



# Sustainability of a local government-instituted ecotourism development: Tayak adventure, nature and wildlife Park in Rizal, Laguna, Philippines

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## Abstract

Ecotourism development is a strategy of the Philippine Government. The existence of untapped natural resources and cultural/heritage assets has impeded the expansion of ecotourism. This situation is exacerbated by the literary deficit where a specific aspect has mainly been overlooked—the maintainability of small/medium-scale enterprises once already put in place. Against this backdrop, the study explores and understands the sustainability of TANAW Park's Ecotourism Enterprise of Rizal Municipality. Using a case study design, the article delineates the circumstances to fathom out the local ecotourism development. Firstly, the leadership is the top-down driven in the initiative, but in maintaining, the bottom-up manner is more significant. Secondly, the financial issue is complicated, so ideal is continuing the government agencies and integrating the commercial businesses. Thirdly, the Holy Week events are a single-month focal point, thus regularly extending the supplementary activities can increase revenue. Fourthly, TANAW Park is strategic if connected to the critical neighbouring towns and nearby resources. Lastly, TANAW Park's strengths lie in the presence of the unusual intermixing of assets, and the weaknesses are the risks of becoming a "white elephant project." In whole, TANAW Park is a noteworthy and tangible contribution to the local government and the people of Rizal.

**Keywords** Ecotourism Development · Local Government · Philippines · Rizal Municipality · Sustainability · Tayak Hill Adventure · Nature and Wildlife (TANAW) Park

## 1 Introduction

Tourism is a major industry of the Philippine economy, rendering a reliable source of revenues, foreign exchange earnings, investments and jobs for the country. Since 2009, the tourism sector's contribution to the domestic economy has been steadily growing,

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posting around 10.1, 10.7, 12.2 and 12.7 percent to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018, respectively (PSO 2019a; PSO 2018; PSO 2017; PSO 2016; see also Dela Santa, 2018; Yu, 2012). The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), which researched the economic impact of travel and tourism, has registered significant increases in its key indicators (i.e. direct/total contribution to GDP, direct/total contribution to employment, visitor exports and investments) for the Philippines in 2016, 2017 and 2018 (WTTC 2019; WTTC 2018; WTTC 2017; see also Wu & Wu, 2019; Holik, 2016). The Philippine Government's strategy for tourism development is currently underpinned by ecotourism, particularly the sustainable tourism of cultural heritage and natural resources. Since the concept was introduced in the late 1980s, ecotourism has transformed into a dominant tourism category in the Philippines over the years. The ecotourism expansion has been precipitated by the inherent competitive advantage of having the abundance of natural resources and cultural/heritage assets in the country (Roxas, 2015; Sicat, 2019). Presently, ecotourism is responsible for more than half of the international tourist arrivals in the country, and its sector is expected to grow most rapidly in the next two decades (NESC-ETWG, 2014; Henderson, 2011).

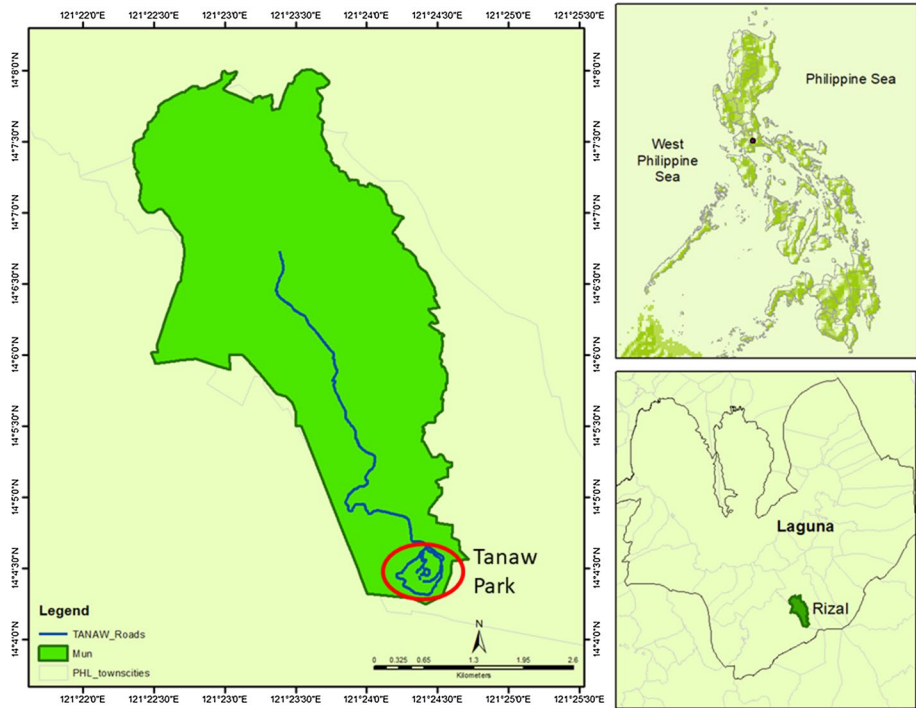
With the growing concern for sustainable development, ecotourism is acknowledged worldwide as a national development strategy in promoting environmental/cultural conservation, and inclusive economic growth (ASEAN 2015a; UNWTO 2013; UNEP-WTO, 2005; see also Dela Santa & Saporantos, 2016). This preference has evolved through the years, from the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the United Nations' Declaration of the International Year for Ecotourism in 2002, and the United Nations resolutions in 2010 (i.e. the implementation of the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, the promotion of ecotourism and the importance of sustainable tourism for Small Island Developing States) to the present—the United Nations' proclamation of 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. In the Philippines, ecotourism was elevated into a development agenda of the country in the 1990s. In 1991, the Department of Tourism (DOT), in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Tourism Organisation (WTO), formulated the Philippine Tourism Master Plan (TMP) which embraces the principle of sustainable tourism development following the 1987 Brundtland Commission Report (NESC-ETWG, 2002; UN-WCED, 1987; see also Maguigad, 2013). In June 1999, Executive Order (EO) 111 put in place the government's organisational structure for ecotourism development in the country (i.e. creating the so-called EO 111 bodies: the National Ecotourism Development Council [NEDC], the National Ecotourism Steering Committee [NESC], Regional Ecotourism Committees [RECs] and the Ecotourism Technical Working Group [ETWG]) and mandating the formulation of the first National Ecotourism Strategy 2002–2012 (NESC-ETWG 2002; see also Dela Santa, 2015). In October 1999, the First National Ecotourism Congress (i.e. the Bohol Ecotourism Congress) furnished a broad but explicit definition of ecotourism (i.e. “ecotourism as a form of sustainable tourism within a natural and cultural heritage area where community participation, protection and management of natural resources, culture and indigenous knowledge and practices, environmental education and ethics, as well as economic benefits, are fostered and pursued the enrichment of host communities and satisfaction of visitors”) (NESC-ETWG, 2014). In 2009, Tourism Act (or Republic Act 9593) formally set forth tourism as an engine for socio-economic development and instituted a collaborating framework for the DOT and the Department of the Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) in developing ecotourism sites in the country. At present, the National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan 2013–2022 serves as the country's road

map for enhancing competitiveness and expanding the ecotourism market of the country (DOT, 2018; NESC-ETWG, 2014).

Despite the abundance of natural resources and cultural/heritage assets suited for ecotourism, the Philippines remains lag behind among ASEAN countries and midpoint in the Asia–Pacific average on tourism’s absolute contribution to GDP (WEF, 2019; WTTC, 2018; Yu, 2012). This observation is apparent in the tourist arrivals category where the Philippines places only sixth out of the ten ASEAN member countries (ASEAN, 2017; Holik, 2016; ASEAN, 2015b). This subpar performance indicates that the country still has a lot to do in developing ecotourism, despite the steady growth in recent years. A key factor impeding the expansion of ecotourism in the country is the presence of untapped natural resources and cultural/heritage assets in many localities which many are either unidentified, undeveloped or underutilised (e.g. Alampay, 2005; Bagadion & Juan, 2015; Brillo, 2016a; Brillo, 2016b; Brillo, 2020; Brillo Quinones et al., 2017; Guerrero, 2000; Libosada, 1998; Roxas, 2015; DOT, 2012; DOT, 2011;). This fact particularly applies to the lower-class municipalities and rural communities where small and medium-scale ecotourism remains in infancy stage despite the Local Government Code of 1991 and the Tourism Act of 2009 which mandate the local government units to develop and promote tourism in their respective areas (DOT, 2014).

The imbalance exacerbates the situation in the literature of ecotourism development. Since the late 1990s, the academic literature has given substantial attention to ecotourism. The scholarly works are heavily concentrated on three broad-ranging and overlapping categories. The first category discusses/elaborates the concept of ecotourism and its evolution in the country (e.g. see Ramos, 2015; Calanog et al., 2012; Sinha, 2012a; Alampay, 2005; Alampay & Libosada, 2003, Alampay & Libosada, 2005; Garrod, 2003; Guerrero, 2000; Libosada, 1998). The second category focuses on outcomes (i.e. the effects and impacts) of ecotourism undertaking (e.g. see Manalo, 2017b; Dion II et al., 2016; Cular, 2015; Aguila & Ragot, 2014; Jalani, 2012; Quicoy & Briones, 2009; Oracion & Hiponia, 2009; Quiros, 2007; Carter, 2004; Tongson & Dygico, 2004). The third category assesses the potentials and challenges of ecotourism endeavours (e.g. see Anastacio & Brillo, 2020; Brillo, 2016c, Brillo, 2016d, Brillo, 2017; Brillo et al., 2017; Boquet, 2017; Manalo, 2017a; Bagadion & Juan, 2015; Bansil et al. 2015; Castillo et al. 2014; Orale, 2014; Sinha, 2012b; Henderson, 2011; Roy, 2010; Okazaki, 2008; Pine et al. 2007; Cruz, 2003; Elixhauser et al. 2003; Ploeg & Taggueg, 2003). On the whole, these rough classifications of literature illustrate that a particular aspect of ecotourism development has mainly been overlooked—the sustainability of established small/medium-scale enterprises (SMEs), specifically ecotourism projects in the lower-class municipalities and rural communities. Although some scholarly works touch on this aspect, the discussions are mainly in general terms or the cases utilised are well-established (or traditional) ecotourism destinations (e.g. Boracay, Puerto Princesa and Donsol). Consequently, this literary deficit indicates little discussion and understanding of the sustainability of SMEs once already put in place—that is: How can an established local government-instituted ecotourism enterprise maintain development? With the recent proliferation of small/medium-scale ecotourism sites (government-led or private sector-led) at the municipal level of the country, this observation signifies the need to supplement the existing literature through empirical case studies on the nitty-gritty of locally established SMEs.

Premised above, this study looks into the ecotourism development experience of a fifth-class municipality. In particular, the article explores and understands the sustainability of a local government-instituted SME—the Tayak Adventure, Nature and Wildlife (TANAW) Park of Rizal Municipality in Laguna Province of the Philippines (see Figs. 1, 2, 3 and 4).



**Fig. 1** Tayak Adventure, Nature and Wildlife (TANAW) Park and the Municipality of Rizal in the Province of Laguna, Philippines (Source: PhilGIS, Philippine Statistics Authority, and ASTER Global Digital Elevation Model)



**Fig. 2** TANAW de Rizal Park's Ecotourism Development



**Fig. 3** Tayak Hill, TANAW Park and Tayak Road ( Source: Google Earth)

The recently named TANAW de Rizal Park is the major ecotourism project of the Municipal Government and is aimed to be the distinctive town's emblem. Although TANAW Park has been featured in mainstream and social media, the academic journal articles on this ecotourism development have been mostly absent. The study is outlined as follows: (a) description of the status and the contextual aspects of TANAW Park; (b) assessment of TANAW Park's ecotourism enterprise; (c) discussion of the facilitating–impeding factors in TANAW Park's sustainability; and (d) the conclusion and implications.

## 2 The criteria for analysis

Following qualitative research, this study utilises a case study design in exploring and understanding the specifics of locally instituted ecotourism development—the TANAW de Rizal Park. The status-contextual aspects, the assessment of ecotourism enterprise and the facilitating–constraining factors in TANAW Park's sustainability are delineated the circumstances to fathom out the local ecotourism development. Data are generated through key informant interviews, site observations and documentary research. The information is analysed from the criteria: (a) the contemporary evolution of TANAW Park; (b) the measure set by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) for tourism development, specifically, accessibility (or the existence of adequate transportation infrastructure, access and tourism facilities) and resources (or the natural, agricultural, historical and cultural tourism assets); and (c) the facilitating and impeding aspects of maintaining TANAW Park. Incidentally, the UNWTO serves as a specialised agency of the United Nations responsible for the promotion of responsible, sustainable and universally accessible tourism (UNWTO, 2017). These attributes are fundamental in the undertaking, establishment and sustainability of TANAW Park's ecotourism enterprise. Moreover, these criteria are in line with the relativism or constructivism perspective, which intends to understand and explain the specific context (rather than aiming a “universal law”) (e.g. Crotty, 2004, also



**Fig. 4** TANAW de Rizal Park in the Philippines (Sources: Philippine Statistics Authority, and ASTER Global Digital Elevation Model)

see Summer & Tribe, 2008). In other words, each ecotourism development undertaking offers a distinct experience and operates in its particular circumstances which influence the enterprise's decisions or causes (e.g. see Brillo, 2008, Brillo, 2010, Brillo, 2014; Pedrana, 2013; Reich, 2002; Cheong & Miller, 2000).

As a concept, ecotourism development is broadly defined in the study as sustainable tourism of natural resources and cultural/heritage assets, which are intended to promote

socio-economic improvements in a locality (e.g. see Brillo, 2016c; UNWTO, 2013; UNEP-WTO 2005; Wood, 2002; Weaver, 2001; Acott et al., 1998). This ecotourism development definition aims to be inclusive (rather than restrictive) and sensitive to the progress capacity of many lower-class municipalities in the Philippines (as imposing strict definition [such as “hard ecotourism” or “deep ecotourism”] would disqualify the majority of SMEs in the country). Consistent with the ecotourism development’s inclusive criterion, an SME is defined as a limited size ecotourism project (i.e. the capitalisation range from PhP 3–100 million (USD 61,802,757.00- USD 206,009,190.00).<sup>1</sup> and employs around 10–199 workers [Aldaba, 2012; SMEDC 2003]) that is established by local stakeholders (i.e. local government units, community organisations/cooperatives, local nongovernmental organisations or private individuals) in a municipality (usually lower-class) or rural community. As a limitation of the study, the research does not tackle the environmental science sustainability but is mainly concerned with the political, economic and cultural aspects of the local ecotourism development.

### 3 The status and contextual aspects of TANAW Park

TANAW Park is an ecotourism development located in the distant Sitio Malaseña, Barangay Tala, Municipality of Rizal, Laguna. It is about seven kilometres away from the town proper and is situated in the south of Mount San Cristobal and the east of Mount Banahaw. The principal aim of the TANAW Park is to enhance Rizal Municipality into a popular tourist destination in the Province of Laguna. The broad-ranging purposes of the ecotourism enterprise are to generate revenue for operations and development, to impress a distinct identity of the municipality and to provide livelihood opportunities to the local community. The TANAW Park is the centrepiece of Tayak Hill (locals call it ‘Tilos’ or ‘Parang’), a naturally raised area of land that provides a scenic panorama of Rizal town proper, Nagcarlan Municipality, Liliw Municipality, San Pablo City and the majestic Mount San Cristobal. The TANAW Park is covered by the central area of 24 hectares and surrounded by various forest and forestland as follows: Open Access (35.487 hectares), Protected Area (6.814 hectares), National Greening Program Site (152.858 hectares) and the Malabanban–Cabunsood Watershed Forest Reserve (31.914 hectares). The land resource of the Park is under the administrative authority of the local government via the Local Government Code of the Philippines (see Republic Act 7160). On the ground, the TANAW Park is under the supervision of the Barangay Officials of Tala, and assisted by members of the Santo Niño Agroforestry Farmers Association and the Citizen Armed Force Geographical Unit (CAFGU) in maintaining and securing the place (OFR, 2016).

TANAW Park’s project was set in motion due to development. The primary context was the socio-economic and the identity issues on the Municipal Government, which impedes economic growth. In the socio-economic issue, Rizal Municipality is considered inadequate in development being merely a fifth-class town in income and the second at the bottom in the population [17,253 censuses in 2015 (PSO, 2015); 20,425 projections in 2022 (DOH 2018)] among the 24 municipalities of Laguna Province (see PSO 2019b). In the financial profile of Rizal Municipality in 2018, the assets and the revenue, PhP 95,572,000.00 and PhP 73,657,000.00 (USD 1,969,154.00 and USD 73,657,000.00), respectively, are in

<sup>1</sup> \*Exchange rate (2020): 1 PHP=0.0206009 USD.

the last and the second-to-last among the municipalities of Laguna (see COA 2019a). In the competitiveness index of Rizal Municipality in 2019, the overall rank is 293, which is 11th out of 18th among third-class municipalities (i.e. third- to sixth-class, see DTI-CB 2019). In terms of Barangays (i.e. the smallest administrative division), Rizal Municipality has 11 Barangays, of which all of them are rural areas that are predominately agriculture. As regards to Internal Revenue Allotment or IRA (i.e. the local government's share of revenues from the national government), Rizal Municipality received PhP 48,990,582.00 (USD 1,009,307.00) in 2016 and PhP 20,209,041.00 (USD 416,364.00) in 2017, which are the lowest and second-lowest among all municipalities of Laguna (see BLGF 2019). In the identity issue, the Municipality of Rizal has been missing its distinct recognition—for a long time, this town has been little known (often erroneously as a Rizal Province), and its tourism trademark has been absent. For instance, both neighbouring towns of Rizal have made promotional emblem; San Pablo City has the Seven Crater Lakes, and Nagcarlan Municipality has the Underground Cemetery, while Rizal Municipality is lacking. On the whole, these circumstances urged the Municipal Government to address the enduring issues immediately.

The Municipal Government evolved TANAW Park's project with the intent to develop Tayak Hill into a full-fledged ecotourism centre. After the 2010 elections, one of the priorities of the new administration was to accelerate the local development. The elected Mayor and Vice Mayor were more open to use new ideas in enhancing the municipality's low status. One of the plans looked into by the Municipal Government was to initiate an ecotourism enterprise in Tayak Hill. This idea was based on the recognition that Tayak Hill is a historical landmark (see Batangrizal, 2011a; Inquirer, 2014). Upon this, the Municipal Government (via the Vice Mayor) set in motion the preliminary steps for establishing ecotourism development. The initial undertaking was the launching of the awareness and information campaign among the local people, and synchronising the local government's overall development strategy to include Tayak Hill's ecotourism project. In 2011, the Municipal Government embarked on the groundwork of the project, which promoted the label as Tayak Adventure and Nature Park and the Landing Point (Batangrizal, 2011b). In 2012, the Municipal Government formally launched the ecotourism enterprise by publicising the official name as TANAW de Rizal Park. The local government elevated TANAW Park into the flagship tourism project and envisioned a broaden ecotourism enterprise, which includes a nature park, an adventure-sports activity and agritourism. TANAW Park also incorporated a religious component in ecotourism development such as putting up a giant cross and an image of the Madonna on the hill's peak. On the whole, the Municipal Government via the Municipal Tourism has commenced the campaign to promote the ecotourism enterprise.

#### 4 The assessment of TANAW Park's ecotourism enterprise

Accessibility in tourism refers to a function of a distance from the population centre, which serves as tourist markets and transit that imply whether a destination can be straightforwardly reached or travelled (Medlik, 2003). This entails that accessibility is affected such as the length of the trip by tourists, the presence of transportation infrastructures and the cost of reaching the visitors' destination, which essentially links the people with the tourism resource (UNWTO, 2011; Tóth & Dávid, 2010). For TANAW Park, accessibility mainly applies to adequate transportation infrastructure, access and tourism facilities,



which are considered as the fundamental prerequisite in developing and maintaining the ecotourism enterprise.

In transportation infrastructure, TANAW Park through Tayak Road is 6.7 kms away from the Rizal Municipality using the Nagcarlan-Rizal Highway via Barangay Talaga; and only around 17 min drive from the town proper using a private vehicle. Using San Pablo City (via Pan-Philippine Highway) to the South Luzon Expressway (SLEX), TANAW Park is 102 kms going to the Metropolitan Manila (i.e. National Capital Region) and 99 kms (i.e. approximately two-hour plus drive) away from the Ninoy Aquino International Airport or NAIA (the main airport of the country). The Tayak Road from Barangay Talaga to Barangay Tala has been incrementally paved by concrete since 2011. The Municipal Government was able to utilise the Farm-to-Market Roads program of the Department of Agriculture (DA) under Republic Act 8435 or the Agriculture and Fishery Modernization Act of 1997. The local government also launched the construction of the entrance road and the cementing of the step's pathway to TANAW Park. Also, the Municipal Government sought external support in building supplementary infrastructures. For instance, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) supplied solar panels for electricity supply, and the World Bank (WB) provided a loan to support the construction of the tourist centre.

In access, specifically travelling or visiting TANAW Park, the road condition from the main Highway (i.e. Metropolitan Manila or SLEX) going to Rizal Municipality is straightforward and manageable; while from Tayak Road to TANAW Park, although not entirely completed, but considerable has been finished at present. In the past, Tayak Hill's community was sporadically visited by the townsfolk since the area is difficult to travel, mostly reached by foot or horseback due to the up-sloping and undeveloped road. Now, going to TANAW Park's undulating terrain via a vehicle and proceeding to the view deck of Tayak Hill via hiking are rudimentary and easily accessible. Even taking public transportation (i.e. renting a tricycle or vehicle) going to TANAW Park is reachable, available and reasonable.

In tourism facilities, the infrastructure of TANAW Park is categorised into three groups— adventure, nature and wildlife areas. Among the most important tourism infrastructure by the Municipal Government is the Noah's Ark, considered as the central attraction of TANAW Park. Beyond that, the basic facilities of TANAW Park, such as the information centre, pavilion, hotel and restaurant, view deck, parking space, camping area, directional signage and public restrooms, have already established. From 2014 up to 2018 (31 December), the disbursements of funds show the construction of tourism information centre/green restroom and the completion of TANAW Park via DOT are PhP 3,500,000.00 (USD 72,110.00) and PhP 10,994,112.00 (USD 226,508.00), respectively, and the flooring of Noah's Ark at TANAW Park via the Provincial Government Fund is PhP 499,469.00 (USD 10,290.00) (COA 2019b). At present, the ecotourism enterprise plans to construct supplementary amenities, such as the overpass, mini zoo, camping area, botanical garden, massage hut, clubhouse, greenhouse, environment centre, bamboo village, terraced organic vegetable farm, tree houses, Guadalupe church, cable car, ecotourism road, evaluation centre and livelihood centre (Municipality of Rizal, 2019). The aim is to expand and boost tourism by giving visitors more opportunities to look into TANAW Park.

Resources in tourism refer to the range and quality of the assets, whether the natural, cultural and other resources of the destination (see UNWTO 2011). The resources are the main components in developing a goal into a prime attraction, which serves as the basis for drawing people to a tourist area as well as the anchor in establishing the tourism services (Benur & Bramwell, 2015). Also, the assets are comprised of improving the tourism area with the intent of enhancing the competitive advantages,

the services or products to be offered, and the cultivation of prospective markets. For TANAW Park, resources primary means the natural, agricultural, historical and cultural assets that create attractions and activities to stimulate the tourists to visit the ecotourism enterprise.

In natural asset, TANAW Park is blessed by natural resources where the vicinity is ample of scenery. Being the highlight of TANAW Park, Tayak Hill is elevated about 720 m above sea level that offers a picturesque view of the northern part of Laguna Province, Laguna Lake, Rizal town proper, Nagcarlan Municipality, Liliw Municipality and the Seven Lakes of San Pablo City. While the Southern and the Eastern part of TANAW Park showcases the impressive landscape of Mount San Cristobal and Mount Banahaw, respectively. For visiting, Tayak Hill is accepted as ideal for watching and adventure-sports activities (e.g. biking or cycling, running or marathon, hiking and camping), whereas Mount San Cristobal and Mount Banahaw are both recognised as suitable for local amateur mountaineers and trek tourists.

In agricultural asset, the terrain of TANAW Park is surrounded by various forest and forestland where 227 hectares are within the protected buffer zone of the Mounts Banahaw-San Cristobal Protected Landscape. This forest area is co-managed by the Rizal Municipality and the DENR for the reforestation program under the Executive Order 26 of 2011 or the National Greening Program (NGP). As part of the reforestation activities, the DENR, with the asset of the Santo Niño Agroforestry Farmers Association, planted around 100,000 indigenous and fruit trees throughout of Tayak Hill. Also, TANAW Park is predominantly agricultural land, so the surrounding areas were generally used for vegetable farming (e.g. radish, cabbage, chayote) and agroforestry (e.g., lanzones, rambutan, banana, pineapple). With these—combining reforestation, agriculture and livelihood, TANAW Park is evolving similar to an agritourism, where tourists are drawn to visit its expanding agricultural operations or activities.

In historical asset, Tayak Hill, being the main feature of TANAW Park, is a historical site. Since 2011, the local government moved to authenticate and recognise the landmark as well as shared the awareness-information campaign. The historical accounts signified the importance of Tayak Hill (known as Sitio Tayak) in World War II (i.e. the Japanese occupation of the Philippines), where the area was utilised as a headquarters of a local guerrilla unit (Filipino-American Irregular Troops [FAIT]) and an improvised airstrip and drop zone for supplies (from the United States Armed Forces) (see Hernandez, 1982; Batangrizal, 2011c; Dwiggin, 2011). With this justification, Tayak Hill imparted an identified historic place by the town, while TANAW Park provided the historical trademark, which can enhance tourism destination.

In cultural asset, TANAW Park is beyond nature, adventure and wildlife recreation by including a religious constituent. In the past, a pilgrimage to Tayak Hill is a traditional practice during the Lenten Season, especially the Christian devotees and local sightseers. So to embrace that opportunity, the Municipal Government integrated a significant religious element into the ecotourism enterprise by erecting a 30-foot concrete cross (i.e. Crucifix) and a shrine of the Madonna del Ghisallo (i.e. Patroness of Travelers or Cyclists) on top of Tayak Hill. Also, the Municipal Tourism Office launched an exuberant campaign to promote TANAW Park's religious constituent (and historic site) in the mainstream and social media. At present, Tayak Hill has worked well in rousing interests and attracting tourists. In fact, the peak tourism of TANAW Park is during the Holy Week where crowds of people visit the area.

## 5 The facilitating–constraining factors in TANAW Park’s sustainability

The leadership of the Municipal Government has been the driving force in the development of TANAW Park. From 2010 to the present, the political leaders of Rizal Municipality have been the prime mover of the ecotourism enterprise’s agenda from envisioning to implementation. So, the initiative to the establishment of TANAW Park, the local government has been top-down driven, where efforts of the local executives are crucial. Being the top-down manner is reasonable considering the ecotourism enterprise is novel and extensive. Novel since it is the first time to establish in Rizal town, and extensive since it integrates the adventure, nature and wildlife park apart from the historical and the cultural assets. Moreover, bearing in mind the limited time of office (i.e. the election of the Mayor and the Vice Mayor takes place every 3 years) in planning and completing the project, then the top-down manner was somewhat acceptable. Consultations with communities were less practised at the start of TANAW Park’s ecotourism project. For example, the consultation meetings were not held to discuss the possible direction or the effect in the implementation, but merely to present or inform the community, on the onset of the project. But in the present, TANAW Park needs to modify by augmenting the involvement of the townspeople, especially the members and officials of Barangay Tala. Since ecotourism enterprise is already established, the bottom-up driven should be adjusted and employed more since the undertaking right now requires local people (i.e. around 40 families are living or farming within the vicinity of Tayak Hill) and managing works (i.e. operations, marketing and finance). So, utilising the same (top-down manner), the political leaders of the local government can be jeopardised since the ecotourism enterprise’s situation, and tasks are now different— from establishing to maintaining TANAW Park. Community participation is one crucial aspect that ensures sustainability of any ecotourism endeavour. Since lack of tourism personnel is one identified problem, the local people and/or farmers of Rizal may be trained and tapped for the operation and management of the TANAW Park. After undergoing ecotourism skills training (e.g. park interpretation, environmental conservation, waste management), they can serve as local tour/trek guides, hosts for homestay, providers of local transportation, emergency response team, and even staff to man the buildings and information centre in TANAW Park. The local people of Rizal can be involved to manage and sustain the ecotourism enterprise and more importantly, act as partners to resolve conflicts and challenges rather than by the local government alone.

Completing the primary and supplementary facilities and maintaining the ecotourism enterprise of TANAW Park have complications— both issues are the financial matter. In completing the amenities, the Municipal Government has finished the main facilities such as the Noah’s Ark (i.e. the principal attraction), gazebo, pavilion, stone trails, the station of the cross, tourism information centre and green restrooms, but the remaining facilities, such as the hotel and restaurant (i.e. completed but not yet operationalised), clubhouse, greenhouse, environment centre, bamboo village and mini zoo, are still incomplete (Municipality of Rizal, 2019). In the past, the government agencies, such as DA, DOT, ADB, WB and Provincial Government, have contributed to building the infrastructures, but at present, the ecotourism enterprise needs more linkages and external support. This is critical in requiring steady assistance to complete TANAW Park since Rizal Municipality has limited funds being a small-scale local government (e.g. in the asset, revenue and IRA, Rizal Town is in the last and the second-to-last among the municipalities of Laguna [see BLGF, 2019; COA, 2019a]). Right now, although the government agencies persist in providing the ecotourism enterprise, the private sector, specifically the big commercial businesses

outside Rizal Municipality, seems to be lacking. The big commercial businesses can contribute to assisting the remaining facilities of TANAW Park and create more employment opportunities to absorb the local people of Rizal. One of the immediate and basic needs in the area is the provision of electricity and ample supply of water. There is no electricity in the area and its natural springs often dry up especially during the dry season (April–July). Although the local government has plans to augment these basic needs, partnerships with businesses that provide alternative sources of electricity (e.g. solar energy/harvesting) and tap other sources of water (e.g. rainwater harvesting) are worth looking into. Commercial enterprises may also explore to act as partners in the establishment of a livelihood and/or trading posts so the local people/farmers can both sell agricultural produce to visitors and neighbouring towns. Partnerships with established tour operators in the country can also be explored as they can help promote to local and international tourists and organise TANAW Park visits whole year round. With this, it is important for the Municipal Government to explore and connect the big companies, whether entering or inviting the ecotourism enterprise. Thus, the preference in TANAW Park is the local government maintained by the government agencies and integrate the commercial businesses into a regular part.

In maintaining TANAW Park, the Municipal Government started the soft operations in 2015 via Executive Order 15 (effectively 1 February) where a promotional package fee of PhP 30.00 (USD 0.21) per visitor (entrance fee), with additional PhP 10.00–30.00 (USD 0.21–0.62) for parking and PhP 5.00 (USD 0.10) for restrooms. From these collections, the ecotourism enterprise has generated around PhP 202,600.00 (USD 4,174.06) annual gross income. In 2018, TANAW Park started to pay the total loan amount of PhP 5,138,000.00 (USD 105,856.48) from the WB, where the Principal is PhP 358,000.00 (USD 7,375.79), and the Interest is PhP 1,476,000.00 (USD 30,409.66) (COA, 2019b). The Outstanding Balance of the loan is PhP 4,780,000.00 (USD 98,464.04), which is a long-term liability that the Rizal enterprise will have to pay every year until completed. So, juxtaposing the proceeds of the ecotourism enterprise's revenue and the maturing debt of the loan's principal and interest, evidently, TANAW Park solely is not enough to remunerate without the support of the Rizal Municipality. With this, there is a need to improve the revenue's generation of the ecotourism enterprise to be self-sufficient and slowly reduce the subsidy of the Municipal Government. The subsidy is normal and vital in starting the enterprise, but it must be temporary and not permanent since the goal is to make TANAW Park self-reliant and not perennial dependent to the local government.

One way to augment the revenue is the concern of the paramount tourist attraction—the Holy Week events. Since in the past, the Holy Week tradition (i.e. Palm Sunday through to Easter Sunday) in Tayak Hill occurs regularly, and TANAW Park has served as the main tourist festivities. The festive events of the ecotourism enterprise constantly influx the visitors, making it the peak month and the highest earnings. But the issue is that the Holy Week events are a single highlight season—1 month, and the rest—11 months are off-season. The slack of TANAW Park is lengthy, so Rizal Municipality needs to offer beyond that to make it consistent for the whole year, and thus, expand the enterprise income. In maximising, the ecotourism enterprise must have regular events that are unvarying in the calendar, such as marathon and cycling events that could bring publicity and people to TANAW Park, in particular, and Rizal town, in general. Also, since most local people in the area are farmers, the local government can provide trainings on organic farming, and hold regular and well-publicised events (e.g. food festivals to promote local wine “lambanog” and local delicacies, fresh fruits/vegetables picking, Farmer's Day, town's fiesta) to both showcase the produce and boost both influx of tourists and municipal revenue. Thus, if the timetable

in Rizal Municipality is stable, then the demand outside (i.e. domestic and international market) of the town, as well as the revenue, can be gradually induced in time.

Strategically, TANAW Park needs to connect the crucial neighbouring towns and nearby resources. In the essential towns, the ecotourism enterprise requires to link the two municipalities—San Pablo City and Nagcarlan Municipality. Both towns are larger in market demand and have long been established assets in tourism compared to Rizal Municipality (e.g. San Pablo has the Seven Lakes and Nagcarlan has the Underground Cemetery and Bunga Falls). So linking them, TANAW Park and the Municipal Government can invoke the spread effects by swaying the prospering areas to support ecotourism enterprise. In pivotal resources, TANAW Park can supplement the two natural assets—Nalagalas Falls (in Barangay Tala) and Calibato Lake (in Rizal Municipality's side). Both natural resources are in the same area and untapped assets for a long time by the local government. Development in terms of accessibility and resources guided by the UNWTO standards can be considered by the local government as potential added attractions, and at the same time promoting environmental conservation and protection. In tying-up, TANAW Park, with the two natural assets, can harness and augment the ecotourism enterprise and increase the opportunity to expand the tourism area of Rizal Municipality.

TANAW Park has multiple resources—the natural, agricultural, historical and cultural assets, which can be utilised to stimulate the ecotourism enterprise. The Rizal Municipality has designated the venture as an inclusive park comprising an adventure, nature and wildlife recreation, as well as integrating sports activities, an agritourism, a historical site and a pilgrimage event. The strengths of TANAW Park are supplying the unusual intermixing of assets that arouse interests, which can provide multiple earnings. On the other side, the weakness of TANAW Park is instituting an enormous agenda that offers numerous assets. This is uncertain to be realistic on costs and revenues in the long run, and limited on market and finance being an SME enterprise. The local government can fulfil the intent plan, but must be cautious on sustainability. That is, they must make certain that the flow of people is continuous in visiting TANAW Park. The risk is to avoid being a "white elephant project" where the government venture is finished but costly and fails to live up the expectations. One way to evade this is to group the different ideas of the ecotourism enterprise and analyse the most important via expected earnings, then prioritise the main and focus on that.

## 6 Conclusion and implications

The study explores and understands the sustainability of TANAW Park's Ecotourism Enterprise of Rizal Municipality. In specific circumstances, the main intent is to develop the ecotourism enterprise into a well-known destination in the Laguna Province, and to generate revenue for operations, inscribe a distinct identity of the town and provide livelihood opportunities to the community. The key to TANAW Park's project is the socio-economic aspect and the identity issues that hinder the economic growth of the local government. In assessment, the ecotourism development is evaluated in terms of the accessibility, specifically the existence of adequate transportation infrastructure, access and tourism facilities, and the resources, specifically the natural, agricultural, historical and cultural assets. The accessibility of TANAW Park is essential in developing and maintaining the ecotourism enterprise. The transportation infrastructure and access are accessible, reachable and reasonable, while the tourism facilities have

been satisfactorily established. The resources of TANAW Park are vital in inducing the attractions and activities to visit the ecotourism enterprise. The natural asset is ample of landscape and ideal for watching and adventure-sports activities. The agricultural asset is encompassing forest area and agricultural land, which are excellent for reforestation activities and agritourism. The historical asset is a distinct landmark that endows an exemplary trademark to the project and the town. The cultural asset is a religious constituent that is the Lenten Season, which functions well in drawing visitors.

The facilitating and impeding aspects are tackled in sustaining the local ecotourism enterprise. One, the leadership of Rizal Municipality is the driving force in developing TANAW Park. The Municipal Government has been top-down driven from the initiative to the establishment of TANAW Park. But in maintaining, the bottom-up manner is more significant since the ecotourism enterprise's situation, and tasks are now different. Two, the financial issue is complicated in completing and maintaining the facilities of the enterprise. The limited funds are due to being a small-scale town, and the big commercial businesses are deficient. The ideal scenario is continuing the government agencies and integrating the commercial businesses into a regular component. Also, the revenue and the maturing debt are not enough to remunerate without the support of the Municipal Government. The remedy is to augment the revenue's generation to be self-sufficient and gradually reduce the subsidy of the local government. Three, the Holy Week events are the highest visitors and earnings of the ecotourism enterprise. But this festive occurrence is a single-month focal point where the remaining months are off-season. Thus, Rizal Municipality entails extending the supplementary events regularly to increase the venture's revenue. Fourth, TANAW Park is strategical if connected to the critical neighbouring towns and nearby resources. The two adjacent municipalities are larger in market demand and have well-established assets, and the two natural environments are linked area and untapped assets. Both municipalities can invoke the spread effects by swaying the prospering localities and extend the opportunity to expand the tourism area. And last, TANAW Park's strength is the presence of the unusual intermixing of assets—an adventure, nature and wildlife recreation, with integrating sports activities, an agritourism, a historical site and a pilgrimage event. The enterprise's weaknesses are the risks of becoming a "white elephant project" where instituting numerous agenda that cannot be sustained due to the costs over earnings and the limited capacity of the market. The practical way is to categorise the different assets and focus on the priorities emphasising the sensible proceeds.

Overall, TANAW Park is a noteworthy and tangible contribution to the local government and the people of Rizal. Noteworthy, since the ecotourism enterprise has de facto accepted the undertaking, dealt the identical concern and addressed the socio-economic issue. Tangible, since TANAW Park's project has been slowly trying to enhance the livelihood opportunities and elevate the town's status. Despite mediocre in the past to drawbacks in the present, the Rizal's enterprise has markedly put in place, and thus, making the fifth-class municipality proud. In the broader theme, the ecotourism development of TANAW Park serves as encouragement and direction to other localities, especially the SMEs and the lower-class town. It can provide information to improve the development of small/medium-scale enterprises and offers a guide to harness the underutilised or untapped natural, historical and cultural assets of municipalities. Also, it intends to augment the database on ecotourism development in the Philippines and abroad, particularly the omnipresent practice and the distinct experiences. Moreover, the research embraces the conviction that SMEs are an effective way to foster inclusive growth and shared prosperity in the countryside, where the proportion of the people is generally indigent.

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