



Bringing local guides together with international tourists

Executive summary

The Rinjani Trek Management Board (RTMB) is a multi-stakeholder partnership that has created a business ecosystem enabling local enterprises and individuals to gain their share of benefits from trekking activities in the Mount Rinjani National Park on the island of Lombok in Indonesia. The RTMB was established to coordinate two formally registered cooperatives that manage the region’s 18 trek organisers and provide training for porters and trekking guides.

This case study highlights how strong community participation can trigger a series of developments that establish a dynamic business ecosystem able to offer financial, social and environmental returns for entrepreneurs and the community alike.



COUNTRY
Indonesia

NAME
Rinjani Trek Management Board and its affiliated cooperatives, the Rinjani Trek Centre and the Rinjani Information Centre

TYPE
Ecosystem enabling public-private partnership

FIELDS OF INCLUSION
Activities, natural conservation



How the business model works

Designated as a national park in 1997, Indonesia's Mount Rinjani National Park on the island of Lombok has been a popular destination for backpackers for three decades. The trek organiser business flourished throughout the 1990s as tour packages including transportation, accommodations and tour guides grew in popularity. Many of these businesses were foreign-run/owned or involved non-Lombok-based tour operators. Despite the high volume of tourists, local communities have often been excluded from the economic benefits of tourism, and most locals have continued to struggle in poverty. Concerns have also been raised about environmental costs incurred by the growing influx of tourists, which has generated an urgent need for sustainable waste management.

An ecotourism platform

The RTMB was established in 2003 to address these and other issues as the successor to Rinjani Trek Ecotourism, a programme that had been funded by the New Zealand Aid Programme since 1999. The RTMB has been tasked with expanding the social, economic and conservation benefits of ecotourism activities in the national park by establishing partnerships between the tourism industry and local communities. To sustain its operations, the RTMB relies on park entrance fees. It receives nearly 68.5% of these funds (USD 10.30 of the USD 15 entrance fee), and the rest is allocated to local governments.

RTMB established two community-run cooperatives – the Rinjani Trek Centre (RTC) in Senaru and the Rinjani Information Centre (RIC) in Sembalun Lawang – to serve as the focal point of all trekking activities. In addition to providing financial services such as savings accounts and loans to members, the RTC and RIC cooperatives have become registered tourism operators. Having established a roster mechanism, they act to ensure local trek organisers take turns delivering services. Local trek organisers wanting to operate in the area must register with the cooperatives and pay an annual license fee of USD 50. Foreign and domestic visitors to the Rinjani area

have three options when booking trekking packages: the RTMB's website, the cooperatives' website or tour agents.

Building capacities

RTMB has also expanded the community's capacity to actively participate in the tourism business by providing various trainings. RTMB provides guides and porters with first-aid and rescue training in order to ensure the safety of visitors on the trails. For locals aspiring to become trek or village guides, RTMB also offers training in English-language and hospitality skills as well as basic geology and volcanology. In order to become a licensed guide, individuals must first master these subjects and gain practical experience on treks, often as porters, for periods of three to five years. To date, the RTMB has issued 200 guide licences and trained over 400 porters in the area. This kind of community-oriented platform for the large-scale training of local porters and guides is unprecedented in the country.

The RTMB also supports local initiatives by actively promoting them through the board's network. For example, several active women in the community formed the Women's Guide Association, which has recruited 40 women and provided them with basic tour-guiding and English-language training. These female guides now offer a half-day Panorama Walk tour through traditional villages, rice fields and waterfalls. The RTMB helped design the tour, ensuring that it included services and features that attract tourists, and promotes it through its marketing channels.

The RTMB, RTC and RIC have successfully integrated park management, community development and tourism, three areas that beforehand had operated separately. Together with community stakeholders, the management board works towards standardising trekking packages, ensuring that clients are provided a high-quality service and that everyone, including guides and porters, stands to gain from tourism.

SPOTLIGHT

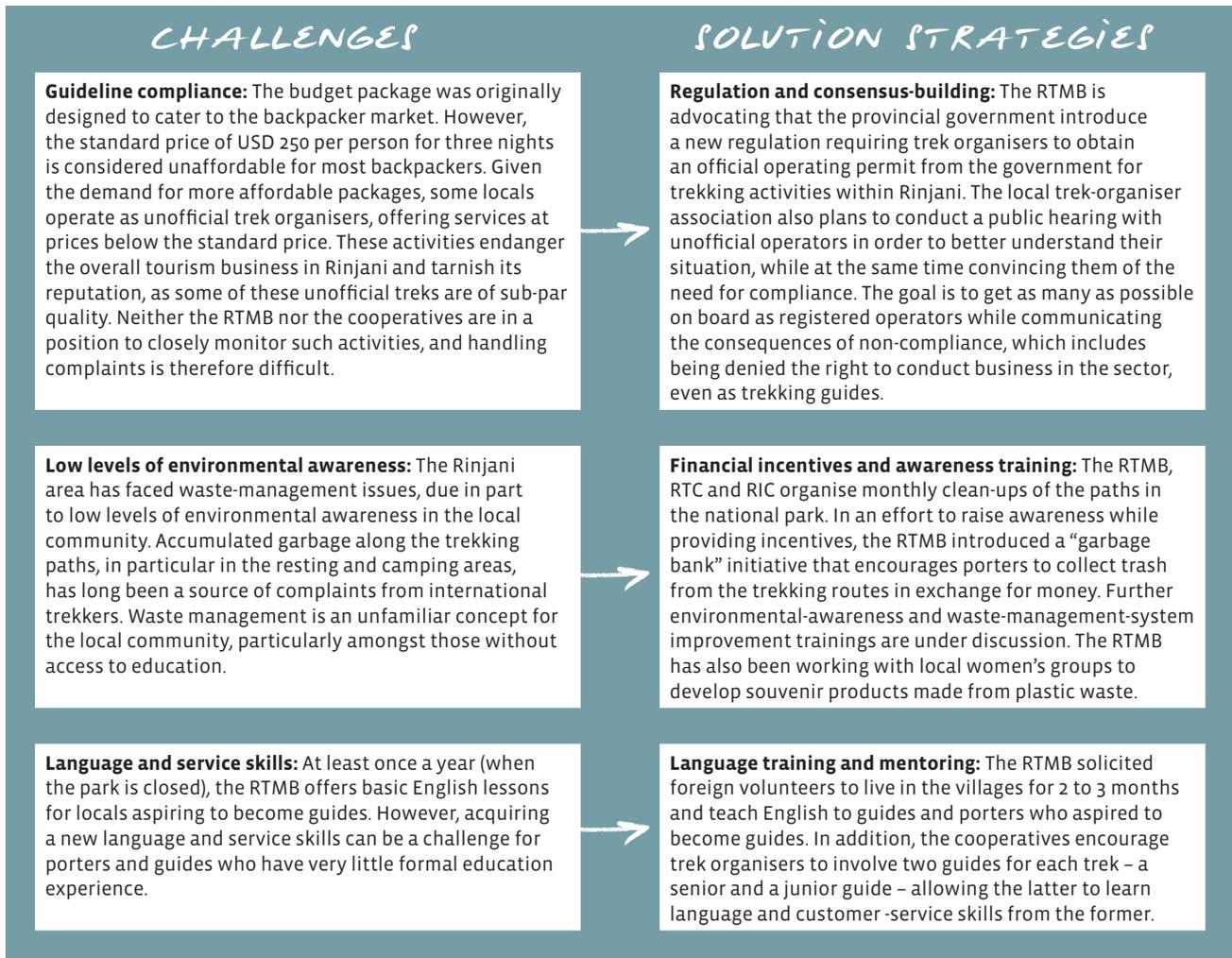
Pardi's language skills opened up new career opportunities



Pardi, a trekking guide in Senaru, recounts his experience: "I started by being a porter because I did not understand English at the time, but I then received training in English and other skills from the RTMB. I then practiced by mustering up the courage to speak with the tourists. Now,

I understand not only English, but a little bit of Dutch and French as well, which I've learned on my own." Pardi makes on an average of USD 250 per month for his various activities. He is saving little by little, aspiring to establish his own trek organiser business someday.

Challenges and solution strategies



Mutual benefits

Business benefits

By engaging the local community and providing training in human-resources skills, the Rinjani tourism activities have improved the quality of services provided over the years. This is reflected in the growth in the volume of visitors. Over the last six years, Mount Rinjani National Park has seen an annual growth rate of foreign and domestic visitors exceeding 13% and 17% respectively. With 13,005 foreign visitors and 6,909 domestic visitors in 2013, individual trek organisers earned up to USD 6,600 in profits during nine months of operation. This growth in scale, linked with an emphasis on local participation, is unprecedented in the country. As a result, Rinjani has received several awards, including

the Award for Innovative Ecotourism from the Ministry of Tourism (2004) and a Legacy Award from Conservation International and National Geographic Traveler. It has also been a finalist in the Tourism for Tomorrow Destination Awards (2005 and 2008). These awards have helped strengthen its international reputation and relationships with local stakeholders.

Working with locals enables the RTMB to develop innovative tour programmes for visitors, thus offering more variety in products that are interesting to visitors and beneficial for the local community. The Panorama Walk is just one example. The RTMB can also rely on the community’s support when implementing monthly

clean-up and waste-removal programmes. In maintaining infrastructure such as shelters and trekking paths, the RTMB uses locals as construction workers, which is more cost-effective than bringing in outsiders. Working with locals has benefits in keeping costs low, which helps maintain affordable trekking package prices.

Development benefits

There are clear and substantial development benefits generated by the Rinjani tourism ecosystem. With regards to the Panaroma Walk, for example, the chairperson of the Women's Guide Association Resi Budiana states: "Since joining the association in 2010, I can support my family financially. I receive up to USD 42 per month (from tour-guide income) and can save it up to support my family during the months when the park is closed and my husband does not have a steady source of income."

The poorest, most vulnerable individuals in the Rinjani tourism ecosystem are guides and porters. Because they operate on a freelance basis and sign up rosters held by each trek organiser, their income relies heavily on the number of trips they work on. The training provided by the RTMB in language, hospitality and safety skills allows porters to advance their career by becoming licensed guides in three to five years, thus increasing their income.

Before the creation of the RTMB, RTC and RIC, porters earned only USD 1.25 per day. In the current ecosystem, they earn ten times that amount: USD 12.50 per day. A senior porter can earn up to USD 125 per month during the low season and up to USD 250 a month during the high season. Guides, by contrast, earn USD 17 per day and can earn up to USD 330 per month during the high season.

Outlook

In April 2014, the Indonesian Forestry Department issued a new regulation raising the entrance fee from USD 15 to USD 25 per person per day, and making the fee a "non-tax state revenue", which requires all revenues to be allocated to the Forestry Department. Together with community stakeholders, the RTMB negotiated with the government to postpone the new regulation until next year. Once the new park entrance-fee regulation comes into effect and the Forestry Department claims all revenues, the RTMB will lose the funding source it needs to provide services. Transforming the RTMB into a cooperative that manages the RIC and RTC, and generates its revenue through a share of bookings has been under discussion, but

no specific arrangement has been decided upon yet. The community-driven ecosystem currently in place and made possible by the RTMB is unlikely to collapse even if the RTMB is dissolved.

The two cooperatives, the RIC and RTC, will continue to play their role in directing visitor traffic to the registered local trek organisers. In the meantime, plans are under way to open a new trekking route in the eastern half of the island to attract more visitors. A cooperative will be established in this area to encourage the creation of new local trek organisers and provide income-generating opportunities for potential porters and guides in the community.

INTERVIEWS

Asmuni Irpan, Executive Director of the Rinjani Trek Management Board

John, head of the Rinjani Trek Center (RTC) Cooperative

Sumatim, Treasurer of the Rinjani Trek Center (RTC) Cooperative

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DATE

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PHOTOS

Courtesy of The Rinjani Trek Management Board and its affiliated cooperatives, the Rinjani Trek Centre and the Rinjani Information Centre