

CONCEPT NOTE

International Conference on Sustainable Tourism

India is witnessing a raging debate over the management of its PAs (Protected Area vis-a-vis Wildlife National Parks and Sanctuaries).

Since the Supreme Court of India's interim ban order on tourism, in the core areas of Tiger Reserves across the country, issues ranging from relocation of villages within the PAs, Tribal Rights, Wildlife protection and Wildlife Tourism, which so far have been debated within the corridors of Ministries, amongst the conservationists, politicians (at Panchayat Levels) and the Tourism industry, have now come to forefront of all the major news paper and electronic media. The stand taken by each of the stakeholders and the activists in this debate are strong and uncompromising.

In the backdrop of such a debate it has become imperative to bring in a Global view, developed over decades around the world, to help strike a balance.

This, two day conference on Sustainable Tourism will aim to bring together all the above actors not only from india but across the world to find that delicate balance, which has alluded this diversity rich country for so long.

The conference will aim to address three main issues which are interlinked and need to be addressed , wholescticly through National and State Policies and Guidelines;

1. **Forest and PAs:** Conservation, Objectives and Management.
2. **Wildlife Tourism:**
 - a) Need for change in its approach and its management within and outside PAs.
 - b) With Special emphasis in recognizing the responsibilities for sustainable tourism by the Tour and Lodge operators.
 - c) Marketing Strategies for wider and experience driven product. (not just Tiger)
3. **Livelihood:** Addressing the livelihood aspect of those living around the PAs in the backdrop of over 30 years (a generation) of Wildlife Toursim as part of their lives.

Protected Areas: Its Objectives and Management

It must be emphasized at the outset, that '*the*' primary and overarching goal of creating a PA is the long-term conservation of biodiversity, as well as the preservation of ecological processes and evolutionary mechanisms. Biodiversity conservation at ecosystem, species

and genetic levels are best protected in situ within most cases, a minimum impact of human activity.

The new specter growing before us is the massive change in landuse patterns around the PAs, extending gradually to its very edge, which has extremely severe impacts on the biodiversity of a PA. This most rapid and fatal process needs to be addressed, if the PA's major objective of biodiversity conservation is to be met.

Thus a new approach to PA fringe management is required. The landscape around the PAs are under various land tenure systems-Reserved Forest or Protected Forest under Forest Department control, Revenue lands under the Collector and other agencies and governance. Thus there is a need to create an overarching coordinating body that links the activities of all these multiple stakeholders on a common platform. Thus it is evident that there are tourism related issues that need to be dealt with both inside and outside the PA.

But we can't close the gates and put a lock on. That would be an appalling admission of failure and just highlights our inability to manage our future.

Positioning Wilderness Tourism & the future:x

Tourism in these areas is passing through a critical phase partly due to lack of policy and clear-cut guidelines from Government (Forest Department & Revenue Department that Manages areas around the PAs don't seem to have any coordinated policy) and also lack of self-regulation on the part of the tourism industry itself.

We need to review and chart a fresh course in the way we promote our wilderness areas and also the way we operate in them if we wish to make tourism to our wilderness areas sustainable in the long run.

Livelihood

Lives of people living, not only in close vicinity of PAs but as far as 25 to 30 km away, are impacted by the economics of Wildlife Tourism Industry. This impact has existed for last 30 years, since the inception of wildlife tourism, (a generation) and has changed their skills to cater to demand of tourism industry.

The linkages between the needs of biodiversity conservation, local people's economic and cultural needs and the growing initiative based on an ecotourism approach, needs to be strengthened. If local people get support from tourism activities, they would support tourism just as they would support a PA if it were made overt that ecodevelopment financial arrangements come through the PA manager.