

Tourism is NOT just a holiday” Indian NGOs blast “flawed” Draft Tourism Master Plan 2015

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New Delhi:

Media Release by the Bengaluru-based NGO Equations – A coalition of 35 Indian non-government organisations has blasted the draft national tourism policy 2015 released by the central government as paving the way for a complete privatisation of the country’s tourism industry, with scant regard being paid to the interests of local communities. The draft policy was released on 30th April with comments to be sent in by 10th May (<http://tourism.gov.in/WhatsNew/NewsDetails.aspx?NID=50>).

In response, 35 civil society groups from across India have sent a joint statement to the Ministry of Tourism, saying: “This draft policy has been drafted in a manner that is limited in its vision, flawed in its approach, aims to centralise power, places central bureaucracy and corporates at the core and is anti-people. There has also been no consultative process in the formation of the draft or the finalisation of the policy with just 10 days provided for comments.” The NGOs have condemned this approach and demanded a consultative, democratic path to the process of policy formulation.

Full text of Statement of Civil Society Organisations to the draft National Tourism Policy, 2015 10th May 2015

Limited Vision, Flawed Approach and Craving to Centralise, Places Central Bureaucracy and Corporates at the core and is anti-people

In the introductory chapter of the draft National Tourism Policy (NTP), 2015 the Ministry of Tourism (MoT), attempts to present the overarching perspective of the proposed policy, and which is further elaborated in the next chapter on Vision, Mission and Objectives. Both these chapters lead to what follows in the rest of the policy. Keywords across the two chapters which stand out are:

- Host Community
- Focus on positive impacts
- National political and economic agenda of tourism
- Responsible Tourism
- Government-led, private sector driven and community welfare oriented

The tourism industry is probably the only industry that sells what it has not produced. While the argument offered by the industry and the draft NTP, 2015 is that the tourism sells an experience, necessary ingredients for the manufacture of this experience are the natural systems as well as human societies and cultures which they have nourished. The tourism industry’s playground — forests, beaches and hills and mountains — are not merely benign ecoscapes to be bartered away by the industry. Instead, they are homes and backyards of people, communities and villages and towns that the tourists descend upon with their demand for as unique an experience as their money can buy.

Not viewing life and livelihood of the people as embedded in nature, we come across terms like ‘host communities’, who are taken to be subservient to the industry. This identity that is thrust on people living in ‘tourism destinations’ takes away the multiple, diverse and vibrant identities that the communities really have. Identities which bestow rights, empower and through which people can negotiate with the State and tourism industry are thus wiped out in the proposed policy.

The draft NTP 2015 portrays tourism as an industry that accrues nothing but positive outcomes. It chooses to ignore the existence of negative impacts, by omitting its mention from the document. Though the Ministry has historically not openly admitted to tourism causing negative impacts, some documents do acknowledge the same. Below is an excerpt from the Report of the Working Group formed during the 11th 5-year plan (2007 – 2012). page 43:

- “The Plan must ensure that the cultural values of a place are not debased by any means. The potential negative impacts of tourism, like: overuse by tourists; inappropriate visitor behaviour and lack of sensitivity to local customs (for example, defiling sacred areas, non-observance of dress code, drinking in public, etc.)
- unplanned tourism infrastructure and development;
- loss of control over cultural property and the absence of copyright or protective legislation; must be considered while preparing the plan and ways of protection devised. There has to be constant monitoring of the impact of tourism and ensure timely remedial measure as and when required.”

Tourism is not just a holiday, it changes the entire social, cultural and economic nature of the place where it thrives. Local economies become dependent on tourism, which like a weed slowly strangles traditional occupations like agriculture, fishing, pastoralism, arts and handicrafts. Land and beaches get taken over for construction of tourism infrastructure affecting farmers, adivasis and fishworkers. Pastoralists find their movement restricted due to tourism and are often forced to ‘settle down’ and become labour in the tourism industry.

People who are dependent on natural resources like forests, coasts and grasslands often find themselves restricted, as tourism is developed without taking into consideration the carrying capacity of these regions. Artisans are co-opted into the tourism industry and often forced to compromise on their art to deliver cheap souvenirs. The unorganised sector which according to various studies contributes 60-70% in tourism industry, is often seen as being a nuisance, affecting the attraction of the destination and therefore marked as something that should be removed. There are social costs: abuse of women, children particularly those forced into sex work, trafficking and child labour because of tourism. Current forms of tourism, systemically and systematically perpetuate the caste system, with sometimes even furthering caste based occupations especially those concerning dalits and adivasis.

Further, the tourism industry needs to take a positive view of dalits and adivasis for e.g. recognition of their arts and handicrafts. Gender and sexuality stereotypes are also upheld – some examples being women dressed up at front desks of hotels and transgender communities having no other option other than sex work and begging in tourism destinations. Therefore tourism not only maintains but furthers social hierarchies.

The draft NTP, 2015 does not alert the industry as to implications of unregulated tourism development, thereby not creating the space for much needed regulatory mechanisms to protect the rights and interests of people affected by tourism.

Over the past decade or so, despite governments claiming that they hold an economic perspective to tourism, through its argument of employment generation and resource creation, tourism has in effect been used as a political tool. The push for tourism in regions of conflict like Jammu & Kashmir and the North East region is testimony to this. What is surprising is that central India has not been mentioned! Several documents of the Government of India linked to ‘Left Wing Effectuated Areas’ have spoken about the role of tourism in maintaining peace. Tourism is being used to drown out people’s struggles for self-determination. Besides, hospitality of people must not be equated with ready-for-tourism. Tourism is no more an innocent industry that provides a good experience for tourists. It is being used as a front to change the social and economic fabric of communities.

A policy document provides insights into the political and philosophical underpinnings of the government. While it sets the developmental goals for the Ministry, it also suggests the path to be taken. In this context, the Ministry has apparently chosen to walk the path of ‘Responsible Tourism’, while deliberately moving away from Sustainable Tourism, which at least found mention in documents, if not actually followed.

For e.g. the National Tourism Policy, 2002 states that: “Sustainability should serve as a guiding star for the new Policy.” (National Tourism Policy, 2002 p.4)

The proposed NTP, 2015 on the other hand, states that: “These positive outcomes on ecological, social, cultural and economic impacts along with a robust community involvement can be achieved by following a paradigm of

responsible tourism as clearly defined by the UNWTO through their Global Code of Ethics.” (Draft National Tourism Policy, 2015 p.8)

The law of the land in our country recognizes the concept of Sustainable Development (1), from which emerges the understanding of Sustainable Tourism.

The UNWTO defines Sustainable Tourism as ‘leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems. Article 3 of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, adopted by the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) in 1999, further articulates practices that the tourism industry should engage in to achieve goals of Sustainable Development.

Furthermore, the Agenda 21, an action plan formulated at the United Nations Conference on Environment & Development Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992 identifies tourism with the potential to play an important role in the global movement towards Sustainable Development. Additionally, Chapter 28 of the Agenda 21, focuses on the role of local authorities in the fruition of the objectives of Sustainable Development.

Quoting from the Mid-term appraisal of the 11th five year plan for Tourism, page 364: ‘Tourism is an industry with great reliance on attraction and amenities, along with dependence on the goodwill of the local community. Of late, the social and economic consequences of tourism have raised various issues related to environment and the impact on the local community. Therefore, in order to have sustainable tourism development, the involvement of local people would be of utmost importance’.

Therefore, the approach of Sustainable Tourism is most likely to align goals of tourism with principles of social justice as bestowed by the Constitution of the country.

The crux of the proposed NTP lies in one of its objectives: **“Evolve a framework for tourism development, which is Government-led, private sector driven and community-welfare oriented”**.

Given the market driven nature of tourism and with its welfarist approach people affected by tourism are perceived as receiving doles from the tourism industry. With the private sector in the driver’s seat, that it would not steer the industry towards fulfilling its profit motive but towards the well-being of those affected by tourism, should seem a little too naive a statement for the Ministry to believe. This is a clear message to the people that the private sector / corporations’ interests would be upheld, this being reflected in the chapter titled ‘Action Plan’. The residual welfarist approach will also ensure that the residual rights of the people affected by tourism will neither be recognised nor upheld.

This statement is primarily one on governance. The National Tourism Authority which will be reposed with authority to respond quickly to market needs and take decisions will comprise primarily private sector and the administration, with the Ministers playing an advisory role as members of the National Tourism Advisory Board! With this, the tourism industry will be completely liberalised, both in letter and spirit. (Until now, the role of the Ministry and Departments of Tourism had some semblance of monitoring, at a minimum).

The proposed NTP is absolutely unconstitutional, one of the pillars of which are the 73rd and 74th amendment. Where are the Gram Sabhas and Ward Sabhas in the policy? Who decides on what form of tourism will be developed where and in what manner? Surely this is a mockery of the world’s largest democracy!

While the NTP seeks to emphasize upon the enhanced and greater role of Center, state tourism institutions (that include state TDCs, other autonomous public sector agencies, District Councils, elected bodies like panchayats and municipalities) find no mention in it. Once again, this is grossly erroneous in a democratic and federated polity like ours. Also, emphasis on centralization and placing tourism in the concurrent list undermines not only their present significant role in tourism promotion, but also the scope of meaningful participation of these institutions in future policy interventions.

The process undertaken by the Ministry to write this policy document is flawed and unconstitutional. It seems that the tourism consultants have been employed to write this document. It’s a global norm now to democratize policy making for its long term consequences. Even for projects there is need for free prior informed consent particularly for

Indigenous Peoples, and this is about a policy. Before the announcement of the draft policy, the Ministry received suggestions that the process be reviewed and a democratic one be put in place, yet the Ministry chose to go ahead and release this version of the draft policy.

With this background, we the undersigned demand:

1. A democratic process for policy making be initiated with the State Departments Tourism, wherein they engage with the LSGIs in the tourism destinations on the policy making process.
2. The draft National Tourism Policy should not be finalised without a consultation with relevant civil society organisations.
3. The Ministry of Tourism recognise the role of the unorganised sector in tourism and therefore involve their unions / associations in the policy making process.
4. The Ministry of Tourism should approach the tourism policy from a Constitutional perspective which is socialist, secular and democratic and refrain from playing into the hands of the private sector / corporations.

Signed by

- 1 All India Forum of Forest Movements
- 2 All India Union of Forest Working People
- 3 Alternative Law Forum
- 4 Centre for Responsible Tourism
- 5 Chhattisgarh Adivasi Sangathan
- 6 Children's Rights in Goa
- 7 Dakshinbanga Matsyajibi Forum
- 8 Delhi Forum
- 9 Delhi Solidarity Group
- 10 DISHA
- 11 Environics Trust
- 12 EQUATIONS
- 13 Himalaya Niti Abhiyan
- 14 Himalayan Ark
- 15 Indigenous Perspectives
- 16 Jan Ugahi
- 17 Kerala Independent Fishworkers Federation
- 18 Law Trust
- 19 Mirza Zulfikar Rahman, Individual Researcher and Gypsyfeet Travels
- 20 National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights
- 21 National Fishworkers Federation
- 22 National Hawker Federation
- 23 North Eastern Society for the Preservation of Nature and Wildlife (NESPON)
- 24 Research Collective
- 25 Safai Karmachari Andolan
- 26 Sangama
- 27 Satar Gaon nu Adivasi Sangathan
- 28 Sneha
- 29 Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust
- 30 Soumya Dutta
- 31 Spice Route Souharda Sahakari Niyamiata
- 32 Sundarbans Jan Shramjeevi Manch
- 33 Uttar Banga Bon Shromojivi Manch
- 34 Vidharbha Vanadhikar Sanghatana
- 35 Vikas Samvad