

**How is Ecotourism Governed?  
The National Ecotourism Strategy (NES) of the Philippines<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

The governance of ecotourism in the Philippines has significant implication beyond conservation and sustainable tourism as is commonly understood. This paper presents an analytical assessment on the political and administrative dimension of the national ecotourism strategy (NES) implementation in the Philippines, within the context of a local community-based governance context. The study found out that the NES institutional arrangements are complex and confusing that institutional roles that govern ecotourism in the country abound. This is largely because of the national conceptualization of ecotourism is too expansive as it integrates a branch of nature tourism, a segment of sustainable development, and a component of mainstream tourism. This is on top of the national-local government-civil society-private sector dynamics in policy development, regulation and management. This paper concludes that there is need for a local governance strategic framework, which allows local multiple actors to have a higher stake in ecotourism with strong emphasis on the development of local institutions.

**1. Introduction**

Ecotourism is the fastest growing sector of one of the world's largest industries—tourism (Amaro 1999, cited by Weinberg, Bellows and Ekster 2002; Panos 1997, cited by Scheyvens 1999 cited by Jones). Compared with mass or mainstream tourism, ecotourism is touted as providing better sectoral linkages, reducing leakage of benefits out of the country, creating local employment, and fostering sustainable development (Belsky 1999; Khan 1997). Thus, it has been popularly promoted as a means of reconciling ecological conservation with economic development, particularly in developing countries (Campbell 2002 as cited by Jones 2005). Based on the 2000 figures, tourism accounted for 10% of the global economic production and 10.6% of the global workforce. In the Asia-Pacific region alone, it generated US\$2.5 trillion of the total Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation demand (10.5% of total APEC regions' GDP) and its direct and indirect impacts support 8.1% of the total jobs in the region (Rodolfo 2003). The Philippines is regarded as one of the top 25 biodiversity hotspots in the world in view of high percentage of endemic plants and animals, which are threatened by extinction (NES, 2002) making ecotourism one of the fastest growing tourism niches in the Philippines. Its promise of sustained environmental, social and economic gains makes ecotourism the preferred type of development for different tourism organizations (Alampay, 2003).

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In the Philippines, ecotourism is viewed from the National Ecotourism Strategy (NES) which rests on the pillars of sustainable management of natural and cultural resources; environmental education and conservation awareness; empowerment of local communities; and development of products that will satisfy visitor needs and position the Philippines as a globally competitive ecotourism destination (NES, 2002).

The complex understanding of ecotourism as conceptualized in the NES determines how ecotourism is governed. Ecotourism governance from its expansive conceptualization has become intricate and further, as Maitland, 2006 observed, ecotourism is “managed in a variety of different ways even within the same national or community situation, and no single administrative or executive model for its creation can be deduced.” Thus, a developed strategy on ecotourism deserves a worthwhile analysis like that of the Philippines’ NES, which was developed in 2002. The purpose of this paper is to consider the governance issues in implementation and examine institutional arrangements governing the NES from a local governance perspective.

## **2. The National Ecotourism Strategy (NES) of the Philippines**

### **2.1 Origins of Ecotourism Governance in the Philippines**

The origins of ecotourism governance can be classified from three conceptual understandings- a branch of nature tourism, a segment of sustainable development, and a component of mainstream tourism. In 1991, the Department of Tourism (DOT) in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Tourism Organization (WTO) prepared the Philippine Tourism Master Plan (TMP). Among the objectives established by the TMP is the positioning of the Philippines as a world-class tourism destination under the guiding principle of sustainable tourism development. In 1992, a National Tourism Congress took up this theme and the concept of “ecotourism” was introduced in the Philippines. Between 1994 and 1998, a series of regional seminars discussed the sustainable tourism and ecotourism concepts (NES, 2002).

The foray of the Philippines in ecotourism is an expression of support to international treaties. It can trace its beginnings from the awareness created on the state of environment from the 1972 Stockholm Human Environment Conference where environment issues were articulated, creating a global concern for conservation and a market niche for nature tourism. This marked the beginning of ecotourism but was largely limited to progressives, academician’s conservation learning experiences and in general nature lovers’ adventure with nature. The Brundtland Commission’s benchmark thinking about the global environment established the sustainable development component in ecotourism. Executive Order 111 was issued thereafter, establishing the formal structures in governing ecotourism in the Philippines.

In addition, ecotourism is also viewed as a component of mainstream tourism where it became part of travel organizations and stakeholder’s advocacy and social concern. The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) published their own Code for Sustainable Tourism in 2001. It urged to conserve the natural environment, respect local cultures, maintain environmental management systems, conserve and reduce energy, eliminate wastes and pollutants. This was an offshoot of the industry’s application of Agenda 21.

The formal structure governing ecotourism through EO 111 adopted in 1999 makes it even ahead put side-by-side Asia Pacific tourism industry action through PATA's Code of Sustainable Tourism in 2001.

Table 1 summarizes the origins of ecotourism in the Philippines

**Table 1. Concept of Ecotourism Origins in the Philippines**

<b>Ecotourism Origins</b>	<b>International Treatise</b>	<b>Substance</b>
Initial foray of SD principles in tourism	UN Conference on the Human Environment	Beginnings of sustainable development paradigm thru the global articulation of environmental and developmental issues in Stockholm, 1972
	UN World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), Brundtland Commission, 1987	The UN World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) made recommendations for long-term viability of human society. Became the benchmark for thinking about the global environment
Concept of ecotourism was introduced in the Philippines	National Tourism Congress. The Department of Tourism (DOT) with the UNDP) and the World Tourism Organization (WTO), 1991	Preparation of the Philippines Tourism Master Plan the positioning of the Philippines as a world-class tourism destination under the guiding principle of sustainable tourism development
Public consciousness on the state of environmental degradation	Earth Summit, 1992 Rio de Janeiro	Generation of high level of public awareness on the degradation of the environment and calls for the principles of equity, citizens' participation, empowerment of women, youth and indigenous peoples. <i>Agenda 21: Program of Action for Sustainable Development</i> , identified ways by which various stakeholders can operationalize the actions called for.
Tourism industry call for integration of sustainable development in tourism	World Conference on Sustainable Tourism Development, Lanzarote 1995	"Tourism development shall be based on criteria of sustainability, which means that it must be ecologically bearable in the long term, economically viable, as well as ethically and socially equitable for the local communities" (Aronsson, 2000).
Translation of Agenda 21 in tourism	Agenda 21 for Travel and Tourism Industry, 1996	World Tourism Organization (WTO), the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), and the Earth Council produced the document Agenda 21 for Travel and Tourism Industry: Towards Environmental Sustainable Development calling for establishment of mechanisms for the implementation of sustainable tourism practices, participatory decision-making, and the interdependence of tourism and peace, among others
Formal national organizational ecotourism structure introduced	National Executive Order (EO) 111, June 17, 1999 was issued in the Philippines	The EO 111 is the formal organizational policy guidelines for the development of ecotourism in the Philippines with the objectives of developing and promoting sustainable tourism.
Asia Pacific Tourism industry recognition of ecotourism as a mainstream tourism market niche.	Code for Sustainable Tourism, 2001	Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) and APEC published their own <i>Code for Sustainable Tourism</i> . It urged to conserve the natural environment, respect local cultures, maintain environmental management systems, conserve and reduce energy, eliminate wastes and pollutants.
Inclusion of sustainable tourism development specifically ecotourism, as a strategy to reduce poverty.	World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 2002	Poverty as main cause of environmental degradation and social problems.
Adoption of the National Ecotourism Strategy (NES) as a contribution on the International Year of Ecotourism (2002)	The National Ecotourism Strategy of the Philippines, July 2002	The NES is a guide to planners, developers, decision-makers, public and private entrepreneurs and the academe as well as government and NGOs including donors working on sustainable tourism development.

## 2.2 The National Ecotourism Strategy (NES) of the Philippines

The Philippines as one of the top biodiversity hotspots in the world in view of high percentage of endemic plants and animals, which are threatened by extinction. Recognizing

these diverse natural and cultural resources of the country, Executive Order (EO) No. 111 was issued on 17 June 1999 to establish the guidelines for ecotourism development in the Philippines. As articulated in EO 111, the State shall develop and promote sustainable tourism while enjoining the participation of the Filipino people in enhancing the growth and competitiveness of the Philippine economy; and, the State shall ensure the sustainable use, development, management, protection and conservation of the country's environment and natural resources and cultural heritage for the enjoyment of the present and future generations. These two major policies established ecotourism governance in the Philippines.

EO 111 created a National Ecotourism Development Council (NEDC), composed of the Secretaries of Tourism, Environment and Natural Resources, Interior and Local Government, Trade and Industry, Finance, Education, the Secretary-General of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and representatives from the private sector and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Under the NEDC, a National Ecotourism Steering Committee (NESC) and Regional Ecotourism Committees (RECs) were established to implement programs and activities approved by NEDC. EO111 also called for an Ecotourism Technical Working Group (ETWG) to provide technical and administrative support to the NEDC and the National Ecotourism Steering Committee (NESC).

The EO111, provided the setting of a national ecotourism strategy formulation for the promotion and development of ecotourism in the Philippines. The NES is founded on the vision to advocate, foster, coordinate, monitor and mobilize support for ecotourism. It specifically aims to: promote and mobilize support for ecotourism from all sectors- government, businesses and general populace; develop a culture of tourism among the local people; institutionalize community participation in planning, development, implementation and monitoring of ecotourism projects; promote environmental education and ethics; develop capability of LGUs and local entrepreneurs; facilitate domestic and foreign investments to fill in facilities requirements; and develop globally competitive ecotourism products for quality visitor experience; ensure benefits redound to the local community.

The NES provides the integrated management plan for a comprehensive direction for the future of ecotourism by recognizing issues and problems for its sustainable development. The NESC through the assistance of New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID) spearheaded the preparation of the NES. Regional stakeholder's consultation and national planning workshops were conducted by NESC, RECs and NZAID that provided the venue for key stakeholders to contribute in the planning process as well as elicit issues, concerns and recommendations.

### **2.3 Institutional Roles in the National Ecotourism Strategy**

Under the NEDC, the NESC and the Regional Ecotourism Committees (RECs) were established to implement programs and activities approved by NEDC. EO 111 also called for an Ecotourism Technical Working Group (ETWG) to provide technical and administrative support to the NEDC and the NESC. All of the grouping are referred to and collectively known as EO 111 Bodies.

The main responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the NES rest with the EO 111 Bodies- the NEDC, the NESC, the REC and the ETWG. The NEDC's role is to provide the policy direction for ecotourism guided by the NES as basic framework in formulating policies,

guidelines, rules and regulations. Any changes to the NES will have to be approved by the NEDC.

The NESC is the working committee of the NEDC tasked in reviewing REC progress regular reports from RECs and other implementing agencies; Advocate the key sites concept and promote banner sites as images for international and domestic tourism promotion; Approve action plans for ecotourism development in the key sites; Encourage the RECs to undertake product development and marketing within and along the networks of key sites; Undertake assessment of projects for accreditation; Approve major ecotourism projects; Lobby for the enactment of legislations in support of ecotourism; Coordinate with concerned agencies/ institutions/ organizations in the implementation of the NES.

The RECs are tasked to prepare action plans for ecotourism development at key sites for approval of the NESC; Advocate and promote the key sites in coordination with concerned agencies/ institutions/ organizations; Provide advice and assistance in the development of key sites; Approved minor ecotourism projects; Recommend legislation, agenda and proposal to the NESC in support of ecotourism development; Lobby for the enactment of ordinances and resolutions in support of ecotourism at the local levels.

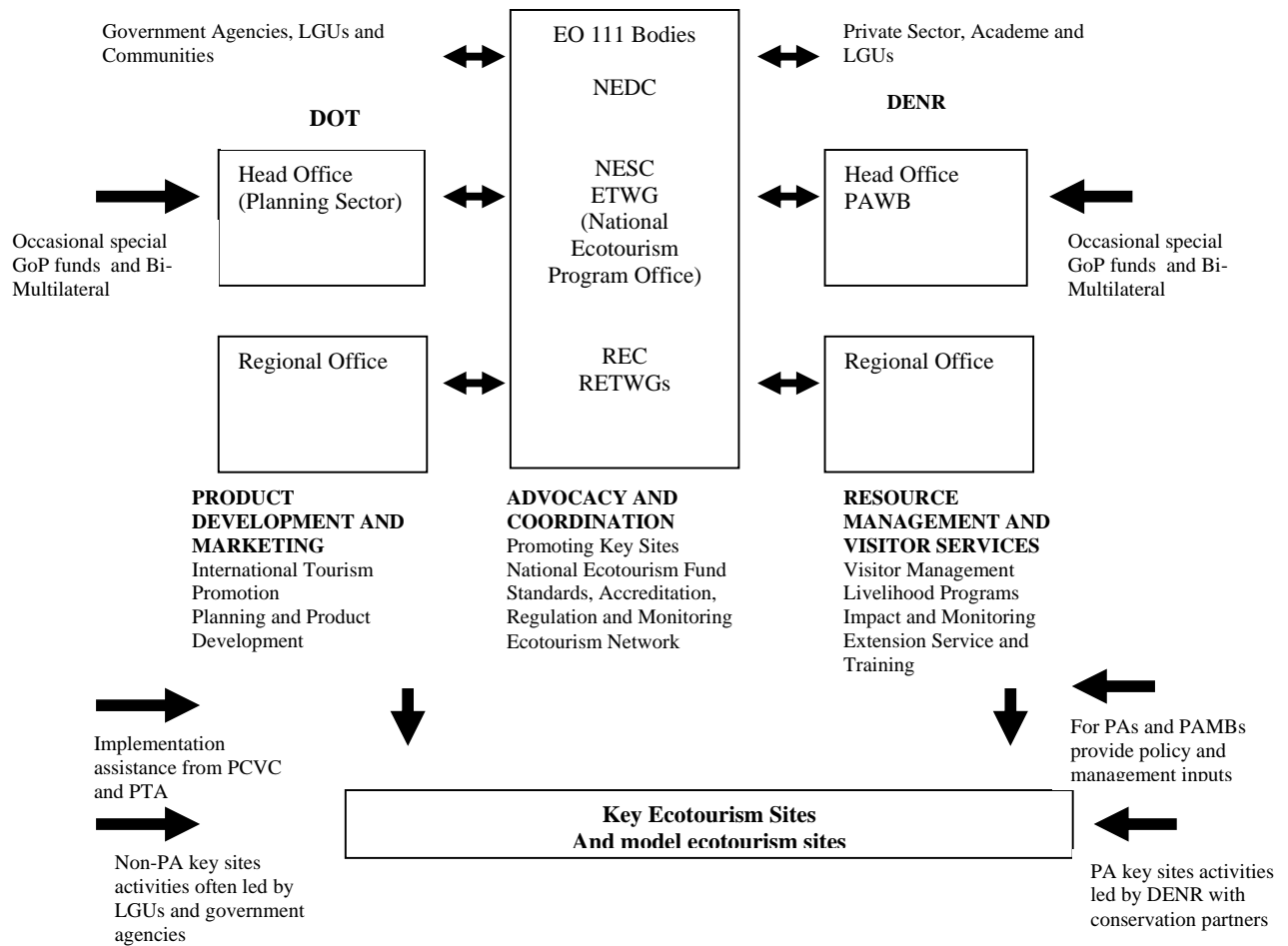
The ETWGs is tasked to assist the NESC and RECs carry out its mandate and spearhead the implementation of the NES. At the national level, an Ecotourism Technical Working Group (ETWG) has been created to provide technical and administrative support to the NEDC and NESC in the implementation of EO 111. In relation to the NES, the ETWG will provide technical assistance to different projects in coordination with a pool of experts as deemed necessary.

Table 2 identifies the institutional roles as defined by the NES and the tourism roles as stated in the Local Government Code of 1991.

**Table 2. Institutional Roles in Ecotourism**

Agencies	NES Roles	Tourism Roles in the Local Government Code of 1991
<b>National Government Agencies</b>		The national government shall ensure that decentralization contributes to the continuing improvement of the performance of local government units and the quality of community life (LGC 1991 Ch. 1 Section 3k, m).
Department of Tourism (DOT) Philippine Tourism Authority (PTA)	An attached agency to the DOT and serves as its implementing arm for physical development. The PTA has set aside a special fund for environmental projects related to ecotourism.	
The Philippine Convention and Visitors Corporation (PCVC)	Attached to DOT and is responsible for international tourism marketing and promotion.	National agencies and offices with project implementation functions shall coordinate with one another and with the local government units concerned in the discharge of these functions. They shall ensure the participation of local government units both in the planning and implementation of said national projects (LGC 1991 Ch. 3 Section 1b).
Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR)	Mandated by EO 192 to conserve, manage and develop the Philippines' environment and natural resources including its territorial waters and lands of public domain. The DENR oversees bureaus that ensure the sustainable management of natural areas.	
Department of Education	to raise awareness of the need for environmental protection and cultural heritage protection, and to foster social cohesion and national unity among Filipinos.	It shall be the duty of every national agency or government-owned or -controlled corporation authorizing or involved in the planning and implementation of any project or program that may cause pollution, climatic change, depletion of non-renewable resources, loss of crop land, rangeland, or forest cover, and extinction of animal or plant species, to consult with the local government units, nongovernmental organizations, and other sectors concerned and explain the goals and objectives of the project or program, its impact upon the people and the community in terms of environmental or ecological balance, and the measures that will be undertaken to prevent or minimize the adverse effects thereof (LGC 1991 Ch 3 Sec 26).
Department of Finance	to develop an incentive program for ecotourism to stimulate local communities and the private sector.	
Department of Trade and Industry	to foster the development of indigenous products that can be promoted and marketed internationally.	
National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP) –	To help ensure the needs of local people are incorporated in ecotourism planning.	
National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA)	To support conservation of the cultural heritage resource base of ecotourism.	
National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA)	To provide the policy and enabling climate for ecotourism to develop in consonance with PA 21.	
<b>Local Governments</b>		
Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG)	To ensure that LGUs play a key role in developing ecotourism programs.	
LGUs		Tourism facilities and other tourist attractions, including the acquisition of equipment, regulation and supervision of business concessions, and security services for such facilities including tourism development and promotion programs is delegated to the local governments (LGC 1991 Ch 2 Sec 17).
<b>NGOs</b>	No clear roles	
<b>Private Sector</b>	No clear roles	

**Figure 1. Institutional Arrangements under the NES**



Source: NES, 2002

## 2.4. The NES Approach

The general approach taken by NES to achieve its goals and objectives involves a combination of top-down and bottom up elements. The top down element hopes to create flows of assistance downward from central government and bottom-up element aimed at stimulating grass-roots participation. The EO 111 Bodies are the key players in top-down process to focus, combine, coordinate and monitor government initiatives in support of ecotourism. Specifically, the top down process focuses on developing, managing and marketing the network of key ecotourism sites and set standards to regulate and monitor ecotourism operation. The bottom-up process aims to create mechanisms for nurturing ecotourism development through community initiatives, local entrepreneurship and private sector participation (NES, 2002).

In addition, the NES is anchored on the key site approach. The key site approach refers to a number of specific locations selected as the focus of concerted efforts to develop

ecotourism in the Philippines. The sites were selected based on established criteria and to the accepted definition of ecotourism. The NESC/ RECs tap the participation of various institutions, donors and other agents of development in the formulation and implementation of action plans for the key sites. It is intended that the EO 111 Bodies also serve as a catalyst to bring together other agents of development to collaborate and cooperate towards developing and managing ecotourism (NES, 2002).

The DOT–DENR partnership advocates for ecotourism in the key sites, taking every possible opportunity to push the cause of ecotourism with political support from the highest possible levels. In addition, DOT-DENR leads programs of technical assistance to key sites, under the guidance of the NEDC and NESC. This program is funded through existing budgetary allocations from the DENR and the DOT, with possible additional support from donor agencies. The DOT's component of the NES focuses on international and domestic promotion, planning and product development, training and awareness. The DENR's component of the NES focuses on resource management, livelihood programs, extension services, training, monitoring and managing impacts.

### **3. Issues in Ecotourism Governance**

3.1 One aspect of ecotourism governance that has generated some debate is the question of appropriate institutional framework of a national-local-private-community mix. Although conventional thought dictates little government involvement, the NES reflects a state-led ecotourism strategic framework with two identified national agency champions, the DOT and DENR with inputs from multiple actors to form a national government strategy. The NES however is a non-statutory process, which means that agreements have to be forged with various local governments to make it binding.

The operative principle of decentralization clearly states that the objectives of realization of local autonomy shall be facilitated through improved coordination of national government policies and programs and extension of adequate technical and material assistance to less developed and deserving local government units. Further, the national government shall ensure that decentralization contributes to the continuing improvement of the performance of local government units and the quality of community life (LGC 1991 Ch. 1 Section 3k, m).

The NES is a national intervention whose operative principles is tilted towards national government functioning and responsibilities over ecotourism rather than contributing to the improvement of local government performance as it is largely a national program implementation between the DOT and the DENR. The NES as a strategic governance framework negates the spirit of the Local Government Code where tourism facilities and other tourist attractions, including the acquisition of equipment, regulation and supervision of business concessions, and security services for such facilities including tourism development and promotion programs has been devolved to the local governments (LGC 1991 Ch 2 Sec 17). Ecotourism responsibilities, however, will only be subject to national policies and subject to supervision, control and review of the DENR, if it concerns implementation of community-based forestry projects which include integrated social forestry programs and similar projects; management and control of communal forests with an area not exceeding fifty (50) square kilometers; establishment of tree parks, greenbelts, and similar forest development projects (LGC 1991 Ch 2 section 17ii).

Thus, circumstances differ in how ecotourism is implemented at various instances in the local governments. Even if there are national champions in DOT and DENR, a state-led



strategy should be viewed as a top-down approach where the triumvirate of the local governments, communities and the private sector is responding to NES. The Coron Island Sustainable Tourism for example, is hinged on the product development initiative of DOT but executed by the local government under the auspices of the province of Palawan or their own strategic environment plan (Pe, 2008). This is in contrast with the Tanauan City Lakeshore Development Project for the portion of Taal Lake in the Batangas-Cavite corridor, where ecotourism is largely the LGUs initiatives.

Further, although the NES is explicit in stating the local governments and communities roles, it is largely rhetoric and is not translated into concrete actions. One manifestation is the flow and channel of funds either through the government of the Philippines (GoP) or bilateral and multilateral assistance directly going through the two agencies- DOT and DENR. In addition, the EO 111 bodies supposedly are advocacy and coordinative bodies but can also be implementing bodies e.g. the DENR handling visitor management responsibilities. The NES champions are both regulatory and implementing bodies at the same time.

This functions disputes trends in ecotourism of devolved and narrower national public interest. In the United States for example, during the Reagan administration tourism privatization, increased private usage of federal park and forest lands, and dismantling of federal tourism promotion were favored consistent with a narrower public role for tourism (Matthews and Richter, 1991). This is where regulatory and oversight functions of the state takes precedence over executive roles. In the age of decentralization, these are local governments, communities and private sector responsibilities, which ironically are consistent with the NES network approach of public, private and civil multi-actor roles.

Thus, the strategic framework (Figure 1) embodied in the NES where ecotourism product development and marketing, advocacy, coordination, and resource management and visitor services are lodged with the DOT and DENR runs in conflict with the devolved functions of the LGUs. Given the assumptions of low capabilities and know how of LGUs where NES acknowledged that local ownership and participation are desirable and necessary, but they often exhibit a limited degree of the necessary skills and business acumen (NES, 2002:9) it is still not a justification of state control, particularly of the DOT. This approach to ecotourism will weaken local institutional capacities rather than strengthen it and negates national governments objectives on the important roles of local governments for development.

The paper acknowledged the shifting on the delegation of responsibilities from central government to local governing bodies with strong emphasis on the development of local institutions and the need for strategic realignment of state guidance on ecotourism.

3.2 These pragmatic governance gap emanates from the conception of ecotourism ideology as defined by the NES is very broad with various conceptual underpinnings as programmed and practiced. Ecotourism most likely has a convergent evolution, "where many places and people independently responded to the need for more nature travel opportunities in line with societies efforts to become more ecologically minded" (Fennel, 1998:234). In the Philippines, ecotourism has been alternately defined as a sub-category of sustainable tourism, a segment of the nature tourism and a branch of mainstream tourism.

Earlier definitions of ecotourism can be subsumed under nature tourism. A good example is that of Hector Ceballos Lascurian one of the first persons who coined the word ecotourism in the late '80s, (as cited by Libosada 1998:14) termed ecotourism as "tourism that consists in traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific

objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestation (both past and present) found in the areas." In these terms, nature-oriented tourism implies a scientific, aesthetic, or philosophical approach to travel, although the ecological tourist needs not to be a scientist, artist or philosopher. It emphasizes that the person who practices ecotourism has the opportunity of immersing himself/herself in nature in a manner generally not available in the urban environment."

On a more sustainable development context, Fennel (2003) defines ecotourism as a type of tourism that is less socio-cultural in its orientation and more dependent upon nature and natural resources as the primary component or motivator of the trip (Fennel, 2003). Ecotourism is "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people."

On a mainstream tourism context, the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), one of the largest international tourism organizations whose members include travel and tour agencies as well as national tourism bodies, in their Code for Environmentally Responsible Tourism (cited by Libosada, 1998:18) summarized ecotourism as "a form of tourism inspired primarily by the natural history of an area, including its indigenous cultures. The ecotourist visits relatively underdeveloped areas in the spirit of appreciation, participation and sensitivity. The ecotourist practices a non-consumptive use of wildlife and natural resources and contributes to the visited area through labor or financial means aimed at directly benefiting the conservation issues in general, and to the specific needs of the people. It also implies a managed approach by the host country or region which commits itself to establishing and maintaining the site with the participation of local residents, marketing them appropriately, enforcing regulations, and using the proceeds of the enterprise to fund the area's land management as well as community development."

In the Philippines, the conceptual understanding of ecotourism engages the three definitions. The official Philippine definition as adopted by the National Ecotourism Development Council (NEDC, 2000) is that ecotourism is "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 for the enrichment of host communities and satisfaction of visitors."

The issue of definition has long been important for ecotourism as well as policymaking, regulation and oversight, in other words governance. Although there are several management strategies that have been developed for tourism in natural areas there is little legislation or policy, which refers specifically to ecotourism. Instead, ecotourism is often managed through more generic limitations on activities that maybe allowed or disallowed in certain identified areas (Diamantis, 2004). Thus, the national tourism congress identifies national legislation of the NES as part of institutionalization.

Whilst the Philippines adopt a very broad definition of ecotourism, implying a supply-oriented understanding of ecotourism programs, consequentially it translates into various governance gaps. For example, the definition does not explicitly mention any requirement that local people participate in the decision-making processes by which the success or otherwise in meeting the other elements of the definition may be achieved. Academically, there is a small body of literature highlighting the critical importance of local participation in the planning and management of ecotourism. While scholars such as Gunn (1994:289-310) recognize the

importance of ensuring widespread participation in the general tourism planning process, they do not clearly indicate the special role played by local participation in the particular case of ecotourism.

The long history of a centralized tourism structure in the Philippines partially explains a national-driven programming or maybe from Stone's influential study of forty years, which identifies an existence of a tourism regime (Maitland, 2006). The tourism regime theory attempts to analyze and to some degree prescribe, how a 'capacity to govern' can emerge 'in the midst of diversity and complexity' within a social democratic capitalist society (Stone, 1989 as cited by Maitland, 2006). The mediating role of local governments between communities and private sector on the one hand and the national governments on the other is inconsistent with the top-down and bottom element process of the NES. Further, studies on the interaction of the NES, the RECs and the LGUs are needed to identify key channels of collaboration. The local institutions as the frontline agencies of government need to understand better the process by which a strategic guidance in ecotourism is governed.

3.3 Ecotourism is largely a community-based intervention and involves multiple actors indicating a collaborative action and problem solving by actors with varied interest in the community. The NES though is tilted towards private sector providers and national government, which traditionally is how tourism works. However, ecotourism draws on a web of interest in the community where multiple actors who have conflicting interest beside the private sector.

The ecotourism areas were already defined and identified in the National Ecotourism Congress in Bohol of 2002 but the set of rules and regulations which maybe explicit and formalized and upon which the local government can be guided is still missing. About half (164) of the programs on the list are found in Luzon (which includes Palawan and the other island provinces of Regions 4 and 5) with the Visayas and Mindanao accounting for 89 and 69 entries respectively. However, one cannot conclude that Luzon is richer in terms of ecotourism resources. Perhaps, it is a case of the Luzon tourism sector being more prepared to identify ecotourism products than its counterparts in the Visayas and Mindanao (Alampay and Libosada 2003). An implication is that, local institutions may act either as a passive or active influences on the formation and implementation of ecotourism (Diamantis. 2004)

Beeton (1998:24-26) emphasizes the critical importance of generating community support for ecotourism, and considers local community participation to be a vital means of gaining and retaining such support. Without strong local participation, Beeton argues, ecotourism ventures cannot hope to succeed, at least insofar as tourism planners intend a truly sustainable form of local economic and community development to emerge. Cater (1994:69-86), meanwhile, highlights the need for local community involvement in planning and managing ecotourism, particularly in the context of developing countries. The NES does not make entirely clear the difference between 'involvement' and 'participation' for communities. This happens because of the conservation component of ecotourism where national governments would not completely delegate responsibilities to local governments where political stakes are high. What happens is ecotourism may simply imply gaining the cooperation of local people to enhance the feasibility of the national implementation plan or, more often, simply ensuring that local people are provided with alternative means of employment (Timothy, 1999:371-391). Javier, 2008 calls this as the politics of holding on to power by the state in an era of diminished roles and redistribution of power.

Ecotourism is designed to channel greater benefits directly to communities. However, Brandon, 1993 argue that the lack of local participation in ecotourism projects has been a major factor explaining ecotourism poor performance in meeting stated aims. A similar view is expressed by Drake (1991:132), who maintains that 'local participation is a necessary component of sustainable development generally specifically, ecotourism. Bovarnick and Gupta (2003) argue that locals are likely to gain incentives for protecting natural resources, but only if they receive a good portion of these benefits.

The challenge is seen therefore as developing the capacity of the diverse stakeholders who potentially could assert concern about their locality (Bryson and Crosby 1992; Forester 1989; Innes 1995 as cited by Bramwell and Sharman, 1999). Once communities lose the character that makes them distinctive and attractive to non-residents, they have lost their ability to vie for tourist-based income in an increasingly global and competitive market place (Fennel, 2003)

3.4 Ecotourism is a politically interesting theme for any politician, which impinges on vote-rich objectives such as local economic development, local and potential international influence, and a boost for local identities, among others (Richter, 1983). Politicians at most governmental levels are quick to couch public sector tourism development in terms of pro-business rhetoric and policy. This means, of course, that the ideological question no longer is whether or not government should be involved in tourism; the question becomes one of who benefits from government policy affecting tourism? (Matthews and Richter, 1991). This argument can also be found in the NES where strategic political support is sought at the highest levels to achieve NES objectives. Thus, limiting local government politicians participation in the NES vis-à-vis its delegated roles as per LGC of 1991 where tourism is an LGU delegated responsibilities, is a sure recipe of failure for any national program, however noble it is. Thus, a political-managerial balance of national-local dynamics should be earnestly sought by the NES.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Playing catch up in ecotourism even if regarded, as a biodiversity hotspot in the world is a continuing strategic challenge in the Philippines. There is a continuing need for overhauling the national ecotourism strategy beyond its expansive conceptual underpinnings that favor the conventional paradigms of national mainstream tourism where it is currently anchored. It must correct the institutional issues of ecotourism governance by providing a policy framework of equal partnership opportunities between the public (national-local)- private and civil society sectors under an era of decentralization. Under this equal partnership ecotourism governance policy, the national governments through the ecotourism champions' agencies such as DOT and DENR can correct confusing and sometimes conflicting strategies and policies at the local government level specially in areas of market and infrastructure priorities.

Second, the private sector whose financial capital is used as investments can provide the opportunities for the local communities and peoples to directly benefit from the economic dividends of exploring their own communities. While the existing ecotourism opportunities are largely a public-private sector partnerships, a coordinative policy framework as a result of an updating of the NES and EO 111 is a must.

Third, the question of sustainable development in ecotourism requires a shift in values and cultural orientation beyond the current understanding of mainstream tourism. This

conceptual understanding of ecotourism entirely different from mainstream tourism needs education and human resource development especially at the local government and community level. They must be equipped with social, political and environmental skills complemented by economic and financial goals to make ecotourism sustainable to meet its lofty objectives as defined, or at least influence the local governments for compliance. This makes the work of ecotourism doubly difficult as it engages people into an understanding of sustainable development under conditions of abject poverty.

Richter's argument (1985) of what can go wrong and right in tourism, where tourism succeeds or fails is largely a function of political and administrative actions and is not a function of economic or business expertise (Richter, 1985). Collaborative and equal partnerships rather than completely national government initiated should make it less politicized giving probabilities of success and private sector inclusion bigger probabilities. This paper concludes that there is need for a local governance strategic framework in the NES, which allows local governments and communities to have a higher stake in ecotourism.

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