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Press Release

Community led tourism can impact rural livelihoods

Madurai, Sep 28: Hospitality is the soul of Indian culture, but packaging it for tourism promotion in the rural areas as a commercial venture needs a lot of orientation and capacity building. The rural communities can expand their basket of livelihoods opportunities by taking up activities related to tourism, according to Programme Officer of United Nations Development Programme, R. K Anil, who is coordinating its endogenous tourism project. He spoke at the workshop on tourism promotion through community participation organised as part of Madurai Symposium 2007 at Madurai.

He pleaded for increased community participation and need for organising them around tourism activity to sustain the efforts and impact. Endogenous tourism promoted by UNDP jointly with ministry of tourism is centered on the culture and craft of a location and emphasizes on creation of livelihood opportunities for the local populations through projects that are community owned, culturally expressive and ecologically sustainable. Learnings from this project would help evolve strategies for replicating it in other areas, he added. He cautioned the pros and cons in tourism programmes operated in rural areas mainly to prevent cultural pollution and adverse environmental impacts due to tourism activity in rural areas – he added.

Home visit is the most unforgettable part of foreigners' tour to India. They value this experience more than their visit to the important tourist landmarks in India like the Tajmahal. They want to experience and meet people, understand their daily life, occupation; religion etc as it is different from theirs, said Kasper Jansen, Water4Life from the Netherlands.

Camille Dow Baker, CEO of Canada based CAWST said; donors from Canada who are supporting the projects of CAWST in various countries around the globe are interested in visiting the project locations. They want to experience and see the impact of their support. We are recommending that they visit DHAN as it is one of the most advanced projects and the work is pioneering in nature.

Benefits of tourism should reach the poor communities and expand opportunities for earning their livelihoods. Organised social infrastructure would form the foundation for successful tourism. No doubt, pro poor tourism will enhance income and employment opportunities, revive rural arts and crafts, conserve environment and heritage. What is needed is collaborative efforts of all the stakeholders such as community, government, NGOs, and private, said K.P Bharathi, Team Leader, endogenous tourism project of DHAN Foundation.

Participants for the workshop were from tourism department, NGOs, community groups, tourism professionals. Experience of endogenous tourism implemented in Karaikudi and Kazhugumalai were showcased to the participants.

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