

Opening Address

Community-Based Ecotourism Development: Identifying Partners in the Process

Keith W. Sproule
Wildlife Preservation Trust International

ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is on achieving conservation and development objectives through development of Community-Based Ecotourism (CBE) enterprises. The premise of the paper is that successful CBE initiatives are supported by the partnerships of communities with government, non-government and private sectors. To this end, this paper attempts to evaluate those partners most able to support various initiatives. Finally, the paper provides a few thoughts about CBE initiatives in the context of a national tourism market and what might be included in a National Community-Based Ecotourism Development Strategy.

OVERVIEW

There are many terms used to link tourism development with conservation of natural and cultural resources. Some of these include: ecotourism, nature-based travel, adventure travel, sustainable tourism, and alternative tourism. For purposes of this paper, the fine distinctions between each of these terms will not be pursued.

Worthy of concern, however, is that no broadly accepted criteria of what constitutes any of these concepts have emerged. Many involved in the field of tourism research have begun to assert that tourism should satisfy various conservation and development objectives in order to be considered sustainable. Three of these objectives are: 1) financial support for protection and management of natural areas; 2) economic benefits for residents living near natural areas; and 3) encouragement of conservation among these residents, in part through economic benefits.¹

Significant resources have been devoted to developing this type of sustainable tourism on the assumption that these objectives can be achieved. However, lessons from the field have begun to highlight that without proper planning and integration, individual projects tend to operate in isolation, failing to influence either conservation or development. Generally, they also fail to generate the policy support necessary to bring their potential to fruition.

¹ Lindberg, Kreg, Jeremy Enriquez and Keith Sproule. 1995. Does Ecotourism Achieve Conservation and Development Objectives? *Annals of Tourism Research*.

A LETTER HOME

The following letter, from a hypothetical traveler, illustrates how Community-Based Ecotourism (CBE) might fit into a typical travel itinerary, just about anywhere in the world. It should also provide insight into how such experiences can be designed to maximize community participation.

Dear Family,

I'm writing you from (fill in the blank). I'm having the most wonderful experience! We left the capital city for a small community (high in the mountains / along the coast). It took the better part of a day to get here, (including a ride on the back of a motorcycle / a trek through the forest). I never thought I'd enjoy traveling in such a manner!

The village where we're staying is part of a unique program to develop community-based ecotourism. This means community members are involved with just about every aspect of tourism to their village. When we arrived we were greeted by one of the community leaders who took us to the Village Guest House. It's a simple house. Similar in design to other houses in the village. We were told it took two months to construct. There are twelve beds in the house, six per room, which makes it easy for both the men and women in our group.

In the afternoon one of the guest house managers took us on a long walk around the village. There's so much history here! The next day we went on a long hike to (a waterfall / mountain top). Our guide, (he speaks English!) told us all about (the medicinal plants of the forest / traditional uses for resources in the area). He said he likes to teach visitors about his home area and how people in his village live. Although he didn't say it, I'm sure he likes the salary he can earn from giving tours as well!

The thing I've enjoyed most about being here is eating! Yesterday I helped to do some cooking—I sure learned a lot about spices!

Learning about life in this village has been the best part of my trip. Being here is what I dream about when I'm sitting in my office at home! Tomorrow we leave for (the coast / the interior). I'm looking forward to seeing another part of the country. For the next part of our trip we have reservations at a really nice hotel.

Home soon,

P.S. I purchased several handicrafts as gifts from the Women's Craft Center in the village. I'm sure you're going to like them.

The preceding letter describes what a foreign visitor might typically experience in many communities around the world. Notice

Community-based ecotourism involves conservation, business enterprise, and community development.

that the community runs all of the activities described: lodging, food, guiding, and craft sales. In addition, the community has maintained a local natural area, perhaps a forest area or marine site, which draws visitors. This relationship between conservation of a natural area and job opportunities from tourism to the natural area is what CBE is all about.

The letter also describes many of the possible benefits to local people derived from the development of tourism in rural areas. Benefits include economic growth in rural regions; distribution of tourism revenue, which can foster improved welfare and equity in the industry; improved resource conservation by local people; and finally, diversification of the regional and national tourism product.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY-BASED ECOTOURISM?

The letter describes what might qualify as a classic community-based initiative. In its basic concept, CBE refers to ecotourism enterprises that are owned and managed by the community. Furthermore, CBE implies that a community is taking care of its natural resources in order to gain income through operating a tourism enterprise and using that income to better the lives of its members. Hence, CBE involves conservation, business enterprise, and community development.

In any CBE enterprise there will be direct and indirect participants and direct and indirect beneficiaries. It is important that the entire community has some level of involvement and some level of benefit. Direct participants in a community ecotourism enterprise might include members of the managing committee and the actual workers involved with producing products or services for sale. In some instances those who are the primary users of a resource might be involved as participants in a project as well. Indirect participants would include the broader community who selected the management committee of a project and those who do not directly use the natural resources involved in an enterprise.

Direct beneficiaries include employees, craft producers, guides, and committee members, while indirect beneficiaries include the wider community as recipients of community development projects funded by tourism revenues. How issues of participation and identification of beneficiaries get decided has a lot to do with how “community” is defined.

DEFINING “COMMUNITY”

A community is a group of people, often living in the same geographic area, who identify themselves as belonging to the same group. People in a community are often related by blood or mar-

Successful community-based ecotourism development, that is, ventures that satisfy both conservation and development objectives, are supported by partnerships between local communities, government agencies, NGOs, and the private sector.

riage. They may all belong to the same religious or political group, class, or caste.

Although communities may have many things in common, they are still complex and should not be thought of as one homogenous group. Communities are comprised of specific groups, such as landless and those with land, rich and poor, new immigrants and old residents. A number of separate interest groups that belong to one community may be affected differently by changes that are introduced. How separate interest groups respond to change is equally tied to kinship, religion, politics, and strong bonds between community members that have developed over generations. Depending on the issue, a community may be united or divided in thought and action.²

The “community-base” for community enterprises is rarely, if ever, all encompassing. Those community members with some initial disadvantages, such as poor housing, insufficient land or income, tend to be among those excluded from participation ecotourism development. Depending on how the ecotourism enterprise is designed, they may be excluded from the benefits of ecotourism development as well.

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES OF COMMUNITY-BASED ECOTOURISM

PARTICIPATION

There is increasing recognition of the need to involve communities in general. There is much less agreement about exactly who should participate and to what extent.

One common definition states that participation is “giving people more opportunities to participate effectively in development activities...empowering people to mobilize their own capacities, be social actors rather than passive subjects, manage the resources, make decisions and control the activities that affect their lives.”³

The African Charter for Popular Participation takes a very broad approach to defining participation:

We believe strongly that popular participation is, in essence, the empowerment of the people to effectively involve themselves in creating the structures and in designing policies and programs that serve the interests of all as well as to effectively contribute to the development process and share equitably in its benefits.⁴

How a community chooses to define participation will prove important in determining what level of participation will satisfy the

² Wyckoff-Baird, B. 1990. *Community Participation in ICDPs*, WWF Technical Paper, 1991.

³ African Charter for Popular Participation.

⁴ Wells, M. with K. Brandon and M. Hannah. 1992. *People and Parks: Linking Protected Area Management with Local Communities*, IBRD, Washington, D.C.

ecotourism project's goals. Even where attempts at all-inclusive community involvement are well thought out, participation has sometimes been decided on the basis of political affiliation, land ownership, kinship, or gender. For instance, there are a growing number of examples of ecotourism enterprises which include overnight stays for visitors in villagers' homes, a type of lodging often referred to as home-stays. However, there are home-stay projects which exclude those whose homes are too small or are perceived to be too poor to lodge outside guests. Programs based on agreements between groups of landowners or tenants have excluded those not wealthy or well-connected. Level of education, English language ability and even age have been used to limit the number of participants. In some instances, the ecotourism enterprises of a community have become primarily ventures for young men.

GENDER

The role of women has proven a challenge for many community groups pursuing ecotourism enterprises. In some instances, gender issues have been dealt with overtly. In these cases it usually the young men who control ecotourism ventures. In other instances, decisions based on gender have not passed community scrutiny. For example, before revenue from a wildlife program was distributed, the leaders of the community (men) created a list of community beneficiaries, which included no female households. The women rebelled and succeeded in redefining the community to include divorced women and other female-headed households.

Many communities and cultures have "unspoken" restrictions on what roles would be appropriate for women within such ventures. Though women in rural areas may welcome ecotourism, quite often they are restricted from the most lucrative aspects of the enterprise, often working as cooks or cleaners.

Still, there are significant opportunities not to be overlooked. Many communities may find it inappropriate for women to work as guides through the forest, yet it may be quite possible for women to assume responsibility for guiding around the village. As women often will be responsible for preparing the meals, structures can be established whereby they also receive payments for food. In many locations, the sale of crafts stands out as an extremely promising approach to nurture women's participation. Overall it is important to recognize that failure to allow for maximum participation of all of the members of a community can limit the success of a project or program.

ECOTOURISM CAN BE DIVISIVE

An additional concern among community groups pursuing ecotourism is that the introduction of such ventures can reinforce

existing divisions in their communities or create new ones. This situation is in no way confined to tourism, but may be more acute since the activity involves highly visible contact with outsiders, so the returns may be perceived to be high. Issues of fairness, jealousy, and exclusion have confronted many CBE ventures.

One approach being tried in several areas is maintaining a community bulletin board and posting all decisions and actions. This has proven particularly helpful where money is concerned. Posting the agreed to prices being charged for products and services sold, such as guide services or stays at the community guest house, can help make everyone feel informed about how much money is actually involved.

Being open about monetary costs and benefits is often described as being “transparent.” Many groups have found that keeping their record books transparent has helped reduce accusations of financial fraud or corruption—one of the most divisive issues that can arise with any community project.

DECISION-MAKING

Although the broader community may be defined as the local people residing in a particular area, not all members of a community can come together all of the time. Therefore, recognized community representatives are often selected to make decisions regarding what tourism enterprise should be undertaken, how it is managed, what the benefits to the community will be, and how benefits will be distributed. In any community, there will be direct participants and indirect participants in decision making. Often the direct participants are elected representatives from a much larger number of participants, both direct and indirect. Sometimes this group of people is called the Management Committee. Management Committees can be divisive as well. Because the Management Committee is responsible for making decisions on behalf of others, sometimes involving expenditures, it may be a very sought after position.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

It is quite likely that introducing a new ecotourism enterprise into a community will raise questions about participation and distribution of benefits. One way of addressing these difficult issues is for project proponents to discuss ahead of time questions such as those found below. Planning to address the twin issues of participation and distribution of benefits can help resolve many potential problems early on. Remember that these are only some of the questions that should be asked during the planning process. No doubt there

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UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY STRENGTHS ⁵

Many of the most successful CBE projects appear to have started small and simple and gradually expanded: informal crafts sales to tourists along routes to national parks; Bed & Breakfast offerings in the extra room of a family house; building of small thatch cabañas. Initial investments for these enterprises were often small, and comprised a mix of grants, loans, and sweat equity. All appear to have passed through an initial stage of start-up enthusiasm, to be replaced by a more realistic understanding of actual returns. Often group numbers declined during this portion of the learning curve—leaving a smaller, more committed number of implementors.

The importance of starting small and keeping the project in line with the financial, organizational, and managerial skills available in the community can be underscored by two examples of projects that might be described as overly ambitious. In the community of Gales Point, Belize, there stands a half built two-story hotel. In the community of Monkey River, Belize, there stands a half completed beach front resort with eight unfinished cabañas.

From their inception, these projects relied on significant amounts of government financing—a questionable source as the transition of governments, and the subsequent conclusion of financing, exemplifies. At the present time each of the projects has been standing idle for several years. Each is fifty to sixty per cent completed. In both instances, the impetus for these projects, as well as the design and construction of the facilities, came from outside the community. In each case, there appears to have been limited research into the organizational skills of the local community, limited financial planning beyond the initial central government allocation, and limited identification of appropriate marketing strategies for the upscale clientele each sought to attract. The fact that financing for each was undertaken during an election year suggests that political motivations were paramount.

Among the community-based tourism projects studied, levels of participation in conceptual planning, design, construction, management, and overall operation appear significantly higher than with the two projects presently standing idle.

By all accounts, the hotel and cabaña projects were designed to be “community-run.” A lesson to be learned may be that “community-based” has broader implications and should not be confused with “community-run.” It may also mean the difference between approaching communities as passive beneficiaries as opposed to active collaborators.

⁵ Sproule, Keith, W. 1994. Community-Based Tourism Development in Belize: Summary Report of a Community-Based Tourism Gathering & Identification of Similarities Among Successful Community Initiatives. Paper presented at the 1994 World Congress on Tourism and the Environment, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 31 May to 5 June, 1994.

will be others that are specific to the community and the CBE enterprise envisioned.

DEFINING “COMMUNITY”

How will community be defined? Will community be defined by geography—everyone who lives within a given area? Or, will it be based on some other factor, such as family or clan? However it gets defined, will this definition be acceptable to everyone who will potentially be affected? Even though the number of community participants in a project may be small, the number of community residents likely to be impacted may be quite large.

PARTICIPATION

Who will be a part of the CBE enterprise? Developing a new enterprise requires a lot of time and effort. Who will provide these inputs? For example, who will help construct the new trails or build the guest house? How will the work be divided? Will participation depend on physical labor? Or, will there be other methods, such as cash payments or in-kind contributions? Will men and women participate equally? Will there be opportunities for both young and old? Rich and poor? Those with schooling and those without? Will efforts be made to train those without the skills to participate from the beginning?

DECISION-MAKING

Who will be involved in the actual decision-making process? Will everyone decide everything? Or, will a smaller number of people be given responsibility to decide on behalf of the rest? Will there be a governing committee? How will members of such a committee be determined? Will they be elected or appointed? How many people will be on it? How many are too many? How many are too few? What will be their job titles and duties? Will there be compensation for serving on such a committee? Will there be ways for committee members to be held accountable for their actions?

BENEFITS

How will prices for what is to be sold (goods and services) be determined? Who will collect the money? How will money collected be divided? For instance, how much will the individual or individuals who provide the service or made the craft receive? Will any percentage go into a general fund? How will accounts be maintained? Is anyone trained to keep a record book?

CASE STUDY: ROTATING COMMUNITY “FOOD PROVIDERS”

The Toledo Ecotourism Association (TEA) is an organization of indigenous Maya and Garifuna communities working to develop ecotourism in the southern Toledo District of Belize, Central America. Since its beginning in 1990, the TEA has constructed Guest Houses in eleven villages, with plans to expand to at least two more villages by the end of 1996.

Each “Village Guest House” consists of two rooms, one for men and one for women, with separate bath houses and toilets. Each Guest House can sleep between 8 and 12 guests, making it quite comfortable for groups of travelers to stay.

From its inception, the TEA has worked to make sure that as many members of each village community participate as possible. To achieve this, they have developed a unique system of rotating “food providers.” Village food providers are those families who have agreed to provide meals to guests staying at the Village Guest House. Participating families are required to attend a workshop on food preparation, health, and hygiene which the TEA conducts. Upon completion of the course, names are added to a rotating list of families interested in providing breakfast, lunch, or dinner. No more than four guests are sent to a family at any one time. This helps assure that the benefits of visitors coming to the village are distributed among as many of the residents as possible.

At meal time someone from the community, generally a young boy or girl, goes to the Village Guest House to take the visitors to his or her home for a hot meal. As the family participants rotate, many members of the community have the opportunity of providing meals to visitors. Each family is paid directly by the visiting guest. The family keeps eighty per cent of what it is paid, with the remaining twenty per cent deposited into a Community Fund. Villagers who choose not to participate still benefit from the Community Fund. Money from the fund has been used for many community improvement projects, including the purchase of school supplies and the upgrading of the community health clinic.

Some of the difficult issues addressed by the TEA when developing the rotating food provider system included:

Feeding Vegetarians

Most local food is prepared with large amounts of lard. The answer has been to be sure to inquire *early* if a visitor is a vegetarian or not.

Feeding During Lunch Hours

Most men were in the field during the day and many families felt it would be inappropriate for a foreign visitor to come at that time. The answer has been to either prepare the lunch in the morning, or to get older family members to participate.

Who’s Next?

At the start, there was some question about which families were next on the roster. The solution was to post the list of participating families in an open place, such as the community bulletin board or Guest House wall, so that everyone could see who was next in line. This solution also helped make sure the twenty per cent for the community fund was paid on time.

PARTNERS IN THE PROCESS

When developing new ecotourism enterprises, many communities have found it important to work in partnership with other organizations. There are several important “partners” in the process of developing CBE enterprises. These include:

- The established tourism industry, particularly tour operators.
- The government tourism bureau and natural resource management agencies, especially the park service.
- Non-government organizations (NGOs), especially those involved with environmental issues, small-business management, and traditional community development.
- Universities and other research organizations.
- Other communities, including those with a history of tourism and those that are beginning.
- Additional partners in the process may include other international organizations, public and private funding institutions, national cultural committees, and many others.

The following section will give a brief overview of why and how some of these partners can help develop successful ecotourism enterprises in and around your community.

GOVERNMENT PARTNERS

Government officials have a critical role in formulating policies for ecotourism. For instance, the Government Park Service generally has responsibility for managing protected land areas. Protected land areas can include national parks, reserves, forests, and sanctuaries. The park service may also have responsibility for managing tourism in protected areas as part of its overall management obligations. For the majority of protected lands, rules and regulations are legislated at the national level. Government officials can decide, for example, to create a law requiring entrance fee systems for all parks, and ensure that the money collected returns to the park.

There are many communities located in and around the surrounding which attract tourists. These communities find themselves confronting foreigners traveling through their homelands. This situation often produces mixed reactions. Some may want nothing to do with tourists. Others may want to develop ecotourism enterprises. In either case, efforts must be made to ensure that a portion of the profit from tourism development remains in the local area.

Developing mechanisms for local residents to benefit directly from the establishment of protected areas in and around their homes can help to offset loss of revenue from traditional extractive activities which may be curtailed or prohibited by the establishment of a protected area.

Not only is this an issue of justice and motivation, but local residents are also often critical of conservation efforts in their area. If adequate rewards can be demonstrated, they can strongly influence community participation in conservation activities.

Although most ecotourism activities happen at the local level, they need to fit into systems designated at the national level. Government officials are also responsible for many of the structures and services outside the protected area which greatly affect tourism. These include airports, roads, and even health clinics.

Government officials and their policies can easily advance or hinder ecotourism development. Government can be an important partner when developing an ecotourism enterprise, especially if a community is located near a protected area.

Specific ways government can help a community develop ecotourism enterprises include:

- Providing coordination between the CBE project and other related projects in the region;
- Providing technical assistance through established government departments for the environment, social services, or cooperatives;
- Providing market research and promotional assistance through the tourism bureau;
- Providing direct financial support for CBE enterprises.
- Reducing, deferring, or exempting tax payments from the community.
- Developing and implementing policies which allow for the flexible development of CBE enterprises.

These are areas in which government can work as a partner to communities striving to develop ecotourism enterprises.

CONCESSIONS

Concessions are contracts with the government that give the holder of the contract the “right” to provide services to tourists visiting protected areas. The company or organization who receiving a concession is called a concessionaire. Often the criteria for selecting a concessionaire is either ill-defined or too stringent for communities to meet. Without concession rights, it can be difficult for communities to develop ecotourism enterprises. If a concession is necessary to develop tourism facilities at a protected area, then the community should work with government park service and an NGO familiar with small business development practices.

GUIDE LICENSING / REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

Many tourism bureaus have requirements for guide licensing or registration that are difficult for community groups to satisfy.

An additional concern among community groups pursuing ecotourism is that the introduction of such ventures can reinforce existing divisions in their communities or create new ones.

Sometimes a written test or drivers license is required. If these requirements must be satisfied for a community to develop an officially recognized enterprise, a community should work with the tourism bureau to provide necessary training, or to establish less stringent criteria.

PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL

Most government tourism bureaus have the promotion of national tourism destinations as part of their mandate. These bodies can help CBE enterprises “get the message out” about their projects. Some specific promotional methods include leaflets about the specific project, maps highlighting the location of the project, and inclusion within larger, more comprehensive national tourism brochures.

The process for preparing such material can prove a catalyst for serious discussion in a community setting. Asking a community group to decide just how it would like its hamlet described to visitors, or how to describe a particular attraction such as a waterfall, can help to organize and prioritize ideas behind a community initiative. Likewise, mapping activities, especially those requiring discussions of distance and time, can be quite fruitful—if only for the amount of discussion such topics can generate.

Efforts in other locations have included preparation of a Community-Based Tourism Guidebook, which takes visitors along a country-wide trail of community-based ventures; production of videos highlighting community-based ventures; and familiarity tours for travel agents and tour operators to learn about community initiatives.

NGO PARTNERS

Local non-government organizations (NGOs) can be valuable partners in the process of developing CBE enterprises in almost any area. They can be sources for training, technical assistance, advocacy at the national level, and in some instances, they can also provide financial assistance. These organizations often have members or constituencies that want information and guidance on ecotourism issues, so they can also influence the consumers of ecotourism, the ecotourists.

Many communities already work with local NGOs in such areas as health, agriculture, small-business development, or conservation programs. An example of how one NGO assisted community groups in developing ecotourism enterprises is shown in the following case-study.

BINA SWADAYA TOURS: A UNIQUE HYBRID⁶

Bina Swadaya is the largest non-government organization in Indonesia. It has a thirty year history of assisting community development projects throughout the Indonesian archipelago. In 1988, Bina Swadaya began advertising tours to several of its most prominent development projects. Tours were organized in response to requests from international visitors who were interested to learn more about grassroots activities in the country. From these non-traditional beginnings, Bina Swadaya Tours (BST) began.

BST occupies the unique position of being a for-profit business which has emerged from a development NGO. BST maintains the Bina Swadaya Development Agency mission of helping to alleviate poverty and protect Indonesia's environment and heritage, and it does so as a for-profit organization.

BST pursues its mission through the content of the tours it arranges. Typical destinations of a BST tour include: remote areas and villages, national parks and protected areas, Bina Swadaya development projects. Donations to each of these destination is included in the cost each of tour.

BST also works to educate tourists on responsible travel and to help them understand the issues of development from its own unique perspective. Every BST tour provides visitors a pre-trip educational packet containing a code of ethics for responsible travel.

In the past several years, with the increasing growth of tourism in rural areas, BST has been called upon to conduct training programs for villages and community groups. BST has become a leading advocate for sustainable CBE development in Indonesia. As the director of BST, Jarot Suwarjoto is quick to point out, assisting new communities in developing ecotourism enterprises is good business for BST too, because it increases the number and diversity of destinations they are able to offer their clients.

When asked to describe a typical BST tour client, Mr. Suwarjoto responds, "The type of tour BST runs attracts an alternative type of tourist. People interested in understanding life in rural areas, how people live, how they get by. Most of our tours utilize small-scale enterprises, which can sometimes mean no hot water showers. Of course we can arrange any type of tour, including deluxe accommodations, but "the average client is seeking small-scale, which is what we provide."

6. Author, personal communication.

LINKING COMMUNITIES, CONSERVATION, AND DEVELOPMENT

It has been argued, in a review of integrated conservation and development projects (ICDP) in Latin America, Africa, and Asia that:

For an ICDP to achieve its biodiversity conservation goals, it is not enough for the development component to foster improved local living standards—a difficult enough task. The development process must not only be economically and biologically sustainable, but must also conserve the ecosystem of the protected area. To satisfy this exacting requirement, explicit *linkages* between projects' development components and conservation objectives are needed.⁷

“Ecotourism” is one concept that has been heralded as a means for establishing such linkages. Unfortunately, while there has been a great deal of discussion about the contributions of ecotourism to local community well being, very little is visible on the ground.

In her research on CBE ventures, Deborah Meadows finds:

There have been numerous efforts to create “guidelines” for ecotourism development, and the bulk of these assign local participation a privileged position. However, these guidelines have not focused on community-based enterprises nor addressed what, if any, mechanisms exist for nurturing community interest in establishing such enterprises. Rather, they tend to view local participation as something incorporated into the design and implementation of ecotourism enterprises which are launched from “outside” the community. Additionally, they tend to focus on the quantitative dimensions of participation (e.g., number of people involved, revenue generated) rather than qualitative aspects of local participation (positions in the ecotourism enterprise).⁸

Whether a community-based tourism enterprise encourages community conservation of natural resources depends on at least four factors:

1. The scale of benefits received by local residents (and whether they outweigh the short term costs of foregoing resource use or changing resource management);

⁷ Wells, M. with K. Brandon and M. Hannah. 1992. *People and Parks: Linking Protected Area Management with Local Communities*, IBRD, Washington, D.C.

⁸ Meadows, Deborah. Beyond Shamans, Toucans and Tourist: Local Participation in Ecotourism in Ecuador and Costa Rica. Presented at the 1995 meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, The Sheraton Washington, September 28-30, 1995.

2. The extent to which the benefits are clearly perceived as dependent on the resource base, and therefore on sustainable management;
3. Whether benefits reach all resource users; and
4. Whether local institutions are strengthened, so as to increase their capacity for collective resource management.⁹

⁹ Sproule, Keith W. 1995. Community-Based Ecotourism Development: Linking Conservation and Development. Paper presented at PACT/WALHI Community-Based Ecotourism Workshop and Seminar, Bogor, Indonesia, April.

If the above conditions are not met, massive financial earnings for a few people will not necessarily change a community's approach to resource utilization. Changes in resource use will also depend on whether communities gain rights, ownership, and control over resources and hence a sense of responsibility for their management.

Developing mechanisms for local residents to benefit directly from the establishment of ecotourism enterprises in and around their home areas can help offset any loss of revenue from traditional extractive activities which may be curtailed, in some instances, by the establishment of the new enterprise. It can also motivate community participation in conservation activities, if adequate rewards can be consciously realized. Developing National CBE strategies can help focus efforts on achieving such mechanisms. At the least, it's a very good way of beginning the process of forging the partnerships deemed so valuable to the process.

DEVELOPING A NATIONAL CBE STRATEGY

The impact of an enterprise on the competitiveness of the national tourism market is important for tourism officials to gauge. Analysis can take the form of three questions:

1. Does the enterprise expand the capacity of the tourism sector, particularly for priority, up-scale market, overseas tourists?
2. Does it diversify the national tourism product, by adding elements of eco-ethical, wilderness, cultural, or adventure tourism?
3. Does it increase the geographical spread of tourism facilities around the country?

As the long-term competitiveness of many national tourism sectors depends on a sustained natural and cultural resource base, concern with encouraging conservation is also a key component of strengthening the national tourism product. Research has shown that enterprises contributing to economic growth, welfare, and equity at the community level gain public and political support for the economic sector in the long run.

COMMUNITY-BASED ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT: A PRIORITY SECTOR IN MANY COUNTRIES

• In April 1995, a *Community-Based Tourism Enterprise Workshop* was held in Wereldsend, Namibia. Until the staging of this workshop, there had been few opportunities for people from different communities, and the various NGOs that support them, to come together. The workshop gave all participants a chance to stimulate ideas, share experiences, and learn from each other so that they could take this information back to their communities. The workshop was also designed to enable those involved in community-based tourism to come up with recommendations for policy makers and others involved in the tourism industry.¹⁰

• Indonesia conducted a National Seminar and Workshop “*Community-Based Ecotourism: Opportunity or Illusion?*” on April 18 - 21, 1995, on the island of Java. Recent dramatic increases in tourism-derived revenue has made tourism the preferred economic development option throughout the Indonesian archipelago. The seminar and workshop were organized to analyze what role Indonesian communities should play in this growing sector of the national economy. The conference was jointly organized by two NGOs and featured keynote speeches by the Indonesian Minister of the Environment and the Director General of Tourism. Over thirty organizations involved with CBE enterprises spoke. More than two hundred people attended—the majority of whom were representing communities involved with, or interested in developing, tourism enterprises.¹¹

In March 1994, the Government of Belize, in conjunction with a local NGO, staged a three day “Community-Based Ecotourism Gathering” to address issues of CBE development in the country. The workshop took place at a cooperatively run facility at a community-based tourism enterprise in the middle of the country. The nation of Belize has given prominence to the role of small-scale CBE initiatives within the development of its national tourism industry. The Minister for Tourism and the Environment, the Honorable Henry Young, opened the gathering with an outline of Government of Belize support to the sector. Over twenty-four communities have now established, or have plans to establish, facilities and activities for receiving visitors.¹²

¹⁰ Christ, Costas. Community-Based Tourism Enterprise Workshop Report. Living in a Finite Environment (LIFE) Project, USAID through World Wildlife Fund, Namibia, 1995.

¹¹ PACT/WALHI Community-Based Ecotourism Workshop and Seminar, Bogor, Indonesia, April, 1995. See: Sproule, Keith. Community-Based Ecotourism Development: Linking Conservation and Development. Paper presented at PACT/WALHI Community-Based Ecotourism Workshop and Seminar, Bogor, Indonesia, April, 1995.

¹² Community-Based Ecotourism Gathering, staged by the Government of Belize, March, 1994. See: Community-Based Tourism Development in Belize: Summary Report of a Community-Based Tourism Gathering & Identification of Similarities

Expanding community benefits from tourism will depend on many factors, including expanding the information and ideas to which community groups and tourists have access; adequately assessing the viability of different ecotourism ventures in regional and national tourism markets; improving the legal rights that communities have, particularly with regard to revenue sharing and concession arrangements; addressing issues of land tenure; and providing the institutional and financial resources necessary to advance CBE enterprise development. Each of the above issue areas will vary over time and place, but certainly they all can be affected by a broadly designed national CBE development strategy.

Following are five broad areas that a National CBE Development Strategy should address:

1. Mechanisms for communities to directly benefit from ecotourism revenues.
2. Financial and legal mechanisms that facilitate, not constrain, CBE development.
3. Information and communication within and between the CBE sector and other sectors of the industry.
4. Increasing the share of the national ecotourism market, while striving to improve standards and criteria for services that are at the cutting edge of this demanding market.
5. Support for institutions of education, training, and other forms of skill development within rural communities.

CONCLUSION

The premise of this paper has been that successful CBE development, that is, ventures that satisfy both conservation and development objectives, are supported by partnerships between local communities, government agencies, NGOs, and the private sector. Partnerships are recognized to emerge from areas of mutual benefit to each of the sectors involved. Policies, then, are seen as formal mechanisms for achieving the goals of mutual benefit through collaboration. They are an overt manifestation of the need for collaboration and cooperation to achieve conservation and development objectives.

Partnerships, then, should be viewed as an integral part of the design and development of community-based ecotourism ventures. They are deemed indispensable for achieving a positive policy and planning framework.

KEITH W. SPROULE

Keith Sproule has been involved with issues of ecotourism development internationally for several years. He served as technical assistant to the Belize Ministry of Tourism and the Environment for two years, where he helped draft national policies and legislation addressing ecotourism development. He also helped develop several innovative community-based ecotourism initiatives. He has worked on ecotourism related projects in Southeast Asia for the Asian Development Bank, USAID, PACT, The Ecotourism Society and the private sector tourism industry. In 1996, he worked with the World Wildlife Fund to draft management plans for new protected areas in the Eastern Caribbean, devising a role for community management of ecotourism enterprises in and around those areas. He recently joined Wildlife Preservation Trust International (WPTI) as Assistant Director for Programs.

Keith W. Sproule, Wildlife Preservation Trust International, Inc., 3400 Girard Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19104-1196, Tel: (215) 222-3636, Fax: (215) 222-2191, kwsproule@aol.com