Are NGOs the Answer?
Two Cases of Ecotourism Development in Nicaragua

A Tree Trunk Inside the Bosawas Reserve

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Preface

Why Ecotourism and Why Nicaragua?

As a result of an internship last year at the Monteverde Institute in Costa Rica, where I observed the effects of advanced ecotourism in Monteverde and other parts of the country, I decided to continue with my investigation of ecotourism as a tool for development in Nicaragua, a much less developed country.

In April 1997, during a quick visit to Nicaragua from Costa Rica, I arrived in the torn up capital city during a country wide strike. In my attempt to escape social havoc in Managua, I took the last bus leaving the central market heading south towards Granada, before all the roads and major highways closed down. The bus took us as far as Masaya. Roaming around the large public market in Masaya, trying to figure out what to do with myself, stuck in Nicaragua...alone...I met an American Peace Corps Volunteer. He had recently been placed in a small town in the hills above Masaya and was hoping to teach the town about changing their farming techniques to ones that are more sustainable. We talked for a while, he told me the reasons for the strike--how the new Government, Aleman, was trying to reallocate some of the land given to farmers and landless peasants during the Sandinista government, back to the Somoza family and other elite's in the country. The strike was led by the National Union of Farmers and Ranchers who were blocking all major roads and highways. He told me that he felt overwhelmed by his task--to teach this small town to change their farming methods, methods they have been practicing for generations, to ones that were more sustainable. He posed this question to me "say while growing up some big orange man came to live in your town and told you and your family and all your friends that you were living wrong, what would you think of that person?"

This experience sparked my interest in the post revolution development process in Nicaragua, particularly in the future of the environment in a country so
poor and disadvantaged. Does ecotourism have the capacity to influence the development process toward an environmentally aware and sustainable future in Nicaragua? Can it also create capital in hope to ease the social conflicts that mar the poor country after years of unrest and civil war?
Acknowledgments

I want to thank the Ford Foundation for giving me this opportunity. I can say that it was empowering to be able to do fieldwork in Nicaragua for my project. The most largest thank yous to Patrice Franko and Elizabeth Hutchison for reading my paper through and through. Lastly, I want to recommend to those who don’t mind a little dust or travel aboard a yellow school bus, to visit Nicaragua.
Chapter I
Introduction to the Concept of Ecotourism

Ecotourism is an instrument that potentially allows low income countries to benefit from economic growth in the rural areas while at the same time conserving the environment. The development tool also has the potential to inspire governments and local communities to value their resources and to promote environmental awareness, as in recent years, more and more attention has been given to the dire conditions of the global environment. The phenomena, defined more thoroughly in Chapter II, has a very visionary agenda, but many factors can disturb its success.

Nicaragua is a country whose past was filled with elitist corruption, state capitalism, and foreign powers all controlling the small nation from a top down approach. The consequences of these historic conditions are the tremendous inequalities that torment society in Nicaragua today. Ecotourism may be a viable development tool and solution to help ease these conflicts that plague Nicaragua. Nicaragua is a country so thwarted by its painful history that it needs close nurturing and attention as it attempts to improve its current conditions. Participatory development, most often implemented by NGOs, non-governmental organizations, and grassroots organizations, is gaining recognition in the present day development process. This development approach that stresses local involvement has the potential in aiding Nicaragua in its arduous process of reconstruction.

In theory, ecotourism implemented with participatory development, has the ability to improve distributional conflicts that trouble Nicaragua.
Ideally ecotourism projects should be locally integrated, as it is the local community that needs the financial benefits and environmental awareness. It is common, however, for this not to be the case, if for example, outside developers invest their own assets to establish ecotourism businesses, dulling the potential gains of the novel reconstruction tool in the local community. It is obvious in countries where people struggle to feed and cloth their families, that many of the communities where ecotourism is quite possible are susceptible to losing local control. Another factor, that often goes unnoticed, is that even ecotourism exclusively based at the local level, also has the ability to induce conflicts as the few townspeople with the most financial leverage have the capacity to hoard the majority of the advantages from the development tool. They have the capacity to have the most efficient businesses, the most comfortable lodging, the best advertisement; they have the overall ability to attract the most tourists. This internal control by a wealthier few, can equally dull the potential effects of ecotourism as a "development tool," as the greater part of the community is unable to share in the possible benefits of the ecotourism.

This argument is not unlikely, as every village, however small it may be, has those people that are better financially endowed, those who can take the greatest risks. Is there any way to avoid this predicament, to avoid this local clash of financial inequality that inherently damages the potential gains of ecotourism? Is there a way for local communities to pool the new capital generated from the ecotourism, so that the new funds can be used to build infrastructure or to raise environmental consciousness in the schools, so that every person can benefit from the ecotourism? The development tool, has vast
possibilities, but it is for the most part useless if the new assets and environmental awareness do not reach the entire local community. This project will explore some of these key distributional issues associated with ecotourism.

Ecotourism requires careful planning and intersectoral involvement. Governments, the private sector, NGOs, and local communities all have a role to play in order for ecotourism to achieve its goals. Adequate infrastructure, integrated involvement within the community and continual maintenance of the local environment are some of the necessary elements that ecotourism relies on. Ecotourism projects that are carefully planned and implemented by grassroots organizations have the potential of establishing the development tool in the right direction and to ensure that its benefits are felt by the entire community.

In the past couple of decades, more and more attention has been given to the dire conditions of the global environment and the need for all nations developed, developing, and even those recovering from a civil war, to limit growth to the sustainable carrying capacities of their environment. In reality, however, sustainable development, is a difficult consideration for Nicaragua when seventy five percent of its population lives below the poverty line, when state institutions are so impotent they have a hard time promoting even minimal law and order, when the debt burden is not payable and per capita income is at 1945 levels, or when the unemployment rate is so alarming and

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crime so rampant that not a month has gone by without strikes and
demonstrations in the last several years.\textsuperscript{2}

Ecotourism, however, has the ability to act as an engine for sustainable
development, as it is an activity that is dependent upon the maintenance and
conservation of the natural environment for its very survival. It is also a
simple tool, that when done right, has considerable rewards.

Although impoverished, and submerged in the consequences of a
revolution, Nicaragua is a country that radiates curiosity. In a sense, with
respect to ecotourism, the nation has a comparative advantage in the future.
Currently, Nicaragua is not a tourist oriented country, and is predominantly
visited by backpackers traveling through Central America. In comparison to
other countries where ecotourism thrives, Costa Rica and Belize for example,
are becoming saturated with travelers, and are losing their “thrill of
adventure” their wild qualities that lure ecotourists. Nicaragua on the other
hand, is only beginning to become known for its copious natural habitats that
lend great ecotourism opportunities in its future.

Nicaragua boasts a mosaic of many rich and little known habitats such
as coastal wetlands, mangroves, and bamboo forests. The extensive pine
savannas in the north of the country are the largest natural lowland savannas
in all of Central America and of great biological interest. Nicaragua’s
expansive rainforests are home to the endangered tapir, harpy eagle, and
jaguars whose survivals depend on these large areas of undisturbed forests.\textsuperscript{3}

There is no doubt that Nicaragua offers great potential for ecotourism. It has

\textsuperscript{2} Nicaragua Monitor. August, 1997 #70. p11.
already begun developing in areas such as Ometepe Island, along the San Juan River in the south and in the Bosawas Reserve in the north.

Nicaragua has the advantage of learning from the past mistakes of other countries, as well as, from studies on the topic, as it develops its own ecotourism throughout the country. Nicaragua has the chance to make sure that ecotourism is working to its greatest capabilities, making sure that benefits are shared throughout and invested within the community, as oppose to among a few local elite's or foreign entrepreneurs. Ecotourism, done right, has a great possibility of being a successful development tool in Nicaragua, as the country contends with its primitive and impoverished post revolution conditions. It has the potential to ease social conflicts through capital formation, as well as, transpire environmental awareness and work towards the global plight for sustainable development.

Research Objectives: Are NGOs the Answer?

Ecotourism has already begun to develop in Nicaragua in different ways. This alternative tourism and development tool is being initiated by NGOs and is also developing more spontaneously as tourists flow into more traveled areas demanding hostels to stay at, restaurants to eat in, and activities to participate in. Often, NGOs, are able to provide close supervision and guidance, and have a better ability to jump start more productive and efficient ecotourism. They can work to ensure that the ecotourism is developing within the entire community, rather than just among those with financial leverage. Ecotourism that has evolved more spontaneously on the other hand, from the demands of tourists, where planning may not have not
begin from the onset of the ecotourism development, may result with benefits that are not shared by all.

Ecotourism projects are developing within the Bosawas Reserve, a large national reserve in the north of Nicaragua, by CEPAD, a NGO that promotes participatory development working with the community pursuing a bottom up approach. Endowed with wild and virgin rainforests along with endangered species of flora and fauna, the Reserve is in increasing jeopardy from transnational corporations looking to exploit its forests, along with local communities unaware of economic options besides slash and burn farming. CEPAD is initiating alternative means of survival for one of these communities. They are introducing ecotourism as a way for this village to acquire capital while protecting the environment around them. As CEPAD introduces ecotourism, the organization has also been researching, and assessing ecotourism development in other countries, such as Costa Rica. This prior research about ecotourism, gives CEPAD a broader knowledge on how to develop their ecotourism project in Bosawas so to ensure that the entire community is benefiting from the development tool.

Ecotourism is also developing throughout Ometepe Island, an island in the middle of Lake Nicaragua easily accessible for travelers from both Managua and San Jose, Costa Rica's capital. Differently from the Bosawas region, ecotourism on the island has not been initiated or preplanned by a NGO, but rather evolved more spontaneously by the rising supply of tourists. In this case, it is not as likely, that the economic benefits and the raised environmental awareness that ecotourism has the capacity of spawning among local communities, reaches everyone on Ometepe Island.
This investigation will compare these two cases of ecotourism development and its success in generating benefits to entire local communities. My hypothesis is that the experience of ecotourism on Ometepe Island is more likely to have negative consequences, such as profit disparities as the gains of ecotourism flow into the hands of a small number. An ecotourism project such as the one in the Bosawas Reserve on the other hand, launched by CEPAD, a NGO that pays close attention to the needs of the local community and its participatory development, may have the ability to ensure the more positive effects of ecotourism on the community.

The Relevance of Ecotourism

Ecotourism has become very popular among governments NGOs and communities as a development tool, along with tourists as an alternative to conventional travel. While much has been written and studied on the ecotourism phenomenon, this paper will add to the current debate on the viability and application of this potential tool for development. This study is also focused on whether ecotourism that has been initiated by NGOs, that stress participatory development, have a better chance in promoting the positive effects of the development tool. Nicaragua is an interesting case study, as the country is not a common tourist destination, and because it is in its early stages of ecotourism development.

Chapter Summaries

Following this Introductory Chapter, Chapter II begins by talking about sustainable development, and goes on to discuss the concept of ecotourism, and the importance of participatory development through the evolution of the development option in Monteverde Costa Rica. This chapter
will also provide us with the building blocks necessary to assess two strategies in which ecotourism is developing in Nicaragua today.

Chapter III looks specifically at ecotourism development in Nicaragua. Nicaragua is a nation marred from a history of inequality, social conflict, and failed development strategies. The nation is presently undergoing a long process of reconstruction following its decades of civil war and social unrest. Tourism has developed since the civil war ended in 1990, and is growing at an increasing rate. Ecotourism is also being promoted as an option for development, as it is a tool that can help Nicaragua protect its rich environment, promote environmental awareness, as well as generate economic incentives.

Chapter IV presents the design of the investigation and shares with the reader how the research was obtained. Funded by a “Crossing Boarders” Grant through the Ford Foundation and Colby College, fieldwork was performed in Nicaragua during the month of January 1998. Ecotourism development was investigated in two communities: Homiguero, located near the Bosawas Reserve, and the Magdalena Cooperative on Ometepe Island. The two case studies give the opportunity to compare and contrast ecotourism initiated by a NGO with ecotourism that has come about spontaneously.

Chapter V and Chapter VI go on to assess and evaluate the data. They discuss the objective of the investigation, whether ecotourism development introduced by a NGO has the potential of being more effective and locally oriented, as oppose to ecotourism that has come about spontaneously. The conclusion summarizes the investigation. Are NGOs the answer for Nicaragua?
Chapter II
Ecotourism In A Literal Sense

This chapter begins by introducing sustainable development, and discusses the key concepts concerning ecotourism and its development. How long has the development tool been around? What are the fundamental elements necessary for developing successful ecotourism? The chapter includes reasons as to why participatory development is essential in launching successful ecotourism. Ecotourism in Monteverde Costa Rica, is used as an example to illustrate the effects of ecotourism throughout the chapter.

Environmental protection and sustainable development are two phenomena that have emerged into the international spotlight of political, economic, and social arenas alike, since the 1980's. These new concerns, have spawned global environmental conventions like the Earth Summit in 1992, and the of recent climate change meetings that took place in Kyoto, in December 1997. This heightened environmental consciousness has given birth to thousands of new environmental organizations; NGOs, non-government organizations, along with government organizations, and it has prompted countries to promote more sustainable practices. Chapters on the environment are being added to textbooks, and themes such as sustainable development and environmental awareness are familiar topics around the world. This recent global environmental awareness has touched all nations, developed and developing, including those recovering from years of national revolution such as Nicaragua.
Sustainable Development

The phrase sustainable development quickly entered into common vocabulary with the heightened environmental awareness of the late 1980's. Sustainable development has become a watch-word among development planners, and the theme around which global, regional and national conferences base their discussions. It is the subject of papers and books, and it is a primary focus in university classrooms. Sustainable development has also become a slogan for environmental and development activists.


The Meaning of Sustainable Development

There is no universally accepted definition of sustainable development. At least twenty definitions are listed in Blueprint for a Green Economy.5 However, the most widely cited definition is found in the World Commission on Environment and development report, which brought the term into common usage. According to the World Commission, sustainable development is:

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"development that meets the needs of the present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." 

Although a simple definition, the phrase has created great controversy and debate as it has become a catchy expression in many languages throughout the world. Sustainable Development, under its basic definition, contains the key concepts of human needs and natural resources. The most essential needs of humans and their communities are clean air, water, forests, shelter, food and clothing, and these human needs often depend on the surrounding environment. Although these needs, are for the most part renewable, they run the risk of exhaustion if abused. And in order to maintain and respect their existence, development must be limited to their carrying capacities in their present environments.

The World Commission on Environment and Development defines sustainable development as: “a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations.” It is obvious from this brief introduction that sustainable development is long-term and a global endeavor.

Achieving Sustainable Development through Ecotourism

As an activity dependent upon the maintenance and conservation of the natural environment for its very survival, in theory, ecotourism is a great motor for the promotion of sustainable development. In Nicaragua, a country

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7 WCED, p47.
whose flailing economy cripples its ability to give sufficient attention to protecting its natural habitats, ecotourism can work to promote the economy, while at the same time help to protect the environment.

Ideally ecotourism is small-scale tourism run by local communities who are often the owners of the natural resources in demand. These communities generate income through tourists who become part of a conscious community effort to learn about and protect the biodiversity of these areas. It provides an alternative form of income generation which can often decreases economic pressure on local residents to meet short-term needs by deforesting or selling land cheaply to international corporations. Ecotourism also has the potential to educate local communities about the wealth of resources they possess, and to give them a reason to preserve and manage those resources.

The Evolution of Ecotourism

About a decade ago, the word ecotourism did not exist, nor did the principles it now represents. While naturalist travelers are not a new phenomenon, their experiences were few and far between. Their trips did not produce significant economic benefits to the remote communities they visited, nor were their activities intended to be a tool for conserving natural areas or promoting environmental awareness. In contrast, today the idea of ecotourism is a widely hailed form of alternative tourism and a potential mode for rural development and environmental conservation.

Ecotourism has evolved with the growing concern for the global environment. In the developing world, poverty, unemployment, debt burdens, desperate economies and post-conflict conditions, such as those in Central America, have increased pressure on natural resources. More and more
governments down to individuals in rural communities are forced to rely upon the commercial production for export and unsustainable extraction of their natural resources. Governments are often lured by large corporations to overexploit their natural resources in order to strengthen their economy through employment and foreign exchange. Impoverished communities surrender to slash and burn agriculture, cattle ranching or timber extraction and other activities at the expense of fragile environments that cannot be replaced.

Ecotourism development, if carried out properly, is one possibility for change. It does not rely on the extraction of resources for profit, but rather, it relies on the environment remaining intact. Ecotourism has the capacity to create jobs and opportunities that are not environmentally destructive, as it promotes the limited use of land and resources. In addition, ecotourism can empower local communities and provide an opportunity for locals to guide their own development. Empowerment of local communities, however, is only a possibility when locals are integrally involved in the development process of the ecotourism.

Ecotourism has a very ambitious agenda, and is often promoted as a “win-win development strategy for underdeveloped rural areas.” The purist definition of ecotourism is “environmentally conscious tourism at low volumes.” It is often explained as “travel to natural areas to understand the cultural and natural history of the environment taking care not to alter

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8 WCED, pp47-55.
the integrity of the ecosystem,” while at the same time, producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of the natural resources beneficial to local people. 11

Since ecotourism appears so idealistic, the concept faces strong criticism. Many feel that the development strategy creates more damage to the environment and fragile wilderness areas as it “penetrates further into the space of local residents.”12 For every researcher who advocates this alternative tourism in hopes that local communities really will be motivated to conserve their environment and resources while building capital, there are others who question the very philosophy of this recently-named development tool. The debate continues throughout this chapter.

Traveling to Costa Rica’s Monteverde Cloud Forest is a prime example of ecotourism. The Cloud Forest was set up in 1972, as part of Costa Rica’s National Park System, to preserve the Cloud Forest’s unique ecosystem. Ecotourism has since developed at a fast rate in Monteverde. In the early years, it was only biologists, students and adventure travelers visited and studied Monteverde’s peerless Cloud Forest. Over the years, ecotourism has expanded at a fast rate, and has had both positive and negative effects on all aspects of life in Monteverde and the surrounding communities. Today, Monteverde is one of the most famous sites for ecotourism, and is visited by young people, old people and worldwide tourists of all kinds. Ecotourism in Monteverde will be used throughout this chapter to portray both the positive and negative outcomes of the development option.

Positive Impacts of Ecotourism

Ecotourism is a form of development that has the potential to generate funds for the protection of natural areas, promote environmental and conservation awareness among tourists and local residents, while creating jobs and economic opportunities that are not environmentally destructive. 13 Ecotourism in Monteverde has stimulated all these things.

Employment

Monteverde is located at the end of a rough and slow moving road in the Tilaran mountains of Costa Rica. Monteverde, along with many of the surrounding communities has undergone many changes due to the rise of ecotourism. The once agriculturally based economies have become more service oriented from the influx of tourists visiting Monteverde's Cloud Forest. Many locals have opened “sodas,” bakeries, restaurants and pensions, others serve as nature guides, while others sell handicrafts and souvenirs. 14 Ecotourism has been used as a tool to promote the sustainable or limited use of lands and resources in the area of Monteverde. Instead of relying on the extraction of resources from the Reserve and surrounding environment for profit, today much of the community earns a living through ecotourism related activities.

Environmental Awareness

Educating and involving locals in the development of ecotourism has stimulated extensive environmental awareness and understanding about the local ecosystems around Monteverde. One example is the Creative Learning

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Center, a bilingual, K-12 school in Monteverde, based on environmental education. The motive of the school is to instill environmental awareness into every aspect of learning beginning from the earliest years of education. The school has gained fast local and international recognition and support, as people, especially in Monteverde, realize the importance and need for environmentally aware and conscious generations in the future.

The local public high school in Santa Elena, just down the road from the Monteverde Cloud Forest, created and manages its own reserve, the Santa Elena Cloud Forest, which opened in March 1992. The Reserve has helped to rebuild the local economy, change attitudes about local rainforests, employ high school students as guides, and has produced enough revenues to add ecology and English to the high school curriculum. The Santa Elena Reserve is one of the first community owned and community administered reserves in the country, and an excellent example of what ordinary people can do to conserve their environment. Many other community organizations that promote environmental awareness have also come about with ecotourism development such as the Monteverde Institute, the Butterfly Garden, the Ecological Farm, along with other museums and community environmental clubs.

In 1982, a women's artisan cooperative, CASEM, was founded in Monteverde by eight local women, with the assistance of two North American graduate students conducting research on small businesses. The women

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started off by selling their crafts to ecotourists out of a private home. Later, CASEM shared space in a community food store, and today the women's cooperative has its own store close to the Cloud Forest Reserve. CASEM is an example of how ecotourism can inspire women and involve the entire community in ecotourism related activities.

Protecting Natural Resources

By promoting the value of untouched natural resources, ecotourism can demonstrate the value of conservation for the present as well as the future. Tourism revenue can go toward the maintenance of national parks and reserves. The amount of land under protection in Monteverde, for example, has increased greatly over the years as ecotourism revenues, local and international campaigns, and visiting ecotourists have invested in conservation efforts. In 1988, the first purchase of land was made in what is today called the International Children's Rainforest. It all began when a primary school teacher from Sweden came to do biological research in Monteverde, and became concerned about the destruction of the unprotected forest surrounding the Cloud Forest Reserve. She returned to Sweden with this concern and shared it with her classroom of nine year old students. The children responded by starting a drive to save and collect enough money to buy six hectares of endangered forest through the Monteverde Conservation League, a non-profit organization, formed in Monteverde in 1986. The idea spread throughout Sweden and then into other countries. By 1995, more than 17,000 hectares had been placed under protection. This project is an

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example of how conservation ideas that often start small can have far reaching effects.

The Conservation League was started by a group of Costa Rican and international biologists and residents concerned about the endangered forest adjacent to the Monteverde Cloud Forest. They started a campaign that resulted in the purchase of 6,400 hectares of primary tropical forest.20 The site is known as the “Bajo del Tigre” trail, and is used for environmental education and has trails open for visitors. The Conservation League has also contributed to environmental awareness in the area by instituting environmental education programs in local schools, working with local farmers, and establishing tree nurseries for native species.21

Local Participation

Ecotourism has developed so quickly, extensively and successfully in Monteverde, largely on account of the strong community involvement in the ecotourism. Community planning has been an integral part of Monteverde dating back to 1951 when nine Quaker families from Alabama made the harsh trip to Monteverde and settled in the fertile land of the cloud forests.22 Early on, the Quaker settlers set about implementing a system to meet community needs. As a first organizational step, they established the Monteverde Town Meeting, which was soon joined by the few and scattered local indigenous families in the area. Meeting helped to organize the construction of houses, plan local roads, and establish community enterprises. The hydro-electric plant which distributed electricity in Monteverde was

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started in 1957, and was later taken over by the Costa Rican government in 1991. Monteverde's most prominent enterprise, which is still strong today, is a dairy and cheese plant that began operating in 1954. Town Meeting decided on a cheese factory, as cheese is the only product that could be stored and moved to market without spoiling along the muddy ox-cart trail that led up to Monteverde.

Town Meeting was the first of several planning organizations to be established in Monteverde, and it was followed by many of the organizations and institutions already mentioned. In the late 1980s, CAMONTUR, the Monteverde Tourism Board was formed to perform various functions from land zoning to coordinating activities. In 1988, a non-profit planning organization was formed, MV2020, to work with questions and problems arising in the changing communities form ecotourism. The main purpose of MV2020 was long-term planning, rather than short-term concerns. Monteverde's history of local participation and community organizations has been essential to its ecotourism development.

Unlike locals in Monteverde, Costa Ricans living adjacent to Tortuguero National Park were unable to maintain control over tourism in their own town. Rapid investment by outside developers denied the townspeople the necessary time to accumulate enough capital of their own to start tourist-oriented businesses. Local entrepreneurs were only able to become involved in the tourism business through menial employment and

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dead end jobs as the pace of outside investment restrained the villagers time to accumulate and invest their own capital. The majority of the income was going to travel agencies, transportation companies, and hotel and restaurant owners, rather than the local inhabitants who used to depend on the nearby resources of the now National Park, for their livelihoods. Ecotourism development in Tortuguero National Park was not set up to ensure local participation.

Local participation in tourism development has become an ideology of tourism. Notable among advocates of community planning and participatory development, is Peter Murphy, who argues that local involvement and decision making from the earliest stages is essential in ecotourism development. Similar to Murphy, Michael Carnea, promotes a participation approach, in which participation is defined as, "giving people more opportunities to participate effectively in developing activities. It means empowering people to mobilize their own capacities, be social actors rather than passive subjects, manage the resources, make decisions, and control the activities that affect their lives." Implementing a participation or community approach in tourism planning and management will not automatically perfect ecotourism development, but it can at least lead to development that is acceptable by local residents.

Guaranteeing local control and direct participation, however, is difficult and requires planning from the onset of the ecotourism development. It is often best achieved through organizing local authorities and institutions such

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27. Place, p171.
as an ecotourism committee. Katrina Brandon, a senior fellow at the World Wildlife Fund and a consultant on biodiversity policy, formulated specific issues she sees as critical to eliciting community based participation in ecotourism development.

She explains that specific community members and institutions should be designated to develop and work closely with all aspects of the ecotourism. It is important that the leaders and organizations monitor and evaluate the ecotourism project regularly, and that the project is flexible to change in order to best benefit the local community as the project develops and unfolds.

Secondly local participation in all stages of the project cycle is essential. The community should be in charge of getting the ecotourists to their village, feeding, lodging, guiding, teaching and entertaining the ecotourists until they depart. This gives the local community complete ownership of their ecotourism project and the ability of the local participants to become empowered by the project.

It is also important to involve as much of the local community as possible in the ecotourism project so to empower as many people as possible. There should be part-time, rather than full-time employment. Hostels and restaurants should be run by the local community. And local goods such as food and crafts should be sold to the ecotourists to involve as much of the village in ecotourism related activities.

Lastly, Brandon explains how it is essential that the success of the ecotourism project be linked to the continuance of conserving the environment and resources in the community. Locals in the community must know that
the prosperity of their ecotourism depends on them conserving and maintaining the natural resources around them. 30

Katrina has worked extensively on policies and projects designed to link conservation with development, and has observed that it is essential for locals to be involved in the planning, decision making, managing and monitoring of the ecotourism from the onset in their community. 31 Local participation helps to avoid possible conflicts, increases the local support of the project through education and awareness, leads to more efficient planning and decision making, and helps to protect the cultural norms of the local community. The extra time and effort in ensuring local participation and involvement will only help to ensure the sustainable, moral and economic success of ecotourism projects.

Outside assistance from an NGO or grassroots organization can often help ensure local participation in ecotourism development, as well as, help provide necessary infrastructure, training and credit necessary for ecotourism. 32 NGOs and grassroots organizations are often known to focus on human development, respect traditional and local knowledge, and work to create a genuine relationship between community stakeholders, when promoting development in local communities. 33 NGOs and grassroots organizations that stress participatory development have the greatest potential in ensuring local participation and successful ecotourism development within entire communities.

31 Lindberg and Hawkins, p170.
32 Place, p171.
Negative Impacts of Ecotourism

With or without local control, some people believe that ecotourism inevitably has negative impacts. Ecotourism often affects the community more than other forms of tourism as tourists are more directly involved with the people and culture in the ecotourism location. The development tool has the ability to cause even greater harm to the environment, economic conditions, along with social and cultural aspects in communities.

Environmental Impacts

Ironically, ecotourism development can cause environmental degradation. As ecotour efforts grow within an area, they often force the community and its natural environment to change. Many conservationists are concerned that uncontrolled ecotourism will destroy the very resource upon which it is based. This can occur as business locations increase and as land usage increases from tour operators and infrastructure, saturating the carrying capacities of these resources. In addition, there is the increased generation of waste and pollution. This is due not only to the influx of tourists in the area, but to the population growth that tends to occur as a community or area offers increasing job opportunities.34

There has been concern that trails in the Monteverde Cloud Forest are eroding and that some species of flora and fauna have disappeared because of the high numbers of tourists visiting the Reserve. Although the Cloud Forest is set up so that visitors only walk on a small percentage of the total protected area, it also means intensive use on that small area of land.35 Biologists and conservationists in Monteverde agree that ecotourism

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35 Chamberlain, p20.
development has been very beneficial to increasing the amount of land under protection, however, there continues to be a debate on the carrying capacity of the Reserve and its resources.

**Economic Impacts**

Ecotourism development also has the potential to cause many economic problems. To begin with, seasonal tourism can often prove to be problematic for local communities that depend solely on ecotourism for their financial subsistence. What do families do during the off season if they have little savings? There is also the chance that ecotourism development can contribute to existing patterns of inequality that paralyze so many nations, as the most affluent, the land owners and business operators, have the most influence and power on the development process.36 Finally, there is the chance that communities developing ecotourism are effected by the fickle nature of all tourism. It is a common trend in tourism that travelers are drawn to the current “hotspot,” only to abandon it once it has become too developed.37 A village that forsakes its traditional occupations in agriculture or cattle farming per se, to take on an endeavor in ecotourism, would suffer if the fickle nature of tourism, affected the development tool in their town.

Locals involved in ecotourism around Monteverde depend on the summer months to make their greatest earnings from tourism. Tourism peaks from December to the end of April, as after that, the rainy season, also known as winter, begins. Ecotourism has caused many economic side-effects in Monteverde since it began to boom in the mid 1980s. There has been an abnormal rise in land prices as land has become more valuable due to

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37 Western, pp.116-133.
tourism construction and increased sales for conservation purposes. Land has become too expensive for many locals, and consequently is being purchased by outsiders. Population increases, due to increased job opportunities, has made many public services such as electricity, water, health services and transportation more expensive.\(^\text{38}\) Housing is also more costly, and harder to find, due to the rising population. Studies show that more than half of the local population in Monteverde has a job in the tourism industry,\(^\text{39}\) which is a major shift, considering Monteverde and the surrounding area was a predominantly agricultural based economy. Currently, Monteverde is a "hotspot" for ecotourism. It is very popular, and hopefully for its own benefit, will not be affected by the fickle nature of tourists.

**Impacts on Local Society**

It is common for local customs and cultures to be altered and even exploited by ecotourism, as the lifestyle of the tourist is often imposed on the society. This happens as luxury items and novelty products are sold in stores, items that locals can not afford, but items that satisfy the needs of the tourist. Many tourists' affluence is apparent through possessions and material things, and such can often cause locals to become frustrated with their inferior conditions. This may cause the community to become more commercialized and lose ethnic and cultural practices.\(^\text{40}\)

Common complaints in Monteverde are crowding and cramping of space. Many residents feel there are too many people, hotels, pensions, restaurants, and buildings. Other's lament that there is too much traffic,

\(^{38}\) Chamberlain, p24.  
\(^{39}\) Monteverde Exchange, No.15 October, 1991. pp16-17  
\(^{40}\) Burton, p4.
high-speed driving, increased robberies, westernization and price rises.41 One author of a site guide on Costa Rica advises its readers to skip Monteverde for all those reasons, "Monteverde has established itself as one of the premier natural history destinations in Costa Rica, and for that reason you may want to skip it. Over construction of hotels, restaurants, and gift shops, high prices, a bad road, and often-inclement weather make it hard to recommend."42

The Monteverde area provides an opportunity to examine a rural community in the developing world that has undergone a process of rapid ecotourism development. The area is unique because it has had a history of community planning that has proven to be successful in establishing strong local participation in ecotourism. Along with the actual Cloud Forest itself, ecotourism has stimulated other organizations such as CASEM, the Conservation League, the Children's Rainforest, the Monteverde Institute, the Creative Learning Center, the Santa Elena Reserve, and numerous others that promote environmental awareness in Monteverde and the surrounding communities. Despite, Monteverde's strong community planning, however, ecotourism has also proven to be problematic, and possibly unsustainable. While there has been job creation and a perceived improvement in the standard of living of many residents, there is concern that limits to growth have been reached for both the environment and in the communities.43 The Monteverde community is lucky that it has organizations, committees and places where future plans for ecotourism can be discussed. The Monteverde

41 Chamberlain, p15.
43 Chamberlain, p22.
experience only reinforces the importance of community planning, participatory development and local involvement in ecotourism.

Comparing Ecotourism in Costa Rica to Ecotourism in Nicaragua

Although ecotourism in Monteverde is used to illustrate the effects of ecotourism, it is not to say that ecotourism in Monteverde is ideal or should be emulated by other communities. Ecotourism is different in every community, as the development tool assimilates to the culture and circumstances unique in every community. Costa Rica is the icon country when it comes to representing ecotourism. Tourism is the country’s biggest income generator, and in 1995 generated $664.4 million.44

Nicaragua, however, is a very different country than Costa Rica, and it is almost difficult to compare the two other than when comparing their similar natural environments. Costa Rica has a relatively high standard of living, no standing army, and has had a democratic government since 1948. From 1986-1990, the Arias administration, promoted tourism and nature tourism in Costa Rica using the advertising slogan of “Costa Rica Naturally.” 45 This does not imply that Nicaragua should adopt ecotourism as enthusiastically as Costa Rica. However, it is important to note the differences between the two neighbors. Many ecotourists in search of adventure, may even find that ecotourism in Costa Rica is almost too accessible, too saturated and too developed. Nicaragua has the chance of luring these ecotourists in the future.

45 Place, p163.
Conclusion

While many still question whether ecotourism is a worthwhile development tool, and one that can be sustainable in practice, ecotourism has become very popular with many governments, NGOs and communities. Like tourism, which has become a most prosperous industry and engine for economic development, ecotourism has become an alternative type of tourism, that, when done well, can be both lucrative and environmentally helpful. It promises employment and income to local communities and needed foreign exchange to national governments, while allowing the continued existence of natural resource. It can empower local communities, giving them a sense of pride in their natural resources and control over their own development. It can educate travelers about the importance of the ecosystems they visit and increase their involvement in conservation efforts. Although ecotourism development has proven, in some areas, to be unsustainable and problematic, well designed ecotourism may be a realistic hope in promoting sustainable development, while at the same time increasing standards of living in developing countries.

Over the past decade, much literature has been focused on ecotourism analyzing the positive and negative aspects of the alternative tourism as a development option. Researchers have only recently begun to look at the effects of stressing participatory development and local involvement in ecotourism development that has been launched by NGOs and grassroots organizations. Can NGOs and grassroots organizations help ensure that there is local involvement and community planning during ecotourism development? Can ecotourism that has developed more spontaneously
without the help of NGOs and grassroots organizations achieve the same local participation and community planning?

Having discussed how ecotourism can promote sustainable development, the impacts and guidelines for the success of the development tool in theory, this paper will introduce and compare two cases studies of ecotourism development in Nicaragua: CEPAD’s ecotourism project in the Bosawas Reserve with ecotourism that has developed more spontaneously on the island of Ometepe.
The Republic of Nicaragua
Chapter III

The Environment and Ecotourism in Nicaragua

Ecotourism is a fast growing type of travel, and a growing development tool around the world. Although quite novel in Nicaragua, the development tool has great possibilities throughout the country. Nicaragua is a nation rich with natural resources. Short-term priorities of the government, international corporations, as well as local communities often, however, use Nicaragua's natural resource base in unsustainable ways. Consequently, ecotourism is a possible motor to help sustain resources in the nation, as the development tool, is dependent on the maintenance and conservation of the environment. Despite Nicaragua's rich natural resource base, ecotourism development will not be easy for Nicaragua, as the nation is overwhelmed with the casualties of a civil war. The economy is drowned in debt, the government has weak institutions, and society is in disorder from a history of inequalities. Development in all areas of the disadvantaged country needs close nurturing and attention to ensure that the development is locally oriented towards the needs of the local people. NGOs and grassroots organizations often approach development in this manner, stressing local and participatory development to meet the needs of local people. Such development organizations are just beginning to promote ecotourism as a development tool in parts of Nicaragua.

Getting Acquainted with Nicaragua

The influence of other nations, state capitalism, a corrupt government and an overall top down approach to development, has dulled growth and
development throughout Nicaragua's history. Consequently, Nicaragua is a
country that perpetuates inequality, similar to much of Central American.

"In Nicaragua, as everywhere, people try to find humor and happiness
in life. They do the best they can in whatever circumstances they find
themselves. But Nicaragua is a tragic place today. Its peoples' hopes
or a better world have been habitually blurred by a foreign power. This
tragedy that Nicaragua shares with most of Central America is the
tragedy of a long history of colonialism, neocolonialism along with pure
and simple injustice."


From 1936 until Nicaragua's social revolution in the late 1970's, three
generations of one family, the Somozas, along with the Guardia Nacional,
controlled the majority of the power in Nicaragua. The Guardia Nacional was
the Nicaraguan police force, which had been organized, trained and equipped
by the United States upon, the first Somoza, Anastasio's inauguration in
1933. The corruption of the Somoza dynasty is legendary. The Somozas
eventually amassed a family fortune worth more than $500 million dollars,
and acquired land holdings equal to the state of Massachusetts, although
Nicaragua itself is only the size of South Carolina.46 This land hoarding by a
small percentage of Nicaraguan elites was the principle contributor to
Nicaragua's major income disparities and the extreme impoverish conditions
that handicaps the environment today. With generous US aid, the Somozas
maintained dictatorial control over Nicaragua for more than forty years, until
the later 1970s when a social revolution broke out in the country. In 1979, the

46 Lancaster, p2.
people of Nicaragua, led by a group called the Sandinistas, won a bitter war against Anastasio Somoza, the last Somoza.47

The Sandinista revolution represented a true attempt from the common people to overcome Nicaragua's long history of colonialism, underdevelopment and poverty.48 On November 4, 1984, Daniel Ortega, of the Sandinista National Liberation Front was elected as Nicaragua's president. Ortega's goal with the Sandinista government was to make life better for the many thousands of poor Nicaraguans by providing health care, education, food and housing as well as redistributing wealth and land. The Sandinista government also had many environmental aspirations that will be discussed later on in the chapter.

In 1981, however, in the midst of the Social Revolution, Somoza loyalists began a counterrevolutionary group known as the Contras. These Contras, organized, trained, and financed by the United States, started a guerrilla war against the Sandinista Government until February of 1990.49 The costs of the Contra war debilitated the Sandinista Government. In 1987 more than 60 percent of the Government's expenditures were absorbed by defense.50 Moreover, the US economic embargo crippled Nicaraguan markets, causing hunger, and famine throughout much of the country. The Sandinista Government lost support from the Nicaraguan public as war, inflation, and recession afflicted the Central American nation, and on February 25, 1990,

48 Lancaster, p3.
49 U.S. Department of State. Background Notes: Nicaragua. Released by the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, April 1997.
50 Lancaster, p6.
Violeta Chamorro of the UNO (National Opposition Union) won the national elections.51

The Chamorro government focused its energy on economic recovery. The new Government's social policy increased spending on education and health care from international aid, as well as from saving in defense.52 Upon Chamorro's inauguration in 1990, Nicaragua had been in a state of economic crisis for more than a decade. This was a result of the prolonged civil war and social unrest, the U.S. embargo, and a disorganized government. Since the end of the civil war in 1990, however, Nicaragua has been in the process of a gradual economic recovery. Gross domestic product, GDP, grew by 3.3% in 1994, and 4.2% in the following year, after more than a decade of GDP decline. After years of hyperinflation, the annual rate of inflation was at 8% in 1994 and increased only modestly to 11% in 1995. In addition, exports increased by almost 40% in the later part of the 1990's.53 Even with this economic recovery, Nicaragua remains the poorest country in the hemisphere next to Haiti.54 By 1994, gross national product, GNP was U.S.$330 dollars per person in Nicaragua.55 Chamorro was succeeded in 1997 by Arnaldo Aleman, the president of Nicaragua today.

Nicaragua's Geographical Location

Located in the geographical center of Central America, Nicaragua is the largest country in the region. It is also the least densely populated, with an
estimated 4.4 million people in 1995.\textsuperscript{56} Nearly half of this population however, lives in Managua, León and the other cities in the western part of the country. Although located entirely in the tropics, the country varies in temperature and other climatic characteristics and is commonly divided into three regions: the Pacific Lowlands, the Atlantic Coastal Plains, and the Central Highlands.

The Pacific Lowlands, consists of an active coastal volcanic chain of 40 volcanoes and a wide rift valley that harbor Nicaragua's great lakes. Although this region is the smallest, 15 percent of the land, it is home to over 60 percent of the population. The Atlantic Coastal Plains, is made up of more than half of Nicaragua's land mass, but less than 5 percent of the population. The region is predominantly made up of pine savannas and humid tropical forests, and is home to the two major indigenous peoples of Nicaragua, the Sumo and the Miskito. In the middle of the country are the mountainous Central Highlands, that separate the two coasts. Few roads go through this region, linking the two sides of the country. The Central Highlands are settled primarily by subsistence and commercial farmers as the soil is best suited for permanent crops.\textsuperscript{57} Of the two ecotourism sites investigated in this project, one is located in the Atlantic Coastal Plains, and the other, is located on Ometepe Island in the Pacific Lowlands.

Environmental Conditions in Nicaragua today

Although Nicaragua's biodiversity is the most poorly explored in Central America, the extent of intact vegetative cover and the variety of life zones and ecosystems suggests it is exceptionally rich. Unfortunately,

58 Homziak, p2.
however, the conservation and sustainable development of Nicaragua's resources have not been maintained and are deteriorating at fast rates.

Causes of Nicaragua's major environmental concerns are the high rate of population growth, poverty, and the nation's focus on short-term gains rather than long-term sustainability. Although Nicaragua has the smallest population of the Central American countries, it has one of the highest rates of population growth, estimated to be about 2.9%. The population is also heavily urban. Increased from 35% in 1950, today more than six out of every ten Nicaraguans live in urban areas. It is expected by the year 2000, that Nicaragua's population will exceed 5.1 million.

Nicaragua's high rate of population growth intensifies poverty and unemployment, impedes economic growth and threatens social and political structures. The average annual income is $420-$450 ($150 of which is external assistance), and nearly 75% of the population lives in poverty. Nicaragua has the highest infant mortality rate (72/1000) in Central America, and one of the lower rates of life expectancy in the region.

Rapid population growth, extreme poverty, an unstable political climate, and a legacy of natural disaster, civil war and economic deterioration are driving population masses into urban centers and on to agricultural frontiers. As urban poverty provokes urban environmental problems, another stream of migration is expanding the nearly empty tropical forest and pine savannas along the Atlantic coast. Land surveys of this agricultural expansion, reveal that land is being increasing used for cattle ranching, timber and fuelwood extractions, and shifting agriculture, all of which

59 Homziak, p2.
60 Homziak, p3.
jeopardize the future sustainability of Nicaragua’s resources. In 1960 Nicaragua’s rainforests covered over 60 percent of the land area. By 1991 they had been reduced to 20 percent, due to timber exploitation.61 In recent years, deforestation rates have exceeded 100,000 hectares per year which would result in the virtual elimination of broadleaf tropical forests within 15 years.62

Nicaragua has some of the worst water pollution, degradation of watersheds, pesticide residues and access to drinking water and sanitation in Central America.63 Lake Managua, the country’s second largest lake, is seriously contaminated with urban and industrial wastes. The high contamination poses serious health hazards to the country’s most densely populated region, the Pacific Lowlands. Access to potable water and sewage systems is beyond the reach for most Nicaraguans, even in the urban areas. Only 68% of inhabitants on the Pacific coast have access to potable water, the figure drops to 37% in the Central part of the country, and to 14% along the Atlantic Coast.64 Finally there are major pressures to water supplies in Managua and other urban centers from the high rates of urbanization.

Nicaragua’s institutional and regulatory framework is unable to sustainably manage Nicaragua’s natural resources, as it is weak from poor organization and little money. Many environmental NGO’s are also known to be inadequate and poorly funded.65 Environmental consciousness and

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62 Homziak, p 4.
63 Homziak, p5.
64 Homziak, p6.
65 Homziak, p6.
education are close to non-existent among the broad population, although, Nicaragua does have a core group of people dedicated to environmental issues. Environmental awareness and concern is present and has been present in Nicaragua in the past two or three decades. However, due to the country's political, social and economic instability, attention to the environmental sector has often been displaced by other priorities.

Nicaragua and Sustainable development

Since 1990, Nicaragua has been eager to join the global bandwagon promoting environmentally sound and sustainable practices. On paper, the Chamorro Government formulated sustainable development policies, endorsing international agreements while reforming, MARENA, Nicaragua's environmental ministry, and environmental policies. The 1992 Earth Summit meetings stimulated profound environmental consciousness and national interest in all levels within the country. Nicaragua has signed all kinds of regional and international environmental decrees on biodiversity, deforestation, and climate change, national parks and reserves, and bans on unsustainable activities all to protect Nicaragua's rich environment as well as the global one.

Table showing the treaties that Nicaragua has ratified:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Ratification</th>
<th>Title of Treaty</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12-26-1996</td>
<td>International Convention to combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-18-1996</td>
<td>Convention on Biological Diversity</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-29-1996</td>
<td>Framework Convention on Climate Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-13-1995</td>
<td>Protocol relating to Intervention on the High Seas in Cases of Pollution by Substances other than Oil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>2-13-1995</td>
<td>International Convention relating to Intervention on the High Seas in Cases of Oil Pollution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-3-1993</td>
<td>Protocol on Substances that deplete the Ozone Layer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-3-1993</td>
<td>Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer</td>
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<tr>
<td>4-4-1991</td>
<td>International Plant Protection Convention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-4-1990</td>
<td>Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare</td>
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<tr>
<td>7-4-1989</td>
<td>Statutes of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>3-17-1982</td>
<td>Convention on the International Maritime Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-12-1980</td>
<td>International Convenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-17-1980</td>
<td>Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-4-1977</td>
<td>Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-25-1977</td>
<td>Statute of the International Atomic Energy Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>8-7-75</td>
<td>Convention on the Prohibition of the Development and Stockpiling of Bacteriological and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>11-6-1973</td>
<td>Convention for the Establishment of an Inter American Tropical Tuna Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-7-1973</td>
<td>Treaty on the Prohibition of the Emplacement of Nuclear Weapons and other Weapons of Mass Destruction on the Sea Bed and the Ocean Floor and in the Subsoil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-9-1968</td>
<td>International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-26-1965</td>
<td>Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and under Water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-30-1960</td>
<td>Articles of Agreement of the International Development Association</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One would assume from all the amendments the Nicaraguan government has made in promoting environmentally conscious activities, and from all the environmental treaties Nicaragua has signed, that the country would be far on its way to achieving sustainable development. It is not. Nicaragua’s post conflict conditions are at the heart of the nation’s inability to execute sustainable and environmentally sound development. A quick review of environmental policy in Nicaragua will illustrate that despite good intentions, Nicaragua has a long way to go to meet the challenge of sustainable development.

**The Environment Prior to the Revolution**

Prior to the Revolution, the Sandinista Government had been quite environmentally idealistic. Its first step was to nationalize the natural resource base, which during the Somoza regime, had been controlled by local elites and international companies. Secondly, the government wanted to cancel forestry concessions as extensive pine forests were being leveled into
pasture lands throughout the country. Lastly, the government wanted to nationalize the gold mines as mining companies were contaminating important water-ways around Nicaragua with toxic wastes. IRENA (today MARENA), the Nicaraguan Institution of Natural Resources and the Environment was also created by the Sandinista government, and although it had little practical powers it did represent the government’s efforts to increase environmental awareness. These environmental aspirations, however, were quickly displaced as the Sandinista government had to prepare itself for war.

The costs of Nicaragua’s revolution were catastrophic. Crops were left unplanted for fear they would be destroyed during fighting. Labor was not mobilized to produce goods, but rather to fight in war. Skilled workers and professionals fled the country in large numbers. The nation’s capital reserves were depleted, and international loans were for the most part unavailable. More than 80,000 civilians were killed during the Somoza regime from casualties in the revolution, 500,000 Nicaraguans were displaced, and up to 400,000 Nicaraguans fled the country. Bridges were dynamited, schools and clinics burned, and farms ruined. Losses from the war in material damages are estimated between $1.5 billion and $4 billion, and the U.S. Embargo caused an additional $3 billion in losses. Displaced populations overloaded ecosystems and contributed to deforestation, soil erosion, and water pollution. Guerrillas armed with automatic weapons used the confusion of war to poach

67 Lancaster, p7.
68 Lancaster, p7.
wildlife in Nicaragua's National Reserves and protected areas. Unrecoverable harm was done to Nicaragua's environment during the Revolution.

The Environment Since the Revolution

Nicaragua was working to correct its unsustainable environmental practices prior to the revolution. While today, maimed by decades of conflict, Nicaragua finds itself in an even more arduous position to promote development that is environmentally supportable. To begin with, Nicaraguan institutions are too weak to enforce environmental laws. Nicaragua, for example, has 71 protected areas decreed by law and known as the National System of Protected Areas. Unfortunately, however, the majority of these protected areas are only protected according to paper, as they lack personnel or support of any kind from the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources, MARENA. Even those few areas in which MARENA does make an effort to protect, suffer from uncontrolled hunting, capture of pets for the pet trade, cutting of firewood and subsistence agriculture within the reserves.

Secondly, Nicaragua is in major conflict and debate as to whether it wants to take the pro-investment fast track or the much slower paced pro-environment track, that is often more sustainable, towards development. Nicaragua accepts toxic wastes from developed countries and partakes in large scale unsustainable logging for export, even though the government has signed national and international treaties that prohibit such unsustainable practices. It is common for the Nicaraguan government to undermine its own

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70 Homziak, p4.
laws and commitments to obtain capital and investment, as the country is eager to jump-start its moribund economy.

Nicaragua’s National System of Protected Areas
At this very moment in Nicaragua, the newly-elected Aleman government has opened up the largest rainforest along the Caribbean Coast in the Western Hemisphere north of the Amazon Basin, for clearcutting, as a short-term investment for his desperate economy. The Aleman administration is blatantly disregarding the provisions of the 1987 Autonomy Law which created the Caribbean Coast autonomous regions. It has allocated land holdings in the Reserve to logging companies, foremost among them, SOLCARSA, a Korean multinational corporation.71

Roads are being built into the virgin rainforest, and the cutting of precious trees, such as mahogany, is in full force. The wood treatment plants operated by SOLCARSA use toxic chemicals that have been banned in most countries including Nicaragua. These chemicals are neither contained nor diluted after use, and run directly into community drinking water sources and agricultural lands. The Nicaraguan government has a ban on mahogany exports, but says it lacks the resources to enforce it.72 Multinationals are attracted to Nicaragua, a country struggling to boost its economy, a country lured by fast cash, and a country unable to enforce its environmental laws.

Lastly, the majority of the population is too poor to care or even think about observing environmental laws. Most Nicaraguans struggle to find food and money for their next meal. Poor rural and indigenous communities displaced from their lands cut down trees, precious and non-precious, for firewood to heat their homes and to cook their food. When the only way to get

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72 Ambrose, p2.
your next meal or some money to survive is by invading the resources of protected areas, those protected areas are going to lose.

The Realities of Nicaragua's Environmental Conditions

Nicaragua's period of post conflict reconstruction since 1990, has been a terrible struggle for the poor Central American nation. This struggle to rebuild its economy and reknit its society is a period that will continue for decades. In Nicaragua post conflict realities have the ability to handicap a nation's aspirations and abilities to develop in a sustainable fashion. As we know the definition of sustainable development from the Brundtland Reports says: “Development that meets the needs of the present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Considering Nicaragua is unable to meet the existing needs of its present generations make it that much more difficult for the country to be concerned about the needs of its future generations.

Although this time of reconstruction and development is hard and exhausting, it also is an opportunity for the government and the country as a whole to pick and choose its investments and development schemes. Nicaragua is in a window of opportunity to instill the importance of environmental awareness into political, social and economic aspects of the society. Out of this environmental crisis, ecotourism has been proposed as a way to confront the short-term needs of many Nicaraguan communities and the long-term necessity to change the consumption and exploitation patterns within the country, for the future.
Tourism and Ecotourism in Nicaragua

Although famous for political instability and warfare, little is known about Nicaragua’s possibilities for tourism. Historically, Nicaragua has relied on agriculture as the strength of its economy. The country’s principle exports have been coffee, beef, sugar, seafood, cotton and bananas. In the past decade, however, the Chamorro government began to focus on tourism as a potential strategy for the economy.

Nicaragua has much to offer that makes it a prime spot for traditional tourism with its beaches, cultural attractions, historical sites, as well as sports and entertainment. It also has much to offer for ecotourism with its wealth of ecological diversity, practically unexplored forests and volcanoes, to lakes, rivers and oceans. The relative stability that exists in Nicaragua today has helped to change the image of the region. Since 1990, data collection has improved and tourism has grown. It rose from being the seventh major export in 1990 to taking second place in 1997, just behind coffee. In 1997 tourism generated 10.7 percent of the country’s total exports, $79.8 million dollars.

Lack of hotels, bad roads, poor transportation, poor sanitation, little to no health or emergency care in remote places, a poorly funded ministry of tourism, MITUR, along with the country’s poor international image will always, however, hinder the development of Nicaragua’s traditional and ecotourism industries alike.

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Tourism in Nicaragua is Steadily Increasing

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Ecotourism in Nicaragua

Not every country has the fortune of being suitable for ecotourism. Nicaragua however, is one such place, and has already begun to develop it. The Ministry of Tourism, MITUR, and the Ministry of the Environment, MARENA, have begun to work together to promote policies and regulations for the development tool on paper. Hotels and tour operators also show interest in the development of ecotourism, as it could stimulate substantial business. Ecotourism is also developing through the help of NGOs and other aid institutions, as well as, spontaneously without planning or organization in different parts of the country. Also, as a neighbor to a country where ecotourism is very developed, Nicaragua has the opportunity to learn from Costa Rica. The development tool can help Nicaragua promote its goals towards sustainable development, while at the same time stimulate
economic development, conservation of natural resources and ease social conflict.75

Existing research suggests that successful ecotourism development requires careful planning and local involvement from the onset of development to accomplish its goals. The research objective of this project is to see if ecotourism initiated by a NGO or grassroots organization has a better possibility of achieving those goals. As discussed earlier, NGOs are often known to focus on human development, respect traditional and local knowledge, and work to ensure participatory development.76

In a country like Nicaragua, whose past was so filled by foreign powers, elitist corruption and state capitalism, all controlling the nation with a top-down approach, ecotourism initiated by a NGO that stresses local participation, may be the nation's answer to successful ecotourism development in the future. This project will compare two sites of ecotourism that are presently developing in Nicaragua. In the first site, an NGO called CEPAD is initiating the development tool in Homiguero, a small town on the outskirts of Bosawas Reserve. In the second site, Magdalena Farm on the island of Ometepe, ecotourism is developing spontaneously without the assistance of a NGO or grassroots organization. The following chapters will go on to investigate ecotourism in both sites, to see whether in this case, ecotourism initiated by the NGO is more successful at achieving the goals of the development option.

75 Western, pp116-133.
76 Warner, p32.
A Petroglyph at Magdalena Farm
Chapter IV
Approach and Methodology

The objective of this investigation is to compare two different case studies of ecotourism development in Nicaragua: An ecotourism project initiated by CEPAD, a NGO in the Bosawas Reserve, and ecotourism that has developed more spontaneously from the influx of tourists on the island of Ometepe. Fieldwork was conducted from January 2-29, sponsored by the Ford Foundation.

Fieldwork Conducted During January 1998

The first week was spent in Managua, the capital, visiting different government ministries, NGOs and organizations that work with the environment, tourism, and ecotourism. The second week was spent researching on the ecotourism project launched by CEPAD in the town of Homiguero and in parts of the Bosawas Reserve. The third and fourth weeks were spent looking at ecotourism on Ometepe Island, and back in Managua gathering final information from NGO's, government ministries and other contacts.

Fieldwork involved a combination of formal and informal interviews, along with participating in different ecotourism related activities. Literature from the environmental ministry, MARENA, and the tourism ministry, MITUR, materials from CEPAD, other NGOs, USAID, libraries and museums in Nicaragua was obtained and integrated into the project. Throughout the month in Nicaragua, Margaret Harritt, the director of the environmental mission at USAID in Nicaragua, acted as the academic advisor to this project.
She helped to hone and focus ideas, to formulate research questions, and to provide literature and new contacts.

**Investigating CEPAD's Ecotourism Project**

Observation for the first case study was based on participating in CEPAD's ecotourism project in the town of Homiguero and the Bosawas Reserve as an ecotourist. CEPAD was coincidentally offering a trip from January 9-14 while I was in Nicaragua. Prior to going on the trip, information was gathered from Edgar at CEPAD's office in Managua to get a better understanding about the NGO and their Eco-Educational Tourism project. CEPAD, the other ecotourists on the trip, as well as the members of Homiguero involved in ecotourism all knew that I was observing the project for a college thesis.

**CEPAD and How it Became Involved with Ecotourism**

After years of working with rural communities throughout Nicaragua, CEPAD began to see that environmental restoration was essential to the development and improvement of life in Nicaragua. CEPAD is a ministry of the evangelical churches in Nicaragua working concurrently in emergency relief, peacemaking and development throughout the country. The NGO was formed originally to meet the urgent needs of the earthquake that demolished Managua 25 years ago in 1972, and today is the largest NGO in Nicaragua. CEPAD works in more than 100 locations throughout Nicaragua, working with local communities to help them better their conditions. Rather than imposing solutions from the top down, the NGO makes an effort to “empower people” by having them make their own decisions about the communities.
they live in. CEPAD tries to ingrain practices, values and tools into communities, and then let the communities use the new knowledge.

It became very clear to CEPAD that practical environmental awareness was urgently needed in Nicaragua from the destruction of primary rainforest by local communities unaware of economic options besides slash and burn farming, from illegal logging and from uncontrolled hunting within reserves. The lack of government funding and will to protect resources, along with the government's alliances with transnational corporations such as SOLCARSA, makes the need for environmental support and education within Nicaraguan communities even more essential. With these factors in mind, CEPAD began to strategize about the benefits of ecotourism in 1992.78

The Projects Different Directors

CEPAD's Eco-Educational Tourism project was initiated in 1992 after a North American woman from the NGO, Martha Collier attended a class called 'Ecotourism in Protected Areas' at the University of Peace in Costa Rica. After several visits to towns around the Bosawas Reserve, Martha chose to work with Homiguero as locals in the community showed interest and wanted to participate in the project. Homiguero is located on the outskirts of Bosawas, 30 kilometers to the east of the municipality of Siuna.79

Homiguero is an agriculturally based community made up of around 1200 people. Its principal growing crops are corn, beans and rice which are consumed locally, and at times, they are sold in Siuna. There is a primary school from kindergarten to 6th grade, and a medical facility in the town.

however, it lacks medicine, a common trait of such facilities throughout Nicaragua.

Siuna, Homiguero, and Bosawas

CEPAD's Eco-Educational Tourism project was designed to offer an alternative form of development in the agricultural community. It was projected not only as a way for the people in Homiguero to earn new assets,
but also as an opportunity for education and new services to enter the town. CEPAD intended that some of the ecotourism profits be reinvested into public services in the community through the local institution set up to work with ecotourism. Martha's mission in Nicaragua was over two years later and a new worker in CEPAD, Randy, took over the project.  

Randy also a North American, organized a list of workshops and training sessions he hoped to implement in Homiguero. His requirements for participation were an equal number of men and women involved in the project, basic literacy, that they have no other major sources of income and that they were the only representatives working in the project from their families. Randy's workshop themes included basic ecology, conservation, national geography, knowledge of the rainforest, trees, plants, animals and birds. Randy also hoped as part of the community training to take project members to observe guides and ecotourism projects in other parts of Nicaragua such as Ometepe Island and San Juan del Sur. Randy's mission with CEPAD in Nicaragua was over a year later, and it is unclear as to what he was actually able to accomplish in Homiguero. Following Randy, CEPAD's Eco-Educational Tourism project went untouched for over two years. Less than a year and a half ago, a Nicaraguan, Edgar Téllez, was hired by CEPAD to direct the project, and has been doing so ever since.

CEPAD's inconsistent leadership with its Eco-Educational Tourism project in Homiguero has limited ecotourism development in Homiguero. Each director has had their own ideas and intents for the Project, and they  

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have often been lost when a new director takes over. Since the Project's initiation in 1991, there have been only eight ecotourism trips.

Tree Roots inside the Bosawas Reserve

The Bosawas Reserve, located in northern Nicaragua is 7400 square kilometers, and is one of the largest reserves in the hemisphere.\textsuperscript{82} It was

\textsuperscript{82} Information about Bosawas. Xeroxed memo from CEPAD, Nicaragua. January 1998.
recently formed in October of 1991. The name comes from the Bocay River, Mt. Saslaya, and the Waspuk River, all located within the Reserve. Bosawas is made up of a diversity of ecosystems including rainforests, humid forests, pine savannas, and contains species of flora and fauna that are extinct from other areas of mesoamerica. The Reserve is also home to more than 20,000 indigenous people, most notably the Mayangna and Miskito.

On paper, the Reserve is protected under MARENA's National System of Protected Areas of Nicaragua. Bosawas, however, confronts the same obstacles of all preserved areas in Nicaragua. MARENA lacks financial support and personnel. Consequently, MARENA is unable to protect Bosawas from squatters, illegal logging, and other activities that jeopardize national reserves already discussed in Chapter III.

**How to Evaluate CEPAD's Eco-Educational Tourism Project**

Before going to Bosawas to participate in CEPAD's Eco-Educational Tourism project and trip into the Bosawas Reserve, a list of markers to help judge the effects of how ecotourism was involving and benefiting the local community was composed with the help of Margaret Harritt. It was hoped that such markers would measure the extent to which the revenues from the ecotourism was improving public and private services in the community.

1. **Community Earnings**
   - Health and Nutrition
     - Is there a health center?
     - Is there a doctor?
     - Is there medicine in the center?
   - Education
• What is the community knowledge of the Reserve?
• Is there environmental education in the schools?
• What kind of materials are used?
• Are there trained guides available for the ecotourists?

• Infrastructure
  • How are the roads?
  • Is the water potable?
  • Is there electricity?
  • Is there a sewage system?
  • What are the forms of communication?

*How have the conditions from question 1 been affected by ecotourism?*

2. Are there community meetings regarding the ecotourism? Is there some type of council on how to generate the funds earned from the tourism?

3. Who owns the restaurants and hostels?

4. Are there many different options of ecotourism? What are they? Who runs the different activities?

*Do those owners from questions 3, 4, and 5 own other businesses? Do they give back to the community in any way from their earnings?*

5. **Household Earnings**

  • How much new money is generated?
  • What is the money spent on?

*Characterization of living conditions, and homes.*

6. **Input of NGO**

  • Does CEPAD make a conscious effort to ensure that ecotourism benefits the entire community? Is there a specific strategy?
It was intended that the questions would help find out how ecotourism profits were being spent and distributed privately and publicly in Homiguero. Was CEPAD, as the NGO implementing ecotourism into Homiguero, making direct efforts to involve the entire local community and ensure that benefits were being felt by the entire community? As discussed earlier, NGOs are often known to focus on human development, respect traditional and local knowledge, and work to ensure participatory development. The objective of this paper states that ecotourism initiated by a NGO or grassroots organization has a better possibility of achieving the positive goals of the development tool: economic development, conservation of natural resources and social equity. Has CEPAD had such effects on ecotourism development in Homiguero?

The Trip into the Bosawas Reserve

For the ecotourist, CEPAD's ecotourism trip lasts for six days. The first day, in Managua the NGO offers an orientation of Nicaragua. An overview is given of the political, social, economic and historical conditions of the country. That is followed by a tour of Managua, and a presentation on Nicaragua's environmental history, current environmental conditions, and environmental problems. The following day the group flies to Siuna with Edgar, CEPAD's project director. A brief tour is given of Siuna, a small city, including a visit to the MARENA office to look at maps of Bosawas. A pick-up truck takes the group out to Homiguero along a bumpy dirt road, around 45 minutes away.

83 Warner, p32.
Upon arriving in the remote agricultural town, the group is welcomed by the Ecotourism Committee, a small group of men and women from Homiguero. A tour is given of the town, and then dinner is served, typical campo food: beans, rice, cabbage, cheese and coffee. The group is divided up to sleep in private homes around the town. The homes are small wooden structures with tin roofs and dirt floors. The sounds of pigs, roosters, crying children, and dogs can be heard throughout the night.

Where Hammocks are hung inside the Reserve

The following morning the group hikes up into the Bosawas Reserve. Four mules, two guides, the main teacher from Homiguero's school, and two cooks from Homiguero accompany the group for the next three days in Bosawas. The hike is long as the group moves slowly observing birds, animals, trees and surrounding nature. The trail is poor and exposes
obstacles of mud, streams and steep hills. Camp is reached after around 4 or 5 hours. Upon arriving, the group works to set up the tarps and hammocks, while lunch is prepared.

Camp exists of two wooden structures which are then covered in tarps. Hammocks are hung in one for sleeping, and the other is set up for cooking. A latrine is located close by. Conditions are primitive, but adequate for the adventurous ecotourist. The rest of that day and the following day are spent taking hikes and exploring further into the Reserve. Parts of Bosawas are still virgin forests, although there are cleared patches that have been cut for logging. Observant ecotourists are able to catch glimpses of Toucans, hummingbirds, and many different kinds of monkeys.

Cooks from Homiguero preparing food inside the Reserve
The guides, cooks, and the professor from Homiguero try to accommodate the needs of each ecotourist. Guides do their best to locate birds for those ecotourists interested in bird watching and ornithology. They do their best to talk about the trees and vegetation for those ecotourists more interested in biology. And they do their best to find animal tracks for those ecotourists interested in the Reserve's wildlife. Cooks do the best they can to prepare foods for vegetarians or ecotourists with other food preferences. It appears as though CEPAD has taught Homiguero that ecotourists are all different, and that very ecotourist is on the trip for a different reason. Some are interested in birds, others in trees, and others such as myself, in the development of the project and its effects on the community.

Three nights are spent in the Reserve, and on the last day the group hikes back down to Homiguero. A feast is waiting, along with many members of the community. After mingling, the ecotourists sit down with the Ecotourism Committee and Edgar to discuss the trip. The Committee is very intent on knowing the pros and cons of the trip, and in getting recommendations to improve their ecotourism in the future. Suggestions such as a better trail, more information about the history of Homiguero, the Reserve and the project posted for ecotourists to read about, and signs along the trail were recommended.

The group then travels back to Siuna. Planes are not on a consistent schedule so there is no explicit time as to when the group arrives back to Managua. When the group separated, Edgar made it clear that if anyone had further questions, concerns or wanted to talk about the trip he would be happy to do so.
Modifying how to Evaluate CEPAD's Eco-Educational Tourism Project

Upon arriving in Homiguero and gaining a better understanding of the circumstances of CEPAD's ecotourism project, it was realized that the intended markers and questions to ask Homiguero did not relate to the conditions in the village. Homiguero is a primitive and remote agricultural town, with little infrastructure, no hostels or restaurants and only one available option of ecotourism, CEPAD's trip.

Due to the primitive conditions of Homiguero's ecotourism development, the questions and markers to judge the effects of ecotourism on the community were altered to better accommodate the actual situation:

1. How and when did ecotourism start in the community?
2. What did CEPAD do to initiate it?
3. Were there workshops? Who was involved?
4. How do you receive money for taking the tourists CEPAD brings to you into the Reserve?
5. What is done with that money? Does the entire community benefit from the funds?
6. How has Homiguero changed because of the ecotourism project? Has anything new been constructed due to ecotourism?
7. Does the ecotourism work to protect the environment? the Bosawas Reserve? and its resources?
8. How has environmental awareness changed in the community since the project began?
9. Do you like what CEPAD has initiated? Do you like the tourists?
10. What do you think about the future of the project?
The intent with these questions, like the initial ones, was to see if CEPAD, as the NGO implementing ecotourism in Homiguero, was making direct efforts to involve the entire local community and to ensure that benefits were being felt by all. Is the objective of this paper correct? Does ecotourism initiated by a NGO or grassroots organization have a better possibility of achieving the positive goals ecotourism: economic development, conservation of natural resources and social equity? Has CEPAD had such effects in Homiguero?

Interviews were conducted with the guides and cooks during the ecotourism the trip. Other members of the Ecotourism Committee were also interviewed along with other people in Homiguero. Joint, more formal interviews were given to the two guides, and to the two cooks at the basecamp inside the Reserve. Although interviews were conducted outside in the rainforest, the 'more formal' interviews were given privately and were not interrupted. Notes were taken in a spiral notebook, and interviewees were always asked whether they would mind being quoted. Considering, the unthreatening topic, and that responses to questions were often critical, it can be assumed that people in Homiguero responded honestly. All those I spoke with were aware that I was a student observing the ecotourism project for a research project at my college. Although I was an American student, I felt as though people in Homiguero respected my questions, and were excited that I was investigating ecotourism in their town.
Limitations

Time restraints, limited research in Homiguero to six days, and the attendance on only one ecotourism trip. Much can be done to further the investigation of CEPAD's Eco-Educational Tourism project in Homiguero. To begin with, there should be participation in numerous ecotourism trips. More time should be spent directly involved in the local community of Homiguero. Finally it would be advantageous spending time on the Ecotourism Committee to get a complete sense as to how the organization works.

The Second Part of the Investigation: Ecotourism on Ometepe Island

Before traveling to Ometepe Island to investigate the second part of this investigation, initial reading and contacts were made from Managua. Personnel at Alistar provided the name of an NGO, Fundación Entre Volcanoes, that works with the environment and many other things on Ometepe. Margaret Harritt provided background information about Ometepe Island from USAID's library. Lastly, a fellow participant from the ecotourism trip into Bosawas, a Canadian who lives in Nicaragua, recommended a site on Ometepe called Magdalena Farm, as a possible case of ecotourism.

Ometepe is the largest of more than 400 islands in Lake Nicaragua. Translated from the indigenous language, Nahuatl, Ometepe means “two hills,” as the island is formed by two volcanoes: Concepción which rises 1610 meters above the lake, and the smaller Maderas which rises 1340 meters. Years ago, lava flowing between the two volcanoes created an isthmus which connects the two islands. Concepción is still active, and the last recorded though not critical eruption occurred in 1983. Maderas is dormant. Lake
Nicaragua is the tenth largest fresh water lake in the world, and home to the only existing freshwater shark.  

There are no exact dates of the colonization of Ometepe, however, historians and archeologists believe that it was some 20,000 years ago. Pottery has been discovered from the Chorotega and Nahuatl Indians that shows they lived on the island between 1500BC and 1500AD. Ometepe is famous for its ancient stone statues and petroglyphs (petrified rock formations) made by the Chorotega Indians depicting spirals, birds, animals and other geometric shapes. They exist all over the island, but mainly around the Maderas Volcano.

Ometepe’s population is estimated around 30,000, and small communities are dotted around the periphery of the island. Agriculture is the

predominant source of income, as the volcanic soil is very fertile. Plantains, coffee, rice, beans, corn, bananas, citrus fruits, cacao, and tabbacco are the main crops on the island. Part of Ometepe, especially on the Maderas side, is covered by thick rainforests and tropical humid forests. Wildlife is abundant in these parts, including white faced and howler monkeys, green toucans, magpies, red headed eagles, quetzals, and many other birds and animals.86

Ometepe is considered environmentally unique. Both volcanoes are National Reserves as is the isthmus connecting the two islands. A national law specifically pertains to Ometepe declaring the island "a national reserve in both the aspects of culture and environment."87 MARENA enforces that prior to all construction, plans must be presented demonstrating how the new structure will complement the culture and environment of the island. MARENA also requires that a permit be purchased for the cutting of trees. Considering these regulations are on paper, their enforcement is often neglected.

Ometepe is a common destination for many travelers when in Nicaragua, as the island is known to be safe, tranquil and an environmental attraction. The island is advertised as one of Nicaragua's prime spots of ecotourism.88 Proximity to Costa Rica, the most visited Central American country, also adds to the tourism on the island, as many tourists in Costa Rica make the short trip over to Ometepe to explore the volcanic island.

The Exploration of Ecotourism on Ometepe Island

A week was spent on the island looking at Magdalena Farm, a working farm and cooperative on the Maderas side, investigating tourism in the two major port towns: Moyogalpa and Altagricaia, and lastly visiting NGOs and government ministries.

Traveling to Ometepe entailed a two and a half hour public bus ride from Managua to Rivas, a crossroads city to the south of Managua. A short bus ride was then taken to the small port town of San Jorge, where the boat over to Ometepe is located. The boat ride takes an hour and docks in Ometetes' largest town, Moyogalpa.

A Bird’s-Eye View of Ometepe Island
The first place investigated on Ometepe was Magdalena Farm. Reaching the Farm required bus travel from Moyogalpa to Santa Cruz, which can take up to two hours, as the road is poor. From Santa Cruz one must walk to the town of Balgue, and then a short way up the Maderas Volcano to the Farm. Magdalena Farm is not easy to find or easy to get to. There is little publicly available printed information about the Farm, and it is not yet listed in guide books. However, in the past two years tourists have begun to flock to it through word of mouth.

Learning about Magdalena Farm

The following information is posted on the wall of the hacienda at Magdalena, in both Spanish and English for visitors to read. Magdalena Farm is a working farm, and a cooperative left over from the Sandanista years. The cooperative consists of 29 associates and their families who work the land both in common and on their own parcels. The main crops produced are organic coffee, plantains, milk, honey, corn, beans, rice and some vegetables. During the Somoza years the hacienda was run by a single landlord who managed the large property. When the Sandanistas came into power in 1979 the cooperative was formed and it begun to manage its own affairs. Over the years, the number of associates has decreased from 50-60 to the 29 that exist today. A group of five directors make up different managing positions: president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and spokes person.

Today Magdalena’s main source of income is organic coffee. The coffee is harvested in October and November. It is then depulped, dried twice under the sun, bagged and sent down the volcano by mule in February. The
Cooperative's harvest in 1995 was over 8,000 kilograms. The Bainbridge-Ometepe Sister Island's Association near Seattle and the Gulf Island's Friendship Association near Vancouver purchase the majority of the Farm's coffee. This is essential to Magdalena, as the Farm knows it will earn profits from selling all of their coffee through the Sister-Island alliance. The two Sister-Island Associations roast and sell the organic coffee in the United States and in Canada, and return the profits from the coffee sales to the entire island of Ometepe in the form of water projects, schools, and health services.

The Organic Coffee Fields at Magdalena Farm

The farms fastest growing source of income is tourism that began around two years ago. A large and deteriorating hacienda that dates back to 1888 remains, and is used as a place to host the adventure tourists that come

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to the farm. Three large rooms on the second floor of the hacienda are filled with simple hammock beds. The rooms can hold up to forty people. There are two bathrooms, two showers, and a sink for tourists to use.

Meals are served on the porch of the hacienda throughout the day. The food is simple campo food: rice, beans, cabbage, eggs, cheese, fish, chicken and beef when available. The farm also provides guide services through the coffee fields, up to the lagoon and to the top of Maderas Volcano, as well as to see the different petroglyphs that are located throughout Cooperative's property.

Magdalena charges small fees for their services. In January 1998, prices were as follows: $1.60 to stay the night, meals were no more than $3.00 and guided tours were priced between $7 and $10 dollars. It is posted that the money received from the tours around the volcano goes into maintaining the trails and protecting the Maderas Reserve. The Cooperative also welcomes any of the guests to help out on the Farm, picking coffee, sorting the coffee beans, or anything else one cares to learn about.

Gathering Information about Magdalena

Three days were spent at the Farm observing and performing informal interviews with different associates in the Cooperative, along with volunteers who had been at the farm for up to a year. Similar questions and markers put together to judge how ecotourism is effecting the community of Homiguero and the Bosawas Reserve were used to investigate the development of ecotourism at Magdalena Farm:

1. How and when did tourism begin at the Farm?
2. How was it initiated? How did and how do tourists know to come here?
3. What has the Cooperative done to organize the development of tourism?
Have you gotten any outside help in the process?
4. What is done with the money received from the tourism? Is there a community fund that distributes the money? Is there a committee that works with the development of the tourism?
5. Does the entire community benefit from the money? How?
6. How has Magdalana Farm benefited from the tourism? Has anything new been constructed due to the influx of tourists?
7. Does the tourism do anything to protect the environment of Ometepe, and especially the Maderas Volcano and the resources on the Farm?
8. How has environmental awareness changed in the community since the project began?

Further questions were asked to get a better understanding of the Cooperative.
9. What is the history of the Cooperative? When did it come about?
10. What has the evolution of the tourism influx been like? How many tourists come per week? Month? Year? What are the busiest times?
11. How do tourists hear about you?

The intent of these questions, similar to the set of questions asked in Homiguero, was to see how ecotourism profits are being spent and distributed throughout the community and individually at the Farm. Ecotourism at Magdalena came about spontaneously without prior planning or help from a NGO or grassroots organization. According to the hypothesis of this paper, ecotourism that has evolved spontaneously, where planning may not have begun from the onset of the ecotourism development, may not result with benefits that are shared by all. Consequently, achieving the positive goals
of ecotourism: economic development, conservation of natural resources and social equity stimulate economic development, conservation of natural resources and ease social conflict, may not be felt by all. Is this the case at Magdalena Farm?

Fortuitous timing allowed the observation of a meeting held between the five directors of the cooperative and some members of the Gulf Island’s Friendship association that had come to visit Magdalena Farm. An American who has lived in Nicaragua for 15 years, Scott Renfro, acts as the coordinator between the sister island associations and the Farm. He was at the gathering as a go-between and translator. At a later meeting, Scott was able to provide me with more information on Magdalena Farm and the history of the Cooperative.

**Exploring Ecotourism in Moyogalpa and Altagracia**

Following the exploration of Magdalena Farm, tourism and ecotourism development was then looked at in the two port towns: Moyogalpa and Altagracia. *Note: the map of Ometepe shows where the two towns are located.* Both towns are located on the Concepción side of the island. Moyogalpa, the larger of the two towns, has six different choices for accommodations, and a seventh is under construction. Many different restaurants exist around the town. A couple of the hotels in Moyogalpa offer guide services, and four wheel drive vehicles are also available for rent. The care rental service is owned through a service in Managua, and located at a desk in one of the nicer accommodations. Altagracia has three accommodations, and a couple different places to eat. Guide services in Altagracia are also offered through
the three hotels and hostels. Services included hiking the volcanoes, visiting the petroglyphs, along with other unique spots around the island.

Each accommodation was visited and interviews were conducted with workers and hotel owners. Informal interviews were also conducted at some of the larger eating places in the two port towns, along with at the MARENA office located in Altagracia, the Ometepe Museum in Altagracia, and finally at the two locations of the only NGO on the island: "Fundación Entre Volcanes," located in Moyogalpa and Santa Cruz.

"Fundación Entre Volcanes" has been on Ometepe since 1991 working in the communities with programs revolving around health, culture, sustainable agriculture, environmental protection, women and children, and many other programs.

**Questions Asked in Moyogalpa and Altagracia**

*The purpose of these questions was to get a better understanding of how tourism works on in these two main towns.*

1. How long have you owned your business? Do you own other business?
2. Is there some form of tourism ministry to help coordinate and control the development of tourism on the island?
   * If so what does it do? Does it work well?
   * If not, would such a thing be helpful?
3. Is there any way that revenues from tourism are returned to the community?
4. Does the tourism on Ometepe have anything to do with protecting, or preserving the unique environment of the island?
5. How has tourism evolved through the years? How do you see the future of tourism on Ometepe?

6. Are there foreigners involved with tourism on the island as owners of hotels or other business? Do you see foreigners as ever posing a problem on Ometepe?

Before departing Ometepe, an afternoon was spent with Scott Renfro at his office in Altagracia. He was able to provide extensive background information, and insight about Magdalena Farm, as he has been working with the Cooperative for more than eight years. Scott is the representative for the Sister-Island Associations on Ometepe. The Associations send profits from Magdalena's organic coffee sales in the United States and in Canada to Scott, whom with a group of locals, decides on how to use the money for projects across the whole island. Over the years, profits have gone into providing potable water to every community on the island, offering classes to men and women on reproduction and birth control, as well as into purchasing school and medical supplies. Scott administers the projects, is considered an associate of the Magdalena Cooperative, and is a friend of many around Ometepe.

Limitations

Similar to the limitations in investigating ecotourism in Homiguero, time restraints, limited research of ecotourism on Ometepe to seven days. It was also decided, that rather than focusing on the ecotourism development throughout the entire island of Ometepe, that the second case study would specifically look at ecotourism development on Magdalena Farm. Since only three days were spent at the Farm, much can be done to further the
investigation of ecotourism there. To begin with, there should be multiple participation on each of the guided tours offered up the Maderas Volcano, to the lagoon, around the coffee fields, and to see the petroglyphs. More time should be spent directly involved volunteering and observing around the Cooperative. And lastly, it would be advantageous to spend time with those at the Farm involved in planning and organizing the Farm’s tourism.

The Final Days of the Investigation in Nicaragua

The last days in Nicaragua were spent in Managua collecting final bits of data and information, along with conducting final interviews, with Margaret Harritt and other contacts. Maps were purchased, and last minute tasks were performed.

A beneficial aspect of this investigation was that through staying predominantly in hostels in local neighborhoods throughout Nicaragua, eating on the streets and taking public transportation occasioned many opportunities to talk with the local people and ask questions about their environmental awareness and knowledge of ecotourism.

Overall Limitations to the Investigation

The relatively brief period of time spent in Nicaragua and at each of the case study locations, limited the amount of information collected. Clearly a thorough investigation of ecotourism comparing Homiguero and Magdalena Farm merits a sustained period of participant observation and research, however, such conditions were difficult in the one month provided for this undergraduate project.
Ecotourism on Magdalena Farm, however, developed from tourists demanding a place to stay, food to eat and people to guide them. Ecotourism there developed spontaneously, without help from a grassroots organization or NGO. Are the goals of ecotourism not being achieved on Magdalena Farm? Is ecotourism in Homiguero developing within the entire local community? The following chapter will compare and contrast ecotourism in Homiguero with Magdalena Farm to determine whether this project's objective is reasonable.

Evaluating the Two Case Studies

Every ecotourism site is unique and different. Ideally, ecotourism is small-scale tourism run by local communities who are often the owners of the natural resources in demand. Ecotourism in Homiguero for example, is small scale tourism run by the rural community and the help of CEPAD. Homiguero is located right on the outskirts of the Bosawas Reserve, and takes visiting tourists inside the Reserve. Ecotourism on Magdalena Farm is also small scale tourism run by members of the Cooperative at the Farm. Located part way up the Maderas Volcano, tourists are attracted to Magdalena because of the Volcano, the organic coffee production, the petroglyphs, the lagoon, and other environmental aspects around the Farm. From the two descriptions of ecotourism it is evident that they are very different, as all ecotourism projects are site-specific.

Ecotourism is a form of development that creates jobs and economic opportunities that are not environmentally destructive in rural communities. It generates funds for the protection of the natural areas around the towns, and promotes environmental and conservation awareness among the local communities and visiting tourists. Seemingly idealistic, ecotourism can also
have many negative impacts. It has the ability to cause even greater harm to the environment, economic conditions, and local society.

To assess ecotourism in the two case studies: Homiguero and Magdalena Farm, the positive and negative aspects of the projects will be discussed along with the degree of local participation in each project.

The Degree of Local Participation

1) Are there specific community members and institutions designated to develop and monitor the ecotourism?
2) Are locals involved in all stages of development?
3) Does ecotourism provide opportunities for all those who want to be involved?
4) Is the success of the ecotourism project linked to the continuance of conserving the environment and resources in the community?

Positive Impacts from Ecotourism

1) Have jobs and economic opportunities been created?
2) Has environmental awareness been raised in the community?
3) Are funds from ecotourism generated to conserve and maintain the natural environment and local community?

Negative Impacts from Ecotourism

1) Have there been environmental damages from ecotourism?
2) Has ecotourism caused economic problems?
3) Has ecotourism had negative effects on local society and culture.
The first Case study: CEPAD's “Eco-Educational Tourism” Project

Local Participation

Are there specific community members and institutions designated to develop and monitor the ecotourism? When CEPAD chose to implement its project in Homiguero, it asked the town to form an Ecotourism Committee made up of those community members interested in the environment and the Reserve. There are sub-committees within the Committee which organize guides, cooking, lodging and mules for the excursions into the Reserve. There is a president of the Committee who ensures that it is organized and working well. Over the years, the Committee members have rotated, and in January of 1998 the committee was made up of eight locals.

When CEPAD is ready to bring a group of ecotourists to Homiguero and Bosawas, they contact the Ecotourism Committee through telegram or messenger from Siuna. The Committee then makes all the preparations for the excursion and is ready for the ecotourists when they arrive. The Committee and other community members involved, plan and guide the trip into the Reserve. They also cook, provide lodging, and pack mules for the ecotourist's trip.

The Ecotourism Committee decides on what needs to be done and what to spend money on for the project. Once wages are distributed, subsequent money is left with the Ecotourism Committee. In the past profits have been invested into buying the plastic tarps that cover the wooden structures in the Reserve, and buying a small cooking stove used when tourists are in Homiguero. There are often, however, no profits left over from trips once all the wages have been given out. Since the project's initiation, two wooden
frames and a latrine were built in the campsite up in the Reserve. One structure is used to hang hammocks for sleeping, and the other is used for cooking. The trail up into the Reserve from Homiguero was also built, but still needs work.

At the end of the ecotourism trip into Bosawas, the Ecotourism Committee meets with the ecotourists to talk about the trip and their experiences. The Committee is very interested in getting advice as to what they can do to improve the trip in the future. In the past such things as a better trail, more background information about the project, CEPAD, Homiguero, and the Reserve posted up around the town, markers along the trail labeling trees and plants, and a building in Homiguero designated to ecotourism where information and photographs are displayed and crafts sold are common recommendations. The Committee is very receptive to the ideas and suggestions. Monetary limitations, however, and the inconsistent flow of ecotourists visiting Homiguero, has inhibited the Committee's ability to follow through to the extent they may like with many of the recommendations. CEPAD is also short of funds, and has been unable to finance these improvements. Major changes in the town will not be evident unless the Committee has increased earnings, and this will not happen unless CEPAD brings more groups of tourists to Homiguero or unless Homiguero finds a way to attract ecotourists to their town themselves.

Are locals involved in all stages of development? Although the Ecotourism Committee plays a large role in the ecotourism development, it is not involved in the full project cycle of ecotourism in Homiguero. The fact that CEPAD brings the tourists to Homiguero, diminishes the community's
control. Homiguero's ecotourism potential is dependent on CEPAD, and the tourists the NGO brings to them.

The project was designed for CEPAD to find the ecotourists interested in seeing the Bosawas Reserve, to bring them to Homiguero, and then for Homiguero to provide the ecotourism services. Homiguero is remote and unknown, and the community does nothing to attract ecotourists themselves. Edgar spoke of how he would like to put a radio in the MARENA office in Siuna along with one in Homiguero. This way if tourists visiting Siuna are interested in going up into Bosawas, they can be sent to the MARENA office, which can then send them to Homiguero, where they can be guided through the Reserve by members of the Homiguero community. Not until Homiguero finds a way to attract the tourists who participate in their ecotourism project themselves, will they be involved in the full project cycle and development of ecotourism in their town.

It is evident that the Homiguero community feels a need to report to, or in a sense be guided by CEPAD. Ecotourists participating in the project pay CEPAD before going on the trip. When the trip is all over, CEPAD pays the Ecotourism Committee, on a per tourist basis. In January 1998, for example, CEPAD gave the Ecotourism Committee $30 a day for a foreigner visiting Nicaragua, $27 a day for a foreigner living in Nicaragua, and $23 a day for a Nicaraguan on the trip. As a non-profit organization, CEPAD charges the tourists just enough to cover their costs for the round trip flight from Managua to Siuna, their costs in Homiguero, and the travel costs of the CEPAD director.

The Committee distributes the wages to locals involved in the trip: guides, cooks, organizers, mule lenders, and those who provide lodging to ecotourists in Homiguero. In January 1998 wages were around $4 or $5 dollars a day. It is difficult to compare these wages to customary wages in Homiguero, since waged labor in the agricultural community is not common. The exchange of money, however, from CEPAD to Homiguero allows CEPAD to retain ultimate reign over the project and in essence the development of ecotourism in Homiguero.

Does ecotourism provide opportunities for all those who want to be involved? Not everyone in Homiguero who would like to be involved in the ecotourism project is able to, as there are not enough trips to provide adequate work to all those interested. Around 120 out of the 1200 members of the Homiguero have been involved at different times since the project was initiated in 1991. From speaking with locals not involved in ecotourism, but who hoped to be in the future, there did not seem to be tension in the community as people understand that the project is still small.

The Ecotourism Committee is set up to rotate its members; however, no efforts have been made to try and involve all those interested to work on the project. More people can become involved through part-time work and other activities such as selling crafts, foodstuff, and other things to the ecotourists. There are these intentions to sell things to ecotourists visiting Homiguero in the future, but such would not be profitable today with the current supply of tourists.

Is the success of the ecotourism project linked to the continuance of conserving the environment and resources in the community? Homiguero's
ecotourism project is directly linked to the conservation and well being of the Bosawas Reserve. Through workshops, CEPAD has explained to guides and other community members involved in the project how ecotourists like to see nature as untouched and virgin looking as possible. Community members were taught not to swing and use their machetes in the Reserve as freely as they may have done before, but instead only at necessary times such as clearing a path.

A Clearcutted Patch of Forest inside the Bosawas Reserve

Homiguero is aware of the logging taking place in the Reserve, and understands that it is not good for the future of their ecotourism. They understand, however, that logging is inevitable and will continue to happen. Similar to most National Reserves in Nicaragua, Bosawas is under jeopardy from both illegal and legal logging. Although Bosawas is under Nicaragua's
National System of Protected Areas, the majority of these areas are only protected according to paper. From speaking with people in Homiguero, they hoped that more tourists would visit the Reserve and venture together with them to make efforts to stop the clearcutting going on in the Reserve.

Positive Impacts from Ecotourism in Homiguero

Have jobs and economic opportunities been created? The ecotourism project has created jobs and employment in Homiguero. Since the project was initiated in 1991, 120 locals have been involved in the project. Although job creation and opportunity has been small, ecotourism has provided some alternative to the customary agricultural work. It is not intended that ecotourism take over the agricultural traditions of the town. However, many more locals can become involved in ecotourism with future development. Local employment can begin to increase by selling crafts and foodstuff to tourists, and increase even more in the future as locals open small shops, bakeries, restaurants and hostels.

Has environmental awareness been raised in the community? Effects on environmental awareness are interesting. People in Homiguero are used to living in nature. They share their homes with their pigs and chickens. They know about the ways of animals, their footprints, and their eating patterns. They know about trees, plants, and weather patterns. Knowledge of the environment appears second nature to most people raised in it. As mentioned earlier, locals try not to swing their machetes, as they may have done in the past, as they know that tourists like to see nature looking as untouched as possible.
Although effects are small compared to Monteverde, other environmental enthusiasm has been spurred from ecotourism throughout the community. School children in the town are taken on field trips into the Reserve to learn about trees, animals, plants and birds. It has also been important for Homiguero to see how interested and enthusiastic tourists are about Bosawas. It is empowering to them and possibly lets them see the Reserve with new respect, as travelers come from so far away to learn about what essentially is their backyard. The guides and cooks who accompanied the trip into the Reserve were very enthusiastic and excited to teach ecotourists about Bosawas. Locals in Homiguero seem excited to meet tourists, they are excited to show them their town and the Reserve. They want the project to grow, and to one day have ecotourism play a bigger role in their community. Many people interviewed spoke of how they would like for ecotourism to one day be even more important than agriculture in their town.

Are funds from ecotourism generated to conserve and maintain the natural environment and local community? Considering the small profits generated from ecotourism so far, revenue has not gone into purchasing land for preservation. Ecotourism has, however, generated efforts within Homiguero to better preserve and maintain the trial into Bosawas and the environment around them. Interestingly, there is litter all over Homiguero such as plastic wrappers, papers, cardboard, glass bottles and metal cans. Although that may only be aesthetics in preserving the environment, Homiguero has not yet realized that a clean town may be better when promoting this development option.
Negative Impacts from Ecotourism in Homiguero

Have there been environmental damages from ecotourism? Has ecotourism caused economic damages? And has it had negative effects on the local society and culture? Although the slow development of ecotourism in Homiguero has weakened the possibilities of job creation, monetary profits, and raised environmental awareness in Homiguero, the slow development has restrained negative effects. Homiguero has not had to worry about inflicting the carrying capacity of Bosawas from too many tourists, a big concern for the Monteverde Cloud Forest. Also, considering the rural community has not forsaken its traditional occupations in agriculture, and that it is not dependent on ecotourism, it is not likely that Homiguero will face economic problems often caused by ecotourism. Lastly, also due to reasons of slow growth and development, there have been few social and cultural problems in Homiguero. Homiguero has not experienced overcrowding, too many buildings, or commercialization.

The second case study: Ecotourism on Magdalena Farm

Different from Homiguero, ecotourism at Magdalena Farm is developing without the help of a NGO or grassroots organization. Although Scott Renfro and the Sister Island Organizations are involved in the production and purchasing of organic coffee from the Cooperative, they are not set up to work with Magdalena in its development of ecotourism.

In January of 1996, a group of archeologists from a program in the United States asked the Cooperative if they could study the petroglyphs on the Farm for a month. Since then, through word of mouth other groups have been to study at Magdalena, as well as have, travelers come to stay at the
Farm for a couple nights at a time. Magdalena also welcomes volunteers for as long as they would like to stay, working in the coffee fields, or in other parts of the farm. Magdalena does not make a conscious effort to attract tourists. It does not advertise, nor is the Farm listed in guide books.

The View from the Hacienda Porch at Magdalena

Local Participation

Are locals involved in all stages of ecotourism development? The members of the Cooperative are in complete command of how ecotourism develops at their Farm. They participate in every stage of the ecotourism development. They decide what to offer the ecotourists, they receive direct payments for their services, they decide how to invest and distribute the revenue from the ecotourism, and they decide who is involved in working with
the ecotourism at the Farm. The Magdalena Cooperative has a complete sense of ownership to the ecotourism.

Are there specific community members and institutions designated to develop and monitor ecotourism? The Cooperative set up a committee to focus on the development of tourism. When interviewing the President of the Cooperative it was unclear as to what the committee actually does. The committee does not meet regularly. Nor is it set up to monitor the ecotourism development or to receive input or recommendations from other cooperative members or ecotourists on how ecotourism can be improved. The President explained that the committee essentially organizes things such as how much food and other goods need to be purchased for the tourists.

By nature of Magdalena Farm being a cooperative, ecotourism benefits should be reinvested into the Cooperative and distributed equally among the Cooperative's associates. The President of the Cooperative could not, however, explain how profits from tourism are distributed. Scott Renfro revealed how Magdalena does not keep public records of annual earnings from the coffee, tourists, or from anything else around the Farm. He explained how it is common for the money earned from guide services up the volcano or to the lagoon to be pocketed directly instead of being deposited into the Cooperative where it could be used to maintain the Maderas Reserve or redistributed equally among associates. Earnings from coffee sales and tourists are often just divided up among associates leaving very little to no money for the upkeep and investment of the hacienda and Farm itself. The president of the Cooperative had no idea of the number of tourists that have come to the farm.
over the years, of how much money tourism has generated, or of how that money has been reinvested.

In 1997, an administrator was hired with the help of Scott to live on the Farm and to make records and accounts of the Farm’s earnings and crop production to help for future speculation. The Cooperative and the Sister Island Associations agreed to split the cost of the administrator. Unfortunately, the administrator lasted only three months as the Cooperative decided his purpose was a waste of their money.

Since tourism began, different things have been done to make the conditions of the hacienda better for the tourists. Hammock-cots where made for the tourists to sleep on in the three upper rooms of the hacienda. Two bathrooms, two showers, and a sink were built for tourists to use. And the lower porch of the hacienda where tourists lounge and eat meals was extended and rebuilt. Over the years tourists have also given gifts to the Cooperative. For example, the first group of archeologists gave Magdalena four hammocks for the hacienda’s porch. With the help of Scott, the Cooperative has posted information in both Spanish and English about the history of Magdalena for tourists to read.

Does ecotourism provide opportunities for all those who want to be involved? The President of the Cooperative, was also unclear as to how many people in the Cooperative participate in the ecotourism. Many different women help with cooking, and feeding the tourists, there are the guides who take tourists to the lagoon, up the volcano, into the coffee fields, and to see the petroglyphs. He did mention that anyone in the Cooperative who hung around the hacienda and interacted with the tourists was essentially involved in
ecotourism. It is very common to see Cooperative members and tourists mingling together around the hacienda and Farm. Tourists often help pick coffee, sort the beans and work the depulping machine.

The Coffee Depulper at Magdalena

Is the success of the ecotourism project linked to the continuance of conserving the environment and resources in the community? Since the
Cooperative is aware that the tourists come because of their special environmental location they use part of the new revenue to maintain and protect the trail up the volcano, the lagoon, the petroglyphs and the conditions around the actual Farm. Although Scott Renfro said this is not always true, there is a sign at the hacienda saying how the earnings from the fees to climb the volcano go to protecting and maintaining the Reserve and the path.

Positive Impacts from Ecotourism on Magdalena

Have jobs and economic opportunities been created? It is obvious that ecotourism has stimulated jobs around the Farm. The influx of ecotourists visiting Magdalena has demanded people in the Cooperative to focus their work on tourism. Although, the President of the Cooperative was unable to specify as to how many members of the Cooperative work with tourism, it is evident from the high numbers of tourists, that a substantial number of people are involved with tourism. The hacienda was full of tourists the three nights spent at the Farm. Extra cots had to be made up to accommodate all of the tourists, as the three rooms on the upstairs of the hacienda were full. Organic coffee and honey are for sale at certain times of the year to tourists visiting the Farm. A more organized store with a larger stock of coffee, honey, crafts and other things would be very successful at the farm. This would also be a good way to involve more people with the ecotourism.

Has environmental awareness been raised in the community? Are funds from ecotourism generated to conserve and maintain the natural environment and local community? It was unclear as to whether the Cooperative has become more environmentally conscious or aware since tourism began. The Cooperative's production of organic coffee is unique and
probably attracts tourists, however, the organic coffee began before ecotourism. It is obvious, however, from the sign explaining to tourists that earnings from fees to climb the Volcano, visit the lagoon, coffee fields and petroglyphs, that the Cooperative knows that ecotourists like to think that the environment is being preserved and maintained from their participation. From hiking up the Volcano and visiting the coffee fields, it appears as if the trail and conditions around the Farm are well maintained. However, I have no prior knowledge as to whether environmental conditions have improved or declined since tourism began. Ecotourism profits at Magdalena have not gone into purchasing land for conservation around Maderas or other parts of Ometepe Island. Evident from the experience of the International Children’s Rainforest in Monteverde, conservation ideas often start small and result with far reaching effects. Considering how the International Children’s Rainforest began in Monteverde, all Magdalena needs, is one ecotourist concerned about the Farm’s environment.

It is difficult to say, whether ecotourism at Magdalena has inspired other environmental awareness around the Farm. There was no evidence of other environmental projects, or community groups involved with protecting resources. The majority of the Cooperative’s members, however, live in Balgue and commute to the Farm each day for work. And Balgue was not investigated to see if ecotourism has raised environmental awareness in the community.

**Negative Impacts from Ecotourism at Magdalena**

Have there been environmental damages from ecotourism? Has ecotourism caused economic problems? Has ecotourism had negative effects
on local society and culture? Ecotourism does not appear to have impacted Magdalena negatively up to this point. As mentioned earlier, there is no evidence as to whether environmental conditions have improved or declined since tourism began. Although ecotourism is growing quickly at Magdalena, the Cooperative's main source of income is its organic coffee. Consequently, it is not likely that Magdalena will be faced with disastrous economic problems if tourists suddenly stopped visiting the Farm. Nor do there appear to be adverse cultural effects.

The Cooperative welcomes all those travelers who come through the Farm. It does not have guidelines limiting the number of ecotourists staying at the hacienda at one time. There are no limitations as to how many ecotourists can climb the Maderas Volcano, walk through the coffee fields, or visit the petroglyphs. The Cooperative sees the increasing numbers of tourists as a way to increase their earnings. They have not thought about the possibility that the increasing numbers of ecotourists could harm the trail up Maderas, the conditions of their Hacienda, their Farm, or the atmosphere of the Cooperative in the future.
Chapter VI

Which is better: Planned or Spontaneous?

Having identified the positive, negative and aspects of local participation in each case study, is it clear whether NGOs do the trick? Is ecotourism in Homiguero more successful than ecotourism on Magdalena Farm since it was initiated by CEPAD? Do NGO's ensure that there is direct local participation in the ecotourism development? And do they ensure that ecotourism brings about the positive impacts of the development tool rather than negative ones?

Ecotourism Implemented by a NGO

CEPAD's role as an initiator of ecotourism in the small and remote agricultural community on the outskirts of the Bosawas Reserve has been very influential. To begin with, the NGO took time to research ecotourism development in other areas and to introduce their project carefully. The NGO also took time to plan and implement different workshops in Homiguero to prepare the town for ecotourists. Martha Collier, CEPAD's first project director took a course at Costa Rica's University of Peace, "Ecotourism in Protected Areas," to get a better idea about ecotourism, and in December 1997, CEPAD sent Edgar Téllez to look at more advanced ecotourism development in different parts of Costa Rica. CEPAD's continuous efforts to learn about and observe different ecotourism projects allows the NGO to make Homiguero's ecotourism project more constructive and effective than it would be otherwise.

CEPAD's efforts to start the Ecotourism Committee from the onset of the project was fundamental. It has allowed the local community to guide the
development of their ecotourism and to decide on how to distribute benefits throughout the community. The fact, however, that Homiguero’s Ecotourism Committee is not in control of the entire ecotourism project cycle has been detrimental to the project’s development. CEPAD set up their Eco-Educational Tourism project so that they would be responsible for bringing the ecotourists to Homiguero, and that once in the town, Homiguero would be in charge of providing the ecotourism services to the tourists. This arrangement may have been essential in the earlier stages of the project considering Homiguero is very remote, and that it has no telephones or radio for communication. The fact, however, that CEPAD continues to bring the ecotourists to Homiguero takes control away from the town to fully develop their own locally oriented ecotourism.

CEPAD has also failed to give all those interested in ecotourism a chance to participate in the project. Recognizably, the project is still very small, however, jobs could be part-time and activities involved with ecotourism broadened. The more people involved in the project the greater the possibility of empowering the community with ecotourism. As mentioned earlier, it does appear that CEPAD has made it aware to Homiguero through workshops, that the success for their ecotourism project depends on the continued conservation of Bosawas. CEPAD has been successful, however, at generating the positive impacts rather than negative impacts of ecotourism. There has been job creation, increased environmental awareness in the community and in the local school, and the maintenance of the trail into the Reserve.
Ecotourism in Horiguero has had many limitations due to CEPAD. Since CEPAD is a large NGO working on an extensive number of projects throughout Nicaragua, it has not been able to give to its ecotourism project all of the initial infrastructure investments and commitment, that Horiguero may have needed. The project has developed slowly and inconsistently over the past six years because of the large array of ideas and intents of the project's inconsistent directors. Monetary limitations from the lack of ecotourists coming into Horiguero has also inhibited the project from developing beyond primary stages.

CEPAD, as do many NGOs, has focused on local participation while respecting local knowledge through the Ecotourism Committee. It has also provided close supervision and guidance throughout Horiguero's ecotourism development. CEPAD, however, needs to leave their direct role in Horiguero's ecotourism project cycle. It has been involved in ecotourism in the community since 1991. This extended period of time has allowed Horiguero to become accustomed and dependent on the NGO. Once Horiguero is in full control of attracting ecotourists to their town, once the Committee receives direct payment from ecotourists for their services, the town will finally be able to direct the future development of their ecotourism.

SpontaneousEcotourism

Ecotourism on Magdalena Farm was not initiated with the help of a NGO or grassroots organization, but rather developed spontaneously. Magdalena never really planned for ecotourism to develop at the Farm. Tourists just started to come, and the Cooperative has dealt with them as they continue to arrive. People like the atmosphere of the hacienda and the
Farm. It has magnificent views, and the climb up the volcano is a beautiful hike through a rich rainforest and National Reserve.

Although a committee was formed within the Cooperative to work with the tourism, from speaking with the Cooperative’s president, the committee does not appear to be well organized. It does not have rules or guidelines to regulate ecotourism development. The committee never set up workshops to give members of the Cooperative involved in tourism suggestions on how to guide the tourists, or plan for the future so to avoid damaging effects. Nor did the Cooperative ever established procedures on how to distribute and invest the revenue from the tourism so to benefit everyone in the Cooperative, conditions around the Farm, and the Volcano.

As there is no NGO or grassroots organization involved with ecotourism at the Farm, the Cooperative has always been in control of their own ecotourism development. Not every member of the Cooperative works directly with tourism, however, the nature of the Cooperative setting gives all members the opportunity to interact with the tourists. Ecotourism at Magdalena has been positive. The increasing number of tourists has created jobs and revenue for the Cooperative. There are no public records to show how profits from ecotourism are distributed and invested in the Cooperative, although it is evident that infrastructure at the hacienda has improved, and that the trail leading up the Volcano has been maintained more consciously since ecotourism began in 1995.

Due to the fact, however, that ecotourism at Magdalena began so spontaneously, that it has grown so quickly, and that the Cooperative has had little structure on how to develop it, Magdalena Farm may be susceptible to
environmental, economic, and cultural damages from its ecotourism more
easily in the future. Such an event would be a prime example of how
ecotourism, smaller scaled tourism that entails an environment where
tourists and locals have close and interacting contact, can ruin the ways of the
local culture and the very things such as the environment it was trying to
protect.

Is Ecotourism in Homiguero More Successful than Ecotourism at
Magdalena?

There is the ability for ecotourism initiated by NGOs to be more
successful at creating jobs and opportunities, raising environmental
awareness, and profits to enhance the conditions for the community and the
natural environment. NGOs often make an effort to ensure that ecotourism
projects are integrated into the entire community so that everyone can feel the
benefits of ecotourism. They often have a broad understanding of ecotourism
from research and study about the development tool. NGOs also focus on
developing ecotourism cautiously so to avoid negative effects.

NGOs, however, may not always be the answer, and may not always
have the ability to originate positive and efficient ecotourism. In the case of
CEPAD in Homiguero for example, the NGO’s extended involvement in the
community’s project cycle has arrested the development of ecotourism from
reaching greater success. From 1991 until January 1998 only eight groups of
ecotourists have participated in Homiguero’s ecotourism project. Homiguero
still lacks simple infrastructure to accommodate ecotourists, and not all
those interested in ecotourism are able to work with the project. A more
developed ecotourism project would create the possibility of more jobs.
increase revenues, further environmental awareness throughout the community and stimulate opportunities for the greater conservation of resources in Homiguero.

Ecotourism at Magdalena is increasing at a much faster rate than Homiguero. Tourists keep coming to Magdalena. Consequently, more and more members of the Cooperative are working with them, and revenue is increasing. The Farm's lack of structure, institutionalized plans on how to develop ecotourism and how to distribute and reinvest profits may, however, damage the future potential of the development tool. The Magdalena Cooperative has no prior knowledge about tourism or how to work with it. The Farm probably does not realize that the carrying capacity of the Maderas Reserve may be reached from too many tourists hiking up the Volcano. And it probably does not realize that the traditional culture around the Cooperative may be altered from too many tourists visiting the Farm. Ecotourism at Magdalena attracts more tourists and probably raises more revenue than ecotourism in Homiguero. Ecotourism in Homiguero may be better off in the future, since it has strong organization and structure for development.
Conclusion

Are NGOs the Answer?

This investigation of Homiguero and Magdalena Farm in Nicaragua provided an opportunity to examine whether NGOs and grassroots organizations may be the answer to successful ecotourism development that promotes strong local participation. In Nicaragua, political, economic, and social instability cripple the nation from protecting its rich natural habitats and National Reserves. The Nicaraguan Government is easily lured by large corporations to overexploit their natural resources in order to strengthen their economy through employment and foreign exchange. Impoverished rural communities surrender to slash and burn agriculture, cattle ranching, timber extraction and other unsustainable activities at the expense of Nicaragua's fragile environments. Out of this environmental crisis, ecotourism has been proposed as a way to change the short-term consumption and exploitation patterns of the Government and many rural communities, so that Nicaragua's environment may be preserved for future generations.

As governmental organizations are weak and poorly funded in the post-conflict nation, NGOs and grassroots organizations may be the answer to initiating successful ecotourism in Nicaragua. The ecotourism representative, Raquel Maria Quesada, at Nicaragua's tourism ministry explained that ecotourism is a new type of development in Nicaragua. "It has the potential to be quite powerful, however, at the present time it is not managed well, and lacks proper regulations."92

NGOs have the potential to ingrain proper regulations and practices into ecotourism development in Nicaragua, that ministries are unable to provide. NGOs often have a wider knowledge about the development tool from research, classes and observation, than would a rural community in a remote location, such as Homiguero and Magdalena Farm. This investigation, however, of ecotourism in Homiguero initiated by CEPAD, and ecotourism at Magdalena Farm that came about spontaneously did not determine whether NGOs really are the answer for Nicaragua.

The broad based knowledge of ecotourism from ongoing research that CEPAD has been able to offer Homiguero, along with the well organized Ecotourism Committee and the ecotourism training workshops, have all been fundamental aspects of CEPAD in Homiguero. CEPAD, however, has inhibited Homiguero's ecotourism development. Since 1992, the NGO has brought only eight ecotourist groups to participate in Homiguero's ecotourism project. The project still lacks basic infrastructure, and not all those interested in Homiguero are able to participate. CEPAD is a large NGO with an expansive role throughout Nicaragua, and their Eco-Educational Tourism project in Homiguero is not the NGO's primary focus.

Magdalena's lack of a NGO or grassroots organization has not affected ecotourism development. Ecotourism at the Farm has increased greatly since it began at the end of 1995, and is continuing to grow at a fast pace. The Cooperative's lack of a development structure, lack of a well organized committee to work with ecotourism development and lack of a system that distributes profit are all conditions, however, that a NGO could correct.
In actuality, the objective of this research, to determine whether NGOs are the answer, cannot be thoroughly answered through looking at the experiences of ecotourism in Homiguero and ecotourism at Magdalena Farm. This investigation is only a start to subsequent research that may come in the future to determine the answer.
Bibliography


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