

## **Tourism and Food Security in Mali**

**Robert B. Richardson, Michigan State University**

**Prepared for USAID Mali, Office of Economic Growth, Partners Meeting, June 23-24, 2010**

Many developing countries have managed to increase their participation in the global economy through development of international tourism. Tourism development is increasingly viewed as an important tool in promoting economic growth, alleviating poverty, and advancing food security. This briefing note aims to review the relationship between tourism and poverty reduction, and to explore the role for tourism development in advancing food security in Mali.

The potential of tourism development as a tool to contribute to economic growth and poverty reduction is derived from several unique characteristics of the tourism system. First, tourism represents an opportunity for economic diversification, particularly in marginal areas with few other export options. Tourists are attracted to remote areas with high values of cultural, wildlife and landscape assets. The cultural and natural heritage of developing countries is frequently based on such assets, and tourism represents an opportunity for income generation through the preservation of heritage values. Therefore, tourism enables communities that are poor in material wealth but rich in history and cultural heritage to leverage their unique assets for economic development. Tourism is the only export sector where the consumer travels to the exporting country, which provides opportunities for the poor to become exporters through the sale of goods and services to foreign tourists. Tourism is also labor-intensive and supports a diverse and versatile labor market; it provides small-scale employment opportunities, which also helps to promote gender equity. Finally, there are numerous indirect benefits of tourism for the poor, including increased market access for remote areas through the development of roads, infrastructure, and communication networks.

Several strategies for tourism development have been found to be effective in creating employment and income opportunities for vulnerable groups and communities. Tourism projects that have been most effective at contributing to poverty alleviation include those that promote training and employment in tourism (particularly for non-educated women), promote the establishment of small tourism enterprises, promote the supply of goods and services to tourism businesses by enterprises that are owned by or employed by the poor, involve partnerships that fund road construction, communication networks, rural schools, sanitation or health improvements, and facilitate voluntary donations and support from tourism enterprises and tourists.

Economic benefits of tourism include the expansion of business opportunities for the poor, expansion of employment and wages by ensuring commitments to local jobs and training of local residents, and the development of collective community income. Non-economic benefits include capacity building, training, improved access to services and infrastructure (such as health care, telecommunications, water supplies, and transportation), and mitigation of environmental impacts and natural resource conflicts. Many of the physical and environmental benefits may have been motivated by tourism development, but they indirectly benefit local communities. The overall economic impact of tourism is maximized through enhancing linkages with other local economic sectors. Strong economic linkages with tourism and other sectors (such as agriculture and small enterprises) will enhance the multiplier effect, thus contributing to increased revenue retention and creation of employment opportunities for local people.

There have been several initiatives strengthen the link between tourism and food security in Mali. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), through its Sustainable Tourism–Eliminating Poverty (ST-EP) initiative, implemented a project to help protect the health of female

artisans in Djenné by raising awareness of the risks of inhaling toxic smoke from plastics, improving working conditions, and providing protective equipment and tools. The Netherlands Development Organization (SNV) is presently conducting a value-chain analysis for tourism in Pays Dogon to map where the rural poor participate and to identify opportunities for increasing the benefits for the poor.

The Global Sustainable Tourism Alliance (GSTA) has been working in Pays Dogon to provide training for local guides, to build capacity among employees in the campements, and to develop marketing materials to promote tourism in the region. This group has also developed projects to promote biodiversity conservation and support reforestation. They have engaged communities in the region to collect and plant euphorbia cuttings to stabilize the sand dunes and reduce wind erosion, and they have developed small tree nurseries that sell seedlings to communities for tree planting projects. These initiatives could be replicated in other regions throughout Mali to achieve greater benefits.

Tourism in Mali is presently based on its endowment of cultural assets, including four sites inscribed by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization on the World Heritage List. They include the Old Towns of Djenné, Timbuktu, the Cliff of Bandiagara (the Dogon cliffs), and the Tomb of Askia. In addition to these designated World Heritage sites, there are nine other cultural properties submitted for consideration for the World Heritage List, which may provide future potential for tourism development. The cultural uniqueness of Mali among its neighbors provides the basis for a comparative advantage for tourism development in the region. Mali has promoted tourism by structuring the nation’s cultural heritage as the engine of economic and social development. There are many festival events throughout the year, including the Dogon mask festivals, the Deegal cattle crossing festivals, the Festival on the Niger in Segou, and the Festival in the Desert near Timbuktu.

Among the food security plans of 685 rural communes, 103 report tourism assets, and only 13 include tourism as part of their food security planning (see Table 1).

Table 1: Rural communes with tourism assets

<b>Category</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% of rural communes</b>
# communes with undeveloped tourism assets	70	10.2%
# communes where tourism exists	33	4.8%
Total # of communes with tourism assets	103	15.0%
# of communes where tourism is part of food security plan	13	1.9%

According to data from the World Travel and Tourism Council, international visitor arrivals to Mali more than doubled during the decade of 1997 to 2007, and has now reached approximately 200,000. The contribution of the travel and tourism economy (including direct and indirect impacts) to GDP is expected to rise from 4.9% (US\$523 million) in 2010 to 6.1% (US\$1,090 million) by 2020. The contribution to employment is expected to rise from 80,000 jobs (3.9% of total employment or 1 in every 25.6 jobs) in 2010, to 129,000 jobs (4.8% of total employment or 1 in every 20.8 jobs) by 2020.

The combination of cultural assets with high economic value, abundant labor resources, a bright outlook for tourism growth, and critical development challenges provides Mali with an opportunity to integrate tourism into its strategy for economic growth and poverty reduction. A tourism policy that builds upon the existing foundation of cultural heritage, respects social and cultural traditions, minimizes economic leakages, and adheres to pro-poor tourism development strategies is likely to produce economic benefits that contribute to food security in Mali. There are significant opportunities for capacity building in tourism, including the development of national tourism marketing materials and information and strengthening of economic linkages between tourism and other sectors.