



# Domestic Ecotourism Opportunities in Barra de Santiago Estuary, El Salvador

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## **Abstract**

This research considers human pressure as a problem for Barra de Santiago Estuary. The local community has limited access to basic services, and extracts natural resources to complement its needs. Domestic ecotourism is proposed as an option to reduce this pressure. This type of tourism is based in two factors: first, ecotourism is considered as an alternative to generate incomes; and secondly, that Salvadorians are potential domestic tourists. In order to identify opportunities, the community perception about tourism was explored. Similarly, opinions from potential tourists were collected. The results show that there are strengths and also pitfalls to achieve the development of domestic ecotourism in Barra de Santiago. Its success will require effective communication, feedbacks and involvement of all the actors at the different levels. The process also needs to be carried out keeping in mind that this type of tourism can benefit the community, but it cannot be seen as the only driving force for local development.

**Key words:** ecotourism, domestic tourism, mangroves

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## List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>AECI</b>	Spanish International Cooperation Agency
<b>CBD</b>	Convention on Biological Diversity
<b>CCAD</b>	Central American Commission for Development
<b>CANATUR</b>	Costa Rican National Tourism Chamber
<b>CORSATUR</b>	Salvadorian Corporation for Tourism
<b>FODESTUR</b>	Tourism Development Promotion Project
<b>GTZ</b>	German Agency for Technical cooperation
<b>ICRW</b>	International Center for Research on Women
<b>INGUAT</b>	Guatemalan Tourism Institute
<b>ISTU</b>	Salvadorian Institute for Tourism
<b>IUCN</b>	International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
<b>MBC</b>	Mesoamerican Biological Corridor
<b>SCBD</b>	Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity
<b>SITCA</b>	Central America Secretariat for Tourism Integration
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nation Development Program
<b>TIES</b>	The International Ecotourism Society
<b>WWF</b>	World Wildlife Fund
<b>WTO</b>	World Tourism Organization
<b>WB</b>	World Bank

## 1. Introduction

El Salvador had a twelve-year civil war that ended with the signature of the Peace Accords in the year 1992. The reconstruction and democratization process are slow and aggravated by natural disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes. At the same time, the accelerated exhaustion of natural resources is evidence of their inappropriate management, and of limits the country's development (UNDP, 2001). It is estimated that 61.5% of the rural population lives in poverty (UNDP, 2001); and that a significant proportion of it is concentrated along the coastline. Most of these communities have very limited access to basic services such as potable water, electricity, education and healthcare. Under these circumstances, the only way to satisfy needs is by the extraction of natural resources (Windevoxhel *et al.*, 1999).

Barra de Santiago is one of these settled coastal places. It is also considered one of the most important estuaries in El Salvador, comprised of an extension of mangroves and a sandy beach (both of which function as habitat for one of the nation's highest concentrations of biodiversity) (Herrera, 1998). The area is inhabited by 5 000 people (Vasquez *et al.*, 1998), a population that depends on the mangroves for firewood, construction materials and food. Additionally, some area residents benefit from tourism activities (Herrera, 1998). However, these practices can cause over-exploitation of the environment, creating a decline in the health of the ecosystem (ICRW, 1999).

Barra de Santiago is proposed as a "Natural Protected Area with Multiple Uses", and as a "Wetland of Importance" (CCAD, 2000). Both nominations aim to achieve sustainable development through management plans. As part of this, tourism is identified as important tool to combat poverty (IUCN, 1985 *in* Gössling, 1999; Ramsar, 2004).

During the past ten years, El Salvador became one of the twenty developing countries that showed the fastest expansion in terms of international tourist arrivals with an average growth rate of 15.1% per year (WTO, 2004). Responding to this, the newly elected government created the Ministry of Tourism by unifying the previous agencies in charge. The main focus of this Salvadorian authority has been to attract foreign visitors from developed countries with high purchasing power, despite the fact that 40% of tourists come from Guatemala, one of El Salvador's neighboring countries (Santamaría, 2004a); another unconsidered point is the role of the Salvadorian middle class that demands leisure activities within the country.

### **Main problem, relevance and connection to sustainable development**

This study considers the human pressure as a main problem for Barra de Santiago Estuary. As noted above, the local community does not have full access to basic services; consequently, natural resources extraction complements their needs. In the absence of policies and regulations, this extraction makes the area vulnerable to overexploitation, which can also lead to the ecosystem's decline.

Estuaries are recognized as wetlands (areas where the primary factor is water), and their conservation is promoted by the Ramsar Convention; as part of this strategy, the "Wise Use of Wetlands" is suggested, this means that as long as the basic ecological functions of an ecosystem are not disturbed, it is possible to utilize their natural productivity and biodiversity (Ramsar, 2004c). One of these uses is ecotourism, which is

considered as a potential tool for biological conservation, and at the same time, as means to generate incomes that reduce communities' reliance on extraction. However, one of the main critiques to ecotourism is based on its connection to long-distance traveling; this creates a vast dependency on fossil fuels that contribute remarkably to global warming (Gössling 2000), contrary to the goals of sustainable development.

This outcome can be reduced when visitors travel from within the same country. This is especially applicable to El Salvador where there are no internal flights and roads are fairly good. This type of visit is categorized as "domestic tourism", which is based on travels within a country for any non-remunerated purpose (WTO, 2004).

The magnitude of domestic tourism in developing countries is growing; estimates show that the number of domestic visits can become as ten times greater than current international entrances (Ghimire, 2001). Similarly, trends in Latin American countries, such as Mexico and Brazil, evidence the internal mobilization of people; which can be explained by the expansion of middle classes (Ghimire, 2001).

Taking into account all the previous points, domestic ecotourism is proposed in as a strategy to alleviate poverty in the study area. The successful combination of these two factors can benefit poor stakeholders by changing their consumptive uses to other non-extractive forms; it can also improve the quality of the ecosystem, facilitate its natural regeneration, and maintain its ecological functions. Simultaneously, it offers a chance for Salvadorians to discover their own country, promotes environmental education among locals and visitors, and avoids economic flow outside the country. Furthermore, it can also have an impact at the social scale, which will be evident in community organization and personal growth. But the achievement of these goals requires careful planning, effective strategies, and most of all, participation and coordination among all the involved actors.

## **2. Questions and Objectives**

This research aims to explore the possibilities for domestic ecotourism as a tool for sustainable development in Barra de Santiago. For that purpose, the main questions of this research are:

- Which are the actors involved in the development of tourism and wetlands management in Barra de Santiago?
- Does the community in Barra de Santiago consider tourism as a viable option to generate incomes?
- To what extent Salvadorians are interested on activities related to domestic ecotourism?

The objectives that will facilitate to answer these questions are:

- To assess the institutional framework for ecotourism and wetlands management.
- To explore the perceptions of the community about present and future tourism
- To search for interest in Ecotourism activities among potential national tourists and temporary residents.

Other aspects to be included are: a classification of nature-based products offered by national tour operators -in order to identify marketing spaces for domestic ecotourism-; and the role of Non Governmental Organizations as intermediaries between donors and the community.

### **Scope and limitations**

This study consists of a background with information about tourism (including ecotourism and domestic tourism) and wetlands (especially mangroves) as a context, analyzed from world, national regional and local perspectives. The different actors are also explained at these same levels. It is important to note that the debate regarding the sustainable development of tourism and the validity of the term ecotourism is acknowledged, but it will not be deeply discussed in this study. Also, as mentioned above, the domestic type of tourism was chosen due to its low flight dependency, however, further analysis of global warming is beyond the focus of this study. Another relevant point is that interviews collect opinions but do not reflect a "market study". Regarding the case study area, biological information presented is based on previous published investigations and no biological research was conducted. Finally, domestic ecotourism is analyzed as a future strategy that can be implemented in the area.

### **3. Method**

To achieve my objectives, I based my research on Literature Review and on the results of questionnaires applied during the Field Work.

**Literature Review:** this was done through the appraisal of scientific articles, books, web information and Salvadorian newspapers; this provided the information for the general framework, some results and for the discussion of them. I used official web pages about tourism and wetlands; they are useful to obtain definitions, general information and guidelines. However, a limitation is that there is very few information available for El Salvador and most of what is possible to find is just in Spanish.

**Field work:** It was conducted in El Salvador in the form of three different questionnaires; these were used to collect opinions and perceptions from the three identified groups of importance: local residents in Barra de Santiago, Potential Tourist from the capital city San Salvador and owners of Summer Houses located in Barra de Santiago. The samples were done using "Judgment Sampling", this technique is non-representative because is constructed using the researcher's experience<sup>1</sup> to select the members of the samples according to their suitability (Graham, 1983; Bunn & Wright, 1991; Anderson, 1995; and Ponemon & Wendell, 1995). It is also appropriate to use it for exploratory purposes such as this one; it helps to approach "hard to reach groups"; and to obtain descriptive comments about the sample as well (Ponemon & Wendell, 1995; and STATCAN, 2004). Descriptive Statistics were applied to the results; and these are also displayed using figures.

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<sup>1</sup> My three-year working experience is on community-base management of coastal resources in El Salvador and Costa Rica.



### **Application of the Questionnaire to Groups of Importance:**

1. Barra de Santiago residents: in El Salvador is preferably to be introduced to a community by someone already known there. In that way, the local stage of this study was organized by the manager of the "Basin Water Management Project" which is funded by IUCN and administrated by the Ministry of Environment. Firstly, I met members of local organizations, including the directors of the two tourism groups. The questionnaire was completed by these participants; and since they are chosen by the community, I assumed that to certain extent their opinions reflect the ones of their groups as well. However, I kept in mind that not every person participates in communal groups, but it was still important to know their opinions about the topic. I decided to look for people not connected to associations; and this was done by walking around the community. People have different schedules to go fishing or to gather in the mangroves, so the questionnaire was filled by the ones that were at home at the moment of my visit. I also chose to include equal number of respondents by sex and different ranges of age, this was in order to identify opinion differences related to traditional values or customs. The questionnaire has a set of demographic/ background questions, plus four different sections oriented to provide insights about attachment to the place, previous contacts with tourists, dependency on natural resources and projections for tourism. The term Ecotourism was not included when asking to people due to the probable unawareness of the concept. (Annex 1).

2. Potential Tourists: at the national scale, San Salvador shows the lowest poverty percentage (UNDP, 2001); based on this fact, it was assumed that this city reunites a high concentration of middle and upper classes people. For this study, middle class was targeted as the potential Ecotourist. This was based on two more assumptions: one is that their average incomes are higher than the minimum Salvadorian salary (that is 110 US dollars per month), which can let them afford not just their basic needs, but others such as leisure, Secondly is that middle class can have access to a better education, and this can provide some type of environmental awareness, and also motivate the interest on Ecotourism. The questionnaires were conducted in different spots of the capital city which reflect middle class buying capacity, such as private universities (where monthly payments can be equal to a minimum salary), and shopping malls.

As in the previous questionnaire, I also interviewed equal number of respondents by sex and different ranges of age, in this case, university students were also include a set of background questions was included because even if most of them do not work, their parents provide everything they need, including entertainment. The questionnaire has background questions and two core sections, one is oriented to provide insights about environmental knowledge, specifically regarding the Salvadorian territory; and the other one is about their preferences as tourist, including minimum comfort requirements, interest on domestic tourism and their concept of ecotourism. (Annex 2).

3. Owners of "summer houses": this is a group of people that has houses in the area, and uses them mostly during weekends and holidays. Their level of incomes let them afford the maintenance of these houses and to contract locals as guardians and housekeepers. Since they own land within the area of study, is important to include them in any decision taken regarding Barra de Santiago. Access to information regarding names or city addresses of all these people was not possible to find. In order to complete these questionnaires, I established contact with a group of owners organized in what is called "Barra de Santiago

Association", the full list of members was given to me by one them; it included phone numbers and e-mail addresses. Before my visit to El Salvador, I sent an e-mail to this group explaining the objectives of my research, and to request an appointment to apply the questionnaire. This questionnaire was mainly focused on owners' connections to the area, interactions with the community and opinions about the development of tourism. For this case I was not interested in differences of sex and age because the most important point was that they owned summer house (Annex 3).

## **4. Background: The Role of Tourism and the Importance of Wetlands**

### **4.1. Tourism in the World**

Tourism as source of employment and as a potential instrument to combat poverty is widely acknowledged (WB, 2004 & WTO, 2004); even so, not only its benefits are recognized but its limitations as well. For example, specialists point out environmental effects, including: erosion, overexploitation of water and natural sources, loss of biodiversity, habitat fragmentation, and threats to endangered species, among others (AECI, 2003). In the same way, social impacts in destination communities receive increasing attention (Lindberg & Johnson, 1997).

Developing countries are especially important due to accelerated growth in this industry (WB, 2004); this fact is one of the starting points for the discussion of different mechanisms that can improve their local conditions. An example of these efforts is the creation of ST-EP (Sustainable Tourism-Eliminating Poverty), a new program considered by the World Tourism Organization as a contribution to United Nations Millennium Development Goals (WTO, 2004). The development of Sustainable Tourism is based on the principle of "meeting the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future;" this also means that the management of resources fulfill economic, social and aesthetic necessities, and at the same time, is able to guard "cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems" (WTO, 2004). This initiative is supported by various statements and declarations, regarding such points as: rights to holidays, prevention of sex tourism, relationships with the travel industry, Ethics and more recently Climate Change and ecotourism.

### **Organization of tourism in Central America**

Central America's efforts to establish regional mechanisms for tourism date back to the sixties; it was in 1965 during the First Conference of Foreign Relations Ministers that the Central American Council of Tourism (CCT) was created; the main objectives remain until today and seek to "facilitate and to stimulate the development of the tourism in all the Central American region" (SICA, 2004).

The process was interrupted by armed conflicts during the eighties but retaken and stimulated by international institutions; in that way, the outcomes are diverse, but one of great importance is the development of the "Regional Policy of Tourism" during the year 2002; this document was created to impel the design of National Policies in coherence among countries; it also includes guidelines to accomplish "sustainable tourism," uniformity of services, competitiveness, certification plans and development of governmental procedures to promote tourism (AECI, 2004).

At the same time, also during the year 2002 the seven countries of Central America presented their new marketing strategy: the international brand *Centroamerica*. This was

designed by consultants and has the endorsement of the region's presidents; the main idea is to appear as a one multi-destiny area and is oriented to the markets a long distance away, especially Europe (GTZ, 2004). The brand participated in most of the international tourism trade fairs during the year 2003, and established the Central American Agency for Tourism Promotion (CATA *in Spanish*) opening their first office in Madrid, Spain that same year (FODESTUR, 2004).

## **4.2. Domestic Tourism**

The World Tourism Organization defines a domestic tourist as “any person residing in a country, who travels to a place within the country outside his/her usual environment, for a period not exceeding 12 months and whose main purpose of visit is other than the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited” (WTO, 2004). The importance of domestic tourism development is stated on the Hague Declaration on Tourism (1989), which points out that this activity can provide a base to benefit the expansion of the international sector; therefore, both types of tourism must be equally encouraged (WTO, 2004).

Even so, in the case of developing countries, the official concept of tourism is strongly oriented to attract “wealthy foreign visitors from the industrialized North”; as a result, substantial efforts are done by most governments in order to promote this part of the market (Ghimire, 2001); consequently, this factor takes the attention away from the increasing flow of domestic tourism in many countries (Huybers, 2003), a process that in most cases occurring without any government-structured plans (Ghimire, 2001). However, although the focus is on stimulating international tourism, in many countries domestic tourism continues to be the most important part of tourism activity. For example, Australia has a domestic tourism disbursement four to five times higher than that of international tourists (Huybers, 2003). Turkey is another case where the rate of domestic tourism surpasses the foreign rate in some regions, largely due to the fact that 97% of Turkish travelers stay within their country (Seckelman, 2002).

Domestic and regional tourists differ from international ones, and this explains the need for specific policies; in many cases nationals can accept fewer commodities and are more understanding about local social and cultural norms (Ghimire, 1997). Additionally, domestic travelers do not require tour guides and the knowledge of the language allows them to move more freely; they can also contribute to reducing the dependence on seasonal periods, to avoid income outflow and the “over-commercialization of culture” (Seckelman, 2002). But domestic tourism has limitations: it is difficult to maintain a precise record on national and regional visitors because people do not cross borders, and in many cases do not even need a visa to go to neighboring country; also in some places lodging registrations of local visitors are not kept (Ghimire, 2001). In addition, the “comfort” and cultural tolerance noted above can be the opposite for those national tourists that are part of “privileged classes engaged in lavish consumption activities” (Ghimire, 1997). At the same time, domestic tourists tend to spend less time in a place than foreign ones, and therefore they generate less income per visit (Seckelman, 2002).

An important question for domestic tourism is to what extent it can contribute to sustainable development, especially for developing countries (Ghimire, 2001). Whereas international tourism has been extensively studied, there are still unanswered questions

regarding mass domestic tourism, related to economic aspects, local people's life quality, cultural matters and impacts on the environment (Ghimire, 2001). Worldwide, is difficult to find policies about domestic tourism, and usually if they are incorporated as part of governmental development plans, it is just in order to prevent "outflow of foreign currency from the country" (Ghimire, 1997).

An example of a "Domestic Tourism Policy" was developed by Kenya; almost two decades ago, the Kenyan government recognized the high importance and the need for domestic tourism. The result was a policy that encourages Kenyans to "travel, visit and know their own country" and within Kenya, domestic and international tourism have been promoted equally since 1984; however, what seems to be a good initiative presents limitations mainly due to the feasibility and restraints of domestic tourism in Kenya that are still not well understood; and the reason is probably the lack of a comprehensive tourism plan in Kenya; which is needed to address strategies and the direction of domestic tourism (Sindinga, 1996).

### **Domestic Tourism in El Salvador**

The importance of tourism for El Salvador was first recognized in the year 1924. The government at that time expressed their support to promote the industry for the benefit not only of international visitors but for Salvadorian families as well. Different offices were established for the next decades, but it was not until the year 1961 that the Salvadorian Institute for Tourism (ISTU) was created. This agency was autonomous and its functions were to administer and promote tourism. The economic and political stability of El Salvador during the 70s benefited the tourism industry, and the country was the top destination in comparison to other Central American countries. This period is known as the "The Golden Years," during which time, at the national scale, different Tourism Centers were established and made accessible with bus services provided to visit them. But by the year 1979, a political crisis and atrocities of violence were spreading in the country in the buildup to a civil war that lasted twelve years. As a result, the country spiraled downwards economically, socially and politically. The Peace Accords were signed in the year 1992, providing a foundation upon which to reconstruct the country. Within a few years, the importance of tourism reappeared and in the year 1996, the Salvadorian Corporation for Tourism (CORSATUR) was created (Lopez *et al.* 2003). The year 2004 saw another change in tourism matters for El Salvador, after the presidential elections in March: the newly elected president merged the ISTU and CORSATUR to create the Ministry of Tourism, which handles the functions of both institutions. At the moment, a General Law of Tourism is being discussed in the Salvadorian Congress.

The Salvadorian Institute for Tourism administers the thirteen national "Tourism Centers;" these places are located around the country and can be parks, spa resorts or natural areas. The institute also promotes the development of social tourism by "offering integral recreation and relaxation to Salvadorian families," and at the same time seeks to achieve the sustainable management of the natural and cultural resources (ISTU, 2004). On the other hand, the Salvadorian Corporation for Tourism manages the country's tourism development; it also coordinates efforts among different sectors, supports the rescue of natural, cultural and historical sites to make them attractive for tourism, and recognizes that tourism must be oriented towards sustainability (CORSATUR, 2004).

Domestic tourism's importance was recognized in August 2004 by the Minister of Tourism, when he invited Salvadorians to stay within their country during the holidays, however, there is not yet a formal proposal to develop any kind of domestic tourism policy.

Public Holidays in El Salvador are connected to religious festivities. Three one-week holidays are distributed as follows: Easter falls in late March or April; the first week of August is a holiday to commemorate "Jesus as the Divine Savior of the World" (an attribution from which El Salvador – in English, "the Savior" – received its name), and lastly, one week to celebrate Christmas and New Year's Day. During these different periods, many Salvadorian citizens take the opportunity to travel in the country or to visit others, especially in the region. Based on the previous experiences, for the year 2004, Guatemala was expecting to receive between fifty-five to sixty thousand Salvadorians during August Holidays, and for the same period Honduras expected the arrival of another forty to sixty thousand Salvadorians. With these numbers El Salvador occupies the top position in the regional market of tourism for Guatemala and Honduras (Santamaría, 2004b). At the same time, 69% of all visitors to El Salvador are from Central America and of them, 40% of visitors arrive from Guatemala (Falconi, 2004).

#### **4.3. Concept of ecotourism**

Ecotourism is a term that has been used – and misused – as a marketing tool for many years (FODESTUR, 2004), but the word's connotations are usually vague to the general public, and definitions vary from source to source.

It was the Mexican architect Hector Ceballos-Lascurain the first to come up with a tourism concept involving many factors regarding not only the environment but also communities (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1998). This concept was officially adopted by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in the year 1996, and establishes that even if there are different models of ecotourism and sustainable tourism, all of them should accomplish the following principles: conservation of biological and cultural diversity, participation of the community, and economic sustainability (SCBD, 2004).

Another definition is given by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) that proclaims Ecotourism to be "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people" (TIES, 2004). This idea implies that all the sectors participating in ecotourism activities should fulfill principles such as: the minimization of impacts, the creation of cultural and environmental consciousness, and the creation of a positive experience for visitors and hosts alike. Furthermore, TIES stipulates that ecotourism must contribute financially to conservation and to the empowerment and economic benefit of local people. It must also acknowledge the political, social and environmental climate and context of the host country, and finally, must advocate for international human rights and labor agreements (TIES, 2004). In the same way, the United Nations declared the year 2002 as the "International Year of Ecotourism" and within this framework, the Quebec Declaration was presented in recognition of the aspects mentioned above, declaring also that the establishment of ecotourism is recognized to be based rather on small businesses, this is contrary to what it is usually considered the big global tourism market (WTO, 2004).

## **Benefits and constraints of Ecotourism**

Ecotourism is a practice that can offer many opportunities for the environment and local communities; the Declaration of Quebec also acknowledges its leadership in “introducing sustainability practices to the tourism sector” (WTO, 2004). It is also considered an important part of the world nature tourism market, in which it still plays a small part compared to all outdoors or nature-based activities, but it is indeed rapidly growing and the number of countries offering “eco-experiences” is expanding as well; an example of this development is Latin America where “potential centers of ecotourism” include Argentina, Ecuador, Costa Rica, and Brazil; at the same time, many Latin American governments are adopting policies to promote ecotourism (WB, 2004).

Another attribute of ecotourism is that can be used as a conservation tool (SCBD, 2004 & WB 2004); and in order to analyze its success in this field there are some key proposed benefits that include a function as a financial source to maintain parks and other conservation targets. This also validates the need for these parks or protected natural areas because they become a source of economic benefits, furthermore, these economic benefits facilitate a reduction of natural resource extraction by local population; and finally, can promote private conservation efforts (Brandon, 1996).

Despite these potential benefits, there are also negative factors that come from ecotourism. Usually there is a high dependence on air travel to visit different places where Ecotourism activities are offered; the result is a huge consumption of fossil fuels and therefore a significant contribution to global warming (Gössling, 2000). Another limitation might be given by the local distribution of incomes, as it can happen that certain members of the community benefit more than others due to monopolization of different services (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1998).

The negative impacts at different scales (cultural, environmental and social) are recognized by the WTO, but at the same time, the Organization states that these impacts can be minimized if ecotourism is “responsibly planned, managed and monitored;” and in order to achieve this, the role that governments play needs to be dynamic and take into account the private sector, local authorities and non-governmental organizations (WTO, 2004). In the same way, other strategies such as “limiting tourist numbers, inform and educate both visitors and locals, and to manage and control the area efficiently” can contribute to the successful development of ecotourism (Gössling, 1999).

### **4.4 Central America: its pathway to Ecotourism**

Central America is one of the richest biological sites in the world, it is estimated that 10% of the known world biodiversity is within the region, which also contains the world’s second largest coral reef barrier (MBC, 2004). This richness has been recognized for many years and in some cases applied as a base to promote ecotourism (FODESTUR, 2004).

Countries like Costa Rica and Guatemala have a longer tradition promoting their natural protected areas, and also include Ecotourism as one of the main choices in information oriented to attract visitors (INGUAT, 2002), (CANATUR, 2004). The other Central American countries have made other efforts; For example, El Salvador elaborated its Strategy for Sustainable Ecotourism (CORSATUR, 2002).

The first proposal to organize a route that included different Central American natural destinies was in 1998; it also incorporated medium-sized and small private entrepreneurs, who were keen to initiate regional offers (FODESTUR, 2004). Currently, the region is experimenting with the Green Central America Initiative (ICV *in Spanish*); this regional effort aims to unite enterprises related to ecotourism and natural protected areas to facilitate “sustainable economic development and the conservation of biodiversity throughout Central America” (FODESTUR, 2004). At the same time, there is a proposal to integrate the “Mesoamerican Ecotourism Consortium” that will also support the ICV, strengthen initiatives involving bi- and tri-national programs, and develop a network of protected areas (MBC, 2004).

### **Ecotourism in El Salvador**

Local and foreign consultants recommended Ecotourism as an option to portray the country as an important destiny in the region. For that purpose, delegated member from the Ministry of Environment and CORSATUR met and worked on the elaboration of the “Strategic plan for Ecotourism’s sustainable development in El Salvador.” For that purpose, the definition of Ecotourism accepted is: “the segment of the tourism activity that uses in a sustainable way the country’s natural and cultural patrimony, promotes their conservation, seeks to create consciousness through environmental education, and promotes local well-being” (CORSATUR & MARN, 2002).

The main objectives according to this strategy are:

- To promote the participation of all involved sectors.
- To assist environmental education efforts in natural areas of importance for Ecotourism.
- To reinforce the personnel training on the Ecotourism field.
- To have high quality products related to Ecotourism
- To develop areas for Ecotourism; and at the same time, preserve the natural resources to benefit the local inhabitants.
- To improve the communities life quality through the production of incomes from the natural areas.

In despite of this effort; concrete activities have not been scheduled yet; and it is important to note that the Strategy's elaboration did not include all possible actors.

### **4.5 The importance of Wetlands**

A wetland by definition is an area where “water is the primary factor” that controls the environment - including the different species of animals and plants. Usually they occur either in places that present water at near land’s surface, or where shallow water covers the land; zones of marsh, fen, peat land are included, independently if the water is “natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, static or flowing, fresh, brackish or salt;” also areas of marine water – if at low tide, the depth does not exceed six meters – and riparian zones are part of this classification (Ramsar, 2004a).

The value of wetlands is based in their high productivity, different components and functions. Biotic and non-biotic elements consist of soil, water, plants and animals; at the same time these components experience different interactions between them. These functions involve nutrient cycling and exchange of water, for example; also important to these systems are their attributes such as variety of species; furthermore, wetlands

support millions of people and provide goods and services (Barbier, 1994), also offering many economic benefits associated to “water supply, fisheries, agriculture, timber production, energy resources (peat and plant matter), wildlife resources, transport, recreation and tourism opportunities” and moreover, they are also part of the cultural heritage of humanity (Ramsar, 2004a).

However, even though all of these benefits are acknowledged, wetlands are critically threatened due to a range of anthropocentric activities, for example hunting and lumbering, water pollution, drainage, sedimentation and farm border expansion (CCAD, 2002)

### **The Ramsar Convention**

The accelerated deterioration of marshlands in Europe during 1960 was the first “call to attention” that ended up in an agreement to start an international convention on wetlands by the year 1962. The text of the convention was developed through different international and technical meetings, and after eight years the Convention of Wetlands was presented in the city of Ramsar, Iran on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1971. The Ramsar Convention, as it is usually called, entered into force in 1975 under the official name of “The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat” (Ramsar, 2004b).

Nowadays, the number of contracting Parties is 141, and there are more than 1300 wetlands designated for their inclusion in the “List of Wetlands of International Importance,” covering about one hundred twenty million hectares. The Convention also established its mission as attaining: “the conservation and wise use of wetlands by national action and international cooperation as a means to achieving sustainable development throughout the world” (Ramsar, 2004). Its scope embraces multiple facets regarding wetland conservation and proposes their wise use (Ramsar, 2004).

### **Wise Use of Wetlands**

Taking into consideration the great influence of economic factors for decision-making processes, some efforts exist to give a quantitative value to the different services and goods that are provided by wetlands (Barbier *et al.* 1997). These efforts respond to one of the main principles of The Ramsar Convention, which outlines the importance of the “sustainable utilization of wetland resources in such a way as to benefit the human community while maintaining their potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations” (Ramsar, 2004). This statement implies that as long as the basic ecological functions of an ecosystem are not disturbed, it is possible to utilize the natural productivity and biodiversity of a wetland (Ramsar, 2004c). Another point to consider is the multiple types of wetlands, which explains the need to classify them in a way that their functions and attributes set the basis for an adequate administration; this approach must reflect an interdisciplinary view that includes principles of biology, economics, policy and social sciences, and which in many cases, responds to global concerns (Ramsar, 2004d). Finally, the wise use of wetlands requires collaboration among countries, and for that reason the creation of national and regional policies for wetland management is of great importance, because it can offer guidelines and common, defined goals in order to accomplish sustainable management objectives (Ramsar, 2004d).



#### **4.6 Wetlands in Central America**

Central America is one of the richest zones of the world in terms of biodiversity and wetlands; the area contains lakes, lagoons, estuaries and mangroves, flood plains, coral reefs, swamps and flood forests (IUCN, 1999). It is estimated that the coasts of the region represent 12% of all the Latin American and Caribbean coasts with approximately 6600 kilometers of them; furthermore, a great extension is covered by mangroves and is calculated to be of more than five hundred hectares (Windevoxhel *et al.*, 1999). 21% of the Central American population lives in a coastal area, and fishing is one of the largest sources of direct employment for approximately twenty thousand people (IUCN, 1999). Although the region offers abundant natural resources, the majority of the coastal inhabitants can be found in rural areas where “the availability of basic services (health, education, drinking water, etc.) is limited and conditions for quality of life are critical” (Windevoxhel *et al.*, 1999).

Sustainable development in Central America requires different strategies, and one of the main challenges is undoubtedly the alleviation of poverty; since wetlands play a vital role in the region, the seven countries decided to work on a common environmental, economical and social agenda, and created “The Central American Policy for Conservation and Wise Use of Wetlands;” this measure is considered a concrete response to the need to conserve wetlands, and at the same time optimize their utilization (CCAD, 2002). The elaboration and endorsement to this policy also reflects the integration efforts of the area and set the first world example of a regional wetland policy, and as part of the Central American Environmental Agenda, its work is connected to other projects such as the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor and the Integrated System of Environmental Management that it is based on the Central American Alliance for Sustainable Development (CCAD, 2002).

The “Ramsar sites” – accepted wetlands of importance – can contribute to achieving sustainable development; they cover about 1% of the Central American territory, and currently there are several identified sites awaiting official recognition; half of these are coastal marine, characterized by beaches, coral reefs, marine grazing areas, mangroves and estuaries (IUCN, 1999).

#### **4.7 Mangroves as wetlands of importance**

The mangroves are tree species able to live in saltwater or salty soils; their ecosystems are found in intertidal areas of protected coastlines called estuaries (Field, 1998; Kaplowitz, 2001). By definition an estuary is a surrounded area where fresh water is mixed with seawater, the result is an ecotone between the marine environment and the land, it also presents wide changes in temperature and salinity levels due to daily tides and differences in the flow of fresh water caused by seasonal variations (Miller, 2004). The mangroves are the predominant species in estuaries, and usually referred to the ecosystem as a whole. Mangroves possess multiple ecological roles such as: shelter juvenile aquatic species, habitat for terrestrial fauna, source of nutrients to sustain food chains and coastal protection (Kovacs, 1999; Windevoxhel *et al.* 1999). Worldwide, there are around seventy known mangrove species, and it is estimated that they cover a surface between 180 000 and 200 000 Km<sup>2</sup> (Field, 1998). As mentioned above, all these species

are distinguished from others by a high tolerance to salt and brackish waters (Lugo, 1998; Field, 1998); which is what prevents the appearance of invasive species, because globally, there is a small pool of species that can resist the conditions of mangrove habitats characterized by salinity, a long hydro-period, and anaerobic soil conditions (Lugo, 1998). These ecosystems are very complex and dynamic, and their environmental processes, structures, goods and services are the result of the interaction among their different elements (Barbier, 1994).

Mangrove ecosystems can sustain coastal human settlements by providing resources that can be extracted such as fish, wood and wildlife; in the same way, people receive other benefits in the form of indirect services that include flood and water control, preventions of storm damage, and transport and recreation (Barbier *et al.*, 1997; Kovacs, 1999; Kaplowitz, 2001). These multiple functions highlight the importance of mangroves and their potential to become areas of “multiple use,” as long as those uses are managed with the aim of sustaining natural conditions (Field, 1998). Furthermore, if this diversity of functions is to support various stakeholders, it must be considered that these groups have different interests in the area, which can create tension among them, especially when there is an observed increase in poverty, population growth, or ecosystem transformation to other uses such as aquaculture, salt production and even tourism (ICRW, 1999). Nowadays, mangroves are in jeopardy globally despite worldwide recognition of the benefits they provide, regional efforts, and the local dependency of communities (Lal, 2003).

### **Mangroves in Central America**

Mangroves cover more than 500 000 hectares in Central America, and are considered one of the most representative ecosystems in protected coastal zones, (Windevoxhel & Imbach, 1998). The biological aspects of mangroves – mainly in the Pacific Ocean coast – have been extensively illustrated; however, much of the available literature contains descriptive biological information about particular species of mangroves, while there is very limited data with reference to historical uses, quantitative information, primary productivity, regeneration and reforestation (Windevoxhel & Imbach, 1998).

It is reported that coastal human settlements in all countries intensively use mangroves as a source of food (mainly fish) and firewood; consequently great pressure put on the ecosystem by deforestation and other inappropriate uses (Benitez *et al.*, 2000). The pressure on the environment by population is originated by different factors such as “changes in fertility, death, disease, and migration”; but the stronger competition over a limited amount of resources is created by the expansion of population (ICRW, 1999). The extraction of wood to supply power necessities is an example; the accelerated reduction of the tropical forests of Central America - mainly of dry forests - transformed mangroves in the main source of firewood, and currently they satisfy between the 40% and 90% of this basic need for families who live in the coasts (Windevoxhel & Imbach, 1998). In order to protect the ecosystems, some restrictions are established, for example fishing in the estuaries or to collect firewood (ICRW, 1999), however, different experiences show that effective biological conservation requires that local stakeholders possess some kind of access rights or ownership, whereas in reality most of these areas are public land under the State’s administration, which implies difficulties for conservation (Windevoxhel & Imbach, 1998; ICRW, 1999). This can be seen in El Salvador; a country with 350

kilometers on the Pacific coast, an estuary system encompassing approximately 27 000 hectares of mangroves plus 10 000 hectares of estuary canals, the main areas of which are the Gulf of Fonseca (shared between El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras), Jiquilisco Bay and the Barra de Santiago estuary. All of these estuaries provide people with fishing, recreation, farming, aquatic transportation and industrial development; the jurisdiction of these main estuaries, and the use of the natural resources in the coastal marine zone, is under twenty-eight municipalities (CCAD, 2002). But El Salvador's authorities do not guarantee local fishing rights in the estuaries; neither do they promote some type of "sustainable fuel wood extraction," and as a result the environmental damage of mangroves is accelerated and noxious practices continue regardless of the legislation in force (ICRW, 1999; Benitez *et al.* 2000).

## 5. Case Study Area: Barra de Santiago Estuary

Barra de Santiago estuary is a wetland of importance for El Salvador; and for that reason, it was chosen to study the possibilities for ecotourism as a wise use. The following section describes the current ecological and socio-economic conditions of the place.

### 5.1 Ecological Characteristics

This area is located in the 13° 42' North Latitude and the 90°03'West Longitude at the occidental part of El Salvador (Herrera, 1998). It comprises a sandy beach and an extension of mangroves. It is part of the National Great Coastal Landscape; and it is also proposed as "Natural Area for Multiple Uses" and as a "Ramsar Site" (MARN, 2004). (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Location of Barra de Santiago in El Salvador. Source: Deufel, 2004.

## **Climate and Hydrology**

Barra de Santiago is affected by a pattern of semidiurnal tides, with maximum floods of 2.14 meters above the sea level. At the same time, two annual seasons distinguish the country and the area as well, they are known as rainy season (from May to October) and dry season (from November to April). The yearly precipitation average is of 1500 mm, and the temperatures range is between 22°C - 27°C (SEMA, 1994 *in* Herrera, 1998). The area has different canals and some small islands; it also receives fresh water from seven different rivers; but during the dry season, the ocean tides become the main water contributors to the system, consequently the salinity increases in the canals (Hernandez *et al.*, 2000).

## **Vegetation**

El Salvador is organized in different “life’s zones”, which were designed in order to classify natural areas (Holdridge, 1975 *in* Herrera, 1998). Barra de Santiago is part of the Subtropical Humid Forest; the predominant vegetation is composed by the mangrove forest, which is dominated by the following species: Red Mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*, & *R. racemosa*), Ishtatén (*Avicennia nitida*), Madresal (*Avicennia bicolor*), Sincahuite (*Laguncularia racemosa*), and Botoncillo (*Conocarpus erecta*) (MARN, 2004). These mangroves are usually organized in nucleus of specific species; also the occurrences of *Conocarpus erecta* in predominantly sandy sites next to firm land, characterizes the whole area. There is also a transition forest, and some spots with palms (Herrera, 1998; MARN, 2004).

## **Wildlife**

Barra de Santiago is one of the most studied Salvadorian natural areas; different research projects and thesis are conducted there. These studies reveal the next information about macro vertebrates:

Fish: 74 species are registered, with possibilities to include more if further samples collection is made. In this group is included the Machorra (*Atractosteus tropicus*), a type of “alligator fish”, extremely endangered and restricted to the western part of the country (Herrera, 1998).

Amphibians: little is known about the species in the area and there are just 6 of them reported, therefore, it is necessary to focus studies on this group, especially due to their function as environmental indicators (MARN, 2004).

Reptiles: there are 22 species reported for the area. The most known are the Green Iguana (*Iguana iguana*), the Garrobo (*Ctenosaura similis*) and the sea turtle type called Olive Ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*). These species have had some kind of management by members of the community; these efforts represented the challenge of conservation of species while obtaining economic benefits at the same time (Herrera, 1998).

Birds: they are the most studied, and at the moment the most numerous group. Registries show the presence of 210 species; from which 183 live in the mangroves and the estuary; and 27 come from surrounding areas. The species are also classified as migratory or residents: 77 species migrate from North America, 3 more from South America and 1 migrates locally; in the same way, there are 106 species that are permanent residents (Herrera, 1998).

Mammals: this group is also understudied. There are 25 species reported for the area; however, the salty conditions of the mangroves contribute to reduce the number of species too (Serrano *et al.*, 1993 *in* Herrera, 1998).

## Threats to Biodiversity

The increase of the population puts more pressure on natural resources if people cannot satisfy their needs by other means (Benítez *et al.*, 2000; Hernandez *et al.*, 2000). In that way, Barra de Santiago's biodiversity is continuously menaced, for example the iguanas (*Iguana iguana*), doves (*Zenaida spp.*), ducks (*Dendrocygna autumnalis*), rabbits (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) and squirrels (*Sciurus variegatoides*) are illegally hunted for subsistence; at the same time, other individuals or their products are exchangeable by money, such as parrots (*Amazona sp.*) parakeets (*Aratinga canicularis*, *Brotogeris jugularis*), crocodiles' skins and sea turtle eggs (Herrera, 1998). Another problem is given by the expansion of tourism activities without any regulations, constructions in the sandy strip affect directly the sea turtles that nest in the area, they are disturbed by illegal harvesting of eggs, illumination and waste at the beach; other species of coastal vegetation, birds and crabs are perturbed as well. The diminishment of wild fauna and flora populations is also connected to deforestation that affects their habitat, and to changes in land use and expansion of the agricultural border that in many cases contaminates the soil and ground water, and harms the trophic levels of the food chains (Herrera, 1998).

## 5.2 Socio-economic aspects.

### Population

Barra de Santiago provides shelter for a human settlement; this community is organized in three differentiated groups of houses distributed around the place. Some families own farmlands that were obtained through the Agrarian Reform, whereas many others live as tenant farmers or summer houses guardians; their houses are made of rough materials, especially mangrove wood, coconut palms and steel plates (León, 1998 in Vasquez *et al.*, 1998). The population is about five thousand habitants (León, 1998 in Vasquez *et al.*, 1998). Most of the people are originally from the area and the rest come from neighboring villages. Another aspect is that families tend to be numerous, for example 69.5% of them have five members or more, whereas 30.5% have four or less (Hernandez, *et al.*, 2000).

### Basic Services

The community has a health center with one doctor and two nurses; their registries show that about four hundred patients are attended every month and that the most common diseases are stomach and respiratory tract infections.

Most of the people take water from wells done by members of the community, and these sources are usually contaminated by coliforms. At the same time, there is not a waste or grey water management infrastructures, in fact, the great majority does not even use a latrine, and do their necessities outdoors (Vasquez *et al.*, 1998).

Regarding education, Barra de Santiago has one school for grades up to the secondary level; since there are not sufficient classrooms or teachers, the school is divided into afternoon and morning classes instruct. There are approximately 500 students in this school and it receives recognition and economic support from the Ministry Education (Deufel, 2004).

About communication, the community has public phones and it is possible to receive signals for mobile phones. And in relation to transport, there are some public busses that go to the area a few times per day, but 94.5% of the population takes private pick-ups that do different trips daily (Hernandez *et al.*, 2000).

### **Energy sources**

It was during the year 1966, that the electricity service was firstly accessed and approximately 86% of population can use it (Hernandez *et al.*, 2000). However, the mangroves are still the main source of wood for cooking and building. Mangroves are protected by the Environmental Law, but it is possible to receive an authorization from the local ranger chief to collect dry branches; it is estimated that 88.3 % of the population uses mangrove firewood, and just 11.7% other type of material including gas stoves (Hernandez *et al.*, 2000).

### **The current type of tourism**

Barra de Santiago was almost an isolated village until 1957 when a small road was built; this path connected a national highway with Guayapa city which had a wharf and in that way, boat trips were easily made to the other side of the mangroves where Barra de Santiago still is (León, 1998). The main attractions of this newly discovered site were the mangroves and the magnificent beach on the Pacific coast, that is how more visitors came and by 1962 there were twenty five *lanchas* (small motor boats) and three ferries to transport up to three cars each of them. This system completely disappeared twenty years later when a road was made to connect the highway directly to Barra de Santiago; this made possible the beginning of massive tourism in the area (León, 1998). Nowadays, three types of tourism are recognized in Barra de Santiago: (1) visitors from the neighboring cities and villages, this group usually does it by public transport; (2) organized excursions in rented buses for that purpose; these two kinds represent mass tourism concentrated during national holidays. The third type is formed by owners of private summer houses that come in their own cars. The number of visitors per week is estimated to be 365 (León, 1998), however this information is based in observation and does not come from any technical process.

### **Areas of special interest**

Barra de Santiago has specific points that are attractive for tourists and are usually the most visited; such as The Cajete Island, this island is the biggest in the area with 20 hectares, and can be reached from two different channels. Its great attractive is that it was a Pre-Hispanic Center (900 – 1200 B.C) (SEMA/MAG, 1994 *in* Herrera, 1998). The vegetation shows some original remaining species but it is also cultivated with maize, sesame, beans, peanuts and coconut trees (Herrera, 1998).

Another popular spot is the sandy beach strip, which is 9 Km. long; this beach is nationally recognized as a sea turtle nesting site, and has a conservation program with participation of the community (Herrera, 1998).

## 6. Results

The results of this study are presented in this section according to the outlined objectives: first, the different actors and their institutional framework will be explained; the next part is the information from the application of questionnaires; then, the nature-based products offered by national tour operators; and finally, the role of NGOs regarding ecotourism in the community.

### 6.1 Domestic Ecotourism: the institutional framework

The promotion of tourism and the management of wetlands are not just related to a couple of institutions; contrary, they result from interactions of the different actors at the international, national, regional and local stages; some of these relations are vertically and do not imply any kind of feedback; while others are more dynamic and require dialogue in order to successes. It is important to highlight that the decisions affecting Barra de Santiago are not necessarily locally-made. The identified actors and their functions are described as follows:

#### International Actors

The main institutions at this level are: The World Tourism Organization, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Ramsar Convention; all of them provide policy recommendations for Environment and Tourism. Usually they have direct dialogue with the national authorities -such as Ministries- and receive feedback or information through reports. At this level, there are also aid agencies interested in promoting or supporting both topics. They can contribute financially to local projects or elaboration of strategies at national or regional scale.

WTO: the World Tourism Organization is a specialized agency of the United Nations, and is in charge to establish a global forum where tourism policy issues can be discussed; it is also a useful guide in different areas such as the development of sustainable tourism; it also includes the "Sustainable Development of Ecotourism" as one of its Program activities. The organization has a Regional Representation for the Americas that offers technical cooperation programs, usually of long duration in order to assist Governments in "acquiring technical know-how in the formulation of tourism policies and strategies in planning, product development, marketing, and human resource development" (WTO, 2004).

CBD: The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity presented this year the document about "Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development", this work offers practical guidance and information related the development of sustainable tourism International guidelines for activities related to sustainable tourism in "vulnerable terrestrial, marine and coastal ecosystems and habitats of major importance for biological diversity and protected areas" (CBD, 2004).

RAMSAR: is the name given to the Convention on Wetlands whose mission is "the conservation and wise use of wetlands", and is this last point the one that includes and promotes sustainable touristy activities.

International Development Aid Agencies: they are local representations and work directly with different tourism matters; the most renowned are the Spanish Cooperation Agency

(AECI) and the German Technical Cooperation for Development (GTZ), both organizations work intensively on the development of tourism and ecotourism for the region; they produce documents and strength local efforts from the official to the civil level.

## **National Actors**

In this scale, the relevant institutions are the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources and the Ministry of Tourism; both of them adopt policies and strategies recommended by the international organizations. At the same time, they are the managers for wetlands and tourism in El Salvador; and participate on regional efforts.

In this level, there also tour operators, these are in communication with the Ministry of Tourism regarding promotion and planning. And finally, Salvadorian tourists that already visit Barra de Santiago and receive services from the local community.

Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN): it seeks to "direct an effective environmental management through policies and norms, in a transparent and participative way which facilitates the sustainable development of the Salvadorian society" (MARN, 2004). The office for "Natural Patrimony" is the Ministry's section that administrates natural areas and provides management guidelines for ecosystems and wildlife; this section also has one managerial unit that is in charge of protected natural areas and activities related to the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor; and another one about environmental services and mangroves, this one guides the protection, use and benefits of systems such as hydrographic river basins, mangroves and high-priority zones for development (MARN, 2004).

A protected natural area is defined as: a part of the national territory, (privately or stated owned) legally established for conservation purposes, flora and fauna restoration and sustainable management; it takes in to account its natural and cultural interactions and functions, and its genetic, historical, scenic, recreational, archaeological and protective values (MARN, 2003). One of the macro principles of the "National Policy for Salvadorian Protected Areas" is to achieve social participation through Co-management; this implies that the management of the area is administrated by any organization from the civil society under the Ministry's supervision and following its guidelines (MARN, 2003). The Ministry also joined efforts together with the Salvadorian Corporation for Tourism and the Ministry of Agriculture to elaborate the Ecotourism and Agrotourism Strategies (MARN, 2003).

Ministry of Tourism: is newly created after the presidential elections of the year 2004, this establishment was motivated by the recognition of tourism as a tool to attack poverty (Santamaría, 2004a). It comprises the Salvadorian Tourism Corporation (CORSATUR) the institution in charge of tourism development, and the Salvadorian Institute of Tourism (ISTU) that administrates the national tourism infrastructure and promotes the development of the national tourism.

Tour Operators: are the companies that assemble the different elements of a tour, and usually include a guide, host, or escort by groups. (TARC, 2004). They also are intermediaries between the tourist and the destinations, offer services to national and



international tourists, and some of them promote outdoors activities and visits to natural areas.

Visitors: any person who comes to Barra de Santiago with the purpose of having holidays. They can go to the area in the form of mass tourism during specific dates.

### **Regional Actors**

These are institutions that promote regional integration for environmental and tourism actions. This stage includes the Central American Tourism Council and the Technical Secretary -with its adjunct offices- ; the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor and the Central American Commission for Environment and Development who elaborated the regional wetland policy.

CCT: is the Central American Tourism Council, and is formed by the seven tourism ministers from the region (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama); seeks to stimulate the development of tourism in the region.

SITCA: is the Central America Technical Secretary for Tourism Integration, works as a permanent office that gives administrative and technical support to the different tourism programs. The following institutions are adjunct offices of SITCA, and are connected and interdependent; therefore the decision-making process requires extensive dialogue and agreement among all members:

COMECATUR: Marketing Committee, this section gathers all the marketing managers from the national tourism administration from each country.

FEDECATUR: the Tourism Chamber Federation is the space where Central American delegates from each national chamber discuss tourism regional actions.

CATA: Central American Tourism Agency, which promotes the region at diverse international levels. Its office is Madrid, Spain where works to catch the attention of European visitors on Central America as a touristy destination.

MBC: the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor Initiative is funded by international donors but maintains regional presence, and includes the promotion of ecotourism as one part of its multiple activities; it also reinforces the importance of natural protected areas and their role in ecotourism.

CCAD: Central American Commission for Environment and Development, it seeks to develop a regional regime for environmental cooperation and integration that will improve the quality of life for Central American citizens.

### **Local Actors**

The local setting is mainly integrated by the community living in Barra de Santiago estuary, and includes the two local tourism organizations. There are also the summer houses owners considered as temporary residents and NGOs that work in the area.

Barra de Santiago Community: some residents offer different services to visitors, such as boat trips, food and lodge; these activities are especially done during national holidays. The community also benefits from social assistance carried by the Association of summer houses owners. Equally, different NGOs do projects with participation of the community; and finally, the Ministry of Environment gives management guidelines regarding mangroves.

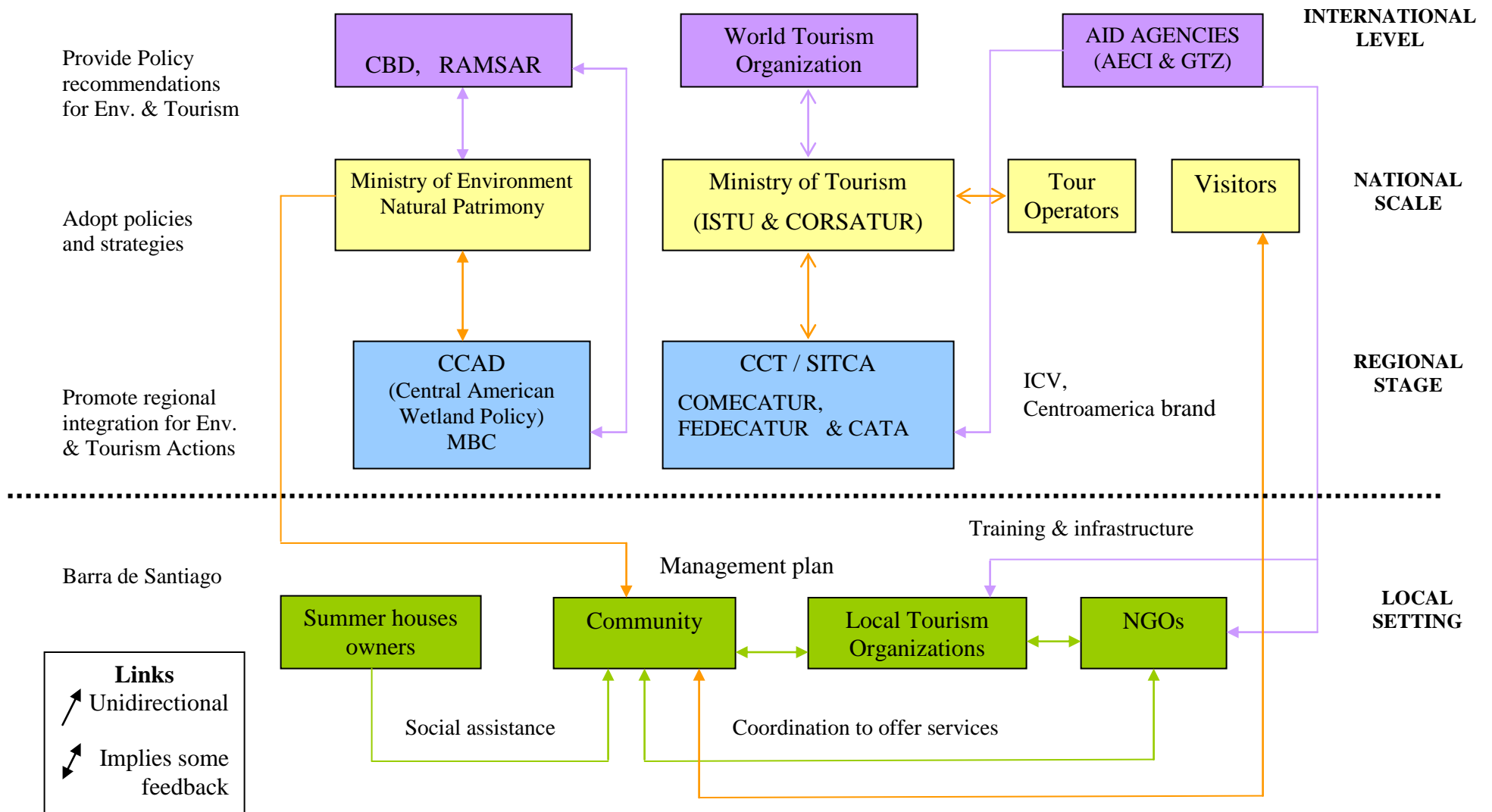
Local Tourism Organizations: local initiatives to self-organize and offer touristy packages having Ecotourism as a main focus. One of them is the "Pro-improvement Association of Barra de Santiago; it compiles 80 members and 6 trained local guides; the other one is AMBAS (Women Association of Barra de Santiago) which is an "umbrella" for the youth group called Shasca Tours, this group offers tour and compiles 20 trained members. Both organizations are directed by women and receive some kind of funding support. They also expressed their interest to change the current Mass Tourism in the area to Ecotourism. These organizations coordinate services with the community such as meals and lodging. International aid agencies have also provide technical and financial support for tourism in the area.

Non-governmental Organizations: institution without profit purposes that conduct environmental or social development projects in Barra de Santiago, they have also offered training regarding tourism as an economic activity. These organizations can also be sponsored by national or international aid development agencies.

Private summer houses owners: people who are not members of the community and do not live there, but have houses to spend holidays in the area. A group of owners created the "Barra de Santiago Association" which aims to contribute to local environmental and social development.

The next diagram compiles all the previous actors involved in the development of tourism and wetland management processes in Barra de Santiago. The four different levels are differentiated using colors for the boxes and for the matching arrows. In that way the links and feedbacks at all stages become clearer. The single arrow means a more unidirectional and vertical link, whereas double arrows are used to indicate feedbacks and communication between institutions.

## "International, National, Regional, and Local Actors involved in development processes in Barra de Santiago"



## 6.2 Community's perceptions of tourism in Barra de Santiago

The questionnaire was answered by forty people; equal number of female and male participated; different ages for both genders were also included. The interviews lasted about thirty minutes, and respondents were motivated to comment more if they still had points to mention.

Regarding demographic information, the youngest interviewed was eighteen years old, and the oldest seventy two years old. Differences in answers according to the age of the respondents are not obvious. About the Marital status, 42% are single, 25% have partners, 20% are married, 5% got divorced and 8% are widows. The household composition is formed by an average of five members. It was asked how many of these members contribute to generate incomes for the family, and the average number is 2.6. Following this line, it was also asked about the total incomes for the household per month, these vary from fifty USD to five hundred USD reported by three people. The level of literacy was also asked and it shows that 86% of the respondents know how to write y how to read, whereas 14% are illiterates.

Finally, this part also included a question regarding land ownership; this is referred to the space in which they live in Barra de Santiago. The answers were a 30% for those who have a legal entitlement over this terrain; and 70% for those who live as tenant farmers or have a designated area if they are housekeepers of summer houses.

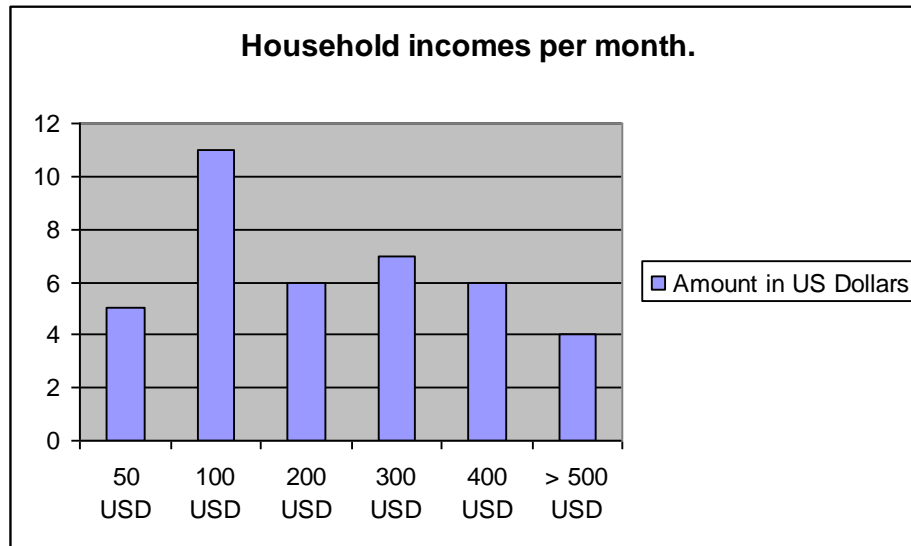


Figure2. Household incomes per month in Barra de Santiago

The next set of questions is about their attachment to Barra de Santiago motivated by family roots. To the question about how long they have lived in the area, 58% answered that they were born there, and the remaining 42% have lived an average of 34 years in the area, with a minimum of 8 years and a maximum of 63 years. At the same time 47% of the people said that their sons and daughters were born there; another 10% have their parents originally from Barra de Santiago, 20% expressed that both, parents and children were born there; and the last 23% has none of them born in the area. The last part of this section seeks to find out if people have plans to continue living in Barra de Santiago, the word "plan" was emphasized

as an organized intention to actually live or stay; to this, 94% answered positively about staying, 3% said no, and another 3% does not know for sure (Fig.3) The reasons that explain why people want to continue living in Barra de Santiago are multiple; for example that they like the beach, the easy access to resources, the nature and the "nice environment". Other group was focused on the safety of the community compared to big cities; and finally, it was also said that business and family are also a reason to stay. On the other hand, the opportunity to migrate to United States was mentioned as a motivation to leave Barra de Santiago.

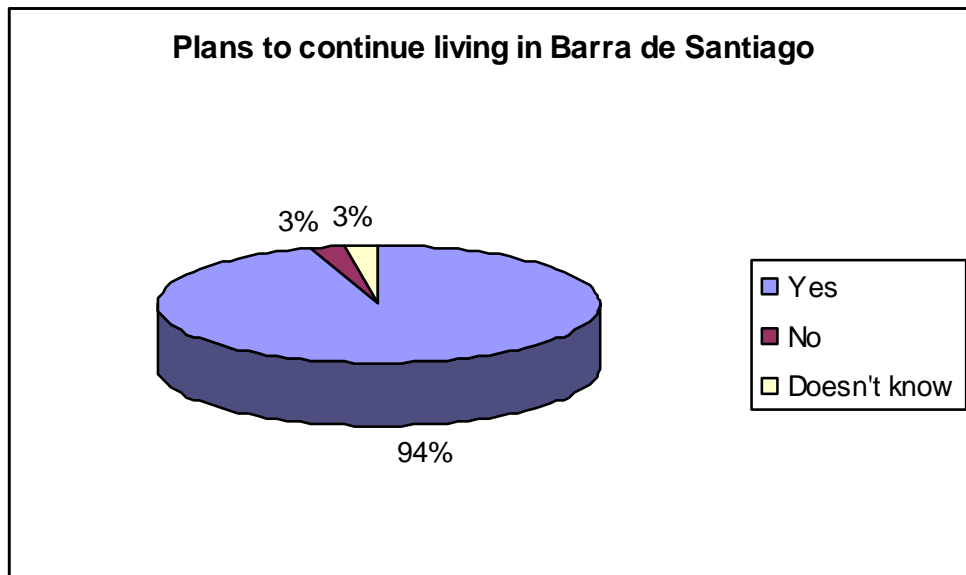


Figure 3. Plans to continue living in Barra de Santiago

The following part of the questionnaire aimed to establish the type of previous contact of the community with tourists; in this case, 29 out of 40 respondents have had contact with visitors, whereas 11 of them have not had any kind of exchange. The tourists pay for various services such as meals, boat tours in the mangrove channels, for tour guiding and even for renting rooms to stay overnight. The answers showed a difference between activities held by woman and men regarding tourism services; for example, serving meals was positively answered just by women. But it is also possible to identify an "emerging" participation of women in non-domestic areas such as tour guiding or boat tours (Fig.4). The next question was about people's occupations, the answers also reflect differences between women and men; half of the women stay at home to do domestic offices, three more sell food, other two are merchants, one is a fisherwoman and three are rangers. In the men's case, most of them combine different occupations; they can work as fishermen, plus other activities such as carpentry, construction and bakery; the ones who own small boats offer tours if it is required. There were also two rangers, one tour guide and two more that administrate hostels. Finally, it was asked if any of them abandoned a previous occupation to work entirely on tourism; to this one man said that before he was fisherman and now works as an accountant for a local tourism organization, another one rents cabins for tourist but still goes to fish. Women also answered to this, one of them worked selling food but received local training by an NGO and

became a ranger; another woman also received some training and is a tour guide, but continues working as a housekeeper in a summer house.

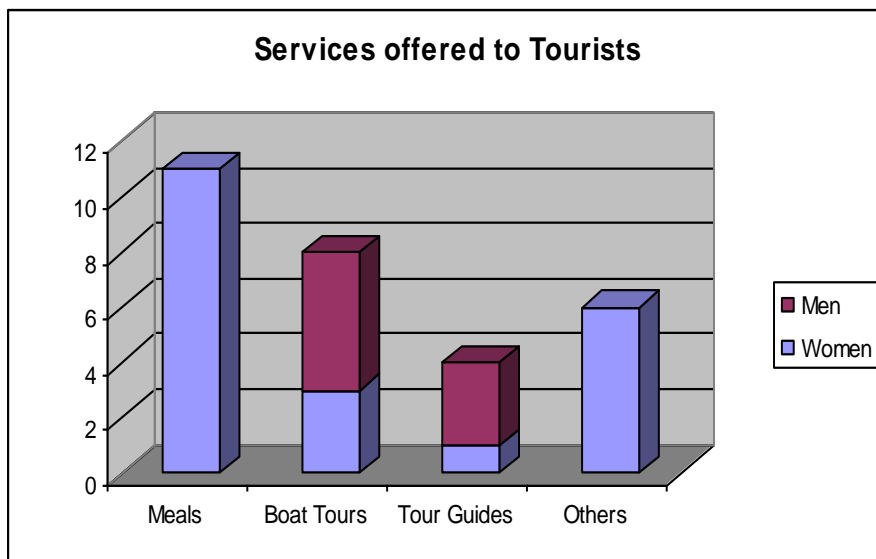


Figure 4. Gender differences among services offered to tourists

What follows are the questions related to people's dependency on natural resources. The respondents were asked to name all the resources or products that they take from the mangroves in order to satisfy some basic needs; to this 64% extract firewood and fish, 28% just firewood, and finally 3% said that does not take anything(Fig.5).

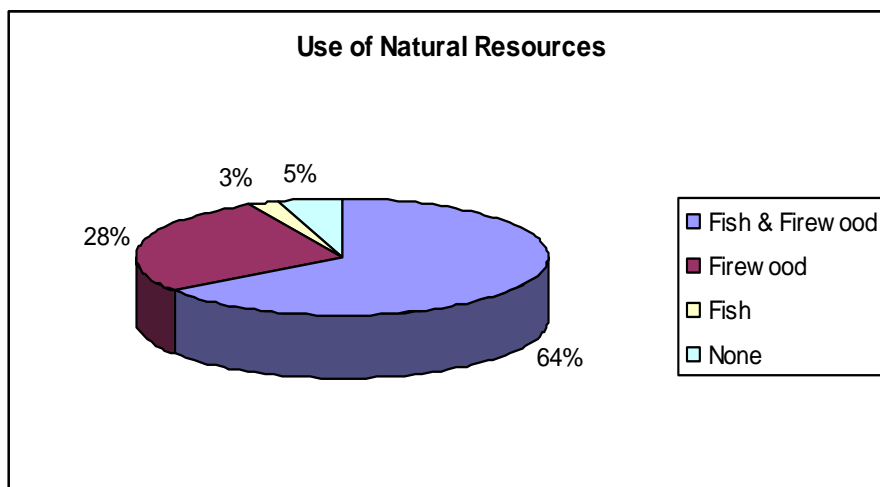


Figure 5. Use of Natural Resources by the community

At the same time, the significance of the natural resources in the area was asked. People referred to the importance that mangroves have as ecosystems with its elements and functions; and is the "everything on them" what makes them important; 52% mentioned

the previous statement, 18% considered fish and sea food as more valuable, 8% said just mangroves as trees, and 22% believed that wildlife was the most important part. Also, people were asked about the importance of the protection of the estuary, and 100% agreed on the topic; furthermore, the action proposed for conservation were related to reforestation, education, more vigilance and even reducing direct dependency.

The last section of the questionnaire was directed to obtain opinions about tourism as a present activity, and also its projections to the future. It was asked if the respondents participated in meetings, workshops or any event organized by Non-Governmental Organizations that work in the area; the result was 62% affirmative, and 38% said no. The following question was if they considered Tourism as an option for better life; to this 97% of people answered yes and 3% expressed doubts. From the positive answers, some participants stated requisites for success Tourism such as: the importance of organize it properly and that the visitors must be educated and respect the place. It was also asked what could be the benefits obtained from Tourism, and for 100% of the people the most important was to obtain higher incomes, just two people mentioned that tourism offers jobs without destroying the environment, and one more said that can attract other investments. Subsequently, it was important to know what kind of job related to tourism could interest people: 27% wanted to have a restaurant, it is important to highlight that all the respondents in this category were women, whereas in the rest of preferences both genders were interested in participate; 29% would like to work as tour guides, 5% as boat operators, 13% would do anything, 8% does not know and prefers to wait until real offers are available, 5% is not interested on doing anything related to tourism, and the last 13% mentioned multiple options for example rangers, or to become owners of hostels (Fig.6)

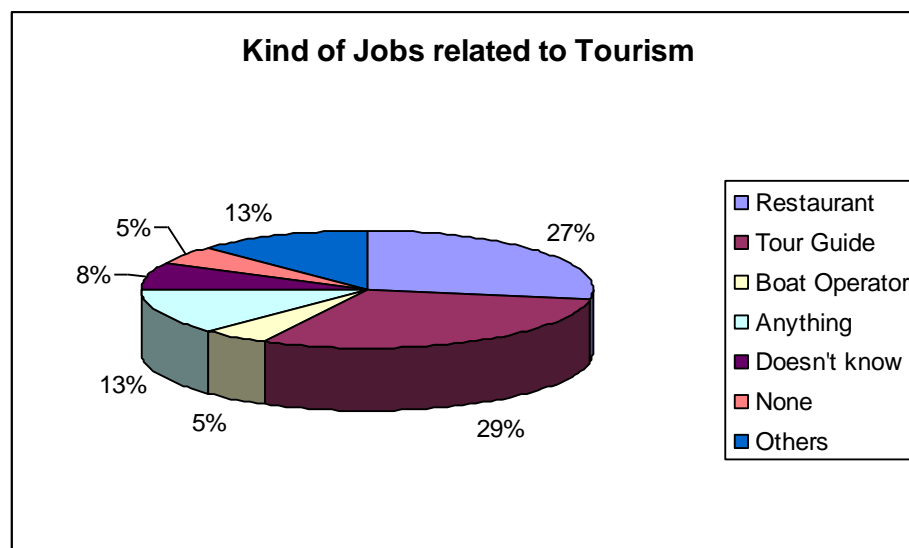


Figure 6. Preferences for jobs related to tourism

If Barra de Santiago could become an important touristy destination, it needs a strategy; respondents were required to suggest ways to make this possible. The proposals were numerous; however, they can be grouped in three main aspects: one is oriented to the importance of having an organized community, which implies the well functioning of local

groups and wide participation; the second one is referred to the local need to improve infrastructure, mainly related to potable water access and a proper road; the last aspect was about promotion of the area, provide good service to visitors, and work jointly with other institutions outside the community.

Another relevant aspect is the quantity of tourism that Barra de Santiago should receive; for 23% of the interviewed it is necessary some kind of regulation. It was said that "frequency is more important than amount", which is referred to the conglomerations during national holidays; also that the number of tourists should correspond just to the ones that can be attended properly. For the rest 77%, tourism should be "as much as possible"; even further, people proposed to receive from one hundred to one thousand visitors per weekend.

The last point of the questionnaire was about the vision that people can have about Barra de Santiago in ten years. These views were also various, but can be synthesized as follows: one is the dream of having access to services for most of the population, especially potable water and better roads; and this also includes access to jobs. Secondly, many people wished Barra de Santiago could become an "attraction center", some kind of resort, very modern and nicer. But, one person could not imagine anything, and two more were worried that the community will be overpopulated.

### 6.3 Salvadorians' tourism preferences

As in the previous questionnaire, forty people were interviewed, from which twenty were women and twenty were men. It also lasted about thirty minutes, and it was open to extent if the respondents wanted to comment more. The background questions were related to age, occupation and incomes. The youngest respondent was nineteen years old and the oldest was fifty seven. Regarding occupations, thirteen students were interviewed, the rest of the people have jobs that implied higher education, such as business managers, bank managers, engineers, publicists, and teachers, among others.

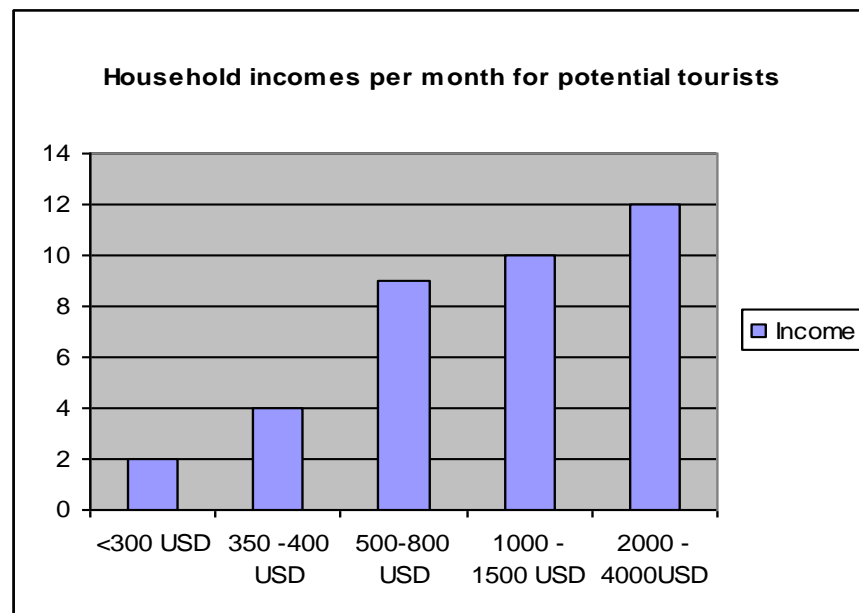


Figure 7. Household incomes per month of potential tourists.



Their incomes per month were also asked; the mentioned amounts are referred to the total income per household, so if the respondent has a partner his/her also included. The amounts vary, but 85% of the people earn more than five hundred USD, whereas the remaining 15% gets less than 400 USD.

The following part shows the respondents' answers regarding environmental knowledge. Firstly, it was inquired if El Salvador still has natural areas, and if it is important to protect them; 100% agreed on the existence of these areas. About the importance of their conservation, the reasons were numerous but are mostly based on the ecosystem's functions; many people considered the natural areas as part of the national patrimony, therefore it is necessary to protect them; some others mentioned their functions and services such as water and oxygen; one more group though that they are the last natural areas in the country, so it is urgent to save them.

After this, they were requested to mention ecosystems of importance for the country; just seven respondents gave examples such as mangroves, forests, lagoons, lakes and coral reefs; on the other hand, the rest of the people talked about specific places, the most mentioned were "El Imposible" forest, the mountain called "Cerro Verde" and another forest called "Montecristo"; Barra de Santiago was mentioned just twice. Additionally, they were asked to explain the importance of these ecosystems; to this, 44% said that they are important because they provide a habitat for wildlife, other 28% mentioned the relevance of the services provided by ecosystems, another 15% considered these areas as the last national reserves; and the remaining 18% expressed various reasons, for example, to reduce the country's vulnerability and their connection to humans.

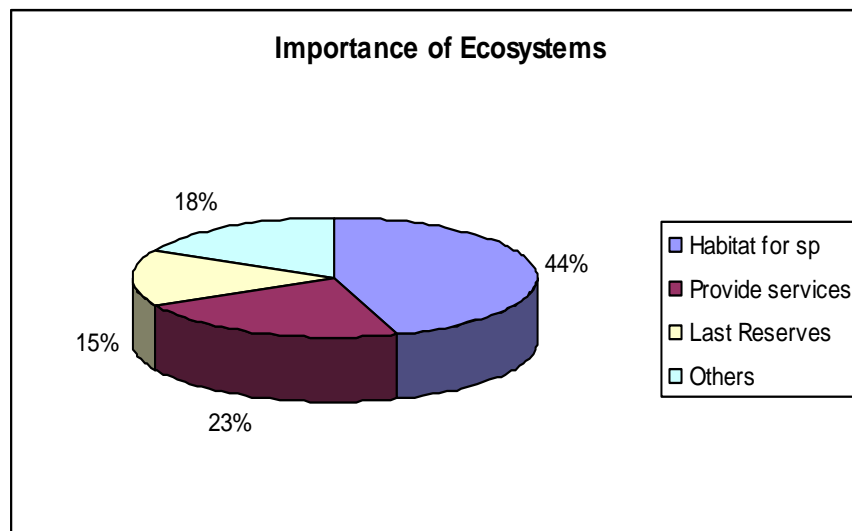


Figure 8. Importance given to ecosystems by potential tourists

Another question was about wildlife, respondents were asked to mention important species for the country, most of the answers were not specific and very general, for example "birds" that was mentioned by 50% of the people, but just four specify that they were referring to parrots, doves and toucans; other animals were deer, wild cats, monkeys, squirrels, rabbits, armadillos, sea turtles, and iguanas. Mangroves and coffee plantation were mentioned once each of them. There were also six people who could not answer. The

last question tried to find out if respondents have participated on any kind of action to protect the environment; to this, 50% have done so, usually in reforestation campaigns, some type of waste management or about environmental education.

The rest of the questionnaire is entirely about choices that respondents have regarding touristy destinations. Firstly, it was asked how they choose a place to spend their holidays; most of the answers repeat and combine aspects mentioned several times; the top conditions were: quality of services, comfort of the chosen places, accessibility, privacy, security and should be away from the city. The number of days spent at the place chosen for holidays, showed that 28% of the people prefer to stay from two to three days, 20% keeps on for five days, 34% prefers seven days, 8% wants to be at the place for fourteen days, and finally a 10% expressed that did not have a pattern. Similarly, the number of vacation-days per year was asked to each respondent, 44% had a period of twenty – twenty one days per year, for 27% is sixty days (this is specially for students), 13% can have thirty days, and varies widely for 8% of the people.

The next question was done in order to find out their minimum "comfort" requirements, in this case the answers also combined and repeated many time the same aspects, and the most important requisites that these people needed to feel comfortable are: clean bathroom, potable water, general cleanliness, security and good service; other aspects were mentioned less frequently such as easy access to medical assistance, in contact with nature, good food and not overcrowded.

Following this, it was asked if people consume food and beverages from the place they are visiting, 90% does it, but 10% said that just sometimes or according to the type of place. The next question was about preferences to travel independently or in organized tours; to this 82% preferred to travel on their own, whereas 18% had no problem doing both types of trips.

After that, respondents were asked if they could imagine themselves spending their holidays just in El Salvador; 75% answered positively, and the remaining 25% said no (Fig.9). The ones who could stay in the country expressed many reasons, but most frequently is because the country still has places to know, and good places to visit. On the other hand, the ones who preferred to go abroad, said that they are interested in other cultures, or that El Salvador is not too interesting.

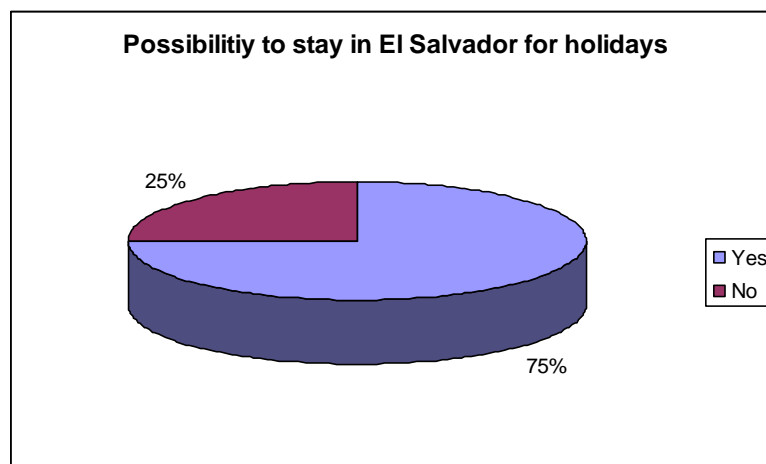


Figure 9. Possibilities for domestic holidays

The next question was about the type of activity people wanted to do in El Salvador, for 39% of the people, to go to the beach is the best option, 33% want to go to places where it is possible to practice sports such as kayaking, rappel, hiking, and mountain biking; 19% prefers to visit colonial towns or historical sites; and 9% just wants to rest during their holidays.

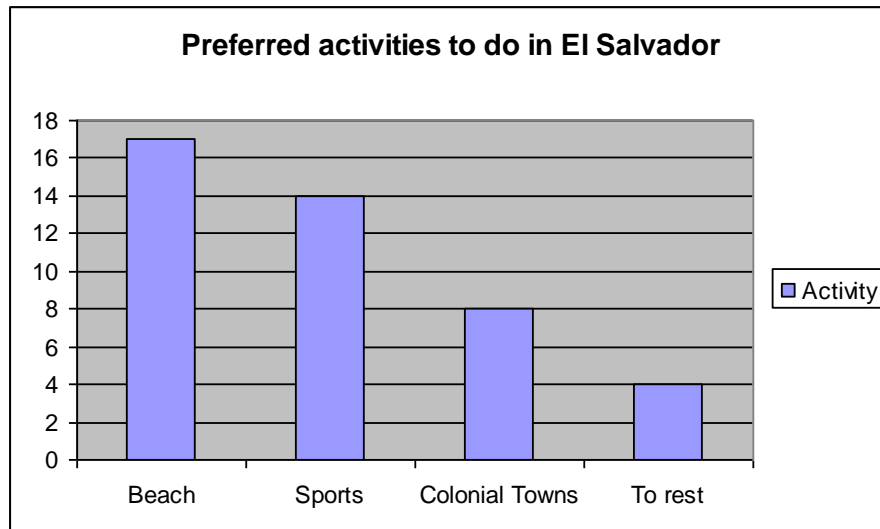


Figure 10. Activities' preferences for domestic holidays

Additionally, it was asked if people enjoyed outdoors activities; to this 92% said yes, and again to go to the beach was the top activity, followed by hiking and camping; on the other hand the remaining 3% does not like any activity.

The next question aimed to find out if people could go to a place just to visit a "rare" animal plant; and 52% could go, 35% is not interested, 8% could go if they have enough information and the animals are not in captivity, and the remaining 5% does not know.

Finally, respondents were asked about their concept of Ecotourism, for 28% is an a visit to natural areas, but for 47% of them it also implies that when visiting this area, there are norms to follow, for example respect the environment, learn something about the place and do not cause any disturbance; 15% more included other aspects such as the importance of helping local communities, also to share their culture; the last 10% did not have any concept (Fig. 10).

#### 6.4 "Summer Houses" owners in Barra de Santiago

Five members of the "Barra de Santiago Association" – including its president- replied to the previously sent e-mail; it was not possible to contact the rest. The five of them expressed how much they like Barra de Santiago and their concern for poverty in the community; at the same time agreed on the continual deterioration of resources. When asked about the importance of Tourism to improve local conditions, they agree but emphasizing that it must function as a biological conservation tool at the same time. Their answers were not further processed, but this Association is considered as a local actor.

## 6.5 Nature-based tourism products offered by Salvadorian Tour Operators

El Salvador is experiencing a growing interest on Tourism; as a result, there are many companies offering different kinds of services. After revising web pages and the national phone directory, some groups that work with nature-based tourism were identified. Their main facts were extracted and compiled as follows:

**Table 1. List of tour operators offering Nature-based tourism**

Name	Objectives and Destinations	Destinations
<b>Alligatours</b> <a href="http://www.alligatour.com">www.alligatour.com</a> info@alligatour.com	Offers Tourism of Adventure (horse riding, hiking, diving); it has a special section called "Eco-Adventure". They manage small groups to reduce ecological impacts.	Eco-Adventure: Coffee Plantations, "Jaltepeque" and "Jiquilisco" Estuaries, The Alegría Lagoon, the colonial city of Suchitoto.
<b>Cadejo Eco-Adventures</b> <a href="http://www.cadejoadventures.com">www.cadejoadventures.com</a> info@cadejoadventures.com	Offers activities such as: Falconry, mountain biking, surfing, fishing, scuba diving, and hiking-camping & bird watching. They profess "enormous respect for the environment".	Hiking and Camping: National Parks
<b>Green Expeditions</b> <a href="http://www.greenexpeditions.com">www.greenexpeditions.com</a> <a href="mailto:info@greenexpeditions.com">info@greenexpeditions.com</a>	Specialized in "Adventure, outdoors and ecological tourism". They promote sports and activities in harmony and contact with the environment. Their trips include a lunch box.	They offer trips to: "El Imposible National Park", "Izalco Volcano", "Lamatepec Vulcano", "Paz River", "Perquin city", "Ilopango crater – lake diving"
<b>Tecolote</b> <a href="mailto:tecolote_viajes@yahoo.com">tecolote_viajes@yahoo.com</a>	It is a professional initiative that promotes "sustainable tourism", this is understood as a means to permanently improve the host community's quality of life, it also facilitates a meaningful experience for the visitor, protects natural resources and contributes to local development. They organize excursions, and routes. At the moment, they are working on a network to unite all the experiences.	The destinations vary according to offers received from communities, cooperatives or city halls interested in promoting their "touristy spots".

According to this information, Ecotourism is emerging in the country but is no yet fully implemented. These enterprises are initiatives that can be further developed. And a way to do it is trough the implementation of the objectives and actions proposed by Salvadorian Ecotourism Strategy.

## **6.6 Role of Non- Governmental Organizations in Barra de Santiago**

The Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) usually facilitate projects in coordination with community-based associations; their functions imply to identify sources of funding, write proposals, administrate funds and presents reports to donors. At the same time, they direct local work in order to achieve the proposed objectives and goals. Most of the time, this organizations have specific "areas of work", and this explains the numerous group that exist, and compete for limited funds. They also function as "intermediaries" between the local community and the international funds. For that reason, presented projects will follow the set environmental agenda and the priorities stated by sources of funding. Barra de Santiago has worked with several organizations; but at the moment there is not any project working exclusively with tourism. The local group called AMBAS (Barra de Santiago Women Association) has under its framework "Shasca Tours", which is a youth group in charge of ecotourism activities; AMBAS received financing to other development activities and can orient a small part of it to support the group, mostly on the logistics field. The projected was presented by themselves to FIAES (America's Initiative Funds-El Salvador). Similarly, the local Association Pro- improvement of Barra de Santiago received training from the "International Committee for Towns' Development", an Italian group who also sponsored radio promotion of Barra de Santiago; and the construction of two cabins with alternative material, for Ecotourism promotion.

### **Donors' Environmental Agenda**

As mentioned above, most environmental and developmental projects answer to priorities set by the sources of funding; in El Salvador the main institutions are:

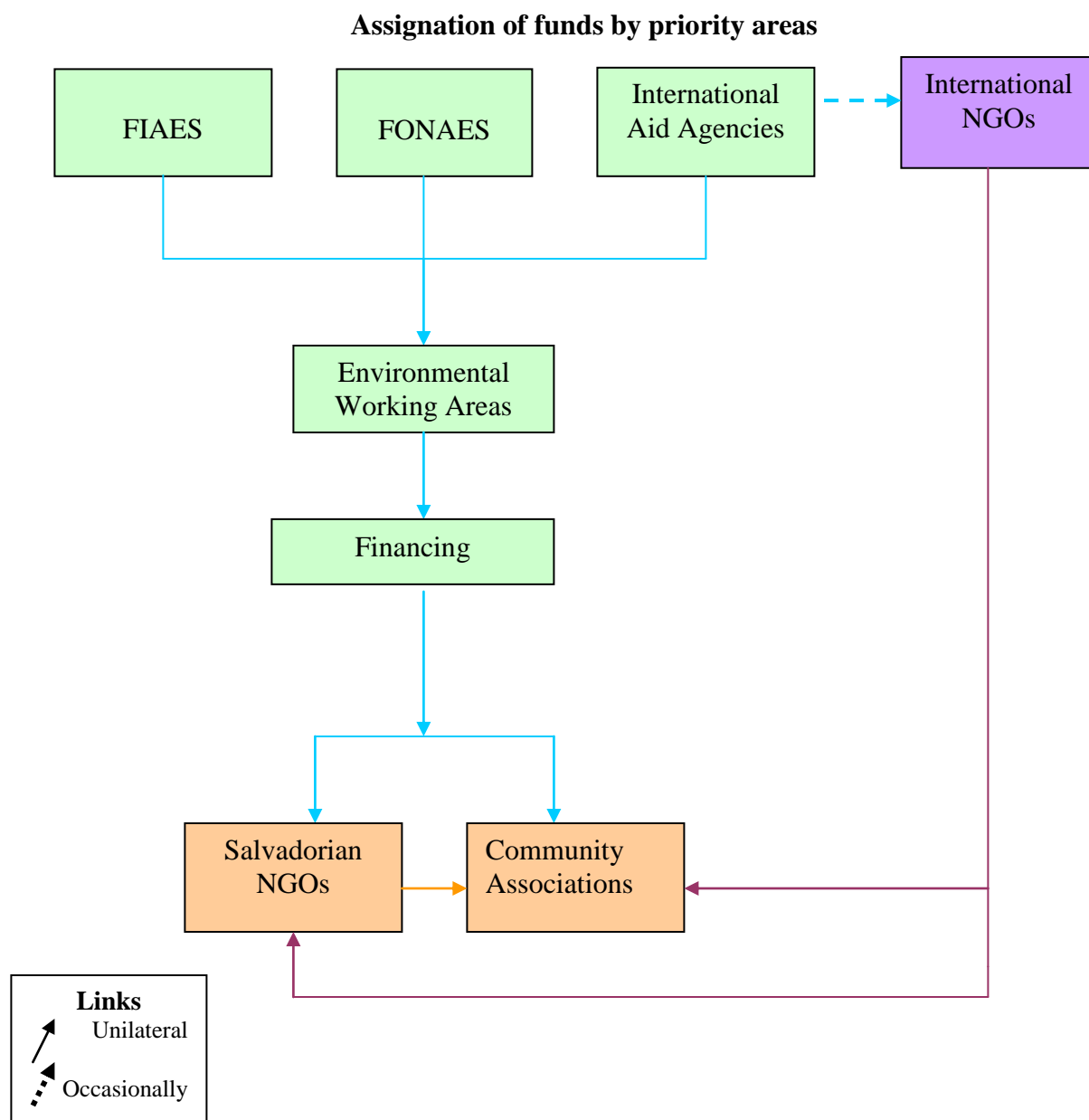
**FIAES** (America's Initiative Funds-El Salvador): United States of America established in 1994 a program to reduce Latin American countries' external debt; it was decided that the remaining amount from interest payment should be used for financing environmental projects. Their mission is to manage financial resources that support projects oriented to protect and restore the environment through citizen participation. The Committee that selects projects is formed by a United States delegate, two more from the Salvadorian government and four designated members chosen from different NGOs. FIAES funds will be distributed to proposed projects that work on its priority areas, which are Biodiversity, Soil Conservation, Water Conservation, Air-Water-Soil Pollution, Environmental Education, Coastal-Marine Resources, Reforestation and Children's Survival. Even further, all projects are required to include three focal points: environmental education, gender and local development (FIAES, 2004)

**FONAES** (Salvadorian Environmental Fund): is a governmental agency that receives international and national funds for financing environmental projects. It also promotes the strengthening of civilian organization as a means to identify and solve environmental problems. Its work areas are: Contamination control, Water Conservation, Reforestation, Soil Conservation, Biodiversity Conservation. Last year supported the national forum for "Wetlands as source of life" (FONAES, 2004)

Jointly, different International Development Aid Agencies provide funds to different projects conducted by local NGOs and community-based organizations. The top bilateral donors for El Salvador are: Japan, United States, Spain, Germany, Sweden, United

Kingdom and Luxembourg; at the same time, the top multilateral donor is the European Union. Similarly, International NGOs can also assign funds; in some cases they have partnerships with local groups, and together request funds to their International Aid Agencies. In other cases, they can have their own fund-raising campaigns which let them support projects independently of "prioritized working areas".

The next diagram shows the connections between sources of funding and NGOs, the levels are differentiated by colors. The single arrows represent vertical link, how the environmental working areas to be funded are decided by donors. As a result, efforts to improve conditions for ecotourism could be sponsored if they are adjusted to present working areas or if specific targets are "attractive to donors".



## **7. Discussion and Conclusions**

This discussion is based on the conceptualization of how ecotourism can contribute to achieve sustainable development in Barra de Santiago. At the same time, the results show that there are main points that can provide the opportunities and also the pitfalls to accomplish it. Consequently, it is necessary to analyze these factors; and also to highlight that the local scene is affected by decisions made at the national and international stages.

### **Domestic ecotourism in Barra de Santiago**

The ecological importance of Barra de Santiago is recognized by its proposed categories: as a Ramsar Site and as a Natural Protected area; this also motivates the attention given to the community; however, in despite of efforts from different organizations –official or public- poverty is widespread and dependency on natural resources is still strong. The results show that 95% of the respondents extract firewood and fish from the mangroves, this is done in order to complement their needs; the estuary also offers a chance for people to benefit from touristy activities; this is demonstrated by the 72% of the people that has received money from the different services offered, such as boat tours or meals. These activities represent consumptive and non-consumptive uses; and that is the base to propose tourism as means to reduce the first ones and increase the second ones. It is also taken into account that there is an interest from other Salvadorian to get in contact with natural areas, and to spend time within the territory; therefore, is also proposed that the domestic type of tourism can be promoted; this will result in a redistribution of money, awareness and environmental education. Furthermore, one the critiques for the validity of ecotourism is related to visitors' flight dependency, which contributes to global warming; domestic ecotourism eliminates this dependency, specially in country like El Salvador that just has approximately 20 000 Km<sup>2</sup>.

Ecotourism is still a projected goal for certain groups in Barra de Santiago, this can be considered as an opportunity to retake other places' experiences and to considerate the factors for success or failure. A way to start is by having community-wide dialogue; which is a central component for "successful planning process"; when more residents are involved, it is easier to minimize problems related to tourism before it becomes "uncontrolled and potentially unsupported" (Reid et.al., 2004). Without dialogue and general participation, tourism can become polarized, and benefit traditional powerful sectors; contrary, involvement can determine a sense of "ownership" of any initiative (Garrod & Wilson, 2004). A rough way to measure interest on communal activities is by people's participation on NGOs activities (this is because most of the time development aid is controlled through these organizations); for example 62% of respondents in Barra de Santiago participate in meetings or programs held by NGOs, whereas 38% does not have any kind of contact. In despite of current levels of enrollment, 97% of the people consider tourism as an option to improve their lives. Even further, they are also clear on the type of tourism-related job they would like to have.

Worldwide, there are many cases that show how ecotourism has failed to fulfill expectations and goals; therefore, it is a priority to identify a framework that can help to detect gaps and to integrate ecotourism main functions. Equally, it is of great importance to state that every community is different, and there is not one specific way to achieve sustainable development. Similarly, it must be highlighted that tourism by no means can

become the only way to change the existing social deprivation and inequalities, but it can be a useful tool if local interests are prioritize (Ghimire, 2001).

In order to plan or asses ecotourism, Ross & Wall (1999) proposed a list of indicators for successful achievement of it, the authors also state that if these objectives are fulfilled, then the resolution of the conflict between resource exploitation versus resource conservation can be alleviated.

Table 2. Objectives for ecotourism and possible indicators. Source: Ross & Wall (1999)

<b>Function</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Example of variables indicating achievement of objectives.</b>
Protection of Natural Area	Provision of local socio-economic benefits	Increased employment opportunities; local distribution of tourism revenues; improved local infrastructure, intercultural relations and social benefits access; local empowerment.
Generation of money	Provision of environmental education services	Passive and active learning through interpretive services, involvement and participation of local communities in environmental Education, awareness and nature appreciation for visitors and local residents.
Education	Conservation of the natural area	Money generated from tourism revenues to contribute to maintenance, protection and management of natural area and its inhabitants; protection occurs from concerned participants* * Heightened if objectives 1,2 & 4 are fulfilled
Quality Tourism	Provision of a high-quality experience	If objectives 1-3 are fulfilled
Local Participation	Promotion of environment and stewardship/advocacy	Both tourists and local residents

This framework illustrates the importance of positive relationships between people, resources and tourism; this is very doubtful to take place without the implementation of "effective policies, management strategies, and involvement of a wide range of organizations including NGOs and aid development agencies (Collins, 1999)

### **7.1 Strengths to develop ecotourism in Barra de Santiago**

These strengths are based on this study results, they reflect the community's perceptions and also projections for the future of ecotourism, and also perspectives for the community itself. The role of women, the importance of non-consumptive uses and the potential tourists' preferences are exposed in order to clarify real advantages for the progress of Ecotouristy activities in Barra de Santiago.



## **Gender Empowerment and Entrepreneurship**

The gender relationships in society are an important component of sustainable development. According to the findings, the overview seems positive for women in Barra de Santiago; they have a high rate of literacy and participation in different sectors of the community life. For example, the two current local tourism organizations are directed by women, this fact increases their level of respect within the community, and opens spaces for the participation of other girls and women. Interviewed men did not express any kind of resentment because of this, as matter of fact the organization of AMBAS started as a group exclusively for women, but at the moment, they also coordinate activities that include men; as Rosa Aguilar (AMBAS president) said: "Gender equity is not about *hating men*, but about learning to work together". This recognition must be the beginning of social and economical changes in the community; however, the results show that there are still marked differences between touristy services offered by women and men; as a result, women's attachment to conventional roles continues. Traditionally, the tourism industry evidences sex segregation; it relegates women to occupations that resemble an extension of their traditional domestic responsibilities, and it is assumed that they are inherently skilled to conduct them; this also can result in disparity of financial rewards affecting their power decisions within the households. (Jordan, 1997). For Barra de Santiago, women participation can shape ecotourism and it is an opportunity that must be enforced.

Another important point was revealed by the respondents in Barra de Santiago, when asked about the tourism-related job they would like to have, people expressed different interests, and aspired to become owners of their working resources; they were not "captivated" by the idea of working for outsiders either. From the Ecotourism perspective, local business represent the opportunities to effectively secure incomes that benefit people directly (TIES, 2004); and the fact that members of the community are motivated to become entrepreneurs can be oriented by aid agencies or NGOs. Without doubts this is not an easy task, it demands a lot of training and even financing at starting points; however, it offers prospects to develop skills and innovation; and it also maintains the community's sovereignty.

## **Non-consumptive wildlife oriented recreation (NCWOR)**

NCWOR can be an instrument for Domestic Ecotourism; it is defined as a "human recreational engagement with wildlife where the focal organism is not purposefully removed or permanently affected"; this kind of use provides an experience rather than a tangible product; and frequently is based on photography and direct observation (Wilson & Tisdell, 2001). Concretely in Barra de Santiago are species that can function well for this purpose; for example, it is an attractive area for bird watching, it also is possible to observe sea turtles nesting at the beach. At the same time, it is needed a local guide, which brings economic benefits and reduces the need of this person to extract resources from the mangroves. The potential tourists respondents, affirmed that 92% of them enjoy outdoors activities, and also a 52% is interested to visit a place just because a "rare" animal or plant; therefore, is an option that can benefit Barra de Santiago. Even further, the economic benefits can provide a strong argument for inter-governmental efforts; and it is compatible with the wise use of Ramsar Sites. Finally, the place can develop a public image through time, as a site particularly attractive for wildlife viewing. (Wilson & Tisdell, 2001).

## **Potential tourists' environmental preferences**

A suitable place for ecotourism must contain particular things that motivate visitors to go and experience the place; one of these motivations is the "feeling of remoteness and of getting back to nature" (Garrod & Wilson, 2004). This was probed by the answers of potential tourists; for 75% of them, it is possible to stay in El Salvador for holidays, and one of the main reasons is "that the country has places to know"; this implies a sense of exploration that can be fulfilled by natural areas such as Barra de Santiago. Additionally, 39% considers the beach as the best option to spend holidays. Barra de Santiago brings together the estuary and the beach, with specific identified spots such as The Cajete Island that can offer a unique experience for visitors.

## **7.2 Limitations for Barra de Santiago as an Ecotouristy destination.**

It is known that chosen areas for any kind of tourism will experience changes in the environment and could also happen that "the features which attracted tourists in the first place lose their appeal with intensification of use" (Wahab & Pigram, 1997). The local community can also experience tensions such as: elitism, frustration with tourism impacts and a sense of self-destruction (Reid *et al.*, 2004). But, these impacts can be seen as future possible scenarios for Barra de Santiago. Currently, there are other factors that limit the development of domestic ecotourism in the area.

### **Open Access and Land Ownership**

An open-access resource offers unrestricted rights to use (Harris, 2002); that is the case of Barra de Santiago estuary; as a communal reserve, it provides important complementary benefits; but the "tragedy of the commons" is a potential risk. As mentioned before, the local dependency on mangroves demands some kind of official regulations; experiences show that effective biological conservation requires that local stakeholders possess some kind of access rights or ownership (Windevoixhel & Imbach, 1998; ICRW, 1999); therefore the establishment of some kind of fishing rights in the estuaries and some type of "sustainable fuel wood extraction" are important conservation means (ICRW, 1999; Benitez *et.al.* 2000). Appropriate forms of tenure can also define boundaries and limit exploitation (Tucket, 1999).

Another relevant aspect, is the level of land ownership in Barra de Santiago, this is meant as the possession of any kind of official authorization of rights over terrain in which people live; for the study respondents, a 30% has a legal entitlement over the terrain, whereas 70% does not have it. The origin of this situation is connected to the Salvadorian Agrarian Reform; this was started in 1980 and pretended to redistribute land among workers, they could receive land and farm it in a "cooperative" way, which implied sharing resources and the maximization of economic benefits; however, the process is still incomplete (Haggarty, 1998). Land ownership guarantees control over land use and social planning, it also provides communal autonomy which is essential for development; furthermore, it secures all type of investments regarding ecotourism; which can also bring benefits for future generations.

## **Infrastructures for Tourism**

The lack of infrastructure is viewed by the community as something that limits their well-being; the improvement of local conditions is also acknowledged in order to attract Ecotourists. For most of the potential tourists, potable water is something they demand and is seldom flexible position. The lack of a potable water system is a significant limitation for the community; not just in terms of tourism facilities but also for its own development. Water functions are diverse: it maintains life and livelihoods; and affects equally the health of visitors and the community. At the same time, the development of tourism can affect the availability of freshwater and increase pollution on its different sources; and it can also create a competition for limited freshwater sources (Stonich, 1998).

Likewise, the Salvadorian potential tourists need a "clean bathroom" in order to feel comfortable at a visited place; and again, Barra de Santiago does not have a sewerage system. It is known that inappropriate discarding of human waste contaminates water, especially by the presence of coliforms and fecal coliforms. Likely, latrines and septic fields can also leak contaminated water into soil and groundwater (Stonich, 1998). Certainly, this is a factor that requires careful considerations and will imply environmental education efforts as well.

As for the improvement of roads that connect to Barra de Santiago, this will help to enhance accessibility to the area, which is also important for visitors. Lastly, present lodges may need to adapt to more "environmentally-friendly" services regarding designs, construction materials and features such as light; this is a factor of importance for those who want to experience Ecotourism.

## **Institutional Management**

At the moment, the responsibilities of the Ministry of Environment are delimited, but it is still unclear how Barra de Santiago categories (Protected Area and Ramsar Site) interact and even complement each other, some questions are not answered for example: who will continue with the area management?, what will be the sources of funding?, to what extent the local population is informed about these plans?. Of the same importance is the role of NGOs; as shown on the results, most of their local participation is determined by donors' priorities; as a result, an aspect such as ecotourism is connected to funding opportunities; but it is necessary to establish to what extent they can be an effective "interlocutor between the local populations groups and the powerful outside actors" (Ghimire, 2001).

Another institutional factor is related to the Ministry of Tourism, which a new created institution fight to legitimize the national importance of tourism; in despite of the existent ecotourism development strategy, this sector needs more dialogue and efforts if all its objectives are meant to be achieved. Similarly, the development of a "Domestic Tourism Policy" is needed; it will provide guidelines for the sector management.

At the same time, tour operators are promoting Nature Tourism which opens a space to its different forms, and that is the reason to include them in ecotourism planning. One more connection was identified, and is the Institutional Seasonality of Tourism in Barra de Santiago; it is expressed by "human behavior rather than natural", this behavior is formalized especially by school and works holidays (Garrod & Wilson, 2004). As mentioned by some members of the community, "frequency is more important than

amount", which is referred to mass tourism occurring during national holidays; even if this factor is difficult to correct, must also be considered in Ecotourism planning.

### 7.3 Concluding remarks

The ecological characteristics of Barra de Santiago, the community's tourism interest and the potential tourist's recreational preferences offer a space to start a dialogue regarding domestic ecotourism planning. As mentioned before, the functions of this type of tourism are: protection of natural areas, generation of revenues, education, local involvement and participation of other Salvadorians. This study reveals the current strengths and limitations to complete them.

*Protection of Barra de Santiago:* its nominations as a "Ramsar Site" and as a "Natural Protected Area" demonstrated the official interest for this estuary. The next important step is the concretization of these proposals; this will provide the official guidelines for the management of the area. The biodiversity of the area also provides chances for Non-consumptive wildlife oriented recreation. On the other hand, it is also significant to mention the importance given to mangroves by the community, but it is clear that their concern is not enough to reduce pressure unless other alternatives are offered.

*Generation of incomes:* at the moment revenues from tourism are more seasonal oriented and derived from mass tourism. The lack of adequate infrastructure limits the development of the community and is one of the major obstacles for domestic ecotourism.

*Environmental Education:* it is an essential aspect needed not only at the planning stage but permanently; it should be oriented to local habitats and also to visitors. Usually, this has been done by NGOs. As part of these previous efforts, some people have the opportunity to work as tour guides or rangers. But, these efforts are not sufficiently widespread in the community.

As for the potential tourists, people in the city demonstrated some kind of basic knowledge that needs to be reinforced in order to really influence their behavior.

*Local involvement:* even if there is local organization and a remarkable involvement of women, communal participation of all sectors in decision making processes is a priority; this will contribute to a more equal distribution of incomes, and even further, to connect people with the projected goals, which generates support and commitment; otherwise conflict and distress can harm shared efforts.

*Salvadorians as Domestic Ecotourists:* people are interested in re-discovering the country, knowing more about it and on spending time outdoors. In fact, Salvadorians might be already traveling within the country in search of natural areas; this can be taken as an opportunity to catch their attention on Ecotourism as a "sustainable option"; however, they need to be well informed about the implication of this type of tourism and its importance for the country. Another important aspect will be the elaboration of a "Domestic Tourism Policy".

The preparation, discussion and application of domestic ecotourism in Barra de Santiago requires effective communication, feedbacks and involvement of all the actors at the different levels; the process needs to be carried out keeping in mind that this type of tourism can benefit the community, but it cannot be seen as the only driving force for local development.

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## **ANEXXES**

### **Annex 1.**

#### **Questionnaire to explore the perceptions of the community about present and future tourism**

- 1) How long have you lived in Barra de Santiago?
- 2) Were your children/parents born here?
- 3) Do you plan to keep living here? Why? Why not?
- 4) Have you had contact with tourists in the area? If so, under which circumstances?
- 5) Did you ever receive money from tourists? For what?
- 6) Which occupations do you have?
- 7) Did you have other occupations before? (question only in case of new focus on tourism?)
- 8) Which natural resources do you use (for example fish or mangrove wood)?
- 9) What are the natural resources that you find most valuable in the area? Should these be preserved? How?
- 10) Do you participate in activities held by NGOs or other organizations?
- 11) Do you think tourism is an option to improve the quality of life in the community?
- 12) What are the most important benefits that tourism can bring to the community?
- 13) What kind of job would you want to do yourself within this sector? How could this become possible?
- 14) How much tourism should be in Barra de Santiago?
- 15) How do you want Barra de Santiago to be in ten years?
- 16) Gender:
- 17) Age:
- 18) Marital Status:
- 19) Literacy:
- 20) Land ownership:
- 21) Household Composition:
- 22) Total Income per Household (no. members generating incomes):

## **Annex 2.**

### **Questionnaire used to assess the interest for Ecotourism among potential domestic tourists.**

- 1) Does El Salvador still have wilderness areas? Is it important to protect them?
- 2) Can you mention some ecosystems of importance for the country?
- 3) Why are they of importance?
- 4) Can you mention some wildlife species of importance for the country?
- 5) Have you participated in any action to protect the environment? If so, which kind?
- 6) How do you choose a place to spend your holidays?'
- 7) How long do you usually stay?
- 8) How many vacation-days per year?
- 9) What are your minimum "comfort" requirements?
- 10) Do you buy any food or beverages at the place?
- 11) Do you like organized tours or do you prefer to travel independently?
- 12) Could you imagine spending your holidays in El Salvador? Why? Why not?
- 13) What would you prefer to do in El Salvador?
- 14) Do you usually enjoy outdoors activities? If so, which ones?
- 15) Would you visit a place just to see a "rare" animal or plant?
- 16) What is "ecotourism" for you?
- 17) Gender:
- 18) Age:
- 19) Occupation:
- 20) Your income per month (net):

**Annex 3.****Questionnaire to assess the interest for Ecotourism among private summer houses owners.**

- 1) Do you own a summer house in Barra de Santiago?
- 2) How long have you had this property?
- 3) Do you want to sell the property in the future? Why? Why not?
- 4) How many employees do you have to keep the summer house?
- 5) Are these employees originally from the community?
- 6) Why did you choose Barra de Santiago to have a summer house?
- 7) What are the most interesting natural resources in the area?
- 8) How many days per year do you spend there?
- 9) Have you noticed any deterioration of the environment over time?
- 10) What are the main environmental problems in the area?
- 11) Do you buy any food or beverages at the place?
- 12) Do you have contacts with the local community?
- 13) Do you know the national plans for this area?
- 14) Do you support the development of tourism in the area? Which kind of tourism?
- 15) Gender:
- 16) Age:
- 17) Occupation: