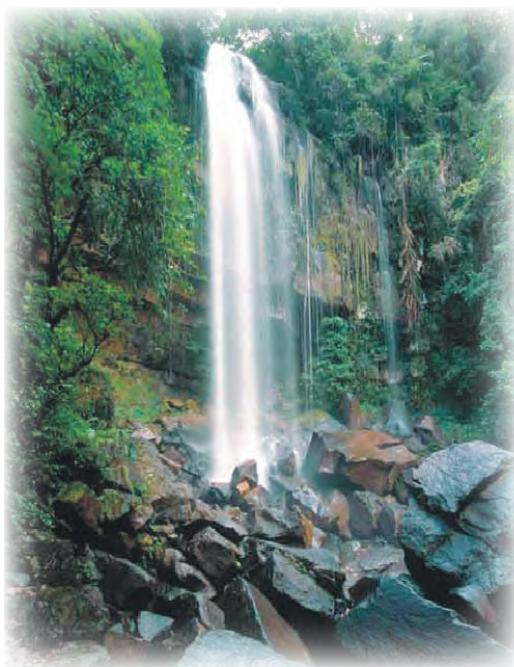


Community-Based Ecotourism: Livelihood cum Adaptation Strategy for Kampong Speu Province, Cambodia

By *Bun Chan Meta*¹



Chambok is a community in Kampong Speu province, Cambodia. It lies on the border of Kirirom National Park, where the eastern slope of Cardamom Mountain can be found. Commonly, villagers earn money by home gardening and animal raising. However, some parts of its land are being used in mining, leaving less arable area for people to grow crops. Because of this, villagers resort to logging and destroying the forests for timber and non-timber products, which they sell for a living.

Ninety-four percent (94%) of the people in the community illegally log trees, hunt wildlife, and burn wood for charcoal. All these activities affect biodiversity and natural resources. Furthermore, it affects the people's livelihood since they rely on forest products to earn money. It also makes the village vulnerable to drought. Sixty-six percent (66%) of the people in Chambok does not have other sources of income. They

have become poorer because of the lack of arable lands, land use change, erosion, use of chemical pesticides, and drought. Thus, some of them migrate to other places for work.

Since natural resources are important to the villagers, Mlup Baitong, an environmental non-government organization, worked with the community to establish Community-Based Ecotourism (CBET) with the aim of sustainably managing natural resources and improving the livelihood of people. CBET in Chambok was established in 2003 and has since conducted a lot of activities for natural resource conservation, income generation, and community capacity-building.

Through the community's cooperation and facilitation by the authorities, Mlup Baitong was able to provide training courses to community members for capacity-building on forest management and awareness-raising about the importance of natural resources and its relation to ecotourism.

The community members identified the potential places that can attract the visitors, such as the waterfalls, batcave, lake, and the forest in the Community Protected Area. The ecotourism site covers 161 ha, situated on the borders of Kirirom National Park and the Community Protected Area.

Efforts on Natural Resource Management

After the capacity-building activities, the villagers became more aware of the problems caused by deforestation. They committed to protect the forest by patrolling to guard against illegal activities.

Nine villages are part of the CBET project. They work together in patrolling the forest, marketing products, providing services to

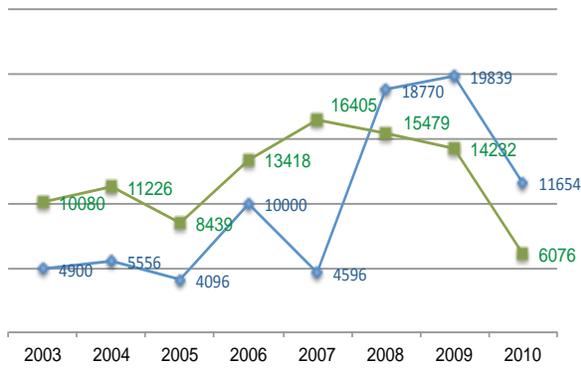


Fig 1. Income in US Dollars and number of visitors in Chambok from 2003 - 2010

tourists, and managing natural resources, as well as building infrastructures like roads and bridges, and market stalls.

They patrol two to three times a week and report illegal activities to the Forest Administration.

Through these activities, community members have attracted tourists to visit the plantation and the botanical garden located in the community. During visits, they present the importance of ecotourism in their community and the conservation of natural resources.

Local income generation from services

Since CBET also aims to improve livelihood by creating jobs for community members, tourist visitor services are provided such as home stays, plantation tours, ox-cart rides, food sales, and tour guides for swimming, hiking, and camping on the mountains.

The women in the community have also formed a self-help group to save their earnings from the tourist visitor services.

Adaptation to climate change

Drought has affected the community's productivity; the prolonged dry season made it hard to grow crops.

Community-based ecotourism has become a way to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change.

The community adapts to climate change by diversifying their livelihood strategies focused on eco-tourism.

Successful project implementation

Chambok's community-based ecotourism has done well in natural resource management and in helping the community improve its income.

In 2006, the community received a Certificate of Appreciation from the authorities and a medal from the Ministry of Tourism for their efforts.

Their CBET strategy is a good example for communities working on climate change adaptation. Villagers learned to adapt to climate change. They not only managed their forest resources, they also increased their income by doing so.



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¹Ms. Bun Chan Meta is the Project Officer of Mlup Baitong, the non-government organization overseeing the Community-Based Ecotourism program in Chambok, Kampong Speu, Cambodia.

Address comments and questions to buth_chanmeta@yahoo.com

SEARCHA, Los Baños
Laguna 4031 Philippines
Phone: +63 49 536 2290 local 161/402
Fax: +63 49 536 2283
Email: kc3@agri.searcha.org

Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture
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