

**PPT Working Paper No.6**



**Practical strategies for pro-poor tourism  
TROPIC Ecological Adventures - Ecuador**

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Fundación Acción Amazonia**

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## Preface

This case study was written as a contribution to a project on 'pro-poor tourism strategies.' The pro-poor tourism project is collaborative research involving the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), the Centre for Responsible Tourism at the University of Greenwich (CRT), together with in-country case study collaborators. It is funded by the Economic and Social Research Unit (ESCOR) of the UK Department for International Development (DFID).

The project reviewed the experience of pro-poor tourism strategies based on six commissioned case studies. These studies used a common methodology developed within this project. The case study work was undertaken mainly between September and December 2000. Findings have been synthesised into a research report and a policy briefing, while the 6 case studies are all available as Working Papers. The outputs of the project are:

*Pro-poor tourism strategies: Making tourism work for the poor.* Pro-poor Tourism Report No 1. (60pp) by Caroline Ashley, Dilys Roe and Harold Goodwin, April 2001.

*Pro-poor tourism: Expanding opportunities for the poor.* PPT Policy Briefing No 1. (4pp). By Caroline Ashley, Harold Goodwin and Dilys Roe, April 2001.

### *Pro poor Tourism Working Papers:*

- No 1 *Practical strategies for pro-poor tourism, Wilderness Safaris South Africa: Rocktail Bay and Ndumu Lodge.* Clive Poultney and Anna Spenceley
- No 2 *Practical strategies for pro-poor tourism. Case studies of Makuleke and Manyeleti tourism initiatives: South Africa.* Karin Mahony and Jurgens Van Zyl
- No 3 *Practical strategies for pro-poor tourism. Case study of pro-poor tourism and SNV in Humla District, West Nepal.* Naomi M. Saville
- No 4 *Practical strategies for pro-poor tourism: NACOBTA the Namibian case study.* Nepeti Nicanor
- No 5 *UCOTA – The Uganda Community Tourism Association: a comparison with NACOBTA.* Elissa Williams, Alison White and Anna Spenceley
- No 6 *Practical strategies for pro-poor tourism. Tropic Ecological Adventures – Ecuador.* Scott Braman and Fundación Acción Amazonia
- No 7 *Practical strategies for pro-poor tourism: a case study of the St. Lucia Heritage Tourism Programme.* Yves Renard
- No 8 *Pro-poor tourism initiatives in developing countries: analysis of secondary case studies.* Xavier Cattarinich.

All of the reports are available on our website at:

**<http://www.propoortourism.org.uk>.**

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packages as an effective way to sell its Amazon community-based programs. While luxury programmes do exist, a large number of travellers in the region are independent travellers, or backpackers, with limited economic resources who pay between \$25 and \$50 per day for all-inclusive multi-day 'jungle adventure' trips. Many of these jungle adventures market visits to 'Indian villages', but rarely are the communities they visit effectively organised to control or capture ample benefits from the often unannounced visits of these tour groups.

Within the last ten years, many indigenous communities have started to organise themselves in order to run their own tourism programs. Some have effectively organised at the community level to receive independent travellers and tourists interested in indigenous culture, either directly or in partnerships with private sector tour operators. Indigenous community-operated tourism projects in the Ecuadorian Amazon, particularly those of RICANCIE (Quichua network of 9 communities geared towards mid to economic market segment) and more recently KAPAWI (Achuar partnership with Canodros – an operator which also has a luxury ship in the Galapagos), have become well-known models touted worldwide in ecotourism literature for their abilities to capture diverse benefits for local people. Since its initial boom in the 1980s, tourism in Ecuador, particularly to natural areas, has been increasing, and Ecuador is considered one of the world's leading ecotourism destinations both for its natural and cultural attractions and for its dynamic ecotourism projects involving indigenous communities.

There seems to be a general consensus among operators and government officials that tourism to the Ecuadorian Amazon and Ecuador in general declined in 1999. There are many possible reasons for this including increasing competition from neighbouring Peru, volcanic eruptions, a tourist kidnapping, a prolonged economic crisis, political upheaval, and most recently the kidnapping of 10 foreign oil company employees from an installation on the Napo. Many of these events received widespread coverage in the international press, and led to travel advisories issued by the US State Department. Many tourists and others involved in the industry feel that these events have tarnished Ecuador's image as a safe tourism destination.

The Ecuadorian government does, however, have policies in place that encourage tourism development, especially in high-profile areas such as the Amazon. The most influential actors in developing tourism in the region, however, are the larger private operators, many of whom are members of ASEC – the Ecuadorian Ecotourism Association. Unfortunately, in addition to recent external problems, the economic dominion of the petroleum industry in the region prevents effective market expansion. The Ministry of Tourism, ASEC, and many small non-governmental organisations operating in the area, do encourage specifically pro-poor tourism policies and practices.. Researchers often cite existing community tourism projects in the Ecuadorian Amazon as models of socially and environmentally responsible operations and products, many of which have implicit pro-poor tourism elements. These pro-poor tourism elements include the creation and expansion of business opportunities for local people, access to education and healthcare, protection of the natural environment, and stated goals of cultural empowerment.

Unfortunately, while many communities are organised to run their own tourism operations, and have been heralded in ecotourism literature, they often struggle to attract enough tourists to make their programs viable (Wesche and Drumm 1999). Lack of marketing skills and effective partnerships with the private sector present critical barriers to the profitability and, thus, long-term sustainability of community tourism ventures.

## 1.2 Background and details of PPT

Tropic Ecological Adventures was created by Welsh environmentalist Andy Drumm from a desire to demonstrate the viability of environmentally, socially, and culturally responsible tourism. Many indigenous communities, particularly the Huaorani, were rapidly becoming a labour force for the oil industry, which was destroying their natural and cultural environment. Tropic realised that the region's natural and cultural resources could provide dynamic ecotourism attractions, where local communities could be active participants in tourism development and management. Tropic believes strongly that tourism, if developed and managed with respect for local cultures and environments, can improve the well being of indigenous communities and contribute to biodiversity conservation. With this in mind, Tropic provides technical assistance and a critical link to the tourism market, and thus broadens the constituency of support for sustainable development in general, and more specifically, in Ecuador.

To address the needs of clients and outbound tour operators, Tropic's objective is to offer specialised dynamic tour packages that are often highlighted by a trip to an indigenous community-run tourism project in the Amazon. Tropic promises that each package will be tailored specifically to meet the needs and budgets of clients. A full itinerary created and sold by Tropic might include two days visiting Ecuador's highlands, a five-day trip into Huaorani Territory, and an overnight stay at Maquipucuna – a cloudforest eco-lodge run by a non-profit foundation. Realising the inherent difficulties in obtaining sustainable profit margins from selling community projects, Tropic's financial viability relies on marketing a diversity of nature and culture based attractions throughout Ecuador. . Tropic has created business alliances with other private companies in order to put together a high quality overall experience and diverse itineraries. These partnerships include numerous arrangements with Galapagos and other mainland operations, which Tropic believes to be socially and environmentally responsible, and at the same time capable of providing a high-quality product. Selling cruises in the Galapagos Islands (an area where both Mr. Drumm and partner Sofia Darquea, as former naturalist guides, have years of experience) accounts for nearly 40% of income, and has proven to be key survival tactic in their continued commitment to sell the Amazon community-based projects.

Tropic has created partnerships with other private operators and non-profit organisations which share its philosophy. The company is an active member of ASEC and has played a key role in implementing policy changes that strive to offer incentives for socially and environmentally responsible tourism throughout Ecuador (see ASEC, 1998). Tropic has also worked actively with a variety of other stakeholders to increase community participation in tourism.

Tropic states that its main commitment is environmental and cultural conservation and support for local communities. To maintain this aspect of the work and still operate as a for-profit company, in 1998 Drumm, then the general manager of Tropic Ecological Adventures, together with other interested parties, created Acción Amazonía, a separate non-profit organisation. Acción Amazonía is dedicated to working with indigenous communities and organisations to protect their environment and cultural integrity, and to develop small-scale, sustainable, development projects including ecotourism.

Tropic has worked with a wide variety of community projects in the Amazon and elsewhere in Ecuador, offering technical assistance. In the Amazon, Tropic has successfully marketed programmes run by the Siecoya, Cofan, and the Quichua community tourism networks of RICANCIE and Union Huacamayos. Drumm has personally visited all these projects and has worked extensively with the communities offering technical assistance to help improve the quality of their tourism products and management capacity. In addition to providing technical assistance and marketing the programs run independently by communities, Tropic established its own

exclusive community programme by developing a working partnership with the Huaorani communities of Quehueriono and Huentado. Tropic's pro-poor objectives are fundamental to its overall approach to working with communities. These are illustrated on its website, marketing brochures and other documents. The idea presented in Tropic's marketing material is that respectful and financially beneficial tourism will bring the income needed at the local level to encourage Amazonian indigenous communities to protect both their culture and environment.

Tropic's pro-poor tourism initiatives are diverse and include: co-developing community based ecotourism operations with indigenous communities, promoting and marketing independent community-based ecotourism operations, creating business alliances with other responsible private companies in areas where Tropic and communities have no product, playing an active role in industry associations to promote policy change, providing financial support for Acción Amazonía, and assisting with research in related areas.

This case study will focus on two of these initiatives that seem particularly useful to discuss, not only in terms of Tropic's successes, but also for the many challenges that the company has faced in implementing them in its first 5 years of operation. The detailed analysis that follows will focus specifically on Tropic's co-developed Huaorani programme, and its marketing of the insightful Cofan Community Tourism Program of Zabalo – the independent community programme sold most consistently by Tropic. The progression and eventual interruption of Tropic's Huaorani partnership may prove particularly insightful because it highlights the many potential problems that can result from limited sales that fail to live up to both the company's and community's expectations. The Huaorani programme also serves to demonstrate that even with a limited financial investment a committed private sector partner can bring significant benefits to the livelihood of local communities. The Cofan Community Tourism Program of Zabalo sold by Tropic to its clients, highlights the marketing potential that private sector partnerships can have in supporting ongoing community programmes. The Cofan Program is also the longest-running community tourism programme in the Amazon, with many lessons to offer.

### *1.2.1 Headwaters of the Amazon with the Huaorani*

The relationship that Tropic's founder Andy Drumm established with the Huaorani was originally one of collaboration on environmental protection issues. During 1993 it became apparent that the communities had title to territories with considerable natural and cultural resources which could be developed into an ecotourism programme that they could manage themselves. Randy Smith, (1995) chronicles many of the cultural injustices that the Huaorani have been subjected to over the past 20 years, as a result of the combination of ignorant tourists, irresponsible tour companies and guides, and the lack of any effective Huaorani involvement in issues of management and control. This exploitative situation predominant in the limited tourism that did exist in Huaorani Territory, led Tropic's founder, Andy Drumm, to begin working more intensely with the Huaorani, and an inspiring community leader, Moi Enomenga, to set-up a small-scale model ecotourism programme in Moi's community of Quehueriono. In order to ensure the community's understanding of the project, and to limit any possible negative consequences, Tropic's style of working with the Huaorani in Quehueriono was commended by Ecotourism Society President, Megan Epler Wood, as a 'go slow' attitude, where low numbers of tourists should be expected (Epler Wood 1998).

From the outset, the idea was to pursue a balanced relationship between the community and the company. Tropic worked for nine months giving orientation and planning workshops in the community before opening the programme for tourists. The hope was that the community would gain employment during tours by working as guides, motorists, helpers and cooks, and, for each



tourist, would receive a fee that would go into a special community fund. Tropic would provide limited capital investment for the project and offer the community technical and background tourism training. Tropic received access to Huaorani Territory around Quehueriono and, with Huaorani and bilingual guides present, its clients were able to visit the community and use the community's extensive system of forest trails. Tropic encouraged the community to build a rustic tourist cabaña built alongside the Shiripuno River in the traditional Huaorani style, made with local palm fronds and other materials gathered from the forest. Tropic and the community decided to build the cabaña about 30 minutes by foot from the community in order to limit the negative social impacts that may result from constant contact between the community and tourists.

In addition to the lengthy planning process, Tropic invested funds to help the community and Moi buy a suitable canoe. Even though the community was anxious to receive more tourists, Tropic stressed the importance of limiting group size and visits. The community and Tropic decided that no more than 8 tourists would be allowed on any one tour with a maximum of one group per month. Tropic would be responsible for marketing, packaging, and selling tours to the community. Tropic's all inclusive tour offerings for the Huaorani Territory range from \$125 to almost \$200 per person per day depending on group size, length of stay, and transportation options (canoe, air). Itineraries were fitted to match the interests of the clients but usually included visits to oil facilities, talks with community elders, guided rainforest hikes, canoe trips, a community meeting, and opportunities for intercultural exchange through song, dance, and stories. With its high price range, Tropic targets sensitive travellers motivated to pay the higher costs associated with a unique and socially and environmentally responsible tour product to remote areas relatively unaffected by outside influences.

Elements in Tropic's Huaorani initiative that are specifically pro-poor include: direct but limited employment, capacity-building at the community level, opportunities to sell local handicrafts (micro-enterprise), investment in useful community infrastructure (canoe, motor repairs, radio), and a commitment to limit potential negative social and cultural impacts. Income received and generated by the community does not necessarily affect their level of subsistence, which remains still largely dependent on the forest, but can provide critical funds for education and both long-term and emergency healthcare. Tropic raised funds from clients to buy a radio that is both a key tool for the Quehueriono community in emergencies, and has the potential to help the community build both territorial control and cultural empowerment. Tropic has also supported community members with transportation, food, and accommodation on visits to Quito for workshops and medical emergencies.

Recognising the importance of promoting inter-community collaboration, Tropic Ecological Adventures has also signed an agreement with ONHAE, the Huaorani indigenous organisation, to operate tours in the Huaorani Territory and was instrumental in helping it establish the \$5 per tourist entrance fee theoretically charged to all tourists entering the Huaorani territory. Tropic has also provided technical and economic assistance to ONHAE in critical situations of disputed control over territory, particularly those concerning incursions by oil companies and illegal woodcutting operations. Tropic's experience and extensive marketing strategies and connections with universities, journalists, and other activists, has helped produce numerous television documentaries, articles in international publications, and extensive documentation in ecotourism literature. This has helped generate exposure and international attention on a macro-level to the Huaorani and their struggles, particularly oil exploitation. This has also served to generate initial visitors for the community and clients for Tropic. For remote indigenous communities with little contact like the Huaorani, international attention (resulting from concerned tourists, academic researches, the international press, magazine articles, books) is one of the most effective weapons in counteracting the environmental and cultural dangers posed by increased oil company operations, and other exploitative practices encouraged by outsiders working in Huaorani Territory.

### *1.2.2 Cofan community of Zabalo*

Tropic markets numerous independently run community tourism projects in the Amazon. From the company's beginning, Tropic has marketed and sold the Cofan Tourism Project in Zabalo more consistently than any of the other Amazon community projects offered in its brochures or website. Zabalo's ecotourism programme was spearheaded by the Cofan leader, Randy Borman. Randy is the son of American missionaries who grew up with the Cofan, a nation of over 700 people, and later married Amelia, a Cofan woman. The Cofan have experienced severe impacts throughout their traditional territory, since the large gateway and oil boom-town of Lago Agrio, was built in the heart of their traditional territory in the early 1970s. Randy and other Cofan helped found the community of Zabalo far down river near Ecuador's border with Peru on the Rio Aguarico. They set up a community-run tourism programme that could provide them with critical economic and cultural benefits. In their brochure, the Cofan boast about being the 'oldest community operated tourism program in Amazonia, with over twenty years of experience.' (See Cofan marketing brochure).

The community currently operates two kinds of tourism operations. One is a partnership with Transturi (a subsidiary of Metropolitan Touring, Ecuador's largest tourism company), whose boats from its luxury Flotel Orellana visit the community weekly for short visits. The community charges the company \$3 per tourist and sells a wide-variety of handicrafts to tourists through a carefully managed craft cooperative. The Cofan's partnership with Transturi is the mainstay of the community bringing in an estimated \$12,000 to \$15,000 per year<sup>1</sup>. In addition, Randy and the community also run multi-day community tours where tourists are lodged in community cabañas, accompany Cofan guides (and occasionally Randy himself) on walks through the forest, and are able to learn about the daily life of the community and the Cofan culture. While Randy and the Cofan do their own limited marketing, they also retain active partnerships with a number of tour operators, including Tropic, in order to maintain a more constant flow of tour groups.

When Tropic sells a trip to Zabalo and the Cofan, it provides a bilingual naturalist guide when necessary, and then leaves the rest up to Randy and the experienced Cofan, who provide lodging, food, and a busy itinerary. Tropic lent logistical and marketing support to the Cofan by bringing their ecotourism product to a wider audience through Tropic's own marketing strategies, and through its contacts with universities and tourism organisations which are often keen to visit this increasingly well-known project. The itineraries are Randy's creation. Tropic has talked with Randy and the Cofan about issues of group management, photography, and guide training. Tropic's guides complete an informal assessment after each trip and offer any suggestions and feedback to Randy to ensure quality control. Tropic appreciates the Cofan's extensive experience in operating community tourism and has arranged on various occasions for members of Zabalo to visit Quehueriono and other Huaorani communities to share their experiences and to help train Huaorani guides.

Pro-poor objectives are implicit in the Cofan's community tourism programme in Zabalo, described in their brochure as a 'a conservation ecotourism community'. Randy has used his knowledge of both the business world and the Cofan to maximise economic benefits to the community. The employment and business opportunities he has helped create are constantly expanding, as more and more Cofan become trained and experienced guides, tourism cooks, and administrators. The community has established an effective cooperative for handicraft sales that Randy estimates yields up to \$100 per household per month. Using tourism revenues to ease the potential negative effects, Randy and the Cofan have established complex hunting regulations and restrictions that

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<sup>1</sup> In early 2001, the Flotel moved away from Cofan territory as a result of perceived security problems resulting from the US backed "Plan Colombia". Tropic has also been forced to cease sending clients to that region. The loss of this business is expected to be critical for the Cofan.

complement existing environmental monitoring practices. In 1992, the Cofan were able to use national and international attention, partly generated by their ongoing tourism project, to successfully confront and halt illegal oil prospecting operations on their lands, and within the Cuyabeno Wildlife Production Reserve.

## 2. Assessment of Pro-poor Strategies and Actions

### 2.1 Assessment of broad pro-poor tourism strategies

Tropic Ecological Adventures' pro-poor tourism strategies developed from the belief that community tourism can provide the impetus for biodiversity conservation and cultural empowerment for indigenous communities that are increasingly threatened by oil industry expansion and other environmentally destructive and culturally insensitive activities. Tropic's main priority in working with indigenous communities focused on expanding business and employment opportunities to demonstrate that, in addition to economic benefits, tourism can yield critical environmental and cultural advantages. From the creation of the company, Tropic's intention was to help indigenous communities to value their increasingly threatened natural and cultural resources, and to help channel outside interest and necessary policy changes to encourage both biodiversity conservation and programmes for cultural empowerment at the community level. Realising that tourism, if not controlled and managed by the community, could also be exploitative, Tropic set-up guidelines to reduce potential negative socio-cultural impacts.

#### 2.1.1 *Expansion of business opportunities for the poor*

Tropic was instrumental in having Cofan trainers employed for tourism training workshops for both the Huaorani and the Achuar. By developing a partnership with the communities of Quehueriono and Huentado and operating a limited ecotourism programme, Tropic created business opportunities in tourism where they had not existed previously. The company provided orientation workshops and training opportunities to the Huaorani, while the Huaorani programme created a new market that enabled community households (without preference) in Quehueriono and Huentado, to sell handicrafts at above average prices to visitors. Tropic actively encourages its clients to buy local artesanía as part of the company's mission to demonstrate economic benefits of ecotourism at the local level. Common handicrafts items sold include: necklaces (\$1 - \$5), woven bags (\$3 - \$6), spears (\$15 - 50), hammocks and blowguns (\$50 up to \$100).

By providing new marketing opportunities for their products, Tropic expanded business prospects for existing community tourism projects and handicrafts, particularly those of the Sicoya and Cofan. The experience in guiding and logistics, and increased contacts with conservationists, TV and print media, academic researchers, and other individuals, has improved the business opportunities for specific members of the communities where Tropic works.

#### 2.1.2 *Expansion of employment opportunities for the poor*

Tropic has created direct employment opportunities for members of Quehueriono and Huentado. On average, a minimum of 4 community members (guide, 2 helpers, and assistant cook) receive direct employment during every tour. This number fluctuates with group size, and may reach 6 or 7 for larger groups. Guiding is a skilled job, but the other jobs are unskilled or semi-skilled, and are open to all who are willing to participate. Usually, the men work as motorists or punteros (poling at front end of canoe) while the women often work as helpers to the cook. No organised rotation exists, but helpers usually change from one trip to another.

For the other community programmes that Tropic sells, employment opportunities have also expanded. In the Cofan community of Zabalo, an apprentice programme is in place to train young, unskilled workers, who begin as helpers, to learn the more skilled jobs of guides and cook-

administrators. Approximately 10 community members have now received ample training and experience in these skilled positions.

### *2.1.3 Addressing/enhancing the environmental impacts of tourism that particularly affect the poor*

Community tourism operations add an economic value to the land and the undisturbed condition of the forest: the more intact and ‘wild’ an area, the more valuable it is for tourism. Some community programmes with which Tropic works, have voluntarily decided to set apart no-hunting zones in areas frequented by tourists, to ensure better wildlife viewing opportunities. These restricted areas limit access to hunting grounds, and serve as a reservoir area for important seed dispersers and preferred food species such as peccaries and woolly and spider monkeys. Community tourism programmes supported by Tropic provide an economic alternative to the environmentally destructive practices of the ever-expanding petroleum industry. Tourism also provides incentives to reduce or halt other extractive activities – i.e. logging, selling animal products, etc. that may jeopardise the attractiveness of the community’s forests. Randy Borman and the Cofan of Zabalo have established detailed hunting restrictions and monitoring practices that ensure not only ease of wildlife viewing for tourists, but also a healthy ecosystem and constant food supply. The Cofan have also been active in a programme for rearing river turtles that complements their tourism activities, and ensures the prolonged protection of this endangered species.

### *2.1.4 Enhancing the positive and addressing the negative social and cultural impacts of tourism on the poor*

Community-based tourism enterprises encourage traditional skills and help maintain cultural knowledge (myths, histories, songs, clothing style) and events (dances, festivals). In Huentado, mothers encourage their children to wear traditional clothing, paint their faces, and learn the traditional Huaorani welcoming songs that they sing to tourists during cultural presentations. Tropic has instituted policies for its Huaorani programme that minimise the negative socio-cultural impacts that can result from tourism activities. This includes limiting group size, restricting visits to one group per month, and locating its cabaña half an hour’s walk from the community. Randy Borman states that tourism has been a ‘very positive cultural influence overall’ in Zabalo and that it has been an ‘affirmation of the Cofan culture’. Tourism in Siecoya Territory has encouraged the use of traditional clothing such as the blue or white smocks commonly worn by guides during tours.

In the Amazon, community earnings from tourism are often used to improve communication, health-care, and education facilities and provide much-needed funds for medical emergencies such as poisonous snake bites. By encouraging their clients to become active donors, Tropic has been able to raise funds to buy two multi-frequency radios for the Hauorani. Tropic has also encouraged clients visiting communities to bring along school supplies to give to the community, if appropriate.

### *2.1.5 Building a supportive policy and planning framework*

Tropic has played a critical role in the formulation of a groundbreaking policy document, ‘Políticas y Estrategias Para la Participación Comunitaria en el Ecoturismo’ (Policies and Strategies for Community Participation in Ecotourism) produced by ASEC. This document was the result of a conference which brought together government ministry representatives, private tour operators, non-profit organisations, and indigenous people, including the Cofan, Siecoya, Hauorani, Quichua, Shuar, and others, to discuss the conditions and aspirations of community involvement in tourism.

The Ministry of Tourism has subsequently adopted the policy document as a major input into its new tourism legislation.

Tropic has also supported the RICANCIE network and other communities' aspirations to establish the legal basis for community ecotourism operations.

### *2.1.6 Developing pro-poor processes and institutions*

Tropic believes it is essential for communities to be active in developing and managing tourism projects. The company has held numerous workshops in Quehueriono which provided forums for orientation and planning. At these workshops Tropic and the community discussed community aspirations, tourism dynamics, possible strategies to manage the programme, the work involved, and the possible rewards. In one of these workshops given in coordination with an environmental organisation, Acción Ecológica, representatives from 20 Huaorani communities were present to discuss the impacts of oil exploitation and the possibilities of tourism as an income-generating alternative. Tropic helped raise money for ONHAE to set up a tourism committee and suggested the implementation of a territorial entrance fee paid to ONHAE by each tourist entering Huaorani Territory. The \$5 per tourist fee would help ONHAE build its capacity to manage and control tourism in the territory.

## **2.2 Specific actions to involve the poor in tourism**

**Table 1 Specific actions to involve the poor in tourism**

<b>Barriers to participation of the poor in tourism encountered by Tropic</b>	<b>Means of overcoming barriers</b>
Lack of human capital of the poor – i.e. skills	Through workshops, training courses, and direct experience Tropic actively promotes the transmission of tourism skills. Tropic encourages the community to select cooking apprentices to accompany Tropic's professional cook and to help Huaorani participants in the formal guide training offered by the Ministry of Tourism.
Lack of social capital, organisational strength	Tropic has given orientation and planning workshops in Quehueriono. At one workshop, two Cofan were contracted to share their experiences and to suggest community management of the programme. Tropic encouraged elders to be active in discussions and decision-making,
Gender norms and constraints	Tropic has made efforts to ensure that women's opinions are expressed in the meetings and encourage the men to take them seriously. This did not violate gender norms, as Huaorani women are more active participants in decision-making than other Amazonian groups.
Location	Tropic bought a boat for the community and helped pay for repairs on the community's outboard motor. Tropic raised money from its clients to buy Quehueriono a multi-frequency radio to facilitate communication with other indigenous organisations, airline companies, the hospital, government ministries, and ONHAE.
Lack of ownership, tenure	Tropic's community partnership was designed to strengthen Huaorani rights to their territory by offering support on issues of environmental protection and control of exploitative tourism practices.
Lack of product	Tropic adapted the existing forest trails to create a couple of circuits. Tropic integrated the river journey out of the community to the bridge into the itinerary, insisting that the canoe be poled down river rather than use the

	noisy outboard motor. Tropic also worked with the community to build cabañas in the traditional Huaorani style and encouraged the community to build another traditional structure on a hill that could serve as a lookout and lunch destination.
Regulations and red tape	The situation that Tropic found was completely open – there were no regulations and many communities were being exploited by irresponsible tour operators. Tropic was instrumental in creating regulations for tourism operations, which included the idea of a community fee for overnight stays, a territorial entrance fee paid to ONHAE, and guidelines for signing operational agreements with ONHAE.
Inadequate access to tourist market	Tropic markets and sells trips to Quehueriono and Huentado using its web site, brochures, and recommendations through publications produced by its clients many of whom conservation and ecotourism professionals. Tropic has worked with NBC, the Discovery Channel, the Independent on Sunday newspaper, Stern Magazine and others to produce coverage of the Huaorani and to highlight the impacts of oil development.
Low capacity to meet tourist expectations	Tropic has worked with the community to establish a dynamic itinerary that includes discussions with elders, and has helped to create balanced intercultural exchanges. Tropic has encouraged its clients to be understanding and respectful of local conditions and rustic infrastructure.
Tourist market segment inappropriate	Tropic has introduced the Huaorani to a new, higher-end segment of the international tourist market. Tropic considers its clients to be a niche market of relatively wealthy people who are adventurous and keen to explore the Amazon and learn from indigenous culture. Tropic sold the Huaorani programme as a special ‘life-enhancing’ experience, and a chance to learn, through direct experience, about the realities of the Amazon and the threats posed by oil industry encroachment. Tropic’s market includes responsible travellers who want to be reassured that their presence does not negatively impact on the culture or natural environment, but rather contributes to cultural and environmental benefits. Tropic provides a high quality bilingual naturalist guide, specialised meal service, and a dynamic itinerary. Tropic also markets the fact that their local Huaorani guide would be Moi Enomenga, a name well-known thanks to the book, <i>Savages</i> , written by Joe Kane.

### 3. Progress and Challenges

#### 3.1 Progress of Tropic's pro-poor initiatives

Tropic has been operating at full capacity only since 1996. Since that time, the company has won two international awards for socially and environmentally responsible tourism for its work. One of these awards, the ToDo! 97 Award, is believed to be the only award evaluated in the field by an independent judge. Along with the Maquipucuna Cloud Forest Reserve and Lodge (with which Tropic has a strategic alliance), Tropic was highlighted in the Ecotourism Showcase 2000 Award, at the annual Non-Profits in Travel Conference. In addition to this international acclaim used in its marketing brochures and website, Tropic has managed to remain profitable and active through difficult years for tourism in Ecuador, due in large part to national political, economic, and other events (volcanic eruptions, kidnappings).

Since 1996, Tropic has sent over 44 tour groups and more than 140 passengers to Amazon community-based projects and has generated over \$20,000 of total income for these communities (See Table 2).

**Table 2 Aggregates for Tropic's Amazon community-based tourism initiatives since 1996**

<b>Community programme</b>	<b>No. of tour groups</b>	<b>No of passengers</b>	<b>Aggregate \$ into community *</b>
Huaorani	19	75	5,333
Cofan	12	40	12,641
Siecoya, RICANCIE, Huacamayos	13	29	5519
<b>Totals</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>23,493</b>

\* Aggregate numbers for the Huaorani Program do not include food, gasoline, oil and other such costs that are included for the other programmes. These aggregate numbers include money collected as a community fee, income earned through employment and other services such as food, accommodation, and excursions. These figures do not include money generated through handicraft sales.

Tropic's ability to sell these projects is a modest, but recognisable achievement considering that the Ecuadorian Amazon in particular has experienced three major kidnappings (one involving tourists, the other two involving oil company employees), all of which received widespread international press coverage. Tropic has provided more groups and passengers to the Cofan project of Zabalo than any other private sector partnership with the community.

Founder, Andy Drumm, summarised Tropic's achievements with its award-winning Huaorani programme by stating:

'At least for a period, we demonstrated that tourism is something that is empowering and collaborative, and is not exploitative in the Huaorani's relationship with an outside organisation. The community benefited materially. Tourism promotes self-esteem in the community, which is not something that outside involvement in communities usually does. Tropic brought the plight of the Huaorani and other communities to the outside world, resulting in greater awareness of the Huaorani, the questionable actions of the oil companies who work in that area, and the Huaorani's potential and need for community-run tourism. When we bring a group into Huaorani Territory it is a very respectful group with high potential to continue a relationship with the Haurani and make donations. Often, Tropic clients buy all the artesanía available in the community, which typically is more than \$150 per group.'



### 3.2 Challenges and Tropic's need to adapt to new circumstances

Due to problems with the country's image abroad, the number of tourists to the Ecuadorian Amazon has decreased in recent years. This has heightened the level of competition (including offerings to Amazon community projects, which have blossomed in recent years). Tropic has therefore had to modify its prices and add new products to accommodate the difficult market. The challenge for Tropic was how to lower prices without jeopardising quality. To subsidise its continued commitment to the Amazon projects (for the most part these are not very profitable), and their implicit pro-poor elements, Tropic has had to depend more and more on its ability to market and sell other destinations such as the Galapagos Islands and the Ecuadorian Highlands.

Tropic also points out that another major obstacle to success is the limited understanding by communities of the disciplines demanded by the tourism business. Following the failure of the Huaorani of Quehueiriono to meet the standards set by the local air traffic regulating board, flights into the community were suspended. Tropic in turn was forced to cancel groups. In recent years, Tropic has also had to re-evaluate the Siecoya project due to changes in the community's management structure after the problems with its initial tourist cabaña. The community promised to reorganise, but when it did, it turned out that the new cabaña and tour was run by only one family. Even though Tropic had sold the Siecoya project well in the past (it had provided clients with a good quality product and at a budget-price, attracting a cheaper and more easy to access market segment), the company decided to cease selling temporarily, as the project no longer conformed to Tropic's philosophy of community tourism.

Tropic's inability to meet its own projected sales goals has hindered the Huaorani project. The company believes its limited economic capacity is a critical obstacle to making the capital investment needed to upgrade community infrastructure (including cabañas, canoe, outboard motor) and to improve its marketing reach through more sophisticated promotional materials and qualified personnel. Tropic recognises that its patchy marketing success of the Huaorani programme has prevented a sufficiently constant flow of groups to encourage and maintain the commitment of a remote community, which barely understands the dynamics of the tourism business.

Another major challenge facing the programme is continued expansion of the oil industry into nearby Huaorani communities. Other communities receive company gifts and employment in exchange for allowing the companies to conduct operations peacefully. Quehueiriono continues to oppose the oil company activities, but this is becoming more difficult as they witness the material benefits gained by their neighbours. The environmental disruptions of the oil companies, and the rapid integration of the Huaorani into the market economy, create ongoing degradation of the tourism resources (pristine tropical forest and relatively unacculturated indigenous communities) that encouraged Tropic to operate in the area in the first place. Tropic believes there is a risk that the quality of the natural resources will deteriorate before it is able to raise money for new investment in Wquehueri'ono and Huentaro. The obstacles and the associated impacts encountered by Tropic are summarised in the following table.

**Table 3 Key factors that limit Tropic's achievement of pro-poor benefits in Quehueirono and Huentado**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Impacts within the community</b>
Company was unsuccessful in reaching target sales of one group of a maximum of 8 tourists per month	- Material benefits, employment opportunities, aggregate community fees, and handicraft sales were lower than expectations
Community lost enthusiasm for the tourism program.	- Community did not maintain airstrip; air service cancelled – emergency airlift was no longer available to residents - Tourist cabañas fell into disrepair - Community ineffective in rebuilding airstrip
Hard skills not adequately transferred to community members.	- Some skills (cooking, guiding, motorist, puntero) were imparted to community members, but their potential for experiential learning was limited due to the number of tour groups sent into the community
Community was not able to assign jobs and assignments on a consistent basis	- Skills were dispersed too widely among community members preventing assistants and apprentices from moving from unskilled positions to those that involved more skilled work (cooks, guides).
Tropic and the community became dependent on Moi as their primary contact with the community	- Moi gained an incredibly diverse range of both practical and marketable skills - Concentration of training in Moi limited Tropic's ability to pass on skills to more than a few other community members. - Friction developed between Moi and some community members who blamed him for Tropic's inability to send groups consistently, and felt that he benefited unfairly.
Oil companies support nearby communities in exchange for unopposed prospecting and drilling operations.	- Quehueirono and Huentado feel increasingly 'poor' in comparison to other Huaorani communities who receive employment and gifts from oil company. - Some community members have false expectations of a paternalistic approach by Tropic - Community members unwilling to invest time or energy in a community project. Influence of market economy through oil and timber industries have encouraged individuals to depend on cash.

Tropic believes that it will be able to more effectively implement and expand pro-poor elements in its new project planned for Quehueirono and Huentado if it can sell the product more consistently. The company will then be able to channel more money into the community through higher levels of employment, increased opportunities to sell handicrafts, and more constant inputs into a community fund. Tropic hopes that an upgrade in infrastructure will enable it to increase sales, and thus, generate more income for the community. The more training programmes that Tropic is able to invest in, or that community members are able to acquire through outside assistance, the more quality services (e.g. cooking, guiding) the community will be able to provide, and the more economic benefits they will be able to receive. For example, Tropic has to pay \$30 a day for the cook it sends into the communities – money that Tropic would rather spend within the community for the same service.

In the past year, Tropic has visited the communities of Quehueirono and Huentado three times in order to assess impacts on the community and discuss with them new possibilities for restarting the partnership and tourism programme. The people brought into the community by Tropic on these trips include an ecotourism researcher who has worked in numerous Huaorani communities, Tropic's managing director (Sofia Darquea) and other qualified consultants. Tropic feels that it needs further investment both in infrastructure and in community training and organisation if it is to satisfy both the needs of the community and the company successfully.

### 3.3 Relevance to the poor and poverty reduction

#### 3.2.1 Analysis of Cofan community of Zabalo

Data has been collected on the Cofan tourism project in Zabalo in order to give some rough estimates of wage earnings (Table 4). It is important to note that for the Cofan figures, Tropic's sales account for approximately 25% of the totals.

**Table 4 Financial earnings of the poor – community Zabalo, Cofan**

Employment	Approximate wage/person/ full day	No. of people (rotating schedule)	Estimated total work days available /wage earner *	Estimated earnings p.a/ wage earner
Guide	\$20	5	20	\$400
Cook-administrator	\$15 to \$25	5	20	\$300 to \$500
Assistants and apprentices	\$5 to \$15	10	10	\$50 to \$150

\* These numbers are based on 20 total groups per year, which stay an average of 5 nights each.

In addition to wages earned by community members, the Cofan earn money through an \$8 per person per night community fee for lodging and handicraft sales. Randy Borman estimates that each household in Zabalo earns on average \$100 per month selling handicrafts. Perhaps more than half of this monthly total comes from Flotel tourists who visit the community for short-stays and visits to the handicraft cooperative. For tourists (like Tropic's) who visit the community for multi-day community stays, Randy estimates that tourists will spend between \$10 and \$50 per person, with American tourists generally spending more than Europeans. Families who are able to sell bigger items such as blowguns or hammocks can make nearly \$100 in just one transaction.

In Zabalo, the majority of households, especially those whose men work as either guides or cook-administrators, have been able to move up from a classification of 'poor' into a more stable economic condition. Money earned by residents of Zabalo is primarily used to buy extras and not for self-sustenance which comes mainly from their forest gardens where they grow manioc, banana, and other staples. The artisan sales go to items such as soap, toothpaste, aspirin, rice, sardines, pasta, and flour. Money earned is also used to buy clothes, more expensive items such as radios, and, more commonly, gasoline to fuel many of the motor boats owned by community members for transportation purposes. Community funds, especially the fees collected through the cabanas, are seen as bulk funds that can be applied to particular community items. Recently, the community was able to replace their old lawn mower. The community has plans to buy another outboard motor and fibreglass canoe later in the year.

Other alternatives to employment with the tourism project include work on Zabalo's turtle conservation project, which pays eight workers monthly salaries. Other potential income generating

activities include work for the oil companies, logging, and selling of skins. Zabalo is too far down river to make oil employment or logging feasible and there is currently no market for animal skins.

### 3.2.2. Analysis of financial benefits to Huaorani communities of Quehueriono and Huentado

While Tropic's pro-poor initiative with its Huaorani project has not brought all of the positive impacts that the company and the community anticipated, it has had some financial impacts for the two communities (Tables 5 and 6).

**Table 5 Financial earnings of the poor – Huaorani communities of Quehueriono and Huentado**

Employment	Approx. amount/person (range)/day	No of people involved	Estimated amount work days available/year/ wage earner*	Estimated earnings pa/ wage earner
Guide – Moi	\$15 - \$30	1	20	\$300 to \$600
Assistants – cooks, motoristas, punteros	\$5 to \$10	14	1.4	\$7 to \$14
Rent (community fee)		All (20-30)		Approx.\$15/person

\* These figures are based on 4 tour groups per year staying on average 5 days each. They do not include community fees that range from \$8 to \$15 per tourist per night spent in the community or the \$5 per tourist territorial entrance fee paid to ONHAE.

**Table 6 Estimation of handicraft sales in the Huaorani communities of Quehueriono and Huentado**

Tours groups	Amount spent on handicrafts/group	Total amount from handicraft sales	Handicraft sales/ household*
16	\$150	\$2400	\$114

\* 21 households

In both communities, handicraft sales are available to all interested households and the economic benefits they receive are related to individual skills and quantities produced. Women are more actively involved in handicraft production, but men are the primary workers on blowguns and spears. Residents in both communities have expressed the opinion that selling handicrafts is one of the best parts of having tourists visit their communities. More than a few women commented that they want more groups to visit just so they can sell more handicrafts. On many of Tropic's tours, clients buy all the handicrafts available and are actively encouraged by Moi and the guides to do so. Sometimes, if handicraft items remain after visitors finish buying, community members will give them away to the visitors as a sign of friendship. Tropic estimates that a typical group spends an average of \$150, commonly buying all the handicrafts offered by the community (See Table 6). This figure can be higher depending on how many large items (blowguns, spears, hammocks) are available and sold.

The main beneficiaries of employment opportunities have been Moi and his immediate family. Moi tends to delegate friends and family members, most commonly his brothers, to work as assistants (motoristas, cook assistants, punteros) on Tropic's tours. Tropic has made efforts to ensure that other families receive sufficient benefits and Drumm has raised the issue on numerous public community

meetings. The difficult situation that resulted may be exacerbated by the Huaorani cultural traditions of gift sharing that have more to do with family than community ties.

Nevertheless, Moi and his immediate family - parents and some brothers and sisters (in total around 12 people) - have received enough financial benefits and training to effectively move from 'poor' to 'not poor' status. It is important to realise that the Huaorani, more so than the Cofan and other indigenous communities with a longer history of contact, still live a traditional lifestyle, especially when it comes to dietary intake. The Huaorani, and Moi, often spend money as soon as they get it. Consequently this 'not poor' distinction given to Moi and some of his family does not mean that they always have money on hand, but rather, that with their connections with outsiders and their collection of purchased items, they would consistently be able to access money in times of need.

All community households receive an equal portion of the community fee that is divided up (in the continued absence of a established and well-managed community fund) and presented publicly to the community president by Tropic's guide during a community meeting. Other community residents who have received less direct benefits from Tropic's initiative may still be considered 'poor', as they have not earned enough to have money consistently available.

Earnings by community members most frequently go towards buying medicine, clothes, backpacks, pocket-knives, boots, machetes, and other 'modern' items increasingly needed or desired by the Huaorani. They will also occasionally spend money to buy basic foodstuffs such as rice, sugar, oatmeal, cooking oil and desired treats such as cola, bread, and candy. Some of the young adults, particularly young men, will also spend money on alcohol.

In addition to contractual type payments, Tropic has spent money in the past year on two emergency operations for community members and transportation for others to travel to/from important Huaorani assemblies and negotiations with oil companies.

In Huentado, Cogui – the community president – has received the most benefits from the community's partnership with Tropic, as he demands usually half of the community fee. In theory, Cogui, as president, is responsible for decisions regarding community projects or for handling potentially costly emergency situations for community members. The other half of the community fee in Huentado is divided equally among households. Households here buy the same types of items as those in Quehueriono, the only difference being that they live further upriver and, thus, are more distant from the bridge and access to town. With transportation to market being a bigger challenge, residents of Huentado seem to be more prudent with their purchasing decisions.

No-one in particular in either community has suffered negative impacts from the community's tourism programme. Some residents may have been prevented from selling timber and other one-time-only extractive practices. The no-hunting area originally set-up is not formally protected and community members have not lost access to hunting grounds. As a whole, community members who participated in community work parties or 'mingas' associated with the tourism project (clearing land, working on cabanas or airstrip) do not receive direct compensation for their work although each family does in fact benefit from the division of community fees. In 1997, Huentaro was founded when the community of Quehueirono split due to conflicts between families, but it is hard to determine how Tropic's involvement in the community influenced the complex dynamics.

### *3.2.3 Impacts on livelihoods of the poor*

Tropic's pro-poor initiatives both in the Huaorani communities of Quehueirono and Huentado, and in other communities who run tourism projects independently, have had mainly positive impacts on

the livelihoods of the poor. Tropic and Acción Amazonía are constantly available to support these communities in times of need. This support has taken many different forms depending on the specific circumstances. This includes helping pay for medical care, transportation to important meetings and events, and providing contacts with local and international activists and clients interested in helping these communities retain their territorial integrity – particularly against threats from oil companies and logging interests. Many community leaders from these projects use Tropic’s office as a home-base in Quito, from which they make and receive phone calls, get advice on issues relating to their tourism projects, and learn from Tropic’s wide-range of tourism materials and brochures available in the office. Tropic frequently provides technical assistance and advice free-of-charge to other indigenous groups and community leaders interested in working in tourism throughout Ecuador, and often links them with volunteers and other professionals who may be better suited to help them.

In the case of the Huaorani communities of Quehueriono and Huentado, Tropic’s continued presence and involvement, even when group numbers are low, gives both communities the feeling that they have an outside organisation on which they can depend, if not for direct economic assistance, then for advice and further connections. For remote communities such as these, this outside ‘friend’ should not be underestimated, as it can provide a valuable type of insurance as there are commonly no other options. The availability of support from Tropic still provides enough incentive to prevent these two communities from asking for extensive support from the oil companies. Even though the programme has faltered in the past year, community members are still proud of their tourism project and relationship with Tropic. Tourism is something commonly talked about by many Huaorani as a solution to their economic and cultural struggles, and they hope that tourism development can combat the oil industry, which continues to build roads into their territory and work indiscriminately with their communities.

Ecotourism has been heralded in various workshops given to the Huaorani, and communities who work with tourism are given respect and often are asked to share their experiences with other, less fortunate communities. Tropic’s presence has prevented the discouraged exploitative tourism common in other communities further down river. The communities and their leaders are eager for Tropic to reinvest in new cabañas and remain confident that the company will act soon and in the community’s best interest.

Even when tour groups are not present, residents of Quehueriono receive access to communication and transportation facilities that donations from Tropic and its clients have helped provide. Many Huaorani utilise Tropic’s groups as an opportunity for transportation and travel to and from the bridge and other communities they wish to visit. The arrival of a tour group in the communities is still considered an exciting event. Many residents, especially children, will watch and follow the tourists for hours and, when possible, interact with them – playing, sharing stories, laughing, and challenging them to volleyball or soccer, which are popular and hotly contested activities in these communities. Many Huaorani are curious as to where the tourists come from (e.g. what they do for work, what their families look like, what their towns and homes are like, etc.) and often want to hear stories about planes, cities, other indigenous people across the world, strange animals, and the ocean. And vice versa of course.

Much attention in tourism literature has been given to the many negative socio-cultural impacts associated with tourists entering sensitive cultures and remote areas. The author’s (Braman) experience with the Huaorani – albeit limited – suggests that tourist visits are thoroughly enjoyed by almost all community members. Of course, in a general sense, tourism does increase the Huaorani’s contact with outsiders and there are possible repercussions that can result – feelings of inferiority, increased desire for expensive clothes, goods, and food items, changes in cultural patterns, music, etc. With the Huaorani, however, the long-term impacts of the continued presence

of oil operations and missionaries are a much more serious and insidious threat than that posed by small-scale tourism activities such as Tropic's. Tropic has worked diligently to develop visitor guidelines and procedures that encourage a balanced and respectful interaction between hosts and guests and which limits the potential negative consequences mentioned above. I believe that in the case of Quehueriono and Huentado, that tourism provides positive cultural reinforcement and a sense of pride and cultural cohesion. The insightful and entertaining interactions that community members have been able to share with tourists are often remembered fondly and stories are often told subsequently to other Huaorani about these encounters. Tropic's philosophy leaves a lot of control in the hands of Moi and the community which can decide what, when, and how they want to interact and share their culture with tourists. The communities often decide to perform a cultural presentation with traditional songs and dances, but this is not always the case. Tourists are occasionally asked to share songs, stories, or dances from their own cultures.

Inspired by tourism activities, young adults want to learn their cultural histories, myths, and songs and have taken a new interest in learning about the flora and fauna of the forest from their elders. Tourism has created a clear recognition that environmentally destructive activities such as oil and logging damage their resource base and should be avoided if possible. In the recent Huaorani Assembly which brought together over 150 Huaorani from every community, participants signed a letter denouncing five of the six oil companies that work in their territory and the imminent plans for a new oil road threatening to divide their territory in half. In the same assembly, tourism was discussed as one of their only income-generating non-destructive alternatives. There was a general consensus that they wanted to continue to look for ways to involve more communities in tourism. By creating a future potential for jobs that require Spanish proficiency and basic education, tourism encourages the Huaorani to continue with their schooling and to pursue out-of-classroom training opportunities. Tourism has generated increased interest in conservation projects such as no-hunting zones, environmental monitoring campaigns, and the rearing of native animals to reintroduce to their natural habitat. ONHAE and Huaorani leaders have formulated plans to organise the creation of a Huaorani-run tourism agency. If and when this occurs, the experience and skills gained by residents of Quehueriono and Huentado will be extremely helpful in planning an effective tourism entity with clear community participation, involvement, and benefits. Thanks to Tropic, Moi has become, without doubt, the best and most experienced Huaorani guide and logistical coordinator, and his experience will be vital for the Huaorani and their hopes of organising and controlling their own tourism enterprise sometime within the next few years.

**Table 7 Synthesis of positive and negative benefits on livelihoods of the poor**

	<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Losses/problems</b>
Skills, access to education	Tourism creates a desire for more education, as jobs in tourism (esp. guiding) require proficiency in Spanish and frequently, advanced training and skill development	
Natural resources	Tourism encourages the protection of the natural environment, as it is the primary attraction for tourists	Logging and oil provide more immediate income
Community organisation, cohesion, pride	Community tourism encourages community organisation. Tourism involvement is a coveted status for Huaorani communities and generates pride	Tropic's delay in reinvesting has the community on the 'edge' of losing hope. If Tropic decides not to continue work, the communities will lose a lot of pride and

		confidence in their worth as a tourism destination.
Access to investment funds, loans	N/A	N/A
Infrastructure - water - roads, transport - telephone/communication - other	Community members gain access to transport provided by tour group trips to communities and Tropic representatives. Multi-frequency radio donated by Tropic in Quehueriono and at the ONHAE office provides improved communication facilities; the community has access to phones in Tropic's Quito office.	Increased access to transportation and cash encourages more connections with the market and fosters a reliance on modern goods.
Health, access to healthcare	Funds generated are often used for family healthcare, medicine and painkillers. Tropic is available for consultation and possible economic assistance for emergencies. Community and individual funds from employment often used in emergency situations.	Increased market access (transportation, funds) also increases access to alcohol, cigarettes and sweets, although discouraged by Tropic. Alcohol can be a serious social problem while all three pose health risks (sweets create seriously dental problems).
Access to information	Intercultural exchanges and potential to use Tropic's contacts with journalists and concerned activists. Use of Tropic's office in Quito. Availability of multi-frequency radios.	
Funds for the community	Community fee charged and currently divided between household in Quehueirono and Huentado. In other communities, fee is used to buy community materials or equipment.	Community friction can occur depending on how funds are divided and/or used.
Other livelihood activities – farming, employment, migration	Potential for employment and other benefits encourages community members to remain in community	Opportunity cost of not working for oil companies.
Markets, market opportunities	Increased experience and training opens up further opportunities for community members to work in or create other tourism activities – employment by other tour operators, creation of new partnerships, community-run tours	Reduced access to other possibly more beneficial opportunities in the tourism market if community signs an exclusive agreement with one operator
Jobs	Limited but sporadic employment opportunities, skilled (guide, cook) semi-skilled (motorist) and unskilled jobs (puntero, assistants) available	Prohibits more stable employment with the oil companies
Influence over policy makers	Potential to use contacts and client base to generate international attention and support in times of crisis	
Opportunities for informal sector, small business	Handicraft sales provide household income and handicraft proficiency, and may encourage new markets	
Casual labour opportunities		



Household income	Provided by sporadic employment, divided community fees, and handicraft sales	Limited by opportunity cost of foregoing employment with oil companies
Local culture	Promotes cultural pride and encourages youth to learn cultural histories, myths, songs, dances.	Increases contact with wealthy outsiders, and heightens risks of feelings of inferiority or the desire for expensive modern items carried by tourists
Overall vulnerability of households	Reduced vulnerability perceived by community members, significance of dependable outside 'friend' organisation	

### 3.2.4 *Broader contributions to poverty elimination and anticipated impacts*

Community-based ecotourism promises social, economic, cultural benefits that can result from effective protection and marketing of intact natural environments through community-organised tourism activities. Tropic's philosophy and commitment to market community-based ecotourism projects to high-end clients has effectively opened up new links to this difficult to reach market segment. Tropic actively encourages its clients to develop ongoing relationships with the communities they visit and has raised funds from clients to invest in community infrastructure and training programmes. The relationships developed, and the experiences shared between clients and communities, have tremendous educational potential that can promote international awareness of pro-poor tourism initiatives in the client's country of origin. Perhaps Tropic's biggest potential to enact change, and to move pro-poor initiatives closer to the centre of tourism development, is the company's desire to provide intense educational experiences capable of altering tourist's attitudes towards communities, and the 'poor', who are traditionally on the margins of mainstream tourism development. Each visitor that Tropic brings to community tourism projects represents another small, but critical step in increasing the demand for socially and environmentally responsible tourism with its strong implicit pro-poor objectives.

Community-based tourism projects which Tropic supports and markets, also have incredible potential for biodiversity conservation and cultural empowerment in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Tourism is starting to emerge as a strong counter-current to the expansion of the oil and logging industries in the region. Where community tourism programmes are successful they have the potential to protect large areas of tropical forest from incursions from these industries and encourage indigenous communities to value their cultural traditions. Community tourism projects may enable local communities to reduce their dependency on hunted meat and their impact on endangered animal populations. These projects can also foster community cohesion and organisational capacity. Unfortunately, it is still unclear how sustainable the market for these projects will be in the future. Tropic and others, particularly community programmes, have suffered from poor marketing performance and this remains a critical barrier to achieving goals. While some communities may be able to operate successful tourism projects, certainly other alternatives need to be developed.

Tropic and others will have greater potential to generate financial benefits for communities if they can design a marketing system that can attract or create larger groups of four or more passengers. Due to fixed costs for guides and transportation, larger group sizes will enable both Tropic and the communities to become more profitable. Tropic also needs to develop a standard assessment form for community visits, to be completed by both guides and clients so that communities receive constant feedback in order to continue to independently improve and market their products.

In order to become more effective in working with communities, Tropic is currently looking for further opportunities to attract outside assistance for capital investment, and for the comprehensive community training programmes needed in order to continue improving programme design, monitoring, and marketing.

## 4. Review and lessons

### 4.1 Different views on Tropic's initiatives

We invite tourists to our community. Tropic has prepared us – we have learned how to manage and run tourism, how to prepare for the tourists, and the important objectives. Now we need to work too. We are still Huaorani – we have forest, animals. We maintain our culture and we want to invite tourists to come and visit and respect us and hopefully we will all make friends. We don't want to live with the oil companies in our territory. We want to work with Tropic, walking with care and caution so we don't get off track. With the money from tourism we buy medicine, rice for community work parties or 'mingas', school materials, and for emergencies. Before, we never worked. Now we need to work and control tourism. When I was a young boy I never thought of studying, did not know what it was to write. Now, I have finished studying to be a nurse and I will work to help our people who suffer.

**David, 23 years old from Quehueriono**

To work in tourism we need to be responsible and control it well, so we can have contact with the world, exchanging ideas and cultures. We have been thinking many things about the future – where will we be able to feel Huaorani, where will we be able to remain Huaorani? We have a big territory that we want to defend because it is our land, our life. For this reason we want to organise for tourism because we need healthcare, education and we also need to gain more skills for tourism because we still don't earn very much from visits. We think tourism is good because with it there is lots of training, courses, and we can build many things. We think that instead of going to the Oil Company we want to organise tourism. Tourism does not destroy or hurt our land. The land – without hurting it, without hurting it – that is why we fight. We do not want tourists just for the money, but we want them to come and get to know our community, our culture, and our forests where we have many things. It's important for us to have many friends to help us defend our territory and we trust them to help us. It's important for the community itself to manage tourism because with that we can advance and have more work. If we don't do this then tourism will also bring problems so we must manage it well. That is good.

**Moi Enomenga, Huaorani leader and coordinator for Tropic**

We do not want any more oil companies. Our ancestors died fighting to defend our lands and our homes and now they come and destroy them. I like tourism – they come, they don't destroy anything, and then they leave. But they need to ask for permission before they come, they need to respect us.

**Mengatohue, a highly respected elder and shaman, former resident of Quehueriono**

We are losing hope. This is one of the only communities not involved with the oil companies because Moi told us that tourism was the best option. Now we are here waiting. We are the only community that has received benefits from neither oil companies nor from tourism.

**Beatrice, Quichua woman married to a Huaorani and resident of Quehueriono.**

Tropic's intentions, especially Andy's original ideas were top notch, but the reality of changing that into an offering on the market and meeting the expectations of what the community wants and needs are very different. As far as their targets, student groups are a good idea.

**Randy Borman, de facto chief of Cofan community and initiator of their community project of Zabalo**

Tropic tried to work with the Huaorani with good intentions and good ideas. Tropic is the only company who has worked in the territory that has given the Huaorani space to be active participants in the program. Quehueriono never managed the benefits from Tropic's project very well and for that and other reasons there was a big division in the community. The Huaorani communities still have not learned how to manage or work well with community projects. They might be able to build a cabaña, but who in the community is going to be able to manage it?

**Huaorani Project Coordinator for Denmark's Project Ibis**

The major impacts on the Huaorani are the oil companies and the missionaries. Tourists are a fairly minor impact. In fact, tourists might even be an effective conservative force as they like to see traditional dances, handicraft skills, etc. Tourists promote the idea that the traditional culture or at least aspects of it are valuable. On the other hand, they also promote the commodification of traditional culture and changes in reciprocity exchanges. With the Huaorani, a lot of those changes are going on anyway with the oil companies and the missionaries. The indigenous people are stuck in a social environment where everything is commodified – that is just the way it is. The only serious question is whether the traditional culture has any value at all. Tourism is one of forces that does assign it a value. Compared to what an oil company does, tourism on the scale that it is happening now is fairly benign. The Huaorani are very sexy group for tourists. They have been famous in North America ever since they killed the four missionaries in 1956. In Europe they are very high profile because they are supposed to be 'natural men'.

**Cultural anthropologists currently working with the Huaorani**

The communities are screwed up with traditions and tourism. Tropic did not help them at all. The community wanted to work, be paid but not be bothered with doing too much stuff like management. Their attitude toward money is the result of the oil companies and missionaries. They did not receive adequate training the first time around. Another big problem is Moi – he is like a big child. He is a bit lost and too ambitious with not much practical follow through. There is nothing there. The community is impatient and on the 'edge'.

**A critic and coordinator of ecotourism projects**

### ***Comments from clients***

We thought the trip was outstanding because of the opportunities we had to see wildlife, learn about the traditional uses of plants, and have some exposure to the Cofan people. We really enjoyed interacting with the Cofan people and the chance to taste traditional Cofan food. The local guide, Mauricio should be declared a national treasure – we are very fortunate to have had the chance to spend time with him and experience a traditional Cofan.

**American couple who travelled to Zabalo in April 2000**

My experience with the Huaorani was one of the best experiences of my life. I hated to have to go. The days I had were simply much too great to describe. Moi made me feel more like a friend than just a tourist. In fact, I can say the same about all of the community members. Although we could hardly communicate verbally, we had a lot of fun together and I always felt really integrated. We

had excellent service all around – good equipment, two great guides, and a good cook. I want to show the world what a great experience this was and deep in my heart I hope to find more people interested in the people and landscape of Ecuadorian Amazon. I feel like I need to do something to help the Huaorani and their battle against the oil companies. Maybe I can help make a website or something.

#### **German tourists who visited Quehueriono and Huentado in December 1999**

My trip to visit the Huaorani was the most exciting excursion I have ever experienced in Ecuador. With this trip my long-lasting desire to explore a part of the jungle was fulfilled. Your flawless organisation, your professional guidance, and your superb contacts with the Huaorani made this possible. Your program not only enabled me to get a taste of the endangered wildlife, but also allowed me to have close contact with the people who are so desperately trying to protect their land and search for better ways to survive with their culture, after all of the damage done by the ‘civilised’ nations.

#### **English tourists living in Ecuador at the time of the trip in January 1998**

## **4.2 Reflections on this PPT initiative**

Tropic’s pro-poor tourism initiatives are diverse and tactfully placed within increasingly popular discourses such as ‘environmentally and socially responsible tourism’, ‘ecotourism’, and ‘community-based ecotourism’. By establishing connections at all levels, including government ministries, national and international conservation and tourism organisations, members of the national and international press, high-end clients, and, most importantly, directly with communities and their leaders. Tropic provides the links capable of moving pro-poor initiatives more to the forefront of tourism development in Ecuador and the international marketplace. In Ecuador, Tropic has indeed been an innovator among private sector tour operators, particularly its commitment to package and sell both independently-run community ecotourism programmes, and its own Huaorani community project. In order to avoid over-dependence on projects with strong pro-poor elements, which do not, and should not, provide high profit yields, Tropic has successfully been able to remain profitable. It has done this by creating diverse packages, often combining trips to the Galapagos Islands, Ecuadorian Highlands, and cloudforest, with indigenous community operations in the Amazon. These more conventional products and private sector partnerships have been able to carry Tropic through difficult years for tourism in Ecuador and the Amazon. A challenge for the company will be to channel money earned back into a carefully-planned Huaorani project to make good on the international acclaim it has generated for the company and fulfil the expectations of the hopeful communities.

Tropic claims to be ‘pioneering ecotourism’ but needs to market more consistently, with more consistent and cohesive community responses in order to reach the level of success it aims for. Tropic’s small size limits its ability to finance comprehensive and ongoing training programmes in the communities in which it operates. Without sufficient training and orientation, particularly in management, the services that communities are able to offer private sector partners can be unpredictable. Inconsistency on the part of the community can quickly lead to problems in marketing and sales for the company, starting a potentially catastrophic cycle. Tropic’s small size and commitment to limit passenger numbers makes it especially susceptible to these fluctuations. It also makes it necessary for the company to develop linkages with non-governmental organisations, government ministries, and committed individuals who together can help the communities where Tropic cannot. The relative inexperience and only recent integration into the market economy of many indigenous communities in the region adds to the difficult challenge of training and organisation strengthening necessary for sustained success and involvement in the tourism industry.

Tropic's experience demonstrates that the success of private sector-community partnerships often depends on a precarious balance between the abilities of both the company and the community to deliver the services to which they commit. Before a private sector partner initiates a relationship with a local community, it is essential for the company to analyse the level of commitment in training and orientation needed for the community to be able to provide what they promise. Without more comprehensive and ongoing training programmes for communities, private sector partners are likely to struggle to achieve success in pro-poor initiatives. As with Tropic, many small private operators lack the funds needed for a more complete investment in capable personnel, lasting infrastructure, and training for the communities. Linkages with, and assistance from, a third party (non-governmental organisation, government ministries, indigenous organisations, researchers) in community training and orientation may prove critical for these small private sector partners. Of course, with the involvement of other organisations, the relationships between stakeholders can become more complex. Some private operators may be hesitant to accept outside assistance because they may lose their 'edge' with the community, risking possible cuts in profit margins and loss of control. This is not the case for Tropic, which is currently updating a business plan for its Huaorani programme. The company is actively seeking investors and arrange partnerships with organisations who actively support initiatives such as theirs, and who may be able to provide the needed capital and community training.

Tropic has learned that working with communities does not just require careful planning, but constant diligence in maintaining the community as informed and active participants in the project, even through difficult times. Financial constraints have prevented the company from investing money in associated programme, as they would have liked. Tropic dedicates much effort and time to its social principles, due to the commitment and creativity of its founder, managing director, and staff. This commitment has been the focus of its marketing strategy and is essential, not only for the market viability of the company, but also for the sustained confidence of the communities with whom it works. Tropic's approach is unique in the region and receives criticism as well as praise from other operators in the area. The manager and owner of a competing operator who works with the Huaorani comments that Tropic talks too much about its ideals and awards while failing to provide the community with sufficient tour groups or economic benefits.

The wide-range of relationships that Tropic has developed relate to the specific situation and evolution of ecotourism, and community-based tourism, in Ecuador and its Amazon region – a process in which Tropic's founder, Andy Drumm, has been a key player. Certainly, facets of Tropic's operation (e.g. selling independently-run community tourism projects, mixing community programmes with mainstream attractions, developing linkages with a wide range of stakeholders, expansion of market to include the high-end segment) may indeed be replicable by other small private operators committed to pro-poor and related alternative tourism discourses.

### **4.3 Reflections on the PPT research**

This case study demonstrates how a small, committed private tour operator can work at various levels to encourage pro-poor tourism initiatives through its support and marketing of community-based ecotourism projects. This case offers important insights into the importance of marketing and what can happen with community projects when private partners do not, or are not able to, meet community expectations. Tropic's strategy to package community projects with other conventional attractions proves both appropriate and necessary to help attract the high-end market often left out of other community and pro-poor tourism initiatives. This case study presents a unique view because it offers an independent analysis in the hope that the lessons learned will enable other communities and organisations, including the private sector, to continue to work through the obstacles without losing their commitment to poverty alleviation through tourism. Tropic has

demonstrated that existing ‘ecotourism’ and ‘community-based’ tourism frameworks can incorporate pro-poor elements that have the potential to transform direct cross-cultural experiences into powerful educational processes that confront class and poverty issues.

Tropic has demonstrated with some success, that while pro-poor elements may be difficult to implement, the results certainly make the effort worthwhile, considering the overall livelihood improvements that are possible. While the economic benefits may not seem robust, the communities with whom Tropic works have received significant livelihood improvements that range from improved access to communication and healthcare to technical support and connections with other committed individuals. Tropic’s ability to maintain a positive relationship with many indigenous communities highlights the diverse ways that a small private operator can overcome financial and staff limitations to impact on the livelihoods of the poor. Nevertheless, Tropic was able to send over 120 passengers and deliver economic inputs of well over \$20,000 into Amazon communities. Additionally, Tropic’s clients spent thousands of dollars on local handicrafts, donated radios, educational supplies, and provided funds for medical emergencies in these same communities. In the Ecuadorian Amazon, where many ‘poor’ communities are indigenous people who derive their sustenance directly from the forests, these diverse improvements in livelihoods, specifically those involving environmental protection and awareness and cultural empowerment, should not be underestimated, as they reflect a considerable benefit in light of Tropic’s financial constraints.

In this vast area where communities are remote and have a history of exploitative practices within cultural tourism, ‘trickle down’ strategies are less appropriate since they place considerable leverage in the questionable hands of independent private ‘jungle tour’ operators catering to a still gullible army of budget travellers.

#### *4.3.1 Methodology*

The work for this case study was completed with formal and informal interviews with Andy Drumm, Sofia Darquea, Randy Borman, Moi Enomenga, Lucia – Projecto Ibis, ecotourism consultants, community residents both in the field and in Quito, and with others. Economic data was primarily based on accounts and records supplied by Tropic and through interviews with Randy Borman.

The Principal author, Scott Braman is completing a year of community ecotourism research in Ecuador financed by the US Government sponsored Fulbright Scholarship programme. The majority of Scott’s work has been with the Huaorani.

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