

CEPF SMALL GRANT FINAL PROJECT COMPLETION REPORT

I. BASIC DATA

Organization Legal Name: Eco-Africa Environmental Consultants

Project Title (as stated in the grant agreement): A Marketing Pilot for Community-based Tourism in Madagascar – Designing and Implementing a Pilot that can be Replicated Countrywide.

Implementation Partners for This Project:

Project Dates (as stated in the grant agreement): February 1, 2003 – December 31, 2004
Date of Report (month/year):

II. OPENING REMARKS

Provide any opening remarks that may assist in the review of this report.

The project period is cited as February 1, 2003 – December, 2004. However, it started late for reasons reported in the progress report of 30 July, 2003: *“Although the starting date of the project was noted as February 1, the funding arrived from Washington DC in the EcoAfrica account only on March 10, 2003.... more problematic was the transfer of funding to Madagascar who was just coming out of the throes of its worst political instability that had a negative influence on the banking sector and its service delivery. Funding to be spent in Madagascar only reached MEA the end of May.”* In reality therefore, the project has not been running for the anticipated two years yet.

III. NARRATIVE QUESTIONS

1. What was the initial objective of this project?

The initial objective of the pilot project was to determine whether an interactive website for a small locally-owned nature-based tourism agency in Madagascar would result in more tourists going directly to the business, thereby obviating the normal route of agents, overseas operators, etc. that handle the bulk of money and get the lion’s share of benefits from the tourists. If the pilot worked well it could be emulated elsewhere in Madagascar, or even in tourism destinations elsewhere in the developing world. The main activity was to design and place a simple but stylish and highly interactive website on the web. Web site statistics were obtained regularly, and the investigator communicated at intervals with the tour agency, known as Madagascar Expedition Agency, to try and determine the success of the website.

2. Did the objectives of your project change during implementation? If so, please explain why and how.

There were no changes in objectives. However, methodology changed somewhat. Initially the investigator was to visit Madagascar early on in the project, but later it was thought that better results would be achieved if he went after the two years were completed, so as to analyze patterns and results over a longer period.

3. How was your project successful in achieving the expected objectives?

The project was successful in getting the initial questions answered. However, a site visit still needs to be undertaken to fully understand the results, and to do a final debriefing.

The website *www.tourmadagascar.com* was created and has been hosted on the web for over a period of two years as initially planned. It is frequently visited as can be seen from the statistics below:

The peaks and troughs are not easily explained as there have been a number of political trends that affected interest in Madagascar during the time of the pilot experiment.

Figure 1: Number of page requests per month for 24 months

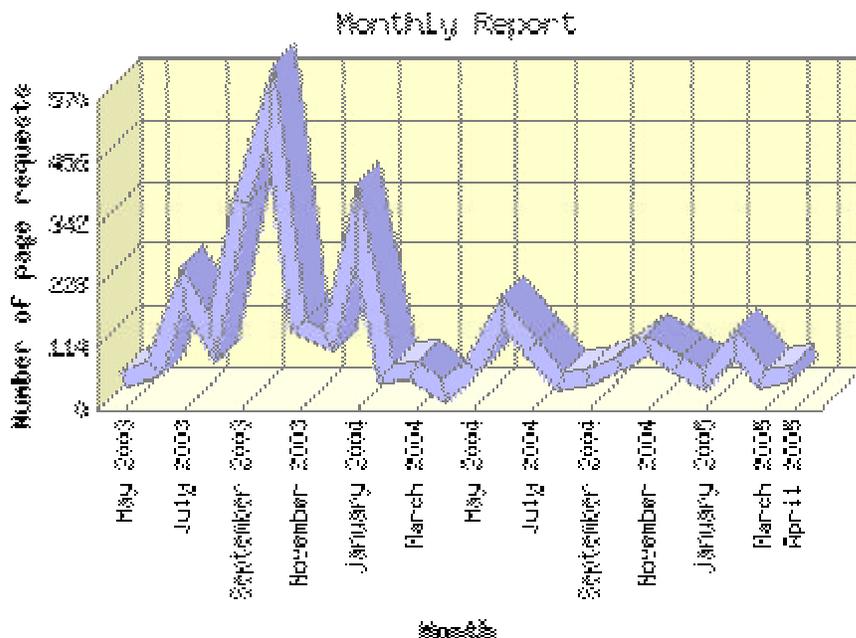


Table 1: Basic web statistic for the first two years of the website

	Month	Percentage of the requests	Number of requests
1.	May 2003	0.95%	71
2.	June 2003	3.93%	293
3.	July 2003	7.51%	560
4.	August 2003	3.42%	255
5.	September 2003	10.31%	769
6.	October 2003	19.70%	1,469
7.	November 2003	10.01%	747
8.	December 2003	4.70%	351
9.	January 2004	11.21%	836
10.	February 2004	1.56%	117
11.	March 2004	2.46%	184
12.	April 2004	0.60%	45
13.	May 2004	2.22%	166
14.	June 2004	3.43%	256
15.	July 2004	2.56%	191
16.	August 2004	0.84%	63
17.	September 2004	1.01%	76
18.	October 2004	2.69%	201
19.	November 2004	3.03%	226
20.	December 2004	1.71%	128
21.	January 2005	1.23%	92
22.	February 2005	2.42%	181
23.	March 2005	0.91%	68
24.	April 2005	1.48%	111

Undoubtedly the website created a certain measure of awareness of the company and the services it offers. The critical question was whether an interactive website would lead to tourists signing up directly with a small company in Madagascar, or not. Unfortunately the answer is no (see more below).

4. Did your team experience any disappointments or failures during implementation? If so, please explain and comment on how the team addressed these disappointments and/or failures.

No.

5. Describe any positive or negative lessons learned from this project that would be useful to share with other organizations interested in implementing a similar project.

See V. Additional comments and Recommendations, below.

6. Describe any follow-up activities related to this project.

It is proposed that the last of the CEPF funding in this grant be used to keep the site on the web for another two years and to partially fund Dr Odendaal's intended visit to Madagascar Expedition Agency for a week to discuss improvements to update the site, which EcoAfrica will do free of charge. Dr Odendaal also plans to work with MEA to improve the nature and speed of their response to inquiries over the internet, and will do a final debriefing after which a small article will be written for publication on the Distance Learning Information Sharing Tool (www.dlist.org), and potentially in one or two hard copy publications as well. CEPF will be fully acknowledged. This article cannot be written before a proper debriefing had taken place, for which an ideal time is one or two months after the completion of the two years trail run of the website.

7. Please provide any additional information to assist CEPF in understanding any other aspects of your completed project.

IV. ADDITIONAL FUNDING

Provide details of any additional donors who supported this project and any funding secured for the project as a result of the CEPF grant or success of the project.

Donor	Type of Funding*	Amount	Notes

**Additional funding should be reported using the following categories:*

- A** *Project co-financing (Other donors contribute to the direct costs of this CEPF project)*
- B** *Complementary funding (Other donors contribute to partner organizations that are working on a project linked with this CEPF project)*

- C Grantee and Partner leveraging (Other donors contribute to your organization or a partner organization as a direct result of successes with this CEPF project.)*
- D Regional/Portfolio leveraging (Other donors make large investments in a region because of CEPF investment or successes related to this project.)*

Provide details of whether this project will continue in the future and if so, how any additional funding already secured or fundraising plans will help ensure its sustainability.

It is anticipated that the website will be funded fully by MEA after an additional two years using the last of the Small Grant's funding. The company is small but growing. It had 80 guests in 2003, and 187 guests in 2004.

V. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

There are two main results from this study. The **first result** is that, if a small tourism company puts a site on the web the site will be looked at by prospective visitors to Madagascar. After discussions with various acquaintances in the industry it is assumed that visitors to the site consist both of surfers curious about Madagascar and prospective tourists. There appears to be no way of conclusively determining whether the existence of the website in fact increases tourism traffic to Madagascar Expedition Agency as no one signed up directly with the company. In other words, someone may surf for Madagascar as a country and may stumble on this site as well as many other sites.

The **second result** is that it appears that the site did not lead to anyone signing up directly with Madagascar Expedition Agency. This reluctance is attributed to lack of confidence on the part of the tourists who prefer to use brokers, travel agents and other agencies in their home countries to sign up for tours rather than wire money to Madagascar. The investigator did further research by studying the performance of two other sites that can be compared to *www.tourmadagascar.com* to gain further insight into the matter¹. In the instance of both sites were there considerable traffic, and both sites received inquiries on a regular basis but neither of them had any clients who signed up directly through the sites.

¹ The two other sites are the site for the South-North Tourism Site in South Africa (*www.south-north.co.za*) that serves a group of community-based tourism organizations and the other site is *www.ecoafribotswana.com* that markets the products and safaris of Eco Africa Botswana (no relation to EcoAfrica Environmental Consultants who are the investigators in the current small grant).

The overall conclusion is therefore that, while sites undoubtedly provide marketing for the general destination and very likely for the particular operations (people do sometimes did send inquiries through the Botswana and South Africa websites but only once over the Madagascar website), there exists no conclusive evidence that the website brought more tourists to the companies although this is likely to be the case. However, what is clear is that tourists are not eager to sign up directly with these small companies, even with Eco Africa Botswana that is a high-volume and fully commercial company with repeat guests. None of the three sites had visitors sign up directly with the service providers, and tourists came to all three of them through the normal routes of brokers, tour companies, and other agencies who consume the bulk of the profit.

The only website in South Africa at least that appears to be effective in getting tourists to sign up through the site is **Ecoafrica.com** (again, no relation to the current investigators). They use a sophisticated system and very active marketing and has been in business for over ten years.

Recommendations and Closing of the Project

Madagascar Expedition Agency believes that the website can in fact be helping them, as they frequently refer agents and operators to it, although not in the direct way as was originally intended. However, the site is now very much outdated and ought to be updated with their new tours.

In the last financial reporting to CEPF over a year ago the following amount was still available \$ 2 094, 72. Some expenses still need to be subtracted from this amount.

It is therefore recommended that Dr Odendaal goes to Madagascar to do a final debriefing with the entire staff of MEA as well as the two downstream beneficiaries (guide associations in Andasibe-mantadia and Masoala) and assist MEA to update their website.

VI. INFORMATION SHARING

CEPF aims to increase sharing of experiences, lessons learned and results among our grant recipients and the wider conservation and donor communities. One way we do this is by making the text of final project completion reports available on our Web site, www.cepf.net, and by marketing these reports in our newsletter and other communications. Please indicate whether you would agree to publicly sharing your final project report with others in this way.

Yes

No

If yes, please also complete the following:

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