

## **Abstract**

A lot has been written on ecotourism since its emergence in the 1980s but up till now there is a lot of disagreement on what it really is. This has profound effect on its ability to contribute in conservation and development, which are the main objectives it craves to achieve. While the debate is going, the tourism industry in general is witnessing tremendous boost over the last few years and the development is consolidating hopes on its ability to serve as viable development strategy. This study is carried out to investigate how ecotourism, as a conservation and development strategy, could contribute in micro-level development in marginal and natural areas. The study area is a remote natural location, the rain forests of central Buton Island; South-East Sulawesi Indonesia, where a U.K based scientific eco-tour company has been operating for the past eight years. The area provided a unique setting suitable for investigating the performance of best practice example of ecotourism and the scope it has in contributing to development. The area is also faced with a huge conservation challenge of protecting one of the most important rain forests in the Wallacea region of South-East Asia because of its high level of species endemism. The biological importance of the rain forest has attracted GEF funding for an innovative locally based forest management scheme that further provided this study the scope of investigating the feasibility of incorporating ecotourism as a viable component of the numerous strategies enshrined in the project. To investigate these complex issues, this study collected data using both qualitative and quantitative methods in generating information for carrying out numerous analyses that would be used as inputs in planning a sound ecotourism project meant to tackle development issues. Results show that ecotourism brings variety of benefits and exposure to remote areas even though such benefits may not be significant. It also established that diversification of livelihood options are important in ensuring local involvement in sustainable resource exploitation. The scope of ecotourism in ensuring micro-level development has been investigated in depth and strategies for achieving that were recommended.