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The Potential of Ecotourism to Contribute to Local Sustainable Development

**A Case Study in Kiet Ngong Village in Xe Pian
National Protected Area, Lao PDR.**

Alavanh PHANTHAVONG

2009

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Local Sustainable Development:**

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degree of Master of Philosophy in Development Studies at
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ABSTRACT

The ecotourism industry is experiencing increasing popularity as the demand grows for tourism that is environmentally sensitive, informative, and beneficial for local communities. For over a decade, Lao PDR, an underdeveloped country, has been promoting its 20 National Protected Areas as ecotourism destinations. These ecotourism projects are positioned as tools for protecting natural resources and reducing poverty, and are generating hope for the creation of local sustainable development. At this point in time, however, the Lao government lacks effective strategies for ensuring their long term success. This thesis was designed to address this concern by analysing the potential for one of these projects, Xe Pian ecotourism, to contribute to local sustainable development. The current outcomes of the Xe Pian ecotourism project were analysed and input was sought from all stakeholders concerning ideas for desirable strategies.

Kiet Ngong village, located inside the Xe Pian NPA, Lao PDR, was selected for case study. Data was gathered by employing mostly quantitative methods consisting of semi-structured interviews, informal and formal interviews, private walks and observation, and questionnaire surveys. The findings illustrated that ecotourism in Kiet Ngong has impacted local livelihoods and other environmental, economic, social, and cultural factors in both positive and negative ways. However, the positive effects of Xe Pian ecotourism were found to be more significant than the negative effects. Importantly, Kiet Ngong residents expressed optimism about the future of ecotourism and have claimed that any negative consequences cannot discourage their desire for continuing ecotourism development. This research also revealed that the stakeholders involved in the project are able to offer a variety of strategies for resolving problems that have arisen along the way.

Results from this study identified three main points that need to be addressed in order to maintain Xe Pian ecotourism, namely the promotion of economic and political empowerment of the local population, the development of external and internal regulations, and the adoption of a community-based ecotourism approach. Further recommendations are offered for the policy planners of both the government and the project's administrative bodies, as well as for the residents of Kiet Ngong. These are followed by additional suggestions for further study.

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