Abstract

Belize is a small Central American developing nation only recently released from under British rule, left with a repressed economy, poor infrastructure, and corrupt politicians. Belize is also heavily dependent on the tourism sector, which potentially provides an opportunity for low-income Belizeans to integrate into the mainstream market. After addressing the current state of the nation, the implications of tourism, reform strategies and challenges facing the tourism industry, an understanding of future investment options may be evaluated.

It is not my intention to analyze or to address the flaws of capitalism, nor is to strike against multi-national corporations; it is not a critique of colonialism, or parliamentary democracies, or any type of government, except perhaps of a government exercising negligence so extensively as to condemn people to suffering. This is a chance for options to be laid out for a country accustomed to not have many options; a chance for a nation to get its foot in the door of economic freedom and human rights with the resources it does have left.

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After spending a rainy July volunteering in Belize, meeting people from the local communities, and learning first-hand what poverty looks like, I began to question the impact I made during my brief time there. After reading Martha Honey’s article, “Tourism: Preventing Conflict, Promoting Peace” (2008), I broadened my question to the impact of the tourism industry on Belize. As Co-Director of the Center for Responsible Travel (CREST), Honey argued that responsible tourism leads to a peaceful society by establishing social and economic stability. Consequently, an argument can be made that responsible tourism is a tool for stability, and eventually, a more peaceful society in Belize. I decided to continue my experience in Belize through qualitative research expanding on Honey’s argument and responsible tourism’s role in Belize.

My hypothesis is that Belize’s investment in the mass tourism industry, which largely ignores its negative impact, is self-inflicting social and economic deterioration upon the nation. Continuing investment in such an industry will only exacerbate poor conditions. This deterioration includes all of the following conditions:

- erosion of population stability and structure,
- social division,
- displacement of traditional occupations and unstable work environments,
- enterprise monopolies and high competition for local entrepreneurs,
- exploitation of natural resources,
- human rights abuses, including human trafficking and forced labor,
- cross-border corruption, and
- organized crime from excessive foreign investment.

Alternatively, investing in ecotourism (related to responsible tourism) may lead to an increase in:
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- economic growth,
- direct and indirect employment,
- community support and participation,
- political and social development,
- investment in infrastructure,
- poverty alleviation,
- environmental conservation, and
- cultural interchange.

A qualitative study is meant to pave the way for more specific quantitative research. However, when studying poverty alleviation, isolating a single variable, such as tourism revenue, is all but impossible to do. The same thing goes for approaching other problems in any country. Small, developing countries, like Belize, see few long-term research projects due partially to insufficient resources. Isolating the impact of tourism on poverty levels in Belize is pulling on one string of a wound up ball of yarn. To detangle the ball, one string must be loosened first—the entanglement cannot be tackled all at once. By reforming the largest single service sub-sector and raising income levels, the people’s focus can turn to other issues—trade freedom, transparent courts, or education.

According to Mitchell and Muckosy (2008) the answer to reducing poverty will not be solved by creating a new community-based tourism market, but by linking poor communities directly to the mainstream tourism market. One method of integration is called pro-poor tourism (PPT), which uses the capital of mass tourism and restructures it to benefit the poor (more will be said on this later), has potential to increase tourist spending to more communities, open market access for more local business, provide education and training programs, tax revenue on tourism, and increase poor communities’ political participation.
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In this paper, I will explore how PPT's integration method could be applied in Belize. My research will address the history’s role in the current state of the nation, tourism’s general positive and negative impacts, reform strategies, and plans for implementing change, challenges and solutions facing eco-tourism, and recent accounts of development activity.

Although I am focusing on Belize, I intend to propose an initiative conceptually applicable to the international tourism industry. I expect my findings will include socio-economic, political, and cultural issues to interest both political science professionals and students. Identifying tourism’s positive and negative impacts on the community, as well as its role in capacity-building, could set a precedent for future investment in sustainable tourism and future investment in peace.

BELIZE PROFILE

History, demographics, and political/cultural issues are important in understanding the current state of Belize. Belize’s long history of claimed ownership between ancient and colonial eras attributes to the lack of capacity the people have now. According to Bruce Barcott’s historical summary in *The Flight of the Scarlet Macaw* (2008), the Mayan ruled Mesoamerica from AD 220 to the mid-900s, but accounts of the first Maya population went back to 3500 BC. Trade routes, city-states, and kingdoms flourished until, according to historians, drought and depletion of resources wiped most of the population out. In the 16th century, the Spanish invaded. Hungry for gold, Hernán Cortés violently captured the Aztec empire, and then headed south toward the Bay of Honduras (modern-day coasts of Belize, Guatemala, and Honduras), killing and capturing the remaining Maya along the way. By the late 16th century, the Mayan population was reduced to half a million from more than two million before the Spanish arrived. When the
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Spanish set up outposts and discovered the value of logwood’s indigo-esque dye in England, it was not long before Britain was competing for claim of the Bay.

After the Spanish were defeated, greedy British loggers turned Belize, with its excess in logwood and mahogany, into “England’s lumberyard” and purchased black Africans from Jamaica for cheap labor. By 1790, three-fourths of the population was made up of slaves and power and ownership of land was controlled by a few white landowners. Even when slavery was outlawed, the wealthy bought all of the land to force wage laborers into low-status jobs. In 1862, Britain founded British Honduras, but when the wood source dried up, the British left the colony in an underdeveloped and uneducated state, a leaky water system, poor electricity and communication infrastructure, and diesel generators as the only source. Partially because of Britain’s indignant claim on the territory of Belize, Belize didn’t become independent until 1981 (Barcott, 2008).

Although Belizean ethnicities are more equally spread out than neighboring Central American countries, diversity is significant. Situated between Mexico, Guatemala, and the Caribbean Sea, the country is a tropical melting pot. As Bruce Barcott (2008: 3) describes, “British innkeepers, Mennonite farmers, Chinese shopkeepers, Lebanese entrepreneurs, American missionaries, Canadian aid workers, and Dutch scientists…Garifuna artists, Maya cacao growers, Mestizo plantation managers, and Creole politicians…” all contribute to Belize’s diversity.

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1 When Guatemala received its independence from Spain, it assumed its inheritance of most of Belize (British Honduras at the time), but was denied by Britain. Guatemala reluctantly recognized Belize as independent in 1992 and British soldiers still make up the infantry battalion outside of Belize City. The next referendum on the constitutional dispute will be held on 6 October 2013 for both Guatemala and Belize. According to the British Embassy in Guatemala, the territorial dispute exacerbates regional peace and security (British Embassy Guatemala City, 2013).

2 Mestizo 48.7%, Creole 24.9%, Maya 10.6%, Garifuna 6.1%, and other minorities 9.7%, including the Chinese, and the Mennonite community (The World Factbook, 2013).
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As of July 2012, over 300,000 people live in Belize. Although most people reside in the cities, Central American immigrants are establishing communities in rural areas and replacing the official language, English, with Spanish (spoken by 46%). According to the 2010 census, Roman Catholics make up 39.3% of the religious population, however the rest of the population is spread out among various affiliations, and 15.2% do not associate with any religion (The World Factbook, 2013).

The agriculture sector is the largest employer, but contribution to the economic sector is not proportional to the population living in the region—the repercussions of colonial British buying all the land to prevent independent farming (Barcott, 2008). As the largest agricultural export, sugar makes up 60 percent of all agricultural exports from Belize. The fishing export market opened in the 1920s and contributed 7.2 percent of GDP in 2001, but has since declined partially because of tourism growth. The Mennonite community supplies 90 percent of poultry and eggs and Belize is self-sufficient in beef, poultry, pork, and eggs. Other agriculture products include rice, corn, beans vegetables, bananas, plantain, citrus, sugarcane, and fruit. Extensive logging in Belizean history drained the supply of hardwood and now conservation programs protect much of Belize’s forests. However, lumber is still sold in local markets and furniture manufacturing is popular among the Mennonite community. Research on reviving the hardwood industry is ongoing (Northern Belize, 2013).

Belize is a parliamentary democracy under the Commonwealth realm and English common law, but according to the 2013 Index of Economic Freedom, Belize ranked 102nd freest.

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3 The second highest is Creole and spoken by 32.9% (The World Factbook, 2013)
4 Belize Sugar Industry, Ltd. is located in Belize City.
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out of 185 countries. Belize suffers high public-sector debt burdens and uninterested foreign investment because of the government’s expropriation of businesses. Institutional weakness, especially in the judicial system, prevents any long-term economic development.

The combination of weak institutions, repressed financial systems, and the history of oppressive colonization created a suffering economy. Although Rushton, Mercado, Viscarra, and Nair (2006) identified recent reduction in poverty level, this is more likely due to “out-migration” of poor, not employment opportunity. Out of a population of about 300,000, 13 percent are unemployed, or 39,000 people. A third of the population is in poverty (Index of Economic Freedom, 2013).

Belize should take priority in cleaning up its court system, protecting property rights for investors, and adopting better economic policies to speed up the permit process, lowering taxes on citizens, and establishing clear and fair regulations. Repressed economic freedom inhibit Belizeans from achieving the prosperity status akin to residents of neighboring Cayman Islands, which attracts more tourists each year and has about six times the real per capita income of Belize (Rahn, 2012).

The complexities of political structural issues, as relevant as they may be, are outside the time constraints and knowledge space of this paper. This paper instead concentrates on capabilities of the tourism industry, as the contributor to a third of the nations’ GDP, to provide employment and build capacity for communities. As a “polyglot” industry, as Gibson (2009: 529) references, the tourism sector affects, and is affected by, all dimensions of civil society; and although this paper’s focus excludes in-depth history, theories, and structure of the political

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5 Belize ranked 20 of 29 countries in South and Central America, dropping 4.6 points from 2012. Rule of law, limited government, regulatory efficiency, and open markets are the categories rated for all countries in the Index (2013 Index of Economic Freedom).

6 For more information on Belize government, see The World Factbook at https://www.cia.gov.
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system, it would be a mistake to ignore all dimensions. Given the hurdles corruption creates for sustainable tourism development, extensive research on the subject may be mandatory for more perceptive pro-poor tourism analysis.

TOURISM’S POSITIVE IMPACTS

Even though most market activity is due to emigration (especially to North America) and crop exportation, tourism is the largest single contributor to economic growth in Belize (Northern Belize, 2013). As a main export for 83 percent of all developing countries and the top export for 1/3 of poorest countries, tourism can act as a catalyst (Honey, 2008).

For developing nations like Belize, entangled in and hindered by many complicated issues, the feasibility of tackling this hypothetical “knot” is all but impossible. Approaching the problem by protecting and promoting resources available—tourism attractions—in order to extract benefits for the people is more feasible. Given the positive impact of tourism in developing states, careful development strategy can set framework for improved social conditions.

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) (2012), travel and tourism made up 9 percent of global GDP and created 255 millions jobs in 2011—the equivalent to employing 80 percent of the United States. By 2020, travel and tourism is expected to provide one in every ten jobs.7

Caribbean tourism took off in the 1980s (Barcott, 2008: p. 55), considered to be the result of trade globalization and rising household incomes in emerging countries (WTTC/Oxford Economics, 2012). In 1990, Belize hosted over one hundred thousand tourists (Barcott, 2008: p. 7. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (2008) reported the number of international tourists increased from 25 million in 1950 to 903 million in 2007, by 2020 that number is predicted to reach 1.6 billion.
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55); in 2012, Belize expected to host 264,000 tourists. Travel and Tourism (T&T) made up 33.2% of GDP in 2011 and is predicted to grow to 37.2% by 2022 (WTTC/Oxford Economics, 2012).

Belize ranks 11th and 13th (out of 181 countries) in T & T’s direct and total contribution to employment, respectively. In 2011, the total contribution to employment was 40,000 jobs, or 30.1 percent of total employment, and predicted to have risen 6.2 percent in 2012. In 2022, T & T is expected to make up 33.8% of total employment—equal to 61,000 jobs (given no significant change in the population growth) (WTTC/Oxford Economics, 2012).

Targeting the growing tourism sector in Belize for reform will show long-term economic and social benefits to stakeholders. The travel and tourism economic impact in Belize in 2012 was predicted to rise in each of the following areas: (both direct and total) contributions to GDP and employment, visitor exports (international spending), and investment. Investing in Belize’s tourism industry while it is still a peripheral destination for mainstream tourism industries creates opportunity for major reforms. Travis (1984) identifies the benefits to a community hosting tourists (as cited by Haralambopoulos and Pizam, 1996),

- cultural development and increased exchange,
- social change and decentralized decision-making,
- improved community image,
- improved public health,


T & T measures mostly hotel and transportation services, but includes restaurant and leisure industries (WTTC/Oxford Economics, 2012).

10 WTTC recognizes direct contribution of travel and tourism as well as indirect and induced direct contribution consists of industries in tourism business, such as food service, retail, hotels, and also includes transportation and entertainment, and spending from residents, businesses, and government expenses, visitor exports. Indirect contribution includes investments in tourism, collective government spending, which benefits the community with development of transportation and security services, and supplier purchases. Induced contribution includes employee spending for expenses such as housing, food, and clothing (WTTC/Oxford Economics, 2012).
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- social and facility improvements,
- education and conservation,
- positive cultural interchange, and
- political modifications.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Commodity and tourism exports generated 59.3 percent (on average) of all goods and service exports in Belize during 2001 to 2007. Meanwhile, international tourism declined at the same time—along with the rest of the economy—due to tropical storms, global economic downturn, and domestic structural changes. The Government of Belize created the Medium Term Development Strategy after a major tourism decline in 2009. Because Belize is greatly dependent on its natural resources, the development strategy includes measures for sustaining environmental assets. The strategy also focuses on efforts to strengthen institutions and revise legislation, to integrate management issues into the development framework, to increase cooperation of regional and international levels to promote capacity building and information sharing systems, to regulate coastal resources use, to increase monitoring of petroleum extraction, and to regulate construction projects (Mendoza, P.B., Staff of the Policy and Planning Unit, Ministry of Economic Development, & Commerce and Industry and Consumer Protection, 2010).

Literature on how to implement sustainable tourism measures aims to encourage collaboration between activist groups, non-government organizations, and residents to balance the interests of everyone potentially impacted. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) adopted the Millennium Development Goals in 2000, which emphasizes the
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reduction of poverty and hunger and promotes tourism as a tool for poverty alleviation (Harrison, 2008). The UNWTO (2005) clarifies the meaning of sustainability,

"Making tourism more sustainable is not just about controlling and managing the negative impacts of the industry...Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a sustainable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability" (as cited by Levy & Hawkins, 2010: 569).

TOURISM’S NEGATIVE IMPACTS

Further examination of the positive and negative impacts of tourism on the local community is directly applicable to the impacts on Belize communities, and specifically addresses the changing population stability and structure. Unfortunately, there is always a price to pay; drawbacks to tourism include, “host culture destruction and debasement, social instability, consumerism, changes in the law and social order, commercialized host-visitor relationships, changes in traditional values and political destabilization” (Haralambopoulos and Pizam, 1996: 504). Agricultural and fishing jobs have been displaced because of more attractive wages in the tourism sector; however, the seasonal nature of tourism creates an unstable work environment, usually leaving some unemployed for several months of the year (Northern Belize, 2013; Haramlambopoulos and Pizam, 1996).

Many local companies, political elite, and economic elite support foreign capital, which presents another challenge to pro-poor tourism advocates—monopolization. Foreign-owned resorts often funnel tourists through businesses all owned by the same group or family (Duffy, 2000). Local businesses are hurt, while the large foreign-operated businesses get rich. This also means the majority of higher paying jobs (management positions) filled by expatriates and
immigrants; the lower-paying jobs are generally left to the less educated and lower-skilled locals (Haramlambopoulos and Pizam, 1996).

One of the most damaging impacts of tourism is human trafficking. Not only human trafficking, including child sex tourism and forced labor of both male and female immigrants, but government complicity with it is a serious problem in Belize. This primarily occurs in the service sector, where bars, nightclubs, and brothels exist, but also where larger Asian and Chinese communities own shops and restaurants (U.S. Department of State, 2011).

The Belize government has repeatedly and knowingly failed to take on human rights violations. A judicial system unable to take punitive action against offenders is the largest barrier to stopping trafficking. Current legislation allows trafficking cases to be tried in lower courts, where delays are common, and the offender is let off easy, if the case is not entirely dismissed. The U.S. Department of State suggestions for Belize include amending legislation to crack down on trafficking, convict government officials for complicity in crimes, and transparency in police work connected to any human trafficking reports, increasing procedural formalities for officials, assisting the trafficking victims, continuing NGO funding and collaboration, and developing a long-term strategic plan for anti-trafficking initiatives.

According to the U.S. Department of State’s Trafficking in Persons Report 2011, Belize is increasing identification of victims, as well as new prosecution efforts—one targeting a government official. Belize government authorities have recently initiated partnerships with NGOs, a multi-lingual awareness campaign, awareness training programs for government officials, and improvements in prevention and protection efforts. Additionally, new legislation was drafted to require legally qualified judges and prosecutors to handle the cases.
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Foreign tourism development and an apathetic government disrespecting or ignoring the local community will exacerbate existing problems, if not create new problems for the community. In order to use tourism as a tool for peace, the tourist sector must work with the government and the people, their cultural dispositions, and their environment (Honey, 2008).

REFORM STRATEGIES

Various case studies show the positive correlation between hosting tourists and peace-building efforts. Tourists are less likely to travel to highly violent and unstable areas. However, according to Honey (2008: 1), "peace must be more than an absence of conflict, and tourism must be crafted so that it truly benefits local communities and the environments."

Using tourism to benefit the local community and environment requires stakeholders to take a broader view of the definition of tourism. If a conventional tourism enterprise is not interested in making ties with the community and improving its image, an ecotourism approach will not be relevant. However, for those businesses willing to adapt and grow with their surroundings, to provide a unique experience for guests, and opportunities for the community, pro-poor tourism should be considered seriously—if not for any other reason—as a marketing incentive.

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines eco-tourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well being of local people" (Honey, 2008: 2). Ecotourism arose in the 1980s from environmental and social movements in destination countries and may be the "most widespread hope for economic growth" (Honey, 2008; Moreno, 2005: 230). Successful ecotourism partially depends on both the government’s support of the community and the “active socioeconomic involvement of local peoples” (238).
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Medina (2005) considers eco-tourism certification for its ability to boil down the definition of eco-tourism to one dimension—it has to benefit local communities. By measuring three characteristics that eco-tourism should promote, localness, participation, and benefits, standardizing certification criteria would foster sustainability efforts. Medina defined localness to represent smaller businesses which benefit the local community by circulating and sharing tourists; participation to represent equal consideration among local voices; and benefits to represent the financial success of local employees. But these criteria are rarely met: all-inclusive resorts tend to hoard their tourists, equal participation is obstructed by organizations often dominated by foreigners with larger businesses, and the service sector’s low-paid wage labor does not encourage entrepreneurship.

A study on travelers’ highest motivation for travel revealed exploring nature, benefiting the local community, and purchasing local food and local ingredients to be top priorities (Kwan, Eagles, Gebhardt, 2008). Griffiths (2010) noted tourists’ preference for positive human impacts and relationships above positive environmental impacts in an eco-tourism experience; he expects that ecotourism will continue to develop and expand the economy. The environment deserves an equal amount of attention, but an overwhelming amount of research on environmental conservation already exists; the socio-economic impact of tourism on local communities addresses a complex web of political, sociological, economical issues that researchers have only begun to study and deserves more attention.

PRO-POOR TOURISM

Kwan, Eagles, and Gebhardt’s (2008) survey distributed to various eco-lodges focuses on travel characteristics, demographics, motivation for travel, and evaluation of lodge attributes. Results showed most coming from the United States, falling in the age group of 36-55 years, being highly educated, employed full-time, traveling with spouse or alone, planning to stay in other accommodations besides eco-lodges.
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Pro-poor tourism (PPT) was born in the late 1990s in collaboration by the United Kingdom Department for International Development, the International Institute for Environment and Development, and the Overseas Development Institute (Harrison, 2008). Pro-poor tourism is a branch of responsible tourism, incorporating its own agenda into the mainstream tourism industry. Harrison argues that mass tourism is the answer to alleviating poverty. Pro-poor tourism is distinguished from other forms of tourism by the following:

- PPT is not anti-capitalist, but a method of market intervention to incorporate poor communities into capitalist markets to establish fair trade.
- PPT cannot stand by itself and depends on “access to markets, commercial viability, investment security, stakeholder cooperation, and strategy implementation.”
- It is not a theoretical approach, but an orientation of the industry.
- PPT is not niche tourism; it includes mass tourism. Its benefits are measured by reaped benefits for the poor.
- No analysis or data collection is specific to PPT. Value-chain analysis is sometimes used for PPT, but is also used in market/economic studies not related to poverty.
- PPT does not only benefit the poor, or the poorest of the poor. Because it is not anti-capitalist, the same capitalist rules apply—the more invested, the more benefits gained.
- PPT benefits are non-economic too. While PPT should be an addition to an established livelihood, and not a replacement, the infrastructure, capacity-building, and empowerment resulting from PPT are significant wider collective benefits to the community.
- Finally (and most crucially) PPT is not against mass tourism.

Pro-poor tourism and eco-tourism overlap in their philosophies, but have important differences. While the broad definition of eco-tourism mentions socioeconomic improvement of local populations, being pro-poor is not the only goal of eco-tourism. Pro-poor tourism is defined by the end result—the financial gains of the poor—while eco-tourism is more of a means to an end.

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Pro-poor tourism (PPT) and community-based tourism (CBT) also get confused, but are not the same either. Jayawardena (2002) claims the most distinctive characteristic of pro-poor tourism is that it plugs into the capitalist market and intends to slant the benefits, while community-based tourism is inclusive in that the community members have consistent control over planning and development. Mitchell and Muckosy (2008) deny the effectiveness of community-based tourism (CBT) on the grounds that CBT does not help build stronger communities, instead concentration on one community cuts others off from tourist flow. They argue that communities are unable to access commercial markets and government structures tend to be opposed to the democratic and inclusive methods of community-based tourism. Given Belize’s centrally-structured tourism industry, poor cooperation, lack of resources, and dominating elite members, community-based tourism is hard to accomplish. The advantages of linking poor communities directly to the mainstream tourism market include (Mitchell and Muckosy, 2008):

- directing tourist traffic through communities to encourage tourists to spend money locally;
- allowing open-markets for craft and food suppliers, and taxi services to create jobs (and overcoming the challenges of participation);
- removing barriers to market access, including language training programs, infrastructure development, and tourist taxes; and,
- increasing the capacity of poor communities to engage in policy-making.

Although, PPT seems like the best option for Belize’s tourism industry, no strategy is perfect and most conceptual criticisms of PPT are defended by explicitly defining PPT. According to Harrison (2008), the first critique says advocates of PPT should be addressing the institutional change that needs to happen within international/national power structures to lead to redistribution of wealth and resources. Harrison counters that ideal conditions for PPT are
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realistically uncommon and PPT advocates do not care so much about making a political statement than making concrete economic improvements for poor communities. The second critique against PPT assumes any kind of tourism is acceptable as long as it benefits the poor, including sex tourism. Harrison relates that the actual practice of PPT has never been reported to condone sex tourism, although its priority is business opportunity. The third critique, which calls PPT “anthropomorphic, weak, and reformist,” is false according to Harrison’s correction that PPT is not a theory, thus cannot be classified as “reformist” or “anthropomorphic.” As a business practice, international/national power structures it can be critiqued as “weak,” but without concrete evidence, Harrison dismisses this as irrelevant (851–858).

PLAN AND IMPLEMENTATION

It may seem that unsympathetic, profit-driven, centralized corporations would never think to extend their success to surrounding local communities. However, a business case can be made for why community out-reach programs are in their interest (Tourism Concern, n.d.). According to the Rezidor Hotel Group’s 2010 Sustainability Report, a company’s reputation can be extensively damaged by breaching good practices and complying with social problems and may deprive the company of its future licenses to operate or its international reputation (Tourism Concern, n.d.).

Streamlining policy for eco-tourism management practices would give pro-poor tourism industries a definitive set of goals to meet. The following eight briefs outline guidelines and operations to proceed with pro-poor tourism. The project’s audience includes hoteliers, government and non-government organizations, small businesses, investors, tourism marketers, and consumers (Ashley, Goodwin, McNab, Scott, & Chaves, 2006):
1. Overview on tourism and the local economy — building linkages.
2. Bringing local producers into the supply chain.
3. Building links with local farmers.
4. Employing local staff.
5. Involving local people and products in tours, packages and excursions.
6. Encouraging tourists to spend in the local economy.
7. Building neighborhood partnerships.
8. Managing internal change for developing local linkages.

The following are working examples to show how these PPT guidelines are being implemented within Belize. The two resorts are compared on their development and incorporation of pro-poor policies. Then, three international examples of successes in pro-poor tourism are described to give evidence to theory.

**EXAMPLES**

The Radisson Fort George Hotel and Marina in Belize City meets three of the PPT guidelines mentioned above. It shows connections with the community by supporting local children organizations, manages internal change for developing local linkages by adhering to environmentally friendly practices, and encourages guests to donate to a local charity. However, for belonging to "one of the world’s most ethical companies," which holds its operations highly responsible for meeting stakeholders’ expectations, the Radisson Fort George Hotel falls short.

The following is a list of Radisson Fort George Hotel and Marina Responsible Business Practices (Radisson, 2013):
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- Adopted Liberty Children’s Home and have a matching funds program.\(^{13}\)
- Works with National Institution for Cultural & History to promote our culture, arts & history.
- Association with Young Men Christian Association for Summer Swim Program.
- Buying bio-degradable plastic bags and disposables utensils made from corn (bio-degrades in 3 months).
- Use of environmentally-friendly cleaners.\(^{14}\)

To understand how the PPT guidelines work, compare the Radisson to another resort in Belize nestled deep in the Cayo District on Belize’s mainland. The Lodge at Chaa Creek’s mission statement promises low-impact and sustainable development, “By stimulating interest in the environment, natural history and local culture we hope to demonstrate the long term benefits of ecotourism over other environmentally damaging options for development” (Chaa Creek, 2013). Chaa Creek meets or exceeds all eight guidelines outlined for pro-poor tourism and is a strong example of how PPT can work. The following (directly from Chaa Creek’s website) gives descriptions of how Chaa Creek puts each guideline into practice:

1. **Overview on tourism and the local economy—builds linkages:** Ten percent of all room revenue goes directly into environmental, educational, and community programs and organizations.

2/3. **Brings local producers into the supply chain and builds links with local farmers:** Organic waste is composted and then used as fertilizers in gardens at the Maya Organic

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\(^{13}\) Liberty Foundation is a charity organization founded in 2004 specifically for Belizean children. The Foundation works with the Belize Human Services Department and foster homes to care for abused and/or abandoned children. In 2011, Liberty Foundation achieved support from the Government of Belize. Read more at http://www.libertyfoundation.org.uk.

\(^{14}\) Actions omitted from the list include staff procedures, such as reminding guests to turn off lights, unplugging appliances, closing off wings during low occupancy, donating food waste, printer ink, and recycling, reducing water use, and returning empty bottles to suppliers (Radisson, 2013).
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Farm, where produce is grown for Chaa Creek’s restaurant menu, leftover food goes to local farmers for pig feed. Gives preference to local food and product suppliers

4. Employs local staff: All 125 of the full-time staff are Belizeans from local villages. Chaa Creek’s policy includes giving preference to employing Belizeans.

5/6. Involves local people and products on tours, packages, excursions; encourages tourists to spend in the local economy: The 365 acre nature reserve advocates environmental education and provides various outreach and awareness programs. Adventure tours and vacation packages offered connect guests with attractions and local culture outside the resort, from a market excursion to nearby city, San Ignacio, to Mayan archaeological site tours.

7. Builds neighborhood partnerships: supports schools and events throughout the country, assists the Octavia Waight old folks centre, the Cayo Deaf Institute, and Marla House of Hope Orphanage, coordinates community development and maintenance projects, hosts and educates foreign students and interns, offers field trips for local and international schools, and community groups, partners with State University of New York to organize a teaching workshop program, publishes teacher’s guides, provides scholarships to local students, and encourages guests to donate with Share a Pound Program. Chaa Creek also established the Eco-Kids Summer Camp, which “gives 24 Belizean school children an opportunity to experience the natural beauty of Belize first hand while learning environmental responsibility during a fully sponsored weeklong summer camp at our Macal River Camp” (Chaa Creek, 2012).

8. Manages internal change for developing local linkages: working with others in tourism industry, as well as private groups, and government departments, and complying with best environmental management practices in all operations.
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Perhaps because Belizeans consider themselves to have more in common with the Caribbean region than Central America, looking at an example of tourism in the Caribbean may help Belize develop its own tourism policies and marketing. Jayawardena (2002) shows that although Cuba is still off-limits to most Americans, Cuba’s growth in tourism arrivals and development has increased dramatically in the past decade and is expected to continue growth. According to Jayawardena (2002), the number of tourists in 1995 was 762,666 and rose to about 1.8 million five years later. In 2010, between 5 and 7 million tourists were predicted to visit Cuba. By 2000, Cuba had built 19 hospitality schools, providing certification programs and employing 1000 professors, and had established a national training and education agency to expedite the training process.

Jayawardena lists the reasons for Cuba’s booming tourism industry, most of which are comparable to Belize: the size and population of the island (highest in region), attractive natural resources, beach and jungle, best airport in region and 9 international airports, famous historical figures, “mystique of revolution and the subtle sense of adventure in visiting Cuba,” intense art and culture, rich heritage and architecture and restoration projects maintaining it, an attentive government to sustainable tourism, support from European and Canadian government and private sectors, high education rates, general friendliness of Cubans, security and safety provided.

A significant difference between Belize and Cuba is government support. Jayawardena believes besides infrastructure and social development, Belize needs a political system with strong partnerships in tourism development, including major European hotel corporations, as well as more regional hotel corporations, such as Sandals, to substantiate tourism.

By studying international organizations and projects in pro-poor tourism, Belize can learn how to work with its limited resources to provide more for its people. Belize could benefit from
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more memberships with international organizations, such as Association of Small Scale Enterprises in Tourism (ASSET). Gambia, in West Africa, is a member of ASSET, and similar to Belize, gained independence in 1965 from the United Kingdom and currently depends on tourism and agriculture. Benefits that Belize could gain from ASSET membership are networking within members, promotional materials, free training in HIV/awareness, health and safety, customer care, computers, advice on product development, facilitate access to grants, and lobbying for members (ASSET-Gambia, 2006).

Closer to home is Ecuador’s Yachana Foundation, which stepped in to help a community largely supported by the government. The Foundation became the largest employer in the region, generating income for families through tourism, and built 21 schools, provided trained programs in dozens of communities, created a farmers association, and a medical clinic (Yachana Foundation, 2011).

CHALLENGES

When describing the tourism industry, d’Hauteserre (2006) coined the term, ‘polyglot’ (as cited by Gibson, 2009: 531). The industry is “more a hybrid economic formation blending different industries, the state, ‘nature,’ the informal sector, the capitalist and non-capitalist economies, and all manner of technologies, commodities and infrastructures,” claims Gibson (2009: 529). In other words, attempting to change a polyglot industry reveals a spider web of issues. Attempting pro-poor objectives in Belize’s complex industry is very difficult; corruption, divisions of labor, and competition are all at work against PPT (Chok et al., 2007; Turner, 2007) as cited by Gibson (2009). Violence, organized crime, corruption, human rights violations,
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extensive foreign investment, social division, and repressed economic freedom are just some of the challenges Belize will have to address.

Bola Adeleke, a university professor of tourism in Nigeria, concluded that Nigeria’s potential for sustainable international tourism is limited by the continuing political instability, crime, and ethnic tension in the country. Even with Nigeria’s extensive natural and cultural attractions, Adeleke argued that without a government fostering peace and stability, sustainable tourism cannot grow (as cited by Honey, 2008). Similar to Nigeria, Belize suffers from political instability, crime, and some ethnic tension, driving tourists away.

Less than a month before I left for Belize, thirteen-year-old Jasmine Lowe was found dead after disappearing for a couple days. This was personal to me because she was a friend of the family I would be volunteering for. During my last week in the country, on Caye Caulker, I met two women on a snorkeling trip, who were victims of assault and robbery during their stay on the island. When I talked to them the morning following the crime, they showed me their bruises. They were scared and angry with Caye Caulker’s police, who reportedly blew them off. One of the women had lost cash, her work visa, and her passport along with the rest of her stolen bag’s belongings.

Tragic events such as these are not atypical of Belize; 2012 saw a ‘record high’ murder rate, with 144 reported murders near the end of December (144 murders in 2012, 2012). State security forces are being intensified in certain areas, but in the opinion of Belize Times writer G. Mike Reid (2012), giving the police longer hours is not going to fix the long-term problem.

Civilian violence is not the only issue; the country flourishes in offshore banking and drug trafficking. Because organized crime has generally protected by the Belize government, it implanted itself in government structure and taken advantage of polices, such as loose border
controls and deregulation of international banking. The merging of illegitimate and legitimate businesses “create highly effective illegal financial and drug smuggling networks,” meaning that illicit activity is a product of cross-border corruption easily spread within the Central America region (Duffy, 2000: 552).

Ecosystem development and international and local capital is hindered when political elites are involved in money laundering and illegal enterprise. They use informal and invisible networks to exercise political and economic power. These high-ranking politicians usually do not hold state office, but attract legitimate foreign investors through private control of resources in illegal markets (Duffy, 2000).

Furthermore, several studies show a direct negative relationship between political corruption and economic growth (Johnston, 1997), including studies by Knack and Keefer (1995) associating weak national institutions and illegitimate leaders with corruption (as cited by Johnston, 1997).

The relevance this has to tourism development is that foreign investment in tourism comes from both legitimate and illegitimate sources. This is happening partially because of legal discretion of investment sources. Another problem is that powerful states and private organizations financially control political institutions, sometimes opposing pro-ecotourism regulations and disrupting funding and political support, according to studies reference by Johnston (1997). Corruption spreads like an infection. Johnston also claims that untreated corruption in Belize wastes valuable resources, makes itself vulnerable to outside interests, and prevents any effective development strategies.

Community services and state funding is declining, leaving the insufficiently funded state enterprises to yield to private corporate development, often supported by foreign investment.
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(Moreno, 2005: 219). Conventional tourism in Belize mostly relies on foreign investment, which is a problem for sustainable employment and joint ownership excludes socioeconomic local involvement. Because of high property taxes, high investment costs, and weak enforcement of zoning laws, residents struggle with high competition in investment opportunities.

Not only do the popular all-inclusive resorts isolate tourists from local communities and local culture, creating cultural friction, some resorts exploit the term “eco” by falsely branding products or services to attract a broader consumer base (Griffiths, 2010).

Many studies on PPT show little improvement of working conditions and substantially fewer benefits granted to the poor than to the wealthy, proving that pro-poor tourism does not uproot underlying power structures. In cases that did work, mechanisms had to be enforced to favor the poorest (Gibson, 2009). Social divisions are more noticeable in areas of the country hosting more tourists, such as Ambergris Caye, where income inequality is high. Ambergris Caye, a popular tourist destination in Belize, was formerly dependent on fishing exports until displaced by the tourist market. The social division between rich foreigners and poor locals troubles the community, but any response of local communities to foreign investment depends on the nature of development funding and the community’s capacity to intervene (Moreno, 2005).

A country born out of dependence on Britain never had the capacity to stand up for their rights. International organization, Tourism Concern’s Putting Tourism to Rights 2009 reports cases in Belize of labor exploitation, forced relocation, illegal land acquisition, loss of livelihood, and poor working conditions, among other human rights violations. International human rights standards are violated when government institutions are weak and national legislation is unenforced. A weak and corrupt judicial system is a major deficiency to Belize government (Tourism Concern, n.d.).
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Economic freedom requires personal choice, voluntary exchange, freedom to compete in markets, and protection of person and property. In economically repressed countries, people with the lowest incomes are worse off than those in freer countries (Lawson, n.d.).\footnote{See Lawson (n.d.), Figure 4.} Unfortunately, in the 2013 Index of Economic Freedom, Belize ranked “Mostly Unfree” to “Repressed” in the categories: Freedom from Corruption, Financial Freedom, Property Rights, and Investment Freedom.

The government is considering where to start reforms and many studies have identified what is smothering the economy and advocated for specific changes. For example, a case study by Comercio y Pobreza en Latino América (COPLA, or Trade and Poverty in Latin America) (2009), identified that lowering market barriers and initial investment costs would open market access to more people.

FINDING SOLUTIONS

A “polyglot” industry means the solution is not going to come from one actor. If changes are to be made to protect human rights, to provide freedom of labor, participation, social and economic freedom, it will have to be a multi-faceted response. Future challenges for the development Belize’s overall tourism industry exist in multiple areas. Political and academic attention to integration of the poor with mass tourism would increase research projects, fellowships, and media access in developing nations. Global recognition of tourism as a large economic sector would encourage research and publication on the tourism economy. Cooperation between regional governments and private organizations would improve the effectiveness of a master plan for sustainable growth through educational committees. Finally,
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developing nations’ education on tourism, and renewing market strategies for local business
would ease cross-cultural tension (Jayawardena, 2002);

“Economic and political competition can scarcely solve all problems; its benefits depend
upon the free flow of information (and thus upon civil liberties and a relatively free
press), a lack of pervasive violence in everyday life, a viable civil society, credible
guarantees of basic economic rights and political will and determination among
government and opposition leaders alike” (Johnston, 1997, What can be done? section,
para. 4).

A step in the right direction of a transparent and peaceful society, as mentioned above, is
encouraging collaborative and inclusive policy-making. According to the San Pedro Daily, the
New Labour Advisory Board took a “tri-partism” approach of assembling experts from public
and private sectors to sit in on the new board. Tri-partism includes government, employers, and
workers. The board’s first agenda is to review and revise labor laws (New Labour Advisory
Board commissioned, 2009).

Although the International Union for Conservation of Nature (2002, para. 2) does
acknowledge that eco-tourism will not always work in the mainstream market, it recognizes eco-
tourism’s potential as a “support mechanism for poverty alleviation, providing employment and
income for local people.” Eco-tourism’s potential support mechanism may help conditions in
Belize City, a city in which travel guides advise travelers not to visit. Perceived economic
opportunity brought people to Belize City, but now the city is a hub for high crime rates, few job
opportunities, and a crumbling education system. Young high-school dropouts are often forced
into criminal lives, often directly affecting tourists visiting the city.

According to Jayawardena (2002: 11), “Eco-tourism has the potential of receiving greater
support from local people even in countries where institutions geared toward developing tourism
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often face hostility, cultural barriers, challenges and objections,” Jayawardena explains (2002: 11). In a study by Haralambopoulos and Pizam (1996), residents of Pythagorion (located on the Greek island of Samos) who are economically dependent on tourism proved to hold more positive opinions of the industry than those residents not dependent on tourism. Therefore, spreading the economic benefit in Belize City to include more of the population would increase community support for the tourism industry, lower hostility toward tourists, and increase tourism revenue for the city.

The Overseas Development Institute recommends two plans to increase cooperation between communities and their government (Rushton, Mercado, Viscarra, & Nair, 2006). Cooperation between private and public sectors and cohesion between residents and foreign investors is necessary to accomplish sustainable and beneficial integration. Thus, Belize may benefit from reforms that emphasize high competition and oversight or independent monitoring committees (Griffiths, 2010).

First, considering Belize government’s lack of coordination with NGOs, processes need to be developed to monitor, evaluate, and provide leadership of NGO actions to see benefits from global economies. Potential partners for executing processes include NGO coordination groups, private donors, and government departments. Second, considering Belize government’s feeble attempt in aiding poverty-stricken areas, influence of government policy to decentralize policy decisions needs to be developed. Potential partners for this development project include the government and international institutions (Rushton et al., 2006). Creating an independent monitor organization for industries may prevent government affiliations from blocking eco-tourism development initiatives and may reduce exploitation of eco-tourism (Griffiths, 2010).
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The relationship between corrupt governments and development initiatives is directly negative (Johnston, 1997). As corruption increases, the number of development initiatives plummets. Cross-border corruption can only be defeated with corresponding domestic reforms and legitimate competition, in both economic and political dimensions (Johnston, 1997).

Solutions to internal political corruption end in a catch-22. A well-informed and ‘viable civil society,’ if strong enough and partnered with economic competition, will act on the political dimension to establish transparency in political institutions as well (Jayawardena, 2002). However, a certain amount of transparency and freedom of the press is required first to accomplish a ‘viable civil society.’ Whether Belize has the minimum transparency level required to decentralize central authority and strengthen local authority’s capacity to manage development is a matter for more research.

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) spells out human rights laws internationally and includes the right to participate, rights of workers, rights to land, life and health, water and sanitation, freedom from economic and social exploitation (Tourism Concern, n.d.). Benefits to businesses for taking a human rights approach include: risk management, competitive advantage, social sustainability, business leadership, and ethics. Tourism Concern (n.d.) advises the tourism industry to take responsibility for those abused and to recognize its “sphere of influence” in advocating human rights.

Improvements in human rights standards can also be accounted for in the past year. The Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) favored six migrant banana workers against multinational Mayan King Limited on July 6, 2012. The ruling proved the creation of the Caribbean court is “positive step towards better access to justice in the region,” assessed Bernaz (2012: para. 1).
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Bernaz argued for superior courts’ power to protect vulnerable groups from unfair or corrupt national courts.

Training programs provide unemployment and under-employed youth with career opportunities and UNDP studies advocate training programs and conflict resolution within community organizations to help build stable societies and allow tourism to grow.\(^\text{16}\) However, limited resources present a major challenge for community development in Belize and it is certainly easier and cheaper to rely on foreign investment (Moreno, 2005). To work around tight finances, the government must establish a cooperative support network from regional and international governments and private sectors (this is where Gibson’s “polyglot” method comes in). A good marketing strategy and NGO support should support community development and connect investment and distribution of local benefits. Moreno (2005) suggests that developing a framework would help establish local ownership of ecotourism businesses and eventually, local investment.

Although meeting pro-poor objectives is challenging, local residents have positive attitudes toward tourists as long as the residents were included in the planning and profits. The Belize government reserves the power to help residents control their common property resources (CPRs) through both policy change and public service, including loan programs and training. Unfortunately, motivation for helping residents is only fueled when votes are secured (Moreno, 2005). The Belize government is also responsible for educating locals on the sustainability of ecotourism in a free market (Gibson, 2009). The local community needs consideration to achieve sustainability. To successfully integrate the poor with tourist operations, locals should be

\(^{16}\) Corruption and Integrity Improvement Initiatives in Developing Countries
United Nations Development Programme, Management Development and Governance Division, Bureau for Development Policy, New York, NY. The publication, Corruption and Integrity Improvement Initiatives in Developing Countries, by the UNDP and the OECD Development Centre offers steps to combat corruption.
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educated about tourism benefits, environment and natural resource impacts of tourism, as well as cross-culture communication to increase understanding of foreigners (Jayawardena, 2002).

The undemocratic political system needs to be reformed and long-term development strategies for any sector in Belize will not create lasting benefits without reform. However, overthrowing politicians is not the goal of PPT, and is similarly not the goal of this paper. The goal is a plan to strengthen community voices and standard of living through economic opportunity in the sector employing almost a third of the population.

Although Belize is making headway on trade freedom and easing regulations to allow the private sector and employment to grow, financial services and investment need to be reformed to open the markets and allow any significant progress (2013 Index of Economic Freedom, 2013).

Friendlier policies for local businesses and development would encourage integration of poor communities and the mainstream tourism market. Lowering barriers for market access and lowering starting investment costs will distribute the cash flow and lead to financial sustainability (Keane, Lemma, & Kennan, 2009).

Increasing service workers’ pay would benefit the community economy. One way to do this is by encouraging cooperation between service companies to raise productivity and wages; another, is increasing affordable housing and improving transportation. A precedent was set during American president Franklin D. Roosevelt’s administration, when the factory workers won union rights and an increase in wages need to reform an industry is not unique to Americans (“Cities must strategize,” 2013). Belize, a country relying on the service industry for almost a third of all employment, would be smart to follow suit.

After a significant decrease in tourists in 2008, the Belize Tourism Board (BTB) focused on promoting the Central American region as a whole to US and European markets, as directed
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by the Central American Integration System (SICA), a regional institution principled by “Peace, Freedom, Democracy and Development.”

Changes within the tourism industry are required to sustainably grow and obtain community support. Meeting the changing demands of the consumer, provide continuous high quality in product and service, improve infrastructure and logistic plans (workers migrating to resort areas with no place to live), setting controls for carrying capacity of tourist attractions, imbedding environmental management systems, obtaining global quality assurance, and expanding markets to outside North America (Jayawardena, 2002). Marketing and promotion investment is a priority for all enterprises in Belize because growth and development relies on effective marketing.

Investors and businesses in Belize identified tourism as being one of the most ideal targets for investment. The strategy for tourism included the development of Mayan ruins, sports tourism, and education tourism and stressed improving industry quality and standards (Mendoza et al., 2010).

The Sustainability Tourism Project intends to reinforce the community development around the destination areas. The checklist for accomplishing some of those objectives include:

- **Selling tourism:** Improve infrastructure to popular tourist sites to ensure visitor comfort. Provide training to all levels of service providers.
- **Involving the community:** Promote agro-eco cultural tourism destination development in southern Belize. Increase public awareness of the importance of the tourism industry through public education campaigns. Complete phase two of the small competitiveness project aimed at increasing competitiveness of micro, small and community based organizations.\(^{18}\)
- **Sustaining the environment:** Promote development incentives to projects that use

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\(^{17}\) More information on SICA can be found at http://www.sica.int/

\(^{18}\) See Developed Projects section
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“green” technologies and products and implement environmental management practices in their operations.

- **Keeping the peace**: Promote licensing and legislation for tour operators, tour guides, water activities, etc.
- **Making big plans**: Participate in the project to develop a tourism master plan.
- **National Tourism policy**: Marketing the tourism product to ensure a viable market position. Participate in North American, European and regional trade shows thereby increasing awareness of Belize as a destination. To encourage travel writers to become familiar with the diversity of Belize’s product by supporting visits to various destinations, and to encourage television crews to film in Belize and increase country awareness. Continue negotiations with international airlines and low cost carriers to persuade them to fly to Belize. Undertake negotiations aimed at establishing a direct bus route from Cancun to Belize (Mendoza, et al., 2010: 32-33).

DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Within the Belize Medium Term Development Strategy’s (MTDS) Annex 3, three lines are dedicated to a vision for the tourism sector: “To develop a vibrant and progressive tourism industry through a responsible approach which embraces a strong “eco-ethic” and effective destination management that seeks to improve the quality of life for all Belizeans” (Mendoza, et al., 2010: 99).

In order to accomplish this vision, the MTDS, produced by the government of Belize, defined five critical areas most important to the nation’s development: (1) Enterprise Development, (2) International Trade Capacity and Competitiveness, (3) Environment and Disaster Risk Management, (4) Human Development and (5) National and Citizen Security (p. 28). The following section will give examples of how Belize is working toward a “vibrant and progressive tourism industry” by showing improvements in the five critical areas (28).

ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT
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After the global economic crisis, 2008 featured a major decline in tourism (especially cruise tourism and U.S. visitors) for Belize. The need for small-enterprise development was recognized and measures to strengthen small businesses and reduce unemployment. Priority was taken to revitalize the Caribbean Technological Consultancy Services (CTCS), a collaborative consulting organization, linking business owners with technical experts by direct assistance, workshops, and job attachments. When benefits seemed to slow down, the process was reviewed and plans were made for training workshops, an investment fund, and an action plan to guide CTCS assistance (Mendoza et al., 2010).

Cornell graduate students in the Sustainable Global Enterprise (SGE) Immersion program teamed up with the Belize Tourism Board to measure the social, economic and environmental costs and benefits of tourism development. The mission is to ease the hardship put on citizens and ecosystems of destination countries by insightful assessments of capital and management costs (CU helps make it easier, 2011).

INTERNATIONAL TRADE CAPACITY AND COMPETIVENESS

The Medium Term Development Strategy (MTDS) calls for increased access to regional and international markets, as well as review of established trade policies. A project for increasing “small business competitiveness” was completed in Belize and Cayo Districts. The project worked on improving the capacity of local businesses as well as product quality. Additional strategies for the tourism sector focus on infrastructure improvements, specifically work on the international airport, on potential cruise ship docking locations, and on involving the communities surrounding key destination areas (Mendoza et al., 2010).

ENVIRONMENT AND DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT
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The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of Belize (with support from the European Union) launched a new project valued at almost US$4 million in September of 2012. "Enhancing Belize’s Resilience to Adapt to the Effects of Climate Change" aims to "enhance adaptive capacity and resilience to climate change in national policies and demonstrate action in support of effective governance of climate change and climate change related impacts in the water sector in Belize." The funds invested are part of the 20% the European Commission’s 2014-2020 budget set aside for climate-related issues. A national risk management response is important to protect the Belize’s water resources, agriculture, and tourism sites from threats related to climate change (United Nations Development Programme in Belize, 2012).

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

CARICOM (Caribbean Community), an organization of fifteen Caribbean nations and dependencies, is donating $23 million to be used in the Caribbean for the training of young and small entrepreneurs over six years (23 million dollar, 2012).

Individual capacity development involved right to representation and participation in national politics. Women’s contribution to political platforms is weak in Belize and initiatives are set to enhance lobbying for women’s rights, provide legal support to women’s participation, and establish training programs for campaigning. In October 2012, a forum was held to engage the public on the matter and an advocacy committee for female leadership roles was formed (Strengthening women’s representation, 2012).

NATIONAL AND CITIZEN SECURITY

The Belize Tourism Industry Association (BTIA) is reported to be working on the
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tourism industry. In reaction to decreased spending, arrivals, and vibrancy of tours, as well as increase in hotel closure periods in 2009, the BTIA attempted to establish a partnership with the public sector for better safety and security enforcement. The Ministry of Tourism, the Belize Tourism Board (BTB), and the public sector agencies were expected to be involved with safety consultations around tourism destinations (BTIA highlights advocacy for tourism, 2010).

The first consultation was held in 2009, in which BTIA representatives from two top tourist destinations, San Pedro and Caye Caulker spoke up. Caye Caulker’s security system is dysfunctional to the point of “serious allegations of police corruption and collusion”. Concerns also were of “non-responsiveness to crimes and the lack of collaboration with the private sector.” said BTIA Executive Director Daedra Haylock (BTIA holds crime consultation, 2009).

In 2010, a meeting took place in San Pedro to present a new security system for the entire island. The BTIA hosted the meeting to find community support and funding for the security system. Unfortunately, in a situation where participation of everyone is needed to make the project work, attendance was low (BTIA addresses island safety, 2010).

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Other projects are underway in Belize, some funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme (SGP). According to the GEF SGP’s website, it is an international NGO organization which provides funds for environmental and community conservation. Research projects can be as specific as increasing the fertility of a native lobster to more general capacity-building projects—many involving the promotion of tourism. The significance of the presence of groups like GEF SGP in Belize has potential for impacting national policy.
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Janet Gibson of SGP National Steering Committee and Belize Wildlife Conservation Society testified that the GEF Small Grants Programme promotes the sustainable “use of natural resources for improving livelihoods at the grassroots level, while at the same time strengthening the capacity of community-based organizations” (SGP The GEF Small Grants Programme, 2012: para. 1). A 2007 United Nations Development Project evaluation of the GEF Small Grants Programme, between 1997 and 2004, proved it “particularly instrumental in the growth of communities and expansion in protected areas…” (Mendoza, 2007: 41).

The Cayo Welcome Center, a development by the Belize Tourism Board’s Sustainability Tourism Project (STP), is a 2.8 million investment in the city of San Ignacio. Other STP initiatives planned include a rehabilitation center in San Ignacio, a municipal pier and plaza in Placencia, and a pedestrian walk in Belize City and receive funding by the Government of Belize and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) through a loan of US$13.322 million (Belize Sustainable Tourism Project, 2011).

Another STP developing since June 2012, is the Ambergris-San Pedro Sunset Board Walk and Water Taxi Terminal Project valued at US$2.82 million. Plans for the construction focus on rehabilitating the island’s lagoon and highlight the fishing history and marine life of San Pedro. Increasing commerce, efficient water transportation, control of traffic flow, and public and private partnerships, and overall commercial and cultural growth are among the project goals (Belize Tourism Board, 2012).

CONCLUSION

At first, in exploring Belize tourism’s impact, I was persistently pursuing an argument for community-based tourism over the conventional mass tourism industry, but my perspective
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changed. We often shape our perspectives from how we think things should be, and not from things as they actually are; and, as I poured through articles on different types of tourism and each one’s approach and impact, I found that my original thesis statement, arguing that community-based tourism is the answer to alleviating socio-economic problems in Belize, was not only naïve, but unrealistic. Pro-poor tourism may not be the answer to alleviating poverty for Belizeans either. This was a possibility that I had not considered before I started research because I wanted to believe a simple answer to my question exists. The truth is that no simple answer exists. The Government of Belize simply does not have the resources, or the capacity, to invest in full-fledged eco-friendly resorts; plenty of, arguably, more pressing issues take up the government’s time. However, studies on nations with economic situations comparable with Belize prove that linking mainstream tourist activity and poor communities is realistic enough to function in a developing, capitalist nation entangled in problems extending beyond tourism. Furthermore, a deficient government does not mean private businesses cannot make changes to ensure local communities benefit from tourist spending.

The purpose of this paper was to explore Honey’s argument that responsible tourism is a tool for stability, and eventually, a more peaceful society in Belize. My hypothesis was that Belize’s investment in a tourism industry largely ignoring its negative impact causes social and economic deterioration upon the nation. Support for such an industry is exacerbating poor conditions. There is no way to separate tourism benefits from politics, or poverty and crime from the economy. The entanglement of all these problems cannot be tackled all at once; somebody has to start at one end and pull on the string that appears the most loose—the tourism sector.

Belize’s tourism sector makes up a third of the nation’s GDP and is a key opportunity to propel the economy forward. Investing resources in reforming mass tourism to take a pro-poor
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direction is economically wise because tourism is the largest single contributor to economic growth. Pro-poor tourism can help diminish cultural tensions, decentralize politics, and improve community image, public health, and education, but cannot be accomplished without socioeconomic involvement of the community.

Because Belizeans were first conquered by the Spanish, exploited as a lumberyard by the British, then left underdeveloped and under claims by both Guatemala and Great Britain, the capacity of Belizeans to establish a strong economy never truly existed. Considering this, strategies for implementing sustainable development require collaboration of government officials, activist groups, non-government organizations, and residents to compromise interests and set goals. Meeting pro-poor objectives comes with challenges of corruption, divisions of labor, and competition. Accomplishing a reform inside the tourism industry will only occur after political and economic policies are changed. However, private resorts, such as Chaa Creek, are successfully implementing pro-poor practices and international resorts, as those mentioned in Gambia and Ecuador, represent how tourism can benefit poor communities.

Besides corruption and economic repression, violence, spiraling education levels, foreign monopolies, drug and illicit activities, and human rights abuses are other obstacles between Belizeans and economic growth. Solutions will arise from a multi-faceted response from international organizations, the Belize government, NGO groups, resort businesses, and community members. The Government of Belize has begun attempting to tackle problems through the Belize Medium Term Development Strategy, which identifies five areas where policy action is most critical. The projects currently underway to relieve some of these challenges include collaborate consultant groups for businesses, United Nations funding, a
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Women's rights campaign, security consultations, research grants, political participation, and infrastructure improvements.

Trying to encapsulate what a tourism experience should mean for Belizeans, realizing the opportunity exists to improve living conditions, and identifying the costs, the challenges, and how manageable reforming the tourism industry would be leads to a better understanding of the relationship of the tourism sector with Belize. Understanding the complexities of the political, economic, and social systems within a developing nation, and how each one factors into the tourism sector allows options to be laid out for a country accustomed to not have many options. By exploring tourism’s positive and negative impacts on the community, as well as its role in capacity-building, a precedent could be set for future investment in international sustainability.
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