

# Ecotourism Projects and Women's Empowerment:

A Case Study in the Province of Bohol, Philippines

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## Abstract

This paper examined the way in which successful ecotourism projects empowered women participants. Research sites were selected at barangay level by looking into two successful ecotourism projects launched by people's organizations in Bohol Province, Philippines. The researcher investigated the sociopolitical contexts of ecotourism projects that facilitate women's empowerment.

This study analyzed the socio-political conditions before and during the implementation of ecotourism projects in Bohol to determine whether the projects facilitated women's empowerment. More specifically, the researcher investigated women's participation, mobilization, and socialization at the ecotourism sites. The researcher employed local women's own perceptions as important indicators of empowerment. By doing so, the researcher attempted to examine whether ecotourism could facilitate women's empowerment.

This paper presents an overview of development of the ecotourism industry at the country level, and then focuses on cases in Bohol Province. A section on socio-political empowerment of women is also presented.

The local women themselves perceived eco-tourism projects as promoting socio-political empowerment of women who were involved in the industry through the organization, training and seminars, and self-esteem development programs. The researcher also found a relationship between women's empowerment and environmental consciousness. Ecotourism projects have raised the level of women's participation, mobilization, and socialization in promoting environmental consciousness.

Although this paper found that community ecotourism projects can provide the necessary foundation for empowerment of women in Bohol, there are sometimes communication problems, not enough income and jealousy among the women.

**Keywords:** Ecotourism, Women's Socio-Political Empowerment, and Environmental Consciousness Empowerment of Women.

## Introduction

This paper examines the way in which successful ecotourism projects empower women participants. The author investigated this by looking into the socio-political conditions before and

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during the implementation of ecotourism projects in Bohol. The author has identified the factors that have facilitated women's empowerment by analyzing the process of women's participation. The author uses Chingudu's view of empowerment and Cercena's definition of participation in this paper. Chingudu (1992: 11) writes "knowledge, confidence, power, skills and access to knowledge are important elements of empowerment". Cercena (1991: 529) defines that participation empowers people to mobilize their own capacities and take an active role in managing their resources, and control the activities that affect their lives.

There have been frameworks on ecotourism and empowerment. Scheyvens (1999) has conceptualized a framework that dealt with ecotourism and empowerment. The women empowerment framework was developed by March et al. (1999: 92). They have defined empowerment as enabling women to take an equal place with men, and to participate equally in the development process in order to achieve control over the factors of production on an equal basis with men. While Scheyvens's ecotourism and empowerment framework focused on economic, social, and political empowerment and discussed ways to measure empowerment and disempowerment in ecotourism communities, it didn't particularly focus on women. These frameworks only provided an initial attempt to conceptualize the relationship between ecotourism and empowerment. There is a need for more empirical observation, research into actual cases of ecotourism and how it affects women.

There are two perspectives in the impact of ecotourism on participants. The first perspective is that ecotourism has a negative impact on women. Scheyvens (2000: 245) has argued that ecotourism has negative effects on women. Women do not always benefit significantly from eco-tourism development. Sproule and Sudhandi mention that the role of women is a challenge for many community groups pursuing ecotourism. For instance, Akama (1996: 573); Rudkin & Hall (1996), Mansperger (1995: 90), Sindiga (1995), Stonich et al., (1995); Scheyvens (2000: 234) have dealt with gender issues explicitly in cases where ecotourism enterprises are strictly concerned with young men's endeavors. Moreover, in some Indonesian communities studied by Sproule and Sudhandi (1998: 217), there are unspoken restrictions on women's roles and ecotourism.

The second perspective is that ecotourism has a positive impact on women. Wearing and Larsen (1996: 119) and Scheyvens (2000: 233) showed how ecotourism can empower local communities by giving them a sense of pride and awareness of the importance of their natural resources and control over their own development. However, these studies dealt with the empowerment of local communities and didn't particularly focus on women. Studies claim that income is an empowering mechanism for ecotourism. Scheyvens (2000: 238) also found that income empowered women. In addition, The Asian Development Bank (ADB 2004) and Huttche (2001) explore the linkage among ecotourism activities, income and alternative livelihood. However, Weinberg et al (2002: 375-376) said that the challenges to ecotourism are neither technical nor economic but rather political and he identified cases that faced political challenges such as a lack of political capacity, government policy,

and people running the council.

This paper follows Weinberg's viewpoint and examines socio-political conditions through women's participation, process in ecotourism in the sites. In addition this study also incorporates environmental consciousness of the women. Honey (1999: 22) said that Ecotourism builds environmental awareness. However, her focus is on the visitors and not on the local people, and she only suggested that it be used as an approach in empowering local people.

## **1. Background of the Research**

### **1.1 Ecotourism Policy in Bohol**

The Philippines provides a conducive environment for ecotourism research. First of all, the country's abundance in natural resources makes it an attractive ecotourism site.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, ecotourism development is fully supported by the national government.<sup>2</sup> The emergence of ecotourism policy in the Philippines was brought about in 1992 by the National Tourism Congress. Former President Estrada approved The Philippine National Ecotourism Strategy, which provided the guidelines for the development of ecotourism in the Philippines and established the legal framework for the partnership of the Department of Tourism (DOT) and Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) with other stakeholders. Thirdly, The Philippines has been noted for several successful ecotourism sites such as the Ulugan Bay, Palawan project master plan for community-based ecotourism. According to United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 2002), in recognition of the success of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and UNESCO collaboration, the Ulugan Bay project team was awarded the Mayor's Award in 2001.<sup>3</sup> However, not all designated ecotourism community projects are deemed successful.

The Province of Bohol is blessed with several ecotourism assets and is rich in biodiversity. Moreover, international donors continue to finance ecotourism development in Bohol. The Philippines and New Zealand recently signed an agreement to continue their ecotourism Local Government Unit (LGU) program, which is in its second phase, and is worth 1.5 million dollars (USD).<sup>4</sup> The national government also supports the development of ecotourism sites in Bohol,<sup>5</sup> and the provincial government of Bohol has been actively supporting, promoting and valuing ecotourism development. The objectives of the national ecotourism policy were adopted in the Bohol Congress in 1999.<sup>6</sup> This initiated ecotourism projects in the province. The Bohol Ecotourism Congress promotes empowered, responsive and gender-sensitive stakeholders for the benefit of present and future generations.<sup>7</sup> The provincial government promotes itself as an "eco-cultural tourism destination of the new millennium."<sup>8</sup> Lastly, LGUs are potential key players in the successful development of ecotourism.<sup>9</sup> LGU initiatives in Bohol have helped make it an ideal site for ecotourism. The majority of ecotourism workers in Bohol are women and this makes it an appropriate place for empirical research into relations between

ecotourism and women’s empowerment.

## 1.2 Research Sites and Methods

### 1.2.1 Research Sites

The researcher selected two research sites among four in Bohol. The two that weren’t selected were the Pamilacan Island, a non-mangrove Ecotourism site which had a different ecotourism product from the other two which was dolphin and whale watching. The other was a newly established ecotourism site in Candijay, Bohol. The two selected sites were recommended and introduced by Ms. Dominise of the Bohol Investments Promotion Center. The two sites were selected based on their similarities in geographical area; Both have mangrove forests, and successful community ecotourism projects.<sup>10</sup> They also have women’s mobilization and participation activities, non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Peoples Organizations (POs) managed sites, and similar ethnic background.

The Cambuhat Village and River Tour project is one of the first ecotourism sites in Bohol. Moreover, it has been deemed a successful project. The project was awarded Conservation International’s excellence, and there has been a steady increase in the number of visitors to the Cambuhat site. In December 1999, 51 visitors visited the site, and by December 2004, the number of visitors increased to 480.<sup>11</sup> The location is in Buenavista Municipality in north eastern Bohol. It is surrounded by nipa mangrove forests along its river banks. It showcases rustic rural life and local management of the river, estuarine and mangrove areas. Sun Star Cebu (2004) reported that the Cambuhat River was once the ultimate dumpsite for domestic garbage and farm wastes. Cambuhat is now one of the cleanest rivers in Bohol. The municipality of Buenavista (Cambuhat) has a population of 25,960; 4,550 households; land area of 8,730 hectares; 35 barangays and is 83 Kilometers from

**Figure 1 The Island Province of Bohol and the Location of the Ecotourism Sites**



Source: Hellingman 2006.

Tagbilaran.<sup>12</sup> The barangay of Cambuhat has a population of 1,173; 225 households; farming and fishing are the major occupations; the number of PO members was 110 registered members (57 are women) in 2005.<sup>13</sup>

The second site is Community Life Tours of Maribojoc project in the municipality of San Miguel. The site is located in the south western part of Bohol, in the Abatan Watershed. The mangrove forest is in Maribojoc Bay and is known for its rich biodiversity. The municipality of Maribijoc has 16,786; 2,630 households; a land area of 5,192 hectares; twenty two barangays and is fourteen kilometers from Tagbilaran (the provincial capital of Bohol).<sup>14</sup> The ecotourism site is located in the barangay of San Vicente which has a population of 998 (572 males and 426 females)<sup>15</sup>, 153 households, and an area of 86.14 hectares.<sup>16</sup> The terrain is generally plains and the soil is classified as clay, farming and fishing are the major occupations with coconut as their, main product and corn, banana and cassava are secondary products. Most residents are engaged in seashell gathering, fish vending and other small scale business; the number of PO members 50 (14 men and 36 women) while the actual number of active members are 30 and out of this number 16 are women.<sup>17</sup>

The Maribojoc project has an organization called San Vicente Mangrove Association (SAVIMA) whose members are from different sectors in the community. The community life tour is managed by Participatory Research, Organization of Communities and Education Towards Struggle for Self-reliance (PROCESS-Bohol).<sup>18</sup> Ecotourism activities include exposure to rural life such as livelihood demonstrations, nipa gathering, weaving, and paper making, and seafood harvesting. Also, the visitor can take a river boat cruise along the Abatan River. The local tour guide educates the visitor on the vast nipa plantations and natural mangrove area. There is also a home stay program where a visitor can experience life in the area.

### **1.2.2 Interview Method**

The researcher conducted structured, open-ended, individual interviews and transcribed the interviews in July and December of 2004 with 50 respondents, of which 25 were from San Vicente and 25 were from Cambuhat. All respondents were PO members and involved in the ecotourism project, except for two who were NGO workers in San Vicente. The respondents were selected randomly, by visiting houses and community centers located in both ecotourism sites.

### **1.2.3 Basic Data of the Respondents**

The age distribution of the Cambuhat respondents is as follows, 48% were age 51 and over, followed by the age group of 46–50, which was 20%, then by the age group of 31–35 at 16%. The age group 36–40 and was 41–45 each made up at 8%. Maribojoc's age distribution was as follows, 43% were age 51 and over, while the age group of 46–50 which was 19%, then by the age group of 31–35 and 26–30 at 10%. The age group 21–25, 36–40 and 41–45 age groups were all 5%.

The marital status of the ecotourism workers from Cambuhat reveals that 76% of the respondents were married, while 20% are widows. The remaining 4% of the respondents are single.

In the case of Maribojoc site, reveals that 80% of the respondents are married, while widows and single score 10% each. This means that the majority of the ecotourism workers for both sites were married.

The classifications of respondents' occupations in Cambuhat were as follows, 40% of the respondents were housewives. While 36% of the respondents were weavers of buri and nipa and 16% of the respondents were farmers and vendors. 8% were fishermen. 4% of the respondents have small businesses like managing a Sari-Sari store, which is a mom and pop store which sells snacks, drinks, soap, and daily needs for instance, and another 4% were drivers. In Maribojoc, 38% of the respondents were housewives. While 1% of the respondents did basket weaving and nineteen percent of the respondents were farmers and vendors 14% of the respondents have small businesses and were involved in agriculture and selling products like salt and coconut oil, for instance. 19% of the respondents were organizational officials; they hold positions in the local government and NGOs, and one of the respondents is a full time student.

The completed level of education for the respondents are divided into three levels. Primary school is from grades 1-6, while secondary school is the equivalent of senior high school. Tertiary school is college and university level. The respondents in Cambuhat who only finished primary school make up 76%. While, those who completed secondary school made up 12%, and those who finished tertiary school such as collage and university, were only 12% of the respondents. The respondents in Maribojoc who finished primary school and secondary school were 43% for both. While, those who completed tertiary school such as college and university were only 14%. Most of the respondents only reached the primary school level for the Cambuhat site while the respondents in Maribojoc seem to have more secondary and tertiary graduates.

More than 60% of the respondents from both sites belong to the middle and old age group and more than 90% are married or widows. In Cambuhat the respondents who run small businesses and hold roles as organizational officers are quite few, while in Maribojoc it is 14% and 19% respectively. This seems to have some relation to the difference in educational background in the two sites.

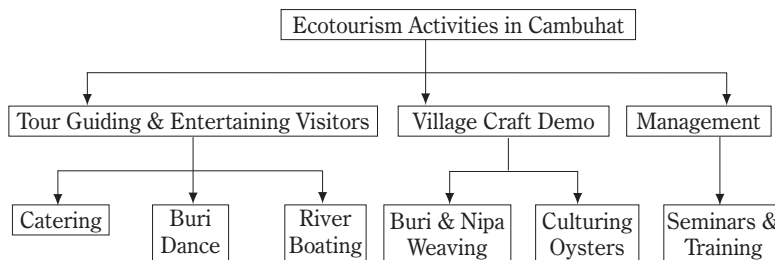
### **1.3 Women's Activities in the Ecotourism Site in Cambuhat and Maribojoc**

Women are major players in ecotourism sites in Bohol.<sup>19</sup> Sun Star Cebu (2004) reported that most of the active members in the PO are women and they play a major role in the management of ecotourism activities in the Cambuhat River and Village Tour.

Ecotourism activities are integrated in the PO annual plans and development agenda. Ecotourism in Cambuhat is composed of the activities as shown in figure 2.

The ecotourism-oyster farm business in Cambuhat is a source of income other than rice farming. They use an association and family-based approach, which they consider to be effective. Each family is given 10X50 meters of river space for culturing oysters. Women make holes in the oyster shells,

**Figure 2 Ecotourism Activities in Cambuhat**

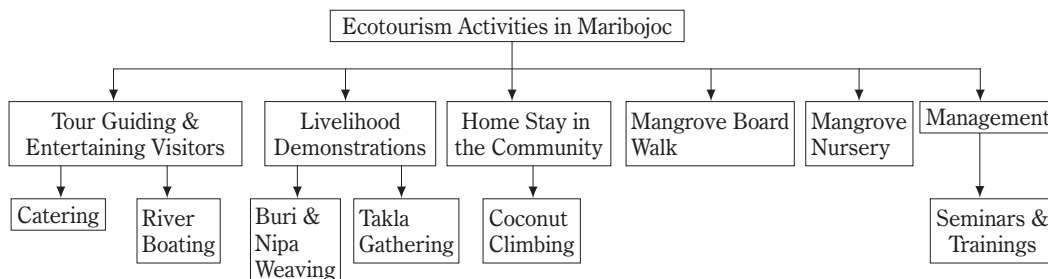


Source: Author's Research Data 2004.

attach them to a string, and the men place them in oyster beds. Women process and sell the oysters and visitors and other villagers from neighboring towns go to the site to buy the oysters and learn about the environment at the same time. The women reported a high demand for the oysters. They sell the oysters plain or salted in a bottle. In addition, cooking and catering services for the visitors are further activities that involved women. 50%<sup>20</sup> of the women interviewed said they are involved in these activities. 65% of the women are involved in various weaving activities in Cambuhat.

Ecotourism in Maribojoc is composed of various activities shown in figure 3. Culturing oysters was tried also and a loan of 20,000 Philippine Peso (378 USD)<sup>21</sup> was made but the oyster cultivation failed due to technical problems.<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 3 Ecotourism Activities in Maribojoc**



Source: Author's Research Data 2004.

Both sites make use of their mangrove environment to provide catering, weaving, and boating experiences to the visitors. Cambuhat boasts its oyster farming while Maribojoc has its Mangrove boardwalk ecotourism attraction. In addition, both Cambuhat and Maribojoc show that ecotourism is not a main source of income for members and adds little to the monthly income.<sup>23</sup>

## **2. Process of Women's Participation in Ecotourism Projects.**

### **2.1 The Role of People's Organization (POs)**

Initially, POs helped mobilize the community to form the ecotourism project. The PO's provided the necessary foundation for establishing a community ecotourism site by creating policies, organizing the people, and providing a liaison between the villagers and various outside institutions that helped develop the area. They also provided gender sensitivity workshops, training sessions, and seminars for the men and women in the community.

In Cambuhat, The Cambuhat Enterprise Development and Fisheries Association (CEDFA), essentially a rural workers' organization, has the objectives of developing the community and promoting environmental sustainability. Specifically, it aims to develop and enhance the livelihood opportunities of the members by culturing oysters and other fishery products.<sup>24</sup> The PO was organized in 1999 by the LGU of Buena Vista, Coastal Resource Management Program (CRMP) & First Consolidated Bank Foundation Inc. (FCBFI) in the form of an organization. The major occupations of the rural workers are fishing and culturing oysters, 81%, while farming and crop production at 19% is secondary.<sup>25</sup> The activities undertaken by the organization are technical training in oyster cultivation, crab cultivation and CRMP resource assessment planning/workshop. In the past, the barangay captain and his wife formed a women's organization in 1997. This was consolidated with CEDFA since it lacked quality organization and did not have a constitution. CEDFA presently manages the ecotourism initiative in Cambuhat.

SAVIMA is the PO in San Vicente, Maribojoc. Its objective is to preserve and protect the natural resources, especially the mangroves along the shoreline of the barangay. It was organized in 1995 by DENR and PROCESS-BOHOL.<sup>26</sup> The activities they implemented were team group building and mangrove rehabilitation. In addition, they also have home based mangrove nursery training.

### **2.2 The Role of NGOs and Local Government Units**

The roles of the NGOs were vital in the formation and support of the POs. For instance, NGOs helped support the SAVIMA PO. The PROCESS-Bohol<sup>27</sup> with the help of the DENR helped facilitate the formation of the PO by providing the networking and technical know-how, seminars, skill training, and management of a PO using ecotourism initiatives. They also mobilized the community and had them participate in the PO formation. In addition, the DENR facilitated team group building and mangrove rehabilitation and training, which has continued since August 1995. PROCESS-Bohol operated a home based mangrove nursery in 2002, where seedlings from the nursery are purchased by visitors to be utilized for mangrove reforestation and environmental conservation.

The LGU was involved in the formation and support of the POs. Monreal (2000) reported that CEDFA "was launched through the partnership between the local government of Buenavista which has taken



the lead in best practicing coastal management among LGUs, the Cambuhat villagers, and the CRMP.” Moreover, this ecotourism project was initiated in 1999 by the Canadian International Development Agency.<sup>28</sup> Conservation International awarded this ecotourism project the Ecotourism Excellence Award “Highly Commended Status”. It generated important benefits for the various stakeholders involved. Flores (1999: 5) said that it has served as a study tour destination, tourism generated ecotourism products, and has promoted ecotourism products by visitor’s word of mouth. More specifically, the LGU assisted in purchasing the land to be used for POs ecotourism purposes and initially gave support funding of 15,000 pesos (300 USD). The LGU also provided technical training on oyster culture in 1998 and provided a resource assessment planning workshop with the help of the community resource management project program. They also have an on going socio-economic business in culturing oysters. The oysters are one of the main attractions in Cambuhat since women cook and serve oyster products to the visitors. They also educate visitors on oyster culture and how it is beneficial to the environment.

### **2.3 The Socialization Process of Women through Ecotourism Activities**

The provision of seminars and training incentives attracted women to join the ecotourism project. 96% of the women have and presently participate in skills and training programs. There are several kinds of skills that interviewees learn, for instance, women learn new skills such as how to cook for visitors and themselves. Maria Jane said that in the past, she used to cook only tamarind soup and *Tinola*<sup>29</sup> but now she also cooks oyster omelets for home consumption and sale. The interviewees have been able to interact with the visitors through their cooking. Another initiative under the skills and training program is oyster culture (See Table 3).

Not only do the training and seminars teach the women skills but they provide women a chance to get out of their houses. For instance, Hermosela from Maribojoc said that it’s boring just to stay in the homes; its routine doing household chores and taking care of her husband and kids. She enjoys going to seminars since there are incentives such as free food and nice people while being able to learn how to improve one’s life. Women also learn how to behave cordially after attending training and seminars in ecotourism. Anuciado from Cambuhat said that ecotourism makes her happy and she smiles a lot now in comparison to the past when there were no ecotourism activities, and all she would do was just stay at home. She said that it’s lonely staying at home. In addition, this activity allows women to improve human relation skills. In the past Maria Jane didn’t know how to face people, etc., but after attending the training seminars she was able to learn how to improve her human relation skills, which made her a friendlier person. Moreover, results show that 86% of the women said that their communication skills improved.

There have been changes in relationships among women group members. 83% of women members reported that they developed closer relationships and interactions with other group

**Table 3 The Socialization Process of Women through Ecotourism Activities (Household Level)**

Positive Impact	
Knowledge and Skills	
* In the past, I used to cook only tamarind soup and <i>Tinola</i> but now I also cook oyster omelets for home consumption and sale.	(Maria Jane, Cambuhat, Age 31-35, December 2004)
* It's boring just staying at the house, its routine doing household chores and taking care of my husband and kids. I enjoy going to seminars since there are incentives such as free food and nice people while being able how to learn how to improve one's life.	(Hermosela, Maribojoc, Age 31-35, December 2004)
* I got involved in ecotourism activities by joining CEDFA. After attending the seminars, I find ecotourism to be interesting. I think ecotourism can help improve my life through educating the visitors about our oyster culture.	(Genera, Cambuhat, Age 46-60, December 2004)
Confidence	
* I used to be shy but now, I don't hide anymore at home. I can go out now and be more sociable.	(Krisanta, Cambuhat, Age 51 and over, December 2004)
* In the past, I didn't know how to face people etc. But after attending the training seminars, I learned how to be friendlier. I was able to learn how to improve my human relationship skills which made me a friendlier person.	(Maria Jane, Cambuhat, Age 31-35, December 2004)
* The training really change my attitude especially in dealing and communicating with people.	(Luchie, Maribojoc, Age 25-30, December 2004)
* I am really happy since I get to interact with other people.	(Rosita, Cambuhat, Age 51 and over, Female, December 2004)
* Ecotourism makes me happy and I smile a lot now in comparison to the past since when there was no ecotourism activities since all I would do was just at home. Its lonely staying at home.	Emelia from Cambuhat, Age 36-40, Female
Negative Impact	
* My husband gets jealous since I smile a lot outside of the house now.	(Hermosela, Maribojoc, Age 31-34, December 2004)

Source: Author's Interview Data 2004.

members compared to before they were involved with the project. Their relationships with other members of the group improved, although there were some misunderstandings which were resolved. The informants said that having a common goal makes the group closer. Juliana from Maribojoc said that she is closer to group members because they have a common goal of protecting the mangroves. Lourdes from Maribojoc said that they are closer with members of the group. She enjoys being in clusters or in groups. She is able to tell stories and exchange ideas with other people. Clarita and Florencia, both from Maribojoc, said that relationships with other group members became closer since they are able to share experiences, especially about dealing with money problems. Consequently, misunderstandings between members occur when a member would take up other member's

**Table 4 Socialization Process of Women through Ecotourism Activities (Community Level)**

Positive Impact	
Skills and Knowledge	<p>* I really don't gain much income from ecotourism but the knowledge that I gained from the seminars were priceless. I learned how to deal with people and learned how to control my own temper and patience.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Clarita, Maribojoc, Age 36-40, December 2004)</p>
Change in Relationships	<p>* I am closer with members of the group. I enjoy being in clusters or in groups. I am able to tell stories and exchange ideas with other people.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Lourdes, Maribojoc, Age 41 - 45, December 2004)</p> <p>* We are closer with other members of the group since we are able to share experiences especially about dealing with money problems.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Clarita, Age 36-40 and Florencia Age 51 and over, Maribojoc, December 2004)</p> <p>* I am closer to group members because they have a common goal of protecting the mangroves.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Juliana, Maribojoc, 51 and over, December 2004)</p> <p>* Ecotourism projects add happiness especially when we have parties.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Selerina, Cambuta, Age 51 and over, December 2004)</p>
Negative Impact	
Change in Relationships	<p>* Sometimes there are some differences in the group but they learn how to patch up the problem.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Fortunat, Maribojoc, Age 41-50, December 2004)</p> <p>* I cannot consider ecotourism as a source of income. Although the organizations have provided us loans and sometime when tourists come in we receive daily wages, it is really not enough.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Antonia, Cambuhat, Age 50 and over, December 2004)</p>

Source: Author's Interview Data 2004.

scheduled to entertain visitors. This means that the opportunity that can be gained from interacting with visitors is lost for the scheduled member. This dilemma is usually resolved in due time and the PO leader intervenes when necessary.

Women looked forward to the interaction with visitors. 91% of the women interact with visitors in the ecotourism sites. While 72% were involved with entertaining visitors. Acabeso from Cambuhat sometimes sets aside her household work to accommodate the visitors. Meeting with visitors is considered to be leisure time. Maria Jane was very happy since she learned how to entertain visitors rather than staying at home. Parties also provide a venue for women to socialize, and are one of the activities that women look forward to. 89% of the women participated in parties. In addition, interactions with the visitors and group members help women develop their people skills. 80% of the women gained know how in dealing with people. Moreover, visitors can access and learn about the mangroves via the SAVIMA Boardwalk which is a wooden and bamboo structure built from the mainland connecting the small islet passing through the mangrove area. Candida from Maribojoc introduces to the visitors the different species of mangroves. Florencia also from Maribojoc, shares

her knowledge about mangrove protection. She hopes that the mangroves continue to be reforested so that in the future she will be able to see it intact. Women who were mobilized in the ecotourism activities have good feelings towards the activities they do together, enjoy interactions with the visitors and environmental continuousness is promoted among the women and the visitors.

In addition, in the past PO members were very shy and not proud of the area they lived in. The above-mentioned account of women demonstrated that women gained confidence and self-esteem by socializing with one another and with the visitors and not through income, in contrast to previous studies. Now, they are willing to share their barangay with outsiders.<sup>30</sup> In particular, women develop pride in themselves and the habitat where they live. 57% of women take pride in the habitat where they live.

The socialization processes of women through ecotourism activities help women learn new skills and get to improve their communication skills. Ecotourism projects helped develop the self-esteem of the women by giving them more confidence and making them less shy to interact and deal with people.

#### **2.4 Political Participation of Women in the Ecotourism Project**

Women members are able to participate in political activities in the ecotourism project. This takes place when women members choose and decide to become members in the PO. The research results from both sites show that 98% of the interviewees get engaged in ecotourism through their initial membership in the PO. For instance, Genera got involved in ecotourism activities by joining CEDFA. She thinks that ecotourism can help her improve her life through educating visitors about culturing oysters.

The positive impacts of ecotourism projects on women's empowerment at the household level shows that because of ecotourism activities, women are able to participate and are able to go outside of the house, but some husbands get angry and jealous when their wives participate in ecotourism activities.

Decisions in the organization are made in a democratic manner. Decision making at the SAVIMA and CEDFA POs is done by its members and committees, and its policies are driven by the elected board of directors and officers. Maria Jane of Cambuhat said that CEDFA provides them the opportunity to vote and is democratic in nature. Emelia from Cambuhat, a housewife explained that her life changed by involving herself in the ecotourism project; she was now able to attend meetings every month and involve herself in the democratic process of voting.

Women take up leadership roles when they get involved in ecotourism activities. Particularly, women are involved in the ecotourism decision making process. Interviews from both sites reveal that 98% of women are involved, and vote, in the decision making process at the PO. For instance, Rosalio from Maribojoc, became the village chief executive. She spends her time on administrative work and ecotourism activities. She said villagers were now doing things they previously did not know they

**Table 5 Political Participation of Women in the Ecotourism Project. (Household Level)**

Positive Impact	
Skills and Knowledge	<p>* I share the experiences and lessons that I learned from the seminar with my husband. He is supportive of me. My husband is interested to know what is new and he would do the housework when I attend seminars.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Aguilina, Maribojoc, Age 51 and over, December 2004)</p>
Participation	<p>* If it weren't for ecotourism projects, I would just stay at home and take care of the kids.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Arcena, Cambuhat, Age 31-35, December 2004)</p> <p>* Because of ecotourism income, she was able to have her children study. It helps her feed her children. Her children and husband help her do household work.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Genara, Cambuhat, Age 45-50, December 2004)</p> <p>* I enjoy ecotourism activities since my husband always gets mad at me so, I was able to go away and take refuge from my husband. Moreover, since my husband is a member of the group, he understands what participating in ecotourism activities is something good for the community.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Krisanta, Cambuhat, Age 51 and over, December 2004)</p>
Negative Impact	
Participation	<p>* Sometimes my husband gets angry when I go to the meetings. He thinks that I am enjoying myself too much while he thinks that I should be doing household work.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Emelia, Cambuhat, Age 31-35, December 2004)</p>

Source: Author's Interview Data 2004.

**Table 6 Political Participation of Women in the Ecotourism Project (Community Level)**

Positive Impact	
Power	<p>* CEDFA is democratic in nature, we can all for a vote.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Maria Jane, Cambuhat, Age 31-35, December 2004)</p> <p>* My life changed by involving myself in ecotourism projects, I am now able to attend meetings every month and involve myself in the democratic process of voting.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Emelia, Cambuhat, Age 31-35, December 2004)</p> <p>* I became the village executive chief. I spend most of my time on administrative work and ecotourism activity. I am more dedicated now to serve my villagers with my uttermost service.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Rosario, Maribojoc, Age 50 and over, December 2004)</p>
Negative Impact	
Power	<p>* There are misunderstandings sometimes with group members. For instance, they would take over the time slot of the others in order to serve the visitors even though it's not their assigned time slot.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Nina, Maribojoc, Age 50 and over, December 2004)</p>

Source: Author's Interview Data 2004.

were capable of doing. Her ambition in the past was to make her village known and appreciated, and this is slowly becoming a reality.<sup>31</sup> In the PO, women not only participate in activities but also participate in the decision making process. However, there are some negative impacts of ecotourism projects at the community level. There are misunderstandings sometimes among group members about time schedules and money.<sup>32</sup>

## **2.5 Development of Environmental Consciousness among Women**

Consciousness in regards to the environment was promoted through seminars and trainings activities. Jorax from PROCESS-Bohol, working in the Maribojoc site, reported that women are more aware of the environment and know how to manage it. Interviews reveal that 87% of the women said that they clean the ecotourism area. Emelia from Cambuhat said that PO members monitor the cleanliness of the ecotourism site. The seminars helped Irenia from Cambuhat know how to protect the environment. Emelia cleans the roads when she knows that visitors are scheduled to arrive. Women in particular increased their environmental consciousness about the river. Lydia in the past threw trash in the river but now she refrains from doing that. There is a municipal ordinance now to prevent this act. There are also information drives since the PO members don't want people to get into trouble, so they conduct environmental campaign drives around the area.

The women also remind others about protecting the environment. Irenia helps in protecting the environment by not cutting wood anymore. She reports those who cut trees to the barangay captain. Rosita said that she is more aware of the environment and that the area became cleaner, the mangroves increased, and there is no more illegal fishing. Kristana from Cambuhat gets mad at people who cut wood and shoot birds. Now, when planting mangroves she realizes that it takes a long time for wood to grow. Alconin from Cambuhat said that there has been a great change in the way she regards nature. In the past, no one could stop local folks from stealing trees, but now she values its protection. She also said that when ecotourism was introduced, the interviewees learned how to preserve the environment. She says that preservation helps keep the environment beautiful and lessens the fear of floods. She now tells the other inhabitants to preserve the environment and reminds them of its importance. These gatherings provide a venue for women to socialize, share and consult with one another while promoting environmental consciousness.

The ecotourism seminars and training also helped women protect the environment by planting flowers and mangroves. Findings indicate that 39% of the interviewees are involved in planting. In the past, Fortuna didn't know how to plant flowers. She was taught how to do this and presently she voluntarily plants in the community at her own expense. Genera from Cambuhat never used to plant at home but she now plants a lot because she lives around the ecotourism site and wants to make her neighborhood attractive to foreigners.

In regards to planting mangroves, Florencia from Maribojoc said that tourists also can save the

mangroves by purchasing mangrove seedlings for visitors at a price of three pesos (.06 cents USD) for one potted seedling or 30 centavos per propagules. In addition, women changed their environmental consciousness in regards to animals and birds, Alconin from Cambuhat said that now people don't kill birds anymore. Kristana also from Cambuhat gets angry at people who shoot birds. The women developed respect for fauna.

In regards to marine life, Juliana from Maribojoc used to unintentionally kill coral not knowing that it had life. Women have been practicing conservation activities after their involvement in the ecotourism project. Interviews show that 98% of the women said that they do engage in conservation practices at an individual level.

The PO established the mangrove nursery in Maribojoc as part of the ecotourism project for the protection of the environment, since the biodiversity of the mangrove species deters pests and diseases, attracts a healthier variety of bird wild life, and supports a richer marine ecosystem and a healthier mangrove forest. Moreover, one member Julian, remarks that in the late 1960s, all the mangroves were cut and more than 150 hectares of mangrove were lost. 54 hectares were granted to the PO for ecotourism purposes. He said if the PO had not been organized all of the mangroves might be gone today.<sup>33</sup> The mangrove nursery provides ecotourism visitors seedlings that can help in rebuilding the mangroves. SAVIMA members know the importance of the mangroves. Most of the planters are women and they continue to plant seedlings because they know how much it can help them in the future.

### 3. Conclusion

The above-mentioned analysis of ecotourism projects in the two sites of Bohol Province indicated how women were empowered through their participation, process in ecotourism activities. Thus, the author concludes the process of women's empowerment in the following points.

First, women were initially mobilized by outsiders, namely the PO, NGO, LGU, and villagers themselves to participate in the ecotourism project. The PO's ecotourism projects also have provided women access to political power by giving them leadership roles. Women have taken up leadership roles when getting involved in ecotourism activities and have started to participate in the decision making of organizations. Moreover, POs have encouraged women to protect the environment. The establishment of the mangrove nursery, environmental cleaning, flower and mangrove reforestation and visitor education at the ecotourism sites have promoted environmental consciousness for the women. In addition, other activities such as environmental monitoring activities by the women in both sites have promoted environmental consciousness since it enforced awareness to the inhabitants in the project site.

Second, the women were interested in the ecotourism activities. The training sessions and

seminars promoted socialization activities which encouraged and promoted the interest of the women to interact with the visitors. The process of socialization brought about changes in relationships among women. The condition of having a common goal of developing the community through ecotourism projects made the group members closer to one another. Moreover, training and seminars, and interaction of women with other members and visitors also encouraged women to take initiatives and increased knowledge in protecting their environment.

Third, in ecotourism projects Women gained confidence and self-esteem to some extent by socialization. Women developed pride in themselves and the area where they live, communication skills, and know-how in dealing with people. Having high self-esteem is important since it provides courage to try new things and the power to believe in oneself, as well as the capacity to respect others and be respected.

There are several factors that have supported the socio-political empowerment of women in Bohol. First, participatory activities were started by the establishment of people's organizations in both sites, namely the SAVIMA and CEDFA with the support of the government. Secondly, women can obtain additional income from the project. Thirdly, before the project, the women just stayed in their houses. Lastly, men have developed support for their wives. Although informants revealed that some men were initially hesitant about letting their wives go out of the house to participate in ecotourism projects, in due time, upon learning that ecotourism projects benefit the community, they began to support their wives' involvement in ecotourism activities.

However, it is necessary to be cautious of the following factors that may threaten women's socio-political empowerment. Specifically, the researcher noticed that transparency in the ecotourism project transaction is necessary to avoid misunderstandings among members. Moreover, there was insufficient not enough income, jealousy among the women and negative attitudes of husbands,

Thus, applying Weinberg's (2002: 375-376) argument to women's empowerment in ecotourism, successful ecotourism projects have a smooth socio-political participation process with support from NGOs and the government. Moreover, ecotourism improves the environmental consciousness of local women. However, there are some different features between the sites. Women in Cambuhat talked more about skills and political participation; and women in Maribojoc talked more about socialization. This seems to have some relation with the differences in occupation and activities of the ecotourism projects. Further research is needed in these areas.

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## Notes

- 1 Business World 1996; UNEP Industry and Environment 2001: 22; Conservation International 2003; The Department of Tourism 2003; United States Agency for International Development 2004.
- 2 Rodolfo 2003: 7; Philippine House of Representatives: 2003: 30; The National Ecotourism Steering Committee 2002.



- 3 Libosada (1998: 108).
- 4 New Zealand to fund P75-M RP ecotourism LGU projects. 2004. Downloaded on September 1, 2004 from (<http://www.gov.ph/news/default.asp?newsid=5291>)
- 5 GMA pushes Bohol as RP's primary tourism growth area.  
Downloaded on September 1, 2004 from (<http://www.gov.ph/news/default.asp?newsid=1654>)
- 6 National Ecotourism Steering Committee: 2002.
- 7 National Statistical Office of the Philippines, National Ecotourism Steering Committee (2002: 49)
- 8 Bohol Province Home Page. 2004. <http://www.bohol.gov.ph/index1.htm> downloaded on June 9, 2004.
- 9 Libosada (1998: 104).
- 10 In Reference to community ecotourism, Libosada (1998: 104) mentioned that a significant evolution of ecotourism in the Philippines is the concept of Community Ecotourism which is basically run and controlled by the local people of a particular destination.
- 11 Data taken from Cambuhat visitors logbook 2004.
- 12 Bohol Philippines Website.  
Downloaded from (<http://www.bohol.ph/municipality.php?id=39>) on November 9, 2005.
- 13 Research Data 2004 and recent update on CEDFA courtesy of H. C. on November 11, 2005.
- 14 Bohol Philippines Website.  
Downloaded from (<http://www.bohol.ph/municipality.php?id=39>) on November 9, 2005.
- 15 This information was provided by Ms. Delia Solis of PROCESS by e-mail on November 15, 2005.
- 16 Barangay San Vicente Website.  
Downloaded from (<http://www.bohol-island.com/maribojoc/about/sanvicente.htm>) on March 13, 2006.
- 17 Researcher Data 2004 and Hellingman 2006.
- 18 PROCESS-Bohol works for empowerment of fishing and farming communities. Women's empowerment is one of its main programs. (Process- Bohol. 1994. PROCESS-Bohol, Inc. Brochure. Tagbilaran: PROCESS-Bohol)
- 19 Interview with Ms. Jorax Tutor from SAVIMA. 2004.
- 20 Research Data 2004: Respondents Interview. n= 53 people interviewed, 7 people were not included in the calculations since they were male and NGO workers. Formula = Total no. of responses/46 (100%)
- 21 Using current Philippine Peso to US Dollar Exchange rates downloaded from (<http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&q=20%2C000+philippine+pesos+in+usd>) on January 25, 2006.
- 22 Personal Interview with Julina Amarille from Maribojoc, December 2004.
- 23 Personal Interview with Irenia Anasco, Arcena Anedez, Emelia Anesco, Antonia Anuciado, from Cambuhat and Fe Almedilla, Julina Amarille from Maribojoc, December 2004.
- 24 Cambuhat Enterprise Development and Fisheries Association Constitution and By-laws. 1999. Cambuhat, Buena Vista Bohol.
- 25 Cambuhat Enterprise Development and Fisheries Association Rural Worker's Organization Profile. 1999. Cambuhat, Buena Vista Bohol.
- 26 PO Profile Form, PROCESS-Bohol Foundation. 1996.
- 27 PROCESS-Bohol, Inc. is involved and stands for participatory research, organization of communities, and education towards struggle for self-reliance. (Process- Bohol. 1994. PROCESS-Bohol, Inc. Brochure. Tagbilaran: PROCESS-Bohol Inc)
- 28 One Ocean (2004) explained that CRMP was created to provide technical assistance and training to coastal communities, local government units, non-governmental organizations, and national governments agencies to promote improved management of costal resources in the Philippines.
- 29 Traditional chicken soup.
- 30 Personal Interview with Genera Augis, Teotima Arigo, Concordia Anyora, Cirila and Crecen Aparce from Cambuhat, December 2004.
- 31 Personal Interview with Rosalio Arocha from Maribojoc, December 2004.
- 32 Personal Interview with Remedios Ihalas, Nina Palomares, Leonara Rubillar from Maribojoc, December 2004.

33 PROCESS-Bohol 1994.

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