

25. Write down a clear policy statement for the ecolodge, including the project's mission. Display it in a visible place for both employees and visitors.
26. Understand the undercurrents and realities of doing business in the area. Find out exactly how things really get done and make the right connections. Make certain that the most powerful people in the area are on your side, and do not discount corruption — understand it and ensure that you have the resources to deal with it. If bribery is customary, work out how much power various officials have, and how much you need them (i.e. for planning permission, electricity and water connections, road-building, etc.). Calculate the possible "extras" it will take for the project to succeed, and stay protected (i.e. from a plethora of "copy-cat" developments by the mayor's family next door to your ecolodge).
3. Buy as much locally produced food as possible. In this way, the gathering will show support for the local economy and it will also help you establish the area's ability to support the finished ecolodge. Not only will this provide a good talking point with potential local suppliers, but it will give them a chance to meet future requirements.
4. Identify cultural impacts the project could produce and establish a monitoring plan. Consider both positive and negative impacts.
5. Establish a solid knowledge base about the values and traditions of neighboring communities and available natural resources.
6. Promote among local people an understanding of the intrinsic value of the site's resources and characteristics, and of their own cultural values and lifestyle, thus encouraging a sense of local pride.
7. Establish a discussion with the community about values and cultural symbols that they would like to share with visitors, and help determine the most convenient way to do it.
8. Avoid developing your own expectations about possible uses of resources or activities to enrich the visitor experience, without first establishing clearly with the community what is and is not possible to offer.
9. Be scrupulous and fair in your dealings with money and make sure you do not earn a reputation as a "soft touch." Be aware of the effect of paying wages that may cause friction in poor communities and the temptations your seemingly endless supplies of money brings about.
10. Avoid surprises, eliminate rumors and always be honest. Good communication is the best tool for establishing solid bases in your relationship with the community.

### 4.3 VALUES AND TRADITIONS

Cultural, economic and physical impact is always going to exist. It is feasible, however, to diminish the negative effects and strengthen the positive features of your proposal. One area of concern is the way in which visitors interpret and value unfamiliar cultures; another is how the locals perceive themselves. Acculturation and loss of values in the face of tourism occur more easily when there is low self-esteem within the community.

### GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Invest in a deep and objective analysis of the values and cultural traditions of the community. This will help you define both your project and your future relationship with the community.
2. Avoid making the mistake of abusing traditional symbols and activities, or allowing yourself to get carried away by romanticism or imagination.



11. Use formal contracts or agreements that authorize you to use certain resources or symbols; use them, as well, for activities or services that the community is to provide you with, or vice versa.
12. Incorporate only those cultural symbols that authentically reflect local values (food, architecture, decoration, clothing, music, etc.) into your project, but do so only if and when the community has no objection.
13. Support activities and projects that foster appreciation and reaffirmation of the local culture (visitor information centers, development of research and distribution of information).



#### 4.4 COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Many problems and difficulties can be avoided when community participation is considered right from the moment a project is proposed. It is an error to assume that community participation is limited to the job opportunities afforded by the ecolodge or to the benefits that the lodge might generate in the way of infrastructure and services.

It is fundamental to keep in mind that each community has its own concept of time, its own mental structure and usually a very respectable ancestral knowledge about the region, which could be of substantial benefit to the project.

#### GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Establish relationships with neighboring communities and identify and work with various interest groups during all phases of the projects (planning, development, operation and monitoring); don't underestimate the value of orientation and aid both from community members and from qualified professionals during this stage.
2. Learn about the availability of primary resources for your use, such as drinking water and energy, and find out about waste management, respecting at all times the community's needs and rules for using these resources.
3. Consider the possibility of helping establish community recycling. After all, it will be very useful to your ecolodge.
4. Identify and respect local leaders; approaching and actively involving them often will result in their transmitting enthusiasm for the project to the whole community and achieve more organized community participation.

5. Identify an appropriate level of interaction with all representative sectors of the community (poor, rich, NGOs, politicians, etc.), establishing relationships and maintaining them throughout all stages of the project.
6. Consider yourself as one more member of the community. Stimulate and promote your role as a facilitator without fostering a paternalistic relationship.
7. Participate actively in current organizations and, if you want to create a new one, take into consideration the criteria of the community's various interest groups.
8. Stimulate communities to protect their natural resources. If the importance of conservation and its benefits are understood, community members will participate in and become proponents of the various projects.
9. Promote opportunities for locals to have access to your project by offering organized programs, special discounts and incentives.
10. Always remember that seeking community participation implies giving the community more opportunities for an effective participation in the development of activities and strengthening their own capacities. In this way, they become active members of society, rather than passive spectators, capable of making decisions and controlling activities that can affect their lives.

#### 4.5 COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ECOLOGDE PLANNING AND DESIGN

Many projects fail simply because designers and developers failed to involve the proper local people and authorities at an earlier point in development. Many opportunities exist to constructively involve local people in the design and development of an ecolodge.

In many countries, corruption is a major issue, especially at local building approval councils. Involving respective council members at an earlier stage of the design process may be helpful at the approval stage.

## GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Consider organizing a two-day intensive design charrete consisting of architects, developer, local people and the authorities. Through this two-way participatory approach — as opposed to the traditional beneficiary one — local people feel part of the decision-making process and the resultant camaraderie may help to foster community pride in the ecotourism facility.
2. Understand the undercurrents and realities of doing your business. Find out exactly how things really get done in an unfamiliar target region and ensure that you maintain good relations with the area's decision makers. Do not discount corruption — understand it — but do NOT encourage it. If bribery is customary (for planning permission through electricity and water connections to road-building), find a non-corrupt way to get the approvals.

### 4.6 COMMUNITY AS DEVELOPERS

In some cases, indeed with increasing frequency, local communities are taking the initiative as developers and operators of ecotourism projects, particularly ecolodges. Various legal frameworks exist for community involvement in such projects, including cooperatives, non-governmental organizations or independent businesses, among others. Many of these community efforts have been supported and/or co-financed by international NGOs such as WWF, AWF, IUCN, TNC, GTZ and others. In any of these scenarios, the development process and operation of a community lodge should comply with guidelines mentioned in this book, to a degree that is in line with the project's scale.

Experience has shown that, while in theory all community members have the opportunity to become involved in development and operation of a project, usually only a few members actually take on the responsibility and face the project's challenges, until it reaches a certain level of maturity and fiscal stability. Evidence exists that this type of project requires a great deal of time (approximately five years) and concerted effort for community members to achieve a sufficient level of involvement and technical expertise for them to take it over completely.

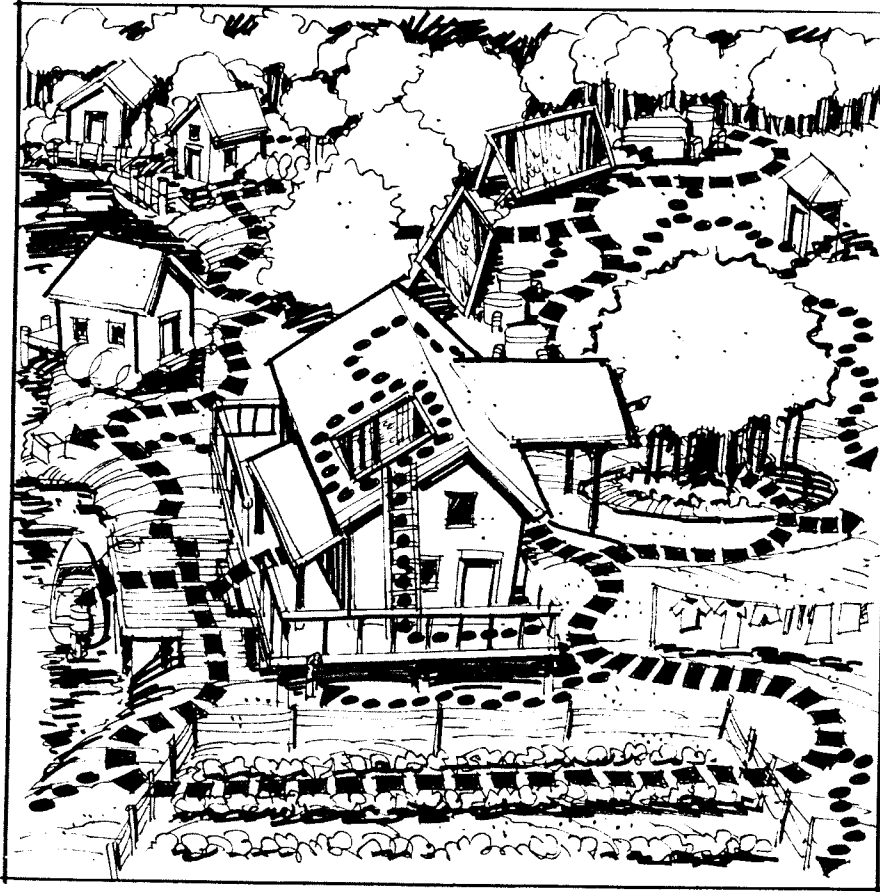
## GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Remember that the guidelines from Sections 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 also are valid for you whether you are a community organization or just one member of a community that wishes to develop its own project (or already has one), and that perhaps they will help you see your community from a broader perspective.
2. Identify your real capacity to take on all the activities this type of business involves, with professionalism and a sense of responsibility, and not merely with enthusiasm or because of a need for new sources of income.
3. Analyze your situation from a business perspective; be objective, critical and open to the opinions and input of other members of the community, yet know how to protect your business interests and profitability.
4. Officially establish the legal framework for your project, in order to comply with all the prerequisites for various legal transactions and commercial activities to be carried on by the business.
5. No matter how small the investment, don't stint on financial and administrative tools that will impose an efficient control on income and expenses. Get advice from professionals who can undertake pertinent studies and analyses.
6. The smaller the business, the more important it is to join forces with other members of the tourism sector, such as other ecolodges within the region, to form tourist routes and to market yourselves as a group with receptive tour operators, so that your product is part of the activities and services they are offering on the national and international market.
7. Leave space to give opportunities for other initiatives by community members that would complement your own product, thus enhancing overall service.
8. No matter what category your ecolodge falls under, you are competing on a global level. Therefore, it is vital to base your work on the criteria of quality; as you will find that the tourist always demands the best.
9. Any technical assistance, cooperation or financing that has been sought to support your project should be viewed as an investment that you will endeavor to repay. Paternalism benefits no one and, on the contrary, can cause disenchantment and failure once support is suspended.
10. Limited training of human resources is one of the commonest weaknesses in this type of project. Recognize your weaknesses and seek to strengthen them.
11. Participation in ecotourism projects should be understood and practiced as a complement to the community's traditional economic activities and not as a substitute.

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# CHAPTER CONTENTS

## 6.0 OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT

6.1	INTRODUCTION .....	119
6.2	MARKET RESEARCH, DIFFERENTIATION AND SEGMENTATION .....	119
6.3	MANAGEMENT AND EDUCATION OF STAFF .....	121
6.4	BROADER COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT .....	122
6.5	GUEST PROGRAMS .....	122
6.6	ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES AND PROGRAMS .....	124
	REFERENCES .....	125

