UNWTO and FAO to Work Together on Developing Tourism for Rural Development

Madrid, Spain, 29 September 2020 – The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding that will see the two agencies work together to advance shared goals relating to the sustainable and responsible growth of rural tourism.

In leading the sector’s response to COVID-19 and now guiding the global restart of tourism, UNWTO has been working closely with fellow UN agencies from the start of the current crisis. This new MoU comes on the back of World Tourism Day 2020, which was celebrated worldwide around the special theme of Tourism and Rural Development. Under the agreement, UNWTO and FAO will build a framework for enhanced collaboration, including through the sharing of knowledge and resources.

UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili said: “This Memorandum of Understanding between UNWTO and the FAO emphasises the cross-cutting nature of tourism and the importance of cooperation at every level to ensure the sector works for everyone. Both tourism and agriculture are lifelines for communities around the world. The agreement is particularly timely as it comes as we recognize 2020 as the year of Tourism for Rural Development. This was also the theme of World Tourism Day, which we celebrated this week, highlighting the role tourism must play in providing opportunities for rural communities and driving social and economic recovery.”

Resilience, innovation and opportunity

A central aim of the collaboration will be to increase the resilience of rural communities against social and economic shocks through growing tourism and making it both more sustainable and inclusive. Across the FAO’s GIAHS (Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems) network of communities, tourism is a leading driver of equality, with the sector employing women and youth and giving them a stake in economic growth. Tourism is also a protector of the rich cultural heritage that characterizes many of the communities within the GIAHS network, for instance through keeping folklore and other traditions alive for future generations.

Moving forward, the new MoU states that UNWTO and FAO will work together to establish a plan for more specific areas of collaboration. Key priorities, as outlined in the agreement, include encouraging entrepreneurship within rural communities,
particularly among youth and women, with the aim of providing them with access to both local and global markets for their products. Other priorities include fostering education and skills so as to provide communities with opportunities within the tourism sector.

**Related Links:**

- World Tourism Day 2020: “Tourism and Rural Development”
- UNWTO: COVID-19 and Transforming Tourism
- UNWTO Supports EBRD's Web Tool for Green Technologies