



**CARIBBEAN NATURAL RESOURCES INSTITUTE
(CANARI)**

**INTEGRATING STAKEHOLDERS IN PARTICIPATORY
NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: ECOTOURISM
PROJECT OF EL LIMON WATERFALL, DOMINICAN
REPUBLIC**

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2001**

CANARI Technical Report N1 283

Credits

This case study is one of the products of a research project entitled “Synthesizing the Caribbean experience in stakeholder analysis for participatory natural resource management”. The project consisted of three major activities:

-  the preparation of six case studies from Barbados, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, St. Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago, and their preliminary analysis by leading actors in each case;
-  the convening, in collaboration with the Jamaica Conservation and Development Trust, in April 2000, of a four-day seminar to present and analyse the cases, to identify common themes and concepts related to stakeholder approaches in the Caribbean, and to develop selected principles and skills relevant to the Caribbean context;
-  the preparation of a publication presenting the results of the analysis in the form of guidelines for Caribbean practitioners, the six case studies, and an annotated bibliography.

The preparation and editing of the six case studies were supported by the University of the West Indies Centre for Environment and Development, as part of its project entitled *Caribbean Capacity-Building for Environmental Management*, and by the International Development Research Centre of Canada, under the framework of the project entitled *Community-Based Coastal Resources Management in the Caribbean*.

Integrating Stakeholders in Participatory Natural Resources Management: Ecotourism Project of El Limón Waterfall, Dominican Republic

Patricia Lamelas

1. Background and project description

The ecotourism project of El Limón Waterfall is a component of the larger project, *Regional Management Strategy of Samaná Bay and its Surroundings: Ecotourism and Sustainable Agriculture*, initiated in January 1996. The project has been carried out by the *Centro para la Conservación y el Ecodesarrollo de la Bahía de Samaná y su Entorno* (CEBSE) a non-governmental organisation whose mission is the conservation and sustainable development of the natural and cultural resources of the Samaná Bay area with the active participation of the local community. The Samaná region is located in the extreme northeast of the Dominican Republic (DR) (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Samaná Bay and peninsula

The original goal of the overall project was "to help members of the community develop alternative sources of income through regulated ecotourism-based activities." This goal has changed during the years and currently focuses on diversifying, regulating, and optimizing the use of natural resources and the environment by local groups involved in tourism, in the area of the Samaná Bay.

The activities implemented include:

- training, regulating, and monitoring the local community groups in relation to the tourism activities at El Limón Waterfall;
- strengthening the co-management mechanisms in the areas where the project is being implemented.

2. Issues and concerns

Located virtually in the middle of the Samaná peninsula, El Limón is an impressive waterfall, with a 50 metre drop. There are three principal access tracks leading from the road linking the town of *Las Terrenas* to the town of *Samaná*. *Paradas* are roofed muster points established by community micro-entrepreneurs. The *paradas* offer guided horse rides and hikes to the falls, informative visits to traditional gardens, visits to caves or other attractions in the area, as well as local food and beverages.

At the start of the project, the principal management problems in the area were:

- C deterioration of natural resources;
- C lack of authority;
- C lack of co-operation among the *parada* owners, leading to unfair competition;
- C lack of regulations for the use of the area;
- C poor quality and lack of consistency in the services offered;
- C poor conditions of the trails;
- C few tourists visiting the area;
- C progressive penetration of the area by outside tour operators.

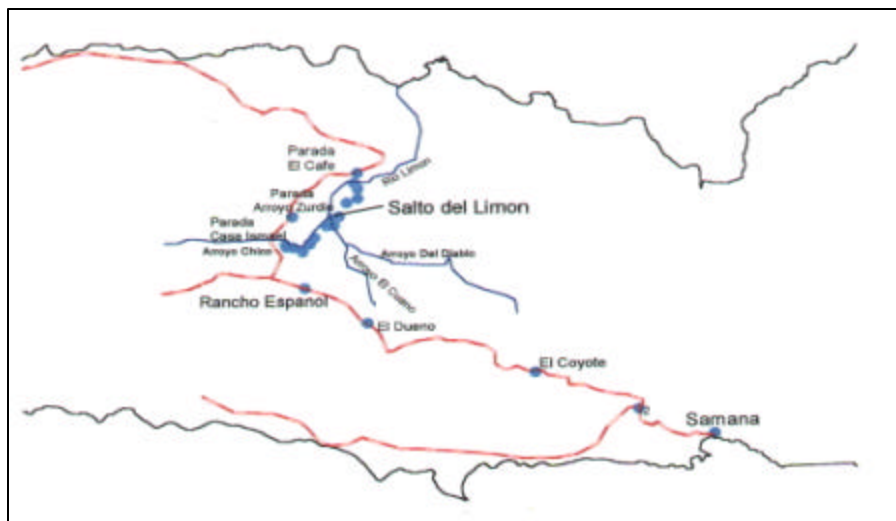


Figure 2. Trails to El Limón waterfall

Until 1996 the uncontrolled tourism activities at El Limón Waterfall were largely based on independent travelers visiting the area, as well as tour groups bussed in from Las Terrenas or as far away as Puerto Plata. The local *paradas* provided improvised services -- food and beverages, horse rides, and local guides. The people working in these *paradas* were family and/or neighbours, according to demand. Usually, they were not paid a regular salary.

The owners of the *paradas* managed the renting of horses and mules. Some of the animals were theirs, and the rest belonged to small holders of the same community. These animals were normally used for transport, e.g., sacks of coconut or root crops. At the beginning of the project the local guides were often minors, whose principal task was to lead the horses by rope, as most tourists cannot ride or control horses. The payment for the guide was usually included in the price of renting the animals.

During the initial project phase, which was intended to define the project area and identify the stakeholders, the community members indicated their unwillingness to join any type of organization, largely as a result of previous negative experiences with governmental institutions. The declaration of the area as a Natural Monument under the jurisdiction of the National Parks Directorate in mid-1996 also aroused mistrust by the community members as to the real interests and aims of CEBSE and its staff with respect to El Limón waterfall. At that time, it became somewhat difficult to advise and work with the communities.

3. The stakeholder groups

The definition of stakeholders used was “individuals, groups, or sectors with an interest in, or involved in or impacted by the use of local natural resources, or with responsibility for resource management”. In the case of El Limón waterfall, the following stakeholders were identified:

Parada owners: micro-entrepreneurs -- the owners of the service infrastructure (roofed muster points, attached kitchen, etc.) and usually of horses -- employing two or more persons. They are in direct contact with the tourists and provide services to tour organizers or operators bringing tourists to the area. These activities are their main income.

Horse owners: Local small holders or farmers with horses, which they make available to the *paradas*. The income from hiring out their horses to take people to the falls represents an important supplement to their traditional income from farming.

Hotel owners: Enterprises with big investments in the area and with large numbers of employees. The trips to the falls represent an attractive option, complementing the activities of the hotel. These types of excursions are important secondary sources of income.

Tour operators: Enterprises usually based in main tourist centers, such as Puerto Plata or Sosúa, generally providing all-round services to foreign, outbound operators offering all-inclusive holiday packages.

Tour guides: Employees of tour operators. They normally accompany the groups of tourists as interpreters and travel representatives. They usually know several languages, yet they are often not familiar with the areas being visited. In addition to their regular salaries these guides also take and expect commissions from the owners of the *paradas*.

Buscones: Young people from the communities who latch on to visitors that do not arrive with an organized tour. They depend on the commissions they get from the *parada* owner for selling excursions (often overpriced) to the falls.

Artisans: People from the community who craft products from local natural resources, such as coconuts, calabashes, and vines. These artifacts are sold at the *paradas*, usually on a commission basis.

Ministry of Tourism: Governmental organization responsible for the regulation, development, and control of the tourism industry in the DR. At the start of the project it did not have any kind of official strategy for the area. El Limón represents its first experience in helping to organize and regulate ecotourism activities on a participatory basis.

National Parks Directorate: A decentralized government organization responsible for the management of the system of protected areas of the DR. It did not officially participate in the management of the falls, due to the fact that the establishment of the falls as a protected area is still under review.

CEBSE: For CEBSE El Limón waterfall is an important natural resource of the region. CEBSE's main role is as a catalyst to empower the communities and facilitate their capacity to participate not only in the decision-making processes related to the management of the area, but also in the benefits generated by their natural resources.

Community Ecotourism Association of Salto del Limón (ACESAL): At the end of the third year of the project, and after numerous community meetings, the local stakeholders established the first community-based tourism association in the DR, ACESAL. This legally incorporated association integrates and represents the management interests and commitments of the *parada* owners, horse owners, artisans and community guides.

4. Stakeholder identification

Before drafting a project proposal, CEBSE conducted a community survey to identify the needs and interests related to the development of ecotourism and/or cultural projects, as well as the potential working areas. Only the technical staff of CEBSE participated in this phase.

Once the proposal was approved, CEBSE proceeded to identify the key groups and individuals for its implementation. Three community meetings were held at which the project and its objectives were presented. Community members were encouraged to participate in the development of the activities and the achievement of the project goals.

At the same time, the technical staff of the project made an inventory and evaluation of the natural resources at the falls and the surrounding area. As part of this study, the identification of the users and the relevant human impacts were also considered. The identification of the stakeholders was made starting with the resource and its direct beneficiaries.

Later, working sessions were organized. The beneficiaries identified the rest of the stakeholders, and defined their responsibilities, benefits, and possible interests. This process required several community assemblies, the use of participatory methodologies, and simple visualization techniques.

At different stages of the process, meetings were held to verify and/or redefine the roles of the stakeholders as well as their levels of participation. The rights, management responsibilities, and benefits

of the stakeholders were repeatedly analysed. The roles of the corresponding authorities were taken into account, as well as the legal status of the area.

By the third year of the project, four entities had been defined as active members in a co-management process for the El Limón waterfall: ACESAL, CEBSE, the Ministry of Tourism and the tour operators.

A CEBSE team -- comprising an ecotourism expert, a community extensionist, an ecotourism consultant and environmental planner, and a lawyer -- has been responsible for executing the activities and monitoring progress. Other interested groups with whom information is exchanged and from whom consultation is sought include tour guides, the General Directorate of Forestry, the National Parks Directorate, the municipal government of Samaná, hotel owners of Las Terrenas, and interested individuals.

Community meetings and planning workshops were the communication mechanisms used since the beginning of the process with the stakeholders. In addition, numerous individual meetings with the different groups and organizations helped to find solutions to problems that arose. This process has reconciled the various types of development desired by each sector that has an interest in the region.

5. Stakeholder analysis

At the beginning of the project the *parada* owners were only informally organized. These *paradas* were managed in a very poor way, lacked accounting, and produced very low profit margins. For the actual management of the areas being visited by tourists, there was no system or agreement in place.

At the start of the process, CEBSE represented the interests of the community in the negotiations. Nevertheless, it was clear that in this phase of the process not all interests were being represented.

The lack of organizational structures among the beneficiaries, inadequate knowledge of the legal status of the area, and insufficient entrepreneurial experience originally limited the participation of local members in the process. These factors have been and are still being overcome with technical assistance and the involvement of the community in on-going decision-making processes. This enabled the Ministry of Tourism to establish official regulations for the use of the area. Also, it has resulted in an agreement by the local entrepreneurs on managed growth of the industry.

Initially the hotel owners, tour operators and local guides dominated the use of the area. The participation of tourism authorities was minimal, and the communities were passive about how their local resources were being utilized and controlled. Now there is a management plan and ACESAL is the principal party responsible for the management of the area. ACESAL negotiates and proposes guidelines for local development. For example, the tour operators now pay a fee to the association for the use and maintenance of the trails, and the numbers of visitors have increased noticeably.

The community is now empowered to make necessary decisions. They chose to assume control and responsibility for the management of the area when faced with the potential of having to yield to outside interests. The participation of the stakeholders in the management of the area is currently determined by:

- ⊆ the level of commitment and responsibility shown in their operation (maintenance of trails, posting of signs, reforestation projects, etc.);
- ⊆ the participation in the community assemblies where problems are discussed and decisions made;
- ⊆ the legal status of the stakeholders in relation to the area (legalized micro-enterprises, guides recognized by the Ministry of Tourism, title of ownership of the land the trails pass through, etc.).

6. Lessons learnt

A base has been established to develop a true process of community ecotourism co-management, in which the stakeholders participate in an active and conscious way in the management of their local resources. The organization of tourism-related micro-enterprises has been a key element in the process, because it defines the beneficiaries of the resource as actors with responsibilities for the resources on which they depend.

As a product of this process, the following lessons were learnt.

The establishment of a co-operative management plan will not necessarily guarantee the adequate management of the resource.

The level of stakeholders' participation will always be oriented to satisfying their particular needs and interests. If stakeholders have the opportunity to achieve their goals without actively participating in the conservation of the resource, they will.

The resource must have a "representative".

The resource is both a subject and an object of the co-management process. If stakeholders' rights and responsibilities are defined according to their individual needs and interests, it is equally vital that the needs of the resource be represented and taken into account, in order to ensure sustainability.

The individuals involved in the co-management process will influence the outcome.

The personality, level of education, and economic or political interests of individuals representing sectors involved in co-management can influence the process and change the results in a positive or negative manner.

Stakeholders with similar interests should collaborate privately in order to facilitate the negotiations and the co-management process.

The creation of associations, commissions or special interest groups within the identified stakeholder groups enhances and simplifies the participatory process. This should be encouraged by the facilitator.

Strengthening community participation skills takes time and dedication.

The time and effort put into the process of building capacity to facilitate participatory processes is the foundation for sustainable resource management and effective management systems.

Stakeholder roles may change.

When management agreements are implemented and evaluated, the stakeholders' roles and responsibilities become more clearly defined. Sectors that were not previously involved may become participants, or vice versa, introducing changes in the roles defined previously.

Be prepared to deal with resistance.

All regulatory processes bring change, and the level of resistance depends on how affected the stakeholder feels. Negotiation and arbitration can reduce resistance, but not completely eliminate it.

7. Relevant documents

CEBSE and CANARI. 1995. La participación comunitaria en la gestión ambiental y el co-manejo en la República Dominicana. Proceedings of a conference held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 27-29 October 1994. 230 pp.

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