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Nature and People Matter Conservation and Ecotourism in Balanan Lake, Negros Oriental

The development of Balanan Lake in Negros Oriental for ecotourism has accommodated its protection as a natural heritage, the economic needs of the local population, and the quest for attractions and the recreation of tourists. The efforts of the state, through the provincial government, have been central in transforming and recreating the social and natural features of the lake and its environs both as commodities and as vital sources of human sustenance. The conservation and ecotourism programs are legitimized to restore the lake's quality and aesthetics, but some locals who had agreed to resettlement resented the disruption of their social and economic activities.

**KEYWORDS: CONSERVATION · ECOTOURISM · RESETTLEMENT · DISPLACEMENT ·
BALANAN LAKE DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY**

Tourism per se can be either good or bad but any of this perception depends upon who is seeing it and from what perspective he or she sees it (Libosada 1998; Miller and Auyong 1998). It may be judged at a time when a site with known tourism potential is yet being proposed for development or during the period of increasing tourist arrivals and their consequent perceived potential impacts (Miller and Auyong 1998; Oracion 2007). Tourism is also a two-sided affair; it may either inflict damage on the environment of a given place, or conserve and protect its resources from human abuses (Coltman 1989, 239). No matter which of these pictures can appropriately describe tourism as a process and a product, its nature depends largely upon how its proponents or developers do it and how those affected by it respond. The same argument applies to ecotourism, defined by the International Ecotourism Society as “responsible travel to natural areas, which conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people” (Lindberg and Hawkins 1993 cited in Huttche et al. 2002, 50).

The anthropological investigation of ecotourism development, which follows the agenda of environmentalists in order to repair the tarnished image of tourism (Miller and Auyong 1998, 24), requires looking into onsite human settlement patterns and spatial behaviors, people’s perceptions of place, and the underlying goals of its proponents (Fellmann et al. 1990, 75; Libosada 1998, 192). Analyzing these factors requires an examination of how the alteration of landscapes is undertaken to offer tourists awesome attractions, amenities, and convenient access to a site of spectacle; and, correspondingly, how local people are affected and how they respond to it. Thus, the primary aim of this article is to examine the nature and potential of Balanan Lake, in Negros Oriental in the central Philippines, as a tourist destination in terms of the spectacle and experiences being promoted. It also investigates how the local people, particularly farmers, have been displaced by conservation efforts to legitimize the lake’s development for ecotourism. The discussion revolves around the constructs of nature conservation, human resettlement, and ecotourism.

We started fieldwork in July 2007 with an initial interview of key informants. They included the governor who considered the conservation of Balanan Lake and its promotion for ecotourism a major project of his administration, the people who managed the development of the place, and members of people’s organizations who were employed in various develop-

ment activities in the lake. Our fieldwork ended in July 2008 after we had completed the surveys of sample households who were members of the people’s organizations involved as well as affected by conservation efforts and ecotourism in the lake. We also did several trips during the one-year period to note the infrastructural developments surrounding the lake and the various activities of local people and tourists.

Conservation, Human Resettlement, and Ecotourism

Related studies link nature conservation to the issue of resettlement and rehabilitation of people when a community’s territory happens to be declared as a protected area because of threats to its biodiversity (Lustig and Kingsbury 2006, 415; Rangarajan and Shahabuddin 2006, 360). Displacement as an associated result of resettlement is not only physical but also economic and social in nature due to the various regulations and restrictions enforced against the extractive activities and the spatial behavior of humans (Brockington and Igoe 2006, 425). Physical displacement is a direct outcome particularly when people are removed and transferred, often against their will, outside of a protected area, which had been their major source of subsistence. This process puts them in a situation where they have to modify or abandon their traditional modes of food production. The technologies they employ are also labeled by authorities as ecologically destructive and are unilaterally declared illegal in order to stop such practices. In this instance, resettlement has become a tool of disempowering local people while pursuing the agenda of those in power (McElwee 2006, 397).

The accompanying economic displacement of people is apparent in a situation where they are engaged in subsistence activities in a new context that do not provide them better results because these are beyond their expertise (*ibid.*, 399). Such a scenario is evident in the case of forest product gatherers or indigenous peoples who are turned into farmers, fishers, or traders (e.g., Novellino 2000). Because the transformation is generally not by their own choice or volition, some people resort to illicit forest gathering or whatever else they could do to meet the subsistence requirements of their families (Rangarajan and Shahabuddin 2006, 363). This situation makes the enforcement of protected area regulations costly, and noncompliance is clearly a form of resistance particularly by those who are not sold to the idea of maintaining protected areas out of their traditional space of subsistence (Brockington and Igoe 2006, 426).

Meanwhile, social displacement is experienced when resettlement disrupts cultural practices and the traditional networks of relationships of people (Novellino 2000, 363; McElwee 2006, 397). Some forms of spatial and psychological adjustments are required because the symbolic attachment of people to their original settlement is not immediately replaced by the new meanings they have found in the new community (Brockington and Igoe 2006). Changes in family organization and community structure are also possible consequences when some family and community members are forced to go elsewhere to seek better opportunities. But aside from the social reasons behind their resistance to forced resettlement, they always use economic arguments to appeal to authorities to reconsider uprooting them from where they have lived for several generations. This suggests how the poor put major importance to their economic survival now while leaving the future to fate—a reflection of the *bahala na* (come-what-may) or fatalistic disposition because of negative past events (Lawless 1967, 121; Ortigas 2000, 37).

In some cases the negative economic and social consequences of conservation displacement make authorities search for ways to cushion the impacts on a community and to respond to impending resistance (McElwee 2006, 397). Thus, conservation becomes not simply an issue of protecting and sustaining biodiversity but also of rehabilitating the people who are drastically affected by it—an argument of the “rights model” for studying displacement (Lustig and Kingsbury 2006, 408). Meanwhile, the “risk model” argues that “resettlement should meet the minimum condition that it improves the condition of the displaced communities” (ibid., 412).

In order to be successful a resettlement project needs to achieve a balance between protecting biodiversity and rehabilitating the people uprooted from their traditional ways of making a living and of relating with others, both humans and spirits. It is unethical for authorities not to address both the manifest and latent consequences of conservation displacement because nature is not only about plants and animals but also about humans (Rangarajan and Shahabuddin 2006, 374).

Putting the displaced people into a resettlement site with amenities and services necessary for a decent life demonstrates the moral obligation of authorities seeking to minimize the direct negative impacts of conservation displacement. Although the resettlement program, as perceived by authorities, may reduce pressure on natural resources and at the same time rehabilitate the affected people, it may not be able to completely satisfy all the needs and

aspirations of the latter. Those affected do not always constitute a monolithic group; they are economically and socially differentiated by minute characteristics, which cannot be addressed totally by resettlement (Brockington and Igoe 2006, 426). The government or a conservation group will not have all the financial resources to provide for and satisfy their specific demands and needs immediately. This suggests that, for it to succeed, resettlement necessarily requires trade-offs between the authorities and the affected community. Resettlement becomes a negotiated process, not an imposition.

The growing market for spectacular sites that offer awesome experiences and natural places to relax for affluent citizens who are willing to pay the price has prompted authorities to promote protected areas for tourism, despite the criticism that it has commoditized nature and reinvented place, people, and landscape (King 1999, 182; Brockington and Igoe 2006, 451). However, tourism, repackaged as ecotourism, is justified because the user fees collected from tourists are used to pay community members who maintain the quality of these places and who help enforce the regulations against any environmentally destructive activities of tourists. This is best illustrated in the case of Apo Island—a world-renowned dive tourism destination in Dauin, Negros Oriental (Alcala 2001; Oracion 2001).

Ecotourism, if well planned and implemented, helps in sustaining the finances of conservation programs and subsequently provides alternative employment opportunities, either directly or indirectly, to local people who are displaced by the declaration of a protected area (Brockington and Igoe 2006, 426). More significantly, ecotourism increases the awareness by tourists and local people about the beauty and the role of biodiversity in human existence, which may inspire them more to support nature conservation, either in terrestrial or marine areas (Oracion 2001; 2007).

The active participation and involvement of the resettled people and peripheral communities are imperative in the maintenance and promotion of a protected area for ecotourism (Rangarajan and Shahabuddin 2006, 372). This is achieved relatively easily if there is a conjunction in the views of authorities and local people about the program, thus also giving the latter a sense of ownership and empowerment as a community (Ortigas 2000; Amper 2004; Aure and Escabi-Ruiz 2005). Voluntary compliance to environmental management policies and regulations is similarly assured.

However, there will be heightened frustration if the benefits of participation and involvement are not realized or equitably distributed. The

disgruntled local people may perceive themselves to have been marginalized in the use of community resources because they feel that tourists are given preferential treatment and access to protected areas (e.g., Oracion et al. 2005). Arguably the tourists, being strangers and unfamiliar with the community, absorb the ire of local people (Cheong and Miller 2000). Moreover, the noncompliance of local people to conservation laws and their hostility to tourists diminish the attractiveness of the place. Thus, any form of governance should not undermine the power of the host community to contribute to, or hamper, the success and sustainability of conservation and ecotourism programs.

Descriptions of Balanan Lake and People

Balanan Lake, which is 9° 7' 36" north and 123° 1' 28" east, is located in Sitio Balanan, one of the sixteen sitios or hamlets that comprise Barangay Sandulot in the town of Siaton, Negros Oriental, in the central Visayas. The twenty-four-hectare humerus bone-shaped lake, which the local people call in the Cebuano language as *linaw* (lake), can be reached after a ten-kilometer or about twenty-five-minute scenic drive from the national highway.



Fig. 1. A view of Balanan Lake with trees along the edges

It is 285 meters above sea level and oriented along a northwest-southeast direction. To the east is the Balanan mountain range and to the west is the Nasig-id mountain range. The southern part is a low and open area while the northern part is bounded by the Lamarao, Balanan, and Managobsob creeks. The Lamarao Falls and Balanan Falls are also found in the northwest side of the lake. These creeks and falls supply the water of the lake.

Balanan Lake is technically, or was originally, a river. It was formed after a strong earthquake that registered 6.8 on the Richter scale. Data from the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology indicate that an earthquake hit the town of Siaton on 5 May 1925 at about five o'clock in the afternoon. This historical account is contained in a report of the status of the various projects in Balanan Lake prepared by the Office of Cong. (now Gov.) Emilio C. Macias II (2006). That earthquake resulted in a massive landslide on both sides of the Balanan and Nasig-id ridges. Felled centuries-old trees and house-sized boulders rolled down to a portion of the Balanan River forming a natural dam. The closing of this portion of the river for several years resulted in the rising of the water level that eventually created what is now the Balanan Lake (fig. 1).

The specific portion that closed the river is called Sampong, which means "to close." Sampong became a settlement of five households before they were resettled. A number of farms and houses were also located along the hills facing the lake before conservation efforts were introduced in these areas. Thus, Balanan Lake is a natural heritage site and has a historical significance to Siaton because the earthquake that formed the lake also destroyed the walls of the town's Roman Catholic church (Office of Cong. Macias 2006).

We surveyed a nonprobability sample of forty-three households, interviewing either the husband or the wife. These households were located in six sitios, and the corresponding sample sizes were as follows: Balanan (13), Nasig-id (12), Lamarao (9), Managobsob (5), Cambonbon (2), and Anapugan (2). They represented 50 percent of the members (n=85) of all the people's organizations in Balanan, which constituted the Lake Balanan Farmers Federation Development Association. Almost 91 percent of these households had been residents around the lake before the government introduced the conservation and ecotourism programs. Ten households had already moved to their new homes at the resettlement site, occupying ten of the seventeen units under construction during our study.

Most households (79 percent) are of the nuclear type, and the rest are extended. The total number of household members is 263, with males comprising 52 percent and females 48 percent. Table 1 shows the age-sex distribution of the sample households and suggests a very young population with a great reproductive potential in the future. More than half of the household members belong to the 0–19 year-old age group; and this has some negative implications for the future condition of the remaining forest and the quality of Balanan Lake. It will be alarming if not prevented by the regulatory measures and conservation efforts already instituted. In fact, the present average household size is already 6.19, with household membership ranging from two to thirteen members.

Table 1. Age-Sex Distribution of Sample Households

AGE GROUP	MALE (%)	FEMALE (%)	TOTAL (%)
0 – 19	87 (63.50)	74 (58.73)	161 (61.22)
20 – 39	24 (17.52)	28 (22.23)	52 (19.77)
40 – 59	21 (15.33)	23 (18.25)	44 (16.73)
60 – 79	5 (3.65)	1 (0.79)	6 (2.28)
Total	137 (100.00)	126 (100.00)	263 (100.00)

Farming is the primary source of income of 60 percent of the sample households. It is supplemented by the employment of some household members in the projects of the Balanan Lake Development Authority (BLDA) or by other productive activities. Households cultivate an average farm area of 1.44 hectares, compared with the 1.99 hectares they tilled before the conservation program started.

On the whole, farming households cultivate various crops such as corn, upland rice, root crops, coconut, fruit trees, bananas, and vegetables. They also raise cows, carabaos, goats, chickens, and pigs. Interestingly the proportion of females (48.84 percent) who are engaged in farming is somewhat higher than that of the males (45.90 percent). In contrast, more males (43.90 percent) than females (27.91 percent) are employed in the BLDA. Able-bodied household members are employed as paddlers, boat dispatchers, utility workers, restaurant and hotel staff, receptionists, cooks, servers, and laborers involved in the ongoing construction of facilities at the lake.

The 40 percent of households that do not farm are reportedly engaged in the buying-and-selling of farm products, operating *sari-sari* (variety) stores, driv-

ing *habal-habal* (single motorcycle used to transport passengers), and working as hired laborers of other households. About 33 percent of all households also fish in the lake, while 40 percent gather forest products primarily for household consumption. From the lake they catch tilapia, eel, catfish, mudfish, shrimps, and shells, and from the forest they gather lumber for house construction, firewood, rattan and vines for basket weaving, and wild honey. The average household monthly income from all sources is calculated at P4,193, with the total for all households ranging from a low of P1,000 to a high of P21,000.

However, 81 percent fall below the poverty threshold of P6,195 for a household with five members outside of the National Capital Region, based on the computation of the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB 2007). In order to economically assist those households needing more help, the governor introduced the “adopt-a-family program” — one of his strategies of rehabilitating households that abandoned destructive farming activities because of the conservation measures introduced around Balanan Lake. To date three households have been “adopted” and assisted by civic organizations and institutions in Dumaguete City.

Conservation and Development of Balanan Lake

Historically the coming out of Balanan Lake in the conservation and tourism map of the province was an initiative of Gov. Emilio C. Macias II. He was later elected as congressman after his term as governor ended. In the May 2007 election he was elected again as governor. According to him, he had heard about the lake from his grandparents and from people around the town, but it was only in the late 1970s that he actually first saw it together with some guests. He realized that the place required some protection from poorly conceived or implemented projects (*Metro Post* 2006) such as the controversial hydroelectric plant, which never materialized. During his administration, the provincial government pursued conservation and development projects in Balanan Lake not only to promote it as an ecotourism destination but also to protect it from destructive activities of locals and tourists (Gallarde 2006). To pursue these goals, the province entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) sometime in the mid-1990s (Office of Cong. Macias 2006).

On 13 December 2007 the BLDA was finally created by the Sangguniang Panlalawigan (Provincial Board) pursuant to Ordinance No. 20 This is a body with a multisectoral representation and mandated by law to take charge

of the development, administration, and maintenance of the projects implemented under the Balanan Lake Development Project (BLDP). Thus the BLDA refers to the management group while BLDP refers to the projects. The governor is authorized to supervise the BLDA and has the authority to appoint the members of its management board for a fixed term of two years. The members of the board include the governor as chairperson, a member of the Provincial Board, the Provincial Tourism Coordinator, the Community Environment and Natural Resources Officer, the Provincial Engineer, the mayor of the Municipality of Siaton, the president of the cooperative operating in Balanan Lake, the head of the Environment and Natural Resources Division (ENRD) under the Office of the Governor, and a representative from the private sector involved in tourism-related business.

During the period of the study, the president of the Lake Balanan Multipurpose Agricultural Cooperative represented the community in the BLDA. He had been supervising the development activities in the lake together with personnel from the ENRD even before the BLDA's formal creation. This is a form of comanagement in progress.

Fig. 2. A farm employing the contour farming method to prevent soil erosion



Fig. 3. An abandoned house on a hilltop whose owners had already moved farther from the lake

The conservation and development program in the lake and the forest around it, dubbed as the BLDP and started in 1993, is composed of six major projects: reforestation, resettlement, housing, livelihood, capacity-building, and infrastructure. A Progress Report of the BLDP describes the reforestation component to involve the planting of a combination of indigenous forest trees and fruit trees (Office of Cong. Macias 2006). Reforestation through cooperative work and under the supervision of the ENRD and DENR personnel was pursued in degraded areas in order to restore ecological balance and provide local people with supplemental income. Soil and water conservation measures, along with contour farming, have also been established in critical slopes to prevent further soil erosion into the lake (fig. 2).

The resettlement of farmers within the perimeter of the lake and those with farms in critical areas is intended to improve the forest cover and restore the ecological balance without human disturbance (fig. 3). In principle, the vacated settlements and farms have become de facto protected areas by virtue of the conservation activities that have been introduced, although they are not similar to those areas declared under the National Integrated Protected Area System (NIPAS) pursuant to Republic Act 7586. The NIPAS sites are

managed by the Protected Area Management Board (PAMB) headed by a superintendent representing the Regional Executive Director of the DENR. The latter is the designated chairperson of the board. Therefore, a NIPAS site is governed by a national law while a de facto protected area is managed by a local composite body and regulated by a local ordinance, which is the case of Balanan Lake.

The housing project has been pursued in order to successfully convince the affected households to be resettled outside of the project site but within the vicinity of the lake. It is also aimed at enhancing the natural beauty of the lake while providing the residents with decent homes.

However, because beautiful homes are not enough compensation for the resettled households, the program has also developed ways to provide them with livelihood opportunities that can reduce pressure on the resources of the forest and the lake. The livelihood component of the program offers various tourism-related employment opportunities that are rotated among members of the cooperative, each of whom receives a salary ranging from P1,000 to P2,500 per month. The livelihood component is reinforced by the capacity-building component, which equips members of the cooperative with the skills needed to run their organization and perform tasks associated with the operation of touristic facilities within the lake. The training also covers skills for alternative sources of income.

Meanwhile various infrastructures and facilities have been constructed to make the lake accessible, safe, and more convenient for local and foreign tourists to visit. A major portion of the road from the highway leading directly to the lake, specifically Sampong, has been cemented, especially those areas that all types of vehicles find difficult to navigate during rainy days. There is a waterworks system installed that provides running water to the resettlement site and the other structures around the lake.

As part of resource conservation and rehabilitation in the lake and forest areas, regulations are being enforced against the cutting of trees and gathering of wild plants, dumping of garbage and defecating on the lake, hunting of wild animals, and fishing with the use of fine mesh nets. A representative from the community cooperative to the BLDA has noted that some households interpreted the restriction on fishing as depriving them of this livelihood, but he explained to them that only the manner of fishing and the sizes of fish caught are being regulated in order to make the lake sustainable. Thus, although 100 percent compliance with these regulations may be diffi-

cult to effect and may take some time to realize, the local people and tourists nonetheless have become aware of the need to protect and conserve the lake and forest ecosystems. A continuing education campaign through warning signs, the monitoring of activities within the lake, and the presence of garbage bins in strategic areas and toilets in the resettlement site may eventually embed environmental ethics in the consciousness of all who reside and use Balanan Lake.

Resettlement Conditions and the Reactions of Locals

The resettlement site is called *kilidge*, a word coined from the Cebuano word *kilid*, meaning side or edge, and the English word “village.” Therefore, *kilidge* as used to describe this place literally means a village at the side or edge of the lake. But it should not be construed that the resettlement site is directly beside the lake; it is actually situated in a lower elevation southwest of the Sampong Lagoon and Spillway, or about 300 meters from the lake. The governor first secured the assistance of a nongovernment organization to handle the resettlement of the affected households, but this partnership did not prosper because they could not agree on the manner of assigning houses and lots to beneficiaries. The private group wanted it done by lottery so everyone would have an equal chance of getting the prime lots, but the governor insisted that it should be done according to who would be affected first by the conservation project around the lake and the construction of the restaurant and conference hall.

The materials and labor for the construction of the concrete houses, each measuring 24 square meters in a 240-square-meter lot, were provided by the government as incentives to those households targeted for resettlement (fig. 4). These houses have been provided with electricity, running water, tiled bathroom, and a water-sealed toilet—something which the resettled households never had in their former homes. Meanwhile, any improvement inside or outside the house is the responsibility of the beneficiaries.

The *kilidge* has a concrete multipurpose pavement designed as a parking area for vehicles but which can be used as drying space for corn and legumes before they are stored or processed. With a stage on one side, this space can also serve as a venue for dancing (*baylihan*, Cebuano) on certain occasions such as fiestas and other public gatherings. A basketball court erected by the young villagers occupies a portion of the multipurpose pavement. The households have formed a cooperative that runs a water purification station,

which provides safe and clean drinking water for villagers and visitors. The resettlement site also offers a pigpen that is located in a common area, particularly for those who wish to raise pigs as a source of additional income. There is also a day-care center for preschool-age children located near the entrance of the village, with a full-time teacher from the Department of Education.

Eight of the ten resettled households appreciated the convenience they now have compared with their former homes, although they are far from their farms. One said that because they did not have toilets in their former homes “we relieved ourselves in the mountains, but now we don’t need to go out of the house to relieve ourselves.” However, two beneficiaries are complaining that their houses have not yet been completed, that these houses have no running water and electricity, and that the location is vulnerable to a landslide. The back portion of one of the houses is directly behind a bulldozed mountainside, which the owner fears could have a loose rock formation that may give way eventually. The beneficiaries expressed joy at having beautiful houses now but hoped that the said deficiencies or problems can be addressed. All understood that they were resettled because the

areas around the lake are protected and have been developed for ecotourism. The manner by which they occupy certain portions of the lake destroys its ecological quality and aesthetics. Those in Sampong were resettled to give way to the construction of the restaurant and conference hall.

The other households that are yet to be resettled expressed diverse explanations why they would be moved from where they have built their current houses. Seventy-nine percent agreed but 21 percent did not, for reasons related to their houses’ location vis-à-vis the lake. Respondents situated northwest of, but a little farther from, the lake said that where they now live is dangerous. They have observed abnormal soil movements, which are evident in the large tension cracks on their farms along the hillsides that may eventually result in a landslide (fig. 5). A geologist of the Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Office, in an interview by a local newspaper (*Metro Post* 2008), has confirmed the observations of the residents in Sitio Nasig-id. The situation may even be worse if an earthquake occurs during the rainy season because the continuous rain would loosen the soil and rocks. The lake’s wall could break according to the geologist. This potential hazard was already reported to the regional director of the Bureau of Mines and Geosciences



Fig. 4. Newly constructed housing units in the resettlement site ready for occupancy



Fig. 5. The biggest tension crack that resulted in a major landslide



Fig. 6. Denuded mountain ridges overlooking the lake

on 29 January 2007. The risk of landslides in the area is high according to the report.

There are respondents who believe that the area's geological formation is really vulnerable to landslides similar to what happened in 1925. Those who consider this threat as a given just pray that no major landslide will occur until they would have been finally resettled. It should be noted in 2004 that there was a major landslide in Nasig-id, which reclaimed a portion of the northeastern side of the lake, forming a seemingly white sand beach that appears now as a nice place for camping. But the excitement that awaits campers is always threatened by sudden and heavy rains, which are becoming rampant now compared with many years ago—believed as manifestations of climate change. The devastating impact of heavy rains is made acute by forest denudation. Not enough forest trees exist that can hold the soil along mountain slopes, which some residents use to explain the presence of tension cracks on their farms (fig. 6). The efforts of the BLDA in convincing them to plant forest and fruit trees on their farms along the slopes instead of corn and root crops may help reduce the risk of landslides.

Meanwhile, the residents who have agreed to be resettled said that they could not refuse to transfer because the governor had personally asked them. They also said the government knows what is good for them as regard the looming danger that threatens their survival. In one case, the governor offered to be a wedding sponsor of the daughter of a resistant couple in order to express his good intention, and it worked. Some households also could not resist the offer of a free house. In contrast, respondents whose houses are closer to the lake and are visible from where the restaurant is located would rather believe that they have to be resettled primarily because they are considered as ecological threats to the lake and its aesthetic quality. These are the households that somehow have some negative perceptions about their impending resettlement.

There are those who agreed to the resettlement offer as long as their old houses in Nasig-id will not be demolished and they could still plant food crops on their farms. Meanwhile, those who expressed silent opposition argued that there is no reason to transfer them because their houses are far from the edge of the lake and these cannot be seen from the restaurant. There is the case of a couple that had been awarded a house at the resettlement site but opted to stay put and continue to farm. Another case is that of a father with several children who questioned the government's resettlement plan that would reduce his farm size and have him plant fruit trees instead of food crops. He grumbled: "What will I feed my children if they ask me to stop farming?" With a large family to feed, economic subsistence is his primary reason for resistance; it has driven him to move his house behind a hill, where it is not visible from the restaurant and where he hopes he will be allowed to remain.

Ecotourism Development and Impacts

Although Balanan Lake had been visited by tourists a decade or so ago, it was only officially opened on 19 May 2008. Also taking effect at that time was the collection of fixed rates as user fees, which was questioned in the past because of the absence of a legal basis (*Negros Chronicle* 2007). The fees and rentals received prior to this date were treated as donations. At present, adult visitors or tourists are required to pay an entrance fee of P50, while children (12 years old and below) pay P25 only. The entrance fee entitles the tourist to make use of the Sampong Lagoon, the boardwalk, the circumferential trail, and the transport raft. Entrance is free on Tuesdays. However, because

of a drowning incident that involved someone on vacation, swimming in the lake is absolutely prohibited (*Negros Chronicle* 2008). Warning signs are now prominently installed along the banks of the lake.

Those who love to swim are encouraged to use the spring-fed swimming pools (our key informant described it this way to emphasize that the water of the swimming pools is not from the lake). Lifeguards are stationed in the swimming pool areas, which are located at the lower part of the lake (fig. 7). Other activities that are not allowed in the lake include littering, vandalizing, drinking liquor or alcoholic beverages, smoking, and gambling (fig. 8).

Those who wish to use amenities and equipment not covered by the entrance fee have to pay the corresponding fees: hotel (a big room costs P2,000 while a small room costs P1,500, with a fee of P200 per additional person), tree house (P2,000), staff house (P2,000), pedal boat (P100 per hour), *banca/baroto* (boat) for cruising (P50 per hour for two persons and P100 per hour for eight persons, inclusive of life jackets), kayak (P150 per hour), triak (P200 per hour), floating cottage (P100 per hour), transport fare from the entrance to the lake (P5 per person), and picnic tables (P30 for a whole day).

Given the above amenities and equipment, Balanan Lake offers tourists with an array of fun-filled activities such as boating or cruising, kayaking, trekking through the woods leading to the Lamarao and Balanan Falls, and taking a dip at the swimming pools. Overlooking the lake is the eight-bedroom hotel called Balodge—a contraction of Balanan Lodge—which is air-conditioned and provided with hot and cold bath, and a refrigerator where guests can put their provisions when they decide to stay more days away from busy work or city life. A second hotel will soon rise near the swimming pool area. There are also three tree houses perched sixty feet above the ground on three-century-old *dalakit* (*Ficus stipulosa* Miq. Linn.) trees, which offer a spectacular view of the lake below. The tree houses are equipped with hot and cold bath and refrigerators. About 300 giant *dalakit* trees are found around the lake (Galleon 2007), which some residents and visitors believe to be enchanted.

The open-air restaurant is fully operational, with an impressive menu of locally sourced food items such as native chicken, tilapia, fresh vegetables, and fruits (fig. 9). The BLDA has recently acquired a power generator in case of brownouts, particularly because perishables are stored in the restaurant. Now nearing completion is a 100-person-capacity conference hall, with a mezzanine where affordable rooms are available for transients and guests.



Fig. 7. One of the pools where swimming is allowed (swimming is prohibited in the lake)



Fig. 8. A billboard with the list of restricted activities in Balanan Lake

Also on the drawing board is a fishing area where the floating dock is presently moored. This will be a net-enclosed portion of the lake where seeded tilapia will be fed with organic aquatic feeds.

Currently being developed to cater to the more adventurous is the Nagdasok Forest Trail (*ibid.*). Along this trail are two shallow ponds and the waterfalls at the end of it. In this spot is a breathtaking view of nearby mountains, the picturesque valley below, and the majestic cliff ideal for rappelling and rock climbing. The trails leading to various sites are just enough for one person to pass, and were made that way in order to minimize the clearing of plants and trees. One has to be an experienced trekker to negotiate this potentially dangerous trail with rugged outcrops and mossy boulders, which may cause freak accidents if one is not careful.

Given this development in amenities and infrastructures, only 16 percent of all the respondents are familiar with the term “ecotourism,” although they know what “tourists” mean. Those who are familiar with ecotourism associate the term with protecting the environment and securing its beauty and resources for tourists to appreciate and enjoy. They learned this term and its meaning from attending seminars and training sessions conducted by

the ENRD and the DENR. The respondents who admitted to be unfamiliar with ecotourism were told about its meaning during the interview and subsequently asked if Balanan Lake has potentials for it (fig. 10). Except for one, those informed about what ecotourism means expressed with enthusiasm the lake’s great ecotourism potentials because of the unique scenery and its combination of features that could entice more tourists to come. Because the lake was formed by an earthquake, they said that it would surely excite tourists to come and see it. They further noted that the lake’s ecotourism value is enhanced because the provincial government has allocated a budget for its development.

Majority of the respondents admitted that ecotourism development, which is linked with the conservation program in Balanan Lake, has given them employment opportunities, which have supplemented their household income (table 2). They have also availed themselves of skills training for livelihood projects, although some are questioning how they can apply these skills if they have no capital. Other respondents cited resettlement houses and lots, electricity, waterworks system, and improved roads going to and from the lake as related benefits. While the paved roads make the lake

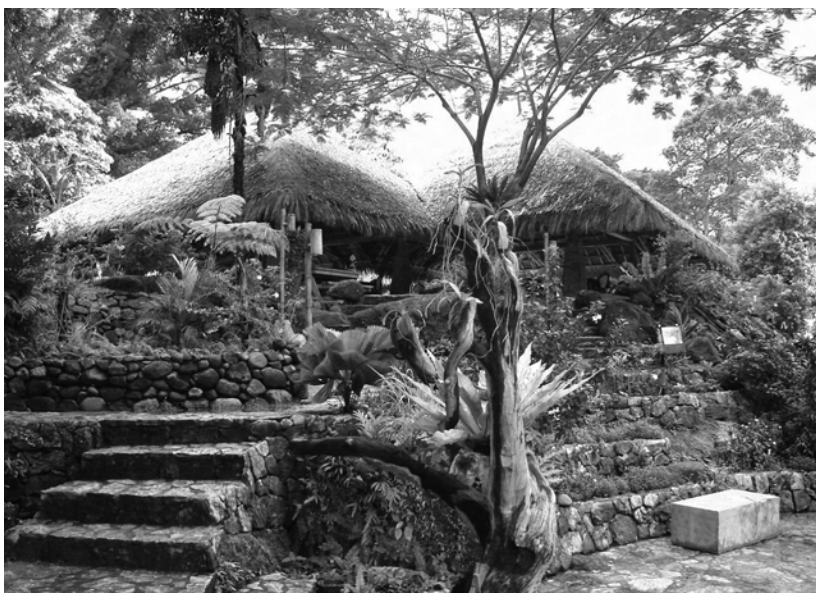


Fig. 9. Open-air restaurant fronting the lake



Fig. 10. A floating raft for rent to tourists who want to relax in the middle of the lake

accessible to tourists, these also make the transport of farm products to the lowland market easier. Only a small fraction of the respondents said they did not benefit or did not know that what are noted improvements can be considered as the associated benefits of ecotourism development.

Table 2. Benefits from ecotourism development of Balanan Lake

FORMS OF BENEFITS	N	%
Employment opportunities and supplemental income	29	67.44
Housing units, electricity, waterworks system, roads	10	23.26
No benefits received or do not know of any benefit	4	9.30
Total	43	100.00

Seventy-nine percent of the respondents reported that the community and their respective families did not experience any problems in relation to the development of Balanan Lake for ecotourism. This finding supports the observation that majority perceived the ecotourism activities to have produced more benefits than caused more harm to nature and people. Nevertheless, those who had problems commonly cited displacement from their farms as a serious matter, particularly because they were told to abandon hillside farming and to plant fruit trees instead of food crops. They have also been prevented from using inorganic or commercial fertilizer because it could contaminate the lake. As a result, they said that the sizes of their farms and their volume of production have been reduced, which means less food for the family, especially since there are not enough ecotourism-related jobs for them. Another reason for not benefiting from ecotourism development is that one cannot be employed if he or she lacks the necessary skills and experience required by the available jobs. This must have created some resentment from those who were rejected or were not able to get jobs when they needed it most, such as during the off-farming season.

Meanwhile, there are residents on the northern side of the lake who have complained that they have been prevented from docking their banca near the restaurant when transporting farm products across the lake. The trucks that carry these produce to the lowland market are likewise not allowed to enter the area, which they used to do in the past. They feel that management considers their transport of farm products near the restaurant as a nuisance to tourists who eat or relax in the same place. This is a situation where the traditional use of space has been replaced in favor of exogenous people who pay the price evident in the imposition of an entrance fee to get close to the

lake and enjoy its beauty. Nonetheless, an alternative site in another portion of the lake, which is far from the restaurant, has been provided for farmers to use to load their products for the market. An access road is currently being developed to connect this site to the main road.

Considering that ecotourism development in the lake is still ongoing, the BLDA tries as much as possible to be self-sufficient with regard to earning enough so it could pay all its workers and employ other qualified residents when necessary. Unfortunately its income is dependent on the volume of tourists. For example, we overheard discussions that the income for the month of June 2008 was in deficit because of payments made to workers. Nevertheless, a provincial government budget has been allocated to cover its operating expenses in the event that its income is insufficient, as stated in Section 11 of Ordinance No. 20 (Office of the Sangguniang Panlalawigan, Province of Negros Oriental 2007).

However, Section 12 of the ordinance (*ibid.*) states that the allocation of the BLDA's net income has to be shared by the following local government units and the cooperative: the province government of Negros Oriental, 45 percent; the cooperative, 35 percent; the municipal government of Siaton, 10 percent; and the barangay council of Sandulot, 10 percent. This provision attempts to democratize the income of Balanan Lake ecotourism among direct and indirect stakeholders. How their respective shares are translated to social benefits may be studied in the future.

Nature and People Do Matter

In retrospect one wonders what might have happened to Balanan Lake and the forest around it if the provincial government or the governor's office did not initiate a conservation and ecotourism development program. As a method of generating imagined scenarios, the "what-if question" allowed key informants to note the differences in the conditions of the lake and the forest either in the past compared with the present, or with and without state interventions. This question also exposes what respondents feel they have lost or gained, given the transformation in the condition of the resources in question. In this instance, the experiences and perceptions of three key persons—the governor, his trusted person in the community, and a businesswoman—were solicited and compared to arrive at a scenario of what might have happened had the local people been left to do what they pleased around Balanan Lake.

The governor recalled that it was difficult to get close to the lake during his initial visit because there was no access road, and hardly a trail existed. But he had already observed that the local people felled forest trees to open areas for raising farm crops. In his succeeding visits, he noticed that their clearings expanded as the number of residents around the lake also increased, maybe five times compared with their previous number. In 2005 his son showed him an article from the Internet about Balanan Lake entitled “Paradise Lost” written in 2002. He decided to see the lake personally, and what he saw made him sad. He recalled that “they cut more trees (and) as a matter of fact at that time, there were still some smoldering embers as a result of their *kaingin*” (Macias 2007). He added that “they were out of control.” That situation could have continued had he not introduced the subsequent intervention.

Meanwhile, Nong Juaning, the governor’s trusted person, who hailed from Mindanao and had lived in the community since 1974, had been working with the governor in the conservation and development of Balanan Lake. He confirmed the governor’s description of the past situation around the lake: *Oo, sige gyud ga-kaingin. Ngano man? Kay wa man gyud lain kap-adulngan* (Yes, they continued to slash and burn. Why so? Because there was no other way to go) (Galleon 2007). We also asked him what he thinks could have happened if *kaingin* making was not stopped. He said:

Maupaw gyud kay ultimo katong mga batohon nga naay yuta gamay pahimuslan man gyud to sa mga tawo kay tamnan mais. Unya naay mo-agi nga katalagman dali kaayo mag-landslide. . . . So posible mawala ang lake. Mao nay klaro gyud kung wala pa gyud nagpakabana si gobernador. Wala gyud kining lugaraha na. (ibid.)

It would be denuded really because even the rocky areas with soil that would have little use to others would be planted with corn. And when calamities or typhoons occur, landslides easily happen. . . . So it’s possible the lake will disappear. That would clearly have happened had the governor not intervened. This place would have been gone.

A businesswoman, whose family was resettled because their house and store were directly beside the lake where the restaurant and conference hall now stand, was particularly asked about the past condition of the lake. Her

husband’s grandparents were early residents in the area even before the earthquake and the birth of the lake, and the story how it was formed had been transmitted down to members of the family. She recalled:

Lalom gyud na kaayo ang linaw sa una. Sa 1981 gangitngit ra gyud ang linaw. Kakahoyan pud ang kilid. Gangitngit gyud kaayo. Pagkakaran makita na nimo ang paglubog. Nimabaw na. (Edria 2007)

The lake was really deep at first. In 1981 the water was so dark. Along the edge it was also forested. It was truly dark. But now you can see it has become murky. It’s already shallow.

She also described how fertile the soil was for planting corn on mountain slopes around the lake, and this had enticed migrants from as far as Mindanao to reside and farm there. With remorse she further said: *Pero karon di na tambok kay nagkadugay nagkawala man ang katambukon sa yuta. Naanod na* (But now the soil is no longer fertile because as time passed the soil has lost its nutrients. They’ve been eroded already) (ibid.). Clearly, her description is not far from what the governor and Nong Juaning had to say. The condition could have been worse if the past practice of open access resource use and spatial activities have not been regulated or stopped.

The dilemma is either to stop poor people from farming in critical areas in order to restore biodiversity or leave them alone because they have the right to survive, given the limited opportunities available to them. This dilemma is also exemplified in the debate between preservation and use, or the divide between biologists and social scientists, because of different priorities and disciplinary expertise that ultimately redound to actions that subsequently determine the kind of future that awaits nature and people (see Rangarajan and Shahabuddin 2006). The resolution of this tension will surely involve the exercise of power, and the one that has more power wins while the other with less is marginalized. However, such imbalance of power and opportunities does not remain constant in reality because opposing forces always threaten the situation, which may cause a shift toward the direction of imbalance. And whatever this direction is would always be to the detriment of the other, at any rate and in any form.

Without a doubt, the statements and actions of the governor speak of the direction to which he is headed—to maintain a balance between protecting

nature and providing the needs of displaced people. But, as already discussed, it was not easy for him to secure the necessary resources and to persuade people who belong perhaps to a rival political party to support his cause. Nonetheless his political advantage as governor, as congressman, and then again as governor allowed him to generate the necessary funds either from his own congressional budget and other political leaders—such as Cong. Herminio G. Teves of the Third District of Negros Oriental; Cong. Sonny Madamba of the Alliance of Philippine Electric Cooperatives, a party-list representative; and Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr. (Office of Cong. Macias 2006)—or through the appropriation made by the provincial board (Office of the Sangguniang Panlalawigan, Province of Negros Oriental 2007). In all these he has demonstrated his way of getting what he thinks would work to achieve his goal when he believes it is worth the effort (*Over Seas* 1998).

Not everyone may agree with his approach in pursuing the protection of Balanan Lake and in dealing with the people affected by it, but at least he is a man who believes he knows what he is doing and what the results would be. To sum it up, how he has articulated that “nature and people do matter” in his approach of conserving and developing the lake can be gleaned from this statement:

It was not easy to convince them. I told them . . . to move out . . . to stop cultivating the mountainside because (it) will loosen the soil, and when it rains we have erosion and silting of the lake. So, the project is primarily reforestation to address the immediate problem. (But) you have to take care of those (affected) people. It (needs) a combination of projects . . . (such as) resettlement (in which) we try to convince them to move out of the area . . . (but we) have to be sure that when they move out there is life support. What will they do if we move them out (without ensuring) their source of food? (And) you don't resettle them unless you are ready with the housing. For me, that is the heart of the whole project because if you didn't have the housing project they will not move out. They will continue to destroy even if you reforest. Why? Because they will be more interested on what to eat. (Macias 2007)

For him it would have been difficult to just make people stop destroying the environment without providing them also with livelihood. If they are satis-

fied then they can continue to protect the resources that support them and not revert to old practices. This is where ecotourism seemingly plays a significant role in sustaining the financial requirement and enthusiasm of Balanan residents in protecting the lake and the forest around it. However, the interest and enjoyment of tourists should not supersede the well-being of the local people because, in the end, they are always the major stakeholders of Balanan Lake and its environs. The tourists will come and go but the local people will have to bear the results of tourism development on the environment.

Moreover, there are lessons that the BLDA can learn from Apo Island, although the conservation initiatives on the island, both in past and present management regimes, centered on the marine protected area (MPA) introduced by Silliman University scientists and established in 1985 (see Alcala 2001). The MPA is off limits to fishing and other extractive human activities so that the corals and fish can rehabilitate and subsequently replenish the surrounding areas as spillover effects. Principally it was aimed at the food security of the residents after several years of dynamite fishing and other destructive fishing methods had devastated the island's coral reefs.

The same open access tradition that prevailed on Apo Island prior to the 1980s characterized the use of the waters of Balanan Lake and the forest around it before the BLDA took over the area's management. The resistance of farmers to the resettlement and conservation efforts of the BLDA is very similar to that demonstrated by fishers on Apo Island, who perceived the threat of losing control over their fishing grounds (Oracion 2006). But their sacrifices paid off because the Apo Island MPA is now a popular dive destination and a learning site in coastal resource management, both nationally and internationally. This scenario must inspire Balanan farmers with the lesson that present conservation initiatives that others perceive as threats can actually offer them long-term ecological and economic benefits.

For several years now Apo Island residents have enjoyed economic benefits from tourism-related activities and improved fisheries, opportunities which could have been missed if they went on opposing the MPA. However, major changes in the management of the MPA have taken place since 1997 with the formation of the Protected Area Management Board (PAMB), a multisectoral group composed of members from outside and within the island pursuant to the declaration of Apo Island under the NIPAS in 1994. This board replaced the community-based management regime led by the Marine Management Committee composed only of island residents.

The changes in the MPA management regime drew resentment from a majority of the island's residents who felt alienated from the MPA decision making and management of tourism user fees, which they enjoyed in the past (Oracion 2006). The collected user fees are remitted first to the national treasury and only 75 percent is returned to Apo Island to finance its resource management activities and pay the salaries of the PAMB personnel while 25 percent goes to the national fund of the NIPAS. But the release of Apo Island's share always suffered bureaucratic delay, causing residents to feel disappointed. They also perceived a lack of transparency in the management of user fee funds and they felt they were being deprived of the supposed economic benefits of keeping an MPA.

The financial management issue and tension on Apo Island likewise offer the BLDA a lesson to ensure that local people who are burdened by conservation and ecotourism programs in Balanan Lake must be compensated equitably in whatever form. The enjoyment of economic benefits will prevent them from derailing the initial positive impacts of these programs. Moreover, the BLDA must see to it that the local people are always consulted and can actively participate in decision making through officials of their organization in various undertakings that have altered their traditional modes of subsistence. These lessons gleaned from Apo Island are not difficult to practice because the governor personally believes that the protection of Balanan Lake must go hand-in-hand with the rehabilitation of displaced farmers. However, the policy that nature and people equally matter needs to be sustained by future political leaders in the province.

Conclusion

This article concludes that government interventions have already brought about considerable changes to the physical landscape around Balanan Lake, beautifying and at the same time rehabilitating degraded areas, and making the whole place touristically viable. In the process, however, the traditional people-place relationship has been altered as spatial regulations and restrictions are enforced. Thus, although a majority of the local people supported and on the whole benefited from the projects of the BLDA, and agreed to be resettled, the government has yet to succeed in securing the full cooperation of all farmers to leave their farms and engage in environmentally friendly and sustainable farming techniques and in nonfarm income generating activities.

Meanwhile, the infrastructures and services currently available to and enjoyed by local people can be viewed in two ways. First, these are the added value of ecotourism development and not actually its direct results, because the resettlement of affected households was primarily intended to protect critical areas. It aims to conserve and rehabilitate the remaining resources in the lake and the surrounding forest, which are subsequently packaged as touristic commodities. Moreover, the improvement of the road to the lake is geared to making it accessible to tourists and is not intended primarily to bring farm products to the market. But this is a matter of perception, because how one looks at these benefits influences the values or meanings attached to them.

An alternative way of seeing the situation is that the conservation efforts and infrastructural developments in Balanan Lake are really intended for the advantage of the local people and not for tourists. Ecotourism is only a strategy to propel the community to help in protecting and conserving Balanan Lake and to generate funds to sustain the conservation program of the BLDA. It is designed as well to provide employment to the affected households. Although more time is needed in order to tell whether the development principles and approaches applied by the BLDA will really work in attaining management sustainability of the lake, we suggest that any effort elsewhere to engage in similar conservation and ecotourism programs must maintain a balance between ecosystem quality and the demands for subsistence of the affected local people.

List of Abbreviations

BLDA	Balanan Lake Development Authority
BLDP	Balanan Lake Development Project
Cong.	Congressman
DENR	Department of Environment and Natural Resources
ENRD	Environment and Natural Resources Division, Governor's Office
MPA	Marine Protected Area
NIPAS	National Integrated Protected Area System
NSCB	National Statistical Coordination Board
PAMB	Protected Area Management Board

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