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“When you travel, remember, that a foreign country is not designed to make you comfortable. It is designed to make its own people comfortable”.

Clifton Fadiman, (1904 – 1999)
American writer, book editor, radio and television entertainer who hosted the popular radio show "Information Please" in the 1930s.

POVERTY ALLIMINATION IN UTSERA THROUGH RURAL TOURISM

FOLLOWED UNWTO
PROGRAM ST-EP
Sustainable Tourism – Eliminating Poverty

Dear colleagues,

This is top honor for me to stand before you today and share with thoughts and dreams had occupied me since my involving in NGO life more than ten years ago.

Before coming in tourism industry I was attached to various International Organizations' programs in Georgia and abroad. Nevertheless, one fixed idea constantly followed me – how to support poor rural population by my personal deeds. A piece from personal history...

While working for SCF we distributed food among drought affected poor population in West Georgia. I watched people's faces when they were receiving their portion of food granted by UN WFP. Believe, it was far not enjoyable entertainment. A bit later we distributed food for work and the picture had slightly changed. Why? Because, people's dignity was restored as they were offered food earned by their communities' joint work. Population had become very active, each beneficiary was much more happier than before.

When IOM invited me to Information Campaign for to prevent TiHB in Georgia as a counselor I had a n opportunity to find out the causes people had to leave for different countries for to survive their families. While interview I used frequently to hear the phrase:” We had all resources for stay and work in native villages, but we have no tools, i.e. means to organize local small enterprises, farms, to produce ecologically pure milk and other products, which could be sold. Gained money could be spent over houses' rehabilitation for to create appropriate facilities for rural tourism experts and fans.

And the last drop, which defined finally my current activity was erected quite by chance when I came across with four German ladies in bus shuttling between Utsera and Oni. They were backpack tourists from Bavaria - birds and butterflies watchers. Thank to this acquaintance my brain was blessed with idea to go to tourism sphere.

This is a long story how and where they had learnt about my Racha land, in general, and existence of fauna, interested, in particular. Honestly, I have no right to betray your dear time.

In the result of all aforesaid there was the first step done : we foundation ICCT, the NGO directed to poverty alleviation in Georgia and other Caucasus countries through rural tourism.

The second step was linked with routine of work devoted to outstanding experiences research worldwide. The thread led us to RTI-TN and we're brought together today by this respectful organization. Thank you.

In spite of young age and tiny experience ICCT has considerable potential to perform precious and considerable deeds.

Like-minded persons founded NGO for to devote its activity particularly to rural tourism issues.

You've been handed the preliminary release regarding my native vil. Utsera.

One could ask: " Why Utsera? Well, we understand it's your village, but is this the sufficient background for inserting Utsera in Sustainable Tourism program? We know there so many charming mountain and seaside places in Georgia"

Surely, Georgia is so rich with great deal of picturesque SPA resorts , but Utsera is special, please, believe. They say" Better to see once than to hear hundred times" An this is not fixed idea relied upon my micro-ethnic belonging to Upper Racha (History Metreveli dynasty goes back to XVI century and my obligation is to contribute in preservation, conservation and development of my native village as I could. We've preferred to start with Utsera as it owns all that could attract rural tourism devotees: from natural resources to unlike customs, habits of the area. The local community owners are poor but very dear : they are apt to sharing with domestic economy "mysteries" like as mastering the innovations Therefore, we've visited Utsera once again and had recorded some interviews either of old residents or youth representatives. Public meeting caused the keen interest among villagers: even my modest knowledge occurred so catching that challenged householders' will to involving in rural tourism.

I was afraid of questions they could put due to the lack of info.. If some years ago anybody asked me regarding rural tourism I had to hide my lack of concern, to put in mild. It's needed to be marked, that some years ago one couldn't get sufficient info on this account.

I'm with you today for to fulfill the gaps I own. I'm with you today for to be armed with experience you've gained much earlier than me. I'm more than sure your accrued experience will act great for my capacity in this direction.

Today my dreams are coming true as tourism is just the sphere where one could get the opportunity to sustain people via tourism expansion in their rural communities.

And all this is happening thanks to our intensive and fruitful correspondence with RTI-TN that has been was ended with my membership. On this account I'd like to say many words of gratitude to dear Ms. Carolien van der Laan. If not your interest and counter steps we were not together today. I'm not going to betray your dear time with story about Georgia as a country, which has stepped on the path of grand tourism.

For this purpose I've selected some updated websites and brought them to your kind attention. You could have one more chance to recognize better and closer my country.

Hence the principal goal of ICCT to contribute to poor population sustainability through rural tourism I'd like to say to you honestly and what I think. I well understand we have to learn more and more for to find that very rational and efficient grain, which could give us the desirable results.

The State Emblem of Georgia is decorated with the words: " The Strength is in the Unity"

Your kind hearts and attempts will be inevitably met with counter initiatives and endeavors.

Before leaving I've negotiated the issue of organizing RTI-TN trainings in Georgia with the Head of Tourism and Resorts State Department, Mr. Otar Bubashvili. Board members and experts would be offered Department facilities together with sightseeing and other cultural program.

On behalf of ICCT I offer you two more alternative options:

1. We could hold trainings in Utsera. School building with personnel and bus are open for your service together with accommodation mine and relative's houses would accommodate you. You will have chance to try ecologically pure food, taste red and white wine, be accustomed to Georgian table regulations including traditional toasts proposal and the only in the world Tamada (chair of the table) institution skills.

2. Combined option which would comprise trainings in Tbilisi and examine Utsera, both.

Program and other issue details will be negotiated and discussed

You're left only to choose the most acceptable one and get us in touch preliminary.

Dear Colleagues, thank you for kind attention and let me express high sense hope of being supported in regards of Rural Tourism development in Georgia by RTI-TN trainings in Georgia. Our joint strengths will lead to many specialists' capacity building so needed for Utsera and many other villages could be famous in Rural Tourism worldwide.

With respect
Marina Metreveli
Coordinator