

Community-Based Ecotourism in Ecuador and Its Contribution to the Alleviation of Poverty

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Abstract

Community-Based Ecotourism projects have the potential to alleviate poverty and protect the environment for future generations. While the preferred model appears to be one of community ownership and control, the case of Yachana Lodge, reported here, suggests that efficient and creative outside management may well make a greater contribution to both the local and wider community than might be possible under local management.

要 約

コミュニティに基盤を置くエコツーリズム・プロジェクトは貧困を軽減し、将来の世代のために環境を保護する潜在力を有している。優先されるモデルはコミュニティによる所有と管理型であるようだが、本稿で報告されるヤチャナ・ロッジは、効率的で創造的な外部の経営が、現地の経営の下で可能かもしれないものよりも、現地のコミュニティとより大きなその双方に、より大きな貢献をするだろうということを示唆している。

Key words : Community-based eco tourism, Ecuador, Poverty alleviation, Innovation, Viability

キーワード : コミュニティに基盤をおくエコツーリズム、貧困削減、革新、可能性

Tourism and Poverty

Approximately one billion people live in extreme poverty, surviving on less than one dollar a day. One of the Millennium Development Goals for 2015 is to

greatly reduce that number. Global tourism is expected to play a significant role in achieving this (UNWTO 2005). Tourism creates employment for hotel and restaurant workers, for guides and drivers, for suppliers of food and beverages, and for many more people in the informal sector, such as street vendors and artisans. It also provides jobs in the construction industry. While many of these jobs are seasonal or temporary, and most are poorly-paid, they nevertheless represent an alternative or additional source of income for a vast number of people. Ashley, Goodwin and Roe (2002:4) report that “a single lodge, such as Wilderness Safari’s Rocktail Bay, can provide secure salaries (\$2-3000/year) for about 30 formerly unemployed poor people, casual earnings for at least twice as many, and collective income for 1,500.”

However, tourism can also cause great harm to vulnerable communities. Numerous publications have discussed these impacts: forced evictions to make way for new resorts or wildlife parks, depletion and contamination of water supplies, inflation of rents and food prices, traffic congestion, crime, drug abuse, prostitution, loss of cultural heritage, invasion of privacy, and so on. In addition, say Pera and McLaren,

“Global tourism threatens indigenous knowledge and intellectual property rights, our technologies, religions, sacred sites, social structures and relationships, wildlife, ecosystems, economies and basic rights to informed understanding, reducing indigenous peoples to simply another consumer product that is quickly becoming exhaustible” (1999:1).

It is thus essential that tourism be conducted responsibly. If a tour operator hires local workers, pays generous wages and provides relevant training, this will lead to significant economic benefits for the workers and their families. If the

operator also provides funding for a school, a clinic or a water purification system, it will benefit the entire community. And if the operator eventually turns the whole operation over to the community, after a period of capacity-building, they will be in charge of their own destiny. If, on the other hand, a community wants nothing to do with tourism, a responsible operator will go elsewhere.

Tourism and the Environment

In June 2005, the Millennium Assessment Board reported that 15 of 24 global ecosystems were in decline. While economic growth is seen as a means of lifting people out of poverty, it is also responsible for harming their environment. This is equally true of tourism. Resort development has resulted in the loss of important wildlife habitats such as mangroves, and in the pollution of rivers and coastal waters. The reckless use of water for hotel pools, gardens and golf courses has led to the depletion of underground aquifers. Garbage left behind by tourists includes not only plastic drink containers but also camera batteries and other toxic items. Aircraft emissions play an increasingly significant role in global warming which, ironically, melts the glaciers the tourists come to see and the snow they want to ski on, in addition to threatening biodiversity.

Ecotourism is viewed as a response to the problems caused by unsustainable tourism. While its origins lie in nature tourism (examples of 19th century ecotourism include boat trips into the Florida Everglades and hikes in the Swiss Alps and Yosemite), it has recently evolved into a form of tourism that attempts to minimize its impact on the environment, as expressed in the adage 'take nothing but photographs, leave nothing but footprints'. Ecotourists stay in tents, or in lodges built with natural materials, lit and heated by renewable energy, with composting of kitchen waste and biological processing of waste from toilets.

They travel on foot or horseback, and in small groups so as not to disturb wildlife. Even the impact of their flights can be neutralized by carbon offset schemes such as those offered by Climate Care.

However, ecotourism has another important function: that of persuading local communities and national governments to conserve fragile ecosystems. Ecotourists are particularly interested in regions of high biodiversity, and these are home to many of the world's poorest people (Christ et al. 2003:vi). If a tropical rainforest is worth more as a tourist attraction than as a pile of cheap logs bound for the sawmill or as a sugar plantation, it is likely to be preserved, especially if an international conservation organization is willing to buy a million hectares and register the forest as a wildlife reserve.

Tourism in Ecuador

Ecuador is a country with considerable natural resources but also widespread poverty. The average citizen earned just over \$4 a day in 2003. Income per capita in that year was actually less than in 1995. While the Gini Index indicates greater income equality in Ecuador than any of its neighbours, it is clear from the numbers of street children selling candies in Quito that the benefits of globalization are not shared by all.

Ecuador's main sources of foreign exchange are petroleum, which accounts for approximately 40% of Ecuador's export earnings, agricultural and marine products, and remittances from its citizens living in the US and Europe. However, international tourism is also becoming a major source of foreign exchange. The principal attraction is the Galapagos Islands, but a significant number of tourists also venture into the Amazon region. This is of great relevance to the issue of poverty because although only 3% of the population live there, they are some of

Ecuador's poorest citizens, and tourism has the potential to improve their lives. It can also provide them with an economic basis from which to reject apparently generous offers made by oil, mining and logging companies that would otherwise eventually devastate their environment.

Tourism in Ecuador is, to a great extent, ecotourism, although purists would hesitate to use that term in reference to the tourist invasion of Galapagos. It is nature that the tourists come to see, whether on the seashore, in the cloud forests or in the jungles of the Oriente. Over 18,250 different species of flowering plants have been recorded in this small country, along with 640 different species of birds, 62 of which are likely to become extinct if deforestation continues at the present rate of 1.2% per year.

Ecotourism clearly has a role to play in combating deforestation and preserving biodiversity. While the government could do more to enforce existing regulations in protected areas such as national parks and biosphere reserves – which occupy nearly a fifth of the country's surface area – protection is now in the interests of the tourist industry as well, although it would appear that many operators have yet to understand the principles of ecotourism.

For people living in protected areas, however, the benefits of ecotourism are less obvious. If they are not allowed to clear their land in order to plant crops, they need another source of income. Yet if the ecotourists arrive on the tour operator's bus or canoe, stay in the tour operator's lodge and eat imported food, how is their visit going to benefit the local community? And if the tourists cause offense by taking photographs of people without permission and violating their sacred places, they are unlikely to be welcomed.

Community-Based Tourism in Ecuador

Concerns such as these led to the development of Community-Based Tourism (CBT), which emphasizes consultation and collaboration with the local community. CBT projects exist in many different countries – Mann (2002), for example, lists projects in 53 countries – but the basic concept is universal. Mann's Ten Principles for Community Tourism (see Appendix 1) provide a very good summary of what CBT is all about. Perhaps the most important of these principles is what Pera and McLaren (1999) refer to as 'informed consent' – the right to say no to tourism development.

The Amazon region of Ecuador has a long history of CBT and CBE (Community Based Ecotourism), starting perhaps in the Misahuali region in the



Figure 1 Guided tour in Amazon rainforest

early 1970's (Wesche 1995:16). According to Ecuador Travel Information, a Ministry of Tourism website, there are almost 40 CBE projects in the Ecuadorian Amazon now. More than half of them are owned and managed by foundations representing local communities, an arrangement which Wesche and Drum refer to as 'the purest model' of CBE (1999: 54).

Federacion Plurinacional de Turismo Comunitario del Ecuador (FEPTCE) currently represents 66 such operations, of which 22 are in the Amazon region. These communities refuse to sell or rent their land to outsiders. The President of FEPTCE sums up his organization's view of CBE as follows: "We want to ensure that our own communities are the ones in charge of planning, operating, monitoring and developing tourism" (Redturs 2004).

In addition to the CBE operations owned by indigenous communities, there are probably dozens more that are privately owned, either by individual members of the community or by outsiders, or subject to leasing agreements. Even these, however, were set up only after receiving the approval of the local community. Since the first few adventurous tourists entered the rainforest accompanied by outside guides in the 1970s, ecotourism in the Ecuadorian Amazon has come to be based on informed consent. Moreover, with the exception of the Huaorani in Napo, these are not reclusive communities which are totally isolated from the outside world and which prefer to stay that way. On the contrary, they are well aware of the advantages and disadvantages of contact with the outside world, having dealt with missionaries, government representatives, traders and other outsiders for many years. Some are politically active in organizations created to fight incursions by oil and mining companies. Most are anxious to increase their income in order to pay for health care and education. (For details of the different peoples, please refer to Appendix 2.)

Research on CBT in Ecuador

Kapawi

Many of Ecuador's CBT operations have been studied extensively, and important conclusions have been drawn. In a study of Rio Blanco, for example, Schaller (1996), questions the long-term viability of CBE projects. Similar doubts have been raised about Kapawi, an eco-lodge located near Ecuador's border with Peru. It has been enormously successful as a social experiment, and as a means of attracting external funding for conservation, health, communications, transportation and education, but not as a money-making venture, possibly because of its remote location and high charges. When the whole operation is handed over to the Achuar community in 2011, they will somehow have to balance the books or close down the operation. With up to 45% of their total income coming from direct employment in Kapawi and a further 21% deriving from handicraft sales (Rodriguez 2000:3), ecotourism is now a vital factor in the local economy. The problem is that while the community may eventually be able to control the enterprise, it has no control over the market. If Canodros, the company managing and financing Kapawi, with its experience and connections in the travel business, cannot bring in the tourists it needs in order to break even, it is unlikely the Achuar will be able to, especially when faced with growing competition from other operations in the region and in neighboring countries. Moreover, the Achuar are apparently not ready to take over Kapawi and run it efficiently because of insufficient capacity-building.

Kapawi may be an extreme and high-profile case, but according to Epler-Wood "there are dozens of community ecotourism ventures that are presently not attracting enough business to offer a viable, sustainable development alternative

to their communities” (1998:28). Events such as the kidnapping of oil workers on the Napo and security problems in neighboring Columbia, reported by Braman and FAA (2001:2), or the oil spill that occurred in Cuyabeno in summer 2006 could wipe out a struggling CBE enterprise.

Profitability, of course, is not the only measure of success. In their report on the operations of Tropic Ecological Adventures, Braman and FAA identify 15 other benefits to host communities (2001:19-20). These include motivation to get relevant job skills, protection of the environment, community organization, better transport and communications, access to healthcare, income from handicraft sales, and incentives for community members not to seek work outside the community (while at the same time increasing potential for employment elsewhere). Also significant is the international attention Tropic was able to secure for Amazon communities in their struggle to keep out predatory oil companies. The founder of Tropic believes the biggest challenge is to provide the right number of tourists: not too few for economic viability and not too many for cultural integrity (Drum 1999, cited in Buckley 2003: 150).

RICANCIE

IDEASS (2003) provides us with a detailed report on RICANCIE (Indigenous Community Network of the Upper Napo for Intercultural Exchange and Eco-Tourism), one of the oldest and most successful CBE operations in the Amazon region, and winner of the ILO-REDTURS Innovation Award in 2003. The network incorporates 10 Quichua communities with a total population of around 2700. It was conceived by the Federation of the Indigenous Organizations of the Napo (FOIN) as a means of funding their struggle to retain their land from the state and migrant farmers without succumbing to the temptation to sell out to oil, mining or logging companies – a familiar story in the Amazon region. The Quichua

had already tried to earn income from the cultivation of maize, coffee and cocoa, but ended up having to cultivate more and more of their land to pay for education, health and other necessary expenses. So in 1990 they turned to ecotourism instead. The first cabañas were built in Capirona. Other communities joined the project in 1993. By 2001, the RICANCIE operation was attracting over 900 tourists per year. Yet there is apparently no sense of tourism as a threat to the local culture; on the contrary, the IDEASS researchers tell us that the Quichua have gained “a newfound admiration for their culture” (p.4). Moreover, they have retained much more of their primary and secondary forests than neighboring communities. As for the business side, RICANCIE has a clear management structure: 25% of all income from tourism is retained by the central office, community members are paid at a fixed rate for all services provided, and the balance is placed in the community fund for development. In 1997, RICANCIE was granted legal status, enabling them to provide services to tourists and hire licensed guides officially. The difficulty in obtaining this status was identified as a major barrier to the long-term viability of any CBE, but the official procedures have yet to be streamlined.

Other studies

Epler-Wood (1998:13-20) identifies a number of useful lessons from the seven projects she investigated. From the case of Zabalo, we can see the importance of a competent manager with business skills and bright ideas, and of the community business partnership model he developed. From Siecoya and Quehueri'ono, we learn the importance of having a partnership with a committed and experienced tour operator in the capital city. A comparison of Playa de Oro with the much more successful Alandaluz shows how an inspired ecolodge operator can achieve significant improvements to the community and to its environmental awareness.

Yachana Lodge

This project was recognized by the World Tourism Organization as one of the best examples of Sustainable Tourism to Eliminate Poverty. The author of the Lonely Planet Guide to Ecuador refers to it as “the best true ecotourism project I have found in 17 years of travel in Ecuador.” It won the 2004 Conde Nast Traveler Ecotourism Award and was a finalist for the 2006 Tourism for Tomorrow Award. What exactly is the basis for such accolades? What insights might we gain from Yachana? In order to answer these questions, I spent 5 days at Yachana in August 2006. The following report is based on observation, literature provided by FUNEDESIN and informal discussion and subsequent correspondence with the founder.

Background

In response to serious concerns about the future of Ecuador’s tropical rainforests and their inhabitants, Douglas McMeekin, a US citizen, established a foundation named FUNEDESIN. Its mission is “to find sustainable solutions that will contribute to reversing the spiral of impoverishment and environmental degradation that is ravaging the people and tropical forests of the Ecuadorian Amazon.” Its board consists of five members, none of whom are from the Amazon region and only one of whom (McMeekin) lives there.

In 1994, the foundation started purchasing land beside the Upper Napo River. Then, with funding provided by the UK charity Rainforest Concern and other donors, additional land was purchased. The Foundation now owns 1730 hectares, 80% of which is covered with primary rainforest which is now officially protected by the Ministry of the Environment. The other 20% consists of secondary forest



Figure 2 Panning for gold on River Napo

and agricultural land.

In 1995, the foundation opened a lodge with accommodation for 40 to 55 visitors, with the aim of using the proceeds to fund some of its many projects. Non-profit foundations are not allowed to own for-profit ventures such as hotels and lodges, so a separate entity named Yachana Lodge was established. It employs cooks, guides, cleaners, gardeners and other staff, all from Amazon communities, though not necessarily indigenous or local (in fact five different ethnic groups are currently represented). All staff members receive in-service training. The lodge has an average occupancy rate of only 47% and, like other similar operations, suffers from seasonal variation. However, it has, over 11 years of operation, generated an income of \$4.6 million that has been reinvested into the communities in the form of salaries, payments for supplies and funding for development projects in the region. The operator has no intention of increasing visitor capaci-

ty, which is already larger than most in the region.

There is separate accommodation for up to 20 volunteers, close to the lodge, for groups of students interested in helping with maintenance, language training and work on the Foundation's various projects. FUNEDESIN also operates a research station five kilometers away, with up to 20 researchers from Global Vision International, a British organization. Both volunteers and researchers pay, though considerably less than tourists, for their stay at Yachana, which earns college credits for many of them.

Yachana Lodge provides various activities for its guests. These include guided rainforest walks (daytime and nocturnal), visits to the high school and research station, encounters with a traditional healer and a family of gold-panners and lessons in pottery and basket-weaving.

Agricultural assistance

FUNEDESIN provides a technical assistance program to approximately 5000 farming families living in Napo and Sucumbios. The program is intended to promote the use of more sustainable farming methods and reduce the need for additional forest clearance, and receives funding from outside agencies. The main crop featured in the program is cacao, which is uniquely suited to the rainforest climate and soil. In 2000, FUNEDESIN founded another for-profit company named Yachana Gourmet, which buys organically-grown cocoa from local farmers at fair trade prices far above the market level, turns it into chocolate and exports it.

Education

The foundation has funded the construction of 21 primary schools and one high school. The latter is currently its biggest project, with a 2006 budget of

\$144,000. The students pay \$80 per year, which includes full board and lodging and insurance. Yachana Collegio Technico opened in 2005 with 61 students. In 2007 its population will reach approximately 180. The students come from all over the Amazon region, with five different ethnic groups represented, and stay in a dormitory near Yachana. They are at present divided into 2 alternating groups, each of which comes for 28 days and then returns home for 28 days. The reason for this is to enable them to help on the family farm. However, it was discovered that students were actually taking home with them ideas they had tried out on the high school's own experimental farm and applying them at home. The curriculum has a strong focus on sustainability, with conservation and eco-tourism among the subjects taught. It also teaches skills needed for employment in the tourist industry, including hospitality, financial management and accounting. All subjects are taught by an Ecuadorian staff of paid teachers and by international volunteers.

Much of the food eaten by the students and by tourists at the lodge is grown on the school's plantations and fields, which produce papaya, passion fruit, bananas, chonta, cacao, yuca, tomatoes, taro and many leafy vegetables. The school teaches permaculture and uses neither pesticides nor artificial fertilizers. There is a pond, used to cultivate algae, which is used to make pig and chicken feed. Chickens are rotated over four areas in order to keep down the insect population, fertilize the soil and provide time for regeneration. A biodigester produces methane gas, which is used for warming the young chicks in the chicken house. Slurry is diluted with water and used as a biofertilizer.

Healthcare

Health indicators in Napo Province, such as infant and maternal mortality, are the worst in Ecuador. FUNEDESIN founded the Mondaña Medical Clinic in 1995,

and it now provides healthcare to over 8,000 residents in 25 communities, with the help of community health promoters and local medical outposts linked to Mondaña by 2-way radio and by periodical visits by Mondaña's medical staff. The clinic, now managed by the Ministry of Health, also has a volunteer program for medical students run by FUNEDESIN. The foundation has recently set up in the clinic Ecuador's first tele-medicine program, connecting this remote clinic to Metropolitano Hospital in Quito.

Conservation

With help from Rainforest Concern and other sponsors, FUNEDESIN has purchased large tracts of primary rainforest that would otherwise have been destroyed by loggers, migrant farmers and cattle ranchers. The whole area is now registered as a buffer zone around the Gran Sumaco National Park, a UNESCO Man and Biosphere Reserve. The curriculum at Yachana High School, as noted, focuses on conservation and sustainable development. Yachana Lodge recycles its glass, plastic and kitchen waste, uses solar energy for its lighting (provided by high-efficiency Light-Emitting Diodes), purifies its drinking water using ozone, biodegrades waste from the toilets in septic tanks and uses a canoe made of fiberglass (light and durable) with a clean-burn four-stroke engine.

Micro-finance

FUNEDESIN has set up 17 'village banks' to provide small loans to farming families. Since 2003, the banks have made 1,253 loans totaling over \$90,000. Over 40% of these were used for agricultural activities, and 20% of them were for education.

Impacts

It will become clear from the above that FUNEDESIN has made a significant contribution to the environment and to the local and regional community. While the residents of the Mondaña community are no longer permitted to hunt or cut trees, this loss is greatly outweighed by the benefits they have received in the form of better education and healthcare, micro-finance, agricultural support, job opportunities and training at Yachana and better communication with the outside world. There are no signs of any resentment towards the tourists or operators of the lodge.

Long-term viability

While Yachana is nowhere near as remote as Kapawi, it is subject to similar market forces, and unless off-season occupancy rates can be raised, the future of Yachana Lodge and of FUNEDESIN's many other projects are at risk. Douglas McMeekin is especially concerned about the High School, and whether funding will continue to be available until it becomes – as he hopes – self-financing. There is also the question of finding an equally dedicated and inspired director when he eventually steps down. He has recently created a unique business structure by passing the responsibility for management of the lodge over to the high school, under professional supervision. The training that the students are now receiving will enable some of them to eventually become not only waiters and cooks but also managers. Yachana thus provides a model for one approach to capacity-building.

Observations and proposals

Epler-Wood (1998:20-21) summarizes the conclusions reached by the National

Forum on Community Participation in Ecotourism, June 1997, and highlights the following:

- * changes in regulations to make it easier for CBEs to operate;
- * a special category within the national guide licensing system, recognizing native guides and their local knowledge;
- * legal recognition of the role of NGOs in developing ecotourism and local communities;
- * signed agreements between communities and institutions seeking to create a CBE;
- * training of community-based guides;
- * university practica allowing students to work with local communities;
- * a national registry of tourism projects;
- * long-term credit to help communities establish their own CBE programs.

Epler-Wood's illuminating paper concludes with a list of key issues and recommendations which should be an integral part of any effort at the governmental level to promote Community-Based Ecotourism as a national strategy for poverty alleviation and environmental protection, but which are too long to reproduce here.

I would like to add the following observations. First, no one model of CBE is inherently superior to others. The value of any project lies in its contribution to the community and to the conservation of nature, regardless of who owns or manages the enterprise. FEPTCE and its members have achieved a great deal for Ecuador's indigenous communities in terms of social and legal recognition and pride in their cultural identity. However, Kapawi and Yachana have also made a great contribution to indigenous communities and to the environment, and represent an equally valid and potentially valuable model for sustainable development.

Moreover, the benefits of the projects funded by FUNEDESIN extend far beyond the tiny community of Mondaña. This suggests a need to broaden our concept of community. CBE can and should benefit not only the immediate community, but also the regional, national and even global community.

Secondly, a CBE operation does not have to be profitable in order to bring benefits to the community. Payment of wages to local staff and purchases of food from local farmers may be costs on the balance sheet but are benefits in reality. However, most of the benefits attached to CBE may ultimately be a result of the organization's ability to raise funds from outside agencies for other projects, such as conservation and health care. FUNEDESIN, for example, has managed to tap a wide variety of funding sources, including US AID, UNICEF, Rainforest Concern and even an oil company. Moreover, in many cases ecotourism is merely the catalyst for the evolution of a whole cluster of other activities, such as education, health care and alternative income-generating projects. It may also be a key engine for capacity-building: as community residents develop the skills they need to manage an ecotourism business, they may transfer their new entrepreneurial skills to other ventures involving, for example, agricultural products and handicrafts.

Perhaps we should not even expect a CBE enterprise to be profitable. The basic economics of CBE are not very encouraging under the current circumstances, with occupancy rates far below capacity for most of the year. The construction of more eco-lodges in the Ecuadorian Amazon might well mean even less income for existing operations. While it may be possible to increase off-season occupancy rates by adjusting prices and targeting new markets (senior citizens, college students and Japanese female office workers, for example), it is also important to establish other sustainable income-generating projects such as the harvesting of rainforest products (honey, fruit, nuts, rattan, rubber, resin,

dyes, perfumes and medicinal plants). These could be supplemented by the sustainable cultivation of high-value crops such as herbs and spices, mushrooms, shade-grown coffee and cocoa, by aquaculture and by the production of handicrafts such as carvings made from tagua nuts. Diversification is in any case essential in order to shelter a community from the effects of a sudden decrease in tourism due to competition, security problems, epidemics and other factors already mentioned.

Thirdly, there is much to be learned from the experience of CBE in other countries. For example, WWF's valuable guidelines on setting up a CBE project include information on the MESCOT project on the Kinabatangan River in Malaysia, which the Ministry of Tourism's Homestay Development Unit is helping to promote, and NACOBTA in Namibia, which links communities with each other and with outside agencies and operators and provides assistance with training, business advice, marketing, advocacy and funding (2001: 5-7). In Ecuador, such services could be provided by FEPTCE, ASEC (Asociacion de Ecoturismo del Ecuador) or the Ministry of Tourism.

Strategies for poverty relief not directly related to tourism may also be borrowed from elsewhere. In Cambodia, for example, an NPO named American Assistance for Cambodia has set up an arrangement with the World Bank under which every private donation of \$13,000 towards the construction of a village school is matched by an equal donation from the Bank. The schools are equipped with solar energy systems, computers and Internet access. So far, over 200 remote villages have benefited from this program, which could work equally well in the Amazon.

GIFEE (2003:5) highlights the need for 'cross-sector and intra-sector cooperation'. Douglas McMeekin pointed out that individual CBE projects are too small to attract and maintain the interest of major funding agencies. The Ecotourism

Association of Ecuador (ASEC) apparently received a joint marketing proposal from its members, but this has yet to take shape. It might be possible for FEPTCE, with 66 CBE projects under its umbrella, to create a single agency responsible for marketing and booking on behalf of all of its members, perhaps in partnership with TROPIC or some other tour company. However, FEPTCE membership is limited to community-owned enterprises. Ecuador Verde provides a different model of cooperation, in which 7 different operators, including Kapawi and Sani, collaborate on marketing. One of McMeekin's many suggestions is to establish a regional clearing house that could not only promote all ecotourism projects in the Amazon (subject, perhaps, to screening for environmental and social responsibility) but also process bookings and credit card payments. A similar clearing house for projects awaiting funding and funding agencies seeking worthwhile projects might also be useful.

Good ideas and practices are disseminated through research papers, seminars and workshops. However, they should also be experienced first-hand. This could be facilitated by setting up regional centers of excellence where best practice – in terms of sustainability, business management, community relations, treatment of staff, use of technology, and so on - can be observed, new ideas tried out and skills developed by means of internships. Virtual tours of outstanding ecotourism ventures such as Kapawi, Yachana and Capirona could also be provided on the Ministry of Tourism's website, along with models of best practice from overseas. Another role of centers of excellence might be to support the proposed certification system, if and when it is introduced, by training inspectors. Costa Rica's 4-part Certification for Sustainable Tourism would appear to be an appropriate model, provided it actually reflects the requirements of conservationists and host communities as well as business interests and government, and is provided at low cost to small enterprises. However, the issue of certification remains highly

controversial. (See, for example, the discussion on the Planeta website.)

GIFEE (2003) sees greater use of the Internet as the most important of their recommendations. It can be used for marketing and promotion, booking and payment, networking, on-line workshops, sharing of research, and so on. It can also be used for trade, education and tele-medicine. However, the cost of Internet access is a major obstacle. Yachana has to pay its Internet Service Provider \$440 every month. While this is affordable for a big operator, it puts the Internet out of reach for smaller and lower-priced operations. If the Ministry of Tourism were to provide a subsidized ISP service, smaller communities would be able to go on-line and reap the benefits.

There have been calls (e.g. Epler-Wood 1998:26) for macro-analysis of the Latin American ecotourism market in order to determine whether or not further expansion is justified. Unfortunately, there are too many unknown variables to permit anything more than an informed guess as to how much longer the current growth in ecotourism will continue – optimistic UNWTO predictions notwithstanding. Current growth rates in regional markets and surveys of consumers and operators cannot be extrapolated without taking into account unpredictable factors such as terrorism and other crime, political instability, natural disasters, global warming, spiraling fuel costs and epidemics, let alone the possibility that ecotourism may yet turn out to be a passing fad. It would therefore be prudent to base feasibility studies for individual projects purely on current local demand and hard data. This requires information that all CBE projects should be prepared to release: month-by-month occupancy rates, in particular, and preferably with visitor profiles as well. It would also be useful for prospective CBE operators and funding agencies to know the extent to which current operations are profitable.

Conclusion

Community-based ecotourism has great potential for simultaneously alleviating poverty and conserving threatened ecosystems in Ecuador and elsewhere, especially when accompanied by other poverty-relief strategies. However, existing capacity is under-utilized and further expansion could result in even lower occupancy rates. From a purely economic viewpoint, it would be prudent to limit new projects to those which have the potential to increase the number of visitors to the Amazon and will not compete head-on with existing operations. The risks can be greatly reduced by following guidelines such as those provided by WWF to its field project staff (2001), including feasibility studies to determine whether or not the necessary pre-conditions exist.

On the other hand, it could reasonably be argued that CBE operations are a necessary stop-gap measure to protect the rainforests until their value is properly accounted for in economic terms, as carbon sinks, research laboratories, gene banks, water purification systems and so on. If UN agencies, conservation groups and even governments are willing to subsidize ecotourism and other sustainable enterprises in the Amazon for the benefit of future generations, the viability of CBE in economic terms may in fact be irrelevant.

Finally, it should be noted that the foundations running CBE enterprises are also providing education, health, birth control, agricultural support and other essential services that would normally be the responsibility of the national government. Their valuable contribution has been recognized by numerous development agencies and supported financially. Such funding should not be withdrawn with the misguided intention of forcing indigenous rainforest communities to become better capitalists. The global tourist market is a very different kind of

jungle.

Note

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Appendix 1 Ten Principles for Community Tourism (Mann, 2002)

1. Community tourism should involve local people. That means they should participate in decision-making and ownership, not just be paid a fee.
2. The local community should receive a fair share of the profits from any tourism venture.
3. Tour operators should try to work with communities rather than individuals. Working with individuals can create divisions within a community. Where communities have representative organizations, these should be consulted and their decisions respected.
4. Tourism should be environmentally sustainable & not use scarce resources. Local people must benefit and be consulted if conservation projects are to work. Tourism should not put extra pressure on scarce resources.
5. Tourism should support traditional cultures by showing respect for indigenous knowledge. Tourism can encourage people to value their own cultural heritage.
6. Operators should work with local people in order to minimize the harmful impacts of tourism.
7. Where appropriate, tour operators should keep groups small to minimize their cultural and environmental impact.
8. Operators/guides should brief tourists on what to expect and on appropriate behaviour before they arrive in a community. That should include how to dress, taking photos, respecting privacy.
9. Local people should be allowed to participate in tourism with dignity & self-respect. They should not be coerced into performing inappropriate ceremonies for tourists, etc.
- 10 People have the right to say no to tourism. Communities who reject tourism should be left alone.

Appendix 2 Main indigenous peoples and their principle locations

Quichua: mainly Pastaza (central Amazon) and Napo (north Amazon)

Huaorani: Pastaza and Napo

Achuar: Pastaza

Shuar: mainly Morona-Santiago (south-central Amazon)

Shiwiari: Pastaza

Zaparo: Pastaza

Cofan: Sucumbios (north Amazonia)

Siona: Sucumbios, near Colombia

Siecuya: Sucumbios

