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**Ghana Rural Eco-tourism & Travel Office
(GREET) Sensitization Material**

For Private Sector

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1. Introduction

According to the World Tourism Industry, tourism is now the world's number one export earner. In 2000, 698 million people traveled internationally spending more than US\$ 498 billion. In 2005 and 2006 Africa was the fastest growing travel destination. Ghana's tourism sector is also growing rapidly.

Ghana offers an array of natural, cultural and historical rural tourism attractions. These include its varied wildlife, birds, ecology and terrain. The country boasts spectacular coastline, mangroves, wetlands and rainforests through to sub-Saharan ecology. Its people are friendly and engaging, local culture, arts and traditions are vibrant and colourful and it has a rich history. Ghana is also unique in its stability and democracy in the region which are important tourist draw-cards.

The Government of Ghana has prioritized tourism sector growth to become the national economy's premier source of foreign exchange. Tourism is the fourth largest foreign exchange earner for the country behind foreign remittances, gold, and cocoa and it is one of the highest growth sectors, averaging approximately 15%/yr in recent years and contributing 4.5% of gross domestic product.

Tourism arrivals stood at 482,000 in 2002, increasing to 531,000 in 2003 and 750,000 in 2005. Tourism receipts reached USD520 million in 2002, increasing to USD602 million in 2003. In addition, the Ministry of Tourism and Diasporan Relations (MoTDR) has identified rural ecotourism as the most important tourism product for the country.

The Government of Ghana has identified NCRC's Community-Based Tourism model as its preferred approach for development of rural ecotourism. In recognition of this endorsement, NCRC's initiatives have worked to develop environmentally and culturally sensitive rural areas as tourism destinations.

From 1996-2007, NCRC supported the development of 30+ authentic, community-owned and operated ecotourism destinations. This created opportunities for rural communities to earn income, increased rural private sector growth and created tourism-related jobs. Their overall goal was increased revenue and visitor numbers at these rural tourism destinations, through development of an enhanced visitor experience and conservation of the ecosystems upon which this tourism depends.

Hence, high quality rural ecotourism products and multi-day tour programs in collaboration with private sector services are a vital first step in development of Ghana's rural ecotourism industry. If the sector is to maintain momentum and build on its past successes it must increase the levels of customer information and service delivery provided by its international competitors.

The global tourism market is highly competitive and sophisticated because of its potential to generate large foreign currency earnings. The most successful international tourism destinations utilize the latest in marketing, technology and information systems to attract tourists and provide them with unsurpassed levels of quality information, customer service and support. If Ghana intends to carve out a niche in this huge global tourism market we must match the levels of customer service and tourism information that tourists expect.

However poor internal communications have hampered Ghana's rural tourism sector until now making it difficult for tourists to pre-plan, pre-book or pre-pay for visits to rural sites. And few

private tour operators visit small community-based rural tours. So rural ecotourism sites are mostly visited by domestic tourists who know the country-side well, or adventurous travelers prepared to arrange their own tour itineraries and transport. They frequently arrive in rural communities unannounced, hoping to find a community guide to take them on tour. They also need to carry significant amounts of cash to pay for tours and services, which is not comfortable in a foreign country.

Now with the recent expansion of the mobile phone network it is possible for the first time to establish a linked network of rural tourism destinations. It will enable coordinated services, pre bookings, advance payments and operation of multi-day rural tour itineraries programs. This development will revolutionize the sector and make its attractions accessible to a far wider range of domestic and international tourists.

Essential developments for Ghana's rural ecotourism sector include the need for:

- Strategic and targeted marketing of Ghana's rural ecotourism attractions,
- Reliable information about Ghana's rural ecotourism attractions and prompt responses to inquires,
- Coordinated systems enabling tourists to plan and organize bookings and advance payments for tours and multi-day itineraries,
- Increased recognition and support by the private sector for Ghana's rural ecotourism attractions,
- A range of medium to up-market accommodation options available in rural destinations,
- Reliable and safe transport around the country.

The proposed GREET office would specifically address items 1, 2 and 3 above through development of a marketing strategy, comprehensive tourism information and bookings systems.

2. What is GREET all about?

GREET is an independent entity under governance of the Nature Conversation Research Center (NCRC), working with rural ecotourism destinations to expand the tourism market and to improve on customer information and coordination services. The GREET office in Accra will provide comprehensive tourism information via its web-portal and printed publications. It will establish a network of rural ecotourism destinations and will enable coordinated services, pre-booking, advance payments and promotion of rural tour itinerary programs. These services would be made accessible to an increasing number of domestic and international tourists. GREET will have the following roles:

- Providing up-to-date information on rural ecotourism destinations to tourists and potential investors;
- Marketing and promotion of collaborating rural ecotourism destinations;
- Building partnerships among communities, private investors¹, government and non-governmental agencies, thereby supporting the mediation, negotiation and brokering needs of such partnerships;

¹ Private sector, in this case, meant entities like hotels, airlines, car rental, restaurants, financial services and communication companies.

- Networking and serving as a central help desk for communities through lobbying, advocacy and provision of advice;
- Vetting and accrediting of agreed ecotourism standards for rural ecotourism destinations and tour operators utilizing these destinations;
- Collect and analyze sub-sector data on agreed indicators for rural tourism destinations.

During the initial years, GREET will focus on the roles of providing information, marketing and promotion, and accrediting rural ecotourism standards. The other roles will be activated in future years as GREET becomes established and creditable.

3. How will GREET operate?

GREET will work nation-wide across the length and breadth of Ghana. It will start with the destinations and organizations already targeted by NCRC but will be open to all community destinations willing to enter into a collaborative agreement with GREET and willing to fulfil / maintain certain standards. It will also enter into associate relationships with private sector entities supplying services to the sector including hotels, airlines, car rental, restaurants, financial services and communications companies.

Before sites or private sectors are signed on, GREET will vet these sites and private sectors based on an eligibility criteria (see below) and provide accreditation e.g. labeling as recommended responsible tourism destination. During the partnership period, GREET will also take on a monitoring role where the performance against the agreed standards will be closely monitored. In situations where GREET members are unable to adhere to these performance obligations, punitive actions (also clearly defined) will be taken e.g. blacklisting and termination of affiliation.

GREET, once successfully established, will run independently into the future in a self-sufficient model based on five revenue streams. These are:

- Commissions on all transactions concluded on behalf of tourists,
- Contribution from responsible tour operators,
- Annual membership fees from all collaborating sites,
- Annual associate membership from all private sector companies affiliated,
- Annual government grant from the Ministry of Tourism.

4. GREET Results and Impacts

The establishment of a central marketing, information and booking office will support rural ecotourism growth in Ghana and will result in positive benefits for the ecotourism industry and rural communities. In addition, GREET will support private sector growth and increase in collaboration with rural ecotourism destinations. Looking ahead 5 years the following benefits are expected.

Ecotourism Development

- Increased tourism to Ghana particularly to rural ecotourism enterprises
- Enhanced profile for Ghana as an international tourism destination, and new market segments and 'special interest' groups identified and targeted.
- Expanded number of rural ecotourism destinations operating in Ghana
- Increased revenue and profit per tourist as a result of more comprehensive range of tourism services

- Stronger involvement and support of private sector for rural ecotourism

Community Impacts

- Increased tourism visitation and income at each site
- Direct and indirect job creation and increased rural ecotourism and associated enterprises
- Enhanced tourism and management skills and technical capacity
- Improved communication systems and technology
- Enhanced national / international profile for communities
- Increased awareness of sustainability issues and improved living standards.

According to GREET's long-term plans; Ghana's tourism market should expand with a particular increase in rural ecotourism visitation and revenue. Communities should enjoy a wider range of tourism and associated business opportunities and increase their technical and business skills and management capacity.

5. What are the benefits of joining GREET?

The following benefits are envisaged for private sectors with a collaborative agreement with GREET;

- Accesses to a reliable information on all rural ecotourism sites and other tourism related services in Ghana;
- Enhance profile through marketing its services and products via GREET web-site and GREET office;
- Increase tourism visitation and income;
- Improve communication system;
- Enhance collaborative works with rural ecotourism sites.

6. Who are those supporting GREET?

GREET will be supported by the following partners;

1. Rural community tourism enterprises
2. Nature Conservation Research Centre
3. Ghana Tourist Board and Ministry of Tourism
4. Private sector tourism operators
5. Wildlife Division - Ghana
6. US Peace Corps
7. SNV Netherlands Development Organisation
8. SPEED Ghana
9. Other partners

7. Standards

1. Must be Licensed by Ghana Tourist Board;
2. Must be a member of relevant and recognized professional association in Ghana;
3. Familiar with GREET Standards and guidelines;
4. Will need to renew membership every year with GREET;
5. Must abide by association code of conduct, GTB regulations, GREET requirement and applicable to Ghana law concerning these areas.