Developing a Framework to Assess SEE Turtles Ecotourism Ventures

by

Caitlin Luderer
Dr. Lisa Campbell, Advisor
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Abstract

The Ocean Conservancy recently launched their SEE Turtles Campaign (seeturtles.org) which serves the dual purpose of inspiring sea turtle conservation ethics in tourists and encouraging sustainable use of sea turtles by communities around the world. The campaign utilizes media pathways to promote selected "partner" sea turtle ecotourism ventures and also provides small grants to these enterprises for operational support. The SEE Turtles project has a list of site selection criteria but lacks a more structured framework for assessing future SEE Turtles candidate sites. The goal of this master's project was to develop a comprehensive site selection process using ecotourism and community development literature. This framework may be used to identify potential SEE Turtles sites that will have the largest positive impacts on sea turtle conservation and local communities.

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Acknowledgements

Section A. Assessment and Selection Process Outline

This assessment process has been divided into four phases:

PHASE 1:

Initial collection of data and information. This phase involves answering a number of questions that pertain to six dimensions of the sea turtle ecotourism enterprise in each location.

These six dimensions are:

General Community Statistics/ Benefits to the Host Community
Tourism Products
Tourism Infrastructure
Institutional Capacity/Support
Benefits to Sea Turtle Conservation
Market Assessment

In addition to the list of questions that need to be completed, each dimension includes information about resources (i.e. literature, guidebooks, government papers) and tools (i.e., surveys, focus groups, community mapping) that can be utilized to collect the necessary information. *A description of the suggested tools can be found in Appendix 2.*

PHASE 2:

Verification of information. This phase of the site assessment process entails verification of information with either site visits (if budget allows) or other methods of communication with site stakeholders, such as phone interviews, conference calls, or mail in surveys.

PHASE 3:

Compilation and Comparison of Data. This phase involves compiling the information gathered at each site and conducting a side by side comparison to allow Ocean Conservancy SEE Turtles project staff to make informed decisions about which sites have better chances for success.

Once all the questions for each site have been answered, a report can be compiled that summarizes the information. The reports about each site can be circulated through email to all the campaign board members who will rank each site on a scale of 1 to 5 for each of the six dimensions. The board members can judge the information for each site against the original site selection criteria authored by the Ocean Conservancy. The scores can be added for a quantitative comparison.

PHASE 4:

Final Site Selection.

After the scores for each site are added, they can be compared and the sites with the highest scores will be chosen. There will be a standardized feedback report for the sites that were not chosen to describe how they might be able to improve their operations to become more in-line with the SEE Turtles criteria.

Section B. Dimensions by which Candidate Sites will be Evaluated

This section discusses the six dimensions of ecotourism by which each potential SEE Turtle site will be evaluated. Each dimension has a checklist of questions that can be filled out by an Ocean Conservancy staff member or a stakeholder at the candidate site (or a combination of both).

For the purpose of this process outline, the author has briefly described why each dimension is important when evaluating potential SEE Turtle sites and a list of key questions/information that should be answered with each worksheet. For a more in-depth discussion of why each criterion was chosen, please see Annex 1.

1. *General Community Statistics/ Benefits to Host Communities*

A key consideration in evaluating SEE Turtle sites is how increased tourism will impact the community. It is important to gather certain information about the communities involved in ecotourism to understand socioeconomic dynamics and the potential for a community to capture benefits from ecotourism. Ecotourism can promote local development through small business creation, improved health care for rural populations, increased income, and the conservation of the local environment (Pauca 2002). However, ecotourism has brought negative consequences to many communities throughout the world because of poor planning and an insufficient understanding of the host community's social, political, and economic configuration. By understanding the relationship between local communities and their environment as well potential political, economic, and cultural tensions; it is possible to see how an increase in sea turtle ecotourism in the region may positively or negatively affect the community (Richards and Hall 2001).

Tools
Participatory Rural Appraisal
Interview : Phone
Survey: Phone/Mail
Snowball Sampling to identify important stakeholders

Resources
Primary Literature
Ecotourism and Conservation Organization Websites • These may provide background information on communities and conservation projects already done in the area
State Sources • Municipal/Federal offices • Socioeconomic Censuses
Locally and internationally based tour companies that operate in the region
Media • Local newspapers/radio • Travel sections of Large/International Publications
Travel Guides

Key Questions

    A. General Community Information

What Physical/Financial/Legal Boundaries define the community?
What are the community demographics?
- Population size
- Average age
- Ratios of male to female
- Average years of education
- Average, maximum, minimum length of residency

Employment Information
- Which sectors employ what % of community

What is the history of natural resource use in the community?
- Is there unequal access to coastal resources?
- Has there been past conflicts over use of coastal resources?

What type of (if any) environmental education is taught in the community or at local schools?

    B. Benefits to Communities

How many ecotourism businesses exist?
- How many are owned by local community members?
- How many are run by local cooperative associations?
- How many are owned by non-resident nationals?
- How many are owned by non-resident expatriates?
- How many are owned by resident national and expatriates?

What percentage of community members own the support services (restaurants, souvenir shops, etc.)?
Are any profits from sea turtle tours reinvested in the community?
- If so, what is the percentage and in what form?
  - i.e. some profits go towards a community development fund to build schools or community buildings
- Are there any other ways the community can benefit from the ecotourism enterprises?
  - Do local school groups get a free or discounted trip?
  - Are there presentations to the public?

    C. Community Attitudes

What percentage of community members supports the presence of sea turtle ecotourism businesses?
What percentage of the community feels the entire community benefits from local ecotourism development?

What percentage of the community feels they can participate in sea turtle ecotourism if they choose?
What percentage of community members support increased tourism in the area?

2. *Tourism Products*

Wildlife tourism has grown phenomenally in recent years and this segment of tourists seek an experience that allows them to explore a new ecosystem and its inhabitants (Newsome et. al 2002). The sea turtle viewing experience at each SEE Turtle site must be unique and memorable. Each site may include other ecotourism (hiking, birdwatching, etc.) or cultural activities (ceremonies, concerts, etc.). All activities should be evaluated to identify possible negative impacts for the host community and the environment. It is the variety of activities offered, coupled with the "local flavor" at each SEE Turtle location, that will help leave a lasting impression the conservation tourists.

Tools

Survey: Phone/Mail
    ▪ Ask community members about natural and cultural activities in the area
    ▪ Ask tour guides about natural and cultural activities in the area

Resources
Primary Literature
Ecotourism and Conservation Organization Websites
Locally and internationally based tour companies that operate in the region

Media
    ▪ Local newspapers/radio
    ▪ Travel sections of Large/International Publications

Travel Guides

Key Questions

A. Sea Turtle Viewing Experience

Current number of sea turtle viewing-related companies
How can tourists view sea turtles?
- Snorkeling, beach walks, diving, cruises

How many sea turtles are likely to be seen on each trip?
What type of educational material is presented to tourists?
- Lecture, pamphlet, signage, movies
- How will tourists reach this area?

Is there seasonality to sea turtle presence?
If so, how does turtle season coincide with local tourism high seasons?

B. Other Activities

What other activities are available to tourists in the area?
- Diving, snorkeling, hiking, paragliding, National Parks, etc?
  - What is the approximate distance of these activities from accommodations?
  - Who owns these businesses (locals or expatriates?)
  - Are any of these activities potentially destructive to the environment (i.e. four-wheeling, treasure hunting on beach)?
  - What is the intensity level of each activ
  - Intensity? (i.e., suitable for the elderly/children?)

B. Cultural Tourism

What cultural activities can tourists participate in?
- Are there any local cultural events that are open to tourists?
  - i.e. art fairs, festivals, sea turtle ceremonies
- Are there any museums or historical monuments open to tourists?
- Are there opportunities for tourists to buy locally made goods and services?
  - i.e. handicrafts, leather makers, pottery

3. Tourism Infrastructure

It is essential to assess the inventory and quality of accommodations and services that will support SEE Turtles tourists at each candidate site. An increase in tourists to these coastal communities must not overwhelm the current tourism infrastructure. Providing a safe and quality turtle tourism experience is essential to the success of the SEE Turtle Campaign. No less important is the need to ensure that the accommodations and activities offered at each site do not negatively impact the local environment, especially local sea turtle populations.

Tools
Survey: Mail/Phone
▪   Hotel and Business Managers
Interview: In Person/ Phone
▪   Hotel and Business Managers
Nesting Beach Lighting Assessments

Resources
Primary Literature
State and Municipal Offices
▪   Building permit records
Travel Guides

Key Questions

A. Accommodations

For each available accommodation, please list . . .
- # and size of available rooms (can fit how many people?)
- How does the number of available rooms change in each season?
- Distance to airport
- Distance to turtle-viewing activities
- On-site activities (guided hikes, nature lectures, cultural demonstrations, etc.)
- Amenities
  - i.e. tv, restaurant (types of food served), pool, A/C etc.
- Distance to healthcare facilities
  - What types of services are available?
- Who owns the accommodation (local/expatriate?)
  - Who is employed by the accommodation (local/expatriate)?
- How could the accommodations impact local sea turtle populations?
  - Located directly on beach?
  - Is lighting an issue for nesting beaches?
- Are any "green" technologies/materials/practices utilized?
     i. i.e. grey-water systems, recycling, composting, organic vegetables from local farms, solar heaters, local labor, local materials

B. Regional infrastructure

Are there any major infrastructure concerns in the area?
- lack of waste/sewage treatment
- hazardous road conditions
- electricity/ plumbing capacity
- food and water provisions

4. *Institutional Capacity/Support*

Both the initial and long-term viability of an ecotourism development program depends on the support and resources the community receives from local and national institutions. National Governments can provide financial/technical support and legitimacy. Local institutions (formal or informal) are needed to manage the project at the community level. It is critical to assess the existing capacity and interactions of these institutions because political instability can dismantle local tourism enterprises.

Tools
Network Analysis
Interviews with upper level government officials
Interviews with community members

Resources
Primary Literature
State and Municipal Offices

Key Questions

A. National Government Support

How does the national governmet support ecotourism development?
- Does the government have a strategic national plan for ecotourism?
- Does the government provide incentives to promote locally owned small and medium enterprises in your community?
  - i.e. – grant legal access to beaches for sea turtle tours, provide training for small business owners, etc.
- What authority (legal or informal/traditional) does your community have over its coastal resources?

- i.e. can distribute coastal development permits
    - Are there any local/national laws protecting sea turtles relating specifically to tourism?
        - i.e. coastal development laws prevent hotels from building on beach
        - beach regulations (vehicles, lights, etc)
        - tour permitting system

B. Capacity of Partner NGO

What kind of legitimacy and management capacity does the partner NGO have?
- Please discuss the organization
    - Year founded
    - Core mission
    - # of employees
    - sea turtle conservation activities
        - research
        - community outreach/educational activities
    - authority to prevent/punish/monitor poaching and illegal harvesting of sea turtles and sea turtle eggs.
    - How is the organization involved in local sea turtle ecotourism?
    - Do the organization have legal access areas to view sea turtles? (beaches, bays, etc.)
    - Is this access special to the organization or are these public areas?

C. Community Institutional Capacity

Does the community have a local tourism and/or development association to represent local interests and make decisions about future tourism development?

What other agencies/organizations are available to help with ecotourism development in your community?
- Local universities?
- International NGO's?
- Government Outreach/extension offices

5. *Benefits to Sea Turtle Conservation*

Similar to the potential benefits to the local community, ecotourism can help or hurt local natural resources. Unplanned and rapid tourism growth in a community can compromise the unique natural environment that draws tourists to the area in the first place. There is great potential for ecotourism ventures to educate tourists and promote sustainable natural resource use in communities.

Tools
Tourist Surveys ▪ Do the ecotourism businesses promote a conservation ethic in tourists?
Survey/ Interviews with Community Members ▪ Do the ecotourism businesses promote a conservation ethic in community members? ▪ Is there a high level of legal/illegal sea turtle harvesting in the area?

Resources
Primary Literature ▪ Baseline data for turtle populations
Reports by local/International Conservation NGOs

Key Questions

      A. Importance of Site to Sea Turtle Conservation

Please describe the sea turtles that inhabit the community
         ▪ Numbers, Species
Why are there sea turtles in the area?
         ▪ Nesting, Foraging Grounds
Is there anything unique about the sea turtles in the area?
         ▪ i.e. Arribada, or a high population of an endangered species (leatherback)

      C. Main Threats to local Sea Turtle Population

What are the main threats to local sea turtle populations?
- Bycatch
  - Percentage/season, types of nets
- Illegal/Legal Consumption of Meat, Eggs, Shells
  - How prevalent is this?
  - Why is this poaching occurring?
    - i.e. lack of employment/ income/food?
- Coastal Development
  - Lighting affects nesting

          o   Development on beach

      C. Sea Turtle Management Plan

What type of management plan governs ecotourism with turtles?
- Do tourists need to be accompanied by a guide?
- Is there a limit to the number of tourists in a group?
- What guidelines/ conservation laws are used to ensure sea turtles are not harmed?
- How many of the SEE Turtles Best Practices Guidelines are in use at the site?

      D. Sea Turtle Conservation

How are profits from sea turtle tourism channeled back towards sea turtle conservation?
- i.e. fees fund further research, tourists can directly donate to clean up beach, sea turtle merchandise is sold with profits going back to sea turtles
- What percentages of profits are used for this?
- What type of conservation message is conveyed to tourists?
- What type of educational material is presented to tourist?
  - i.e. Brochures, videos, signs

What themes of sea turtle conservation are presented to tourists?

6. <u>Market Assessment</u>

The final dimension by which potential SEE Turtle Candidates can be evaluated is Market Demand. An assessment of the market demand in each site requires understanding the place, goods, consumer preferences, demand, available opportunities, and the enterprise of buying and selling (Eagles 1995). An evaluation of these qualities will help the assessment team identify any major considerations regarding product development, facility designs, visitor use plans, and marketing (Conservation Intl. Tourism Assessment Manual). This is indeed a critical element of the assessment process; many small-scale community based initiatives have failed due to a lack of market assessment, organization, quality, and promotion (REAP Assessment Program Guide 2003).

Tools
Survey: Tourists at Airport
■ Motivations for visit
■ Activities they participated in while at the destination
■ Demographic Information

Resources
Primary Literature
National Tourism Statistics
Travel Guides

Key Questions

      A. Understanding the SEE Turtles Market Segment at each candidate site

Demographic Profiles
- What is the age range, gender, education level, etc. of visitors

Purpose of Trips
- Leisure, business, visiting friends and family

Experiences and knowledge they hope/expect to gain
Services/Items Purchased

      B. Estimating Market Size

How many visitors come to the area?
- How long do they stay on average?

      C. Supply and Competitiveness

Review any unique qualities of the destination or any competitive advantages the area has over other nearby tourist destinations
- i.e. sea turtles are more plentiful in the community, the accommodations are more environmentally friendly, etc.

      D. Potential for Networking

Is there a group of ecotourism businesses that may want to form a cooperative for more marketing power?

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Appendix 1

Background Information on the Evaluation Criteria.

Introduction

Despite the fact that the term *ecotourism* was the New York Times travel section's "buzz-word of the year," our society still lacks a universally accepted definition. The term first began to appear widely in the literature in the 1980's and has evolved over time. Early definitions encompassed a basic characterization of what ecotourism *was* - travel to see nature. Ultimately, these definitions evolved to also describe what people thought ecotourism could *do* - benefit local communities near tourist destinations. This development is concisely illustrated in one of the mostly widely cited definitions today,

" [Ecotourism is] responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people"

- (The International Ecotourism Society, 1990, www.ectourism.org)

This definition is often adapted to reflect the individual interests of a variety of agents such as governments, tour companies, and non-profits involved in tourism development. The idea that ecotourism could be used to achieve community-based conservation and development began as a response to the perceived failures of traditional "fortress conservation" efforts that prohibited or even removed people from protected areas (Murphree 2002). Conservation and development organizations viewed ecotourism as a potential win-win scenario. Local communities would support natural resource conservation, thereby also ensuring that resources could be sustainably utilized to generate income.

This ideal ecotourism scenario is frequently oversimplified and has proven difficult to achieve in practice for a variety of reasons that are mentioned briefly here and discussed more in depth throughout this document. Ecotourism practitioners frequently fail to acknowledge the dynamic political and economic interests within small communities. Often, there is a tendency to falsely perceive these communities as homogenous or unsophisticated. (Agrawal and Gibson 1999). In many situations, the creation of a community-based ecotourism enterprise does not automatically inspire conservation ethics in citizens, especially if profits do not compensate for income previously received from traditional, extractive activities (Berkes 2004). Additionally, some community members may have greater access to financial and natural capital and are thus able to capture most of the benefits of ecotourism in the area (Scheyvens 1999; Mycoo 2006). Finally, even if a community based ecotourism program is managed well, a national government may promote foreign investment which can out-compete these small-scale enterprises (Epler Wood 2005).

Confusion about the true meaning of ecotourism is reinforced by the lack of a global ecotourism authority, and "greenwashing" (inappropriately calling something sustainable when it is not) runs rampant in the industry. This makes it difficult for consumers to determine which operations are truly environmentally sensitive and beneficial to local communities. It is for the reasons discussed above and the difficulty of achieving a true win-win ecotourism scenario in practice, that an organization who wishes to "do" ecotourism must be guided by a set of transparent and comprehensive criteria.

The Ocean Conservancy recently launched a SEE Turtles Campaign through which they will support and promote existing community based sea turtle ecotourism ventures around the world. My task was to develop an assessment process that will guide the Ocean Conservancy in identifying the ecotourism enterprises that have the best potential for positively impacting sea turtle conservation. A proper assessment of potential sites is a most critical task in this campaign; as the literature demonstrates, ecotourism operations should be treated like any other venture and include "business planning, feasibility studies, infrastructure planning and training" if they are to be successful (Epler Wood 2005).

For this assessment process, I have separated what I feel are the essential criteria to evaluate potential SEE Turtle sites into six dimensions; as guided by the original criteria provided by the Ocean Conservancy. This annex document serves to provide the necessary background information, in conjunction with a more in-depth explanation of the six "dimensions" of ecotourism discussed in the assessment process.

The Six Essential "Dimensions" for SEE Turtles Ecotourism Ventures

The SEE Turtles operation is an Ocean Conservancy "conservation tourism campaign" which serves dual purposes. It links travelers with community-based sea turtle ecotourism enterprises, aiming to inspire a conservation ethic amongst the tourists. It secondly strives to encourage host communities to utilize sea turtles in a non-consumptive way (as opposed to harvesting sea turtle meat or eggs).

The Ocean Conservancy provides small grants to partner conservation organizations who help manage local sea turtle ecotourism ventures. The campaign also promotes these ecotourism destinations in the mass media, and provides "best practices" guidelines to assist communities who would like to create their own ecotourism ventures. The initial launch in February 2008 included sites in Mexico, Costa Rica, and Trinidad, but the goal is to expand the program rapidly and include sites from all over the world.

The six dimension of site assessment are described in detail below.

1. General Community Statistics/ Benefits to Communities

The term "community" has become popular in conservation and development literature over the past few decades. Bottom-up, grassroots approaches are often viewed as promising alternatives to top down, generic management of natural resources and economic development that has often failed to be successful. Yet, some scholars argue the concept of community is too often vaguely defined (Agrawal and Gibson 1999). Community-based ecotourism enterprises may offer a way for local communities to benefit financially from increased tourism to the area and by increased conservation and management of local natural resources. However, like the concept of community, the perceived pathways of benefits to the communities are often over-simplified. It is important to assess several aspects of communities and community-based enterprises to ensure that tourism can be beneficial and not create or exacerbate existing hardships. Ecotourism can have numerous drawbacks for communities including unrealized economic benefits and aggravated conflicts over access to resources (Young 1999). One who wishes to evaluate how an

ecotourism venture impacts and possibly benefits a community must consider the following factors.

1.1 Communities are not homogenous

It is often commonplace to oversimplify perceptions of small communities, especially those in developing countries with low levels of technology and livelihood diversification. These communities are frequently regarded as having common experiences, norms, and interests. But this is often not the case (Agrawal and Gibson 1999), and it is only by identifying and acknowledging the various situations experienced by community members, that one can assess the positive or negative impact of increased tourism within that community.

The disparity in experiences of community members is often due to sociodemographic variables (Williams and Shaw 1995) and unequal benefits can be accrued to those community members who have a great access to physical and natural capital. Research has suggested that local elites come to dominate community-based development efforts and can monopolize the economic benefits of tourism (Belsky 1999; Scheyvens 1999; Mycoo 2006). For example, an evaluation of ecotourism development in Gales Point Manatee, Belize, revealed the majority of local residents were prohibited from participating in ecotourism because of the startup costs of buying a boat to become a tour guide or operating a guesthouse. Thus, only the most wealthy families from the community were able to operate ecotourism businesses and this created much tension and eventually compromised tourism in the region (Belsky 1999).

The notion of growing tensions within host communities can be seen in a 2007 interview with a community member from an ecotourism program in Africa:

" if you ask the community they say they are fed up, they are not seeing any benefits and would like to start growing maize, but the leaders would say they are successful" (Manyara and Jones 2007)

Additionally, it is important to research the history of natural resource use and management in the community, including any previous attempts to promote tourism. Although the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA) in Tanzania was zoned for multiple uses, the manner of zoning disrupted traditional behaviors of Masai pastoralists by removing some of their customary grazing areas;

"Several of the best pastures within the NCA were closed to grazing and settlement. Fire, traditionally used as a tool for pasture improvement, controlling bush encroachment, and reducing tick populations was prohibited. Perhaps most significant for the Masai, crop cultivation in the NCA was banned in 1975 (Charnley 2005)"

Understanding the context of how ecotourism was initiated in the community may help to explain any negative perceptions.

For these reasons, advance profiling of social, political, and livelihood strategies is recommended (Epler Wood 2005). Personal interviews with several stakeholder groups in the community are necessary to understand the diverse experiences of different citizens and potential problems that may occur from increased tourism.

1.2. Leakage

A second common problem with ecotourism operations is the occurrence of profit leakage. Just because ecotourism often takes place in rural communities does not mean that they are receiving the financial benefits. It is often the case that the majority of money paid for ecotourism activities does not stay in the host community (or even country) and typically the only benefits to the local community come in the form of low-wage service employment such as maids, waiters, and drivers (Honey 1999; Young 1999). This leakage arises primarily as a result of First World control of the tourism industry in the Third World (Mowforth and Munt 1998; Loon and Polakow 2001). Communities are most often able to prevent leakage through ownership of the local ecotourism businesses and infrastructure, but this is often difficult as many communities are operating under "opportunity and economic restraints which is in some cases exacerbated by large scale tourism development (Swarbrooke 1999)."

Despite the aforementioned weaknesses of some ecotourism ventures; literature suggests there are ways communities can benefit from ecotourism. To identify these potential benefits, an evaluation of candidate SEE Turtles sites should include consideration of the following indicators. Community members should have ownership over ecotourism operations and related ventures such as restaurants, guide services, etc. An ideal situation appears to be when a portion of financial proceeds are spread through a mechanism such as a communally managed development fund that can pay for community-wide projects such as health facilities or schools (Sindinga 1995). This may help to assuage community members who are unable to participate directly in the ecotourism ventures. Potential non-financial benefits include enhanced access to

markets, the generation of employment, and the potential for small enterprise growth and diversified livelihoods (Manyara and Jones 2007). Charnley (2005) argues that tourism benefits to local communities should be more than just economic, they should also "promote deeper social political and justice goals that, if left unaddressed, restrict a community's ability to enjoy the economic benefits of tourism."

2. Tourism Products

Because SEE Turtles ventures are marketed as "conservation tourism", the products and activities offered at these sites should attempt to mirror principles of sustainable development. Consideration must be given to the many facets of this type of undertaking which include environmental, economic, and socio-political sustainability. Thus, it is important that the tourism products offered at each SEE Turtles location are environmentally sensitive and culturally appropriate. In addition to the sustainability of tourism products, it is also important to assess the variety of activities offered at each site. Ecotourists may then compare destinations based on attribute bundles and not just a single, dominant feature (Naidoo and Adamowicz 2005).

Tourism at various scales has had documented negative impacts on natural areas (Deng, King et al. 2002) and developers of sustainable tourism products face a paradoxical task: preserving the resources that attract tourists while providing a quality travel experience (Mehmetoglu 2007). Thus, it is important to document the main activities that draw tourists to the area and note any negative impacts on local natural resources, particularly sea turtles. For example, the use of off-

road vehicles should be discouraged in sandy beach ecosystems (Brown and McLachlan 2002) due to their negative impacts on sea turtle nesting habitats.

Cultural activities at ecotourism destinations can include archaeological sites, community festivals, traditional dances or ceremonies, or simply shopping for handcrafted products (Besculides, Lee et al. 2002). Some communities who provide cultural tourism attractions see it as a way of helping them learn, share, and preserve their culture (Besculides, Lee et al. 2002), but care must be taken to prevent commoditization of the people and culture at each site. An extreme example of this commoditization was described in an essay by Greenwood 1977 (as cited by King 1996);

"The centuries-old festival celebrating the victory by the Basques over the French siege of 1638 AD, symbolized the Basques' collective valour. The festival was a source of pride for the townsfolk, and preparations for it took months to complete and involved most of the townsfolk – young and old, rich and poor. In the late 1960s, the Spanish government declared that the performance central to the *Alarde* be performed twice on the festival day in order to accommodate the growing number of tourists. This order transformed the *Alarde* from a festival for and by the residents into a show for tourists. Attitudes toward the *Alarde* consequently changed from enthusiasm to indifference; two years after the declaration, the Spanish government was considering paying the townsfolk to perform in order to maintain the festival."

Tourism at the community scale is subject to boom and bust cycles that reflect global market and political conditions beyond local control (Young 1999). Additionally, the seasonality of some tourism activities can negatively impact a community by placing a great demand on limited resources such as water (Swarbrooke 1999) in the high season, and creating an unreliable source of income that must last throughout the year. Therefore, an ideal situation would offer both tourism products not subject to this seasonality, and a supplemental income for most residents (Hall and Boyd 2005; Manyara and Jones 2007). A case study from a community ecotourism program in Tanzania detailed how residents can become proactive in preventing potential

hardships from the unpredictability of the tourism industry. Residents are encouraged to prepare for future food shortages that may occur due to seasonal hurricane events. The community will plant crops which can then be stored for long periods of time and utilized in the event of a food shortage (Ormsby and Mannie 2006).

A final consideration regarding the tourism products offered at each site is how they might affect the access of local people to certain places in the community such as a favorite beach destination or a sacred site. It is important to remember the common pool status of many natural resources and all the "contextual factors that influence local use patterns (Young 1999)."

3. Tourism Infrastructure

There are two main qualities to consider when assessing the tourism infrastructure at each destination; it's ability to handle an increase in tourists and the sustainability of the transportation and accommodation systems.

 Tourists from "first" world countries will most likely demand a certain level of comfort and have minimum requirements for safety (King and Stewart 1996). This includes access to emergency healthcare facilities, safe transportation options, and low rates of crime. It is often difficult for a rural community to benefit from larger scale infrastructure planning because the taxes generated in rural areas will not provide the internal rate of return governments need to justify building the infrastructure required (Epler Wood 2005). Poor infrastructure, such as compromised road access, may jeopardize tour guide safety (Ormsby and Mannie 2006). Other

infrastructure issues that can limit tourist visitation rates include unsafe living conditions, high costs of transportation, a lack of accessibility via planes, extreme weather conditions, as well as political instability and natural disasters (Ormsby and Mannie 2006).

It is critical to assess any negative impacts of the infrastructure on the environment, especially because the campaign is promoting a form of ecotourism. In general, tourism has severe documented threats to social and ecological stability as a result of sprawling urbanization, expanding hotel and infrastructure construction, rising population and visitor densities, and price inflation (Keogh 1990; Mycoo 2006). Coastal areas are even under greater development pressure (Gezici 2006) as it is estimated that almost 75% of the worlds population will live within 60km of the coast by 2020 (Brown and McLachlan 2002). Adequate sewage treatment systems are essential in coastal areas where resources such as coral reefs and sea grass beds are vulnerable (Mycoo 2006) and insufficient sanitation services can sometimes pose a risk to human health (Young 1999). Again, it is important to assess how the infrastructure at a potential SEE Turtles site may impact local people's access to clean water, food and fuel products (Swarbrooke 1999).

 There are many ways accommodations can be deemed sustainable. In some rural areas, the inherently small scale of the infrastructure or primitive nature of transportation may give the infrastructure "low impact" status. "Green" building technologies can include the use of solar panels, grey water recycling, and composting while "green" management practices can include sourcing food to a local supplier and community recycling schemes. Another element to consider is the interpretive signage and educational material that is integrated into the larger ecotourism experience. Studies have demonstrated that tourists are most responsive to interpretive material,

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such as guide books, technical information, maps, promotional materials, and signs as it relates to both environmentally sensitive management practices and the natural history of the site (Boo 1990; Lee and Moscardo 2005).

Finally, it is especially important to assess the tourism infrastructure as it relates to sea turtle preservation. Natural beaches without hotels or hard structures (such as sea walls) are best for conservation of sea turtle nesting habitat. Additionally, a lighting assessment should be done because lights from beachfront structures may disorient sea turtle hatchlings (Witherington, Bjorndal et al. 1990)

4. Institutional Capacity/Support

Institutional capacity/support refers to the sociopolitical infrastructure that exists at a potential SEE Turtles site. Three levels of this infrastructure must be examined; the ability of the community to participate in decisions regarding tourism in their region, the ability of the partnering non-profit to manage the ecotourism venture, and the amount of legitimization a community has from upper levels of government.

Small, rural communities are particularly susceptible to negative impacts from tourism. Expatriates or people from larger cities may have more financial resources and the ability to buy land in or near a community and begin developing tourism infrastructure without any participation in or benefits for local citizens. In addition to price inflation (Campbell 1999), a

high level of visitation can overwhelm local culture and cause serious social problems (King and Stewart 1996). As mentioned above, a community can benefit most from ecotourism if they own local ecotourism related businesses. However, a community also needs a mechanism - such as a community association to represent collective opinions and help devise a tourism development strategy. This would allow the community to remain active in tourism development but also help them retain a sense of place (Jamal and Getz 1995). Without such a mechanism, community members may often feel they have no way to influence decisions unless they persuade a local power elite or politician (Jamal and Getz 1995; Swarbrooke 1999). Although not related specifically to ecotourism, an ideal case of community control over natural resources can be found in Ostional, Costa Rica. In this community, a development association manages the day-to-day operations of a legal sea turtle egg-harvesting project. A board of directors who are elected by community members manages this program. Through this egg harvesting project and the association, profits were reinvested into conservation and other community projects (Campbell 1998). It is important to assess the balance of stakeholder groups represented by the board members of the association, as women and minorities are frequently under represented on community decision making forums (Scheyvens 2000). However, also consider that a particular culture may have its own rules for decision-making. For example, participation based on a model of inclusive democracy may be inappropriate in communities where decisions are made through consensus among a group of elders. King and Stewart (1996) noted that, it is important to identify the proper indigenous institutions and leaders with whom to work.

Even if there are no formal organizations established to manage community ventures, one could look for indicators of social capital to estimate that ability of a community to control tourism

development. Social capital refers to the "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit in a society (Putnam 1995). Social capital exists in two different forms; *cognitive* refers to the norms, values, attitudes, and beliefs of a group of a community, and *structural* forms include networks, roles, rules, precedents (Krishna and Shrader 2000; Jones 2005).

The second capacity that needs to be addressed is the ability of a SEE Turtles partnering nonprofit to coordinate the community efforts and deal with threats to sea turtle ecotourism. This intermediary role is most important at the sites because nonprofits and citizen groups often have the most complete information about local site conditions/constraints and can serve as a link between community and government. This source of decentralized authority may be appropriate for a government who is not comfortable handing total control of resource management over to a community (Swarbrooke 1999).

Local NGOs who may have greater management and enforcement resources than community organizations can help set up and assist in the management of profit sharing mechanisms, and acting as an intermediary between tour companies and communities. This may be necessary because so often, local populations are unable to provide services that foreign tourists demand or are not contracted to do so, leaving large tourism operators with neither competition, nor the incentive to distribute the wealth (Yu, Hendrickson et al. 1997).

In addition to an association that manages community tourism and development, there may be other civil organization in the area to help people capture benefits of ecotourism. For example, in

Madagascar, the Masoala National Park has a strong association of guides who are contracted as the only organization to provide tourists with access to the forest, and accordingly to the local cultures. This guide association is made up of members from local villages and can thus provide a route of communication between park management authorities and the surrounding villages (Ormsby and Mannie 2006)

In an ideal ecotourism operation, the bulk of decision-making authority should be decentralized to the local level. The local government will then assume a supplemental role, providing legitimization, technical assistance, and a favorable political framework (Putnam 1995) to support these sites. When community based ecotourism enterprises are left to the market, there is a tendency to promote short term commercial gain over long term environmental sustainability. This type of situation undoubtedly fosters a weak enforcement of protective legislation (Mycoo 2006).

 Most importantly, it is critical that community members and partner NGOs have recognized legal access to the land and natural resources being used for the ecotourism ventures (Yu, Hendrickson et al. 1997; Young 1999; Charnley 2005; Manyara and Jones 2007). This may be accomplished through ownership of the property, or perhaps a joint agreement to rent land for community access. An essential function of government is also to control access for other groups to these areas as conflicts can easily arise when there are no regulations;

"In the absence of effective community-based institutions to regulate human activities around whales, outside tourism companies often take it upon themselves to police such activities as they see fit. Sometimes their priorities and interests conflict directly with those of local residents, particularly in the absence of communication between all users of the lagoon. For instance, one foreign company confiscated lobster traps of a longtime lagoon fisher in the middle of the lobster season, asserting that the traps posed a danger to whales that might become entangled in the trap. As a result, the fisher lost a significant source of seasonal income from the lucrative lobster harvest (Young 1999)."

At SEE Turtles sites, it will be important for community organizations to be given the legal authority and capacity to enforce conservation laws, and a mechanism (such as fines) to punish people who are illegally harvesting or selling sea turtle products. Upper level government offices can support these decentralized organizations by promoting investment, helping to police the resource with licenses or permits, and working with other departments on issues concerning the industry such as transport, security, and public health (Swarbrooke 1999).

National governments may be eager to capture the large profits that can be attained through foreign investment in tourism; however, many benefits can be achieved by promoting smaller, more sustainable undertakings. In the sponsorship of smaller scale ecotourism endeavors, governments can be favorably viewed for maintaining socio-cultural and economic regional development, thereby protecting the natural and cultural values of the country (Kelkit, Ozel et al. 2005). There are two main ways government can promote and support community based ecotourism, 1) By providing financial and technical support and 2) By establishing a policy framework conducive to community based ecotourism development.

Technical support is greatly needed as members of small communities may not have the "necessities of the tourist trade" such as language abilities and specialized vocational skills, which makes it difficult for them to compete with outside service providers. This problem may also prevent even the best-intentioned tourism lodges from supplying employment to community members (Yu, Hendrickson et al. 1997). This need for technical and financial support may be especially true for ecotourism operations that are catering to more demanding western tourists. For example, an environmentally friendly ecotourism lodge in South Africa bought a refrigerator

because they wanted to upgrade their facilities and appeal to a larger tourist market. The idea was to operate the fridge from energy provided by solar panels. However, the lodge could not afford the green technology and had to buy a diesel-powered generator (Jones 2005). In Baja California, Mexico, the government sent officials from their environmental enforcement offices to visit the communities who were participating in popular whale watching ventures. This visit was focused toward improving community education and increasing knowledge of environmental policy. Prior to their visit, most of the community members were unaware that they lived in a biosphere reserve. These officials also implemented a course to instruct local guides on how to enhance passenger safety and minimize gray whale disturbance. A local university also hosted an educational seminar, providing a forum for scientists and community members to exchange ideas on marine mammal behavior and whale conservation issues (Young 1999). Large, international conservation organizations or local universities may be able to provide technical and financial support for ecotourism development when a national government does not. These organizations can sometimes also apply political pressure and persuade upper level governments to participate in community based ecotourism development.

Finally, a government can support community based ecotourism by providing a political framework that supports tourism development at this small scale. Many countries have a tourism development policy or plan that may inadvertently hinders small scale enterprise development (Manyara and Jones 2007) by providing incentives or resource allocation rights to foreign based operators. One could also examine the country's natural resource conservation strategy to determine if it is conducive to sustainable use programs such as ecotourism, or if it aims to keep people out of protected areas completely.

5. Benefits to Sea Turtle Conservation

There are conflicting opinions among scholars as to whether ecotourism can truly promote resource conservation. Many argue that ecotourism is not as effective as historical conservation controls (such as national parks or moratoriums) because there are still too many incentives to overexploit the resource (Young 1999; Isaacs 2000; Kiss 2004). For example, the rising value of land in tourism destinations creates a higher opportunity cost for protection of natural areas arrives, can make the opportunity of protection of natural areas (Swarbrooke 1999).

In certain situations ecotourism may, in fact, negatively impact sea turtles and other wildlife. The disruption of natural resources, habitat, and natural behaviors is always a consideration. However, with appropriate guidelines, long-term disturbance to wildlife may be avoidable *(Guillemain, Blanc et al. 2007)*. For sea turtle ecotourism ventures, these guidelines must be based on research regarding safe viewing distances, acceptable proximity to nests, and number of tourists that may be taken to view a nesting female without disturbing natural behavior.
Sea turtles face many human-induced threats (Report 2006). These include threats from fisheries (bycatch mortality, food web changes), coastal development, shoreline and seafloor alterations, nesting beach degradation, seafloor dredging, vessel traffic, construction, alteration of vegetation, direct take, pollution and pathogens, and global warming. Though this is not true of every project, ecotourism can provide some tangible benefits for sea turtle conservation if subjected to appropriate guidelines (Wilson and Tisdell 2003).

Ecotourism programs that include a large conservation and public education component can promote sea turtle conservation in a number of ways. When sea turtle tours focus around a specific area such as a nesting beach or concentrated foraging area, the constant presence of people often discourages humans and animals from taking eggs (Tisdell and Wilson 2002). Ecotourism programs can also be coupled with monitoring projects to provide an important source of scientific data. In Participatory Environmental Research Tourism (PERT), tourists pay to work as volunteers helping wildlife managers perform important research. This is an alternative means of funding conservation and management projects (Ellis 2003). A fee system may also be established as a supplemental source of income. Fees collected for access to natural areas can be used to fund conservation of the resource, and many studies have shown that fee systems are often underutilized (Tershy, Bourillon et al. 1999; Tongson and Dygico 2004).

Ecotourism can also provide conservation benefits by providing incentives for local resource users to preserve them. Some research has demonstrated a correlation between the sustainable use of natural resources with a noted increase in overall conservation ethic (Wunder 1998, Jones and Mosimane 2000; Shackleton 2001). A survey of communities involved in whale watching tourism in Mexico illustrates that local residents "acknowledged they originally had little interest in the whales, but have now come to appreciate the economic potential of these marine mammals and have acquired a more personal stake in the whale's long term survival (Young 1999). In Australia, the potential for significant economic and conservation gains from sea turtle ecotourism has had been a factor in the forestalling of a proposed real estate development and the establishment of marine parks (Wilson and Tisdell 2003).

Surveys of tourists who have participated in sea turtle ecotourism have also demonstrated an increased conservation ethic. In Australia, participants in a sea turtle ecotourism experience seemed convinced of the urgency to take action in the protection of sea turtles; some said they would change their behavior by more carefully disposing of plastics, avoid purchasing sea turtle products, and avoiding using nesting beaches during nesting season. Additionally, tourists said they are now more likely to report poaching or the sighting of a mistreated or sick sea turtle (Tisdell and Wilson 2002). Correspondingly, forty (40) percent said their visit will influence them to contribute more money for sea turtle conservation (Tisdell and Wilson 2002).

Whether it comes from communities or tourists, the social and economic support for sea turtle preservation as a result of ecotourism represents a significant international constituent base (Young 1999; Wilson and Tisdell 2003).

6. Market Assessment/ Market Demand Analysis

Assessing the demand for destination-based ecotourism is a crucial step in determining if a venture is sustainable. Often, ecotourism projects fail to provide conservation and community benefits, due to an absence of sufficient feasibility assessments and business planning (Denman 2001). This is demonstrated in a quote from Boo (1990); " For every park that functions as a profitable tourist attraction, there are hundreds that do not because they are either too remote, not truly protected and managed, and/or have little infrastructure that would encourage visitors to spend money on the local economy." Understanding the flow of tourists, their behaviors and travel motivations helps an enterprise expose major considerations regarding product

development, facility design, visitor use plans, and the marketing of "new and improved" tourism products (Gutierrez, Lamoureux et al. 2005).

The SEE Turtles Campaign may want to analyze two different scales of the ecotourism "market." These two scales are at the levels of 1) the tourists who book through the SEE Turtles Website and 2) the tourists who already visit each candidate SEE Turtles destination. It will be useful for the Ocean Conservancy to understand the profile of ecotourists who book the trips through the seeturtles.org website, so they can adapt their marketing campaigns to meet the "right" people.

However, it is critical to assess the market at each potential SEE Turtles site. Understanding the statistics regarding who travels to the area, where they are from, how long they stay, how much they spend, etc., helps the campaign to achieve a greater perception of the type and volume of tourism that already exists at each site. It then becomes easier to identify potential sources of conflict amongst the existing tourism products and those offered by the SEE Turtles venture. Nature based tourists are thought to be a heterogeneous group (Mehmetoglu 2007), and so it is important to assess the tourism market at the community level. Various enterprises and destinations have suggested they attract a diverse set of visitors in addition to the ecotourism niche market - including those who want to enjoy ecotourism as part of a more general vacation experience. Understanding the market segmentation at each site will enable products and promotional strategies to be adapted to different expectations and requirements (Denman 2001).

A market assessment could also identify other ecotourism-related enterprises that may be interested in creating a network or association. Such cooperation could improve the destination's marketing outreach and establish a critical mass of product in one area. This would provide a more complete visitor experience, possibly attracting more business and providing validation for investment in infrastructure (Denman 2001).

Because foreign tour companies are under pressure to expand visitor densities regardless of the social and ecological carrying capacity of the destination, it is important to understand how most tourists are arriving in the area and identify they major companies that book any package tours (Mycoo 2006).

Conclusion

The six criteria discussed above represent the minimum recommended dimensions that must be evaluated at every SEE Turtles candidate site to ensure project sustainability. An understanding of the diverse interactions of stakeholders, agents, and institutions at each location will help the Ocean Conservancy identify the ecotourism ventures with the greatest potential to lead to a mutually beneficial situation for sea turtles and communities.

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Appendix 2

Description of Suggested of Tools

Interviews

a) In Person

In person interviews may be the best way to gather information about community members regarding their involvement in and perceptions of ecotourism in the community. There are various types of interviews and they can range from conversational, non-structured versions to structured interviews with a formalized, limited set of questions. The advantages of in-person interviews are that a researcher can speak to a wide range of community members and make sure they are getting the "whole picture." A disadvantage to this method is that it can be time-consuming and costly. Also, it may take awhile for a community member to feel comfortable enough with the evaluator to agree to an interview.

b) Over the Phone

The same type of questions asked in in-person interviews may be asked over the phone. This method will be less costly than in person interviews, but it will be difficult for the evaluator of the SEE Turtles venture to determine if they are indeed speaking to a wide range of stakeholders.

Resources: Berg, Bruce L. 2007. Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences, Sixth edition. Pearson Education, Inc. Boston, MA.

Nesting Beach Lighting Assessments

A lighting assessment can be performed at candidate SEE Turtles sites to determine if lights from hotels and restaurants may be negatively impacting nesting beaches. The assessment can reveal the type and quantity of light that is emitted from beachfront structures and also help identify simple changes that may be made (such a planting trees or altering beachfront light type) to reduce any negative impacts.

Resources: Witherington, B.E. and R.E. Martin. 2000. Understanding, Assessing, and Resolving Light Pollution Problems on Sea Turtle Nesting Beaches. Florida Marine Research Institute Technical Report TR-2 revised edition. Tallahassee, Florida.73pp.

Political/Institutional Mapping

Political/Institutional Mapping is a tool that will help an evaluator to visualize the strength and nature of institutional connections in the political landscape. It can be used to understand the organizational structure and functioning of institutions involved in the ecotourism venture and to understand the flow of knowledge/resources between these organizations.

A SEE Turtles evaluator can work with a group of community members to create such a map by asking them to identify the agents and institutions involved in ecotourism in the community. Alternatively, an evaluator may choose to sketch an institutional map as a quick visual representation of the relationship between the important stakeholders of sea turtle ecotourism in the area. Asking community members to help with this exercise will take more time and money, but may uncover important stakeholders and relationships not previously identified by the evaluator.

Resources: Holland, Jeremy. 2007. Tools for institutional, political, and social analysis of policy reform: a sourcebook for development practitioners. The World Bank, Washington, DC.

An example, from Jones, S. 2005. Community Based Ecotourism; The Significance of Social Capital. Annals of Tourism Research 32(2): 303-324
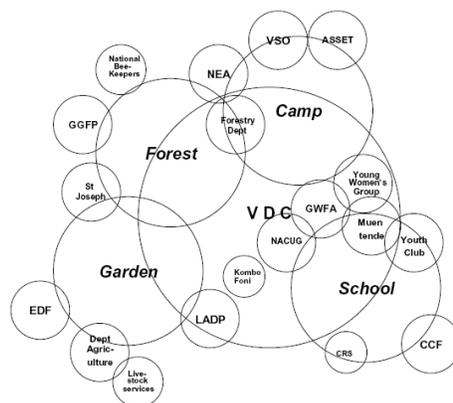
Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA Techniques)

PRA techniques are a series of qualitative approaches used to learn about local-level conditions and local perspectives. These techniques may include interviews/discussions, focus groups, community meetings, and community mapping exercises. Some advantages of PRA's are that they are flexible and can be adapted to reflect local conditions. However, there are some disadvantages in that the community may have increased expectations that their input will be utilized. Futhermore, these methods do not provide quantitative, statistically verifiable data and can be time-intensive and expensive.

Resources: Reitbergen-McCracken, J., and Narayan, D. 1998. Participation and social assessment: Tools and techniques. Washington, DC: The World Bank

Snowball sampling

Snowball sampling is a technique that attempts to identify a large number of stakeholders by having their acquaintances recruit future subjects. An assessor will identify people with certain characteristics and then ask them to refer other people with the same characteristics. In this case, an ecotourism evaluator could ask community members to identify additional people who they think maybe affected by ecotourism in the area. An advantage of snowball sampling that is it may help to identify hidden stakeholders and conceptualize the social network that connects stakeholders. However, this method can provide biased results.

Resources: Henry, G.T. 1990. Practical Sampling (Applied Social Research Methods). Sage Publications, Inc.

Survey

a) Mail:

A printed survey could be distributed to community members who would fill out questions about ecotourism in their area. This method is much less costly than personal interviews but it would be difficult to verify if a diverse set of stakeholders are being consulted if the evaluator is not in the community. For the purposes of the SEE Turtles Campaign, surveys could also be sent to accommodation owners, or administered to tourists at local entry/exit points to help answer the various questioned raised in the assessment checklist.

b) Phone

Questionnaires could also be filled out over the phone. This would cost more than mailing printed interviews but much less than visiting the site in person. However, it would be hard to verify if all stakeholders were consulted. This method may be preferable to printed, mailed surveys if a large number of the population is illiterate.

Resources: Louis M. Rea and Richard A. Parker, Designing and Conducting Survey Research: A Comprehensive Guide, 3rd edition, 2005, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers