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Local perspective on Community Based Ecotourism: A Case Study in Ban Na in Phu Khao Khoay National Protected Area, Lao PDR

Kongchay Phimmakong
2011
Local perspective on Community Based Ecotourism: 
A Case Study in Ban Na in Phu Khao Khoay National 
Protected Area, Lao PDR

A thesis prepared in partial fulfilment of the requirements 
for the degree of Master of Environmental Management 
at Massey University, New Zealand

MASSEY UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

In 2002 the Lao government adopted a policy for nationwide economic growth based on the development of tourism as a priority sector. This aims to alleviate poverty through ecotourism and pro-poor tourism, through community based projects such as Ban Na community based ecotourism (CBE) project. This research aimed to investigate factors influencing household involvement in CBE projects in Laos. The impacts of the project within the village were also identified. To date little research with this focus has been undertaken in Laos. The findings and recommendations of this research will provide important information to the Lao Government for the future development of strategies and initiatives concerning community participation in rural ecotourism. This is particularly important for Laos as they are in the early stages of developing their ecotourism industry, especially CBE projects in rural areas. To achieve this, a single case study was undertaken focusing on Ban Na CBE project and field data was collected using semi-structured interviews and observations, and additional secondary sources. Qualitative data analysis methods were used to extract the key findings.

This research confirmed that CBE has the potential to enhance socio-cultural, socio-economic and environmental benefits for rural communities in Laos. In socio-cultural terms CBE increased household awareness of the value of their traditional culture, and in socioeconomic terms CBE allowed local households to improve their livelihoods through financial benefits. The benefits have taken place at both community and household levels. At the community level, public infrastructure has been improved such as water supply upgrading. At the household level, households actively involved have gained direct income from guiding and homestays. The new source of income has enabled households to improve their housing conditions, to purchase farm materials and investing in their children’s education. Those households that have not been actively involved in CBE (that include the very poor) also benefit from selling local products and through access to the CBE village fund. CBE has resulted in enhanced conservation outcomes for the protected area. This is a consequence of increased household awareness of the environment and their impact on it. However, CBE has also had negative impacts including an increase in solid wastes and dust and noise associated with the increasing number of tourists.
Findings from this research indicate that the majority of households can benefit from CBE projects when the management of the project includes rules that limit the level of participation of any one household, thereby ensuring maximum household participation and subsequent resulting benefits. In a CBE project, there is no requirement for all households to be involved in providing services to tourists because it is not possible for some households to provide the types of service preferred by tourists. Although, not all households can actively participate in CBE, the benefits can be accessed by all those in the community. CBE has the potential to provide benefits across the community to both households who are actively and not actively involved in the project. This equitable benefit is a result of the CBE project rules that ensure assistance through the community fund, spread benefits from actively involved households and ensure those households not actively involved are able to access benefits.

The findings from this research also illustrate that a local structure such as village committee can manage and establish rules for CBE projects without support from outsiders. The committee also has the potential to manage the allocation of benefits across the community. Further, rules within CBE projects have the potential to assist long term sustainability and ensure the equitable distribution of benefits throughout the community.

CBE provides an opportunity for community members with different circumstances to participate in the project due to the range and nature of ecotourism activities such as guiding, hosting tourists and producing handicrafts. This is also the case for a homestay option which offers women an opportunity to be actively involved and gain direct benefits without leaving their children and household responsibilities. However, like other community based development projects, poorer households are limited from being actively involved as a result of lack of facilities, time, labour and lack of awareness of the rules around the project and potential benefits as well as personal confidence.

Key words: community based ecotourism, community participation, Phu Khao Khoay National Protected Area, Laos.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the role of my two supervisors, Janet Reid and John Holland and their contribution to this thesis. I am greatly indebted to them for their continuous support, guidance and feedback throughout the research process.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the New Zealand Government, specifically New Zealand International Aid for their financial support over my two years of study at Massey University. I would also like to sincerely thank the Institute of Natural Resources, College of Sciences for their financial assistance during the data collection stage of my research.

I also greatly appreciate the input from all participants and their willingness to share their information and opinions to fulfil the research objectives.

I would like to express gratitude to all the staff at the International Student Office in particular; Dianne, Denise, Natalie, Olive, Sue and Sylvia for the support and assistance. Thanks to all my fellow colleagues in the Environmental Management programme especially; Bandeth, Carmella, Chau, Christie, Fleur, Jerry, Katrina, Naomi, Paula, Peter and Rony. Your friendship has made my time in New Zealand enjoyable and has provided me with another source of support while I have been away from home.

Finally, I would like to thank from my heart my family members for their support, understanding and most importantly, their love.

Without these people, this thesis would not have been possible. I wish you all the best for your good health and future endeavours.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................... i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................................................................................... iii
LIST OF FIGURES .......................................................................................................................... viii
LIST OF TABLES .............................................................................................................................. x
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS ............................................................................................................... xi

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................. 1
  1.1 Background and statement of the problem ........................................................... 1
  1.2 Problem statement and research aim ................................................................. 6
  1.3 Research questions and objectives .................................................................... 6
  1.4 Outline of the thesis ............................................................................................. 7

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .................................................................................................... 8
  2.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................. 8
  2.2 Ecotourism development ..................................................................................... 8
  2.3 Factors influencing local participation in community development projects .......................................................... 11
  2.4 Inequities in ecotourism projects ...................................................................... 16
  2.5 Impacts of tourism on local communities ......................................................... 18
    2.5.1 Socio-economic impacts ............................................................................ 20
      2.5.1.1 Ecotourism and income generation ................................................. 21
      2.5.1.2 Ecotourism and employment and infrastructure opportunities ........ 22
    2.5.2 Environmental impacts ............................................................................. 24
    2.5.3 Socio-cultural impacts ............................................................................. 26
  2.6 Summary ................................................................................................................. 29

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ..................................................................................... 31
  3.1 Introduction .......................................................................................................... 31
  3.2 The selection of research strategy ...................................................................... 31
  3.3 Research case approach ..................................................................................... 32
    3.3.1 Case selection ............................................................................................ 34
  3.4 Data collection processes .................................................................................... 34
    3.4.1 Fieldwork preparation .............................................................................. 35
    3.4.2 The process of getting permission to conduct the research ...................... 35
    3.4.3 Sampling ................................................................................................... 36
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Map showing the location of Laos with neighbouring countries...........1

Figure 3.1: A diagram of a single case study method adapted from Yin
(2003) .........................................................................................................................33

Figure 3.2: The qualitative data analysis process....................................................44

Figure 4.1: Map showing the location of Phu Khao Khoay National
Protected Area and other 18 Protected Areas in Laos .................................48

Figure 4.2, 4.3: Tad Sai .............................................................................................49

Figure 4.4: Tad Luek ................................................................................................49

Figure 4.5: Tad Xang ................................................................................................50

Figure 4.6: Map showing the location of 78 villages both inside and
outsides PKK ...........................................................................................................51

Figure 4.7: The location of Ban Na at the edge of Phu Khao Khoay National
Protected Area .........................................................................................................52

Figure 4.8: The elderly women are preparing bamboo for weaving ...................55

Photo 4.9 The women are weaving bamboo while talking with the
researcher .....................................................................................................................55

Photo 4.10: The final product of bamboo weaving .................................................56

Figure 4.11: The elephant tower of Ban Na ...............................................................60

Figure 4.12: The elephant tower of Ban Na ...............................................................60

Figure 4.13 Homestays in Ban Na ............................................................................61

Figure 4.14: Homestays in Ban Na ............................................................................61

Figure 4.15: The structure of Ban Na ecotourism .....................................................62

Figure 4.16: The welcome tourist office in front of the head of village tour
house .........................................................................................................................63

Figure 4.17: The tour manager is weaving bamboo basket on the welcome
tourist table while there are no tourists coming to the village ..............63

Figure 4.18: Monetary contribution from the elephant tower fees ......................66
Figure 4.19: The organisational hierarchy of the village committee in the ecotourism project .................................................................68

Figure 5.1: Map showing the location of Ban Na in relation to the villager houses .................................................................................87

Figure 5.2: A Farmer’s house before working with the project ...................94

Figure 5.3: A Farmer’s new house under construction after 4 years working in the project ......................................................................94

Figure 5.4: A water supply source improvement in Ban Na ......................98
**LIST OF TABLES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.1</td>
<td>Relevant situation for different research methods</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.2</td>
<td>Research participants and number of interviews</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.3</td>
<td>Example of an interview guideline for key informants used during the interviews</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.4</td>
<td>Example of an interview guide for households used during the interviews</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1</td>
<td>The households of Ban Na categorized according to their living condition</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.2</td>
<td>Incoming tourist statistics of Ban Na between 2005 and 2009</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.3</td>
<td>Ban Na’s tour activities and fees</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.1</td>
<td>The case study’s important characteristics</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CBE</td>
<td>Community Based Ecotourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DED</td>
<td>Germany Development Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lao PDR</td>
<td>Lao People's Democratic Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>LNTA</td>
<td>Lao National Tourism Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>Non-government Organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAST</td>
<td>National Authority of Science and Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGPES</td>
<td>National Growth Poverty Eradication Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QDA</td>
<td>Qualitative Data Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PKK</td>
<td>Phu Khao Khoay National Protected Area</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>