Expert Discussion Series: Towards inclusive, accessible and resilient societies

Building Future Societies for All

When: Friday, 1 December 2017, 15:00-18:00
Where: CR 4, UNHQ, New York
Co-sponsors: Permanent Missions to the UN: Antigua and Barbuda, Bulgaria, Ecuador, European Union, San Marino, and United Nations World Tourism Organisation

Format: Panel discussion show

Expected Outcome: In line with the 2030 Agenda, the aim is to encourage multi-stakeholder partnerships to positively impact the prosperity and wellbeing of vulnerable communities living in urban areas.

Host: Ms. Daniela Bas, Director Division for Social Policy and Development/UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Opening Remarks:

- H.E. Ms. Joanne Adamson, Deputy Head of Delegation of EU to the UN
- H.E. Mr. Georgi Panayotov, Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the UN
- H.E. Mr. Damiano Beleffi, Permanent Representative of San Marino to the UN
- Mr. Kazi Rahman, United Nations World Tourism Organization NY Liaison Office

Panel A

- Mr. Dennis Anderson, Executive Chair, Center for Entrepreneurship, Institute of E-Government and Sustainability, St. Francis College (Moderator)
- H.E. Mr. Diego Morejón Pazmiño, Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the UN
- Mr. Victor Calise, NYC Commissioner - Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities
- Mr. Srin Madipalli, Accessibility Program and Product Manager, AirBnB
- Mr. John Farmer, Director, Microsoft Cities
- Ms. Lauren Gula, Senior Manager, Social Responsibility and Gender Equality, UN Global Compact
- Mr. Rick Chavolla, Board Chair, American Indian Community House
Panel B

- Mr. Ahmed Fathi, Managing Editor, American Television News (Moderator)
- H.E. Mr. Walton Alfonso Webson, Permanent Representative of Antigua and Barbuda to the UN
- Ms. Daniella Foster, Senior Director of Global Corporate Responsibility, Hilton Worldwide
- Mr. Clark Stevens, Director of Government Affairs and Strategic Partnerships, AirBnB
- Mr. Bryan Grimaldi, Chief Operating Officer and General Counsel, New York & Company
- Ms. Tui Shortland, Co-founder, Native XP
- Ms. Lynn Minnaert, Academic Chair, Clinical Associate Professor, New York University Preston Robert Tisch Center for Hospitality and Tourism, New York University

Introduction

The United Nations Division for Social Policy and Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is organizing a high-level expert discussion in the lead up to the 56th Commission for Social Development, whose priority theme is “Strategies for the eradication of poverty to achieve sustainable development for all.” Bearing in mind that 2017 is the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, in addition to a focus on urban social development, the discussion will also explore the benefits and contributions of pro-poor tourism, to encourage stakeholders to better identify strategies for building prosperous, inclusive and resilient societies for all, leaving no one behind.

Urban poverty, inequalities and exclusion often exist at the expense of sustainable development. The speed and scale of urbanization brings challenges for all family members such as youth, particularly young girls and women, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and older persons. Furthermore, most cities are vulnerable to at least one type of natural disaster, and people living in cities face high risk of disaster-related mortality or economic losses [1].

When civil society and governments work together on poverty eradication strategies, innovative public policy frameworks can be created to build resilient societies. Due to the increasing economic importance of travel and leisure worldwide, the tourism industry offers a unique opportunity to shape future cities by ensuring social inclusiveness, employment and poverty eradication.

Panel A – Dialogue between the public and the private sector

Background

Building accessible and inclusive cities requires the design the adequate framework for developing social policies and allocate funds. Smart cities of the future should also meet the needs of vulnerable social groups, including families, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, older persons and youth. By bringing city experts to the discussion, the Division for Social Policy and Development is helping to strategize how to shape the future of urban communities and create prosperity for all through interconnectivity.

A city, or any local or regional authority, is inclusive when it enables people of all conditions to actively participate in community activities, treats everyone with respect and protects the most vulnerable ones.
That is why urbanization should provide the potential for new forms of social inclusion, including greater equality, access to services, new opportunities and civic engagement.

To meet the future challenges that the growing urban population is facing, city leaders must move quickly to plan accordingly. Planned urbanization maximizes the capacity of cities to generate employment and wealth, it fosters diversity and social cohesion between different groups, cultures, ethnicities, religions; and should design urban growth for persons with disabilities.

Inclusive cities designed for all create opportunities, enable connection and interaction, and facilitate the sustainable use of shared resources. When handled properly, urbanization has the potential to create opportunities for a prosperous life, eradicate poverty and act as an engine of social, cultural and economic growth.

Guiding Questions

1. How can civil society better support urban policy-makers to ensure that cities are accessible to all?
2. How can cities become more inclusive and resilient (SDG 11)?
3. What are the main challenges for local governments to guarantee social inclusion?
4. What are the necessary tools to mainstream inclusive urbanization policies in national policy frameworks?

Panel B – Tourism: its social dimension in urban areas

Background

In recognition of tourism’s contribution to development and to raise awareness of the potential of the sector to support sustainable economic growth, social inclusiveness, employment and poverty eradication, the United Nations 70th General Assembly declared 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. The tourism industry has the potential to eradicate poverty, and create a culture of understanding among peoples that fosters a culture of sustainable peace, and thus, improve wellbeing and happiness.

Over the decades, tourism has experienced continued growth and deepening diversification to become one of the fastest growing sectors. International tourist arrivals have increased from 674 million in 2000, to 1.2 billion in 2016 and are expected to reach 1.8 billion [3] by 2030. In 2016, travel and tourism generated approximately 10% of total global Gross Domestic Product and created approximately 11% of global (direct and indirect) employment.

The path towards inclusive and accessible tourism is a process which rewards good industry practices while protecting the needs of tourists and host communities and addressing social problems. Policymakers need to work with industry specialists to devise innovative public policies that draw upon advances in technology, infrastructure, services and products to ensure inclusion and accessibility for all. Therefore, focusing on the wealth-creating and transformative power of inclusive accessible tourism on vulnerable social groups and ensuring that no one is left behind, remains an immense task and opportunity.
The benefits of tourism are not available to everyone since many still face challenges in accessing basic travel needs such as clear and reliable information, efficient transportation and public services, and a physical environment that is easy to navigate. According to the WHO, 15% of the global population, approximately 1 billion people, live with a disability. Rapid demographic ageing will lead to an increase in the number of persons aged 60 and over to nearly 2.1 billion by the year 2050 out of a projected total global population of 9.7 billion [4]. Given increasing life expectancy, an increase in the overall number of persons with disabilities is to be expected in the decades ahead, which will require specific access to tourism infrastructures, services and products. Facilitating travel for persons with disabilities is an urban development imperative, and an exceptional opportunity for tourist operators and host communities.

Furthermore, if carefully managed, tourism can have a positive impact on the environment and the local culture and economy. Otherwise it could negatively affect, for example, indigenous peoples, who often bear the burden of new investments that disregard their needs and heritage. If properly designed and implemented, inclusive and accessible tourism, can improve the wellbeing of indigenous peoples and local communities and can create significant opportunities for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity by encouraging indigenous peoples and local communities in host countries and tourists alike to preserve and respect their natural and cultural heritage.

Another social group that is increasingly impacted by tourism is youth (aged 16-24 years). As one of the largest job markets, the tourism sector can play a critical role in boosting youth employment globally. In fact, access to training and employment opportunities can help youth build and strengthen highly demanded professional skills, thus reducing poverty levels. Tourism incentivizes entrepreneurship in productive sectors related to the tourism value chain and provides youth with new opportunities for innovative solutions that lead to social inclusion and prosperity.

To unlock the immense untapped potential that inclusive tourism can offer towards more prosperity and wellbeing, national and local governments must work in close cooperation with the private sector, NGOs and academics. Through a global partnership focussing on the social dimension of sustainable tourism, stakeholders must join efforts to make urban areas inclusive and accessible to all.

**Guiding Questions**

1. How can we create responsible investment policies that create sustainable communities?
2. How can we better understand the nexus between tourism and employment generation? How can we improve the monitoring and evaluation of inclusive and accessible tourism and better communicate the impact of tourism on the eradication of poverty?
3. How can inclusive and accessible tourism contribute towards strengthening the resilience of people living in poverty and those in vulnerable situations?
4. What are the main challenges faced by regulators and tourism operators on the path to making sustainable tourism more accessible to all people of all ages?
5. How do we guarantee that new business models disrupting the traditional tourism industry develop sustainably and help to end poverty?

[3] UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Prospects, 2015 revision*