

Sustainable Destination Award Good Practice Story

Scaling up Community Led and Owned Indigenous Tourism in Guyana

I. Issues faced: Two of the major issues that were addressed with the Good Practice were out-migration from indigenous communities and the need for focused development assistance. Out-migration in Guyana's indigenous communities are as high as 80%. This situation gets even more complex when farm lands become abandoned, and family-structure changes due to absentee husbands and fathers. Although the economic situation may improve due to income producing jobs from outside of the community, it negatively affects many families, and by extension their communities. Hence, the need for alternative sources of income which can be derived through social enterprise development such as community-led and owned tourism enterprises. The communities of Rewa, Surama and Yupukari in Guyana's North Rupununi have all experienced improved livelihoods, increased pride in and protection of their cultural heritage, and enhanced ecosystem services through conservation – all through sustainable social enterprise development. These community-led and owned enterprises took many years to develop. Multiple governmental agencies and donors have supported and invested in the establishment of community-based tourism enterprises in Guyana over the years. However, a focused methodology based on proven solutions and sustained support has been lacking. Although out-migration and capacity constraints remain an issue, more communities are embracing the use of the Guyana Community-led Tourism Framework and toolkit and seeing results.

II. Methods / steps / tools used: In order to address the challenges faced by the indigenous communities, the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA) developed and began implementing the Guyana Community-led Tourism (CL&OT) Framework and toolkit in 2018 to establish a step-wise methodology to create Return on Investments (ROI) and sustained impact in prioritised indigenous communities in collaboration with the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs (MOIPA). Leveraging combined budgetary resources are result in enterprise development in multiple communities throughout Guyana. The Guyana CL&OT Framework involves a multi-phased approach and is inclusive of the following activities:

Activity 1: Readiness, Governance, and Action Planning. The purpose of Activity 1 is to assess each communities' readiness for tourism, establish a Tourism Committee, and support them in developing tourism development action plans. There are four sub-activities involved in this process. *Stage 1* involves community awareness raising through community engagement, information sharing and a self-assessment. *Stage 2* involves an assessment of community needs, governance, and the level of visitor readiness and market readiness. Assessing community tourism offerings provides the

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basis for identification of product development opportunities and support requirements, community capacity building needs and an action plan for implementation. This phase reflects a community-centric and market responsive orientation that empowers communities to lead tourism development activities, attract visitors directly, and attract domestic and international travel intermediaries who have clients interested community tourism experiences. *Stage 3* involves facilitating the prioritization of actions undertaken through a participatory process. *Stage 4* includes completing a Market-Readiness Diagnosis and Market- Product Match. Visitor ready criteria are used to assess existing tourism product, according to the level of product and operational market readiness. This is followed by a market-led approach based on what target travellers want. The process utilizes sustainable livelihood measures, market demand, product supply, and community values compatibility measures to assess the strength of the market-product match. In addition, a competitive analysis is conducted and ideal guest profiles are prepared. Throughout Activity 1 and the activities that follow, local trainers are trained in how to implement the Community-led and Owned Tourism Framework and toolkit.

Activity 2: Building Capacity through Centralized and Hands-on Training. The purpose of Activity 2 is to implement peer-to-peer and shadowing trainings to build capacity within beneficiary communities to lead tourism development. The MoIPA and GTA lead the implementation of new and existing curriculum, which includes but may not be limited to business accounting, management and marketing; reservations and bookings; hospitality and the visitor welcome; food safety and catering; and tour guiding and packaging. Trainings are undertaken with a lead tour guide, a caterer from the MoIPA, and staff from Surama Eco-lodge and or Rewa Eco-lodge members. This activity includes the provision of support for becoming licensed by the GTA.

Activity 3: Developing Tourism Enterprises and Product. The purpose of Activity 3 is to develop tourism and package tourism experiences. This activity starts with undertaking an inventory of natural and tangible and intangible cultural heritage assets, which leads to identifying what is sacred and what can be shared with outsiders and the establishment of Visitor Codes of Conduct that spell out the social mores, customs and rules that visitors are asked to follow. The next step is centered on developing tourism and packaging tourism experiences. It then leads to the establishment of either Private-Public-Community Partnerships and or joint ventures with tourism private sector companies to develop new products, complete eco-lodges that are under development, refine existing products, and package new and existing offerings. Informed by the findings of the Market-Product Match in Activity 1 and the new GTA Experiential Travel guidelines, community tourism enterprises and experiential travel product is developed, inclusive of business planning, and the packaging one two full-day tours, four half-day tours or a combination of both.

Activity 4: Establishing Market Linkages. The purpose of Activity 4 is to establish market linkages for visitor ready product. This activity involves establishing market linkages and integrating market ready product into the tourism value chain. To realize the potential, the GTA helps communities secure direct market access through domestic and international tour operators in collaboration with

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the Tourism & Hospitality Association of Guyana and other partners. Emphasis is placed on developing peer-to-peer experiences such as home-stays, in-home dining and insider cultural experiences and securing market access through sharing economy platforms such as Airbnb, Airbnb Experiences, EatWith, Viator, and Traveling Spoon.

Activity 5: Marketing Community Tourism Offerings. The purpose of Activity 5 is to develop marketing strategic action plans and market visitor ready product. The GRA helps communities develop marketing strategic action plans. Marketing implementation activities are also led by the GTA. This activity includes the promotion of community tourism product that is visitor ready on the GTA website, through its social media channels, and through its market representatives in its core markets (United States, Canada, Germany and the UK). The GTA also coordinates familiarization trips in communities with the media, international tour operators and social media influencers. The Tourism and Hospitality Association of Guyana and its members support these marketing activities as well.

Activity 6: Measuring and Communicating Outcomes. The purpose of Activity 6 is to implement a system to measure and report on the outcomes on an ongoing basis. During Activity 6, a tourism dashboard monitoring system is implemented to enable the monitoring, tracking, and reporting of tangible outcomes. The dashboard is designed to ensure transparency within the community so that the flow of monetary resources within the community is known to the Toshao and Village Council and shared with community members. To operationalize the system, members of the Tourism Committees are trained in the use and management of the system.

III. Specific/measurable results, benefits and recognitions (e.g. awards): The GTA is in the process of piloting the Guyana CL&OT Framework and toolkit. The GTA, in collaboration with the MOIPA, prioritized four communities for tourism development based on community receptivity, visitor readiness, market access, and strategic visitor flows. Outcomes achieved from 2018-2019 follow:

Karasaai:

- Completed: The community is known for protecting the sub parakeet and its habitat. Karasabai has developed a Tourism Development Action Plan, which is being implemented by an active Tourism Committee. An Eco-lodge is being built by the community, and 2 rooms have been completed. Product assessment, tourism development plan, and select trainings have been completed. Day tours and a 2-day/1-night package has been developed that includes birding, hiking, cultural presentations, and a village tour. The community is now hosting international and domestic visitors through two domestic outfitters.

Warapoa:

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- **Completed:** A 6-bedroom Eco-lodge has been completed, and Warapoka has developed a Tourism Development Action Plan, which is being implemented by an active Tourism Committee. Comprehensive peer-to-peer training has been completed. A 2-day/1-night package has been developed, and there is potential to increase the visitor length of stay. Sustainable catch and release sport fishing peer-to-peer trainings have been delivered by Rewa Eco-lodge. A FAM trip for sport fishing operators has been implemented. The product is now visitor ready at a basic level. The community has hosted its first international visitors and media.

Moraikobi:

- **Completed:** An Eco-lodge is being built by the community, 2 rooms have been completed, and refurbishments are being made to the existing 9-room guest house, which can be booked by visitors. Moraikobai has developed a Tourism Development Action Plan, which is being implemented by an active Tourism Committee. Product assessments and select training guide, hospitality, and trainings have been completed. Day tours and an overnight package has been developed that includes cultural presentations and a village tour. The community is now hosting international and domestic visitors through one domestic tour operator, and a FAM trip is planned to introduce others to this new product.

Chenapu:

- **Completed:** Chenapou has developed a Tourism Development Action Plan, which is being implemented by its new active Tourism Committee. The Tourism Committee is in the process of refurbishing its eco-lodge, which was built with support from WWF but never completed due to lack of funding and technical assistance. A product assessment has been completed, and a 2-day/1-night package has been scoped. Existing product includes three high-quality day hikes and Guianan cock-of-the-rock viewing. The community is now hosting SAVE travel (scientific, academic, volunteer and educational travel).

The anticipated short- to long-term outcomes associated with community-led and owned tourism and the metrics for monitoring them are summarised below. These outcomes have been achieved in several communities within Guyana. They address the issue of outmigration and resource exploitation by creating an alternative livelihood opportunity that benefits entire communities and incents the protection of their natural and cultural heritage.

Ripple Effect: design of a scalable initiative, which is beginning to be replicated in indigenous communities throughout Guyana, that takes advantage of the inter-linkages and cross-cutting impacts of the tourism sector to drive the implementation of the GSDS and the achievement of the SDGs.

- Quantification of the number of indigenous communities involved in tourism and the number of communities operating community-owned enterprises.

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Social impact: provision of the receptive communities with direct access to the travel and tourism value chain, support capacity building, help to preserve cultural heritage, increase community pride, and reduce out-migration.

- Quantification of the number of training and the number of community members trained in each individual training.
- Quantification of the number of traditional cultural heritage stories and performances integrated into the community tourism product offering.
- Quantification of the number of private sector partnerships established.

Economic impact: increase direct spending by domestic and international visitors, increased enterprise development and employment creation and an economic multiplier effect with an emphasis on indigenous women entrepreneurs and youth within the beneficiary communities

- Quantification of job creation by gender and age. Note: The majority of roles in indigenous community tourism enterprises in Guyana are prescribed to women. The women are almost exclusively responsible for craft-making enterprises, food catering, and for the cleaning, cooking, and reception roles within eco-lodges. A majority of men, young and old alike, are responsible for tour guiding and the provision of transportation services. There is perceived to be an equal split between men and women who manage eco-lodges in Guyana. Men and women of all ages are involved in cultural performances and storytelling.
- Quantification of the visitor expenditures within the communities and disaggregate them by expenses for service offerings, suppliers, and for the shared community development funds
- Quantification of the number of community members receiving direct economic benefits from the community enterprise.

Based on the communities' experiences in Surama and Rewa, tourism begins with hosting a small number of visitors within their first year or two of operating a new tourism enterprise. If the visitor experience is positive, it is possible for host communities to host more than 100 visitors by year two or three. The GTA anticipates comparable outcomes in all four of the pilot communities.

IV. Lessons learned: Many indigenous communities and villages that have attempted to build and or operate eco-lodges. Few have been successful. There are many reasons for the traditional high failure rates. These include but are not limited to:

- Unsuitable locations leading to inaccessibility and sub-optimal siting of lodging.
- Unsuitable designs of lodges and other infrastructure (e.g., small rooms, short beds for taller visitors, lack of adequate bathroom facilities).
- Design of products to suit one's liking or perception of what travellers want rather than what the visitor/target market actually wants.
- Lack of cooperation/shared vision within the community or continuity of leadership once there are changes in leadership at a community level.

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- Expectation that tourism will quickly generate money and attract visitors versus the reality that generating financial returns from tourism takes time.
- Expectation that if we build it, people will come.
- Traditional lack of adequate inter-agency support and collaboration.

V. Key success factors (how did you overcome the issues, resume in 3 points):

There have been ample opportunities to learn from the past, identify the various means for overcoming the myriad challenges involved in tourism development, and identify the top factors for success, which cannot be limited to three aspects:

1. **Access & Visitor Flows.** Affordable and reliable access via road or air is a prerequisite to the success of community tourism enterprises. Like-minded tourists make up strategic visitor flows that have predictable patterns and that create tourism circuits. Strategic visitor flows must be evaluated to understand where existing visitors are coming from, where they are going, what they are doing when they get there, and what amounts they're spending on tourism activities, lodging, transportation, food and other services. Creating tourism products outside of the existing strategic visitor flows and tourism circuits is difficult unless the gateway communities have affordable and reliable access, and or unique product offerings or iconic attractions nearby.

2. **Government Commitment.** Many community tourism ventures fail because of lack of adequate funding and financial expertise on the part of the person(s) managing community tourism. Financial budgeting, planning, and resource allocation need to be planned as part of the funding process. Aligning share aims and resources through inter-ministerial collaboration between the Ministry of Business, Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, Ministry of Communities, Ministry of Public Infrastructure, and Ministry of Public Telecommunications and private-public partnerships between the tourism private sector and relevant governmental agencies are key to the success of community tourism development in Guyana.

3. **Community Receptivity and Visitor Readiness.** The Toshao, Village Council and entire community must first agree to initiate the development of a community-owned and managed enterprise and be open to hosting visitors. Once the community is receptive, the level of community readiness should be assessed. In the context of Guyana, visitor ready means the tourism business is fully ready to welcome customers and offer them a safe, quality and memorable experience. This means that community members have received the necessary training. The community tourism business should be accessible via radio, phone, or internet. Visitors should be made to feel welcomed and should be able to engage in a half to full day of activities at a minimum. Activities should have very limited impact on the environment and provide an authentic representation of living culture and heritage. Good tasting and filling meals should be offered and should include a variety of dishes. Reliable transportation should be made available through the use of the community's vehicle or a taxi

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service. If accommodation is offered, it must meet basic international standards and be clean and comfortable.

4. **Commitment to Self Help.** Communities have traditionally received financial and technical support for a limited time. Poorly scoped community tourism development initiatives, underfunded projects, and lack of the requisite capacity within the beneficiary communities have led to a high failure rate in the past. The role of the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA) is to support communities throughout the tourism development process, and help them meet basic standards for visitor readiness in the areas of safety, quality and sustainability. The GTA and MOIPA act in the capacity of facilitators, providing guidance to inform community-level decision making, training to build local capacity, and financial assistance to underwrite the costs through the start-up phase of enterprise development. Importantly, the beneficiary communities have to agree to “self-help”. That is, they must volunteer and invest their time in ensuring the success of their tourism enterprise. This approach engenders shared accountability, empowers communities and fosters self-reliance.

5. **Peer-to-Peer Training & Mentoring.** Most community members have never been tourists or operated tourism companies. Therefore, it is critical that the GTA and MOIPA provide a series of trainings in customer service, catering, financial management, bookings and reservations management, managing tours in progress, and other related areas. This is typically followed

by peer-to-peer trainings. Community members from Rewa and Surama visit the new community enterprises and provide the Tourism Committee and select residents with hands-on training. This is often followed by job shadowing training. Wilderness Explorers, Guyana’s only Destination Management Company, hosts community members and provides in-office trainings that lasts for a week or more.

6. **Independent Tourism Committee & Financial Transparency.** Having an active Tourism Committee in place is critical. The village owns the tourism enterprise, and there is a separate standing tourism committee that is selected by the Village Council or community to operate the tourism business on behalf of the Village Council. The Tourism Committee is completely responsible for all matters regarding the operations of the community tourism enterprise and for the management of the income generated by tourism. This includes salaries, maintenance, infrastructure, transportation and paying all taxes and fees due to the Village Council. The work of the Tourism Committee should be fully aligned with the rules governing the community. All income generated by tourism should be deposited into a separate account specifically designated for tourism. The Village Council is solely responsible for how the fees and taxes received from the Tourism Committee are spent, and the community usually votes on how the monies are spent. The Tourism Committee is answerable to the Village Council, but it operates on a daily basis, independently from the Village Council and Toshao. This helps to ensure continuity in leadership when, for example, a new Toshao and Village Council come into power.

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7. Tourism Development Action & Business Plan. Communities need a road map and practical tools to guide tourism development and manages tourism. This includes a business plan for their community tourism enterprise. Action Plans are successful when they are informed by participatory community visioning, goal setting and action planning process and reflect the comments, recommendations, and preferences of the Toshao, Village Council members, residents, and external tourism stakeholders. Importantly, these action plans should be prescriptive and clearly define the level of priority, timeline and responsible parties leading and supporting each line of action and the associated tasks.

8. Market-driven Product Development. The approach to tourism development and planning within communities in Guyana has traditionally been ad hoc and supply driven. The demand for authentic cultural and nature-based experiences and for tourism that benefits people and places has been increasing globally. This defines Guyana's raw product offering. Product development must be linked to this market demand to maximise resource efficiencies and the return on investment.

9. Setting Expectations and Benefit Sharing. Community expectations should be managed and aligned, recognising that it takes a least a few years of hard work to develop and successfully implement a new community enterprise. Tourism oftentimes generates supplemental income but should not be a community's only means of income. To maximize supplemental income and become visitor ready, community members should specialize in different areas of hospitality and the requisite support services, including producing arts and crafts, providing supplies (e.g., beverages, fish, meats, fruits, and vegetables), food cooking and catering, tour offerings, home-stays, and transportation.

