



UN Tourism

Tourism for Rural Development Programme

Impact Report
2021–2025

Tourism for Rural Development Programme

Impact Report
2021–2025







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UN Tourism

Bringing the world closer

Foreword

Zurab Pololikashvili

Secretary-General
UN Tourism



Rural areas are foundational to our planet's natural and cultural heritage, characterized by distinctive landscapes, bespoke traditions, and diverse local communities. Such communities are steeped in ecological and cultural richness, helping preserve the anthropological histories that define our world. Yet, rural areas also face some of the most pressing challenges with 80% of the poorer living in rural areas, growing depopulation and below average access to jobs, education or services.

Our Tourism for Rural Development Programme aims to leverage tourism's potential to drive economic growth, foster community development and wellbeing, promote territorial cohesion and conserve cultural and natural heritage in rural areas. The Programme focuses on building resilient, sustainable communities in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), emphasizing advocacy, skills development, on-the-ground support and projects, and knowledge for action.

This report provides an overview of the initiatives and accomplishments made since the creation of the Programme in late 2021, showcasing how sustainable tourism can serve as a powerful catalyst for rural development and the progress of rural people.

Some of the Programme's notable successes include the Best Tourism Villages Initiative which to date has seen more than 1106 candidacies and 236 villages recognized, or the training provided to nearly 38 Member States, particularly in the Middle East, to implement effective policies and strategies for rural tourism.

Additionally, through the Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism Initiative, the Programme has established the largest global network of rural destinations, with over 300 members in 64 countries across 5 regions. This network has engaged more than 600 participants in masterclasses and provided tailored on-the-ground mentorship to 38 rural villages across the globe.

While progress has been made, there remains a plethora of untapped opportunities. Our commitment to advancing rural development through sustainable tourism remains unwavering. We will continue to offer support to our member states, local communities and relevant stakeholders in order to nurture vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable rural development.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all partners, member states, and communities whose dedication has been crucial to the achievements of this Programme and we look forward to expanding our partnerships. Together, we can ensure that tourism is indeed a transformative force for positive change.



UN Tourism

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Foreword

Zoritsa Urosevic

Executive Director
UN Tourism



In late 2021, UN Tourism created the Tourism for Rural Development Programme, a first of its kind in the Organization.

Mindful that rural communities face immense challenges – ranging from access to services or depopulation to suitable infrastructure and job opportunities – the Tourism for Rural Development Programme works to promote economic diversification, strengthen the linkages between tourism and agriculture, empower local communities, stimulate innovation and investment and progress national and local policies that benefit rural areas.

The Programme is a testament to our commitment to making the sector an effective driver for development and wellbeing among rural communities, fostering inclusion and contributing to territorial cohesion and reducing inequalities within countries.

The Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism – a flagship initiative for the Programme – demonstrates how rural tourism can preserve cultural heritage, foster environmental stewardship, and promote socio-economic development. As of today, almost 235 villages worldwide have been recognized as examples of how tourism can transform communities by unlocking local empowerment and enhancing conservation efforts. Another 56 villages have been mentored by UN Tourism through a collective effort to make them champions of rural tourism. The Best Tourism Village Network, with over 300 villages participating, is today the biggest global net of local communities gathering territories which are home to more than half a million people and range from Chile to Japan.

This Report showcases the various initiatives of the Programme since its creation four years ago alongside its reach and impact in charting a future course for rural tourism development globally and locally – from creating knowledge, to guiding policymaking and supporting communities on the ground.

As we get ready to launch the first call of the Tourism for Rural Development Small Grants Programme, we place our future look into amplifying our impact through strengthening partnerships with local governments, private sector stakeholders and international organizations. This will be essential for scaling up successful models, replicating best practices and drive change in communities around the world.

Ensuring that development leaves no one behind is core to UN Tourism and we believe that working together in creating opportunities for rural communities can effectively deliver on the essential goal of making tourism work for People and Planet.

Foreword

Samer Al-Kharashi

Director
Regional Office for the Middle East
UN Tourism



Tourism has long been a driver of progress. Yet its full potential to empower rural communities and safeguard nature and heritage remains largely untapped. The Tourism for Rural Development Programme by UN Tourism brings this vision to life – positioning tourism as a catalyst for opportunity, sustainability, and resilience in some of the world’s most remote destinations.

Through a diverse set of tools – including training for policymakers, the Small Grants Programme, the inaugural Conference on Tourism for Rural Development, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), and the Self-Assessment Tool for Rural Destinations (STAR) – the Programme delivers tangible impact for Member States and rural communities alike.

Since its launch, the Programme has cultivated a growing global network of change makers: Member States, local authorities, entrepreneurs, and community leaders united in advancing rural prosperity through tourism. From mountain villages reviving traditional crafts to desert communities embracing ecotourism, it demonstrates how innovation and authenticity can flourish side by side. Tourism for rural development is not merely about attracting visitors – it is about building resilience, fostering pride, and protecting the unique cultural and natural assets that define each place.

Looking ahead, the Programme is expanding its reach through new research, strategic partnerships, knowledge platforms, and pilot initiatives that bridge global policy dialogue with local action. By connecting evidence-based insights with on-the-ground experience, it aims

to accelerate rural transformation and ensure tourism contributes directly to the Sustainable Development Goals – particularly those related to poverty reduction, reduced inequalities, gender equality, and climate action.

The UN Tourism Regional Office for the Middle East proudly serves as a hub for this global initiative, reflecting the region’s commitment to making rural development a cornerstone of tourism policy.

Foreword

Sandra Carvão

Director
Market Intelligence, Policies and Competitiveness
UN Tourism



In 2020, UN Tourism celebrated the Year of Tourism for Rural Development – an opportunity to bring forward the role of our sector in promoting a more equitable development model. In that same year, under the Saudi Presidency of the G20, UN Tourism delivered the Alula Framework for Inclusive Community Development through Tourism.

These milestones laid the foundation for the creation by end 2021 of the Tourism for Rural Development Programme at UN Tourism and the launch of the Best Tourism Villages Initiative. Five years later we have welcomed over 1106 candidate villages in the five editions of the initiative and our Network of Best Tourism Villages and those joining the Upgrade Programme caters today for more than 300 village representatives worldwide. The initiative has brought opportunities, pride and visibility to communities across continents and created a web of synergies that today links rural areas in 58 countries.

The Programme has also expanded to include skills development among our members states to drive effective tourism policies that promote rural development as well as knowledge creation and research to better understand the challenges and opportunities on the ground. We launched the first Tourism for Rural Development Small Grants Programme enabled by the TUI Care Foundation aware that access to financing is among the biggest hurdles for rural communities and we unveiled our pioneering digital self-assessment tool designed to progress tourism development in rural areas – the UN Tourism Self-assessment Tool to Assist Rural Destinations, STAR.

As we continue to step up our efforts to bring opportunities to rural communities, we will continue to recall that 84% of people in poverty live in rural areas. Progressing tourism's capacity to drive growth, inclusion and conservation will deliver on a fairer and more sustainable society.



Introduction

Rural areas are vital to the global landscape, serving as the backbone of food production, biodiversity, and cultural heritage, yet they face significant development challenges. Tourism has a unique potential to bridge these gaps, fostering sustainable and inclusive development of rural communities.

HOW IT STARTED

2020

Year of Tourism and Rural Development. A global, inclusive strategy for rural areas was identified on World Tourism Day 2020, which laid the foundation for the later creation of the Tourism for Rural Development Programme.

2020

Launch of the **Recommendations on Tourism for Rural Development.**

2020

AIUla Framework for Inclusive Community Development through Tourism. Under the leadership of the G20 Saudi Presidency, UN Tourism in collaboration with the G20 working group developed the Alula Framework.

2021

Launch of the Best Tourism Villages first edition. With candidacies received from 75 different countries, the first edition recognized 44 villages worldwide.

2021

Opening of the UN Tourism Regional Office for the Middle East. Based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, the office plays a crucial role in advancing the global agenda of the Tourism for Rural Development Programme.

Being home to approximately 44% of the world's population, rural areas are the backbone of global food production, provide essential ecosystem services, host a large portion of the planet's biodiversity, significantly support local and national economies and exports and are custodians of invaluable cultural and historical heritage for humankind.

Economic, social, and other forms of development have traditionally been concentrated in urban areas, leaving significant gaps in rural landscapes and populations. Rural areas face substantial challenges in accessing economic opportunities, infrastructure, and essential services, which are critical for their sustainable development and population retention. This disparity hinders the growth and well-being of rural communities, emphasizing the need for targeted policies and investments to bridge these gaps and promote inclusive development.

UN Tourism plays a decisive and central role in promoting tourism as a means of sustainable development. By serving as a global forum for tourism policies and a practical source of knowledge for action, UN Tourism supports member states in fostering tourism that is responsible, inclusive, and that enhances sustainable development.

The Tourism for Rural Development Programme (T4RD), part of the Market Intelligence, Policies and Competitiveness Department, aims to harness the potential of tourism to address the unique challenges faced by rural communities, supporting efforts to enhance sustainable livelihoods, reducing poverty and regional inequalities, enhancing the quality of life and wellbeing of rural populations, as well as preserving and promoting their natural and cultural heritage. By aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the Programme aims to create resilient and empowered rural communities worldwide.

Why rural areas?

Some of the key global gaps and challenges for rural areas worldwide:

Around 84% of people living in poverty are found in rural areas¹.

Share of world population living in poverty



In rural areas

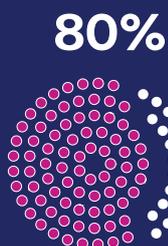
16%



In urban areas

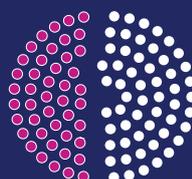
People in rural areas are twice as likely to be in informal employment as those in urban areas².

Population in informal or vulnerable employment



In rural areas

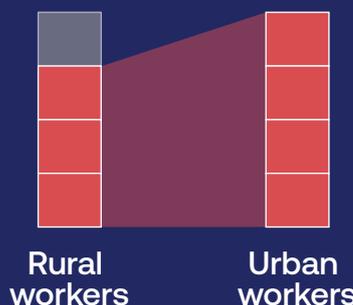
44%



In urban areas

Rural workers are paid, on average, 24% less than their urban counterparts³.

Average wages comparison between rural and urban areas



Rural workers

Urban workers

Why tourism for rural development?

When properly managed, tourism can support sustainable development in rural areas by:

 Creating economic opportunities and boosting local entrepreneurship.

 Empowering women and vulnerable groups.

 Preserving and promoting cultural and natural heritage.

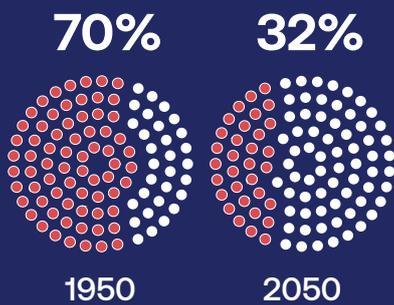
 Fostering partnerships, collaboration and strengthening governance.

 Enhancing community cohesion and social inclusion.

 Reducing rural-urban migration and increasing local awareness.

Rural areas forecast to represent **30% of the world population in 2050** down from 70% in the 1950s⁴.

Share of world population living in rural areas



Access to the **digital world** in rural areas is **almost half** that of urban areas⁵.

People accessing the internet



Share of population with no access to **safely managed drinking water** tops 40% in rural areas⁶.

People with safely drinking water coverage



-  Increasing investment and accessibility of healthcare.
-  Increasing the availability of financial services.
-  Improving services such as sanitation, waste management, and public safety.
-  Encouraging infrastructure maintenance and development.
-  Promoting innovation and technological connectivity.
-  Supporting education and skills development opportunities.

Sources:

¹ United Nations Development Programme, 2023.
² International Labour Organization – ILOSTAT, 2019.
³ International Labour Organization, 2024.
⁴ United Nations Population Division, 2022.
⁵ International Telecommunication Union, 2023.
⁶ World Health Organization and the United Nations Children’s Fund, 2021.

Our Focus

The Tourism for Rural Development Programme (T4RD) is dedicated to leveraging tourism as a catalyst for sustainable economic growth and community wellbeing in rural areas. It aims to promote inclusive, sustainable, and resilient development in alignment with the SDGs.

OUR VISION

Make tourism a driver of rural development and well-being.

OUR MISSION

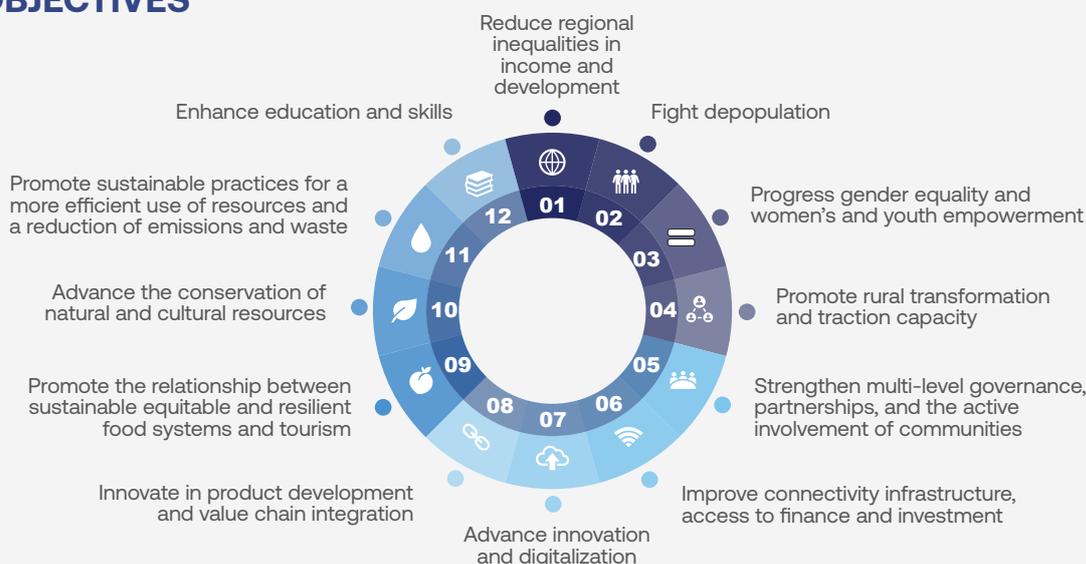
To advance the role of tourism in valuing and safeguarding rural villages along with their associated landscapes, knowledge systems, biological and cultural diversity, local values and activities. Promote innovative and transformative approaches to the development of tourism in rural destinations that contribute to the three pillars of sustainability – economic, social and environmental – in line with the SDGs.

The Programme has been designed under a comprehensive approach to address the multifaceted challenges and opportunities in rural areas through tourism. It responds to **12 objectives and it is structured around four strategic axes.**

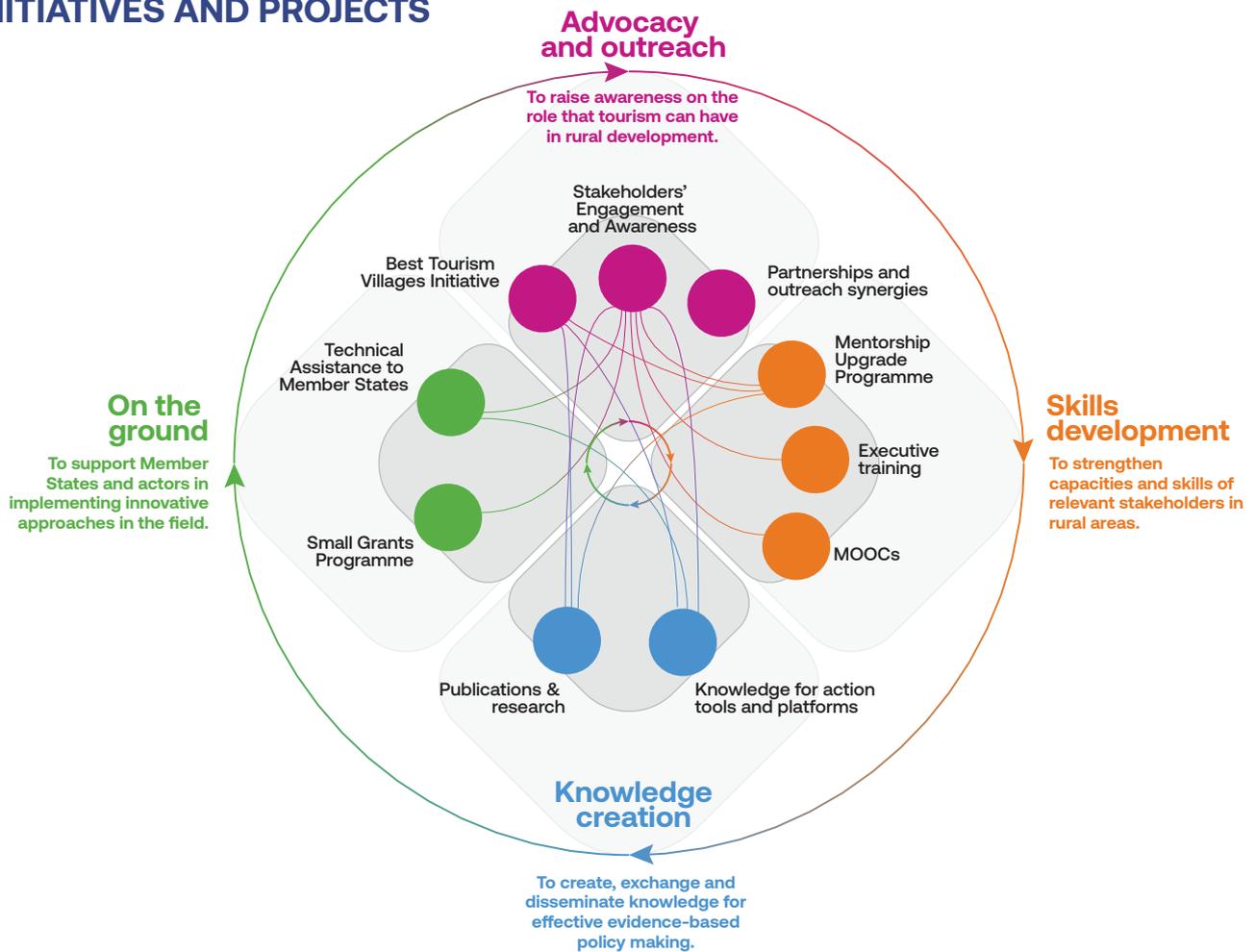
The objectives focus on promoting economic development and equity in rural areas, fostering inclusion and empowerment of communities, adopting innovative and sustainable approaches, and promoting and preserving cultural and natural resources.

These objectives, as well as our axes of work – Advocacy and Outreach, Skills Development, On the Ground Implementation, and Knowledge Creation – are interconnected and support the comprehensive development of rural areas through tourism.

OUR OBJECTIVES



AXES OF WORK, INITIATIVES AND PROJECTS



SUPPORTING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

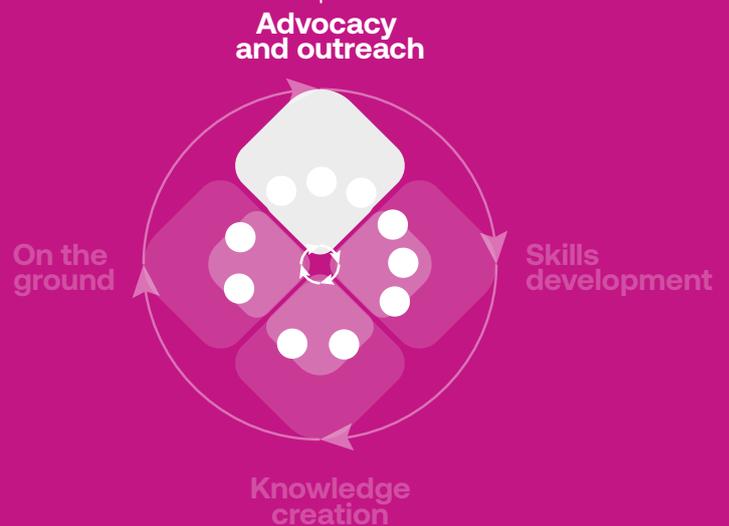
The Programme is strategically aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), promoting actions that directly support specific targets within the SDG framework. This includes supporting practices that address global development challenges while continuously supporting the broader UN mandate for sustainable development, driving systemic change, and fostering inclusivity and resilience.

● Key SDGs for the T4RD Programme



Advocacy and outreach

To raise awareness on the role that tourism can have in rural development.







Lamas, Peru – Best Tourism Village by UN Tourism (2022)

The Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism Initiative

This initiative celebrates rural destinations that are committed to preserving and promoting their cultural heritage, natural landscapes, and local traditions while fostering socio-economic development and environmental sustainability.



5

Editions (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025)

236

Best Tourism Villages recognized worldwide

57

Countries

5

Regions

1.08M

Inhabitants in recognized villages

The Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism (BTV) Initiative is a pioneering effort to recognize and support villages that harness the power of tourism for sustainable development.

Launched with the vision to spotlight exemplary rural tourism practices, the Best Tourism Villages Initiative identifies villages worldwide that serve as outstanding examples of rural tourism destinations. These villages demonstrate innovative approaches to tourism, showcasing how it can be a driving force for positive change. They provide inspiring models of how tourism can create jobs, stimulate local economies, and promote social inclusion, all while safeguarding cultural and natural assets.

The initiative also provides a platform for knowledge sharing and capacity building, helping other villages and rural destinations to learn from these best practices and implement similar strategies. By promoting a network of Best Tourism Villages, UN Tourism aims to enhance the visibility of rural destinations and attract more visitors, investments, and opportunities for sustainable growth.

The Best Tourism Villages Initiative by UN Tourism is based on three pillars:



Best Tourism Villages (BTV)

A recognized Best Tourism Village is an example of a rural tourism destination with recognized cultural and natural assets, that preserves and promotes rural and community-based values, products and lifestyle and has a clear commitment to sustainability with the fundamental aim of making tourism one of the drivers of rural development and community well-being.



BTV Upgrade Programme

It includes villages that do not fully meet the initiative criteria but have strong potential. These villages receive mentoring from UN Tourism to improve elements of the areas identified as gaps in the evaluation process.



Best Tourism Villages Network

The members of the network are those villages recognized as Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism, and those selected to participate in the Upgrade Programme. It is a space for exchanging experiences and good practices, learnings, and opportunities. It is the largest community of villages sharing the vision and mission of making tourism a driver of rural development and wellbeing.

**Best Tourism Villages Initiative
2021 to 2025 editions**

	AMERICAS	EUROPE	AFRICA	MIDDLE EAST	ASIA PACIFIC	TOTAL
Candidacies submitted	294	321	149	76	266	1106
Number of recognized BTVs	58	90	15	14	59	236
Number of villages part of the Upgrade Programme	23	36	7	3	13	82
People reached (Inhabitants in BTV and villages in the upgrade programme)	370k	327k	119k	76k	194k	1.08M
Countries with members in the network (BTV and villages in the upgrade programme.)	12	29	7	6	10	64

The BTV areas of evaluation

Every year, BTV candidacies are submitted through National Tourism Authorities of UN Tourism member states. Each candidacy is evaluated by an independent, multidisciplinary Advisory Board following a set of criteria under nine areas of evaluation. The areas of evaluation focus on key aspects of sustainable development, resources promotion and preservation and community well-being.



Cultural and natural resources

The village has natural and cultural (tangible and intangible) resources recognized at national, regional or international level.



Promotion and conservation of cultural resources

The village is committed to the promotion and conservation of the cultural resources that make it unique and authentic.



Economic sustainability

The village is committed to promoting economic sustainability by supporting business development, entrepreneurship and investment.



Social sustainability

The village is committed to promoting social inclusion and equality, promotes policies to advance gender balance in tourism and to foster opportunities for vulnerable groups.





Environmental sustainability

The village promotes and disseminates policies, measures and initiatives that advance the preservation and conservation of its natural resources and minimize the impact of tourism development on the environment.



Tourism development and value chain integration

Tourism in the village is significantly marketed and developed. The village enhances the tourism value chain and the competitiveness of the destination including market access, marketing and promotion, innovation, product development and quality.



Governance and prioritization of tourism

The village is committed to making tourism a strategic pillar for rural development. It promotes a governance model based on public-private partnerships, cooperation with other government levels, and the engagement of the community in tourism planning and development.



Infrastructure and connectivity

The village has infrastructure to facilitate access and communications that improve the well-being of rural communities, promote business development, while enhancing the visitor experience.



Health, safety and security

The village has health, safety and security systems to safeguard local population and tourists.

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Best Tourism Villages 2023 edition ceremony, Samarkand, Uzbekistan

The World's Leading Event Recognizing Tourism's Impact on Rural Development

The Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism Initiative has garnered over 750 million impressions in the media through its five prestigious ceremonies held from 2021 to 2025.



UN Tourism Secretary-General, Zurab Pololikashvili, and the Vice Minister of Culture and Tourism of China, Mr. Gao Zheng, during the 2025 BTV ceremony in Huzhou City, China.

The Best Tourism Villages Initiative by UN Tourism has garnered an outstanding 750 million impressions in the media through its five prestigious ceremonies held from 2021 to 2025.

The inaugural event in Madrid, Spain, in 2021 marked the beginning of a transformative journey, bringing global attention to the unique sustainable tourism practices of rural communities. The subsequent ceremonies in AIUla, Saudi Arabia (2023), Samarkand, Uzbekistan (2023), Cartagena de Indias, Colombia (2024), and Huzhou City, China (2025) further amplified the initiative's reach, highlighting the remarkable contributions of rural villages to sustainable tourism and community resilience.

These ceremonies have not only celebrated the achievements of these villages but also significantly elevated their visibility and that of tourism for rural development on the global stage. By engaging a diverse audience of stakeholders, media, and tourism professionals, the initiative has fostered a greater appreciation for the vital role of rural tourism in promoting cultural heritage and sustainable development. The remarkable media impact underscores the growing recognition of the Best Tourism Villages as exemplary models for integrating tourism with community and environmental stewardship.



Best Tourism Villages 2021 edition ceremony, Madrid, Spain



Best Tourism Villages 2022 edition ceremony, AlUla, Saudi Arabia



Best Tourism Villages 2024 edition ceremony, Cartagena de Indias, Colombia

1st UN Tourism Conference on Tourism for Rural Development

10-11 December 2024, Hoi An, Viet Nam



UN Tourism Conference on Tourism for Rural Development 2024, Hoi An, Viet Nam

The First UN Tourism Conference on Tourism for Rural Development

Recognizing the transformative potential of tourism in addressing challenges and bringing opportunities to rural areas, UN Tourism, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism of Viet Nam, held the 1st First Conference on Tourism for Rural Development.

300+

Participants

50

Member states represented

6.5hr

Active presentations and discussions

2k+

Streaming reproductions in the first two days after the event

This landmark global gathering brought together national and local governments, international organizations and the private sector to demonstrate and accelerate tourism's significant role and contribution in driving rural development.

The conference was celebrated in Hoi An, Viet Nam on December 9 to 11, 2024.

The conference underscored the critical importance of inclusive community development and empowerment as catalysts for local economic growth and social transformation. Discussions spanned a wide array of topics including policies to promote tourism for rural development, innovative funding, market access, connectivity, the preservation of local identities, empowerment of local communities and vulnerable groups, including women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples, environmental and cultural sustainability, as well as the opportunities brought by new technologies.

The conference convened over 300 participants from 50 countries, including government officials, representatives of international and regional financial institutions, development agencies, tourism professionals, rural community leaders, researchers, and NGOs.

Panelists included officials from Tourism Authorities from Viet Nam, Maldives, Türkiye, Indonesia, Morocco, and from key organizations including the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Centre for Innovative Planning and Development (CIPD), Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office, the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), Designated Areas for

Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA), Rustic Hospitality Group, and companies such as Booking.com, Fliggy, BBC Travel Show, Intrepid Travel, Japan Travel Bureau (JTB), Meta, Planeterra, and Traveloka.

Alongside the conference, the Second Annual Meeting of the Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism Network took place as an invitation-only private session. The meeting brought together Network members, including Best Tourism Villages (BTV) and villages involved in the Upgrade Programme, along with national focal points to establish the strategic framework of the Network and discuss future directions.



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UN Tourism Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili delivering the BTV recognition plate to Nkotsi Village, Rwanda – Best Tourism Village by UN Tourism (2021)

Top Initiative in UN Tourism: Best Tourism Villages and the Secretary-General’s Commitment to Rural Development

The Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism Initiative was ranked as the top valued UN Tourism activity in the Programme of Work Survey for 2024-2025 among the Organization’s member states, reflecting the interest and priority of this area. Demonstrating his commitment to rural tourism, the Secretary-General has made official visits to **10+ villages across all 5 regions**.

“Tourism can be a driver of positive change for rural communities all around the world. We want to recognize the uniqueness of each village and showcase the best initiatives to make tourism a means for a better future in rural areas”.

Zurab Pololikashvili
Secretary-General
World Tourism Organization
(UN Tourism)



UN Tourism Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili delivering the BTV recognition plates to Douma, Lebanon (BTV 2023), Yucun, China (BTV 2021) and Gruyères, Switzerland (BTV 2021)

BTV Network: Fostering Collaboration, Knowledge Exchange, and Visibility

With more than 250 members worldwide, the BTV Network promotes a community of practice for villages to collaborate and learn from each other and from sustainable tourism leading stakeholders.

50+

Events held since 2021

2.5k+

Village stakeholders' beneficiaries

Villages that are part of the BTV Network benefit from various opportunities, including participation in masterclasses, thematic working groups, and international events. These activities help members to exchange knowledge, develop skills, and access resources that support the sustainable development of tourism and contribute to their long-term socio-economic resilience and the preservation of their cultural and natural heritage. The network also facilitates partnerships and enhances the global profile of its member villages and enhances their visibility on an international stage.

The Network has three components:

-  **Visibility** – Enhance the local, national and international visibility of its members.
-  **Interaction** – Promote the participation of its members in partnerships and collective ventures for sustainable rural tourism.
-  **Learning and sharing** – Promote the exchange of knowledge between its members and relevant stakeholders.
-  **Monitoring** – Document villages unique attributes and commit to sustainable practices. The first monitoring round was completed in 2024.

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First meeting of the BTV Network in AlUla, Saudi Arabia in 2023

Connecting Communities: BTV Network meetings

The BTV Network has been convening regularly both online and offline. During the BTV 2023 award ceremony, the Network held its first in-person meeting in AIUla, Saudi Arabia, bringing together 45 villages from around the world. The subsequent Network Meetings took place in Hoi An, VietNam (2024) and in Huzhou City, China (2025) each gathering upwards of 50 representatives from over 30 countries. Villages themselves also organize networking meetings to share experiences, challenges and opportunities—July 2023 in San Ginesio, Italy (BTV 2021) and September 2024 in Huangling, China (BTV 2023). These meetings contribute to shaping the long-term vision and strategy of the Network.



Third Annual BTV Network Meeting, Huzhou City, China

Twining and Collaboration: Strengthening partnerships for positive impact

In the spirit of networking and sharing experiences among communities with similar interests, various villages participated in twinning, study trips and collaborative projects. Some villages proactively established sub-group within the Network, leading to the creation of the BTV Network Chinese, Japanese, Ecuador and Iberian (Andorra, Portugal and Spain) Chapters. The chapters engage in mutual exchanges, site visits, and the development of joint marketing campaigns. As another example, Uaxactún, Guatemala (BTV 2024) organized a study tour to Peru to exchange experiences with peer BTVs.



Villages part of the BTV Network Iberian Chapter, Ordino, Andorra



Villages part of the BTV Network Japanese Chapter

Amplifying the voices of the villages

To enhance the visibility of Best Tourism Villages’ good practices, UN Tourism offers outreach opportunities to villages, allowing them to present their messages on the international stage.

Throughout these interventions, villages part of the BTV Network not only inspire other rural destinations worldwide but also contribute to a broader movement toward sustainable tourism and best practices.

As of 2025, 40+ villages have participated in regional or global events.

On 4 May 2022, Kaunertal, Austria (BTV 2021) represented rural communities at the 76th United Nations General Assembly High-Level Thematic Debate, titled ‘Putting Sustainable and Resilient Tourism at the Heart of an Inclusive Recovery’.

In 2022, Angochagua, Ecuador (BTV 2022) and Valposchiavo, Switzerland (BTV 2021) joined the World Forum on Gastronomy Tourism in San Sebastian, Spain.

In 2023, Raqchi, Peru (BTV 2022) and Oyacachi, Ecuador (BTV 2023) shared their examples at the UN Tourism Commission for the Americas, among other events.



Sarah Raich, Vice Mayor of Kaunertal, Austria (BTV 2021) at the United Nations General Assembly



Kaspar Howald from Valposchiavo, Switzerland (BTV 2021) and Tania Endara from Angochagua, Ecuador (BTV 2022) participating in the 8th UNWTO World Forum on Gastronomy Tourism, San Sebastian, Spain



Fabián Aigaje, Oyacachi, Ecuador (BTV 2023) participating in the UN Tourism Commission for Americas 2024, Cuba

Empowering Women from Rural Communities

The Programme is committed to amplifying the voices of women, youth and people in vulnerable situation in rural areas. Through global partnerships and targeted initiatives, it provides platforms for these groups to lead, innovate, and shape an inclusive future for rural tourism.



UN Tourism has strategically prioritized the empowerment of women transversally across the T4RD Programme.

Female leaders from the BTV Network have shared their perspectives internationally through strategic partnerships with UN agencies. In March 2023, UN Tourism partnered with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to host the online event “Rural Women, Agritourism and Digitalization: Practices and Experiences that Contribute to Sustainable Development,” featuring discussions with women rural tourism professionals from Puquédon, Chile (BTV 2022) and Rupit, Spain (BTV 2022). Additionally, in November 2022, Cumeada, Portugal, highlighted how intellectual property can enhance women’s participation in tourism during the WIPO-organized session “Closing the Gender Gap in Intellectual Property (IP) – Women and Tourism.”



To celebrate International Women’s Day in 2024 and 2025, the Programme launched the social media campaign: “Celebrating Women in Best Tourism Villages,” showcasing best practices in women’s participation and empowerment in rural communities through tourism.

Advocating for heritage and women empowerment

The Haenyeo women divers of Sehwa (BTV 2023) in Jeju Island, Republic of Korea, some in their 80s, plunge up to 10 meters below the sea to harvest shellfish without oxygen masks. This remarkable cultural practice has been inscribed on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The T4RD Programme provides platforms for women and other groups to share their stories, preserve their traditions, and promote their cultural heritage on a global stage.



Sehwa, Republic of Korea – Best Tourism Village by UN Tourism (2023)

https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/book/10.18111/9789284427291 - Wednesday, March 04, 2026 12:10:08 AM - IP Address:62.74.15.14

Inspiring Young Generations to Lead Change in Rural Areas

Engaging the next generations in rural development is crucial for ensuring the sustainability and vitality of rural communities worldwide. Recognizing this, the Programme focuses on empowering young people to take the lead in the transformation of rural areas through tourism.

To enhance youth engagement, UN Tourism organized three editions of its Students’ League thematic challenges on tourism for rural development (2021, 2022, and 2023). Approximately **650 high school, undergraduate, and master’s students participated**, both globally and in national competitions in Switzerland and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Besides gaining experience in presenting innovative solutions to the challenges of the sector, winning teams received internships with UN Tourism.

Furthermore, the Regional Office for the Middle East hosted four events for youth – university students, alumni, and local youth associations – demonstrating the benefits of tourism for rural development. In November 2023, the UN Youth Cafe engaged young professionals in finding solutions to rural development challenges, aligning their efforts to specific SDGs.

Starting in 2025, UN Tourism partnered with HSLU – Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, engaging 27 undergraduate students from seven countries in a

collaborative research project as part of their academic coursework. The students conducted in-depth studies on five BTVs. Each group focused on a different BTV, exploring the challenges and opportunities related to tourism development in rural settings. The initiative proved valuable for both the students and the BTVs, offering meaningful insights and increased visibility for all stakeholders involved.



“Reimagine Rural” a workshop part of the United Nations Youth Cafe organized at the UN Tourism Regional Office for the Middle East in 2023



Rural Development Through Tourism – Social Media Challenge, part of the UN Tourism Students’ League, celebrated in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2023

Placing Tourism for Rural Development on the Global Agenda

The Programme aims to promote rural development through innovative and impactful joint initiatives, by integrating tourism for rural development into high-level policy discussions and fostering synergies with other UN specialized agencies.



Tourism for rural development as part of the G20 agenda



Since its inception, the Programme has actively sought diverse collaborative relationships and strategic partnerships to advance its mission. Inspired by the AIUla Framework for Inclusive Community Development through Tourism developed during Saudi Arabia's G20 Presidency in 2020, the Programme has consistently worked to position tourism as a tool to fight inequalities and progress inclusion. At the **1st G20 Tourism Working Group Meeting** under India's Presidency in July 2023, UN Tourism organized a side event titled "Rural Tourism for Community Empowerment and Poverty Alleviation."

In 2020, UN Tourism and the **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** signed a Memorandum of Understanding to support initiatives related to the sustainable growth and development of rural tourism. This partnership advocates for rural tourism as an important driver of socio-economic growth, reduced inequalities, increased resilience, and development for the achievement of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. The two agencies are enhancing their synergies in rural areas by integrating the work of FAO's Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Sites (GIAHS) and Digital Villages Initiative, and the Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism. This collaboration has led to several joint initiatives, including three dedicated webinars in 2023 on topics related to agritourism and rural development. Additionally, the two agencies have developed guidebook for tourism in GIAHS to enhance tourism potential and improve livelihoods in rural communities.

UN Tourism has also partnered with the **International Labour Organization (ILO)** to contribute to an online course developed by its International Training Centre (ITCILO) on the Future of Work in the Rural Economy, specifically addressing poverty reduction and social justice through decent jobs in tourism. Additionally, UN Tourism participated in the 2023 and 2025 edition of the ILO Rural Development Academy together with Alquézar, Spain (BTV 2022) and Bojo, The Philippines (BTV 2021).

UN Tourism has also joined hands with the **World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)** in several initiatives to untap the potential of Intellectual Property (IP) and rural tourism, mainly through Geographical Indications (GIs). In this sense, UN Tourism has participated in international workshops and some of the Best Tourism Villages have joined to showcase good practices and successful case studies in boosting rural tourism through the development of GIs.



UN Tourism Secretary-General, Zurab Pololikashvili, and FAO Director-General, Qu Dongyu, during an official visit to FAO headquarters in Italy in March 2023

Unveiling Success Stories: How Press Trips Showcase Tourism’s Impact

Press trips organized by the Programme gather compelling tourism impact stories from BTVs, helping to spread these narratives globally and inspire others to embrace sustainable tourism as a driver for rural development.

15

Leading journalists from top international media outlets have been invited to visit the Best Tourism Villages by UN Tourism

24M+

Total reach

EUR 160K+

Advertising Value Equivalent

In San Ginesio, Italy (BTV 2021), Nglanggeran, Indonesia (BTV 2021) and Misfat Al Abriyeen, Oman (BTV 2021), these trips have brought together 15 journalists from leading international media to know more about the Programme and the Best Tourism Villages. The focus has been on telling the story of how tourism serves as a powerful tool for community empowerment, cultural preservation, and economic resilience. By visiting these exemplary Best Tourism Villages, the journalists have been able to witness firsthand the positive effects of tourism on local practices and success stories.

The press trips have not only highlighted the achievements of these villages but have also amplified their stories to a global audience. Through detailed coverage and compelling narratives, the journalists have showcased how tourism can drive sustainable rural development, strengthen cultural heritage, and foster economic growth. This increased visibility is crucial for inspiring similar initiatives worldwide and demonstrating the significant role tourism can play in transforming rural communities.



Engaging Audiences: Our Media Outreach

Through strategic communications, the Programme aims to raise awareness of its initiatives, highlight key achievements, and engage a diverse audience, including UN Tourism member states, policymakers at local and national level, industry leaders, and the general public. Most importantly, it aims to promote the role of tourism in rural development and garner support for targeted policies, financing and investment from both public and private sectors..



15K+

Pieces of coverage



900M+

Publications reach



55M+

Estimated AVE* in Euros

*Advertising Value Equivalency



2.9K

Instagram followers



700K+

Instagram impressions



1.2K

X (Twitter) followers



600K+

X (Twitter) impressions



2K

LinkedIn followers



500K+

LinkedIn impressions



100K

BTV Website users



550K+

BTV Website views

Data from October 2021 to August 2024

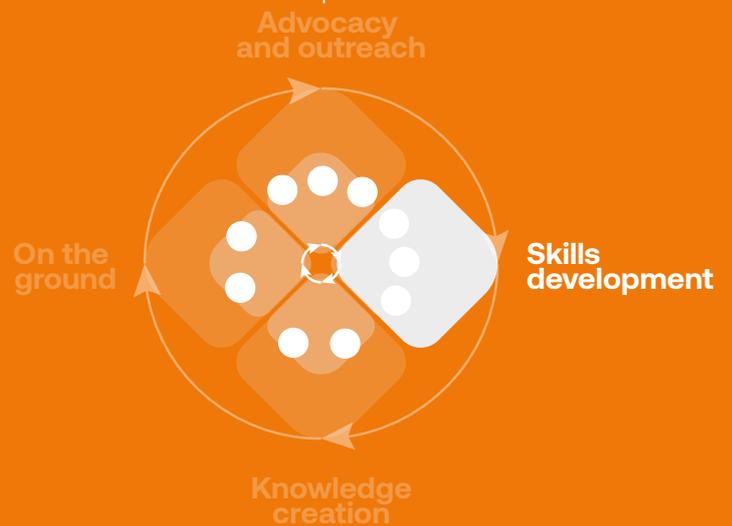
Tourism Rural and Development: Stories that Capture Global Attention

Focused on amplifying the role of tourism in driving rural development, the Programme activities have highlighted the ongoing significance of community-driven tourism and cultural preservation. Whether through dedicated initiatives like the Best Tourism Villages or broader rural tourism efforts, these stories have been featured in a variety of top-tier publications, underscoring the importance of sustainable practices in rural areas.



Skills Development

To strengthen capacities and skills of relevant stakeholders in rural areas







Kalopanagiotis, Cyprus – Part of the Upgrade Programme in 2022

The Best Tourism Villages Upgrade Programme

The Upgrade Programme is designed to provide targeted support and resources to villages that demonstrate significant potential to become a Best Tourism Village but require additional assistance to reach the highest standards.



56

Mentored villages

38

Countries

1400+

Stakeholders involved

120+

Days of work on the ground

89%

Of stakeholders rated their satisfaction with the Upgrade Programme at the highest level.

The Best Tourism Villages (BTV) Upgrade Programme supports rural villages that have previously applied for the BTV recognition without meeting the required threshold.

Through the Upgrade Programme, villages receive mentorship from dedicated experts who provide recommendations to address areas for improvement. This support focuses on enhancing the villages' tourism potential for rural development.

The mentorship provides a tailored approach that helps identify and address weaknesses highlighted in the BTV evaluation process. Following the mentorship's completion, villages can re-apply to the BTV Initiative through a Fast Track process, with the aim of achieving recognition and further advancing their tourism development goals.

The Programme has established a structured feedback mechanism for mentors, village representatives, and member states as a means for continuous improvement. The integration of stakeholder feedback helps strengthen the tailored approach to mentorship and enhances understanding of the development needs of rural communities.

Mentorship in Action: Empowering Villages on the Ground

The Upgrade Programme Mentorships brings together mentors, member states and village representatives on a transformative journey toward sustainable rural development through tourism. Through immersive field visits, focus groups with different stakeholders, and comprehensive mentorship recommendations, the

mentorship provides strategic guidance and facilitates the implementation of targeted actions. The success of this initiative highlights the dedication, engagement, and commitment of the villages, whose proactive efforts are driving meaningful improvements in sustainable tourism practices and rural development

“The active involvement of the national authority is crucial for the success of the mentorship. At the Ministry, we coordinated the process and supported the implementation of the recommendations report. For instance in Anıtlı, we began inscribing Syriac Calligraphy in the national inventory of intangible cultural heritage. In Cumalıkızık, the Ministry gathered local stakeholders and established the Village Promotion and Development Board. Additionally, the Bursa Provincial Directorate of Culture and Tourism signed a protocol with Bursa Uludağ University to ensure sustainable and inclusive tourism development in Cumalıkızık, launching the Zero Waste Village Cumalıkızık project.”

Basak Önsal Demir
Esra Mert

Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Türkiye

“The participatory approach of the mentorship programme significantly strengthened the relationship between the public and private sectors at local, regional, and national levels. It clearly demonstrated that sustainable development is achieved through collective effort. The focus group meetings facilitated valuable exchanges, helping us identify both strengths and weaknesses. Moving forward, we are committed to assisting Trevelin in developing its tourism strategy.”

Rodrigo Baez

Secretariat of Tourism, Environment and Sports, Argentina

“Ordino was named Best Tourism Village in 2023, after being invited to be part of the Upgrade Programme in 2021. Thanks to participation in the Upgrade Programme, we had the support of a mentor that helped us to identify improvement areas in our tourism strategy, guiding us to better align with the Sustainable Development Goals and to try new ways to engage and mobilize tourism stakeholders. The Fast Track procedure allowed us to showcase the progress we’ve done since, to share our roadmap for the future, and to better communicate what makes Ordino a unique rural destination.”

Enric Martínez Sala

Ordino, Andorra—part of the Upgrade Programme in 2021 and Best Tourism Village 2023

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Mentorship activities in villages: Cumalıkızık, Türkiye (left); Il Ngwesi, Kenya (center); and Ferraria de São João, Portugal (right)

Building Capacity: Masterclasses and Good Practices Sharing for Sustainable Tourism

At the core of the T4RD Programme and the BTV Network is a commitment to continuous learning and capacity-building, ensuring stakeholders are equipped with the latest knowledge and innovations for sustainable tourism development.

11
Masterclasses

750+
Participants worldwide

25+
Streaming hours

 Contents developed focusing on key topics about tourism for rural development and inviting leading firms and stakeholders.

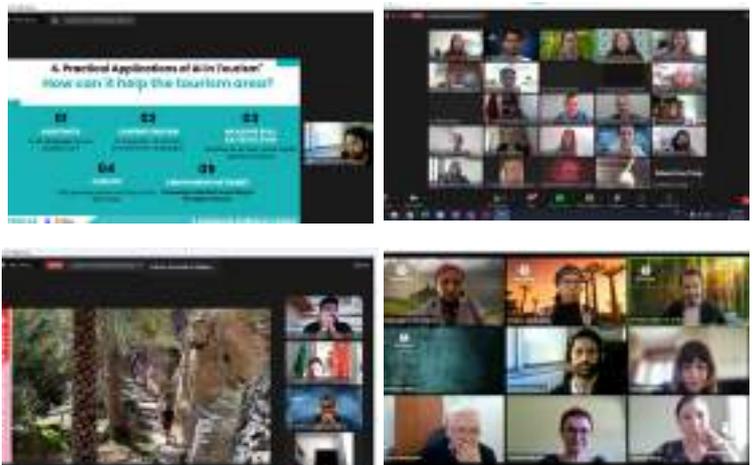
The BTV Network strives to empower all stakeholders within member villages – ranging from MSMEs to public, private, and civil society representatives – to innovate and address their specific needs in developing sustainable tourism solutions. One of the Network’s primary objectives is to facilitate continuous learning and capacity-building, ensuring that members stay updated with the latest knowledge and advancements in the field.

To support this goal, the T4RD Programme has organized a series of masterclasses led by subject matter experts. In 2025, it launched the new BTV Network online series The Knowledge Series – Learn from the Experts, held quarterly throughout the year.

 **The Knowledge Series:** Sessions focused on critical topics discussed by leading industry professionals.

In total, eleven knowledge series have been held, attracting 750+ participants. Topics covered include enhancing social media presence, collaborating with tour operators, leveraging user-generated online platforms, and utilizing AI technologies for an improved visitor experience, developing green strategies, and protecting intellectual property.

Partners for capacity building sessions:



Learning from the best: BTV Network’s Sharing of Good Practices Series

Knowledge sharing is another cornerstone of the BTV Network. The Sharing of Good Practices component offers online sessions where villages exchange practical knowledge and real-life success stories with peers.

Building on this approach, UN Tourism launched in 2025 a new quarterly webinar series, Village Talks – Voices from the Ground. The series provides BTVs with a platform to present their experiences in leveraging tourism for sustainable rural development, while also giving them international visibility. Each session, open to the public, focuses on a specific theme, with villages sharing how they address challenges, seize opportunities, and implement successful tourism initiatives.

11

Sharing of Good Practices sessions

25

Villages sharing practices

480

Attendees worldwide

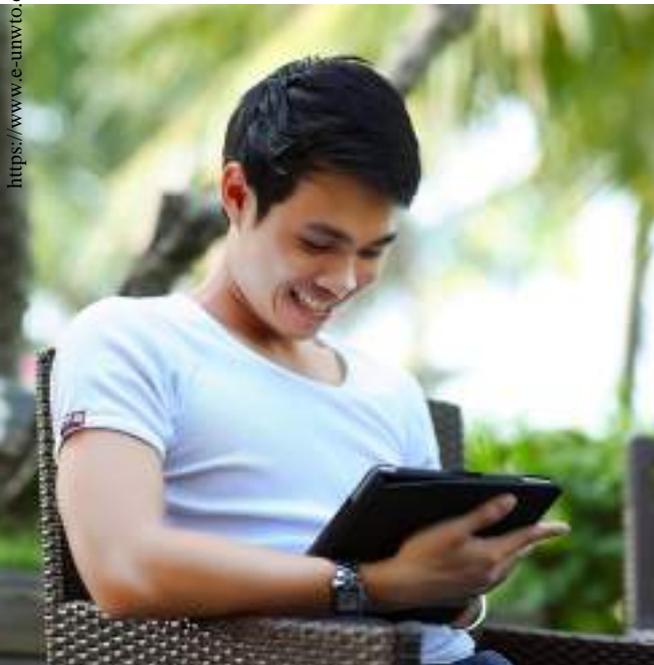


Sessions designed emphasizing the value of peer-to-peer learning and the importance of continuous knowledge sharing in driving sustainable rural tourism.

This initiative aims to nurture a culture of learning, inspire creative thinking, and generate innovative ideas. Since 2022, eleven sessions have been organized, engaging 480+ participants on topics such as heritage preservation, value chain integration, social and environmental sustainability, and tourism development. This initiative aims to nurture a culture of learning, inspire creative thinking, and generate innovative ideas across the Network.

- Youth and Tourism Key Take-Away Messages**
Youth is the heart of the future.
Youth Engagement in Tourism:
Highlighted the role of youth in community-based tourism development, using Mpingwe, Tanzania, as a case study to show how young people can drive sustainable tourism initiatives.
- Heritage conservation for preservation of identity:**
The safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, such as the Voladores ceremony in Mexico, is crucial for maintaining cultural identity and enhancing the tourism experience.
- Destination Management and Traffic Control:**
Madrid, Spain, has been recognized for its approach to managing visitor flow and preserving the quality of life for residents. Local management with surrounding municipalities has been key.
- BEST TOURISM VILLAGE YUSUO VILLAGE, CHINA**
Ecology-based economy:
Explored the transformation of Yusuo, China, from a mining-based economy to one focused on nature protection and tourism, showcasing the benefits of an ecology-based industry.

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LAUNCHED

Making tourism for rural development skills development widely accessible

The Programme has launched its first-ever set of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) dedicated entirely to rural tourism. Developed under the Tourism for Rural Development Programme, the two online courses, focusing on “**Product Development and Marketing for Rural Areas**” and “**Design Thinking for Rural Tourism Development**”, are now live and available free of charge in both English and Spanish.

Designed to be practical, accessible, user friendly, the MOOCs will equip those working on rural destinations with knowledge and tools to create more sustainable, inclusive, and community-led tourism experiences. Together, the two MOOCs offer a comprehensive and hands-on learning journey.



Executive Training 2023, UN Tourism Regional Office for the Middle East in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

UN Tourism Delivers Targeted Trainings to Address Member States' Skills Needs

UN Tourism is dedicated to offering targeted training and capacity-building for various stakeholders, addressing specific thematic needs identified among member states and key stakeholders.



58

Participants from UN Tourism member states trained

18

Member states represented



Training topics identified through the T4RD Programme research and the needs of member states.

In 2023, the Programme launched a series of regional Executive Trainings on Tourism for Rural Development titled "A Practical Approach to Strategy and Product Development."

The first edition took place at the UN Tourism Regional Office for the Middle East in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in May 2023, benefiting 25 government officials from 10 member states in the Middle East. In August 2024, a similar training was conducted in Brunei Darussalam for the Asia and Pacific region, involving 33 participants from eight countries.

These training courses equipped technical-level managers with practical knowledge on developing, implementing, and measuring rural tourism strategies. Participants also learned how to create, develop, and market tourism products and destinations on both national and international scales.



Executive Training 2024, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam

“Three things I learned during the training: the experience shared among the participating countries, the importance of sustainability in rural development and the cooperation with networking.”

Zeina Haddad
Ministry of Tourism, Lebanon

“I will apply this systematic thinking design that we have learned here with the local community, service providers and experiences.”

Mohammad Al Jboor
Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, Jordan

“One thing for sure, tools that we were given today are going to put us on the right track.”

Khadija Turki
Ajman Tourism, United Arab Emirates

“We gained valuable insights into rural development, particularly regarding community engagement and growth. The entire program was excellent, and we had the opportunity to share our knowledge with colleagues, which was fantastic.”

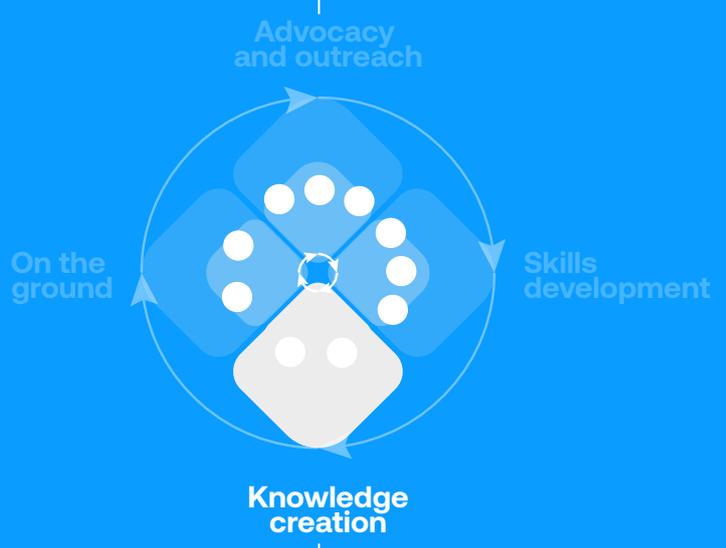
Champa Priyadarshani
Ministry of Tourism and Lands, Sri Lanka

“The training was highly beneficial for us in Vanuatu, as it directly relates to our situation with scattered islands, making rural tourism development challenging. Attending this two-day workshop provided us with valuable strategies for effectively developing rural tourism.”

Jeannette Samuel
Ministry of Tourism, Trade and Industry, Vanuatu

Knowledge Creation

To create, exchange and disseminate knowledge for effective evidence-based policy making.





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Huangling, China – Best Tourism Village by UN Tourism (2023)

The One-Stop Shop for Tourism for Rural Development Knowledge

Gathering knowledge from on-the-ground evidence to worldwide surveys, the T4RD Programme research agenda aims to empower stakeholders with the latest knowledge, tools, and resources necessary for driving sustainable tourism in rural areas.



6

Reports

48k+

Publications downloads

55k+

Impressions reached with rural tourism knowledge posts

1st

Global Tourism for Rural Development Survey among UN Tourism member states

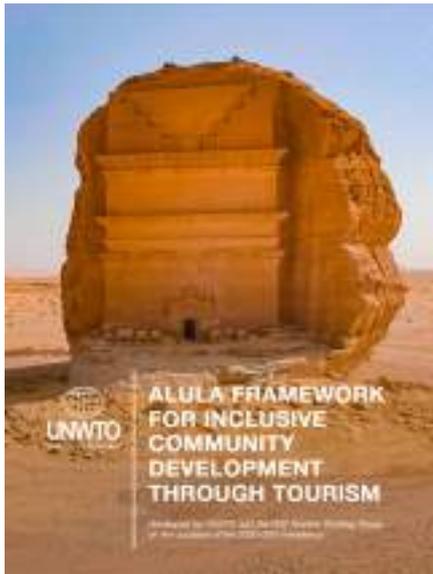
The T4RD knowledge generation is aimed to set a dynamic resource hub, compiling a wealth of knowledge that ranges from on-the-ground evidence and case studies to comprehensive research and policy guidelines at national and regional levels.

The ultimate goal of the T4RD Programme knowledge creation axis is to empower informed decision-making at every level – from local communities to national governments. To achieve this, we have established foundational frameworks, such as the AIUla Framework for Inclusive Community Development Through Tourism and the UN Tourism Recommendations on Tourism and Rural Development.

The research agenda is specifically tailored to address the needs and challenges identified by stakeholders in rural communities and national governments. To map these needs, the Programme launched the first Tourism for Rural Development survey among UN Tourism member states in 2023, complementing these results with the analysis of 200+ Best Tourism Villages candidacies to fully understand the landscape of rural tourism worldwide.

Tourism for Rural Development Programme Research

The T4RD Programme has produced essential research providing strategic insights, policy recommendations, and practical tools designed to support stakeholders in advancing sustainable rural tourism.



AlUla Framework for Inclusive Community Development through Tourism (2020)

<https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284422159>

Under the leadership of the 2020 G20 Saudi Presidency, UN Tourism and the G20 Tourism Working Group developed this framework to help fulfill the sector's potential to contribute to and achieve inclusive community development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The framework provides guidance and inspiration to governments, as well as all other key stakeholders in the tourism sector with the aim of fostering a truly holistic and integrated approach to inclusive community development through tourism.

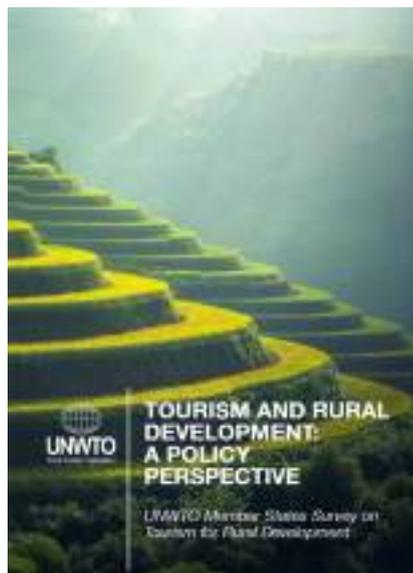


UNWTO Recommendations on Tourism and Rural Development (2020)

<https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284422173>

On the occasion of the 2020, designated as the 'Year of Tourism and Rural Development,' these recommendations were published to guide stakeholders in developing rural tourism that fosters inclusive, sustainable, and resilient growth.

The document contains a strategic set of recommendations for leveraging tourism as a tool for sustainable and inclusive rural development. It outlines practical approaches and policy guidelines to ensure that tourism contributes to the well-being of local communities and the preservation of rural heritage.



Tourism and Rural Development: A Policy Perspective – UNTourism Member States Survey on Tourism and Rural Development (2023)

<https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284424641> (AR)

<https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284424306> (EN)

As the first global outlook on rural tourism, this document provides an analysis of the current state of policies related to tourism and rural development. It highlights the key challenges and opportunities faced by rural areas from a national perspective and offers insights into rural tourism prospects.

Drawing on responses from 79 countries across five regions, the document presents a nuanced understanding of how different nations are approaching rural tourism.

This report is available in English (EN) and Arabic (AR).



Tourism and Rural Development: Understanding Challenges on the Ground – Lessons Learned from the Best Tourism Villages by UNWTO Initiative (2023)

<https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284426881> (AR)

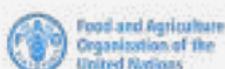
<https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284424368> (EN)

Rural communities are home to some of the world's most vulnerable populations. Tourism can be an effective means of providing socioeconomic opportunities for rural communities.

This publication represents a compendium of the main challenges in rural areas at a local scale and a wide range of innovative examples of how villages worldwide are addressing them, including novel approaches in policies, tourism products and practices to increase opportunities afforded by tourism.

This report is available in English (EN) and Arabic (AR).

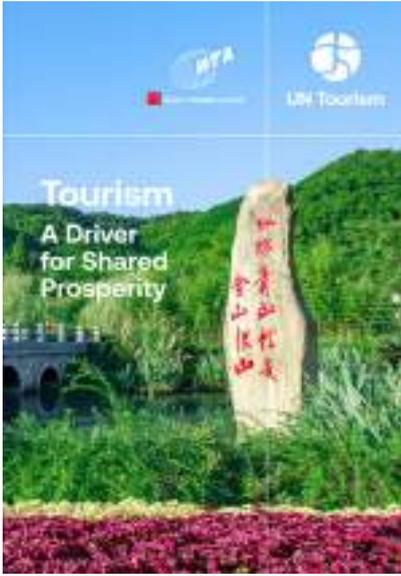
 **UPCOMING**



A Guidebook for Tourism Development in Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) Sites

In partnership with FAO, UN Tourism is developing a guidebook to promote sustainable tourism in GIAHS sites. This guidebook will serve as an international reference providing practical strategies and insights to help these unique agricultural heritage sites harness tourism for sustainable development and cultural preservation.

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**Tourism: A Driver for Shared Prosperity
Key insights (2023)**

<https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284424788>

Full report (2024)

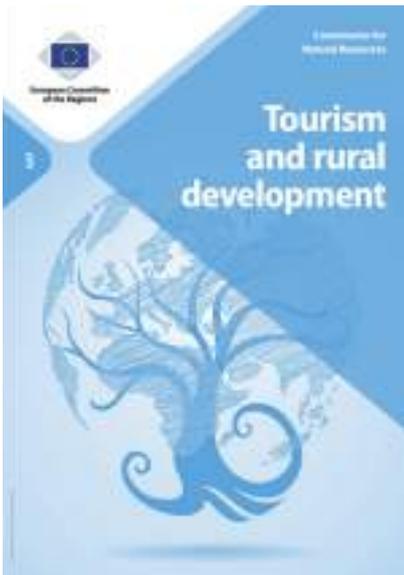
<https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284425822> (EN)

<https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284426348> (FR)

<https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284426324> (SP)

This document, developed in partnership with the World Tourism Alliance (WTA) and presented at the 2023 WTA Xianghu Dialogue, highlights the transformative power of tourism in achieving shared prosperity in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. The report emphasizes tourism’s significant contribution to inclusive growth in the post-pandemic era.

The report provides key insights to shape a sustainable tourism framework that promotes fairness and collective wealth with case studies from around the world.



**Tourism and rural development
(2024)**

<https://core.europa.eu/en/our-work/studies-publications>

UN Tourism, in partnership with the European Committee of the Regions, conducted a comprehensive study on the impact and potential of tourism in driving socio-economic development.

The report highlights rural tourism’s resilience post-COVID-19, its role in economic diversification and cultural preservation, and the challenges and opportunities for sustainable development. It provides a strategic roadmap focusing on integrating rural value chains, enhancing digital connectivity and skills, and aligning tourism with evolving consumer trends and sustainability practices.



UN Tourism eLibrary

Find these and other tourism publications available at UN Tourism eLibrary:

<https://www.e-unwto.org/>





Cumeada, Portugal – Best Tourism Village by UN Tourism (2021)

STAR: Self-Assessment Tool to Assist Rural Destinations

The Self-Assessment Tool to Assist Rural Destinations (STAR) is an online tool that empowers rural destinations to evaluate and enhance their tourism strategies. STAR provides a comprehensive framework for local authorities to assess and improve their policies and actions aligning with reference best practices for sustainable development.



Open to all rural destinations in UN Tourism member states



Focused on local public authorities and destination managers



Modular assessment

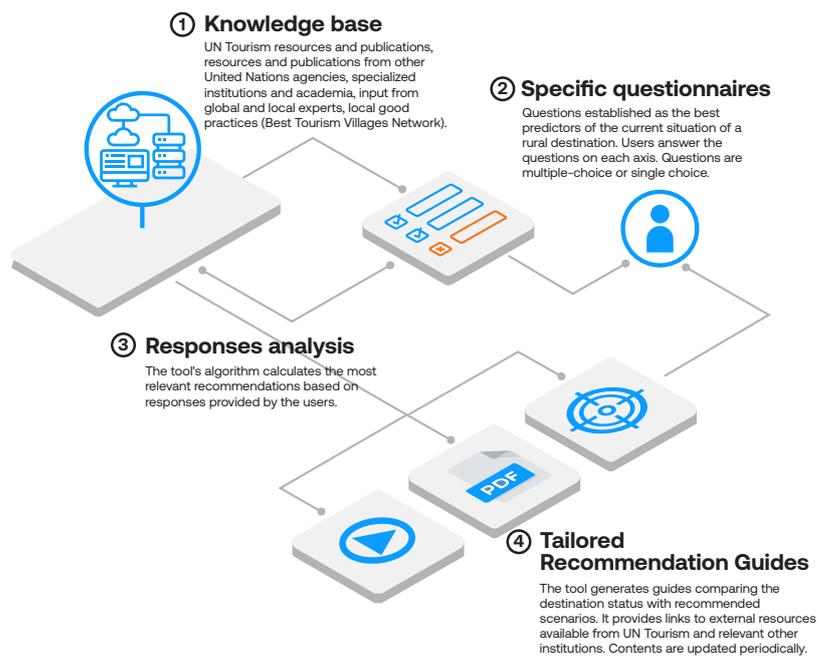


Tailor made recommendation guides based on knowledge available from UN Tourism, other UN agencies, and other relevant stakeholders.

Launched in May 2024, this diagnostic tool allows the user to determine the strengths and weaknesses at destination level, focusing on the following assessment axes: i) tourism governance, ii) tourism development, iii) environmental sustainability, iv) economic, social and cultural sustainability and v) infrastructure.

Based on the unique responses of each destination, STAR generates a set of personalized recommendations that focus mainly on priority attention areas. Where possible, STAR recommendations point to UN Tourism and other UN agencies resources, as well as examples of best practices in rural destinations.

The tool compiles and analyzes aggregated data from destinations at national or regional level, highlighting strengths, challenges and priority areas of intervention. This information can support local and national governments in strengthening their tourism policies, strategies, and interventions to enhance rural development.



How does STAR work?

STAR contents are built from available knowledge at UN Tourism, other UN agencies, experts, and local examples in the BTV network. Through modular questionnaires, it gathers information about a destination's status. After users complete them, they receive a tailored recommendations guide with links to additional learning resources.

The STAR modular assessment

STAR allows rural destinations to self-assess their strategies and actions under five axes:

-  **Tourism Governance:** Assesses the management and coordination of local stakeholders in developing a respectful and beneficial tourism model. Key elements: legal framework, tourism prioritization, public-private cooperation, community involvement.
-  **Economic, Social, and Cultural Sustainability:** Evaluates the management of economic opportunities, social well-being, and cultural preservation. Key elements: connection of vulnerable groups to tourism, preservation of cultural heritage, addressing depopulation, economic opportunities.
-  **Environmental Sustainability:** Assesses the management and preservation of natural resources. Key elements: conservation of biodiversity, efficient resource use, waste management, circular economy.
-  **Tourism Development:** Measures the destination's approach to sustainable, inclusive, and resilient tourism. Key elements: tourism strategy, promotion, visitor experience management, benefit management.
-  **Infrastructure Management:** Evaluates the management of infrastructure. Key elements: access and mobility, accessibility for people with disabilities, digital connectivity, maintenance of basic and tourism infrastructure.

A bridge to more knowledge

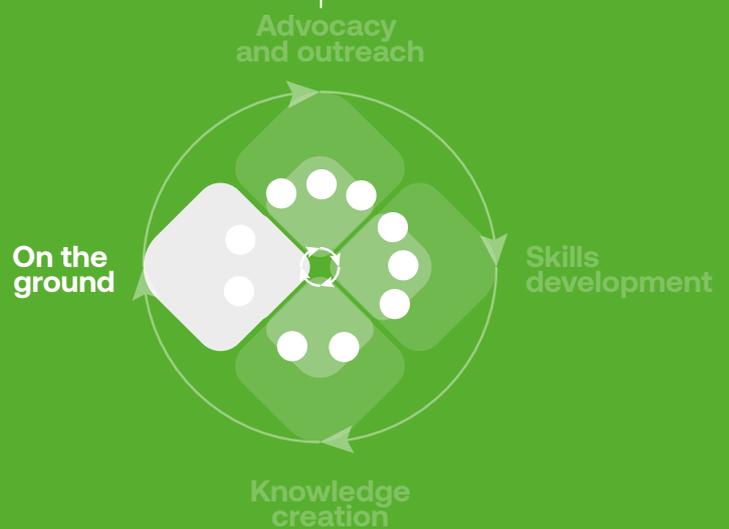
One of the standout features of STAR is its ability to provide destinations with personalized guidance based on their unique circumstances. The tool not only offers practical recommendations but also connects users to resources from UN Tourism and other UN agencies. This ensures that rural destinations have access to the latest knowledge and best practices in tourism development.

Benchmarks for rural destinations and national decision-makers

The tool aggregates data at the national and regional levels, allowing for benchmarking against similar destinations. This collective insight can inform broader policy-making efforts, enabling governments to strengthen their overall tourism strategies and interventions.

On The Ground

To support Member States and actors in implementing innovative approaches in the field.







The Tourism for Rural Development Small Grants Programme

The Tourism for Rural Development Small Grants Programme (T4RD-SGP) aims to provide direct support to civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in rural areas to develop innovative approaches and solutions at community level to foster tourism as a driver of rural development and well-being.

Benefits of the SGP Programme



Funding support: Projects receive financial assistance to cover eligible expenses.



Increased visibility: Awarded projects receive UN Tourism coverage and increased visibility.



Networking opportunities: The programme facilitates collaboration, partnerships, and joint efforts.



Recognition: Awarded projects are endorsed, highlighting their quality, relevance and potential impact.

Rural communities face various development challenges including depopulation, ageing, lower income levels, decline in traditional economic activities, gaps in infrastructure, health and financial services, and a digital divide. Recognizing the role of tourism in addressing challenges in rural areas, UN Tourism has launched the Tourism for Rural Development Small Grants Programme.

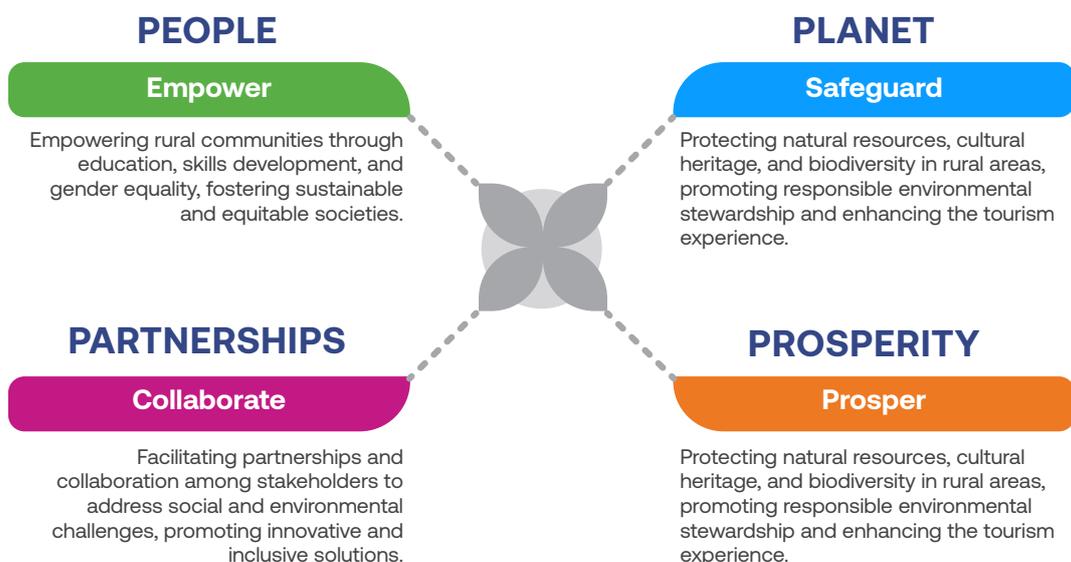
Despite the availability of financial aid initiatives for rural areas, communities often lack the capacity or support services needed to fully capitalize on tourism opportunities. UN Tourism seeks to leverage its unique comparative advantage as the UN Specialized Agency for tourism by developing a mechanism that addresses the challenges faced by rural populations, with a focus on using tourism as a driver of sustainable development.

The Programme fund projects that demonstrate innovation, sustainability, inclusivity, community involvement, and a strong commitment to enhancing local tourism experiences in rural areas.



The Tourism for Rural Development Small Grants Programme – areas of action

The programme is centered on four key programmatic areas of action aligned with the AIUla Framework and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:



A CALL TO FUNDING PARTNERS

Become part of the T4RD-SGP
Join us in exploring partnership opportunities that can drive transformative change in rural communities through the upcoming calls of the Tourism for Rural Development Small Grants Programme.

More information: rural@unwto.org





‘Colourful Cultures’ the first Small Grants Programme Call

This grant will enable Civil Society Organizations and Non-Government Organizations to provide innovative support services to artisans and artist communities to boost income opportunities, preserve cultural heritage and promote rural tourism in Africa.

EUR 20,000

Top grant amount

10 eligible countries

Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, The Gambia, Tunisia and Zambia

CSOs and NGOs

Eligible applicants include civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

141

Applications Received

7

Projects Selected

1000+

Direct Beneficiaries, emphasis on women and youth as target beneficiaries.

Enabled by



The main objectives of the Colourful Cultures Call for Proposals are: i) increasing the capacity of artists and artisans to participate in and benefit from the tourism economy, thereby enhancing their income; ii) enhancing the visibility of artists and artisans within tourism destinations across the targeted African countries; iii) improving the availability of support services for artists and artisans in rural tourism destinations.

The Colourful Cultures Call for applications has four areas of intervention:

- 1. Capacity Building and Skills Development:** The call emphasizes strengthening the capabilities of local artists and artisans through mentorship programs, workshops, and technical assistance, aimed at nurturing emerging talents and fortifying cultural heritage practices.
- 2. Policy and Governance:** Proposals are sought to enhance the institutional resilience of cultural organizations and foster networks and collaborations among artists, artisans, and tourism stakeholders, ensuring a robust and interconnected cultural landscape.
- 3. Product Development:** The call encourages the development of compelling tourism packages that engage travelers with local artists and artisans, enriching their experiences while supporting the local economy and preserving cultural heritage.
- 4. Market Access, Marketing, Promotion, and Branding:** The call supports projects that promote cultural festivals and fairs, create dedicated sales platforms in tourism destinations, and advance the digitization of artisan offerings, enhancing visibility and appeal to a broader audience.

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World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism)
C/ Poeta Joan Maragall, 42
28020 Madrid, Spain

Tel.: (+34) 915 67 81 00
E-mail: info@untourism.int
Website: www.untourism.int

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To know more:

consult: <https://www.untourism.int/rural-tourism>
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