mathur, Founding Member, ESOI

Mr. Rakesh Mathur remarked that though ecotourism encompassed a whole range of issues and activities, this conference was focused mainly on wildlife tourism and hence it was natural for most of the speakers to dwell upon wildlife issues. But we must not lose focus on other issues in future deliberations.

Ecotourism in India is still grappling with basic regulatory laws and policies which are in a confusing state of affairs. Also there is a need to spread awareness about ecotourism and responsible tourism to various stakeholders. To address this situation, ESOI has conducted 12 workshops in various States of India. The impact of these workshops needs to be assessed.

The problem was also that of political will and good governance issues. Instances such as Dal lake eutrophication, Jim Corbett Tiger Reserve becoming a marriage destination, illegal constructions at Mandarmani beach, effluents flowing into Sunderbans estuaries, lack of construction bye-laws in eco sensitive zones, etc. are merely manifestations of the problem.

Education is the need of the hour for both tourism service providers and tourists, and the answer to the problems plaguing ecotourism sector in India lies in self-regulation. In this context, we must pursue the proposal of compulsory interaction in schools (from class 5 to 9) on hygiene, sanitation, pollution, energy and water conservation, garbage disposal, disaster preparedness, first aid, road discipline, compulsory social activity etc.

The oath on Safe, Honorable and Sustainable Tourism taken by the industry is not being followed by many and it is not even displayed in many hotels and lodges. Garbage piled up in sensitive destinations is a big issue and the tourism industry must manage pollutants discharged from its hotels.

There is a need to redefine parameters based on which a hotel is evaluated. Instead of looking at only parameters like average room rate, etc. the industry might look at, for example, energy consumed per guest as one of the indicators of sustainability. It is also necessary to distinguish between luxury and comfort since luxury tourism generates a lot of conspicuous consumption and environmental waste.

EMERGENCE OF WILDLIFE TOURISM IN INDIA AND LESSONS FOR FUTURE

Hashim Tyabji

Mr. Hashim Tyabji shared that wildlife tourism grew in India in the mid-1970s after hunting was banned in 1969. His presentation provided an outline of the current tourism scenario in India and the self-regulatory approach to tourism.

Wildlife tourism had very humble beginnings and modest ambitions. Wildlife tourism in India existed even before the hunting was banned but was limited to small groups of forest aficionados who used forest rest houses as lodges. After the ban on hunting, some state governments made inroads into wildlife tourism such as the State of Madhya Pradesh, which under the guidance of Dr. Ranjit Singh started MP tourism lodges in Kanha and Bandhavgarh in the late 1970s. The main thrust however came from the private sector – with the establishment of Kipling Camp by Anne Wright; Tiger Haven by Billy Arjan Singh in Dudhwa and Mahua Kothi by K.K. Singh in Bandhavgarh.

All early pioneers shared some key characteristics like:

- None of them were professional businessmen
- Almost all were previously hunters and shikaris
- Shared a strong conservation ethic
- Were wildlife enthusiasts, conservationists, purists and catered to like-minded people
- Made reasonable profits by showing off wildlife
- It never occurred to them that this activity would be taken over by mass tourism
- Most importantly they spoke a common language with park managers and developed strong friendship with them

The expanse of common understanding between the tourist operators and the forest staff is on the wane today. In hindsight this could be one of the main reasons for the lack of pre-emptive regulation that should have encouraged wildlife tourism. The government was unaccustomed in dealing with large numbers of hoteliers, who followed no unofficial rules and enjoyed commercial advantage.

Much of this growth had been foreseen, but regulation was enacted in an ad hoc manner. Concepts such as carrying capacity were known at the time but still there was no policy and only reactive rules and regulations were brought in, many of which reflected individual biases of officers. Wildlife tourism was privately initiated in MP; while the real competition was the African lodges, the trump card for India was the tiger. In marketing terms, however, the ecotourism product is susceptible to change due to the changes in dates of closure of the parks, visitor timings and the extent of area allowed to be visited. The notice periods are small which lead to chaos in planning.

In this setting no thought is given to the quality of wildlife tourism. For example, a tiger can be seen by the tourists but in circumstances that often manage to reduce the rare sighting to a mere spectacle. No rules presently address this issue; and in the face of all the cynicism, if the industry brings in self-regulatory mechanisms it would be the most powerful way forward. Such a mechanism will still be dependent on the stick that the industry would carry

and not just the carrots. The fact that this stick is missing from the current Indian system is not a good sign.

Mr. Tyabji concluded by citing the need to have a coherent policy for ecotourism before regulations are put in place. He pointed out that the initial question to ask is if the government really needs wildlife tourism. The regulations must be thought through, and implemented only after adequate notice. They must be based on evidence and common sense, and policy should be adopted in its entirety to achieve the desired outcomes. He remarked that there is a need to be open to new ideas, and best ideas were not implemented in a government regulated set-up. The agreements and assurances given by governments must be addressed in spirit and in letter, else the industry will not have the courage to invest and experiment in this domain.



Hashim Tyabji joined Tiger Tops Nepal in 1978 as a trainee naturalist guide and left 10 years later as Director Operations for Tiger Tops Mountain Travel India. Over this period he also worked in Dudhwa with Billy Arjan Singh and in Chitwan with Dr. Chuck McDougal. After working in Bandhavgarh he completed a survey on the birds of Bandhavgarh published in the Journal of BNHS in 1992. From 1992 he was resident in Pataur Village near Bandhavgarh and started the Van Suraksha Samitis with the Forest Department in Pataur area. Tyabji was Honorary Wildlife Warden of Shahdol district for several years and a member of Indian Board of Wildlife from 1996-2000. He strongly feels that conservation oriented tourism must flow from responsible behaviour of private players and well-thought regulations from government acting in tandem. He is a director of Wild India Camps Pvt. Ltd., the company that owns Bagh Van in Pench and Forsyth's in Satpura. He has contributed articles on wildlife and tourism to magazines and books.

CALLING TO ACCOUNT, TOURISM'S ACCOUNTABILITY TO COMMUNITIES AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Swathi Seshadri

Ms. Swathi Seshadri's presentation elaborated on the social justice framework and attempted to analyze community involvement in tourism projects on the basis of this framework.



The Brundtland Commission's definition of sustainable development defines it as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". In terms of tourism the social justice framework is an important aspect. The socio-cultural and socio-political ambitions of the communities are important and tourism must be equitable, environmentally friendly and socially just. It is important to understand the link between social justice and tourism.

Social justice is inherently broad and inclusive and is classified according to several criteria. Historically, justice was defined by the elite as distributive justice or retributive justice and had always been challenged by movements and revolutions. Conflicts occur because of the modes of human relationships with respect to social justice. At any given point people existed in solidarity mode with the community, shared an instrumental association for economic betterment with the market, and were bound by abstract rights of citizenship with the State. Conflict occurred when people from these modes interacted.

The relationship between the industry and the community exists in one of the following levels of engagement:

- Tokenism

- Informing
- Consulting
- Collaborating
- Ownership

It is important to evaluate the level where the interactions between the industry and community are happening. The prevalent industry outreach and interactions with the community are at the tokenistic level only. The community does not have representation in tourism industry associations and the high-end tourism sector does not engage with the informal sector which is about 70 percent of the tourism sector.

The nature of the tourism industry is subject to commoditization which involves packaging of the culture, forests and its animals as unique products and it assigns a price value to everything. Tourism is a private activity subject to consumption and equations of demand and supply. Corporate accountability is a solution for the market to be sustainable and unlike corporate social responsibility, corporate accountability ensures a stringent code of conduct on the private enterprises.

The reality of tourism industry is that its relationship with the community is flawed. The primary issue is with the perspective of the industry towards the people, which creates resistance. The locals are looked down upon and the government does not pay heed to community issues. The tourism industry needs to transform and inculcate transformative justice. The social costs of tourism need to be accounted for and it needs to be seen if tourism perpetuates class, caste, etc. All the social and cultural costs of tourism should be evaluated.

In response to some queries, Ms. Seshadri clarified that one particular response from the industry is to do some actions that could be considered good from community point of view, but the issue at large is of the industry as a whole doing good for the community. She drew parallels with the fact that the term 'community' is used in ecotourism but the well-being of an individual household is not looked at. She further stated that the lack of a proper planning process has also hurt the communities; and the industry and the State need to come together to address communities' issues.

Efforts had been made to inform various state governments about the social aspects of tourism but the issue has been a lack of access to those in power and meeting them.



Swathi Seshadri has been working with EQUATIONS since August 2010. She comes with many years of experience in working with people's movements and community-based struggles for social justice. She has also headed an organisation called National Youth Foundation, done extensive research and has taught social work students. She has a Masters of Arts in Social Work. At EQUATIONS, Seshadri is overall in charge of the networking programme and also has specific charge of the Central India, East and North Eastern regions. She is also responsible for the Economic Impacts of Tourism.

TOURISM INDUSTRY AS A PLAYER

MridulaTangirala

Ms. Mridula Tangirala’s presentation provided glimpses of varied approaches taken up by Taj Safaris in engaging with the community. The programs and services currently available at Taj Safaris are based on the successful intervention strategies that also highlight the need for innovative approaches for the inclusion of local community in every aspect of tourism. The world is in perfect balance at this very moment and conflicts arise when this balance is not in accordance with the expectations of the people. The conflict arises when a particular kind of stakeholder expects the other stakeholder to behave in a certain way.

At Mahua Kothi at Bandhavgarh, an attempt was made by the Taj Safari group to deploy the famous Conservation Corporation Africa model in the Indian context. The resort provides an opportunity to connect with nature by providing an enriching experience to the tourist. Taj Safaris revived traditional architecture techniques and thus ensured a light footprint on the landscape before it was set up. This is what creates the heart of the experience at the Mahua Kothi.

For the purpose of inclusion of the local community, a cadre of naturalists from the local community was trained for 3-9 months, thus ensuring that people with a passion for nature and team work are employed and made a part of the system. Staff from the rural areas was trained. Local cuisine is served in the lodges to encourage guests to indulge in a wholesome experience in a different way. Taj Safaris collaborated with the Forest Department for the Gaur relocation program. The other initiatives taken up for the community were education of rural children, provision of smokeless chullahs and capacity building programs such as honey harvesting, youth skilling programs (food craft courses) etc.

Based on the experience from Africa, marketing requires patience. Marketing of the tourism product in the international market needs considerable level of infrastructure, and the development of a brand of a particular destination requires a large amount of time. Tourists do not mind waiting if there are good products, but in the international market Madhya Pradesh is a less known product.

If the state wants wildlife tourism then the role of tourism in community development and overall wildlife management must be figured out. Tourism can be one part of a solution and not the only solution. The current perspective of having only one type of solution is not the way forward and it is necessary to think out of the box. It is also necessary to have a variety of products to cater to every type of tourist. If the industry cooperates towards a conservation objective then the issue of disappearing dispersal tigers can also be resolved. The tourism industry has to act as conservation messengers for the masses for the larger common goal.

Some solutions to the existing tourism sector problems may include a better way of policing high density tourism, walking trails, watch-towers, planned stopovers, staggered entry, more exit gates etc.

To conclude she emphasized on the need for a higher level of cooperation with the local communities and NGOs. A lot of collaborative effort is going on which need to be advertised by the organization involved in it akin to Travel Operators for Tigers (TOFT). She reiterated that there lies an opportunity to think out of the box on the various issues presently faced by the tourism industry.

MridulaTangirala is Director Operations, Taj Safaris Ltd.

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SESSION 6: ECOTOURISM FRAMEWORK IN INDIA: EXPLORING POTENTIAL FOR STAKEHOLDERS' COLLABORATION IN MADHYA PRADESH

Chair – Mr. R. Parasuram, Chief Secretary, State Government of Madhya Pradesh
Facilitator – Mr. Krishna Kumar Singh

Panelists:

Community Representatives – Ms. Seema Bhatt and Mr. Santosh Dwivedi

Conservationists – Dr. Raghu Chundawat and Dr. H.S. Pabla

Industry – Mr. Amit Sankhala and Mr. G. Krishnamurty

For this session the panel consisted of members from all the stakeholder groups – two members represented the community, two were from the industry and two were conservationists. At the end of the panel discussion the conference participants had the opportunity to ask questions to the panel members.

Mr. R. Parasuram provided a government perspective on tourism and referred to his earlier statement that Madhya Pradesh Tourism was at crossroads and in such a situation ecotourism provides one of the right ways to move forward.

A larger perspective of the government towards economic development of the state is through development of skills, involvement of communities and expansion of livelihoods and ecotourism is one of the solutions towards achieving this.

He assured that all the good suggestions emanating from the conference can be worked on to eventually have a concrete, action oriented framework which can be executed through possible future collaborations and partnerships. He shared the views expressed by Ms. Seshadri on community involvement in tourism to a large extent but clarified that a way forward cannot mean going back to a basic economy and a way to avoid regression would be to create new entrepreneurs.

Best practices that are available within and outside the State should be used to build a framework that can be articulated in the form of a good policy that consequently is translated into guidelines and action. He lamented that current policies are merely documents to attract investment and are mistaken to be policies.

Dr. Raghu Chundawat opined that the industry's thinking is limited to a single conservation model whereas there are a lot of skill and expertise existing which can help to bring about

change. Ecotourism is only one of the ways to achieve this change. There is a need to explore opportunities as to how such expertise can be channelized.

The current conservation model of forming Protected Areas is like creating ecosystem islands. Ecotourism outside of Protected Areas could be a model where along with conservation communities could benefit as well. There are several models available that can enhance protection to the Protected Areas.

On tiger conservation, Mr. Chundawat mentioned that the Tiger was the most popular animal in the world and opined that control and regulation of tiger tourism are retrogressive steps. A huge number of tourists want to come and see tigers but at present there are only three or four places where one can sight them. There is a need to disperse tourists all over the state which could help the Forest Department with revenue and bring in required expertise in identifying corridors and planning process around national parks. Identifying corridors is extremely urgent. A solution suggested is to enforce land use restrictions along the lines of those enforced in Khajuraho and Manduin order to plan areas with low and high density of lodges.

Mr. Amit Sankhala expressed that it was already too late for bringing self-regulation in the tourism industry. The self-regulation paradigm was addressed earlier from the business side by the formation of associations such as Travel Operators For Tigers (TOFT). He lamented the fact that while lodges in the PAs started due to owners' passion for wildlife, self-regulation is still not present around national parks despite various efforts. While everyone looks towards the tourism industry for regulation, the government too has done little in terms of policy making. He further pointed out that ecotourism guidelines have been talked about for years but were not yet put in place.

A new revenue sharing model with the community may be put in place that will lease land from them instead of purchasing it. He pointed to the paucity of trained local villagers and the need to open a training institute where the community could be trained in ecotourism. This can be possible only with the support of the Forest Department. He cited the example of Satpura National Park where radical new initiatives have resulted in a different kind of tourism model. He concluded by saying that the industry wants locals to be employed in their resorts but is unable to find the skilled human resources due to lack of proper support from either within the industry or from the government.

Dr. H.S. Pabla shared his belief that tourism helps conservation and the creation of new jobs in ecotourism justifies the conservation of dangerous wild animals. He admitted that he treated the tourism industry as an equal and an ally in conservation efforts, as along with the Forest Department, it is the biggest stakeholder in conservation. While many in the tourism industry may not be sensitive towards conservation initiatives, in the long run, conservation is the way forward for the industry.

Dr. Pabla's support for the tourism industry has got him labeled as a spokesperson for the tourism industry. He has often been unfairly blamed for being hand in glove with them, largely due to the prevailing opinion that the tourism industry is run by the rich and is only

seeking profits. He shared his view that a legal framework may be possible that mandates the partnership of state, community and the industry; business can then be run by the community.

Despite personal efforts to promote ecotourism in the Forest Department, Dr. Pabla has not been successful in his efforts due to lack of awareness of stakeholders on forest governance laws and lack of and no training or orientation of Forest Department staff in ecotourism activities. The Forest Department never thought that ecotourism would be one of the key activities apart from production of timber. The tourism industry on their part too had not been able to create a sensitive image for the environment and community. He opined that the NTCA guidelines have both good and bad elements. One change that he advocated for in the NTCA guidelines was that tourism zones should not be restricted and all areas should be open to tourism as this would allow for dispersal of tourists. There is also a need to construct and promote good wildlife lodges as they offer a better land use for wildlife as compared to farmland. This can be possible only if regulations for wildlife lodges were brought in and parameters set.

Ms. Seema Bhatt, a biologist, has been working on biodiversity issues for the last 35 years. She believes that ecotourism is a tool that could potentially link local livelihoods to the conservation of biodiversity. She expressed the apprehension that ecotourism if not carried out in an appropriate manner could do more harm than good. Ecotourism, by definition indicates that communities need to benefit through this enterprise. However, it is unreasonable to expect communities to be capable of running such enterprises without adequate capacity building. There needs to be wide ranging trainings before communities become owners/managers of ecotourism enterprises. These trainings could be innovative where members of other communities could become trainers. Cross-site visits could add to the richness of experience. Finally, there is a need to establish adequate roles and responsibilities, rules and regulations and set standards for community-based tourism. She shared her experience of establishing a certification system for home stays in Ladakh using the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) framework.

Mr. Santosh Dwivedi is a journalist and an activist of the Ekta Parishad NGO⁸. His initial comments were on the so called ‘conflict’ between conservation tourism and wildlife. Here the conflict is, in essence, with the rules and regulations which do not respect tribal rights and are against tribal culture and hamper their livelihoods. There is a need to take a look at these issues afresh. The tribal communities have never been in conflict with the forest. The question arises as to why they have not emerged as a strong partner in conservation activities by the State. Mr. Dwivedi shared his experience of villages in core areas, terming them “*open jails devoid of any development where rights violations of the inhabitants are rampant.*” For the tribal, “consented relocation” is actually the last resort as he is forced by situations to relocate. One million rupees per adult is the relocation amount paid but after receiving the compensation amount, the tribal is left to fend for himself in the open market. There is a need to build the capacity of villagers to deal with such situations. Relocation should be done in suitable areas, and money and capacity building must be provided at the same time.

8 EktaParishad is a mass based people’s movement leading a country wide struggle for the land rights of the marginalized and excluded communities.

The consent of Gram Sabhas is further not taken prior to declaring buffer zones. The villagers are kept in the dark and later blamed if any illegal activities occur in the Protected Areas, but are not made a partner in the conservation effort. Mr. Dwivedi concluded by calling for a partnership with the community to achieve balance between environment, tourism and the community development.

Mr. G. Krishnamurty, Chief Conservator of Forest, Hoshangabad, shared his practical experience as a forester. Apart from the core area, buffer areas can also be explored for ecotourism. He gave the example of Hoshangabad where the Forest Department with the help of tourism industry had started night patrolling. This has been a success and tourists are happy to explore these buffer areas where all major cats have been sighted. He added that people should take up tourism with the responsibility to stop illegal felling, poaching etc.

Mr. Krishnamurty also shared information on some of the initiatives that his department had taken up with respect to communities. When the Forest Department was unable to restrict the activities of Pardhis⁹, they initiated a project that stressed on education for their children. Many adult Pardhis were also recruited as naturalists in the tourism industry. The Forest Department had by now trained around 600 people as security guards and recruited them to help communities in Hoshangabad. He opined that the Forest Department is a major stakeholder in ecotourism and blaming the department would not be helpful as it would make the department defensive.

To conclude, he asked delegates to support the Forest Department and help it in relocating people in such times when hundreds of crores are allocated for voluntary relocation.

Mr. Parasuram clarified that in the past, the government did carry out activities in a top-down manner. The community was not involved in decision making in a majority of cases. There is now a need to restore the balance through partnership and collaboration with the community.

9 A rural community believed to be traditional hunters.

VIDEO PRESENTATION

Once the Chair had summed up the panelists’ views, a video clip of communities living in and around Bandhavgarh and Kanha National Parks was screened. The video had the camera man asking various questions to different sections of the community, ranging from tourism and relocation to tiger attacks. Though the questions differed, the responses primarily revolved around livelihood problems faced by the people.

Numerous issues in Protected Areas were highlighted through the video, such as:

- Problems in mobility as no outside vehicles are allowed in the PAs; and the fact that the villages are in the middle of a jungle makes it worse.
- Lack of electricity in the villages.
- Gram Sabhas were called and resolutions to create buffer zones were passed without properly informing the villagers; signatures for the resolutions were taken from children and adults on blank papers.
- The problem with buffer zones is that the state wants the villagers to relocate from the areas.
- In case of an animal attack, there is no facility of taking the injured person to the hospital.
- Displacement is another major issue in these villages.

The villagers felt that the policy of the state government to provide one million rupees as a panacea for relocation is not enough and they need land to farm. However, the Collector interviewed believed that a million rupees was more than enough for these villagers to relocate and buy their own farmland. The villagers meanwhile feel that this being the place where they have grown up, no amount of money will help them to buy the same kind of livelihood opportunities.

The video also highlighted few problems of the other stakeholders of the parks:

- The numbers of vehicles were cut down by 50 percent; as a result the drivers now have less work than before.
- Shopkeepers report that business has been affected. Transporters report that business has reduced by almost 25 percent.
- The hotel and lodge owners around the area also claim that with the new rules, business has been affected negatively as tourists are not getting permissions to enter the parks.

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OPEN HOUSE DISCUSSION

Once the video clip ended, Mr. K.K. Singh opened the house for questions by providing certain pointers. He said that community development was an important issue to address but at the same time it would be important to define what we mean by ‘community’. This would then help deal with the larger issues of community benefits.

Ms. Swathi Seshadri was of the view that the Gram Sabha can be considered as the community. Mr. Singh added that the tourism industry is responsible for the Gram Sabha and not for any other group or individual. He wondered if this means that the Gram Sabha can tax the tourism industry for carrying out its operations or takes a percentage of their profit and also shares it with the Forest Department.

Ms. Seshadri pointed out that the relationship that the tourism industry builds with the Gram Sabha is more important and that taxation is only one of the many tools available. She provided an example of Nagarhole Tiger Reserve in Mettur Panchayat where the tourist operators had to obtain permission from the Gram Panchayat to operate. The tourism industry in the area feels accountable to the Gram Sabha through the Panchayat. She also mentioned that the Gram Sabha of a particular village felt left out at not being consulted in case of a tourism project starting in its vicinity. A Panchayat might tax these operators in anger on being left out of the decision making process.

Mr. Guy Chester attempted to provide a solution to the community development paradigm by citing the ‘5 Es’ framework.

- Entry – Resource rent or equitable buying of the land instead of taking it over and making sure that people are not being excluded
- Employment – Job opportunities for locals in the tourism operations
- Enterprise – Fostering micro businesses
- Education – Tourism could contribute in a big way towards the education of locals on culture, wildlife, and tourism as well
- Engagement – Involving community in decision making issues, that is, the Gram Sabha

Mr. K.K. Singh remarked that there were basically two ways in which benefits can be given back to the communities. The first being taxes, where the Panchayat could tax the industry directly or through the government. He asked the participants what the industry could do to engage the community. He addressed a question to Dr. Raghu Chundawat, asking him about alternative models for managing the buffer zone area other than the current model available.

Dr. Chundawat replied that an alternative was to target the corporates and have an area on the similar lines to Special Economic Zone in the tiger area targeting conservation that would benefit communities. Dispersal tigers die in agricultural fields after getting caught in traps laid out in the crop lands. He provided a solution where the state or the central government can provide monetary incentives to the farmers for the damage suffered due to wildlife in return that traps are not laid. To manage the buffer zone in a proper manner, several such solutions need to be found that can benefit the local communities as well.

Mr. Santosh Dwivedi pointed out that the tourism industry need not replace the role of the government. It is the mandate of the State to provide education, health and other basic amenities. All the tourism industry needed to do was to safeguard the economic interest of the locals and not replace it. To achieve this goal, the tourism industry should partner with the community by leasing out their lands and banning land sales completely.

Mr. Parasuram interjected and shared that numerous issues had risen because of the lack of pre-emptive legislation to regulate area around Protected Areas. In Madhya Pradesh Town and Country Planning Act exists through which prescription on land use can be given. But this does not restrict the transfer of ownership of non-tribal land or the sale of such land excluding the agriculture land ceiling. He pointed out that the Gram Panchayats rarely do any zonal planning for land use. He further said that the Panchayat Act has now been amended after it was found that the Sarpanchs were misusing their power – this misuse of power was more evident in Panchayats adjoining urban areas. After the amendment, the Town and Country Planning Officer had to be consulted. This would inculcate better discipline in land use in sensitive areas outside Protected Areas. He cited the case of land use restrictions in place in Madhai and remarked that it was difficult to arrive at a decision in the government set-up. But once a decision was taken, the land use pattern around eco-sensitive zones cannot be changed and there will not be an increase in degradation.

Mr. K.K. Singh posed a question to the Wildlife Department about the reason for inclusion of Limits of Acceptable Change criteria in the NTCA guidelines while the carrying capacity rules were being strictly followed.

Mr. B.P. Singh from the Forest Department responded and said that the Local Advisory Committees has been formed everywhere. He then responded to an issue raised in the movie clip about reduction in the number of vehicles allowed in the park. He said the State had misinterpreted a rule and the number of vehicles were miscalculated and doubled in the interest of tourism. He further stated that with the use of Limits of Acceptable Change, this situation would be corrected. The Local Advisory Committee (LAC) would have sole discretion to demarcate eco-sensitive zones around Protected Areas. A member representing the Panna LAC informed the delegates that the LAC had not yet met, but an opinion had been formed and a meeting was scheduled to be held soon. Prior to submitting their opinions to the government they would share it with other LACs. He also commented on the NTCA guidelines that they were criticized by everyone but nobody had yet challenged them in court.

Mr. Sanjay Upadhyay directed a question to Mr. B.P. Singh seeking clarification that as per the NTCA guidelines a state level strategy for legislation or for policy was to be enacted and what work has gone towards achieving this goal. Also, why a guideline based institution was to be established when there was already a statutory institution in place in form of the advisory council. Similarly, Conservation Reserves or Community Reserves are institutions that can be created and strengthened under the existing laws.

Mr. B.P. Singh clarified that he did not agree with the NTCA guidelines but was bound by the Supreme Court order to implement them. He questioned the logic behind keeping 20 percent

as the vehicle limit inside the Protected Areas and the sanctity of the carrying capacity calculations. He reiterated that the NTCA guidelines need to be challenged, but mentioned in the same breath that the state government would not challenge it.

Mr. R. Parasuram remarked that if the NTCA guidelines are challenged then a proper and well considered rejoinder from the State's side could be expected.

The tourism industry is keen to develop wilderness areas outside the Protected Area network. If these areas are managed by the industry then tourist pressures on the Protected Areas will be eased. Will the Forest Department be able to grant such managerial control? Is it possible to have a partnership with the Forest Department towards this effect?

Dr. H.S. Pabla informed that interpreting the Forest Conservation Act in a manner that allows a private entity in a forest area was difficult. In legal terms such an activity would be translated as leasing of land for non-forestry activities and is not allowed; currently even ecotourism is classified as a non-forestry activity by the Government of India. He opined that, apart from major conservation actions, forest land had been assigned to private entities to undertake activities, such as tendu leaf collection, Joint Forest Management (JFM), etc. and if ecotourism was seen as similar to such activities then diversion was possible. This is possible only if the Forest Advisory Committee of the Central Government took a favorable view of such request.

Mr. Hashim Tyabji shared an existing example of the night safaris at Satpura National Park. The local community was taken into confidence and a dialogue was started with the community that used to put traps in their fields for wildlife. The community was told to report any sighting of wildlife to the tourist operator and was paid if the tourist managed to see the animal. Instead of individual officers permitting or restricting tourism actions, a policy must be put in place which deals with this whole issue.

A circular issued on 22nd October 2012 provides a common framework for all Forest Divisions to practice ecotourism outside Protected Areas which will aid in resolving the issue being discussed. According to the circular, the local forest officer should be taken into confidence before entering the forest area.

Dr. Madhu Verma said that it was difficult to promote ecotourism in the current set-up. She suggested that the eco-circuit model practiced in Jim Corbett was an alternative the industry may look at. She suggested that the industry practice a landscape based approach to ecotourism which has been successful in many countries. She pointed out that the transaction costs of ecotourism are high but the economic costs were high as well and forests were diverted for many causes and could be diverted for ecotourism activities as well.

Dr. Arvind Boaz, APCCF, Chhattisgarh felt that there was a need to talk about wilderness and not only about the Protected Area network and buffer zones. He felt that the delegates were worried about what the Supreme Court judgment meant for the elite of the tourism industry. He shared that a model on the 4 P's (Private, Public, and People Partnership) approach should be worked out instead.

Ms. Seema Bhatt said that it was possible to have community based ecotourism but all tourism activities cannot be based on ecotourism since tourism in India involves a wide spectrum of activities and the tourism scenario needs to be looked at holistically.

Mr. Rohan shared an interesting experience on elephant corridors. In the Mudumalai area, scrub forests of Nilgiris were protected and developed by an entrepreneur and as a result elephants had started using the area as a corridor. Though the land was private, the Forest Department later claimed the land because of the high elephant movement. The aggrieved entrepreneur challenged the Forest Department's claims in the High Court but lost, and the case was now pending in the Supreme Court.

Mr. R. Parasuram shared a similar case involving States of Madhya Pradesh and Kerala in which the coffee estates were owned by the Government of Madhya Pradesh. These estates in time were overgrown with shrubs and trees and had become forests and were taken over by the Kerala Forest Department. The MP government itself was in litigation with the Kerala government over the issue. Based on this case, he pointed that after providing compensation the government had the power to acquire any land.

Mr. Sharma said that ecotourism was being discussed for the past 4-5 years and the problem lay in the word 'tourism' and not in the activities. He opined that the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department activities for collection of tendu leaves involving construction of warehouses and roads in Protected Areas were essentially to aid commercial activities. Nobody had objected to these activities. Ecotourism would be a forestry activity if done within the rules and regulations and if land use were to be designed in an ecological way.

Mr. R. Parasuram summarized the session by saying that it was clear that ecotourism was the way forward but there are several challenges in how undertake ecotourism. Some of these challenges were:

- Challenge of ownership – there is a need to understand the changed relationships between stakeholders in ecotourism.
- Challenge of appreciating each stakeholder's point of view.
- Challenge of identifying the best way to regulate tourism industry as many regulations were present but not implemented.
- Challenge of dialogue through formal and informal channels and for ecotourism activities; informal channels are more important.
- Challenge of self-regulation – stakeholders need to look at self-regulation to create a nurturing environment for the future.
- Challenge of engagement and participation of stakeholders and the need for comprehensive guidelines to address them.
- Challenge to provide a framework with guidelines that looks at different policies of the government, and helps the tourism industry to move forward.
- Challenge of receptivity – skill development at the local level is important for livelihood but by respecting the community and treating them as partners. The industry can then become a partner.
- Challenge of defining a menu for ecotourism – the industry can play a big role in bringing ecotourism outside the wildlife habitats.

- Challenge of capital – money has to be brought in along with entrepreneurs; innovation and entrepreneurship are linked here. The community can create capital as well but only if they come in as an equal.
- Challenge of benefit sharing at broadly acceptable terms among all stakeholders.

The conference ended with Mr. K.K. Singh thanking all the participants.

ANNEXURE 1 - AGENDA

BHOPAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM APRIL 18-19, 2013, JEHAN NUMA PALACE HOTEL, BHOPAL

DAY - 1, APRIL 18, 2013

Registration and Tea: 10am-10.45 am

Inaugural Session

Lunch Break

Technical Sessions 1 and 2: Ecotourism solutions, strategies and tools: reflection on global experiences

The focus of these two technical sessions was to understand whether or not ecotourism has met its objectives of balancing the demands of conservation and local development. By reflecting on experiences from different parts of the world, the sessions aimed to highlight the stakeholder driven as well as contextual factors that enable ecotourism successes and limitations.

These two sessions had speakers from around the world: Lynn Woodworth (Australia); Richard Vigne (Kenya); Guy Chester, GSTC (Australia); Manori Gunawandena (Sri Lanka); Enrico Ducrot (Italy); Les Carlisle (South Africa) and others.

Technical Session 3: Interactive discussion on ecotourism solutions, strategies and tools: Lessons for India

Conference Dinner

DAY - 2, APRIL 19, 2013

The day started at 09:30am

Technical Session 4 and 5: Ecotourism Framework in India: Stakeholder experiences of challenges and opportunities, and the potential for collaboration

The focus of these two technical sessions was on understanding the opportunities and challenges of implementing an ecotourism framework in India, through an exploration of the macro and micro contexts within which this framework is situated. The sessions particularly concentrated on protected areas in the country.

These two sessions were addressed by speakers like Dr. Erach Bharucha (Pune); Sanjay Upadhyay (Delhi); Rohini Chaturvedi (Cambridge, UK); Hashim Tyabji (UK); Mridula Tangirala (Delhi); Swathi Seshadri (Bangalore) and others.
The session included screening of a short film on interventions of communities living in and around tiger reserves in India.

Technical Session 6: Interactive discussion on stakeholder perspectives on ecotourism and the way ahead

Technical Session 7: Panel discussion and interaction on ecotourism in Madhya Pradesh: a review of policy and practice and recommendations for a strategy for the future

Chair: Mr. R. Parasuram, Chief Secretary, Madhya Pradesh

The day ended at 5:30pm.

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THE CUTTING EDGE IN TRAVEL TRADE

EVENT ROUNDUP

Holistic approach to sustainable tourism

The Bhopal International Conference on Sustainable Tourism 2013 organised by Ecotourism Society of India along with Madhya Pradesh Tourism was an effort to bring on one platform conservation experts, NGOs and hotel operators to focus on wide ranging issues related to sustainable tourism and community engagement. By Sudipta Dev



The Bhopal International Conference on Sustainable Tourism (BICST), 2013 organised by Ecotourism Society of India (ESOI) in association with Madhya Pradesh Tourism saw 150 delegates from India and overseas carry out two days of focused discussions on creating a balance between tourism, conservation and local livelihoods. The subject of the conference was "Tourism: Enabler for Conservation, Livelihood and Sustainable Growth", and brought together experts from diverse fields who shared a common interest. The conference was represented by NGOs, conservationists, forest department officials, tourism authorities, the travel trade and hoteliers.

BICST 2013 was inaugurated by R Parasuram, chief secretary, Government of Madhya Pradesh. The speakers included many notable names like Mandeep Singh Soin, president and founding member, ESOI; Sujit Banerjee, secretary general, WTTC India; Raghendra Kumar Singh, managing director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism; Enrico Ducrot, CEO, Viaggi dell'Elefante and ECO Luxury, Italy; Les Carlisle, group conservation manager, &Beyond, South Africa; Guy Chester, founder & MD, EcoSustainAbility, Australia; Lynn Woodworth, wildlife researcher from Australia; Heidi Bernsdorff, travel journalist; Richard Vigne, CEO, Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Kenya; Manori Gunawadena, director, Environment Foundation, Sri Lanka; Krishna Kumar Singh, founder and governing body

member, ESOI; Hashim Tyabji, director, Wild India Camps; Rohini Chaturvedi, research associate, University of Cambridge, UK; Ravi Singh, secretary general and CEO, WWF-India, and others.

R Parasuram stated that ecotourism bridged the gap between those who live in hotels/resorts and the village / local populace of the area. "It enhances participation, livelihood and promotes partnerships. Ecotourism has brought back people to the centre stage. Sustainability should be the outcome of any effort and not an objective. That's what will promote the future of these people through ecotourism intervention." Pointing out that eco tourism as a concept is not often understood by the operators and hotels, Mandeep Singh Soin, founder president, ESOI said that the government on its part has made efforts like printing and distributing free of cost 10,000 copies of Ecotourism and Environment Handbook. He also spoke about how tourism can create alternate livelihood in areas like Chambal, which has a great potential to be a World Heritage Site.

Krishna Kumar Singh acknowledged that the conference has emerged out of need/a particular problem being faced at that point of time. Following the Supreme Court ruling on core areas for tigers, BICST 2013 is an effort to bring the conservationists, NGOs and hotel operators on one platform. "We are looking at the big picture and hope it will turn out to be a policy document for central or state governments," said Krishna Kumar Singh.

E | D | G | E



and conservation of PAs. "Conservation in PAs cannot be isolated from whatever is happening in the country - the political and economic dynamics," remarked Chaturvedi.

There is also another important question that needs to be evaluated - has eco tourism in the country become increasingly 'tiger centric'? The fact however remains that it is not possible to protect tigers only in small areas. There has been a large spurt in growth of tourists in Bandhavgarh and Pench. Hotels are on migration route of tigers.

Legal tangles

Supreme Court advocate Sanjay Upadhyay who is also the founder and managing partner of the India's first environmental law firm, Enviro Legal Defence Firm, mentioned that India is the only country where every policy was written after the Act, which is an anomaly. "The CRZ notification has been amended 29 times. You can actually do a trend analysis of which lobby was working," he said. According to Upadhyay it is important to look at tourists in different legal categories. Geographical context in ecotourism is important. "Concepts such as core areas, critical tiger habitat, PAs, etc, should not be depended on courts," he asserted.

"Ecotourism is not about wildlife tourism, we are still grappling with basic issues like regulatory law. We have

conducted about 12 workshops in various states, however we have to see how much of that training gets translated into better environmental practices," said Rakesh Mathur, VP, ESOI.

It was the ban in early 1970s that some state governments started investing in these areas. The main thrust came from the private sector. "All the early pioneers had strong conservation ethics. They were former shikaris or wildlife enthusiasts who wanted to share their lifestyle. They never saw that this will lead to 'mass tourism'. The government was unprepared for the new lodge owners who did not necessarily share the same mindset. Many rules and regulations were based on personal bias of individual officers and changed with them," remarked Tyabji. It is necessary for regulations to follow firm policy and must be based on evidence and common sense.

Giving an operator's perspective, Mridula Tangirala, director operations, Taj Safaris stated that they have a small footprint (four lodges) inspired by local traditions that lets people experience nature in very different ways. "A big challenge was to create a cadre of naturalists. Our staff are from the rural areas and were trained for English speaking guests." The company also has many focused CSR initiatives for the local communities.

Involving the local community is an important part of Madhya Pradesh Tourism's strategy, pointed out R Parasuram. "In MP, ecotourism is at a very nascent stage and we would like to take this forward," he said.

Ecotourism has a lot of significance for a state like Madhya Pradesh that has one-third of its total area covered by forests. There are nine national parks and 25 wildlife sanctuaries in the state. Raghendra Kumar Singh mentioned that they are looking to organise ecotourism conferences in the future in different places in the state. There are also plans to hold an ecotourism mart.



IN THE MEDIA

FOR THE TRAVEL PROFESSIONAL

TravelBiz

monitor.com

Thursday, March 07, 2013, 17:00 Hrs [IST]

MPTDC, ESOI to hold Bhopal International Conference on Sustainable Tourism on April 18 & 19, 2013

By TBM Staff | Bhopal

The Ecotourism Society of India (ESOI) and Madhya Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (MPTDC), along with the Ministry of Tourism (MoT), Government of India, will host the Bhopal International Conference on Sustainable Tourism (BICST) on April 18 and 19, 2013. The aim of the Conference is to come up with a meaningful conceptualisation of Ecotourism that meets policy requirements, reflects existing ground realities and strikes a balance between conservation, tourism and local livelihoods, a press release stated.

5/16/13

Bhopal International Conference on Sustainable Tourism to be held from April 18-19, 2013 - Express Travel World

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Friday, 05 April 2013 14:48

ETWSTAFF - Mumbai

The Bhopal International Conference on Sustainable Tourism will be jointly hosted by the Ecotourism Society of India (ESOI) and the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (MPTDC) with support from the ministry of tourism, Government of India in Bhopal on April 18-19, 2013 at Jeha Numa Place Hotel.

IN THE MEDIA

5/16/13

Bhopal to host international conference on sustainable tourism on April 18-19th

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BHOPAL: Ecotourism society of India (ESOI) and Madhya Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (MPTDC) will organize an international conference on 'Sustainable Tourism' at

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Tourism Today


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BICST : Balanced approach is a must for sustainable tourism in India

The conference on ecotourism brought together over 200 professionals from across the globe and India to discuss the challenging issues of responsible and sustainable tourism in the country

The Conference, organised by the Ecotourism society of India (ESOI) and Madhya Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (MPTDC) and supported by the Union Tourism Ministry, the Bhopal International Conference on Sustainable Tourism (BICST) 2013, aimed to come up with a meaningful concept of ecotourism that meets policy requirements, reflects existing ground realities and strikes a balance between conservation, tourism and local livelihoods besides helping the government to create enlightened policies and execute best practices in the tourism industry.

Inaugurated by R Parasuram, Chief Secretary, Govt. of Madhya Pradesh, the event welcomed eminent and national speakers such as Raghuvendra Kumar Singh, Managing Director, MPTDC; Les Carlisle, Group Conservation Manager, AT & Beyond, South Africa; Hashim Tyabji, Member, Tiger Nation; Rohini Chaturvedi, UK (Cambridge), Guy Chester GSTC, Australia; Lynn Woodworth, Senior Manager of a Commercial Tourism Operation; Swathi Seshadri, Equations; Enrico Ducrot, CEO, Viaggi dell'Elefante and



R Parasuram lighting the traditional lamp to inaugurate BICST

governing bodies to successfully manage and administer tourism for the long-term good of all stakeholders, including local people, businesses and wildlife. Ducrot talked about various Eco Luxury project that he undertook and how he implemented the sustainability criteria to maintain the fundamentals of the heritage structure.

The second session was moderated by Soin. Vigne, Chester, Bernsdorff and Gunawadena were the speakers for the same. Vigne shared his views on 'how to use livestock to provide conservation space in support of ecotourism'. He shared his experience of OlPejeta in Kenya which had always been a cattle ranching area and now the OlPejeta Conservancy. "This Conservancy holds the single largest population of black rhino in East Africa and receives over 80,000 visitors per year. Our wildlife populations, including some of the highest predator densities recorded in Kenya, are fully integrated with a commercial and 'profitable' cattle operation. All profits are reinvested back into conservation and community development," he said. Chester talked about the development of Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) how it

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5/16/13

HospitalityBiz India :: MPSTDC, ESOI to hold Bhopal International Conference on Sustainable Tourism on April 18 & 19, 2013

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MINISTRY

MPSTDC, ESOI to hold Bhopal International Conference on Sustainable Tourism on April 18 & 19, 2013

Friday, March 08, 2013, 10:00 Hrs [IST]
By HBI Staff | Bhopal

The Ecotourism Society of India (ESOI) and Madhya Pradesh State Tourism Development Corporation (MPSTDC), along with the Ministry of Tourism (MoT), Government of India, will host the Bhopal International Conference on Sustainable Tourism (BICST) on April 18 and 19, 2013. The aim of the Conference is to come up with a meaningful conceptualisation of Ecotourism that meets policy requirements, reflects existing ground realities and strikes a balance between conservation, tourism and local livelihoods, a press release stated.

The Conference will hold deliberations among international experts, policy-makers from the Centre and state governments, NGOs and representatives of communities currently engaged in tourism. The technical sessions of the Conference will look at best international practices of multi-stakeholder involvement as well as national level Ecotourism framework in India, leading to Responsible Tourism practices so that India can become a model Ecotourism destination.

The platform of this Conference will also be channelised for generating specific policy inputs for Madhya Pradesh's Ecotourism Policy as well as for discussions on harnessing the tourism potential of Madhya Pradesh's rich and important religious destinations with special emphasis on its historical Buddhist sites.

Mandip Singh Soin, Founder President, ESOI, emphasising on the promotion of Sustainable Tourism development, said it is a balance between conservation, tourism and local livelihoods while maintaining the cultural and environmental integrity of the host communities and enhancing the protection of ecologically-sensitive areas and natural heritages. He welcomed MP Tourism's support to the Conference and efforts in promoting Ecotourism.

Raghvendra Kumar Singh, Managing Director, MPSTDC, said, "In the present scenario, Ecotourism is essential for human development and environmental development. BICST 2013 is another step to make a new framework for and promote environment-friendly tourism in Madhya Pradesh, which is known for Religious Tourism, Khajuraho temples, forts, exquisitely carved Jain temples, palaces, wildlife sanctuaries and national parks endowed with incredible natural beauty and splendour."

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May | 2013

India Calling

ESOI hosts India's 1st international conference on Sustainable Tourism

Good planning, meaningful deliberations involving thought provoking speakers and serious listeners, incredible on-time sessions with frequent tea breaks, attendance of key ESOI members, sponsors and representatives from Ministry of Tourism, Maharashtra Tourism, MP Tourism and Punjab Tourism all through the two-day conference and the eco-friendly setup and execution of India's 1st international conference on Sustainable Tourism made it truly out-of-the-box.

AKANSHA RUPAINWAR IN BHOPAL

Witnessing a turnout of 120 delegates, the Ecotourism Society of India (ESOI) with its esteemed co-partner Madhya Pradesh Tourism recently held BICST2013 - 'Bhopal International Conference on Sustainable Tourism' addressing the theme 'Tourism: Enabler for Conservation, Livelihood and Sustainable Growth' at Jeha Numa Palace Hotel, Bhopal.

Mandip Singh Soin, President, ESOI in his inaugural address stressed on effective sustainable planning, doing away with negative practices and on the vision with which ESOI was formed. "I advocate to make this conference an annual event and associate it with a mart wherein industry stakeholders can be educated," said Soin.

Krishna Kumar Singh, Founding Member, ESOI gave the conference overview and cleared, "The technical sessions of the conference will look at best international practices of multi-stakeholder involvement as well as the national level ecotourism framework in India, leading to responsible tourism practices."

"Our active cooperation will always be there with ESOI in the noble cause. I urge all to enhance participation opportunity for livelihood, enhance value of experience, conserve heritage and view sustainability as an outcome," highlighted R Parasuram, Chief Secretary, Madhya Pradesh Government.

On behalf of the key partners, Raghvendra Kumar Singh, Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism gave the vote of thanks saying, "We are more than happy to be a part of ESOI's initiatives. With 10 national parks and 25 wildlife sanctuaries in Madhya Pradesh, such conferences and the upcoming mart are welcome at each destination of the state."

The first and the second session elaborated on the topic- 'Ecotourism Solutions and Strategies: Reflections on Global Experiences'. Leslie Carlisle, Group Conservation Manager, Phinda Private Game Reserve, South Africa stated, "We need to recognise the inter-dependency among conservation, community and tourists. Public-private partnership can probably be a good option to secure national parks and wildlife sanctuaries along with expanding and securing existing corridors." Dr Lynn Woodworth, Wildlife Researcher, Australia talked about Antarctica. "International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO) manages and controls tourism in Antarctica to ensure that it remains environment-friendly. It is successful because all stakeholders give input in decision-making and breach of rules leads to no practice in the region," he added. Enrico Ducort, CEO, Viaggi dell'Elefante and ECO Luxury, Italy gave the example of the Italian and African Tourism industry and elaborated on ECO Luxury business model.

Richard Vigne, CEO, OIPejeta Conservancy, Kenya propagates the idea of wildlife based tourism. "The livestock can be used as ecological management tool to support conservation. With animal dung on the patch, the rain leads to a renewed, highly productive, nutritious grass cover," added Richard. Guy Chester, Founder and Managing Director, EcoSustainAbility, Australia insisted on the fact that tourism, be it any, should contribute to conservation, community, benefit of the traveller and sustainability. Heidi Bernsdorff, Travel Journalist feels that a tourist must be informed about the destination they are going to. "Regenerative tourism is direly needed. What tourists destroy, they must also pay for it," conveys Heidi. Manori Gunawadena, Director, Environment Foundation, Sri Lanka told, "With cooperation at various levels, we in our country are scaling up conservation across larger landscapes."

The third session had an open discussion on the 'Ecotourism Solutions and Strategies: Lessons for India' wherein Sujit Banerjee, Secretary General, WTTC drew everyone's attention to global warming. "Can't TOFT manage and control the core tourism of Ranthambore as IAATO does in Antarctica? Matera has hotels inside caves. Can we have this in India? Settlements in national park drive great balance. Can't we drive it out here?" questioned Sujit adding, "We must have a code of conduct, may be a national body on eco-tourism."

'Ecotourism Framework in India: Law, Policy and Politics' was discussed in the fourth session on day two. Erach Bharucha, Director, Bharati Vidyapeeth, Institute of Environment Education and Research, Pune feels the carrying capacity is getting greatly affected and to overcome the same, a sense of belongingness must be developed among the tourists. Sanjay Upadhyay from Enviro Legal Defence Firm, Noida mentioned, "We only have 'n' number of plans without any integration. There needs to be a policy-strategy-action plan all within the parameters of prevailing law of India." Dr Rohini Chaturvedi, Research Associate, University of Cambridge, UK said that the increased involvement of courts have disempowered the Centre and State Government.

Hashim Tyabji, Director, Wild India Camps, UK believes that innovative ideas can be put in to practice with the help of private players. Swati Seshadri from Equations quoted that tourism is accountable to social justice and community welfare. As per her the state must research and evolve appropriate models of tourism. Mridula Tangirala, Director Operations, Taj Safaris concluded, "We at Taj have footprints of local culture at lodges such as Mahua Kothi. I strongly feel planned stopovers can be of great help and we can even go ahead to adopt a tiger or a patch of forest."



Mandip Singh Soin addressing the delegates



Raghvendra Kumar Singh giving the vote of thanks



(L-R): Arvind Balan and Hangmi Meivah

MEET THE SPEAKERS

NAME	ORGANISATION	LOCATION
Dr. S. Anbalagan	Divisional Forest Officer (Ecotourism), Sikkim Biodiversity Conservation and Forest Management Project	Gangtok
Ms. Seema Bhatt	Independent Consultant - Biodiversity	New Delhi
Dr. Ajoy Bhattacharya	Former CEO, Madhya Pradesh Ecotourism Development Board	Bhopal
Mr. Nima Tashi Bhutia	Khangchendzonga Conservation Committee	Siliguri
Mr. Anirudh Chaoji	Pugmarks Eco Tours P. Ltd.	Pune
Mr. Shivumso Chikro	Wakro Ecotourism Project, Arunachal Pradesh	Wakro
Mr. Mrinal Choudhary	Asst. Director, Assam Energy Development Agency	Guwahati
Ms. Supriya Goturkar	INTACH	Pune
Mr. Chandrashekhar S. Jaiswal	Regional Director, MTDC	Aurangabad
Mr. Ramashish Joshi	Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra	Chiplun
Mr. Hyder Ali Khan	Kinetic Engineering	Pune
Mr. Niranjan Khatri	GM Environment, Welcomgroup	New Delhi
Dr. Bibhuti P. Lahkar	Programme Secretary, Aaranyak	Guwahati
Mr. Vinay Luthra, IFS	Addl. Principal Chief Conservator Of Forests, Government of Karnataka	Bangalore
Ms. Shubha Mahajan	Director, MGM Khadi and Paithani Research Centre	Aurangabad
Mr. Rakesh Mathur	Vice President, ESOI	New Delhi
Dr. H.S. Pabla, IFS (Retd.)	Former PCCF, Government of M.P.	Bhopal
Mr. C.B. Ramkumar	Our Native Village	Bangalore
Ms. Swathi Sheshadri	EQUATIONS	Bangalore

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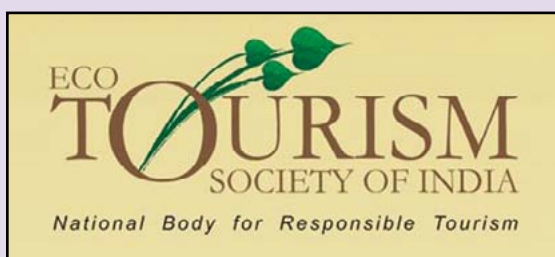
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The Ecotourism Society of India (ESOI) continues its series of workshops on responsible tourism issues. This publication contains the outcomes of ESOI's 10th and 11th workshops – in Guwahati, Assam (March 2012) and Aurangabad, Maharashtra (April 2012), respectively.

It introduces the reader to a wide range of successful ecotourism initiatives in India. It also highlights challenges that have to be addressed to make tourism practices in the country more sustainable.

The overarching focus of the workshops, as the topic suggests was, 'Responsible Tourism – Issues and Practices'. This publication covers a range of topics that include lessons learned in the areas of biodiversity conservation in the context of tourism; involvement of local and tribal communities in tourism; sustainable use of resources and conserving built heritage.



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ISBN NO.: 978-81-928272-1-6

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