Promoting Women's Empowerment Through Involvement in Ecotourism: Experiences from the Third World

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In many parts of the Third World the number of local communities seeking involvement in ecotourism ventures has soared in the past decade. A cogent concern, from a development perspective, is that many such ventures have progressed with scant regard for the changes they may provoke in gender roles, gender relations and access to resources. As with other development initiatives which profess to be 'gender neutral', ecotourism runs the risk of disadvantaging and marginalising local women. This paper considers both positive and negative ways in which women are engaging with ecotourism enterprises in Third World contexts. Such examples could help to guide agencies which wish to find ways of facilitating local level empowerment of both men and women through ecotourism in the future.

The surge of interest in ecotourism in the Third World

> Ecotourism is currently a 'hot' topic. The fury is predictable. It is a movement that potentially involves billions of dollars, high-level politics, the survival of threatened cultures, and the preservation of rapidly disappearing wildlands. (Ziffer, 1989: 1)

Ziffer's comments from 10 years ago still ring true today: the 'heat' or fervour associated with ecotourism has not abated. Of particular concern in this paper is the amount of this interest generated in the Third World. The Ecotourism Society (1998) cites studies which show that: the number of trekkers in Nepal increased 255% between 1980 and 1991; visitors to Kenya increased by 45% between 1983 and 1993, with approximately 80% of them drawn by wildlife; and nature tourists to Honduras increased by 15% in 1995 alone. It was estimated that from 1996, ecotourism would grow by up to 25% each year until 2005 (Herliczek, 1996: 31), and clearly Third World destinations are a key drawcard.

Concurrently, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of local communities seeking to benefit from the booming ecotourism trade. Ecotourism is being embraced as a potential economic saviour by many rural communities which are motivated by the promise of jobs, new business opportunities and skill development, as well as the chance to secure greater control over natural resource utilisation in their areas (Ashley & Roe, 1997).

A number of authors caution us from uncritically accepting ecotourism as a common good, however, especially where vulnerable peoples and environments of Third World countries are involved (Ziffer, 1989; Boo, 1990; Cater & Lowman, 1994). In many cases the 'ecotourism' label has simply worked as an attractive marketing tool (Cater, 1994; Thomlinson & Getz, 1996; Woodwood,

1997: 167), with little or no mention of local community involvement or benefits. However, there is now evidence of support for a more ethically sound form of ecotourism than that bandied about at tourism industry conventions and in glossy tour brochures. Ceballos-Lascurain (1996), for example, suggests that ecotourism is:

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

While this definition insists that local populations should share in the benefits of ecotourism, the ways in which they have been drawn into this phenomenon have not always been in the best interests of all. The concept of empowerment can help us to draw out the positive and negative impacts of ecotourism on local people.

Involvement of local communities in ecotourism initiatives

It has only been in the last few years that empowerment has attracted the interest of those writing on ecotourism, however those who do discuss it fervently support the concept (see Drake, 1991; Theophile, 1995). Akama (1996: 573), for example, stresses that '… there is a need for the initiation of alternative wildlife conservation and tourism programmes aimed at the social and economic empowerment of rural peasants', while Gauthier (1993: 105), goes further, claiming that 'Empowerment of local people within the context of environmental protection is one of the tenets of ecotourism'. Wearing and Larsen (1996: 119) are positive about the potential of ecotourism to promote community development, stating that

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

Empowerment herein is taken to be '… a process by which people acquire the ability to act in ways to control their lives' (Staudt, 1990). From a development perspective, ecotourism ventures should only be considered 'successful' if they promote empowerment, with local communities having some measure of control over ecotourism development and sharing equitably in any benefits deriving therefrom. It is problematic to assume, however, that a 'community' consists of a homogeneous, egalitarian group with shared goals (Moore, 1996). We need to ask who, in fact, is being empowered by ecotourism? The interests of members, and the power they are accorded within a particular 'community', are likely to be divided according to class, age, ethnic affiliation and, the focus of this paper, gender.

Women's Involvement in Ecotourism

In recent years gender analyses have played an important role in deepening our understanding of the tourism industry in general (see, for example, Kinnaird

& Hall, 1994; special edition of the *Annals of Tourism Research* 22 (2)). However, the impacts of ecotourism and other alternative forms of tourism, and their potential to enhance the lives of impoverished communities, have rarely been analysed from a gender perspective:

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

Similarly, Swain (1995: 250) posits that 'Environmental issues in tourism development are a distinct area of research ripe for gender analysis'. While a dearth of gender analysis on ecotourism initiatives is notable in the academic literature, we can find useful discussions on related issues, such as the impacts of tourism on village women (Wilkinson & Pratiwi, 1995) and women's involvement in ethnic tourism (Swain, 1993), or mountain-based tourism (Lama, 1998). In addition, examples of 'good practice' which show that women are participating equitably in sustainable tourism initiatives, have recently been compiled in a report for the United Nations' Commission on Sustainable Development (Hemmati, 1999). Some cases from these sources will be considered below when discussing the potential empowering or disempowering impacts of involvement in ecotourism for women.

A focus on gender in research on community involvement in ecotourism is long overdue in light of other studies which demonstrate how elites, particularly men, often coopt and come to dominate community-based development efforts and monopolise the benefits of tourism (Akama, 1996: 573; Rudkin & Hall, 1996; Mansperger, 1995: 90; Sindiga, 1995: 53; Stonich *et al.*, 1995: 8). Hitchcock and Brandenburgh (1990: 22), for example, discuss how among an indigenous group of people in the Kalahari Desert, adult, multilingual males are much more likely to benefit from tourist enterprises than other members of the community. Such findings appear to have had limited impact on tourism planning, however, as to date most tourism development has progressed with scant, if any, regard for the changes it may provoke in gender roles and relations (Wilkinson & Pratiwi, 1995).

It may be particularly important to be vigilant about assessing the impacts of ecotourism on women's lives given the supposed cultural and environmental superiority of this form of tourism (Hall & Butler, 1995: 105). This is perhaps why many commentators have overlooked the social dimensions of ecotourism. If we really are to learn from popular, alternative forms of tourism such as ecotourism, they should not be placed on a pedestal where they are immune to critique, rather, we should subject them to rigorous assessment, including analysis of gendered impacts and their potential for promoting equitable and sustainable forms of development.

This paper brings gender issues to the forefront, discussing ecotourism initiatives from the perspective of local populations in the Third World and specifically considering whether or not women have any control over ecotourism development or are sharing equitably in the benefits which ecotourism may

bring. This is distinct from other approaches, such as that expressed at a national symposium on gender and tourism in Indonesia in 1995, which aimed '… to increase awareness of the potential of women to contribute to the expanding tourism industry and, through that, to Indonesian development priorities' (Wall, 1996: 721). Such an approach considers how involvement of women can benefit tourism development, whereas I am interested in whether tourism development, especially ecotourism which has grown so rapidly in recent years, can benefit women. Furthermore, I am advocating the need for active (having some control), rather than passive (being seen as beneficiaries), involvement of women in ecotourism initiatives (Pretty, 1995).

Rationale for Promoting Women's Active Involvement in Ecotourism

There are a number of clear reasons why any agency interested in promoting effective ecotourism should encourage the active involvement of women, even if their primary concern is not gender equity. Firstly, in countries where socially prescribed roles mean that women and girls generally have greater interaction with the natural environment than men, women's cooperation is needed if that natural resource base, the resource upon which the ecotourism trade is dependent, is to be sustained. In many parts of rural Asia, Africa and the Pacific, for example, women and girls are responsible for collection of water, fodder and fuelwood. They are also involved in income-generating activities based upon the sale of forest products and crafts made from reeds and grasses (Deshingar, 1994; Molnar, 1989). Furthermore, it is estimated that 60–80% of food production in Africa is carried out by women (James, 1995: 4). While some men also have a close connection with the environment through agricultural work, the raising of livestock and more sporadic activities such as hunting, many men now engage in paid employment and do not rely so heavily on the natural environment as do women.

Where women's roles place them in close connection with the physical environment they develop specialist knowledge because of this work, as well as an interest in protecting that environment. Thus, argue Fortmann and Bruce (1993: 7), 'women, who as the hewers of wood, drawers of water and tillers of the earth suffer the most when soil erodes, water sources go dry, or trees disappear, are the natural constituency for environmental endeavours'. Maasai women, for example, have special knowledge of walking routes, craft production and useful plants, all of which can be related to the development of tourism products and services (van der Cammen, 1997).

In such contexts it would seem logical that those managing environmental projects should actively seek out women's involvement. However, past development initiatives, including ecotourism, have often seen women's voices sidelined as development consultants, researchers and government officers seek the opinions of village heads or chiefs, the vast majority of whom are men, or consult village development committees, which have no female members. Even male commentators from within the Third World are now calling for this situation to change:

> … in order to translate the rhetoric of sustainable management of natural resources into reality, local people, including women, children, the elderly, and indigenous minorities, must be allowed to actively participate in the decision-making process. We have tended to vest too much power in our Traditional Leaders through traditional and cultural belief systems. (Mulolani, 1997: 12)

Furthermore, deriving from their different roles and responsibilities, women's interests in terms of utilisation of natural resources are often different from those of men. For example, land beside a forest which is not suited to live-stock grazing or commercial agriculture may be identified by men as ideal land to lease for a tourist lodge development even though it is highly valued by women who collect broom grass and pottery clay at the site. They may make a reasonable income from the sale of products manufactured from these resources, and this needs to be weighed up against the likely revenue from a tourist lodge, which would require a lot of capital investment and may not return profits to the community until after several years of operation.

If people are deprived of access to resources because of the development of ecotourism, and yet they do not receive any benefits from ecotourism, it is unlikely that they will have support for conservation of the natural resources upon which ecotourism is based (Sindiga, 1995). This statement has particular relevance in societies where women's roles place them in close connection with the natural environment, yet decision-making is dominated by men.

In summary, there are three reasons why gender issues should be considered when planning for effective community involvement in ecotourism:

(1)   to ensure that decisions about ecotourism development are made by bodies reflecting the interests of diverse groups of community members, and that these groups genuinely share in the benefits of the development;
(2)   to ensure good natural resource management which protects the key resource upon which ecotourism is based; and
(3)   to ensure that ecotourism development benefits from the skills and knowl-edge of a broad range of community members.

Ecotourism and the Empowerment of Women in the Third World

The following section considers the extent to which women in selected Third World communities have been empowered or disempowered by their involve-ment with ecotourism ventures. For the purpose of this analysis, four dimen-sions of empowerment are discussed: economic, social, psychological and political (Scheyvens, 1999a). While it is easy to be preoccupied with economic benefits from ecotourism, especially when considering impoverished communi-ties, in reality development is multidimensional. It is thus essential to consider issues such as whether a community has control over an ecotourism initiative (political empowerment), if it provides opportunities for people to develop new skills, gain respect within their communities and thus improves their self-esteem (psychological empowerment), and if it enhances community cohesion (social empowerment). Each of these four dimensions of empowerment are discussed

below and illustrated with examples which point to the need for gender sensitivity in ecotourism planning and management.

Economic empowerment

When considering whether or not a community have been economically empowered by an ecotourism venture, it is necessary to consider opportunities which have arisen in terms of both formal and informal sector employment and business opportunities. While some economic gains are usually experienced by a community, problems may develop if these are periodic and cannot provide a regular, reliable income. In addition, concerns may arise over inequity in the spread of economic benefits (Wilkinson & Pratiwi, 1995).

In terms of formal employment, local women are often overlooked when lodges and other ecotourist sites are developed. In Mahenye, Zimbabwe, for example, a joint venture agreement between the local Shangaan people and Zimbabwe Sun Ltd, which owns a chain of hotels in the country, has seen the development of two tourist lodges on Shangaan land. Up until the early 1990s, the Shangaan had poached extensively from the neighbouring Gonarezhou National Park, from which many of them were evicted and their villages burned to the ground when the park was created in 1966. They had become very hostile towards both the government and conservation authorities. They poached both as a means of survival and in the hope that if they killed all of the animals, no more tourists would come and there would be no further need for the National Park, so the land could be returned to them (Ndlovu & Mashumba, 1998: 167). The agreement with Zimbabwe Sun Ltd. has brought a lot of infrastructural improvements to the area including tarred roads, a better water supply and electricity. However, employment at the lodges has been heavily biased in favour of men. At Mahenye Lodge, only three out of 15 positions have been filled by women while at Chilo Lodge, four out of 38 positions have gone to women (Ndlovu & Mashumba, 1998: 187–8).

In addition, in many contexts women miss out on formal employment opportunities in ecotourism because social norms continue to restrict the type of economic activities in which women may engage. This applies, for example, to guiding both in the Himalayan region (Lama, 1998) and in Indonesia (Wilkinson & Pratiwi, 1995). In 1992, local people from the fishing village of Pangandaran in Java who took tourists by canoe to a nearby game park could earn up to US$21 per trip. However, of the 12 formal guides, none were women and of the 40 informal guides who worked during the peak season, only five were women. Many women felt they could not exploit this relatively lucrative economic opportunity because, 'Women being involved in guiding is not regarded favourably by villagers, the connotation being that such women are "prostitutes" interested in contacting foreign tourists' (Wilkinson & Pratiwi, 1995: 293).

Ensuring that women have some control over income deriving from ecotourism is a particularly difficult issue in societies in which men control household finances. There are ways around this issue, however, even in a society such as the Maasai in Tanzania where traditionally women have neither income nor possessions of their own. The Dutch tourism non-governmental organisation (NGO), Retour, was asked to work with the Maasai to pursue small-scale, low-impact tourism opportunities (van der Cammen, 1997). Retour staff eventu-

ally convinced the men that they should allow women to be actively involved in tourism, largely for the pragmatic reasons that firstly, they would otherwise have difficulty gaining funding from development agencies, and secondly, culturally-responsible tourists, whom they wished to attract, would not be interested in a society which oppressed women. After working with groups of women to build up their confidence and skills, Retour helped the women to cooperate with youth groups to offer complementary tourism products: campsites, walking safaris and beadwork shops. A major achievement of this venture is that women have been able to retain the income they have earned through selling beadwork:

> Maasai women don't want to radically change their culture. But they do want to create incomes of their own and to put more pressure on men if necessary, to cope with growing needs for income, health-care and education for their children. Empowerment is a process to enable them to achieve these goals … (van der Cammen, 1997: 163)

While the Maasai women were economically empowered by gaining control over their own income, in Belize the Sandy Beach Women's Cooperative has taken economic empowerment a step further, establishing a very successful lodge as part of a self-initiated ecotourism venture. In 1989 a group of 12 women decided that they needed to supplement the income their husbands could provide from farming and fishing. Tourists were being attracted to nearby villages which could offer sun and sea experiences but the Sandy Beach women wanted to attract nature lovers, not mass tourists. Local attractions include the beautiful seaside setting, an adjacent wetland area of interest to birdwatchers, hiking, and tours of the village, a nearby jaguar reserve and Mayan villages (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1996).

One of the real achievements of this Cooperative has been to challenge existing gender roles which suggested that women's domain was restricted to the household. In addition to supplementing the family income through lodge management and service provision, women's involvement in the Cooperative has enabled them to gain valuable skills in business management and marketing, as well as a deepened knowledge of environmental issues. Training in environmental education has been an important component of capacity building for the Sandy Beach women. Economic success has allowed the Cooperative to expand from a six-room venture to providing accommodation for 26 guests and seating for over 100 people in an adjacent dining/conference room.

The Sandy Beach women have gained the respect of the entire village largely because of their approach to tourism, one which promotes understanding of local culture and environmental sustainability and which encourages local involvement, meaning many people have been able to benefit economically from the venture. Multiplier effects, for example, stem from use of local materials and labour in construction of the lodge and local food in cooking, sales of crafts from the lodge and work for locals as cultural performers, demonstrators of traditional food and guides. Thus while women retain their hold over management of the initiative, both men and women have benefited economically from it (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1996).

Economic empowerment is also related to a community's access to productive resources in an area targeted by ecotourism. When ecotourism focuses on preservation of natural resources, economic livelihoods of local people may be threatened. For example, the establishment of protected areas in Africa has often reduced access to hunting and agricultural lands, and it may also lead to an increase in the number of wildlife species such as elephants, which threaten people's crops (Ashley & Roe, 1997). Because women carry out a lot of the day to day work in tending crops and they also collect water from areas where wild animals come to drink, they are particularly vulnerable to attacks from these animals (Scheyvens, 1999b). In Himalayan areas, tourism has resulted in widespread deforestation in some areas as lodges use wood for heating water and rooms for tourists and cooking meals. This has placed incredible pressure on women who are responsible for collecting fuelwood for household consumption (Gupta & Shah, 1999). Rather than accepting deforestation caused by the demands of tourists, however, women in Himachal Pradesh, India, formed groups to rally against use of fuelwood by tourism enterprises, even when men made money by selling wood in this way. They have also become actively involved in joint forest management programmes in areas where tourism has placed increasing pressure on this scarce resource, thus stopping illegal felling of trees. Consequently they have gained the support of the tourist industry which relies on beautiful, but stable, mountainsides to attract visitors to the Himalayan region (Gupta & Shah, 1999).

Psychological empowerment

A local community which is optimistic about the future, has faith in the abilities of its residents, is relatively self-reliant and demonstrates pride in traditions and culture, can be said to be psychologically powerful. In many small-scale, less industrialised societies, preservation of aspects of tradition is extremely important in terms of maintaining a group's sense of self-esteem and well-being (Mansperger, 1995). And it is precisely in these types of societies – whether the hill tribes of northern Thailand or the forest dwellers of the Amazon – that ecotourism is growing in popularity. Ecotourism initiatives which respect and show interest in aspects of traditional culture can, therefore, be empowering for local people. Psychological disempowerment can also occur, however, if the ecotourism development makes local people feel that they are somehow inadequate or inferior, or if they feel they have no control over the pace and direction of development.

When ecotourism is developed in a culturally sensitive manner, there seems to be a good chance that it will lead to psychological empowerment. Furthermore, women are often at the centre of efforts to preserve aspects of tradition. Swain (1993: 49), for example, claims that the production of ethnic art by Kuna women in Panama and Sani women in China '… serves as a viable way to resist cultural assimilation'. When discussing the Langtang Ecotourism Project in Nepal, similarly, Lama (1998) suggests that women are the 'keepers of cultural traditions and knowledge' because many men find employment in towns or with trekking parties and are away from home for long periods of time. Women maintain traditions and therefore build strong communities through supporting reli-

gious functions, producing handicrafts, using natural medicines, speaking local dialects, wearing traditional dress and performing traditional songs and dances.

In Samoa, Fairburn-Dunlop (1994) explains how people have been reluctant to embrace conventional, mass tourism because of a fear this will undermine *faaSamoa* (the traditional Samoan way of doing things). In this context, Samoan women faced a dilemma: whether to produce handicrafts used for household and ceremonial purposes, such as prestige fine mats (made from pandanus leaves) and tapa (a cloth made from bark and dyed with distinctive patterns) or to produce goods for tourists. The government tried to encourage the women to sell culturally important items such as large pieces of *tapa* to tourists, but these tourists did not appreciate the cultural significance of tapa and were not willing to pay an amount which would cover even the labour costs of the women. Women's committees in the villages thus decided to produce such culturally important items mainly for their own use, and meanwhile they developed new skills in printing tapa patterns onto clothing and tie-dying sarongs for tourists. Only smaller pieces of tapa are sold to tourists, which also ensures the plant materials used in traditional craft manufacture are not depleted unnecessarily. Fairburn-Dunlop (1994: 139) thus suggests that '… women have been able to capitalise on the opportunities the [tourism] industry offers because their rights have been safeguarded by customary norms'.

There is no doubt that the potential for ecotourism to simultaneously conserve natural resources and supplement local livelihoods has made it attractive to many development agencies. These agencies can, in some cases at least, be credited with assisting local communities to engage in positive ways with the tourism sector. They have subsequently raised feelings of self-confidence and community self-reliance and pride. Gurung (1995), for example, shows how external development agencies have assisted Nepalese women to develop their self-confidence and become actively engaged in trekking tourism through providing education and training for them. In other cases, development agencies have made clear their expectation that women should be involved in all aspects of their activities, thus giving women the opportunity to develop leadership skills and gain wider recognition within their communities. The Mountain Institute (TMI), for example, which works on community based mountain tourism in the Himalayan region, expects at least 30 percent of participants in any of its activities, including committees, study tours and planning workshops, to be women. TMI also seeks to gain men's support for women's involvement in ecotourism, holding community discussions at which the roles and responsibilities of women in tourism, and the unique skills women bring to tourism, are highlighted (Lama, 1998).

Psychological empowerment has also occurred through the work of the Siyabonga Craft Cooperative in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, which has seen a major growth in the confidence of its members. The women here had sold their crafts alongside the road for several years, when in 1995 the Natal Parks Board agreed to provide land for them to set up a permanent craft outlet. They subsequently raised funds to build a shop on the banks of the St Lucia estuary, where numerous tourists leave their cars before taking a boat ride to see hippos, crocodiles and birds. By 1998 the Cooperative had 35 members, including many women household heads. Polygamy is common in Zulu culture and women are

often abandoned by their partners, temporarily or permanently, thus economic independence is a matter of survival for many women (Scheyvens, 1999c).

The Cooperative has increased the self-reliance and pride of its members by providing them with a good source of income so they can, for example, afford the fees to send their children to school. It also gave some members the confidence and motivation to go back to school themselves, as they wanted to learn English so they could speak to the tourists who came to their shop, and to learn maths so that they could serve customers, give the correct change and understand the bookkeeping system. The Grade 1 classes they attended were held at night at a local primary school. Rather than being ashamed to be attending classes at a level lower than that of most of their children, the women were so eager to learn that they complained that the teachers would only hold the two hour classes on four nights of the week as they wanted Friday nights off (Scheyvens, 1999c).

Social empowerment

Social empowerment refers to a situation in which a community's sense of cohesion and integrity has been confirmed or strengthened by an activity such as ecotourism. Strong community groups, including youth groups, savings clubs, church groups and women's groups, and good participation in community meetings, may all be signs of an empowered community. On the other hand, social disempowerment may occur if tourist activity results in crime, begging, displacement from traditional lands, loss of access to resources, cultural decay or prostitution (Mansperger, 1995). In an examination of community-based wildlife management, including ecotourism initiatives, in South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland, Mander and Steytler (1997: 15) found that 64% of respondents from the 38 initiatives studied thought that community dynamics had a big influence on project success. They concluded, 'It may therefore be desirable to design initiatives in such a way where benefits and costs are equitably distributed throughout the community from the outset to promote community cohesion'.

A tangible expression of social empowerment can be seen when ecotourism indirectly or directly results in greater local access to services, such as water supplies or health clinics. Gurung (1995) discusses how trekking tourism in the Annapurna area of Nepal had brought a number of benefits to the Dhampus village community. For example, when lodge owners installed water taps this benefited many village women who otherwise had to walk some way to collect water. In addition, the demands of tourists for better facilities saw the adoption of labour-saving technologies – including kerosene stoves and solar water heaters – which reduced the drudgery aspect of women's work considerably. Similarly, in the 'Sua Bali' (meet Bali, understand Bali) sustainable village tourism initiative which was established by and is managed by a woman, each guest pays US$1 per day to the village. This money supports the upkeep of the village, is used for temple festivities and provides a hardship fund for locals who face difficulties such as illness (Mas, 1999).

However, community benefits from ecotourism may sometimes be biased against women. CAMPFIRE (Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources) in Zimbabwe explicitly sets out to empower local communities by allowing them to manage wildlife resources in their area and to determine how they can benefit economically from this wildlife. Advocates of

the CAMPFIRE programme claim that social development has been a major benefit to come from the programme, citing specifically the availability of funding for local clubs and for community cultural events such as traditional ceremonies, which enhance community spirit (Dhliwayo, 1998: 3). This is true to a large extent, however, differential funding of men's and women's clubs is also evident in some cases and may be a reflection of the larger proportion of men on many CAMPFIRE committees at village level. In Sunungukai, for example, there is a small ecotourism development consisting of community built and managed chalets and a campsite on the banks of the Mazoe River. When a modest profit was realised in 1994, Z\$2160 was allocated to the all male football club while only Z\$500 each went to the school and a sewing club (Scheyvens, forthcoming).[1]

In some cases, women's groups use tourism as a source of revenue for community projects. In Nepal, for example, Langtang women perform cultural dances for tourists and are using the funds raised to restore their local monastery (Lama, 1998). And funds raised by a women's group in Dhampus were used to build 500 metres of trail, used by both trekkers and villagers, which was widely recognised and appreciated. Rather than simply seeing this as an addition to women's already heavy workloads, Gurung (1995) explains how through such activities women gain greater respect within their communities, and this can indirectly lead to greater freedom for them. For example, because the Dhampus women's group was working on a project to benefit the entire community, men felt compelled to allow their wives to attend meetings (Gurung, 1995).

In communities where culturally and environmentally appropriate forms of tourism are occurring, and where women are involved in running or servicing tourism ventures, this often leads both to greater respect for women and a reconsideration of gender role stereotypes. Examples such as the Sandy Beach Women's Cooperative in Belize show communities that women need not only be restricted to household work, but they may also encourage men's involvement in what are seen as women's domains. For example, many of the lodges for trekkers in Dhampus are managed by women and they are often more economically successful than the traditional livelihood in the area, agriculture. With the growing popularity of trekking, women have to rely upon the cooperation of their whole families, thus men have been found to be engaging in a much wider spectrum of work than previously, including kitchen work (Gurung, 1995).

Political empowerment

If a community is to be politically empowered by ecotourism, their voices and their concerns should guide the development of any ecotourism project from the feasibility stage through to its implementation. They should also be involved in monitoring and evaluating the project over time. Diverse interest groups within a community, including women and youths, need to have representation on community and broader decision-making bodies.

In programmes encouraging community involvement in the management of natural resources, and ecotourism in particular, it is typically expected that a representative body will be formed to convey community interests and act on behalf of the community. Because of the complex nature of the term community, it is very difficult to accurately assess what 'community opinion', let alone consensus, is, even though this is often what it sought. Gender bias in community

forums is a common problem (Joekes *et al.*, 1996). Moore (1996: 29) describes '… gendered patterns of exclusion from "public" forums empowered with constructing "community" opinion'. Representation of women in deci-sion-making structures is notoriously poor beyond the village level because meetings often necessitate travel. Travel may be a problem for women both because it can involve taking them away from their traditional roles and obliga-tions for periods of time and because of the suspicion that a woman travelling alone will commit adultery. This leads to what Moore (1996) calls 'sexual polic-ing' of women's movements. Women also lack the same freedom of movement as men in societies where they are seen as having secondary social status (Lama, 1998).

Thus it is important not to assume that if women have benefited economically from an ecotourism venture, they will have greater voice within their communi-ties and beyond. While tourism provided opportunities for Sani and Kuna women to gain economic independence, for example, they continued to have 'little real power' within their own societies (Swain, 1993: 40). This issue of power is important, but complex. Even in the context of heightened decision-making power of women at household and community levels in Dhampus, Gurung (1995) claims that women are not considered men's equals in the development process. Meanwhile in the Sua Bali initiative, discussed earlier, the female manager has not been able to promote as much local participation in her sustain-able tourism venture as she would like simply because as a woman, she cannot be actively involved in village discussions in the traditional village council, the Banjar. Her lack of voice in the Banjar, a forum dominated by richer males in the village who are very suspicious about her successful tourism venture, makes it difficult for the manager to achieve her aim for a '… mutual, careful, coexistence … between the village (its culture and the natural surrounding) on the one side and Sua Bali on the other' (Mas, 1999: 110).

Some communities, however, have genuinely overcome cultural constraints to women's participation in meetings and on decision-making forums. For example, in Palawan village in the Philippines, women have emerged as the organisers and managers of a sustainable tourism project. Ecological degrada-tion of surrounding seas was undermining the local fishing industry, with catches dropping from a household average of 37 kg of fish in 1985 to 8.4 kg of fish in 1989. Meanwhile tourism in the area was growing, based around boat trips to the reefs and islands in Honda Bay for activities such as snorkelling and diving. While this potentially offered the fishing community an alternative liveli-hood option, first they had to challenge a cartel of five families which otherwise controlled and monopolised the boat tour business in Honda Bay. Women were active in community meetings held with this cartel, learning to use the legal and political systems to push their cause (Mayo-Anda *et al.*, 1999).

Eventually with the support of an NGO (the Environmental Legal Assistance Center) and a local people's organisation, 30 small boat operators created the Honda Bay Boatmen Association (HOBBAI). As suggested in this name, a gender-sensitive approach was not evident in HOBBAI at the outset, even though women were heavily involved in the initiative. The objectives of HOBBAI include operating an ecologically-friendly service, alleviating the poverty faced by most local fisherpeople and establishing a fair rota to allow all

members of HOBBAI to take turns in gaining an income from tourists, while continuing with fishing activity at other times. Operating a tour boat earns a family twice as much as they would get from fishing for one day.

In one respect, HOBBAI may be seen as reinforcing gender roles as men continue to operate the tour boats while women carry out administration for the cooperative. In another respect, however, women have been highly politicised by their involvement with HOBBAI and are now active in local tourism planning and natural resource management forums. They have lobbied members of the City Tourism Council to gain financial support for HOBBAI and prepared speeches for city council meetings, for example, as well as protecting the marine resource by filing complaints about illegal commercial fishing vessels. With assistance from their NGO partners, a process of participatory monitoring and evaluation is being implemented involving HOBBAI members. This includes collection of data on gender issues such as the distribution of labour and revenue within HOBBAI households (Mayo-Anda *et al*., 1999).

Conclusions

The examples discussed in this paper have highlighted both disempowering and empowering impacts of involvement in ecotourism for women. Clearly community involvement in ecotourism in Third World countries can be very positive in terms of promoting development in economically marginalised regions, encouraging sustainable use of natural resources and enhancing the control of local people over development in their surrounding area. However, it is not a gender neutral activity.

One key finding to come from analysis of the case studies herein is that women are not simply victims of inappropriate ecotourism development. Rather, they have benefited greatly from some well-planned initiatives and in other cases, they have successfully taken action to ensure that they way that ecotourism progresses is in their direct interests. Examples from both Nepal and Samoa showed how women were helping to ensure the continued pride and dignity of their people by engaging in ecotourism in ways which protected tradition, rather than feeling their culture was being degraded or 'sold out' to tourism. Establishing their own craft cooperative had significant flow on effects for the Siyabonga women, boosting their confidence and encouraging several members to expand their education with night classes in literacy and numeracy. Growth in economic independence was another major spin-off of engagement in ecotourism for women, whether through simple efforts to sell crafts and jewellery or more elaborate ventures, such as the Sandy Beach Women's Cooperative in Belize.

Furthermore, significant changes in gender roles and relations often came about through women's involvement in ecotourism. The success of the Sandy Beach women in managing their venture challenged predominant gender role stereotypes and increased community respect for women. Similarly, when women in Nepal used tourism as a means of raising funds for improving trails or repairing a monastery, such was the community respect for them that the onus was on men to shoulder non-traditional roles within the household while their wives engaged in this community work. Where women in Nepal managed

lodges for trekkers, men also took on work in the non-traditional domain of the kitchen. Such examples show that there is potential for ecotourism to promote equitable, sustainable development in marginalised Third World communities.[2]

Particularly of note in a number of the positive examples cited earlier was the facilitating role played by NGOs. While self-initiated, independent involvement of communities in ecotourism might be the ideal, the support of outside agencies will often be needed in order to equip the community with relevant skills, to expose them to the highs and lows of involvement in ecotourism and to provide technical assistance. The case studies showed how The Mountain Institute insisted that women were involved in all of the study tours and workshops that they conducted, and that they served on committees, and how other NGOs provided education and training for women and girls so they would have the skills and confidence to engage in ecotourism activities.

It is likely that there are further opportunities for women to be involved in ecotourism which have not yet been adequately pursued, as most ecotourism endeavours have failed to explicitly consider how they could provide a better product by actively incorporating women's specialist knowledge and skills. Women now make up over 50% of ecotourists (Obua & Harding, 1996: 499; Pearce & Wilson, 1995: 21). These women could appreciate having more possibilities for interaction with women at local sites, for example, cultural tours which incorporate demonstrations of women's work and guided walks to reveal women's specialist knowledge of forest products, including medicinal plants.

Women do not always benefit significantly from ecotourism development, however. They may be largely passed over when a lodge on communally held land is seeking employees, as with the Shangaan people in Mahenye, and they may not have the freedom to pursue economically lucrative forms of employment, such as guiding. Even social development projects supported by ecotourism revenues are sometimes biased against women, with more funds going to clubs dominated by men. Of greatest concern, however, is not simply that women may miss out on the benefits that ecotourism can bring. Rather, the more fundamental issue is that women generally have little control over locally-based ecotourism development. While they may be allowed to engage in economic activities associated with ecotourism and have their workloads lightened due to installation of new services, such as water supplies, they are typically poorly represented on so-called 'community' decision-making forums which are concerned with natural resource management and ecotourism.

The greatest challenge in the future is to ensure that women are not just consulted, but listened to, when deciding whether to pursue ecotourism and how to pursue ecotourism. This is not only 'fair', it is practical, especially when women are reliant upon natural resources to meet their families' livelihood needs and when they have excellent knowledge of these resources. Where women have a deep concern for sustainable use of the natural resource base this can actually benefit ecotourism endeavours. This was demonstrated in the case of the Himachal Pradesh women who protested that local trees should not be cut down for tourist lodges, even when men in their communities were earning money from the sale of the wood.

These constraints to women's active participation in ecotourism initiatives – in terms of both their ability to have control over the ventures and to secure bene-

fits – have been noted by authors writing about regions as diverse as the Nepalese Himalayas, Sub-Saharan Africa and coastal Indonesia. Clearly a need for gender-sensitive planning and management of ecotourism extends to any region where community involvement in ecotourism is seen as a potential development strategy.

The preoccupation of development agencies and conservation organisations with support for preservation of natural resources and sustainable development is such that it is easy for gender concerns to be swept aside in environmental projects, including ecotourism (Scheyvens, 1998). This paper has tried to stress that while support for ecotourism, with the potential environmental benefits this can bring, is highly desirable, this should not blind us to the social aspects of ecotourism activity, including gender concerns. As such, the empowerment of women may not be a key item on the agenda of agencies involved in promoting community involvement in ecotourism, however, it could be seen as a necessary step for them to achieve broader goals. For example,

> … [while] empowerment is not the major focus of TMI's [The Mountain Institute's] work in CBMT [Community-Based Mountain Tourism] in the Himalaya, enhancing women's roles in mountain tourism is recognized as an inseparable factor in developing local capabilities for managing sustainable tourism that supports conservation of the region's rich biodiversity and cultural heritage. (Lama, 1998: 5–6)

This paper has focused upon whether or not involvement in ecotourism has *resulted in* empowerment for women in Third World communities. However, it is also critical to realise that women and men may need to be empowered, in terms of having access to a wide range of information about their options and the confidence to take part in discussions and negotiations, *before* they can effectively decide whether, and how, to pursue involvement in ecotourism. Empowerment should not just be seen as a potential outcome of ecotourism development. As Akama (1996: 573) argues,

> … the local community need to be empowered to decide what forms of tourism facilities and wildlife conservation programmes they want to be developed in their respective communities, and how the tourism costs and benefits are to be shared among different stakeholders.

It will be a positive step forward if agencies supporting locally-based ecotourism recognise that the 'local community' and 'stakeholders' referred to by Akama must include women.

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Notes

1. In July 1998, the exchange rate was approximately US\$1 = Z\$18.
2. Clearly women can be empowered by engaging in ecotourism, however, there may have been some bias towards more positive examples in this paper simply because so

little has been written about this subject overall. Many of the examples herein were drawn from the Hemmati (1999) volume, essentially a case book of examples of 'good practice' in sustainable tourism. It is hoped that researchers will include gender analysis in future studies of ecotourism initiatives, thus rising to the challenge raised by Swain (1995) and Kinnaird and Hall (1996) as documented earlier in this paper.

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