



Community Based Tourism
Research Initiative

*Survey Results Demonstrating the Connection that Community Based
Tourism Projects Have to Protected Areas*

February 2007

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Introduction

EplerWood International began the process of researching the role that Community Based Tourism projects have played in Latin America in conservation of natural areas and their economic contribution to local well-being in September 2006. Thanks to the internship of Holly Jones, it was possible to undertake this research with a contract with the Nature Conservancy – Ecotourism Department which allowed the research project to look at the relationship between community tourism projects and protected areas as one component of the research. The goal of this component was to review how many communities working in ecotourism perceive there are benefits from protected areas. The results are based on a small sample size, but nonetheless demonstrate an extremely strong positive relationship between community-based tourism projects and protected areas.

Methods

A five page, 35-item, email and telephone administered questionnaire (see Appendix A) concerning community based tourism in Latin America was distributed to 138 community based enterprises in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. The questionnaire contained the following sections: 1. Basic Information, 2. Ownership, Employment & Community Benefits, 3. Marketing & Technical Assistance, 4. Protected Areas, and 5. Limitations. The survey categories were based in part on the community based tourism survey used by RETOSA in South Africa. An international survey review committee was formed who commented on the survey instrument and revisions were made based on their comments.¹

Contact information for the community enterprises was collected from a variety of sources. The RedTurs.org online data base, an active project of the International Labor Organization supplied 78% of the contacts. SNV of the Netherlands provided 14% of the total contacts, specifically the Nicaraguan organizations. EplerWood International business contacts and miscellaneous organizations made up the remaining 8% of the contacts.

In order for the community enterprises to participate in the research, they needed to have a functional email address and phone number. Phase one of data collection was making an initial contact with groups by sending them an email describing the background of EplerWood International and the goals and objectives of the study. The questionnaire was attached to the email with a request for the survey to be returned in 2 weeks of the sending date. All correspondence for the project, including the survey was in Spanish.

Of the original 138 community enterprises that an email was sent to, 32% (45) were returned for email accounts that were no longer in service or temporarily disabled. Phase two began with 98 valid sites (93 sites with valid emails and 5 additional sites from enterprises contacting their colleagues to participate). Of the 98 organizations, 42% (41) had telephone numbers out of service which were either disconnected, reassigned to a

¹ The committee was Anna Spencely of the UNWTO RETOSA Project S. Africa, John Terborgh of TNC-Ecotourism Department, and Maria Jose Zapata Campos of SNV in Nicaragua.

private residence, or not able to accept international calls. Therefore out of the original 138 community enterprises 62% has either discontinued email service or telephone service not functioning internationally.

Phase three began with 57 organizations to work with. Live contact (in Spanish) was made with 37 of the 57. The remaining 20 groups either did not have voice mail or did not respond to a message identifying EplerWood International, the objective of the study and a reminder to check their email for the survey.

During the preparatory phase, ResponsibleTravel.com, an online travel agency, contacted the project. Responsibletravel.com offered to give all enterprises that responded to the survey a link to ResponsibleTravel.com, as they were building a database of community based tourism and were offering free technical assistance.

After making live contact with the organizations, resending the survey, offering the Responsible Travel.com web link and making follow up calls, and sending periodic reminder emails, 21 groups agreed to send in surveys. Six sent surveys without reminders, for a total of 27 participating enterprises. Chart 1 supplies the country contact and response breakdown.

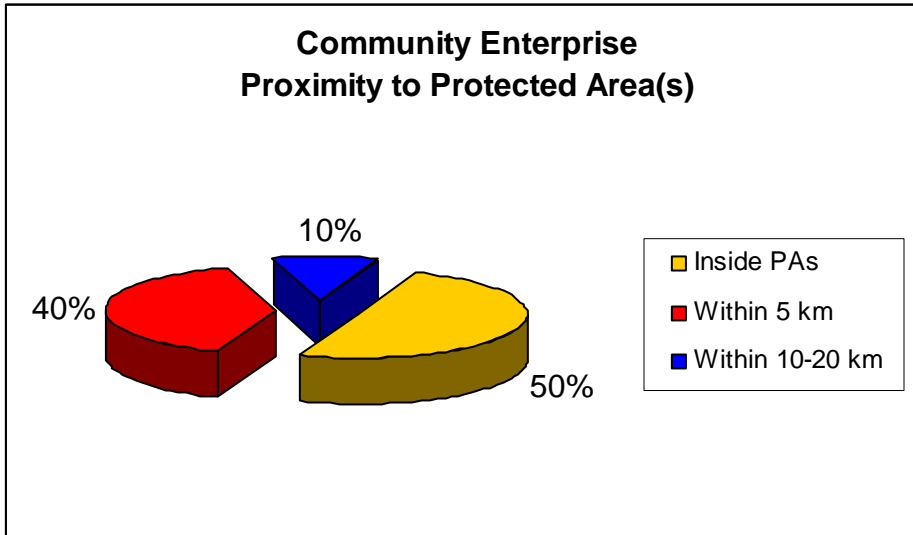
Chart 1: Country Contract and Response Breakdown

Country	Potential Contacts	Enterprises Response
Mexico	8	1
Panama	5	1
Peru	4	1
Costa Rica	24	2
Honduras	7	2
Bolivia	18	3
Guatemala	14	3
Ecuador	41	7
Nicaragua	17	7
Total:	138	27

Results and Discussion: Protected Areas

Of the 27 community organizations that returned the survey, 20 were either inside, adjacent to or within 20 kilometers of a protected area(s). 10 were within a protected area(s), 8 were within 5 kilometers of a protected area(s), 2 were within 10-20 km of a protected area(s). See Chart 2.

Chart 2: Proximity to Protected Area(s)



The enterprises surveyed were frequently near to more than one protected area. 8 community enterprises were near one protected area. 4 enterprises were close to two protected areas and 8 were close to three protected areas.

The enterprises were then asked to estimate what percentage of their clientele is attracted to their business due to their proximity to the protected areas. 7 enterprises commented that 100% of their customers stay with them because of the protected areas. 6 noted that 75% of guests were motivated by the protected areas. Therefore 59% of the community enterprises surveyed had a customer base of over 75% attracted to their business because of their proximity to a protected area. The full results are found in Chart 3.

Chart 3: Protected Area Role in Attracting Clients to Community Enterprises

No. of Enterprises	Percentage of Enterprises From Total Responses	Percentage of Clients Attracted by Protected Areas
7	32%	100%
6	27%	75%
4	18%	50%
5	23%	25%

The businesses were then asked to report on the percentage of their guests that actually visited the protected areas. 50% of the enterprises (11) commented that 100% of their customers visit the protected areas. 32% (7) noted that 75% visit the protected areas. Therefore over 82% of the communities surveyed had over 75% of their clients visiting protected areas during their stay. Chart 4 provides the full results on this question.

Chart 4 Visitation Rate to PAs for Community Enterprises

No of Enterprises	Percentage of Enterprises from total responses	Percentage of Clients Using Protected Areas
11	50%	100%
7	32%	75%
1	4%	50%
3	14%	25%

In order to develop an understanding of the relationship that the community enterprises have with the protected area system, the following three questions were posed:

Do the enterprise offer guides or other tourist services (i.e. transportation) related to the protected areas?

Does the enterprise’s publicity mention the protected area(s) as one of the attractions of the location?

Does the community based enterprise have a relationship with the personnel of the protected areas in regard to collaborating on the management of the protected area or tourism?

100% of the community organizations answered Yes to each of the three questions, indicating a strong correlation between the community organizations and their involvement with the protected areas systems.

Conclusions

The results of this research demonstrate that 42% of community enterprises listed on international websites or other international sources have not maintained active email and telephone service. This indicates there is a high attrition rate of community based tourism projects, although other limitations must also be considered (see Limitations). Or it may indicate many of the projects are run on a “as needed” basis, depending on walk in arrivals.

CBTs are not atypical of small business world wide which fail due to a lack of understanding of the business environment in which they are launched. They are not particularly typical of microenterprises which have a very high rate of success, based on peer loan systems. CBTs are generally not financed by peers and their management systems require staffing – not just individualized service. Further study of the differences and similarities between microenterprises and CBTs would be very useful in order to understand how to boost success rates of CBTs through peer related loan systems.

The fact that such a high percentage of CBT businesses cannot respond to international communications indicates that 1) these projects may be extremely local or regional in

nature, 2) when given the assistance of being listed on the Internet by outside organizations, these enterprises may not have the capacity to handle the customer service that international tourism enterprises require. Future international assistance to CBTs will have to focus on where the market for these enterprises genuinely lies and the full range of marketing and customer service systems required to develop a tourism enterprise with international markets. This and a look at the types of capacity building that are required for CBTs is explored in other parts of this research to be released later.

CBTs and Protected Areas

The fact that over 50% of the CBTs interviewed were found inside protected areas and 40% within 5 kilometers indicates there is an extremely close relationship between CBTs and protected areas. It is important to note that the data bases used for this research were not from organizations that work on protected areas – but rather from organizations associated with community development and pro-poor activities.

The fact that 59% of the community enterprises surveyed had a customer base of over 75% attracted to their business because of their **proximity** to protected areas, and that 82% of the communities surveyed had over 75% of their clients visiting protected areas during their stay, could not be a stronger demonstration that community based enterprises and protected areas in Latin America have a strong co-evolutionary relationship and that CBTs are highly dependent on protected areas to attract business. It is highly significant that all of the sampled enterprises mention protected areas in their promotional literature, offer tourist services to the protected area and work closely with protected area personnel.

Although based on a small sample size, this research demonstrates how strong the relationship is between community-based tourism projects and protected areas. Upcoming EplerWood International CBT survey results will also look at the economics of the CBTs, their management, and their technical assistance needs. These results should be extremely helpful to the strategic planning of similar investigations in the future.

This research has demonstrated that special attention needs to be paid to the benefits of protected areas to local communities seeking to develop community ecotourism enterprises. Relatively convenient access to protected areas may well be an important determinant of community ecotourism enterprise success. The strong positive relationship between PAs and CBTs confirmed here, gives researchers, conservationists, and local governments a stronger incentive to ensure there is an appropriate system of planning for CBTs that recognizes 1) how interdependent PAs and conservation areas are, 2) the need for PA planning which incorporates the communities and their tourism enterprises, and 3) the need to ensure communities appropriately recognize the ecosystem services they are receiving from protected areas.

Limitations

The small sample size of this research may be attributed in part to several factors. The time frame of this project was designed in accordance with the Jones internship. The internship extended over the holiday season, which is a traditionally high season for the

tourism industry in Latin America. The enterprises were not only busy with their clientele, but also with arranging their own personal vacations. Unlike business in the U.S., Latin American business generally shuts down completely from December 15-January 15. These scheduling differences caused communication to be more challenging than previously anticipated.

The business cultures differ in their styles of communication as well. Traditionally, Latin Americans prefer to do business in person, rather than over the phone or through email. Many enterprises asked when Jones would be able to stop in the office to meet the management and assist in filling out the survey. Many of the enterprises seemed to lack a general understanding of the North American business culture. Many did not fully understand the importance of this type of research, and their response time to correspondence was markedly delayed.

Contact information was also not up to date in many cases. The database created by the International Labor Organization had several listings with outdated contact information. The enterprises themselves listed web pages, email addresses, and phone numbers that were not current or not functional.

Appendix A: Survey Instrument (English)

Questionnaire: Community Based Tourism in Latin America

Instructions:

1. Fill out this survey completely.
2. Return to hollyjones.eplerwood@yahoo.com by x date.
3. If you have questions or need clarification, please contact me at hollyjones.eplerwood@yahoo.com

Name of the Organization:

Address:

Tel. #:

Fax:

Website:

E-mail:

Main Contact Person:

Position:

E-mail:

Tel. # (day)

Tel. # (night):

Section 1: Enterprise Information

1. When did the enterprise first open to tourists? Month/Year

2. What is the primary geographic region of the enterprise? Choose one that best describes the location.

- Coastal Forest/Jungle
 Mountain Agricultural Zone
 Other (specify):

3. Describe the location of the enterprise.

What is the name of the closest city?

How far away is it? km

What is the name of the closest major airport?

How far away is it? km

4. What is the theme of the enterprise? Choose all that apply.

- Wildlife Cultural Recreation
 Other (specify):

5. What types of accommodations are available and what are the rack rates in USD please?

Write N/A if the type of accommodation is non-applicable.

Accommodation	Price in Low Season	Price in High Season	Is the price per person or per room?
Camping			<input type="checkbox"/> per person <input type="checkbox"/> per room
Cabins			<input type="checkbox"/> per person <input type="checkbox"/> per room
Home stay			<input type="checkbox"/> per person

- %- Education
- %- Health
- %- Community Infrastructure
- %- Conservation
- %- Other (specify)

Environment Protection
Other (specify):

7. Does the enterprise profit?

No Yes

8. If yes, how much in the following years:

2003
2004
2005

Section 3: Marketing and Technical Assistance

1. Does the enterprise have partners or other companies that provide marketing and sales assistance? tourism businesses, NGOs, consultants, etc.

Organization:

Contact Person:

Tel. # (day):

Tel. # (night):

E-mail:

Website:

Organization:

Contact Person:

Tel. # (day):

Tel. # (night):

E-mail:

Website:

Others:

4. What type of training is most needed?

Training	Very needed	Needed	Somewhat needed	Not needed	N/A
Management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff Training/Operations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Best Practices Training (Social and Environmental)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Marketing/Internet Training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Guide	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Language (specify):	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (specify):	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Which style of training has been most effective?

- Workshops
- Exchange programs
- Other (specify):

Section 4: Protected Areas

1. Is the enterprise near protected areas? Yes No Inside

If you responded no, please move on to Section 5.

- a. Name: How far away is it? km
- b. Name: How far away is it? km
- c. Name: How far away is it? km

2. On average, what percentage of your guests visits the protected area during their stay?

- 25% 50% 75% 100%

3. Does the enterprise offer guides or other tourist services (i.e. transportation) to the protected area? Yes No

4. On average, what percentage of your guests is motivated to stay at your facility due to the protected areas?

- 25% 50% 75% 100%

5. Does your publicity mention the protected areas as one of the attractions of the area?

- Yes No

6. Does the enterprise have a relationship with the personnel of the protected area in regard to working together on the management of protected areas and tourism?

- Yes No

7. What are other benefits that the enterprise receives due to its proximity to a protected area?

Section 5: Limitations

What are most important barriers to building your enterprise?

- Not enough market Remote location
- Communications with partners Lack of publicity
- Divisions in the community
- Skills (specify)

Other (specify)

Please note any other issues that are not captured in this questionnaire, which you think are of value or interest to tourists and tour operators.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.