



EARTHCHECK

# SUPPORTING LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Supporting and sustaining local communities underpins a triple bottom line approach to sustainable tourism where economics, environmental and social thinking are all integrated into core business activities. Strong, respected, healthy and prosperous local communities are more likely to be hospitable to visitors and concerned for their welfare and safety. They often have a greater ability and willingness to preserve their own culture and the destination on which the tourism operator relies, resulting in rewarding and authentic visitor experiences.

This fact sheet has been developed in line with the goals of The Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) Partnership<sup>1</sup>. The key areas of community support involve government lobbying and education, infrastructure and planning, community engagement and consultation, employment, business partnerships and product development and guest education. The focus is on identifying opportunities for tourism operations to provide:

- Financial assistance (loans, donations, bursaries, business partnerships etc.);
- Technical assistance (business management, engineering and design, planning etc.); or
- In-kind service (use of facilities such as conference rooms, food, human resources, equipment, etc.)

## GOVERNMENT LOBBYING AND EDUCATION

**GSTC - B.1. The company actively supports initiatives for social and infrastructure community development including, among others, education, health, and sanitation.**

Consider government lobbying and community engagement on social issues such as health and education services.

Work with the community to identify education needs and provide financial, technical or in-kind resources and assistance to deliver training and support programs for:

- Health and sanitation (HIV/AIDS, TB, malaria etc.)
- Literacy and language courses

- Financial and business management skills (developing business plans and funding proposals)
- Environmental management and managing special tourist sites

Help identify appropriate training providers and provide resources and assistance to deliver training through financial, technical and in-kind support. This might include:

- Local community members co-training with employees
- Funding (or in kind contribution such as food and board) for training programs
- Providing buildings as classrooms
- Employee run community training

Set targets for the percentage of financial assistance provided to local community initiatives based on total revenue of operations. Continually review and increase these targets if possible. For example, for a business revenue of \$2 million the target might be set at 1% to increase by 0.5% per year for 5 years (\$20,000 initially followed by an additional \$10,000 every year following).

**GSTC - B.6. The company has implemented a policy against commercial exploitation, particularly of children and adolescents, including sexual exploitation.**

Implement a company policy against the commercial and sexual exploitation of local communities (especially children).

Ensure staff and guests are aware of the policy and that any breaches to the company policy will not be tolerated. For more information visit: <http://www.thecode.org>

### DID YOU KNOW?

To assist with facilitating community engagement, consider appointing a community liaison officer to facilitate active communication with the community. Also, promote your initiatives to staff and encourage them to get involved with community initiatives. You may even consider staff incentives such as discounts for local businesses to encourage support and commitment.



## CASE STUDY:

Taj Residency  
Bangalore, India

Community service is one of the core values in the Taj Group of Hotels. Since inception, the company has been committed to responsibility to society and the community in which it operates, which is reaffirmed by way of inclusion of a Clause of Social Responsibility in the company's Articles of Association. The Taj Residency Hotel is one of many hotels in the Group that has undertaken a range of initiatives to support local communities, including:

- Adoption of a slum where they primarily work with AIDS affected victims. The objective is to create lasting change in the lives of children, families and communities living in poverty and injustice.
- In-kind assistance to communities by sending clothes and bed sheets to the Friend in Need Society who provide necessities such as shelter and clothing for aged and destitute people.
- Engaging with a Public Charitable Trust which works to improve the working and economic condition of ragpickers and an ecological sustainable waste management system by engaging with municipal authorities and community groups to identify solutions. This is reducing the threat to public health and environmental degradation.
- Involvement with a NGO which enables underprivileged youth to "Learn, Earn and Stand Tall". This is a vocational training centre for the underprivileged youth offering free three month programs with assured placement at the end of the course. Taj Residency has taken three trainees and is providing training in housekeeping of food and beverage production departments.

## INFRASTRUCTURE AND PLANNING

**GSTC - B.9. The activities of the company do not jeopardize the provision of basic services, such as water, energy, or sanitation, to neighbouring communities.**

Consider the operations current and future impact on local infrastructure and resources and how your operation could be directly involved in infrastructure improvements or what kind of financial or technical assistance you could provide. This might include improved transport options such as roads, bridges and public transport. Consider the following issues:

- What is the impact of current operations on traffic, congestion and road conditions?
- Is there adequate public transport?
- What financial, technical or in-kind support might be needed to help improve transport infrastructure?

### *Water, energy and natural resources:*

- Does the local community have appropriate technology and sufficient access to water, energy and natural resources?
- What are the current and future estimates of water, energy and natural resource demand on local resources and will tourism demand cause deficiencies (or price rises) to water, energy or other natural resource supply to local communities?
- Are there projects which could be undertaken to help reduce, reuse or recycle within the community to improve the sustainability of water, energy and natural resource supplies? What assistance (financial, technical or in-kind support) could be provided?
- Are there technologies or alternate sources of water, energy or natural resources that can be identified to reduce resource consumption within the community?<sup>2</sup>

### *Solid waste and wastewater systems:*

- What are the current and future estimates of waste generation and are local services and infrastructure adequate?
- Are tourism operations causing any health and/or sanitation concerns in the local community?
- Could tourism operations facilitate reuse or recycling schemes within the community?
- What assistance (financial, technical or in-kind support) could be provided to help initiate and maintain these schemes?<sup>3</sup>

### *Hospitals, fire brigades and emergency infrastructure and planning*

- What are the most likely emergency situations that could potentially occur in the region (floods, tsunamis, earthquakes etc.)?
- Are there appropriate management systems in place to deal with these emergency situations if they arose?
- Will the emergency facilities available, such as hospitals and fire brigades, be able to cope with an emergency situation?
- What services (such as bedding, shelter, human and financial resources or medical aid) could tourism operators in the region provide if an emergency situation arose?
- Is the local community aware of potential emergency situations and how to respond?

### *Schools and sports facilities*

- What local schools are in the area?
- What facilities or financial assistance could tourism operators provide (such as books, donations, scholarships to local school children, transport, facilities for teachers, etc.)?
- Are there enough sport and recreation facilities available to local communities and their children?
- Could tourism operators help foster collaborations between international organizations and schools and local communities?

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

**Involve communities in consultation and planning processes for tourism developments and work with communities and governments to identify infrastructure deficiencies.**

There are many different ways to engage and consult with communities. Be considerate of the individual needs and customs of communities. Every community is different and will require a different approach to consultation. The following provide some options to consider when engaging communities:

- Community meetings
- Interviews
- Public exhibitions, displays and information sheets
- Advisory committees
- Media and advertising
- Written submissions
- Telephone polls and surveys
- Focus groups
- Open days
- Guided information tours

- Conferences or workshops
- Residents' feedback sessions
- Pictorial and photographic illustration<sup>4</sup>.

## EMPLOYMENT

**GSTC - B.2. Local residents are employed, including in management positions. Training is offered as necessary.**

**GSTC - B.7. The company is equitable in hiring women and local minorities, including in management positions, while restraining child labour.**

**GSTC - B.8. The international or national legal protection of employees is respected, and employees are paid a living wage.**

It is important that tourism operations employ local people to help keep the financial benefits associated with the operation in the community. Set employment targets for local people at your operation, for example 80% of all employees live within 20km of operations. Continually review and increase these targets over time.

When advertising and recruiting, ensure:

- Hiring policies are fair and equitable without bias on the basis of gender, ethnicity, age or disability. Advertise positions locally and be open and transparent about job requirements and selection criteria. Provide feedback on job submissions
- Fair wages are paid above the minimum standard for your region. Incorporate additional benefits into employment contracts including sick and holiday pay, reasonable working hours, overtime and health cover
- Additional employee assistance (where appropriate) is included such as free uniforms, transport, meals, accommodation or child care
- Training is provided for employees and opportunities provided for local community members to participate
- Staff are provided with incentives and bonuses linked to performance or service levels<sup>5</sup>

## BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS AND PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

**GSTC - B.3. Local and fair-trade services and goods are purchased by the business, where available.**

**GSTC - B.4. The company offers the means for local small entrepreneurs to develop and sell sustainable products that are based on the area's nature, history, and culture (including food and drink, crafts, performance arts, agricultural products, etc.).**

Business partnerships provide a mutually beneficial development opportunity for tourism operations and local communities. By partnering with local businesses, tourism operators can benefit from promotion of their operation, pooled skills and resources and by providing new and unique tourism experiences.

Partnerships can be formal contractual arrangements or informal cooperative agreements, but be sure to consider:

- Partnerships are fair, equitable and sustainable to both the community and the businesses involved.
- Documentation is prepared indicating rights and responsibilities, financial arrangements and any other agreed terms and conditions. Ensure this documentation is reviewed by all parties. Legal advice should be considered where appropriate.
- Communication channels between parties are clearly established and agreements are regularly reviewed.

When developing or reviewing business operations, consider how the local community could be better represented. Identify the



percentage of products currently being procured from local businesses and set targets to increase this percentage, for example 50% of services and products to be procured from local businesses within 5 years.

Identify business operations that could be reviewed to accommodate locally available products or services:

- Select food and products that are appropriate to the region and available locally
- Develop menus based on seasonal availability of local produce
- Pay a fair and reasonable price for products taking into account the cost and time required to produce. Provide information to visitors about the producers, and be transparent about the mark-up of any products
- Promote local initiatives to guests and encourage them to also buy local produce by providing information on local restaurants and markets
- Provide retail space for local businesses to sell their products and services and help support local business cooperatives by supporting local business events
- Provide assistance to local producers to help them meet quality and quantity specifications and develop contracts to maintain supply. This might include financial assistance through donations, loans or development support agencies.
- Encourage local dealers to stock required products not available locally. Similarly, encourage and facilitate, international business contacts to engage with local businesses in a fair and equitable manner

Ensure any products or services acquired locally abide by any laws relating to the sale of artefacts, local resources and produce.



### CASE STUDY:

#### The Novotel, Sydney, Australia

The Sydney Novotel held an 'Indigenous Job Ready Food & Beverage Training Program' for Indigenous job seekers. Participants engaged in a five day program to equip the candidates with the appropriate skills and knowledge to commence within breakfast shifts or conferences and events. From this program the hotel employed three new Indigenous employees.

### GUEST EDUCATION

Informed tourists lead to positive community experiences that help sustain tourism operations and communities. Provide information to your guest on the local community including:

- Language
- Religion
- Food (and alcohol)
- Local currency and prices
- Community structure
- Respect for cultures and customs and appropriate behaviour (dress codes, gender issues, sacred sites, etc.)
- Local environment and environmental protection measures
- Local maps and sustainable transport
- Health and safety considerations
- Emergency contacts

### TIP

Work with the local community to develop educational materials to provide to guests. Materials might include information brochures, video clips, notice boards, posters, guides, community talks and organized community tours. Establish an avenue for communities to continually contribute information and advertise community projects, events and activities.

### REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> GSTC Partnership, 2008, <http://www.sustainabletourismcriteria.org/>
- <sup>2</sup> Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage, 2004, Steps to Sustainable Tourism
- <sup>3</sup> Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage, 2004, Steps to Sustainable Tourism
- <sup>4</sup> Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage, 2004, Steps to Sustainable Tourism
- <sup>5</sup> Greening the WSSD Initiative, 2003, Responsible Tourism Handbook: A Guide to Good Practice For Tourism Operators