

U.S.-MOROCCO ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION ON SUSTAINABLE TOURISM



SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IS DEFINED AS ACHIEVING AN EFFECTIVE BALANCE AMONG THE ENVIRONMENTAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECTS OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN ORDER TO GUARANTEE LONG-TERM BENEFITS TO RECIPIENT COMMUNITIES.

As tourism continues to grow in Morocco, it is critical that it does not lead to increased environmental degradation. The rapidly growing tourism industry, combined with growing human and agricultural pressures in rural areas surrounding Morocco's protected areas, threatens to compromise the quality and integrity of Morocco's unique natural resources. Responsible development of the ecotourism sector, particularly in the protected areas, can provide economic benefits to local communities while generating incentives to strengthen conservation of natural resources.

Under the **U.S.-Morocco Joint Statement on Environmental Cooperation**, and with support from the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Department of Interior International Technical Assistance Program (ITAP) is working with the **Moroccan High Commission on Water, Forests and the Fight Against Desertification (HC)** and the **Ministry of Tourism (MOT)** to promote the development of Morocco's sustainable tourism sector and the long-term conservation of biodiversity and natural resources.

ITAP is assisting the HC in **developing visitor management plans** for its protected areas. The plans are in support of the new national draft strategy for sustainable tourism in Morocco's protected areas (completion in October 2011). The initial focus area for technical assistance, training and infrastructure development is **Souss Massa National Park** with expansion into other protected areas planned in 2012. ITAP is also working with MOT to develop a **Sustainable Tourism Criteria Rating Program**. This program will help the MOT and tourism operators throughout the country to demonstrate credibility in their sustainable planning and operations and build consumer confidence in the ecotourism industry.

