

Mr Simon Springett , UN Resident Coordinator

Mrs Beth Hogben, Consultant from Travel Foundation Ltd

Distinguished Guests,

Workshop Participants

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All protocols observed

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to address you this morning on the occasion of the opening of this Inception Workshop on “Transforming tourism value chains in developing countries and Small Islands Developing States” under the ambit of the Sustainable Tourism Value Chain Project.

The Sustainable Tourism Value Chain Project launched by UN Environment aims at promoting resource efficiency and low-carbon development, thus reducing greenhouse gas emissions, in three tourism sector value chains namely Accommodation, Food & Beverages and Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events (MICE). This project is

funded by the German Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety under its International Climate Initiative. I am sure that, during this Workshop, you will hear a lot about the Sustainable Development Goals which are interconnected . In particular, Goals Nos 8, 12 and 14 set targets on inclusive and sustainable economic growth . Let us also not forget that the UNGA has declared 2017 as the year of sustainable tourism for development. Sustainable tourism is also prominent in the 2030 Agenda.

I understand The UN Environment is launching the “Sustainable Tourism Value Chain Project” in Mauritius as well as the Philippines, Dominican Republic and six other countries of the Organisation of the Eastern Caribbean States. Mauritius is proud to be associated with this initiative.

TOURISM CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Ladies and gentlemen,

Tourism is one of the fastest growing socio-economic sectors in developing countries generating economic growth, creating jobs, opening up business opportunities and alleviating if not reducing poverty.

Tourism also drives the development of critical infrastructure like airports, seaports, road networks and hotels that connect economies at global value chains.

According to UNWTO, last year, international tourism accounted for 9% of global GDP, 9% of total employment worldwide equivalent to 260 million jobs and 29% of the world services exports.

Despite global economic challenges and geopolitical changes, international tourist arrivals have registered an uninterrupted growth from only 278 million in the 1980's to 1.235 billion in 2016. By 2030, international tourist arrivals would attain 1.8 billion. These figures clearly demonstrate that tourism is a catalyst for comprehensive and inclusive development.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN MAURITIUS

Ladies and gentlemen,

Tourism, in Mauritius, is a major pillar of our economy. In year 2016, Tourism accounted for 7.8% of GDP, 7% of total employment and 8% of investment. In fact, the tourism sector has been the sector showing constant growth over the last four decades.

- The number of tourist arrivals registered an increase from 74,597 in 1975 to reach 1,275,227 in 2016.
- Tourism earnings attained an all-time record of 55.8 billion rupees (approximately USD 1.6 billion) in 2016 representing 7.8% of the GDP compared to Rs 35 million rupees in 1975 (approximately USD 18 million).
- The number of hotel establishments increased from 34 in 1975 to 114, representing a hotel stock room of 13,605.
- The tourism sector generated some 40,800 direct jobs in 2016 compared to 8,000 jobs in 1975.

We have positioned and we will keep positioning Mauritius as an exclusive resort destination. We ensure that we remain at the top and also that the quality of the service is never impaired.

Challenges facing the Mauritian Tourism sector

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Tourism is always a work in progress and challenges, new and old, keep coming and they span the spectrum from climate change, currency exchange loss to labour issues.

With a view to rising to those challenges, my Ministry organised in June of this year the “*Assises du Tourisme*” which has served as a platform for all tourism stakeholders to reflect on the state of the tourism sector and to chart a roadmap for the short and medium term. Post Assises Workshops are being held to come up with an action plan in respect of the recommendations emanating from the Assises with a view to institutionalising sustainability in the tourism industry.

Sustainable Tourism Development

The tourism industry impacts directly on the global and local environment, contributing to 5% of total greenhouse gas emissions, according to UNEP. In such a scenario, business-as-usual is not an option.

It is incumbent for all tourism stakeholders to adopt eco-friendly policies, processes and practices to address the implications of climate change on tourism and meet the evolving needs of an increasingly green conscious customer.

Tourism operators should embrace new technologies and sustainable practices to reduce the impact of their activities on the environment. The commitment towards the protection, preservation and conservation of the natural environment in the Fight against Climate Change must become the priority of priorities.

We should also adopt the 4 R's principle, namely Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Recover to better protect the environment and make judicious use of scarce and non-renewable resources.

Government Support to Sustainability

Ladies and gentlemen,

Conscious of the need to promote Mauritius as a clean and green destination, Government has adopted an integrated approach, making of sustainability a central plank for its tourism development strategy.

A series of initiatives towards climate change adaptation and mitigation have been taken to ensure the sustainability of the tourism industry:

- a. Government has launched, in collaboration with all stakeholders, the Clean Up Mauritius and Embellishment campaign to promote the concept of cleanliness, waste minimisation and the greening of the destination.
- b. The Hotel Development Strategy also emphasises the need for hoteliers to adopt eco-friendly practices such as use of energy-saving devices, use of renewable energy, composting, installation of recycling and desalination plants and rain water harvesting.

- c. My Ministry has also, in consultation with industry partners and the assistance of the Mauritius Standards Bureau, developed the standard MS 165 for sustainable tourism in Mauritius. The Mauritian Standard based on the Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) takes into account the local specificities and context. The standard specifies the requirements that tourism operators should meet in order to obtain an eco-label. We are currently seeking international accreditation with the Global Sustainable Tourism Council for the MS 165.
- d. Regulations on Industrial Waste Audit have been promulgated in 2008 for industries to adopt more efficient and sustainable patterns of production so as to reduce the volume of wastes generated.
- e. Industries and enterprises have to go through the process of an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) or a Preliminary Environment Report (PER) approval before project implementation so as to minimize impacts on the environment.
- f. Our National Programme on Sustainable Consumption and Production has as slogan “Achieving more with less”

and encompasses a number of projects which aim at making our industrial sector more resource efficient.

- g. The Zoning of Lagoon programme aims at protecting the fragile marine ecosystem, biodiversity and seascape and combating coastal erosion which might be caused by pleasure craft and nautical activities. In the same breath, the Consumer Protection (Control of Imports) Regulations 1999 makes provision for outboard motor engines used by licensed pleasure craft to meet EU directives on noise and exhaust emissions.

Tourism Value Chain

Ladies and Gentlemen

The tourist experience consists indeed, of a series of services provided by multiple and different entities such as air carriers, inbound operators, hotels, taxi operators, restaurants, tour operators, guides and pleasure craft operators. Failure to provide a good experience at any point may undermine the entire experience and accordingly destroy the competitiveness of the destination. A country's

competitiveness in the provision of tourism services is, therefore, complex and requires the harmonization of a diverse set of inter-dependent industries and the public sector.

I understand the Project will be focussing on the main components of the tourism value chain namely Accommodation, Food & Beverages and Meeting, Conferences and Events (MICE) through a value chain mapping, policy review, establishment of sustainable consumption and production and an integrated framework for mitigation and capacity building. It will ultimately develop a concrete action plan that will help reduce emissions in some 100 value chain businesses.

It is important to conduct a value chain analysis on tourism activities as they impact on local communities and the economy as a whole. We have always maintained that tourism as an industry is unlike any other as it has the unique potential to be inclusive and to meaningfully engage local communities. But tourism is not an easy sector. It is in fact a complex one with linkages to every single component of the

wider economy. It is therefore not only desirable but also critical that all policy makers and all stakeholders of the tourism industry manage the linkages in order to reap maximum benefits from it.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Tourism has significant linkages throughout both the economy and employment. As a major component in the strategy for poverty alleviation, tourism contributes massively to lifting women without any skills, people with disabilities, uneducated youth from unemployment and consequential poverty to gainful work. In 2012 the outcome document Rio+20 recognized the contribution of tourism to “The Future We Want’. There is nothing more demoralizing for people who want to work and to be engaged than to find no such opportunities. Tourism provides them with such opportunities and the trickle down effect becomes visible very fast at the level of the communities.

Any tourism development creates an environment for local farmers, fishermen, entertainment and leisure personnel,

artists, painters, guides, landscape specialists, craftsmen to respond to the requirements of the tourism activities. Such an environment adds value and gives a meaning to the lives of people who would be desperate without a tourism industry. The aim of tourism as an industry is to keep increasing the amount of revenue from all transactions in the sector. This can and does happen with the adoption of policies which are pro-tourism and pro-poor. The impact of such policies is felt very fast and the impact is positive. The local economy thrives and is enhanced by a multiplier effect. The industry must really provide opportunities to local communities to become a partner and, once this happens, the great supporters of tourism will be the local people. This pre-empts what some countries are experiencing in terms of tourism phobia. Tourists are ambassadors of tolerance and multiculturalism and they are the greatest assets for Sustainable tourism.

Ladies and gentlemen,

For tourism to be sustainable and eventually to become self-sustainable, Governments must step in with a tourism –

friendly environment. Tourism is a private - sector driven industry and there will be no one prepared to invest in places that are insecure, in conflict or which do not have a legal regime which is fair, predictable, impartial and independent. This applies not only to tourism but to any other sector.

There are a few matters which countries need to address when strategizing on sustainable tourism. These are:

- A law- based business and regulatory framework
- Security and safety of investments
- Availability of labour force and hospitality skills
- Certainty in trade rules and ease of procurement
- Flexible labour policies for expatriate personnel particularly in areas where local expertise or skills are not available
- Appropriate tax regime and banking facilities
- Food quality and safety standards especially for locally processed products
- Coordination among ministries to avoid bottlenecks in decision-taking
- Openness to imports

- Seamless visa regime and customs clearance
- Adequate public health facilities and access to hospitals
- Development and maintenance of infrastructure, airports, seaports, roads, utilities, transport, renewable sources of energy
- Above all, policies that protect, preserve and enhance nature and the environment.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There are challenges which will be encountered. Tourism requires massive investments and it is natural for investors to seek a fair return on their investment. There are many places on earth to invest and SIDS must overcome many hurdles to attract investors. Once the investment is secured, it is imperative for countries to benefit from it over the long term.

For island destinations like ours, air connectivity is crucial. We have over the years adopted a gradual opening of the skies in order to cope with an increasing stock of rooms. We acknowledge that we are vulnerable to factors beyond our control which can negatively

impact on sustainable tourism. I have in mind natural disasters and calamities, terrorist attacks, travel bans and the vagaries of air transport.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We feel the pain of the Caribbean countries which have been buffeted by typhoons last month and we hope that the international community will help them and their tourism industry to recover as soon as possible.

Last weekend Air Mauritius, our national carrier, endured a difficult time with a few pilots all falling ill on the same day and almost at the same time resulting in the cancellation of 4 international flights. You are aware that one cancellation has a ripple effect on others causing prejudice to passengers and to the country at large.

Small countries without any natural or mineral resources and which are constrained by territorial exiguity need to diversify their economy. Tourism is an important

industry in Mauritius and all our major resorts are on the coast. We had to deal with another project based on the oceans and I am referring to aquaculture which, as an industry, holds a great deal of promise in terms of employment and revenue generation. The tourism sector is against as it fears the aquaculture project will attract sharks. As a responsible government we called for studies on the impact of aquaculture on tourism and we even invited l'AHRIM- which is the body that looks after the interests of the hospitality industry- to come up with its own study. I must state clearly that there was no compelling evidence that an aquaculture project far removed from the lagoons posed a risk of sharks attacking swimmers in front of hotels. We shall keep this project under review as we would prefer both tourism and other sea based activities to co-exist and flourish.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The workshop will certainly provide the right forum to understand the nature of constraints confronting the tourism industry, through a rigorous assessment of the role of each

stakeholder in the value chain as well as the linkages between all service providers with the ultimate goal of providing a rich overall tourism experience. I am confident that the Sustainable Tourism Value Chain Project will provide valuable policy guidance to decision-makers for promoting the greening of tourism with a view to reinforcing its potential and developing significant opportunities in tourism oriented toward local culture and the natural environment. I now declare open the Inception workshop and I wish all participants a fruitful deliberation.

I thank you for your attention.

A.K.G