



**MESOAMERICAN
BARRIER REEF SYSTEMS
PROJECT
(MBRS)**



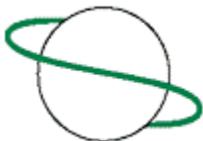
**DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE MBRS SUSTAINABLE
TOURISM FORUM**

**PART I – OPERATIONAL MANUAL
PART II – BELIZE FORUM 2002**



(Revised for Web Publishing)

March 2003



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**CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE USE
OF THE
MESOAMERICAN BARRIER REEF SYSTEMS PROJECT
(MBRS)**

Belize – Guatemala – Honduras - Mexico



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LIST OF ACRONYMS USED

BEST	Business Enterprises for Sustainable Travel
CARICOMP	Caribbean Coastal Marine Productivity Program
CCAD	Comisión Centroamericana de Ambiente y Desarrollo
CEP	Caribbean Environment Program
DANIDA	Danish Development Organization
EIA	Environmental Impact Analysis
EIS	Environmental Impact Study
FUNDEMUN	Fundación para el Desarrollo Municipal
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (German development organization)
GWU	George Washington University
IDB	Interamerican Development Bank
IUCN	World Conservation Union
MBRS	Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OAS	Organization of American States
PA	Protected Area
PROARCA	Programa Ambiental Regional para Centro America
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
TRA	Tourism Rapid Assessment
TRIGOH	Tri-national Organization for the Golf of Honduras
SME	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
STEP	Small Tourism Enterprises Project
STSC	Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNAID	United States Agency for International Development
URI/CRC	University of Rhode Island/Coastal Resources Center

WB	World Bank
WH	World Heritage
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development
WTO	World Tourism Organization

PROLOGUE

Every day more is recognized by different sectors that in the countries of MBRS region, coastal marine tourism is being increased, constituting in one of the most important economic activities and also, actually is considered one of the touristy ways of mayor interest in the global scale.

The scenic beauty, the diversity of natural and cultural resources, immerse in the magnificence of the Caribbean sea, attracts a massive tourist visit from cruises, yachts, air way and terrestrial that in a good percentage is focus in natural attractions and at the same time, these focus in the different reefs assemble of the Caribbean.

This tourism can impact negatively in the ecosystems and human communities close to the Marine Protected Areas (MPA's) if politics focus to the implementation of practices and principles of sustainable tourism within MBRS region through regional cooperation are not promoted.

This is why the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System Project (MBRS) pretends to prevent and to disseminate examples that demonstrate how to minimize the adverse impacts of tourism and potentate those effects that benefit the resources and coastal marine habitats as well as the human communities located close to the touristy destinies.

An important step in the search of achieving the previous actions is the formulation of political lineaments and better practice models for a sustainable coastal marine tourism in the four nations of the MBRS through the establishment of a Regional Forum of Sustainable Tourism.

The Project for the MBRS, with the support of international Experts from the firm Hawkins and Associates Inc., four national experts, one from each country of the region and the team of the Project Unit Coordinator (PUC) initiated the process of Design and Implementation of the Regional Forum of Sustainable Tourism for the region of MBRS.

In such sense the First Regional Forum is conducted and its product, the PUC, by the Regional Direction with much joy and an enormous satisfaction, puts at disposition of the MBRS region this working tool that offers directories produced by the key actors of the four countries.

The present document presents two sections, an Operative Manual of the Regional Forum and the results of the First Regional Forum in Belize with concrete recommendations that ease the formulation of tourism policies that can support the MPA's directors in its protection and management.

Likewise, recommendations to reach the agreement of the touristy industry and the non governmental organizations in the evaluation of environmental impacts, acceptable site limits visits, inspections and the development of consensus in prioritize actions and regional strategies for the better practices in the coastal marine tourism.

We hope that the present tool contributes to the promotion of an ecological tourism and environmentally sustainable in our four countries and we trust that the dialogue space offered by the Regional Forum eases the regional agreements in the different sectors and groups of interest that can be converted into Regional Policies.

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System (MBRS) in Central America extends from Isla Contoy on the north of the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico to the Bay Islands of Honduras, includes the second longest barrier reef in the world. It is unique in the Western hemisphere due to its length, composition of reef types, and diverse assemblage of corals and related species.

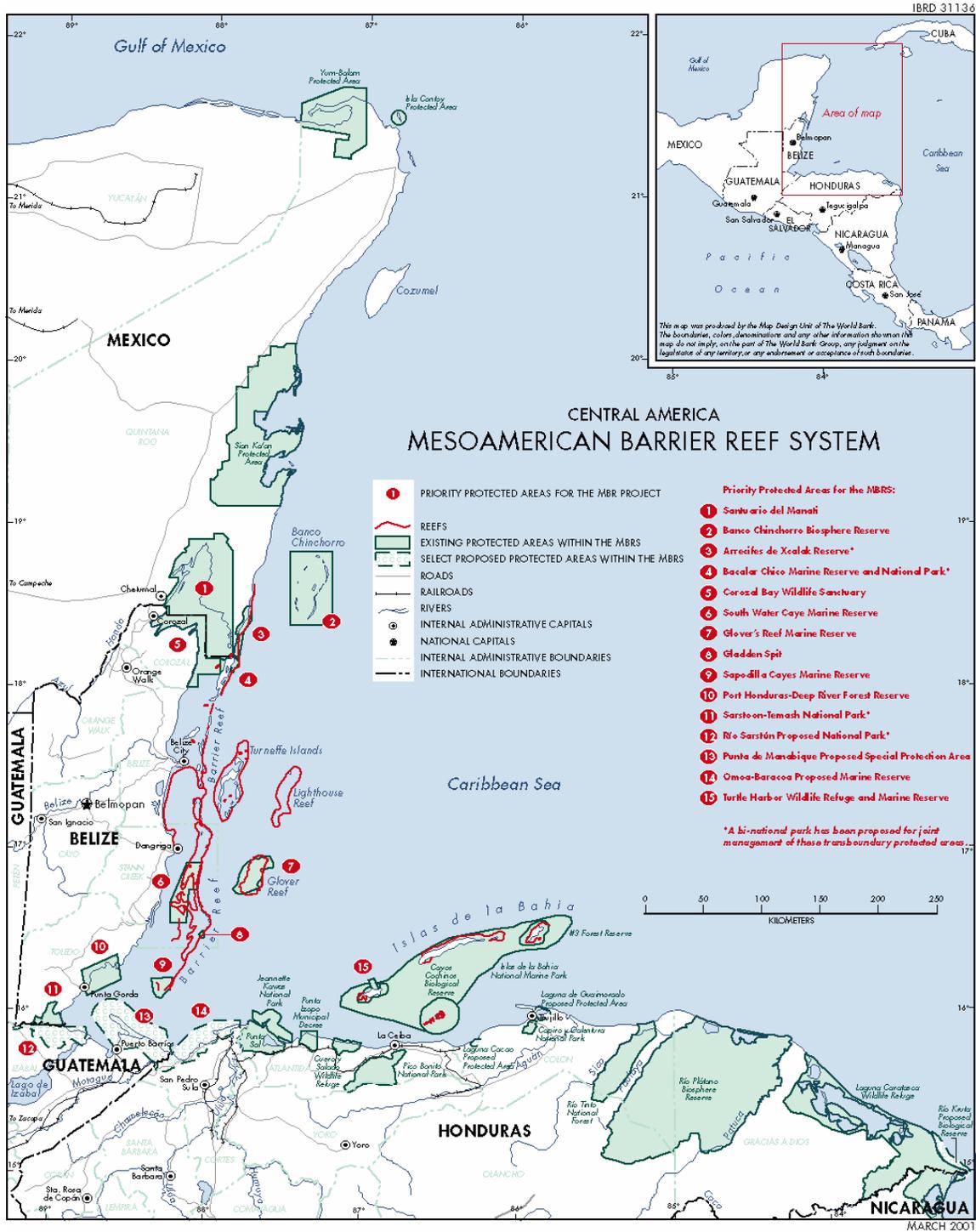
The MBRS contributes to the stabilization and protection of coastal landscapes, maintenance of coastal water quality, and serves as breeding and feeding grounds for marine mammals, reptiles, fish and invertebrates, many of which are of commercial importance. The MBRS is also of immense socio-economic significance providing employment and a source of income to an estimated one million people living in adjacent coastal areas.

The goal of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System Project is to enhance protection of the unique and vulnerable marine ecosystems comprising the MBRS, and to assist the countries of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras y Mexico to strengthen and coordinate national policies, regulations, and institutional arrangements for the conservation and sustainable use of this global public good. This Project is part of long-term program to safeguard the integrity and continued productivity of the MBRS. The MBRS initiative is being actively promoted by a variety of donors and partners in the region and within the context of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor.

Central to the MBRS is the Belize Barrier Reef Reserve System, inscribed as a World heritage Site in 1996 by the World Heritage Center of UNESCO under natural criteria (ii), (iii) and (iv) as the largest barrier reef in the Northern hemisphere, as a serial nomination consisting of seven sites. The Reef illustrates a classic example of reefs through fringing, barrier and atoll reef types. The MBRS has established 15 priority protected areas in its four country region, which are described in the map on the following page.

The MBRS Tourism Forum is related to Component 3 of the MBRS Project: Promoting Sustainable Use of the MBRS; Sub-component B - Facilitation of Sustainable Coastal and Marine Tourism. The objective of this tourism sub-component is to formulate and facilitate the application of policy guidelines and best practice models for sustainable coastal and marine tourism in the four countries of the MBRS. Adoption of industry codes of conduct may then lead to regionally recognized certification schemes for tourist operations and eventually entire destinations within the MBRS.

MBRS Map



Hawkins and Associates, Inc was engaged to assist the MBRS staff and National Consultants from Belize, Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala in the development of the Forum. The objectives of the consultancy were to:

1. design and implement a regional forum, entitled the “Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System (MBRS) Sustainable Tourism Forum” (hereafter referred to as “the Forum”) to facilitate a tourism policy supported by the four countries that are consistent with marine conservation objectives and sustainability principles.
2. develop an operational manual, which will be used in the training of regional personnel on how to organize and operate the Forum.
3. conduct a strategic planning and design workshop to facilitate the Forum’s establishment.
4. provide recommendations for the Forum’s development over a five-year period, including a detailed description of the initial planning process.

The following assumptions were stated:

- Coastal tourism applies to both coastal and marine tourism. Coastal tourism is defined as tourism brought to bear on the marine environment and its natural and cultural resources... most [of which] takes place in the coastal zone- along the shore lands and in the water immediately adjacent to the shoreline; it occurs outdoors and indoors, as recreation sport and play, and as leisure and business.
- Coastal tourism in the four MBRS countries should reflect a regionally-accepted set of policy guidelines and best practices related to sustainability principles and marine conservation objectives.
- The Forum should form strategic alliances with other regional bodies focused on sustainable tourism - including the Mundo Maya organization and the Mesoamerican Ecotourism Alliance, coordinated by the Rare Center for Tropical Conservation, Proyecto para la Consolidación del Corredor Biológico Mesoamericano, among others.
- The Forum will operate as a public/private sector coordination body that will influence tourism policy and involve collaborative action. It will focus on:
 - policy issues that need to be addressed nationally and regionally,
 - existing sustainable tourism initiatives in the region,
 - strategies for harmonizing sustainable tourism and conservation of natural and cultural resources
 - identifying and encouraging key stakeholders to participate in Forum.
 - ensuring participation of representatives from relevant organizations, agencies and businesses involved in tourism in the region

- developing recommendations for priority actions

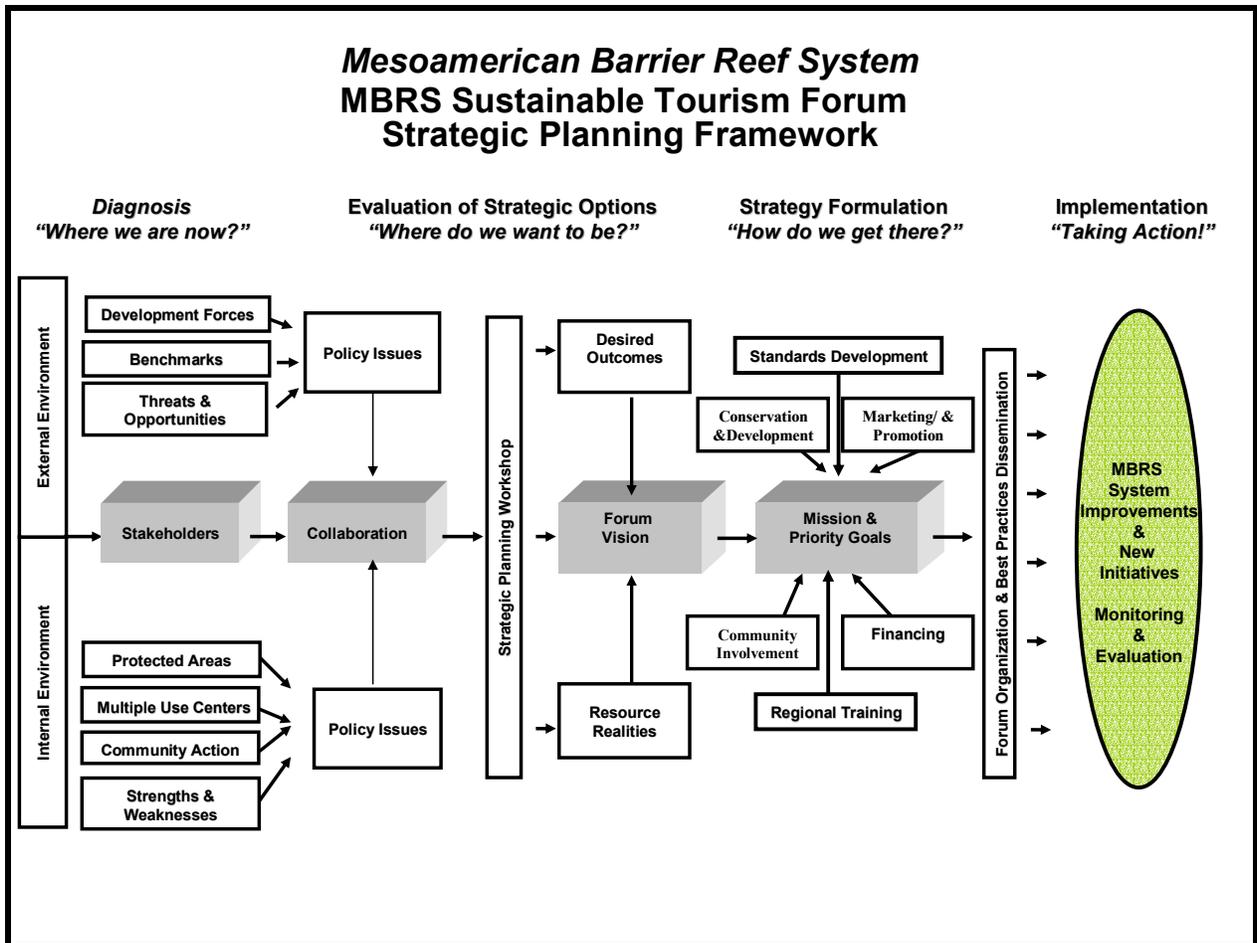
- The Forum will engage in a strategic planning process which is acceptable to key stakeholders in the MBRS countries.

This Report is divided into two parts: Part I is an operational manual related specifically to the development of a regional policy dialogue and a cooperative action forum which shall be referred to as the MBRS Tourism Forum; Part II is a report on the first MBRS Tourism Forum held in Belize on December 5 -6, 2002.

PART I: OPERATIONAL MANUAL

1. STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

This manual will be used to guide the strategic planning process, with particular focus on facilitating the strategic planning workshop at the first meeting of the Forum held on December 5 and 6, 2002 in Belize City, Belize. The development of the workshop program and procedure was conceived by the International Consultants hired to support planning and design of the Forum with input from the four National Forum Consultants and the MBRS Project Coordinating Unit. Identification of participants for the initial meeting was carried out by the Consultants who selected representatives of the public and private sector sustainable tourism initiatives of the four countries of the region.



2. SITUATION ANALYSIS AND DIAGNOSIS

2.1 EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

2.1.1 DEVELOPMENT FORCES

Tourism is the world's fastest growing industry. Tourist arrivals to the Central America sub region represented the highest average annual percentage growth increase within the Americas region over the past 3 years. A large part of this growth is in nature-based tourism, relying on the amenities or attractions of the Caribbean Basin's unique marine environment. The MBRS still boasts some of the least spoiled coastal profiles and some of the most outstanding underwater experiences in the Caribbean. However, in the absence of adequate environmental management guidelines or regulatory regimes, proliferation of traditional sea and sun tourism in parts of the region has occurred, putting many of these amenities at risk. There is a critical need to stimulate an on-going policy dialogue and take specific steps to ensure that sustainable tourism principles and practices are implemented through regional cooperation in fast growing tourism destinations within the region.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS

Based on the review of literature and discussions with selected scientists in the four countries, the following categories were seen as the principal threats resulting from tourism-related development in the study conducted for the MBRS¹:

- Coastal/Island development and unsustainable tourism, which includes urban, hotel and resort development and related infrastructure, together with all the direct and indirect impacts that these bring to bear on the MBRS (pollution/contamination, nutrification, sedimentation, physical reef damage, impacts to estuary and lagoons and mangrove destruction, beach erosion, and habitat change.
- Land clearing and construction activities for urban, tourism and industrial developments in coastal areas involve removal of natural vegetation, dredging, filling, channelization and draining, and sand and coral rock mining in mangrove, dune communities, wetlands, shorelines and adjacent areas. These actions can cause changes in local currents and flushing in bays, onshore and offshore erosion and sedimentation of seagrass beds, adjacent reefs and navigation channels, and result in a loss of protection from storms and hurricanes.

¹ Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Meso-American Barrier Reef System: Threat and Root Cause Analysis (Draft) October 10, 1999

- Siltation and agricultural runoff can seriously impact the productivity of sea grasses, such as *Thalassia testudinum*, as their leaves are smothered and photosynthesis interrupted (Heyman, 1996).
- Coral reefs grow at slower rates in areas of high sedimentation, and species changes occur in response to such conditions, with more tolerant coral species found in more highly-sedimented areas, especially on near-shore patch reefs (Hall, 1994). Similar problems occur with the disturbance of the Zooxanthellae symbiotic algae, if light restricts their photosynthesis or impacted by herbicides (even in low concentrations), that may die or leave its host corals, resulting in bleaching or death of the latter.
- Construction can also result in fracturing and stress of terrestrial, riparian, coastal, estuarine and nearby reef ecosystems resulting in changes in composition of species.
- As the residential and tourist populations grow, increased consumption of water from surface and ground water sources (especially on islands) can induce salt intrusion and changes in ecosystem function, and decrease the availability of local and regional water supply.
- Disposal or spills of untreated liquid organic and chemical wastes, whether domestic, industrial, agricultural runoff (including fertilizers and pesticides) or oil or formation waters from petroleum drilling locations, can cause eutrophication and/or chemical contamination of estuaries, bays, wetlands, reefs and sea grass beds, potentially causing massive kills of, and sublethal impacts to, aquatic organisms in fresh, salt and brackish water environments, and further affect related trophic chains. The disposal of solid wastes into coastal rivers, the sea, shorelines and estuaries, impacts fishes and reef organisms and reduces the aesthetic value of the tourism resources. The combination of nutrients and chemical contaminants is thought to exacerbate coral diseases and bleaching and/or stress their recovery.
- Many tourist sites are over-saturated with visitors, beyond their carrying capacities, both from biophysical and management perspectives. Punta Nizuc Reef in Quintana Roo, for example, has an average of 1,500 snorklers per day arriving on 21 large tour boats and 650 two-seater jet skis (J. Bezaury, 1999). Improper diving, fishing and recreational activities by tourists and nearby residents has caused physical and biological damage to island environments, reefs and beaches.
- Many of the coastal and marine protected areas are under financed and exist more “on paper” than in reality, as monitoring and enforcement actions are deficient. Immigration induced by the growing tourism service sector and availability of employment opportunities can lead to the proliferation of poorly planned residential neighborhoods without adequate basic human services. This can lead to sanitation and human disease problems, the exacerbation of social problems, and pressure on adjacent natural resources as people of limited economic means cut mangroves for fuel and building supplies and fish for subsistence and income.
- Ever-increasing cruise ship and live aboard tourism, which were predicted to add an additional 20 ships and 2,000,000 passengers to the Caribbean in the year 2000, can produce similar impacts experienced in urban areas if not regulated. Belize has an average of 3,000 cruise ship and live-aboard visitors per day (Belize

Tourist Board, personal communication, 1999).

- Pulses of high numbers of tourists can overtax public services, reduce local food stocks, and generate vast amounts of solid and liquid wastes that must be accommodated by municipalities in the MBRS, and present challenges for police. If these ships visit offshore island and coral reef sites, waste management problems become more acute, and inexperienced and/or unsupervised divers and snorklers may present problems of coral breakage and predation and uncontrolled fishing.

MARKET FORCES

It is important to monitor changes in the market. Specific segments linked to visitor interest in marine and terrestrial protected areas include ecotourism, adventure travel, scuba diving, and reef recreation. Market research needs are listed in the following box:

MARKET RESEARCH NEEDS

- What are the current travel profiles and outlook for conventional tourism and marine ecotourism in the Caribbean Basin and international markets?
- What is the public awareness level and attitudes concerning MBRS Protected Area?
- What is the role of travel agents and tour operators?
- How can the studies of ecotourism in nine major market generating countries conducted by WTO be applied to the MBRS Region?

2.1.2 BENCHMARKS

Emphasis needs to be placed on learning from other destinations that have experience in mitigating tourism impact and creating sustainable marine ecotourism in other destinations with world class coral reef resources, including:

- Red Sea Coast and Sinai, Egypt
- Galapagos Islands, Ecuador
- Philippines Palawan and selected sites
- Indonesia Komodo World Heritage Site
- Australia's Great Barrier Reef

The MBRS Project plans to develop a Catalogue of Exemplary Practices. International and regional organizations have invested considerable resources in developing sustainable tourism guidelines and codes of conduct. Through literature search and interviews with sustainable tourism experts, good practice should be identified and adapted for use in coastal and marine

environments. This catalogue should include voluntary codes of conduct in critical segments of the coastal and marine tourism industry which need to be considered and adopted by tourism-related businesses.

2.1.3 CAUSES OF THREATS

The focus of background study on Threats and Root Causes² conducted in the formulation of the MBRS strategy focused on deteriorating environmental conditions. Some of the threats resulting from tourism development have been listed above. Causes are discussed below.

Land-based sources contribute nearly 77% of the total pollution load to the oceans, with 44% from improperly-treated discharges of wastes and runoff and 33% from deposited from atmospheric sources (UNEP, 1992). The intermediate causes of threats of inappropriate coastal development and unsustainable tourism are linked primarily to the inability, or lack of will, to enforce compliance of existing laws and regulations regarding environmental impact assessment and land-use zoning. In some cases, laws do not have clear regulations that would provide guidance to developers, and land-use plans are non-existent. There is a notable lack of land-use/integrated coastal management plans and zoning. With the exception of Mexico, the absence of environmental codes & standards for land development, buildings, resource utilization, and waste treatment and disposal limits developers' guidance in meeting environmental protection standards, and the ability of government authorities to enforce the same. In addition, the technical professional capability in the countries to prepare EIAs is grossly deficient. The absence or poor quality of baseline information on natural resources and ecological interactions, especially in island settings, needed to prepare land-use plans, EIAs, and follow-up environmental monitoring complicates these efforts.

Another intermediate cause of the threats is the failure to control of settlement and inappropriate land use in marginal areas not environmentally fit for habitation, especially national & municipal properties including mangroves, beaches, wetlands and near lagoons. The burgeoning immigration to coastal areas and tourism centers from other parts of the country, by peoples in search of economic opportunity and improved social services, overstrains municipal authorities' ability to control development and exerts pressure on the local and sub-regional resources base.

The desire of developers to institute the high-value, cosmopolitan, full-service resort tourism model, not environmentally adaptable in the certain locations, also tends to complicate land-use planning and environmental protection efforts. The ever-increasing volume of cruise ship tourists has outpaced the countries' regulatory framework, and tourism and environmental protection authorities are racing to accommodate this tourism sector with infrastructure and waste management facilities. Many of the coastal and marine protected areas are, in reality, under-protected since meager investments by governments and the failure of police and judicial authorities to enforce regulations, even when these are denounced by protected areas managers.

Behind these intermediate causes stands a series of structural root causes of political and economic origin. First and foremost would be the lack of education and awareness of the impacts of development actions in the coastal environment at all levels, from local resource

² Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Meso-American Barrier Reef System: Threat and Root Cause Analysis (Draft) October 10, 1999

users up to national government policy makers. In many cases there is a strong political lobby from vested economic interests, especially the industrialists and land developers, to avoid encumbering their development activities with the costs of environmental protection, which are seen as a low priority and “unbearable cost that reduces international competitiveness”. These premises are supported by the non-sustainable economic development model promoted by most national and local governments, which is fraught with economic distortions, including subsidies to favored sectors and “friends”. Large-scale industrial, agricultural and tourism developers have long enjoyed numerous subsidies which encourage overuse of resources and avoidance of incorporating environmental mitigation into their projects. This non-incorporation of the environmental costs of development into national accounts actually promotes environmental degradation and coastal resources depredation.

These same distortions tend to place the rural poor at a disadvantage. Weak land tenure policies favor large landowners and restrict access of the poor to land needed, in most cases, for subsistence agriculture. This is complicated by the levels of poverty in rural areas due to the lack of employment opportunities, the failing natural resource base, and lack of investments in rural areas for basic social services (clean water, education, transport, healthcare). As these conditions worsen, the rural poor set out in search of other opportunities, with an increasing number heading to coastal areas.

Finally, with the exception of Belize and the State of Quintana Roo, there is an absence of an integrated coastal resources management policy and related laws and regulations. The lack of national investments in investigation and monitoring of coastal environmental processes and the impacts of development complicates the development of regulatory frameworks. Also, the authority for enforcing existing coastal resources and environmental management regulations is scattered among numerous government institutions, leading to low priorities and investments in the enforcement of existing regulations.

There has not been much attention given to the opportunities that can be developed through more sustainable forms of tourism—particularly ecotourism focused on poverty reduction, community involvement, and increased funding for protected areas. One of the exercises in the strategic planning workshop for the Forum is designed to involve participants in identifying major threats and opportunities.

2.2 INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

2.2.1 PROTECTED AREAS

There has always been strength in numbers. Tourism development is no different. In order to be competitive, all destination players must work together by identifying the elements that make up the destination, beginning with the reasons tourists will travel to the area, the services available to them and the activities that support the tourist services. Tourism development should meet three concurrent goals which must be addressed using sustainable principles and practices: (1) biodiversity conservation: protecting natural and cultural resources; (2) poverty reduction through SME development, job creation, and social equity measures; and (3) business viability through access to capital, return on investment and profitability. Key terms are defined as follows:

BIODIVERSITY The variety of life in all its forms, levels and combinations, including ecosystem diversity, species diversity, and genetic diversity.

CONSERVATION The management of human use of organisms or ecosystems to ensure such use is sustainable. Besides sustainable use, conservation includes protection, maintenance, rehabilitation, restoration, and enhancement of populations and ecosystems.

PROTECTED AREA An area dedicated primarily to protection and enjoyment of natural or cultural heritage, to maintenance of biodiversity, and/or to maintenance of life-support services.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM An umbrella concept which embraces all types of tourism which maintain the environmental, social and economical integrity and well being of natural and cultural resources in perpetuity. Sustainable tourism involves the optimal use of natural, cultural, social and financial resources for sustainable development on an equitable and self-sustaining basis to provide a unique visitor experience and an improved quality of life through partnership among government, the private sector and communities

ECOTOURISM A subset of sustainable tourism, referring to tourism that is carried out in relatively undisturbed natural areas (a concept which covers a wide spectrum, from pristine nature to more or less degraded habitats) and which serves as a tool for conservation and sustainable development of local communities. The IUCN definition is: "Ecotourism is environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features - both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations". The main components and issues that should be considered in any ecotourism activity are, broadly speaking: nature, local community, economics, conservation, culture, and interpretation.

COMPETITIVE CLUSTER The "competitive cluster" concept is a strategic set of activities and services organized as an effective ecotourism supply chain. The core of the "cluster" is the comparative advantage represented by a protected area's natural attractions and biodiversity. The competitive cluster is used to examine and support a set of strategic relationships between donors, the private sector and government in a specific program of support to ecotourism development linked to improved management of a country's protected areas.

MULTIPLE USE CENTERS A fundamental element in the administration and management of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) is the basic infrastructure, which facilitates planning processes, strengthens administrative capacity and allows personnel involved in MPA management to implement the measures defined in their Operational Plans, thereby impacting on management effectiveness. The basic infrastructure should include a Visitor Center, which offers different types of information including the characteristics and objectives of the MPA, maps, species, regulations, temporary exhibitions, etc., and in which it is ideal to have a place for oral and audiovisual presentations.

2.2.2 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Indications are that community awareness promotes sustainable practices. Educating the local community, and in some cases, the tourist, is increasing important. By understanding why it is important to protect an area, residents are given the opportunity to make educated decisions about their quality of life and to comprehend the reasons why tourists visit their destination.

One of the most common ways of fostering education and community awareness is through benchmarks or best practices. There are many sources of best practices. The World Travel and Tourism Council has developed an on-going series entitled *Steps to Success*. *Steps to Success* offers a variety of "real-life" case studies in key areas of management and training. The publication is designed to offer practical information relating to travel and tourism, including customer service training, intercultural training, specialty training, peer training, institutional frameworks, management tools and practices, travel & tourism human resource development. Further information about *Steps to Success* can be found at <http://www.wttc.org/resourceCentre/publications.asp>

An additional tool for best practice identification has been developed by Business Enterprises for Sustainable Travel (BEST). Through a monthly publication, BEST highlights successful business practices utilized by travel and tourism companies that advance their business objectives while enhancing the social and economic well being of destination communities. Examples featured in this series are drawn from BEST's extensive and ever-growing database of the latest sustainable travel and tourism practices. Further information can be found at <http://www.sustainabletravel.org/practices.cfm>.

2.2.3 ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

There are extensive organizational elements involved in the MBRS Project, including:

- Comisión Centroamericana de Ambiente y Desarrollo (CCAD)
- Ministers with Environment, Coastal Zone or Tourism Portfolios in the four MBRS project countries
- Project Coordination Unit
- National Barrier Reef Committees
- Technical Working Groups
- Technical Advisory Committee
- Consultative Group
- Governments
- Non-Governmental Organizations
- Consultants
- Universities

In addition, there are a number of projects concerning tourism, conservation, environment and sustainable development in the region. See Annex 3 and 4 for listings of related projects. With so many national and regional initiatives, it is not surprising that the level of coordination has been very limited. Coordination among bilateral and multilateral organizations, whether at the country or regional level, has been poor, resulting in instances of duplication of activities, several with the same counterpart institutions. While many of these national and regional projects support activities that coincide thematically with the proposed MBRS project, they do not have uniform geographical coverage throughout the MBRS region.

Thus, it will be important for managers of the current MBRS project to forge collaborations in order to create operational synergies. In this way, they can make best use of the limited resources available to assist in the development of the Tourism Forum.

3. EVALUATION OF STRATEGIC OPTIONS

3.1 STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION

Some destinations now acknowledge that operating in a sustainable manner can minimize costs and protect the surrounding environment, which in many cases, is the basis for the appeal of their destination to tourists. According to Simpson, “recent attitudes to the sustainability of tourism development have tended to move away from an initial approach which classified all forms of activity as sustainable (‘good’ tourism) alongside another style simultaneously condemning unsustainable (‘bad’ tourism)” (Simpson, 2001). Simpson then explains that the importance of sustainable tourism is to set a “global target to which all forms of tourism must necessarily aspire.”

According to Simpson, sustainable tourism development should be:

- **Comprehensive** – including social, cultural, environmental, economical and political implications
- **Iterative and dynamic** – readily responding to environmental and political changes
- **Integrative** – functioning within wider approaches to community development
- **Community oriented** – all stakeholder needs addressed through community involvement
- **Renewable** – incorporating principles which take into account the needs of future generations
- **Goal oriented** – a portfolio of realistic targets results in equitable distribution of benefits

As the principles above indicate, every tourism destination is made up of any number of interested parties that are directly or indirectly affected by tourists visiting their location. Stakeholders range from private sector participants such as hotels, restaurants, transportation companies, and related businesses to public sector including local and regional governments. Stakeholders also include non-governmental organizations, private-public partnership entities and product suppliers, among others. There are those that argue that even the natural environment constitutes a stakeholder. Finally, the stakeholder group most directly affected by tourism development is most often the local community.

General management literature has evolved to include an array of stakeholder and participatory theories, including stakeholder theory, organization theory, strategic alliance and network theory, all focused on the basic notion that the “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” In 1984, Freeman first presented the notion of stakeholders, explaining that a “stakeholder in an organization is (by definition) any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (Freeman, 1984). While Freeman intended

stakeholder theory to focus on a firm or company, the underlying premise is very much applicable to tourism destinations. In most cases where tourism occurs, there are groups of stakeholders directly affected. How tourism develops and its subsequent impact on the social and natural environment of a destination is very much determined by the stakeholders that lead the development, implementation or management processes. Although each destination may have a similar group of stakeholders, it is the party that leads or “pushes” tourism development that will determine to what degree the needs of each stakeholder, including the natural environment, are protected. These development “pushers” or “tourism entry points” range from tour operators, resort developers, non-governmental organizations, local/national governments and local communities pushing for tourism development. Additionally, specific situations such as the need to protect a National Park or to manage a coastal area or recover from a catastrophic event such as a natural disaster, war or terrorist attack may serve as a tourism entry point.

Failure to include all key stakeholders within a destination is the most common cause of discord and ultimately, failure of a tourism destination. In other destinations around the world, tourism has been developed without any attention given to those that will be most directly affected by it. The most effective way, although not always the easiest way, to ensure that all of the needs of each stakeholder are developed in a manner that protects the natural and social environment as well as fosters economic sustainability is to include each stakeholder in the planning process. For destinations to be competitive the stakeholders described below—businesses, government, NGOs, others—need to be organized to form effective competitive clusters.

There are several methods of fostering stakeholder participation. Recently, Conservation International and the George Washington University with support from USAID developed the Tourism Rapid Assessment (TRA) Tool. This tool is designed to perform a rapid assessment and analysis of a tourism destination through a participatory planning process. The assessment can be used for policy debates, for developing a conservation strategy, for determining focus areas for development assistance, and for planning and implementing tourism development. This tool is primarily designed to assess nature-based tourism in rural communities in urban communities. This instrument takes into account the importance of large-scale mass tourism, but focuses primarily on smaller-scale, niche market tourism. The TRA is currently being tested in both Ghana and Niger. Further information regarding the TRA can be found at <http://www.raise.org/tourism/>. As the world moves towards a global economy and boundaries continue to blur. It is no longer effective to operate with the “each man is an island” mentality. Creating strategic partnerships and competitive clusters strengthens a destination and enables it to compete on a greater plain while reducing individual economic liability.

3.2 POLICY ISSUES

The MBRS Project has already undertaken several policy related activities which should be taken into consideration.

- The first meeting of the MBRS Southern Transboundary Park Commission (Honduras, Guatemala, and Belize) took place from May 27 to 29, 2002, in Puerto Barrios, Izabal, Guatemala. In this first meeting, the Tri-national Organization for the Golf of Honduras (TRIGOH), which comprises environmental NGOs and the academic sector of the Caribbean region, accepted the responsibility of being the MBRS Southern Commission. The meeting was attended by 30 participants, who on this occasion also included representatives from the governments of these three countries.

- Similarly, the first meeting of the MBRS Northern Transboundary Park Commission (Belize-Mexico) was held from June 26 to 28 of this year, at the University of Quintana Roo, Chetumal, Quintana Roo, Mexico. The Belize-Mexico Alliance for the Management of Common Coastal Resources, an organization comprised of environmental NGO's and academic institutes located in the Chetumal Bay, accepted the responsibility of being the Northern Commission. An estimated 25 people attended the meeting, including representatives from the governments of both countries.
- A Working Meeting on Certification for Environmentally Sustainable Tourism was held on May 30-31, 2002 in Belize City, Belize. National Coordinators (or their representatives) and delegates of Tourism Institutes of the four MBRS countries participated. Tourism officials of PROARCA/APM, representatives from the Costa Rican Institute of Tourism and from CCAD also attended. The discussions in this meeting revealed that the Certification Program for Tourism Sustainability designed in Costa Rica, which has been adopted by the Central American nations, currently focuses on the hotel sector and should be extended to other tourism operations, such as diving, cruise ships, marinas, etc., to reduce the impact of these activities on coastal and marine ecosystems.

Some of the policy issues identified to date include:

- the need to support rigorous environmental impact assessment, inspection and enforcement systems for coastal resource development;
- guidance on the design of innovative regional trip circuits which “package” and market marine parks and other tourist destinations;
- ensuring full and equal participation of communities and offering of financial and technical incentives and training to facilitate their involvement;
- facilitating training opportunities in the areas of hospitality, tourism management, guiding, fund-raising, financial management, and administration;
- creating public awareness of the intrinsic value of the MBRS and of the costs of inadequate protection in terms of loss of goods and services it provides; and
- building and maintaining a constituency of support for national and regional level actions required to ensure the sustainability of the MBRS.

National Consultants have also identified the following issues; Honduras did not provide a report:

BELIZE

1. Balance between conservation and development.
2. Cross-sectoral, interdisciplinary discussion among the agriculture sector, service sector, finance sector, the Government, non-governmental organizations, community based

organizations, civil society groups etc. This discussion should focus on issues related to human dimensions on the coast.

3. High quality research and data gathering to be the basis for management decisions and policy making.
4. Advocate sound environmental principles in development. There should be adequate Environmental Impact Assessments and proper monitoring of mitigation activities.
5. Meaningful incorporation of local communities in any decision making process that will affect them.
6. Provide fiscal incentives and other financial assistance guidelines to locals who may desire to get involved in the tourism industry but could not afford or cannot compete with other developers.
7. Balance traditional use of coastal resources with strict conservation practices.
8. Through relevant training, build or improve the human resource capacity so that locals can get involved in the tourism sector at all levels.
9. Educate locals as to the value of coastal property.
10. Ensure adequate enforcing of legislations so as to reduce or avoid illegal fishing, illegal cutting of mangroves and other such misdemeanors.
11. Provide relevant education to coastal communities so as to build awareness of the value of protecting this sensitive resource.
12. Review legislations and policies to ensure that current concerns are addressed. Too often the laws are old and obsolete.

GUATEMALA

Policy:

- Implement a regional tourism certification program. Maybe Blue Flag could be adapted to the socioeconomic and environmental realities of the region.
- Implement bilateral projects that focus on compatible conservation and environmental development in border zone areas
- Legislation and policies relating to the environment and to tourism should be compatible. Environmental legislation should be complete and simple enough that it does not discourage people from investing in sustainable tourism

Technical instruments:

- Develop a single system or analogous systems of Environmental Impact Studies for sustainable tourism projects in the region. This EIS system must be the simplest possible because ecotourism activities already are understood to have minimal environmental impacts. It is important to provide incentives for sustainable tourism in the area and not create bureaucratic obstacles. EIAs for ecotourism should be conducted in similar fashions in each country in the region to ensure that the conditions for sustainable tourism will be equally favorable in each.
- In the EIS, develop an environmental monitoring and evaluation program and apply it at the beginning, throughout the process and for each of the stages of the project.
- Define specific mechanisms in order to guarantee effective participation of civil society in tourism development. Participants should include organized NGOs or cooperatives, as well as local communities. Mechanisms should include regulations, standards, guidelines and other instruments to ensure maximum participation. Full participation should focus on resource management issues, project implementation, and information about the economic benefits of the project.
- Develop land-use plans (conservation zones, public recreation areas for tourism, areas for environmental education, etc.)
- Develop local and regional level tourism plans

Coastal and marine resources management:

- One of the most critical issues in regional coastal zone management is precise information about biological diversity in the area and migratory patterns of marine fauna
- Identify sensitive and critical coastal and marine areas (such as nesting areas for marine turtle or shorebirds) in order to prevent destructive activities (such as mass tourism or use of motorized vehicles on beaches)

Training:

- Regional level training related to low impact tourism management, environmental monitoring (especially for high use tourism sites), conservation of coastal areas (including beaches) and public security
- Train local communities on development, implementation and evaluation of ecotourism projects

MEXICO

Operational:

- Scarce training in the designing, handling and administration of ecotourism projects.
- Little or no distinction between ecotourism projects, alternative projects and sustainable development.
- Insufficient Markets -the current kind of tourist in the region corresponds to recreational and diversion for whom ecotourism activities, adventure, etc., are only complementary attractions.
- Difficulties of maintaining products – referring to financial situations: costs and competition.
- Alternative Tourism becomes a new form of colonialism, where abuse is frequently observed in the terms of exchange (prices, payment conditions) as well as the difficulty to access markets.
- It is frequent to find investors who visit communities, achieving concessions on the use of land and resources, instead of creating alliances or associations, which would benefit the community. In these cases the community turns into employee of its own natural resources instead of becoming allies.
- The high concentration of the market in hands of a few wholesalers (more than 70% of the market is channeled through 13 international wholesalers) driving to a high control of the prices and the promoted services.
- The increasing existence of lodging facilities in the modality of “all inclusive”. Similar to the tendency in the average expense of visitors.
- The sales commissions paid by the “eco” products to the local intermediaries (travel agencies) make prices less competitive.
- Proliferation of products presuming to be ecotourism and even sustainable, which compete with other projects which might not be entirely sustainable but which are community-based and emphasize conservation.
- Insufficient financing schemes for projects of the kind, as well as the low administrative capability for the conforming of tourism micro-enterprises.
- Ignorance on the methodology for designing ecotourism products.

Management and Organization:

- Again, ignorance on the features of adventure, alternative, community-based, etc., ecotouristic projects (and products)
- There is a profound incompatibility between the current massive traditional and the alternative sustainable models.
- The market concentration noted above, has lead to changes in the product. In other words, in order to satisfy the demand's needs the product is modified, losing its original qualities; turning it into a "one more" sub-product of the mass market.
- As a consequence of the above, satisfaction in the users of "eco" products is diminished; therefore the flow. (The search for authenticity for both market groups is different).
- High levels of simulated products. Due to the non-existent minimal conditions or characteristics for designing this kind of products. There are many options that make tourists believe that it is a non-simulated product.

Politics and Regulations:

- The tourism politics set about in the region, has focused in favoring the construction of hotel rooms (currently there are 52,000 hotel rooms in the region operating. Most of them in the 4- star rank) as well as politics focused in the promotion with the intention of influencing demand (which has been sustained in rates inferior to the demand, creating a reduction in hotel occupation)
- The deregulation process begun in 1993, has allowed entrepreneurial sector to participate, very discretionally, in the super structural decisions (promotion plans, growth strategies, etc.)
- Except for Reserves and Protected Areas, there aren't programs designed for measuring or mitigating the social impacts (employment, migration for example), environmental and economic. In those cases where there are protection measures, these are insufficient or unknown.
- Government's support is very scarce. When it is decided to launch a global action on the subject of sustainable tourism, they are instructed from the top downwards, not taking the community into consideration.
- In the cases where there are management plans (Costa Maya, Cozumel), there are many ways to exceed the maximum allowed limits. In the Riviera Maya case (20,000 hotel rooms which represents a 500% growth in 4 years) the plan continues being a matter of public consultation same that is over exceeded.
- To the interior of the Reserves where there are management plans, problems are centered in the precision about coastal and marine resources, tourist activities that take place and the little surveillance and control.

- Sian Ka'an is one of the few projects that has accomplished a correct management of the resources with participation of the community, even when the micro level of communitarian projects suffer from the same situations above mentioned.
- There are some initiatives for communitarian organization, work is incipient and support dispersed.

3.3 MBRS FORUM: PURPOSE AND FUTURE PLANS

In December 2002, a two-day Strategic Planning Workshop was held. It was the first meeting of the Sustainable Tourism Forum and the results are described in Part II of this document. The purpose of the first Forum was to:

- Identify and prioritize major regional tourism policy issues and challenges
- Develop a vision for tourism in the MBRS region
- Develop a mission statement and goals for the Forum
- List and prioritize key themes or topics for discussion
- Identify responsible parties/stakeholders to participate
- Begin discussion of key topics.

Future meetings of the Forum should include the following groups of stakeholders:

1. Government – representatives of the Tourism Ministries, Environmental Ministries and other national level agencies, as well as local government personnel, should listen and contribute in order to consider and effect policy and legislation changes or improvements. This group should also send people specifically working on a regional level on coastal and marine issues.
2. Community Based Organizations and Non-governmental Organizations – members of tourism organizations, community development, environmental and conservation organizations and other civic organizations have much hands-on, practical experience to share.
3. Private Sector Tourism Businesses and Suppliers– small, medium and large business sector players have much to learn and share regarding tourism management, impacts, partnerships with NGOs and communities, government policies and tourism business. Chambers of Commerce and tourism trade organization members should also be included and encouraged.
4. Academia and Consultants – Colleges and universities in the region should use the Forum as an opportunity to present research findings and learn from each other in finding possible solutions to common problems that the countries face. Consultants and others with hands-on and theoretical experience can also provide a wealth of experience from other regions and provide a non-biased perspective.

The following activities should be considered when determining the format of future Forum meetings after the initial strategic planning workshop:

- Presentations of case studies from each country and representing the four sectors above could be used to highlight key policy issues. These presentations should look at both positive and negative aspects of the cases.
- Panels of regional policy makers could be invited and then followed by facilitated discussion and dialogue with the above groups of participants.
- Field trips could be arranged to look at various examples of tourism development, and to stimulate discussion based on real world experience.
- Receptions and cultural presentations could highlight the role of indigenous people and the communities near the MBRS sites.

4. STRATEGY FORMULATION

4.1 DESIRED OUTCOMES

Based upon discussions with MBRS Project staff and National Consultants, proposed desired outcomes from the Forum will be to ensure institutional coordination and to provide tourism management guidance. Relevant recommendations follow:

4.1.1 INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION:

- The Forum should become a permanent entity that assures continuity and coordination of the initiatives developed through the Forum
- It should be an efficient and respectable institution that facilitates financing for regional sustainable tourism projects
- It must be clear who the responsible parties are, both nationally and regionally. These people or organizations must maintain personal and institutional continuity throughout the Forum process
- The roles of the actors and key stakeholders should be clearly defined in order to maximize the efficiency of regional and national cooperation
- The Forum should have an efficient system to record and share national and local experiences
- The Forum should promote multinational agreements and policies regarding management of coastal resources such as development and implementation of regional sustainable tourism and conservation projects
- The Forum should be web defined.

4.1.2 TOURISM MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE:

- Facilitate a tourism policy that is consistent with marine conservation objectives enshrined in the Tulum Declaration, the World Ecotourism Summit and other international conventions or guidelines. Refer to Annex 5 for a listing of useful resources compiled by the World Tourism Organization.
- Define national and regional tourism circuits based on land use plans
- Promote effective administration of the protected areas included in the MBRS, especially those which have had little or no management priority
- Offer sustainable economic activities to communities that are presently involved in environmentally disruptive activities

- Identify potential tourism activities and additional alternatives that can be carried out utilizing coastal and marine resources of the region
- Provide and disseminate examples that demonstrate how to minimize the adverse impacts of tourism and enhance its potential beneficial effects on coastal/marine habitats and resources and on human communities located near tourism destinations.
- Utilize a sustainable tourism platform to educate residents and visitors about the values of the MBRS's environmental and cultural resources
- Formulate and apply policy guidelines and best practice models for sustainable coastal and marine tourism
- Inform senior government officials, MPA managers and their tourism industry counterparts about critical coastal and marine tourism issues and problems

4.2 RESOURCE REALITIES

The current MBRS project budget for the Sustainable Tourism Forum allows for one face to face meeting a year with approximately 30 sponsored participants. Additional stakeholders will be encouraged to participate at their own expense.

4.3 FORUM VISION AND MISSION

At the strategic planning workshop three groups identified goals, objectives, and visions for the Sustainable Tourism Forum. Some also identified desired outcomes and characteristics for the Forum's order and process. See Part II for details.

A summarized mission for the Forum was developed and agreed upon by full consensus as follows:

The Sustainable Tourism Forum will be a permanent body facilitating and uniting all sectors of tourism in the MBRS region. Its recommendations will be derived from analysis of regional and local problems and will formally be presented to decision-making bodies to promote policies and strategies for planning and management of tourism activities that contribute to social and economic development and conservation of national and cultural heritage.

4.4 THEMES FOR FUTURE FORUMS

The following six themes, with a sampling of related subtopics, are priority goals for discussion by Forum members and other interested stakeholders for future forum discussions. Future Forum's will offer specific recommendations leading to improved practice and regional policy implementation. The themes are listed in the following order based upon potential interest of key stakeholders—particularly private sector businesses—in participating in future Forums.

- **Promotion and marketing**
 - Development of regional (trans-frontier) tourism circuits linking MBRS sites to World Heritage Sites, Mundo Maya Sites and other protected areas
 - Development of tourism products linking sites to local communities—tour packages, interpretation, outfitters, marine sports, events, adventure travel, among others
 - Regional public-private coordination for marketing campaigns, brand awareness and market research sustainable tourism in the MBRS region.
- **Development, implementation and measurement of sustainable tourism standards:**
 - Development of minimum standards for sustainable tourism
 - Codes of conduct
 - Guidelines for tourism development
 - Impact analysis
 - Development of indicators of sustainability and monitoring
 - Enforcement of tourism and environmental laws and regulations
 - Sustainable tourism certification
- **Financing**
 - Development of financial incentives for sustainable tourism
 - Access to funding sources for sustainable tourism
 - Fund-raising training
 - Financial management and accountability
 - Public/private alliances
- **Development of regional training curricula**
 - Standardization and development of regional training programs and materials
 - Conduct regional training needs assessments
 - Involve universities and other training institutes and mechanisms in sustainable
 - Tourism training, providing a variety of training options
 - Topics: Business planning and management
Destination and service management
Guiding
Quality control
Monitoring and impact analysis
Planning and design of sustainable tourism products

Marketing and promotion
Participatory planning methodologies

- **Coordinated planning for conservation and development**
 - Converting traditional tourism into sustainable tourism
 - Integrated land-use planning during tourism development
 - Public-private collaboration

- **Community involvement in sustainable tourism**
 - Balancing traditional use of resources with tourism
 - Awareness raising and education related nature and heritage conservation
 - Community empowerment – community organization and training
 - Preferential treatment, credit and financing for communities

5. IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 FORUM ORGANIZATION

Future Forums will be 2-3 days, depending on available budgets, and will be held in a different location in the region each year. Topics for discussion and participants to be invited will be determined through on-going discussions, described below, coordinated by the MBRS national coordinators, MBRS Project staff and additional tourism consultants and advisors. The second meeting of the Forum will take place in July 2003 and is tentatively scheduled for Roatan in the Bay Islands of Honduras. Representatives from other regional tourism initiatives and related national, regional or international networks should be encouraged to attend and participate.

The program and invitations should be issued at least 6 to 8 weeks before the event and notice will be given to all about the theme, issues and problems to be discussed; methodologies used at the Forum; desired outcomes; and responsibilities of participants. This will ensure that participants come with appropriate expectations and a readiness and willingness to contribute fully. The meeting facility will provide all necessary equipment and space for participants to comfortably present and discuss their tourism challenges and experiences and for other invited members to benefit according to their needs.

To increase communication and discussion and to provide more consistent continuity beyond the yearly meetings, Forum participants and other interested stakeholders should communicate electronically and in person between meetings. Options include a list-serve, direct e-mail communications, an on-line conference (similar to the ones that Ron Mader holds through his Ecotravels in Latin America website) as well as teleconferences and local real-time (as opposed to virtual) meetings with community members and themed sub-groups.

On-line communications will be coordinated by the national MBRS coordinators, who will continue to attend the face-to-face meetings of the Forum, thereby providing linkage between meetings and virtual discussions. These coordinators will serve as moderators and facilitators on-line and will work with members in their countries to extend discussions to local communities and those not participating via the Internet. They will invite all interested stakeholders to participate in whatever manner works best for each individual. The focus of the conversations will be the six themes identified at the planning session and working groups for each topic will be formed. If needed and if funds can be raised, face-to-face meetings on these themes will also be organized. Additional themes and topics of concern will be developed and discussed as determined appropriate.

If and when possible, it is suggested that the MBRS project hold local level tourism meetings in each country to allow fuller participation of community stakeholders. Since many community members do not have access to e-mail, such meetings will allow fuller participation of those tourism stakeholders often left out of policy and planning discussions. If additional funding is required, the national coordinators and Forum members will look for funds to hold such meetings.

The MBRS coordinators will be responsible for keeping notes, organizing discussions, and summarizing the results, issues and recommendations from all meetings and electronic communications in order to present findings to the MBRS project office. The MBRS Project Coordinating Unit will use this information for developing regional sustainable tourism policy

recommendations and will present them to the appropriate officials. In addition, it will be responsible for the development of manuals of exemplary practices relating to themes and topics discussed at the Forum. These manuals will be works in progress, to be updated and expanded as time and experience proceeds.

Future meetings of the Forum will focus on identification of and discussion about exemplary practices for coastal and marine tourism in the MBRS region. There are a growing number of compendiums of case studies of exemplary practices, including many compiled by the World Tourism Organization. Please refer to Annex 5 and 6 for listings of resources and tools which might be helpful in formulating actions leading to MBRS system improvement and new initiatives.

5.2 EXEMPLARY PRACTICES DISSEMINATION

As stated earlier, there are plans for the MBRS to develop a catalogue of “exemplary practices” for sustainable coastal tourism. This catalogue should be constantly updated and disseminated widely in the region through future Forums and through use of print and Internet distribution channels. “Exemplary” refers to those practices that have been shown to produce superior results; elected by a systematic process; and judged as exemplary, good, or successfully demonstrated. In the formulation of this catalogue and subsequent dissemination efforts, the following best practice resources and references are useful starting points.

- The University of Rhode Island’s CRC developed guidelines for low-impact tourism along the coast of Quintana Roo, Mexico under a USAID contract—the report can be downloaded at http://www.dec.org/pdf_docs/PNACQ241.pdf; and coastal zone. Mexico’s National Policy and Strategy for Sustainable Tourism sets out the overall framework for applying a number of environmental policy instruments to this goal, for example the *Environmental Strategy for Integrated Management of Mexico’s Coastal Zone*. Quintana Roo is perhaps one of the states that best exemplifies challenges which may be faced at MBRS sites. Quintana Roo also created Mexico’s first biosphere reserve for the Sian Ka’an ecosystem. The possibility of incorporating tourism activity as a strategic component of economic development depends on the capacity to correctly identify environmental requirements and conditions for its success. This requires taking an integrated focus that is sensitive to local situations and priorities, sufficiently flexible and receptive to the continuous changes that occur in the coastal systems, and that is reinforced with other outreach tools and environmental regulations. Through a strong promotion effort, it may be possible to build awareness of the high long term costs of inadequate infrastructure planning and support for mitigation measures now. This book, *Guidelines for Low-Impact Tourism Along the Coast of Quintana Roo*, provides a practical tool that complements the other efforts being carried out by the private sector and government to reduce the pressures on coastal ecosystems, lower the costs of treating pollution, and open up new opportunities to address the energy crisis and attain a more efficient use of resources.
- The World Tourism Organization has published *Compilation of Good Practices in the Sustainable Development of Ecotourism*. A new edition, focusing on successful examples of small ecotourism businesses, is currently under preparation and will be published in early 2003.— please refer to Annex 5 for further details on WTO best practice resources.

- Conservation International is working on obtaining funding to develop an exemplary practices catalogue which will focus on coral reefs and lowland rainforests;
- The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority in Queensland, Australia, has invited the private sector and NGOs to participate in the Framework for Partnerships, which will revisit issues such as certification, licensing, concessions and joint marketing. The Great Barrier receives over 2 million visitors per year. UNEP has contacted the Park Authority and they have agreed to become a model for similar A/P situations in the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia, especially in exchange and training programs.
- Egypt's Red Sea Sustainable Tourism Initiative, a 5-year project supported by USAID, is involving major resorts, industry associations, NGOs and local authorities, especially in the Sharm el-Sheik region, addressing destination management, environmentally sound technologies, and public-private partnerships. Egypt's National Policy for Sustainable Tourism has made it a leader regionally.
- The International Council of Cruise Lines, Conservation International, UNEP and the Ocean Conservancy are working with the US's EPA to raise standards in waste management and marine pollution in Florida and Alaska, also as a way to address increased regulation requests. The benefits can be replicated in the Caribbean.
- The University of Rhode Island' Coastal Resources Center has also developed a booklet and CD-ROM entitled "A World of Learning in Coastal Management—A Portfolio of Coastal Resources Management Program Experience and Products." This extensive resource contains best practices and lessons learned from sustainable coastal development in coastal areas which encourage the use of sustainable tourism and mariculture. Selected case experience from Sri Lanka, Mexico, Tanzania, and Ecuador are presented. For further details, go to <http://www.crc.uri.edu/comm/download/WOL.PDF>

Please also refer to Annex 6 for a listing of facilitative tools, innovative approaches and best practices.

5.3 SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS AND NEW INITIATIVES

The Forum is designed for the users - tourism stakeholders from all sectors and organizational backgrounds in the MBRS region. They will take the lead in determining how they would like to use it and what they would like to discuss and gain from it. Since the users are a diverse and ever changing group of individuals representing different interests; the Forum must remain an instrument that is flexible and adaptable to participants needs.

In addition, the MBRS Project Coordinating Unit has certain goals and objectives which, even with a flexible Forum format, can be met. One of these is to listen to Forum members and learn about the issues, challenges and solutions faced by those who are on the ground working in tourism in the region. Out of the discussion, recommendations will be made and these can be taken by the Project staff and translated into policies to be applied on the regional level. In addition, manuals, training materials and other education and outreach materials can be produced and disseminated to users. These products can go far to disseminate good practice and to influence legislation and policy in the region such that tourism supports conservation of

natural and cultural heritage and helps communities and nations follow the path of sustainable development.

5.4 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

A monitoring and evaluation system for the Sustainable Tourism Forum is recommended in order to ensure that its mission and the goals of the project are being met. This should be developed by Forum participants and national MBRS coordinators who will maintain long term presence over the life of the Forum. An annual report describing the outcomes of both the face-to-face meeting of the Forum as well as other meetings and electronic discussions should be produced and submitted to the MBRS project staff as a basis for examining and evaluating the progress of the Forum. Participants will also be asked to fill out periodic evaluations indicating whether their needs are being met.

In addition, it is important to note that the MBRS Project has already listed specific performance indicators related to its sustainable tourism use component, which follow:

- Analysis of tools for voluntary compliance with harmonized policies related to use of MBRS resources
- Exemplary practices for coastal and marine tourism industry developed by project year 2.
- Regional environmental certification program designed and implemented
- Marine tourism exemplary practices study tour designed and executed for “emerging” marine tour operators by project year 2.

Although the development of a monitoring system might be the least exciting element to tourism development, it is extremely important in the long run.

PART II: MBRS BELIZE FORUM: 2002

The first MBRS Sustainable Tourism Forum was held in Belize, December 5-6, 2002, and it focused on developing a strategic plan for future Forum activities.

6. WORKSHOP DESIGN

The design focused on the following questions:

- Identify key policy issues facing the MBRS tourism sector--*i.e. Where are we now?*
- Develop a shared vision for future tourism in the MBRS region--*i.e. Where do we want to be?*
- Formulate actions and implementation strategies that are realistic, consensus-building, and achievable --*i.e. How do we get there?*
- Design a monitoring and evaluation process for the Forum—*i.e. How do we know how we're doing and when we've gotten there?*

6.1 WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Identify key tourism related policy issues facing the MBRS.

After participants are introduced, an MBRS Project briefing will be presented by MBRS Staff and international consultants. Relevant regional bodies will be invited to present their experience. These include Mundo Maya; RARE's Mesoamerican Ecotourism Alliance, UNEP Tour Operators Initiative and the Mesoamerican Corridor Project. Then, national consultants will identify key internal and external policy issues facing the MBRS region

What are the tourism related threats and opportunities which can be realistically addressed now given the resources available to the MBRS region?

Threats and Opportunities will be identified by participants.

What are MBRS Project's strengths and weaknesses in planning and implementing a regional tourism forum, given the resources available?

Strengths and Weaknesses will be identified by participants.

6.2 WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE?

A sample shared vision of a desired future for tourism in the MBRS region:

"It is the year 2007 and sustainable tourism in the MBRS region is thriving. Local citizens, government, the private sector and other stakeholders appreciate the vital importance that tourism plays in sustainable development linked to coral reef conservation and protection"

What common themes or desired outcomes are stated or implied in the vision statements?

Workshop participants will identify these unifying themes and desired outcomes, and they will be recorded on flip chart sheets.

Vote for your highest priority themes from the list of themes/desired outcomes; consider the following criteria in making choices:

- Potential for public/private partnerships, strategic alliances or inter-organizational relationships that can be implemented over the short term using existing resources
- Possible funding from domestic or foreign investors, donors or governmental programs
- Capacity to mobilize community support and produce net benefits
- Contribution to the protection of natural or cultural heritage resources

Formulate the mission and goals of the MBRS Tourism Forum (e.g. desired market position, competitive products, and conservation outcomes)

Work in small groups, select a discussion leader, formulate your mission statement, develop a short list of goals, write on one flip chart sheet and present to the overall group

6.3 HOW DO WE GET THERE?

Formulate actions and implementation strategies that are realistic, consensus-building, and achievable

What priority actions can be initiated? Describe the action & expected outcomes (results) for strategic goals—e.g. Biodiversity Conservation, Business Development, Policy and Legislation, Regional Cooperation

National consultants assist each group in formulating actions and strategies for each goal, based on international experience and regional policy issues identified throughout the workshop. Participants will work in small groups, select a discussion leader, formulate 2 to 3 priority actions for each goal, write each action on one flip chart sheet and present to the overall group.

Who will be responsible for implementing these actions and when? Groups will develop a matrix which lists each action, the responsible parties and organizations, potential funders and other resources, and timelines, and will present results to the group.

6.4 HOW DO WE KNOW WHEN WE'VE GOTTEN THERE?

Design a monitoring and evaluation process for the Forum

Groups will develop measurable indicators for each of the actions, identify individuals and organizations responsible for measuring them, and a monitoring timeline. They will present their scheme to the overall group. National and international consultants will develop a process for evaluation and feedback to the Forum members.

Next Steps

- Organizational—Appointment of Steering Committee
- Follow up Activities—Additional steps to be taken, budget requirements, scheduling of next Forum, etc.

7. FORUM SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 PLENARY PRESENTATIONS

Noel Jacobs, MBRS Project Coordinating Unit:

Expectations and Desired Outcomes of Sustainable Tourism Forum:

Platform for dialogue for field people to exchange experiences – good and bad practices which will lead to added value

MBRS provides different mechanisms for sharing experiences. The transboundary commissions are addressing other sectors but this Forum will deal specifically with tourism.

Will do a series of Forums. For this, the first, we want these outcomes:

- A process for development and implementation of Forum
- We want participants views and ideas on process

To be successful, design should come from primary players. The manual defines a suggested framework. Key players will tell us if it's doable or not, or if we need alternative processes. Want to let players and resource users tell us what has worked and what not.

Role of participants in Forum is important. They will define what results they can get from the Forums

Based on their experience, what issues face coastal tourism are worth placing on table for policy development. They know best what policies are needed or must be changed. Strengths of a policy lie on recommendations of those involved and affected

3 desired outputs for this session:

- 1) Definition of a process for development and implementation of the Forum
- 2) A discussion of tourism practices in region – how best they can be extracted for a best practices manual
- 3) Do you consider a need for additional policy? Strength in answer lies in the fact that it comes from you, those active the sector

INTRODUCTION OF PARTICIPANTS

See Annex 2 for participant list

Vincent Palacio, National ST Forum Consultant, Belize:

SECAP – Each country will give a marketing campaign for each country
Mundo Maya is supporting tourism training in region

5 types of concerns in Belize

Environment

- certification scheme will standardize and can be used for marketing
- regional guidelines for coastal tourism development, need EIS and proper monitoring for mitigation
- database of personnel to do consultancies from the region
- universities should form a consortium of research and data-gathering – need, good sound facts
- regional standards for use limits

Social

- cross-sectoral, interdisciplinary discussions of stakeholders
- issues related to humans and the coast
- meaningful incorporations of local communities in decision-making processes – local empowerment campaign
- balance between traditional use with conservation practices
- regional advocacy program to educate locals of intrinsic value of reef resources and land resources of coast (skyrocketed)

Tourism Training

- standardization of training materials and delivery
- utilize existing training programs from other regional organizations
- regional training needs assessment every two years
- regional universities could play a crucial role

Financing

- regional policies and guidelines should ensure financial incentives for locals wanting to be involved in tourism
- establishment of a regional tourism development credit union

Marketing

- pool resources to promote region as a destination
- tour packages can include activities from various countries
- use existing regional entities (SICA – Sistema de la Integracion Centro Americana) to advertise out product

Marisol Vanegas, National ST Forum Consultant, Mexico

- Training in ET projects
- Little distinction between ET and SD
- Insufficient markets
- Difficulties maintaining products
- Alternative tourism is a new form of colonialism
- High concentration of the market – few wholesalers manage most of T
- All-inclusive model – 70% Reduces mobility of tourist
- Sales Commissions – 40-60% -
- Confusion in marketing – not all marketed as eco are. Need a seal or certif.
- Insufficient financing

Organization and Management

- Incompatibility of existing of models
- Changes in the product
- Reduction in satisfaction level of “eco” products
- Offer is greater than the demand
- High level of simulated products – must respect a level of authenticity

Tourism Policy

- Regulation process
- Need processes to measure impacts not only in PAs
- Government support is very low

For Forum:

- Unify criteria
- Present good examples
- We need concrete indicators
- Recommendations
- Define indicators to ensure sustainability

Group Discussion:

Recommendations:

Development of integrated products – to figure out who market is

Development of regional terminology – have the same concept throughout region

Need norms that private sector can have – will help marketing

Minimum standards – should be simple so as not to scare away the private sector

Markets must be defined and produced

If companies aren't profiting then sustainable tourism will provide no benefits.

Must meet minimum standards, with that industry can begin benefit communities and environment.

Need a promotion strategy focused on a specific niche market. There are good products but they suffer because they're not marketed. Need to work jointly.

Need good planning and must use a specific, clear planning method

Ricardo Steiner – Mesoamerican Ecotourism Alliance

Impact measurement

Marketing jointly - promoting tours between countries

Tour coordination

Training for mgmt, marketing, business planning

6 tours so far – not including Salvador or Guatemala. Most of market has been insiders so far. Specialized

Patricia Amador, Sustainable Tourism for the North Coast of Honduras project

Working with community groups – very important

Components:

- ST strategy
- Capacity building
- Promotion
- Project management

Mundo Maya – has a logo. Have had difficulty in entering market

Trying to include communities, World Heritage sites.

Are looking for new organizations to work with – like Mesoamerican Alliance

Need to become more integrated with other initiatives

Have had difficulties coordinating between countries. Need to discuss land-use plans and become more regional. Need to redesign a regional product. Most of it is on paper now – not actually functioning.

7.2 VISION AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

Assignment for Breakout Groups: Develop a vision of the Sustainable Tourism Forum and list desired outcomes for the Forum

GROUP 1:

The ST Forum should establish regional strategies which bring together conservation and social development to create sustainable tourism products

Desired outcomes:

1. Establish a glossary of terms and methodologies
2. Prepare a manual that can be used by community members – with simple language for fisherman and guides – that takes into account cultural differences
3. Develop a tourism product in each of the regions of the MBRS project focusing on conservation of the reef.

Group 2:**The ST Forum will:**

- Act as a facilitating entity to integrate different stakeholders, policies and programs to develop a model of sustainable tourism for the MBRS region
- Promote the development of regional, short-term action plans for product development, training, promotion, development of standards, etc

Group 3:

The ST Forum is an organization composed of public and private sector participants (e.g., chambers of commerce, medium and small size businesses, social development organizations, etc.) which will remain permanent in spite of changes in its members, and which will not be affected by changes in government.

Vision: in five years there will be an organism which

- Provides recommendations that address common tourism challenges faced by the MBRS region countries; and
- Orients and supports different stakeholders in their respective action areas and with regard to tourism issues specific to each country with the:

Mission of guaranteeing tourism practices which:

- Improve the quality of life
- Include and involve communities
- Contribute to conservation
- Contribute to environmental education and awareness-raising
- Ensure economic equity among businesses

Agreements made within the Forum should be signed by all the countries and should be considered binding.

Characteristics:

- Regional coverage regarding both technical and political issues
- Free, non-bureaucratic participation

- Well-defined roles
- Ministries of tourism play an important role

Actions:

- Affecting regional policies
- Planning and management

Regulations:

- It should have a manual of procedures
- It should include a process for evaluation and follow-up
- There should be an advisory council with ad hoc commissions for specific themes or topics

Discussion:

Want all recommendations from Forum to be considered for implementation. Want them to go to an assessors committee.

MBRS wants the manual to serve as the linkage to policies

Participants want action, not just legislation. Will MBRS commit resources to plans and activities of Forum?

Answer: It will be a network between meetings. If it wants to carry out actions, it will need to develop and implement a fund-raising strategy.

Forum should be open to others who want to participate, but there is limited financing. MBRS team can maintain communications and can link people and conduct follow-up from Forum. The webpage and the outreach component can also help to maintain communications. SAM also has technical advisors for each component and an advisory committee.

On-line conferences – like Ron Mader’s (Ecotravels in Latin America) – can serve to promote discussion between meetings.

We are motivating the sectors we all need to ensure that the Foro is linked to politics. Worried that

Want to have a national Forum for each country

Answer: MBRS can’t support meetings to discuss the same themes in different places. Must work regionally.

7.3 MISSION: MBRS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM FORUM

The Sustainable Tourism Forum will be a permanent body facilitating and uniting all sectors of tourism in the MBRS region. Its recommendations will be derived from analysis of regional and local problems and will formally be presented to decision-making bodies to promote policies and strategies for planning and management of tourism activities that contribute to social and economic development and conservation of national and cultural heritage.

7.4 PRIORITY THEMES/TOPICS

Full group prioritization of themes (selected from national consultants' reports)

- 1) Incorporation of local communities; community empowerment and organization
- 2) Developing minimum environmental and others standards for tourism development and tourism operators, eventually leading towards creating a certification program
- 3) Regional level tourism training
- 4) Advocating sound environmental principles and practices in development; establishing a balance between conservation and development
- 5) Management – controlling impacts, developing standards, regulation, enforcement of laws and regulations, monitoring, carrying capacity, patrolling, etc.
- 6) Fiscal incentives and financial assistance
- 7) Promotion and marketing
- 8) Identification and management of sensitive and critical areas
- 9) Education for local communities, tourists, business owners, etc. regarding the value of natural resources

Assignment for Breakout Groups: For each of the top three themes, discuss and suggest desired outputs and audiences who should participate in further discussion

Group 1: Community participation and organization

Problems/Challenges:

1. There is insufficient participation of communities in decision-making processes on issues that affect them

2. Interdisciplinary and intersectoral tourism products, especially with communities, are deficient and complicated and do not include human element sufficiently.
3. Traditional uses and conservation are often portrayed as oppositional
4. Communities put little value on their coastal and marine resources
5. There is insufficient training for development, implementation and evaluation of community-based ecotourism projects.
6. There is a lack of understanding about alternative tourism, ecotourism and community-based tourism.
7. Government support for community projects is scarce
8. Working projects are incipient and lack sufficient support

General recommendations:

1. Provide technical assistance and preferential treatment to communities for permitting, financing and fiscal support
2. Conduct outreach about the value of protected areas
3. Strengthen and respect local leaders
4. Form community patrols and rangers' groups
5. Ensure that community leaders are present at MBRS discussions and Forums
6. Encourage governments to promote participation of communities in local tourism meetings and organizations

Conclusions:

The Forum should:

- provide governments with a series of strategies to address these problems, highlighting examples of success and failure of projects in the MBRS region, as well as providing results of diagnostics and scientific research
- propose alternative income-generating activities which support environmental conservation so that communities can implement them

The only way to ensure conservation is with local community participation.

Participants include:

academic institutions, local communities, federal, state and local governments, community associations, non-governmental organizations, protected areas administrators, tourism businesses.

To make this work, financing will be needed.

Group 2: Regional tourism training

DESIRED OUTCOMES	ACTIVITIES	STAKEHOLDERS WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THE FORUM
<p>A regional training program to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Organize and support small community tourism businesses 2. Service and destination management (hotels, restaurants, guides) 3. Maintaining quality standards for certification and marketing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orient the tourism component of the MBRS towards communities and identify training needs and community leaders • Design a training program • Assemble the priority stakeholders • Validate the program with community members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community leaders • Educational institutions • Private sector tourism • Tourism ministries • Cultural ministries • Education ministries • Environmental ministries • Labor and social security ministries • Local non-governmental organizations • Local government representatives

Characteristics for training manuals:

1. They should be simple with language that communities can understand (e.g. in the Garifuna language)
2. Present methodologies and examples of best practices
3. Use participatory methods

Group 3 – Establishing minimum standards for tourism practice**What do we want?**

- To establish minimum standards of operations for tourism providers operating in the MBRS region

How?

- Identify and classify which tourism providers to be regulated
 - aquatic activities (tour operators, marine and wetland transport, diving and snorkeling)
 - hotels and lodges
 - restaurants
 - others
- Analysis and collation of existing minimum standards for tourism providers (looking at the current program/structure of each country)
- Training of tourism service providers
- Monitoring of enforcement of standards provided by Ministries of Tourism

In the evening the international and national ST Forum consultants gathered to further develop, refine and clarify the themes and to develop a process for addressing them the following day.

8. THEMES FOR FUTURE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM FORUMS

8.1 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- Balancing traditional use of resources with tourism
- Awareness raising and education related nature and heritage conservation
- Community empowerment – community organization and training
- Preferential treatment, credit and financing for communities

8.2 DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION AND MEASUREMENT OF ST STANDARDS

- Development of minimum standards for sustainable tourism
- Codes of conduct
- Guidelines for tourism development
- Impact analysis
- Development of indicators of sustainability and monitoring
- Enforcement of tourism and environmental laws and regulations
- Sustainable tourism certification

8.3 DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONAL TRAINING CURRICULUM

- Standardization and development of regional training programs and materials
- Conduct regional training needs assessments
- Involve universities and other training institutes and mechanisms in sustainable tourism training, providing a variety of training options
- Topics: Business planning and management
Destination and service management
Guiding
Quality control
Monitoring and impact analysis
Planning and design of sustainable tourism products
Marketing and promotion

Participatory Planning methodologies

8.4 COORDINATED PLANNING FOR CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT

- Converting traditional tourism into sustainable tourism
- Integrated land-use planning during tourism development
- Public-private collaboration

8.5 FINANCING

- Development of financial incentives for sustainable tourism
- Access to funding sources for sustainable tourism
- Fund-raising training
- Financial management and accountability
- Public/private alliances

8.6 PROMOTION AND MARKETING

- Regional coordination of marketing
- Development of regional (transfrontier) tourism circuits
- Public-private coordination for marketing campaigns
- Market research
- Focused marketing for MBRS region sustainable tourism

9. PROBLEMS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND BEST PRACTICES

Assignment for Breakout Groups: For each of the remaining priority themes, identify the challenges or problems, provide recommendation or suggested actions, and present some models or case studies of best practice and bad practice

9.1 FINANCING

Problems:

- Local tourism operations have a competitive disadvantage due to a lack of fiscal incentives and other forms of financial assistance
- Difficulties in maintaining products due to costs and competition
- Insufficient financing programs for these types of products
- Lack of administrative capacity to develop and operation small businesses
- Financial support is preferentially provided to companies which can guarantee returns on investment
- Subsidy programs do not necessarily provide positive results nor the development of successful companies or products

Recommendations:

- Establish conditions for community-based businesses to be eligible to receive financial incentives
- Promote the establishment of fiscal incentives to develop and operate sustainable tourism businesses
- Develop a scheme of productivity indicators (economic, social and administrative) to ensure that financial assistance will be effectively utilized and that loans will be repaid
- Develop training opportunities for fund-raising, financial administration and community empowerment
- Promote sustainable tourism projects in the agendas of economic development forums and meetings

Best Practice Example:

The Cooperative “Punta Allen” in Mexico, supported by the COMPACT Program (UNDP and UN Foundation) was established to contribute to the conservation of the Sian Ka’an Biosphere reserve by providing support to local community-based groups working in biodiversity conservation. The financing is used to buy 4-stroke (ecological) outboard motors to replace 2-stroke, conventional ones. To ensure that all operators participate, they developed a strategy to recuperate the loans and reinvest them for others to use. The members of the cooperative pay back loans at very low interest rates and the money is then loaned out to other members of the organization. This “subsidy-return” has allowed the cooperative to improve the quality of their services and has given them a sense of self-empowerment.

9.2 Promotion and Marketing**Problems:**

- You can’t promote what you don’t really have (must promote real cases)
- Lack of financial resources for promotion
- Lack of promotion strategies and market studies
- Lack of promotion and coordination networks to support our niche market
- Dependency on the wholesale markets
- International competition is too strong
- Lack of organization and coordination between public and private sectors to promote a product or destination
- Lack of public relation campaigns
- Sense of “lack of security”

Recommendations:

- Develop an image for marketing the MBRS region
- Establish an agency for public relations
- Conduct an awareness-raising campaign
- Raise funds for developing a promotion strategy
- Coordinate promotion among the four countries
- Ensure that small communities can receive promotional benefits through the Internet
- Use special interest magazines, Internet, international trade fairs, etc. to market MBRS region sustainable tourism

- Organize cooperative marketing programs between the public sector, private sector and communities
- Conduct regional promotional events and campaigns that reach international markets
- Develop regional tourism circuits and packages
- Promote MBRS sustainable tourism programs and products to international conservation organizations interested in coral reefs

Best practice examples:**Belize:**

Team Belize project - to improve tourism services and attitudes nationally
Separate the different regions of the country to promote each one individually

Honduras:

Awareness raising campaign

Guatemala:

Campaign: "Tourism with a smile"
"Go on vacation without leaving your country" (internal tourism)

Mexico:

Rally Adventure Hol Box competition runs an expensive promotional campaign using television, printed media, Internet, trade fairs and press conferences. It partners with local business sponsors, benefiting the companies, their activities, the destination and the country.

9.3 SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLANNING**Problems:**

- There is no balance between conservation and development
- Governmental enforcement of laws and standards is weak or non-existent
- There are no good plans/projects which include communities
- There is no legislation or policy related to incompatible tourism
- Existing legislation is so complicated that it serves as a disincentive
- Need to develop a simple system for environmental impact studies
- Land-use plans are non-existent or insufficient
- Sensitive and critical conservation areas need to be identified
- The existence of cheap all-inclusive lodging negatively affects the market and tends towards decreasing the quality of tourism
- There is an inequality between mass tourism and sustainable or alternative tourism models

- Tourism policies favor the construction and operation of mass tourism facilities
- Deregulation favors a select business sector
- There are few programs to mitigate social, environmental or economic impacts, and those that exist don't work
- Many projects are planned from the top down and don't include the communities
- There are many examples of hotels exceeding their carrying capacity
- Lack of planning
- Insufficient/inadequate planning

Objectives:

- Create a balance between conservation and development
- Strengthen the government to enforce standards
- Develop integrated conservation and tourism plans which include the communities
- Communities should receive priority
- Develop compatible tourism legislation and policies to ensure sustainability
- Develop clear and simple legislation which communities can access
- Develop simple environmental impact study models and formats
- Ensure that land-use planning integrates conservation and development
- Develop regional and local tourism plans
- Identify sensitive and critical areas for conservation
- Regulate "all-inclusive" tourism operators
- Develop promotion policies which support small businesses
- Intervene through regulation
- Develop programs to mitigate negative social, environmental and economic impacts
- Develop a horizontal form of planning which ensures that communities participate on an equal playing field
- Plan effectively

PROBLEMS	RECOMMENDATIONS
Legislation and Policies: There are no policies in place to make tourism sustainable	Analyze existing legislation and work with legislators to promote favorable policies
Planning There is a lack of planning and few models or guidelines for sustainable tourism planning	THE MBRS project should encourage the countries in the region to develop and implement good tourism planning

Stakeholders – to be coordinated by professional tourism planners:

1. Governments (national, provincial and municipal), tourism ministries, environmental ministries and protected areas administrators
2. Private sector (including chambers of commerce and NGOs)
3. Local communities
4. Tourism and environment professionals

10. ORGANIZATIONAL PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

Given that the current MBRS project budget for the Sustainable Tourism Forum allows for only one face to face meeting a year with approximately 30 sponsored participants, the group decided that the Forum participants and all other interested stakeholders should communicate electronically between meetings. They suggested several options including a list-serve, direct e-mail communications, an on-line conference (similar to the ones that Ron Mader holds through his Ecotravels in Latin America website) as well as teleconferences and local real-time (as opposed to virtual) meetings

On-line communications will be coordinated by the national MBRS coordinators, who will continue to attend the face-to-face meetings of the Forum, thereby providing continuity and

linkage between meetings and virtual discussions. These coordinators will serve as moderators and facilitators on-line and will work with members in their countries to extend discussions to local communities and those not participating via the Internet. They will invite all interested stakeholders to participate in whatever manner works best for each individual. The focus of the conversations will be the six themes identified at the planning session and working groups for each topic will be formed. If needed and if funds can be raised, face-to-face meetings on these themes will also be organized.

The participants expressed an interest in having the MBRS project hold local level tourism meetings in each country to allow fuller participation of community stakeholders. Since many community members do not have access to e-mail, such meetings will allow fuller participation of those tourism stakeholders often left out of policy and planning discussions. If additional funding is required, the national coordinators and Forum members will look for funds to hold such meetings.

The MBRS coordinators will be responsible for keeping notes, organizing discussions, and summarizing the results, issues and recommendations in order to present findings to the MBRS project office. The MBRS Project Coordinating Unit will use this information for developing regional sustainable tourism policy recommendations and will present them to the appropriate officials.

The annual regional meetings of the Forum will be held in a different country each year and invitations will be sent out with at least two, and preferably four, weeks notice. Invitations will clearly specify the topics and issues to be discussed and the desired outcomes so that participants can prepare themselves appropriately. The national MBRS coordinators will be responsible for recommending who shall be invited (with MBRS sponsorship), depending on the agenda and topics to be discussed. They will also provide names of other relevant stakeholders to be invited to attend at their own expense. The next meeting of the Forum will take place in May 2003.

CLOSING STATEMENT

Belize's Director of Tourism, Tracy Taegar concluded the Forum with the following remarks. It is vital for us as a growing region to maintain a balance between conservation and development. Our survival, at least from a tourism perspective, depends on it. Tourism has been identified as the industry with the greatest potential for the further economic expansion of this region. According to the World Tourism Organization international tourist arrivals will see an unprecedented growth ratio in the next twenty years. It is predicted that international arrivals will triple from 600 million to 1.6 billion people in the year 2020. Tourism receipts will multiply four-fold to over \$2 trillion dollars. Of greater significance to this region is the growth in what has been defined as "nature-based" tourism: this segment now contributes some \$200 billion dollars in receipts and is expected to grow at a rate of 15% over the next two decades.

Central to the nature-based product of our region is the *MESOAMERICAN BARRIER REEF SYSTEM*. I can recall back in 1999 when our Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Natural Resources shared with pride, in an address he made to tourism stakeholders, that Belize was chosen to house the international headquarters of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System Project. His pride and excitement, was two-fold: first from the socio-economic impact a project

of this nature can have on communities in adjacent coastal areas but more importantly, from the opportunity we would have as a region to leap frog to the frontlines of marine biological research. Research can only help us to build our institutional capacity; strengthen our educational science programs; co-ordinate and strengthen national policies and regulations; record best practices; and safe guard the sustainability of this world-class eco-system.

Our stewardship of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System is a sacred trust and we cannot afford to fail in preserving its natural-state and conserving its boundaries. It is said that this region has more marine life per square foot than any other place on earth and is home to the earth's most unique geological formations and exotic marine life. If we think about this for a second we can easily become overwhelmed by this awesome responsibility delegated to you by

your respective governments.

Back in 1963 when the tourism revolution formally started in Belize with a five-room, one bathroom hotel on one of Belize's most popular islands, Ambergris Caye, it started as a result of our 170-mile long barrier reef. Today the Barrier Reef and its related marine activities; diving, snorkeling, fishing, continues to be our primary attraction. Well over 60% of all our visitors are motivated to visit our shores because of this living organism. Our tourism industry has grown from a \$44 million-dollar industry in 1988 to a \$260 million dollar industry. We have grown from that five room, one bathroom capacity to well over 400 hotels and 4200 rooms today. New hotel infrastructure, primarily in the coastal areas, for this year alone stands at \$173 million. Our industry represents 1 in every 4 jobs and approximately 20% of total foreign exchange earnings. In Belize, tourism is singularly the largest growing economic sector. We are ever mindful that the only way we are going to continue fueling this growth and demand our fair market share is through developing strategic partnerships; like the one this project represents, and to ensure the sustainability of the resources that makes us world-renowned.

I congratulate each of you for your individual and collective effort in this regard. It is imperative that we work without ceasing to develop the regional guidelines and certification standards that

will govern our further tourism development. We must establish regional standards that determine relevant carrying capacities of our scarce resources. We must actively pursue the dialogue of balancing development with conservation with our local communities with our governments and non-governmental institutions and we must continue to advocate, educate and sensitize our population both young and old, on the intrinsic value of our reef and other natural and cultural resources.

This region has a unique opportunity to lead the way to determine our global competitive advantage. The burden of this responsibility lies on each of us and those of you here today that are given the mandate and privilege to chart the course. I encourage you to move forward quickly, not only in reaching consensus of what's best for this region and in formulating recommendations on how best to move forward, but rather in implementing programs that will garner tangible economic results.

Our government and our Ministry of Tourism and culture stands ready and committed to this end.

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APPENDIX 1:

AGENDA FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING WORKSHOP & INAUGURAL FORUM MEETING

Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System (MBRS) Project

AGENDA

DAY 1 – December 5, 2002

- 8:00** Registration
- 8:15** Welcomes by MBRS Regional and National Staff and others
- 8:45** Introduction of Participants
- 9:15** Workshop Purpose and Desired Outcomes – MBRS Staff
- 9:30** Presentation of Forum Manual and brief overview of Sustainable Tourism in the MBRS –
Abi Rome
- 9:50** Regional report on policy issues and programmatic challenges for sustainable tourism in
the MBRS Region: Perspective from Belize – Vincent Palacios
- 10:00** Regional report on policy issues and programmatic challenges for sustainable tourism in
the MBRS Region: Perspective from Honduras – Norman Flores
- 10:10** Regional report on policy issues and programmatic challenges for sustainable tourism in
the MBRS Region: Perspective from Mexico – Marisol Vanegaz Peres
- 10:20** Regional report on policy issues and programmatic challenges for sustainable tourism in
the MBRS Region: Perspective from Guatemala – Doris Martinez
- 10:30** Break
- 10:45** Reports on regional experiences and challenges for sustainable tourism – Mesoamerican
Ecotourism Alliance, Mundo Maya, Honduras North Coast Sustainable Tourism Project,
others
- 11:15** Breakout groups develop vision and desired outcomes for the Regional Forum

- 12:00** Presentation of visions and outcomes
- 12:20** Discussion - full group consensus building for a common vision
- 12:45** Lunch
- 2:00** Breakout groups to determine regional issues and challenges which can benefit from the dialogue through the Sustainable Tourism Forum and potential Forum participants for each issue
- 2:45** Presentations and prioritization of issues followed by discussion
- 3:30** Breakout groups discuss first three themes and provide recommendations
- 4:30** Break
- 4:45** Presentation and discussion of breakout groups findings
- 6:30** Finish for the day

DAY 2 – December 6, 2002

- 8:30** Review of previous day's advances and decisions
- 8:45** Presentation and review of thematic topics to be discussed
- 9:00** Breakout groups to discuss the next three themes – problems, recommendations and case studies of good and bad practice
- 10:30** Break
- 10:45** Continued discussions
- 11:30** Presentations and discussion of breakout groups findings
- 12:15** Brainstorm and discussion of an operational mechanism for the Forum
- 1:00** Closing Speech by Belize Minister of Tourism
- 1:15** Closing and Evaluations

BELICE

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APPENDIX 3:**RELEVANT NATIONAL PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS**

At the national level, several projects stand out due to their direct relevance to the MBRS. They include various projects related to protected areas (PAs) management of both marine and coastal (or near-coastal) PAs, supported by local and international NGOs and private entities, national and state governments, and bilateral and multilateral funding, including GEF, World Bank, IDB and USAID. Particular projects of interest are:

- the Southern Quintana Roo Integrated Coastal Zone Management Project (Amigos de Sian Ka'an, University of Quintana Roo, USAID);
- Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Barrier Reef Complex of Belize (Coastal Zone Management Authority and Institute, UNDP/GEF);
- Trinational Alliance for Conservation of the Gulf of Honduras (currently developing new project initiatives); and
- The Bay Islands Environmental Program (Honduran Tourism Institute, IDB) and Sustainable Coastal Tourism Planning and Management Project (Honduran Tourism Institute, FUNDEMUN, GEF/World Bank, currently in design), both in Honduras.

APPENDIX 4:

RELEVANT TRANSNATIONAL PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS

Of direct importance to the current MBRS project design are several initiatives dealing with the MBRS and coastal and reef resources, which follow:

- The coastal resources management component of the Regional Environmental Project for Central America, PROARCA-COSTAS, is co-financed by USAID with matching funds provided by international NGOs The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the University of Rhode Island/Coastal Resources Center (URI/CRC). The project supports capacity building and local empowerment of local communities in the development of strategies for the sustainable use of coastal resources focusing on pilot areas in Belize, Guatemala and Honduras.
- A new regional initiative, Conservation of the Mesoamerican Caribbean Reef Ecoregion, is being coordinated by WWF and focuses on biological assessment of the MBRS region and determining priority interventions for treating root causes to resource degradation from a biodiversity conservation perspective.
- Both of these projects complement the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor Initiative spearheaded by CCAD. There are numerous ongoing international and regional programs providing technical assistance in coastal resources assessment, monitoring and capacity building. These include the Caribbean Coastal Marine Productivity Program (CARICOMP) and the UNEP-coordinated Caribbean Environment Program (CEP). Also, the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network, operating through its Caribbean Sub-node is supported by various international and regional organizations with local coral reef monitoring carried out with governmental and NGO staffs in all four MBRS countries.
- The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission/Subcommission for the Caribbean is coordinating support to countries in the Wider Caribbean Region to ratify and adopt actions under the protocols of the Cartagena Convention and supports scientific research, training and monitoring of oceanographic, fisheries and biological diversity parameters.
- There are also various projects under preparation with financing of GEF, World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, UNDP, GTZ, USAID, DANIDA and other bi- and multilaterals directed to objectives of conservation of coastal and marine resources. There is currently a GEF Block B grant to develop the Gulf of Honduras Maritime Pollution Control Project with IDB support.

APPENDIX 5.

WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION BEST PRACTICE RESOURCES

Source: WTO Sustainable Development of Tourism Section
<http://www.world-tourism.org/sustainable>

1. **Tourism and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August - 4 September 2002.**

WTO encouraged the National Tourism Authorities of its Member States to participate in the preparatory process and at the Summit itself, and undertook a number of specific activities in order to ensure that the tourism sector is represented according to its global importance and capability to positively contribute to the main challenges addressed at the Summit:

WTO prepared various reports for the UN Commission on Sustainable Development and other UN agencies in preparation for WSSD, including the Report of the Secretary-General on the Sustainable Development of Tourism. A publication, containing these reports and two speeches delivered by the WTO Secretary General has been widely circulated through the Internet, at WSSD and other events. Just prior to the Summit WTO supported a **Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations** that was held in **Cape Town**, South Africa, 21-23 August 2002. This conference aimed at examining the challenges of sustainable tourism development and the responsibilities at the local level.

On 30 August 2002, WTO held at WSSD a **Side Event on Tourism and its Contribution to Poverty Alleviation** that generated a great interest and resulted in a high level participation. During this Event, with participation of WTO Secretary-General, Mr. Francesco Frangialli, and UNCTAD Secretary-General, Mr. Rubens Ricupero, WTO presented its new **publication on "Tourism and Poverty Alleviation"**, followed by presentations of State Ministers of Tourism and representatives of international finance and aid agencies on different ways to encourage tourism activities that contribute to the reduction of poverty. The Section also prepared a special brochure on Tourism and Poverty Alleviation to distribute at WSSD.

The final **Plan of Implementation**, agreed by Heads of State at Johannesburg, includes a specific paragraph (N° 41) concerning Tourism. Further references to tourism can be found in the Plan of Implementation related to energy (para 19) and biodiversity conservation (para 42), Small Island Developing States (para 52) and African issues (para 64). For more details on the above activities and documents:

<http://www.world-tourism.org/sustainable/wssd/menu.htm>

2. **International Year of Ecotourism 2002 - Update**

The Year has generated a vast interest and numerous activities have taken place so far in all sectors involved, at the international, national and local levels.

All **proceedings of the World Ecotourism Summit** (Quebec, Canada, May 2002) are available in the Summit website, that is now hosted and arranged by WTO:

- Final Report, with conclusions and summaries of the regional panels, thematic sessions and special forums
- Quebec Declaration on Ecotourism
- Statements and Presentations

<http://www.ecotourism2002.org>

World Tourism Day, September 27, 2002:

On the occasion of IYE 2002, World Tourism Day focused on the topic of ecotourism by the WTO General Assembly at its Fourteenth session. The official celebration of the Day took place in Costa Rica, while several countries organized national and local events. <http://www.world-tourism.org/sustainable/IYE/WTD2002.htm>

National activities for IYE

In early 2001 WTO recommended its Member States to undertake different types of activities for the IYE at national and local levels. As a result more than 50 countries have reported so far on these initiatives, such as the creation of local and national multi-stakeholder ecotourism committees, organization of national conferences and seminars, ecotourism development and conservation activities at protected and other natural areas, awareness raising and education programmes, marketing activities, etc.

Details and contacts by countries:

<http://www.world-tourism.org/sustainable/IYE/Activities-WTOMemberStates.htm>

Special WTO publications for the IYE:

- *Compilation of Good Practices in the Sustainable Development of Ecotourism: 55 case studies from 39 countries, presented in a systematic form, drawing lessons that may be applied at other destinations.*
- *Ecotourism Market Study Series: seven pioneer country reports on the main European and North American ecotourism generating markets (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, UK, USA)*
- *Guidelines for the Sustainable Development and Management of Tourism in National Parks and Protected Areas* (revised edition, jointly with UNEP/WTO/IUCN)
- *International Ecotourism Guidelines* (WTO sponsored and contributed to this publication by The International Ecotourism Society)
- **A new edition of the sustainable tourism good practice compilation series is currently under preparation. This third volume will focus on successful examples of small ecotourism businesses, and it will be published early next year.**

More information on the above publications:

<http://www.world-tourism.org/cgi-bin/infoshop.storefront>

Around **150 ecotourism case studies from all around world** are available at WTO's IYE 2002 website. Check the case study presentations made at the regional ecotourism conferences:

<http://www.world-tourism.org/sustainable/IYE/RegionalEcotourismConferencesSeminars.htm>

Recent ecotourism events with WTO support:

- EXPO-ECOTURISMO 2002, Ecotourism Exhibition and Trade Show (10-11 September 2002, Caracas, Venezuela)
More info and contact: expoecoturismo@cantv.net, www.angel-ecotours.com
- Ecotourism in the Amazon region, Conference and trade fair, 11-13 September 2002, Manaus, Brazil
- National Seminar on Ecotourism, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 24 September 2002
Contact: Sri Lanka Tourist Board (www.srilankatourism.org), ctbria@slt.net.lk
- Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions, Geres, Portugal, 18-20 September 2002
- Ecotourism, Mountains and Protected Areas - Partners in Prosperity, First National Ecotourism Forum and Fair, 2-5 October 2002, Sofia, Bulgaria
http://www.moew.government.bg/ecotourismforum/index_e.htm

Upcoming ecotourism events supported by WTO:

- ECOAQUA - International Conference on Ecotourism in Water Areas
16-19 October 2002, Mondariz-Balneario, Galicia, Spain
<http://www.atlanticocongresos.com/ecoaqua/index.html>
- 2002 Ecotourism Association of Australia International Conference
21-25 October 2002, Cairns, Tropical North Queensland, Australia
<http://www.ecotourism-australia.info>

Further information on the International Year of Ecotourism 2002:

<http://www.world-tourism.org/sustainable/IYE-Main-Menu.htm>

3. Indicators of Sustainable Tourism Development – New WTO Taskforce

Indicators are essential tools for the monitoring and control of tourism development. Sustainability indicators are designed to provide reliable data and information on the environmental and socio-economic impacts of tourism development, thus facilitate responsible decision-making. WTO has been involved in this field since 1993, it published "[A Practical Guide to the Development and Use of Indicators of Sustainable Tourism](#)" in 1996 and held 6 regional workshops since then.

WTO will be soon working with an **international experts' task force** to develop a revised guide on the use of sustainability indicators in tourism development. The new study will be based on a comprehensive international review of experiences in this subject. The new guide will aim at providing a practical manual on the definition and application of indicators, and how to build them into tourism planning, policy-making and regulatory processes. As a first step, the expert group will compile available information and documentation in this field, internationally and nationally, in order to prepare a comprehensive inventory.

4. Certification and other systems of voluntary regulation for sustainable tourism – towards a global framework. Voluntary Initiatives for Sustainable Tourism: Worldwide Inventory and Comparative Analysis of 104 Eco-labels, Awards and Self-commitments

WTO has published, with the above title, the results of a **comprehensive research on initiatives of voluntary regulation in tourism**, initiated in 2001. This study provides an evaluation of the effectiveness of existing schemes by identifying similarities and differences among voluntary initiatives, finding out the factors that make them successful in terms of sustainable tourism development. Based on the results, guidelines are provided: to tourism companies wishing to adopt one of these voluntary schemes; to organizations that run these initiatives, in order to improve existing schemes or create new ones; to governments and NGOs, to provide them with technical criteria and guidelines for the support and/or supervision they may wish to give to these initiatives. The publication also contains a CD ROM with the detailed description of the 104 initiatives, allowing a combined search according to the types, target regions and target areas of the initiatives.

<http://www.world-tourism.org/cgi-bin/infoshop.storefront/EN/product/1232-1>

Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council

Based on this publication on voluntary initiatives, WTO is supporting a **feasibility study on the possible establishment of a global accreditation agency**, called **Sustainable Tourism Stewardship Council (STSC)**. The purpose of this council will be accrediting certification systems and other voluntary schemes according to developed international guidelines and standards, in order to give them greater credibility in front of consumers and business partners. As part of its support for the initiative, WTO coordinated a survey among its Member States about their perspectives on STCS.

Summary of the survey among WTO Members:

<http://www.world-tourism.org/sustainable/STSC.htm>

5. International Network for the Sustainable Development of Mass Coastal Tourist Destinations

WTO is working on setting up this network with the aim of establishing a direct communication system amongst local authorities and destination management organizations in order to generate and disseminate methodologies, and to share experiences on sustainable management and development issues. As the first step of this process, a methodological framework has been developed for the network and a survey has been conducted among WTO Members. The second phase is currently being developed and its first outcome, the *Worldwide Guide of Resources for the Management of Mass Coastal Destinations*, is now available at <http://www.omt.uned.es/>.

APPENDIX 6:

FACILITATIVE TOOLS – INNOVATIVE APPROACHES AND BEST PRACTICES

There are substantial resources available from the World Tourism Organization, OAS, BEST, and Caribbean Tourism Organization, to name several. Here are examples of several approaches to assist the participants in identifying and prioritizing actions to be undertaken in the formation of the MBRS Tourism Forum.

1. Facilitative Tool: Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network

The Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network connects visitors with the Bay's special places through a system of parks, refuges, museums, historic communities, and water trails. Managed by many different partners, these sites each tell a part of the Bay story. Together, as the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network, they provide a way for experiencing and understanding the Bay as a whole. See the following links for more details:

<http://www.baygateways.net/index.htm>
[The Gateways Network Vision](#)
[Gateways Framework -- A Guide to the Network's Development](#)
[The Network's Goals](#)
[Types of Gateways](#)
[Telling the Chesapeake Story](#)

These organizations guide and support the Network; find out what they do and how to contact them.

[National Park Service](#)
[Gateways Network Working Group](#)
[Mesoamerican Barrier Reef Program](#)

How to become a Designated Gateway: New Chesapeake Gateways are regularly being added to the Network; find out what it means to participate and how to nominate a Gateway.

[The Benefits](#)
[Nomination Instructions and Forms](#)
[Gateway Commitments](#)

Using the Chesapeake Bay Network as a benchmark, a thematic structure might be developed for organizing Barrier Reef stories. The thematic structure could be based on current research as well as ongoing interpretive programs. It can be informed by regional work shops around the Barrier Reef and developed in part through a subsequent session bringing together a diverse group of interpreters, planners, educators and researchers. The thematic structure does not prescribe specific themes for particular sites. Rather, it fosters development of a cohesive approach to interpretation by placing specific stories in context, and by outlining the focus of interpretation for network-wide functions.

Overarching themes, emphasizing “interconnectedness,” “interdependence,” and “knowledge,” are examples of the main interpretive messages of Gateways Network. They are broad, but integrating themes, essential to conveying and understanding the essence of the Mesoamerican Barrier Reef today. Overarching themes provide a context in which principle and sub-themes — and all places in the Network — can be viewed and

understood. Particularly important, overarching themes are broad enough to apply to Network locations (water trails) along Barrier Reef tributaries outside the core Barrier Reef area. This provides a Network-wide interpretive connection throughout the marine /coastal environment and watershed.

Principal themes focus on core aspects of the Barrier Reef story that give the Chesapeake its unique and significant character. Unlike overarching themes which can be addressed in some way at all locations, principal themes do not apply to every site or interpretive location. Principal themes represent major story lines, each tying a a number of Barrier Reef sites together. For example, “The Living Coral Reef” may be interpreted at a range of different sites, each focusing on a different or related aspect of the story.

Sub-themes or topics are even more discrete. They represent a range of Barrier Reef-related topics that might be addressed by a particular protect area site.

2. Facilitative Tool: Using Networks of World Heritage and Protected Area Sites in Tour Design at the Regional, National and Transnational Levels

For World Heritage and protected area sites, tourism is an increasingly important management issue. Tourism has problems and advantages. Linking World Heritage (WH) and Protected Area (PA) sites may provide a vehicle to address a number of these problems. Linking sites could be through the creation World Heritage and Protected Area tour circuits or linking sites through shared interpretation and promotional materials and shared management practices under the WH or a PA (e.g. National Park, Marine Reserve) “brand”. Linking may increase local economic development, raise WH and PA public awareness, enable the distribution of visitors from one heavily visited site to another less visited, and enrich the visitor experiences through better industry-site management coordination. At the Ecotourism Summit in Quebec and recently in Indonesia, the World Heritage Center of UNESCO joined forces with UNEP’s Tour Operators Initiative for Sustainable Tourism to explore how such opportunities can be developed, using two types of linking possibilities:

- **Physical networks** are a series of sites linked together in a tourism package. Networks have special themes to link them together. Trading routes (e.g. Ruta Maya, Silk Route) are a typical example of physical networks. These groups of sites can be promoted via guidebooks, maps and online route planning facilities. On route the visitor may find kiosks, regional information centre and interpretation about the attractions and resources the visitor sees.
- **Branding** develops a common market presence for a group of sites. A common logo symbolises the brand and stands for certain values and a certain quality for example, high quality guided tours, interpretation programs, sustainable commitment, and good local products. A common website is an important tool to present the brand on the market.

Developing shared promotional and interpretation materials and sound visitor management practices, such as reservation systems and local advisory groups are all possible under both the physical networks and the brand linking concepts Several needs have stimulated interest in developing WH and PA networks.

Some WH and PA sites receive little or no private industry support, even though an area may contain a richer biodiversity or more extensive cultural heritage than a well-known site. Linking popular sites to those less visited sites could increase financing for conservation activities at the less visited sites.

Secondary sites could serve as add-on attractions increasing the value of the tourism product. Formation of links to outlying sites not necessarily WH or PA sites are also possible. These outlying sites would enable diversification of destinations and experiences permitting tourism benefits to be shared by a broader range of public and enriching the visitor experience.

Coordination with tour operators and site management is needed at most sites. Looking at a group of WH and PA sites as one tour circuit could provide a framework for exploring coordination practices between the sites and tour operators.

There is a need and demand to promote WH and PA interpretation. Linking several sites with “stories” describing their natural and cultural heritage under the WH or PA theme could enhance the visitor experience and the quality of the tour.

Accurate and updated information is needed at many sites. Shared information developed by the industry and the site administration could aid visitor planning, marketing and promotion. Shared lists of qualified guides at each site, a data bank of conservation activities for visitor participation, information on making donations, all could enhance site protection and stimulate local tourism-related economic.

Some useful management techniques are too costly to be implemented by individual sites. By linking sites, management could share cost-cutting management instruments such as reservation systems and passport programs. The knowledge gained from implementing these actions can be shared and help to enrich site management across the linked sites.

Driven by the WH or PA anchor points, other protected areas, not necessarily WH areas, can share policy and management know-how research and training opportunities expanding the collective knowledge and economic development possibilities.

The branding of a tourism product takes much time and is costly. WH and PA sites already possess a high market value because the WH name is known and respected, thereby limiting the need for more extensive marketing.

The World Heritage Center has conducted one Workshop in Indonesia to explore this concept. Preliminary discussions have indicated that there may be interest in doing a similar Workshop in Mexico/Central America, and possibly other regions.

3. Facilitative Tool: Foster Small and Medium-sized Business Development and Entrepreneurship

Large destinations feature large resorts, transportation and other suppliers. However, regardless of the size of the destination, small and medium size businesses (SMEs) play a key role in development. These businesses serve various purposes such as providing an entry point to the economic gains for the local community, help to foster ownership of the destination, provide the tourist with alternative or support services (i.e. diving, horseback riding, traditional

cuisine, etc) that are not available directly through the resort. Additionally, SMEs are the key to maintaining tourism revenue within the destination, as they are more likely to buy locally and use local infrastructure to develop their product or service.

a) **Ecotourism Enterprise Incubator:** A tool to guide the development of the MBRS Tourism Sustainable Tourism was developed by George Washington University and Conservation International with the assistance of Management Systems International (MSI) under the USAID RAISE Consortium. The goal of an ecotourism enterprise incubator is to promote the creation and/or strengthening of strategic new businesses in the area of ecotourism and related industries, as an instrument for the conservation of biodiversity and the creation of jobs, based on the principles of sustainable development. The expected results include:

- A network of competitive ecotourism enterprises in strategic pilot areas focused on the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable development.
- A pilot model for incubators in ecotourism, potentially replicable in other rural municipalities near protected areas.
- A mechanism for assisting in the financing of protected areas
- Greater harmony between the financial sector and entrepreneurs in ecotourism, creating possibilities for other interested entrepreneurs.
- Sustainability of a nucleus of synergistic enterprises, united by service standards and attention to environmental management improvements and social concerns.

The Incubator is described in the following diagram. Further information about the Ecotourism Incubator can be found at www.raise.org/tourism/.

b) **Small Tourism Enterprises Project:** In 2001, the Organization of American States (OAS) Inter-Sectoral Unit for Tourism and USAID have engaged in a partnership involving the packaging of a “Caribbean experiences” brand with sites, attractions, events, festivals and related activities of interest to the marketplace. An adaptation of the OAS STEP (Small Tourism Enterprises Project) approach to the MBRS region linking ecotourism to protected areas might encompass the following elements:

- Best practices identification and dissemination.
- A coaching system and walk-in centers to support product development;
- Occupational standards for small hotels and receptive tour operators;
- A comprehensive environmental management program;
- An investment fund
- Volunteer programs and partnerships;
- Needs assessment related to protected areas; and
- An international marketing system, built upon the “nature experiences” type of brand “World Heritage” linked to small hotel, chalet and Bed & Breakfast types of accommodation.

4. Facilitative Tool: Expand destination management capacity by continually involving the community

In almost all of the other tools mentioned above, ownership is mentioned as a positive result of the stakeholder driven process. While this is essential, it is important to foster ownership not only among the direct stakeholders but also throughout the community in general. Tourists will come in contact with many more people than just the hotel clerk and the bus driver. Therefore it is important that the general public feel a sense of pride in their destination, which will be translated, in a friendly attitude, good customer service and a pleasant experience for both the tourism and the resident. Community involvement and ownership is a result of a planned, well-represented development process which includes providing the destination with as much information as possible as well as having an informed destination manager or destination management organization leading the process.

There is no one easy way to develop an educated destination manager or destination management organization. The George Washington University (GWU) has developed a program entitled Tourism Destination Management and Marketing Certificate Program which offers continuing education courses for professionals in the tourism and hospitality field or those working in areas related to tourism such as economic development, investment promotion, planning, protected area management, historic preservation, cultural resources, performing arts, museums, small business development, sports and recreation, and transportation. GWU has joined together with partners' universities from all over the world to offer the Destination Management program throughout the world. Further information about the Tourism Destination Management and Marketing can be found at www.gwu.edu/dmp.

5. Facilitative Tool: Establish product diversification and contingency plans.

Unfortunately, a great weakness of the tourism industry is its fragility. For example, tourism arrivals to Egypt have been greatly affected by terrorist activity through the last decade, causing a significant loss in revenue. Equally devastating to the industry was the Gulf War in the mid-nineties, which represented the only period of overall tourism decline that decade. Because there is no way to predict those events that will negatively impact tourism development, contingency planning and diversification of the tourism product is necessary to limit this impact.

Carefully developed plans that deal not only with the emergency, as it occurs but also how to overcome the crisis and generate new economic alternatives are key to tourism development. It is vital that a destination not completely depend upon tourism as its only means of revenue. As the recent terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington have shown, the industry is extremely susceptible to catastrophic events, regardless of where they happen.

A tool to assist destinations, as well as small and medium size businesses foster product development and differentiation is the *Product Development Workbook* developed for ARD, Inc. for use in the gateway communities of the Rila and Central Balkan National Parks. This workbook was designed to provide a step-by-step process from which local participants could strategically develop their own tourism product.

It utilized a product development approach designed to add value to the core product which focused on the natural attractions represented by the Rila and Central Balkans National Parks.

Several tools for contingency planning are currently being developed in the wake of the recent disasters in New York and Washington. The Pacific Asia Travel Association offers a seminar entitled “Managing a Crisis: Are you prepared?” This seminar provides insight into crisis management operations, the needs and demands of the media, action plans for handling crisis and regaining consumer confidence. The program also included recent tourism industry case studies about health, natural disaster and terrorist situations that tested crises plans in action. Information regarding this program can be found at <https://www.pata.org/frame3.cfm?pageid=6>.

6. Facilitative Tool: Increasing Financing for Protected Areas

For a protected area ecotourism cluster approach to work, it is essential to establish resource rents, taxation regimes and other financing mechanisms to support improved environmental management and protected area systems.

The Caribbean Group for Cooperation in Economic Development and the Environment Department of the World Bank in collaboration with The European Union (Tourism and the Environment in the Caribbean, June 2000) called attention to the relationship of improved environmental management to the ability to continue to generate revenues for Caribbean countries. Their report concluded that there is an argument to be made for the existence of resource rents arising from tourism assets, and for taxation schemes to capture these rents. These resource taxes should be considered as fees or user charges for the enjoyment and preservation of the environment—e.g. the fee systems used for the Bonaire Marine Park or in Costa Rican National Parks.

The recommended model for taxing tourism resulting from their report follows; these recommendations may be applied to other natural resource dependent destinations in developing countries worldwide:

- Eliminate tax holidays for tourism investments;
- Design a straightforward and moderate-rate corporate income tax, as well as moderate tariff rates for tourism inputs; tariffs on materials and equipment during the construction phase of tourism projects could be waived (and preferential tariff rates considered for environmentally friendly equipment or investments)
- Establish arrivals taxes for cruise ship passengers (but explicitly identify part of these charges as environmental or resource user fees);
- Establish a room tax as the primary resource rent tax (this is preferred because the tax is proportional to resource use); room taxes may need to be harmonized with existing value added taxes;
- Use a departure tax designed to collect resource rents to supplement room taxes; this tax should be reduced or waived for residents. Identifying some portion of these departure taxes as explicitly environmental charges would help to decrease consumer resistance, and provide earmarked funds for environmental management;
- Charge user fees for sites where access is limited; these fees may be 2-tiered, with different rates for residents and visitors.

- Develop opportunities for small business investment and operation of concessions at World Heritage Sites, with a percentage of gross revenues returned to the Site for management, infrastructure improvements, interpretation and related management expenses.

The approach outlined in this paper could be adapted to conditions in the MBRS Region as a re-positioning strategy focusing on niche markets from major market generating countries. A well-funded protected area management system linked with quality ecotourism products would be right step forward for the MBRS Project.

7. Facilitative Tool: Destination Monitoring to Assess Impacts

Monitoring a destination allows its stakeholders to adequately assess the impact (both positive and negative) tourism is having on the natural, social and economic environments of a destination. Two useful guidelines for monitoring tourism development and implementation may be recommended:

- *Indicators in Monitoring Tourism in Small Communities* has been developed as part of the Urban Environmental Management Project of the Canadian Universities Consortium at the Asian Institute of Technology under the supervision of Dr. Walter Jamieson. It is a manual intended for use by those involved in monitoring tourism development in a village or small community. It may be used by a community member who has been designated as the person responsible for monitoring tourism change in the community, by a local government official given the same task, by someone from outside of the community who has been brought in to conduct the monitoring or by anyone else charged with this task.
- *Ecotourism Impacts Monitoring: A Review of Methodologies and Recommendations for Developing Monitoring Programs in Latin America* is a report produced by Abigail Rome, under contract with the Ecotourism Program of The Nature Conservancy. It offers a summary of some existing visitor impacts measurement methodologies for protected areas and provides recommendations for how to establish ecotourism monitoring programs in Latin America. It offers a methodology which is easy to implement on a limited budget and which does not require high levels of technical expertise. It also outlines a training program for conservation NGOs and protected areas or ecotourism managers which incorporates tourism impacts monitoring. It is available from The Nature Conservancy

(adrumm@tnc.org) or

http://www.conserveonline.org/2001/06/s/en/Ecotourism_Impacts_Monitoring.doc