

Philippines Ecotourism Programme Review

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| Report Title | Philippines National Ecotourism Programme Phase II: Participatory Monitoring Review |
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Background

From 2001 to mid-2004 the New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID) funded an ecotourism programme implemented by the management services consultant (MSC), Tourism Resource Consultants (TRC). TRC worked in partnership with the Philippines Department of Tourism (DOT), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Ecotourism Technical Working. Broader oversight and policy direction was provided by the National Ecotourism Steering Committee. Subsequently, NZAID and Philippines agreed to support a Phase II of the National Ecotourism Programme for four years from July 2004 to July 2008. The implementing agencies are the DENR (lead) via its Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau (PAWB) and the DOT. Overall strategic direction and oversight is the role of National Ecotourism Steering Committee, with technical advice/monitoring from Ecotourism Technical Working Group. NZAID also supports a Continuing Links Programme (CLP) through a three year contract between NZAID and the Phase I MSC (TRC), with the bulk of inputs provided by a Philippines based consultant.

The programme goal is: “to mainstream ecotourism into Community Based Resource Management as a means to improve livelihoods and manage natural and cultural resources in a sustainable manner”. The major components are:

1. establish ecotourism businesses and visitor services
2. establish advocacy and coordination of the National Ecotourism Strategy (NES) within DENR and DOT
3. establish product development and marketing at site, regional and national levels.

The total NZAID contribution to the Phase II is NZ\$1.1 million over 2004-2005 to 2007-2008. The CLP MSC Programme cost NZ\$280,000.

Purpose and Objectives

The objectives of this participatory review, involving stakeholders, are to:

1. assess progress made by the NZAID supported intervention towards achievement of the Phase II programme goal, strategic objectives and individual activity objectives/outputs
2. assess the programme's development impact to date
3. consider any lessons from the programme and NZAID involvement which might be relevant to future NZAID and Philippines work in ecotourism.

Main Findings

Project Progress: the Review found that the project has started to make progress towards the project goal in a number of areas but, overall, progress has been slower than anticipated. A number of positive results have emerged and need to be further enhanced and sustained. Progress towards establishing ecotourism businesses and visitor services (objective one) has been slow. Although progress was noted towards implementation of NES (objective two), much of it has been through activities not directly related to the project. Adequate progress has been made in the areas of ecotourism standards and monitoring of the NES, as well as in developing training modules and support for development of a national ecotourism forum/network. Progress has also been made towards the marketing of ecotourism products (objective three); however product development within the banner sites has been limited.

The Review found that the project-related performance of the DENR and specifically the PAWB has been satisfactory. The implementation of the project has been a learning and capacity building experience for the PAWB staff. Difficulties in project management were due to:

- slow internal procedures, slow reporting and acquittal by the regional teams
- conflicts between stakeholders at a site level
- lack of project management experience
- lack of ecotourism enterprise skills
- changes in key personnel, particularly at a senior level.

Difficulties in project implementation have also arisen due to a lack of senior level engagement with the project by DENR and several changes within the Department's senior management during the period.

The DOT has provided a useful supporting role throughout the project, including working with DENR at a policy development and site level. Senior management within DOT appear to have engaged in the project activities and outcomes. Positive feedback on the CLP was noted, but the Review found that, at times, the CLP inputs have not delivered effective outcomes. The less-hands on approach of the CLP, together with the level of senior DENR management engagement, have contributed to implementation delays and insufficient focus on the key goal and objectives.

Project Impacts: impacts are only starting to emerge due to delays in starting activities, and implementation will continue for 14 months. Current data collection practices will make it difficult to identify impacts going forward, and needs to be addressed by the implementing agency and the CLP consultants.

The level of economic impact varies significantly across sites depending on the level of implementation. Generally economic impacts are low and only starting to emerge as income generating opportunities are established. There is some evidence that the project has mobilised additional investment at some sites; for example, significant private sector investment is taking place at Sapang Bato (Phase I site) and Local Government Unit investment is taking place or committed, at HINP (Phase I site),

Lake Sebu and Mt Mayon (Phase II sites). There is a need to further consolidate and ensure sustainability for emerging income generating opportunities. For the Phase I sites, there is evidence that part-time, formerly employed people are working more and longer hours due to project interventions. There is however significant scope for increasing employment generation, if the fledgling enterprises are sustained and improved.

All participants of the project training programs claimed increases in their social status, mostly due to the new-found level of confidence brought about by an increase in their skills, their membership in organisations supported by the project and their exposure to people outside their community. The project highlighted their potential to contribute to their household incomes and their empowerment as productive members of their community.

The project has not had any negative environmental impact in the banner sites. In Lake Sebu, HINP, Sapang Bato and Pamilacan banner sites, environmental improvement occurred due to the enhancement of the ecotourism products. In sites where Indigenous People (IP) groups were present, impacts on these groups were positive, given the direct targeting of IP groups as project beneficiaries. The project has had positive impacts on targeting women beneficiaries for most sites, albeit at varying degrees.

The project has achieved some capacity building at a central agency level. At a banner site level, there was a mix of successes and challenges as far as institutional cooperation among other stakeholders was concerned.

Future Phase II Program: the Review found that, in line with existing agreements, DOT should take over as lead implementing agency from July 2007. The project should refocus on the original goal and objectives, building sustainability into those outputs which are partially complete and where successful outcomes are starting to emerge. Where outputs have not been successfully completed, where conflicts have occurred, or where activities will not directly support the achievement of the goal and objectives in the time remaining for the project, they should be excluded and resources reallocated.

It is envisaged that the focus of the activities for the remaining period will be at a banner site level, where there is a need to support the existing income generating opportunities developed in Phases I and II. There is also a need to build upon some of the earlier policy development successes, in particular to support the implementation of the ecotourism training modules and the development of an implementation process for the ecotourism standards.

Potential Future NZAID Intervention: the Review Team considers that there is justification for a more detailed assessment of a further intervention by NZAID, although its precise nature and the delivery mechanism need careful consideration.

Key Issues and Learning for NZAID

At the Operational Level

The project's sustainability at a banner site level is a concern, with fledgling income generating opportunities needing continued support and direction. Whilst particularly relevant for the Phase II sites, it also applies, to a lesser extent, to the Phase I sites.

There is a noticeable difference between the efficiency and effectiveness of delivery of Phase I and that of Phase II. Existing local consultation and input mechanisms need to be strengthened, where these exist. There is evidence that the NES and project implementation structures both duplicate existing ones.

A change in lead agency role offers the advantage of securing ownership, but this is outweighed by the disadvantages of losing momentum, leadership consistency, long-term ownership, agency commitment and capacity building.

The ongoing funding of maintenance by DENR of the facilities being developed under the project is a sustainability concern, particularly at Raja Sikatuna Protected Landscape, and Mt Mayon, where the project has an infrastructure focus.

Level of Development Practice

The importance of focused design and careful site selection: the Review considered that the project's design lacked focus, was overambitious in a number of areas and required more careful site selection. Some of the sites selected had not identified potential community-based ecotourism opportunities and some did not have stakeholder consensus on the way forward. This resulted in broad objectives and project resources being thinly spread over a wide range of activities and in the inclusion of some sites that did not yet meet selection criteria.

Gender equality: the project has been successful in being gender and IP inclusive in most of its activities. It has successfully targeted IPs in areas where they live and included them as project beneficiaries, particularly in the income generating projects at Lake Sebu and Sapang Bato. There is a positive gender balance in the majority of activities undertaken reflecting project management teams being briefed on the gender requirements and a proactive gender recruitment policy.

Follow-up

The Review recommended enhancing the project's monitoring. As a result CLP and DOT have completed the design of surveys, to be piloted before June 2008. The recommendation to conduct an independent financial audit will be considered as part of the mid-term review. The project has agreed to conduct an audit of one site. The recommendations to focus, for the remainder of the project, on sites where successful outcomes are emerging and to continue ecotourism training and implementation of ecotourism standards at these sites was discussed at a planning workshop and a focus on two sites was agreed. The recommendation to transfer lead agency responsibilities to DOT has been implemented and NZAID agreed to extend the CLP to focus on technical advice rather than management support. NZAID also agreed to work with Government of the Philippines to consider a future ecotourism intervention.