

Ecotourism as a Catalyst of Poverty Alleviation in Rural Economy in Cebu, Philippines

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Abstract - Inclusive economic growth encompasses alleviating the people in the rural area from massive poverty and vulnerability. The study aims to determine the indication of ecotourism's contribution to alleviating poverty in the rural economy as a basis in formulating a tourism development plan. It applied the descriptive research design, utilizing a researcher-made survey tool as a primary instrument of data gathering. The research sites were in Olango Island Wildlife Sanctuary, Aguinid Falls, and Bojo River. Using a random sampling technique, 70 respondents were residents and earning income from the ecotourism activities. The gathered data were treated using simple percentage, weighted mean, Chi-square test of independence and ANOVA. The findings revealed that meager income for selling locally-made products, as tour guides, providing transportation services, and through fixed salaries per month. The ecotourism sites in Cebu, Philippines had a significant contribution towards alleviating poverty in terms of uplifting the standard of living, providing a means of subsistence, development of social well-being, and improvement of social overhead capital. There is a significant relationship between the respondents' educational attainment and source of livelihood and their perceptions on the contribution of ecotourism in terms of uplifting the standards of living and improvement of social overhead capital. Lastly, there is a significant difference in the respondents' viewpoint on the three well-known ecotourism sites in the aspect of the development of social well-being. The popular community-based ecotourism sites in Cebu holds great potential in making significant contributions to poverty alleviation since it supported the local people to escape from hunger that is prevalent in the rural areas in the developing countries.

Keywords: Macroeconomics, Poverty Alleviation, Development of Social Being, Philippines

I. INTRODUCTION

The travel industry is one of the quickest developing businesses in countries around the world. It is labor-intensive and is a significant source of development (International Labour Organization, 2013). It serves as a substantial source of foreign exchange earnings and public revenues, which are essential for economic growth. Since tourism activities are labor extensive, it creates more employment opportunities for people with diverse skills (Sibanda & Ndlovu, 2017). Ecotourism poses potential as a useful tool for development. Developing countries are now embracing it in their economic development and conservation strategies (Kiper, 2013). It guarantees the sustainable use of environmental resources while generating economic opportunities for local people (Bhattacharya *et al.*, 2011).

All inclusive, 1.2 billion individuals are in extreme utilization destitution. More than 66% of them are in Asia wherein south Asia alone accounts for nearly half of them. About one fourth was in sub-Saharan Africa. Three-quarters of the shoddy work and live in rural areas (World Tourism Organization, 2004).

Poverty has been a recurrent challenge in the country. Based on statistical data about poverty and socioeconomic development in the Philippines and comparison of poverty indicators among countries in Southeast Asia, the country's poverty line is 21.6 % of the population, which lives below the national poverty line in 2015 (Asian Development Bank, 2017). Based on the data from the Social Weather Station, 7% or about 10.9 million Filipino families think that they are poor (Leonel & Tubeza, 2017). Extreme poverty is a reality for one in every five people in the world today (United Nations Development Programme, 2006). Philippine Statistics Authority (2015) data noted that the Province of Cebu is the number one province in Region VII with the highest number of low-income families and ranked third (3rd) with the highest number of targeting household beneficiaries on Conditional Cash Transfer program. There is no doubt that the province of Cebu is much in the battle against poverty.

Due to the worsening problem of poverty in developing and populous nations in the world, including Asian countries and the Philippines, it calls for more efforts to look into how tourism in the countryside where the incidence of poverty is high could be useful as an impetus of poverty alleviation. In this study, the researcher aimed to assess the contribution of ecotourism in the rural community in alleviating poverty. Thereby, an appropriate local tourism development plan will be devised to sustain the economic viability of these well-known ecotourism sites. This study anchors on to the trickledown theory that asserts that financial development assumes an essential job in destitution decrease in some random nation, given that the dispersion of pay stays steady. There is a belief that the benefits of higher economic growth in a country trickle down to the poor (Kahsu & Nagaraja, 2017). It is not a specific tourism product or sector. However, it is an overall approach designed to unlock opportunities for the poor (Jamieson *et al.*, 2004). Tourism has become an essential economic activity for many developing countries in their search to lessen poverty (Croes & Vanegas, 2008). Christie (2002) opined that tourism

could address poverty and a useful toolkit to alleviate it. In the study of Thornton et al. (2007), reveals that economic growth tends to trickle down to needy families.

Since tourism stimulates economic growth by generating income and employment (Athanasopoulou, 2013), it is usually seen that whenever there is income flowing to the local community, it will trickle down eventually reaching the bottom of the community to those who struggle most daily (Ojala, 2012). A commonly held belief states that as long as the whole region gets wealthier, the benefits brought by economic growth will eventually trickle down to the local poor through multiple channels, such as employment, public welfare, health care and family networks (Zeng *et al.*, 2005).

In enhancing poverty alleviation through tourism, community participation should be given priority. Cole (2006) discussed that community participation is essential in the development, as it results in a more suitable decision. Tourism is the cultural industry, and its progress depends mostly on society's willingness to accept it. Lima *et al.*, (2011) stated that as a service industry, tourism is highly dependent on the goodwill and cooperation of the host communities. Scheyvens (2011) emphasized the importance of local communities in having a high degree of control over the tourist activities that are taking place in their rural areas and are sharing the benefits to the people. One way of reducing poverty is through tourism by creating employment and diversified livelihood opportunities that provide additional income. As a massive global industry, tourism has become increasingly promoted as a viable alternative livelihood for people living in rural, poor, peripheral, indigenous or developing communities around the world (Holden, 2013).

Many developing countries had started to consider tourism as an essential and integral part of their economic development strategies as it serves as a source of scarce financial resources, job creation, foreign exchange earnings, and technical assistance (Dieke, 2004). Holloway (2006) confirmed that the economic benefits of tourism included mainly employment for the local people as well as other business activities. Similarly, tourism is resilient and associated with positive impacts in terms of generating foreign exchange earnings, creating employment and income, and stimulating domestic consumption (Steiner, 2006). The most commonly used indicator of the standard of living is gross domestic product per capita (Straka & Kiralova, 2015). Through work creation and pay age, the travel industry conveys financial advantages to have networks; in this way improving the nearby individuals' expectation for everyday comforts as the financial advantages of voyagers' give the budgetary way to get to present day offices as products and enterprises (Rahman, 2010). Song (2012) mentioned that tourism influence the socio-economic factors and thus could change as a result of innovation and more fundamentally as a consequence of changing values and priorities and rising living standards.

Creation of employment and economic opportunities benefits individuals, household and community (Simpson, 2007). Households entering into tourism have significantly raised their living standard, so it has the potential to lift people out of poverty through employment and entrepreneurship (Ramasamy & Swamy, 2012). There is an exchange off between financial advantages and natural and sociocultural expenses as it requires a decent parity to actualize the idea of ecotourism that boons for forest conservation, livelihood, and community development (Adhikari & Fischer, 2008).

Tourism affects the natural environment in which people live and their social and cultural context. Whether or not these directly affect their livelihood, they affect their well-being (Spenceley & de Kock, 2009). It can likewise represent a danger to the social fabric of an area and its natural and cultural heritage but if it is well-planned and managed it can be a force for their conservation (Anstrand, 2006). Moreover, tourism is the critical factor for infrastructure development and help in the increase of the export revenues (Pedrana, 2013). These literature have contributed to the formulation of the variables concerning ecotourism as a means to alleviate poverty in the rural areas of Cebu, Philippines.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This investigation aimed to determine the indication of ecotourism's contribution to poverty alleviation in the rural economy in Cebu, Philippines. The results of this study were used as a basis in the formulation of the tourism development plan.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive correlational research design with the utilization of a researcher-designed survey tool to gather data on how ecotourism alleviates poverty in the rural economy. The study focused mainly on the local communities along Bojo River in Aloguinsan, Cebu and Olango Island Wildlife Sanctuary in Lapu-Lapu City and Agunid Falls in Samboan, Cebu. The three areas were most highlighted community-based eco-tourism in the province of Cebu, Philippines. Using a purposive sampling method, this study surveyed a total of 70 respondents. The respondents were the locals who were involved in the community-based ecotourism in the three identified ecotourism sites. There were twenty (20) respondents residing and earning from Wildlife Sanctuary in Olango Island, another twenty (20) from Bojo River Cruise community in Aloguinsan, Cebu and 30 respondents from Agunid Falls in Tangbo, Samboan, Cebu. The study used a researcher-designed questionnaire to collect data on how ecotourism alleviate rural poverty. Part I pertains the profile of the respondents in term of age, gender, civil status, highest educational attainment, and source of livelihood. Part II pertains to determining the income earned by the respondents from local tourism as to the sale of locally-made products, salaries and wages, tour guiding, and

provision of transportation. Part III relates to how local ecotourism alleviates the rural poverty in the aspects of uplifting the standard of living, providing the means of subsistence, development of social well-being, and improvement of social overhead capital.

Likert Scale was used with the scale of 4, 3, 2, and 1 with the verbal meaning of Strongly Agree (SA) Agree (A), Less Agree (LA) and Strongly Disagree (SD), respectively. Language translation from English to *Bisaya* dialect was applied to ensure that the respondents genuinely understand the purpose and the main context of the study. Pilot testing was applied to expose several limitations of the survey and allow for revisions to be made before administering the survey questionnaire. Before switching on the survey to assess how ecotourism alleviate rural poverty, the researcher conducted a pilot testing at the Whale Shark

Watching site in Oslob, Cebu with 10 respondents to check whether the survey instrument was usable in terms of constructs, appropriate written procedures and the reliability and internal consistency of the responses received was identical. The researchers sought approval to conduct the study at the tourists' spot from the local government units (LGU) in three areas. Based on the approved date, the researcher administered survey forms to the respondents. Retrieval of the accomplished instrument, and collating and recording followed immediately. The collected data were treated using frequency, single percentage, weighted mean, Chi-square test of independence, and ANOVA.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Sources of Earned Income

TABLE I SOURCES OF EARNED INCOME FROM LOCAL ECOTOURISM (N = 70)

		Sources and Level of Income	Frequency	Percentage
A.	Sale of Locally-Made Products (per month)			
	Php	1,000	1	1.43
		1,500	1	1.43
		2,000	2	2.86
		2,500	1	1.43
		3,000	1	1.43
		Total	6	8.57
B.	Tour Guiding			
	Php	1,500 - 3,000	1	1.43
		3,001 - 4,500	12	17.14
		4,501 - 6,000	10	14.29
		6,001 - 7,500	2	2.86
		7,501 - 9,000	3	4.29
		9,001 - 10,500	1	1.43
		10,501-12,000	2	2.86
		12,001 -13,500	0	0.00
		13,501- 15,000	2	2.86
		Total	33	45.14
C.	Transportation Services			
	Php	2,500- 4,000	3	4.29
		4,001- 5,500	1	1.43
		5,501- 7,000	0	0.00
		7,001- 8,500	0	0.00
		8,501- 10,000	1	1.43
		10,001-11,500	0	0.00
		11,501-13,000	2	2.86
	Total	7	10.00	
D.	Fixed Honorarium/Salaries			
	Php	1,500 - 3,000	9	12.86
		3,001 - 4,500	2	2.86
		4,501 - 6,000	9	12.86
		6,001 - 7,500	1	1.43
		7,501 - 9,000	1	1.43
		9,001 - 10,500	1	1.43
		10,501 - 12,000	0	0.00
		12,001 - 13,500	0	0.00
		13,501 - 15,000	1	1.43
	Total	24	34.29	

This part presents the personal data of the 70 residents who were involved in the ecotourism activity. The profile covers the age, gender, civil status, highest educational attainment and source of livelihood.

There were more respondents (32.86%) aged within 20-29 years old. This data denotes that the residents earned a living through ecotourism activity in the various ecotourism sites belonged to the young adult's group considering that at this age range, a person is expected to be more active and vigorous in performing the day-to-day tasks.

In the study conducted by Schmiedek *et al.*, (2013), it posits that both day-to-day and within-day variability in cognitive performance are particularly low in older adults when compared to younger adults. Moreover, there are an equal number of female and male respondents. This could be explained that both genders can perform the job requirement in performing various ecotourism activities, regardless of their exposure to work hazards since they are still young. It also signifies that there was no widespread discrimination between the man and woman in the community-based ecotourism, as long as they can perform the needed tasks to the tourists or guests.

Further, the majority were married (64.29%) at the time of the administration of the survey. It is a common observation that the people in the rural community would usually get married younger compared to those people who work and live in the city. The people in the rural areas lived a more laid back lifestyle compared to those living in urban areas who prefer for career advancement rather than marrying early. Leonhardt and Quealy (2015) stated that the place where individuals grow up does not affect only their future income. It also affects the odds of marrying — additionally, education mixed with rural culture affected the marriage pattern of the rural people.

Furthermore, 48.57% were high school graduates. It is expected that the predominant highest educational attainment of the people in the rural community is to complete only secondary school since their chance of studying college and obtaining a baccalaureate degree is slim since there is no college or university in the place. Due to poverty, they also do not have the financial capacity to study college in the city where the colleges and universities are located. As Eccher and Debs (2017) mentioned, the geographic decision affects the decision of rural students to pursue higher education.

Lastly, more respondents (28.57%) worked multiple types of jobs or preferred to engage in more than one types of job to augment their income as fishermen and support their family needs. These people served as a tour guide, sell food products and also provide transportation services to the tourists or any other types of services as long there is income that can be generated.

More (2.86%) residents earned an average monthly income of Php 2,000.00 from the sale of locally-made products. These products are mostly cooked food, delicacies, biscuits, and essential souvenir items. Most of these products were sold at a lower price so that they can quickly sell. This explains the difficulty of the residents to earn a higher income. The predominant (17.14%) income earned by those who were engaged in tour guiding was within Php 3,000.00-4,500.00 per month. This income level is quite low, but if the earner is living in the province, it can already cover the food and other essential commodities.

To those residents who were providers of transportation services, their earned income was within Php 2,500.00-4,000.00 consisted of 4.29%. They are the motorcycle drivers or locally known-as *habal-habal* drivers. Further, there was another one (1) or equivalent to 1.43 % who earned at the range of Php 8,501.00-10,000.00 per month. This is already a substantial level of income in the rural area, but only a few can earn this level out of providing different services in the local ecotourism sites.

For those who earned through fixed honorarium/ salaries, there was nine (9) or equivalent to 12.86 % of the residents who earned at the range of Php 1,500.00-3,000.00 per month. These people are workers of small eateries and other small-time businesses in the area near the ecotourism sites. Likewise, the amount of income earned by the respondent depends on the type of tourism activity that they perform or provided to the tourists at the ecotourism sites. The higher the position, the more complicated their job so that they could earn.

B. Poverty Alleviation Due to Local Ecotourism

TABLE II HOW LOCAL ECOTOURISM ALLEVIATE RURAL POVERTY (N = 70)

	Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
A.	Uplifting the Standards of Living	3.63	High Contribution
B.	Provide the Means of Subsistence	3.53	High Contribution
C.	Development of Social Well-Being	3.47	High Contribution
D.	Improvement of Social Overhead Capital	3.37	High Contribution
	Overall Mean	3.50	High Contribution

Through tourism activity, it can address the issue of poverty which can be regarded as the inability of people to meet economic, social and other standards of well-being (Organization for Economic Cooperation Development, 2001). Similarly, the community based-ecotourism in the rural areas as per the viewpoint of the respondents showed that ecotourism activities had immense contribution towards the development of their social well-being, as presented by the average mean of 3.47. It was perceived that through local ecotourism, there is the improvement of the people's health, ability to learn new skills and knowledge. Thereby, Bushell and Eagles, (2007) opined that tourism seeks to

build capacity by improving skills and knowledge for individuals and the community as a whole. This relates to the fact that in the country, most of the people in rural and far areas have limited access to various public services and infrastructure. According to Pike *et al.*, (2010), the poor community had challenges of enhancing prosperity and well-being.

Lastly, ecotourism also had a significant contribution to the development of social overhead capital at the ecotourism sites, as divulged by the average mean of 3.37. For a country as a whole, a chance of development on a global scale starts from the local one. Residents from the rural areas admit that even if the improvement of social overhead

capital of the place had a significant contribution to alleviating rural poverty, they considered it to the least contribution compared to the other indicators in poverty alleviation. This calls for more projects of the government to build the more and better socially-benefitting groundwork to lessen the chance of inclusive growth and development in the countryside.

The World Tourism Organization stated that the infrastructure required by tourism, such as transport and communications, water supply and sanitation, public security, and health services, can also benefit poor communities.

TABLE III RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS AND THEIR RESPONSES ON HOW LOCAL ECOTOURISM ALLEVIATE POVERTY

Variables	Computed Chi-Square	df	cv	Significance	Result
A. Age					
Uplifting the Standards of Living	2.837	4	9.488	Not significant	Ho accepted
Provide the Means of Subsistence	4.675	8	15.507	Not significant	Ho accepted
Development of Social Well-Being	8.134	12	21.026	Not significant	Ho accepted
Improvement of Social Overhead Capital	8.264	12	21.026	Not significant	Ho accepted
B. Gender					
Uplifting the Standards of Living	0.108	1	3.841	Not significant	Ho accepted
Provide the Means of Subsistence	1.837	2	5.991	Not significant	Ho accepted
Development of Social Well-Being	2.239	3	7.815	Not significant	Ho accepted
Improvement of Social Overhead Capital	2.543	3	7.815	Not significant	Ho accepted
C. Civil Status					
Uplifting the Standards of Living	1.210	3	7.815	Not significant	Ho accepted
Provide the Means of Subsistence	4.671	6	12.592	Not significant	Ho accepted
Development of Social Well-Being	8.970	9	16.919	Not significant	Ho accepted
Improvement of Social Overhead Capital	7.938	9	16.919	Not significant	Ho accepted
D. Educational Attainment					
Uplifting the Standards of Living	18.003	5	11.070	Significant	Ho rejected
Provide the Means of Subsistence	18.018	10	18.307	Not significant	Ho accepted
Development of Social Well-Being	15.160	15	24.996	Not significant	Ho accepted
Improvement of Social Overhead Capital	16.189	15	24.996	Not significant	Ho accepted
E. Source of Livelihood					
Uplifting the Standards of Living	8.238	10	18.307	Not significant	Ho accepted
Provide the Means of Subsistence	10.639	20	31.410	Not significant	Ho accepted
Development of Social Well-Being	43.737	30	43.773	Not significant	Ho accepted
Improvement of Social Overhead Capital	44.971	30	43.773	Significant	Ho rejected

C. Test of Significant Relationship

There is a significant relationship between the residents' educational attainment and their perceptions on how the existence and operation of ecotourism sites in Olangao Island, Samboan, Cebu and Aloguinsan, Cebu had uplifted the way of life of the people in the rural community as

denoted by the computed chi-square value of 18.003. This means that the disparity of the educational background of the seventy respondents from the three (3) municipalities in Cebu where there are ecotourism sites relates to their idea on how their participation in the ecotourism activity had afforded better changes in their level of affluence. Likewise, the less educated the respondents are, likely they

have difficulties in grasping the particular contribution of ecotourism in their community to reduce poverty since what is important to them is to earn income for daily subsistence. Accordingly, a study showed that the respondent's level of education is an essential indicator in terms of income earned. It has a strong relationship between education and income (Wolla & Sullivan, 2017). Furthermore, there is a significant relationship in the respondents' source of livelihood and their viewpoints on how ecotourism alleviate poverty through the improvement of social overhead capital. It indicates that the kind of income earning activity that they are indulged in ecotourism are linked to their ideas on how the presence of the sites had paved towards the building of various public infrastructures. The more improvement on

the social overhead capital in the rural areas, the significant possibilities that the residents can earn more income from the local tourism. Srinivasu and Rao (2013) pointed out that infrastructure investment directly affects economic development. Therefore, the only way to build a country's gainful potential and raise per capita pay is to extend the limit with regards to delivering products. This need not allude necessarily to the arrangement of plant and apparatus, yet in addition to streets, railroads, electrical cables, water funnels, schools, medical clinics, houses and even motivating force shopper products, for example, buyer durables. All of which can add to increasing productivity and higher living standards.

TABLE IV SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE IN THE RESPONSES ON HOW ECOTOURISM ALLEVIATE RURAL POVERTY

Grouped By	df	Sum Square	Mean Square	F- value	P- Value	Significance	Results
A. Uplifting the Standards of Living							
Between Group	3	0.554	0.185	0.58	0.632	Not significant	Ho accepted
Within Group	276	88.557	0.321				
Total	279	89.111					
B. Provide the Means of Subsistence							
Between Group	4	0.783	0.196	0.47	0.755	Not significant	Ho accepted
Within Group	345	142.371	0.413				
Total	349	143.154					
C. Development of Social Well-Being							
Between Group	4	8.943	2.236	5.83	0.000	Significant	Ho rejected
Within Group	345	132.271	0.383				
Total	349	141.214					
D. Improvement of Social Overhead Capital							
Between Group	4	1.754	0.439	1.08	0.365	Not significant	Ho accepted
Within Group	345	139.700	0.405				
Total	349	141.454					

D. Test of Significant Difference

The outcome demonstrates that there is a critical contrast in the responses of the respondents from the three well-known ecotourism sites in the three (3) municipalities in the aspects of the development of social well-being. This means that the perception of the residents is diverse based on their extent of interaction with the different tourism from various places here and abroad considering that these ecotourism sites are located in different towns with different ways of governance even though the Local Government Code mandates the LGUs to support their tourism sector.

V. CONCLUSION

The popular community-based ecotourism sites in Cebu holds great potential in making significant contributions to poverty alleviation. Ecotourism in rural areas supported the local people to escape from hunger that is prevalent in the developing countries in the rural areas. Local government

agencies encouragement to the local community to participate in the tourism activity to augment their income also plays a vital role in alleviating rural poverty. Local tourism brought tourism income generated activities to the community that aids their day-to-day basic commodity requirements. Further, the eco-tourism initiatives supported the local people to uplift their standard of living through the creation of tourism-related. The opportunities that tourism brought to develop the community's social well-being and improve the infrastructure of the place indeed benefited to the poor people. The social well-being of the respondents depends on the earned income that they had from the local tourism. The higher the rural people income from tourism-related jobs, the greater they can feel the development of their social well-being.

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