Local economic linkages to community-based tourism in rural Costa Rica

Bernardo Trejos¹ and Lan-Hung Nora Chiang²

¹Department of Tropical Agriculture and International Cooperation, National Pingtung University of Science and Technology, Pingtung, Taiwan
²Department of Geography, National Taiwan University, Taipei, Taiwan

Correspondence: Lan-Hung Nora Chiang (email: nora@ntu.edu.tw)

This paper reports on the contribution of tourism to the wellbeing of rural residents through the development of economic linkages engaged by community-based tourism (CBT) in rural Costa Rica. In a qualitative case study of local economic linkages surrounding one such project in Chira Island, economic linkages were assessed at two levels: discourse and practice. The findings indicate that CBT does not involve the collective property of the community, but rather, the collective property of a group of community members organized in a formal association. As a result, a discourse on local economic linkages has been promoted by CBT support organizations in which hopes of wider benefits are placed on small linkages to services and products provided by local community members. However, a field survey suggested that the economic linkages generated by CBT in the community were sporadic and polyvalent and, furthermore, that the linkages with agriculture are negatively affected by scale and seasonality, resulting in leakages out of the community. These findings caution practitioners that CBT may only have small-scale positive impacts on the local economy.

Keywords: Costa Rica, community-based tourism, economic linkages, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), rural development, rural tourism

Introduction: community-based tourism (CBT) as a development strategy

The potential contribution of tourism to the wellbeing of rural communities in developing countries such as Costa Rica involves the development of economic linkages (Telfer & Wall, 1996; Telfer, 2001; Mbaiwa, 2003). As with any other economic activity, the developmental impacts of tourism depend on the nature and interactions of tourism-related activities with both suppliers (backward linkages) and customers (forward linkages) in the provision of food, construction outputs, power supplies, transportation and so on (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996). Nonetheless, in most developing countries, there are few links between tourism and local sectors of the economy (MacLellan et al., 2000), in particular the large informal economy that sustains livelihoods in rural and urban areas.

Detracting from linkages is the problem of ‘leakages’ (Kontogeorgopoulos, 1998), or earnings spent outside of the local economy to cater to tourism in distant or peri-urban rural contexts, most notably on imports of food and drinks, of capital and technology, as well as advertising and additional government expenditure on tourism infrastructure. In some cases, the consumption habits and infrastructure ensuing can affect local lifestyles and livelihoods – for better or for worse – in ways that lead to additional imports (Gnosh et al., 2003). In order to maximize the benefits of tourism development for rural communities, ways must be found to increase the utilization of local food products and, where feasible, agriculture. In this respect, given their reliance on local food, numerous small tourism establishments may be more important than larger hotels or resorts (Telfer
Wall, 2000) as there is scant evidence that international tourism stimulates local or domestic agriculture (Torres, 2003).

Linkages and leakages vary with the type of tourism development. For example, the study by Slee et al. (1997) on ‘soft tourism’ compared to ‘hard’ enclave forms of tourism in the Scottish highlands showed that ‘soft tourism’ was more embedded in the local economy and, therefore, generated higher local income. Although the volume of spending was higher for ‘hard tourists’, this may have to be traded off in order to maximize local economic benefits. Other research has shown that backpackers are more likely to desire and consume locally-produced goods and services (‘typical’ foods, native guides and local modes of transport) than mass tourists seeking comfort and pleasurable pursuits that require luxury imports and specially catered infrastructure (Hampton, 1998). Therefore, backpacker tourism is seen as having a higher local multiplier and backward linkage effect (Wunder, 2000; Scheyvens, 2002). Yet, in developing countries where backward linkages have been acknowledged as crucial for linking the informal to the formal sector (Kontogeorgopoulos, 1998), estimates of tourism employment continue to be based on data that often do not include the informal sector. Thus the engagement and contributions of this sector, which typically caters to backpacker and ‘soft’ tourism, may be undervalued. However, the mode of participation, ranging from autonomous or unregulated enterprises to salaried employment, is less decisive for local income generation than the existence of natural attractions, the degree of tourism specialization and the level of local organization (Wunder, 2000).

The most widely accepted definition of CBT states that a high degree of control and a significant proportion of the benefits must be in the hands of those in destination communities (Scheyvens, 1999; Mitchell & Reid, 2001; Ramsa-Yaman & Mohd, 2004; Jones, 2005; Kontogeorgopoulos, 2005). There is however no unanimous agreement on what the term CBT means. For some researchers, it involves joint decision making among a group of autonomous stakeholders in order to plan tourism development (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Reed, 1997). For others, it involves the formation of cooperative groups or community-based organizations (MacDonald & Joliffe, 2003; Mbaiwa, 2003). Wearing and McDonald (2002) suggest that in CBT, the visitor should not be given priority within the local system. Blackstock (2005) argues that CBT is an unrealistic discourse for legitimizing tourism development, since it sidesteps issues of social justice and local empowerment. Echoing such concerns, Belsky (1999) found that income from a community-based rural ecotourism project in Belize was too concentrated among few households and individuals and not sufficient to make much difference in securing village livelihoods. It has also been pointed out that in terms of countrywide planning, other forms of tourism aside from CBT may also contribute significantly to socioeconomic development (Sharpley, 2001).

The success of a CBT project ideally aims at the generation and equitable distribution of surplus revenue, the success of which has been associated with internal collaboration, external partnerships, safe access to locations and effective leadership (Weaver & Lawton, 2007). However emerging destination communities such as those in rural Costa Rica are at a disadvantage in terms of skills, experience and knowledge of the tourism industry and therefore require institutional support for information, capacity building and networking opportunities relating to community based ventures (Scheyvens, 2003). In this broad context, this paper explores the local economic linkages generated by a CBT project in rural Costa Rica and evaluates the hypothesis that CBT enterprises generate small economic linkages that can spread to the wider community in which businesses are embedded.
CBT has been promoted in Costa Rica primarily by an array of nonstate organizations promoting sustainable development since at least 1993.\(^1\) The most constant supporters have been the Global Environment Facility’s Small Grants Programme (SGP) (which in 2000–5 contributed USD 936 453 for 46 CBT projects, see Barrera, 2007), and two nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) – Fundecoopéración (http://www.fundecoopercion.org/eng/home.html), founded to administer the funds from the 1994 Bilateral Agreement for Sustainable Development between Costa Rica and the Netherlands, and the Central American Association for the Economy, Health and the Environment (Asociación Centroamericana para la Economía, la Salud y el Ambiente or ACEPESA, see http://www.acepesa.org/), which has supported projects for the development of small tourism businesses. More recently, there has been considerable support from the Rainforest Alliance and the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB).

International financial assistance for CBT has been channelled through complex networks of organizations linked to community-based projects. Most funding agencies require that a formal association be registered for each community-based enterprise and support groups rather than individuals. These associations may be categorized as grassroots organizations of locally-based membership groups that work to improve or develop their own communities (Fisher, 1994) and are seen to have taken a proactive stance towards improving their community’s quality of life (Jackiewicz, 2008). Financial support for grassroots organizations are channelled through umbrella support organizations. Of the many tourism-related support organizations in Costa Rica, only two have nationwide coverage: the Costa Rican Association of Community-Based Rural Tourism (Asociación Costarricense de Turismo Rural Comunitario or ACTUAR, see http://www.actuaracostarica.com/app/cms/www/index.php), and the Cooperative Consortium – National Ecotourism Network (Consorcio Cooperativo Red Ecoturística Nacional, COOPRENA, see http://www.turismoruralcr.com/). In 2007 ACTUAR (2007) had 23 member-grassroots organizations while COOPRENA (2007) had 13. Both ACTUAR and COOPRENA serve as a link between grassroots organizations, funding sources, government institutions, tourism intermediaries, tourists and other NGOs (Trejos et al., 2006). In 2007 there were at least 70 grassroots organizations involved with CBT in Costa Rica (Barrera, 2007), but no comprehensive study of revenues or even visitor numbers for these CBT initiatives in Costa Rica has yet been undertaken. However, a study of eight selected grassroots operated lodges from different parts of Costa Rica found that the total visitation went from 4935 tourists in 2002 to 7084 tourists in 2004, and that total revenues rose from USD 60 000 in 2003 to USD 69 000 in 2004 (Guereña & Calderón, 2005).

Study of CBT in Chira Island, Costa Rica

The study area

Chira Island (Figure 1) is located in the Nicoya Gulf and has an area of 43 km\(^2\) (ADIIC, 2007). This site was chosen for the study because it is one of the better-known CBT destinations, its clear geographical boundary as an island and its ample availability of interviewees. In 2007, the population of Chira Island was officially estimated at 1740 (ADIIC, 2007). Although the population is mostly of aboriginal descent, the census does not categorize them as ‘indigenous’. Table 1 provides a sociodemographic profile of Chira as at the last census in 2000 (CCP, 2008). Chira has four primary schools and one
high school, and a medical dispensary where basic medicines are available, with a doctor in attendance once a week (ADIIC, 2007). Two boat services provide passenger links to the mainland – one plies to and from the mainland town Pájaros thrice daily, the other plies to the main port city of Puntarenas once daily – though many residents have their own small boats. According to 2000 census data, 96 per cent of the households had access to electricity; cooking in 68 per cent of the households is done with gas, compared to 23 per cent with firewood and 7 per cent with electricity (CCP, 2008). An aqueduct water supply is delivered from the mainland via underwater supply lines. More recently, underwater connections to coastal mainland areas have provided telephone services (Arrieta, 2007).

Fishing is the main economic activity directly employing one in every four persons (Arrieta, 2007). Official reports indicate that there were around 2300 fishermen in the Nicoya Gulf in the year 2000, but the actual numbers were probably higher and likely to have increased over the past years since fishery is an ‘employer of last resort’ (Fischer

Table 1. Sociodemographic profile of Chira Island, 2000.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>1534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged below 15</td>
<td>570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged 15–64</td>
<td>880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aged above 64</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population aged above 5</td>
<td>1341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can read/write</td>
<td>1165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot read/write</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total no. of occupied houses</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water supply from aqueduct</td>
<td>298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water supply from well</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity supply</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No electricity</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the fishing industry in the Nicoya Gulf is small-scale, the large number of fishermen has led to overexploitation and dwindling catches (Fischer & Wolff, 2006). A secondary salt production activity had to be abandoned due to recent environmental laws. Another traditional economic activity is livestock production, although it is not a major employer (ADIIC, 2007).

The main tourism attractions in Chira include bird watching in the wetlands, boat rides and tours of the mangrove forest and nearby smaller islands (which also include wildlife sanctuaries), recreational fishing, hiking and biking (because of the muddy shoreline, it is not a good place for swimming). Many of the interviewees from Chira also commented that the island is a relatively safe place compared to the mainland.

Under the terms of the 1977 Maritime Zone Law (Ley sobre la Zona Marítimo Terrestre No. 6043), all of Costa Rica’s islands are state property (cited in Solís et al., 2006: 45). Nonetheless, those who had been resident on their lands for 10 years at that time were allowed the right to stay on, but no census of these people was undertaken. In the 1980s, the government gave out property titles to Chira Island villagers, in contravention to the 1977 law. Over time, owners divided their land between descendants. Then, in 2006, the Comptroller General abruptly instructed the local government of Puntarenas (which has purview of Chira Island) to suspend the collection of property taxes, which has created a situation of uncertainty over whether villagers had a legitimate right over their land or not (Arrieta, 2007).

**Study approach**

The fieldwork on which this paper is based was conducted by Bernardo Trejos (2008) in 2005–7 as part of his doctoral research on CBT in rural Costa Rica. That work evaluated CBT policy in Costa Rica from the perspective of Granovetter’s (1983; 2002; 2005) network theory (also see Trejos et al., 2006; 2008). Following this, and for the purposes of this paper, the assumption may be raised that grassroots organizations such as those for tourism in Chira link individuals from rural communities (with strong ties between members) to other or distant parts of the social system (with which they have few weak ties) in ways that would not otherwise occur.

The research used a case study approach in which the goal is to expand and generalize theories (analytic generalization) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalization). Case studies may be generalized to theoretical propositions but not to populations or universes (Yin, 2003), so these findings are not intended as a representative sampling of CBT businesses, although they may usefully amplify those from other studies in encouraging improvements.

The paper mainly draws on evidence from face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with representatives of 8 CBT support organizations, 6 grassroots organizations, and 12 Chira villagers with linkages to CBT. Interviews were triangulated and contrasted with published and unpublished documents, as well as with observations of the grassroots organization-owned tourism businesses and the communities in which they are located. Interviews conducted with representatives of the support and grassroots organizations were recorded and dwelt on the social linkages between the organizations. On Chira Island, a list of economic linkages to local businesses was provided by the Women’s Ecotourism Association of Chira or AEDC (Asociación Ecoturística Damas de Chira) and all of the contacts on the list were interviewed in March 2007. This set of interviews was not recorded (the digital recorder inhibited communication and was too much of a distraction). However, the interviewees afforded ample time between commentaries for
note-taking (perhaps correlated with the slow pace of life in rural areas mentioned by Jackiewicz, 2005).

**The scope of CBT in Chira**

In 1999, a group of 12 women initiated a tourism project on Chira Island (prior to this they were involved with fishing and/or were married to fishermen). In 2001, 10 of these women formally registered the AEDC as a grassroots organization. By 2007, only four women remained active in AEDC, which belonged to ACTUAR and had received additional support from various Costa Rican government institutions as well as their four associates, the Ford Motor Company, Fundecoperación, SGP and Rainforest Alliance (see project profile at http://www.eco-index.org/search/results.cfm?projectID=865). Tourism has allowed members of AEDC to receive an income that they can live on from outside of the local economy:

> When we started out, we did not think right away about community-based tourism. First we thought of a lot of things. We wanted to be seamstresses, but then we thought: if there is no fishing, who are we going to sell the clothes to? Then we thought of a bakery... but if the fishing is bad, there is no money, so the business cannot work. Drawing on all these factors, we concluded that we needed a project in which income came from outside (AEDC representative, 21 October 2006, Chira Island).

From January 2000 to December 2002, a project supported by SGP was developed with two major components: ecotourism and the cultivation of *piangua* clams (*Anadara tuberculosa*). Both activities were executed by two independent groups of women. At the end of this project, AEDC – the ecotourism group – had acquired boats, built a two-room La Amistad (Friendship) lodge (with kitchen), walking paths and a lookout site, and also organized hiking, bird watching (waterfowl), fishing, bicycling and tours to Chira’s mangrove forest and to other islands in the Gulf (UNDP, 2003; also see http://eco-indextourism.org/amistad_cr_en). Four additional rooms were constructed in 2006.

According to Eduardo Mata (2006), coordinator of the SGP in Costa Rica, linkages had been created with fishermen, groceries, land and marine transporters, craft producers, *piangua* extractors and farm suppliers of plantain, cassava, coriander, fruit, cheese, eggs and chicken. As the AEDC representative (interview, 21 October 2006, Chira Island) affirmed: ‘The people that produce milk, eggs, chicken and seafood, all sell to us. So do the women that extract *pianguas*. Even the lady that makes corn tortillas comes here and we buy from her’.

**Findings**

**Discourse on CBT linkages**

A recent UNDP publication on Costa Rica reveals the faith placed on CBT linkages in terms of local development:

> The expression ‘community-based’ emphasizes that this type of tourism benefits the rural communities where it takes place. This does not mean necessarily that all the people participate in tourism, but it is important to state that the owners of the businesses are local, as are most of the suppliers of services and products. Therefore, these linkages generate strong contributions to local economic development (Guereña & Calderón, 2005: 23, translated from Spanish).
Evidence from the field interviews also confirmed how the development of linkages is an important part of a discourse maintained by members of CBT support organizations in Costa Rica. As an ACTUAR director (interview, 1 August 2005, San José) articulated in relation to their objectives to ‘consolidate rural tourism destinations’: ‘Where some investment [of international cooperation funds] has been made, the idea is to develop local linkages’. Similarly, a COOPRENA director (interview, 9 August 2005, San José) stated that local products such as eggs, bread, tortillas and cheese, ‘are linked to the lodge [grassroots organization businesses supported by COOPRENA]; not everything is produced by the lodge, nor is it bought in San José [capital of Costa Rica]; it is bought at the local level’; further, when tourists arrive, ‘they generate a splash of linkages and small economic contributions which are not generated by a traditional hotel. Managers from traditional hotels go shopping in San José and take [the earnings] all back’ (emphasis added).

Many studies of CBT, in particular natural resource based activities, report that locals experience differential access to meaningful or adequately rewarded jobs that involve mostly manual work (Mbaiwa et al., 2008). According to the Costa Rican Tourism Institute (Instituto Costarricense de Turismo or ICT), the official state agency, the CBT policy aims to develop small and medium enterprises: ‘Instead of creating jobs, we are strengthening and promoting the development of businesses and business people’ (ICT representative, 4 December 2006, San José). Support organizations therefore set their expectations firmly on the generation of business linkages. Acknowledging that CBT initiatives are not expected to generate much employment, ACTUAR (director, 1 August 2005, San José) also confirmed the aim to generate ‘quality employment’ in which people become small entrepreneurs and generate small linkages. Likewise, the launch in 2006 of a nationwide ‘Rural Community Tourism in Costa Rica and Replication in Central America’ project, financed by IADB and implemented over four years by COOPRENA, was announced as increasing ‘local linkages’ in the form of new economic actors whose initiatives are linked to tourism products (IADB, 2006; also see http://www.iadb.org/projects/project.cfm?id=CR-M1006&lang=en).

The goal of CBT, clearly implied in the discourse, is for tourism to complement but not displace traditional agricultural activities:

We don’t want to encourage people to stop farming. This is why it is important that tourism is not seen as an end in itself, but that it can also generate complementary services around tourism activities (ACTUAR representative, 23 November 2007, San José).

Furthermore, traditional agricultural livelihoods and activities are part of the attraction catering to tourists who seek to encounter new lived experiences (Jackiewicz, 2005). Thus:

the idea is that peasants don’t see tourism activities as a substitute but instead as a complement. They should continue farming, and this is an activity that they can profit from when tourists come (ACEPESA representative, 31 August 2005, San José).

In general, therefore, CBT support organizations do not push for significant changes in the nature and structure of employment in rural destination communities.

Research on six CBT lodges in Costa Rica – including La Amistad in Chira – revealed many different types of linkages, including backward linkages involving agricultural and food products as well as local services (such as laundering) and forward linkages involving boat trips, food stalls, horse rides, medicinal plant gardens and orchards (Trejos, 2008). These economic linkages are embedded in wider social linkages because
the appeal of CBT is to allow tourists to experience life in a rural community – from going to the same grocery as locals do and sharing the experience of watching soccer matches and bullfights to participating in any authentic and representative local cultural activity (ACEPESA representative, 31 August 2005, San José).

Compared to the sectoral-based employment catering to mass tourism, CBT allows the majority of rural inhabitants to continue their traditional or preferred lifestyles and specializations instead of making a radical change to join the ranks of the service sector. Those who chose to work full-time in CBT ventures were usually ‘young’ and ‘bright’ people who are computer literate and have tour guiding skills (ACTUAR director, 1 August 2005, San José). An interesting partnership can be created with the living culture and traditions of settled farming families, for example, by facilitating tours to an organic farm or a trapiche (a traditional sugarcane mill) and paying farmers for entertaining these short visits: this too can be called a ‘linkage’ (ACTUAR director, 1 August 2005, San José) – instead of farmers having to be employed in a tourism activity that has no relation with their knowledge and skills.

The ideal stage in CBT is reached when a grassroots initiative like La Amistad is self-sustaining, that is when revenues at least approximate costs and little by little more linkages are generated around the lodge so that the main objective of CBT can become a reality (ACTUAR representative, 23 November 2007, San José). To date, however, none of the CBT grassroots organizations in Costa Rica have arrived at this utopia, nor are they likely to, but the goal of ACTUAR remains for more and more people to develop linkages, so that tourism destinations are created through a logic that is ‘friendly’ with local rural communities.

A tourism official (ICT representative, 4 December 2006, San José) explained the difference between CBT and conventional rural tourism as follows: rural tourism can be centred on a reconverted farm, or run in combination with activities such as tours to pineapple, coffee, sugarcane or macadamia plantations, but employing people from San José and only making use of local labour for unskilled or manual jobs (such as tending the gardens or cleaning rooms) such that the profit stays in few hands. CBT on the other hand may generate only a little profit but whatever tourists spend is redistributed between several families in a specific community.

**Characteristics of tourism linkages in Chira Island**

*Linkages are occasional.* On Chira Island, most linkages were reported by interviewees as occasional. For example, the bus operator divulged that those who own vehicles might occasionally transport tourists to a special attraction such as a spot on the beach – complementing the regular bus that takes locals and tourists around the island three times a day. Other islanders may also transport tourists in their cars.

Another interviewee, a grocer-cum-lodge operator, commented that when the AEDC lodge is fully booked, usually in December or on national holidays, they send tourists over to privately run facilities such as hers. A grocer confirmed that the AEDC bought from them almost every week, as did a vegetable farmer who sold produce regularly to La Amistad about every 8 days. However a grocer-cum-pick-up truck driver and the grocer-cum-lodge operator reported only occasional sales when tourists come to Chira. And La Amistad also hires occasional employees to clean the trails and in the lodge during peak seasons (the security guard is a permanent employee) (AEDC representative, 21 October 2006, Chira Island).

Clearly people cannot depend on occasional linkages for urgent or necessary expenses. A Women’s Craft Association of Chira Island (Asociacion de Mujeres
Artesanas Isla de Chira) representative for example stated, as of the time of interview in March 2007, that the last time they had distributed money amongst themselves was in December 2006. But on the whole most interviewees were mildly positive about the community benefits that stem from AEDC’s La Amistad lodge, notwithstanding that the linkages generated are mostly occasional: as the bus operator pointed out, there were few other sources of income on the island.

**Linkages are polyvalent.** In developing countries, employment studies have to account for the reality of widespread informal and multiple employment (Cukier, 2002). Polyvalent employment is difficult to measure with conventional tourism multiplier calculations (Mihalic, 2002). Conversely, most literature on CBT in Costa Rica follows a functionalist bias: each person, family or business is supposed to have a specific function in relation to the lodge that accords with their main livelihood (Guereña & Calderón, 2005). However, there were many examples of multiple or polyvalent employment in most of the linkages to the lodge. One family who raised cattle, pigs and poultry and regularly supplied the lodge with chicken also had an additional linkage of regularly supplying the lodge with vegetables imported from the mainland (AEDC representative, 21 October 2006, Chira Island). Arguably importing merchandise does not take place everyday and therefore does not interfere with more regular farm activities.

And the grocer family who operated their store – which was their main occupation and source of income – on the first floor of a building and had a lodging facility on the second floor, staffed both businesses with family members. But since the lodging business was seasonal (to accommodate the overflow from La Amistad), no additional employees were required. Yet another family who operated a cattle and pig farm as their mainstay sold milk, cheese and a local plantain (cuadrado) from their farm to the lodge. As for the grocer-cum-pick-up truck driver, besides reporting only occasional sales to the lodge, he also earned extra income from AEDC, as he told it:

> I also transport people in my car for [AEDC] . . . Additionally, when they bring construction materials into the island, I transport them. I have a small pickup truck with an extra cab, so three people fit inside it, besides me.

Even the manager of the bar nearest to the lodge who catered to visiting tourists also maintained the bicycles of the lodge and occasionally went on fishing outings. These examples demonstrate that a functionalist approach to assessing the income and employment generated by CBT may not be relevant.

**Linkages depend on the availability of materials, products and know-how.** The AEDC tries to prevent leakages by buying locally unless the commodities and raw materials they need are not available. For example, a representative of AEDC (interview, 21 October 2006, Chira Island) described how they once needed 100 eggs to serve a large group and had to go from house to house to collect enough eggs. Similarly, a farmer nearby the lodge said that AEDC buys dairy products from him, but mostly in winter when milking can be done; the last time they had bought from him was about two to three months before. In reality, however, a significant portion of the materials on Chira were derived from outside the island. Thus, although the AEDC had made an effort to buy locally, many supplies (including meats, vegetables, drinks, beer, construction materials, diesel, mechanical parts, wire, feeds, vaccines and herbicides) were bought in from Jicaral, Nayandure and Puntarenas (Figure 1). For vehicle repair too, mechanics have to be brought from the mainland. And the boat service to Pájaros belongs to mainlanders –
though the service to Puntarenas is offered by an islander and boats may be constructed in Chira using local workmanship. Some of the materials used in craftmaking are locally available, for example, ‘jícaro’ (*Crescentia cujete*) and coconut (*Cocos nucifera*), but thread, metal, paint and plastic parts are bought from the mainland and some seeds may be from other rural areas. Quality and freshness are the reasons for buying products directly from the mainland. A restaurant owner revealed that he brought in vegetables from Puntarenas on the weekly cargo boat service so as to get fresher produce than that available in Chira. Nonetheless, he bought non-perishable food supplies such as rice, beans and oil in Chira in order to benefit the community.

During fieldwork, Bernardo Trejos was shown an indigenous-style vase, as well as a stone artefact used for making corn flour, vestiges of old indigenous ways of life that no longer existed: dried corn flour for making tortillas is bought at the grocery store and the once famous traditional indigenous pottery could no longer be produced because, according to the women’s craft association representative, ‘We want to revive clay craft-making, but the women that used to make those kinds of crafts are no longer living’.

The increased supplies and materials that have to be brought in to generate income and linkages from CBT have, in their wake, created a problem of waste by-products, which contradicts the environmental management policy promoted by CBT funding associates such as Rainforest Alliance. The AEDC representative (interview, 21 October 2006, Chira Island) acknowledged the problem faced in disposing of plastic bottles and said the leading bottled drink manufacturing company did not want to supply them with glass bottled drinks, fearing they would shatter during the boat ride; likewise the beer company supplied canned rather than bottled beer.

**Perceived benefits of CBT linkages.** Chira islanders expressed two diverse, although not mutually exclusive, responses when asked if the AEDC lodge benefitted the Chira community. One response was that tourism only benefited the four funding associates of AEDC; others responded that the lodge, being in the community, would benefit all. Overall, it would appear that economic linkages with the lodge are too widely distributed, making the benefits seem sporadic:

- It benefits [AEDC], which are a part of the community, and also the businesses, because they don’t look only for me [for transport services], but also other cars. Sometimes they need a bus. In this way, more people benefit (grocer-cum-pick-up truck driver).
- Yes [it benefits the community] because they are from the island, and also other businesses. Tourists come and consume some items in the businesses (farmer).
- They try to distribute, and not buy only in one place. They don’t have one particular place to buy, but surely [AEDC] are the first ones to benefit (grocer).

Other interviewees opined that few people benefit at all, and both the dairy farmer and vegetable farmer considered that only four families – those of the four persons employed at the lodge – benefitted from tourism.

Nevertheless, most felt that the whole community would be affected if tourism activities ceased because:

- It is a ‘nucleus’ [of activities]: marine transport, ground transport, businesses, crafts, the lodge, and even the fishermen, because some tourists rent boats to go fishing (grocer-cum-pick-up truck driver).

Moreover, some services that benefit local residents might not be available or profitable enough without tourism such as the bus service (bus operator). Although dwindling
fishing livelihoods make tourism an attractive alternative, tourism is seasonal, which means that local businesses still depend on local patronage for their main earnings:

I always sell groceries, but when tourists come, obviously I sell more: drinks, water, and other things (grocer-cum-lodge operator).

My business would go down a little, because they buy a considerable amount. We would lose a part, but not all (grocer).

Concluding summary

In Tönnies’ (1957) classic work *Community and Society*, an association is a part of society (*Gesellschaft*) and its existence depends upon it. Tönnies (1957: 75) states:

Several people can agree to regard their association as an existing and independent being of the same individual nature as they are themselves, and to grant this fictitious person a special will and the capacity to act and therefore to make contracts and to incur obligations. Like all other things related to contracts, this so-called person is to be conceived as objective and real only in so far as the *Gesellschaft* seems to co-operate with it and to confirm its existence.

In contrast, Tönnies related rural living to community (*Gemeinschaft*), since ‘all praise of rural life has pointed out that the *Gemeinschaft* among people is stronger there and more alive’ (Tönnies, 1957: 35). It seems contradictory that CBT support and funding is conditional on having formal associations. The rationale that development agencies follow is that formal associations allow businesses located in rural areas to be integrated with the larger society. Herein lies the tension between the discourse and the practice of CBT. How can development agencies make sure that rural communities in general benefit from tourism, if they advocate supporting associations that represent only a fraction of the community? This explains why the discourse on linkages is so appealing since it, at least at the level of discourse, legitimizes practical support for formal organizations.

The discourse influencing the practice of CBT in Costa Rica presents several divergent aspects. CBT in practice is not the collective property of the community, but instead the collective property of a group organized in a formal association. As a result, a discourse on local economic linkages promoted by CBT support organizations emphasizes the local benefits from CBT accruing to small linkages to services and products provided by community members.

In practice, however, these linkages are found to be sporadic, polyvalent and heavily dependent on availability of materials and supplies (many of which are brought in from outside). Approaches may be found to mitigate such problematic issues. Ultimately practitioners and policymakers may have to accept that small-scale CBT initiatives such as the one on Chira Island are likely to have only small-scale impacts (Stem *et al.*, 2003).

Acknowledgements

Special gratitude is due to the anonymous *SJTG* reviewers, and Marielena Moncada, Michael Naish and Ana Luisa Trejos whose comments helped to improve the manuscript. Financial support for the doctoral research from which this paper derives came from the Taiwan Scholarship Program and the National Pingtung University of Science and Technology, Taiwan with additional institutional support from the Programme of Social Study of Science, Technology and the Environment, Centre for Geophysical Research, University of Costa Rica.
Endnotes

1. Public institutions have had a secondary but nonetheless crucial role in the development of CBT projects in Costa Rica. The National Technical Education Institute (Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje) has provided constant support throughout the development of the subsector. More recently, the Instituto Costarricense de Turismo had started to provide considerable support to CBT projects (for a partial list of the many organizations supporting CBT in Costa Rica see UNDP, 2003; Solano, 2003).

2. The CBT support organizations were: ACTUAR (umbrella organization), COOPRENA (umbrella organization), Instituto Costarricense de Turismo (the state tourism bureau), National Technical Education Institute (state institution), ACEPESA (local NGO), Rainforest Alliance (international NGO), Fundecooparación (bilateral NGO) and the United Nations Development Programme (intergovernmental organization).


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