Ecotourism and Community Development: A View From Belize

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In recent years, conservationists have become increasingly concerned with the impact of tourism on developing countries. Despite the allure of tourism as a low-cost high-profit venture, mass tourism can have far-reaching, negative consequences for native peoples and the environment. It can degrade the environment through overvisitation (de Groot, 1983), lead to local inflation (Yamauchi,1984; Puntenny, 1990), and widen the cultural and economic gap between local people and affluent travelers (Britton, 1980; Perez, 1980; Tambiah, 1991; Boo, 1991; Polit, 1991, Peters, 1991).

Ecotourism is not only the fastest growing branch of the travel industry (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1991), it has also been hailed as a hopeful new approach to both preserving fragile and threatened wild areas and providing people in the developing world with opportunities for community development. Although many enterprises purporting to be ecotouristic are clearly marketing tools for travel promoters, even conscientious aims can fall short of their goals.

Poorly managed reserves or parks can lead to destruction of these areas (de Groot, 1983) and the setting aside of lands used exclusively for nature travelers can leave local peoples beyond the fence, jeopardizing the livelihoods of the rural poor and provoking their opposition.

Genuine ecotourism must be predicated upon a systems perspective that includes sustainability and the involvement-participation of local, rural people in those areas where the greatest potential for ecotourism development can be found. Ecotourism must be seen as a collaborative effort between local people and concerned, informed visitors to preserve wildlands and their biological and cultural assets through support of local community development. By community development we mean the empowerment of existing local groups to control and manage

valuable resources in ways that not only sustain the resources but also meet the social, cultural, and economic needs of the group.

Tourism in Belize

Belize, with its impressive combination of natural and cultural features, has become a popular travel destination. Between 1980 and 1990, tourist arrivals increased by 55 percent (Boo, 1990b). In 1984, responding to this influx and the potential tourist-dollar revenues, the government of Belize designated tourism as the second priority for strategic growth. The "Integrated Tourism Policy and Strategy Statement" of 1988 set several important goals, including the creation of a friendly climate for development investment (Boo, 1990b). Much of the initial tourism went to the Cayes, but with the recent emphasis on ecotourism a good percentage is getting inland. However, little money is spent in rural villages.

Belize has devised modernization projects to capture tourism industry potential, such as completing its new airport, building several large hotels, renovating the local market in Belize City, and improving public utilities in the two major urban areas, Belize City and Belmopan. Most significantly, environment was formally connected to tourism in the Ministry of Tourism and the Environment, with its mandate of protecting and enhancing the environment through ecotourism (Godfrey, 1990). A stated emphasis is also local control of small tourist operations at every stage, from ownership and management to service positions (Godfrey, 1990).

Due to Belize's success in developing an ecotourism industry, both the government and the private sector consider wildlife and forest conservation important. The industry has attracted foreign income by using natural areas without building major facilities or drastically changing the sites. Under the Belize Audubon Society, park development and conservation have been integrated with local economic development by promoting local trail guides, local crafts industries, and "bed-and-breakfast" tourism. This local development has been most significant in both the Community Baboon Sanctuary, which has been cited as functioning as a transition area of a Biosphere Reserve (Hartup, 1989), and the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary (Boo, 1990b).

The Community Baboon Sanctuary

The Community Baboon Sanctuary (CBS) was initiated by Dr. Robert Horwich with the cooperation of twelve landowners in Bermudian Landing, a rural village thirty-three miles northwest of Belize City. The CBS has been an experiment in conservation and multiple land-use methods on private land (Alderman, 1990; Horwich, 1988, 1990; Horwich and Lyon, 1988). Because the majority of wildlands are private, and many landowners understand both the freedom and responsibility

of owning land, conservation efforts have been directed toward the subsistence needs and agricultural practices of area farmers and small ranchers (Lyon, 1986).

The CBS was started in 1985 to encourage private landowners to manage their lands for the benefit of the black howler monkey, *Alouatta pigra*. Because the CBS depends on the landowners' complete cooperation, it must meet their needs as well as those of the wildlife. The basic principle is simple. Private landowners are asked to voluntarily pledge to follow a land-use plan created for each farm in order to maintain a good habitat for the black howler monkey. The goal is to maintain a skeletal forest from which howler troops and other wildlife can easily use the regenerating cut forests. Landowners are asked mainly to leave forest strips along riverbanks, between property boundaries around yearly milpa cuts, and as aerial pathways in large cut areas for the monkeys, as well as to leave specific food trees. These management plans also help landowners reduce riverbank erosion and reduce the fallow time for adequate nutritional buildup between slash-and-burn cultivations.

The first step in the creation of the CBS was in circulating a petition that was signed by most of the villagers of Bermudian Landing including the village council members, inviting Horwich and colleagues to investigate a potential sanctuary. Given this informal acceptance, they then mapped the lands of the twelve villagers who owned farms surrounding the village. They drew up management plans and procured voluntary pledges from the landowners. The pledges were easily agreed to because of their voluntary nature and the fact that the farmers had adequate land. Having a local man act as an intermediary was also very important. Horwich then brought the idea of a community sanctuary before a village meeting with the area representative present. The area representative, an elected official for the area, initially spoke out against the idea. Conservation and ecotourism were then new and exotic concepts in Belize and the area representative, with little background or understanding of conservation, was reluctant to endorse the project. However, once the villagers understood the voluntary nature of the pledge they enthusiatically and unanimously accepted the idea and requested that Horwich try to attract tourism to the village. Since the lands were all privately owned, the national government was neutral toward the sanctuary. It was only after the sanctuary was publicized and tourism increased that government officials became interested in it.

With the aid of the World Wildlife Fund of the United States (WWF-US) and Jon Lyon, a botanical ecologist, the sanctuary has expanded to include over a hundred landowners and eight villages, encompassing eighteen square miles (forty-seven square kilometers) of forest along the Belize River, home to more than a thousand black howler monkeys. Lyon brought the project before each of the other villages at a village meeting and received the same unanimous approval. The CBS continues to grow under the financial support of the Zoological Society of Milwaukee County given to the Belize Audubon Society (BAS).

In 1987, under the BAS administration, the first local Belizean sanctuary manager, Fallet Young, was hired and an operational plan was established. As part of the operation manual written by Horwich, Lyon, Young, and Mick Craig, the executive director of BAS, an advisory committee was created to work with the BAS in administering the sanctuary. With the sanctuary under local management and control, the foreigners took on an advisory role, primarily developing programs. Most of the day-to-day decisions were left to the manager who reported to the BAS director.

Since there was no university and little expertise available in Belize, and since the sanctuary manager did not have a high school degree, Horwich and Lyon provided training and tutorial assistance using high school biology texts. Horwich and Lyon also proposed ideas for programs incorporating the manager's suggestions and wrote the guidebook and field sign texts that the manager used as a formal basis with which to integrate his own forest knowledge. Young was also a trainee at an in-country conservation workshop sponsored by World Wildlife Fund. With this on-site training, Young was then able, eventually, to tutor his assistant and other staff members.

The duties of the manager included meeting yearly with landowners, guiding tourists, and coordinating tourist visits with local hosts. Later in that first year an assistant manager was hired by the BAS. Together the manager and assistant manager gave field lectures to student classes, gathered data on plant phenology, cared for the museum, cut and maintained trails, planted a small arboretum and greenhouse, and performed other maintenance chores. The sanctuary manager handled donations and museum sales as well as hired and paid part-time workers and guides. Since the manager arranged for all economic operations, this eventually led to some claims of unfairness, and jealousies developed. With no functioning advisory committee in place, these problems continued. The BAS is currently working to rectify this situation by creating a strong managerial committee of landowners from each village to oversee on-site operations and implement the sanctuary's four main goals: conservation, education, research, and tourism.

Conservation

The sanctuary manager's most important function is to work with each landowner to make sure agricultural practices are consistent with the management plans they pledged to uphold. The increase in the howler monkey population shows that the conservation plan has been effective. Because nine out of ten landowners are living up to their pledges, part of this increase is attributed to improved farm management practices. This initial success has encouraged efforts to protect other native species as well.

A second endangered species, the Central American river turtle (*Dermatemys mawii*) which is assiduously hunted for subsistence and economic exploitation, rapidly disappears whenever exploited (Moll, 1986). Seasonal reproduction information on the species is being used to make management suggestions to local and federal governments for the turtle's protection and sustained use. The sanctuary also plans to reintroduce plants and animals that have disappeared from the area, including game birds such as the ocellated turkey and hardwoods like mahogany.

Education

The sanctuary's educational program is designed for a wide spectrum of people including local villagers and school children, Belizeans countrywide, and foreign visitors (Horwich and Lyon, in press). The small natural history museum, Belize's first museum, opened in April 1989. A labeled forest trail and an extensive book on the sanctuary's rain forest are also part of the educational program.

Originally the museum was to be a conservation-oriented resource center available to rural people responsible for protecting the forests in which they live. It has since become an important tourist attraction as well. The exhibits illustrate the importance of tropical forests, forest regeneration after slash-and-burn agriculture, water resources, mutualism, and other ecological topics in a conservation context. They include locally gathered natural history, cultural, archaeological, and historical materials.

The book, *A Belizean Rain Forest: The Community Baboon Sanctuary* (Horwich and Lyon, 1990), started out as a small pamphlet given to local villagers on howler monkeys. Evolving through guidebook stages, it became a 420-page text, integrating information on local flora and fauna with general material on the functions and the importance of tropical rain forests. The book is given free to Belizean schools and is sold to tourists, with profits benefiting the sanctuary.

The three-mile trail system provides visitors with information about the forest through numbered signs whose texts are included in *A Belizean Rain Forest.* Sanctuary staff guides supplement the text with prepared lectures as well as first-hand knowledge about the monkeys. Their familiarity with the forest and local wildlife enhances the educational experience for visitors by incorporating formal with informal conservation education messages.

A 1988 Belize television documentary stimulated Belizeans' interest in the sanctuary. Since then, school class visits have dramatically increased with hundreds of students occasionally visiting in a single day. Added staff are working to regulate these visits and to broaden the lecture program to include rural and Belize City schools. Free booklets on specific topics (howler monkeys, rain forests) and the book have been offered to elementary and high school teachers throughout Belize.

Research

Research provides the basis for sanctuary management and education, and researchers become long-term tourists who contribute economically to their headquarter villages. Projects have included studies of howler ecology and behavior, forest ecology and farming practices, river turtle biology, bird behavior, pesticide and herbicide residues in fish, cultural studies and studies of landowner views of sanctuary conservation, and tourism (Hartup, 1989).

Tourism and Local Economics

Integrating human interests with the conservation of the forests and wildlife is one of the sanctuary's main goals. Since the villagers first proposed the creation of a tourism base, visits by foreign and Belizean tourists have increased from an estimated ten to thirty visitors in 1985 and 1986, to 200 in 1987, 900 in 1988, 5,500 in 1989, and over 6,000 in 1990.

A few rooms can be rented from local families and overnight tourists can also camp when taking meals with local families. A few tourists use local boat and horseback guides. All of these services are arranged through the sanctuary staff.

An $11,000 grant from the Inter-American Foundation has been used for low-interest loans to villagers. The grant proposal was written by BAS staff and Horwich and was submitted by BAS to the InterAmerican Foundation. Loans were made to five villagers based on proposals they submitted to BAS through the sanctuary manager. The repayment was scheduled to be collected through the sanctuary manager. However, with a change in sanctuary staff, payments ceased for a while. BAS has since arranged for the collection of these payments through the sanctuary committee.

History of Ecotourism in the Community Baboon Sanctuary

At first, considering the lack of tourist amenities and resources, the idea of promoting the area as a tourist destination seemed absurd. As news spread and visitors flocked to the sanctuary, the potential for tourist development became apparent. In 1987, fifteen American students who went to Bermudian Landing to study monkeys provided a trial run of villager accommodation to groups of visitors. The students took their meals with a half dozen families in the village and lived in tents on the host families' properties. It was workable and the program was continued for three sessions in the 1987-1988 season.

All the while, tourism was developing informally. Local teenagers were encouraged to serve as guides, entry to the sanctuary was free, and arriving tourists were matched with local families eager to offer bed-and-breakfast services. More visitors arrived every year.

With the influx of U.S. guided tour groups in 1988, the newly appointed staff quickly saw a need for regulating visitor activities. Tour leaders often circumvented local guides and took their groups through the forest trails on their own initiative. The trails are on private property with livestock fences, planted fields, and other assets, so uncontrolled traffic can cause damage to crops and can reduce protected wildlife populations (Lippold, pers. comm.). Unmanaged visitation also prevented direct contact between local sanctuary staff and tourists who wanted to give money for conservation, specifically to the CBS. Visitors were subsequently required to pay $2.50 per person and to be accompanied by sanctuary staff. Additional donations are also accepted and turned over to BAS for deposit in a CBS account. A small amount is retained for purchases or expenses incurred by the sanctuary manager who is accountable to BAS staff. All of these BAS functions are gradually being turned over to the local sanctuary committee.

Since the sanctuary needed a centralized location to welcome visitors, the museum, which also houses the sanctuary's main headquarters, was created partly for that function. The headquarters helped to formalize and consolidate the sanctuary manager's role, office, and administrative duties. The museum thus accommodates a totality of integrated activities. Despite the trepidations of funding agencies that the museum would receive too little use to justify even its low cost of $12,000, it has become a tourist attraction in its own right.

Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary

The idea of a village-based, locally-managed conservation has found its way into other BAS-sponsored projects as well. Cockscomb Basin is one such example that is working for the benefit of local villagers, but it began on a rather different course from the CBS project.

The Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary was declared a protected area in 1984 after the jaguar ecology study by Dr. Alan Rabinowitz of the New York Zoological Society. In 1986, 3,600 acres of the Forest Reserve was declared a sanctuary for the jaguars and other wildlife as well (Boo, 1990b). With the success of both the park and the general increase in ecotourism in Belize, the sanctuary has been expanded to 102,000 acres, a realistic size for jaguars (Anonymous, 1990).

Prior to the establishment of the park, a small village of Mayan Indians was located at Quam Bank, where the new park headquarters were to be situated. Once the park was established, the Mayans were compelled to vacate the area without any adequate explanation. As development proceeded in setting up of signs and the installation of a foreign caretaker in residence, the displaced Mayans had little understanding of what was occurring and it appeared to them that their legal rights were being violated. Eventually the people were relocated to a new settlement at Maya Center six kilometers from the original location. Although two local men from

the village were hired as wardens, there was still resentment by the villagers toward outside visitors who passed through the village and showed no interest in them. Additionally, villagers were now forbidden to hunt or fish in the newly protected area.

A Peace Corps volunteer was assigned through the Belize Audubon Society as an interim manager in 1985, but there were still very limited relations with the villagers. In 1987, Ernesto Saqui, a local Mayan teacher, was appointed director of the sanctuary. With this local appointment, relations between the park and the villagers improved and villagers also began to see potential economic benefits from ecotourism. Seven young villagers were trained to conduct organized tours, but had to compete with foreign guides.

Despite its remote location, along a poorly maintained six-kilometer road, park visitation has grown from twenty-five in 1985, to 376 in 1986, 1,653 in 1987, 1,909 in 1988, 2,073 in 1989, and 2,017 in 1990. Most visitors to the sanctuary are foreigners and students from Belizean schools including the University College of Belize and Belize Teachers College.

Gradually, economic benefits to villagers began to materialize. At first these were as salaries earned by local cooks and other service providers. As visitation increased, village women sold embroidery and other handicrafts at the roadsides. This haphazard approach met with some success, but eventually the park director and the village council came up with a more organized plan. The villagers built a small thatched building as a craft and souvenir center. The Belize Audubon Society, as part of their park administrative duties, organized several workshops on marketing, quality diversity in craftsmanship, accounting, and bookkeeping, to teach the local craftswomen business skills. Profits soared 87 percent in just one year. In three-and-a-half years, fifteen village women have earned $28,000.

The park now has a few cabins with cooking facilities as well as camp grounds for overnight visitors. The trails are extensively developed and well-maintained. A visitor center with exhibits on the jaguar and the other cats and their prey opened in 1992.

There have been some research projects by foreign scientists including studies of the jaguar and other cats, bird population censuses, and vegetation surveys. The director gathered data in preparation for reintroducing howler monkeys to the sanctuary. Since surrounding forests are being rapidly removed to establish citrus groves, howler troops are being moved into the park from the Community Baboon Sanctuary. Three troops were successfully translocated in 1992, and translocations will continue for two more years.

PROBLEMS AND POTENTIALS OF VILLAGE-BASED TOURISM

Several problems have arisen in promoting tourism in the Community Baboon Sanctuary, partly because of inexperience in creating reserves and lack of tourism planning. Because of the isolated location of the sanctuary, more effort was invested in publicizing the area than in providing an infrastructure for visitor overnight accommodations. In retrospect, a small hotel should have been built and operated by a village or sanctuary cooperative. Instead, foreign interests have attempted to capitalize on the area's success by planning to build hotels in the area. This would undermine the community-based foundation for the entire integrated system, and local people will suffer the disenfranchisement experienced elsewhere.

The lack of a broad-based management structure presents another problem. The Community Baboon Sanctuary was organized under the Belize Audubon Society, because it was the only Belizean-managed and controlled conservation organization. At the time, the society had a full-time executive director and staff and was supported by funding from a U.S. conservation group. When finances were prematurely withdrawn and the BAS executive director's position discontinued, the sanctuary staff was left without direct supervision. For two years the sanctuary staff was supervised only by the BAS voluntary board of directors. Since no local committee was in place, an inordinate burden and responsibilty was placed on the sanctuary manager during this time. Before organizing and promoting the reserve, a committee of village landowners should have been formed. A legal cooperative would have involved more community members in the ground-level process of planning and implementation and might have headed off some of the intravillage and intervillage jealousies that arose.

Resources and communication have presented still other obstacles. A radio, replacing the inconvenient community telephone, has allowed direct communication between sanctuary staff and tourists through the Belize Audubon Society office. Villagers have had an opportunity to obtain revolving loans to add bed-and-breakfast facilities to their homes, but few families are able to take advantage of it, because there initially was a failure in creating a suitable loan collecting mechanism. Maintaining a steady rate of overnight tourism has also been difficult. Currently Gail Bruner of Zoo Atlanta is creating a plan to spread tourism to all the communities in the sanctuary.

Although it is difficult to estimate the economic benefits from ecotourism, Hartup's (1989) tourism data lets us make some estimate. Using the approximately 3,000 foreign visitors in 1990, times the collective amount spent locally (excluding donations) by all interviewed tourists, divided by the number of tourists, gives an estimate of U.S. $21,605 spent in the village during 1990. Of this estimate 8.7 percent was spent on transportation, 9.8 on guiding, 20.2 on accommodations, 43.2 on meals, 12.3 on souvenirs, and 5.7 on personal/other. A second estimate based on the percentages of tourists who spent one and over two nights in the village, times 3,000 visitors times an estimate of what they spent on local travel, meals, and accommodations gives a similar estimate of $20,169 spent in 1990. Most of that money goes to between six and ten of the approximately twenty families in the village. However, much of that money probably stays in the community through local purchases and hiring local labor but that is more difficult to estimate.

The successes of the sanctuary project are promising, although some of its contributions are intangible. Most people in the area feel the project has been beneficial and want it continued. Press, radio, and television coverage have swelled regional and national pride. More people arrive every year, paying local families for bed and breakfast, guide services, and other spin-offs from tourism. The proliferation of howler monkeys shows that local cooperation in conservation endeavors works, which offers encouragement for future projects based on private lands and local subsistence patterns. Not all reserves have to be carved from pristine plots of wilderness to be effective.

The Community Baboon Sanctuary has also had at least one fortuitous result that will further stimulate tourism. The opening of the museum with its exhibit on local Creole culture and history marked the beginning of a yearly festival that has refocused community attention on its cultural tradition. As the sanctuary has developed and more and more visitors have begun to arrive, ethnic consciousness has also risen among the Creole villagers. Creole folk singing, story telling, and bushcrafts have seen a renaissance along with traditional uses of tropical forests. These forest uses include boiling chicle sap for chewing gum, carving wood dishes, making fly brushes, tongs, and fish traps, and processing cohune palm cooking oil.

Most important, the sanctuary has awakened a sense of pride and achievement and has stirred a widespread ecoconsciousness with its own momentum. This gradual, intangible education has integrated an awareness of conservation into the villagers' daily lives. Insights gained at Bermudian Landing through trial and error are now being used in planning a new comprehensive, integrated ecotourism-conservation project in Belize.

MANATEE COMMUNITY RESERVE

Landowners, villagers, and foreign visitors have embraced the community conservation concept, and the CBS model is being applied elsewhere in Belize. One American biologist has organized foreign landowners on Ambergris Cay, a large northern island, to protect the nesting beaches of sea turtles. In Monkey River in southern Belize, a local cooperative has been formed to create the Monkey River Nature Preserve as a tourist attraction. Another project in planning, the Manatee Community Reserve, is even more promising because it integrates protected government lands with private lands and is attempting to overcome some of the experimen-

tal mistakes made in setting up the CBS, namely, it has created a legal cooperative with a broad local base to oversee the sanctuary and is constructing a hotel to be run by the local cooperative.

The Manatee Community Reserve (MCR) project began with a series of visits to the area by Horwich and Chris Augusta, an American artist who has visited the area for the last ten years. They presented a plan to the villagers at a village meeting and obtained signatures of support from most of the villagers at the meeting, inviting them to proceed with the plan. A preliminary proposal was then submitted to the village council of Gales Point and to the Minister of Tourism and the Environment, who is also the area representative. The area representative then arranged a village meeting in which a number of politicians and government officials gave short presentations to the villagers. Talks were given by the Minister of Tourism and the Environment, the Chief Justice who is from the village, the Chief Forestry Officer, a government archeologist, a successful foreign hotel entrepreneur and Horwich. The talk by Horwich included potential shortcomings to such a project as well as the potential gains.

At the request of, and with financial support from, the Minister, and with help from the Lands and Forestry Offices, Horwich and Lyon (1991) created a proposal for a multiple-use, land-management plan. The proposed Manatee Community Reserve being planned by the authors and other volunteers (Community Conservation Consultants) covers 170,000 acres of public and private land and three large lagoons.

The specific tourism and local development objectives of the MCR are threefold: first to develop a locally supported reserve to insure sustainable use of resources; second to maintain and strengthen the local rural culture (based on farming, fishing, and hunting); and third to give the village a supplementary source of income through tourism, resulting in economic self-sufficiency rather than traditional job creation. Change will occur gradually, in accordance with community wishes, and under community control. Conservation will encompass preservation of the rural lifestyle as well as protection of wildlife and other natural resources. The sanctuary will concentrate on developing tourism around the community lifestyle, giving tourists an authentic experience of village life, something like the exposure to Creole culture at the Community Baboon Sanctuary. Allowing tourists to enjoy an "intercultural experience" should also relieve villagers of pressure to invent a sense of opulence for tourists (Moulin, 1980).

Because the area around the village of Gales Point has to be viewed in its entirety, the multiland use plan includes subsistence and citrus farming as well as ecotourism (Horwich and Lyon, 1991). Using the biosphere philosophy, the plan provides for core areas where human disturbance will be minimal, buffer zones where specific human uses are designated, and transition zones where human activities will be restricted to ensure proper land use. Human use will be limited to low-impact ecotourism in core areas, which were selected for specific endangered species, specific ecosystems and watershed protection. Buffer zones will be used mainly for selective hardwood logging, managed hunting and gathering, or harvesting nonwood forest resources such as chicle. Based on current human use, transition zones were selected as areas for sustainable agriculture and ecotourism. Zoning restrictions will be used to insure sustainability of both enterprises .

The government-sponsored hotel being built will be run by sanctuary staff under guidance from a local cooperative. This infusion of government seed money has already enticed residents to begin building their own tourism facilities. Systematic record keeping and monitoring of tourist traffic is planned to provide essential data for future tourist planning. Simple research questionnaires with regular follow-up can yield much information about the tourists visiting a given site (Boo, 1990a and 1990b; Hartup, 1989).

In developing the Manatee Community Reserve, as with all ecotourism projects, changes required by tourism have to be carefully balanced so as to keep the cultural unity and integrity of the village intact. CBS guides are encouraged to embellish tours with their own local cultural knowledge about plants and animals. A similar approach would be useful for the MCR guides working out of Gales Point.

In order to better display and protect natural areas, adequate preparation is required. To minimize environmental problems, all tourists should be guided into an area or at least provided with a set of trail maps and rules which can be enforced. Trail systems must be maintained for ease of passage and to keep tourists in selected areas. A similar system of boat channels will have to be laid out in the lagoons for motorized boat traffic, specifically to protect manatees and other wildlife. Lagoon boat channels may include marked water lanes and speed limitations within certain areas. To develop and foster success in ecotours, it is beneficial to locate and mark specific areas where tourists will be most likely to view wildlife or other natural features. By establishing such areas and by pointing out locally unique elements that tourists may not see or understand themselves, the success of ecotours increases. For example, at the Community Baboon Sanctuary, tourists are almost certain to see howler monkeys because guides know where and how to find monkeys. At Gales Point, certain areas where manatees and American crocodiles reside would please naturalists. Setting up permanent viewing sites such as an anchored raft or a viewing tower in these situations would further enhance the possibility of viewing wildlife. Often things that villagers and local guides take for granted will thrill foreign visitors.

Finally, with an eye to pleasing tourists, Gales Point villagers should appraise their village. With village consensus, improvements might include alternative toilets to accommodate both village and tourist wastes. Dry wastes could be recycled to enrich the soils for local flower or vegetable gardens. Planning and constructing boat moorings and piers should be under strict local control.

Suggestions for Community-Based Ecotourism Planning

Ecotourism, though a growing approach to conservation and development, is still in the experimental stage. We thus can learn from the failures as well as the successes of various projects around the world.

Though some areas, such as the Galápagos Islands, are already experiencing the devastation of overvisitation (de Groot, 1983), projects such as those in Nepal and Ladakh are arising to counteract environmental degradation (Passoff, 1991; Puntenney, 1990; Goering, 1990). Some projects simply fail due to lack of local control, such as at Hana, Hawaii (Farrell, 1990). Those that appear to be more successful are those that are locally managed such as the Kuna tribal tourism operations (Howe, 1982; Chapin 1991). The most promising ventures are those that were established initially at the local, village level, utilizing an integrated approach with an emphasis on appropriate infrastructure and local materials, such as the Tourism for Discovery program in Senegal (Saglio, 1979).

With these and other examples of success, combined with our own experience in Belize, we offer some suggestions for future community-based ecotourism planning.

Village level. Any plan that includes use of local resources must be planned and implemented at the village level, even if the project has a wider scope.

Local integration. Genuine ecotourism must integrate local people as equal partners into the design, implementation, and every other aspect of projects that use lands and resources that are part of their subsistence patterns (Boo, 1990b). The local partners must also benefit from and recognize the partnership between conservation and community development.

Broad-based, legal, local empowerment. Local peoples must become educated advocates for conservation, empowered to manage and administer long-term efforts as conscientious stewards of precious wild resources. Projects must be broad-based with wide involvement rather than based on elite village factions or individuals. Legal organizations must be established to run parks or tourism programs. Thus there must be a strong educational component.

Use existing resources. Among the resources to be used are local human skills, labor, and materials which should be made available through local people and the park centers. Tour leaders and planners should use local staff or local guides and encourage purchases of materials from local people.

Appropriate scale. Design and development should be on a scale appropriate to local lifestyles, social structure, cultural world view, subsistence patterns, and community

organization. **Ecotourism** should be only considered a supplementary industry and an emphasis should be placed on maintaining the existing agricultural, fishing, or other rural industries.

Sustainability. Work for long-term sustainability and perpetuity of conservation efforts. Donor agencies and funding organizations must become aware of the need for long-term commitment of resources to assist community development and conservation. In any village oriented conservation project, financial support must be obtained for immediate village run tourism facilities.

Local needs and conservation are primary. Tourist needs must be made secondary to the preservation of natural areas and their resources, including local people. Tourism projects must be designed to attract those ecotravelers who recognize their role as preservationists and who are willing to provide economic incentives for protection of these resources. Such tourists will be willing to forgo the luxury, convenience, and costly amenities of the mass tourist trade to experience the authentic natural and cultural experiences that are becoming rare. Ecotourists should be informed rather than entertained, educated rather than diverted. Tourists and tour groups must be gently controlled according to the needs of the natural resources and the needs and wishes of local people. Tour group leaders in strategic positions have an obligation to educate clients.

Professionals must contribute. Biologists, anthropologists, and other on-site researchers should tailor some of their study to include hands-on work to involve local people in the responsibility and benefits of conservation.

Conservation is a viable development strategy. National governments must be encouraged to set policies for preserving wildlands as viable development strategies and for reforming land tenure systems so that local rural people can own land without a concomitant obligation to clear, graze, or cultivate their parcels in entirety.

Government support. Governments as well as national conservation groups must actively support local people in ecotourism. This includes financial support, legal support and the creation of a bridge between local-level organization and federal government systems.

Conscientious tour operators and investors. Tour operators who offer "ecotourism" destinations must work through the local communities and local tourism structures. Tour leaders must be thoroughly versed in local life and ecology and must incorporate educational components in their work. They should encourage visitors to purchase materials from the sanctuaries and let visitors know how they can support and contribute to conservation of any site they visit. Foreign investors should be encouraged to invest in community-based ecotourism projects as equal partners with local communities or local investors. As an example, a foreign investor who shows

an interest in taking on a village as his partner can be introduced to various villages, with the goal of developing a hotel and selling it, eventually, to a village cooperative.

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