South Africa: Fair Trade in Tourism

Tourism is the world's largest industry, employing some 240 million people worldwide and contributing nearly ten percent to the global domestic product (GDP). Africa's share of the global tourism market currently stands at less than five percent (UN-WTO, 2008), leading many in the continent to call for a more aggressive approach to tourism development as a means of spurring revenue, employment and investment.

South Africa is no exception: international arrivals to the country reached 9.07 million in 2007, up by 8.3% on the previous year. This compares to less than 3 million international arrivals in 1992. Continued growth in the range of ten percent per annum is projected for the next decade.

With the growth in tourism, there are benefits to be gained and costs that have to be borne. Benefits include more employment, foreign exchange earnings, and the like; while the costs include such things as environmental degradation, social exploitation, etc. Faced with such gains and losses associated with tourism development, issues of responsibility must be incorporated into the tourism industry.

Responsible tourism has thus emerged in recent years as a strategy that gives due weight to economic, social as well as environmental impacts and seeks to maximise the benefits for local destination stakeholders. And across the globe there has been a growing interest in making tourism as responsible as it can be.

In South Africa, efforts towards responsible tourism started to appear in government policy with the advent of the 1996 White Paper on the "Development and Promotion of Tourism in South Africa". This White Paper explicitly recognised and promoted the concept of responsible tourism. Then, there was a multi-stakeholder process in 2001-2002 aimed at producing national policy Guidelines for Responsible Tourism. The South African Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) coordinated this effort, and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) provided the funding. Most recently, in 2003, a Responsible Tourism Handbook was released, published by IUCN-South Africa on behalf of DEAT, which is a manifestation of the rising interest in responsible tourism in South Africa.¨

Fair Trade in Tourism is about ensuring that the people whose land, natural resources, labour, knowledge and culture are used for tourism activities, actually benefit from tourism.

In 1999 Tourism Concern, a London based advocacy organisation, initiated an International Network on Fair Trade in Tourism which focused mainly on research, advocacy, and information sharing. At the same time, a Swiss NGO, Arbeitskreis Tourismus & Entwicklung (AKTE), a tourism and development working group, began to investigate the principles and modalities that would underpin Fair Trade in tourism.

On 13 June 2002, the Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa certification programme was officially launched in South Africa, marking the first time in the history of the fair trade movement that a trademark or label for the tourism sector had been created.

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