GROWING RURAL EMPLOYMENT THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM

by

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ABSTRACT

As an archipelagic country of more than 7,000 islands, the Philippines is naturally endowed with tourism assets, many of which are largely unexplored and isolated from mainstream tourism circuits yet presenting huge potential for tourism development. Incidentally, small-scale or community-based tourism (CBT) is already being promoted in many of these destinations as a strategy to improve livelihood and provide alternative source of income to their marginalized communities.

Against this background, this study seeks to examine the potential and viability of these tourism livelihood projects as a strategy for employment creation and poverty reduction in the rural areas. For this purpose, case studies of model community-based tourism projects in selected provinces in the Philippines were conducted. Findings of the study highlight serious disadvantages that the community faces as they seek to partake in the benefits from tourism development. Nevertheless, the hope that CBT could be an effective tool for community development is not totally unrealistic. Directions, identification of specific conditions and attributes that contribute to successful projects and guidelines for their effective implementation are important.

I. INTRODUCTION

About half of the Philippines’ population lives in the rural areas.\(^1\) Among them are the poorest of the poor that include the indigenous people, landless farmers and fisher folk, people in upland areas and women, most of whom are mainly dependent on agriculture for livelihood. Rural communities, nevertheless, with their unique setting and natural resource endowment, offer unique culture, heritage, landscape and other interesting attributes that can be harnessed for tourism purposes, which, in turn, could generate jobs and increase non-farm sector enterprises in these areas.

What is community-based tourism?

Community-based tourism has long been promoted as a development strategy in many countries, particularly in peripheral rural areas where traditional agrarian industries have been losing ground.\(^2\) Community-based tourism (CBT) is a type of sustainable tourism that promotes pro-poor strategies in a community setting. CBT initiatives aim to involve local residents in the running and management of small tourism projects as a means of alleviating poverty and providing an alternative income source for community members. CBT initiatives also encourage respect for local traditions and culture as well as for natural environment.\(^3\) The most widely accepted definition of CBT states that “a high degree of control and a significant proportion of the benefits must be in the hands of members of local communities.”\(^4\)

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\(^1\) Enabling Poor Rural People to Overcome Poverty in the Philippines, accessed at www.ifad.org
\(^3\) A Toolkit for Monitoring and Managing Community-Based Tourism, accessed at www.snvworld.org
\(^4\) Support Networks for Community-Based Tourism in Rural Costa Rica, accessed at http://www.benthamscience.com/open/toarsj/articles/V001/16TOARSJ.pdf
Rationale for CBT

CBT has been viewed as offering an opportunity to empower local communities, particularly in developing countries, to develop a more appropriate grassroots form of sustainable tourism than mass tourism and to contribute to local economic development and poverty reduction. It is argued that through developing CBT enterprises, communities can be empowered by raising their pride, self-esteem and status; improving cohesion and community development; and creating an equitable community political and democratic structure. Through developing community based tourism, it is believed that communities will be able to share the benefits from tourism, rather than simply endure its consequences. At the same time they can offer tourists an enhanced experience and an opportunity to experience community life.

Why this study?

The Philippine Development Plan 2011-2016 identified tourism as one of the ten priority sectors for investment promotion and industry development. The country’s development strategy further highlighted its policy agenda toward “inclusive growth” emphasizing the need to ensure that economic growth translates to poverty reduction, job growth and equitable income distribution among the wider populace. In the same manner, CBT espouses an approach that is consistent with the idea of inclusive growth by advocating that a significant amount of economic benefit accrue to the local community, particularly amongst the low income, politically marginalized populations.

While the term ‘community-based tourism’ has never been explicitly used in previous Philippine tourism strategies and plans, the Draft National Tourism Development Plan (NTDP) and previous tourism plans are replete with references to the role of local communities and the need to ensure that benefits of tourism redound to “concerned communities.”

Furthermore, substantial amount of resources have been invested in CBT projects by communities, governments and aid and development agencies. In addition, “residents also commit time, money, effort and hope in CBT projects believing that they can bring a range of economic and social benefits to their communities.” In the Philippines, a number of projects have already been started through public and private partnership that aim to mainstream tourism in community-based management as a means to improve livelihood and manage natural and cultural resources in a sustainable manner. With the devolution of tourism planning and promotion functions to the local government after the passage of the Local Government Code in 1991, local government units are now at the forefront of these initiatives as they are often the ones providing guidance and instructions as well as funding for community-based programs.

Finally, considering that the larger sections of Philippine tourism destinations cover rural areas, the potential of tourism development through CBT should be examined, especially its potential as a strategy for employment creation and poverty reduction in rural communities.

Aims of the research

In examining the employment creation potentials of CBT projects, this study seeks to draw lessons and insights from the experiences of communities with existing CBT projects in

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5 Armstrong, Rebecca (2012)
6 Moscardo (2008), p.1
selected provinces in the Philippines. Through the conduct of case studies of model community-based tourism projects, the research will try to identify the underlying practices and processes that can make CBT projects successful and also the key challenges and risks involved. The study will also be substantiated by a desk review of CBT initiatives in other countries and a review of related literatures on the subject.

The aims of this research are therefore:

1. To document good practices in community-based tourism in selected Philippine provinces;
2. To examine issues and challenges in advancing community-based tourism as an employment generation strategy; and
3. To recommend strategies for enhancing the employment outcomes of CBT.

II. THE COMMUNITY BASED APPROACH TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Nearly all developing countries have identified tourism as a viable direction in the effort to alleviate poverty, however, not all forms and approaches to tourism development will directly benefit the people in the locality.

A Bottom Up Approach

As is the case of most businesses, many tourism enterprises in the country are owned and managed by private businessmen and investors. In these businesses, particularly in high end or mainstream tourist destinations, a “top to bottom approach” to business operations is employed, with the interest of the investors being the top priority (See Figure 1). In this set-up, local people are mere employees, while the businessmen are at the helm of decision-making. Traditionally, the income of these enterprises primarily goes to businessmen who could afford huge investments and capital requirements for infrastructure and other components while the local people earn their keep from the basic salaries they receive.

Figure 1. Top to Bottom (Centralized Approach) in Conventional Enterprises

Adopted from Calanog et. al. (2012)

In contrast to the approaches of conventional enterprises, CBT ventures utilize the “bottom up” or decentralized approach to business operation with the local people and their leadership at the heart of decision-making and regarded as the primary beneficiaries of the
enterprise. Through this set up, the community is ensured of direct benefits in every project activity.

**Inward-Oriented Development Model**

In some destinations, work opportunities are limited because the owners, who are not local residents, prefer to hire staff from their home provinces or towns. Furthermore, the revenue generated is mostly spent or invested elsewhere leading to tourism leakage. Rather than focusing on the attraction of new businesses to the community or adopting an outward-directed approach, CBTs are more inward in their orientation, by striving to help the consumers become producers, users become providers, and employees become owners of enterprise, through the principles of economic self-reliance, ecological sustainability, community control, meeting individual needs and building a community culture. With the community-based tourism model, the income that is generated locally is also utilized locally as local people earn from their very own enterprise while being able to maintain and improve their local biodiversity.

Other benefits of CBT include the following:

1. CBT provides employment and income for marginalized people in the locality.
2. Agriculture, forestry, and marine products and by-products are showcased and marketed, thus bringing local heritage and products back into the tourism map.
3. Cash is not leaked out of the community. Instead, local supplies are produced for local consumption.
4. Surpluses and income revenues can be allocated to social development projects in the community.
5. Surpluses and income revenues can also be utilized as capital for new community enterprises (or as an alternative for more or other community enterprises).
6. Decentralized approach in decision-making allows local people to become economic decision-makers and actively-engaged citizens.

**Growth of CBT Perspectives**

The growth of community-based tourism perspective has emerged from a growing awareness of the need for more “resident-responsive” tourism or a more democratic participation in tourism decision-making by grassroots members of a destination society. CBT is seen as an alternative to earlier approaches to tourism planning which have failed to deliver development to the community at large, especially where parts of the latter are poor or particularly disadvantaged. CBT has also often been linked with the “pro-poor tourism agenda” which aims to mobilize tourism for employment creation and the alleviation of poverty. The conceptual diagram shown below depicting the concept of Pro-Poor Tourism demonstrates parallelism between the linkages and CBT goals.

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7 Fennel (1999), p. 155-156
8 Calanog (2012), p.186
9 Moscardo (2008), p.60
As a concept, CBT refers to small-scale and “local” form of tourism, as opposed to “mass tourism” which is characterized by large-scale development and aiming to attract a large number of tourists/visitors. It is a form of tourism that favors local service suppliers and providers and is focused on interpreting and communicating the local culture and environment. A number of different terms have also been used alongside CBT with the same objective of planning tourism to safeguard a destination’s cultural and natural heritage while at the same time improving the socio-economic welfare of communities. These include sustainable tourism, rural tourism and ecotourism.

One of the key differences between CBT and other forms of tourism is the focus on empowering the local community to run their own tourism businesses. Meanwhile, the following attributes are considered common to CBT operations:

- aiming to benefit local communities, particularly rural or indigenous peoples or people in small towns, contributing to their wellbeing and the wellbeing of their cultural and environmental assets;
- hosting tourists in the local community;
- managing a tourism scheme communally;
- sharing the profits or benefits equitably;
- using a portion of the profits or resources for community development and/or to maintain and protect a community cultural or natural heritage asset (e.g. conservation); and
- involving communities in tourism planning, on-going decision making, development and operations.

III. CBT CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework below represents how CBT approaches to community development can lead to successful tourism projects and thus, generate employment for the local community.

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10 APEC (2010), p. 3
IV. CBT INITIATIVES IN ASIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES

The development of community-based tourism has become an integral part of rural development strategies in many countries. Community-based tourism is widely practiced in Latin America where a network of 15 destination countries promoting more than 100 small community tourism enterprises may be found. In 2001, the International Labour Organization (ILO) provided technical support to the launching of the Redturs project,\(^ {11} \) a network of indigenous and rural communities in these Latin American countries seeking to promote decent jobs and healthy economies through CBT.

Successful models of rural tourism have also been cited in Asia.\(^ {12} \)

The Pha Mon Karen Community in Chiang Mai, Thailand is a community-owned enterprise offering forest walks, cycling trips, village visits, local food, cultural and traditional activities. The enterprise is said to generate approximately €10,000 annually for the community fund.

One Life Japan, on the other hand is a community-based tour service that allow participants to learn more about the local environment instead of spending money and being processed through popular tourist traps by offering tourists the chance to live with and go on tours led by local people in the province of Nagano. Bikes are provided, as are maps and all meals (often prepared by local farmers or picnics using locally-grown food). Visitors can choose to spend a night in a local family’s home, a 200 year-old family-run inn, or a mountaintop hut. They can set off hiking in the countryside on their own, or work for an

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afternoon in a rice field or collecting wild vegetables. Bilingual facilitators who have studied the area and culture are also made available.

Another example of good practice CBT in Asia is the case of Bario, a remote village surrounded by rainforests in the Kelabsit Highlands of Sarawak, Malaysia where visitors can stay with local families as part of a home-stay, and other community members work as guides on treks, or provide transport and food to visitors. An art gallery and handicraft shops sell local artists' work. Other activities provided by the community include jungle survival courses, treks to other longhouse communities in the area, paddling and fishing, information on longhouse living, talks on the local flora and fauna, jewellery making classes, worshipping with the local Christian community, traditional dance, and visiting the local salt mines or the ancient monoliths. Tourism in Bario has become one of the cornerstones of the local economy. It has led to the creation of several micro-enterprises that have created employment, particularly for women, and this has in turn re-invigorated the local economy, attracting ex-residents to return to the community and retaining young people who are now able to find paid work. As highland trekking has grown in popularity among tourists, these beneficial effects have also been felt in the more remote communities throughout the area. Because of tourism revenues Bario was able to establish a telecentre which they are now using to market and promote their tourism venture.

V. PHILIPPINE FRAMEWORK FOR CBT DEVELOPMENT

The term community-based tourism (CBT) has never been explicitly used in previous Philippine tourism strategies and plans although the Omnibus Tourism Code (Tourism Act of 2009), the Sustainable Tourism Development Plan for Central Philippines prepared in 2007 and the Draft National Tourism Development Plan for 2011-2016 are replete with references to the role of local communities and the need to ensure that benefits of tourism redound to “concerned communities.”

The 2007 Sustainable Tourism Management Plan for Central Philippines states that “government policy on community involvement encourages participatory processes that strive to attain equity for all concerned.” It states further that “the application of this policy is manifested in the acceptability of tourism development to the host communities and validated by the degree of communities' participation in its component activities.” This policy also gives emphasis on “bringing the benefits of tourism development to womenfolk and putting in place measures that will not make them unfairly pay the price of such development.”

Republic Act 9593 also known as the Tourism Act of 2009 recognizes, on the other hand, the need to balance tourism development between urban and rural areas in order to spread the benefits of tourism and contribute to poverty alleviation, better access to infrastructure and to a reduction in regional imbalances. Also mentioned in its general policy objectives is the need to enhance capability-building of local government units (LGUs), in partnership with the private sector in the management of local tourism projects and initiatives, thereby ensuring accessible and affordable destinations throughout the country, especially in areas which have shown strong comparative advantage.

The latest draft of the National Tourism Development Plan for 2011-2016 recommended the promotion of “a more pro-poor pattern of tourism through increased local community participation in the development of tourism in their area especially at public sector tourism sites in their vicinity.”
While the country has no explicit development framework for CBT, the National Ecotourism Strategy, issued in 2002, stated among its objectives the need to “spread tourism benefits to rural areas not only for employment generation and poverty alleviation but also for the sustainability of the tourism industry.”

Meanwhile the DOT, through the Grassroots Entrepreneurs Employment and Tourism (GREET) Program has granted some 55 million to about 123 rural communities to help develop and improve indigenous tourism products and facilities as well as for training on tour and trek guiding, native craft making and local food catering. The objective of the GREET Program is to generate employment and livelihood with balanced ecology and environmental protection to promote ecotourism sites and develop tourism at the community level.13

VI. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

CBT arrangements transpire in a number of ways and structures. These arrangements range from the ‘purest’ model, which is solely a community-owned business venture to another model wherein the community is engaged in a collaborative partnership with the government an NGO or a private sector (see Table 1).

Table 1. Institutional Arrangements/Models for Community Involvement/Livelihoods in Sustainable Tourism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Brief Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community-owned</td>
<td>This is considered the ‘purest model’ of community-based tourism. The community owns, controls, and manages the tourism venture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint venture with the private sector or NGO</td>
<td>An outside business partner or NGO collaborates with the community; the partnership may be based on lease agreement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO or other grassroots organizations</td>
<td>The tourism venture is initiated and managed by a local organization or external NGO in accordance with the community’s traditional use of natural resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative management with government (also known as co-management)</td>
<td>The community collaborates with national or local government in the management of public land (e.g. Marine Protected Areas, NIPAS sites). Decisions and problem-solving are based on the collective actions of community members and other relevant stakeholders.</td>
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</table>


For purposes of this research, the selection of cases has been based on the condition that CBT projects should be engaging members of people’s organizations in the mainly agricultural communities as local suppliers or service providers, regardless of the structure or business model employed. This research is thus concerned only with enterprises comprised of a group or groups with common interest (rather than by private individuals/corporate ventures), with the intention of benefitting the wider group as well as the individuals within it.

The following CBT projects were chosen based on a list of model CBT projects obtained from the Department of Tourism (DOT):

13 Reyes (2011)
1. Guisi Community-Based Heritage Tourism Project of Nueva Valencia, Guimaras;  
2. Donsol Whaleshark Interaction Project of Donsol, Sorsogon;  
3. Abatan Community River Life Tour of Cortes, Bohol; and  
4. Pamilacan Island Whalewatching and Dolphin Industry of Baclayon, Bohol

For some reason, it was realized that all the model CBT projects listed by DOT are actually ecotourism sites. This, nevertheless, the objective of this research is actually to find out the employment generation potential of other CBT ventures, not just those characterized as ecotourism. However, for purposes of the subsequent research findings, CBT generalizations were based on the observational data gathered from the above four CBT/ecotourism projects.

VII. OBSERVATIONAL DATA / FINDINGS FROM CASE STUDIES

A. Guisi Community-Based Heritage Tourism Project (GBHTP)

This community tourism project showed great potential of providing an additional source of income to the people of Barangay Dolores, whose main sources of livelihood are fishing, farming and charcoal-making. It started through a donation of a heritage cottage from the Provincial Government and the Canadian Urban Institute to be managed and operated by the community as a lodging facility for Guisi travelers and guests. The cottage is strategically located beside the ruins of an 18th century old Spanish lighthouse, which is among the most visited sites in Guimaras and a very important part of its tourism products. Sitio Guisi is also famous for its pristine white sand beach and island hopping activities. All travellers to Guisi visit the symbolic lighthouse which also provides a spectacular panoramic view of the place.

To supplement the income from the heritage cottage and as a means to diversify Guisi’s tourism products, the Guisi Discovery Quest Tour Package was launched in 2008. Among the major highlights of the tour package are boat ride, snorkeling, rappelling, mountain biking, trekking and coastal walk. Aside from these activities, the tour package also includes a showcase of the unique tradition and heritage of Guisi through the karosa ride, local food demonstration, and a cultural presentation by the students of Dolores Elementary School. Prior to this, the community and its members who were identified to act as tour guides, boatmen, food caterers and tanods received various skills enhancement and trainings sponsored by the LGU, TESDA, DOT and other agencies. Besides capacitating them, DOT also provided various equipment including snorkeling gears, mountain bikes and rappelling gears. To further augment the economic outcome of this village-based enterprise, CIDA has recently approved a grant for the construction of a coffee and souvenir shop and a mini-grocery store within the vicinity of the lighthouse. Also part of the CIDA funded project is the promotion of agri-tourism by providing a credit facility to members who would like to engage in backyard farming and poultry-raising to supply the activities of the heritage cottage.

Because Guisi is an emerging destination, the place typically has very limited tourism establishments to cater to tourists. At present, there are only two private resorts operating in the area and it will be highly advantageous for the community to initiate tourism development at this point, as they still have few competitors in offering these tourism products and services.

However, despite prospects for further expansion of this community enterprise, the community is currently being hindered by limited access to, and ownership of, land and...
physical assets for tourism. For instance, because of the absence of the necessary permit from the Philippine Coast Guard which has the jurisdiction over the land on which the lighthouse stands, the construction of coffee shop and grocery store has been put on hold. The community also needs to secure permit from the National Historical Institute which has the mandate in the restoration of the tower. Pending the issuance of access rights to the community, larger private sector enterprises could, at any time, take advantage of the tourism opportunities.

It was also evident that despite the community’s great enthusiasm during the earlier phase of the project, the newly formed community-based association lacked the capacity to sustain previous gains in managing the tourism project. The Barangay Dolores Tourism Council is a public-private consortium which oversees the tourism-related activities of the barangay before it was transferred to the community-based Barangay Dolores Heritage Tourism Association (BDHTA). It was observed that the facilities of the heritage cottage are already showing signs of deterioration. It was also admitted that the Discovery Quest Tour Package is not selling to local tourists who mostly comprise visitors to Guisi. The reasons cited for the poor turn-out of the project are varied, such as lack of access rights to pursue the expansion within the site of the lighthouse, poor infrastructure such as absence of water supply in the area, small number of tourists, poor marketing and promotion and lack of capacity for project administration on the part of the community-based association.

In a small barangay community like Barangay Dolores, very few individuals would likely be able to demonstrate leadership skills that are crucial in the management and operation of a tourism enterprise. The community is thus held up with a limited pool of willing and capable leaders who could sustain the operation and management of the tourism project. On the other hand, the DOT which is in charge with the promotion and marketing of the project seemed to have waned in its effort despite the fact that no less than Secretary Joseph Durano graced the launching of this project in 2008. Focus group discussions with tourism managers also revealed that monitoring of the project is likewise hampered by the municipal government’s personnel services cap. When asked about the status of the project, the Tourism Officer-Designate admitted that they can no longer handle project monitoring because of personnel deficit and they are only pressed to act when issues regarding the project are brought to their attention. Political and governance issues also strongly figure among the major challenges being faced by the project as it appears that differences in party affiliation between the heads of barangay the municipal and provincial governments have likely affected the flow of support for the project.

B. Donsol Whaleshark Interaction Project (DWIP)

Among the cases examined for this research, the Whaleshark Interaction Project of Donsol demonstrated the most ideal set-up, enabling the grassroots to feel the beneficial outcomes of the tourism project and empowering them through their involvement not only as suppliers and providers of services but also as direct participants in decision-making and planning processes.

The development of a community based ecotourism project in Donsol started with the conservation and lobby efforts of WWF and other non-government organizations which led to the declaration of the municipal waters of Donsol as a whaleshark sanctuary in 1998. The advocacy efforts of conservation groups did not just result in the crafting of legal instruments to protect the whalesharks, it also brought an enormous number of local and foreign tourists who found swimming with the butandings “an adventure of gigantic proportions”.
Being an LGU-led community-supported venture, the municipal LGU oversees and manages the operation of the tourism activity but works in close partnership with the DOT and WWF. The municipal LGU, DOT and WWF function in a tripartite arrangement where they perform their respective mandates of managing the tourism product; research and conservation; and tourism promotion and marketing. The tripartite system of management undertaken by the WWF, DOT and the municipal LGU proved beneficial in addressing the myriad concerns associated with the operation of a CBT project.

The Whaleshark Project carried with it the true essence of community-based tourism by involving the grassroots, including the women and out-of-school youth as service providers. Members of the Butanding Boat Operators’ Association were once marginal fishers of Donsol who now earns substantially each whale interaction season. Next to the boat operators, the Butanding Interaction Officers (BIOs) are the major service providers for the DWIP. Other local organizations of service providers also benefited from the spill-over effects of this tourism project. To address the clamor from other members of the community to partake in the benefits of tourism, the Donsol Rivercruise and Firefly Watching Association, the Island Hopping Association, the women’s Health and Wellness Association and the Girawan Character Village were organized to offer distinct tourism products. The strategy of diversifying tourism products for a wider distribution of economic benefits of tourism is a good CBT practice that deserves to be highlighted.

Along with the people’s traditional livelihood such as fishing, ecotourism became Donsol’s second engine of economic growth. As a result of increased revenues from tourism, the municipality of Donsol has changed from being a laid back fishing and agricultural town into a first class municipality. Moreover, because of the way stakeholders democratized Donsol’s system for tourism, the people of Donsol had every chance to share the benefits of tourism and feel the positive impacts both on their dining tables and in their wallets.

C. Abatan Community River Life Tour (ACRT)

The most recent of all the CBT projects studied for this research, the Abatan Community Life Tour is a nature experience/river tour project that traverses the five municipalities of Bohol (Cortes, Maribojoc, Antequerra, Balilihan and Catigbian). It started as a conservation project undertaken by Process Bohol, a social development non-government organization operating in the province in 1999. Realizing later on the potential to create a tour along the river, the different municipal officials were consulted and organized to be part of the Abatan River Development Management Council (ARDMC) which now serves as the regulatory body not only of tourism development but also of environmental conservation efforts along the Abatan River. The involvement of an NGO that specializes in community organizing proved beneficial in uniting the POs of the different municipalities toward this ecotourism development strategy.

The tourism product being offered is much like the Loboc River Cruise but the development of the Abatan Tour was specifically aimed at bringing the benefits of tourism directly to the people by organizing them into cooperatives and engaging them as service providers.

In each of the municipalities, a village center is established that will feature the communities’ products and demonstrate how they are made. These satellite ecotourism villages serve as river tour stopovers, where the tourists could take some meals, get a preview of what the place can offer and buy some souvenir items and briefly experience community life in the area. In addition to the nature experience of cruising along the Abatan
River and the local attractions and destinations of the towns covered by the project. Abatan’s rich cultural heritage is also being showcased through the performances and dances interpreting the life of the community and history related to fishing and agriculture, and food and livelihood demonstrations. The activities are managed by cultural collectives composed of people of all ages to give everyone in the community a chance to get additional revenues.

Today, around 2000 people are visiting the Abatan River per month, but it includes the 30-minute firefly tour which mostly contributes to the volume of visitor arrivals. The low number of visitors availing of the regular tour package is due to the high price of the tour which costs about P1,400 per person for a group of 10. It was also noted that it is only when the regular tour packages are availed that the local service providers, including the cultural collectives earn from the tourism activity. Process Bohol also attributes the small number of visitors to lack of promotion.

D. Pamilacan Island Dolphin and Whale Watching Industry (PDWW)

The CBT experience of Pamilacan underscores the difficulty in building community self-sufficiency and empowering locals for tourism development in the absence of a permanent structure that would oversee and manage CBT operations despite attempts by different stakeholders to revitalize them. At present, the absence of a genuine organization that would represent the collective interest of the people of Pamilacan overthrows all previous efforts to harness the potential of tourism for community development.

The earliest attempt to develop a community-based tourism project in the island was initiated by the WWF in 1998 with the assistance of the Inter-agency Task Force on Marine Mammal Conservation. The project’s goal was primarily the conservation of marine mammal’s population and to develop a self-sustaining whale watching industry as a conservation-livelihood strategy. To train and involve former dolphin-whale hunters in marine tourism, a grassroots organization called the Pamilacan Island Dolphin and Whale-watching Organization (PIDWWO) was created.

In 2001, PIDWWO received a funding support from the New Zealand-aid National Ecotourism Programme (NEP) for training and capability building in running a tourism business through the development of an ecotourism business plan, wildlife tourism interpretation, communication skills and tourism management strategies. Through this grant, the community likewise received soft loans to transform their fishing boats into tour boats, purchase life jackets and snorkels and construct toilets and rain water collectors on the island. For a time, the activities of PIDWWO generated livelihoods and raised significant revenues that benefitted the local community.

In 2005, however, a financial fiasco involving one of PIDWWO’s officers damaged the reputation of the organization. At present, PIDWWO is beset with management and organizational problems. According to its president, only a few individuals are actually involved in tourism activities. The system of rotation is no longer being followed and even the few members who get to benefit from tourism are not paying the required association dues.

In 2008, Ayala Foundation spearheaded the effort, to once again, revive the community tourism project by organizing the Pamilacan Island Tourism Livelihood Multipurpose Cooperative (PTOLMPC). Ayala Foundation, through PTOLMPC assisted Pamilacan residents by providing them with soft loans to finance the refitting/conversion of decommissioned whale fishing boats into tourism boats. Other livelihood projects supported by the Ayala Foundation include small capital outlay for livestock raising, vegetable gardening, setting up small shops (sari-sari store) and a souvenir shop, and training and
initial capital outlay for body massage services. Aside from the grant of loans for business purposes, Ayala also provided financial assistance for school allowances and tuition fees of qualified members and emergency loans for needy members.

Even the existing members of PIDWWO were benefitted by the livelihood projects, trainings, workshops and seminars organized by the Ayala Foundation. However, in 2010, when Ayala withdrew from the project, PTOLMPC likewise ceased to exist as a group.

VIII. REFLECTIONS ON THE CBT EXPERIENCE (ANALYSIS AND KEY ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CBT PROJECTS)

The experience of the four tourism projects that were selected and analyzed for this research shows that even before any economic or employment benefit to the community from CBT projects could be realized, there are a number of critical issues that should be considered in the development of tourism initiatives run and managed from a community institutional base.

1. Residents of local communities are often lacking appropriate skills and knowledge to manage tourism on their own.

While it is said that the ‘purest’ or most ideal form of participation in a community based tourism is one where the community itself owns, controls and manages the tourism operation\(^\text{14}\), residents of local communities are often lacking appropriate skills and knowledge to manage tourism on their own. As seen in the case of the Pamilacan Dolphin and Whale Watching industry, the operation of the community-based tourism activity may only last until the lifetime of the donor agency. In the case of the Guisi Heritage Tourism Project the series of trainings, support and capability building programs provided to the community have not guaranteed a successfully-managed independent CBT project.

Government and development agencies involved in tourism development must also realize that regardless of their social or environmental dimensions, CBT projects must operate as any business, compete in the market and be profitable if they are to attain their higher ends. In this regard, a strong NGO or government agencies working alongside to develop the initiative and build capacity at the community level may prove invaluable. In fact, there are other CBT perspectives which consider that a community is more likely to succeed in partnership with other entities, e.g. private entrepreneurs, donors, NGOs, etc rather than by seeking to run the enterprise entirely by itself.\(^\text{15}\) Furthermore, as seen in the case of Donsol, a collaborative arrangement with different institutions led by the LGU and with the support of the community could be an ideal set up. In the case of the Abatan River Community Life Tour, the presence of an NGO that is specializing in community empowerment offers more chance of success for a community-based tourism project.

2. Community ownership, access and management of land resources for tourism are often limited.

As illustrated by the case of Guisi, one of the barriers to the success of the project was the lack of ownership or access rights to the site. As is often the case in CBT enterprises, the lands on which communities establish their tourism enterprise are public-owned. When the community fails to establish ownership or access, more powerful stakeholders, such as owners of private resorts are more likely to take advantage of the tourism opportunity perpetuating the marginalization of rural and indigenous communities.

\(^\text{14}\) Catibog-Sinha (2012)

\(^\text{15}\) Moscardo (2008), p. 101-114
The need to establish community’s access rights to land and other resources for tourism are thus important to the success of a tourism enterprise as this will give them the ability to generate community benefit and the will to commit and invest in a long-term enterprise.

3. The natural and cultural resources for CBT projects are mostly found in remote locations and characterized by poor infrastructure base.

   It is said that the two cornerstones to effective marketing of tourism sites are the attraction for tourists and tourism infrastructure to support the industry.16 Although studies on the characteristics of ecotourists show that these people are naturally drawn to areas that are away from the main tourist destinations, at the minimum, good levels of tourist safety and health must be ensured in these destinations. Except in the case of the Donsol Whaleshark Interaction Project, where probably the uniqueness of the tourism product compensates for accessibility issues, among the major barriers to successful marketing of the tourism product in the cases examined are poor water supply (GBHTP); absence of regular passenger ferry and distance from the mainland (PDWW); and remoteness from the main tourism circuit (ARCT).

4. Small communities lack marketing capacity.

   With the exception of Donsol Whaleshark Interaction Project which has already captured a steady and secure market, this is an area in which all of the initiatives face challenges. One of the factors that may account for this is the projects’ relative isolation from the mainstream tourism circuits. Another is the cost of effective marketing programs. As noted in many CBT studies, marketing is one of the most difficult aspects for small-scale projects to get a handle on because of the complexity and cost of effective marketing programs.

5. CBT offers seasonal and limited opportunities for employment.

   Tourism projects such as the operation of the heritage cottage, (GBHTP); guided river cruise (ARCT); marine mammal encounters (PDWW and DWIP) were seen to generate seasonal income for a small number of people within the rural community (just the regular caretaker and sometimes, the cooks/food handlers for GBHTP; the boat operators and crew for the ACRT, PDWW and DWIP). In the case of the Donsol Whaleshark Interaction Project, concerns with regard to keeping the local carrying capacity and meaningful levels of income have prevented other members of the community from being part of the main suppliers and providers of tourism services e.g. boat operators and BIos. However, where opportunities for linkages to other sectors and economic activities could be made, such as the sale of souvenirs items and craft products and cultural performance in the ARCT; the promotion of Agri-tourism in GBHTP; or where women and out of school youth are trained to provide wellness massage, put up homestays, souvenir shops and engage in other tourism activities (e.g. firefly watching activities, island hopping, and setting up a character village) in DWIP, greater economic benefits to the community are realized. The degree to which local talents and resources are mobilized to create entrepreneurial activities, and tourism products are diversified, to enable other community-based organizations to participate in tourism activities will determine the extent of employment creation.

6. Opportunities for financial capital in small communities are limited.

   While the diversification of tourism offers and the creation of entrepreneurial activities are deemed to be important in increasing the potential of CBT projects to generate employment, in all the cases examined, the community could not have engaged in tourism

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16 Ryel and Grasse in Fennel (2006)
product development without funding assistance from donors and other government agencies. As pointed out earlier, community ownership of tourism resources such as lands are often limited and so it would be difficult for village associations to secure loans because, for instance, communal landownership may not be accepted as collaterals. Many of the women who expressed interest to put up small tourism businesses are also being hindered by lack of credit access.

7. **Community based tourism may be vulnerable to local politics.**

   While a government-led tourism project seems to be working well in the case of Donsol, there are also some disadvantages to a government-led tourism program. As seen in the case of Guisi and Pamilacan, project implementation and governance may be affected by rivalry and differences in political interests at the level of the barangay, the city/municipality and province. Hence, it could be that some projects that were formerly considered to be priority are now given least attention in terms of assistance. Movement of personnel, especially in the Municipal Tourism Office, whenever a new set of political leaders is elected is also a challenge to the consistency of tourism programs and policies that affect CBT.

**IX. KEY COMPONENTS FOR SUCCESS OF CBT PROJECTS**

   From an analysis of the initiatives, it was shown that a CBT project is more likely to be successful when the following are present:

1. **Uniqueness and inherent attractiveness of tourism assets.**

   As many of these community based ecotourism projects are found in the peripheral rural areas, they must offer a kind of tourism offering that would be attractive for people to visit these areas despite their marginal or remote locations. The tourism product must be marketable, of sufficiently high quality and inherent attractiveness to tourists. Good levels of tourist safety and health are also important as are human and physical capital.

2. **Presence of strong NGO or government agencies working alongside that has a good knowledge of the industry.**

   Particularly at the beginning stages of the initiative, having a competent agency working alongside to develop the initiative and build capacity at the community level has proven invaluable as in the case of Donsol.

3. **Beneficial tourism policies and laws that encourage CBT development.**

   CBT is most likely to be successful where it is supported and facilitated by beneficial tourism policies and laws that encourage CBT development. As seen in the case of Donsol, the management and operation of the tourism activity can be woven through supportive local legislative policies or ordinances that mandate the tour package fees, system of accreditation for suppliers and providers of services and system of rotation for a more equitable income distribution. In the case of Pamilacan, while there is in principle, an ordinance that is supposed to govern how tourism activity should be operated, this is not actually being put into practice for political reasons.

4. **Access rights and/or equitable participation in the management of the tourism resource.**
This allows the community to have control over the use of the resource and can prevent private stakeholders in taking advantage of the tourism opportunities.

5. **Access to funds.**

Provision of start-up funds for tourism initiatives through soft loans and funding of costly infrastructural development will provide a successful catalyst for community-based tourism initiatives.

6. **Creation of visible links to the wider community.**

As earlier raised, the degree to which local talents and resources are mobilized to create entrepreneurial activities, and tourism products are diversified, to enable other community-based organizations to participate in tourism activities will determine the extent of employment creation. Other members of the community could, for example, be encouraged to start up enterprises that seek to provide needed inputs to other existing local businesses e.g. sale of crafts and souvenir items, food vending, spa services, etc. Through the development and use of support industries, the financial impact of the existing set of tourists, no matter how small, may be increased.

7. **Engagement with the private sector especially in marketing and promotion.**

Since the mainstream tourism market has the necessary economic muscle, engagement with the private sector is absolutely crucial to the success of CBT projects, especially in gaining market access. CBT enterprises should be able to capitalize on the commercial opportunities presented where significant tourist numbers already exist by engaging with the private sector such as tour operators. For instance, CBT enterprises could benefit from being included in the tour packages developed with mainstream tourists' destinations.

8. **Non-partisan tourism support structures.**

Community-based management structures that are not politically polarized will be most beneficial for CBT projects.

9. **Initiatives that create opportunities for and strengthen participation of women and young people.**

As most marginal areas are dominated by women and unemployed young people, it is when these CBT initiatives and the jobs that they create are able to accommodate women and young people’s skills and roles that the benefits to the community as a whole would be significant.

**X. CONCLUSION**

Considering the role of DOLE in assisting community groups in developing sustainable enterprises through the DOLE Integrated Livelihood Program (DILP), this study hopes to serve as an input and guide for DOLE evaluators in examining the potential and viability of tourism livelihood projects, particularly those initiated by community groups. The experience of the four CBT cases examined highlights serious disadvantages that the community faces as they seek to partake in the benefits from tourism development. Nevertheless, the hope that CBT could be an effective tool for community development is not totally unrealistic, as proved in the case of the Donsol Whaleshark Interaction Project.
Directions, identification of specific conditions and attributes that contribute to successful projects and guidelines for effective implementation are important. Furthermore, the role of DOLE in operationalizing a convergence scheme of related programs and services of government agencies and private organizations that will assist and provide complete support to CBT enterprises will be invaluable, as shared information, knowledge and interconnectedness between different stakeholders responsible for tourism development create a stronger foundation for CBT development.
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