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## Improving Tourism:

### Environmental and Social Considerations of Sectoral Reform

USAID programs increasingly are utilizing sustainable tourism as a tool in helping to achieve diverse objectives such as economic growth and poverty reduction, biodiversity conservation and enhanced natural resources management, local governance and gender equity. However, sound environmental policies and practices are prerequisite for a successful and sustainable tourism industry, which in turn can nourish and maintain an improved quality of life for host countries and communities.

#### How Environmental Policy and Practices Affect Tourism

- *Economic growth through tourism is dependent upon a healthy environment.* Environmental quality and biodiversity may represent one of the few internationally competitive advantages for some less developed countries. Tourism receipts are of critical importance to many of these countries' balances of payments and national economic welfare. At the regional and community levels, environmental and tourism planning go hand in hand to create linkages and synergies that benefit the local population through income generation and improved livelihoods.
- *Pollution control and reduction support a tourism destination.* Many of the more popular tourism destinations – especially in coastal areas – experience degraded marine and terrestrial systems because of pollutants emanating from tourism and related development. Environmental best practices at the design, construction, operation and closure phases significantly protect the environment from these pollutants and hence improve the sustainability of the tourism sector itself.
- *Habitat preservation supports sustainable tourism activities.* The establishment of protected natural areas and parks, together with the support of indigenous community livelihoods, opens the door to low impact types of tourism and diversifies the tourism product. Development and implementation of improved national park management also helps to upgrade a country's overall tourism sector, with beneficial results to local communities.
- *Environmental education and training encourages community support for tourism.* A critical factor for tourism sustainability in an area is the local community's willingness to participate in and otherwise support the sector. Environmental education and awareness not only lead to a better understanding of the intrinsic value of the surrounding environment, but also an appreciation of the contribution of sustainable tourism activities to the community.
- *Environmental accounting and practice improve the long-term sustainability of tourism.* The use of Sustainable Gross Domestic Product (SDGP) accounting, that is inclusive of mitigation and remedial costs, helps identify and promote policies and actions necessary to prolong the sustainability of the tourism sector. In addition, the cost of growing burdens of the tourism industry on the world's atmosphere and biosphere needs to be reflected in the actual cost of the product, and not perceived as a "commons" issue.

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