

Award Rationale

Open Eyes

in India



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on behalf of

Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung e. V.

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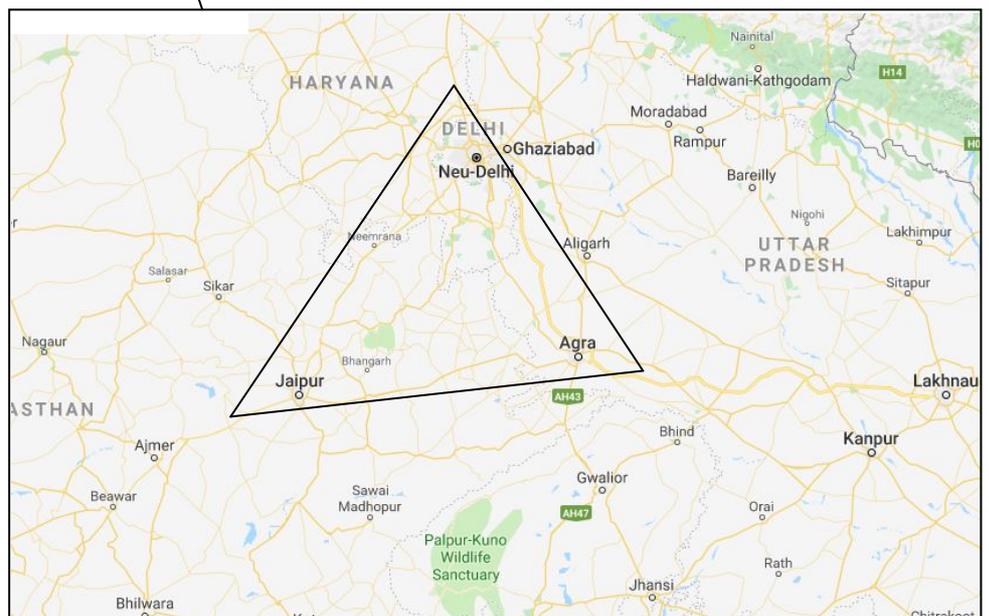
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Maps: Project Area in India (referred to in the text)



Source: www.weltkarte.com, Google Maps



1 Introduction

The application for the TO DO Award 2019 was submitted by the social enterprise in responsible tourism OPEN EYES from DELHI, INDIA and the project was nominated by the TO DO Award jury. The expert Dr. Dietmar Quist travelled in India from 11th to 21st December 2018 on behalf of the Institute for Tourism and Development (Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung e. V.) in order to verify on location the information given in the documents submitted by OPEN EYES. After a four days' stay in Delhi with Open Eyes, he also visited Jaipur and Agra (the "Golden Triangle"). Contact persons of OPEN EYES (the founder, staff, drivers, guides, representatives of partner organisations) were available at all times. The author got all the information required and got the opportunity to look at documents and statistics.

Based on his insights and findings, the author recommends awarding **OPEN EYES** with the TO DO Award 2019.

2 Background and Setting

INDIA! "India is more than a country, India is a subcontinent". Advertising was hardly ever more to the point. From the Himalayas at an altitude of up to 8500 m to deserts, subtropical regions and tropical jungle areas to the Indian Ocean, India offers a multitude of very different landscapes and cultural regions. India is about 25 percent smaller than the countries of the EU, but has almost three times more inhabitants (1.4 billion). Apart from the official languages Hindi and English, another 21 languages are recognised as official regional languages. Stereotypes of India abound: Indians are vegetarians, their food habits follow Ayurvedic rules, they practise yoga, they meditate. India's national tourism office (India Tourism) plays with these clichés in a humorous manner: The photo of an Indian tiger in a stupa got the caption "Not all Indians are vegetarians". 37 UNESCO world heritage sites offer various attractive round trips. Spiritual retreats and healing in ashrams and retreat centres are in high demand with foreigners.

Looking at today's realities, India remains a dazzling country that can hardly be categorised. 20 percent of the population live in extreme poverty, about 500 million people live on less than one US dollar a day. About 25 percent of the population belong to the lower castes who find upward mobility almost impossible. But there are also 104 billionaires living in India, which makes India rank 4th after the US, China, and Germany. India is a nuclear power and runs its own missile programme. Not just IT experts from India are globally in demand. The brain drain paralyses development in the country, but leads to remittances of far more than 60 billion US dollars per year, more than three percent of India's total economic output. The pace of urbanisation is unimaginable. More than 20 million people live in Mumbai, almost half of them in slums. Delhi has 12 million inhabitants, Bengaluru (India's Silicon Valley) more than 9 million, about 30 percent of them in slums. Delhi is one of the cities with the highest air pollution worldwide".

In the Human Development Index (HDI) of 2018, India ranks 130 among 189 countries (China 86). In terms of gender equality, India ranks 130 (among 189 countries). India is developing rapidly: In many statistical sets of data, India is improving its rank year by year.

Due to its high domestic consumption (purchasing power parity), India is the world's third strongest economic power. Among all emerging economies, India is the one that grows fastest. Economists believe that India will see strong development in the future.

Almost 15 million foreign tourists bring close to 30 billion US dollars into the country. In 2018, India was in the top ten of selfie countries in the world. Among other things tourism campaigns in the media (Incredible India) have regularly led to annual increases in tourist numbers by 10 percent. At the same time, more Indians - 23 million - are now travelling abroad than foreigners to India.) The most popular destination among domestic and foreign tourists in India is the mausoleum Taj Mahal.

3 The project Open Eyes

3.1 History and Objectives

Against this dazzling background, as a young woman Anna Alaman came to India from Spain. She was in charge of the import and export of textiles and design for a Spanish company. It was not love at first sight with India, with Delhi. Not only did daily life feel strange to her, life seemed to be a chaos which was difficult for her to figure out. The persistent smog in Delhi made (and still makes) her suffer. But once she had returned to Spain, it became clear to her: She wanted to come back.

She wanted to position herself between poverty and wealth. She wanted to contribute to alleviating poverty by empowering and supporting disadvantaged people and by helping them to increase their income. In India, the disadvantaged include women and people with disabilities. She envisioned a socially committed, socially responsible company. And it was soon clear to her that tourism offered the best opportunities to implement her ideas.

In India, tourism is still an open sector, not yet shared out, not demarcated. It grows fast and offers major development opportunities. In 2011, Anna Alaman founded the social enterprise in responsible tourism. Underlining its high degree of flexibility and experimental stage, she initially called it OPEN EYES PROJECT, today OPEN EYES. Along with the first steps she began a distance course in responsible tourism management at the University of Leeds and obtained her master's degree. In 2019 she is planning to complete her PhD on gender and partnership in tourism.

From the beginning it was clear that OPEN EYES (OE) needed to operate independently. OE is still not an organisation that takes and offers programmes developed by foreign companies. OE develops its own programmes which are from the beginning discussed and agreed upon with those involved or affected. The organisations or people involved have a full voice in decision making and also agree on the details; they jointly develop the programmes. Only then will the plans be considered ready for the market and will be presented and offered. Each and every step of a programme must be socially responsible, humane, and fully accepted by the organisations, partners and by everybody in India who is involved in one way or the other. Real participation, questions regarding sustainability, and the possibility of continuous adaptation must be part of each step.

This has been a risky balancing act from the beginning, as eventually it will be up to the customers to decide to accept an offer or not. Planning without considering the market is disastrous, but a lack of full and convinced consent of those involved is disastrous as well. So it is clear that the operation and development of OE is possible only with good management, marketing, conviction, intelligent advertising, and the right way of addressing the target groups. And it remains clear that the development must be slow and cautious, as the products and services eventually depend on finetuning, on permanent response and adaptation in the light of the guests', partners', and organisations' different ideas.

The customers will of course visit the highlights that India has to offer in abundance. As a matter of principle, OE does not offer visits to sales shows. But the customers will get extra opportunities for visits and encounters which "normal" tourists don't get.

Fairness is not only applied in the relationships with Indian partners, but the customers, too, are assured: ... "After your trip, you will no longer be the same. With us you will visit the highlights of India, but in entirely new ways with open eyes". It's a promise that OE keeps.

OE did not plan and is not planning to set up new organisations. And it is not about donating part of the profit. It is about finding suitable partners in order to jointly develop a concept for their staff and members to participate in tourism without becoming dependent on it. The profit generated will mainly be invested in education, training, and qualification measures. Suitable routes are planned in such a way as to help disadvantaged groups and socially responsible projects get access to tourism.

OE's objectives are clear. Access to tourism improves the income situation of the people involved. Tourism becomes part of their work life without leading to any dependence on tourism development. Especially women and women with disabilities, as major groups marginalised by economic development

in India, are obtaining qualifications. Less than 25 percent of the women in India are employed and earn wages or salaries. Only about 1.5 percent of the people with disabilities have access to the labour market; the percentage of women among them is significantly smaller. So “Women in Tourism“ is an important part of OE’s project strategy.

Last but not least: Apart from the qualification to earn money, the training measures are, as an additional important objective, always and generally targeted at strengthening the self-esteem and self-confidence of the women and at convincing them of their own capacities and possibilities. OE wants them to be proud of the objectives they have achieved.

3.2 Concept and Programme

OE’s success formula is based on the attentive cooperation with their Indian partners on an equal footing and on targeted marketing strategies to address and convince potential customers.

Five examples, all within the “Golden Triangle“, which illustrate OE’s concept of work:

1. In Delhi, the taxi company SAKHA is a partner of OE. SAKHA employs women as taxi drivers (in India less than one percent of all taxi drivers are female). The idea behind it: Women drive for women. OE and the taxi company contact drivers to find out if they would be interested in taking English classes and in getting trained as tour guides. The costs are covered by OE. These women remain taxi drivers as their occupation. As driver guides with this new qualification they get access to tourism and are used by OE whenever possible.

They pick up tourists from the airport and guide city tours for OE. For the meantime, this concept only works in Delhi. Trips for several days that require the women’s absence over night are socially not accepted. There are plans to also transfer the concept to other big cities. The driver guides know the neighbourhoods, can explain the sights and provide female perspectives on the markets and business life.

These tours in small and very small groups are of course offered as exceptional kinds of city tours in Delhi. One of the most popular tours among many is the “Spice Girl Tour“, the exploration of local markets. The drivers may also invite the guests home for a meal with their families and in this way offer them unforgettable insights into every day life in India.

The tourists get new perspectives of life in a big city. The women have increased their income by 30 percent or more.

2. NAB, an organisation for blind people, trains blind women as masseuses (project: Talking Hands). In cooperation with OE the masseuses attend language classes and are trained in dealing with tourists and their expectations. OE facilitates the placement of blind masseuses in retreat centres and wellness hotels they work with. The income of the blind masseuses has increased by about 30 percent. While the cooperation with NAB worked very well and smoothly, it took long and required a lot of persuading to convince hotel and retreat managers to work with blind masseuses.

Six blind masseuses have successfully completed a course in Berlin for the early detection of breast cancer (Project: Helping Hands). In the future, OE plans to offer, at the request of tourists, the examination by trained women and doctors.

3. The rural Anoothi Centre near Jaipur is supported by OE. A community has been living there for several years which at the beginning gave shelter to street children and took care of them. Later a school was founded in addition, which is now also attended by youths from this very rural region where there are hardly any schools at all. About 100 female and male students are taught (almost 40 percent of them street children).

Women from the villages and farms in the surroundings are trained with the support of OE in order to improve the quality of their handicraft and to develop their creativity with regard to designs, so that these textiles can also be exported to Europe. The women who participate can either work at the centre or at home. It is difficult to quantify the extent to which their income has increased, as previously there had been no income opportunities for these women at all. It is often for the first time that the women

participate in economic life to an extent that is noteworthy as well as regular.

OE's tourists spend a full day and two nights at the centre. Alcohol, nicotine, and meat are not permitted and the tourists accept these rules. The accommodation is very simple: dorms and non-attached showers and toilets. This saves costs, the trips can be offered at lower rates. What is more important, however, is that the centre creates and maintains a kind of equality, in order to prevent the richer participants from becoming aware of the poverty, which would complicate any kind of encounter.

The tourists are offered a course in printing fabrics (block printing). They receive guidance to produce their own product. The women are the teachers and the tourists are the learners. Encounters between equals are facilitated, despite all language barriers and inequalities. An alternative course acquaints tourists with solar energy (water and electricity), solar ovens, and biogas. The community has more than 40 solar cells, a solar oven, and a biogas plant; the electricity costs are zero, firewood is hardly needed anymore.

After the courses the guests and hosts meet in order to play together: tug of war, or simple tag. The games were introduced at the women's initiative. Earlier the guests used to visit the women in their homes for joint meals. These encounters were experienced as tense by the guests and especially by the hosts. The women were also bored of being asked the same questions over and over again: How old? How many children? What is your husband doing? etc. Now the days pass with more equality and joint activities, with much fun and laughter.

The centre is not touristic. In total, there will not be more than one (small) group visiting per week.

The centre is getting direct financial support from OE. The money is mainly used for education, training, and teaching at the school.

4. After sight seeing at the Taj Mahal, which may be the most widely known building in the world, a café is visited that is run by women who became victims of acid attacks. OE has made this visit a fixed point in their itineraries in order to support the women who have now become entrepreneurs. The first moment of shock will be more than compensated for by the energy and vitality and laughter of these women. Here, too, it is obvious how sensitively OE deals with the situation: in the programme, these women are presented as strong survivors, not as victims, which is also how the women see themselves. This instantly opens up a very different approach to their fate.

5. Another point on the itinerary is the elephant rescue centre. It is supported with entrance fees and small purchases. There is a possibility to get close to the old, partly blind, disabled elephants on their open-air compound, or to feed them by hand. Again, a win-win situation is created. The tourists have a touching experience that remains, contribute something good, and the organisation can sustain itself with such support. OE facilitates the encounter between the rescue organisation and the tourists.

These projects and encounters are all in the area of the so-called Golden Triangle. This is the shortest and very popular round trip in India. It was visited by the author during his short stay, accompanied by OE. OE sells round trips in different parts of India and also offers Ayurvedic treatment and spiritual retreats. On the other trips, too, OE tries to facilitate similar encounters.

4 Evaluation Against the TO DO Award Criteria

Assessing the activities of the OPEN EYES PROJECT against the contest criteria for the TO DO Award leads to the following evaluation:

4.1. Participation

How were/are the interests and needs of the local population taken into account in the planning phase and throughout the project?

Still in the planning stage, the programmes to be implemented by OE are discussed in detail with partners, apprentices, and staff. Suggestions, changes, and ideas are taken up in the process. This applies to the training of taxi drivers, the training of women of the blind groups, and to the work with

handicraft producers at the rural centre.

Discontinuing the meals they used to have together with the tourists was initiated by them. The neighbours' envy and repeatedly the same questions posed by tourists led to their decision. After renewed discussions the concept was changed to now include working together with the handicraft producers as teachers. The games to be played together were also added. Both activities increase the respect for each other.

Frequent meetings several times a year ensure that problems and suggestions for change can be addressed and that programmes can be adapted on a regular basis.

Tourists can only indirectly be involved in developing the itinerary. At the end of the trip, they can suggest improvements, mostly in direct conversations. The high percentage of small groups and individual travellers allows for very individually tailored tours. A focus can be chosen according to the wishes of the customers, without OE compromising their own standards. Tourists finally approve of this joint, participatory way of elaborating an itinerary by booking with OE. They like the concept of seeing famous sites, but in new ways, with new encounters and experiences.

Marketing is an important instrument for OE. There is no shrill promotion of their destination. Flyers, itineraries, and the website are characterised by mindful presentation. The same attentiveness that the partners experience is also given to the customers who are to be convinced, not lured. So OE don't say "India is the world's most fascinating country to visit", but "TO US, India is the world's most fascinating country to visit". Or: "WE believe that everybody should visit India once in their lives".

OE's target group are clearly not the tourists who want to experience a look at a "post card" or the selfie tourists, but those who seek exchange and encounters: "After your trip, you will no longer be the same person". That's how OE addresses exactly the kind of tourists who are open and willing to learn something new.

With clear statements, OE achieves a high degree of customer satisfaction. And yes, with that much of empowerment and encounters with women, the percentage of women among the guests is far more than 70 percent.

A contribution to respectful, participatory cooperation also consists in the fact that the guides are paid more than what is usual in the sector. As they do not visit sales shows and handicraft markets, the guides miss out on their commissions. However, the atmosphere within the groups is usually perceived as more positive, the guests don't mistrust the guides (and the tour operator) as they would if they were agents helping to boost sales.

To achieve this, the guides need to be heard and understood. Good communication is the foundation in order to find solutions that are fair for both parties.

The respect OE has for the partners is also reflected in minor details. For example, an external guide reported that OE was his most valuable customer. "OE may be paying better, but I still earn less, as I cannot take my groups to the sales shows. But OE is fair. Three to four days after the tour my money will be in my account – in other cases I will have to wait for at least three to four weeks".

The taxi drivers also need to be paid more. When guests are to be picked up from the airport, taxi drivers wait outside the airport area until they get information that their guests have passed the controls and can be picked up. The women do not have this possibility – they cannot be expected to wait with the groups of men at the roadside. This means in practice that they will have to be at and inside the airport in time and will need to pay significantly higher parking fees (often around 5 US dollars) per pickup. This will be communicated with OE and OE refunds the higher expenses.

Taking the blind masseuses to their workplaces is also significantly more expensive. They have to take a person along to accompany them, this person often needs to stay over night and at the end of the season the masseuses will also need to be picked up again.

According to OE, this is the price the company is willing to pay as a socially responsible enterprise.

4.2. Economic Benefit

Ensuring the economic participation of broad local population strata in tourism

OE's activities open up new areas of work in tourism or expand existing ones for those involved and for the apprentices. India is a country with very low wages. Even small increases in income significantly improve people's quality of life. Not only the person herself, but her entire family will be better off. Especially if women and disabled family members can (all of a sudden) contribute significantly to increasing the family income, this is well recognised by the family, but also by neighbours and relatives. The increase in income is often more than 30 percent.

In one case the additional income helped to cover the instalments for a small house. The young woman's pride of her new position in the family cannot be overlooked. For the father it is not easy to accept that his daughter (in many families a cost factor) now earns more than him, but he is also visibly proud. These are still individual cases. But these examples mean a significant empowerment of women in the society.

In rural areas access to money often creates the first possibility for women and their families to participate in the economic environment. Suddenly they can buy necessary medicines, expand the basis of their diet, think of shoes, better clothing, and consumer goods.

4.3. Awareness Raising

Enhancing the awareness of local people with regard to the chances and risks of tourism development for their economic, social and cultural lives

OE's concept has been designed in such a way as to prevent any dependence on tourism. Taxi drivers and masseuses remain in their jobs. The work as driver guides in tourism offers an attractive additional income. Tourism is generally recognised (by friends, relatives, neighbours) as a possibility to increase incomes. Everybody is aware of the enormous potential of increasing incomes.

For women in rural areas their occupation as handicraft producers can quickly lead to a dependence on touristic development. A buffer is surely the fact that part of the handicraft products is exported to Europe. Even if tourism weakens, exports may remain stable. Here, however, the question of dependence is not a matter of principle. If there are hardly any possibilities to participate in monetary transactions, this is an enormous opportunity – no matter how insecure it may be on the long run. In any case, the increased income contributes to improvements in every day life.

In the city, there are hardly any influences on daily cultural life (except for the fact that women in general are empowered), in rural areas the handicraft work with textiles and woodblocks can stabilise clothing traditions.

All training programmes have a common content: self-esteem, self-perception, strengthening self-confidence are important objectives of the courses. This cannot be achieved without them critically questioning their own role in every day life and in their jobs. In this way, the women are also sensitised for the problems tourism entails.

4.4. Cultural Identity

Strengthening local culture and the cultural identity of local people, avoiding/minimising any social and cultural damage caused by tourism, supporting intercultural encounters and exchange between hosts and guests

In Delhi, a city with 20 million inhabitants, tourism plays too unimportant a role to cause cultural damage. Taxi drivers, female guides, and blind women of course get in contact with tourists – in a preset, largely regulated environment.

The tourists certainly benefit from such encounters. For the local women the encounters lead to pride and a strong self-esteem, because they clearly see that they get a lot of appreciation by tourists and in

their own environment.

In rural areas, tourist visits remain – despite their regularity – an exception. As far as possible, the encounters are organised as encounters among equals (joint work and games). This is unlikely to weaken the women's cultural values.

4.5. Decent Work

Creation of qualified jobs and/or improvement of the working conditions in tourism with regard to social security, working hours, education and training, and remuneration

Expanding employment opportunities through education and training in tourism has a positive impact on the economic conditions in every day life. The income situation improves. Training programmes, including language courses, expand the range of opportunities in life, strengthen the participants' identity and improve the image of women in society and in the family.

4.6. Gender Equality

Equal participation of women and men in planning and implementation processes within the frame of their cultural background and values

The OE programmes certainly give preference to women, even though for round trips men from Anoothi are used as drivers and guides. However, in a society where inequalities between men and women are so pronounced as in India, this cannot be seen as a discrimination of men in the company. OE only supports a convergence of fairer labour conditions for men and women.

4.7. Environmental Sustainability

Taking into account criteria of low environmental and climate impact and sustainable use of natural resources

In Delhi, the city with the highest air pollution worldwide, OE does not work in the field of environmental protection. In rural areas, it is different. The Anoothi Centre is financially supported by OE. Apart from a focus on the school, education and training, solar cells the biogas plant and the solar oven are co-financed. This does not only help the centre save money, but also serves to protect the environment. The solar oven and the biogas plant have significantly reduced the use of firewood. In terms of generation of electricity from solar energy, the centre is almost self-sufficient. It saves energy and reduces the burden on the environment in a sustainable manner.

OE is involved in the energy saving measures in indirect ways as well. Time and again, tourists who came to visit the centre with OE are so enthusiastic that one or two years later they come back to work at the centre as volunteers. They have been instrumental – technically and financially – in setting up the electricity supply by using solar energy. The solar plant is managed by a member of the centre who has obtained a master's degree in energy management.

4.8. Future Sustainability

Ensuring the economic and institutional sustainability of the project

Over the past few years, OE has set up reserves in order to be able to survive fluctuations in tourism. Salaries are slightly above average. Thanks to shared office space, the rent for the office needed by OE is relatively low.

OE regularly employs interns. Their analyses have shown that over the past seven years on average, 176 € per tourist were invested in training programmes and financial support. After deduction of the salaries for office staff, of reserves and marketing measures, OE uses 90, almost 100 percent of the profit for assistance measures. It is a lot of work – the regular coordination, renewed elaborations, and taking an interest in new projects require time and strength.

About 800 tourists have been taken care of since 2011, and since 2015/16 an upward trend has been

visible. All this makes OE optimistic about the future.

They plan to expand the concept of training taxi drivers as driver guides to other big cities (Mumbai, Kolkata, etc.).

To achieve improvements and reduce individual work load, they plan to employ one more clerk in 2019.

There are also plans to give further training to the guides. Imparting facts is no longer sufficient. To guide tourist groups, it is getting increasingly important to package the knowledge and the facts into stories and background. Tour guides increasing turn into story tellers – today's or the historical world come to life and fascinate the audience.

Of course there are questions. What will happen if other companies copy the model "Women in Tourism"? Others might employ the trained taxi drivers/masseuses/artists. OE would lose a USP, even though OE financed the training programmes. For the women remain free to decide to work for other companies, too. OE does not want to constrain them by contracts. The question if the drivers will stay after getting married or after giving birth to a child cannot be answered.

A very recent example: Two of the female driver guides got employment contracts with embassies. They are very well paid and have regular working hours. OE has mixed feelings about it. "For us it is a setback, but in the light of our concept as a socially responsible enterprise it is a success".

There a currently also two trained blind masseuses who are pregnant. If they will later want to continue on their jobs cannot be predicted yet.

"We have to tolerate and endure these risks if we want to act in a participatory and socially responsible manner. In addition, we must consider ourselves lucky if we contribute to development and to the role of women in society".

It is unlikely that the model would soon be copied by anyone (in India). There is no quick money to be made with this model of sustainability, social responsibility, and cooperation. For it requires a deep social honesty, responsibility, and patience. The complex, detailed adjustment with staff and partners, the communication with guests means a lot of work. But only this major effort and the intensity of cooperation eventually ensure customer satisfaction and determine success or failure in the development of OPEN EYES.

5 Conclusion

Since 2011, the "Social Enterprise in Responsible Tourism" OPEN EYES has become a stable factor in the market segment "mindful, socially responsible, thoughtful travel" in India. It was a strenuous effort to develop ideas on sustainable, participatory tourism in India, to market them and to successfully implement them while pursuing studies in tourism. With financial support, language courses, and training programmes OPEN EYES very successfully created, protected and enhanced jobs. All the women, disabled women and street children do not only increase their self-esteem, but can also increase their income and improve their living conditions significantly. The participatory, respectful ways of dealing with all stakeholders made OPEN EYES an accepted partner.

The criteria elaborated by the Institute for Tourism and Development for the TO DO Award are fully met. OPEN EYES is a worthy winner of the TO DO Award 2019!

About the author: For 30 years, Dr. Dietmar Quist has been working in tourism: Teaching tourism in the United Arab Emirates, as advisor to the tourism ministers in Syria and Yemen and to several governors in the Philippines. He offers adult education, training and communication programmes. For 20 years he has been working as a tour guide. From 1996 to 2001 he was the CEO of an incoming tour operator in Yemen. Dietmar Quist has been a member of the TO DO Award jury since 2007 and in this context evaluated projects in Uganda, India, Italy, and Switzerland.

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