

Ecotourism: Who Benefits?

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Part I—Background

Scenario

The setting for the case is the Carara Biological Reserve, located in the central part of the Pacific Region of Costa Rica.

Characters

A roundtable discussion is scheduled to take place involving the following characters:

Manuel Soto

Profile:

Fifty-three-year-old Manuel has lived near the Carara Biological Reserve in Tarcoles, Costa Rica, his whole life. His family has gained subsistence on the land for generations. They have farmed, hunted, and raised their families there. Six months ago, however, the government, citing a provision in the constitution, reclaimed 1000 acres of land that had historically been used and lived on by 200 families, including Manuel's. The government claims that it intends to use the land for an ecotourist destination for Europeans and North Americans. Manuel's family was told they must leave the five acres that have been occupied by Manuel's family for decades. The government gave Manuel some monetary compensation for the house, but not enough for Manuel to buy another house or retire in the town where the majority of his family lives. As a result, Manuel has moved in with relatives, who live in town. The relative's house is small and overcrowded. Furthermore, Manuel has no skills except farming and hunting, which are not skills needed in town. As a result, Manuel has become a **poacher**, taking scarlet macaw (*Ara macao*) chicks and selling them for purchase in the U.S. and Australia. He only needs to poach one macaw a month for survival needs since he can sell a scarlet macaw nestling for \$200 to \$400, the equivalent of two months average wage. He hopes he can afford to buy his own home in town in the upcoming year.

Goal:

Manuel has entered the roundtable discussion to protect his reputation in the community. He thinks "poaching" is not the problem. He feels that the problem is that those in power are more interested in making foreigners wealthy than providing decent jobs to hard-working Ticos. Manuel Soto does not trust outsiders.

Lucy Soto

Profile:

Lucy, 18, is the youngest child of Manuel and the only daughter of five children. Prior to being forced from their home, Lucy helped her mother gather fruit from the trees nearby and grow vegetables in the garden. The two of them took this food and sold it at a road-side kiosk. While waiting for customers, Lucy and her mother knitted shirts, which they also sold at the kiosk. The money made from this

informal work helped the family buy the goods they could not make or barter: kitchen utensils, bathroom products, clothes. When Manuel and his wife moved in with relatives, however, there was no extra room for Lucy. More importantly, there was no more opportunity to grow or gather fruits and vegetables. As a result, Lucy was forced to seek work away from home. The closest factory was a banana plantation owned by a large U.S. multinational company. The plantation was having difficulty finding workers given that the price of bananas had dropped internationally, causing wages to drop and workers to leave. The movement of families off of the Carara land, however, has given the company a ready labor pool. Like the 75 other young, female coworkers, Lucy is a **banana plantation employee** at the factory. Forty-percent of the young women are from Lucy's former town. Lucy's job requires that she box the bananas without bruising them. In the process, she is exposed to the pesticides that cover each banana bundle, causing severe contact dermatitis. Unfortunately, she does not make enough money to pay for the necessary medication.

Goal:

Lucy has come to protect her father, but she also wishes to protect her interests as a worker. She met Nicole Harvey through union organizers at work. She wants to keep her job, but she wants to have a better working environment.

Nicole Harvey

Profile:

Nicole, a 39-year-old **non-governmental organization (NGO) leader** from the United States, has traveled around Central America trying to help shape global trade policy so that the poor as well as the rich benefit. She has concerns about drawing people into a market economy. She recognizes that it will be impossible to stop "free trade" policy. Yet, she yearns for "fair trade," not "free trade." Nicole understands the dual purpose of the new ecotourism policy. Although the state claims it simply wishes to protect the rainforest through tourism (tourism will make the environment marketable the way it is so that it does not have to be destroyed), she knows that the state also wishes to make sure the large plantations and factories have a ready labor pool. Furthermore, she knows that protecting the rainforest is not the state's only goal. Two large U.S. pharmaceutical companies have been given rights to the land; they will patent herbs and other healing medicines they find on the land that used to be Manuel's and the rest of the community's. They can potentially make a tremendous amount of money from these medicines, enough money to pay the people fairly for their land.

Goal:

The roundtable discussion was called by Nicole Harvey. Although an outsider, the NGO that Nicole represents has considerable money and resources. It has threatened to call a boycott against Costa Rican ecotourism unless the people who once lived on the re-claimed land receive "fair" compensation from either the government or the multinational corporations (MNCs) who will benefit from the use of the land.

Daniel Allende

Profile:

Allende, 33, is an **environmentalist**. Originally from San Jose, the capital of Costa Rica, Allende prides himself in having worked at or visited all of the national parks in Costa Rica. Currently, he dedicates his time to preserving rainforests, and receives an income through grants and donations. Allende is worried about the increased foot traffic at the Carara Biological Reserve. Although ecotourism can save

the rainforest, it can also destroy it. With tourists come development—hotels, restaurants, shops, etc. Also, tourists leave their trash and can't resist feeding the monkeys, as well as other animals. Allende believes that the ecosystem will be disturbed in ways the government has not anticipated. Furthermore, Allende has conducted research that suggests that local people do not often benefit from ecotourism. Like general tourism, ecotourism economically supports a few wealthy and middle-class people, but harms many because of land reclamation.

Goal:

Allende wants to see the land used the way it has historically been used: a place for Ticos to live and make a living and for the flora and fauna to flourish. He does not want any kind of tourism to expand in this vicinity.

Luis Ortega

Profile:

Luis' role as a **state official** renders him active in reclaiming land in Tarcoles. He is the same age as Manuel, but the two couldn't be farther apart in their approaches to the future. Luis received a Masters' Degree in Economics from the University of Chicago where he studied with Milton Friedman, the famous economist who popularized privatization and commodification as economic strategies. His goal is to have no more subsistence farmers or family-run kiosks in Costa Rica. Rather, he believes that dependence on the formal market economy is the way of the future. That means he wants everyone to receive wages in an employment relationship and wants people to stop working for him/herself! He believes they will benefit by obtaining jobs working for corporations because farming is so unpredictable. Isn't it better to let the large fincas handle the risk of farming instead of the poor campesinos? He feels that farmers can never make enough money to purchase luxury items that will convey to the world the wealth of Costa Rica. He understands that the road to development is rocky. To attract investors to Costa Rica, he must promise businesses low-waged workers. Also, he must not place large demands on them about environmental impact. How can he attract investors if he has rules and policies that cut into their profit? Luis understands that while this generation may suffer the growing pains of economic development, future generations will prosper. People will travel by cars, rather than horses. They will send their children to schools, rather than having them educated on the land. He has high hopes that Costa Rica will become a real player in the global marketplace.

Goal:

Ortega wishes to support Henry Copple, the U.S. trade representative, in his endeavors to advance Costa Rica.

Henry Copple

Profile:

Henry is a **U.S. trade representative** who was sent to work with Ortega to determine which lands are needed to both increase ecotourism and find workers for the banana plantations. Henry's primary goal is to convince Costa Rica to adopt the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). CAFTA would allow U.S. companies to come into Costa Rica and establish production facilities without being taxed. Such a move benefits the United States because it provides cheap labor. Yet, it also benefits Costa Rica by providing people with capital that they can use to educate their young and develop an economic infrastructure. CAFTA would also allow U.S. companies access to cheap material resources, like the medicinal-plant products found in the rainforest, as well as fertile land for coffee and banana

plantations. The United States needs such access to ensure that their corporations are competitive on a global market. Now that Africa is a player in the coffee market, the U.S. needs to ensure that the Costa Rican coffee trade will prosper. Central America has always been the domain of the U.S. while Africa has been the domain of the Europeans. Thus, Henry wants Ortega to successfully convince the Costa Ricans that CAFTA is the right thing to pursue.

Goal:

To appease Nicole Harvey's NGO so that no boycott is called.

Felipe Antonio Arce

Profile:

Felipe is a **Carara Biological Reserve worker** who is also from the land taken by the government. Unlike Manuel, he is excited to see the expansion of the national reserve because his job is now secured and the ecosystem is better protected. He has worked at the Carara Biological Reserve for 10 years. He loves the park and the flora and fauna within it. He understands why people like Manuel are poaching; in fact, his uncle has been arrested for the same offense as Manuel. However, he feels that the growth of parks like Carara is important. Of course, there's the obvious reason for wanting the park to grow. Preserving the land will more likely ensure the preservation of the scarlet macaws and other animal and plant species. Without such animals Costa Rica would be just like any other place on the planet. These species give Costa Rica its identity! Even though Felipe doesn't like to admit this, his career has blossomed since the re-claiming of the land. Previously, he supervised three park workers but now he is in charge of 10, many of them former poachers. In addition, a new vehicle was provided to the park for Felipe's use. Such prestige and "perks" have made Felipe very happy.

Goal:

He has been invited by Ortega to demonstrate how ecotourism is positive for the park and how hard workers can find subsistence without poaching.

Questions

1. What potential dilemmas exist among the seven people?
2. Which groups are most likely to have the most conflict? Explain.
3. Although Felipe, Manuel, and Lucy are all from the same land, what different views might they have about what is happening? Why?
4. Even though Henry and Luis support U.S. business presence in Costa Rica, can you see them having conflicts about anything?

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Part II—Roundtable Discussion

Manuel Soto speaks first:

“My old friend Felipe has claimed that he is going to have me arrested if I continue with my poaching of the scarlet macaw. I see his point. But he forgets that I need to poach in order to survive. This young woman, Nicole, says that she is trying to help me get a little piece of my land back. Maybe such a piece will get me a place to live, but a little plot of land will not let me farm and gain my subsistence. I am a 53-year-old *campesino*. What am I supposed to do to survive? The government has taken my land, but has given me no skills in return. And even if they paid for me to learn some new trade, could I really learn something completely new? It would kill me to sit inside a factory all day at an assembly-line like my daughter. If people want me to stop poaching, they need to give me enough money to buy a home in town next to my family *and* enough money to retire. The land belonged to my people long before the Spanish came. How can they now claim it as their own? I have no desire for Costa Rica to be a “Global Player.” What do I need with a television, computer, CD player, and all the things my government claims I will have if the people are willing to sacrifice for a while? I want things to be the way they were. And so does my daughter, Lucy. Our motto is *pura vida*—the pure life.”

Lucy Soto speaks:

“Like my father, I do not like working in an assembly line. The rash all over my face and body demonstrates what it is like to handle bananas all day. With the little money I am given, I share a room with three other girls. The wages are not enough to even send back a small amount to my parents. It is true that I don’t like such working conditions. I work hard for what? So that the people in the United States can relax while eating the bananas I slave to pack for them?

Also, it is true that I always pictured myself living in the same community as my brothers and parents and marrying a boy from the land. But ...”

Lucy is worried about speaking openly like this in front of her father since she was taught to avoid open conflict, particularly with family and elders, but she speaks nonetheless.

“... I find that I do not mind living away from home as much as I thought. If I had better wages and working conditions, I really would not mind being away from my family so much. There is a certain freedom I receive by making my own money. I don’t like to see my father’s land taken from him, but I like the idea of having some small luxuries. Also, I like the idea of choosing the people with whom I want to be friends or even date.”

Manuel is devastated at this unexpected news. Lucy obviously wants to say more but is too embarrassed to do so.

Nicole Harvey takes over the conversation from Lucy:

“First, I want to thank Mr. Copple and Mr. Ortega for sharing with us some of their valuable time. We all understand the desire for Costa Rica to move forward and benefit from modern comforts. Women, like Lucy, are excited to have the opportunity to become independent in ways they have never experienced before. But that does not mean everyone approves of the method the state is using to move the country forward. The *campesinos* that are being forced off of their land need to be fairly compensated, either by the government or the pharmaceutical companies that are benefiting from the acquisition of the land. People need to be given housing elsewhere. Those who cannot be expected to learn a new way of life must be adequately compensated. People should be given access to education and job training. Furthermore, people should be provided with livable wages for their work and should *not* have to work in jobs that expose them to harmful toxins. Transition is good. Nobody should be

afraid of change. However, we need to make sure that the powerless are given the same access to the benefits of economic growth as the wealthy. Only then can we make sure that Manuel, and people like him, do not poach our already threatened wildlife and plants.”

Felipe Antonio Arce feels compelled to enter the conversation at this point:

“I am insulted that this young American woman thinks all Ticos will resort to crime. Manuel does not represent every Tico. We are a law-abiding people who care about our country and protecting the species within it. I know many people who have been displaced. My own parents have, for example, and they have not turned to poaching.”

Manuel gets angry:

“Your parents do not need to turn to crime because you have been given an undemanding job with lots of benefits. They are living off your income, not the money given to them by the government. If you want to know what happens to Ticos who are not given such hand-outs, look at your uncle. He was thrown in jail for stealing because he was so tired of living a life of poverty.”

Daniel Allende intervenes:

“My concern is not to judge the people who turn to illegal acts, but to develop strategies Costa Rica can use in ways that benefit as much land and as many people as possible. Many of us are glad to see the land around Carara protected. The fear, however, is that with more tourists coming, the indigenous plant and animal species might become harmed, putting more on the endangered or threatened species lists. Animals will come into town, dig into trash and eat what people eat, and become afflicted with disorders similar to that of humans. But they have no medical care, so animals will die. We are already seeing white-faced capuchin monkeys at parks such as Manuel Antonio dying. This could be due to the fatty foods in their diet because of the junk food snatched from the bags of tourists. Also, it takes a lot of resources to please tourists. They like hot showers, processed food, potable water, and many amenities. This requires resources from the land. The government must think of ways to protect the land and, to do this, it must control tourism.”

Nicole interrupts:

“Just as importantly, however, the government must think of ways to protect the people whose land it needs to make tourism possible. Everything is connected: the economy, the environment, the people.”

Luis Ortega speaks:

“I appreciate your concern, Mr. Soto and Ms. Harvey. Every Costa Rican has the best interest of the country at heart. We, too, are concerned with how to develop the park in a sustainable way. For that reason, we have only given permits for two hotels to be developed instead of the four that have applied. We have given permits for only two stores to be developed instead of the six that have applied. In addition, we have instructed the merchants that no bleach or other harmful toxins are allowed to be used on their properties. Furthermore, we are using as little energy as possible for the purposes of making hot water. These are the laws that we have created because of our concern. Mr. Soto, you are well aware that the government offered to buy you a nice acre of land near Matina. There you could afford a house and have a small amount to retire. You chose to stay near your family, where the money we gave you will not go as far.”

Manuel grows furious:

“The land you gave me is seven hours from my family! And, it is in the middle of nowhere! How am I supposed to live so isolated from others?”

Nicole speaks:

“You have failed to mention, Mr. Ortega, that the hotels and stores you discussed are both owned by foreign investors. Further, they will hire a total of 70 workers, while 420 adults have been displaced from their land. What will happen to the people like Mr. Soto: skilled workers who built homes and families around their land, but who now have no livelihood and no place to live near the ones they love? Losing 420 workers, even if those workers had jobs in the informal economy, to 70 formal sector jobs does not help the Costa Rican economy as a whole.”

Luis continues, as if he was not interrupted:

“The problem, however, is that most Ticos are like your daughter Lucy, here, Mr. Soto. They are excited at the freedom the new development promises them. Soon, each daughter can choose her own partner, live where she wants, and have as many children as she desires. Each man can soon afford to buy small luxuries, perhaps even a car. We, too, want the freedom and the luxuries afforded those in the United States. Globalization cannot be stopped.”

Finally, Henry Copple speaks:

“It’s true that the United States will benefit from CAFTA. I cannot deny the boost it will give to our exports. However, we also genuinely believe that tariff liberalization will aid in bringing about a much-needed modernization of your country and will help reduce poverty, not only in Costa Rica, but in the rest of Central America and the Dominican Republic by boosting trade, expanding the economies, and creating new jobs. Greater trade opportunities are essential to improving living standards in developing countries. Most of the opposition I have experienced thus far has come from a coalition of groups that are skeptical about forging closer ties with the United States on political grounds. People like you are concerned about the conditions negotiated in the agreement and its impact on the economy and the environment. No one ever promised that the movement towards modernization would be easy or simple, but evidence has proven time and time again that only when countries move towards a market economy does the quality of life improve. The world is just too complex to have people living off of the land, like Manuel and his family used to do. The United States has done everything it can to ensure that the Costa Ricans will benefit from CAFTA. Yes, there will be some people harmed by the agreement. But overall, we must ensure that the economy progresses. In order to do that, people must obey the law, regardless of their position. Without such order, there will be chaos.”

Henry begins to gather his belongings:

“I think I have heard enough here. It’s time for us to leave.”

Before he leaves, Daniel Allende states:

But Mr. Copple, it is not globalization we wish to stop. It is the way globalization is being proposed. Unfortunately, the people making decisions about land reclamation, foreign investment, and ecotourism are not the people who are affected by the decisions. The people need to be included in how their land and lives will be affected. Mr. Ortega and Mr. Copple, you both live in cities. Your jobs and livelihoods are not affected directly. But imagine if someone told you that you must leave your home—told you that you must sell it and move far away—to a place where you know nobody. What if your daughter was forced to move and begin work at a place that gives her skin diseases, possibly cancer? What if the land you had known forever was going to be changed so that foreign people, rather than you and your family, could enjoy it? And imagine if you were told that ruining your life, family,

and land would be the best for everyone else? You must include the people in your decisions. That is all we are asking.

Sensing that the discussion is not producing the outcomes they had desired, Henry Copple and Daniel Ortega leave. The roundtable discussion ends.

Questions

1. What are the main debates in the above discussion?
2. Should Manuel have taken the land given to him by the state? Why or why not?
3. Should Lucy have done things differently? In your opinion, to whom is she most closely allied?
4. Is Henry Copple's claim that the problems experienced by Manuel and Lucy "are just growing pains" a valid argument?
5. How should people whose land is taken from them be compensated?
6. What measures should be taken to protect the environment? Should similar measures be taken to protect the workers?

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