

Stakeholders reach consensus on tourism sustainability council

REPRESENTATIVES of nine sustainable tourism certification schemes in Africa and other stakeholders gathered in Johannesburg during January to consult with representatives of the newly formed Tourism Sustainability Council (TSC).

The meeting was facilitated by the Sustainable Tourism Network Southern Africa (STNSA), of which Fair Trade in Tourism South Africa (FTTSA) is the secretariat.

The TSC was formed in September last year and the council will offer support and tools to international tourism stakeholders to ensure that tourism helps, rather than damages, local communities and the environment. The TSC has proposed an international accreditation system for sustainable tourism certification programmes, and so the main purpose of the meeting was to elicit input from African certification programmes that will be among the future

users of the accreditation system.

Delegates expressed support for the TSC accreditation system, although a number of questions were raised.

Many certification organisations were concerned that compliance with an international accreditation programme could potentially undermine the authority of strong national accreditation processes of countries such as South Africa and Brazil.

Although the global sustainable tourism criteria (GSTC), on which the TSC accreditation standards will in part be based, are internationally recognised standards, the GSTC need to be further clarified and would also have to be flexible to fit an African context.

Accreditation fees should be affordable and announced far in advance to enable certification organisations to build these fees into annual budgets and fee structures.

The possibilities that the TSC will in

future offer membership directly to the tourism private sector could inadvertently undermine local certification programmes.

Apart from enabling African stakeholders to engage with the TSC, the meeting also enabled African certification organisations to network, which is essential for a more integrated approach to sustainable tourism on the continent.

FTTSA executive director Jennifer Seif summed up the meeting by stating that "It would have been impossible only a few years ago for African stakeholders to participate with such strong agreement in this type of meeting.

"Networking has created strong trust and collegiality between the various certification organisations on offer in Africa.

"The Sustainable Tourism Network Southern Africa is prepared to take on the role of focal point for future consultation with the TSC."

