

**TRANSFORMATION THROUGH
TOURISM: BRINGING THE RHETORIC
TO LIFE, AND LIVES**

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KEEPING TOURISM TRUE TO ITS WORD

The growth of global tourism has occurred for a number of reasons: the fall of barriers to global mobility and accessibility; the rise in numbers of people wanting to see the world for themselves; the deepening of understanding of the value of the sector to uplift nations; the spread of invitation for visitation, to name but a few. Case study after case study, from countries and regions across the globe, demonstrate how the creation and promotion of a tourism sector enables nations to stand up, stand tall, and step forward. For example, a study conducted by the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India revealed that rapid growth of the tourism sector in India from 2011 onwards would result in the country's tourism sector becoming the second largest employer in the world, employing more than 40,037,000 people by 2019. Over 40 million people. As a result, India is committed to spreading tourism into both urban and rural areas, enabling dramatic growth in the overall economy through revenues and employment from tourism.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is very clear in its appreciation of the tourism industry. *"Hotels, Catering and Tourism (HCT) is one of the fastest growing sectors. It is highly labour-intensive and a valuable source of employment and income in rural areas, especially for those with limited access to the labour market, such as women, youth, and migrants. Sustainable rural tourism based on Local Economic Development and decent work can significantly support socio-economic development and poverty reduction."*

Without a doubt, through tourism sector development, economies become strong and self-sustaining, nations gain identity and independence of spirit, nationals find pride, purpose and a means of living a productive life in their homeland. And, importantly, other economic sectors are switched on, and switched up a gear, as a result of the multiplier effect of a strengthening tourism industry.

The power of tourism can best be described by one word: *transformational*.

'Transformation' has, in fact, become one of the overtly stated, strategic goals of nations participating in the tourism sector. And at a global level, the United Nations looks to tourism as a way of fuelling the world's ability to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), transforming the lives of those most desperately in need.

Specifically, tourism is viewed, and respected, as a means of directly addressing the following four MDGs:

MDG 1 - Eradication of Poverty: creating meaningful, sustainable work, which in turn creates a means for personal and community enrichment.

MDG 3 - Gender Equality: creating opportunities for women to enter the workforce, achieving new levels of appreciation, participation and cooperation.

MDG 7 - Environmental Sustainability: developing the sector in tandem to preserving and protecting the natural beauty and benefits of the destination, and

MDG 8 - Global Partnerships for Development: creating opportunities for the private and public sector to make plans to make a difference, together.

Speaking of the active, on-going role that tourism plays in achieving grand, global ambitions, Taleb Rifai, Secretary-General of the UNWTO makes clear the responsibility that the tourism sector has beyond the tourism industry itself.

"Tourism can make a significant contribution to address economic, climate and poverty imperatives. Tourism represents up to 45% of the exports of services of developing countries, and is often one of the few entry possibilities into the job market. It is also one of the most viable and sustainable economic development options given its significant impact on related areas of economic activity."

(for more on Tourism's link to the MDGs see
<http://www.unwto.org/tourism&mdgsezine/>)

Transformation, while a word that inspires immense praise when stated as a goal of the industry, remains a challenge when it comes to actual delivery. Reason being, genuine *transformation* demands ongoing commitment, conviction and call-out. It must be at the top of the list of national objectives, not near the bottom, and not merely as a guiding principle.

Transformation, like *green growth*, is the tourism sector's insurance policy when it comes to achieving genuine *sustainability*.

FROM INTENT TO IMPACT

Governments across the globe, especially those in developing nations, are looking to tourism as a way of transforming not just the economy, but the lives of its people, within and outside the sector. Transformation in these nations is not purely about growth of arrivals, growth of GDP, growth of investment and trade, and growth of jobs within the existing industry framework. The spirit of transformation goes so much wider. It is about creating opportunities, through tourism, for each and every individual of the destination to play a direct role.

As a result, real *transformation* requires embracing the need for the sector to ensure, at all levels, resources (time, funding and know-how) are committed, ongoing, towards:

- **SKILLS DEVELOPMENT:** creating opportunities for people to be able to learn and apply new skills, turning ability into direct productivity, and unlocking the opportunity for employment and advancement.
- **OWNERSHIP:** going beyond employment to creating opportunities for people to become small business owners (and therefore employers themselves), actively and meaningfully playing a leadership role in industry development, and able to influence the direction of growth.
- **PARTICIPATION:** ensuring that each and every roleplayer in the industry, regardless of size and structure, understands and feels that they are a part of something bigger, something shared, and something that generates immense pride for the sector and the destination as a whole.

There is no question that transformation is the right way to ensure growth of the destination, and therefore the nation's economy and society. The challenge, however, comes in bringing these good intentions to life, and keeping them alive, through purpose, patience and partnership.

Beulah Mosupye, Chief Director: Sector Transformation in South Africa's National Department of Tourism, is acutely aware of the importance of investing time, funds and expertise into transformation, with a long-term, industry wide view, and yet the practical challenges of making it happen. This is especially true when it comes to government and the private sector working as partners.

"Transformation does not take place in a vacuum. Whether transformation happens or not, there will be a price to pay, and as a country we need to understand what cost are we prepared to pay, as citizens, as businesses, and as beneficiaries."

Doing nothing is always an option. But that too has its consequences, at many levels. The gap between the haves and have-nots will only grow, eroding the fibre and spirit of the destination, which can and will be felt by both locals and visitors.

For genuine growth to occur, all roleplayers need to play their part.

"From government, we need to ensure all our policies for the creation of an inclusive economy are aligned in order to ensure that all government levers are used effectively to incentivise the desired behaviour from industry."

But, she maintains, it is not only up to government to drive the transformation agenda.

"Private sector needs to awaken to the reality that an inclusive economy increases the number of economically active people, and therefore opens new consumer markets, for the products and services they produce. For these new

markets to be unlocked, business must embrace (transformation) beyond a tick box exercise, providing ongoing training and up-skilling to enable beneficiaries to take advantage of the opportunities created through a transforming economy."

Ultimately, transformation of the tourism industry yields a transformation of the greater national economy and society. The national whole is far greater than the sum of the sector's individual part.

TRANSFORMATION AS A REFLECTION OF THE DESTINATION

It is often thought that transformation is an invisible force of change working behind the scenes in a destination. Not so. Interestingly, a destination that is clearly and actively committed to transformation naturally exudes a unique element of the spirit of the destination - its people, its culture, and its Brand. While it may be subtle, it is there. And for millions of travellers across the globe, seeking holidays to places where they can see, and feel, that their visit is making a positive difference to locals, that creates an added 'pull'.

Tourists are becoming increasingly aware of, and interested in, the behind the scenes of the industry. Responsible travel, fair trade, eco-sensitive – these principles are slowly factoring into the decision making of travellers. They might not be the motivation for travel, but they can be a tipping point in the final analysis of where to go.

Transformation is one of the most powerful legacies of tourism. For the tourism sector to truly fulfill its potential in unlocking and uplifting economies and societies across the globe, creating a tomorrow that offers so much more possibility than today, transformation is essential. Genuine transformation.

Nations that recognize the importance of the sector, and the need to leverage it as a vehicle for transformation, must be prepared to invest the time, care, funds and capabilities needed to enable the alchemy to occur.

And, importantly, they must know, deep down and with a smile, that the answer to "Are we done yet?" will always be NO.

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