

## Identification of perceived needs and constraints in the target country/ies, in particular in the region(s) concerned

The **leisure and tourism industry is one of the world's largest industries** and one of its **fastest growing** economic sectors. According to statistics of the World Tourism Organization (WTO), 715 million people travelled to a foreign country in 2002, spending more than 474 billion USD. International tourism receipts represented, in 2003, approximately 6% of worldwide exports reaching 30% if considering service exports exclusively. Moreover, the number of international arrivals shows an evolution from a mere 25 million international arrivals in 1950 to an estimated 763 million in 2004, corresponding to an average annual growth rate of 6.5 %. Tourism has become, also, one of the **world's most important sources of employment**. Its industry can generate substantial economic benefits. Especially in the **least developed countries**, tourism has proven to be a powerful macro-economic tool in alleviating poverty (it stimulates enormous investment in infrastructure, most of which helps improve local people living conditions; it provides governments with substantial tax revenues; it creates new jobs and business, etc.). Despite these advantages, for developing countries there are, also, many "hidden" costs that affect negatively a "fair development". Local business communities often see their chances to earn income from tourists severely reduced by the "all-inclusive" vacation packages. It is estimated that only a small amount of tourists' expenses remains locally: **about 80% of travellers' expenditures go to the airlines, inbound hotels and other international companies** (which headquarters are located in the travellers' home countries); it has been calculated that for 100 USD spent on a vacation tour by a tourist from a developed country, only around 5 USD actually remains in a developing country destination's economy, with an extremely **limited trickling down effect on local economies**.

For these reasons, in the last years, a **responsible tourism** approach has been developed in order to reduce potential negative social and environmental impacts of tourism as well as **to improve the potential positive economic impacts that tourism can have on host communities**. At the same time, globally, increasing numbers of tourists are choosing travel experiences that do not exploit local people, and that respect their culture and natural resources. Ecotourism, nature tourism, sports tourism and health tourism count among the

top growth sectors. **This kind of tourism represents a new niche market that has not been adequately explored yet**. Moreover, the World Tourism Organisation estimates that the market for nature tourism is increasing at 6 times the rate of tourism overall. Given the scale of the industry, the potential benefits to local economies and environments of successful and well-managed tourism are very significant.

Asian countries, especially the less developed ones, could bring great advantages for their communities by exploiting some areas under a responsible-tourism-basis.

**Nepal** is one of the poorest countries in the world (with a per capita income of about 265 USD) whose economy was mainly based on agriculture (almost 80% of the population is directly involved in this activity) and manufacturing sector, has made lot of effort to develop the tourism industry, which is now one of the key sector of the national economy. Tourism has undergone rapid development in recent years (in 2004 the country received almost 385.000 foreign visitors mainly from Spain, Italy, Canada, China, United States, UK and India). This sector contributes 3.5% to GDP and makes up 15% of the total foreign exchange earnings of the country. It is, moreover, a major employment generating industry. Nevertheless, Nepal is, mainly, a tourist destination for **hikers and mountain climbers** and for the majority of tourists trekking in Nepal means going to the popular trekking routes in the Mt. Everest area, Annapurna and Jomsom area. *Thus, there are still many areas in Nepal that remain unexplored and unknown by foreigners such as Mustang, Kailali and Dolpa, areas with the same beauty and wildness. These less developed tourist areas have some weakness to overcome such as: inadequate knowledge among the local communities about management of natural resources, trekking trails are at a rudimentary stage, lack of trekking infrastructure, lack of knowledge about eco-tourism; lack of well developed infrastructures (road, bridges electricity, and so on); little development of new tourist products like safari, rafting, kayaking. It is important to develop competencies of local communities in order to boost the tourism in these less developed areas of the country where many potentialities should be better exploited.*

**Mongolian** transition from a centrally planned to a market-oriented economy started in 1991 and was not easy for the country that faced a decade of macroeconomic problems that ended at the beginning of 2001. During this period, the Mongolian economy had been growing at an irregular annual rate with the low point coming in 2001. Since 2002, the GDP growth rate has continued on a positive trend. Its economy has traditionally been based on herding, agriculture and mining industry. **Tourism sector** has become crucial for the country's economy since 1990 and has been recognized by the Government as a priority sector with a great potential and able to contribute to socio-economic development of the country (a National Tourism Development Plan 2000-2015 has been approved by the Government). At the same time, **Mongolia's transition to the market economy has resulted in the emergence of private sectors that have started to operate in the tourism industry.** The number of private tourist companies has grown rapidly all over the country: there are 495 tourism companies, 140 tourist camps and over 200 hotels. The sector accounts for 10% of the overall GDP in Mongolia, and this figure is expected to grow significantly in the future. However, even if its great combination of scenic natural features, its wide variety of untouched landscapes including vast open spaces, its pale-ontological and historical heritage areas, and its nomadic life style and culture, **Mongolia remains a relatively unexplored travel destination.**

**China** is now the world's fastest-growing economy its 2005 PRC became the fourth largest economy in the world. One of the fastest-growing industries in the national economy is **tourism:** 24 Chinese's provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions have made tourism one of their pillar industries. A growing number of people are employed annually in attractions, tourist sites, hotels and restaurants. The total revenue of China's tourism industry reached 67.3 billion USD in 2002, accounting for 5.44% of the GDP and inbound tourists were about 91,66 million. However, this impressive development is not spread equally all over the country where a large disparity between rural and urban areas and between eastern and western regions still remain. This unequal development is also reflected in the tourism industry: tourists tend to visit China's most popular attraction and big cities and to ignore some other places of interest of unexpected beauties and with unique tradition. Hunan Province, for example, located in the southern part of the middle reaches of the Yangtze River is home to the Tujia, Miao, Yso, Dong, Bai, Hui and Zhuang ethnic groups. These groups have maintained intact their tradition and their economy is mainly based on agriculture and

traditional hand-crafts. In particular, the Miao groups is well know (in China) for the homeopathy medicine which is used as an alternative treatment for bones pains and rheumatisms. ethical The Province (and not only the most known capital city Fenghuang) has natural beauties (such as rivers, mountains, etc) and typical products as well as many monuments of interest.

To sum up, it is important to create and support new responsible tourism routes in the less famous areas of the three countries involved in the project. For these regions, where the tourism industry is not fully exploited and where local market is far from being saturated, responsible tourism could represents a good opportunity for local communities and business organisations to improve their income living conditions. However, these positive impacts could be fully reached if some actual gaps will be overcome.