Importance of Economic Diversity in Community-Based Ecotourism to Support Sustainable Development: Culturally Defined Models of Reduced Extraction in a Meta-Analysis and Field Study

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Abstract for Paper Presentation:

This research comes from a field study in the Peruvian cloudforest and a meta-analysis of 30 community-based ecotourism enterprises located in protected terrestrial and marine areas that are also defined as biodiversity hotspots. One common phenomenon that appeared in the meta-analysis was the existence of multiple income sources in several of the community-based ecotourism enterprises. Economic sustainability is often the sustainability factor that is most lacking in community-based ecotourism because of the low cost/low accommodation/low impact that must be maintained to avoid mass tourism. Some of these enterprises utilize multiple income sources such as medicinal gardens to supplement the economic factor, and others continue to practice agriculture in the form of agroforestry and seasonal fishing instead of slash and burn agriculture and year round marine extraction.

It is imperative to understand that these unsustainable forms of agriculture and marine extraction are typically the only sources of income for the host population, so the economic factor for community-based ecotourism weighs heavily on the potential for longevity of the ecotourism enterprise. Through this meta-analysis, there are examples of culturally defined methods of agriculture and marine extraction that adhere to reduced environmental disturbance and at the same time allow the host community to continue to produce cash crops in conjunction with the ecotourism business. At times, the agricultural methods are used as an attraction through agrotourism and volunteer tourism. By creating reduced extraction and sustainable agricultural methods, the local population gains empowerment and a greater sense of control over their economic growth and maintenance because the method is not foreign to them. For the continuation of conservation through community-based ecotourism, reduced extraction models that adhere to the local culture are a determining factor for success and replicability in the region.