

PAN Parks

Lessons Learned Series



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How to Bring Stakeholders Together to Pursue a Common Goal

October 2007





Dear Reader,

It is with great pleasure that I present to you the very first lesson in the PAN Parks Lessons Learned Series.

Working within a team to pursue a common goal is never an easy task. It then becomes ten times harder when you want to bring a group of strangers together to pursue a goal.

In this report, I share with you valuable lessons I have learned over the years that can help you do just that - bring together various stakeholders to pursue the goal of sustainable tourism development.

Good Luck!

Vlado Vancura,
Conservation Manager,
PAN Parks Foundation

What is sustainable tourism development?

Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary.

Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them.

World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2005

Why is there a need for sustainable tourism?

Sustainable tourism is an excellent tool to use if you want to simultaneously protect nature and stimulate regional development around a protected area. In addition, if one is to respect international standards and governmental commitments, then sustainable tourism is really the only activity that can be undertaken in accordance with most categories of protected areas.

At PAN Parks, we have incorporated this tool into our concept and it has helped us reach our goal of improving the management effectiveness of protected areas.

Why has sustainable tourism been selected as a tool to achieve this goal?

While sustainable tourism is not the only tool we use to achieve our conservation goals, it is a critical one. The development of sustainable tourism can be seen as an umbrella for the entire process of regional development and if used wisely, it is an important economic development tool. The trick is how to use this tool in a smart way – how to achieve a balance between conservation and sustainable tourism development.

At PAN Parks, we are finding answers to this challenging question together with many partners, supporters and stakeholders.

We have learned over the years that this is a very challenging and slow process. The steps we follow at PAN Parks are based on the implementation of a carefully planned process. We establish very clear benchmarks to support this process, which are subject to international independent assessment/verification.

Each of our PAN Parks, their Protected Area Authority and their relevant partners aim to achieve a synergy between conservation of natural values and sustainable tourism by developing together and jointly implementing a Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy (STDS). The STDS is ultimately used to ensure that local business partners meet important green tourism standards and work in harmony with the protected area's management objectives. While this is difficult to implement, we have been successful, and with this process, you can too.

Our Major Achievements in this Area:

- ✓ Romania's National Forest Administration, Romsilva, has elected to use PAN Parks STDS process as a best practice to follow and apply throughout their protected areas.
- ✓ The Bulgarian government applied a modified version of our methodology to develop and implement a visitor management plan that is used in all of their protected areas.

Where can you find the "Secrets of How to Bring Sustainable Tourism to your Region"?

In short, the biggest secret is in our chosen mindset and the mindset of our partners. Only the people who truly believe and commit themselves to sustainable tourism development for their protected area and its surrounding region will be able to make a positive difference.

At PAN Parks we actively search for protected area managers and local businesses who already think in this way, or are open to learning more about the benefits of thinking this way. To help these various people with their endeavours, we provide all the necessary technical assistance and international credibility during the process. In our system, we award each of our most successful partners with the use of our brand which represents quality, and access to our international marketing initiatives. This is an added benefit to committed partners, and something you can consider developing on your own for your group.

It is important to remember that the PAN Parks process, our quality brand and international reputation are mere tools that we use to stimulate, support and reward the efforts that stakeholders of protected areas make towards sustainable tourism development.

The true secret to developing effective sustainable tourism in your region is the stakeholders you bring together. Their commitment is critical. They must recognize and value the development of this kind of philosophy of sustainability, and they must want this philosophy to benefit both themselves and their neighbours. If you are able to bring a group of stakeholders together under this common understanding, you are well on your way to bringing sustainable tourism to your protected area and region. These people will then spread the message about the philosophy and in turn you will gain more support for the various businesses, projects and ultimately the conservation of the protected area.

How to Bring Stakeholders Together to Pursue a Common Goal

The PAN Parks Methodology

We have found that the best way to bring various stakeholders together is to make it clear for them that everyone will benefit from their involvement (Note: Not everyone will benefit in the same way). Our experience shows that with a clear benefit in mind, people suddenly begin talking in a very concrete and pragmatic way. It is important to remember that benefits should not always be defined as more tourists, but also an increased level of nature protection.

The challenge always becomes how to accommodate all of the varying stakeholder interests. This is often one of the most difficult steps in the process. We believe that a good solution is open communication right from the beginning about everyone's motives and desired benefits. Our experience shows that this can really help move the process forward in a positive manner, and that it is possible to satisfy the motives and objectives of the majority of relevant stakeholders.

The challenge is discussing all of this with the various stakeholders and arriving at a meaningful agreement that satisfies everyone. We provide a clear framework and rules to follow during this process. At the end of the day, the process we have developed offers significant benefits for everyone involved who is willing to respect the requirements and interests of the other partners/stakeholders.

Once everyone has discussed their motives and objectives, the next step is to develop a common goal that everyone agrees with. The common goal can be expressed in a strategic document that summarizes the agreement made among the stakeholders through the STDS or by the Local Partners Group. This is another area that PAN Parks can provide you with more technical assistance, advice, and benchmarks from relevant partners inside and outside of our network.

In the next step, the Local Partners Group must assume responsibility for formulating, implementing, and monitoring their STDS and executing the verification of local business partners. The stakeholders who make up this group must formally confirm their support and commitment to the conservation goals of the protected area.

Action Steps: Developing and Operating a Local Partners Group

Identify the right stakeholders and representatives to include – varies from place to place but usually includes:

1. Park Authorities
2. Local governments
3. Local landowners
4. Local Businesses
5. Entrepreneur's that use best practices
6. Community members
7. Local tourism agencies
8. NGOs



Face to face meetings help to stimulate ideas and encourage working together

Things to Remember

- ✓ Each member of the group must benefit from participation
- ✓ Each member must be treated equally
- ✓ To keep each member motivated, benefits of participation should be established within one year
- ✓ Maintain regular communication and plan regular face to face meetings

Steps to Follow

1. Each member of the group must actively contribute ideas and take action. By sharing their experiences and ideas, other members of the group will be able to develop new ideas that will help both themselves and the group as a whole.
2. Define clear and realistic goals, guidelines, timelines, and roles and responsibilities for each member of the group.
3. Respect each member's outside commitments and keep their workload and responsibilities to a minimum.
4. As a group, formulate a common vision. A consensus is important as each member must buy-in to the vision in order for the outcome of the group's activities to be successful.
5. Look for case studies and examples to help develop benchmarks that your group can follow.
6. Ensure that there is no internal competition between stakeholders (i.e. tourism businesses selling identical products and/or services).
7. Ensure all members understand the short-term and long-term benefits of their involvement.

A Heed of Caution

While following all of these steps will help you bring together various stakeholders to pursue a common goal, because protected areas are seen as attractive places for developers there will always be external factors that hinder the process of sustainable development.

The members of the Local Partners Group will continuously be influenced and tempted by factors such as lucrative offers from big investors who want to develop in unsustainable ways in and around the protected area. Therefore it is critical that each member of the group stays committed to the idea of sustainable development, and the vision that the group has established.

We recognize how difficult this challenge is. We therefore stress that open communication about sensitive topics should be raised during meetings. We also suggest that if your area is facing pressure from key players, that you consider inviting them to a group meeting and educating them about your group's vision. If you need additional information about how to do this, please contact us and we can provide you with more information and possibly act as a third-party mediator.

Upcoming Lessons in the Series

- ✓ How to Encourage Businesses to Follow Sustainable Practices.....November
- ✓ Combining Conservation with Business.....December
- ✓ How to Perform a Cost Benefit Analysis.....January
- ✓ Building Awareness for Your Protected Area.....February
- ✓ How to Lobby Decision Makers.....March
- ✓ Conducting Independent Audits.....April
- ✓ The Value of a Research Network.....May

Contact Details

If you have further questions please feel free to contact us:

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You can also visit panparks.org for more information about the Foundation, our initiatives, and other publications we have produced.