

WORLD TOURISM DAY-2010

Tourism and biodiversity



development of tourism must meet the economic expectations and environmental requirements, and must respect not only the social and physical structure of a location but also the local population.

Tourism development should be sustainable, which means that it must be ecologically bearable in the long term, economically viable, as well as ethically and socially equitable for the local communities. Tourism requires integrating the natural, cultural and human environment in order to be sustainable. It must respect the fragile balances that characterise many tourist destinations, in particular many small islands and environmentally sensitive areas.

To be sustainable, tourism development must be based on the opportunities offered by the local economy. It should be fully integrated into, and contribute positively to, the local economic development. Governments and authorities should promote coordinated actions for planning of tourism with environmental NGOs and local communities to achieve sustainable development.

Across the globe, a study says, 70% people live in villages and their survival and welfare are directly influenced by biodiversity. Moreover, biodiversity-based tourism represents a significant source of income for the world's developing countries. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) reports: "Uncontrolled land conversion, climate change, pollution and other unsustainable human activities are causing biodiversity loss at a rate many times higher than that of natural extinction. Biodiversity matters for its own sake; but our ecosystems also sustain us, providing food, energy, health and 40% of the global economy."

Tourism works as an important tool for raising the environmental awareness of the people. It beautifies nature and thus helps increase the public appreciation of the environment. Through this year's campaign, UNWTO draws attention to the two most pressing global challenges of our time -- sustainable use of environmental resources and eradication of extreme poverty.

The WTD theme "Tourism and Biodiversity" has been the most important issue in the Bangladesh context regarding protecting Sundarbans and Saint Martins from biodiversity loss. The government and other concerned agencies are also aware of the importance of the biodiversity in these places.

With political developments hogging the headlines, we sometimes forget that our country is a paradise. Nature is at its best in Bangladesh. Sadly, we do not know how many species of flora and fauna are disappearing from the Sundarbans. The Sundarbans of 10

years ago and the present Sundarbans are fairly different from each other from the biodiversity point of view.

The Sundarbans provide a unique ecosystem and a rich wildlife habitat. They were home to approximately 500 Bengal tigers in 2004, one of the largest populations of tigers. Chital deer are also widely seen. There is much more wildlife here than just the endangered Royal Bengal Tiger. Fishing cats, macaques, wild boars, common grey mongoose, foxes, jungle cats, flying foxes, pangolin abound.

Most importantly, mangroves are a transition from the marine to freshwater and terrestrial systems, and provide habitat for numerous species of small fish, crabs, hermit crabs, shrimps and other crustaceans that are adapted to feed, shelter and reproduce among the tangled mass of roots that grow upward from the anaerobic mud to get the trees' supply of oxygen.

As the study points out, the long-term prospects are bleak. It is no secret that many endemic species of flora and fauna are on the verge of extinction. They are likely to disappear in the next few decades, if not years. Urgent measures must be taken to arrest this trend. The destruction of the forest cover must be stopped and reforestation efforts must be intensified. The Sundarbans can change the economy through tourism.

Climate change is a harbinger of biodiversity loss. No one now doubts the reality of climate change, and the UN system is committed to seeking solutions that are coherent with other global challenges, particularly the war on poverty. This is important for tourism, which is a vital means of earning foreign currency for poor countries.

Tomorrow's citizens and leaders must be taught the importance of protecting our natural resources, especially the endemic species. Nature is yet to reveal all its secrets. There may be thousands of species waiting to be discovered here and in other parts of the world.

Wildlife is also gradually being driven to extinction by expanding human settlements, adding to the problem. Therefore, all steps should be taken to preserve animal habitats in the region while going all-out to combat the destruction of wildlife in the region.

The government should ensure that development imperatives are balanced with the need to protect and preserve the country's flora and fauna. Today, we are experiencing a geological imbalance due to destruction of forests. It is thus essential to guide the younger generation to the correct path vis-a-vis environmental conservation.

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World leaders in recent years have documented a range of challenges of truly global import, with acute poverty and biodiversity conservation as the most forceful issues. They entail innovative and changed behaviour to effectively respond over time, and tourism can and must play its part in the solutions to both.

MOHAMMAD SHAHIDUL ISLAM

WORLD Tourism Day falls on September 27. This year, China will host World Tourism Day celebrations, with "Tourism and Biodiversity" as the theme. Within the scope of the United Nations International Year of Biodiversity, this year's World Tourism Day theme is supposed to highlight awareness in alleviating poverty through tourism development and biodiversity conservation.

Biodiversity is, of course, a theoretical concept for tourism. It is a phenomenon that affects the sector, and certain destinations in particular. The tourism industry also contributes to the greenhouse effect, largely through the transportation of tourists. There is, nowadays, wide acceptance of the burning need for employing tactics to face the changing climatic conditions and take precautionary actions against future impacts. The world must respond in a holistic way to the twin challenges of biodiversity conservation and poverty.

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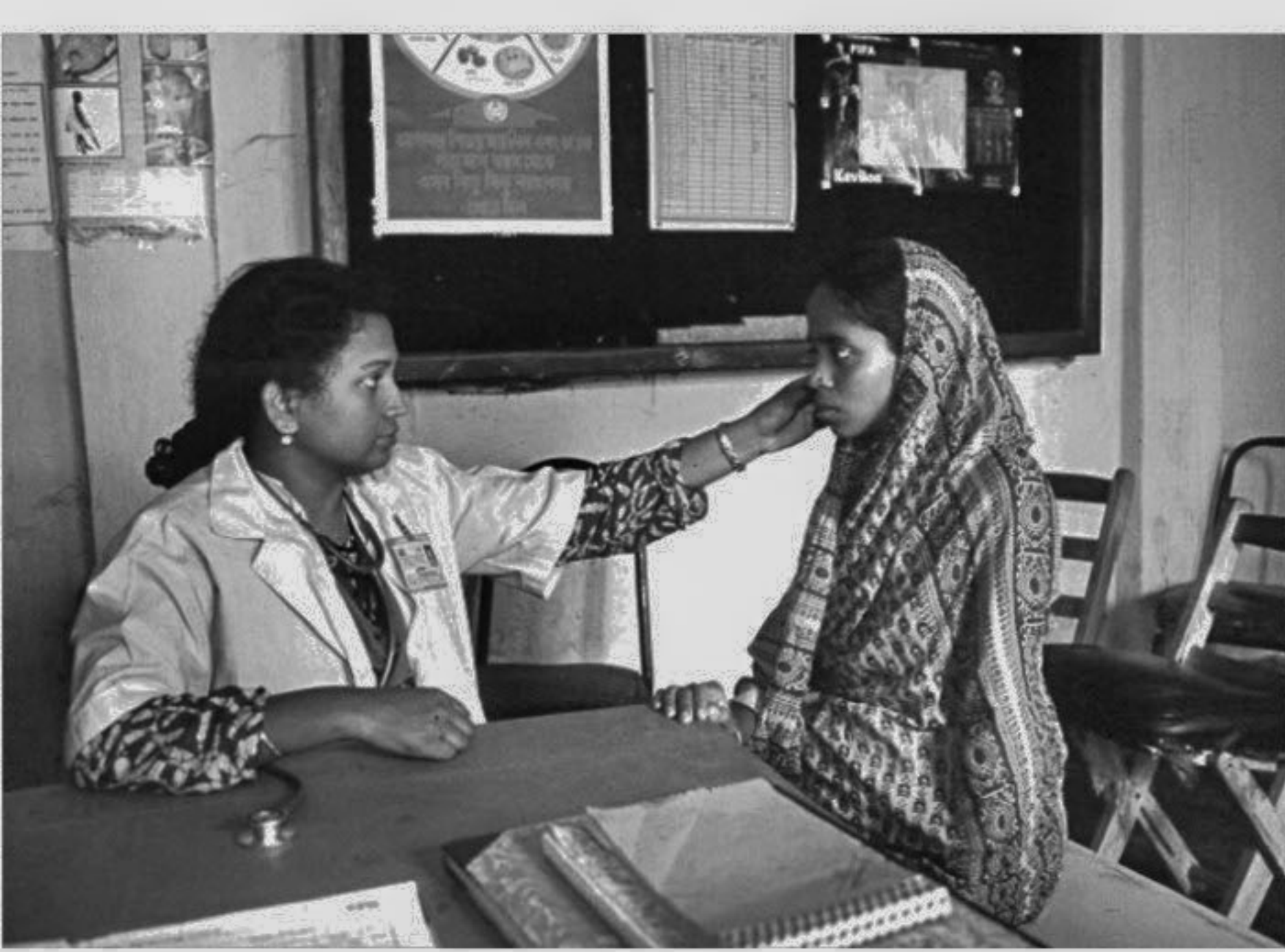
mented a range of challenges of truly global import, with acute poverty and biodiversity conservation as the most forceful issues. They entail innovative and changed behaviour to effectively respond over time, and tourism can and must play its part in the solutions to both. World tourism has entered a historically new phase of growth, which began five years ago.

A more solid and more accountable type of growth distinguishes this new phase. The United Nations World Tourist Organisation (UNWTO) will encourage stakeholders from the public and private sectors, and representatives from the civil society as biodiversity conservation has become a key issue for policymakers worldwide, and tourism is an important element in the discussions.

Many tourist attractions are linked to flora and fauna, such as protected areas like the Sundarbans, beaches and islands, coral reefs, exclusive eco-parks etc. Biodiversity is, thus, a principal tourism asset and essential to its sustained growth.

Tourism provides an opportunity to see and know about other cultures. It can promote closer ties and peace among peoples. The

Primary health care can reduce the impact of disasters



Report, in 1999-2008, about 61.6% of those who died from natural disasters globally were in the 11 member states of WHO's South-East Asia Region. The tsunami of December 26, 2004 and cyclone Nargis that hit Myanmar in 2008 are two examples of disasters in the Region, which killed hundreds of thousands of people and caused billions of dollars worth of damage.

In these crises, we have seen that pre-existing inequities were amplified and new social and public health problems have arisen. Those hardest hit are always the most vulnerable -- the poor, women, children, the disabled and the elderly.

The primary health care approach can impact the health of people when it matters the most -- in an emergency. Universal coverage means that service coverage is extended to all crisis-affected areas in an equitable manner. Through the four approaches of primary health care -- universal coverage and equity, community participation, inter-sectoral collaboration and use of appropriate technology -- people's access to standardised health care following accepted protocols and guidelines is guaranteed.

Community participation and inter-sectoral collaboration increase community resilience and the ability of people to make choices for themselves. As a result, actions to safeguard health, livelihoods and assets during the response phase and to address the roots of the crisis in the recovery phase are made sustainable.

With only limited outside help generally available during the first week of an emergency, the response from the community and the local government determines the outcome. Every crisis tests the capacity of the local health system already in place to address needs in an emergency.

Time and again, applying the PHC approach has proven to be the best strategy and investment in health. This not only ensures equal access of the population to standardised health care but also reduces the vulnerability of the community and enhances resilience. Additionally, it will eventually reduce dependence on external assistance and promote self-reliance and self-determination.

The WHO Constitution affirms that the health of all people is fundamental to the attainment of peace and security. The success of humanitarian health action depends

on strong implementation of the PHC approach. Thus, humanitarian health action is not just meeting needs. It is also a means to promote social justice and fulfill the right to health.

Primary health care-based approaches can be implemented with low-cost technologies. Preventive measures are more cost-effective than damage response. The cost implications of the increasingly frequent natural disasters argue for more investment in primary health care.

The challenges are immense, and include:

- Inappropriate policies that focus on response rather than preparedness, or neglect community involvement;
- Unavailability of community-based workers and volunteers;
- Lack of capacity to respond to emergencies;
- Inadequacies in early warning and surveillance;
- Inefficient coordination.

It takes time to turn primary health care principles into ground reality. But recent disasters have raised awareness of how community resilience to emergencies can be improved through health systems that apply the PHC approach. Indeed, in several countries in the Region, there is now a greater recognition of the need for healthy public policy on disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness and response, focusing on those communities most at risk. These are helpful signs. Such emergency health preparedness plans are an integral part of the health system, and build community resilience.

PHC demands planning processes that are more inclusive and participatory, as well as reflective of the culture and context of the people. Self-care, including improving the knowledge and communication skills of community-based health workforce, is a key preparedness strategy. Humanitarian health action must not discriminate between people based on their ethnicity, race or beliefs. The issue of equity is fundamental to PHC disaster preparedness and response. By revitalising primary health care in emergencies, we can revitalise the traditional resilience of the community in the face of adversity.

Dr. Samlee Plianbangchang is Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia.

It is important to realise that disasters not only cause death and injuries with their initial strike. In their aftermath, they continue to threaten lives by increasing the risk of disease, reducing food security and access to basic services, and endangering water safety.

SAMLEE PLIANBANGCHANG

FROM floods to cyclones, Bangladesh has frequently faced major natural disasters, which have had a deep social and economic impact. Some of the world's most devastating cyclones, including the great Bholá cyclone of 1970, have occurred in this country. In 2007, Cyclone Sidr killed 3,000 people, destroyed more than half a million houses and caused economic losses of approximately \$1.7 billion.

But it is important to realise that disasters not only cause death and injuries with their initial strike. In their aftermath, they continue to threaten lives by increasing the risk of disease, reducing food security and access to basic services, and endangering water safety.

A primary health care approach helps to ensure that quality health care is accessible, available and affordable before, during and

after any emergency. Climate change will increase the likelihood of disasters in countries of WHO's South-East Asia Region, including Bangladesh, further adding to our vulnerability.

WHO has been working with member states to revitalise the primary health care (PHC) approach and put people at the core of processes that support health and disaster preparedness and response. Bangladesh's focus on the community in its disaster preparedness and response work is exemplary in this regard.

Its corps of 32,000 trained village-level volunteers have saved lives by warning their communities to move to shelters when a disaster alert sounds. Equipped with an emergency health kit that includes first aid and basic antibiotics, they are often the first providers of basic medical care in an emergency.

According to the 2008 World Disaster

WORLD RIVERS DAY

Rivers are calling, can't we respond?

As the day is going to be celebrated with different themes locally and regionally we have adopted a theme for World Rivers Day 2010 -- "Rivers Are Calling Us, Respond Please."

SHEIKH ROKON and SUHA SANWAR

TODAY, on the last Sunday of September, World Rivers Day is going to be observed in Bangladesh, which is crisscrossed by rivers, as well as the rest of world. Rivers are the lifeline of the riverine people, and have provided them with their livelihoods for generations. What will happen if we wake up one day and find that all the rivers have gone? What will happen to those people? What will happen to the city-dwellers, who largely depend on food items from rural parts?

Climate change, unplanned water development structures, massive pollution due to population pressure and industrial development, and encroachment are choking the rivers. Little did we actually care about rivers and about what we are doing! Today, we have 320 rivers left out of the 700 rivers that made one of the largest river networks in the world.

Encroachment, urban and industrial development, decreasing drainage area and the huge amount of water the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna basin carries result in overflowing of the banks and floods. Global warming driven glacier melting will cause frequent flooding and sea-level rise to push brackish water inward, which will increase salinity.

Less water for fish, aquatic plants and animal species including birds will affect food supply, ecosystem linkages and livelihood activities due to internal and unsustainable migration, unemployment and other socio-economic issues.

Changed river flow and velocity and direction, siltation, removal of sand from riverbeds and altering of flow paths and patterns will cause further river erosion. Low, or no, public investment on water research at local and national level, lack of knowledge, and lack of networking among agencies will affect decisions at policy-making levels.

Being a downstream country, we need quick, coordinated, and long-term actions for the protection of rivers, or else they will continue to die out, threatening our very existence as we have threatened theirs for quite some time.

World Rivers Day, established in 2005, is a global celebration of the world's waterways and highlights the many values of rivers. This day has been endorsed by various agencies of the United Nations and is intended to complement the broader efforts of the United Nations Water For Life Decade.

Originally, World Rivers Day was based on the great success of Rivers Day, which started in 1980 in British Columbia, Canada. The 1980 event was founded by acclaimed river conservationist Mark Angelo. When the United Nations launched the Water for Life Decade initiative in 2005, extensive communication was established with various UN agencies and the first World Rivers Day took place in 2005.

This year, for the first time, World Rivers Day is going to be observed in Bangladesh also. We, the "Riverine People," a group of river-loving people, are observing the sixth annual World River Day with hundreds of groups, organisations and agencies from dozens of countries on six different continents. The international authority and persons concerned with World Rivers Day have been informed about the programmes that will be observed here. Our events are also circulated through the main webpage of World Rivers Day.

As the day is going to be celebrated with different themes locally and regionally, we have adopted a theme for World River Day 2010 -- "Rivers Are Calling Us, Respond Please."

Can't we hear the rivers calling? Under this theme we want to spread the message that it is the high time to respond. Everyone should respond to the call of the rivers within his capacity. One can write, read, paint, photograph, discuss and make people aware. One can go to visit his favourite river on this day. Or one can think about rivers, at least.

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Listen to what the rivers are saying.

CORRIGENDUM

The word "League" was inadvertently used instead of "Dal" in the third line of the first paragraph and the fourth line of the third paragraph in the article "Presidential prerogative to grant clemency" by M. Latif Modar, printed on September 24. The writer apologises for the error.