

# Information and Empowerment: The Keys to Achieving Sustainable Tourism

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Sustainable tourism is a sub-branch of sustainable development that was put on the world agenda with the publication of the Bruntland report. The report focused on environmental issues and the natural environment has remained a central theme. Socio-cultural issues have been overshadowed or marginalised. Community participation, although considered essential in sustainable tourism, is a concept subject to much interpretation. Based on longitudinal action research this case study, from Eastern Indonesia, provides theoretical coverage and practical ideas of how community participation can be moved from the passive, rhetorical end of the participation scale towards empowerment. Tourism has the potential to empower communities and the sustainable tourism agenda needs to focus on how to bring this about. As the case study illustrates, understanding tourists and tourism processes is the first stage to empowering the local community to make informed and appropriate decisions about their tourism development. Considerable investments are required in communication and trust building between the actors in tourism. This paper examines how action research, focus groups and the creation of a tourism forum can be concrete, first steps towards achieving sustainable tourism development in the 21st century.

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## Introduction: Sustainable Tourism and Sociocultural Issues

Sustainable tourism is a sub-branch of sustainable development that was put on the world agenda with the publication of the Bruntland report (WCED, 1987). The report focused the public eye on a debate that began in the 1960s. It brought environmental issues from the domain of protest groups to a common frame of understanding (Jamison, 1996), and transformed environmentalism into political ideology (Eber, 1996). The report focused on environmental issues and the natural environment has remained a central theme of sustainable development and sustainable tourism, overshadowing the important early works on sociocultural issues in tourism. Sociocultural issues have thus been given secondary attention (Pearce, 1995), are slipped in (Harrison, 1996), are weak (Ashley *et al.*, 2001), are marginalised (Pearce *et al.*, 1998) or are ignored. For example, in seven edited collections on sustainable tourism from the 1990s only 17% of articles dealt with community issues (Viken *et al.*, 1999).

Local community participation is considered an essential step to ensure tourism development is sustainable but true active participation or empowerment has received little attention in the tourism development literature (Sofield, 2003;

Warburton, 1998). Following an outline of barriers to participation, this paper examines how tourism can be part of community empowerment.

Using data based on a long-term study of a remote community in Eastern Indonesia, the reasons why the villagers' participation remains passive is examined. The greatest barrier lies in the villagers' lack of confidence and knowledge.

In the final section, this paper discusses how action research can be used to help empower research subjects. It examines how, using action anthropology, the research became a two-way learning process and how focus groups and a tourism forum became the loci for the transfer of knowledge. This was an initial step towards facilitating the empowerment of the local people to participate in the planning of tourism to ensure its sustainability.

### **Participation and Empowerment**

Despite some dissenting voices, a consensus of opinion now exists to suggest that community participation is essential in development (Botes & Van Rensburg, 2000; Porritt, 1998), and that the public have a right to participate in planning (Simmons, 1994). Local community participation is a widely accepted criterion of sustainable tourism. The reasons for community participation in tourism development are well rehearsed in the tourism literature. Not only does community participation need to be seen in development proposals; it is often essential to secure funding (Kadir Din, 1997; Mowforth & Munt, 1998). Involvement in planning is likely to result in more appropriate decisions and greater motivation on the part of the local people (Hitchcock, 1993). Additionally, the protection of the environment, tourism's resource, will be supported (Tourism Concern, 1992). Community participation is considered necessary to obtain community support and acceptance of tourism development projects and to ensure that the benefits relate to the local community needs. Tosun and Timothy (2003) further argue that the local community is more likely to know what will work and what will not in local conditions; and that community participation can add to the democratisation process and has the potential to increase awareness and interest in local and regional issues. Furthermore, they suggest that democracy incorporates the rights of the individual that often encourages various forms of equity and empowerment.

As a service industry, tourism is highly dependent on the goodwill and cooperation of host communities. Service is the key to the hospitality atmosphere (Murphy, 1985). Virtually all tourism surveys show that the friendliness of the local people rates high on the list of positive features about a destination (Sweeny & Wanhill, 1996). Villagers' support and pride in their tourism is especially important in the case of remote village cultural tourism, where 'meeting the people' is often sought by the tourists (see for example Zepple's 1993 discussion of tourists' experiences among the Iban of Sarawak). Personalised encounters and opportunities to socialise, such as sharing drinks and meals, are important for these 'intensive cultural tourists'.<sup>1</sup>

While the reasons for community participation in tourism are many, the paradigm is subject to great debate (Mitchell, 2001). The community is far more than an environmental or geographical territory. Consideration needs to be

given to power and decisionmaking between and within community groups. Definitions of who in the community should participate involve ruling some people in and some people out. Who is local and who is included can be vital considerations as conflict over limited resources can result in tourism being a divisive force.

Our understanding of community needs to extend to psychological and intangible aspects as well as the political. Notions of 'community spirit', for example, may be grounded originally in 'place' but values are shared and negotiated between evolving groups of people (McGettigan *et al.*, 2005). In view of the complex and fluid nature of communities many researchers question how community participation can work in practice (e.g. Braden & Mayo, 1999; Harrison, 1996; Joppe, 1996; Warburton, 1998); and few analysts unpick how communities are fractured along lines of kinship, gender, age, ethnicity and existing levels of wealth (Crehan, 1997).

Participation is also open to a variety of interpretations. As has been identified by Arnstein (1969) and Pretty (1995), a ladder of participation exists ranging from 'being consulted' (often only being informed of a *fait accompli*) to being able to determine every aspect of the development process. While it can be argued that all communities participate to a certain degree, such as by sharing a despoiled environment, receiving menial jobs or getting a percentage of gate fees to a national park, community participation is about active participation and, as argued here, empowerment.

There are a number of reasons why active community participation is hard to achieve in practice. In urban tourism destinations in the West, participation is constrained by a number of factors, including residents' lack of knowledge, confidence, time and interest (Goodson, 2003). Frequently a lack of ownership, capital, skills, knowledge and resources all constrain the ability of communities to fully control their participation in tourism development (Scheyvens, 2003). In remote areas of less developed countries, as featured in this case study, a number of further barriers exist: the concept is new; decisions are taken by bureaucrats in a highly centralised system; planners believe that local people are uneducated and too ignorant to be involved; and importantly the local people do not have the knowledge to participate. 'The difficulty for ordinary people in accessing technical discourse is often identified as a major barrier to full participation' (Abram, 1998: 6). Kadir Din considers ignorance as the greatest barrier to participation but that the ignorance is not restricted to residents but 'also affects the planning machinery and bureaucracy vested with implementation' (1997: 79).

Active participation is then frequently constrained by a community's lack of information and knowledge. Knowledge of the decisionmaking processes and the tourism system are essential if residents are to take an active part in tourism planning and management.

Empowerment is the capacity of individuals or groups to determine their own affairs; it is a process to help people to exert control over factors that affect their lives (Di Castri, 2003; Scheyvens, 1999). It represents the top end of the participation ladder where members of a community are active agents of change and they have the ability to find solutions to their problems, make decisions, implement actions and evaluate their solutions. While a body of literature exists in relation to empowerment and employment (Lashley, 2001; Wynne, 1993), there are few

studies 'that focus specifically on empowerment and tourism development outside the business sector' (Sofield, 2003: 96).

Scheyvens (2003) builds a framework around four dimensions of empowerment. The economic gains of tourism that are well documented in the tourism literature are signs of economic empowerment. Psychological empowerment comes from self-esteem and pride in cultural traditions. The ability of tourism to bring pride has been widely discussed (Adams, 1997; Boissevain, 1996; Cole, 1997; Crystal, 1978; Erb, 1998; Mansperger, 1992; Van den Berghe, 1992). Outside recognition of tourism initiatives adds to the self-esteem brought to individuals and communities. For example in Kiltimagh, Ireland, a number of enterprise development awards added to the community's pride (McGettigan *et al.*, 2005). Similarly, in Tanzania, the 'TO DO' prize contributed to increased confidence (Adler, 1999).

Social empowerment results from increased community cohesion when members of a community are brought together through a tourism initiative. The enhancement of community cohesion is discussed by Sanger (1988) in relation to Bali, by Cole (2003) in relation to Ngadha, by Mc Gettigan *et al.* (2005) in relation to Ireland, and by Ashley *et al.* (2001).

Scheyven's (2003) fourth dimension is political empowerment and this can be regarded as empowerment in the sense Sofield (2003) discussed it. According to Sofield, empowerment is about a shift in balance between the powerful and the powerless, between the dominant and the dependent.

It can be 'regarded as a multidimensional process that provides the community with a consultative process often characterised by outside expertise; the opportunity to choose; the ability to make decisions; the capacity to implement/apply those decisions; acceptance of responsibility for those decisions and actions and their consequences; and outcomes directly benefiting the community and its members, not directed or channelled into other communities and/or their members'. (Sofield, 2003: 112)

Since knowledge is an essential element in empowerment (Tosun & Timothy, 2003), communities need access to a wide range of information about tourism. Meaningful participation cannot take place before a community understands what they are to make decisions about (Cole, 1999; Sofield, 2003). Tourism can be important in increasing a community's access to information and external contacts (Ashley, 2001), as well as new language skills and globalised media (Williams, 1998).

In many marginal communities, especially where there has been a long history of colonisation and/or authoritarian rule, communities lack the confidence to take part in the decisionmaking (Cole, 1997; Timothy, 1999). Tourism can be important in giving individuals and communities confidence and is strengthening their identity (Johnston, 1992; Swain, 1990) and thus their self-belief, with these being necessary for them to be active in decisionmaking forums. These are at once signs of empowerment and part of the process by which a community can challenge outside and elitist interests in tourist destinations. As Kalisch suggests, in a destination where the community has organised itself into a strong and knowledgeable force for social and economic empowerment, transnational

corporations and governments will think twice before they displace people or take away their land and resources (2000: 2).

In order to bring about the confidence for meaningful participation and empowerment, many researchers have recognised the need for and value of considerable public education (e.g. Simmons, 1994; Connell, 1997; Pearce, 1994). As Ashley *et al.* (2001) have examined, the poor have a weak understanding of tourists and how the industry works. An understanding of tourists and tourism is the first stage of empowering the local communities to make informed and appropriate decisions about their tourism development.

## The Study

The research took place in two villages, Wogo and Bena, in Ngadha, an area that approximates to the Southwest third of the Ngada regency of Flores, Nusa Tenggara Timur, Indonesia. The Catholic villagers are largely peasants, eking out a hand-to-mouth existence on poor soils. The rugged mountainous area began to be visited by 'drifters' in the 1980s and has seen increasing numbers of tourists ever since. The most popular village, Bena, received 9000 tourists in 1997 (Regency Department of Education and Culture, 1998). The area is one of the poorest in Indonesia, and tourism is considered the area's best option for economic development (Umbu Peku Djawang, 1991).

Four of the Ngadha villages, including those where the research was carried out, have been designated prime tourist attraction status<sup>2</sup> by the government. These traditional hamlets provide a complex of attractions: traditional houses arranged in two parallel lines or around the sides of a rectangle; clan 'totems', and megaliths provide a 'feeling of being enclosed in antiquity' (Cole, 1997).

The study was carried out between 1989 and 2003, during which time my role changed. The research was carried out in three phases. Firstly, I was a tour operator from 1989 to 1994. I took groups of 12 tourists at a time to stay in Ngadha villages. The villagers of Wogo showed their appreciation of this by ritually adopting me as a village member in 1991. Secondly, in 1996, for an academic paper, I carried out a Rapid Rural Appraisal. I spent 10 days in Wogo, and carried out 30 questionnaire-based interviews.

In August 1998 I returned to Ngadha to carry out eight months of ethnographic fieldwork for my PhD thesis. With my extensive knowledge of tourism in the villages and the villagers' desire to increase the benefits from tourism, one of my PhD objectives was to transfer some knowledge to the villagers. As May suggests, 'the subject population have the right to the social power that comes from knowledge' (1980: 365). As Wadsworth (1998) suggests, most action research sets out to explicitly study something in order to change and improve it. My study was a deliberate attempt to help the villagers to understand, and have more control over, tourism development. Although the content and goals of this action research were not negotiated with the villagers, the impetus of the original research came from them and the process and methods were discussed with them. Furthermore, during the research process some community topics were investigated alongside the researcher's questions. This stance undoubtedly influenced the research process, a matter I have discussed elsewhere (Cole, 2004a).

During the fieldwork, participant observation was carried out in a number of villages. Focus groups were held with groups of women, men and young people in Bena and Wogo. Government officials, including the head of the Regency Department of Tourism, head of the Regency Department of Education and Culture and the Regency Head (*Bupati*), were interviewed. Tourists were interviewed both prior to and after village visits and there were numerous opportunities for spontaneous chats (cf. Selanniemi, 1999) about their experiences. Participant observation, interviews and a focus group were held with the guides who accompanied most of the tourists on village visits.

In 2003 I returned to Ngadha with the specific objective of sharing the results of my research. The study had revealed a lack of communication between the various stakeholders and a specific recommendation was the development of a tourism forum. I suggested that I could facilitate the first forum to discuss the results of my research and present the (Indonesian language version) recommendations.

Before discussing the action research aspects of my work and the first forum I will examine tourism in Ngadha villages, the villagers' participation and the barriers that exist that make further participation difficult.

## **Tourism in Ngadha villages**

### **Passive participation**

The majority of villagers in Ngadha are passively participating in tourism. Tourists visit the villages for between 20 minutes and two hours. They wander around the villages, look at the houses and 'totems to the ancestors'; take photographs and leave again. Some tourists attempt to enter into focused social interaction, usually via children. By offering them sweets, balloons or pens they try to ask the children questions and sometimes enter into dialogues with adults. In one of the villages, Bena, there is an indigenous weaving industry, which provides additional interest for tourists and an opportunity for the villagers to gain financial benefit from tourism. However, in the majority of villages, the local people have the inconvenience of tourism without economic advantage. They are passive participants, unpaid actors on a stage, gazed at by an affluent audience. Tourism has, however, brought non-economic benefits to the villages, and the villagers are happy to be visited.

### **Real and perceived benefits from tourism**

In Wogo and Bena a clean convenient water supply is a direct result of tourism. In Wogo, my company collected donations from tourists. At the request of the villagers this was used to provide the building materials to pipe and store water in the village, saving the villagers arduous walks to collect water. In Bena, donations from individual tourists were also collected, and used for the same purpose. As tourism to Bena has increased, the road to the village has been improved. This has also benefited the villagers who have easier access to Bajawa, the local market town.

In Wogo the villagers believe that tourism is strengthening cultural values (*menebalkan adat istiadat*), and that children will have the importance of custom reinforced by seeing tourists come so far to see it. Tourism has increased their

pride in their cultural heritage. When a village is included in a guidebook, villagers are proud that their culture is worthy of entry into a book.

Tourism has provided the opportunity for some villagers to travel. Tourists noticed local music and dance traditions. As accounts of the villagers' unusual talents circulated, the villagers' skills became known to the outside. Some villagers have since played at regional, national and international musical events.

Knowing foreigners brings pride in many Indonesian societies. Tourists' visits are appreciated because it gives the villagers an opportunity to find out about the wider world. Through the occasional opportunities to have conversations with tourists, the villagers are able to learn about what goes on outside the area and to have a 'friend' from another country. The possibility of entry into some form of tourism employment has been an incentive for some young people to hone their language skills. Contact with tourists and tour operators has opened up opportunities for a few young people and enabled some to progress to further employment with international agencies.

Alongside the villagers' positive view of tourism is a feeling of bemusement. Frequently I was asked by villagers in Wogo, 'Why do they come?' 'What do they want?' 'They don't ask anything; they don't learn anything; that one didn't even take any photographs.' 'They just look and take photographs; they do not understand the meanings.' Villagers in Bena expressed similar views.

### **Villagers' knowledge of tourism**

The villagers' knowledge of tourism comes from experience, guides and the government's tourism awareness programme (*sadar wisata*). Contact with tourists has enabled the villagers to distinguish three types of tourists, which can be roughly translated as 'young, low spending, dirty tourists'; 'older, fatter, high spenders'; and 'tourists that want to understand'. From the guides, villagers have learnt that tourists are impatient or at least do not like waiting for events; that tourists become anxious if villagers crowd around them and that tourists require personal space; and that tourists do not like 'begging children'.

The government's tourism awareness campaign (*sadar wisata*) was a training programme initiated by the Minister of Tourism in 1989–1990. At the heart of the campaign was a seven-point formula for successful tourism (*sapta persona*) to be disseminated through government departments, community groups and youth organisations (Joop Ave, undated). The seven-point formula consists of security, cleanliness, service, cool comfort, natural beauty, friendly people and memories.

The regency tourist office followed a provincial instruction to 'develop the villagers'<sup>3</sup> through the tourism awareness campaign. The villagers of Bena were invited to attend a presentation in 1996. The material<sup>4</sup> (Dinas Parawisata Ngada, 1995) included an overview of tourism development in Indonesia and why the preservation of both material and non-material culture would serve to develop economic rewards.

The villagers, who had to be persuaded to attend, considered the presentation boring and unhelpful. They felt patronised to be told, by townsfolk, to preserve their culture, which they had done for centuries with no thought of economic benefit. Furthermore, there was no opportunity for the villagers to ask questions or raise any of their issues about tourists or tourism development.

In 2000, a further training programme was organised. Three villagers from Bena attended. 'The same again, just like what they said last time, protection of culture, preservation of our material assets, be good hosts. Nothing new, no help, we did not learn anything' is how one villager described it to me. These programmes were an attempt by the government to gain villagers' support for tourism development. They were not designed to empower the villagers to develop indigenous plans, and, in effect, represent the bottom rung of Pretty's (1995) participation ladder.

The provincial Department of Tourism has built a viewing-point and toilet facilities in Bena. It also built three home-stays there; dwellings built in traditional style for use by tourists. The research revealed that the villagers did not understand the English word 'home-stay' or the purpose of the buildings – these were not anyone's homes where guests would stay. They asked me, 'What are home-stays?' 'What are they for?'

The Department of Tourism did not provide the villagers with any relevant information or training. No individual or group was assigned to manage the home-stays, to collect any revenue or made responsible for hospitality to tourists. According to the Department of Tourism, all this was left up to the villagers. As one woman pointed out, she could not be preparing meals in a home-stay and in her own house. It is easier, she explained, to have tourists in her own house, although she could not provide the comfort or privacy that tourists may want.

The villagers lacked knowledge about tourist expectations. Several villagers suggested that each home-stay could accommodate 30 tourists. This was based on their own houses accommodating in excess of 30 members at major rituals. Although each home-stay could reasonably accommodate eight tourists, only one toilet was provided for all three houses, seriously restricting potential occupancy levels. In 1999, tourists were not using the home-stays; members of the headman's extended family were living in them.

In summary, the villagers' participation in tourism is limited to receiving tourists in their midst and occasionally engaging with them. In Bena there are economic benefits from the sale of crafts and a greater chance for interaction as a result. Both villages have had the benefits of piped water, pride, social cohesion, and developing 'friends from afar' as a result of tourism. The villagers' knowledge of tourism management is minimal, and the government attempts to educate the villagers have been more about gaining support than empowerment.

### **Barriers to Participation**

There are a number of barriers that make fuller participation for the villagers difficult. An understanding of the impacts the New Order government<sup>5</sup> has had on the villages helps explain some of these difficulties. In its peripheral position, with limited resources, Ngadha has, in the main, been bypassed by central government development initiatives. There have, however, been important impacts of the highly bureaucratic, hierarchical structure of the Indonesian state system, with state administration extending to very local levels.

The Javanese patrimonial system, based on a patron–client relationship in which the patron is the father, the client is deferential and obedient, and con-



frontation avoided, has reached every village in the Indonesian archipelago. Javanese concepts of power and authority, whereby reverence is shown towards people in power or other people of high social standing (Anderson, 1972), prevail from high-level political jurisdictions, down to the village level. The top-heavy traditional perspectives of power remain strong in Ngadha as they do elsewhere in Indonesia (see e.g. Timothy, 1999). As Reisinger and Turner (1997) suggest, the authorities make decisions and they cannot be questioned. In dealings with state officials the villagers' fear of authority could easily be sensed. While many villagers were openly critical about decisions relating to tourism in discussions with me, they believed that decisions by higher authorities could not be challenged.

The legitimacy of the New Order government was based on stability and development. In order to achieve development, stability had to be maintained and individual interest had to submit to collectivity, in the interests of harmony (Maurer, 1997). Confrontation is avoided at all costs. In their closely-knit communities where consensus takes precedence over personal gains, entrepreneurial spirit is frowned upon in order to prevent jealousy and the potential for conflict.

The pervasive development ideology of the Indonesian state has meant that all villagers are able to articulate concepts of development and progress (*maju*). In focus groups the meaning of development was discussed. People said that development involved being like city people, having money, electricity and healthcare and children wearing clothes. They also said that in order to be developed one must get an education. State doctrine attributes 'underdevelopment in large part to a lack of education' (Dove, 1988: 7). Both state and church sponsor the hegemonic view that formal education is a precursor to development. As a consequence, the value of traditional knowledge has been undermined, leaving the villagers belittled.

Villagers accept and expect political and social control to be in the hands of the government. As elsewhere in the archipelago, there is a belief that the government knows best (Gede Raka, 2000). Individuals place themselves at the disposal of the nation to support efforts of national development (*pembangunan*) with guidance, support and direction from the government (King, 1999). Village people in general and peasants in particular say 'We are only peasants'.<sup>6</sup> They do not feel 'developed' (*maju*) and have a low opinion of themselves. When, in discussions I asked why they had not tried a number of initiatives to raise money they always said, 'No-one has told us to' (*tunggu disuruh*). The patrimonial hierarchy of the New Order appears to have smothered personal initiative. The paternalism of the state system meant that the villagers thought that mechanisms to achieve development came from outside instructions and they lacked the confidence to act on their own initiatives.

An issue raised on numerous occasions by villagers was the Department of Tourism's assertion that 'guides know better' and that the villagers lack the education to work as guides. Most of the guides come from the local town or from other villages close to the town. The villagers are clear that their lack of foreign language skills prevent them from becoming guides, but they object to the idea that they are not knowledgeable, especially about their own culture, which, unacknowledged by guides, is village specific. When the state claims

that the villagers are not educated enough to act as guides, they are referring to formal education. When the villagers bemoan the lack of education provided by the state, with reference to tourism, they are referring to much more specific types of training.

The requirement for education means youngsters in Bena spend three to six years out of the village, where they are exposed to a wider media, develop greater expectations and find it hard to return and settle in the village. An Australian priest working in Flores wrote 'because of the many schools and irrelevant education, our most intelligent and able young people flee the village and do not wish to become farmers' (quoted in Webb, 1986: 179). Youngsters also find it hard to return to their village with ideas and initiatives. Out of respect for their seniors they would not like to appear to have ideas above and beyond them.

While the authoritarian and patriarchal government has resulted in villagers who feel belittled, uneducated and lacking in confidence, their participation is further restricted by their lack of knowledge about tourism. They are unable to participate in the planning and management of tourism due to their lack of understanding. They are unable to access the 'technical discourse' of tourism, so often in English, as epitomised by the Tourism Department's 'home-stays'. The villagers' lack of tourism understanding is linked to the unfulfilled potential for further tourism development. The villagers were not short of ideas about potential future developments. For example, villagers could act as guides for groups who are accompanied by out-of-area guides who could then translate. Villagers could also act as guides for Indonesian-speaking tourists. As discussed, they did not have the confidence, knowledge or skills to put their ideas into practice. Villages in Bena blamed the state for not providing the necessary training.

### **Action Research: Sharing Knowledge About Tourism**

This final section outlines how action research aided the villagers' empowerment. During my long fieldwork I used focus groups to compare opinions of tourism development between women, men and young people. These focus groups became the locus for the transfer of knowledge about tourism. In the discussions I initiated, the villagers interviewed me. For every topic they wanted to know what I thought, probe my knowledge, seek my advice and glean information from my experiences elsewhere in Indonesia. Although frustrating from the perspective of data collection, the focus groups became a valuable two-way learning process. They allowed for the de-mystification of the technical discourse of tourism and the clarification of positions held by officialdom. The focus groups allowed a discussion to take place about the problems of tourism and potential solutions.

In interviews with staff at the Department of Tourism, during my research, I was able to raise the villagers' issues. As it emerged that each party was unaware of the other's position I was able to begin the process of bridging the gap. In the recommendations that came out of my research I suggested a regular 'tourism forum' as an opportunity for all the local stakeholders to meet and discuss issues that relate to tourism development. Such a forum would enable those in positions of authority and the villagers, young and old, as well as guides,

to explore their various standpoints. The tourism forum would be an opportunity for the local actors to meet, maintain communication and work together on future developments. It would be an opportunity for any group of actors to bring issues to the notice of all other groups, such as the need for transparency about funds and their use in order to prevent their misappropriation and mismanagement (a problem identified in the research).

In 2003, I returned to Ngadha to share the results of my fieldwork. This gave me the opportunity to organise the first tourism forum, a one-day seminar in a guesthouse with a large 'lobby' in Bajawa, the nearest town. The key local stakeholders were the villagers, the local guides, the Department of Tourism and the Department of Education and Culture.<sup>7</sup> Invitations were sent to the stakeholders by the Department of Tourism, and villagers' travel costs were covered. Seven villagers came from Wogo, and eight villagers came from Bena, representing 34 and 36 households respectively. The head of the Department of Tourism opened the seminar and three staff stayed for the entire day (despite saying initially they would have to leave early). Three members of the Department for Education and Culture attended, including the head of section responsible for the preservation of culture.

Unfortunately, the invitations to 12 guides had not been distributed by the Department of Tourism. I managed to contact some of them, and three were able to attend, others had committed to taking clients. When I met some guides after the event they expressed extreme disappointment that they had not been sent a personal invitation and several cynically concluded that the Department of Tourism deliberately sought to exclude them. However the guides that did attend were vocal, and put the guides' views<sup>8</sup> across.

After considerable email discussion with one of my key informants, who was very experienced at organising community discussion forums in Indonesia, I set the agenda. The participants, having been schooled in a system of teacher talk and rote learning, expected me to give a presentation. I wanted to facilitate a debate in which the actors would reach their own conclusions, and thus they found themselves taking part in an entirely new learning environment.

One of the recommendations in my thesis was the production of a code of conduct for tourists, so that they could visit the villages without causing offence to the villagers.

In the first session I asked mixed groups made up of the three local stake holding groups to list what they wanted tourists to know before visiting the villages. The groups quickly settled and enthusiastically took part. The recommendations were collated on large sheets of paper stuck to the walls.<sup>9</sup> I then asked them to play 'spot the difference' between the code of conduct I had developed and their lists. Howls of amazement (how could I turn their lists in to print so quickly), laughter and 'Why did we have to do it if you already have?' were finally calmed. Two differences were spotted and the code was amended accordingly. Using this exercise the local stakeholders became aware that the capacity to articulate problems and contribute towards solutions lay within themselves.

In the second session, each stakeholder group sat separately and identified the roles and responsibilities of their own group and the other groups. This was important to highlight what different groups expected of each other. For example, the villagers' and government groups felt that guides should ensure

that tourists followed the code of conduct before visiting the villages. The government officials thought that the villagers should be responsible for keeping the villages clean. The government should provide education but not determine tradition – this was a matter for villagers alone. In a very public forum the government was told to limit its heavy-handed approach in the villages.

The final session was eagerly awaited, tense and difficult to facilitate at times. Following on from the roles of the government, the villagers and guides wanted pledges – what would be done and when – and deadlines to be set. Using the copious notes many had taken, villagers and guides stood up and asked for government action. They wanted to know when the codes of conduct would be displayed in the guesthouses, and when the road to one of the villages would be made safe. The government did not attempt to defend its record but did comment at length about limited funds.

Despite an agreed close at 4 pm, the participants stayed later and were reluctant to leave. I had been over-ambitious in what could be covered in a day and we did not have time for a formal evaluation of Ngadha's first 'tourism forum'. However, the comments I received on closing, and in the days that followed, were very positive. The Department of Tourism also agreed that it was a useful process that should be repeated.

Given the opportunity to air their views, the villagers felt empowered to speak out against the government and to raise ideas and issues in a public forum. It was unusual to see villagers, who consider themselves 'only peasants', stand up to the heads of government departments. The breakthrough that this represents cannot be over-emphasised. While there was no political empowerment, in the sense of changed structures, the psychological empowerment they gained can be regarded as an important first step in that direction. Furthermore, the forum transferred knowledge to the villagers, and as Tosun and Timothy (2003: 10) suggest: 'empowerment is a way of gaining knowledge that may arm a community to challenge outside and elitist interests'.

## **Conclusions**

The community participation paradigm has become a mantra of sustainable tourism. However, this rarely moves beyond passive participation in the case of much cultural tourism in remote regions of the world. The barriers to participation include: a lack of knowledge, confidence, capital, skills and self-belief. Tourism may bring pride, confidence, strengthened political identity and external contacts, but these valuable aspects of empowerment, in themselves, cannot further participation.

In order to achieve socioculturally sustainable tourism in the 21st century we need to examine how empowerment through tourism can be fostered. If communities are to be able to participate in decisionmaking about tourism development they need first to understand tourism development processes. They need to further understand tourists, their needs and wants and the variety of development options. Access to relevant information is essential. The early stages of empowerment can then be transformed into the ability to determine their own development.

Tourism researchers can take an active role in disseminating information both

to the tourees and also to government departments. Focus groups are not only a successful data collection method (see Cole, 2004a), but they can also be an effective way to transfer knowledge about tourism to local stakeholders. In this case the researcher was able to expand the villagers' knowledge of tourism, and, through the tourism forum, enable their self-esteem and confidence to develop. The research took a small but concrete first step in developing trust, knowledge and confidence in this remote marginal community.

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### Notes

1. Intensive cultural tourists are described by others as ethnic tourists, but as the use of 'ethnic' reifies ethnic groups and boundaries, entrenches inequalities between rich and poor and represents cultural ignorance (cf. Cole, 2003; 2004b), its use is avoided here.
2. obyek wisata unggulan (objek = object, wisata = tourist, unggulan = superior).
3. Membina masyarakat.
4. Which was lent to me for analysis.
5. The New Order government refers to the years of Suharto's power 1967–1998.
6. They would use the expression 'Kami hanya petani saja' which uses two words for only, before and after the noun for emphasis.
7. The department has since been reorganised and there is a new department of Culture and Tourism. Having one government department responsible for both should prevent many of the communication problems identified.
8. Views that a variety of guides had expressed during earlier research.
9. There was no black or white board or flip chart.

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