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**Community based tourism experiences in the Caribbean:
Lessons and key considerations**

Paper presented at the
*Caribbean Tourism Organisation Sixth Annual Caribbean Conference on
Sustainable Tourism Development: "Keeping the right balance – Land and
Sea Encounters"*
Havana, Cuba 27 – 30 April 2004

Introduction

Over the last ten years, there has been growing awareness, internationally and
regionally, of the need to spread the benefits of the tourism industry more widely within
the destination.   Niche markets and tourism trends such as eco-tourism, heritage
tourism, sustainable tourism, community-based tourism and pro-poor tourism
approaches, have been developed in response to this need to reduce negative impacts
to the environment and to try to extract more from the industry for the more marginal
sectors of society. Regionally, strengthening the tourism sector has been identified as
one of the key responses to the socio-economic challenges facing many Caribbean
nations. At the local level, community-based and non-governmental organisations as
well as the donor community have also been developing and encouraging small-scale
projects to take advantage of the tourist dollars for the benefit of rural communities and
other marginalized stakeholders. However experience shows that tourism's contribution
to community and rural development and local industry has not been fully realised.

Background

The lessons and key considerations, presented in this paper, for community involvement
and local and rural development from tourism are based on analyses of five community-
based tourism initiatives in the Windward Islands. These case studies provided a variety
of tourism products from nature based sites to arts and craft activities to cultural events.
These initiatives are run and operated from a community institutional base and require
collective action in the development and planning of the activities. Findings are also
based on the experiences of tourism and development practitioners from throughout the
region, gathered from a number of seminars and workshops, convened by the
Caribbean Natural Resources Institute, over the past five years. These meetings have
been particularly insightful forums where issues and challenges facing government, the
private sector and civil society stakeholders in tourism development have been
discussed.

Lessons and key considerations

From the analysis of experiences, a number of critical issues that have influenced the
development of the tourism projects can be identified. These issues point to a number

of considerations that should be considered in future development of tourism initiatives run and managed from a community institutional base:

1. The process of developing a tourism initiative

Use of participatory and visioning approaches
Engaging in tourism activities can affect social networks, and community organisations, as well as values on local culture and resources. Initiatives that employed a broad, inclusive process of decision-making and visioning, at the onset of the activity, showed greatest success in achieving their objectives. A transparent process has also helped to manage conflicts – an inevitable consequence of changes to management arrangements as a result of tourism development. At one of the projects observed, a series of consultations to assess the readiness, institutional capacity needs and development assistance required for tourism development were organised. This provided an opportunity for stakeholders to propose tourism projects that they felt would fulfil the vision for development in their community.   At the meetings, community members underscored the need for non-partisan and independent management organisations.

Building management capacity
There appears to be three levels or types of management that must be developed in tandem at the community level when developing community-based tourism projects: (1) capacity for project administration (2) capacity for resource management, which requires a role in management or access rights to the resource (3) capacity for product development and marketing – even if this aspect is not carried out at the community level, the necessary linkages to execute product development and marketing must also be developed at the community level. Experience has shown that a failure to identify the various levels of management capacity needs and a strategy to develop these needs together may be partly to blame for some of the failures of community level projects. For example, at one case study, after the departure of its strong, externally funded project leader, management was transferred to a community-based committee. However, a lack of capacity for project administration – communication; financial management; and, organisational development strategies, was cited as the cause of the project's failure.

A simultaneous approach
This approach requires a good funding base and good knowledge of the industry. Where opportunities exist, making linkages with government bodies and the private sector can also be effective. Well orchestrated initiatives have shown the ability to work simultaneously on (a) infrastructure and services on site, (b) link with larger industry stakeholders, (c) develop linkages for greater community benefit (e.g through the agriculture and fishing sectors, transportation services provided by community persons, encouraging arts and cultural sectors and other small scale enterprises at the local level) and (d) marketing. Where only one or some aspects of this approach was developed benefits to the community were not maximized.

Researching the sector
Prior to the development of many of the tourism initiatives, there has been a weakness on the part of project leaders and initiators in researching the tourism industry and the rural sector in order to identify opportunities for linkages and niche markets. Community-based tourism developers need information such as:

- Incentives and concessions: What incentives and concessions can be made use of to increase benefits and opportunities at the community level or what incentives and concessions should be advocated for?
- Institutional arrangements: Where does the responsibility for decisions related to community involvement in tourism lie? What agencies, organizations, and stakeholders need to be involved?
- Marketing: Are some markets more amenable to community tourism and the use of local products and services than others? (There seems to be some evidence that intra-regional tourists may be.) What are the mechanisms available to enhance access to markets by small businesses and local communities?
- Import-substitution inputs: What are the inputs to the industry, from food products to furniture to guide services that are now coming from outside the region but could be provided locally? What is needed to develop these goods and services to make them competitive? How can business and employment opportunities be increased?
- Distributional impacts of tourism: Where and in what form are benefits distributed to stakeholders? What could be done to achieve more equitable distribution, in both social and geographic terms to the rural sector?

2. The importance of marketing

This is an area in which all of the initiatives face challenges and it is fair to say that projects have suffered because of a lack of marketing capacity and a thorough knowledge on the part of project leaders of the way that the tourism industry and its marketing structure operates.

Due to the resources needed to adequately market a product, all of the tourism initiatives must rely on their government Tourist Boards for marketing their product or must rely on their own (limited) marketing avenues when visitors are on-island The literature shows that marketing efforts by Tourist Boards and statutory industries make only a small impression on the promotion of the Caribbean. Most visitor perceptions are shaped by the marketing efforts of major hotel chains.

Most effective marketing was demonstrated in St. Lucia where a marketing brand, 'heritage tours' was developed by the St Lucia Heritage Tourism Programme and handled by an association of tour operators called Heritage Tours. Heritage Tours staffs a booth at the cruise ship harbour where it sells tours and has negotiated agreements with taxi operators to take visitors to the heritage sites.

3. Enabling institutional arrangements

Each of the tourism initiatives function within a broader policy and institutional context that influence the type and scale of impacts and distribution of benefits from tourism.

Tourism affects every facet of society, yet the institutional arrangements to plan, develop and manage tourism do not reflect that. Tourism development currently takes place in isolation from other aspects of national development, and generally favours more powerful stakeholders, generally large, often foreign-based operators. Concessions and incentives are, more often, targeted at large scale tourism development with little comparative treatment for small-scale enterprises. In addition, coordination between

government agencies responsible for tourism development, the private sector and rural development practitioners involved in tourism development is generally weak.

The participation of community-based groups and small-scale tourism operators in decision-making structures has been hindered by a lack of 'space' for their participation, although this may be slowly changing. Their participation is further undermined by their own lack of capacity to become involved in decision-making about tourism development. However, without the involvement of small-scale, local and community-based tourism stakeholders in the institutional structure, there has been no real way for policies and institutional arrangements to incorporate their needs and priorities.

One exception has been the approach of the St Lucia Heritage Tourism Programme (SLHTP), placed under the auspices of the Ministry of Tourism, but with a great deal of autonomy. The programme acts as a change agent for the St. Lucian tourism industry, trying to shift the industry towards a more equitable approach to its development. To improve distribution of the benefits accrued from the traditional tourism sector, such as cruise and stay-over visitors, as well as create a new 'heritage tourism' sub-sector, it has had to make good use of staff and resource people that know the mechanics of the industry and has also made links with government agencies and non-governmental organisations concerned with the management of natural resources, provision of environmental services and rural development. Links have also been made with the private sector although this aspect remains weak. Perhaps most importantly, the Programme has secured the commitment of the political directorate.

The SLHTP's approach, combining product development, marketing and capacity building, at the local and community level and public awareness and policy development[1]at the national level seeks to develop the skills and empowerment of local organisations to play a more active role in decision-making about the industry while trying to create the 'space' for participation at the top.

It would seem feasible that the Tourist Boards in each of the Caribbean Islands could play a key role in influencing the impacts of tourism on rural development. At the moment, Tourist Boards have different roles in each island depending on the institutional context. In some places it is product development, in others it is marketing and in others the Board may be developing policy, or a combination of the three. However, because of their placement within government and links with the private sector both locally and internationally, the Board could have a key role to play in influencing the impacts of tourism on rural development and communities but requires a clear vision for local and rural development with the requisite skills in facilitation and other participatory approaches.

4. Enabling policies

No national policies appear to exist for maximizing rural development needs from tourism. There have been a number of policy development projects but these have resulted in little change in the policy environment nor the institutional structures.

Supportive policy frameworks to enable community tourism projects are needed for specific issues, namely:

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[1] For a more thorough description of the SLHTP see Renard , 2001.

Private sector partnerships with community and rural tourism stakeholders:
For small, community-based enterprises, public sector policies that recognise and seek to address the power imbalances between companies and communities in the tourism industry could be very important. This however requires a framework and a vision for national development within which private sector businesses can operate. Approaches or components of a framework to engender long-term relationships between the private sector and communities are:

- legal frameworks that require management of the social impact of businesses;
- securing a social licence which requires communication and co-operation with local stakeholders;
- partnerships and legislation that promote opportunities for social development through partnerships;
- sourcing supplies locally; and/or,
- assistance in marketing and advice to small tourism enterprises;

Capacity building
As previously mentioned, the lack of capacity within community groups to engage in decision making over tourism development is a major stumbling block in shaping a form of tourism that delivers greater benefits to the rural and other marginalized communities. Specific skills are also needed in the three areas of management capacity outlined earlier. Training and technical assistance could be provided by a collaborative partnership between the Tourist Board and private sector (marketing and product development), development non-governmental organisations (project administration and management and possibly resource management) and natural resource government agencies (resource management).

Access rights
The research showed that one of the barriers to the success of small-scale, site based initiatives was the lack of ownership or access rights to the sites.   More powerful stakeholders, such as the better-resourced private tour companies are more able to take advantage of the tourism opportunity and have been able to "muscle in" on community resources, particularly site based activities - using their own tour guides and buses with little benefits accruing to the community.   If access rights are granted to community groups, private sector companies would need to negotiate arrangements and may force partnerships, which would likely have more benefit to the community.

Addressing environmental concerns
The burgeoning tourism industry of the Windwards depends on healthy environmental resources and marine and terrestrial biodiversity, but also contributes to environmental degradation. The island's natural resources must sustain its productive capacity, so it is important that the tourism initiatives develop a sustainable use plan for the natural resources of their community.   Environmental issues were best addressed in tourism projects that developed close linkages with environmental management authorities and services and developed organisational capacity at the community level to manage and consult on environmental concerns.

Credit access
Policies that enable easy access to credit and funding are an important facility for getting good ideas and intentions up and running.   One of the approaches to product development of the SLHTP has been the provision of soft loans to small entrepreneurs.

Key components for consideration

From analysis of the initiatives, a number of components and approaches that have worked well in the development and execution of community-based tourism initiatives can be pinpointed. These include:

A supportive institutional structure: Individual groups may succeed on their own if there is a sufficiently good attraction (existing or developed) but they are much more likely to succeed and develop other initiatives where there is a supportive environment that recognises and seeks to address the need for spreading the benefits of tourism. A supportive environment requires an institutional structure that has the necessary policies, linkages between agencies and other tourism organisations, and has access to the necessary skills to provide or source technical assistance and support to community-based groups.

*Participatory process of development***:** Positive social impacts have been demonstrated where there has been a participatory process of decision-making in planning a tourism initiative and where tourism development is perceived as one component of a rural development vision. When this vision is developed and shared by stakeholders, it has been shown to improve local decision-making bodies by promoting consultative, inclusive decision-making processes and a sense of belonging and empowerment.

Strong NGO or government agencies working alongside that have a good knowledge of the industry: Particularly in the beginning stages of the initiative, having a competent agency working alongside to develop the initiative and build capacity at the community level at a number of levels, has proven invaluable.

Access to funds: Provision of start up funds for tourism initiatives through soft loans and funding of costly infrastructural development has provided a successful catalyst for community-based tourism initiatives but must be provided within the context of a participatory process of development so that there is transparency on the allocation and management of funds.

Tourism development does not have to be site based: Economic opportunities for communities from tourism have been shown to be successfully developed where there was no natural attraction (such as a waterfall or nature trail). Well-organised events (cultural) and the identification of products that add value to the existing package or supplied to another site (e.g. craft and agricultural production) have created more opportunities for a wider cross-section of the community.

Access rights: This allows the community group some control over the use of the resource and can prevent more powerful interests taking advantage of the tourism opportunities

Management and organisational capacity needs were identified and developed: Capacity is needed at a number of levels (organisational management, project administration,

resource management and product development and marketing) to adequately orchestrate a community-based tourism project.

A role for women: When project planning activities and jobs created can accommodate women's skills and roles in Caribbean society, the benefits to the community as a whole have been significant.

Non-partisan development of tourism planning: Community-based management structures that are not politically polarised and reflect a cross-section of stakeholders have shown best results.

Conflict management mechanisms: Conflict is inevitable when changes in local decision-making structures or access rights to land change in the establishment of a tourism initiative. The recognition and anticipation of the "role" of conflicts and creation of adequate opportunities to reveal and address conflicts through ongoing dialogue and negotiation has contributed to a successful project.

Support for marketing: Adequately marketing a site/event is a complex and costly undertaking and community-based groups need support in the development of the marketing products, funding and promotion.

Creating a local market: Developing a local market (as well as a regional market) is useful for protecting revenues in the 'low season', and improving the durability of the product. Considering a local and regional market in product development may also help to ensure its authenticity.

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Acknowledgements