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An Ecotourism Partnership in the Peruvian Amazon: the Case of Posada Amazonas

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Introduction

From the moment the term was coined (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987), ecotourism was deemed to be an integration of conservation and local development. It is widely recognized as well that, in order to provide a memorable and authentic experience, ecotourism requires relatively intact natural areas, many of which are found in the poorest and most remote regions of the world (Christ *et al.*, 2003). None the less, ecotourism has demonstrated the capacity to bring together demand with the offer in such a way that win–win situations sometimes occur between the stakeholders involved: the environment, communities, entrepreneurs/operators and visitors.

One example is Posada Amazonas, a 30 double-bedroom lodge located along the Tambopata River in south-eastern Peru, in the biodiversity ‘hotspot’ of the Tropical Andes (Myers *et al.*, 2000). The lodge brings together the native community of Infierno and a private company, Rainforest Expeditions, to achieve a common goal: to prove that local communities can generate enough income through ecotourism to promote natural resource stewardship and conservation. By pursuing sustainable local development through the marketing of wildlife and nature, the long-term goals of both the community and the private company can be met.

Two Partners, Two Ways of Thinking

The community

The native community of Infierno was founded in 1976 by 80 families of the Ese’ija, Andean and Ribereño ethnic groups. The first group are the

original inhabitants of the Tambopata River, while the Andean and Ribereño groups migrated to the region from other parts of Peru and the wider Amazon. Their major activities are slash-and-burn agriculture, hunting and fishing, Brazil nuts and palm fruits collection, timber and, more recently, tourism, handcrafting and fish farming. As of 2007 the population of Infierno is approximately 600. Their community infrastructure includes a kindergarten, primary and secondary schools, a fresh water tank, and connectivity via an unpaved 19 km road to Puerto Maldonado, the region's capital (Fig. 3.1).

In the mid-1980s the Tambopata National Reserve was created. In the process part of the Infierno's territory was included by mistake. The community disputed the error and, following the recommendations of local environmental and indigenous rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Peruvian Authority for Natural Resources (INRENA) agreed to the devolution of the land with one condition: the community should declare the returned land as a reserve. Infierno agreed, and in 1987 established a Communal Reserve of approximately 3000 ha, a full 30% of its titled territory. Within the reserve, all resource extraction (hunting, logging, fishing, etc.) is banned. In addition to this community reserve, the community also created an elaborate medicinal garden that same year. The Ñape Ethno-botanical Center is a place devoted to traditional medicine.

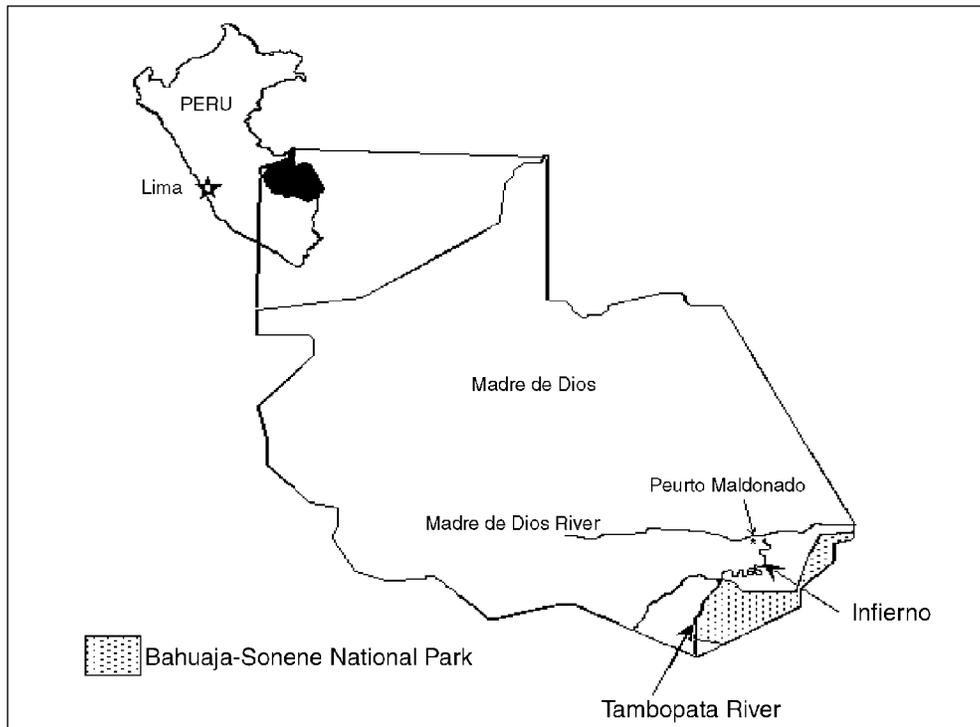


Fig. 3.1. Native Community of Infierno in Madre de Dios, Peru.

Ñape serves not only Infierno but also many other communities in Madre de Dios.

Until 1993 Infierno residents managed to avoid tourism development in their community. They watched tourism boats go up and down river, crossing their territory, and wondered whether tourism could be a good alternative for them. Still, the memory of a previous bad experience with a tour operator who promised to pay for recreational use of their land, yet never did, made them very cautious of tourism and of outsiders in general at that point. As a result, Infierno rejected Rainforest Expeditions' first attempt to collaborate with them.

The company

Rainforest Expeditions is a Peruvian tour operator established in 1989, founded by Eduardo Nycander and Kurt Holle. It initially oriented its efforts towards developing a research station devoted to the large Amazon macaws along the Tambopata River, 8 h by boat upriver from Puerto Maldonado. In 1992, the Tambopata Research Center was opened to tourists with a goal of using tourism revenues to continue funding the research endeavours. However, the long boat ride usually forced them to stay overnight en route, either camping on a beach along the river or spending the night in a competitor's lodge. They needed a place for an overnight stay. By that time, some of Infierno's community members had been hired to work as research assistants. This helped establish relationships within the community that would be effective in helping forge collaboration between the two future partners.

An Innovative Partnership

After a first attempt failed in 1993, an Ese'jeja leader from Infierno approached Nycander in 1995 to propose the idea of building a lodge in the community. For Rainforest Expeditions, the prospect was quite exciting. They knew Infierno still had primary forest, particularly in the Communal Reserve, and that, along with the presence of typical Amazonian biodiversity, harpy eagles were currently nesting there and giant otters were easily seen in the oxbow lake nearby. These charismatic mega-fauna provided the perfect 'franchise species' for ecotourism development. Moreover, Infierno was within 2 h of Puerto Maldonado – the major gate to the Madre de Dios Region where flights arrive daily from Cusco, one of the most popular destinations in all of South America. However, coming to an agreement with the community was not easy. Dissemination of information about the project and close communication with families in the community was needed. Community members, Rainforest Expeditions' owners and local offices of Conservation International (CI) worked hard through group meetings and with individual households to discuss the potential benefits of a partnership.

The contract

Finally, in May 1996, Infierno and Rainforest Expeditions signed a 20-year agreement for Posada Amazonas Lodge (PAL). This contract held Rainforest Expeditions responsible for funding, building and operating the new lodge. However, profits would be split 60/40, favouring the community. The agreement also stated that transfer of ownership of Posada Amazonas from Rainforest Expeditions to the community would take place after the initial 20 years of operation. At that point, the community may choose to continue working with Rainforest Expeditions, collaborate with another partner or operate the lodge entirely on its own. In the meantime, the community is bound by contract to work exclusively with Rainforest Expeditions in order to avoid a disordered spring-up of other projects that could damage tourism development at Posada Amazonas and local resource-carrying capacities. The partners also agreed that the lodge would be located in the Communal Reserve, and the community would continue to enforce restrictions on resource extraction in that area.

After spending nearly a year looking for funds, construction on the new lodge started in 1997. It was then that the magnitude of the situation and the construction ahead began to set in for Rainforest Expeditions and Infierno: obtaining government permissions for the community to gather materials, such as wood and palm-tree roofs; organizing work teams, which was considered a non-paid, matching contribution of the community according to the grant obtained; and directing the construction of buildings far bigger than anything that existed in the community. Despite such large-scale effort, the lodge was carefully designed to offer the visitor the maximum opportunity to connect with the forest. For this reason the only areas of rainforest cleared were precise footprints of the buildings that formed the lodge. The rest of the primary forest was left intact; in fact, tourist rooms have only three walls, the fourth side being open to the forest.

In April 1998, the first tourist group arrived at Posada Amazonas. Since then, the lodge has become internationally known and runs at capacity year-round. The number of visitors has grown annually, recently totalling more than 7000 a year. The partnership between Infierno and Rainforest Expeditions originally emerged as the result of two intentions coming together: the community pursued collaboration with the company as a way to achieve economic development; the company saw collaboration as a way to expand its other business operation 8 h upriver. While these goals have been achieved, Posada Amazonas has come to mean much more to both partners.

Profit Sharing

The Peruvian–Canadian Fund agreed to fund Rainforest Expeditions US\$350,000 to build the lodge and do the initial training. While the

majority was granted, US\$110,000 was deemed a loan. This amount was repaid continuously from 1998 to 2000. In every one of these initial years, Rainforest Expeditions' owners visited the community and explained the financial situation. The end message was no profits to share yet. Finally, in 2001, the situation changed and profits were available to share between partners. It was only then that the project ensured its permanence in Infierno. *Comuneros* wanted a return on their investment, some economic benefits after 5 years of involvement in the project. At first the profits were not high, as each family received little more than US\$100 for the entire year. Even so, the message was clear: respecting the Communal Reserve was worthwhile; respecting certain wildlife was worthwhile; the partner, Rainforest Expeditions, was meeting its commitment. Tourism could in fact be a good option.

As of 2006, the community of Infierno has received more than US\$500,000 in profit from Posada Amazonas. From that portion, around 70–80% has been split among 150 families for their personal use. The remaining revenues were used to improve Infierno's infrastructure with works such as a secondary school, a computer facility, additional road access alongside the community, and a potable water well and tank system. Additionally, social support in the form of a health emergency fund, care for the elderly and higher education loans has been made possible.

Institutional Support

Offering natural resources to visitors as the primary attraction of a tourism operation requires a profound knowledge about those resources. In this regard, Rainforest Expeditions has been working closely with several institutions that provide useful information about the best way to show and interpret a natural resource. These include the Frankfurt Zoological Society (FZS), several US universities (Stanford, Texas A&M, University of Michigan) and CI, among others. FZS collaborated with the ecotourism operation to establish codes of conduct for interacting with the otters in the Tres Chimbadas oxbow lake. The code prioritizes reproductive nests and foraging behaviours of the otters, keeping them inside a zone comprising half the lake area which remains untouchable to both community members and tourists alike. CI has collaborated with the community since 1996 on a wildlife monitoring programme that tracks levels of pressure on wildlife in Infierno due to hunting and tourism. Since 2005, community members have served independently as the wildlife monitors, gathering the data which CI analyses. Six *comuneros* have undergone this training, taking turns in pairs to collect data on the otters every six months.

The support from universities has come in various forms. One is a long-standing field research programme with Stanford University, which enables six student scholars every year to conduct research on topics in conservation biology, sustainability and ecotourism. Individual scholars too

have carried out doctoral dissertations and long-term field research on the impacts of ecotourism (Stronza, 2000), harpy eagles (Piana, 2001) and resource management strategies of the Ese'ejá (Ocampo-Raeder, 2006). The results of these and other studies in Infierno have influenced various initiatives for conservation and development. One example was a comparative study and series of workshops between local leaders of Posada Amazonas and two other community-based ecotourism partnerships – the Chalalan ecolodge in Bolivia and the Kapawi lodge in Ecuador. The 'Learning Host to Host Project', funded by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, enabled community members to see and learn for themselves how local residents in other communities were managing ecotourism (Stronza, 2004). Another result of research is the 'Macaw Project' at the Tambopata Research Center. Donald Brightsmith, a renowned parrot researcher, has gathered valuable information about macaw and parrot behaviour, nesting alternatives and customs regarding the daily congregations on the clay bluffs along the Tambopata River (Brightsmith, 2005). As researchers typically publish their work, these linkages constitute additional avenues for marketing Posada Amazonas to a specialized public with relatively little effort.

Building Capacity in the Community

By the time the transfer of ownership is due to take place in 2016, Rainforest Expeditions would have to have developed within the community the abilities needed to manage the entire operation. The contract stipulated that local labour from the community be hired whenever properly trained. For this reason it was necessary to develop capacity in the community. This process follows four stages, each increasing in difficulty: (i) training to fulfil operational positions at the lodge, such as waiters, housekeepers, boat drivers and cook assistants – this is crucial for enabling community members with no prior experience in tourism to start working at the lodge; (ii) more elaborate training to fill technical positions, such as bilingual guides (Spanish–English), maintenance chief, chefs and bartenders; (iii) accruing experience for community members to serve as lodge administrator and fill logistical positions at Puerto Maldonado office; and (iv) developing capacities for serving in the upper-level management positions in finance, human resources, operations and marketing. Every year a training course is held in the community to identify the best candidates. Those selected to work at Posada Amazonas are placed on a 2-year staff rotation in order to give the same opportunity of working at the lodge to all families of the community and also to develop experience in multiple aspects of lodge operation to those being groomed for higher-level positions.

Community guides

Every year, all community members interested in becoming guides participate first in a short training course about biology, conservation, sustainability issues and additional interpretation concepts. The top four performers in each course qualify to participate in a longer course that Rainforest Expeditions organizes every year. This 3-week guide course is an intensive programme that covers all of the knowledge an environmental interpreter should know in order to provide excellent service as a tourist guide in the Amazon rainforest. Along with the four selected Infierno members, participants are typically university trained biologists, foresters or environmental engineers. The best two community members are selected to work in the next guiding season. More than 60 *comuneros* have participated in the short course and 20 have attended the long one, nine of them proceeding to work as bilingual guides. In addition to the guide courses, ongoing training continues in the following areas: staff positions at PAL, basic accounting, sales and bookings, handicrafts, computer use, general maintenance, cooking, English, wildlife monitoring and communication, leadership and business concepts, park rangers.

Community guides quickly become more acquainted with tourists' preferences and behaviours because they experience it every day. Almost all of them dedicate themselves only to guiding because they find it very satisfying and it pays at least three times as much as traditional farming-related activities. The US\$6000–8000 that guides earn annually is literally a fortune in Infierno, making them some of the wealthiest community members. Moreover, many of them have quit hunting in their spare time, choosing instead to use the same skills to identify and alert tourists to the presence of wildlife. One community member in particular has developed quite a reputation as world-class birdwatching guide. Such particularly gifted community guides now have the potential to become Peru-wide tour conductors.

Control committee

While profits are split 60/40, decision making would ideally be taken 50/50. A community 'Control Committee' (CC) was created to directly address issues connected to the lodge, including but not limited to those related to future investments, operational problems, sales, budgets, human resources and training, and service quality. The CC consists of ten members elected in a Communal Assembly, the primary governing body of Infierno to which the CC regularly reports. The CC meets every month at Posada Amazonas with Rainforest Expeditions representatives, among them the lodge manager, the project coordinator, the human resources manager, and often the owners of Rainforest Expeditions themselves. Meetings provide an opportunity for the CC members to discuss all tourism-related issues mentioned above and to increase their confidence

in expressing and explaining their opinions. Since the beginning of the project, more than 40 *comuneros* have served as members of the CC.

Since the contract created it in 1996, the CC's presence in the project has grown continuously in significance. Through periodic changes in membership, the committee affords its members exposure to business concepts essential to the successful, independent operation of the lodge. This type of experience is otherwise not readily available in the community. Perhaps more importantly, however, they have learned that their opinions are of fundamental importance to the project, and they now freely express them during meetings and assemblies.

Empowerment Through Ecotourism

As tourism has grown in importance in the community, the CC has increased its influence in Infierno's everyday life. CC members have become more able and willing to express opinions in Communal Assemblies. They are now meaningful participants in the difficult decision-making process regarding all future community developments. Budgeting from the profits is one such heavily discussed theme. Every year the CC presents a proposal to reinvest a portion of the profits in projects for communal good to the entire Communal Assembly. As a result of their exposure to the tourism activity and the regular contact with Rainforest Expeditions representatives, CC members learn new concepts and values about business management and conservation, and these are transferred to the community at each Communal Assembly. It is a slow but steady process.

Moreover, the CC has undertaken many tough initiatives related to tourism development in the community over the last year, including a renegotiation of the original contract with Rainforest Expeditions and the possibility of increasing the number of lodges operating in the community. This latter undertaking is based on the fact that after 10 years of the exclusive contract, the community is savvier about the tourism industry and understands that visitor numbers can potentially increase without posing a threat to Posada Amazonas' success. In fact, in 2005, Rainforest Expeditions opened a new lodge, Refugio Amazonas, 2.5 h upriver from Posada, with relatively good success to date. As such, the CC requested the elimination of the exclusivity clause so that they can start their own tourism developments, possibly with other companies. Rainforest Expeditions agreed, recommending that Infierno prepare a territory-use plan and a tourism plan for the entire community. These plans continue to be discussed.

A Vehicle for Conservation

While the Posada Amazonas project has involved decisions related to conservation since the beginning, economic development edged out

conservation as the primary goal of the partners at the outset. Now, owing to its growing capacity, intimate involvement in conservation-related activities and a heightened awareness of the tangible results that conservation behaviour can offer (e.g. revenues and capacities), the CC has directed the community to tackle difficult conservation situations in the region, none more ominous than the recent development of the inter-oceanic highway connecting the Amazon rainforest with the Pacific Coast.

Inter-oceanic highway

In 2004, the Peruvian Government announced the construction of a highway, or rather the pavement of an existing road, linking Brazil and the Atlantic Coast with the Peruvian rainforest town of Puerto Maldonado, the commercially important highland cities of Cusco and Puno, and eventually the Pacific Ocean. The highway totals 2586 km and requires an investment of US\$892 million, backed by both the Peruvian and Brazilian governments, funded in its majority by the latter with an eye towards future exports from the region to the Asian Pacific (Balvín and Patrón, 2006; Dourojeanni, 2006). Many have cried out in opposition to this accelerated development as it places Peru, and especially the department of Madre de Dios, in a poor situation: lots of land without official titles; undetermined land-use regulations; little capacity to control for positive use of the highway; and no apparent production to compete with Brazil (Brandon *et al.*, 2005). Already, increasing immigration from Cusco and Puno to rainforest areas is causing deforestation, typically through a change in land use from primary or secondary forest to agriculture (Dourojeanni, 2006).

Ecotourism concession

This precarious situation has elevated the CC's interest in securing its own land and tourism resources. One of those resources is the Tres Chimbadas oxbow lake, located 5 min upriver from Posada Amazonas. Just outside community land, this lake is home for a family of giant river otters, important indicator species of the health of the freshwater ecosystem. The Tres Chimbadas Lake is located a perilous 7 km away from the inter-oceanic highway.

Prior to the Government announcement, Infierno recognized this impending threat and in October 2003 presented an application for a 1700 ha piece of land under the form of an Ecotourism Concession to protect the territories surrounding the lake. The process took almost 3 years, but at last the concession was granted to the community. It is the intention of the community to construct another lodge within this concession and build on the success of Posada Amazonas, which now has a waiting list for visitors. During this application process, Rainforest Expeditions connected Infierno with the Peruvian Society for Environmental Law (SPDA), an NGO

devoted, in part, to supporting private conservation initiatives. For the CC, this reiterated the importance of alliances when pursuing complicated objectives.

However, the concession awarded did not include the Tres Chimbadas Lake itself. Because of unspecific legislation allowing several dependencies of INRENA to have different positions, an outsider was granted the concession to fish the lake. Infierno united with Rainforest Expeditions, other tour operators, SPDA and the FZS to challenge the concession. After many months of continuous meetings, INRENA agreed to revoke the concession. At the present time, Infierno, led by the CC, is forming an association with other tour operators to apply for their own concession to the lake in order to ensure its conservation. While the community will be required to pay for this concession, it will allow them to develop birding trails, access to clay licks, and other indirect uses in the area of the oxbow lake.

Cocococha Lake recreational license

Along with Tres Chimbadas Lake, the Cocococha Lake presents an opportunity to observe giant river otters. However, Cocococha is located within the Tambopata National Reserve, adjacent to Infierno land. Taking a proactive stance, the CC is attempting to secure access to this resource as a backup plan in case all efforts to protect Tres Chimbadas fail. To achieve this, Infierno has applied for a recreational license which will grant permission to take Posada Amazonas tourists on a 2-h walk to the lake.

Promotion of alternative agricultural tendencies

In Infierno, the common agriculture practice is slash and burn. This approach provides nutrients to the soil but only for the first year. Each *comunero* has 30 ha of land. In the majority of cases, 4–5 ha are used for farming and the rest is left as primary or secondary forest. From the year 2000 on, some *comuneros* started to use nitrogen-fixing plants to restore soil fertility and to minimize slash and burn. The coverage, called *mucuna* and *kudzu*, provides nitrogen during the whole year, requiring less investment of labour to have the farm ready to start another crop. Another new technique being promoted within the community, agroforestry, is an approach to farming that integrates short-, medium- and long-term crop plants with fruit- and nut-bearing trees. An agroforestry approach has the potential to increase the overall profitability of the farm.

Incorporating sustainability

Aguaje is a palm tree whose fruit is precious for Amazon people in general. It grows in swampy soils and its season corresponds with the

rains between January and March. Traditionally, harvesting involves cutting the tree down to reach the fruits. In 2006, thanks to a grant from The Netherlands' embassy in Bolivia through World Wide Fund for Nature, a sustainable aguaje harvest committee was formed in the community. The *aguajeros* were very conscious of the need to protect the *aguajales* because every year they needed to walk further and further into the forest to find the aguaje palm trees. The committee implemented a new approach to harvesting aguaje through the use of climbing equipment. CI provided technical assistance and helped organize the *aguajeros* for the coming season. With no complete season totally registered yet, it is too soon to call this project a success. It may still be necessary to provide a market incentive to fully convince the committee about the profitability of sustainable harvest. However, it is certainly another indication of the community's shift in attitudes towards more sustainable approaches.

Perception of resources

In the past, Infierno members hunted certain species for prized feathers or animal skins. It has been a hard task to convince them that a macaw is worth more flying overhead than in a soup or decorating a dress. The same is true with harpy eagles, a highly endangered species that was traditionally hunted for its feathers. When an active harpy nest is found on a community member's property, the owner receives an amount of money for every tourist given the opportunity of viewing it from a distance. This ensures careful stewardship of the nest until the chicks have flown. This maturation process can take up to 8 months and, with a harpy eagle sighting being highly desirable among tourists, this represents a good earning opportunity for a *comunero*. Similarly, the giant otters in the oxbow lakes of Tres Chimbadas and Cocococha were sometimes hunted for their pelts but more often because community members considered them competitors for the lake fish they also eat. Together with the CC, regulations were set that include certain hours when fishing is permitted and restrictions on the type of equipment utilized to fish at the lake.

Satellite Projects

Even with the sharing of economic benefits it was always clear that Posada Amazonas would not cover all families' needs on a year-round basis. In view of all of the supplies and purchases required to operate Posada Amazonas and Rainforest Expeditions' other lodges in the region, it was therefore necessary to develop other business ventures so that Infierno could take advantage of the tourist demand, economic power and secure markets available through these projects.

Handicrafts project

As an additional part of the original contract, the two partners decided that products would be bought locally from the community as long as they met quality requirements and market price. An arts and crafts endeavour was the first to be established. Thanks to a World Bank grant of US\$50,000 in 2000, community artisans built and equipped a workshop in the community and received training to use machines and prepare handicrafts. The products consist primarily of wooden carvings, jewellery composed of rainforest seeds, vine weaving and *yanchama* (traditional tree bark used for dressing). A small store was established at Posada Amazonas to create a secure market for the handicrafts and also to allow tourists to purchase items at the lodge rather than enter the community and disturb *comunero* life. Considering the number of tourists at PAL each year (around 7000), sales are still somewhat low (US\$4600/year). However, there are 14 artisans whose ages range between 25 and 60 years, with an average age of 50. In the majority of cases, artisans devote time to making handicrafts only after meeting their needs for farming, hunting and fishing. It is often very difficult for them to shift the proportion of time dedicated to these traditional activities towards handicrafts until they recognize that the increased profitability can subsidize them. By devoting time to the modestly lucrative artisan activities, *comuneros*, particularly those advanced in age, are able to continue to provide income to the household unit and in some cases may even earn enough to hire younger individuals to assist with taking care of the family farm.

Ñape Center

Ñape is the ethno-botanical centre of the community. It was founded in 1987 to provide traditional health services to the communities of Madre de Dios. Until 2000, it was funded by an NGO which later had to end support for internal institutional reasons. At that time, the managers of Ñape Center approached Rainforest Expeditions and the CC with the goal of selling ethno-botanical tours to lodge visitors and focusing on medicinal properties of various rainforest plants. Since then, Ñape has received approximately 4000 visitors annually, generating US\$12,000 each year. Ñape Center continues to expand and make preparations for the future. The plans include the construction of a laboratory, improved infrastructure for new health services to be offered to tourists, including a sauna, enhanced facilities for mystic tourism involving Ayahuasca sessions with local shamans, direct sale of natural medicines, and production of dyes and soaps to be utilized at Posada Amazonas and other Rainforest Expeditions' lodges (Fig. 3.2).



Fig. 3.2. Indigenous leaders on botanical walk in Posada Amazonas. (Photo: Amanda Stronza.)

Tourist port

Built in 2000 in order to save around US\$10,000 per year in fuel expenses, the tourist port in Infierno consists basically of an access road linking the main Puerto Maldonado–Infierno highway with the Tambopata River. Initial investment was US\$12,000, half of which was donated and half loaned by Rainforest Expeditions to a group of eight community members who agreed to take care of work and manage the port. Once the group paid off the loan, income from the port would pass to the community for another project. So far, Ecorosco SRL, an officially recognized enterprise formed by those eight *comuneros*, has been able to repay US\$5000, maintain the road and port in good shape, and sell its services to other tourism companies at a rate of approximately US\$0.50 per tourist. Annual income from the port is currently around US\$10,000.

Fish farm

Motivated by a personal interest, one of the families in Infierno decided to invest its profit share along with other personal savings to build and operate a *piscigranja*, or fish farm. The farm will raise Amazon species,

such as gamitana, pacotana and paco. As of 2006, the family has managed to supply Posada Amazonas with 10–20 kg of fish per week for nearly 6 continuous months. In 2007, they seeded 4500 more fish, which will be ready to sell in another 6 months. Current annual income from this project is around US\$5000.

Juice factory

In 2000, CI developed a juice facility with the goal of testing whether the sustainable harvest of forest fruits could be a lucrative business for local residents. Unforeseen difficulties saw the plant close a year later. CI intended to transfer technology and know-how to the best available option. In 2004, supported by Rainforest Expeditions, the members of Infierno decided to solicit the transfer. After several months of negotiations, CI agreed to transfer the machinery and know-how to Infierno on the condition that the community and Rainforest Expeditions use Posada Amazonas revenues to fund two wildlife monitors who would continue to gather information about wildlife numbers in the community and the effects of hunting.

Having acquired the equipment and know-how required to produce juice, Infierno then needed a good facility with regular water and electricity services. In July 2005, Industrias Alimenticias Amazónicas EIRL (INALA), a small company in Puerto Maldonado, offered themselves as a partner. Within a few months, an agreement between Infierno and INALA was signed. Formal production of bottled juice and marmalade products started in March 2006, with Posada Amazonas again providing a secure market. At present (2008), this continues to be a small-scale project, staffed primarily by Rainforest Expeditions or INALA staff and involving only a small handful of local producers. Expanding distribution may further increase the economic impact of this facility on the community.

Some Thorns in the Rose

People receiving some kind of economic benefit from the ecotourism project have begun to change their attitude towards some species and the need to protect them. However, the majority of community members still work on their farms, do not participate in conservation efforts, watch without interest as tourists arrive each day and do not receive many direct benefits from the project. Owing to the logistical complexities of monitoring and guarding resources within the rainforest, many know they can easily get away with exploitive behaviours. In such remote and underdeveloped areas, even a 50% increase in income is not enough to elevate many families out of extreme poverty, and in such circumstances, conservation of natural resources is at direct odds with self-preservation. Therefore, despite all the positive changes for conservation and development described earlier, there continue to be many challenges that Posada Amazonas faces.

Trust

One might think that after 11 years of knowing each other, Rainforest Expeditions and the Native Community of Infierno would have developed full trust in each other as partners. However, this is not always the case. While the relationship between both parties has developed in a generally positive direction, there have been tensions between the two that at times nearly led to the demise of the project. So far, the problems have been overcome because the project is important for both partners. The only way to allow trust to reign is to communicate, communicate, communicate. As Kurt Holle, Rainforest Expeditions' co-founder, once said: 'Things get never tired of being clarified'.

Trust is also a challenge within the community. As mentioned at the outset, Infierno is a heterogeneous community formed not just from indigenous Ese'Eja rainforest families but also from the descendents of transplanted Ribereños and colonists from the Andean highlands. These groups often have colliding interests, agendas and *modus operandi*. Trust between the two partners, and within ethnic groups and families in Infierno, will continue to represent a challenge.

Unwillingness to assume responsibility

There are sometimes erratic decisions at the communal level that indirectly affect the normal course of project operations. For instance, the CC carries the responsibility for imposing sanctions on someone who has broken project regulations. Unfortunately, CC members often times choose the Pontius Pilate approach of 'washing their hands', leaving such difficult decisions to the overall Communal Assembly. In other situations, CC members will make difficult decisions among themselves about a certain issue and yet, when presenting the decision to the entire Assembly, have difficulty sharing their position, explaining their votes before the entire hall, or supporting sanctions against close friends or family members. Although the CC was created to make decisions about tourism issues, its representatives often prefer to pass the issue to the larger Assembly. In that context, the 'squeaky wheel gets the oil' where the most vociferous or feared individuals drive the vote. This imbalance subverts the whole purpose of having a CC for making strategic decisions about the ecotourism project.

Lack of development specialist

Members of Infierno participated in the Trueque Amazonica/'Learning Host to Host Project' in 2002–2003, which brought together members of various community-based ecotourism projects in South America. This exchange made clear the need to use each partner to the best of their

capabilities. For instance, the Native Community of Infierno offers natural and cultural resources while Rainforest Expeditions brings its market and operations know-how. However, the exchange also highlighted the importance of a third party devoted to community development who serves as a translator/negotiator between the other two parties. Ideally, these three parties manifest in community-based tourism projects through the involvement of a community, a tourism company and an NGO. While Posada Amazonas is not supported by an NGO per se, that role is performed by a Community Project Office and the Community Project Coordinator. Despite an impressive history of grant acquisition, workshops, training and development consultation for the community, this office continues to lack human and financial resources needed to cover many of Infierno's needs.

Paradigm shifts

Because their rainforest environment features such an abundance and diversity of plant and animal resources, *comuneros* in Infierno sometimes ignore the need for long-term planning. Most of their basic food and water needs are easily satisfied. This makes it difficult to convince them of the need to plan and prepare for long- or even medium-term benefits. Such a shift in thinking is slowly happening across these ten initial years of the project. Maybe with a development NGO as a partner, this change could have been facilitated many years earlier.

Relationships with research institutions in Puerto Maldonado, like the Peruvian Institute for Amazon Studies, allow information sharing between scientists and *comuneros*. Such relationships have been crucial to the development of the aforementioned satellite projects. Yet problems persist. Good organization in a traditional forest community involves the idea that everyone does more or less the same work and therefore receives more or less the same benefit from it. However, these new endeavours involve a paradigm shift towards more capitalistic notions of organization that reward accordingly those who specialize and contribute more. While such a shift may increase production and sales, it may come at the expense of the community's social order.

Ownership

While knowledge of its ownership of Posada Amazonas has done much to empower the community of Infierno, it may have come with some negative consequences. Having been the benefactor of many collaborations, a 'what's in it for us?' ownership attitude has come to reign in the community that at times seems to have less to do with pride in the project than with exacting overly favourable benefit from, or even abusing, potential partners such as Rainforest Expeditions, NGOs and researchers.

While being able to act in one's own best interest is the goal of empowerment, a flippant attitude towards potential partners combined with short-term thinking may cause Infierno to lose out on future opportunities of the kind that have been responsible for its success to date. This then begs the question of whether or not simply paying dividends for land use in future ecotourism development would produce the same outcomes for conservation and development that have been seen in Infierno through the current ownership-oriented contract.

Hidden costs and lost opportunities

Making decisions and advising the community on development issues require additional costs that typical tourism companies do not often provide for. The expenses of a dedicated Community Project Office and corresponding Coordinator's salary, transportation between the Rainforest Expeditions' office in Puerto Maldonado and Infierno, and even small costs such as meals for CC and Rainforest Expeditions members during each meeting, are important details easily overlooked. Even anticipated training expenditures, already high due to constant staff rotation, have exceeded projections.

One reason for this is an unforeseen consequence of the initial contract itself. Designed to promote community involvement, the contract for Posada Amazonas includes a mandatory rotation among staff, the intent being to develop expertise in the various positions required to operate an ecolodge. However, once trained, many members prefer to stay at one particular position. This has led to an exodus of trained, experienced staff to other lodges that do not have a rotation requirement. Posada Amazonas is then required to recruit from a smaller pool of potential staff, is often forced to involve more youths who have demonstrated less responsibility towards their jobs, and must spend additional revenues on training.

Finally, hindsight has revealed some missed opportunities for ecotourism partners. While Infierno has benefited from investments in its educational system, Rainforest Expeditions now recognizes the lost opportunity of not investing more in education at the outset. As noted with respect to staff rotation, Posada Amazonas relies more on the youth of the community each day, and a generation has already been lost to a poor public school system that does little to foster a conservation ethic.

Conclusions and Expectations About the Future

Ecotourism can effectively be used as a tool to achieve economic development and this can bring a connected benefit of environmental conservation. In many ways, Posada Amazonas proves this ideal. However, as described here, the true integration of conservation and development through ecotourism has been a challenging and time-

consuming process. Posada Amazonas has also benefited from certain advantages at the outset. For example, the community of Infierno already had 30% of its land set aside as a Communal Reserve. How many countries or regions have that amount of territory turned into protected areas? Peru as a whole only has 13% of its land under some form of protection (www.peru.info).

There are also important consequences of tourism revenues entering the community that may be at odds with a conservation ethic. How can we judge a community member for buying a chainsaw, or a television, or a boat motor, to make his or her daily life easier? While Infierno decided 20 years ago to protect a large portion of its land, it still has the right to use the rest in any way it wants. Yet as long as the ultimate decision-making authority of the community is respected, cannot we, as outsiders who have links with other realities, offer suggestions and help communities to make informed decisions? We need to collaborate by presenting different and successful alternatives, always keeping in mind as a mandatory requirement to show first and foremost the economic benefits and time investment involved. An important lesson from Posada Amazonas is that many conservation initiatives undertaken by Infierno were initially driven by economic motives rather than conservation ones.

As the end of the 20-year contract nears, Posada Amazonas stands at a crossroads: a savvy set of community partners who yearn for its independence yet still lack vital expertise, and a business partner that hopes to continue to earn profits while also fulfilling its commitment to integrated conservation and development. The case of Posada Amazonas will no doubt continue to be one of interest for ecotourism practitioners and researchers for years to come.

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