



# **ECOTOURISM AS A TOOL FOR TIGER CONSERVATION – AN OVERVIEW**

# ECOTOURISM

- Special challenges in TRCs
  - Tiger is an **elusive creature** – not easy to sight.
  - Tiger (wildlife) most often viewed in TRCs as a **liability and not an economic asset**
  - High human **population and development densities**
    - Buffer zones under tremendous pressure everywhere



# ECOTOURISM AS THE PANACEA FOR CONSERVATION?

- Good examples (Namibia) illustrate it can be a very **effective and sustainable conservation and development tool**
- Successful, sustainable ecotourism is a **delicate balancing act**
  - One instrument to shift incentives from turning wild places from a liability to an asset
    - Needs to work in conjunction with a suite of other conservation policies and approaches
  - Success measured in terms of **conservation** as well as **economic development**



## BUT THERE ARE RISKS .....

- Experience shows ecotourism if not done well can become an **“enclave industry”** and an **“exploitative industry”**:
  - Industry benefits from nature and the forest, **but contributes little**.
    - Profits exported, jobs to non-locals, disrupts environment and communities .....
  - **Adds to environmental pressures** within PAs and buffers
  - **Excludes local communities** who are key stakeholders in the process
- All of this is a recipe for alienation and environmental decline



# TIGER CONSERVATION REQUIRES BROADER ECOSYSTEM CONSERVATION

- Tigers require large ecosystems to flourish
  - Tourism **MUST FOCUS ON BUFFER AREAS** under pressure from conversion
- Marketing of tiger exclusively is risky (**elusive animal**).
  - Stress **multi-objective tourism** including other animals, plants, culture, scenic sites, etc., with tiger sightings as special bonus
  - Examples: South Africa, Kenya, Namibia, Costa Rica, Belize
- Tiger Range Countries can develop tiger and nature tourism as a complement to general tourism to create high value market niches.



# INVOLVEMENT OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES IS ESSENTIAL

- Communities suffer the consequence of living with wildlife, while others enjoy the benefits.
  - Need incentives (rewards) to become protectors (rather than detractors) of large wildlife icons.
- **Benefits from ecotourism** must be equitably **shared**.
  - Go beyond providing a few jobs to locals
  - Mechanism through which this happens will be important. There are risks of “benefit capture” by local elites. Need to balance schemes that give private benefits (e.g. cash and jobs) versus public benefits (e.g. schools, clinics)
  - Innovative compensation schemes needed for villagers who lose animals to predators. The amounts lost are usually **VERY SMALL!!!!**



# GOVERNMENT ESSENTIAL TO UNLOCK THE POTENTIAL

- Government creates the **enabling framework** and act as **honest broker**
  - Establish laws, regulations, enforcement
  - Empower local communities
  - Create incentives for conservation
  - Clarify land rights and use rights
  - Provide conservation finance
  - Provide appropriate infrastructure
  - Provide conducive environment for private sector development and NGO involvement



# PRIVATE SECTOR IS KEY

- Ecotourism is a business that involves consumer choices and preferences
- The private sector brings the **business know-how**
- It must provide **authentic experiences** if it is to survive in a competitive world
- Tiger ranges compete with many other destinations; public-private partnerships may be helpful for **effective marketing**



# NGO INVOLVEMENT CAN BE IMPORTANT

- NGOs provide:
  - local knowledge,
  - technical assistance,
  - enthusiasm, and
  - additional community ownership.
- They may benefit from capacity building



# CONCLUSION

- **Ecotourism has potential for helping with tiger conservation.** However, it must be managed carefully.
- It will work **IF AND ONLY IF** the focus is on
  - **Buffer zones** and not just the protected area;
  - **Gives local communities a stake** and strong incentives (rewards) for conservation (make the tiger an **asset not a liability**);
  - **Government supports with institutional framework, appropriate rules and regulations.**

