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**Engendering Ecotourism:  
Analysing the Participation of Rural Women in Ecotourism in Belize**

**Catherine A. Redmond**

October 2001

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Signatures of the Examining Committee:



Dr. Anne Marie Dalton  
Supervisor



Professor Gerald Cameron  
Reader



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# **Engendering Ecotourism: Analysing the participation of Rural Women in Ecotourism in Belize**

## **Abstract**

Global ecological concern has led to a dramatic increase in ecotourism development projects worldwide. Governments in indigent countries of the South are eager to capitalise on economic opportunities presented by a rapidly growing industry, while rural communities are enticed by prospects of new jobs, business opportunities, skill development, and a desire to gain control over the use and management of natural resources in their areas. Local participation in ecotourism is a means by which individuals and families can generate a livelihood in rural communities through the sustainable production of goods and services, and provides impetus for environmental protection and restoration as well as a revival of cultural traditions. Thus, ecotourism can be seen as a vehicle for rebuilding rural societies currently threatened by ecological degradation and urban migration.

While local participation in such community development ventures has become the subject of fervent debate among scholars, gender issues have been largely ignored. From a Gender, Environment and Development perspective, which recognises that women - particularly in the South - are more adversely affected by environmental degradation than men are, ecotourism initiatives should only be considered sustainable if the diverse needs of men, women and children within a community are met. This report examines local women's roles within the context of ecotourism and presents case studies conducted in four rural communities in Belize.

**Catherine A. Redmond**

October 2001

## ***Acknowledgements:***

*This work is dedicated to ~*

*My wonderful husband Steve, my constant source of inspiration*

*Our parents, Sara & Ralph Redmond, Pat & Jim Myrden*

*My dear friends, especially Holly Melanson and Heather McPeake*

*My supervisor, Anne Marie Dalton*

*My reader, Gerry Cameron*

*All the kindhearted and courageous women who helped me find my way in Belize*

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# **Chapter I: Introduction to Research Project**

## **1.1 Background and Rationale**

Statistics provided by the Ecotourism Society (1998) indicate that the number of trekkers to Nepal increased by 255% between 1980 and 1991; nature tourism to Honduras increased by 15% in 1995 alone; and visitors to Kenya increased by 45% from 1983 to 1993, with 80% of total arrivals being directed toward nature-based tourism. The Ecotourism Society has estimated that between 1996 and 2005, there will be a 25% per year growth in ecotourism in Third World nations (Lindberg & Hawkins, 1993). These estimates give rise to a number of concerns about cultural and environmental sustainability and provide the rationale for the investigation that follows.

In search of 'greener' alternatives to growth through industrialisation in an era of rapid globalisation and ensuing ecological crises many governments, especially those in poor, highly indebted countries of the South have pursued environmentally sustainable forms of tourism as a basis for economic development. Since the 1987 United Nations World Conference on Environment and Development (WCED) in Brazil, the ecotourism hype has spread rapidly throughout the developing world, particularly in Latin America. In Belize, the result has been an immense socio-economic and cultural transition from subsistence agriculture and small-scale forestry, farming and fishing to an economy supported in part by revenues from nature-based tourism. While many of the environmental and cultural impacts of ecotourism on rural communities have been studied, changing gender roles and relations have been largely undebated. Yet in

countries of the South, women are more adversely affected by ecological degradation than men are. This is because women, in addition to being accountable for meeting the basic needs of their families, are often responsible for income generation and food production for subsistence and more recently for export. In fact, at least one third of the world's households are headed by women who have sole responsibility for household production and needs. These realities give rise to a number of fundamental questions about sustainability issues related to ecotourism development such as:

- How is ecotourism changing women's lives and impacting on their children?
- Are women becoming empowered by their newfound income or burdened with yet another responsibility? That is to say, are gender roles changing to compensate for the extra demands on women's time?
- Are environmental and cultural resources able to be better preserved to benefit local people who are threatened by ecosystem destruction?

These questions must be answered in order to answer the essential question:

- Is rural community-based ecotourism sustainable in Belize?

This report is a synopsis of the research I have been engaged in for nearly two years, including an account of my recent field experience in Belize. The research is primarily concerned with the implications and outcomes for women who are exposed to the challenges and opportunities presented by rural ecotourism as a force for development in their communities. It questions whether ecotourism development and employment are steps to empowerment for women or add to the burden of household and community divisions of labour. The answer to this question will ultimately determine whether or not their endeavours are sustainable.

In January of 2001, I submitted a proposal to the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) requesting funding for a research project through their Bureau of International Education (CBIE) Innovative Research Awards. The proposal was accepted and during the summer of 2001, from June through September, I embarked on a research project to analyse the ways in which gender roles and dynamics have changed within this relatively new ecotourism economy, and in particular how women's roles have been transformed and what the impacts have been on their families. My rationale for choosing this topic of investigation was based on Gender, Environment and Development theory, which recognises that women in the South, because of their direct dependence on natural resources to take care of their families and communities are more intimately connected to the natural environment than men are, and thus they suffer more from its destruction. This relationship and the theory that supports my argument will be discussed further in the literature review in chapter two.

As a researcher from Canada studying ecotourism development in four communities in rural Belize, I was in the unique situation of being intimately involved in my own study as an actual ecotourist. And, although secondary to my position as a researcher, when I was not actually conducting interviews or focus groups I *was* essentially an ecotourist: I lived out of a backpack, stayed in locally run accommodations, ate at local restaurants, took local buses, and participated in local activities - all characteristic elements of an ecotourist's itinerary. I had the advantage of being able to partake in the very activities I was studying, which permitted me to experience and critically assess first hand the accommodations, facilities, food, tours, services and other factors that might influence

sustainability from the perspective of a tourist. It also allowed me to patronise women's businesses while engaging in a process of analysis. In many cases, such as homestay visits, I was afforded an inside look at gender roles and relationships within the household. I was in a position of perpetual participant observation.

The only disadvantage I faced was that Belize is currently inundated with researchers, primarily from the Environmental Science, Anthropology and Archaeology disciplines. This is due to an abundance of natural resources, protected areas, Maya ruins and diverse cultures within the country. As a result, many people have become understandably exasperated with those whom they perceive as privileged American and Canadian researchers and claim not to have received any benefits from the multitude of studies conducted thus far. In spite of this trend, most people I approached willingly agreed to participate in the study.

## **1.2 Discussion of Terms**

Before proceeding, it is necessary to clarify some terms that are central to the argument that follows. Because there exists no standard definition of ecotourism, for the purposes of this discussion, ecotourism is defined as:

... environmentally responsible, travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socioeconomic involvement of local populations (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996).

Secondly, one must be aware of the distinction between sex and gender. *Sex* refers to biological attributes, while *gender* refers to the relationships between men and women. Gender has been defined by Henderson (1994) as 'a set of socially constructed relationships which are produced and reproduced through people's actions'. Simply stated, *sex*, being biologically determined, is fixed and therefore unchangeable, whereas gender is dynamic. Gender is variable in the context of cultures and interpersonal relationships. Yet there is an overlap between the two if one's biological sex determines the roles he or she will be expected to fulfill based on gender relationships within the boundaries of a particular culture. Thus, changes in gender roles require some modification of culture.

Since this study focuses on Belizean women from two different ethnic groups, Maya and Creole, each terminology must be explained. There are three groups of Maya in Belize: Yucatecan, Mopan and Kekchi, each with their own dialect. Maya comprise eleven percent of the country's population. The Yucatecans migrated from Mexico to escape the Caste Wars and became small farmers. The Mopan Maya fled oppression and war in Guatemala and settled in the mountains of Toledo district and in the area near Benque Viejo in western Belize. The Kekchi Maya is the largest group. They too, came from Guatemala and worked on the cacao plantations in southern Belize.

The Creoles descended from African slaves and early white settlers. Creoles make up thirty-one percent of the population. A large segment resides in Belize City, with smaller scattered settlements throughout the country. Although English is the official language of

Belize, Creole is the common tongue and there are controversial efforts being made to make Creole the official national language and to teach it in public schools. Creole is a derivative of the English language and is similar to dialects spoken in parts of the West Indies that were once British colonies.

### **1.3 Methodology and Outputs**

The principle goal of the research was to assess the roles of Maya and Creole women in community-based ecotourism projects in rural Belize for the purpose of making recommendations to relevant government departments and non-governmental agencies so that they may better address the needs of rural women in development planning. I had intended to focus specifically on Maya women in the Toledo district of southern Belize, but found it necessary to expand the scope of my study to include more than one ethnic group. My rationale for adding the Creole element was that there is not enough data to focus solely on the Maya. I quickly realised that Maya are still almost exclusively a subsistence society and tourism is still a very minor part of their economy. As well, I came to understand that Creole women participate very differently in ecotourism than do Maya women, and the nature of gender relations is significantly different between the two cultures.

Although Mestizo and Garifuna women also participate in ecotourism ventures, Garifuna culture has been researched extensively and they have become somewhat reticent about being the object of investigation. Moreover, Garifuna people constitute only seven percent of the total population and reside mostly along the coast. Their geographical

location does not offer them the same kinds of wilderness tourism activities afforded to those living inland. While Mestizo people do participate in ecotourism in the San Ignacio region, many speak only Spanish and communication would be more difficult. For these reasons, I decided it would be most logical and effective to compare ecotourism development in Creole villages with indigenous Maya communities.

The research methodology consisted of a preliminary literature review and was followed by qualitative inquiries and feminist participatory activities in Belize. Feminist research involves strategies that “listen more and talk less, that humanise the research process and that insist that the ethnographic researcher become both involved with her subjects and reflexive about her own thoughts” (Berg, 2001: 140). Moreover, participation is about empowering people to take charge of their own lives, about being able to effectively involve themselves in the research process.

As mentioned in Section I, my situatedness as a privileged white North American was at times an encumbrance, due to the fact that women did not perceive me as a 'sister', but rather another foreign student coming in to ask questions. This presented a disadvantage at first, but as women came to know and trust me as I spent day after day at their homes, they began to open their hearts to me and share their experiences readily. The other disadvantage I faced was related to expense. I found it necessary to stay at locally run guesthouses and homestays rather than renting an apartment of my own. By doing this, I was omnipresent in the sphere of my study. However I paid a significant price for this advantage - both in terms of cost and privacy. My secondary position as an ecotourist

enabled me to enter into situations through patronage that a Science or Archaeology researcher may never realise. Thus, even when I was not officially collecting data, I was always engaged in the research process. In conversing with other foreigners who were travelling in Belize, I came to recognise that I viewed things through a different lens than they, in that I observed everything around me from an analytical and critical perspective.

### **Specific Methods and Outputs**

A review of community development reports and other relevant (governmental and non-governmental) tourism and gender-related documents were used to provide a context for the research that would follow. It also created an overview of the policies and chronological events that have led to the current development situation in Belize.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with several women and a few men in each community of study. Since Gender and Development (GAD) analysis is based on structured gender relationships, it was necessary to include the views of some men in order to acquire a better picture of the structures from both sides. Participants of various ages and occupations (homestay hosts, craftspeople, tour guides, etc.) were interviewed to gain an understanding of the needs and priorities of village women especially in terms of natural resource management, and to see if current ecotourism projects as administered through municipal national and NGO structures are effective in addressing those needs. I was also able to learn more about how the roles of women have evolved and to find out more about their level of participation in the community development process.

The research study involved ongoing participant observation. This process allowed me to observe interactions and dynamics between participants in an ordinary setting. A series of participant observation periods made it possible for me to observe the norms of daily life in the communities. Through the initial observation periods, I discovered gathering places within each village (markets, wells, shops, etc.) for subsequent examination. Participant observation was useful to watch dynamics at community meetings and to assess the level of women's participation and their attendance at the meetings. Within villages, it provided insight into the nature of gender relations and responsibilities. Within the household (observable during a homestay visit) it offered insight into the nature of spousal and family relationships and the gender division of household labour.

A focus group was utilised with seven women from the Maya Center Women's Group to discuss their current participation and roles in the community ecotourism development process, the changes that have resulted, and their needs for a better future. Focus groups produce qualitative data useful for understanding the attitudes, perceptions and opinions of participants. Unlike the individual interview, the focus group provides a responsive atmosphere where people influence and are influenced by others. This strategy presented village women with an opportunity to discuss and reflect on issues that they may have otherwise taken for granted.

Oral histories were employed as a way of hearing the voices of elder Mayans and Creoles in order to create a clearer context of the broader issues in each village by presenting a contrasting view of the community in the past and present. Elder Maya women from each

village were requested to share their histories of the ecological and cultural changes and the evolution of women's roles that have occurred over the course of their lives, particularly during the past decade of ecotourism development. It is important that the knowledge and wisdom of seniors be respected and utilised by encouraging their participation in development projects. Moreover, GAD literature emphasises giving voice to all women and recognises it as a means of empowerment (hooks, 1981; Gilligan, 1982; Lerner, 1993).

'Themed' picture drawing activities with Maya girls and boys were intended to provide insight into their present situations and their future hopes and aspirations as adults in the communities. 'Themed' picture drawing is a non-threatening way for children to communicate their feelings. This activity was somewhat useful in learning about how children are being affected by ecotourism. I had also hoped to learn about their attitudes toward environment and culture and to see how their home lives have changed. The children were shy about expressing themselves through their drawings and their attention spans did not endure past the first activity: 'What I want to be when I grow up'. Nevertheless, their drawings about their future dreams enabled me to determine that they saw themselves participating in ecotourism through slate carving and selling crafts as their mothers were currently doing. 'Themed' picture drawing is a good idea in theory, but in keeping with my past experience as an elementary teacher, I discovered that young children had difficulty realistically imagining their own futures. Thus, for the purposes of this study, I found interviews with youths to be more telling.

Many of the above techniques were used to pursue four community case studies. Each will be described individually leading to a common set of conclusions. Prior to embarking on the case studies, it will be necessary to set the context. The recent evolution and status of ecotourism in Belize will be discussed and aspects of common gender roles and relationships will be described in brief.

#### **1.4 Host Organisation: Belize Organisation of Women and Development (BOWAND)**

The study was originally to be conducted in partnership with the Toledo Ecotourism Association (TEA). Unfortunately, a number of factors led me to reassess the feasibility of working with this organisation. Political conditions within the organisation have recently created seemingly irreconcilable differences among staff members resulting in two separate ecotourism offices working independently of one another. In addition, the consultant, with whom I was to work directly, was suffering from malaria and the chairperson who agreed to support my research had to resign from his post and relocate to Belize City following a tragic accident involving his son, who was sent to the Belize City Hospital in critical condition. These conditions led me to reevaluate my situation and in order to salvage my research, it was necessary for me to secure a new host organisation. I approached three organisations in Belize City: Belize Audubon (BAS), Society for the Promotion of Education and Research (SPEAR) and Belize Organisation of Women and Development (BOWAND). BOWAND seemed to be the most logical choice given the gendered nature of the study and that the organisation is experiencing some difficulties due to a lack of funding and a low morale at present. Consequently, the women were enthusiastic about having access to the research findings and the promotion

associated with being affiliated with a CIDA funded project. Although BOWAND is essentially an urban women's association, they recognise that many of the same kinds of problems and needs exist in rural villages and eventually hope to be able to extend the scope of advocacy and support work to outlying areas.

### **The Inception of BOWAND:**

In 1979, twelve courageous women decided they wanted to work together for the betterment of their sisters and thus formed the Belize Organisation of Women and Development. They adopted the motto 'Women Working Toward Our Own Solutions'. BOWAND has helped women in the labour force all over Belize by fighting for better wages and working conditions. Presently BOWAND is working towards greater gender awareness, so that the roles of women and men can be better understood, and the value of women more appreciated. BOWAND's goals are:

- to develop skills and leadership abilities within the leadership
- to enhance leadership and participation in community development
- to promote gender sensitivity and greater public awareness about issues affecting women
- to advocate for the appropriate implementation of the Domestic Violence Act
- to provide support services for victims of domestic violence
- to evolve into a financially secure and self-sustainable organization

BOWAND's vision is a 'self-sustainable women's organization, advocating for the rights of Belizean women, with an active membership and a self-sufficient staff capable of

carrying forth the mission and providing leadership so that women can lead healthier, happier lives' (BOWAND, 1982).

Due to the fact that BOWAND is based in Belize City, I was unable to work from their office. Mostly I worked in consultation with them from the field. I was able to assist by volunteering at a major fundraising event, helping to promote BOWAND internationally through a project website and by co-planning a two day 'gender training' workshop in conjunction with Joyce Flowers, one of the long standing sisters of BOWAND (see Appendix II). My promise to take responsibility for the workshop required me to travel by bus to Belize City and spend the weekend there. The planning session was on Friday, July 20<sup>th</sup>, and the actual workshop was to be held the following Monday and Tuesday nights. Unfortunately none of the 20 - 25 women who had committed to the workshop came on Monday night so the session was cancelled for Tuesday as well. Many of the women may have fully intended to attend the session but found it impossible. The BOWAND office is not conveniently located and Belize City is extremely dangerous after dark. Most women who belong to the organisation cannot afford to take a taxi, and others are restricted by household responsibilities or controlling and in many cases abusive husbands who will not allow them to attend such meetings. If the workshop had been scheduled for a Saturday, those obstacles may have been alleviated: women could have walked to the meeting and told their husbands they were going elsewhere. However it was the women themselves who initiated those dates and times for the workshop, and unfortunately due to conflicting schedules and my own personal time and travel money

limitations, we were unable to reschedule. Joyce has willingly offered to conduct the already planned workshops independently this fall.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The following section, an overview of current gender and community-based ecotourism literature, will be concerned primarily with the impacts of ecotourism on women in the South: its emergence, its effect on rural communities and sustainability issues. Because I have recently conducted field research on this subject in Belize, political, social, economic and cultural factors affecting ecotourism development in the said country will be addressed, including gender relations.

### **2.2 Gender and Ecotourism Development: The Connection**

In Chapter I, a distinction was made between *sex* and *gender*. The concept of gender was explained as unequal relations between men and women which have been determined by a society and can be changed by a society. These relations are a major obstacle to achieving a better life for women and men.

In terms of community-based ecotourism projects thus far, a fundamental problem has been the assumption that the community as a whole will benefit from ecotourism. This can be translated to imply that ecotourism is gender, class and age neutral. This, in fact, is not the case. All of these attributes intersect in determining labour tasks and positions within a community and there is substantial evidence to support the argument that if marginalised people such as women, the elderly, the disabled and the poor don't participate in the design and implementation of ecotourism initiatives within their communities, they will not enjoy its benefits. On the contrary, they may be negatively

affected by it. Ecotourism communities are not exempt from the social ills caused by conventional tourism. Those who are excluded from the ecotourism development and implementation process may become resentful and be forced into the less desirable realms of a service sector, such as prostitution or begging (Cater, 1995).

It appears as though a critical examination of community-based ecotourism using the underlying principles of the Gender and Development approach, especially as it relates to the environment is overdue. In order to perform such an analysis, a Gender and Development framework will be the most appropriate, incorporating principles of empowerment and sustainable livelihoods.

### **From WID to GAD**

Due to the gendered nature of this study, the literature on Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) theories acquires special significance in understanding the importance of examining women's roles in ecotourism development in the South. This section will provide an introduction to WID and GAD, with a brief reference made to Ecofeminism.

While the Women in Development (WID) approach, which combines neoclassical economic theory with liberal feminism in an attempt to 'integrate' women into the existing development process, is popular in development policy, it does not endeavour to change institutional structures or recognise how gender relations are affected by these entrenched structures. In contrast, the Gender and Development approach recognises that

in every society, the problems that women and girls face are deeply rooted in socially and culturally contrived structures which inevitably govern the way human beings function and the way in which women and girls are exploited. Complex sets of interrelated factors mould social, cultural, political and economic structures that influence all aspects of our lives. The GAD approach perceives many of these structures as patriarchal and oppressive to women and thus seeks to alter them as a solution to the development problem (UNIFEM, 1998).

This school of thought attempts to employ a Southern approach to development that is people-centered and based on emancipation through empowerment. GAD sees women and girls as agents of development and their full participation as crucial to sustainable development (UNIFEM, 1998). As a result, part of GAD's strategy involves engaging women in consciousness-raising initiatives to facilitate a process of empowerment which will foster the political will to embark on changing structures that perpetuate unequal gender relations in the household and the local, national and international community.

Until recently, it has generally been assumed that women, men and children have the same relationship with the environment (Rathgeber, 1995). The inextricable link between gender and the natural environment, particularly in the South, has finally been acknowledged by most developmentalists. Yet, because of patriarchal cultural and political norms in most societies, women still participate less than men in making critical decisions about the use and management of natural resources, which they depend on for the care of their families and communities. Ecofeminist Vandana Shiva in her book

'Death of Nature' describes development as a "Western, masculine project of modernisation that has involved the subjugation of women and nature." (as cited in Zein-Elabdin, 1996).

Both Gender and Development, and Ecofeminism<sup>1</sup> rely on a participatory or 'bottom-up' process of development, which is led by the project beneficiaries themselves and in which participation and empowerment are both a means and an end. Marginalised populations (such as women, children and indigenous people) must be incorporated into the development process at every level, including the design and implementation of projects. One of the many objectives central to participatory development is the necessity to create self-reliant groups and associations and increase local decision-making. In planning and implementing development projects, participatory methods help 'outsiders' to better understand local people's perceptions of both problems and solutions. Particular relevance to ecotourism is discussed below (2.4).

### **2.3 The Emergence of Ecotourism**

In order to create a context for the remainder of the discussion, it is essential that the reader have a sound understanding of what ecotourism means, how it differs from conventional tourism, what the central issues surrounding community-based ecotourism are, and why it is necessary to look at gender relationships in this debate.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ecofeminism emerged as one of the environmental movements in the late 1970s. Proponents generally believe that women's subordination is linked to the degradation and exploitation of the earth's resources. While some ecofeminists do suggest that women are innately more protective of the earth than men, others argue that it is a result of women's historical position and material conditions, that they are better situated to lead the movement toward a more just and ecologically-sound world.

Interest in ecotourism in the South emerged as a response to the sustainable development discourse that stemmed from the World Conference on Environment and Development's Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, in 1987. It has since been embraced by debt-ridden, environmentally degraded Third World nations as a strategy for economic growth.

### **Ecotourism versus Conventional Tourism**

Ecotourism is often described as small-scale tourism catering to visitors who express an interest in local natural history and culture and through which a local tourist-based economy builds support for the conservation of natural attractions in the area. Ecotourism is touted as providing better sectoral linkages, reducing leakages of benefits out of the country, creating local employment and fostering sustainable development. Proponents argue that it provides a last resort for small debt-burdened and ecologically degraded Third World countries.

In conventional tourism, the maximisation of profits was the main objective of developers, while the seeking of relaxation and enjoyment was the main goal of tourists. Little if any consideration was given to environmental and social costs incurred by the destination country. By contrast, ecotourism, at least in theory, aims to generate satisfactory profits and continuously maintain ecological resources while fulfilling economic, social and aesthetic goals. Ecotourists travel not only for fun, but also to enjoy natural and cultural attractions. An opportunity to participate in or observe traditional rituals, dances and other practices, for a fee, is thought to promote a revival and new

appreciation for local culture. The profits generated from ecotourism activities are subsequently used to maintain and help protect the natural environment. Other less green industries, such as slash and burn agriculture, logging, hunting and fishing will no longer be necessary or desirable to provide income. Moreover, tourists are offered an 'authentic' natural and cultural experience in the tropics.

Based on these theoretical assumptions, ecotourism prospects have generated enthusiasm from all players. Tourism industries constantly seek remote, pristine and exotic wilderness areas to advertise as the next 'place to go' for a genuine and exciting experience. Environmentalists view ecotourism as a way of convincing governments to conserve land. Indigenous and rural peoples look to ecotourism as an alternative to destructive industries, hopeful that it will create employment options which will enable them to remain with their families and enhance their rural communities. Development agencies are impressed by the potential of ecotourism to conserve natural resources while simultaneously supplementing local livelihoods. (Scheyvens, 2000) Tourists are eager to explore new wilderness havens. And, of course, states regard ecotourism in terms of economic development. As scholar Erlet Cater posits:

The South has turned increasingly toward ecotourism to meet the need to earn foreign exchange without at the same time destroying their environmental natural resource base and thus compromising sustainability (Cater, 1995: 72).

Governments seek to generate revenues from protected areas, species and other natural assets and to lower land management costs. Governments in the South have seized the opportunity to earn desperately needed foreign exchange and to break from the

stranglehold of poverty, debt and dependence. As a result of widespread acceptance of the concept, ecotourism now represents the fastest growing sector of the tourism industry (Cater, 1994: 71).

Of course all of these conjectures are the subject of fervent debate among those who represent different causes and interests. Due to the lack of a clear definition, ecotourism is often used as a marketing tool, rather than a sincere ecological and cultural preservation strategy. This has had severe ramifications for indigenous people, women, children and other marginalised populations who are most at risk from degradation of the natural environment upon which their livelihoods and future survival depends.

Ecotourism in all its forms has increased interaction between tourists and people from small-scale societies, partly due to the fact that tourist agencies often guarantee contact with indigenous peoples. This has had both positive and negative cultural, environmental and social implications for local people. The obligations and dependencies created by tour operators divert locals' time away from traditional ways of life. And, land exploited for ecotourism infrastructure, including ecolodges and conservation areas has led to a shortage of land for slash and burn horticulture, hunting and fishing. This has resulted in numerous and significant cultural changes. Such is the case in many tourist regions in the Philippines (Gonseth, 1988). According to Mark Mansperger:

The tourism industry has facilitated the further disintegration of the people's indigenous way of life. Cash production for the tourism industry has led to commercialisation and individualism in contrast to the indigenous ways of simple living and mutual cooperation. Likewise, the commercialisation of their culture has led to undignified ways of seeking a livelihood such as allowing them to be photographed as souvenirs or to do

their indigenous dance for a fee. This practice was never part of their culture (Mansperger, 1995: 216).

The fact that ecotourism is often described as a trend is worrisome in itself. Trends are capricious and if a community becomes dependent on this new form of development by giving up its old ways, (e.g. subsistence agriculture, small animal husbandry, hunting, fishing, boat building) the results can be devastating when tourists move on to a new destination. Moreover, other unanticipated factors such as political instability, poor planning and management and social conflict over ecotourism benefits will most certainly dissuade potential tourism to the area (Cater, 1995).

Broader environmental changes also pose threats to long-term successful ecotourism development. Global warming may lead to rising sea levels, which in turn may be detrimental to coral reefs and other elements of marine environments. Increasingly, deforestation is leading to droughts, landslides and avalanches. Natural hazards such as hurricanes and volcanoes may annihilate ecotourism attractions. Ecotourism is, by nature, highly dependent on spatially significant, well maintained networks of protected areas.

As many scholars (Scheyvens, 2000; Cater, 1995; Mansperger, 1995 et al.) remind us, ecotourism is a particularly precarious industry. It's true that traditional tourism has been notorious for displacing people from their traditional lands, restricting their access to resort areas, and transforming the traditional sector into a service sector, through which indigenous people, particularly women and children are often excluded or exploited under poor labour conditions. Nevertheless, while traditional tourism has its pitfalls,

ecotourism if not carefully planned and controlled, has the potential to be even more damaging since it relies on fragile ecosystems and contact with traditional cultures living in remote regions, thereby subjecting them to the exploitative and environmentally destructive effects of the industry (Cater, 1999). Also, the life span of an ecotourism venture is entirely dependent on the sustainable use and management of the very resources (both ecological and cultural) upon which it is based. Concentrated visitation to specific ecotourism sites in destination regions with delicately balanced physical and socio-cultural regimes may lead to a high level of deterioration, since these remote areas are particularly susceptible to socio-cultural disruption and ecological degradation.

Mechanisms must be put in place to ensure that local people have direct involvement in planning, implementing and monitoring ecotourist activities that affect them in order that they can become beneficiaries rather than victims of this type of development. One such mechanism would be a change of national policy; one that would shift the responsibility for natural resource management activities such as ecotourism to local communities. Some governments *have* attempted to decentralise control over natural resources which has allowed villages to pursue community-based ecotourism development.

### **Community-based Ecotourism**

According to R. Prosser (1995), community-based ecotourism development is predicated on the following suppositions:

- There are few alternative livelihoods available to poor rural residents.

- Existing sources of employment are not adversely affected because ecotourism complements rather than replaces traditional employment activities.
- Residents can earn benefits with relatively low levels of investment, so little is lost if tourism doesn't generate the expected benefits.
- Income is generated for ongoing conservation activities through ecotourism activities.
- Ecotourism will benefit the community as a whole.

The term "community-based ecotourism" for the purposes of the discussion that follows shall be defined as a special kind of tourism in the South; a kind of tourism that involves a synthesis of three vital components:

- ecological conservation and cultural preservation
- meaningful community participation, including the full and equal participation of both men and women at all stages of ecotourism planning and implementation
- local control and socioeconomic profitability at the community level (Mader, 2000)

Community-based ecotourism has emerged as a significant area of interest in development because of its reputation for being environmentally and culturally sensitive and for promoting local participation. According to the Ecotourism Society, ecotourism is defined as:

Purposeful travel to remote areas to understand the culture and natural history of the environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem; producing economic benefits that make the conservation of natural resources beneficial to the local people (Lindberg, 1991, p.75).

There has been a considerable increase in the number of communities endeavoring to take advantage of the booming ecotourism trade. They are enticed by promises of new

jobs, business opportunities and skill development, and the desire to gain control over the use and management of natural resources in their areas (Ashley & Rowe, 1997, as interpreted in Scheyvens, 2000).

From an ecological perspective, the social well being of communities as an integral part of the ecosystem acquires special significance. Hypothetically, the goal of ecotourism is to improve living conditions through conservation activities. Local participation in ecotourism is a means through which individuals and families can generate a livelihood in rural communities through the sustainable production of goods and services, and provides impetus for environmental protection and restoration as well as a revival of cultural traditions. Most importantly, ecotourism is a vehicle through which to build rural societies currently threatened by environmental degradation and urban migration.

The co-operation and participation of local people is a prerequisite for ensuring sustainability in biodiversity conservation. Local participation gives people a sense of responsibility and ownership in projects and programs that affect them. Economic benefits for local participants provide incentives to protect tourism resources for sustainable use.

When the idea of an ecotourism project emerges within a community, the main concerns local people have are as follows:

- Conservation activities will threaten existing livelihoods by restricting local people's access to natural resources.
- Tourism will have negative social and moral impacts for the community.

- Economic benefits will not be sufficient or shared equitably within the community.

These are issues that need to be addressed at the design stage. Communities need to be involved and informed in order to make decisions that will affect them economically and socially.

Much has been written about the importance of people's participation in development. There is little doubt that local participation in the planning, implementation and evaluation stages of the project cycle is vital to the sustainability of any development project. Community involvement, empowerment and local control are central tenets of this process. Participation must, in fact, teach people the development process and equip them with the necessary skills to plan, execute, manage and evaluate development initiatives so they can control their own lives and secure a living based on the available natural resources.

As Anthony Hall states:

Poor groups must, in order to have an effective voice in policy-making, have some form of bargaining power to oblige governments to take their demands seriously. This may occur through political parties, trade unions, cooperative movements or well-organised and coordinated community organisations. In the truest sense of the word, participation involves the 'empowerment' of the poor so that they may extend their own influence, independently of government direction, on decision-making and related activities of development projects ( Hall, 1995:29).

J. Overton and R. Scheyvens (1999) cite negative examples from the South Pacific (Fiji and Solomon Islands), to illustrate what can happen when ecotourism projects are

imposed without community participation at the design/planning stage. In these cases, outside developers intended to 'integrate' communities into tourism, without ever visiting the "beneficiary" community first to ask what local people needed or wanted. Consequently, resentment toward ecotourism projects built among villagers as problems arose which threatened their livelihoods and day-to-day security. The most common problems included:

- a lack of potable water
- a shortage of building materials for basic shelter
- insufficient sanitation and waste disposal
- a decrease in the quality and amount of available food
- a lack of adequate cooking and laundry facilities
- decreased water and food quality from nearby rivers, lakes and streams
- restriction from conservation areas/ parks thereby limiting access to natural resources

When the design and implementation of development projects tended to exhibit a long-term view of an overall conservation strategy, it was not sustainable. This is understandable since local people are primarily concerned with meeting their immediate needs for daily survival. In some cases where locals have lost interest in ecotourism projects due to a lack of participation, they have sought alternatives such as timber milling, shellfish harvesting and hunting to support themselves. Not only do these activities put pressure on already threatened natural resources, they also require a reinvestment of profits to pay for and maintain livelihood equipment; profits that could otherwise be used for direct consumption. This increases the potential for overharvesting

for pure economic gain, or simply to meet everyday needs (Overton; Scheyvens, 1999). Thus, it has become evident that by neglecting to include local people, environmental and social problems arise; precisely the problems that ecotourism development intends to solve.

The idea of meeting social needs and the achievement of sustainable societies is growing increasingly popular in development theory. Two key concepts underlie this theory. The first is local participation, or development from below. It is based on the idea that poor and otherwise marginalised people must be perceived as the primary participants in the development process, whereby they identify and meet their own needs. The means through which they accomplish this is 'empowerment', the second key concept. Empowerment enables the poor, women and otherwise marginalised groups to become agents of change and improvement in their own lives. "Empowerment is both a means and an end in itself in development and may involve profound political and social change" (Overton and Scheyvens, 199, p.8). The concept of 'empowerment' will be discussed in further detail in a following section.

### **The Dynamics of a 'Community'**

To present a wholistic picture of past and current ecotourism development practices in the South, it is necessary to further analyse the concept of 'community'. It is problematic to assume that a 'community' is a homogeneous, egalitarian unit, and that everyone within it shares the same vision and goals. There exists a power hierarchy in every community, an individual or group of individuals who makes decisions about the implementation of

plans and distribution of benefits from tourism projects. It is quite common for local elites, primarily men, to dominate community-based development initiatives and monopolise the rewards of ecotourism (Mansperger, 1995). As P. Taylor points out that:

To assume that communities will share (cooperatively and equitably) in the production and benefits of the ecotourism product may be excessively romantic. Clearly in all communities there are inequalities which may be exacerbated by the introduction of a somewhat lucrative industry to which all will not have access (Taylor, 1995; in Scheyvens, 2000, p. 248).

In existing community-based resource management (CBRM) programmes, often a representative body is formed to make decisions on behalf of varied members and interest groups within communities. The problem with these 'representative' groups is that there is usually a gender bias, if not a class bias. Scheyvens (2000) has found that the representation of women, in particular, is exceptionally low in decision-making structures because of time limitations imposed by their triple role as reproducers, producers and community managers. Women often have neither the time nor the freedom to travel because of cultural norms that frown upon women travelling alone, or other gender role stereotypes.

#### **2.4 Gender Relations in Community-based Ecotourism Development**

The realities mentioned above provide the rationale for my research in Belize. Because the academic literature about gender relations in ecotourism is very limited, it was my intent to conduct a gender analysis in order to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on this topic.

Regina Scheyvens is one of the few contributing authors who writes about ecotourism from a gendered perspective. According to Scheyvens (2000), community-based ecotourism ventures have progressed with little consideration given to the changes they may induce in gender roles, relations and access to resources. Whereas gender analysis in recent years has deepened our understanding of the impacts of conventional tourism, the influences of ecotourism and its capacity to benefit the residents of rural communities have rarely been analysed from a gendered perspective.

...while some critics of mass, large-scale tourism development have advocated the pursuit of small-scale 'sustainable', 'alternative', 'responsible' or 'appropriate' tourism which is locally controlled, sensitive to indigenous cultural and environmental characteristics and directly involves and benefits the local population, gender considerations have yet to be placed centrally within such a debate (Kinnaird and Hall, 1996: 97, as cited in Scheyvens, 2000: 234).

Correspondingly, Swain (1995: 250, as cited in Scheyvens, 2000: 234) proposes that "Environmental issues in tourism development are a distinct area of research ripe for gender analysis."

Scheyvens (2000) acknowledges that there are cases where women have been empowered by ecotourism, but argues that these instances are rare, primarily due to the fact that their consultation and participation in the planning of ecotourism has been extremely limited. She summarises three reasons why gender issues need to be considered when planning for community-based ecotourism development:

- to ensure that decisions about ecotourism development are made by bodies reflecting the interests of diverse groups of community members, and that these groups genuinely share in the benefits of development.

- to ensure good natural resource management which protects the key resource upon which ecotourism is based; and
- to ensure that ecotourism development benefits from the skills and knowledge of a broad range of community members (Scheyvens, 2000: 236)

## **2.5 Viewing Ecotourism Through an Empowerment Lens**

Empowerment is of particular importance in this exploration of gender and ecotourism literature. It is relevant and significant from a community development perspective, as well as a gender and environment perspective. Ultimately, the goal of community-based ecotourism is to create conditions of self-reliance whereby local people gain the skills, resources and confidence to improve the quality of life for the community as a whole through sustainable tourism.

Despite the positive potential impacts of community-based ecotourism, many authors (deChavez, 2001; Cater, 1998; Scheyvens, 2000; Mansperger, 1995) warn against the dangers of uncritically accepting it as a universal panacea, *especially* for countries of the South that are blessed with a comparative advantage in diverse natural ecosystems and traditional cultures, but burdened with balance of payments difficulties.

...many governmental agencies and tourism academics have been caught up in the 'sexy', supposedly 'new', forms of tourism such as ecotourism and cultural tourism. There is a somewhat mistaken belief that these forms of tourism are somehow ethically superior (Hall & Butler, 1995, p.105, as cited in Scheyvens, 1999, p. 245).

The problems with 'putting all of one's eggs in one (ecotourism) basket' are various. Even in community-based ecotourism ventures that are purported to be locally controlled and

culturally and ecologically sensitive, problems inevitably arise. As was mentioned previously, economic benefits may not be distributed equitably among village members. Scheyvens (1999) warns that we must subject ecotourism to rigorous assessment and suggests that ecotourism must be looked at through an empowerment framework in order to draw out the positive and negative impacts for local people. She argues that for rural ecotourism to be successful, economic, psychological, social and political empowerment must be incorporated into and result from community-based ecotourism initiatives. 'Empowerment' is a process through which people gain the capacity to become self-reliant.

Ecotourism can empower local communities by giving them a sense of pride in and awareness of the importance of their natural resources and control over their own development (Scheyvens, 2000).

It is virtually unavoidable that some members of a community will be excluded, either purposefully or unintentionally, from involvement in and the benefits of ecotourism development yet they still may depend on natural resources for survival. If they are cut off from productive resources (ex. hunting and agriculture) through the establishment of protected areas, they will ultimately be disempowered. Furthermore, the protection of some species may result in a proliferation of animals that cause damage to crops, livestock and people. Scheyvens posits that women are particularly at risk in this situation.

Because women carry out a lot of the day-to-day work in tending crops and they also collect water from areas where wild animals come to drink, they are particularly vulnerable to attacks from these animals (Scheyvens, 1999).

The commodification of cultural rituals may indeed enhance a sense of pride, and respect for local traditions, which could be psychologically empowering for local people. It is important to be aware that women play a central role in the preservation of cultural traditions through their daily activities such as cooking, using natural medicines, supporting religious functions, speaking local dialects, making handicrafts and performing song and dance rituals. (Of course men often play a large part in some of these practices as well, but in many cases, it is men who migrate to cities to work, leaving women behind in villages.) On the other hand, if cultural performances and commitments to tour operators result in local people having insufficient time to tend to crops, hunt and fish or if it interferes with the integral relationship between rural people and their land, ecotourism may have devastating effects on a community (Mansperger, 1995). Moreover, if local people feel that they are somehow inadequate or inferior to tourists, psychological disempowerment may be the result. If tourism is developed in a culturally sensitive manner, chances are good that the outcomes for a community will be positive.

Social empowerment may occur when profits from ecotourism are used within a community to fund social development projects, such as schools, health clinics or improve water systems in the local area. However, when ecotourism displaces people from their traditional lands, or excludes certain members of a community, prostitution, begging and crime may be the consequence. Furthermore, when benefits of ecotourism are not shared equitably, feelings of jealousy and resentment may develop among members of a community (Mansperger, 1995).

In order for a community to become politically empowered by ecotourism, power needs to be decentralised from the national to the community level. Local people's voices and concerns should guide the development process from beginning to end. Most importantly, diverse interests within a community, including those of women and youth, need to be represented through involvement in community and broader decision-making processes (Akama, 1996). According to Scheyvens:

From a development perspective, ecotourism ventures should only be considered 'successful' if they promote empowerment, with local communities having a [substantial] measure of control over ecotourism development and sharing equitably in any benefits that are derived therefrom (Scheyvens, 1999: 233).

## **2.6 Environmental vs. Sustainable Livelihoods Perspective**

It is impossible to de-link community empowerment from sustainable livelihoods. In order to achieve the latter, there must be self-reliance, which derives itself from empowerment.

A number of proponents equate ecotourism with sustainably managed nature tourism and environmental education to support conservation, but fail to include issues around local livelihoods (Scheyvens & Overton, 1999). In the words of H. Thurman:

In Western industrial societies, where large amounts of land are privately or state owned, and where legislation can be enacted to promote conservation and wildlife protection, and prohibit resource degradation, tourism and conservation verge on the symbiotic. This [idealised] view of ecotourism becomes problematic in the context of Pacific Island societies, where economic livelihoods (20% - 80% of real incomes) and cultural integrity depend on the continued use of ecosystems on a sustainable basis, be they forests, the seas, rivers, beaches, reefs, or agricultural and

village lands (Helu Thurman, 1994: 188 as cited in Scheyvens & Overton, 1999: 215).

The above obliges us, as developmentalists, to find a balance to maintain or improve people's lives while simultaneously protecting the natural environment on which they depend. Thus, viewing ecotourism development using a "sustainable livelihoods perspective will be necessary.

Livelihoods are secure only when households have adequate and sustainable access to resources to meet basic needs: adequate access to food, potable water, health facilities, education opportunities, housing and time for community participation and social integration (Frankenberger, 1996).

Sustainable livelihoods (SL) is a concept that was introduced in the Brundtland Report and has gained recognition over the last decade. It has to do with ownership and access to natural resources, basic needs, and secure livelihoods especially in rural areas. 'Sustainable livelihoods' is defined by the UNDP (1999) as the capability of people to make a living and improve their quality of life without jeopardising the livelihood options of others, now or in the future. Livelihoods include not only economic assets, but also natural, cultural, social, political, human and physical attributes.

The objective of the SL approach is to eliminate poverty by trying to comprehend the way poor people perceive their own realities and then attempting to understand how that reality is related to what happens in the rest of society, creating new relationships within and outside of the locality and imagining alternate forms of social transformation. The SL approach emphasises the need to support and protect people's capacity to act and produce. This approach stresses control over natural resources, the need to reassert the

value of indigenous knowledge and the need to develop appropriate technologies and systems of credit. It focuses on the convergence of the security of life of poor people and natural resource management. (UNDP, 1999) Thus, I would argue that the Sustainable Livelihoods approach is relevant and in fact central to the philosophy of ecotourism as a basis for community development.

In order to discern what is responsible ecotourism, it is necessary to look at it through a development lens, and analyse it using a synthesis of a sustainable livelihoods and an empowerment perspective. Social, environmental and economic goals must be considered and one must think about how ecotourism can best meet both the short and long term needs and desires of all people within a community (Cater, 1995).

## **2.7 A Look at Belize, Central America (See Appendix I: Map of Belize)**

Anne Sutherland speaks of Belize as follows:

Belize skipped modernism and went straight to post-modernism. Without ever having developed a modernist economic base, Belize moved into the post-modern technological age. In this context, tourism in Belize blossomed. There are now more tourists coming to Belize each year than Belizeans living there. Tourism is the fastest growing industry in Belize providing a significant growth to the GDP (Sutherland, 1996: 259).

Tourism in Belize was regarded somewhat negatively until the late 1980s. Belize gained its independence from Britain in 1981 and in the years immediately following, most Belizeans perceived tourism to be environmentally destructive, elite-controlled and culturally exploitative, perpetuating patterns of North/South inequality and dependency. Attitudes began to change under the administration of the People's United Party from

1989 – 1993, when in response to the Brundtland Report that emerged from the Earth Summit in Brazil in 1987, “new tourism” was promoted. New tourism was defined by the administration as “respecting and restoring nature, preserving and valuing local culture, and building sustainable development.” Belizean capitalists supported the idea of new tourism as a means for economic restructuring and growth in the service sector. New marketing strategies targeted the international traveller looking for an authentic and natural experience.

What followed was a market shift from conventional mass tourism to flexible individualised travel packages, designed to provide a more authentic, culturally and environmentally sensitive experience. Current tourism policy, according to the “Strategic Vision for Belize Tourism in the New Millennium” focuses on the development and promotion of responsible tourism to “encourage a strong ‘eco-ethic’ to ensure environmental and socio-cultural sustainability, to promote equitable distribution of economic benefits and to develop a strong positive image for Belizeans.” When the Ministry speaks about responsible tourism it is referring to the *management* of the industry rather than the *type* of tourism. The government supports all types ranging from deep ecotourism to conventional mass tourism. It recognises that Belize has many assets including its unique combination of cultural diversity and natural attractions.

Despite its small population, Belize is home to a variety of ethnicities and cultures. The main ethnic groups are Creole, Garifuna, Hispanic, Mestizo, Maya, and English. In terms of natural attractions, the country is well endowed with two highly productive and diverse

ecosystems: the second longest coral reef in the world and tropical rainforests. Most of the population lives in urban areas, therefore nearly seventy percent of the land is uninhabited by humans. Forests are home for jaguars, howler monkeys and more than 500 species of birds. Diverse tropical flora includes 4000 species of flowering plants and 700 species of trees. Belize is rich in history and culture, which can be seen in ancient Mayan ruins and indigenous communities spread throughout the country (Steinberg, 1994).

### **The Condition, Position and Role of Women in Belizean Society**

The Government of Belize ratified the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in 1990, with the commitment that the 30 articles would be considered in all elements of society. By the time the Convention was signed, the Government had engaged in a series of acts to 'integrate' women into the development process. The Government's 'Development Plan for 1990-1994' acknowledges the triple role of women as producers, reproducers and community managers. It stresses the need for social programmes to promote and achieve real social equity, with particular attention directed towards women and youth, and especially to the needs of women in the areas of health, skills training, legal protection and employment conditions (UNDP, 1998).

Despite these intentions, according to information provided by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women Report from 1996, women's underrepresentation in key areas of decision-making is still widely observed in important positions of public administration, civil service and private enterprise. These domains

have features that inhibit women's advancement, such as the policy of seniority over merit as a basis for job promotion, the lack of any affirmative action scheme, and the determined nature of male-oriented 'cultures' within senior management and business structures.

Women have not yet played a decision-making role in other ministerial sectors, such as agriculture and national security, but to a certain extent, have been doing so in such areas as economic development, finance, housing and local government. Some of the obstacles are closely related to the cultural stereotyping that promotes women in social service careers, such as nursing, teaching or clerical positions (UNDP, 1998).

Belizean society assigns a strong value to mothering. In fact, a woman's assigned role is one of production and reproduction. This may account for the high rate of teen-age pregnancy, whereby young women are left fully responsible for the welfare of their children. Thus, it is possible that women have been socialised to see themselves as mothers, more than as wives. Women head 22 per cent of households in Belize and 64 per cent of women, as compared to only 4.4 per cent of men, identified 'home duties' as their primary economic activity (UNDP, 1998).

One of the most serious problems for women in Belize is domestic violence. According to statistics provided by Women Against Violence (WAV), ninety percent of violent crimes against women are committed by their spouse or partner and often result in deaths and disfigurements from mutilations, burnings and beatings. Socially, it is considered

taboo to discuss domestic violence, since women are considered to be subordinate to men, their “protectors”. Police and government officials prefer not to get involved with domestic violence. Legal obstacles make it very difficult for a woman to press charges for rape. There are no laws against marital rape, and in other cases, a woman’s past sexual history is used against her as rape defense (IWRAW, 1996).

### **Gender Relations in Belize**

Women in Belize, regardless of class or ethnicity are subordinate to men in all spheres of life.

The gendered nature of social relations operates at various levels, regardless of ethnic race or status background of women in Belize. The gender expectations underlying the conviction that men are superior to women contrast with the renowned capacities and contributions of women of Belize in the domestic sphere, community and work places. An historical glance at the processes that had reinforced cultural and gender stereotypes help to understand the rooted prejudices against women in the country, while adding to the identification of obstacles in the country to eliminate practices that reinforce inequality (CEDAW, 1996: 11).

Traditional gender role practices and the seclusion of women to the domestic sphere inhibit women from engaging in activities to reach decision-making structures. Political parties do not provide opportunities for women to advance political careers, and there are no incentives for running in elections. In 1993, women accounted for only 6.7 per cent of the candidates. This contrasts with "informal" participation during election times, when women carry out much of the lobbying, campaigning and organizing of constituencies. When women choose to become political candidates for the advancement of women's interests, they generally feel frustrated by the lack of support for gender-sensitive agendas within their own political associations (IWRAW, 1996).

Consequently, women have chosen to create their own organizations (whether non-governmental, women's or community), where they can more actively advance in the reproductive and productive spheres, and exercise their abilities as problem solvers and community leaders. Within such groups, women can also strengthen their natural solidarity networks, their search for collective solutions and their sense of cohesion around gender issues (IWRAW, 1996).

### **Indigenous Women**

In Scheyvens words,

...development initiatives (including ecotourism), which profess to be gender neutral run the risk of disadvantaging and marginalising local women. Many ventures have progressed with scant regard for the changes they may provoke in gender roles, gender relations and access to resources (Scheyvens, 2000: 232).

The majority of women in rural regions of the north, such as Corozal and Orange Walk, are descendants of Yucatecan Maya Mestizo people and of earlier Maya populations. In the southern area of Toledo there are also Maya populations (Ketchi, Mopan). In the northern area, colonialism was mediated by the economic and cultural system based on milpa farming and subsistence agriculture. The milpa, a type of plantation, is a symbol of Maya identity. Milpa farming is more than a commercial activity for Maya people; it is a way of life based on sacred tradition. Before the 1960s, both men and women were in some way involved in the cash economy, and some tasks were also shared by both sexes (ex. gathering firewood and shelling corn). However, the introduction of commercial sugar cane production in the early 1960s brought changes to the way women and men have organized their own spheres of influence. As men became commercial farmers or

seasonal workers in an export industry their activities evolved around co-operatives and production, beyond the kin group. Yet, for women, dependence on the generation of income by the male "breadwinner" reinforced the assigned household role in the domestic realm and male authority. At present, few women from this region are entrepreneurs (Sutherland, 1996).

Indigenous women in Belize are doubly marginalised. They are marginalised in Belizean society as a whole because of their ethnicity, and within Maya society because of their gender. Because, in Maya culture, girls and women are assigned roles that require a greater interaction with the natural environment than men, women's input is necessary in managing and sustaining the natural resource base, on which ecotourism activities depend (Scheyvens, 2000).

## **2.8 Concluding Remarks**

There are many lenses through which to view community-based ecotourism. These range from the neoliberal approach, which emphasises the 'rational use' of human and natural resources, and supports the incorporation of indigenous peoples and women into projects by recognising their contributions to environmental sustainability in an economic sense, to the post-modern view at the other end of the scale. Post-modernism advocates endogenous community self-reliance and rejects all Western assistance or, as proponents (Esteva, Escobar, Sachs, et al.) regard it, interference. Although the combination of GAD/empowerment/sustainable livelihoods that I have proposed incorporates significant elements of the Post-modern approach, I would argue that the support of national

governments, non-governmental and community support organisations (NGOs and CSOs) and outside consultants is necessary and beneficial to the sustainability and success of any community-based ecotourism development programme. These are the general conclusions I came to after reviewing the existing literature. There is a further description of research findings and resulting conclusions in Chapter 4: Conclusions and Recommendations.

## **Chapter III: Notes from the Field**

### **3.1 Belizean Women in Ecotourism**

#### **The Evolution of Ecotourism in Belize**

The National Development Tourism Policy passed by the Belize Government in 1999 supports responsible tourism to guide tourism development. A set of ethical practices defining responsible tourism include a proactive approach by stake holders and partners in the sector to develop, market and manage the industry; environmental stewardship and environmentally based tourism activities; local participation in decision making processes about tourism, and respect for guests as well as between guests and hosts. The PACT (Protected Areas Conservation Trust) is comprised of Government officials and representatives of the Tourist Industry, Village Councils and Belize NGOs. The Trust oversees the management of revenue generated by a conservation fee added to the airport departure tax and charged to all foreign tourists. The fund is used for projects related to biodiversity protection, cultural heritage preservation and community based ecotourism ventures.

Tourism has become a priority in the development plans of the Belizean government, in the hopes that the industry will continue to grow and provide economic benefits for those involved.

Like tourism in other countries in the South, the Belize ecotourism industry has emerged with minimal participation from local people. According to Sue Wheat,

While the tourism industry employs over 130 million people worldwide, local people are typically employed in menial, seasonal and low-paid positions with the more prestigious and powerful positions going to many expatriates working for multinationals (Wheat, 1994: 18).

What struck me most about the tourism industry in Belize, is the exponential number of expatriates and foreign owned resorts, tour operators, restaurants and other businesses. The Belizean people are faced with an uphill battle against inflation and competition with high-end resorts owned by North American and European individuals and multinational companies. I encountered mixed attitudes toward this phenomenon. Some locals are grateful for the employment opportunities that hotels and spin-off services have brought into their communities. Others, especially small business owners, are frustrated and resentful. As Ms. Lydia Villanueva expressed during an interview at her guesthouse in Placencia:

We have to try to control tourism so a lot of people can gain from it. If we don't control it, only the big ones will benefit, so what they need to do is market the big ones and small ones. The Belize government should be helping its people instead of foreign owners. Now, politics plays a huge role in whether people get support for their ventures. They should do something to regulate so that not everyone who comes to Belize should get into tourism, because if they have more money than us to put into it, they can make a better business. We can get loans but we need to have collateral and the interest rate is 15%.

*-Lydia Villanueva, Lydia's Guesthouse Owner*

Over ninety percent of all coastal development in Belize is under foreign ownership (Cater, 1992). The Belize government does not restrict foreign ownership. Substantial import leakages due to a need for mass importation of products for tourist domains exacerbate Belize's economic losses from tourism (Cater 1992; Wheat, 1994). Transnational corporations, such as airlines, construction giants and hotels now dominate

the industry and reap many of the financial gains while local people have been largely excluded from the economic revenues generated by tourism.

As a direct result of unlimited foreign ownership, land prices and costs of goods and services are being driven up yet local incomes remain relatively low. Consequently local people can't afford to enjoy natural resources and struggle to survive due to high rates of inflation. Many Belizeans sell their prime land to foreigners for much needed cash, not realising the appreciation potential of the land. The Belize government has been actively acquiring land for parks and reserves for tourism while displacing local people from former farmlands and hunting grounds with little apparent concern for their survival and needs. Presently 40% of Belize land is protected.

Conservation organizations, such as the Belize Audubon Society, are often designated by the government to look after parks and reserve land. By taking over total control of reserve areas and national parks, and subsequently employing some local people as guides and maintenance staff after cutting them off from their livelihood sources (natural resources, hunting and fishing and other subsistence activities) they often create a relationship of dependency with locals rather than encouraging self reliance. Such groups look at the environment through an economic and scientific neoliberal lens rather than from a sustainable livelihoods perspective.

### **3.2 Case Studies: Rural Women and Ecotourism**

Field research was conducted in four communities in Belize from June - September 2001. Approximately two - three weeks were spent living in each area. As described in Chapter 1.3: Research Methodology and Outputs, the approach adopted was qualitative in nature. A total of 50 interviews was conducted with a non-random sample of people working in tourism-related businesses in the four communities and with members of various women's organisations and conservation organisations. Preliminary surveys and community mapping were utilised as strategies to select women, and some men, of various ages and occupations related to the ecotourism industry. Organisations were chosen based on their relevant social, ecological or political agendas. Where possible, a review of applicable records and documents was also conducted.

The purpose of the research was to examine the ideas and beliefs held by local people, about the growth of ecotourism within their village. It assesses the employment opportunities and constraints for local women in ecotourism and community development and whether or not their participation has led to their empowerment. Through an analysis of the data, the issue of sustainability can be addressed and recommendations made to move toward more sustainable ecotourism, where necessary. The study locations included two Creole and two Maya communities: Bermudian Landing Community Baboon Sanctuary, Placencia, Maya Center, and the Maya mountain villages surrounding Punta Gorda. All sites were chosen in consultation with BOWAND, who provided names of key contacts in some communities.

*Throughout the history of the feminist movement, the primary means of empowerment has been women telling their own stories. In the discussion that follows the reader will hear personal comments from women all over Belize as they have courageously told their stories to me.*

### **3.21 Case Study #1: The Community Baboon Sanctuary Women's Conservation Group (CBSWCG)**

#### **Description of the Research Site:**

Bermudian Landing Community Baboon Sanctuary (CBS) is a completely volunteer grassroots conservation organisation dependent on the participation of private landowners in active farming communities.

The sanctuary is located about 50 kilometers northwest of Belize City off the Northern Highway in Belize district and can be easily visited on a day trip. It exists within an area of tropical broadleaf forest, secondary forest marsh, pasture and other farmland. The region has a long history of forestry and subsistence agriculture dating back to the 1800s. The sanctuary encompasses seven predominantly Creole villages: Bermudian Landing, Flowers Bank, Willows Bank, Big Falls/St. Paul's Bank, Isabella Bank, Double Head Cabbage and Scotland Half Moon. Bermudian Landing is the central village of the sanctuary. It houses the CBS Museum and most tours, activities and accommodations are arranged from here.

#### **History of the Sanctuary:**

The Community Baboon Sanctuary (CBS) began under a voluntary management plan initiated by an American zoologist named Robert Horwich. The site was first visited by

primate researchers in 1981. Studies highlighted high densities of Black Howler Monkeys, one of the few healthy populations in the region. The endangered Black Howler Monkey – commonly referred to as ‘baboons’ in local Creole dialect - is the largest in the Americas and is characterised by a deep and raspy roar that can be heard up to one mile away. The sanctuary is also home to about 200 species of birds, crocodiles, the Central American Turtle, Coatis, Iguanas and a plethora of other species of fauna and flora.

In 1985 Horwich approached Fallet Young, a Bermudian Landing landowner about setting up a sanctuary for the howler monkeys. Young agreed to help Horwich by arranging meetings with the council of each village located within the boundaries of the proposed sanctuary. Jon Lyon, a botanist from New York State University began a survey of the village. He, in conjunction with Horwich and Young, the new sanctuary manager, talked with landowners about drawing up property maps and a management plan. Over 100 landowners in eight villages covering 18 square miles along the Belize River agreed to abide by the plan. Subsequently, new members signed a voluntary pledge which was not legally binding, yet indicated the intent of each landowner, to the best of their ability, to follow the plan while retaining title to their own lands within the sanctuary. After many meetings with village "fathers" they agreed to leave the monkeys' food trees - Hogplums and Sapodillas - and small corridors of forest between cleared fields as aerial pathways for the primates as well as sixty feet of forest along both sides of the waterways.

### **Conservation and Development Goals:**

The conservation efforts of the Community Baboon Sanctuary seek to coordinate the protection of forests and wildlife with the needs of local people. CBS residents are thus encouraged to conserve their natural resources by using them in a sustainable manner. The sanctuary, although initially designed as a conservation plan, has evolved into a scheme for community-based ecotourism development in the area. Employment opportunities and revenues from tourism provide extra incentives for residents to protect the monkeys. According to Young, during an interview in July of 2001, no real convincing was needed to persuade people in the villages to protect the monkeys. The monkeys have never been used as a source of profit and do not pose a threat to residents or their crops. People in surrounding villages have always lived harmoniously with the monkeys.

The Community Baboon Sanctuary has been held by the Belize Government as a model for participatory ecotourism development based on voluntary membership. It has demonstrated commitment to involve riverine residents in protecting the habitat of Black Howler Monkeys (*Alouatta Nigra*).

### **Attractions for Ecotourists:**

The main attractions for tourists to CBS are the howler monkeys, scenic canoe trips down the river to spot crocodiles and iguanas, and the peaceful setting. There are currently two lodges which are both located in Bermudian Landing and several people offering small-scale, lower budget homestays. The lodges are moderately priced ranging from US\$30 -

\$60 per night. There are no restaurants and people staying at the lodges usually eat at the local bar, which doubles as a restaurant for tourists. The restaurant does not have a menu, so a meal must be ordered a couple of hours in advance. There are no souvenir shops, but there is a museum which provides information about the sanctuary and the flora and fauna of the area. The few existing tourist facilities are located in the community of Bermudian Landing.

### **Women's Participation**

Three years ago, the sanctuary was in danger of closing due to poor management and a resulting lack of commitment on the part of the landowners. That is when a group of inspired and dedicated women decided to take control of the situation. Jessie Young - President of the CBS Women's Conservation Group and Management Committee describes the transition:

In 1998, the sanctuary was going to close because there was no money and the staff wasn't being paid...nothing was going on. The men who were supposed to be running it weren't doing anything. The museum building was dilapidated. We had this women's group that was formed to take over the Howler Monkey Lodge, formerly the Jungle Drift Lodge and make it part of the sanctuary. But before we could come up with the money - because we were just in the proposal writing stage to get money - another guy with cash in hand came and bought it. We were really disappointed. But later when the sanctuary closed, I said that we women should try and get a break at it. I asked the ladies if they think we could manage it. Everyone agreed to give it a try. We started having meetings in all the communities and inviting landowners to come. We also handed around a petition and said 'if you want us to do it, please put your signature here saying that we give you the authority to take over the sanctuary.' That was how we got it. They all supported us. In Flower's Bank, there were two men that said, 'I don't know if I have any more interest in this thing again, but since you are women, I will just give it a try. We believe in you and your intentions.' We told them if they just hang in there we are sure to bring the sanctuary back to where it was or even better so that everyone could benefit somehow.

We were already registered as an NGO because the same people who sold the lodge wanted to speed up the process so the women's group would get the proposal, so they paid for our registration. We used that to convince the landowners. We said that we are registered and we are serious. Once we got the petition and committees in place, we wrote the former men's committee a letter informing them that they are no longer authorised to run the sanctuary because the landowners have given us permission. And we gave them a copy of the petition that was signed and everything. They didn't respond. They didn't know what was happening to the sanctuary money...they don't even know who is the treasurer. The president was doing everything. I tried to get documents from the president. I waited two weeks after sending the first letter and then I contacted a lawyer who told me to send another letter and waiting another two weeks for the records and everything. I couldn't take court action because we had no money for it. He changed the account at the bank so I couldn't even get records from them. So we were left with all the old bills and debt collectors were calling and sending us letters but we couldn't pay the money back yet.

~ continued..

Then social security wanted to take us to court or take office equipment away from us that we purchased with a grant. They even called PACT (Protected Areas Conservation Trust) to see if they could. But they couldn't so I told them that we just took over and these aren't our bills, but we will pay them little by little.

We have been working so hard to get transparency back and credibility with funding agencies. We have been successful with three so far: Pact, Programme for Belize (PFB), and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) one is still being decided.

*~ Jessie Young, President of WCG*

The day I left the sanctuary, Jessie Young was awarded the \$100,000 UNDP grant on national television. The money would be used for the completion of a restaurant - the first in the village - as well as numerous other community development projects. So far the women have secured money from PACT and PFB for a jam factory in Isabella Bank, which employs three women, a Creole museum and the only cabanas and restaurant in Saint Paul's Bank, upgrades to the sanctuary museum in Bermudian Landing, the initial construction of the restaurant in Bermudian Landing, basketball courts for community youth and many community services.

The WCG try to involve as many members of the community as possible by having them cook meals and provide accommodations for large groups of students or tourists to the sanctuary. The women have organised free community awareness sessions about drugs, breast examinations and pap smears, and invited doctors to the community who provided eye glasses and free medical attention for those in need. They also hire students to work on weekends during the high season, donate money to families to buy books, have given small loans to people in the community, which some paid back and some did not, and last December, they sent a Christmas card to each landowner with an enclosure of BZ \$50 to help pay their land taxes in January. When landowners are in debt, they try to give them

money to help them out. Jessie concludes with, "We are doing quite a bit with whatever little money we are getting here."

The women I met through the WCG were an inspiration. They have numerous goals for the future. One group member stated:

We want to work on some of the broader issues like health and community development. We want to start a community development fund with profits from the restaurant. We want to give scholarships to landowners' children who cannot afford education. As we put more infrastructure in place, we want to buy and sell people's products so they can get money immediately.

*~Bernice Casasola, WCG member*

To clarify this last point further, several women explained that they would like to have people from the communities grow fruits and vegetables to be used as ingredients in the restaurant. The sanctuary would come and buy directly from them. They also want to use part of the restaurant as a gift shop where local women can sell their crafts and jam from the jam factory. They indicated that they would like to encourage further conservation by recruiting new members - poor people who can benefit from the sanctuary so that they will not be forced to clear more land for farming. These ideas have been met with mixed reactions from women in communities outside Bermudian Landing which is where the new restaurant will be located. Some women feel that Bermudian Landing is reaping all the benefits. The satellite communities want to attract tourists to their villages rather than bringing their crafts and produce to Bermudian Landing to be sold. There is some animosity towards Jessie and Fallet Young and the Women's Conservation Group. This may stem from a lack of trust and a misunderstanding of the intentions of the group.

Accordingly, perhaps clearer lines of communication should be established between the committee and outlying communities of the sanctuary.

While some feel that they may not be reaping benefits directly, they acknowledge that their lives are not worse than before and recognize that some members are benefiting. They hope that they too will eventually be able to participate in some type of tourism business. It seems that with the new management, there are measures being taken to assure long-term support for the sanctuary. The Women's Conservation group is working to address those factors which influence residents' attitudes about the projects, namely the extent of local participation, representative organization, sound management structure, effective management capabilities, fair employment allocations, educational opportunities for community residents regarding the howlers and protection of their habitat and the value of resource conservation for the sustainability of their rural communities. It is a slow process, but from what I witnessed, it is likely that these objectives will be met and there are signs of progress everyday.

The Women's Conservation Group's energy and dedication to the betterment of their communities was impressive and the group was certainly the best example I saw of women's empowerment through ecotourism in Belize.

### 3.22 Case Study # 2: Women in Placencia

#### Description of the Research Site

Placencia, a mostly Creole village of 650 residents is located at the tip of the 26-kilometer Placencia Peninsula, a narrow sandy finger of land separating the Caribbean and Placencia Lagoon in Southern Belize.

#### History of the Village

Over the past decade Placencia has been transformed from a sleepy fishing village to a thriving ecotourism center. Ms. Cordelia Lopez, 74 years of age, provided an interesting account of the history of the village, as she remembers it:

I came to the village in 1942. I was only nineteen or twenty years old. I grew up in Belize City but my mother died in the big hurricane in 1930. She got trapped in the house and drowned so a lady adopted me and that's where I grew up. I came to Placencia for a holiday one time and I met my husband. I moved here, of course, when we got married. Life was very hard out here in those days. The women used to grate coconut and make oil out of it and the men would go fishing. We would preserve the fish by laying it on the ground and drying it. We had no refrigerators in those days. The men would take it to Dangriga or Punta Gorda to trade it or sell it.

I don't remember the year the tourists started to come but the first sign of tourism was when a lady started a motel called the Seaspray and then an American started one over there. They (tourists) came to swim and go out to the cayes (islands). Then people started opening hotels and restaurants.

Placencia has changed a lot since then. There was nothing to do. In 1945, I grated 85 coconuts. I would have two helpers. That was all there was for us to do. Oil was worth \$2.00 a bottle. The men used to take it to Punta Gorda and exchange it for food, but I have never been to Punta Gorda.

But tourism has made life a lot easier. People used to cook with a fire hearth, but now almost everybody has gas. There is no real poverty in our village. To the best of my knowledge tourism has really helped this village.

*-Cordelia Lopez, Elder*

Placencia has seen the most dramatic increase in tourism of all the villages in this study.

At the time of the research there were 23 hotels/guesthouses, 13 restaurants, 8 bars, 17 tour operators and various other tourism related services in the village. Consequently, Placencia has also been impacted by tourism more than the other communities.

Of the 15 people interviewed in this investigation, all said that ecotourism has been very good for their community. Five years ago, Placencia acquired a potable water system and two years ago, a garbage disposal system. According to one resident, both services have improved the overall health and sanitation of the community. There has been a decrease in parasitic infections and other illnesses. Tourism infrastructure and revenues have also brought telephone and internet service to Placencia. The town has two schools, a community center, a bank, a health center, a non-denominational worship center and good roads. Because of ecotourism, women and men can pool their money so homes are more comfortable, people are better dressed and there is a higher quality of food available to meet tourist demand, so there is minimal malnutrition or sickness. People have the money to take their sick children to the doctor at the new health center.

Less optimistic is what seems to be a prevailing feeling amongst business people in Placencia that foreign owners and government ministers may be more concerned with making a profit than supporting local people's environmental and cultural endeavours. In their view current preferential treatment of foreigners over locals may threaten the environmental and cultural sustainability of the ecotourism industry in Placencia. Moreover, what I found particularly disconcerting, is that tourism has become the only form of development in Placencia. While many operations promote themselves as being

eco-friendly, intense competition seems to have relegated ecological concerns to the 'back burner'. Examples include over fishing, clearing of mangroves for shrimp production, catching undersized lobster to meet tourist demand, and more trips to the reef - some of which are run by less than environmentally responsible operators in my experience. There are also more exotic foods being offered at the many restaurants; foods that must be transported from other countries. Moreover, most of the hotels equip all rooms with small refrigerators for guests' convenience and water consumption has risen dramatically due to the daily showering habits of visitors. Such practices have arisen to meet increased tourist demand and are ecologically taxing.

### **Attractions for Ecotourists**

Placencia hosts an array of water-based day trips such as scuba diving and snorkeling on the offshore reef, jungle river trips to Monkey River Town, sea kayaking and swimming. It hosts the best mainland beach in Belize and attracts a wide variety of international backpackers and resort tourists. Placencia itself has few upscale resorts. Most are located on the peninsula before you reach the village. However, most independent restaurants, bars, tour operators and budget accommodations are in Placencia.

### **Women's Participation**

While women are active at all levels of community decision-making and business management, Placencia is the only village of study that has no established organisation for women. Through interviews with several women working in the industry in Placencia, it became apparent that while some own and manage their own businesses, the majority

are owned by men and run by women. Women are generally in charge of administrative duties whereas men act as tour guides, boat operators, dive masters, etc. There are currently programmes offered by the Belize Tourism Board (BTB) in Placencia, to provide training for people who want to work as guides. These courses are open to women, but job opportunities in this area are still scarce for women. They provide no programmes catering to the particular business needs of women.

### **Impacts of Ecotourism**

According to all the women I interviewed, ecotourism has improved the lives of women and their families in Placencia. Even though women are spending many hours at work and they still have the same responsibilities at home, life is easier because now women have gas stoves to cook on and washing machines to do the laundry. Family sizes have decreased as well. Another positive outcome is that youth seem more inclined to stay at home and find a job or return to the community after they finish their college education to look for work in the ecotourism industry.

Ms. Lydia Villanueva has run her own guesthouse for eleven years and has been a member of the village council for fourteen years. Ms. Lydia is also on the water board and has been the President of the Placencia chapter of the Belize Tourism Industry Association for one year. She commented that although BTIA is supposed to be for foreigners and Belizeans alike, the foreigners outnumber the locals. When asked how ecotourism development in Placencia has changed her life, Ms. Lydia responded:

Over the past fifteen years, women are getting more educated and owning businesses of their own, so they can do so many different jobs. Women have a stronger voice in things and the men got to realise it and share it.

In a way it's (women's lives) better. You have a little bit more work, but you are the one who is supposed to organise it so you'll still get some time. But in any business, if you are working for yourself, you put in at least fifteen hours a day. There is always something to do. It's a good way of living because it's independent. I like my business.

Women are more respected now, but before women were respected too by just being a housewife and taking care of the children. It was a good way of life for children because they got a lot of attention.

(As for girls), most want to have a career. It's good and it's bad, because in my days we had our kids young. I was 15 years old so now I am still young.

~ Lydia Villeneuve, Lydia's Guesthouse, owner

Unfortunately, interviews also revealed that not only do traditional household divisions of labour endure, but also that despite women's newfound financial independence, so do other gender disparities. According to one interviewee:

Women's household duties are not changing and domestic violence is rampant. Working women still stay in abusive relationships even though they are the main breadwinners in a lot of cases. For example, many fishermen who on a bad weather day can't go out to sea usually don't offer to help their wives. Instead they go to the bar all day with their friends, while the woman goes to work and when she gets home she is still expected to do all the housework and cooking and childcare. Then the man comes home drunk and beats her if she doesn't cook what he wanted for dinner. It's a symptom of (women's) low self-esteem. Women need training to help build their confidence, skills and self-reliance.

~ Martha Eiley, Dockside Bar, co-owner

Another manifestation of unequal gender patterns is reflected in young men in Placencia. The infiltration of drugs, such as Crack cocaine, appears to have shattered the motivation of youth to lead healthy, productive lives. Drug use is endemic and exacerbates the problem of violence against women. This begs the question: Having achieved some degree of financial autonomy, what is the next step for women in empowering themselves to overcome this destructive cycle?

### **3.23 Case Study #3: Maya Center Women's Craft Cooperative**

#### **Description of the Research Site**

Maya Center is situated at the entrance to the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary, a Jaguar Reserve, located below the jagged peaks of the Maya Mountains Cockscomb Range in the Stann Creek district of Belize. The village is located beside the Southern Highway, which was in the process of being paved as I was conducting my research there last summer. Maya Center has a population of about 300 residents. Most people are subsistence farmers but some are able to supplement their income through tourism-related businesses such as tour guiding, offering homestays, providing meals for researchers, students and tourist, selling crafts, etc. The village is laid out in a square grid, with a series of dirt roads and small, mostly thatched- roof houses. There is one school, a well, a bar/shop and two lodges for tourists.

#### **History of Maya Center**

Maya Center was established as a community for the Maya people who were displaced from lands where the Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Reserve was set up in 1984 by the Belizean government. The area was declared a forest reserve and a 'no hunting' area in 1984 to protect the jaguar and an abundance of other resident wildlife. In 1986, a small portion of the forest reserve was given sanctuary status, which afforded it complete protection. The sanctuary expanded in 1992 to include the entire forest reserve. Currently it encompasses 100,000 totally protected acres. That means no one is permitted to live,

hunt or set foot on the reserve unless they do so with the permission of the Belize Audubon Society, the organisation in charge of the reserve.

The people of Maya Center were requested to give up their land in order to create a protected area for the jaguar. They were offered incentives from the Belize government, which included resettlement land and assistance and were promised employment as guides at the reserve and at the proposed visitor center to be located in the new village of Maya Center. The people agreed to move; many reluctantly, others hopeful about possibilities offered by tourism. During the course of the interviews conducted in Maya Center in August 2001, I came to inadvertently discover a deep resentment among many residents toward the Belize Audubon Society, and about the relocation scheme which they claimed would have occurred even if they had not agreed to move. It is evident that the community is divided, with some members working for or in co-operation with the BAS, and others actively resisting its occupation of a land they once roamed, hunted and farmed. Disgruntled comments about the overall situation with BAS and the Belize Government, however, came from members of both camps, but those who accept their fate are trying to make the best of what they perceive as an inevitable situation.

### **The Women's Co-operative**

The Maya Center Women's Craft Co-operative was formed in 1986. It now has 42 members. The building for the craft shop was funded by BAS. At present, it is used as both a visitor center and a venue from which crafts are displayed and sold. Slate carvings of Maya gods and Belizean animals are sold there, as are beaded bracelets, necklaces,

handbags, traditional Maya clothes, and baskets. The women hope that in the near future they will be able to begin conducting craft-making workshops for student groups and tourists who come to do research or to visit the reserve. Women in the co-op also participate in other tourist activities. Some offer homestays, perform cultural rituals such as traditional music and dance, others provide meals, and one woman, Aurora Saqui is a natural healer.

According to several members of the group, working as a co-operative was not intrinsic in Maya society. It has been a struggle for the women to learn to work together. There are still problems, but they are trying to find solutions to overcome them. Some problems stem from competition in sales and disagreements over decisions.

There are three categories of members in the co-op. The category of membership determines the amount one must contribute to the group savings fund. Active members voluntarily contribute their time to work every second day at the shop on a shift schedule; therefore they are only required to pay 10% of their earnings. As a gesture of courtesy, elderly members also pay 10% but are not requested to take part in the managing of the shop. Dormant members make crafts at home but because they do not assist with shop operations, they are required to pay 20% of their craft revenues to the group fund.

Profits from the group savings fund are used for maintenance of the shop. Some money is also allocated for needs of the local school, such as to pay teachers' salaries in the event that they need extra funds. As members, women decide collectively how the money is to

be spent. Sometimes a small gift of appreciation is presented to each member at the end of the year.

### **Empowerment of Women**

Most members agreed that the women who earn money through crafts are able to decide how it will be spent. This has led to a decreased dependence on their husbands. During a focus group discussion, one woman stated:

Some women in my village, they are not so strong to hold on to the money. All the money they make, they must give it to their husbands, but not many. It's a rare case that may happen, but most of the women here they have their own accounts so when they get their cheque they save whatever they want and buy whatever they want. It helps them because they are always looking out for the need at home – the need of their children. So if the husband is not doing what he is supposed to do - supporting the family - the woman can go to the bank and buy whatever she wants to. That's one of the reasons why this group is still active.

*~ Federika Saqui: Chairperson of Women's Group; Vice Secretary of Village Council*

The women of Maya Center indicated that ecotourism has not really changed women's and men's roles within the household. As before, women are responsible for cleaning the house, preparing meals and looking after children. Men help collect water and firewood and are primarily responsible for farming.

Women are gradually breaking through long-established barriers to participation in public life. Evidence can be seen of this in the current village council which, for the first time, includes one woman, alongside six men. Some women are running their own businesses and there is an organisation of women who run the Cockscomb Visitor's center and who have formed a craft cooperative.

## **Impacts of Ecotourism on Women's lives**

All of the residents of Maya center who were interviewed said they believe tourism has been good for the village and for them personally. It has allowed them to open their own bank accounts with money they have earned from selling crafts, providing homestay accommodations or cooking meals for tourists. This has enabled many women to feel more independent and confident. It has also allowed them to meet new people and share their culture with them. It has created a new sense of cultural pride. At the same time, tourism has contributed to a loss of culture. As one young member explained,

It (tourism) is good. They (tourists) help in many ways. The only way they don't help us is that they bring their own culture and then they (Mayans) want to use the other people's clothing and they don't want to use their own clothes anymore. They feel that the other ones are more important than their own. It helps us to so we don't have to depend on just our husbands and parents. We can also depend on our money by selling our arts and crafts.

*~ teenaged girl, name withheld*

When asked about their needs and the future goals of their organisation, one woman replied,

We need to understand the value of our culture and even our food. Education would help people to understand the culture. Since they have the income now, they don't appreciate the old way of living from way back. I think it should work both ways...like keeping, maintaining our culture and promoting the economic benefits for families, communities and the country.

*~ Alberta Saqui, Women's Group Member*

Currently, the group is awaiting construction on a new building, which will become the new craft center. The Belize Audubon Society will add BZ \$40,000 to the women's \$15,000 for the materials and construction. They are hoping to use the existing shop as a place to present workshops or possibly as a restaurant.

All of the women agreed that training would be most beneficial in helping them open and maintain a locally run restaurant or hotel. They are extremely concerned about the possible development of an exclusive resort hotel in the jaguar reserve. They feel that if this were to happen, the tour buses that now must stop to pay entrance fees to the reserve at Maya Center would eventually pass straight through to the full-service resort and their community would be excluded from revenue-generating activities.

They expressed a need for volunteers or intensive programmes to help them with computer training, proposal writing, price controlling on crafts, marketing (creation and distribution of pamphlets), and setting standards for accommodations. While non-governmental organisations have offered skills training workshops in the past, all the women concurred that they were useless. They were too brief and failed to provide opportunities for the women to practically apply their new skills so they were soon forgotten. Or, in some cases, the sessions were not pragmatic because the women themselves did not have access to the resources they needed to employ the skills; for example, computers.

### **3.24 Case Study #4: The Maya Women of Toledo District**

#### **Description of the Research Site**

The Toledo district of Southern Belize comprises 4,413 square kilometers with many isolated Maya Indian villages surviving on subsistence farming. A total of 4,770 people live in Punta Gorda while 16,800 people reside in the rural areas. The Mopan and Kekchi Maya inhabitants of these mountain villages surrounding the town of Punta Gorda are a unique case. They are certainly the most impoverished group in Belize and most neglected by the government. Their geographical location places them at a disadvantage in terms of development projects. They are physically isolated from the rest of the country and the Toledo district is not a priority for tourism development, by government or conservation organisations.

#### **History of the Area**

The people of the Toledo region have long survived on subsistence farming through slash and burn agriculture techniques that have recently been criticised by environmentalists for contributing to the problem of disappearing rainforest and ecosystems in the area. Yet, as I observed huge tracts of land from the air that had been clear-cut by a Malaysian logging company, I had to question the credibility of those accusations. In fact, it would seem that the livelihoods of the Maya people have been threatened by the multinational logging industry, making them victims of ecological destruction rather than as the perpetrators they have been portrayed to be by some conservation organisations.

## **Ecotourism in Toledo**

The most active tourism development in the area has been facilitated by the Toledo Ecotourism Association (TEA). Initially, the TEA was set up in four Maya villages and in 1995, it expanded to include nine, and by the time of this research study, ten communities. It is operated by an association of Mopan and Kek'chi communities. The association enables indigenous people to plan, control and profit directly from ecotourism. The scheme employs service and food providers, tour guides, musicians, tour coordinators, storytellers and dancers. Locals are trained in cleanliness, hygiene, making of beds, putting up mosquito nets, construction of toilets, cooking, boiling drinking water and reading visitor reports.

The objectives of the TEA are :

- to preserve the culture and values of the people of the Toledo district; to protect and respect both the natural environment and the quality of life through controlled tourism; to revitalise and strengthen traditional arts and crafts and protect the natural resource base in a sustainable manner; to provide beneficial tourism that ensures just returns to the local community based on a rotational system for fairness; and to provide an opportunity for cross-cultural understanding and knowledge sharing between guest and host

In early June, shortly after I arrived in Punta Gorda, I decided to participate in the Toledo Ecotourism Maya Guesthouse Programme. I felt that in order to truly understand the context of where the interviewees were coming from, it would be necessary for me to

experience it firsthand. I wanted to do so before hearing too much gossip about the communities and people within them. Punta Gorda was swarming with volunteers, and rumour abounded. I wanted to go in without bias and with an open mind. I joined a woman I had met from New Zealand for the guesthouse excursion, after being advised by a woman from another NGO that it might be wise to go with a companion on the weekends, when alcohol flows freely among the young men in some of the villages. This is an account of my experience on the TEA guesthouse programme:

We took the bus to San Antonio, a village of 1222 inhabitants occupying 230 households, located in the mountains beside a river and surrounded by rainforest. Upon our arrival, we asked directions to the village leader's home. We were greeted with enthusiasm by Marcus Ack, his wife Maria and two daughters. The Ack home was similar to most in the village: a one-room structure with dirt floors and a wood hearth on the floor for cooking over an open fire. Hammocks were strung in the center of the room for sleeping. We were given Kool Aid made from boiled well water and asked what tours we would like to take. We indicated that we would like to take a tour of the village with one of the local women. We said we were also interested in the jungle/cave/canoe tour. It was strongly recommended that we should do the latter, since there was not time to do both, and before we knew it, everything had been arranged. The village leader would be our guide and we would leave in fifteen minutes. One of his little girls followed us across the road to the guesthouse, chatting eagerly with us. When we arrived she asked us for a pen, but we told her we hadn't brought any with us.

Before we set out on our jungle hike, there seemed to be some confusion as to the price of the tour. We were asked to pay more than what was quoted in Punta Gorda at the TEA office. We told our guide that we needed to clarify the price before setting off into the jungle. Reluctantly, he assured us that the price would be as quoted. The tour lasted three hours. It consisted of a one-hour walk along the river and a half-hour trip into a cave. We returned down river in a hollowed out mahogany canoe. That evening we were to have dinner at another family's house. We were asked if we could eat meat, and replied that we were vegetarian, but that chicken or fish would be okay. When we arrived at the house for our meal, we found a woman sitting in her kitchen cooking pork and rice for us. We suggested she save the pork for her family and ate only rice - at US\$7 a plate. The woman's children and husband eventually returned home. They sat in hammocks and the husband talked with us while we ate. The woman sat submissively beside the stove. The family waited until after we left to have their meal.

The village leader's daughter was waiting outside to walk home with us and asked us for a tip when we returned. After all that had happened, this made us extremely uncomfortable, and we politely refused her request but thanked her for her friendship. Not long after, there was a knock at the door of our hut and the village leader's wife asked us to come and look at the crafts next door. We told her we would love to have a look but we may not be able to purchase anything. The crafts started at \$35, everything was priced in American dollars. We felt a great deal of pressure to buy something, but did not have enough money. The women became hostile toward us and asked us to settle up our bill for everything else immediately. The bill was much more than what we had been quoted. This resulted in an uneasy situation for everyone. That night we returned to our cabin at seven PM. We were not invited to partake in any village activities so we decided to retire early. The next morning we returned to Punta Gorda on the 4:30 AM market bus. Maria Ack and her daughters were also on the bus, but refused to reply to our "good mornings".

When I returned to Punta Gorda, I went straight to the TEA office. Through the reading of random visitor reports dating back to 1990, I discovered that the situation we faced was not uncommon. While some visitors raved about their adventures in certain villages, many of the concerns and disappointments we experienced had been faced by others. This, in my opinion, is one of the shortcomings of the TEA. There seems to be a lack of communication among administrators, which has been exacerbated by the recent division of staff and the resulting separate offices. Unfortunately, the Maya people may suffer the consequences of the instability within the organisation.

A thorough review of TEA documents compiled over the last decade reveal a process of development whereby the specific needs of women and projects designed for women have been largely ignored or neglected. In spite of the TEA's intentions to be inclusive, women do not hold high level positions within the association, nor do they participate in meetings as frequently as men. Moreover, they have no specific gender policy in place. I would argue that this deficit threatens the sustainability of the ecotourism programme in Toledo. Because, in Maya culture, women are assigned roles that require a greater interaction with the natural environment than men, women's input is necessary in managing and sustaining the natural resource base on which ecotourism activities depend (Scheyvens, 2000).

From July 20-31, 1998, a survey was conducted by the Toledo Maya Women's Council with the assistance of UNICEF and other NGOs which revealed that an extremely low education level exists among women in the region. Only 29.5% of the total women

surveyed finished primary school while 70.5% did not attend school at all. Other problems that were identified included poor communication, limited transportation, weak organisations, lack of market and credit facilities for groups, low levels of social conscience and solidarity, poor leadership skills and political manipulation. Language barriers, illiteracy, discrimination and isolation also limit their access to services. Villages are distant from one another and inaccessible during the rainy season. These factors prohibit Maya women from becoming participants, decision-makers and leaders within their communities. They also prevent them from organising and networking with women in surrounding villages. Training has been offered by a number of organisations such as Belize Enterprise for Sustainable Technology, Fahina, Help for Progress and The United Nations Development Project, among others, in the areas of crafts, baking, cooking, guesthouse management, rice hulling, etc. However, there have been no efforts to establish a permanent venue in Punta Gorda through which women can display and sell their goods. Many women cannot afford market stalls and must resort to begging tourists in the streets, restaurants and hotels to buy their crafts. One woman whom I met selling crafts on the beach in Placencia described her situation:

I used to sell crafts at Golden Bank (near her Toledo district village), but now I don't. There are more tourists here. I usually come 2 or 3 times a week. I leave at 5:15 AM on the bus and I get to Independence at around 6:30. Then I have to take a fifteen minute ferry to Placencia. Sometimes I make a profit but some days I don't make none because I have to pay for the bus and the boat.

*~ Isabella Coc. Medina Bank Villave*

Unfortunately, Isabella is one of the women who faces resentment from hotel and restaurant owners as well as tourists in Placencia. I asked a member of the village council what could be done to deal with the current situation. She replied that they were going to

require the women to rent a stall at the market. The problem with the proposed alternative is that the women (and a few men who come to sell crafts made by their wives) will be charged a space fee on top of their transportation costs. This may further prohibit them from making any profit. On the other hand, sales may be increased, which might, in turn, increase their profit margin.

In Punta Gorda, often 'sick' babies and small children are used to elicit sympathy from tourists. These practices perpetuate racial discrimination and intolerance toward Maya women by non-Maya Belizeans and foreign tourists. This problem could be alleviated by helping the women open a craft shop in Punta Gorda and possibly another in Placencia. Not only could this shop provide a space from which Maya women could sell their wares, it could also be used as a cultural center which would promote tourist interest and pride in Maya heritage. The spin-off benefits would include public interaction skills, heightened self-confidence and esteem, business-management abilities and increased respect from non-Maya customers. Perhaps the Maya Center Women's Craft Cooperative could be used as a model.

## **Chapter IV: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **4.1 Conclusions**

In an era of rapid globalisation, where new technology has made it possible for travellers to access even the remotest corners of the earth, and tourism has become the world's fastest growing industry, it is essential that we address issues of ecological and cultural sustainability. In Belize, where ecotourism arrivals have increased by 65% in four years (1996 - 2000), it becomes crucial to confront these concerns. Sustainable development is dependent not only on environmental education, but also on the capacity and will of the people who will be directly affected by it. Rural women, especially in the South, are the ones most dependent on the natural environment and thus most adversely affected by its degradation. Through ecotourism - now more than ever - rural women are making a gradual shift into the employment sphere. In this research, I have attempted to explore what roles they are fulfilling. What opportunities and constraints do they face? How has it impacted their lives and their children's lives? Have women become empowered through their involvement in ecotourism development ventures? In looking at Belize as an example, I would have to conclude that in some ways they have. Involvement in ecotourism development has been a first step in empowering rural women, but there are many remaining steps in their journey towards equality and equity.

Clearly, ecotourism has created numerous employment opportunities for women, although many tourism jobs are gender segregated. Men tend to own businesses, whereas women take care of the day-to-day operations of those businesses. Women are generally

responsible for most administrative tasks and their roles also include cleaning and cooking for tourists. Men are frequently employed in the industry as tour guides, dive instructors, restaurateurs, and bar owners. Of course there are exceptions to this trend and according to several women interviewed in all four communities, more and more women are starting to become active in the public life of their villages and own their own businesses. Some of the women interviewed generate more income through ecotourism related jobs than their husbands do.

While employment benefits both men and women, women's work at home has generally not been alleviated to compensate for the hours they now work outside the home. Although financial independence can be seen as a step toward empowerment, full emancipation is restricted by limitations on their time resulting from unchanging household divisions of labour and the low status attached to 'women's work' in the household. Domestic abuse remains a major problem in all of Belizean Society, and in many cases the efforts of women (within both the household and the community) are undermined by men's authority, substance abuse, and monopoly over certain job markets.

Many young women shouldering responsibility for several children, are unable to seek employment, and as a result many stay with abusive partners for financial security or live in poverty. There is some evidence of sex tourism in Belize, though it exists more in beach resorts such as Ambergris Caye and Caye Caulker, than in rural eco-adventure tourist communities. Placencia, however, attracts a diverse range of tourists and travellers and substance use is high, thus in my opinion, it has the potential to attract prostitution. If

young women continue to be excluded from skills training opportunities, it is possible that they will fall victim to the ills of prostitution in the future.

There seems to be an incredible strength surfacing among women in Belize. In many, but not all regions, they are actively organising to fight against injustices based on gender discrimination in the home and in the workplace. One such organisation is BOWAND. They have made great strides in raising awareness about the inequities faced by women in a male dominated society. Groups such as BOWAND are fundamental in bringing about social change. Women need to have voice in the development of their communities. In Belize, there is evidence that this is beginning to happen.

Based on the nature of qualitative research, these findings are impressionistic and may be subject to weaknesses. As Bruce Berg cautions,

As with all analytic strategies, strengths and weaknesses are associated with each approach. The most important problem commonly associated with qualitative data of any type is the question of confidence in the accuracy of suggested patterns (Berg, 2001: 164)

Since the focus of qualitative research is depth rather than scope, the reader must make judgements based on fewer representations of the population. Conversely, there are strengths to the qualitative character of this project. Its depth provides a profound insight into how women are thinking and functioning in the villages, an understanding one cannot realize through quantitative data alone.

A follow up of quantitative data is desirable, as it was not a part of this particular study. But because my findings in Belize are supported by substantial literature as shown

throughout the report, it is my prediction that subsequent quantitative data will not reveal different findings than those included here, rather that it will serve to supplement existing qualitative information.

## **4.2 Recommendations**

While I recognise that local people should ultimately decide what is best for their communities and determine the path of their own development, I have come to believe that in order to participate competitively in the tourism industry, rural communities need outside help in order to develop tourism to its fullest potential. Because tourism is based on outsiders coming in to stay, eat and participate in aspects of village life, a consultant who is both familiar with the needs and desires of different types of tourists and willing to learn about the needs and desires of local people would be well worth including into a planning, implementation and evaluation committee. I came to this conclusion when three out of four communities I visited for research purposes had a less than steady flow of tourist traffic coming in, and I began to see a pattern. All three, in fact were caught in a similar 'catch 22' situation, where the accommodations, tours and eating establishments were priced to suit a 'tourist' budget, with an average room rate of \$40.00 US but practically and aesthetically would only appeal to a 'traveller' - a terminology I use synonymously with 'backpacker' - typically on a \$10 - \$15 US per night budget.

At one of the hotel/cabanas where I stayed, the sheets had not been changed and were visibly dirty and the room had not been swept out. There were no clean towels and no fan in the room. In another, fresh water, coffee, cream and sugar were advertised in the price,

but were not available. The sheets and towels were not changed for the entire ten days of my stay, nor was the garbage emptied or the room swept. In yet another place, I was bitten by bedbugs, and at still another, there were old empty liquor bottles and garbage in the room, and only river water to bathe in. These are not conditions that will draw the type of tourists they are priced for. Furthermore, the tours were extremely expensive for international backpackers, who are likely be the only ones interested in travelling down a river sitting on the floor of a leaky dugout canoe. Handicrafts were highly priced in all cases and many were not easy items to transport in a backpack or suitcase (i.e. fragile baskets, heavy slate carvings). In some cases, crafts may have to be adapted to the desires of the tourists. If traditional crafts are not selling, a new assortment of items, using the same techniques must be tried. This is also a way of protecting one's culture, while offering the tourist something authentically Mayan.

In many countries in which I have travelled, accommodation and tour brochures were distributed throughout the country in hotels and guesthouses. Belize is geographically a small country, yet unless local businesses are featured in the Belize Tourism Industry Association (BITA) guide, which caters mostly to foreign and locally owned upscale resorts, most tourists never hear of them. Even travel writers, such as those from Lonely Planet and Rough Guide, do not often venture far off the beaten path to discover the small ecotourism 'gems', and thus they tend to promote the already-known establishments. A network of small-scale, budget guesthouses, eateries, etc. catering to backpackers would be much appreciated by those on the 'gringo trail'<sup>2</sup>. Backpackers,

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<sup>2</sup> The 'gringo trail' is what is referred to by international backpackers as the route they take to travel through Central and/or South America. Latinos often refer to North American and European tourists as 'gringos'.

when asked, are often willing to drop off pamphlets or posters at their next destination. This strategy has significant and low cost marketing potential.

As mentioned in Chapter III, in order to alleviate begging on the streets, in restaurants and outside hotels, Maya women, especially in Toledo district need to have a venue, a permanent shop from which to display their craft making techniques and to sell their finished products. Practical and comprehensive skills training based on a needs assessment conducted in cooperation with each village would be most beneficial in helping women to learn how to help themselves. The women's group that has been most successful in securing funding for projects is the Community Baboon Sanctuary Women's Conservation Group. This is in large part due to the fact that Jessie Young's son is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in environmental conservation at the University of Connecticut. It was he who taught his mother how to effectively write proposals, a skill which has been paramount to the accomplishments of the WCG.

With the help of NGOs local women can identify their needs and desires and subsequently organise to lobby for policy changes and financial assistance from the government. NGOs can also be helpful in drawing broader attention to the problems and concerns of rural people. Moreover, they have the capacity to provide vital communication and technological resources, assistance with setting up credit and loan services, and links to outside professional consultants. NGO staff and/or professional consultants in areas such as biology, education, business, law, environmental research, gender training, skills training, sanitary food handling and preparation, and infrastructure

assessments such as accommodation and waste disposal requirements can help identify potential problems and solutions especially in the planning stages.

Generally speaking, one fundamental problem arising in communities involved in ecotourism in rural Belize is an increasing number of subordinate relationships between conservation groups (many of which are Northern-based) and local people; relationships that are encouraged and supported by the Belize Government. Environmental organisations that try to 'manage' people and the areas where they live, often end up creating a situation of dependence, whereby local people have little control over their own lives. This seems to be true in the case of Maya Center and its relationship with the Belize Audubon Society. Rather than displacing people from their lands and excluding them from the process, eco-organisations should facilitate the empowerment of the local residents in order that they can become self-governing. The Community Baboon Sanctuary and, to a lesser extent, Placencia are examples of communities in charge of their own destinies. Their conservation efforts are self-managed and voluntary and enable locals to continue traditional means of subsistence, while cautiously searching for less ecologically taxing ways of life. For instance, in CBS, 50% of all species is protected, 25% goes 'to the table' and 25% is for the pet trade. This compromise ensures that people still have enough resources to survive while encouraging people to engage in tourism related businesses.

Conservation groups must open their minds to learn more about the needs of rural people and seek to create a balance between nature preservation and people's needs by moving

toward a sustainable livelihoods approach to environmental conservation. This is essential for the healthy survival of rural societies.

The other tremendous challenge rural Belizeans face is to change the attitudes of governments, tour operators and investors to encourage them to think about long-term sustainability rather than short-term profit. Conscientious investors and tour operators should work with local communities and local tourism structures and as of yet, I have seen little evidence of this happening in Belize. Tour operators must become knowledgeable about village life and ecology and integrate an educational component into their work. As part of a tour package, visitors should be encouraged to purchase items directly from village people and local markets (rather than from hotel souvenir shops) and be made aware of how they can contribute to conservation efforts at any given site. They should also be informed about respecting local customs and appropriate behavior in the destination area.

Community involvement in ecotourism in the South can be very effective in economically marginalised areas. It encourages the careful use and management of natural resources by local people, and enhances their control over the development of their surrounding region. It should not, however, be the only form of community development in an area, given the fickle nature of the tourist agenda and the vulnerability of natural attractions to adverse weather conditions and other circumstances beyond local people's control. (I am extremely sorry to report that only a couple of weeks after I returned home from Belize, Hurricane Iris wiped out 90% of the tourist facilities in

Placencia - one of my communities of study. In fact, some of the women I interviewed were among the many who lost their businesses.) For these reasons, tourism should provide alternatives to ecologically destructive practices and generate incentives for conservation and cultural preservation, while supporting other existing socio-economic livelihoods to improve the quality of life of all community residents.

In order to ensure true cultural and environmental conservation in tourism, a standard definition of ecotourism, and practical gender-sensitive guidelines based on lessons learned from various communities from different regions in the world, must be composed and established within the tourism sphere. This will necessitate an attitude convergence based on compromise, co-operation and partnership between local people, governments, environmental and other non-governmental organisations, investors and tourism operators in the industry.

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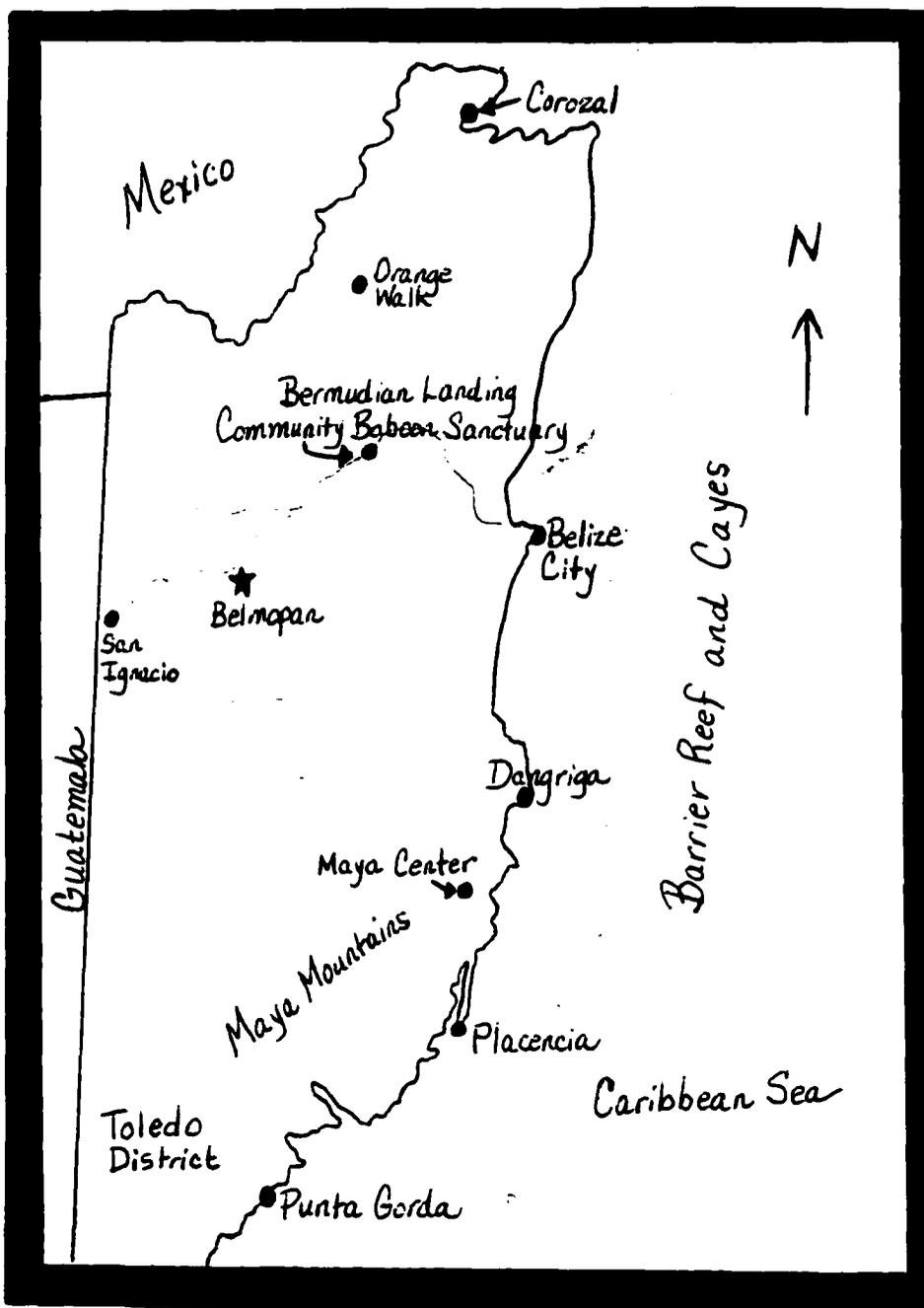
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**Appendix 1: Map of Belize**



## ***Appendix 2: Gender Training Workshops***

**Day 1, Monday July 23, 2001**

### ***Exploring Power and Power Relations***

#### **Hour 1: Distinguishing 'Sex' from 'Gender'**

1. Introduction to workshops (5)
2. Warming up
  - a. Joyce (10) Brainstorming Activity  
Using newsprint and the labels "Gender and Sex", ask women to think about words that come to mind for each concept.
  - b. Cait (10) Sex or Gender: Categorising phrases  
GENDER (things that can be changed\_  
SEX (biological characteristics – unchangeable)  
Women put sentences under the proper headings.
3. Role play:  
Number the women off into 4 groups. They will each choose a leader. The leader will draw a scenario. Each group has 15 minutes to prepare a skit. We will go around to each group of 4 and give them some suggestions. Each skit will be followed by a discussion. (Total discussion time: 25 minutes)  
Look for common patterns of power (self-esteem, guilt, gifts...)

#### **Hour 2: Exploring Power from a Personal Perspective**

1. Think of something/someone they have power over. Why do they have that power?  
Ask some women to share (?)  
  
Flip Chart with definitions: Power to, Power within, Power with
2. Group Activity- After discussing each of the above definitions, the women in 3 groups will try to come up with everyday examples of each definition.
3. Conclusion: Feedback. What did they learn? What did they like and dislike?

## **Gender Training Workshops (continued)**

***Day 2, July 24, 2001***

### ***Women in the Workplace***

1. Introduction (5)
2. Warm up activity (?)
3. Divide into 2 groups for case study activities. Look at case studies #1 and #3 . In their groups women will discuss and present each case study

Case Study #1: Equal pay for equal work. (tie into Minimum wage campaign)  
Women discuss feelings and why they should get = pay for = work.

Brainstorm suggestions for trying to lobby for equal pay with the help of BOWAND.  
(Protests? Go to Minister of Labour?...)

Case Study #3: Group II: Conditions under which women work (Garment factory, shops, offices, etc.)  
Different conditions exist for different places. As women working together, what can we do to address these serious problems?

*10 minute break*

Case Study #2: Volunteer participants will dramatise a scenario about sexual harassment in the workplace. Discuss experiences and strategies.

4. Conclusion – Feedback

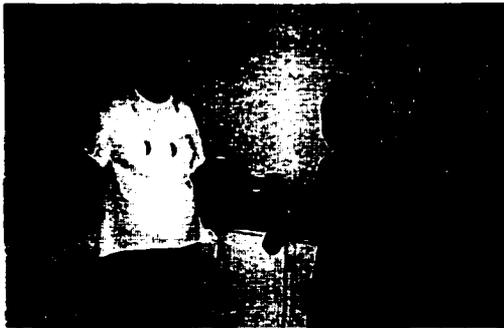
### ***Appendix 3: Photos***

Photo 1:



*Bernice Casasola, of the Community Baboon Sanctuary Women's Conservation Group, demonstrates how women used to hull rice at the Creole Cultural Center in Saint Paul's Bank.*

Photo 2:



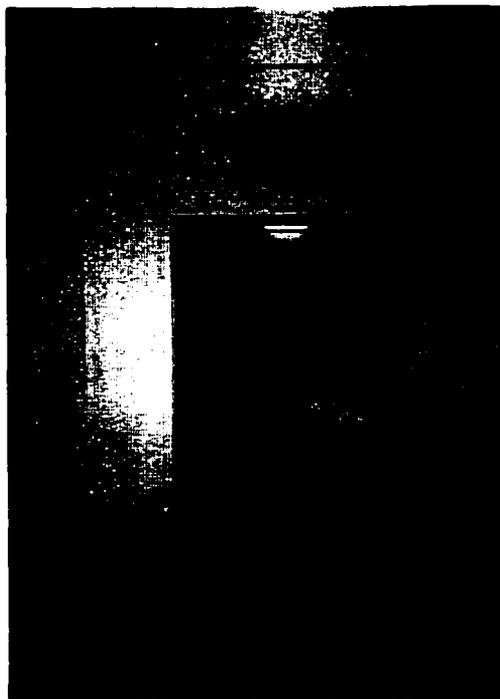
*Marcia Banner and co-worker at the Isabella Bank Jam Factory, Community Baboon Sanctuary.*

Photo 3:



*Ms. Lydia Villeneuve and myself outside Lydia's Guesthouse in Placencia.*

Photo 4:



*Ms. Merlene Bernard outside her restaurant in Placencia.*

Photo 5:



*Focus group session with Maya Center village women.*

Photo 6:



*Members of Maya Center Women's Cooperative display crafts in traditional clothing.*

Photo 7:



*Toledo Maya children engaged in 'themed' picture drawing activity.*

#### ***Appendix 4: List of Interview Questions***

**Interviews were based on the following inquiries. Selection of suitable questions depended on the situation in each community. The following questions are in no particular order.**

- *What is your occupation?*
- *What kind of work did you do before ecotourism?*
- *Tell me about your work.*
- *Is your business owned by a man or a woman?*
- *Is your business run by a man or a woman?*
- *What was your life / community like before ecotourism*
- *What were women's and men's roles in the household? Community?*
- *How have those roles changed?*
- *How many men / women on the village council?*
- *How are community decisions made?*
- *Are women's voices more respected now that they are employed outside the home? Independent? Stronger? Domestic violence?*
- *What roles do women play in the new ecotourism industry?*
- *Who makes decisions about economic activities?*
- *Are there any community support groups to deal with issues of domestic violence, substance abuse, etc.?*
- *What about youth in the community? Do they see a future in ecotourism here? Are the aspirations of girls changing?*
- *What have been the impacts on youth and children?*
- *What were the first signs of ecotourism in your village?*
- *What committees are you involved in? How many women / men on the committee?*
- *Do women's voices carry as much weight as men's on committees and in decision-making?*
- *What are the main development or social priorities of each committee?*
- *How often are meetings held? What percentage of community members attend? Men? Women?*
- *How are profits generated by cooperative and other ecotourism activities shared amongst community member and within families, and who makes these decisions?*

- *Has greater environmental conservation resulted? Cultural preservation or revival?*
- *Who controls resources in the community?*
- *What are the main benefits you have seen from ecotourism?*
- *How is money from ecotourism used to improve community services?*
- *Are there any existing or planned training programmes for women, men, or youth?*
- *How has your involvement in ecotourism affected your domestic workload?*
- *How have marriage patterns changed?*
- *What are the main problems associated with ecotourism? Drugs? Loss of culture?*
- *What are the future goals of your organisation / community?*
- *How do you envision your community in the future?*
- *Has ecotourism improved your overall quality of life?*
- *What kind of outside help and resources do you think are necessary for women to benefit more from ecotourism development in your village? What about for the community in general?*

## ***Appendix 5: List of Interviewees***

### **Community Baboon Sanctuary: (July 4 – 20, 2001)**

Bernice Casasola, Community Baboon Sanctuary (CBS) Women's Conservation Group, member  
Fallet Young, Bermudia Landing CBS, manager and tour guide  
Kathleen Thompson, CBS Women's Conservation Group, member  
Marcia Banner, Isabella Bank Jam Factory, jam producer  
Ms. Sallas, Isabella Bank Jam Factory, jam producer  
Joyola Joseph, CBS Museum, treasurer; CBS Women's Conservation Group, member  
Jessie Young, CBS Women's Conservation Group, President  
Ms. Edna, Edna's Homestay, owner

### **Maya Center Village: (July 25 – August 5, 2001)**

Federika Saqui, Chairperson of Women's Group; Vice Secretary of Village Council  
Rosita Pop, Women's Craft Coop member  
Anna Pop, Women's Craft Coop member  
Arona Pop, Women's Craft Coop member  
Alberta Saqui, Women's Craft Coop member  
Aurora Saqui, Nu'uk Che'il Cottages & Hmen Herbal Center/Medicinal Trail, owner  
Liberato Saqui, School Principal  
Araceli Saqui, MejenTz'il's Lodge, co-owner

### **Placencia: (August 10 – 25, 2001)**

Lydia Villanueva, Lydia's Guesthouse, owner  
Merlene Bernard, Merlene's Café, owner  
Cordelia Lopez, elder  
Lavern Parham, Ocean Motion, tour guide  
Janice Leslie, Tradewinds Guesthouse, owner  
Martha Eiley, Dockside Bar, owner  
Jodie Yearwood Leslie, Seaside Hotel and Restaurant, co-owner and manager  
Arlene Ferrel, Serenade Guesthouse, waitress  
Daisy Leslie, Daisy's Ice Cream Parlour and Cafe, owner  
Lucille, Traveller's Inn co-owner, manager  
Diana Eiley, Nite Wind Tour Guide, employee  
Ms. Lucille, Lucille's guesthouse, owner

### **Punta Gorda region: (June 8 – 20, August 25 – 30, 2001)**

Antonia Mo, Medina Bank, craft seller  
Domingo Fernando, Blue Creek, craft seller  
Maria Mo, Medina Bank, craft seller  
Isabella Coc, Medina Bank, craft seller  
Melanie Reimer, Plenty International (NGO that supports TEA projects), Country Director

Chet Schmidt, Toledo Ecotourism Association Consultant  
Glenn Brown, Professor of Environmental Studies, Researcher with Plenty International  
Elizabeth, Student Research Project with TEA

**Others:**

Valdemar Andradi, Belize Audubon Society

Dirk, Belize Audubon Society

Juni, Liberty Sailing and Snorkeling

Joyce Flowers, BOWAND member

Janice Savery, BOWAND, executive director

Patricia Sturgeon, Tipple Tree Beya, owner

Jennifer, Placencia Tourist Bureau

*\*\* Several other women and men were interviewed over the course of the three months, but wished to remain anonymous.*