



LEBANON RURAL TOURISM STRATEGY



Ministry of Tourism

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The Ministry of Tourism hopes that the aforementioned ministries and organizations will maintain their commitment to supporting this strategy throughout its implementation, in order to reach the set objectives, namely to improve the rural tourism sector and its economic growth in a sustainable way.

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I. Introduction

The strategy for rural tourism in Lebanon was developed through consultations with rural tourism stakeholders between January and July 2014. The goal of the five-year strategy is to enhance economic opportunities in Lebanese rural areas through improving the competitiveness of specific value chains, including rural tourism and another set of agriculture sectors and food products.

The rural tourism strategy follows a rural tourism value chain assessment including a SWOT analysis of the sector (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats). The assessment included an analysis of the current situation of rural tourism in Lebanon. It identified main rural tourism stakeholders, dynamic trends in rural tourism and the different segments and sub-segments. The development of the rural tourism strategy is in line with the identified need to strategize and advocate for the development of the rural tourism sector through cooperation and common action among stakeholders.

II. Strategy Objectives

This document is a plan including key directions and practical actions at large that could be implemented in the next five years to improve the competitiveness of rural tourism in Lebanon. A short-term promotional plan has also been developed in parallel to this document until a more comprehensive marketing strategy is completed.

This strategy is developed to

- Set strategic areas of intervention to improve the rural tourism sector attractiveness and capacity;
- Outline the different key actions with recommended actors and linkages across the value chain; and
- Promote and prompt cooperation and common action among all stakeholders and encourage rural tourism actors to develop a shared understanding of rural tourism, to take ownership, and to advocate for the sector.

This strategy is a living document and could be revised progressively based on detailed action plans for each strategic direction and lessons learned during the implementation phases. Many actions and activities are already being implemented by actors in the sector and need to be sustained, reinforced and improved.

The strategy was developed through consultations with various stakeholders. The directions presented in this document reflect the ideas of these stakeholders and the ideas of the team who worked on this strategy. See Annex 1 for full names of participants.

This strategy is a public document for

- Decision makers
- Municipalities and unions of municipalities
- Ministries
- Private sector and tourism businesses
- Syndicates
- NGOs and civil society
- Investors (individuals and companies)
- Foundations and donor agencies

- Universities, schools and tourism faculties
- Interested public

III. Process and Methodology

The process of developing this strategy was based on consultations with rural tourism actors on national and regional levels so that all the proposed actions reflect their needs and perspectives.

Consultations started late January 2014 and included:

1. Twenty key stakeholder interviews with key players. This was a first-hand inquiry to understand what is affecting the quantity and quality of rural tourism in Lebanon and to identify priorities and suggestions for practical actions to improve both. (Interview Guidelines in Annex 2).
2. A plenary workshop with thirty-nine stakeholders to discuss and validate priorities to work on and actions to take including ideas for a mechanism of common work (March 2014).
3. Six focus group discussions in regions with eighty-six actors in total. Groups were clustered as follows: Ehdn-Bsharre-Akkar, Batroun-Jbeil-Tannourine, Shouf-Jezzine-West Bekaa, Mid-East-West Bekaa and Rachaya, Hasbaya- Marjaayoun, and Akkar. Focus group discussions identified regional specificities for intervention and for local common work recommendations (Guidelines in Annex 3).
4. One workshop with twelve stakeholders to discuss and identify a mechanism for actors to work together on implementing actions and developing the sector.

Actors that were consulted represented the rural tourism value chain within

- NGOs (nature conservation, trails, accommodations, food, local and tourism development)
- Travel agents and transport companies
- In-bound tour operators
- Specialty tour operators and outdoor and adventure companies
- Forest reserves and protected areas
- Syndicates of hotels and restaurants
- Municipalities and unions of municipalities
- Online tourism marketing companies
- Event and festival organizers
- Universities, training and tourism schools
- Experts in tourism development and independent activists
- Wineries, food trails, and agro-tourism development programs
- Ministry of Tourism
- Owners of hotels, guesthouses, accommodations in rural areas and youth hostels
- Local guides
- Owners of restaurants in rural areas
- Craftsmen
- Women groups

The process also included desk reviews of existing strategies and plans for the tourism sector in Lebanon (Annex 5).

IV. Tourism and the Lebanese Economy

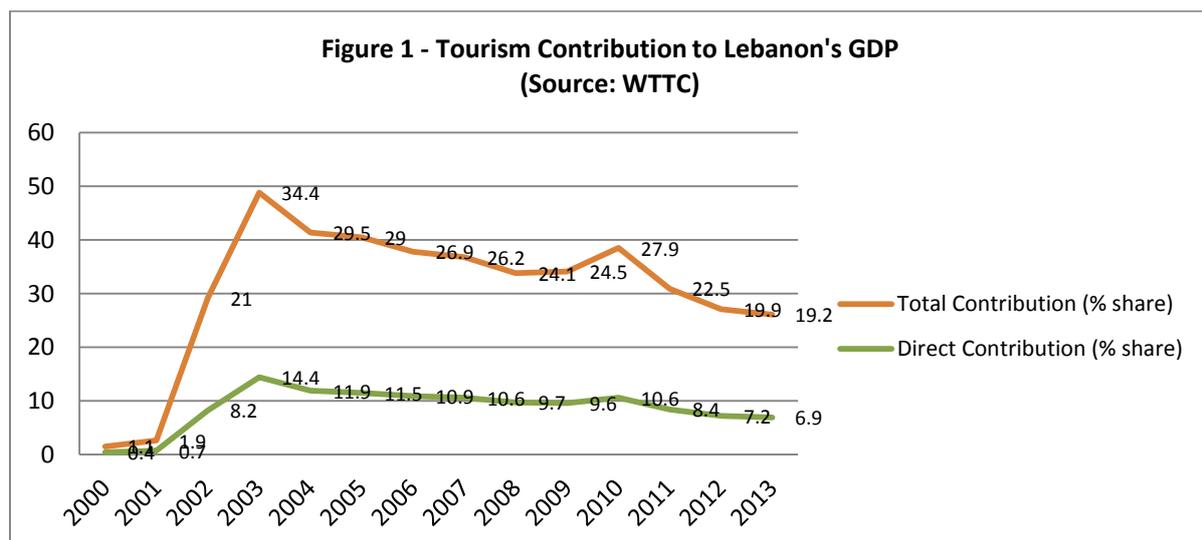
A. Tourism's contribution to GDP

The contribution of tourism to the development of local economies worldwide is a reality. It is a major source of income and employment generation for the countries and has played a key role in alleviating poverty in marginalized communities.

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) barometer the growth of international tourism arrivals reached the record of 1,087 million arrivals in 2013 (5% growth) despite global financial and economic challenges. It is expected to grow by 4.5% in 2014.

The travel, tourism and hospitality industry is a significant contributor to the Lebanese economy. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) indicates that the direct contribution of travel and tourism to the Lebanese GDP reached a peak of 14.4% in 2003, a year considered as the most prosperous for tourism in Lebanon in the last twelve years. This figure takes into account the activities of hotels, restaurant and leisure services directly receiving income from tourists, in addition to travel agents, airlines and other transportation services¹. Of course the indirect contribution to the macro economy is much higher when other services linked to tourism activity are considered such as purchases and procurement conducted by tourism businesses (construction, grocery suppliers, equipment suppliers, etc.).

Figure 1 below shows the variations of the direct and indirect contributions to Lebanon's GDP between 2000 and 2013.



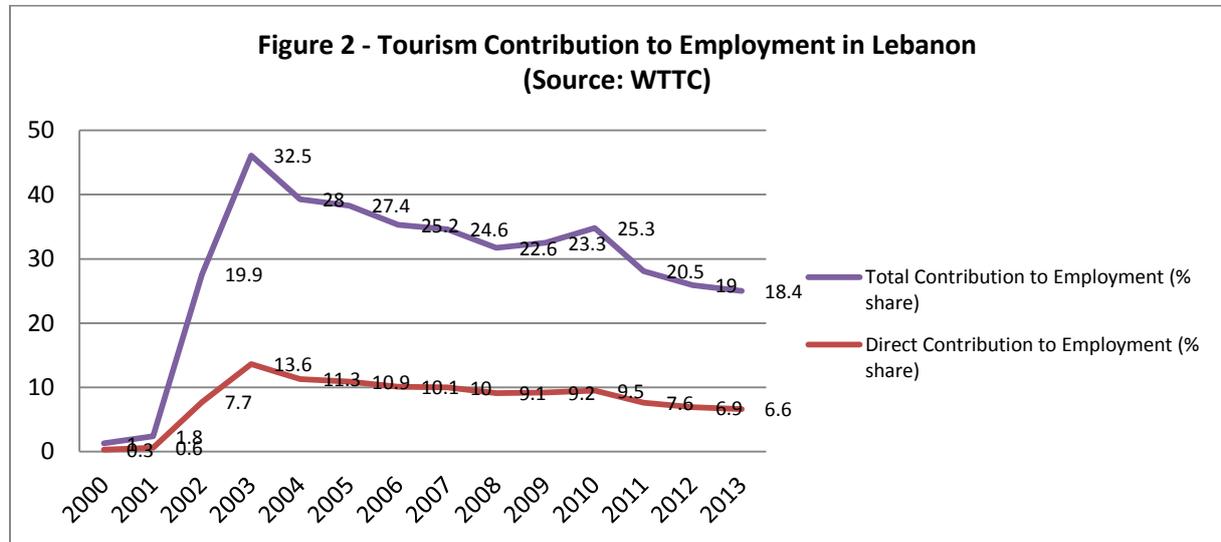
B. Tourism's Contribution to Employment

Travel and tourism does not only impact the GDP but also the employment in the country. In the peak year of 2003 the industry recorded a 13.6% direct contribution to employment (32.5% indirect).

¹ Source: Methods of calculation by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), Definition of Tourism GDP, Tourism Satellite Account: Recommended Methodological Framework (TSA: RMF 2008)

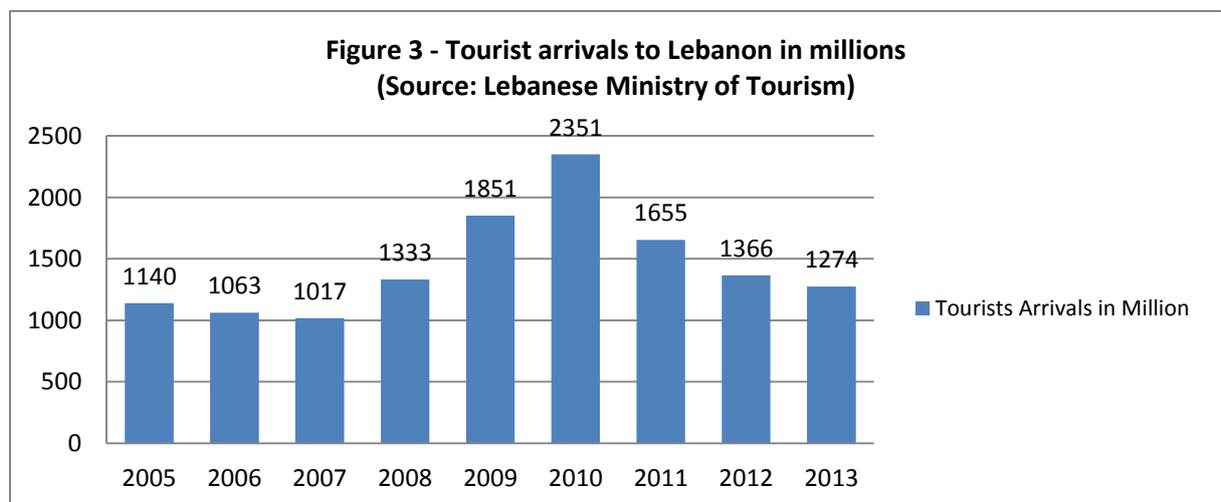
Transportation services, travel agents, hotels, airlines, restaurants' activities, and leisure and tourism services at large were impacted in addition to other indirect trades dealing with tourism businesses (suppliers to tourism businesses). Tourism contribution to employment has been declining as has the sector's contribution to the GDP since 2004 with the exception of 2010.

Figure 2 below shows the variations of the contribution of travel and tourism to Lebanese employment, directly and indirectly between 2000 and 2013.



C. Arrivals to Lebanon

Figure 3 below shows the fluctuation of international arrivals to Lebanon. The number of arrivals has been fluctuating for several reasons. The most influential factors have been the political situation, travel bans on Lebanon, and the general global economic and financial situation around the world.



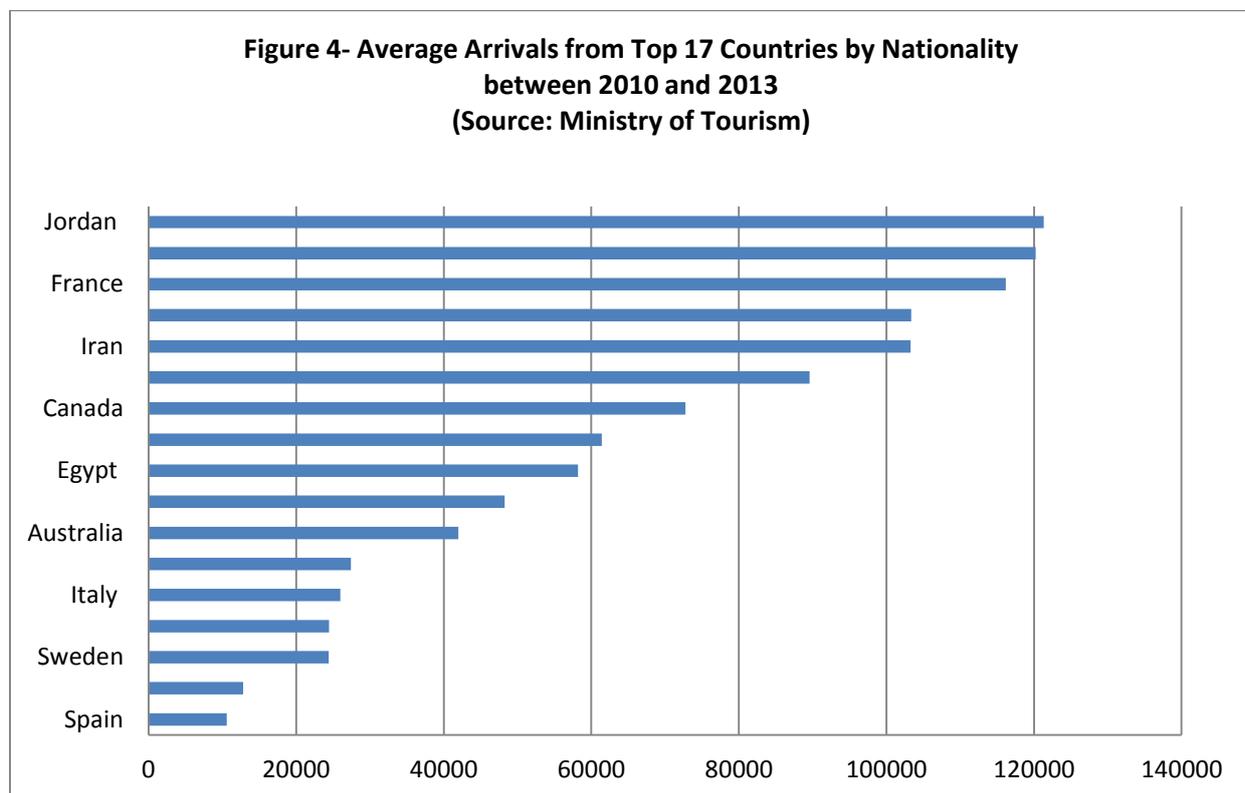
Accurate estimates of the number of tourists out of the above arrival numbers remains difficult though. It is quite vague to define who from those arriving to Lebanon are actually coming for tourism and travel. There are no data available to answer this question. Many visitors actually come for work and on business trips; others come to visit their families in the country.

D. Tourism Volatility and Politics

Above charts show the sharp drop in arrivals in 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2013. In fact, international arrivals are highly impacted by the security and political situation in the country and the region. After the end of the civil war, Lebanon's tourism took time to recover and throughout the last two decades its growth remained affected by the fluctuation of the security and political conditions in the country. In the last decade, tourism contribution dropped 6% after the assassination of Prime Minister Hariri in 2005 and after instability reigned again between 2006 and 2007 (2006 summer war and series of political assassinations). When the situation got relatively better between 2008 and the end of 2010, figures were back on the positive growth curve. When the war started in Syria in early 2011, they dropped again. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) the number of tourists visiting Lebanon has fallen by more than a third since the beginning of the Syrian crisis. The international travel bans from Western countries is negatively impacting the number of incoming visitors to Lebanon.

E. Incoming Visitors by Nationality

Figure 4 reflects arrivals to Lebanon segregated by most popular countries of origin.



These figures are only indicative and do not reflect the number of Lebanese expats living abroad coming to visit the country for either business or tourism purposes. Many Lebanese hold foreign passports and may be entering the country using these passports. Also, there is inconsistency in collecting and recording figures by nationality from one year to another. For instance figures from the UAE are not available for 2012. In addition, arrivals figures do not say if a visitor is counted several times (the same person counting for many visits). Also, notably absent from the list of countries is Syria whereas since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, many Syrians are visiting as tourists or staying for a short time in the country (not counting those that are registered as refugees).

Despite this inaccuracy, these numbers are a good indicator of the variations of nationalities that arrived to Lebanon in the last four years and for conclusions to be made. Jordanians and Iraqis head the list, with French, Americans and Iranians the first among non-Arabs.

F. Domestic Tourism

Domestic tourism, also known as internal tourism, is defined by the UNWTO as tourism “*comprising the activities of a resident visitor within the country of reference*”. Unfortunately, there are no data available to measure how many Lebanese locals, or foreigners resident in Lebanon are actually touring around Lebanon and staying in rural areas for tourism purposes. Information about where they go is also incomplete or missing - visits made to major sites in Lebanon such as at heritage sites of Baalbeck, Byblos, Jeita etc. are recorded but are not enough. This is another big challenge when trying to understand the dynamics and the trends of the local residents in terms of visits they make to rural areas and preferences. But in general and according to the Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) and the UNWTO, most of the domestic travel is for leisure. Domestic tourism is usually less affected by the political situation and international travel bans. Locals continue visiting their country despite the negative political situation and security conditions. This has been highlighted by the many tourism operators and businesses in rural areas who, despite recent years of political instability, report they have seen the number of local Lebanese visiting to be much higher than foreigners.

V. What is Rural Tourism?

A. Shared Definition

In its “organic” meaning, rural can be directly linked to “rural” areas, “countryside” and “agriculture” in comparison to what is defined as “urban”. The rural aspect in Lebanon is actually atypical if factors that normally define typologies of rural areas are considered (density of population, demographics, socio-economic disadvantages, land use, physical access, environment, town planning, etc.). Many rural areas in Lebanon have become semi-urban in appearance but still retain aspects of rural areas in the background and regional specificities need to be taken into consideration when considering areas as “rural” under this strategy.

“We need to be pragmatic and define it within our context.”

Specialty Tour Operator

This strategy defines rural tourism within

- The local context and the local rural aspect
- The perspective of the tourist that is looking for a “different experience” than what could be normally offered in big urban and dense areas or in a “tourism resort”, or in what is commonly known as “classic tourism” and “mass tourism”
- The perspective of the local communities and local service providers wishing to showcase their local heritage and traditional products and assets to the visitor within their capacity

Rural tourism is “experiencing the country” through a variety of tourism activities that have positive impact on the local environment, local community or local culture. Therefore, rural tourism is tourism that:

- Takes place in rural areas and outside the big urban centers in Lebanon

- Where visitors experience the authentic rural way of life that is different and unavailable in an urban setting
- Where landscapes, nature, agriculture, food, and heritage (both intangible and tangible) are at the heart of activities
- Where tourism development, businesses, facilities are of small scale (in buildings and investments in general)
- Allowing interaction and connection with local people (human element is key)
- Where local people are involved in developing and managing their tourism activities for their own social, economic and cultural benefit
- Where local communities are aware of the value of local assets and work to preserve them

B. Perception of Rural Tourism: an added value

In the consultative process rural tourism has been seen as *a culture; a philosophy; a duty; a social responsibility; a social cause; a lifestyle; and a way of being that involves local communities and encourages them to stay in their home towns and preserve their lands, landscape and local heritage.*

It is also a “tool for fostering, promoting and advocating national identity that is specific to Lebanon... While highlighting regional specificities, rural tourism showcases the similarities of rural communities in terms of hospitality, culture as well as socio-economic struggles. Tourism that allows contact with the local farmers, workers of the land, shepherds, food processors which in some way, is part of the daily life of rural people- whether agriculture is their main source of income or just an activity to plant their orchards- allows the tourists to experience these people’s approach to life and to the land. This identity is not experienced the same way in major urban areas in Lebanon. On the opposite, the differences are more salient in urban rather than rural settings.”

Rural tourism is perceived as an “added value” and could be differentiated from other types of tourism by:

- A relaxed and quiet environment: charm of laidback villages and towns
- Nature: outdoors, beautiful scenery, adventure, discovery
- Fresh and traditional local food: agricultural and local food experiences, wine, food trails discovery, organic food
- Heritage discovery and conservation: cultural, historic, religious
- Authenticity of the experiences
- Contact with local people and contribution to improving their income and local environment

C. Rural Tourism Types and Activities

The rural assets in Lebanon where such tourism activities take place are diverse and could include mountains, rural seaside and coastline, artificial and natural lakes, rivers, villages, rural towns, orchards and agricultural fields, farmhouses, museums, arts and crafts ateliers, forest reserves, protected areas (himas), hiking trails, historic and heritage sites and locations, guesthouses and rural lodgings, eco-lodges, archeological sites.

Rural tourism products and experience may include the following: walking; hiking and trekking; nature-based trips; conservation trips and ecotourism; sightseeing and visiting villages; agri-tourism including: farming and harvesting activities, wine tourism and visits to wineries; food tourism including knowledge of regional food specialties and cuisine, food trails and food-processing activities; adventure and sports; biking and mountain biking; kayaking and rafting; camping;

horseback riding; fishing; bird watching; crafts making; local festivals; music and dance; literary discovery and literary trails; visits to historic, archeological and heritage sites; religious tourism and visits to religious sites and trails; museums; accommodation in rural lodgings, eco-houses and guesthouses.

The list could be further extended to other travel activities and products that respect the above definition and added value of rural tourism.

VI. Benefits of Rural Tourism

International academic researchers and sustainable tourism experiences from around the world, and the UNWTO strategies and recommendations identify tourism as a great economic development and tool to achieve wellbeing for local communities, especially for rural areas. Rural tourism in Lebanon is no different. Given the expected growth of tourism worldwide and the contribution of tourism to the local GDP, there is a great opportunity for rural tourism in Lebanon. Although there are no figures that indicate the actual contribution of rural tourism in the general tourism of Lebanon its benefits for local communities are great.

In the last thirty years and after the end of the civil war, rural areas have been slowly emptied from their inhabitants. Young people and those in the productive age group have been migrating to Beirut and other major cities looking for better jobs and income opportunities. Still, the emotional and familial link with “their village” remains strong. Many come back to visit their families on week-ends or spend the summer with their relatives. Many maintain a second house in the village. However, their main economic activities and spending is invested in the city. If economic incentives were created, people would be encouraged to remain in their villages.

Lebanese people have rightfully earned a reputation for being consummate hosts who enjoy receiving guests and take pride in what they have to offer, and rural areas in Lebanon offer a diversity of tourism experiences. The local cultures and religions, the beautiful and diverse landscapes, agriculture, forests, valleys and mountains, and the historic and archeological heritage are great assets that if valorized and properly invested in, could be great opportunities for investors themselves and for rural communities at large. In fact rural tourism in Lebanon could generate:

- **Employment and economic benefit for rural Lebanese communities**
 - Creating employment in accommodations and rural lodgings, guesthouses, camping sites, small restaurants. It generates work for local guides, local craftsmen, local food and agri-producers and for the many others living in rural areas where other job opportunities are limited.
 - Providing the opportunity to local people to increase and diversify their source of income: for example, a farmer could be managing a guesthouse while selling his local produce.
 - Improving the micro economy and supporting local small and micro enterprises at large. If linkages are well established within the supply chain at a destination level, the benefit is multiplied to reach many people in the village and rural area such as the craftsman, the local family-run restaurant or guesthouse, the local guide, the grocery shop or the barber in the main square.

- **Social opportunities**
 - Rural tourism empowers local communities and improves social integration. It allows youth and women to become integrated and more involved in the social and economic

life of their community. Women can offer food, do crafts, sell their local produce, and host visitors in their house and youth could be local guides and expand their knowledge in hosting people. Such activities do not necessarily require high levels of education or investment.

- The promotion of culture, heritage and local customs bring people to know more about “*the other*”. This by itself promotes more openness, respect, tolerance, and understanding among communities.
- **Conservation of local heritage, environment and enhancement of landscapes.** Since landscape and heritage (both tangible and intangible) are at the heart of the rural tourism product, they become an incentive for locals to take pride in them, protect them and engage the visitor in doing the same.
- **Authentic and different experiences to visitors,** especially for urban people seeking added-value in their travels.

Furthermore, rural tourism is made up of micro and small enterprises that do not require large-scale investments, a factor that encourages marginalized communities to invest in and foster their financial wellbeing.

VII. Main Driving Forces for Rural Tourism in Lebanon

There is a set of driving forces which encourage the development of rural tourism that have been identified throughout the process of developing this strategy:

- Roughly 87% of the population in Lebanon lives in urban areas²². The urban lifestyle and the daily stress generated by the city life have created the need for urban Lebanese (and foreigners) to escape the urban traffic, noise, pollution and stressful lifestyle of the capital and other major urban cities. Rural areas offer the opportunity to experience a quieter, less polluted environment and a chance to reconnect with nature and eat healthy and fresh food.
- Mass and traditional tourism and resort-tourism (ski and beach resorts), has created congestion and people are looking for alternative and less expensive experiences.
- Lebanon is a small country and distances between cities and villages are relatively short. This facilitates access to rural areas.
- The busy life of urban residents, and in some cases financial constraints, makes them interested in short escapes and affordable breaks. Rural areas are a great choice for them.
- Educated Lebanese and the young generation have an increased awareness and interest in environmental protection, nature tourism, outdoor adventures, and heritage tourism.
- Lebanese immigrants and expats living abroad have the desire to learn more about the history of the country, reconnect with their relatives and friends in home villages, bond with their roots and traditions while supporting the local economy. They are less influenced by the security situation in the country and will continue to visit their families and relatives.

²² Index Mundi, Lebanon Demographics Profile 2013

- The nice temperate weather in Lebanon and the diversity of natural and green landscapes is a drive for people living in the region. Many visit Lebanon to escape the heat in their home countries.
- Internationally, tourism trends are evolving towards an experiential tourism and Lebanon favorably answers such demand because of the diversity of its landscape (coast, mountain, plain and valley) and its rural communities, in addition to the legendary Lebanese hospitality.

VIII. Source Markets for Rural Tourism in Lebanon

Prior to presenting the issues to be addressed, it is important to provide an overview of the current and potential markets for rural tourism. As seen in the above visitors chart, Lebanon attracts many foreign nationalities. The following have been identified as important current and potential segments for rural tourism in Lebanon.

- 1- **Lebanese living in Lebanon** – The domestic market is relatively aware of the situation in Lebanon and is less affected by the ups and downs of the security situation. They live in Lebanon and wish to discover new alternative leisure and holiday opportunities
 - a. Schools and universities: looking for educational opportunities for the young generation and increasing awareness about geography, history and environment
 - b. Young urban professionals: educated in general and look for trendy experiences and adventures that are not necessarily very expensive
 - c. Urban families: looking for affordable healthy and family and child friendly services, accommodations and activities where leisure and education may be highlighted
 - d. Special interest groups: such as companies and corporations that have the purchasing power and looking for team building opportunities, clubs and associations looking for summer camps and outdoor educational activities for groups
 - e. Elders: mostly looking to reconnect with the country's heritage, namely religious and historic attractions
- 2- **Lebanese living and working abroad and diaspora** – The diaspora market can play a unique and important role in opening markets for new tourism destination markets³. According to the International Organization for Migration, tourists from diaspora markets are more likely to stay in locally managed accommodations, eat at local restaurants, and shop in locally managed shops than other international tourists. They are interested in heritage tourism that highlights culture, religion, genealogy, identity and history. They also have the advantage of speaking the language and are more familiar with local dialects.
 - a. **Living and working in the GCC and other countries:** have the purchasing power and looking for good weather and trendy and quality activities and services when they come back to visit their relatives. They are also seeking to reconnect with their home

³ Source: Migration Policy Institute (MPI), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Roadmap for engaging diasporas in development, 2012

villages and towns. They are generally aware of the situation in the country and can be less affected by the ups and downs of the security situation.

- b. **Diaspora namely in South America, North America, Australia, Africa, Europe:** have the purchasing power and look to reconnect with their roots and support local communities. They look for good weather and good food. They may be affected by the security situation in Lebanon but not as much as foreigners.

3- Foreign expats living and working in Lebanon: have the purchasing power and generally look to discover local particularities of Lebanon, nature, sports and adventure, and culture. These expats become an incentive for their friends and families to visit the country.

4- Middle East Market

- a. **Western Expats in the GCC:** have the purchasing power, are cultivated and look for short breaks from the Gulf. They are eager to discover the particularities of Lebanon, nature, sports and adventure, night life, and local culture.
- b. **Arabs (Jordan, Syria, Egypt, GCC):** have the purchasing power, look mostly for luxury, good food, night life and good weather. They tend to understand the situation in the country more than other foreigners. Many young Arabs are also looking to experience the young Lebanese lifestyle and could be highly attracted by the outdoor activities and adventure.

5- Other foreign and European countries namely French, Italians, Spanish, British, US, Australians: In Europe Lebanon is perceived as a unique culture and geography in the Middle East, and as a society that blends Western and Arab cultures with a multi-religious composition namely Christianity and Islam. This category is well educated and cultured in its majority. It can be divided into different sub-segments of purchasing power and interests. In general this category looks for cultural particularities of the country, outdoor activities and adventure.

IX. Rural Tourism in Lebanon - Challenges and Opportunities

For more than two decades many rural tourism entrepreneurs have managed to take advantage of the great assets in rural areas and transform them into successful initiatives. The entrepreneurship of the Lebanese, their know-how, creativity and experience have contributed to developing great rural tourism projects differentiating Lebanon as a destination.

Forest reserves, eco-tourism, wine tourism, religious tourism, trails, rural guesthouses, camping sites, food produce and food markets, local guides, agri-tourism activities, cultural tourism activities, hiking and adventure clubs and many others have successfully developed and gained popularity and attention at the local, regional and international level. Many rural destinations have also been successful. Socio-economic benefits could be increased and expanded to surrounding areas if local communities and stakeholders manage to increase the length of stay and retain visitors more.

The interest of the new generation and young urban Lebanese and international markets has played a key role in increasing this success. This is adding to the interest of investors, donors, funding agencies and corporate social responsibility programs in funding such initiatives, including Lebanese expats living abroad and diaspora that are willing to give back to the country.

These are great strengths and opportunities for rural tourism, still all different efforts remain individual and fragmented and the sustainability of many initiatives is at risk. Many threats continue to affect the sector: the political situation, the long lasting infrastructural gaps in the country across all sectors, the lack of strategy and vision on a national level, and other multi-sectorial ills affecting the development of rural areas in general.

This section is not an assessment but rather a general overview of the key issues that are also opportunities to be taken into consideration to improve the competitiveness of rural tourism in Lebanon. These issues were highly emphasized throughout the consultative process of developing this strategy.

A. Consumer Awareness, Marketing, Promotion and Communications

- Rural tourism products lack a comprehensive, integrated, local and global exposure. Marketing and promotion remains fragmented without a clear and coherent marketing strategy. Several great initiatives to promote rural tourism in a cooperative approach have been developed in the last few years; however they were not properly sustained beyond the funding period.
"We have a lot to offer. Let us start to talk about them and to promote them before we develop additional ones."
Tour Operator
- Stakeholders agree that there are lots of offers in rural areas but they are invisible to consumers and among value chain suppliers (tour operators, travel agents, marketers) as they often lack even the most basic promotional material or the right communication channels and business linkages. Also when developed, many promotional materials remain in storage and do not reach travelers or potential buyers.
- The Lebanese domestic market potential hasn't been fully explored and urban people in the country haven't been properly addressed. Smart marketing, which applies better segmentation and diversification tailored to the needs of the different markets and sub-segments, is needed. Key segments include the Lebanese domestic market, the Lebanese urban residents, the diaspora and the Lebanese expats living abroad, families and children, young people, schools and universities, etc.
"Rural tourism needs to be more accessible and affordable to Lebanese in Lebanon."
President Conservation NGO
- Most of Lebanon's travel agencies have more interest in outbound travel and are either not aware of rural tourism offers or not interested. Yet, they could be a great channel and support for rural tourism if they become more aware of the added value the sector has to offer.
- Travel and tourism is moving online worldwide and the use of online travel and technology from researching destinations and information and booking online is on the rise. According to Internet statistics, more than 50% of travel and leisure trips are booked online.

Consumers and tourists in general are relying more and more on technology and information needs to be accessible online and through mobile devices. Rural tourism in Lebanon needs to follow this trend and improve its online presence.

- Many online portals, websites and magazine already exist, namely Lebanon Traveler that emphasizes on showcasing the “other Lebanon” and are a platform opportunity to promote Lebanon rural tourism products and destinations.
- The Lebanese Ministry of Tourism is well present at the international trade shows and international marketing scene. Also, many in-bound travel agents are well connected with the international market. This is an opportunity to include rural tourism and its representatives in such international marketing and promotional efforts.
- Rural and alternative destinations’ themes offer great unique selling propositions and differentiation opportunities. Themes such as eco-tourism, agri-tourism, adventure tourism, wine tourism, food tourism and religious tourism are important thematic destinations on a national and regional level, and if well promoted could add value to tourism in Lebanon.
- Lebanon’s persistent image as unsafe destination is impacting tourism in Lebanon. Every time a security incident occurs in the country, Lebanon is removed from the list of destinations of international tour operators and countries in general. The recent incident involving a suicide bomber blowing up his hotel room during a police raid in the Raouche Corniche is a strong reminder to all stakeholders that they need to be mindful of the security situation. A crisis management plan, which includes a sound strategy to counter the effect of such negative incidents, needs to be assumed seriously by concerned stakeholders, namely government, media and officials.
- There are local destinations that have great assets and potential for rural tourism in Lebanon but they are somehow forgotten and or overlooked because of psychological or political barriers or because of their image of being “unsafe”. This is the case for example of few parts of Akkar, Bekaa, and few regions in the south. Local community strategies and efforts from investors, donors, government and communication could be developed to counter this.

B. Market Information and Data

- The consultative process as well as most of the documents and earlier strategies reviewed highlighted the urgent need for data and statistics. Better information is needed to improve tourism planning, marketing strategies and policy making. The sector has been suffering from insufficient and inconsistent data for years. While international statistics could be used as benchmarks, consistent statistics and data (general and sectorial) on the level of tourism in Lebanon and at the level of rural areas in particular are needed. This includes occupancy rates in rural accommodations, number of people visiting rural destinations, money spent, etc.
- While trends and motives of international rural tourism seekers are identified, there is a major lack of knowledge about the needs and profiles of the domestic clients, diaspora and Lebanese expats who are considered a great opportunity as alternative markets, especially when discouraging political and security conditions in the country prevail.

- Tourism businesses and other services could benefit more if they invest in data collection. During regional focus group discussions, a short survey was distributed to participants of different sectors. The purpose was to get an idea about the percentage of tourists in their area per season, the percentage of their clients segregated by nationality, segment, incoming region, etc. In about 90% of the cases, stakeholders were not able to give accurate figures or answer the questions - even if the data concerned their own business.

C. Destination Offer - Products and Services

Accommodations: availability and capacity

- Accommodations are mainly concentrated around big urban and coastal areas and specifically Beirut (more than 47%). Lebanon is a small country and distances with rural areas are relatively short. With a low number of accommodations in rural areas, visitors tend to do day visits and come back to sleep and dine in the big cities and Beirut. This reduces the length of stay in rural areas and subsequently shrinks the benefits of local communities. Also, if existing, rural accommodations' capacity remains limited.

Accommodations: quality and pricing

- Many rural accommodations may increase their business potential if quality standards and certifications are applied and monitored. Many travel agents are reluctant to sell rural services such as accommodations and restaurants in their packages because minimum quality standards cannot be guaranteed.
- Pricing is another challenge that needs to be addressed. In order to attract the Lebanese market and families specifically, prices need to be accessible within good quality standards. Many stakeholders see that Lebanese tend to ask for five-star quality for a three-star price.

Tourism workforce professionalism

- Quality of services decreases for economic reasons and does so further in times of crisis. This is a factor to take into consideration. Stakeholders consulted see a need to improve the service quality and professionalism of the workforce in rural tourism businesses including restaurants, hotels, accommodations, and guides.
- On the one hand, capacity building is needed to improve the quality of services; on the other hand, it is imperative to promote existing services in order to generate the interest of tourism business owners in investing in training and capacity building.

“When we start bringing more visitors to the areas, products and services will automatically start to develop”

Adventure Tour Operator

Tourism product diversification

- Agriculture is at the heart of most of rural areas. Existing organic farms, local produce, food trails, food festivals, and farming are great opportunities for locals to invest in and develop diversified rural tourism products. This is an opportunity that hasn't been developed to its full potential and should be looked into more seriously.
- Panoply of local crafts, oral and intangible history also exists and could be highlighted and promoted to its full potential and as new rural tourism offers.

- Lebanese rural destinations and regions have great tourism assets. The challenge is that local communities are not yet fully aware of the value of these assets. This is an opportunity to be maximized.
- To attract and retain visitors, destinations (local communities) need to offer a variety of activities, programs, events, services and products that also are family friendly. This remains a challenge for many rural destinations that have great potential to invest in tourism but lack the right development and funding strategies to do so. Several NGOs and development programs and consultants are available to support if local communities show the will to develop their local tourism.

Clustering

- Many villages and towns could increase their benefit and improve the viability of their destinations if they work together as a cluster. They could enrich the visitors' experience, increase the length of stays and bring benefit to more than one village.

Infrastructure at destination

- In order to become an attractive and competitive destination, local municipalities at destinations need to maintain basic infrastructure. This includes road maintenance, signage, waste and trash management, forest fire prevention, rehabilitation of sites and zoning. This is still weak at the level of many destinations which decreases visitors' motivation to explore rural areas.

Access to information at destination level

- Information and access to information are still weak at the level of the destinations and information centers are practically non-existent in most rural destinations. Previous initiatives to establish information centers were done but very few were sustained. If there is a will to develop information centers, lessons learnt could be shared by those that succeeded.

D. Environment, Heritage and Landscape

- Many rural areas have become highly urbanized; others half urbanized and very few relatively left unspoiled and need to be urgently protected before it is too late. Litter, waste, cutting trees, forest fires, unorganized and disproportioned constructions of building and roads, unlicensed hunting, and illegal quarries are all negatively impacting the rural environment. Also, many heritage and historic sites and buildings are in danger and need to be protected. This is affecting the quality and the attractiveness of the rural destinations and subsequently rural tourism. This is a chance to improve awareness of local communities and enforce the many existing protection laws and decrees.

"Conservation in all its forms is the driving force for rural tourism"

Tourism Lecturer

E. Tourism Legal Frameworks and Organization of the Sector

"... We have good laws. Amending few and issuing decrees that are pragmatic and easy to implement could be done but on the medium and long term."

Tourism Expert

- Stakeholders see that the rural tourism sector still needs organization and new legal frameworks to improve performance, quality and accountability. First,

rural tourism themes are all mixed up (i.e. activities in nature are not *eco-tourism* activities) and there are differences between the product themes (and how they are promoted) and the actual activities offered by some tourism service providers. There is a need to develop a common understanding among providers and the public and classify types of activities accordingly.

- Legalizing local guides' work: Within the concept of sustainable tourism and job creation, rural tourism development programs have encouraged the recruitment and training of different types of local guides in rural areas. These initiatives have offered capacity building programs for local youth and other residents and have increased income generation to local families. However, many rural local guides need additional training to achieve standards of safety and technical skill. Official standards, classifications and certifications, and a mechanism to monitor the work of local guides are missing. The only type of guide officially recognized by the Ministry of Tourism is the National Tour Guide (with a syndicate) trained and certified by the Ministry's school, which is focused on the country's official heritage and classical tours.
- Specialty tour operators (e.g. eco-tour operators) have been a key driver of the development of rural tourism in the country and are essentially self-regulated. Yet they haven't been officially recognized as tourism businesses by the Ministry of Tourism. In addition, there are no proper definitions and structure for the types of activities conducted by these operators and there is confusion among them concerning "*the difference of their work compared with the work of travel agents*". The ministry should establish professional standards, classification and monitoring mechanisms to regulate their activities and the activities of the many unlicensed clubs that have developed through the years.
- Enforcing the decree legalizing the status of rural accommodations and guesthouses: the decree that was issued in 2011 has yet to be implemented and enforced. In the meantime, many guesthouses are still constrained by legal, operational and financial modalities. Also, the decree has created some confusion for other types of rural accommodations (that are not guesthouses) and a few clauses in the decree could be improved.

F. Connectivity and Access to Rural Areas

- Reaching rural communities remains a challenge and most of trips are made by private vehicles because alternatives (public transportation) do not exist. Signage and directions to rural areas are very limited. Solutions could be found at the level of destinations and among towns.

G. Seasonality

- The seasonality of demand for rural tourism makes it challenging for venue proprietors to create a year-round source of income. Developing year round offers to compensate for low seasons is a challenge to look into.

H. Sustainability and Coordination

- The key concern of the actors consulted was about the sustainability of any action beyond individual initiatives and grants. Many previous initiatives have failed to be sustained. Questions about follow-up on decisions, coordinating among tourism stakeholders in order to complement and not duplicate efforts, advocating for policies and legal frameworks, and working on proper coordinated promotion and sustainable actions have been major issues in the past. Actors are requesting to improve cooperation among all actors, private, public and civil society. Also, finding the right balance between healthy competition and mutually beneficial cooperation is necessary.
- Local tourism destinations could be more sustainable if local communities (including authorities and municipalities) take more ownership of their local assets, protect and invest in them. Many NGOs and foundations are supporting communities technically and financially but it is the role of the local authorities to take charge to sustain these efforts.

"...until now we have been weak at sustaining actions... and at lobbying..."

"There are lots of efforts that are not coordinated. Unification of efforts between all stakeholders is a must."

Tourism Business Owner

"Rural Tourism needs to be institutionalized ... Municipalities, Ministry of Interior need to play an official role. NGOs are not always there to work on this..."

President of an NGO

X. Strategy's Guiding Principles

A. Sustainable Tourism

This strategy with the suggested actions is guided by the cross-cutting principles of sustainable tourism, heritage conservation and community development.

The United Nation World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) definition of sustainable tourism is: ***"Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities"***

A full explanation is provided in Annex 4.

The consultative process with stakeholders has been a key element in developing the strategy. Following the UNWTO sustainable tourism understanding *"Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building."*⁴

The strategy suggests interventions that include involving local communities and stakeholders in institutionalizing tourism at the local level, in enforcing policies and regulations to manage tourism activities and in preserving their natural, cultural and historic heritage. Communities must take ownership of their local assets, protect them and invest in them otherwise rural tourism destinations will not be sustained.

⁴ Source: UNWTO- Sustainable Development of Tourism –<http://sdt.unwto.org/content/about-us-5>

The strategy also recommends developing innovative and quality services and products that create better experiences for visitors and encourage longer and repeated stays. Such actions have the potential to generate more income for local communities in a way that doesn't create a burden on the environment nor on the social and cultural assets, identity and structures of the local communities.

B. Implementation Principles

The guiding principles for this rural tourism strategy revolve around:

- Cooperation among all actors in rural tourism: local communities, civil society, donors, decision makers, service providers, and other stakeholders in the tourism sector and in other sectors that can support the development of rural tourism such as environment, investments and finance, transportation, and others.
- Coherence and complementarity of projects and initiatives and building on already existing projects and programs and established structures.
- Promoting protection and conservation and building on protected areas and zones (himas), and parks initiatives.
- Strengthening the participatory approach and involvement of local communities at destinations and work towards inclusive growth of all businesses involved in the sector, making sure that investments end up benefiting entire communities.
- Strengthening mutual benefits and sound and fair funding opportunities among stakeholders.
- Adapting and developing context-oriented actions specific to Lebanon that respect the uniqueness of communities, regions or clusters.

XI. Recommendations for Interventions, Actions and Plans

A. Vision

The following vision will steer the development of rural tourism in Lebanon for the next five years.

Rural areas and regions beyond the capital city Beirut and major urban areas are more successful sustainable destinations for travel including cultural, historical, religious, culinary, nature, sports, agricultural and adventure tourism.

B. Goal

Rural communities expand their income by receiving more visitors and by offering more competitive tourism products, services and experiences to tourists while preserving their natural environment and cultural heritage.

The long term expected general outcomes are:

- Increased awareness on rural tourism destinations, products and services in Lebanon with consistent and professional presentation of the sector among Lebanese and diaspora markets

- Improved conservation of natural, historical and cultural heritage at the level of local communities and enhanced policies and procedures that promote sustainable tourism practices
- Improved regulations, legislation and procedures that enhance the work of rural tourism providers and encourage rural tourism ventures and investments
- Improved quality of visitor experience in rural areas of Lebanon
- Increased tourism expenditures in rural areas through longer stays and higher spending per capita
- Improved economic development and job creation across local communities
- Improved quality and professionalism of service providers
- Improved common action and cooperation among rural tourism stakeholders

XII. Strategic Directions

As highlighted above, Lebanese regions and rural areas are destinations that can offer a variety of attractions to diverse markets, and Lebanon can offer differentiated travel experiences. However, Lebanon is not the only country that can do so. The Middle Eastern and Mediterranean countries are capitalizing on the UNWTO forecasts for the next ten years. Many are and will be a great competition for Lebanon on the international market. Lebanese tourism has to shift into more competitive direction.

If Lebanon is to differentiate itself it has to capitalize on the different assets the country has to offer. In order to promote what is different, these assets need to become an added value and thus be protected and valorized.

The volatile political situation remains the main threat to tourism in the country. This is a challenge that has been affecting Lebanon's tourism for a long time. With the ongoing regional unrest, attracting international tourists will become even more challenging. Paradoxically, insecurity has become part of the normality of the country. This is an issue that needs to be resolved and requires cooperation at all levels.

Recognizing the likely continuation of instability, this plan focuses on the domestic and diaspora markets more seriously and develops recommendations accordingly.

In the process of developing this strategy through consultative meetings and discussions, several actions, activities and recommendations have been identified to develop the competitiveness of rural tourism in Lebanon. Taking into consideration the context, the challenges and the opportunities, this document considers the directions that may have the most impact.

Strategic directions are not listed by order of priority. Implementation is suggested to be systematic and wherever possible, phases and timelines are suggested. Each of the strategic directions and key actions need to be translated into detailed activities, timetables, and respective monitoring and evaluation plans.

Eight strategic directions with respective key actions are detailed in the activity tables in Section XV.

Strategic Direction 1 - Develop and improve marketing and promotion to increase consumer awareness and the visibility of rural tourism destinations, products and services domestically and internationally

- 1.1. Package, market, and promote existing rural tourism destinations, products and services
- 1.2. Develop a comprehensive rural tourism marketing strategy including an inclusive communication and promotional plan focused on the domestic market and the Lebanese diaspora
- 1.3. Work on countering the negative image of Lebanon on the international market

Strategic Direction 2 - Institutionalize rural tourism at the level of the local communities

- 2.1. Work with local communities and local governments (municipalities, mohafazats) to improve their understanding, valorization and ownership of the environmental, economic and social value of their local assets
- 2.2. Encourage and support local communities and municipalities in developing tourism strategies including investment and infrastructure strategies following zonal and clustering approach
- 2.3. Engage religious orders to participate in the social and economic development of rural areas

Strategic Direction 3 - Improve and enforce conservation and protection of the environmental, cultural, historical, agricultural heritage of rural areas

- 3.1. Enhance protection of local assets and enforce applicable laws
- 3.2. Consolidate and expand on existing community based conservation models
- 3.3. Officially recognize and protect national trails and identify zones to be protected

Strategic Direction 4 - Diversify, modernize and improve quality of rural destinations, products and services

- 4.1. Develop existing *and* new competitive rural tourism destinations - according to new trends - and appropriate to the local communities specificities and identities
- 4.2. Improve quality of tourism offers and products and develop standards and the culture of certification and labeling across the value chain
- 4.3. Improve funding and investment mechanisms to support rural tourism products and services development

Strategic Direction 5 - Improve policies, legislation, and regulation of the rural tourism sector and enforcement of laws across the value chain

- 5.1. Improve the regulatory framework of rural accommodations and guesthouses
- 5.2. Enforce customer protection and complaint mechanisms across the value chain
- 5.3. Regulate the work of local tour guides

5.4. Regulate the work of unlicensed outdoor activities clubs and specialty tour operators

Strategic Direction 6 - Improve information and data collection and management to support sound planning

6.1. Form a rural tourism research network (and later an observatory) to collect and manage tourism information, knowledge and data for planning and strategizing

Strategic Direction 7 - Develop the culture of rural tourism among the young generation and in the education system

7.1. Promote the culture of rural tourism and raise awareness within schools and universities

Strategic Direction 8 - Improve domestic and international business linkages and networking (cross cutting objective)

8.1. Improve private-public coordination and linkages on the local level

8.2. Network with international stakeholders

8.3. Network with diaspora and Lebanese expats

XIII. Common Action Mechanism

A. The Need

Experience in Lebanon and across the world shows that interest groups are successful in advancing their agendas when they efficiently organize around a clear vision of change. Rural tourism stakeholders did not yet initiate any consistent and organized national plan with a clear vision for the development of the sector despite its significant economic potential. Nevertheless, getting stakeholders to commit to common work to advocate for their interests and strategize, plan and take action together requires the creation of a dynamic organizational framework that allows participation and builds ownership through processes that take into consideration cultural, social and political factors.

From the early stages of the strategy development, the key concern of the actors consulted and the team preparing the strategy was the development of a common framework and a sustainability mechanism to take action on recommendations. The strategy should not end up in the drawer like the many strategies for tourism that were developed before. As much as identifying the strategic directions needed to be shared among all, joint efforts in implementing relevant actions are also a crucial element of success for any plan aiming at developing the sector.

B. Objectives of the Common Action Mechanism

Joint efforts to implement recommendations in this document will be crucial for success. A mechanism is needed to coordinate among all stakeholders, to follow-up on the implementation of the strategy and to coordinate with the Ministry of Tourism and other ministries and official bodies.

The objectives of the Common Action Mechanism are:

1. Implement the actions developed in this strategy in a sustainable and efficient way
2. Advocate for the development of rural tourism through collaboration and common action
3. Ensure proper coordination and linkages among stakeholders

The mechanism is the structure and modalities of work through which rural tourism stakeholders are organized together in order to achieve the stated objectives.

C. Key Principles for the Mechanism

The key principles guiding the common action mechanism are:

- **Participation:** Active involvement of rural tourism stakeholders is critical for the development of the sector and the success of the strategy actions. As such, joining efforts increases the strength and power of the actors in voicing their needs, advocating for their cause and benefiting from the diversity of experience and expertise.
- **Inclusiveness and representativeness:** All rural tourism stakeholders across the value chain on national, regional and local levels should be represented in the proposed structure for an optimized impact on both macro and micro levels.

D. Proposed Mechanism

Based on the strategic directions and the recommendations of stakeholders the mechanism shall be based primarily on the creation of a *Rural Tourism Movement in Lebanon (RTM)*.

- The RTM shall bring together all active stakeholders in rural tourism in Lebanon. The stakeholders being all those identified in the strategy on national, regional and local levels.
- The RTM shall, after its creation, advocate for the adoption of public policies and improved legislations for the sector of rural tourism. Public policies and legislation will enable the market mechanisms to function effectively and contribute substantially to the increase of qualitative and quantitative competitiveness of rural tourism.
- The strategy will be the guiding document for the RTM. It will be further reviewed and amended as necessary.

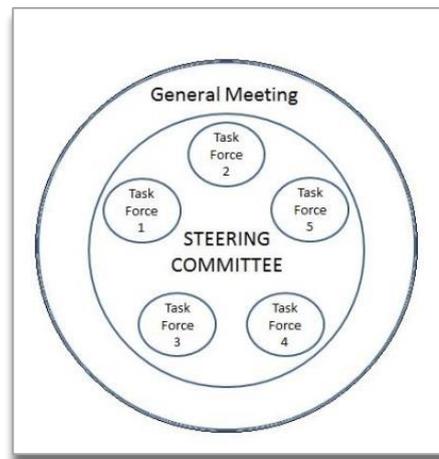
E. Process of Establishing the Mechanism

The following steps are suggested to establish the mechanism.

1. The RTM will be launched in a general foundation meeting gathering representatives of the stakeholders (not to exceed 60 persons). The General Meeting (GM) shall adopt the, foundation charter including the goals and principles, the RTM structure and the strategic agenda (based on the strategy).
2. The GM shall elect a Steering Committee (SC) for the RTM. The SC will be the executive body with the mandate to follow-up and coordinate the work of the RTM and develop action plans according to the approved agenda and implement them.

3. The GM will convene twice a year (ideally at the end of summer season and winter season) for consultation, communication and follow up on achievements and work progress based on reports of the Steering Committee.
4. The SC will form Task Forces (TF) according to the action plans and as needed. Priority of membership in the TFs should be mandatorily given to members from the GM with relevant expertise to the work. Non-member experts could be invited to join the TFs.

Rural Tourism Movement (RTM) Structure



Starting with a committee as a first phase

Since the creation of the Rural Tourism Movement is a relatively lengthy process and requires considerable time and effort, and since experience shows that establishing similar movements could face challenges of a political nature relevant to the dynamics of dealing with public issues in Lebanon, and since some of the strategic directions in the strategy are priorities and need to be implemented without delay beside being of technical nature and require specific expertise - such as the communication and marketing - it is suggested that work on priority directions in the strategy starts immediately within a Steering Committee (SC) in a gradual way and without waiting for the creation of the organizational structure of the RTM. The Steering Committee shall integrate organically within the movement at a later stage and complement it as needed.

The creation of the RTM will be assigned to the Steering Committee. The Committee should be a core nucleus ready to take action promptly. The SC will coordinate closely with the Ministry of Tourism through a focal person appointed by the latter.

XIV. Other Considerations in Implementing this Strategy- Realism and Pragmatism

There are additional considerations to take into account in implementing this strategy. Based on lessons learned from desk reviews and previously implemented projects, it is important to be realistic and pragmatic and allow time for the implementation of any action in tourism and for measuring its impact. Looking at documents about models of community-based tourism programs and action plans in Lebanon, a minimum of eight to ten years was needed to develop a region as a successful destination.

The extensive time needed to tackle priorities is legitimate when developing a destination but it is more challenging in the Lebanese context due to local policies and procedures. To name a few illustrative examples from the studies reviewed, the idea of certification of guides was suggested in 2009. It is only after five years that this has been re-launched. The decree to organize the work of the guesthouses in Lebanon was developed in 2007. It was four years later that the decree was issued. Seven years later it is still not enforced.

Developing the competitiveness of rural tourism in Lebanon is a challenge. Tourism is interlinked with many other sectors and factors. The perpetual infrastructure gaps across all sectors at the national level are a hindrance to the proper development of rural tourism specifically. A key lesson learned is for any detailed plan for the above strategic directions, to be simple, pragmatic and action oriented highlighting who will do what. Also it is important to build on what already exists and refrain from “reinventing the wheel.” It is advisable to take actions systematically through local or regional interventions rather than national.

While there are similarities in rural areas in Lebanon, diversity and differences in dynamics and social structure remain. Challenges, opportunities and approaches will differ from one destination to another and needs to be considered on a case-by-case basis. What is applicable in one region may not be applicable in another.

Tourism is one mean to support local economies and it should complement other development plans at the local level. Relying only on tourism may increase local prices and traffic and congestion in rural areas.

XV. Strategic Directions Activity Tables

Each strategic direction can be developed as an independent project or a set of projects. A detailed and comprehensive implementation plan for each one of the directions needs to be further developed throughout the implementation process.

Below tables suggest key actions with respective activities, key achievement indicators, and general timeframe. Furthermore, implementing this strategy is a shared responsibility among all actors. Suggested stakeholders to involve at each action level are also indicated. It is recommended that counterparts (stakeholders) that later endorse and engage in specific actions are further named and confirmed when detailed activity plans for each action are developed and task forces are identified by the steering committee.

Strategic Direction 1: Develop and improve marketing and promotion to increase consumer awareness and the visibility of rural tourism destinations, products and services domestically and internationally

Actions	Activities *	Suggested Stakeholders	Main Outcomes/ Success Indicators	Stage/ When
<p>1.1. Package, market and promote already existing rural tourism destinations, products and services</p>	<p>1.1.1 Review/ develop materials</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In coordination with regional entities and bodies (tourism committees where available, municipalities and union of municipalities), complete an inventory of already existing rural tourism destinations, products, services, and packages - Develop promotional materials for destinations that need it - In coordination with tour operators, in-bound travel agents and tourism marketing experts, evaluate and enhance already existing packages - In coordination with tour operators and service providers (rural accommodations networks, restaurants, etc.) develop packages, circuits, and group offers that are innovative, attractive and affordable and that emphasize the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The promotion of destinations and clusters of villages (to increase the length of stay) • Circuits and thematic clusters for <i>wine</i> tourism, <i>religious and spiritual</i> tourism, <i>adventure</i> tourism, <i>eco-tourism</i>, <i>agri-tourism</i>, <i>culinary and food</i> tourism, <i>cultural</i> tourism, <i>history and war</i> tourism (aka dark tourism), etc. • Hybrid combinations: classic tours with alternative and rural tourism components • Discount and special offers among service providers 	<p>Specialty Tour Operators Travel Agents NGOs Donors Private sector Ministry of Tourism</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New materials produced - New Destinations and new products promoted - New packages developed 	<p>Immediate/ Short Term</p>
	<p>1.1.2. Develop and conduct promotional and communication activities with catchy slogan to raise awareness among the domestic market and promote the added-value of rural tourism in Lebanon. Work on</p>	<p>Ministry of Tourism Private sector NGOs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Destinations promoted locally - Increase in perception and awareness of 	<p>Immediate/ Short Term</p>

	<p>promotional events (exhibits, film festivals, etc.) addressing urban people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diversify distribution and promotion channels to improve access to rural tourism information namely e-promotion, mobile applications, social media (downloadable walks, trails), GPS location services, etc. - Use an online platform and guide for Lebanon Rural Tourism (i.e. promoting the <i>"Lebanon Uncovered"</i>) - Generate a list of media and travel writers and lobby to get their attention and raise public awareness about rural tourism destinations and offers (i.e. through human stories) - Work with media to help change the image of local destinations that are undergoing an erroneous negative image (i.e. being insecure) - Organize familiarization trips for media and tourism businesses - Generate a list of travel sites, travel guides and connect with them to promote rural tourism destinations and products - Select Ambassadors for rural tourism (well-known celebrity) for the sector to support promotion 		<p>local domestic market</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in # of domestic visitors - Increase in # of visits from domestic market - Increase in \$ value spent in rural areas by domestic market - Increase in rural tourism destinations presence online and in media 	
	<p>1.1.3. Develop and conduct promotional and communication activities and raise awareness of the Lebanese diaspora and the international market and promote the added-value of rural tourism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordinate a plan to include rural tourism destinations and representatives in the international activities promoting Lebanon (international fairs and trade shows and PR activities) - Connect with international tourism PR agencies that may be more cost effective and more targeted to reach out to international markets - Connect with international tour operators to include 	<p>Ministry of Tourism Tour operators Travel agencies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Destinations promoted internationally - Increase in perception and awareness of diaspora and int'l market - Increase in # of Int'l diaspora visitors - Increase in # of visits from of Int'l and diaspora market 	<p>Immediate/ Short Term</p>

	<p>rural tourism on their agendas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organize special events in the Lebanese expat and diaspora countries namely in South and North America, Australia and the Gulf - Generate a list of websites and pages run by Lebanese diaspora and connect with them - Develop competitive cross-border holiday offers combining two or more countries together that could be appealing to international travelers (i.e. program Jordan- Lebanon) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in \$ value spent in rural areas by int'l and diaspora markets 	
<p>1.2. Develop a comprehensive rural tourism marketing strategy including an inclusive communication and promotional plan endorsed by national and regional stakeholders <i>(with focus on the domestic market and the Lebanese diaspora)</i></p>	<p>1.2.1. Conduct market surveys to understand the needs and motivations of the domestic market</p> <p>1.2.2 Develop a comprehensive tourism marketing strategy for the domestic market, diaspora and international markets with detailed segmentation, branding, messaging, promotion etc.</p>	<p>Universities NGOs Ministry of Tourism</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Surveys conducted - Comprehensive marketing strategy developed 	<p>Surveys domestic market Short Term</p> <p>Marketing strategy - Medium Term</p>
<p>1.3. Work on countering the negative image of Lebanon on the international market</p>	<p>1.3.1. Form an inter-ministerial crisis-working group and intensify linkages and communications with international bodies to counter the negative effect of the political situation in Lebanon, and keep Lebanon on the international destination map. Namely connect with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Media o Foreign embassies in Lebanon o Lebanese diaspora o International foreign affairs officials <p>1.3.2. Organize events to facilitate the linkages between local tour operators, in-bound travel agents and international tour operators dealing with counterparts in Lebanon to keep Lebanon on their tourism plans</p>	<p>Ministries of Tourism, Foreign Affairs, Defense In-bound travel agents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lebanon back on the list of international travel agents and tour operators and destinations - Increase # of international visitors 	<p>Short- Medium Term</p>

	<p>1.3.3. Develop a comprehensive marketing crisis plan to manage the negative effect of political instability in the country</p>			
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*** Note on Promotion and Communication**

The above table represents general actions to improve promotion of rural tourism. A short term promotional action plan has been developed in parallel to this document with suggestions for more detailed activities over two years. It suggests that the mechanism committee (marketing task force) hires a tourism marketing specialist (with potentially a pool of communication consultants and contractors) to work on this cooperative marketing and promotion on behalf of stakeholders, making sure it benefits them all.

Strategic Direction 2: Institutionalize rural tourism at the level of local communities

Note: Actions should build and expand on existing and successful initiatives

Actions	Activities	Suggested Stakeholders	Main Outcomes/ Success Indicators	Stage/ When
<p>2.1. Work with local communities and local governments (municipalities, mohafazats) to improve their understanding, valorization and ownership of the environmental, economic and social value of their local assets</p>	<p>2.1.1. Hold awareness sessions for local municipalities, mohafazats, decision makers and local communities at large (CBOs, clubs and others) about the social, environmental and economic benefit of their local tangible and intangible heritage (environment, historic, archeological, cultural, etc.) and the potential of developing rural tourism in their zones/regions.</p> <p>Strengthen existing awareness initiatives and work on new ones. Sessions need to be accessible to all and open to the public.</p> <p>Illustrative sub-activities could include developing best practices and guidelines that could be used by all.</p> <p>2.1.2. Launch competition schemes among municipalities and destinations to encourage them to valorize and promote their assets. Provide valuable rewards and grants. Illustrative themes could be: greenest village of the year, best local craft design, best rural accommodation, most flowery village, etc.</p>	<p>NGOs Municipalities Unions of Municipalities Mohafazat Religious Orders Regional Tourism Committees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in # of local communities integrating best practices to preserve and invest in their local assets - Increase in awareness of local communities about the importance of preserving their local assets 	<p>Short, medium and long term</p>
<p>2.2. Encourage and support local communities and municipalities in developing tourism strategies including investment and infrastructure strategies following zonal and clustering approach</p>	<p>2.2.1. Develop technical guidelines to support local municipalities, communities and authorities in developing local tourism strategies. Include in the strategies inventories of attractions, products and services, tourism calendar events and programs in destinations, promotion and social media accounts etc.</p> <p>2.2.2. Map out already existing destination strategies and</p>	<p>Municipalities Unions of Municipalities Mohafazat Donor agencies NGOs Regional Tourism Committees Ministries of Environment,</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in # of tourism destination strategies - Increase in \$ of investments in rural tourism at the level of the local communities - Increase in basic 	<p>Medium- Long Term</p>

	<p>support their implementation</p> <p>2.2.3. Invest in and where available conduct basic infrastructure related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rehabilitation of heritage and archeological sites, old buildings, etc. • Roads and signage to improve access to tourism sites, and villages and towns in general • Protection of sites and natural resources sites • Public transportation and inter-towns connectivity • Waste water management • Trash collection and waste management <p>2.2.4. Develop local tourism committees and mechanisms to manage destinations based on specificities of each region; and conduct capacity building sessions for local communities including NGOs, youth, women groups, and the community at large in developing community based tourism. This could be done through learning by doing activities (i.e. organizing yearly calendar of events and common activities to promote their region together)</p> <p>2.2.5. Develop tourism information “centers” or “people/reference” or even less costly stand-alone information boxes and fact sheets about local destination available in main town squares run and managed by municipalities or tourism committees or NGOs.</p> <p>2.2.6. Train local guides at destinations</p>	<p>Culture, Agriculture, Works and Transport</p>	<p>infrastructure improvements at the level of the local communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - # of clusters and destination committees formed - Increase in road signage - Increase in public transportation means in between villages - Increase in the # of information centers at the level of the local destinations 	
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	<p>2.2.7. Develop public transportation hubs among destinations and village towns and develop scheduled departures from “entrance towns” that could lead to other towns in a destination (i.e. from Byblos to surrounding rural areas, etc.). Design flyers, online information and signs at departure posts in different languages to communicate schedules to public</p>			
	<p>2.2.8. Develop investments and fund raising plans for the destination and activities to reach out to local investors, businessmen and diaspora from the village/ town and encourage them to invest in their villages. Work on critical mass movement and crowd-funding campaigns.</p>	<p>Municipalities Unions of municipalities Local CBOs, clubs NGOs Regional Tourism Committees Investors Corporations Donor agencies Diaspora</p>	<p>- Increase in \$ value invested in the local communities by source of funding</p>	<p>Medium- Long Term</p>
<p>2.3. Engage religious orders (wakf) to participate in the social and economic development of rural areas</p>	<p>2.3.1. Approach religious orders in the regions, owners of large assets and lands (<i>wakf</i> lands) still relatively protected to raise awareness among them about the importance of investing in such assets to benefit the local communities. Instigate the development of programs that are environmentally, socially and economically beneficial to locals. Projects could include agriculture, organic farming and agri-tourism, accommodations, food produce, religious and spiritual trails, training programs, and other employment programs for locals (youth, women, and others)</p>	<p>NGOs Religious Orders Municipalities Unions of Municipalities Regional Tourism Committees Academic units</p>	<p>- Increase in new initiatives developed with religious orders - Increase in employment of locals</p>	<p>Medium- Long Term</p>

Strategic Direction 3: Improve and enforce conservation and protection of the environmental, cultural, historical, agricultural heritage of rural areas

Note: Actions should build and expand on existing and successful initiatives, laws and regulations

Actions	Activities	Suggested Stakeholders	Main Outcomes/ Success Indicators	Stage/ When
<p>3.1. Enhance protection of local assets and enforce applicable laws</p>	<p>3.1.1. Enforce existing programs of awareness and capacity building sessions about conservation of environment and landscape among local communities, decision makers, mohafazat, municipalities and community at large and reach out to new destinations</p> <p>3.1.2. Develop local protection action plans with authorities and decision makers that promote Environmental Impact Assessment culture and the development of conservation including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identifying assets to protect (forests, landscapes, mountains, natural sites, old buildings, historic and archeological sites, old religious buildings etc. - Where applicable develop himas (protected areas), regional parks and reserves - Develop cleaning campaigns and applicable plans and best practices for proper waste and litter collection and management - Proper waste water management <p>3.1.3. Develop with local decision makers practical mechanisms and disseminate them among community to enforce the application of laws protecting the environment regarding namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Hunting o building and construction o ground water and springs o quarries o tree cutting <p>3.1.4. Establish environmentally friendly best practices and</p>	<p>Municipalities Unions of Municipalities Mohafazat Religious Orders Ministries of interior, environment, culture and tourism Directorate of antiquities NGOs Conservation and Heritage Associations Forest Reserves Trails Associations Regional Tourism Committees Donor agencies Corporations' CSR programs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased number of protected areas - Increased official recognition of national trails (cultural and natural) - Increase number of protected sites - Increased green areas in rural regions - Increased cleanliness in rural areas - Increased satisfaction of visitors 	<p>Short- Medium Term</p>

	<p>guidelines in building roads in rural areas including agricultural roads</p> <p>3.1.5. Establish watch dogs and community or municipality police to safeguard natural and cultural sites and develop on-site penalty instruments</p>			
3.2. Consolidate and expand on existing community based conservation models	3.2.1. Organize linkages and round tables to exchange know-how with existing models of biospheres, reserves, and himas to expand them geographically and develop new ones			Short- Medium-Long Term
3.3. Officially recognize and protect national trails and identify zones to be protected	<p>3.3.1. Establish an inventory of national trails and regional trails and zones (whether natural, cultural or historic) to be protected</p> <p>3.3.2. Liaise and coordinate with official bodies (ministries) to recognize trails and zones and develop practical and tangible actions to safeguard them</p>	<p>NGOs</p> <p>Conservation and Heritage Associations</p> <p>Forest Reserves</p> <p>Trails Associations</p> <p>Municipalities and Unions of Municipalities</p> <p>Mohafazat</p> <p>Religious Orders</p> <p>Ministries of interior, environment, culture and tourism</p> <p>Directorate of antiquities</p> <p>Regional Tourism Committees</p>	- Trails and zones are officially and publically recognized as protected areas	Short- Medium-Long Term

Strategic Direction 4: Diversify, modernize and improve quality of rural destinations, products and services

Note: Actions should build and expand on existing and successful initiatives

Actions	Activities	Suggested Stakeholders	Main Outcomes/ Success Indicators	Stage/ When
<p>4.1. Develop existing and new competitive rural tourism destinations - according to new trends - and appropriate to the local communities specificities and identities</p>	<p>4.1.1. Invest in and develop products, services and activities to attract different types of visitors (families, individuals, urban youth, etc.) around the year and reduce the effect of seasonality, completing the chain of: <i>things to do, places to eat, places to sleep, things to buy</i>. Guiding characteristics of activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stand-alone activities and products accessible to visitors without the need of local guides - Creative and differentiated products and destinations to beat the “me-too” effect- highlighting local identity of each region in food, crafts, and other products - Activities and products that encourage <i>authenticity, heritage (tangible and intangible such as oral histories and customs), culture and nature and that are specific to rural areas</i> <p>Encourage the development of products and services that create local micro economic opportunities that link diverse tourism providers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Restaurants and accommodations with food producers Agri-tourism activities and healthy food destinations with participation in farming activities (harvesting, planting, taking care of animals, etc.) could be very attractive to families, children and schools ○ Nature conservation and where applicable eco-tourism activities ○ Consolidate and develop around the year festivals in destinations including: music, 	<p>Private sector and businesses NGOs Food Foundations and Associations Local clubs and CBOs Local festival organizers Donor agencies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New destinations developed - Increase in products and services developed (crafts, accommodations, local produce, trails, events and festivals, etc.) - Increase in # visitors in destinations during both high and low seasons - Increase and diversification in income of local providers 	<p>Short- Medium and Long Term</p>

	<p>food, wine, and gastronomy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consolidate and develop new thematic trails: historic, social, cultural, literary, food, etc. ○ Revive local typical crafts of the regions and produce trendier and nicer designs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase accommodation capacity in rural areas and develop small lodging and accommodation facilities with low investment and low environmental impact (such as bed and breakfasts and guesthouses, camping sites), which provide personalized, quality experiences. - Provide capacity building programs to local suppliers and workforce (designers for crafts, food specialists for producers, hospitality specialists for accommodation, restaurants, and agri-producers who agree to incorporate touristic activities in their line of work etc.) to develop <i>appealing and competitive</i> products in destinations 			
<p>4.2. Improve quality of tourism offers and products and develop standards and the culture of certification and labeling across the value chain</p>	<p>4.2.1. Work on developing labeling and certification schemes for lodgings as a marketing tool and quality guarantee for the consumer</p> <p>4.2.2. Establish standards for rural lodgings and guesthouses, association and monitoring mechanism for accommodations in a practical and context-oriented way. Certifications such as “Inspected”, “Visited”, “Recommended” can be developed</p> <p>4.2.3. Develop quality labeling and certification schemes for local food products highlighting the locality of ingredients and traditional processing techniques/ recipes to give these products added values and develop a quality assurance plan</p>	<p>Private sector with certifications bodies NGOs Donor agencies Ministry of Tourism Ministry of Economy Ministry of Agriculture Ministry of Health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in # of qualified personnel in sectors - Increase in customer satisfaction - Increase in \$ value in income of providers - Increase in # of certified establishments and products 	<p>Medium- Long Term</p>

	<p>4.2.4. Consolidate already existing and develop training programs to build the capacity of local service providers and tourism businesses to provide quality and meet standards namely for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - accommodations - restaurants - festival organizers - agriculture and local producers - local guides - craftsmen 			
<p>4.3. Improve funding and investment mechanisms to support rural tourism products and services development</p>	<p>4.3.1. Develop a funding strategy to support rural tourism investment. This could include liaising with</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Banks and credit institutions to develop special credit programs with low interest rate and “small entrepreneurial grants” to encourage investment in rural tourism and <i>within a set of sustainable tourism investment conditions</i> ○ Local corporations (CSR) ○ Individual investors (i.e. those from village seeking to give back to their local community) ○ Donor agencies ○ Diaspora 	<p>Private businesses Private investors CSR programs Expats and diaspora Donor agencies and foundations Banks and investment funds Credit and micro-credit institutions Religious Orders</p>	<p>- \$ invested in rural tourism</p>	<p>Medium- Long Term</p>

Strategic Direction 5: Improve policies, legislation, and regulation of the rural tourism sector and enforcement of laws across the value chain

Important Note: Regulations should not become an impediment to the people working in the sector and need to be tailored to the local context

Actions	Activities	Suggested Stakeholders	Main Outcomes/ Success Indicators	Stage/ When
<p>5.1. Improve the regulatory framework of rural accommodations and guesthouses</p>	<p>5.1.1. Review, amend and improve clauses in the decree #6298 issued in 11/9 legalizing the work of guesthouses in Lebanon to provide a better legal and financial frame for service providers</p> <p>5.1.2. Disseminate information among guesthouses about decree and procedures, develop clear applications and make information about the process of registration available on the Ministry of Tourism website</p> <p>5.1.3. Hold free information sessions by the Ministry of Tourism to train guesthouse owners on the process of legalizing their status</p> <p>5.1.4. Work on developing a regulating and monitoring mechanism in collaboration between private and public sector</p>	<p>Ministry of Tourism DHIAFEE Program Lebanon Mountain Trail Association (LMTA) Private sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decree #6298 is reviewed and improved - Increase in awareness of owners and potential owners of lodging guesthouses about the decree - Increase in # of guesthouses and rural accommodations that have an official status and are duly officially registered 	<p>Short term</p>
<p>5.2. Enforce customer protection mechanisms and complaint references across the value chain</p>	<p>5.2.1. Establish a mechanism for customer protection for rural tourism services and products through a body of qualified people at the national level and the local destination levels. Such body would be able to receive complaints about prices, quality, and other issues. It would work within the ethics and guidelines of ensuring fair income to local producers</p> <p>5.2.2. Engage, train and enforce the role of consumer protection office and other respective bodies on implementing the guidelines and regulations</p>	<p>Ministry of Interior and municipalities Syndicate of Restaurants Syndicate of Hotels Consumer Protection Syndicate of crafts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protection mechanism established and promoted - Increase in awareness about the process of complaints etc. among concerned bodies in charge of implementing it - Satisfaction of complaining visitors 	<p>Medium- Long Term</p>

	5.2.3. Work on enforcing the public display of prices for products and services			
5.3. Regulate the work of local tour guides	<p>5.3.1. Finalize the decree and standards regulating the work of local guides (guides de montagne, guides accompagnateurs, etc.). Such regulation should consider the local context and should not create obstacles for local tour guides but rather be a mean to improve the quality of their services</p> <p>Note: Make sure to involve clubs and specialty tour operators in reviewing/ commenting on any regulatory/ decree text before finalizing it</p> <p>5.3.2. Consolidate already existing training curricula and develop modular training programs tailored to the Lebanese and local context and organize training sessions (annual and regional) to improve the professional skills of local tour guides</p> <p>5.3.3. Develop and provide official training certifications to the local tour guides (recognized by the Ministry of Tourism)</p> <p>5.3.4. Develop pricing guidelines for local guides based on their specialties and qualifications</p>	<p>NGOs Ministry of Tourism Specialty guides Guides training schools/ institutions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decree developed - More qualified local guides - Training curricula consolidated and developed - Increase in the # training sessions organized on regional basis - Increase in satisfaction of tourists and visitors guided by local guides 	Short- Medium Term
5.4. Regulate the work of unlicensed outdoor activities clubs and specialty tour operators	<p>5.4.1. Unify understandings and definitions of the different types of tourism activities and concepts: eco-tourism, nature tourism, responsible tourism, rural tourism, etc.</p> <p>5.4.2. Officially recognize the work of specialty tour operators and legalize their work and the work of unlicensed activities clubs within clear definitions of activities, operation standards and regulations (including</p>	<p>Ministry of Tourism Specialty Tour Operators Outdoor activities clubs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved understanding of the different types of tourism activities among specialty tour operators - Specialty tour operators are officially 	Medium - Long Term

	<p>pricing) without jeopardizing and conflicting with their current work and the work of local guides</p> <p>An evaluation of fair price-value combinations for different types of tours could be available online as a guideline for new operators</p> <p>Note: Make sure to involve clubs and specialty tour operators in reviewing/ commenting on any regulatory/ decree text before finalizing it</p>		<p>recognized by the Ministry of Tourism</p>	
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Strategic Direction 6: Improve information and data collection and management to support sound planning

Actions	Activities	Suggested Stakeholders	Main Outcomes/ Success Indicators	Stage/ When
<p>6.1. Form a rural tourism research network (and later an observatory) to collect and manage tourism information, knowledge and data for planning and strategizing</p>	<p>6.1.1. Start a market research group to identify needed information and studies that will help develop strategies across the sector and conduct surveys and collection of data (including those that are sector specific)</p> <p>6.1.2. Develop an online portal to make data, information, analysis and strategies and plans accessible to the public</p> <p>6.1.3. Develop a plan to secure funding from agencies, banks, universities, and others to conduct the research studies</p> <p>6.1.4 Develop best practices for data collection and train local micro enterprises in rural areas on survey and client feedback collection</p> <p>6.1.5 Maintain data about venues (Hotels, Eateries, Entertainment places, sites) available on a selected rural tourism platform and regularly update it</p>	<p>Universities Syndicates Ministry of Tourism NGOs Donor agencies Regional Tourism Committees</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in market surveys on rural tourism done - Improved availability of rural tourism information, knowledge and data - Improved sharing of data and information online among stakeholders 	<p>Medium- Long Term</p>

Strategic Direction 7- Develop the culture of rural tourism among the young generation and in the education system

Note: Actions should build and expand on existing and successful initiatives

Actions	Activities	Suggested Stakeholders	Main Outcomes/ Success Indicators	Stage/ When
<p>7.1. Promote the culture of rural tourism and raise awareness within schools and universities</p>	<p>7.1.1. Liaise with schools (including those in local communities) to raise awareness and offer educational programs to enable youth to discover rural Lebanon and understand the importance of conservation of rural areas, fauna, flora, history, agriculture, trails, etc.</p> <p>7.1.2. Provide discounts for schools and students to stay in rural areas and/ or to participate in rural tourism activities</p> <p>7.1.3. Liaise with Ministry of Education and Higher Education to push forward a comprehensive program that includes the topic in schools in the long term</p> <p>7.1.4. Develop programs with universities, faculties and schools offering tourism and hospitality trainings to include rural tourism in their programs</p>	<p>NGOs Ministry of Education Schools and Universities Donor agencies Corporations and banks CSR programs Specialty tour operators</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase in school and university programs that include rural tourism discoveries - Signed agreements of schools and rural tourism providers - Increased and improved training programs integrating rural tourism in the curricula - Increase in # of youth and school children participating in rural travel activities 	<p>Medium- Long Term</p>

Strategic Direction 8 - Improve domestic and international linkages and networking (Cross cutting objective)

Note: Actions should build and expand on existing and successful initiatives

Actions	Activities	Suggested Stakeholders	Main Outcomes/ Success Indicators	Stage/ When
<p>8.1. Improve private-public coordination and linkages on the local level</p> <p><i>Knit and web the sector (Create a big family of rural tourism stakeholders.)</i></p>	<p>8.1.1. Establish a body (committee) for common action and coordination with and among stakeholders</p> <p>8.1.2. Organize round tables, forums and meetings to bring stakeholders together for collaboration, promotion, marketing, policy making, advocacy, exchange of experiences, fund-raising, etc. Illustrative examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Among accommodations, restaurants, outdoor activity providers (rural with rural, urban with rural), tour operators, etc. - In-bound travel agents with service providers and tour operators (incentives) - Among festival organizers (international festivals with local festivals) for cost-effectiveness and exchange of experience - Municipalities with service providers and tourism stakeholders - Investors and businesses <p>8.1.3. Develop practical actions and approach religious institutions and orders to promote religious tourism and to raise funds for and invest in the sector</p> <p>8.1.4. Network with universities to provide technical support, training and research</p> <p>8.1.5. Organize familiarization trips for stakeholders within their region first and then within the country to improve business linkages and the knitting effect among them</p>	<p>All actors: private, public and civil society, banks, donors, investors, universities, etc.</p> <p>Religious Orders</p> <p>Donor agencies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rural tourism committee created - Increased meeting and get together of stakeholders across the value chain - Increased sharing of experiences and information - Improved common measures, representation of the sector, regulations, processes across the value chain - Improved awareness among stakeholders 	<p>Immediate, medium and long term</p>
<p>8.2. Network with</p>	<p>8.2.1. Develop a series of activities: PR with international</p>	<p>All actors: private, public and</p>	<p>- Improved connections</p>	<p>Short- Medium</p>

international tourism stakeholders	tour operators; social media and online networks to raise interest and improve connectivity with international stakeholders	civil society, banks, donors, investors, universities, etc. Ministry of Tourism Donor agencies	- with international stakeholders - Improved representation of the sector internationally	and Long Term
8.3. Network with diaspora and Lebanese expats	8.3.1. Develop a plan to network with and seek the involvement of the diaspora for marketing and fund-raising purposes and create a global community that would provide support. Crowd funding programs could also be implemented	Ministry of Tourism Ministry of Foreign Affairs Municipalities and local communities	- Improved connections with diaspora and Lebanese expats living abroad - Improved funding opportunities from diaspora to local rural tourism initiatives	Short- Medium and Long Term

Annex 1- List of people who kindly participated in the interviews, workshops and focus group discussions (by alphabetical order)

- 33-North/ MADA Association, Gilbert Mokheiber
- Akkar Olive Trail / Zejd, Youssef Fares
- Akkarouna Association, Nina Masri
- Akkarouna Association, Aza Adra
- Al Achkar guesthouse, Salim Al Achkar
- Al Chalouf restaurant, Tony Rizk
- Al Midane Association, Sanaa Abi Deeb Antoun
- Al Qalaa Tourism Resort, Ali Abou Hamine
- Al Shouf Cedar Reserve, Nizar Hani
- Al Shouf Cedar Reserve, Samer Zebian
- Al Shouf Cedar Reserve, Faten Gayth
- Al Shouf Cedar Reserve, Kamal Abou Assi
- ANERA- DHIAFEE, Maysoun Korban
- ANERA/ DHIAFEE, Julie Tanas
- Arc En Ciel, Thomas Mc Grane
- Association for Forest Development and Conservation (AFDC), Pierre Akkawi
- Association for Forest Development and Conservation (AFDC), George Chayboun
- Association for Forest Development and Conservation (AFDC), Daher Abdel Massih
- Association for Rural Development and Charity, Tohama Ghadar
- Association for the Protection of Jabal Moussa (APJM), Tanya Rached
- Association of Travel and Tourist Agents in Lebanon (ATTAL), Selim Boutros
- B West Saghbine, Elias Chehwane
- Balamand University, School of Tourism and Hotel Management, Dr. Hamid El Debs
- Baldati Association, Chaker Noun
- Baldati Bi'ati Association, Nazih Kamareddine
- Batroun Mayor/ Local Guide, Anwar El Ghalbouni
- Batroun Mountains Winery, Katy Hark
- Bchee'li for Development, Sami El Khoury
- Beit El Kroum, Irene Alouf
- Bentaël nature reserve- Granplan, Raymond Khoury
- Chateau (Clos) St Thomas, Dima Layoun
- Chateau Kefraya, Assaad Abiad
- Chateau Kefraya, Edouard Kosremelli
- Chateau Kefraya, Michel De Bustros
- Chateau Qanafar, George Naim
- Committee for the Development of the Caza of Rachaya, Liliane Maalouli
- Committee for the Development of the Caza of Rachaya, Faten Bou Saad
- Development for People and Nature (Jabal El Sheikh), Taleh Khoder
- Douma Festival, Hayat El Hage Chalhoub
- Douma Guesthouse, Hala Mershed
- Edelweiss Club, Michel Mansour
- Ehdeniyat Festival, Jimmy Franjeh
- Environment and Sustainable Development Unit (ESDU)- American University of Beirut (AUB), Dr. Shadi Hamadeh
- Fawar Al Hasbani Restaurant and Resort, Salim Abou Ghaida
- Fayek Guesthouse, Mehdi Fayek
- Food Heritage Foundation, Zeinab Jeambey
- Food Heritage Foundation, Mabelle Chedid
- Gray Matter, Ronald Sayegh
- Great Escape, Andre Bechara
- Guesthouse Chahine (Bkassine), Therese Massoud
- Habbat Al Roumman- Sumsun Farm (Beino), Ekatherina Saghiyeh
- Hammana Municipality, Laura Hatem
- Hasbaya Village Club, Anwar Abou Ghaida
- Hatbeh w Nar Restaurant, Tony Antoun
- Hima Anjar- Kfarzabad, Kassem Shukr

- Hima Anjar- Kfarzabad, Sami Abou Rjeily
- Horsh Ehden Nature Reserve, Sandra Koussa Saba
- Hospitality Services, Joumana Salame
- Hospitality Services/ Lebanon Traveler, Karl Hitti
- IRIS Flower Hotel Jezzine, Joseph Khoury
- Jabalna Chalets, George Karam
- Jabbour Pottery (Assia), Sanaa' Jabbour
- Jbeil Municipality, Khaled El Lakkis
- Jupiter Association for Tourism Development, Imad Mortada
- Lebanese Reforestation Initiative (LRI), Roula Saadeh
- Lebanese University, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Dr. Jad Abou Arrage
- Lebanese University, Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Dr. Fahd Nasr
- Lebanon Mountain Trail Association, Karim El Jisr
- Lebanon Mountain Trail Association, Christian Akhrass
- Economic Development Agency in Bekaa (LEDA Bekaa), Kamal Saikaly
- Economic Development Agency in Bekaa (LEDA Bekaa), Ali Abou Ali
- Economic Development Agency in Bekaa (LEDA Bekaa), Toni Hajjar
- Liban Trek, Rafik Saliba
- Local Guide, George Zgheib
- Local Guide, Charbel Saliba
- The Lebanese Organization for Studies and Training (LOST), Ahmad Al Tofaily
- Michel Hallak
- Ministry of Tourism, Nada Sardouk
- Ministry of Tourism, Mona Fares
- Ministry of Tourism, Judge Ziad Ayoub
- Ministry of Tourism, Gaby Kattini
- Ministry of Tourism, Paola Pharaon-Rizk
- Ministry of Tourism, Zeina Haddad
- Ministry of Tourism, Petra Obeid
- Ministry of Tourism (Info Center Niha el Shouf), Nahed Bou Dargham
- Municipality of Hebbariye, Ali Barakat
- Municipality of Akkar El Atiqa, Mustafa Kassem
- Municipality of Anjar, Garabet Banboukian
- Municipality of Aydamoun, Dr. Rami Haddad
- Municipality of Aydamoun, Mustafa Ibrahim
- Municipality of Bsharre, Antoine Tawk
- Municipality of Chatine/ Association of the Three Bridges, Fadi El Chaer
- Municipality of Chebaa, Ramez Dalli
- Municipality of Ebl El Saqi, George Rahal
- Municipality of Ehden, Iskandar Moawad
- Municipality of Ehden, Josiane Kandalaft
- Municipality of Ehmej, Imane Khalife
- Municipality of Ein Zebdeh, Bashir Bou Mounsef
- Municipality of Hadath El Jebbeh, Jihad Chlela
- Municipality of Hadath El Jebbeh, Rosy Sfeir
- Municipality of Jdeidet Marjaayoun, Hassan Abla
- Municipality of Jwar El Hachach, Yassine Jaafar
- Municipality of Jwar El Hachach, Ahmad Jaafar
- Municipality of Kawkaba, Kamel Al Kalaani
- Municipality of Kfardebian/ Beity Association, Josephine Zgheib
- Municipality of Mimes, Samih Madi
- Municipality of Qanafar, Antoine Abou Izzi
- Municipality of Rahbe, Jean Fayad
- Municipality of Tannourine, Dr. Mounir Torbay
- Municipality of Tannourine, Najat Harb
- Nabh El Bohsasa Restaurant, Majed El Hamra
- Neo Kids, Dr. Nour Farra Haddad
- PRODES/ IMS, Juliana Najem
- PRODES/ IMS, Rita Sarkis
- Rachaya Vocational Training Center, Farid Kamal

- Rachaya's Gardens, Fares Nayef
- Rashaya El Fokhar Guesthouse, Esber Esber
- Responsible Mobilities, Pascal Abdallah
- Rida International Tours, Pauline Daher
- Saad Tours, Mireille Ayoub
- Saad Travel and Transport, Amine Nasser
- Shmeiss Guesthouse, Wael Shmeiss
- Slow Food Beirut, Barbara Massaad
- Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL), Adonis El Khatib
- Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL), Dalia Jawhary
- Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL), Bassima El Khatib
- Syndicate of Hotels, Pierre Ashkar
- Syndicate of Owners of Restaurants, Cafés, Night-Clubs & Pastries in Lebanon, La Reserve Afqa- Peaks Resort, Paul Ariss
- Taanayel Ecolodge- Al Khan Al Masskoul, Ahmad Abou Abbas
- Tannourine Forest Reserve/ Tannourine Municipality, Me. Nehme Harb
- Taste Lebanon, Bethany Kehdi
- Taste Lebanon, Joslin Kehdi
- Tawlet Ammiq, Bechara Saker
- TLB Destination, Dany Abi Nader
- Union of Municipalities of Jabal El Cheikh, Marwan Zaki
- Union of Municipalities of Jezzine, Joe Harfouche
- Union of Municipalities of Jezzine, Khalil Harfouche
- University St Joseph, Department of Geography- Faculty of Arts, Science and Humanities, Dr. Liliane Barakat
- Vamos Todos, Marc Aoun
- Wafa Serhal Mehanna
- Women Association of Deir El Ahmar (WADA), Dunia Khoury
- Women Association of Deir El Ahmar (WADA), Nadia Akoury
- Youth Club Jezzine (Shabibat Kaza of Jezzine), Khouloud Assaf
- Yolande Amanou'eel

ANNEX 2- Semi-structured/ Key Informant Interview Guidelines

A/ Objective of interviews

Interviews are first-hand inquiry about what is affecting quantity and quality of rural tourism in Lebanon, identifying priorities to be addressed and practical actions to improve both. Interviews will explore **sector-specific** and **general** subjects with some interviewees. They will help answer questions in guidelines further below and identify new information from key players and experts in the sector.

B/ Identification of interviewees

The interviewees belong to the primary and secondary direct stakeholders groups in the rural tourism supply chain. They are by categories: accommodation, food and crafts, transportation, excursion and activities suppliers, government bodies (ministry and municipalities), non-governmental bodies, tourism and marketing experts, and tourism investment companies. An enclosed list of interviewees provides more details.

The source of the list of people considered from a series of other lists developed by the consultants on the project under previous activities. Other names may be included and or amended progressively through further consultation with stakeholders.

Interviewee's consent to participate in the semi-structured interviews will be done via phone and/ or email.

Selection Criteria

Participants' selection criteria are based on the following:

- Stakeholder should be serious, currently active and regularly engaged in tourism and rural tourism activities and tourism development in Lebanon
- Stakeholder is a director/ manager of a tourism product/ service/ activity within the rural tourism value chain
- Stakeholder could have been or is involved in development programs in rural areas including tourism
- Stakeholder is a key player and can influence the development of rural tourism in Lebanon

C/ Data Collection and guidelines

Semi-structured interviews will be in a form of 60-80 minutes meetings. Data collected will be mostly qualitative. Each post-interview analysis may identify themes and topics that may not be listed in the set of question guidelines and that could be brought up during the conversations with the interviewees. Question guidelines and discussion prompts will be amended and improved accordingly and progressively. Also, interviews will also take into consideration the person interviewed and the scope her/ his tourism activities, knowledge, involvement and area of expertise. Questions will be readjusted accordingly.

D/ General Interview guiding questions

After introduction and clarification of objectives of the meeting, collect data on the below.

Name: _____ Organization/ Company: _____
 Position: _____ Website: _____
 Tel: _____ Email: _____
 Date of meeting/ by: _____

(Interviewer internal notes for further prompting questions)

Understanding rural tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As a key stakeholder in tourism in Lebanon, can you please give your definition for rural tourism?
Quality and Quantity of rural tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the factors that you think are currently affecting the demand for rural tourism in general in Lebanon and to bring more people to rural areas? o What does the sector need to operate properly and become competitive o Policies? Laws? Standards? Development of new services and products? Capacity building and training? Marketing? Business linkages? Infrastructure? Access and transportation? o Can you be more specific in your line of business? What is affecting positively and negatively your work and line of business? - What actions, improvements, initiatives that have been previously or recently put in place that you think are working for the sector in general? o Why? o Can you be more specific to your sector of activity? - What are those that you think are not working? o Why? o Can you be more specific to your sector of activity? - What are those missing? Please be specific to your line of business
Recommendations and prioritization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you think are practical actions and solutions that could be implemented and which ones are priorities to start with? o In general? o Specific to your line of business? o Policies? Laws? Standards? Development of new services and products? Capacity building and training? Marketing? Business linkages? Infrastructure? Access and transportation? - How would you suggest implementing it? - Who do you think should be involved in this? Whose responsibility is it?
Demand and marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who do you think are the current clients for rural tourism and your activity in specific? (% etc., details)- Budget/ client allocated in general - How are you attracting/ communicating to them? - Who are the potential ones that you think you could attract? - What do you think should be done to support your marketing efforts for your line of business and for rural tourism in general - What support you think the sector needs in this regard? Who should do that? and how do you see that done? - How could this be implemented (examples)

Annex 3- Regional Focus Group Discussions Guiding Questions

1. What is rural tourism?
2. What are the factors that attract visitors to your region? What is the added value of your region (assets, heritage, etc?)- *how they see the identity of their region*
3. What are the priorities that need to be tackled to improve rural tourism at the level of your region?
4. Based on your experience and the context, and in order to address these priorities, how do you see common work at the level of your regions? (Suggestions)
5. Do you see that the regions represented at this meeting could form a cluster and work together as a cluster? Suggestions for including other regions?

Quick presentations of findings from workshop and interviews and of the Common Work mechanism suggested at the workshop.

Feedback

6. How do you see your connection and involvement in the Common Work mechanism suggested at the workshop?

Annex 4: Sustainable Tourism - Definition by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

Reference: *Making Tourism More Sustainable - A Guide for Policy Makers*, UNEP and UNWTO, 2005, p.11-12

Sustainable tourism can be defined as:

"Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities"

Conceptual definition

Sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments. Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability.

Thus, sustainable tourism should:

- 1) Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.*
- 2) Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.*
- 3) Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.*

Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary.

Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them.

Annex 5: References

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