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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  
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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.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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





# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background and statement of the problem

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), or Laos, is a landlocked nation in the heart of South East Asia. The country is located at the centre of the dynamic Mekong Region. Laos covers approximately 236,800 square kilometres and shares borders with several countries including Burma, China, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam (see Figure 1.1). The country is characterised by central plains along the Mekong River and mountainous regions to the north, east and south. The climate is governed by monsoons bringing rain from May to October, followed by a dry season from November to April. The country is divided into 17 provinces and one special zone (a new province which is small compared to the other provinces). Each province is further divided into districts and villages.



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

In 2004, Laos had a population of approximately 5.5 million of whom 85 percent lived in rural areas most of whom were engaged in agriculture as their main activity (LNTA, 2004). The majority of these rural people are poor<sup>1</sup>. Laos is one of the world's least developed countries, ranking 140<sup>th</sup> among 174 countries and the least developed nation in South East Asia (Lao PDR, 2003). Its per capita income was US\$425 in 2005, and social indicators such as low life expectancy, high infant and maternal mortality, and low educational levels place it among the poorest in the region (World Bank, 2006).

Over the centuries, Laos has joined forces with other neighbouring countries such as Burma, Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam in order to free itself from foreign influence and control. In 1893, the country became a French protectorate. In 1945, the Japanese occupied some areas of the country and Laos only achieved independence from them in 1954. However, between the late 1960s and early 1970s, the USA had a strong influence on the country's political regime. It was also the time of the armed struggle between the Royal Lao Government and its political opponents. This resulted in bringing an end to the monarchy in 1975 and the country becoming Lao People's Democratic Republic.

During the first decade of the republic which started in 1975, the government attempted to develop its social and economic sectors based on central planning and state control, but despite these efforts, the country experienced a decline in its economy (World Bank, 1989). In 1985, for example, manufacturing and exports declined by 50 percent and 30 percent respectively (World Bank, 2001). At the same time, the debt ratio rose to 22 percent which impacted on the ability of the government to pay its debt. In 1986, Laos undertook a nationwide reform and transformed the country's economy and policies to be based on open, competitive market forces. The reforms are known as the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) and were aimed at liberalizing trade and foreign investment, strengthening the private sector and improving macroeconomic management (World Bank, 2001).

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<sup>1</sup>The Lao government has defined poverty as the lack of ability to fulfil basic human needs such as not having enough food, lacking adequate clothing, not having permanent housing and lacking access to health, education and transportation services (NGPES, 2004).

The primary economy of the country relies heavily on natural resources as more than 50 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) is received from agriculture, forestry, livestock and fisheries (UNDP, 2009). The economic reform has contributed to improved economic performance, as shown in the increase of annual GDP from 7 to 7.3 percent from 2005 to 2006 (World Bank, 2006). According to the UNDP (2009), the increase in the GDP is based on foreign investment in mining and hydro-power as well as the growth of mineral exports. The economic adjustment undertaken from 1986 onwards seems to have also had positive economic impacts on the country in general. However, negative consequences for the environment are severe, for example: deforestation; the decline in non-timber forest products; and biodiversity loss. These directly affect a poor who are the majority of the country and rely on these natural resources for their daily consumption in rural areas (UNDP, 2009). Moreover, the new economic change has also created the social issue of poverty increasing in many rural areas of the country, resulting in migration of rural people to urban areas to find jobs for their survival and to avoid this increased poverty (UNDP, 2009).

In the 7<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, held in March 2001, the Lao government set poverty reduction as its central policy goal in an effort to shift the country from the status of a less-developed country by 2020. The policy has focused on sustainable development, with a balance not only between economic growth, cultural and environmental conservation, equitable distribution of economic wealth, sound macroeconomic management and governance, but also international cooperation and recognition of national security and stability (LNTA, 2004). This clearly shows that the Lao Government sees the importance of protecting the environment, as it tries to sustain economic growth and reduce the poverty of its population in rural areas.

Since 2002, the Lao Government has undertaken several policies that aim to reduce poverty. One of these focuses on tourism development which is one of the 11 priority sectors for the country's social and economic development (Gujadhur, Linphone & Panyaouvang, 2008). The Government is using tourism as a tool for national development through ecotourism and pro-poor

tourism, a primary focus of its poverty alleviation strategy (NGPES, 2004). The significance of tourism is the role it plays in providing income and creating jobs for both urban and rural communities. Moreover, it can play an important role in protecting Lao's natural and cultural heritages in order to meet the needs of sustaining economic growth in the country (LNTA, 2004). The Government has promoted sustainable tourism development by taking important steps to implement social and environmental programmes in cooperation with various international organisations and NGOs (LNTA, 2004).

Although there is no history of tourism in Laos before 1975, due to the Government at that time closing the door to tourists (LNTA, 2004), since Laos opened its borders in 1990, tourism has become a key source of the country's foreign exchange (Engelhardt & Rattanaovong, 2004; LNTA, 2004). Tourism is ranked as the second most important contributor to foreign exchange earnings, with a value of US\$233.3 million, making up eight percent of the GDP of the country in 2007. It is also a very important source of employment for Lao people (Gujadhur et al., 2008). Annual tourist numbers have increased significantly from 14,400 people in 1990 to 894,806 people in 2004 and this rocketed to 1.62 million people in 2007 (Gujadhur et al., 2008). It is projected that the number of international arrivals will increase to about 2.3 million, and the overall revenue for the tourism sector is expected to rise to 10 percent of GDP, reaching US\$250-300 million by 2010 (LNTA, 2007, cited in Gujadhur et al., 2008). Since Laos opened its doors, the country has become a new destination to international tourists. This is because Laos has a stunning natural environment and a people that have retained their cultural traditions. The abundance of natural resources and cultural heritage are a point of difference for the country in developing its ecotourism and tourism (Harrison & Schipani, 2007).

Studies in a number of countries suggest that the benefits from the participation of local people in development projects can play a significant role in reducing poverty (Armitage, 2005; Kellert et al, 2000; Kayat, 2002; Kiss, 2004; Li, 2002; Lise, 2000; Mosse, 1994; Narayan, 1995; Ostrom, et al., 2002; Pollnac & Pomeroy, 2005; Stem et al., 2003; Wilson, Fesenmaier,

Fesenmaier & Van, 2001; Wunder, 2000). Although the Lao government has promoted community participation in ecotourism as a tool for poverty reduction and environmental protection, there is limited research on this approach.

Studies in a number of countries also suggest that the benefits of community development projects do not reach very poor households (Barrett et al, 2001; Burkey, 1993; Cheyre, 2005; Dercon & Krishnan, 1996; Eswaran & Kotwal, 1990; Kumar & Corbridge, 2002), and in fact, the poor are often excluded from becoming involved in the projects through the actions of the more powerful members of the communities (Adebayo, 1985; Njoh, 2002; Oakley, 1991). While experiences from many developing countries have revealed a number of other factors and reasons influencing people becoming involved in community development programmes (Adebayo, 1985; Kayat, 2002; Lise, 2002; Narayan, 1995; Tewari & Khanna, 2005; Vos, 2005), again there has been no research conducted in Laos that relates to the factors influencing local households involvement in community based ecotourism.

Studies from several countries have created a debate in the literature over ecotourism impacts on host communities. Some literature argues that ecotourism has a positive impact on rural communities by increasing income (Zepple, 2007), creating employment (Roberts & Hall, 2001; Sharpley & Telfer, 2002), increasing a sense of pride in people to preserve traditional cultures (Wearing & Larsen, 1996) and conserving the environment (Stone & Wall, 2004). However, other studies reveal negative consequences for local communities in relation to social, economic and environment outcomes for the people (Mason, 1995; Mason, 2008; Peare, 1989). Very little research has been reported that explores the impacts of community based ecotourism (CBE) in Laos. In searching through the relevant literature on ecotourism in Laos, it was found that the Nam Ha and Kiet Ngong ecotourism projects are the only two of Laos' projects that have been studied with the aim of investigating the impacts on the local communities (Harrison & Schipani, 2007; Phanthavong, 2009; Schipani & Marris, 2002), while other ecotourism projects have had no impact studies. The Ban Na project, which is the focus

of this research, is among those that have not been analysed to determine impacts.

## **1.2 Problem statement and research aim**

While community based ecotourism in Laos has the potential to provide opportunities for rural communities in terms of community development and livelihood enhancement, little research has been reported that identifies the factors that affect the participation of community members. It is also necessary to determine the benefits and impacts of CBE on communities, particularly at the household level, as this will provide information that may improve both current and future projects.

Therefore, the aim of this research was to identify the factors influencing household participation in order to help ensure that the benefits of the project reach as many households as possible so as to contribute to and ensure the enhancement of local livelihoods including those of the very poor. This research aims also to provide policymakers with a useful source of information for improving strategies and plans for guiding the development of sustainable CBE in rural communities throughout Laos.

## **1.3 Research question and objectives**

This study was conducted to answer the following research question:

- How can the majority of households benefit from community based ecotourism projects in Laos?

In order to answer the question, two objectives were formulated:

1. To identify and describe the factors that influence household involvement in a CBE project in Laos.
2. To identify and describe the impacts on the households in the community where a CBE project operates.

In line with these objectives, this thesis describes the factors that influence the involvement of households in a CBE project. It also identifies the

environmental, socio-economic and socio-cultural impacts of a CBE project at the community and household levels.

## **1.4 Outline of the thesis**

Chapter 1: this chapter introduces background information on the research topic. It also outlines the aim, research question and objectives.

Chapter 2: this chapter presents a review of literature on ecotourism that has a specific focus on its developing definition. The factors that can influence local participation in community developments projects, and the impacts that tourism and ecotourism can have at both community and household levels are outlined.

Chapter 3: the methodology used in this study is presented in this chapter including the research design, data collection and data analysis processes.

Chapter 4: this chapter presents a detailed description of the case study area.

Chapter 5: the findings of the qualitative data analysis of the factors that influence household participation, and the impacts of the CBE project are reported in this chapter.

Chapter 6: the results from Chapter 5 are discussed in the light of the literature review in Chapter 2.

Chapter 7: this chapter presents the conclusions that are drawn from this study.



## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

A review of the literature relating to tourism, ecotourism and local participation is provided in the five sections of this chapter. The first section reviews the literature on ecotourism that has a specific focus on developing countries. It begins with ecotourism developments and later discusses the various definitions of ecotourism dating from the late 1980s. Several definitions were selected and compared to find the most suitable and relevant definition for the purpose of this research.

The second section contains the literature on factors influencing people's participation in rural development projects. This demonstrates the factors that limit local participation in many development projects including community-based ecotourism projects. Section three outlines the inequities of benefit contribution in community ecotourism projects.

The fourth section will outline the literature on the impact of ecotourism at the community level. Environmental, social-culture and socio-economic impacts will be further outlined. The final section will provide a summary of key findings from the literature.

### **2.2 Ecotourism development**

Tourism is a large industry that supports and contributes to the economic development of many developing countries (Torres & Momsen, 2004). For the world's 50 poorest countries, tourism is one of the largest contributors to economic development (World Tourism Organisation, 2000, as cited in Sofield, 2003). Also, it is a main source of foreign exchange, exceeding 80 percent of total income, for many countries including Lao People Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) (The International Ecotourism Society, 2010). Tourism has assisted poor countries to gain greater economic independence through

foreign exchange earnings (de Kadt, 1979; Scheyvens & Homsen, 2008). It also plays an important role in creating employment in many countries (Ulack & Casino, 2000) with one out of every 16 jobs worldwide in the sector providing 50 million jobs in developing countries alone (Ulack & Casino, 2000).

The concept of ecotourism has evolved from a widespread and growing interest in the natural environment and a corresponding recognition of the importance of conserving natural environmental quality (Orams, 1995). The term ecotourism first appeared in the 1980s. Ceballos-Lascurain, a Mexican conservationist, used the word 'ecotourism' while lobbying to conserve wetlands as a breeding ground for the American flamingo in northern Yucatan. To talk developers out of building marinas, he used the argument that tourists bird watching in the area could boost the rural economy and help preserve its ecology (Gilbert, 1997, p. 5).

Ceballos-Lascurain's definition of ecotourism was simply 'travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as existing cultural manifestation (both past and present) found in these areas' (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987, as cited in Boo, 1990, p. 2). This definition seems to be one of the most widely quoted in the literature on ecotourism and tourism's evolution (Bhattacharya et al., 2005; Honey, 1999; Higham, 2007; Orams, 1995; Wearing & Neil, 1999; Weaver, 2008). However, the definition does not widely capture the purpose of the conservation Ceballos-Lascurain mentioned, rather placing more emphasis on tourists' experience travelling to the area, than on the ecological concerns.

Developing a single definition for ecotourism remains a challenge for many experts and researchers worldwide (Björk 2000; Cater, 1994, cited in Björk 2000; Phanthavong, 2009). Since Ceballos-Lascurain defined ecotourism, it has been defined in various ways by different academics and organisations, based on their particular interest. Common components that are found in most definitions are that ecotourism takes place in a relatively undisturbed natural

area, attempts to minimise environmental impacts, and enhances conservation by providing opportunities for environmental education (Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Scace, Grifone & Usher, 1992, as cited in Weaver, 2008; Scace, 1993; Sxporsdottir et al., 1998, as cited in Higham, 2007; Valentine, 1992; Wallace & Pierce, 1996). Other definitions also involve conservation, tourist experience in undisturbed areas, local community concern and the minimization of environmental impacts (Goodwin, 1996; Honey, 1999; International Ecotourism Society, 2010; Orams, 1995; Weaver, 2001; Ziffer, 1989). Furthermore, some definitions also incorporate the notion of sustainable development regarding both the community and the environment (Bjork, 2000; EAA, 2000, cited in Weaver, 2008; Fennell, 2008; LNTA, 2005).

Over the last decade, the definition of ecotourism has been expanded to include references to local benefits, community participation and sustainable development (e.g. Bjork, 2000; EAA, 2000, as cited in Weaver, 2008; Fennell, 2008; LNTA, 2005). Garrod (2003), for example, argues that local involvement must be clearly identified in a definition of ecotourism if it is to meet the needs of sustainable development. The more recent definition has led to the concept of community based ecotourism.

Community based ecotourism increasingly implies, especially in developing countries, that local people are taking care of natural resources in order to increase their income via operating an ecotourism venture and are using the income to enhance their livelihoods (Brohman, 1996; Wells & Bradon, 1992 cited in Kellert et al., 2000). Lindberg et al., (1999, as cited in Bhattacharya et al., 2005) calls this type of ecotourism, ecotourism which takes place under the control of and with active participation of local communities who use natural resources. However, it is not easy in developing countries to achieve conservation sustainability goals when people are suffering from poverty and food insecurity. The majority of poor people in Laos are an example of this as they are living in remote areas and use natural resources for their daily consumption (LNTA, 2004). CBE is the solution that is most likely to meet the development conservation goals and help the local people who live in the

ecotourism areas. The most successful efforts in ecotourism development have included community participation (Bhattacharya et al., 2005), and this approach is now used by the Lao government.

In 2008, Fennell (2008) published a definition of ecotourism which more comprehensively captures the dimension of sustainable development and community involvement, local benefits and conservation of the environment than earlier definitions. “Ecotourism is a sustainable, non-invasive form of nature-based tourism that focuses primarily on learning about nature first-hand, and which is ethically managed to be low impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented (control, benefits and scale)” (p.24).

This research is concerned with the participation of local communities in a community based ecotourism project in Laos. For this reason, the definition of ecotourism that is accepted as relevant to this research is that of Fennell (2008). However, the definition misses some elements that are necessary in this case study. Supplementing Fennell’s (2008) original definition, ecotourism typically occurs in natural areas and must contribute to the conservation and sustainable development of natural resources and the empowerment of local communities.

### **2.3 Factors influencing local participation in community development projects**

Community participation has been the most common strategy used to achieve the goal of sustainable development over the last two decades; some people call them the participation decades (Botes & Van Rensburg, 2000). While much literature has highlighted the benefits and importance of local people’s involvement (Armitage, 2005; Kellert et al, 2000; Kayat, 2002; Kiss, 2004; Li, 2002; Lise, 2000; Mosse, 1994; Narayan, 1995; Ostrom, et al., 2002; Pollnac & Pomeroy, 2005; Stem et al., 2003; Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier & Van, 2001; Wunder, 2000), there have been few studies that identify the factors

that influence this involvement in development projects. This section reviews the literature which is relevant to the topic.

Studies have identified a range of factors or reasons why local communities do or do not participate in development projects including ecotourism projects. Powerful project members have a potential impact on the participation of people in rural development projects. Njoh (2002) identified that powerful members will influence the selection/participation of those who are involved; a conclusion based on a self-help water project in Cameroon. Adebayo (1985) also observed that local leaders had a significant part to play in influencing the participation in community based projects in Nigeria. This is clearly supported by Oakley (1991) who commented that lack of local leadership skills when implementing the project resulted in non-participation due to households not being confident and, therefore, not wanting to be involved in the activities. This is mirrored by Tewari and Khanna (2005), who conducted a study on the success of farmer participation in irrigation management in Gujarat and found that effective local leadership was one reason people were motivated to participate in the project due to their trust in their local leaders. They found that good leaders are able to get on well with their community, to speak for them, have honest discussions with them, and to be able to spend time or make extra efforts to solve problems in their communities. Wilson et al., (2001) claimed that it was important to recognise that local leaders are able to make a difference in the amount of community participation and increase the chance of a tourism project being successful.

The level of education and literacy has also been revealed to influence people's participation in community development projects (Glendinning, Mahapatra, & Mitchell, 2001; Napier & Napier 1991; Walters, Cadelina, Cardano & Visitacion, 1999). These authors found that higher educated people are more aware of the benefits that can be gained from their participation than illiterate people. This is supported by Lise (2000) who conducted a study on household participation in forest management and conservation in India. He found that the literate villagers in three states including Bihar, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh were more likely to be involved in

the forestry activities compared to the illiterate. Likewise, Abdulai and CroleRees (2001) studied farm and community development in Southern Mali. They found that the educated households were more likely to participate in the non-farm sector than the less educated. To increase participation, therefore, it has been suggested that the people's capability, especially in literacy, must be considered in community development projects (Sen, 1983, as cited in Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004).

Some literature highlighted labour availability as a reason influencing the involvement of local people in several development projects. Both Richards (1986) and Williams (1997) found that lack of labour availability was the greatest constraint for farmers in Sierra Leone wanting to participate in the community development project. This particularly happened in the planting and harvesting seasons when all farmers had to spend quality time in their fields, so they did not want to be a part of the project which took them away from their farm activities.

Narayan (1995) carried out a research project on community participation in 121 rural water supply projects in 49 countries around the world to identify the factors influencing local participation. He highlighted that the benefits from projects were significant factors motivating local participation. Another example of the benefit motivation is cited by Williams (1997), who studied the factors influencing local participation in a rural development project in Sierra Leone. Williams' research showed that the potential source of income from the project activities was the main reason that encouraged local people to be actively involved in the project. This has been found to be true in many development programs such as those in Costa Rica, Chile, China, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Nepal and the Philippines, where, without creating opportunities for people to benefit, it can be difficult for development projects to involve local communities in the project activities (Cheyre, 2005; Dolisca et al., 2006; Lise, 2000; Ogutu, 2002; Pollnac & Pomeroy, 2005; Stem et al., 2003; Studsrod, 1995; Stone & Wall, 2004; Udaya Sekhar, 2003; Wunder, 2000).

Briedenhann and Wickens (2004), in their research of tourism in South Africa, reported that a lack of understanding of the details of the project by the community created a barrier to participation in the tourism sector in the region. This included a lack of awareness of the value of natural resources for tourism which resulted in reluctance and a lack of enthusiasm to be involved in the tourism activities (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004).

Eswaran and Kotwal (1990) studied the implications of credit constraints on risk behaviour and found that the poor often preferred less risk when investing their money because they are more concerned about their future credit. This is supported by Dercon and Krishnan's (1996) research on income portfolios in rural development projects in Ethiopia and Tanzania. This revealed that the households' present incomes and attitudes to the financial risk involved play an important part in the households' decisions to participate (or not). They also found poorer households have lower risk preferences for investing their money in cash-crop production and non-crop activities.

Burkey (1993) raised the important point that passive participation often occurred where there was inadequate confidence, especially among poor people. Lack of confidence and reluctance to change was also acknowledged in a study by Wilson et al. (2001), who found these factors alone limited the number of people willing to participate in tourism projects in a case study in the United States. Accordingly, it is important to note the contextual differences between developed and developing countries although it appears that, in general, poorer households have lower participation rates.

Kayat (2002) conducted a study to find out what factors influenced local participation in Kampung Relau Ecotourism Program in Malaysia. He focused on two main points: the level of local participation and reasons for passive participation. He found that personal choice was the main factor that took locals away from the ecotourism project. He made the observation that people in the Kampung Relau area were mostly already employed in occupations such as self-employment, the public sector, private organisations and industries, so they did not want to be involved in the project as they did not

want to be limited by hosting tourists and participating in regular meetings related to the ecotourism project. He found that employed people had less interest in participating in the community development project. This was affirmed by Dolisca et al. (2006) in a study of factors influencing farmers' participation in forestry management programs in Haiti, where landowners were less likely to participate in forestry activities than renters.

Many other studies have shown that participation is restricted by relative wealth or lack of it. In Chile, participants in ecotourism projects are in the main not from the poorest households (Cheyre, 2005). The reason is that the more well-off people have their own houses and land and better education compared to the very poor households. Lack of such things seemed to be major barriers to poorer households' involvement. Having inadequate facilities for tourists was also found to be a key reason for the lack of involvement of the poorest households (Cheyre, 2005). In the Eastern India Rained Farming Project, the richer farmers were also more likely to reap benefits from the project than poorer villagers (Kumar & Corbridge, 2002). Barrett, Bezuneh and Aboud (2001) studied community development in Cote d'Ivoire of Kenya. They observed that poorer households had fewer opportunities to be involved in on-farm and non-farm activities compared to wealthier households.

It was claimed that location can influence community participation. Abdulai and CroleRees (2001) found that farmers in remote areas of Mali are less likely to be involved in the non-cropping sector than others who stay close to the local markets. The authors suggested that promoting community projects as a source of income, and improving infrastructure will achieve greater participation from poorer local households.

Gender is another factor influencing participation (Dolisca et al., 2006). Generally speaking, existing culture and gender roles are considered an important factor limiting many women's participation in rural development projects in developing countries. Mosse (1994) observed that very few women attended the Kribhco Indo-British Rainfed Farming Project (KRIBP) of India. He described how women there faced constraints in participation in the



project because they were too busy on their farms, especially in the weeding season. Not only did women not want to stay away from their fields and home, but they also had a low status in their society and did not have any public roles. Haidari and Wright (2001) supported these views on women's participation stating that the most common factors blocking women's participation in western Iran was the workload on their dairy farms. They found that these women worked about 17 hours per day, especially in spring when milk production is at its highest level. In contrast, the men's work did not go beyond 10 hours per day in the same period. Therefore, women tended to be excluded from any rural development projects in the region due to having no time and being tired from their dairy activities.

Vos (2005) pointed out that the factor influencing people not participating in Bohol Island development projects in the Philippines was that local people had had unfavourable experiences in a previous project. Therefore, they were not willing to be involved in further projects. Another research study, carried out in Cameroon (Njoh, 2002), also highlighted that previous negative experiences such as unfair cash contributions to water development projects caused a lack of interest in further participation by local communities.

Age is also considered to be a factor influencing the ability to be involved in several development projects. This is best represented by Dolisca et al., (2006) who studied the factors influencing farmers' participation in forest management programs in Haiti. They found that younger farmers are more willing to get involved in the forest activities than the older. This is also supported by Wilson et al. (2001) who found that aged people tended to not actively participate and not support tourism activities in a United States case study.

## **2.4 Inequities in ecotourism projects**

Ecotourism, it is believed, will improve local incomes and create employment opportunities for local communities. Participating households often receive a

range of economic benefits primarily in the form of increased income and enhanced employment opportunities. However, there are many ecotourism projects where there are questions about the local financial benefits (Unwin, 1996). Ashley and Roe (1998) claim that local communities receive a very small number of benefits from tourism programs. They gave the example of the Chiang Rai Community Based Ecotourism of Thailand, where villagers received only 20 baht (US\$ 0.50) for each tourist they accommodated and fed.

Furthermore, some ecotourism projects benefit only a small group of local people and institutions involved (Neth, 2008). In the Annapurna Conservation Area Project in Nepal, there was inequity in income benefits to local people with only 100 -150 households who owned tea shops and lodges gaining extra income (McLaren, 1998). Similarly, only six percent of local villagers near Royal Chitwan National Park in Nepal benefited from ecotourism programmes while many others did not (Bookbinder, Dinerstein, Rijal, Cauley & Rajouria, 1998).

In addition, several studies pointed out ecotourism can offer jobs to local villagers, but these are often unskilled jobs such as cleaning and cooking in hotels and lodges (Cater, 1996, as cited in Ashley & Roe, 1998; Hasler, 1996). This was supported by McLaren (1998) who studied the impacts of tourism in Cuzco, Peru. He demonstrated that of 280,000 employed economically active people involved in tourism operations in this region, only two percent (approximately 6,000) of them were local to the area. He reported that almost all the local people were hired in unskilled service positions such as waiters, maids and porters.

Gender imbalance was also considered to be one of the negative effects in local communities where ecotourism programmes are operating. Scheyvens (1999) argued that men were more likely to gain from and monopolise the benefits of tourism rather than women. This was supported by Walpole and Goodwin (2000) who found women were not employed in the charter boat

sector of the community-based ecotourism venture in Komodo National Park, Indonesia.

Inequity in income benefits can also arise from aspects mentioned in section 2.3 of this chapter. For example, Njoh (2002) highlighted that elite groups or powerful members in self-help water projects often select members based on their preference and reap the benefits from the development projects. This creates the beneficial inequity within the communities and results in passive participation from many local communities. In the Rural Credit Projects in northeast of Thailand, it was reported that funds did not reach the poor from several projects. The reason was that the powerful project members provided the financial benefits to their relatives and friends rather than the extremely poor households in their communities (Coleman, 1999).

## **2.5 Impacts of tourism on local communities**

This section will review the literature relating to tourism impacts in general and also how this has been measured over time. Over time, the research on tourism impacts has switched focus. During the 1960s, research on perceived impacts of tourism mainly focused on the positive impacts (Mathison & Wall, 1982), and was mainly concerned with economic consequences (Pizam, 1978). Studies analyzed the creation of wealth, growth in GDP, infrastructure development and growth in foreign exchange (Boyne, 2003). This has been called the period of optimism for tourism (Ap & Crompton, 1998).

In the 1970s, however, anthropology and sociology were applied to study how and why communities interacted with tourism, and in turn, the influences of tourism on people's ways of living (Young, 1973). Research during this time focused on social, cultural or environmental destruction (Liu, Sheldon & Var, 1986). The inequity of benefit contributions and the high social costs imposed by tourism were two strongly studied outcomes, so this resulted in increasing evidence that tourism negatively impacts the lives of people in host communities (Jud & Krause, 1976; Lankford & Samuel, 1994). Some authors

described this as the pessimistic decade for tourism (Ap & Crompton, 1998). However, Cohen (1978) argued these negative perceptions of tourism were overly emphasised in the decade, and that the impacts needed to be considered in the context of the overall contribution of tourism to a community. Cohen (1978) proposed the idea of a 'balance point' between the positive and negative impacts of tourism on communities and stated that the impacts of tourism are not just economic benefits but also include environmental destruction.

This 'balance point' approach has been used by academic researchers of tourism throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Ap & Crompton, 1998). Contemporary researchers have employed many techniques in their attempts to increase the accuracy of their measurements and more accurately and rigorously identify and record the impacts including social science techniques (Boyne, 2003).

In today's context, the majority of literature conceptualizes the impacts of tourism as falling into three categories: environmental; socio-cultural; and economic (Ashley & Roe, 1998; Cheyre, 2005; Diamantis, 2004; Dowling, 2003; Jenkins & Wearing, 2003, 2003; Neth, 2008; Phanthavong, 2009; Roberts & Hall, 2001; Weaver, 1998). However, the boundaries of these categories are not clearly delineated, with overlap between them (Boyne, 2003; Runyan & Wu, 1979). Mathieson & Wall (1982) called the interactions between economic, environmental and social phenomena 'cross impacts'.

Mason (2003) and Roberts and Hall (2001) claim that it is not straightforward to categorise the impacts as solely social, environmental, economic and cultural, as all tend to have interrelated dimensions. What categories are used and how these are perceived depends on the value position and judgment of the observer of the impacts (Mason, 2008). This can be demonstrated through the use of the social and economic impacts. It is possible for observers to define economic impacts of tourism as those that generate income and create jobs (Dowling, 2003; Neth, 2008; Weaver, 1998). Others see that income can bring many changes in people's lives, therefore, they prefer to combine both

social and economic to a socio-economic category instead, of just an economic category (Mbaiwa, 2003; Mbaiwa, 2005; Oppermann, 1996, as cited in Sharpley, 2003, Wunder, 2000). Even in research where impacts have been classified in one category (e.g economic), discussion shows how this then impacts on social dimensions of the community (e.g Cheyre, 2005; Phanthavong, 2009).

Social and economic impacts are intimately linked. In this study, socio-economic, environmental and socio-cultural categories have been selected to identify the impacts of ecotourism. These impacts will be further discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

### **2.5.1 Socio-economic impacts**

The socio-economic benefit has been signalled as the most important positive impact associated with ecotourism (WTO, 1999, as cited in Mihalic, 2000). Pearce (1989) indicated that the economic impact of ecotourism/tourism has been researched more than any other type of impact. The impacts on the host communities can be both positive and negative (Diamantis, 2004; Fennell, 1999, Fennell, 2008; Neth, 2008; Roberts & Hall, 2001; Weaver, 1998). Positive impacts include the contribution to foreign exchange and government revenues (Ashley & Roe, 1998), contributing income to local communities and households (Phanthavong, 2009; Zepple, 2007), increasing employment and infrastructure opportunities (Cheyre, 2005; Nelson, 2004; Roberts & Hall, 2001; Sharpley & Telfer, 2002; Weaver, 1998), and introducing new local economic activities like arts and crafts (Mason, 2008). Negative impacts of ecotourism are the increase in the cost of living in the host communities due to inflation, opportunity cost and over-dependence on tourism (Mason, 1995, Pearce, 1989).

Generating income and the creation of jobs and public facilities were seen to be the most significant positive economic impacts identified in the literature for communities involved in ecotourism activities. The details of these impacts will be outlined in the following sections.

### **2.5.1.1 Ecotourism and income generation**

A research study conducted by Harrison and Schipani (2007) examined the contribution of the Nam Ha Community Based Ecotourism in Laos to local communities. They reported that about 2,000 locals from eight villages earned US\$34,400 from selling local products and providing lodging and guiding services to tourists between October 2000 and February 2002. This represented 40% of the total village income. Phanthavong (2009) also reported that Kiet Ngong CBE generated income of 1, 940 million kips (or approximately US\$170,000) to the community between 2004 and 2009. The contributions of the ecotourism projects were not only improving local livelihoods in remote areas, but they were also a significant source of foreign exchange in Laos. Ashley and Roe (1998) reported that ecotourism has generated a significant source of foreign exchange in some developing countries, including the Caribbean islands where tourism is the main contributor to the GDP. Likewise, the biggest foreign exchange income of Fiji comes from ecotourism, which earned F\$521 million in 2001 (Tokalau, 2000).

Generally, people who live in rural areas of developing countries are very poor. As pointed out by Ellis (2000), poor people mainly focus on securing their livelihood. Therefore, the income from ecotourism plays a key role in raising the living standards of poor households. According to Garcia-Ramon, Canoves and Valdovinos (1995) and Hashimoto (2002), even a very small amount of income from ecotourism in the rural communities of Spain is considered to be a significant financial source for many households. Ogotu (2002) researched ecotourism in Kenya and concluded that ecotourism has played an important role in increasing household and community income in the Eselenkei community. His research indicated that over 20 percent of local people in the area received direct benefits from the ecotourism, while the whole community experienced indirect benefits from the village gate fees, the bed charge and selling firewood, charcoal and livestock to tourists or those looking after tourists.

One significant example comes from the Bushman community in Botswana where 47,675 people used to live on the poverty line with limited economic opportunities. Within community-based ecotourism programs, jobs such as local guides and housekeepers were created. Consequently, the income generated allowed the people to have better living standards (Zepple, 2007). This is similar finding to Weinberg et al. (2002) who conducted a study in Costa Rica and found that the increase of local income allowed local people to have a better standard of living. Tanzanian local communities have benefited from selling their products to tourists, generating more than US\$10,000 per year (Emerston, 1999). These incomes provide them with an improved livelihood and some of this money contributes to improving community infrastructure such as roads, schools and health clinics.

In Chile, income from tourism has improved the local housing conditions of some rural communities through access to better materials and being able to purchase household items (Cheyre, 2005). Similarly, local residents in Laos' Kiet Ngong and Nam Ha Community Based Ecotourism programs have better living conditions from the income earned through ecotourism. Hence, they can save money for buying household items and paying school fees for their children (Gujadhur, Linphone & Panyaouvong, 2008; Phanthavong, 2009).

#### **2.5.1.2 Ecotourism and employment and infrastructure opportunities**

Ecotourism projects play an important role in providing employment opportunities and infrastructure services to local communities. In Chile, ecotourism in rural areas plays a vital part in increasing job opportunities for women and young people. Cheyre (2005) outlined that before ecotourism was established in Curarrehue and Pucon Districts, in the southern part of Chile, the local women had very limited employment opportunities. There were jobs available in the summer season, but they had to leave their homes to work in the town nearby. This was the most difficult time for the women as summer coincides with the school holidays so they were required to care for their children at home (Cheyre, 2005). Due to the new roles in the ecotourism programs, these women could play an important part through their

involvement as cleaners, cooks and hosts in their own houses. Ecotourism provides jobs and income and without these, people have to leave their homes, farms and children to work in other places (Cheyre, 2005). Such ecotourism programs are also creating employment for many young people in the communities. They are more likely to be involved in tourism activities such as organizing sport activities, welcoming and guiding tourists, and arranging/booking tours in their communities. This is an advantage as it should encourage the young generations to stay in the rural areas, rather than having to move to town to find work (Cheyre, 2005).

Phanthavong's (2009) case study of ecotourism in Kiet Ngong, Laos reported that ecotourism brought employment to the local community. He reported that local households had become employed as elephant minders and riders, trekking guides, homestays, canoe services, traditional hand massagers, and craft and food producers. In a similar way, more jobs are available in Cambodia, Kenya and Costa Rica from ecotourism developments (Neth, 2008; Otugu, 2002; Weinberg et al., 2002). In addition to this, Mason (2003) indicated that producing and selling local crafts to tourists played a significant role in creating jobs for many local people in Nepal.

Ecotourism brings also a range of benefits to local people by creating public infrastructure. Poor people live in rural areas where there is limited infrastructure, transportation and telecommunication systems (Fernando, 2006). Ecotourism development can increase the provision of public facilities and enhance the social welfare of local communities as a whole (Nelson, 2004). In Cambodia, ecotourism development has had positive implications for the development of infrastructure systems in local communities (Neth, 2008). In Kenya, the Eselenkein community has benefited from more than 70 kilometres of earth road network which was built to support a community wildlife conservation project. As a result, the local people now have access to outside markets for the sale of their products (Ogotu, 2002).

One negative economic impact of tourism/ecotourism identified is its impact on living costs in the host community (Mason, 1995). A higher cost of living



can result when tourists increase the local demand for goods, food and properties (Mason, 2008). This is happening in the Keit Ngong community where the price of food has increased considerably since ecotourism started in the area (Phanthavong, 2009) which has negatively impacted on local livelihoods, especially the poor in terms of reducing their access to resources.

### **2.5.2 Environmental impacts**

According to Mason (2008), environmental impacts have been increasingly recognised as a major concern for sustainable development. The impacts often relate to the change in the natural environment, wildlife, the farmed environment and the built environment (Swarbrooke, 1998), and can be both positive and negative (Buckley, 2004). A number of studies indicated that positive impacts of ecotourism are associated with biodiversity conservation and the increase of people's awareness in protecting the environment (Kiss, 2004; Stem et al., 2003; Stone & Wall, 2004). Negative environmental consequences often refer to damage to vegetation, wildlife disturbance and the increase of pollution and waste because of the increasing number of people in the area (Mason, 2008).

Tourism can make an effective contribution to environmental protection because it promotes awareness in both the host communities and tourists (Bookbinder, Dinerstein, Rijal, Cauley & Rajouria, 1998; Weaver, 1998). As mentioned earlier, local participation in tourism is a popular tool for seeking better resource management outcomes, conserving biodiversity, and improving local livelihoods in rural areas (Armitage, 2005; Kiss, 2004; Li, 2002; Ostrom, Dietz, Dolsak, Stern, Stovich & Weber, 2002). This is true in the Ao Phangnga community based ecotourism in Thailand where tourism has increased local people's understanding and motivation to protect the environment in order to support their way of living (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2005).

Mehta and Heinen (2001) found that, in Nepal the majority of local communities were keen to preserve their community forests for the purpose of ecotourism and local food sources. Due to the income which can be

generated from protected areas, the promotion of conservation and a positive stance toward tourism was also recorded in Hainan, China (Stone and Wall, 2004). Stem et al. (2003) have drawn attention to the fact that the incidence of hunting has been reduced due to local people acknowledging the value of wildlife for tourism in the Costa Rica Ecotourism Project. A similar outcome has occurred in the Cuyabeno Wildlife Reserve in Ecuador (Wunder, 2000). Moreover, the number of wildlife in the Eselenkei Protected Area in Kenya significantly increased as shown by the doubling of bird species in the area (Ogutu, 2002), showing that CBE and conservation can be combined to benefit both the people and the ecology of a target area. In addition, ecotourism can also contribute to the conservation of protected areas. Weaver (2006) and Lindberg (2000) highlighted how ecotourism can play an important role in the protection of the environment through providing financial support for the conservation of relatively undisturbed areas.

Ecotourism can also increase community awareness of the importance of maintaining a hygienic environment. Phanthavong (2009) reported that Kiet Ngong Ecotourism in Laos has contributed to the improvement of household rubbish disposal which resulted in a cleaner community.

However, ecotourism may also have negative impacts on the environment. In Cambodia, Neth (2008) reported that the number of tourists can lead to environmental pollution, rubbish and changes in the village landscape. Therefore, the result is an increase in waste dumping where there is high potential to contaminate rivers and land near ecotourism sites often in protected areas. This has happened in Costa Rica where ecotourism is producing pollution such as solid wastes, traffic and noise (Weinberg, Bellows & Ekster, 2002).

In general, ecotourism is often focused on sensitive and unique environments; hence, it is not possible to avoid certain negative impacts on those special environments. In Bako National Park in Malaysia, soil erosion and vegetation damage are the most urgent issues for environmental managers due to the increase in tourist numbers (Chin, Moore, Wallington and Dowling, 2000).

Disturbance of wildlife is one of the greatest concerns for ecotourism lodges in many wildlife protected areas of Africa. Diamantis (2004) cited evidence that tour guides and their drivers often leave established tracks for observing animals such as lions and rhinos, and these disturb the natural settlement of many animals in the area. With respect to birds, in the Galapagos Islands of Ecuador, Burger and Gochfeld (1993) reported that almost all boobies (a native bird species) fly away when tourists come within two metres of their nests which is a factor likely to reduce their breeding success.

### **2.5.3 Socio-cultural impacts**

Socio-cultural impacts of tourism refer to the way in which tourism is perceived to contribute to a change in value systems, individual behaviour, family relations, a collective life style, safety levels, moral conduct, creative expression, traditional ceremonies and community organization (Fox, 1977 as cited in Ap & Crompton, 1998, p.121). Socio-cultural impacts are most likely to occur between hosts and tourists as a result of their coming into contact (Williams, 1998). During the 1980s, the majority of studies associated with the socio-cultural impacts of tourism on the host communities focused only on negative consequences (Dogan, 1989). Those negative impacts included the decline in traditions, increase in materialism, increase in crime rates, the introduction of social conflicts, overcrowding, and a dependency on industrial countries (Dogan, 1989).

More recently, however, numerous studies have focused on both positive and negative consequences (Besculides, Lee & McCormick, 2002; Cheyre, 2005; Neth, 2008; Phanthavong, 2009; Roberts & Hall, 2001; Weaver, 1998; Wearing & Larsen, 1996). The positive socio-cultural impacts include the sharing and learning of new traditions, creating a sense of local pride and a positive self image among local people, strengthening the sense of ethnic identity, and creating friendships between local people and visitors (Wearing & Larsen, 1996). The negative impacts include increases in drug and alcohol abuse, changes in traditional culture, negative influences on the youth of the

community and changes from the former peaceful lifestyle of the community (Wearing & Larsen, 1996).

Studies from many countries have suggested that ecotourism does produce positive socio-cultural impacts (Fagence, 2003). In Chile, for example, ecotourism has increased awareness of the importance of their traditional cultures amongst the villagers (Cheyre, 2005). Likewise, in China and Nepal, as people see the importance of their ethnic culture, this has increased youth interest in protecting the traditional cultures including cultural dances and traditional crafts and arts (Nyaupane, Morais & Dowler, 2006). In Laos, ecotourism has allowed local people to build solidarity within their community from the experience of working together as a group (Phanthavong, 2009).

Ecotourism can also create an opportunity for local empowerment (Ribot, 1999). Scheyvens (1999) highlights that community-based ecotourism is only successful when community empowerment (social, economic, political and psychological) is being actively practised by the ecotourism development. Local empowerment could allow representatives who would work to represent the interest of communities to be found by local elections. This maintains equity in benefit sharing, and addresses the concerns of all groups of people in a community (Hulme & Murphree, 2001; Murphree, 1993; Mohammed-Katerere, 2001; Ribot, 1999).

One positive socio-cultural impact associated with ecotourism is the empowerment of women (Nyaupane et al., 2006). Ecotourism plays a significant role in promoting the role of women's empowerment in many developing countries around the world (Scheyvens, 2000). Traditionally, women are often powerless in many minority groups in remote areas; hence, ecotourism helps to minimize the gap between men and women in these rural areas (Cheyre, 2005; Flintan, 2001). The requirement of a project in ecotourism in Namibia is that at least 50 percent of the local participants in the project are women (Flintan, 2001). According to the United Nations Development Program (2008), women's empowerment is considered a mechanism for reducing poverty and food insecurity. The involvement of

women can play a crucial role in poverty reduction and in reducing food insecurity as they are responsible for the health and nutritional status of the households. In China, Chile and Nepal, ecotourism has enhanced the power of many women by creating opportunities for them to earn money and, therefore, be less dependent on men (Cheyre, 2005; Nyaupane et al., 2006).

Along with positive impacts, ecotourism may also have negative consequences by creating social and cultural changes in host communities. It has long been claimed that ecotourism can lead to social conflict (Lankford, Dennis and Samuel, 1994). Conflict happens when ecotourism programs try to bring economic benefits into communities. This tends to trigger rent-seeking opportunities and the capturing of resources by both the elite and local officials. Conflict between business people also occurs when the CBE works in favour of one group rather than the whole community (Hulme & Murphree, 2001; Tai, 2007). One example is in the Chiang Rai Ecotourism Project in Thailand where low payments from tourists created conflict in the community. Some hosts of tourists had agreements with the tour guides and as a result, other households were not able to host tourists (Daniel, 1998 as cited in Ashley and Roe, 1998).

Similarly, Nelson (2004) studied the evolution and impacts of wildlife-based tourism in northern Tanzania for a decade and revealed that community conflicts were one of the serious negative impacts of CBE. He further commented that this resulted in increased instability in local governance and the decision-making processes due to the lack of solidarity in the region. In addition, Scheyvens (1999) highlighted that the financial benefits from ecotourism can lead to a confrontation between local villagers because of jealousy, relationship breakdowns, social inequality and an increase in crime in the local community.

From a cultural perspective, the local culture could also be affected negatively by outsiders entering the local communities. Phanthavong (2009) called the potential of this undesirable social-cultural consequence, cultural intrusion. He explained that this occurs when tourists come into close contact with local

people. Ashley and Roe (1998) also found that tourists can bring social and cultural disruptions. They gave an example of Nepal where the commercialisation of culture destroyed the local community spirit and damaged religious life. Neth (2008), who studied ecotourism as a tool for sustainable rural communities in Cambodia, examined how local people tried to commercialize their traditional cultures such as traditional cultural performances and other cultural practices to earn money from visitors. This degraded the intrinsic value of a culture and led to the culture being valued on a commercial basis only.

## **2.6 Summary**

Tourism plays an important role in supporting and contributing to sustainable socio-economic development in many developing countries. The term ecotourism first appeared in the 1980s as a result of the widespread and growing interest in the natural environment, and the corresponding recognition of the importance of conserving natural resources. Ecotourism has been defined in different ways by different academics and organisations based on their particular interests and concerns. Common components that are found in most definitions are that: ecotourism takes place in relatively undisturbed natural areas; attempts to minimise environmental impacts; and enhances conservation by providing opportunities for environmental education in both tourists and local communities. Recently, the definition of ecotourism has been extended to include references to benefits for local communities through their participation.

A number of factors that influence local participation in community development projects, including ecotourism projects, have been identified. Some factors are directly related to the benefits that may be received through participation, and the influence of powerful members in the projects, while other factors are related to the personal ability of local people to be involved in the projects, such as literacy, labour availability, facilities and personal interest.

The impacts of tourism have been categorised as socio-economic, environmental and socio-cultural impacts. In socio-economic terms, tourism can result in an increase of income while creating employment and infrastructure opportunities at both the national and local levels. It can also introduce new economic activities like arts and crafts to local communities. However, in direct contrast, a higher cost of living may result and this is the downside of tourism as it impacts host communities, especially poor people harshly.

Tourism can have both positive and negative environmental impacts. Although ecotourism plays an important role in enhancing conservation practices, the destruction of vegetation, and the increase of solid waste, pollution and noise, due to the increase in numbers of tourists, is a concern. The potential negative environmental impacts need to be minimised and avoided to ensure the overall environmental impact is positive.

Tourism can have both positive and negative socio-cultural impacts. Key socio-cultural benefits are an increased awareness of the importance of local cultures, and the empowerment of local people, especially in many developing countries where previously gender inequality has occurred for women. Furthermore, a strengthening sense of ethnic identity, creating a sense of local pride and positive self image among local communities, and the sharing and learning of new traditions between tourists and local people are highlighted as positive results of tourism. However, negative socio-cultural impacts that may take place can include the occurrences of social conflicts, relationship breakdowns, jealousy, social inequity and an increase in crime in the host communities. The negative socio-cultural impacts also include an increase in drug and alcohol abuse, changes in traditional cultures and negative influences on younger generations in local communities.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The aim of this research is to identify and describe factors that influence the household participation in a community based ecotourism project and its impacts on the community's livelihoods. This chapter will begin by describing the selection of the research strategy and research approach. Then, the research processes, including preparation for the fieldwork and getting permission to conduct the research, are highlighted. Data collection and data analysis used by the researcher are also outlined. At the end of the chapter, the ethical considerations that were applied by the researcher in the research are outlined.

### **3.2 The selection of research strategy**

According to Yin (2003; 2009), there are several research strategies that can be applied in a research study depending on what the research is about and the type of research questions that will be asked. Yin identified five research strategies: experiment; survey; archival analysis; history; and case study. The classification of these five methods was based on three significant conditions: the form of the research question; the degree of control required over behavioural events; and the focus on contemporary events (see Table 3.1).



Table 3.1: Relevant situation for different research methods

Methods	Form of research questions	Requires control of behavioural events	Focuses on contemporary events
Experiment	How, why?	yes	yes
Survey	How, what, where, how many, how much?	no	yes
Archival analysis	Who, what, where, how many, how much?	no	yes/no
History	How, why?	no	no
Case study	How, why?	no	yes

**Source:** Yin (2003, p. 5; 2009, p. 8)

In this research study, how and why questions were applied. The main investigation of the research attempts to explore why only some households are involved in the community based ecotourism project and how the ecotourism project impacts on local livelihoods. According to Yin, 'how' and 'why' questions are more likely to require experiment, history and case study methods. This research focuses on a contemporary event; so obviously, the history method is not suitable. According to Bouma (2000) and Bouma and Ling (2004), the experimental method applies with the format of an investigation with hypotheses for causes and effects. Furthermore, Yin asserts that control of behavioural events is necessary in order to use the experiment research; however, the control of behavioural events is neither possible nor desirable in this study. Therefore, the case study method is the right choice for this research study, because the researcher wants to investigate situations that require no control over behavioural events and to focus on contemporary events within a real-life context.

### 3.3 Research case approach

In general, case study designs can be based on single or multiple cases (Creswell, 2007; Gillham, 2000; Simons, 2009; Vaus, 2001). According to Yin (2003; 2009), there are four types of case study design. Single case-study

designs are used when the case represents a critical test of existing theory, a rare or unique circumstance, a representative or typical case, or when the case serves a revelatory or longitudinal purpose, while multiple-case designs are more likely to offer a replication purpose (Yin (2003, 2009). Similarly, Vaus (2001) states that multiple case designs are applied in order to provide a greater number of more powerful, convincing insights than single case designs.

This research focused on a single case of a CBE project in Laos. By definition, this involves a community, a project and households that are involved and those that are not. The single case study approach for this research was based on Yin (2003) [Figure 3.1] which consists of three phases: design; data collection; and within case analysis and interpretation. Firstly, the relevant literature was reviewed in order to develop a theoretical basis by which to design the case analysis. Additionally, the theories examined were used to develop the criteria for selecting the case and undertaking data collection. The data was collected through key informant interviews, household interviews, household observations and secondary data sources. Finally, the case analysis and interpretation were applied in order to compare the research findings with the existing literature.

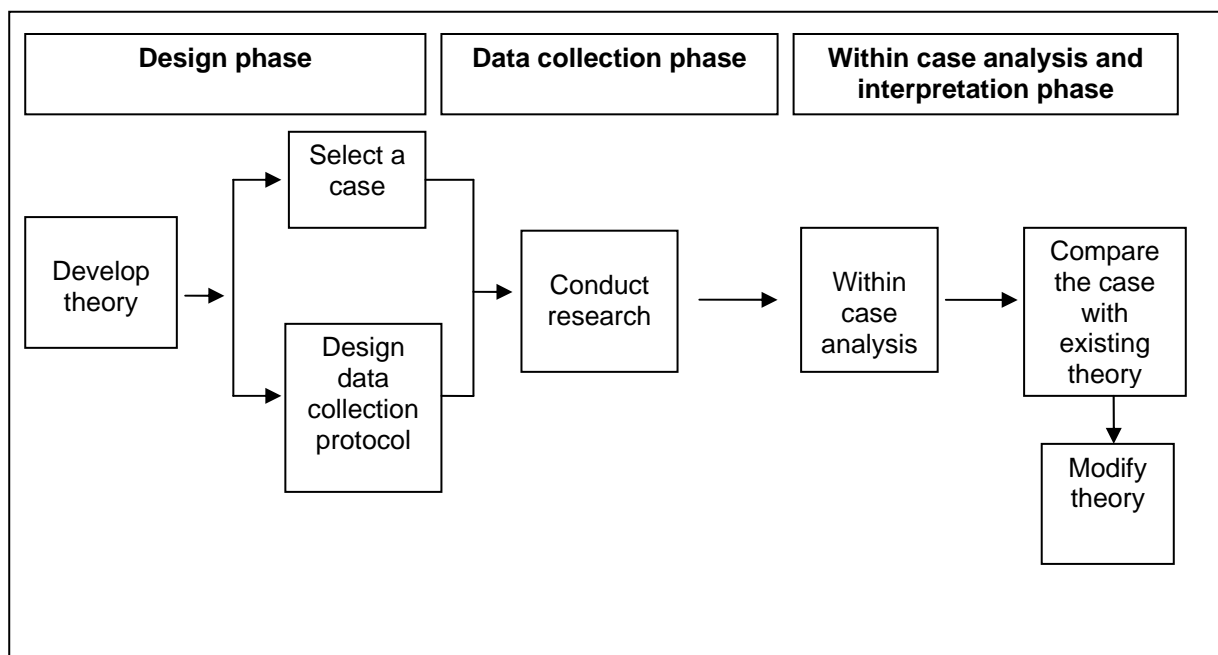


Figure 3.1: A diagram of a single case study method adapted from Yin (2003).

In addition, Yin points out that a case study can be applied to qualitative research or a mix of both qualitative and quantitative research. It is believed that the qualitative technique is the best method to investigate people's opinions of the world around them and to gain a better understanding of their behaviour (Henn, Weinstein & Foard, 2006). Exploring people's perspectives on the ecotourism project was the key component of this research. Therefore, the researcher employed a qualitative case study method for this research project.

In the following sections, the case selection is outlined in detail.

### **3.3.1 Case selection**

There is a belief that as a researcher, he/she cannot study everything and all things at one time. The researcher must set the boundaries for the topic (Simons, 2009), based on the context, of whom to talk with, where, when, about what and why (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Ban Na Community Based Ecotourism Project in Na Village, Thaphabath District, Bolikhamxay Province was purposefully selected as the single case study for this research project. In searching through community based ecotourism projects in Laos, there are only two available CBE projects, the Ban Na and Hatkhai CBE projects. Of the two possible case projects, the Ban Na CBE project was selected because it was in an accessible village and involved community participation in the operation and management of the project. The selection was also based on the fact that the researcher had initially contacted local people from the project who were able to provide information about the project before conducting the research.

### **3.4 Data collection processes**

This section provides the details of the data collection process that was used in this research. First, the preparation that was undertaken for the fieldwork or data collection is described, which includes the process of getting permission to conduct the research. The snowball sampling strategy, which was employed during participant interviews to ensure richness of information

gathered, is explained. Then, the key informant interviews, household interviews, household observations and secondary data sources conducted and gathered in this research are outlined.

### **3.4.1 Fieldwork preparation**

Fieldwork preparation plays a crucial part in gaining a comprehensive understanding of research before moving onto the data collection step (Leslie & Storey, 2003). Robson, Willis and Elmhirst (1997, as cited in Phanthavong, 2009) believe that having done sufficient amounts of appropriate fieldwork is the key element to the success of a research project. The researcher read many academic studies that were relevant to the research topic and wrote a literature review before commencing the fieldwork. By doing this, a broad understanding of the study area was put in place (Gray, 2004). She also sought additional information from the former supervisor of the project and the head of the community tour operation via e-mail and telephone to obtain as many details as possible about the project and community before visiting the field.

### **3.4.2 The process of getting permission to conduct the research**

In accordance with Laos's official system, the researcher started discussions with the director of The National Authority of Science and Technology (NAST) to discuss the steps necessary to contact each key informant interviewee. A letter of permission from NAST was issued requesting the cooperation of the Lao National Tourism Administration, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, provincial, district and village level governments, and other relevant stakeholders. This, together with the information sheets and consent forms which were translated into Lao, were used to clearly inform participants of all of the purpose of the research.

In order to make contact with the targeted governmental offices, the researcher had to submit an official letter to the related offices by going in person. This saved time as it enabled the researcher to introduce both herself

and the purpose of the research. This initial visit was followed by a formal interview with an official at an appointed time. The process of going to the targeted community was similar to this process. The researcher contacted the head of village tour operation, Mr. Bounthanome Inthilath, to inform him of the purpose of visiting Ban Na where the community based ecotourism project is running. A date and time were set for the visit. On arrival at Ban Na, Thaphabath District, Bolikhamxay Province, the researcher was welcomed by Mr. Bounthanome Inthilath, who also provided accommodation. The researcher was guided around the village. The purpose of the village visit was to become more familiar with the location. During the visit, he introduced the researcher to the head of Ban Na Village. The researcher handed the village head the official letter asking for their cooperation and informing him of the purposes of the research study (see Appendix 2). Permission was then granted to the researcher to conduct her research in their community.

### **3.4.3 Sampling**

In qualitative research, sampling is a very important yet complex stage for many researchers due to the range of variations in qualitative sampling (Coyne, 1997). In Patton (1990), for example, two key sampling strategies were identified: probability and purposive sampling. The purposive sampling is more likely to suit a qualitative case study because it allows researchers to select cases that they can learn the most from (Merriam, 1998). Snowball sampling techniques were applied to participants from the target population (Patton, 1990). Interviewing a wide range of people in various positions and with varying knowledge (Patton, 1990), such as key informants and households, was employed in this research (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2: Research participants and number of interviews

<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Number of interviews</b>
Government agencies	5
Community leaders <sup>1</sup>	7
WWF Laos	1
US volunteer who has knowledge about ecotourism and Ban Na	1
Private companies	2
Households <sup>2</sup>	45
<b>Total interviews</b>	<b>61</b>

<sup>1</sup>While the community leaders were also members of households within the village, their main role within this research was as community leaders, and as such, they are not included within the 'Households' count.

<sup>2</sup>The households interviewed included both those involved and not involved in the CBE project. In total, 28 households within the village are involved in the project, and of these 16 were interviewed. The remaining 29 households that were interviewed were not involved in the project at the time of the research.

With the snowball sampling strategy, interviewees were asked if they knew others whom the researcher could contact for detailed information on a particular issue (Patton, 1990). The use of this sampling technique can ensure the richness of information collected in a research study.

#### **3.4.4 Key informant interviews**

According to Yin (2003, 2009) and Gillham (2000), key informant interviews are considered to be the most significant technique for obtaining case study information in qualitative research. In this research, interviews were completed with five types of key informants. These included government

officials, personnel from NGOs and private companies, community leaders and other people who held knowledge about the community. They were selected based on their official positions and knowledge of the project. A semi-structured interview technique (Wisker, 2008) was applied in this study. The semi-structure interview was selected in order to allow respondents to talk about their opinions on a particular subject (Gliiham, 2000; Gray, 2004; Wisker, 2008). A total of 16 semi-structured key informant interviews were carried out in the study.

The researcher went to meet key informants in person, in their offices, houses and companies. Appointments were then made depending on both researcher and participant convenience. While making appointments, the purpose and type of questions were introduced and they were asked if they had any secondary sources of information that related to the project. By doing this, participants were able to prepare before the interview. This process also helped the researcher to both ensure the quality of interviews and cover all of the research objectives.

Furthermore, an interview guideline was used during the interview to ensure that the relevant information was covered (Patton, 1990; Walter, 2006). Table 3.3 provides an example of the interview guideline used in the field interviews. At the end of the interviews, the researcher thanked the interviewees and asked them if they knew others, for example, people who are involved or used to be involved with the project, with whom the researcher should talk (Overton & Diermen, 2003; Patton, 1990). This allowed the researcher access to new sources of information enriching the study (Patton, 1990), and to meet with a comprehensive range of groups and organisations.

Table 3.3: An example of an interview guideline used during the interviews of key informants

<b>Interview guideline for key informants</b>
<p>1. Personal background</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Occupation</li> </ul>
<p>2. Roles and history</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Household</li> <li>- Community</li> <li>- Organisation</li> <li>- Relationship with the project</li> </ul>
<p>3. Personal perspective/knowledge/understanding/others</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Factors influencing people involved in the project “why”?</li> <li>- Some households involved and some are not involved “why”?</li> <li>- Benefits and constraints of the project in community development “how”? (environmental, social and economic)</li> </ul>
<p>4. Anything else you want to add/do you have something to add?</p>
<p>5. Who else should I talk to?</p>

The interviews were taped only when participants agreed and had given their consent (see Appendix 3). During the interviews, there were no standardised questions (Gray, 2004). Instead, the questions were created to meet the needs of the research objectives and were specific to each interviewee. By doing this, the researcher was able to explore in-depth the factors that influenced household participation in the project and its impacts on the households. The researcher also took notes of the important points made by the interviewees.

### **3.4.5 Household interviews**

Household interviews were used with the local villagers in Ban Na. The participants were selected by identifying who was involved and not involved in



the project with the consent of participants. A semi-structured interview technique was used similar to that used with the key informants (Wisker, 2008). The researcher carried out a total of 45 household interviews, of which 16 were involved in the project and 29 were not. The purpose for interviewing the local households was to identify and describe the reasons for their involvement in the project and its impacts on their livelihoods. To ask for consent and make an appointment, most of the time the researcher went to meet local villagers at their houses in the early mornings or late evenings as this was a convenient time for them being either before they left their homes or after finishing their daily routine activities.

Similar to the key informant interviews, local villagers were briefly introduced to the purpose and type of questions to be asked. Some people preferred to have the interviews straight away instead of postponing it to another day, while some of them preferred to do it in evening after finishing their busy day. The researcher tried to create a good atmosphere for the interviews by asking simple questions to relax the interviewees (Yin, 2003), before moving to more specific questions. An interview guideline was also used during these interviews (Patton, 1990; Walter, 2006). The researcher also took notes of the important points made by the interviewees for summarising and clarifying at the end of the interviews. Table 3.4 provides an example of the household interview guide used in the field interviews.

Table 3.4: An example of an interview guide used during the interviews of households

<b>Interview guideline for local households</b>
<p>1. Gaining understanding of the participant's situation and history</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- personal and family</li> <li>- occupation</li> <li>- role in household</li> <li>- role in community</li> <li>- relationship with the project</li> </ul> <p>2. Gaining understanding of local authority</p> <p>3. Gaining understanding of the community situation</p> <p>4. Gaining understanding of the community tour operation</p> <p>5. Gaining understanding of the local knowledge, perception of the history about ecotourism project and/or community participation</p> <p>6. Household involved/not involved in the project (what are the reasons for involvement or not being involved?)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- internal factors</li> <li>- external factors</li> </ul> <p>7. Conditions of involvement (rules or individual choices)</p> <p>8. Limitations of involvement (rules or individual choices)</p> <p>9. Problems/opportunities</p> <p>10. Inequity in household participation (income, employment, age, schooling, etc)</p> <p>11. Advantages and disadvantages of ecotourism in general (social, economic and environment)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How?</li> <li>- Why?</li> </ul>

### **3.4.6 Household observations**

Participant observation/household observation offers the opportunity for researchers to collect rich detailed data (Burgess, 1995). An observation is

often used for both qualitative and quantitative data collection and provides a straightforward accurate means of collecting data (Overton & Diermen, 2003). Marshall and Rossman (2006), Gillham (2008), and Yin (2009) concluded that observation is a fundamental and highly important method in qualitative research, especially in case studies. It is used to discover complex interactions in natural social settings (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). These authors further asserted that participant observations play a powerful role in gaining information through observing the body language and facial expression of interviewees. Observations are simply done by using three elements: watching what interviewees do; listening to what they say; and sometimes asking them to clarify their viewpoints (Gillham, 2000).

Household observation was used in this study to add to the information gained from interviewees and secondary data sources. While staying in the community, the researcher had a chance to attend the village meeting which involved all leaders and households in the community. Attending the meeting allowed the researcher to observe the householders' behaviour (Gray, 2004) and their involvement in the community decision-making. On one occasion, as the researcher stayed at the house of head village tour operator, she was able to observe the way management and operational decisions were made, as well as his attitude when guides and homestays were requested by tourists. This helped the researcher understand the community circumstances on a deeper level (Pratt & Loizos, 1992).

#### **3.4.7 Secondary data sources**

Sorensen, Sabroe and Olsen (1996) state that secondary data are sources of information where relevant data already exists (Pratt & Loizos, 1992). They believed that secondary sources are always needed to conduct research either before or during the collection of primary research data. Locating secondary data is a common activity in fieldwork. There are several types of secondary data such as: published government statistics; local or regional government reports and collected data; local newspaper and magazine

archives; university, NGO and organisational reports; local government maps; and company reports (Overton & Diermen, 2003).

In this research, the majority of documents relevant to the project were collected including: official documents (published and unpublished); written government reports; government statistics; maps; management; planning policy documents; and community annual reports. The data mainly came from the Lao National Tourism Administration, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Provincial Government, the District Government and the community.

### **3.5 Data analysis**

After the data were collected by using these procedures, within-case analysis was undertaken in the case study to produce the results and compare the results with existing literature (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1984, as cited in Eisenhardt, 1989). The research project applied Dey's (1993) structure of qualitative analysis for the process of data analysis (see Figure 3.2). The primary step in the qualitative data analysis process is description (Dey, 1993; Gray, 2004). This step plays a significant part in identifying the phenomena which provides an overview of the raw data, including how the data were collected (Gray & Ling, 2004) and highlighting the significant points of the collected data.

The second step of data analysis is classification. The aim of this step is to identify and define categories relevant (Strauss, 1987) to the research through the form of a logical hierarchy (Dey, 1993). It is simply called the process of converting data into categories. Dey uses the term data-bit including words, sentences and paragraphs to define the data in categories. He highlights that if the data-bit does not match the existing category, then a new category is named and defined, as long as the data is relevant to the research.

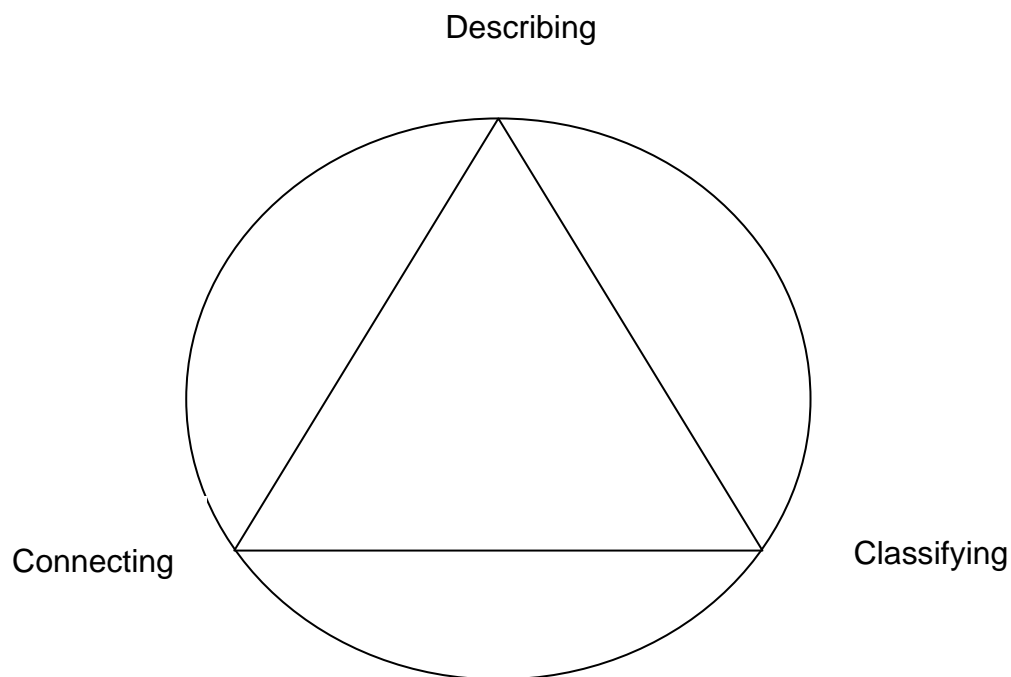


Figure 3.2: The qualitative data analysis process (Dey, 1993, p. 31)

The final step of data analysis is to establish data connections. After, the data is classified into well-defined categories, sub-categories and supra-categories, and then the connections between them are needed in order to identify the empirical relationships of different parts of the data (Dey, 1993). Dey states that three forms of connections are often found in data analysis: explanatory relationships; causal relationships; or chronological relationships.

In this research project, the data consists of: 16 key informant interviews; 45 household interviews with 39 tape recordings while the remainder recorded through field notes which also include the household observations and secondary data. The interviews that were conducted took between 20 and 120 minutes. The researcher did not transcribe all the interviews, but instead listened to each interview and summarised the key themes and information that emerged that was relevant to the research objectives. Additionally, the field notes were transformed to written notes.

### **3.6 Ethical consideration**

Ethical issues are considered to be one of the most concerning parts of doing research (Flick, 2006), particularly in qualitative research (Bouma, 2000). Thus, ethical issues need to be emphasised throughout all the processes from the beginning until the end of the project (Denzin, 1997, as cited in Scheyvens; Nowak & Scheyvens, 2003). There were several ethical principles which were applied in this piece of research. Ethical considerations were divided into two sections: before and during field work. Before starting the fieldwork, the researcher discussed the ethical issues with her supervisors and colleagues who had experience and knowledge in order to brainstorm and find out possible ethical issues which could arise. The researcher completed all the documents required by Massey University's Human Ethics Committee and received approval before starting the fieldwork (see Appendix 1).

While undertaking the fieldwork, all stakeholders were informed by the researcher about her presence in the areas and background, and their permission was gained prior to data collection. All participants were informed of the purpose and process of the study prior to the interviews. The researcher clarified all participant rights, including the right to decline to answer any particular question, withdraw from the study at any time, ask any question about the study at any time during participation, provide information on the understanding that his or her name will not be used unless permission is given to the researcher and that the participants are able to access a summary of the thesis finding when it is concluded (Massey University Ethics Committee, 2010). The participants were also informed that all information would be used only for academic purposes and would not be used to bring any harm to them. In addition, the information collected, as well as tape recordings, would be kept in a secure place for five years before being destroyed.

### **3.7 Summary**

This chapter has provided a description of the research method that was adopted for this research. The selection of a research strategy was based on the research question, the degree of control required over behaviour events and the level of contemporary events (Yin, 2003; 2009). The research approach was a single case study which was a CBE project in Laos, and involved the study of multiple units of analysis (Yin, 2003). This research selected only one case study because of time and budget constraints. The case was selected because it was in an accessible village and involved community participation in the operation and management of the project. The selection was based also on initial contact by the researcher. A full description of the case study area is provided in Chapter 4.

A range of data was collected at national, provincial, district and household levels through semi-structure interviews with key informants and with households in the village case study area. A large number of documents relevant to the project were also collected, including; official documents; written government reports; government statistics; planning policy documents; community annual reports; and community raw data. For data analysis, the interviews were listened to and a summary was made of the important points. Following this, a QDA process was followed that involved classification and categorisation of the data in order to compare and contrast the results with existing theory.

During the research all ethical considerations and guidelines, such as ensuring that all participants were fully informed before interviews, were adhered to, so that they understood both the process of the research and the potential results of the study. All participants were willing and knew that at any stage they could choose to not participate or not continue to participate if they so decided.

## **CHAPTER 4: THE CASE STUDY DESCRIPTION**

In this chapter, a detailed description of the case study community is outlined. First, the details of the establishment and location of the case study community are presented; this is followed by a description of the community's characteristics, the development of the ecotourism project and the decision-making structure of the community.

### **4.1 Introduction to the research area**

The Phu Khao Khoay National Protected Area (PKK) is located in the Bolikhamxay Province in the east of Laos, and is surrounded by three provinces and one special zone: Bolikhamxay Province, Vientiane Prefecture, Vientiane Province and Khet Phiset Xaisomboon. The PKK comprises an area of six districts: Hom, Keo Udom; Long Xan; Pak Ngum; Thaphabath; and Thulakhom. This National Protected Area covers 2,000 square kilometres and was officially established in 1993 following a declaration by the Prime Minister's Decree No.164/PM on October 29, 1993 which also covered 18 other areas (Phu Khao Khoay Management Plan, 2007) (see Figure 4.1). This declaration created the areas to protect the indigenous forests and animals.





Figure 4.1: Map showing the location of Phu Khao Khoay National Protected Area and the other 18 Protected Areas in Laos (Source: [http://www.mekong-protected-areas.org/lao\\_pdr/pa-map.htm](http://www.mekong-protected-areas.org/lao_pdr/pa-map.htm))

Most parts of the forest areas have been degraded in previous years but, for a decade, logging has been banned by the Government. Currently, PKK is an important source of biodiversity. It comprises approximately 38 percent mixed deciduous forests, 35 percent semi-evergreen forest, 15 percent deciduous dipterocarp forest, six percent stone mountains, waterfalls and rivers (LNTA, 2009; Phu Khao Khoay Management Plan, 2007). Many important species are found in the protected area, including white-cheeked gibbons, Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*), endangered tigers (*Panthera tigris*) and green peafowl (LNTA, 2009). Over 70 bird species are indigenous to the area. It is also reported that more than half of all orchids (more than 500 species) found

and identified in Laos, are in PKK (Phu Khao Khoay National Protected Area Survey, 2009). Moreover, the park provides a home for many butterflies and insects as well. Additionally, the beautiful scenery and waterfalls in PKK such as Tad Luek (Luek waterfall), Tad Sai and Tad Xang already attract a number of local people for recreational purposes during weekends and special holidays (see Figure 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5).



Figure 4.2, 4.3: Tad Sai



Figure 4.4: Tad Luek

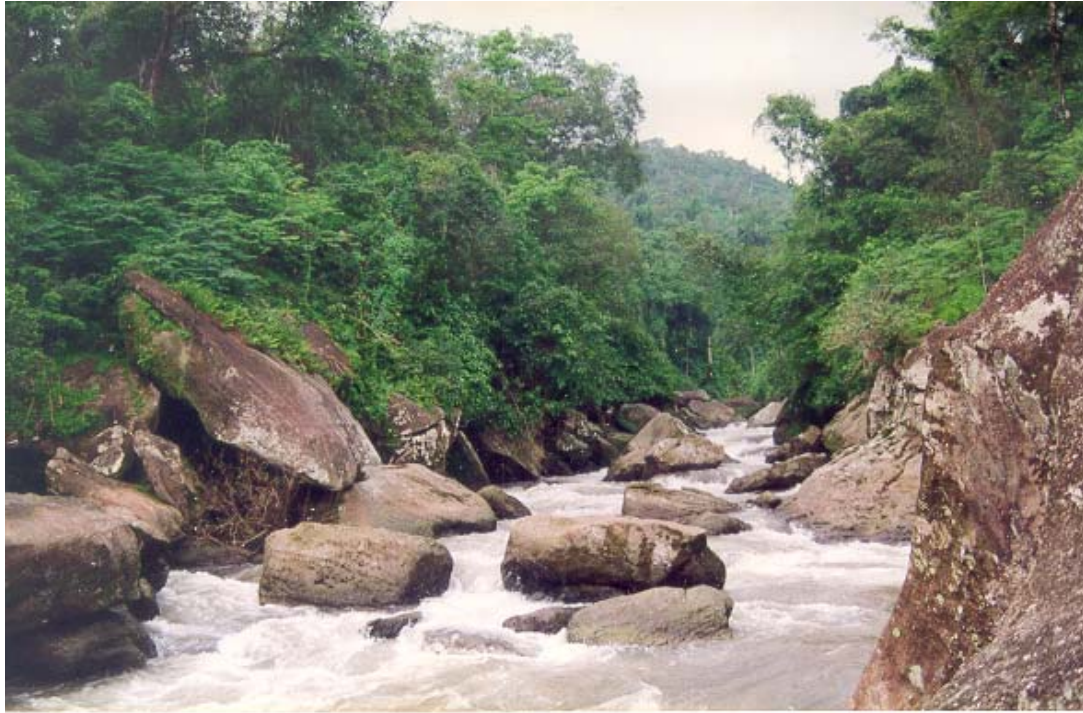


Figure 4.5: Tad Xang

According to the Phu Khao Khoay Management Plan (2007), before the protected area was set up, there were 78 villages; two of those are now inside PKK, Phu Khao Khoay and Vang Hua, and the rest are on the boundary (see Figure 2). In total in 2007, there were 8,419 households with a population of 50, 514. These people were mainly subsistence rice farmers who depend on natural resources from the area to support their livelihoods. Although there are 78 villages bordering and inside PKK, only two villages are practising ecotourism activities, Ban Na and Ban Hatkhai (see Figure 4.6).

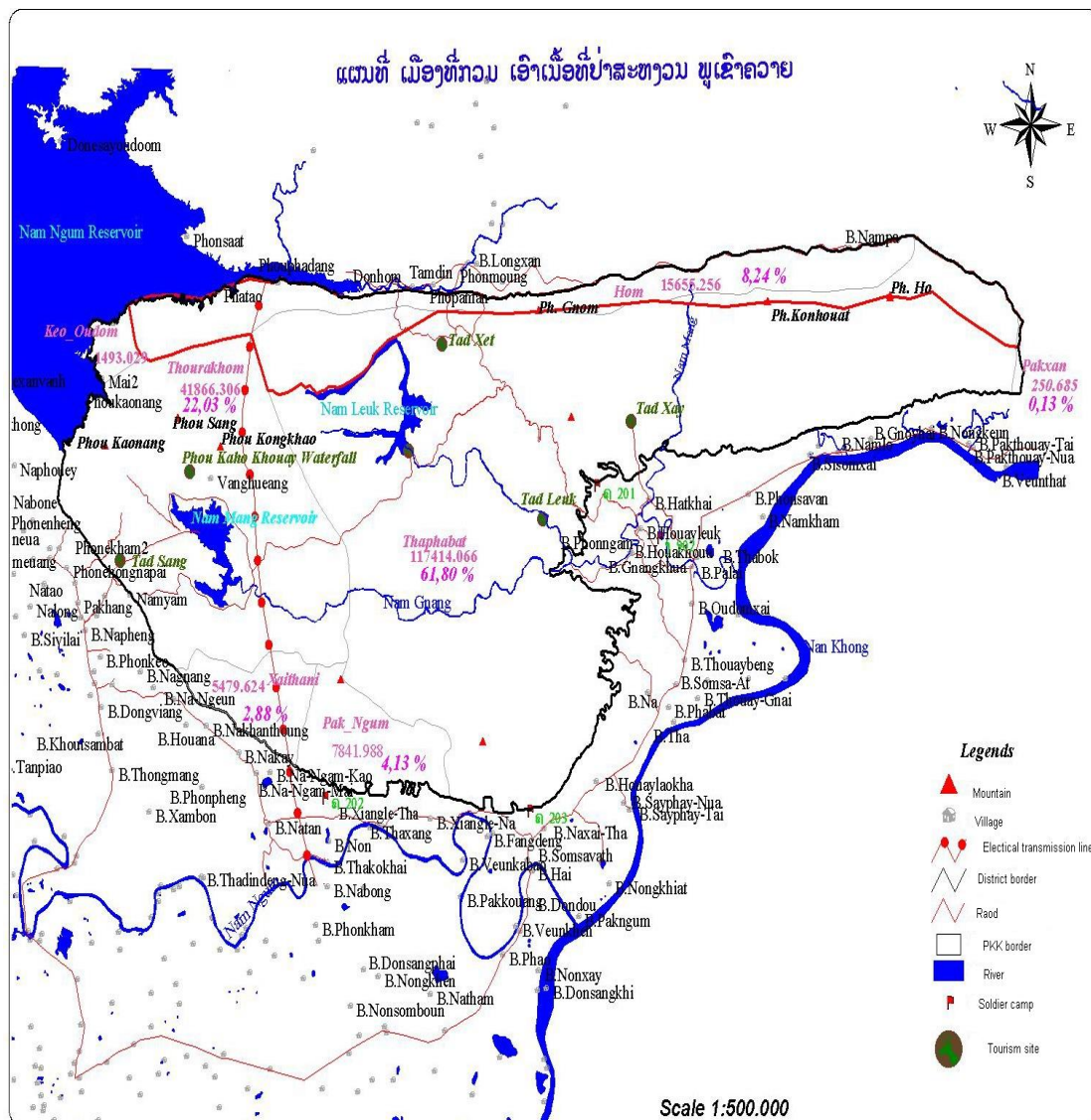


Figure 4.6: Map showing the location of the 78 villages both inside and outside PKK (Source: PKK, 2010) [B means Ban or village].

Although PKK has been declared a protected area, local people are still allowed to use the natural resources to support their livelihood. However, some local people take too much of the resources and use it for commercial purposes. These people have been fined or jailed as their actions are potentially threatening forest and animal habitats. According to the deputy director of PKK, in general, a lack of job opportunities and food deficiency are the two key reasons for this unsustainable resource use in PKK today (B. Keomalythong, personal communication, May 15, 2010).

## 4.2 The case study village: Ban Na

### 4.2.1 Physical geography and community characteristics

Ban Na or Na Village is located in the east and on the edge of Phou Khao Khuay National Protected Area in Thaphabath District, Bolikhamxay Province (see Figure 4.7). The village is easy to access being approximately 90 kilometres along the 13 south highway from Vientiane to Phabath Temple (the temple is well known for the Buddha Foot Print). Ban Na is approximately one and a half kilometres by dirt road from the main highway.

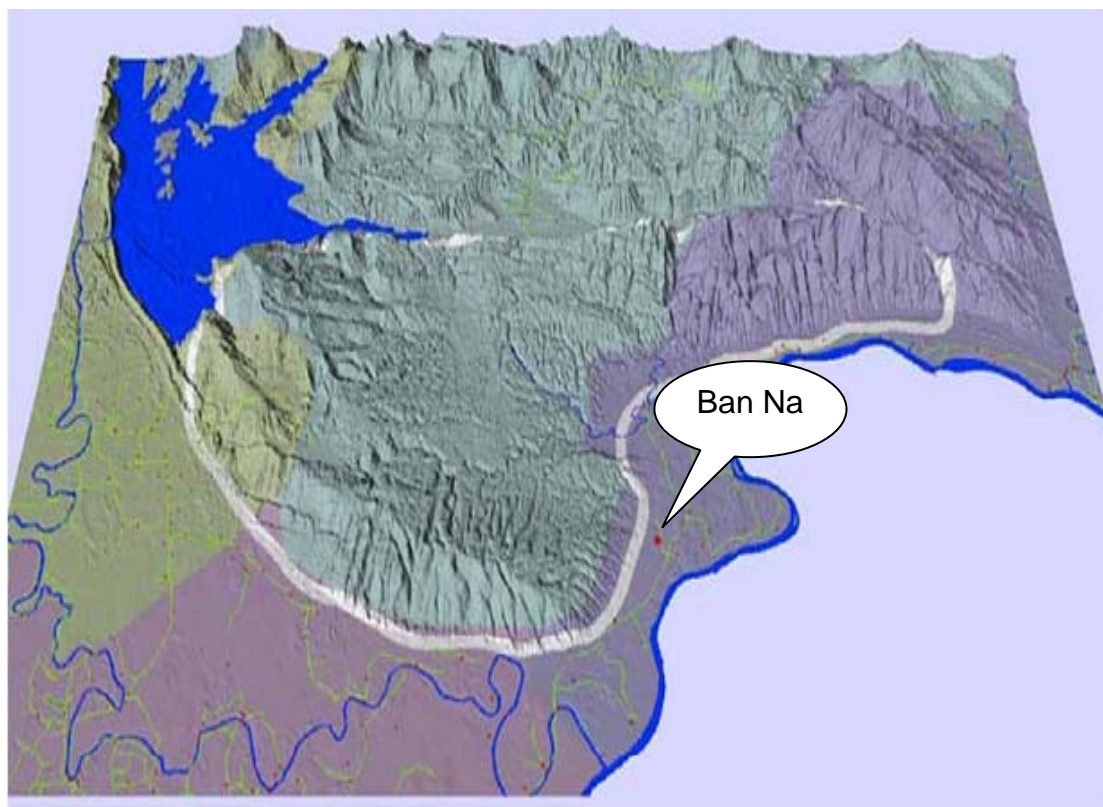


Figure 4.7: the location of Ban Na on the edge of Phou Khao Khuay National Protected Area (PKK), PKK is the white zone

The head of the group of Ban Na elders said that Ban Na was established 60 years ago when monk Sytud, who believed in and respected Buddha, visited the Buddha Foot Print at the Phabath Temple. The monk came with a few elderly people who served in his temple, and they found the land was suitable

for rice plantations (slash and burn cultivation). Since then, a few families have moved from the southern part of Bolikhamxay Province to stay in the area near the Buddha foot print and the settlement is now known as Ban Na (meaning rice paddy village).

Today, the population is 648 residents, comprising 341 females and 307 males from 125 households. The total area of Ban Na is 2,183 hectares which is divided into several zones including 492 hectares of re-planted forest, 473 hectares of protected forest, 139 hectares of usable forest and a four hectare grave yard. Farmland covers 733 hectares, including 115 hectares of rice fields, an eight hectare rubber plantation, 15 hectares of residential settlements and the remaining 227 hectares consist of a stream, roads, a temple and a school. The residential settlement area includes a lot of underground stone which acts to limit water supply sources in the community.

#### 4.2.2 Local livelihoods

The villagers livelihood levels are classified by how much food they had: not enough; sufficient; and more than sufficient (Thaphabath District of Statistics, 2010) (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: the households of Ban Na categorised according to their living conditions

Type of living conditions	Number of households	(in 100%)
More than sufficient food	5	4%
Sufficient food	108	86.4%
Not enough food	12	9.6%

Source: (the head of Ban Na, May, 2010)

As shown in Table 4.1 above, the majority of the population, approximately 86 percent live with enough food. The proportion of those households that do not have permanent houses is about half according to the village head. The head

of the community also said that all of those households living with insufficient food additionally have no access to permanent houses.

Most of the households in the village engage in subsistence rice farming. They grow rice in the rainy season, from June to December, and during the dry season, January to May, they mainly engage in supplementary activities such as making bamboo boxes; the women are involved in the weaving (see Figure 4.8, 4.9, 4.10), while the men become the providers of raw materials and their regular work is to obtain bamboo from the forest. Local people said that after the dry season, farming proved to be impossible due to the presence of elephants, so women learned to weave bamboo baskets (for sticky rice), and most of the community including children are now involved in their production for sale. This activity seems to be the most significant source of income for the villagers and they receive about US\$ 50 /month/person from bamboo weaving (Head of Ban Na village, 2010). A group of women said that:

Everyone in Ban Na, ranging in age from kids to elderly people, is able to weave bamboo boxes. We have no exact time we have to start and finish weaving bamboo boxes; just whenever we have time after sending kids to school, finishing work in houses, or finishing work on the farms. We tend to think that this is our job because of the number of boxes we produce, sets the amount of money we will earn monthly for our families.



Figure 4.8: The elderly women are preparing bamboo for weaving



Figure 4.9: The women are weaving bamboo while talking with the researcher





Figure 4.10: The final product from bamboo weaving

In recent years, the Lao government launched the “One District One Product” movement to promote small local business as a means of improving the livelihoods of local residents in rural communities throughout the country. According to the district statistics (2010), Ban Na which is located in the Thaphabath District, fulfils a role in this government strategy through their bamboo weaving activities.

In addition to this, farmers also engage in raising cattle and chickens. Within the village, only a few mainly wealthy families run businesses such as driving Song Tea (a vehicle similar to a pick up truck) and selling goods.

The village has a school with four rooms, classes one to five. There are three teachers, one is the director and another is the deputy director with 69 students (34 female students) attending classes. Some students here have to finish school after they complete class five because they have to help their parents work on the farms and earn money by weaving bamboo boxes, especially the girls. For larger families, parents often stay at home to carry on

farming with one or two of their children while the others can go onto further education in the district schools and the city.

### **4.3 The history of the Community Based Ecotourism Project of Ban Na**

In the early nineties, about 50 elephants moved into the area around Ban Na village. Initially they were around occasionally in December and January, but then, the animals chose to make Ban Na their permanent home. The density of bamboo and farmed crops, such as sugarcane and bananas, seems to be a suitable food source for them. There is uncertainty about the reason the elephants came down to Ban Na from the nearby mountains (Phou Khoa Khuay National Protected Area). According to the Deputy Director of Phou Khao Khouay National Protected Area (B. Keomalythong, personal communication, May 15, 2010), one of the reasons may be the construction of a hydro-power dam and reservoir inside the park (Ang Nam Leuk). The reservoir is located in the centre of the park and covers an area of 1280 hectares, and the dam, which was constructed in 2001 for power generation, was officially opened in 2003. This construction and habitat disturbance may be behind the elephants' resettlement in the Ban Na area. Illegal hunting and poaching are other factors that could have disturbed the animals as well.

The establishment of new sugarcane plantations and the natural saltlick deposit (saltlick contains many essential salts and minerals which are required by elephants and other wildlife) of Ban Na are the most likely factors attracting the animals to the village (Bounthanam, pers.com, 2010). The elephants consequently moved into the fields of the farmers, raiding their crops and destroying rice fields and the shelters used by the field workers during the harvest season. The farmers growing the sugar cane had formed a company and had a contract and were waiting for their new income from sugar cane harvest that they had spent time and effort over several months to establish. The losses to the elephants made them very angry and some elephants were killed.

As it is illegal to kill elephants, one member of the company was eventually jailed and since his release part of his punishment has been to work with the elephants and he is now a leader in the CBE project. As he had only been trying to frighten the elephants away, he has been enthusiastic to take on this new role. Moreover, due to the elephants, the work in numerous outlying fields also became increasingly dangerous as did the collection of non-timber forest products, which was traditionally the duty of women. This obviously created a conflict between the animals and farmers. The conflict became stronger as more time passed according to the local people. Poaching still continued; between 1999 and 2004, four elephants were killed in the area.

In 2001, the village was visited by Dr Klaus Schwettmann (a representative of National Tourism Administration of Laos (NTAL)) who was interested in the conflict with the elephants and proposed the potential usefulness of the elephants as an eco-tourist venture for trekkers.

While I was already interested in PKK ecotourism development, I learnt that Ban Na had a problem with elephants. The animals came from PKK and were destroying farmers' fields. I saw that this could be interesting because tourists want to see elephants, so I managed to set something up like seeing elephants and bringing tourists to Ban Na which created incomes for the local households. Then, the villagers did not just see elephant as their enemies, but as friends as well as they could gain income from the animals (K. Schwettman, personal communication, April 30, 2010).

Initially, tourists were taken into the area where the elephants were and Dr Klaus Schwettmann trained five villagers as guides. Later, this was found to be too exhausting and so he proposed the building of an elephant tower in the forest which could provide an observation tower and overnight accommodation for trekkers. A first attempt was made in 2003, but failed dramatically because of poor design and construction.

Unfortunately, we got the wrong advice; the first tower was destroyed by elephants only two days after finishing it. I was very frustrated and angry and said so to the head of the village and villagers while drinking beer, but they told me that they really wanted a new tower. They came to me with their idea after two days chatting. I already had a good relationship with the village and they were very excited to have the tower. I told them OK. I needed to make some effort to find new sponsors.

The second elephant observation tower was completed on 12<sup>th</sup> of March, 2005 and was officially opened on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April, 2005. The tower continues to be used today. The project comprised of multiple co-operations between the Lao National Tourism Administration, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Bolikhamxay Provincial Tourism Department, the Thaphabath District Tourism Office, the Germany Embassy through Germany Development Service (DED) and the Canadian Embassy in Bangkok.

#### **4.4 Existing community ecotourism in Ban Na**

Ban Na is now well known as the elephant village, because the community is operating both elephant trekking and watching. This is assisted by the previously mentioned elephant observation tower which is about 4 kilometres from the community (see Figure 4.11, 4.12). This was established in 2005 under the supervision of Lao National Tourism Administration. The financial support for the project comes from the German Development Service (DED) and the Canadian Embassy in Bangkok, Thailand. The tower is located to the north of the village and includes a toilet facility and solar power which provides some light during the night; it is safe and can accommodate more than ten people. The tower's platform is seven metres above the ground and is not only used for watching wild elephants but also other animals such as birds, deer and wild pigs. The tower is close to the Sai Stream which contains a natural saltlick deposit and is a regular drinking hole for many wild

elephants. The elephant tower is a place where a maximum of six people including tourists can stay overnight.



Figure 4.11, 4.12: The elephant tower of Ban Na

The local households operate and manage the ecotourism project independently of any outside agencies. They offer trekking tours into the village forest and the nearby forest for environmental education purposes and relaxation, as well as wild elephant watching. Local guides are available for tourists to observe wild orchids, traditional herbs, birds, insects and butterflies. The village also has a home stay programme for visitors who want to experience the local lifestyle and engage in cultural exchange activities (see Figure 4.13, 4.14).



Figure 4.13, 4.14: Homestays in Ban Na

The villagers have formed a village ecotourism unit to manage and operate their ecotourism services (see Figure 4.15). Mr. Bounthanome Inthilath is the elected head of the project and has been head since the initial project development phase. He primarily works on welcoming tourists to the community and arranging guides and home stays for them during their visit. He is also the contact liaison for the project and co-ordinates with organisations outside the community in relation to the project.

The management of the Ban Na ecotourism project is divided into three sections: tourist operators, a project secretary and a project assistant. Tourist operators are further divided into guides and home stay providers with any one household being able to be involved in any one activity. Guides are responsible for welcoming and taking care of tourists while trekking and watching elephants at the tower. There are 20 guides and all of them are males. They are divided into three groups and the groups work week about. Homestay providers are responsible for accommodation and hospitality for tourists. There are eight households providing accommodation to tourists in

Ban Na. A roster is also applied to home stays for hosting visitors. The project secretary works as the project treasurer and is responsible for auditing records and preparing the monthly financial report for the project. As a village based and managed project, it is important that transparency is in place regarding the financial status of the project. The project assistant plays an important role in helping the head of the project by stepping in when the head is not available to be present in the tour office, for example. The project assistant also oversees the compensation process that has been put in place to deal with elephants damaging households' crops and rice fields. This involves inspecting any damage and reporting back to the project in order to process the compensation for the household victims.

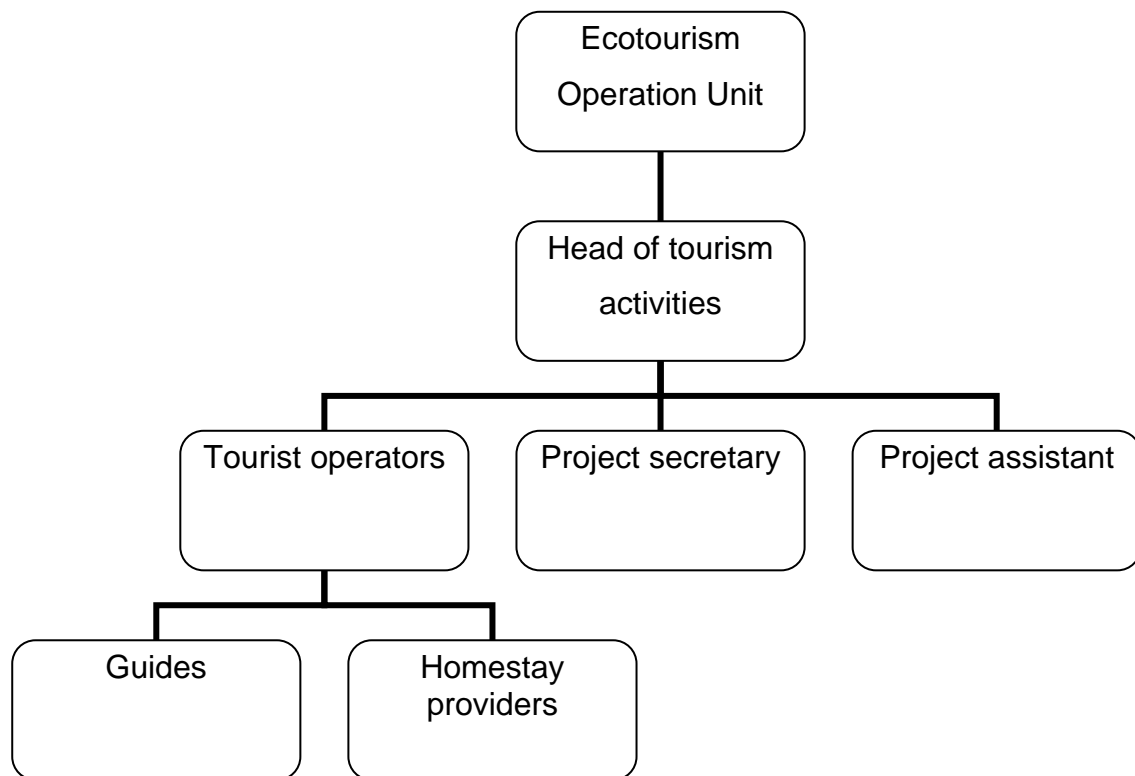


Figure 4.15: the structure of Ban Na ecotourism

The tourist welcome office of Ban Na is located next to the residence of the head of the village tourism. There are simple facilities such as a set of tables and an information board which provides full information about the tour activities and the fees charged for the services. The office also handles any

bookings and payments, as well as selling soft drinks and acting as a pick-up and drop-off point for tourists (see Figure 4.16, 4.17).



Figure 4.16: The welcome tourist office in front of the head of village tourism house



Figure 4.17: The tour manager is weaving a bamboo basket on the welcome tourist table while there are no tourists in the village



The number of tourists coming to Ban Na is increasing (see Table 4.2). As shown by the statistics in Table 4.2, the number of tourists has dramatically increased from 128 people to 519 people between 2005 and 2009. This has created income for the community; for instance, in 2008, ecotourism generated US\$ 5,890 for the local community (Village Statistic Report, 2010). Therefore, the ecotourism activity is considered an important source of income and will continue to be so.

Table 4.2: Incoming Ban Na tourist statistics between 2005 and 2009

<b>Years</b>	<b>Number of tourists</b>
2005	128
2006	372
2007	377
2008	589
2009	519

Source: Village Statistic Report, 2010

The fees and services are clearly set for the tourists to provide them with information regarding the monetary contribution that this ecotourism project makes to the local community (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3: Ban Na's tour activities and fees

<b>Ban Na</b>	<b>Fees</b>
Trekking	2 guides 140,000 kip/day/visitor group
Accommodation	- Homestay 30,000 kip/person/night - Food 25,000 kip/meal/person
Elephant tower	Over night 100,000 kip/person
Additional payments	- PKK trekking permit 40,000 kip/person (10,000 kip for the district tourism office and 30,000 kip for the PKK National Protected Area) - Village fund 50,000 kip/tourist

Remark: 1US\$ = 8100 Kip (January, 2011)

There are two main services provided for tourists in Ban Na CBE project; the elephant trekking and the homestay opportunity. If a tourist or a group of tourists (not more than 6 people) is interested in elephant trekking, the costs include 2x70,000 kip for two guides (for safety reasons each trip must always have two guides present), 40,000 kip for the trekking permit; this money will be divided into two parts, 30,000 kip for the PKK National Protected Area Fund and the rest for the district tourism office. Then, there are two options for accommodation; the overnight visit to the elephant tower which costs 100,000 kip, or the homestay in the community which costs 55,000 kip - 30,000 kip for accommodation and 25,000 kip for a meal.

Additionally, it is compulsory that each tourist pay an extra 50,000 kip as a contribution to the community. This money is added to the community fund, which is a source of funds that is available to all community members for low-interest loans to support their livelihoods. While the interest of borrowing is low at approximately four percent, special consideration can be given to the very poor households for which even this would be a struggle to repay. These situations are considered on a case by case basis, particularly when the funds are needed for a family emergency, such as a family member becoming ill or passing away.

All fees are paid to the tourism office. Then, the head of the project allocates the financial benefits to the participants proportionally. Guides and homestay fees go directly to the households involved. Other fees contribute to their project accounts, such as the elephant operation account, the village account, the PKK National Protected Area account and the tourism district account. According to the village committee, the village and elephant operation account funds are presented monthly to the village head and the whole community by the tour operation unit. The PKK and tourism district funds are transferred to these organisations every three months.

The elephant tower fee is further divided into four parts to cover a range of costs: 35 percent tower maintenance, 30 percent village elephant fund, 20

percent administration and the remaining 15 percent as compensation for nearby villages which may be affected by elephants damaging crops among other things (see Figure 4.18). A further break down of the use of these funds follows Figure 4.18.

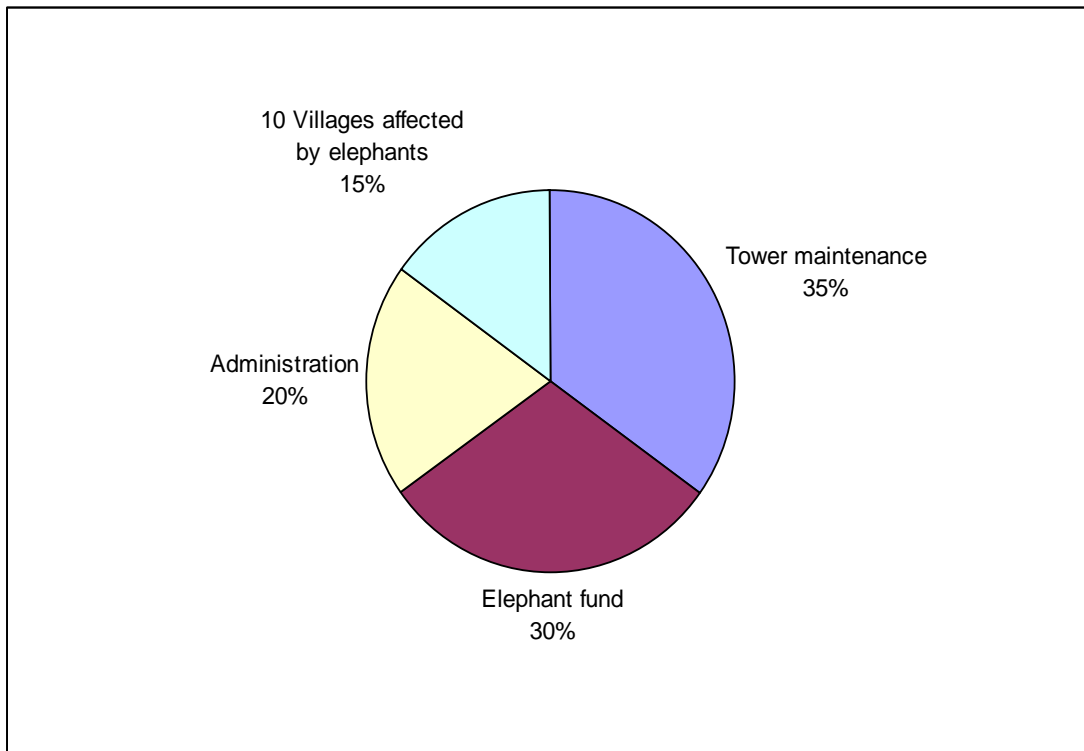


Figure 4.18: Monetary contribution from the elephant tower fees

The 35 percent directed to the tower maintenance includes activities such as painting, fixing and cleaning the tower. The 30 percent directed to the elephant fund is spent on activities related to the elephants such as household compensation for any damage caused by them. According to the village tour operation unit, this money is also spent on growing bananas and sugar cane in the area to increase the food supply for the elephants. The 20 percent spent on administration fees includes paying for the costs of running the project such as telephone, electricity and water bills. Finally, 15 percent of the elephant tower fee is separated into another account to be used for compensation for the other 10 villages nearby that may be impacted by

elephant destruction. According to the village committee, if there are any funds remaining from the administration and maintenance costs, these will be used to top up the accounts used to compensate households for any damage, either within the village or in the neighbouring villages.

#### **4.5 The decision-making structure of the community**

In Laos, the government leadership structure is divided into national, provincial, district and village levels. In relation to this case study, national and provincial governments were involved in the setting up of the project. Now, the village is the primary group that runs the ecotourism project, so only the district level government works closely with them. However, the district government has limited involvement in the operation and management of the ecotourism project retaining a supporting role which includes the provision of technical information.

As is typical of all Lao villages, Ban Na village has a village committee that comprises of heads of the women and elder leader groups, and the leaders of each village zone. In addition, as Ban Na has a tourism venture, this village committee also includes the tour management group (see Figure 4.19). All of the people on the village committee are elected by the villagers. The village head and deputy are elected from nominations within the village. Those elected are approved at the district level, so their appointment is recorded and official. The elder leader is selected based on their experience, education and status in the community. They are elected from the villagers and may be male or female. The women's leader is voted for by the women in the community and this person represents women's concerns.

Ban Na is divided into eight zones comprising 15 or 16 households each. Each zone elects its own leader and these leaders raise issues for their zone with the village committee. In relation to decision-making for the village ecotourism project, all committee members are involved. The eight zone leaders recommend households from their zone as suitable guides or home

stays, and these recommendations are considered by the whole committee. On the village committee, the village head has no more decision-making power than any other committee member. The committee acts, and is expected to act, in two ways. Information from government or committee discussions is disseminated via each representative to zone groups. All zone group members can agree or disagree with committee decisions (e. g. about the selection of guides and home stay) and can have their views made known to the committee.

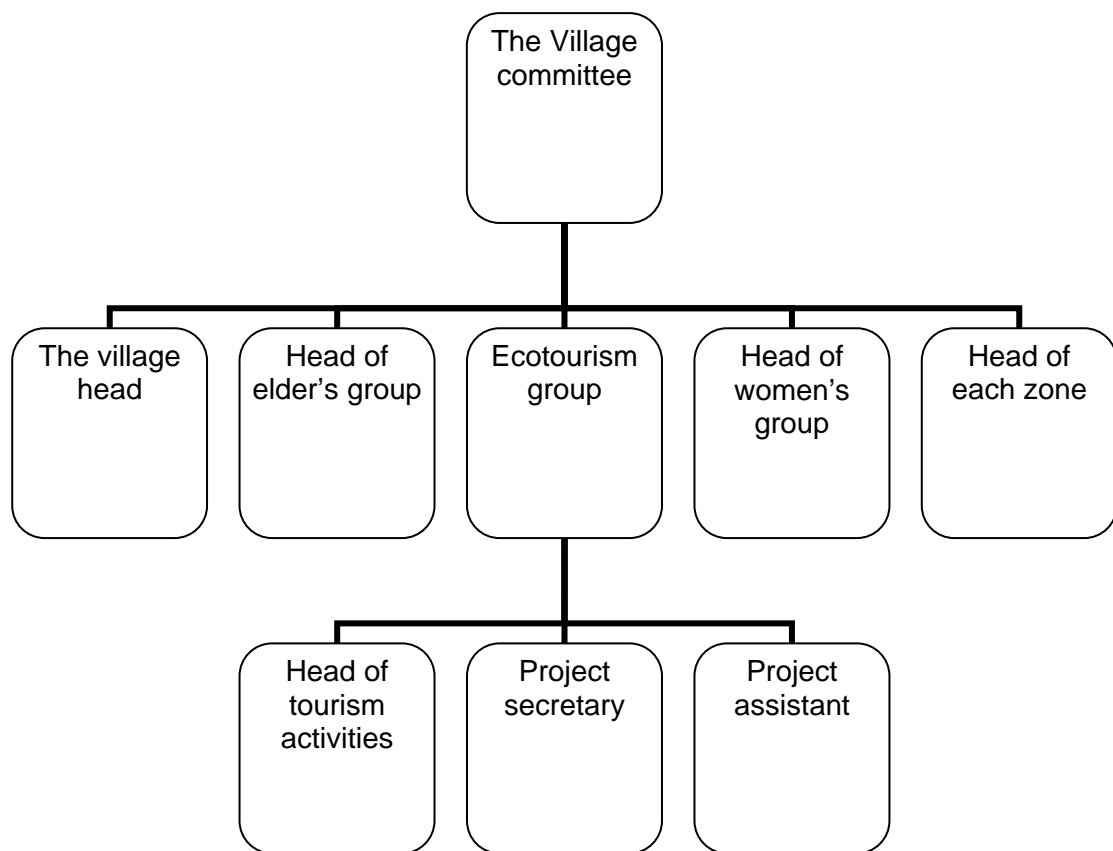


Figure 4.19: The organisational hierarchy of the village committee

In relation to the CBE project, the village committee plays the most important role in the process of decision making. This includes creating and setting rules associated with not only selecting households to participate in the project but also for ecotourism activities in the community. Setting the rules requires a consensus be reached among the committee members.

The committee has also established rules which apply to different actors in the project including households; community members; visitors; and the committee members. The committee selected householders to become involved directly in the CBE project based on a number of criteria including personal, social and economic factors and the amount of contribution which an individual makes to community development. A householder can only be involved in one activity, either guiding or hosting tourists. This regulation aims to evenly distribute the benefits among households in the community.

No community members are allowed to fell forests or hunt animals in the tourism area in order to conserve the natural scenery. Fines and punishments are applied in cases where households do not follow this rule. Rules for tourists were also established including restricting the number of visitors and time restrictions in order to reduce negative impacts on vegetation and animal disturbance. The tourists are required to act in a manner in keeping with locally accepted norms. The visitors' rules are developed by the committee as a result of regulations laid down during the initial stages of the project's establishment. In addition, the committee members are excluded from being involved and receiving benefits under this regulation.

## **4.6 Summary**

The Ban Na community based ecotourism project is an ecotourism venture which was established in 2005 which has experienced an increase in the numbers of tourists since its establishment. The community is located at the edge of Phou Khao Khuay National Protected Area in Thaphabath District, Bolikhamxay Province, Laos. The community is a relatively small village, with 125 households with no extreme wealthy or poor households. The majority of households in the community grow rice as their main source of income and prior to the project, the presence of elephants had negatively impacted this livelihood.

Since the establishment of the project, it is now operated and managed by local households in the community, and provides two main activities to visiting tourists: trekking and elephant guiding; and homestays in the village. The decision-making structure of the community is the village committee which is considered at the highest level and incorporates representatives from the CBE project into the previous structure. This has resulted in the project being managed through a joint decision-making process.

## **CHAPTER 5: CASE STUDY RESULTS**

This chapter presents the results describing and identifying factors which influence household participation in the community based ecotourism of Ban Na (CBE) and its impacts on local livelihoods. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section will describe factors that have influenced household involvement in the CBE project. This will also include a description of each factor which has attributed to the involvement of local households. The second section will focus on the impacts of the project at the household level. The impacts will be presented under three key perspectives: environmental; socio-economic; and socio-cultural.

### **5.1 Factors influencing households' involvement**

This research study found three key factors influencing household participation in the CBE project. These factors are the role and selection process of the village committee, household willingness to participate in the project, and household ability to meet tourist expectations. These factors are outlined with regard to their influence on the involvement of households and the other factors and reasons that influence them are described in more detail in the following sections.

#### **5.1.1 The village committee**

The village committee is the most important factor influencing household participation in the ecotourism project. The committee is responsible for identifying the households that will and will not be involved in the project. As the village committee is elected by the villagers (see Chapter 4.2), they trust them as their representatives or leaders. The decision as to which households are selected to be involved in the project is made by the committee before agreement is sought from the selected households.



The village committee was formed to meet the need of deciding how households are selected to be involved in our community tourism. It could be the most important step to identify households who suit under the committee criteria before asking for their agreement [...] (a local leader, interview no 34, Ban Na).

Local leaders stated that the village committee was formed to reduce the potential conflicts between households involved in the project and those not involved. The village committee did not exist at the beginning of the project, because there were very few households and no one who wanted to be involved in the project. However, one year after the project's implementation, the number of tourists had dramatically increased which resulted in greater demand for guides and homestays, and more interest amongst households to get involved was stimulated.

[...] in contrast, many households today want to participate in the project. However, we cannot take all of them [...]. Thus, setting up the committee which represents the voice of the whole community is a good solution to reduce the potential conflict in the longer term (a local leader, interview no 8, Ban Na).

#### **5.1.1.1 The process of household selection undertaken by the village committee**

The selection process begins with the head of the project informing the committee of the demand for guides and homestays at the village meetings or in the monthly project meetings. All committee members are informed of a meeting a few days in advance and a date, time and venue are agreed upon between the members. Sometimes, the committee meetings are held at the village temple but, more often, they are conducted in the village welcome tourist office. According to the project head, meetings are not held often. Since the start of the project in 2005, there have only been three or four meetings of the village committee.

The committee determined household selection based on two main criteria: personal attributes of the households and the household circumstances. According to the village committee, it is concerned with ensuring both the long term success of the project and that the benefits of the project are distributed throughout the whole community. For this reason, they also set a criterion of participation in the project on the basis of ensuring these goals are met and not based on the personal agendas of the committee members. The following sections will describe these criteria.

### ***Personal attributes of households***

The committee selects households based on: the personal attributes of individual that are part of the household; their behavioural history; and the way they act in the community. The attributes considered to be important are friendliness, responsibility, honesty, activeness and the enthusiasm to learn new things. The importance of household attitudes was discussed by a provincial staff member who believed the sustainability of the project was based on the people providing such services as this makes a strong impression on tourists coming to the community.

Household attributes are most important as households are running the community tour venture, meaning they provide service to tourists by guiding and hosting them. If they are impressed by the service, they may come again and tell others as well. Then, the benefits are still available to the community [...] (interview no 39, Pak Sun).

This was reinforced by another interviewee; this time a tourist who commented on how they liked meeting the people and talking with them. This would not happen if the people were not friendly and open in their hosting activities.

This is my second time coming to Ban Na; I did both homestay and elephant watching. I didn't even see elephants this time. I came here again just to see the people who I met last time, hanging out together. I

do more talking with the people this time because I sent them some donations such as clothes [...] (interview no 10, Ban Na).

The importance of honesty was discussed by a female farmer homestay provider who has worked in the tourism project for more than two years.

Many times tourists came to stay in my house; they leave their belongings, including money. I told my two children not to touch the money and I lock the house to make sure their property was not taken by someone. I think my honesty was the most important reason that I was selected to host the village visitors (a female homestay, interview 21, Ban Na).

The committee was not just relying on the attributes of householders in inviting them to be involved in the ecotourism project. They also considered householders based on literacy, health, physical strength, and traditional knowledge and skills. According to the village committee, not all householders will match all these criteria, but they should have two or more at least to be eligible to be involved in the project's activities.

Literacy is considered necessary for the English, hospitality and services training provided by the project. Therefore, the committee has to ensure that householders are able to write and read Lao in order to learn in the English lessons and other training sessions provided by the project. The requirement of literacy was also discussed by a community leader who identified the important role of literacy for the English classes provided by the project.

[...] I found at the beginning of the first English class that one of the selected guides could not even write his name in Lao. I remembered that while others were writing down English words to communicate with tourists, he just listened to the teacher and sat at the back [...], he chose to leave the project because he could go no further. Therefore, literacy is included in the committee criteria for the selection of households (interview no 15, Ban Na).

Some farmers believed that their poor literacy excluded them from participation in the project, even though they were happy to be a part of the ecotourism activities. For example, a male farmer said that:

[...] I want to be involved in the project, but I would not be selected because I am not able to write and read properly. If you are involved in the project, you have to attend English classes, so you need to write down what is being taught [...]. You can see over there, the temple is the place that volunteers come to teach English for people involved (interview no 55, Ban Na).

People's health was another factor influencing the committee's selection. The main activity of the CBE in Ban Na is trekking to the forest, so guides have to be strong and have no infectious diseases or illnesses. Two guides are always required in the trekking activities for safety purposes. One has to be in the front and other at the back of the tourists. They are trained in first aid in case of a medical emergency as well. They need to be able to not just help themselves, but also the tourists. Therefore, they need to be strong enough to care for others.

The local guides must be strong and healthy people. Otherwise, it would be hard to care for tourists or even for themselves. The tourists' safety is the guides' responsibility, so we have to make sure that they have the ability to deal with unexpected things [...] (a local leader, interview no 9, Ban Na).

The household's ability to preserve traditional knowledge and skills was also considered an important factor for household selection. In Ban Na, "100% local" is a selling point for the homestays. Tourists are motivated to come and stay in the community to observe and understand more about the way the local Lao people live. "Tourists would not come to Ban Na if they want luxurious things [...]. The key point that attracts them is experiencing the local lifestyle" (a district staff member, interview no 36, Thaphabath). Thus, the

households need to keep those traditional things and ways. Moreover, elephant trekking seems to be the most popular activity in the project. Therefore, all guides have to know the forest well and have local knowledge about the elephants and their habitat.

We offer elephant trekking to tourists, so our guides have to be familiar with the forest and be able to differentiate between elephants based on their noise [...]. It is hard to explain, but as locals we have the sense (a local leader, interview no 15, Ban Na).

Based on these criteria, households who have potential to be involved in the project are selected. The final selection is made using further criteria with regard to special circumstances. The following sections will describe this factor in more detail.

### ***Household circumstances that receive extra/special consideration***

Another significant factor is that the committee also considers three particular circumstances relating to household livelihoods and service to the community. The very poor households and households who had been affected by elephants were the two groups of households whose circumstances were taken into account during the selection process. The third group are households who are known to be active in village security.

First, the committee focused on involving the very poor households in the project. The purpose of adding the poor into the process of selection is to provide them with the opportunity to gain an alternative income for their livelihoods.

[...] we were concerned also about very poor households being involved in the project, so that they can use the benefits from the project to support their families. There are three out of twelve very poor households that are trained to be guides in the community project (local leaders, interview 15, 22, Ban Na).

Second, households who have suffered from elephant damage were another group proactively considered by the committee. Rice is the staple food for the local farmers. Some farmers had had to stop growing rice because their rice fields are very close to the elephants' home. "My rice field is close to the elephant habitat; for two years we have grown rice without any harvest. This year, we decided to stop growing rice" (a male farmer, interview no 41, Ban Na). This changed them from rice producers to rice buyers, because they have to buy rice from other households and outsiders for their daily consumption. As elephants are the highlight activity of the project, protecting the elephants is a means of keeping the project going. In contrast, people who are affected by those elephants are not happy to see the elephants; "I want the elephants to disappear" (a male farmer, interview no 16, Ban Na). The committee is aware of this sensitive situation and gives priority to these households to become involved in the project.

We offer elephant trekking to tourists, so we need to consider the households who are affected by elephants. They are the number one group of households who should get benefit from the project (a local leader, interview no 22, Ban Na).

Another factor taken into account by the village committee is the level of community voluntary activities households undertake. It is important to notice that the majority of these households are those that have higher levels of literacy in the village, and they are recognised and respected members of the community. There are households who serve in the village without payment such as village guards. They work voluntarily to keep the peace in the village and to protect the village forest from illegal logging and hunting. The committee believe that providing a chance for these people to gain benefits from what they are protecting rewards them for the effort and time they contribute for the good of the whole community.

### **5.1.2 Household willingness to participate in the project**

The household willingness to participate in the project was identified as another important factor influencing involvement in the project. According to local leaders, a key element maintaining the tourism activities in Ban Na is people's willingness to be involved and undertake the tourism activities.

One of the most important aspects of keeping the ecotourism activities moving forward is having the motivation to do so. Not everyone can do the activities; it needs people who are really keen to welcome and share his/her life with the tourists (A local leader, interview no 9, Ban Na).

In relation to the village committee, after the decision making related to the selection of households is made in a committee meeting, agreement from the households is then sought. The procedure of asking each household about its readiness is very simple and conducted by the head of the project. He goes to see the selected households in person at their houses or farms, talking briefly of the committee selection, and the new roles of he/she could have in the project. Some people postponed their agreement to another day after discussing it with their family members, while others agreed at the time. According to the head of the project, not all people were passionate about being involved in the project even if they were selected by the committee. Those people who agree then have to be trained either as guides or homestays before they can provide these services to tourists.

The project creates an opportunity to improve household knowledge and this is another reason motivating involvement in the project. As local farmers who rely on farm production and natural resources in the area, a high level of education was not necessary for them. They rely on their labour availability, because the higher the farm production, the wealthier they are in the rural context. For households who are seeking to develop their knowledge, participation in the ecotourism project seems to be the right choice, mainly

because of the training opportunities provided by the project. For example a male farmer said that “there is very limited opportunity to improve simple education in our rural place, so involvement in the project is a golden chance” (interview no 16, Ban Na).

The opportunity to be involved in an activity that was of benefit to the village was another reason local people were willing to participate in the CBE project. The main reason found in this study was the awareness of a role in the development of the community. As a member of the community, each household was keen to help and be part of the community activities.

I participate in the homestay part of the project because I think it is important to work together in harmony and to be a part of the community (a female farmer, interview no 24, Ban Na).

The opportunity to be involved in the conservation project was a further reason influencing participation in the project. Some participants mentioned their willingness to be a part of environmental protection. These people mainly work in the project as local leaders, guides and homestays. The idea was revealed during an interview with a guide who has worked in the project for three years:

A reason that motivated me to be involved in the project was being a part of conservation. In the old days, it was common when you were in the forest, to hear the sound of cheeky gibbons everywhere. However, the sound today seems to have disappeared (interview no 17, Ban Na).

The influence of those households involved in the project on those not involved was another significant factor that motivated people’s participation in the project, particularly for the uninvolved households. There were two main reasons found to influence the uninvolved households who wanted to be involved in the project. The primary reason was social status. Some households did not want the embarrassment of not being selected to become



involved in the project due to not meeting the criteria set by the village committee. A PKK staff member said:

Some households just want to be involved in the project when they see others or their friends who are involved. I think some of them may just not want to be embarrassed in front their friends or neighbours for not being involved in the project (interview no 37, Thaphabath).

The better standard of living of households involved in the project was another reason why uninvolved families wanted to participate in the project. Some participants understood that involvement in the tourism activities can bring a better living standard like those of the involved people. An uninvolved female farmer stated that:

A cousin of mine who is a guide in the village was very poor and had nothing a few years ago. Today, his family has a better standard of living which shows through him not borrowing money to buy rice to feed his family. I want also to be like him (interview no 44, Ban Na).

The opportunity to get a job during the dry season was another reason influencing local people's involvement in the project. During the dry season, some households do not have access to water for growing crops, so they do not have crops to look after. In addition, in the dry season their livestock are left to graze freely and require little care, meaning they have plenty of time. Therefore, the involvement in the tourism activities allows them to have a job while waiting for the next wet season. Some interviewees talked about the reasons why they had become involved in the project:

I am very busy in the wet season because every day I work in the field, but there is nothing much to do in the dry season. It would be good if I could participate in the village tourism venture while waiting for the next rice season (a male farmer, interview no 57, Ban Na).

Many farmers here do not have job to do in the dry season while waiting for the next growing season. I think one reason that people want to be involved in the project is for something to do to earn money in the dry season (a local leader, interview no 28, Ban Na).

The opportunity for households to become involved in income generating work that is not illegal was a reason why some households wanted to participate in the project. As mentioned before, the lack of jobs in the dry season cause many farmers to be without work during this time. This has meant that some of them harvested timber and hunted wildlife in the forest to sell. The farmers know that cutting trees and hunting wildlife is illegal and could harm their livelihoods if the practices were seen by village guards. Some of them have been fined, while others have been put in jail for their practices. They told the researcher, however, that there was no alternative to staying away from these illegal practices.

I don't want to be involved in the illegal cutting of trees because it is very dangerous work. However, if I were not cutting trees, I have no idea how I could earn money to buy food to feed my family (interview no 42, Ban Na).

A number of other factors that influenced household willingness to be involved in the project were also identified including: household labour availability; level of household awareness of the project; and household personal preferences. These factors will be outlined in the following section.

#### **5.1.2.1 Household labour availability**

Household labour availability was another factor that influenced household ability to be involved in the ecotourism activities. Several reasons were described by participants to support this factor. Some people, especially young women, said that having very small children constrained their involvement in the project.

There is only my husband and I in our family, and we have two small kids. My work is mainly taking care of the kids and all the work in the house, while my husband often goes to do construction work outside the village. Thus, we don't think about participation in the ecotourism project because of our lack of availability to be more involved in the labour force (a female farmer, interview no 46, Ban Na).

A group of farmers said that having limited time to attend regular meetings and training for the project was the main reason they were not involved. As members of the ecotourism project, each member is required to be involved in the project's activities including meetings and attending English classes. The English classes are provided by an NGO. How often the English classes are held is dependent on how many volunteers come to stay and teach the villagers in the community, and when they come. According to the head of the project, sometimes, the volunteers come monthly and stay for one or two weeks, while at other times they may only come every two or three months. Therefore, some farmers found it difficult to manage the time commitment for participation in the project's activities. Two farmers who shared similar thoughts both said attending regular project activities was the limiting factor for their participation in the ecotourism project.

I missed the English classes and the tour meetings a few times because I had some things to do. I realised that I could not continue to be a member of the project. Therefore, I left the project giving the reason of having limited time to attend the regular activities provided by the project (interview no 42, Ban Na)

As a member of the project, you have to attend activities which are provided by the project. I personally found that hard to do, so it is better to stay away from the project (interview no 60, Ban Na).

This was also the case for households who have permanent jobs and are busy with their own business. They stated that having no time meant they

were not interested in being involved in the project. These people seem to have a more secure financial income compared to other households in the community. Two respondents talked about their reasons for not participating in the project.

In our case, my wife and I have permanent jobs. We work from Monday to Friday and on the weekend, spend time on our farm activities. This already uses all our time. We don't want to be involved in the project. This also gives the chance to other households who have no jobs (a male, interview no 29, Ban Na).

In my case, I just have no time to be involved in the project. My husband and I are working on our family businesses and our two children are studying in the city while another one is helping us (a female farmer, interview no 13, Ban Na).

A few farmers gave the reason that having no family members at home impacting on their families' involvement in the project.

I have seven children, but no one is at home now. Five of them moved out after getting married, and the other two stay in the city studying. Our family used to be involved in the project, but we don't now due to our lack of labour (interview no. 12, Ban Na).

A male farmer stated that the lack of labour in the family caused him to decide not to be involved in the project, even though the opportunity arose.

I went with tourists two times when the project was short of guides due to many tourists coming at the same time. It was difficult for me because there was no one tending the cows and doing my work on the farm when I went with tourists (interview no 32, Ban Na).

### **5.1.2.2 Level of household awareness of the project**

The findings from this study indicate that the ability to take advantage of economic opportunities was an important factor which influenced people's participation in the project. People who have been involved in establishing the project have had a consistent source of income from the tourism activities, so they are aware of the benefits from the project. Before the CBE project's establishment, various organisations undertook studies and surveys of the elephants in the area. These organisations required locals who knew about the area to act as guides. As a male farmer stated:

I started to work as a guide before the project's establishment with the people who came to survey the elephants. I went with them many times and they paid very good money (interview no 8, Ban Na).

People's understanding of the project was another factor influencing the level of involvement. The majority of the community are aware of the ecotourism project in the village, but some have little knowledge about how the project works. They know about tourism in their community because they have seen tourists coming to the village and they hear about it at the village meetings. These farmers tended to believe that they would be required to spend a lot of time away from their farms and their farm work would suffer. The project, in reality, however, places farmers on a roster to ensure they have flexibility in how much time they are of their farms. This finding was supported by a provincial staff member who has worked with the project from the beginning.

Some people just believed that if they were involved in the project, it might take them away from their normal activities such as cutting trees; hunting wildlife and having limited time to work in their fields (interview no 36, Pak Sun).

A decline in household farm activities was not the only factor influencing the lack of understanding of some households regarding the project. There is also

the belief among some in the community that only some households who are relatives or friends of members of the committee are selected to be involved in the project. One female farmer stated that:

I think I have all the criteria to meet the demands of the project, but I was not selected to be involved in the project. I do not know why, maybe the project tour operators focus on particular households, such as people who they like and their relatives (interview no, 58, Ban Na).

### **5.1.2.3 Household personal preferences**

Personal preferences of households also influenced their willingness to participate in the project. The attitude towards participation in the CBE project differed significantly between poor households and those household which are relatively better off. The majority of farmers who wanted to be involved in the project are not the poorest families in the community. These people own farms and have access to permanent houses. The main reason that motivated them to be involved in the project was to try a new role in the community which is different from their daily routine. As one female farmer stated:

My work every day is weaving bamboo boxes at home. Sometimes, it feels boring alone and I move to weave in other neighbourhoods. I want to try something which is different from what I am doing every day (interview no 40, Ban Na).

However, there are some farmers who have no idea about how to talk with tourists and appeared to lack the confidence to learn to be involved. They believe they are not in a position to host tourists and, hence, are not willing to be involved in the project. Interestingly, these people are mainly the young women who come from poor families. As a 17 year female participant said “I have never thought of participating in the project because I really don’t know what to do with tourists” (interview no 30, Ban Na).

### **5.1.3 Household ability to meet tourist expectations**

A household's ability to meet tourist requirements plays a role in explaining their participation in the project. The tourist requirements, in turn, are influenced by several factors such as: household ability to meet tourist facility requirements; household ability to meet tourist location requirements; and household ability to communicate with tourists.

Firstly, the ability of households to provide facilities that meet tourist expectations was considered an important factor. Local households are not required to have rooms the standard of a hotel to become a homestay. It is only necessary to have a clean toilet and room which can be converted into a tourist facility; this is good enough to become a homestay in Ban Na. However, in the rural areas, these facilities are still often beyond what can be supplied by many farmers. As a male farmer said:

I feel that my family is not ready to become a homestay for tourists. The reason is that we don't have room in our house and we don't have a proper toilet for them as well (interview no 56, Ban Na).

All households who provide houses for hosting tourists in Ban Na are not very poor households. The main reason is because very poor people do not have facilities that meet the tourists' requirements.

Location preference was another factor that influenced a household's ability to meet the expectations of tourists. Some tourists have their personal requirements which influence their selection of a place to stay. The tourists mostly prefer to stay in the village where there are more local houses close together, and close to the village tour office (see Figure 5.1).

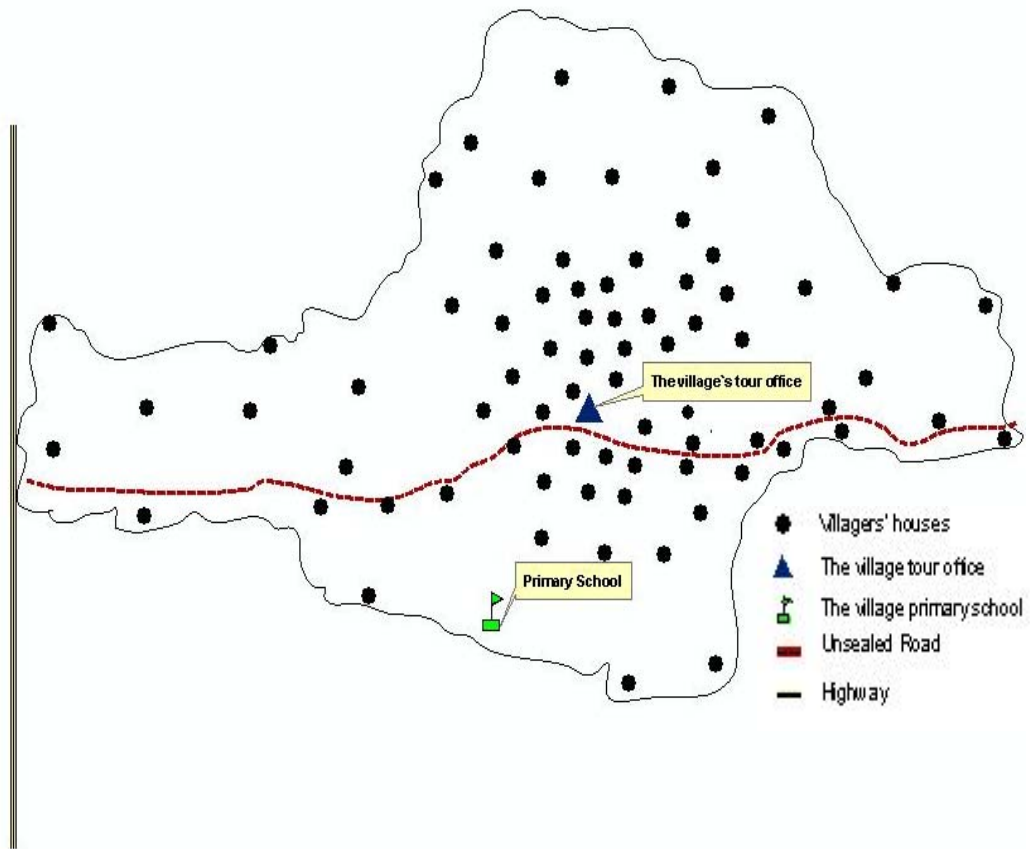


Figure 5.1: Map showing the location of Ban Na in relation to the village houses (Source: created by the author)

According to the project head, those tourists might want to see and talk with locals as much as they can while staying in the community. In case of emergency or something happening to them, they can just drop into the office to ask for help or advice if they are close by. He further shared the fact that a few times tourists had asked to not stay at the places that were selected by the village tour operator.

Some tourists did not stay in the houses provided; they selected their own places to stay in the community. Several of them love to stay close to where there are many village homes and the village tour office which is the centre of the community.



Location was also discussed by a female homestay provider who has worked in the project for two years.

I have not received many tourists compared to other households in the centre of the community. I think maybe my house is too far from the tourist office and also far from other households (a female farmer, interview no 55, Ban Na).

In addition, the ability of a household to communicate influenced tourists' choice of a place to stay. Households better able to communicate with tourists have more opportunities to serve and host tourists. As a local leader stated that:

Some tourists who came to our project more than once insisted on having the same guides as the previous time. Those guides are mainly the once who have better communication in English (interview no 9, Ban Na).

The findings of this study indicated that the village committee is the most powerful factor in influencing household participation in the Ban Na CBE project. Rules and criteria were set by the committee for selecting households who should and should not become involved in the project. However, the selection processes is not for the personal gain or the agenda of the committee members. The committee are concerned with ensuring the long term success of the project and ensuring the benefits are distributed to the whole community. Household willingness to participate in the project and the ability of households to meet the demand of tourist expectations were also found to influence the involvement in this CBE project. The following section highlights the impacts of the project at the community and household levels.

## **5.2 Impacts of Ban Na Community Based Ecotourism Project**

This section presents the environmental, socio-cultural, and socio-economic impacts of the Ban Na CBE project.

### **5.2.1 Environmental impacts**

The most significant positive impacts of the Ban Na CBE project were improved forest and wildlife conservation outcomes and a cleaner village. These impacts have occurred because of the increasing awareness among households from their involvement in the ecotourism project. An increase in the amount of waste, pollution and noise were highlighted as negative impacts. The details are presented in the following sections.

#### **5.2.1.1 Positive environmental impacts**

One positive environmental impact of the project is the enhanced conservation of protected vegetation. This is a direct result of increased household awareness of the environment. This is illustrated in participant responses where they reported better forest and wildlife conservation, and a cleaner village resulting from the project establishment.

There was a high level of household awareness about protection of the environment resulting in the establishment of better forest and wildlife conservation, with the village having responsibility for its own protected area. Local villagers created their own regulations for protecting the forest and wildlife in the area. The local guards had also been authorised by the village to protect the area against any illegal cutting and poaching. All local households in the community have been encouraged to protect the forest and wildlife; this was revealed by a local leader:

We have the village protected area which we created on our own in the community resulting from the project. We are encouraging villagers to

be our eyes and ears to immediately report any illegal activity they see in the area. Our community is offering environmental tourism, so we have to preserve the natural environment or even make it more beautiful (interview no 15, Ban Na).

Interestingly, this study found that the potential benefits of the project were the main motivation for households to protect and preserve the environment, as this protected their livelihoods. This is shown in the words of two householders who have worked with the project from the beginning:

We have been earning income from tourists coming to our village to watch wild elephants and experience the nature, so losing them would mean hardship for the local households. Thus, we need to protect them as a valuable source of revenue for our future and our next generation as well (interview no 9, Ban Na).

Before being a guide, I only thought about how I can get better food and money. I did everything, even illegal stuff such as cutting trees and poaching wildlife both for consumption and selling. But now, I feel like I think more about the environment. If there were no aesthetic natural environment and elephants like there is today, then tourists may stop coming to our community and there would be no income for us at all (interview no 18, Ban Na).

The CBE project has also improved the management of rubbish disposal in the village. Since the ecotourism project started, the village has created a rubbish disposal area, and all households have bins for collection of their rubbish. Prior to the project, they just threw rubbish on the ground and in nearby bushes. Interestingly, the research found that tourists played a very important role in influencing household behaviour in terms of rubbish disposal practices. Participants said that they have never seen tourists drop their rubbish on the ground; they collect all their rubbish and put it in bins. The good behaviour of tourists has been adopted by locals, as shown in several participant interviews:

One time, I took a couple of tourists to watch the elephants in the forest. On the way back from the elephant tower to the community, the husband gave me a candy [...]. He asked me where to put the paper of the candy when we reached the village tour office while we were drinking water on the office table. It embarrassed me very much because I threw the candy cover away in the forest on the way back, while he kept the paper to put in the bin. Since then, I never threw any rubbish out from my hands without putting it in bins when I go with tourists (a male farmer, interview no 17, Ban Na).

All tourists coming here never drop their rubbish on the ground. In contrast, they collect all rubbish such as plastic bags and drinking bottles along the way when trekking. I have to do like them; otherwise I would not impress them at all. It felt a little strange at the beginning, but it is a common habit to me now (a male farmer, interview no 20, Ban Na).

#### **5.2.1.2 Negative environmental impacts**

In addition to the positive environmental impacts, some negative environmental impacts of the project were also found in this research. They included an increase in the amount of rubbish, air pollution and noise associated with the tourists. Some participants noticed that there was an increase in the quantity of rubbish in the community since the start of the project, as a female farmer said: “I feel the waste is increasing in the village such as plastic bags, cans and drinking bottles” (interview no 59, Ban Na). A higher number of tourists coming to Ban Na also means an increase in vehicles bringing and collecting them. This has resulted in increased dust and noise which has disturbed the households.

## **5.2.2 Socio-cultural impacts**

Findings from the research indicated that tourism has both positive and negative consequences for the local livelihoods. The most significant of the positive impacts is the improvement of local livelihoods through access to a new source of finance, which has led to an increasing expenditure on children's education, houses and farms, improving the water supply and an increase in the confidence and sense of pride among locals. In contrast, the creation of difficulties for some household livelihoods and unpleasant feelings among locals are two negative consequences identified. The details of these are presented in the following sections.

### **5.2.2.1 Positive socio-cultural impacts**

The ecotourism project, in general, brings a range of positive socio-cultural impacts to the local households. Participants indicated that the project improved their livelihoods, in terms of the opportunities it provides to access a source of income, which creates an ability to increase spending on their children's educations, housing improvements and appliances, and farms. The local people in the village have been able to build confidence and a sense of pride.

All participants shared an optimistic opinion of the project in terms of the opportunity to access the funds from the tourism project. They said that all households in the community are better off because of the village fund which has been created by the project. The locals have been able to borrow from and use the fund to assist their financial circumstances. A female farmer said that having the village fund has helped many of the very poor households to overcome their complicated issues, such as dealing with health concerns.

Last year my son was very sick and needed an operation immediately. The cost of the operation was very expensive; my entire family did not

have enough money. I borrowed 2,000,000 kip from the village fund (interview no 51, Ban Na).

Another positive social impact is the increased ability of households to pay for their children's education. As a male farmer told the researcher, the increase in income let him dream about sending his son to a higher level of education.

I have three sons; one of them passed away a few years ago. The oldest one is studying at secondary school. I used to think that I wanted him to stop studying after finishing secondary school because I had no money to send him further, and he could also have worked on the farm raising cattle. Now, I have changed my mind and want him not only to finish high school but also to send him onto college (interview no 18, Ban Na).

Interviewees also stated that the income earned from the project had improved their financial circumstances, enabling them to improve their housing conditions. Some households can now afford to buy better materials with which to build and renovate their houses. One male farmer said that the income from the ecotourism project was the most important factor in boosting his family's living conditions, especially his house (see Figure 5.2, 5.3). He was very enthusiastic about sharing his story with the researcher about how his life has been changed in regard to better living conditions from participating in the project.

My house was very wet in the rainy season and very cold in winter, so I had a dream that I wanted to have a better house for my wife and the two sons. My dream has come true today; I am starting to built a concrete house which is the result of my work in the tourism project (interview no 17, Ban Na).



Figure 5.2: A farmer's house before working with the project



Figure 5.3: A farmer's new house under construction after 4 years of working in the project.

Some participants said that they have a greater capacity to purchase household appliances and other goods to enhance their quality of life, such as

TVs, fridges, clothes, and motorbikes, while others have more money for buying seeds and fertilisers for their farms.

Additionally, households identified other positive social-cultural impacts of the project including the building of confidence and a sense of pride in their cultural and traditional practices. The households said that they were encouraged to maintain their traditional practices in order to attract tourists to the community. Several of them said that they like tourists coming to the village to see their traditional life styles because they were pleased people were interested in the lifestyles of remote areas.

#### **5.2.2.2 Negative socio-cultural impacts**

Along with the positive social impacts mentioned, negative impacts at the household level also were noted by participants in this research. Some households indicated that the ecotourism project has provided negative impacts on their livelihoods. These people are mainly from the uninvolved and poor households in the village. Some of them are affected by the elephants, and they complained that they cannot practise farming resulting in a need to buy rice from other households and outsiders. This also results in them having a poorer quality of life.

Additionally, the project has also created some unpleasant feelings among some local villagers. Some participants' view is that the project has impacted on the community bond, which has been weakened due to their jealousy of each other. In particular, people who are involved and have benefits from the tourism services seem to be active in the village activities such as participating in the community meetings and conservation activities. This contrasts with uninvolved households who do not have direct benefits from the project; they are seemingly not interested in participating in any activities in the community. Two male farmers, for example, both complained about being asked to help clean away elephant bodies near the village forest.



When we had to clean away an elephant body last year some people complained that people who are involved in the project should do the work, not the whole village. They gain money from the project, so they should do the work themselves (interview no 16, Ban Na).

### **5.2.3 Socio-economic impacts**

Findings from this study indicated that three key positive socio-economic impacts were identified by participants. They were the increase in household incomes, the enhancement of public infrastructure and the creation of a local market in the community. There is only one negative socio-economic impact that was highlighted by the participants, which is a higher living cost in the area. The details of these will be highlighted in the following sections.

#### **5.2.3.1 Positive socio-economic impacts**

The increase of household income was considered the most important of the positive socio-economic impacts. This income included both that received directly from the tourism services, and the selling of local products such as bamboo baskets to tourists. Before the ecotourism project, households only sold the products to middle men, but with the project they can also sell directly to tourists. Some participants said that they could get immediate money from selling the products to tourists:

Sometimes, the middle men did not give me the money from selling the products; they only gave the money to me when they came to collect another lot of products or when they had finished with the products. It often took a week or more to get money from them. By comparison, selling the products to the tourists is much better because they pay me directly for the products (interview no 38, Ban Na).

Another positive economic impact is that the ecotourism project created a local market among people in the community. Participants said that before

there was no market in the community. Households had to walk or drive to a market approximately 5 km from the village. With the project, today, there are some small shops which sell vegetables and meat, as well as other household goods in the village. Moreover, there are often also mobile fresh markets (pick up trucks and motorbikes which carry goods for sale) which come to the village; these were only occasional in the old days, according to the households. Participants said that the project brought to the market closer to them, which is easier for their daily life. Another type of trade, shared by the participants, was household to household purchasing; they said that households who run homestays often buy local products such as chickens and ducks from other households to cook for tourists. This was reported as also good for people who are not involved in the project, because they could also gain benefits from the tourism operation.

Participants also said that infrastructure enhancement was a positive reflection of the social improvement in their community. A majority of households said that the ecotourism project played a significant role in helping to improve their living conditions by providing a clean water source (see Figure 5.4). The researcher was told that local villagers today no longer worry about accessing water in the dry season as they used to in the past. For example, a female householder expressed her happiness in having a supply of clean water that is more convenient:

In the past, I had a very limited water supply in the dry season, because my well did not hold water for the whole year. Sometimes, I had to buy drinking water from outside, while other times I had to beg from other villagers who lived very far from my home but who had more water than I did. Thanks to the ecotourism project we have a clean water source, and this makes my life easier (interview no 26, Ban Na).



Figure 5.4: a water supply improvement in Ban Na

### 5.2.3.1 Negative socio-economic impacts

Participants also identified a socio-economic downside of the ecotourism project during the interviews carried out in this study. The participants said that living costs appeared to be increasing due to a higher demand for products to serve tourists coming to the village. The participants believed that this could cause difficulties for locals, particularly very poor households in the community.

## 5.3 Summary

This chapter was divided into two sections. The first section described the results that were found relating to the factors that influenced households' participation in the Ban Na CBE project. The second section described the findings of the impacts of the project on both a community and household levels. An overview of the key findings is provided in the following paragraphs.

When looking at the factors that influenced households' participation in Ban Na CBE, it was found that at the highest level, there were three main aspects that influenced involvement of the people focused on in this research. They were the role and selection processes of the village committee, the household willingness to participate in the project, and household ability to meet tourist expectations. Each of these factors was influenced, in turn, by a number of factors which were also outlined in this chapter.

It was found that the impacts of the Ban Na CBE project at community and household levels could be categorised into environmental, socio-cultural and socio-economic impacts. The project has had both positive and negative environmental impacts with it enhancing conservation and improving the management of rubbish disposal in the community. However, there were also negative environmental impacts including an increase in the amount of solid rubbish, dust and noise associated with tourists. The socio-cultural impacts were described as being positive, and included building local people's confidence and developing a stronger sense of pride in their culture. The socio-economic impacts of Ban Na CBE project were also identified as being positive with an increase in household incomes, the enhancement of public infrastructure and creation of the community market.

## CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

This chapter is divided into two sections; the first section will discuss key factors influencing the involvement of households in the Ban Na CBE project. The second section will discuss the impacts at the household level which arise from participation in the project.

The following table highlights the key characteristics of the Ban Na CBE project and sets the context for the ecotourism project that is the focus of this research.

Table 6.1: The case study's important characteristics

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Case classification</b>
<i>Project type</i>	Community Based Ecotourism Project
<i>Project characteristics</i>	
The level of community control and management of the project	High
The level of external organisations in the project	Limited
<i>Project management</i>	
Project decision-making and management	Undertaken by the village committee
Project managed through rules set by village committee	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. rules around household participation to ensure cross household benefits</li> <li>2. rules to minimise negative impacts on cultural and environmental resources</li> <li>3. rules to ensure the needs and expectations of tourists are met</li> </ol>
<i>Project activities</i>	
<i>Types of project activities households can participate in</i>	Guiding of tourists or homestays plus making and selling local handicrafts

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Case classification</b>
<i>Types of access to benefits from the project</i>	
Household level	1. direct remuneration from active involvement in guiding or homestays or/and selling local products 2. indirect remuneration from community funds –for those not actively involved
Community level	community-wide benefits from investment in infrastructure improvement
<i>Community/village locality in district</i>	- close to a district centre - close to the PKK national protected area - close to a main highway
<i>Household locality in village</i>	Dispersed over 15 hectares with a density of village houses at the centre of the village
<i>Community demography</i>	
The number of households in the community	Relatively small with 125 households (648 residents of which 341 are female)
The number of households actively involved in the project	28 (20 guides and eight homestays)
The number of households not actively involved in the project	97 households
<i>Community cultural and socio- economic characteristics associated with the project</i>	
Ethnic mix	Relatively homogeneous
Household wealth status	No extreme wealthy or poor
Categories of households differentiated on the basis of food sufficiency and facilities to host tourists	1. enough food and facilities adequate for hosting tourists (approximately 50 percent) 2. enough food, but facilities not

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Case classification</b>
	adequate for hosting tourists (approx 40 percent) 3. not enough food or facilities for hosting tourists (approx 10 percent)
Households with a regular source of income	<15 percent
Households with no regular income	>60 percent
Average level of educational attainment among community members	Year 5 primary school

In this research, the case study has several characteristics that distinguish it (see Table 6.1). The Ban Na CBE project is controlled and managed by local villagers to provide ecotourism services to visitors. There is limited external support from Government and non-government organisations. The management of the project is undertaken by the local village committee. The committee established the project rules including rules around household participation to ensure cross household benefits, rules to minimise negative impacts on cultural and environmental resources and rules to ensure the needs and expectations of tourists are met. Households can be involved in either guiding for tourists or providing homestays but not both, and all households can make local products for selling to tourists. The benefits of the project are received on both a community and individual household level, through an improvement in the water supply, access to funds from the village fund and the receipt of income directly from active participation and selling local products to tourists.

In terms of physical characteristics, the village is located relatively close to not only a district centre, Thaphabath, where there is a bus station and shopping areas, but also the PKK national park as well as a main highway. Residents' houses are in high density in the centre of the village where they are close to the village tour office. The village itself is relatively small with 648 residents, comprising 341 females from 125 households. Of these households, 28 are actively involved in the project with 20 participating as guides and 8 as homestay providers. The community is relatively homogeneous in that the

majority of people share similar cultural and ethnic characteristics. Three categories of household circumstances are identified based on their food status and having facilities to host tourists in the community. These categories are: those that have food and adequate facilities to host tourists; those that have adequate food but no facilities; and those that have neither. Less than 15 percent of the residents in the community have a regular income, whereas more than 60 percent do not have this. Those with no regular income are more likely to rely on natural resources from the park to supplement their income, as well as for food. The average level of household educational attainment is year 5 of primary school. This level of educational attainment compares favourably with many remote areas in Laos primarily due to the village's close proximity to an urban centre, higher schooling participation rates and better schooling facilities.

## **6.1 Factors influencing household involvement in the project**

Studies in a number of countries suggest that active participation of local people in development projects play a significant role in providing them with financial benefits for enhancing their livelihoods (Armitage, 2005; Kellert et al., 2000; Kayat, 2002; Kiss, 2004; Li, 2002; Lise, 2000; Mosse, 1994; Narayan, 1995; Ostrom, et al., 2002; Pollnac & Pomeroy, 2005; Stem et al., 2003; Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier, & Van, 2001; Wunder, 2000). From the findings of this study, it is evident that the benefits of the CBE project are not restricted to only active participants. The project also benefits the wider community through related economic opportunities and the establishment of a communal village fund. Members of the community who are not actively involved in the CBE project have access to these benefits. Community participation in rural development projects is widely accepted as resulting in the widespread distribution of benefits (Narayan, 1995; Stem et al., 2003). This was believed to be a key factor in determining the success of rural development projects. However, the findings of this research indicate that broad based active participation is not always suitable due to the nature of this CBE. This is largely due to the CBE being service oriented with the need for the community to meet tourist expectations including facility and literacy



requirements. As not all households are able to fulfil these requirements, their participation in servicing the needs of tourists is not appropriate.

Three key factors were found to influence the participation of community members in the Ban Na CBE project. These three factors were not identified within the ecotourism, CBE and rural development literature. However, some elements of the factors influencing people's participation in this case study are similar to those found in rural tourism and rural development case studies from both developing and developed countries. This suggests that different types of communities around the world have experienced similar lessons when dealing with community participation in projects. In contrast, the differences experienced can also be explained by the particular characteristics of the case study of Ban Na CBE in terms of location and specific community characteristics.

The following sub-sections will present the findings in detail in order to compare the differences and similarities in light of the literature. In order to maintain consistency with the case study results, this discussion will use the following structure reflecting the three key factor findings: the criteria for household selection used by the village committee; household willingness to participate in the project; and household ability to meet tourist expectations.

### **6.1.1 The process of household selection undertaken by the village committee**

The village committee plays a key role in influencing household participation in the project through their selection process and criteria. However, there is the potential for this position of power to be misused, as identified in the rural development research of Adebayo (1985), Njoh (2002), Tewari and Khanna (2005) and Wilson et al., (2001), where powerful members of projects were able to treat friends and family preferentially. The findings of this research contradicted previous research and indicated that committee members do not act in their own interests. In the context of the Ban Na CBE, the committee is concerned both with ensuring the long term success of the project and

ensuring the benefits from the project are distributed throughout the whole community. For this reason, they set criteria for participation in the project on the basis of ensuring these goals, and not the personal agenda of the committee members, was attained. Rules established by the committee at the beginning of the project exclude committee members from being involved and receiving benefits from the project. The characteristics of the community are likely to be another contributing factor, as the community is relatively small and ethnically homogenous which reduces the potential for conflict to arise.

Other rural development literature shows that benefits tend to go to powerful members in the community projects. As Coleman (1999) pointed out, local leaders in a micro-finance project in Northeast Thailand often selected people, such as relatives and friends who gain benefit from the project, to participate based on their own preference. There was no evidence of this occurring in this case and may reflect the fact that committee members are excluded from being involved in and receiving benefits from the project. However, the perception that the village committee did preferentially involve their relatives and friends was held by some households, and this had led to some of them assuming that they could not be included in the ecotourism project. This suggests that current levels of communication about the project selection criteria are not adequately communicated to all members of the community.

For the project to have continued success and long term sustainability, the committee recognizes that the impression that households make on the tourists that come to the village is crucial, as well as the household's ability to meet the requirements of the project. The selection criteria include factors that relate directly to this, such as the personal attributes of the households which includes literacy, health, physical ability and traditional knowledge and skills. Of these attributes, only literacy has been previously reported as being a factor in rural development literature (Abdulai & CroleRees, 2001; Glendinning, Mahapatra, & Mitchell, 2001; Lise, 2000; Napier & Napier 1991; Walters, Cadelina, Cardano, & Visitacion, 1999) and an explanation for the presence of this criterion may be that the committee is concerned about

ensuring the long term sustainability of the project as well as the nature of the work involved in the ecotourism venture.

It has been found in this research that the literacy criterion has been one of the limiting factors in the participation of households in the project. This finding is supported by research undertaken by Abdulai and CroleRees (2001), Glendinning et al. (2001), Lise (2000), Napier and Napier (1991), and Walters et al. (1999) who claimed that well educated people have greater opportunities to be involved in development projects when compared to illiterate people, because these households were able to easily take up training provided by the development projects. Briedenhann and Wickens (2004) suggested that it is essential to help local people improve their ability to read and write, so that they can get advantages from the development projects. In the context of Ban Na, illiteracy affects about 10 percent of the population; this, for the most part, affects those who are elderly and very poor due to lack of access to education and a limited amount of time to be involved because of the labour needs on the farms.

In this project, the poorest villagers were excluded from being actively involved for a complex mix of reasons. While the committee acknowledges that inclusion of the very poor households in the village is important by giving them special consideration, the requirement for literacy as an attribute directly conflicts with this. This means that even though the project tries to include the poor households in order to improve their livelihoods, in reality it is not very successful at this. In addition to this, it was also found that these households had a lack of confidence in their ability to become involved, and this was another key factor that stopped them from participating.

Kumar and Corbridge (2002) highlighted that poor people are often excluded from participating in and gaining benefits from rural development projects in India. This current study also supports the finding that the poor are excluded from being actively involved, but it is relevant to note that despite this, they are gaining some of the benefits from the Ban Na CBE through the village fund. Although the committee has reached a consensus to involve the very

poor households in the project, the priority to involve the poor still remains difficult due to the literacy requirements as well as these households' lack of confidence in becoming involved, as mentioned earlier. In addition to this, there may be difficulties in their ability to provide the facilities to meet tourist expectations, which will be discussed in detail in the following section. Although the committee encourages them to be involved by creating the special circumstance criteria, they are, for the most part, not in the position to host tourists and, hence, are not able or willing to participate in the project. This finding explains that a community ecotourism project has an important and unique characteristic when compared to other rural development projects, because it provides services to tourists, and, therefore the certain expectations tourists have need to be taken into account. Consequently, for these reasons, the poor were excluded from being involved actively which means the active involvement of the poor is not appropriate or possible in Ban Na CBE project. Although the poor were excluded from being actively involved in the CBE project in Ban Na, this research highlights the multiple dimensions of "participation" and how in ecotourism "exclusion" from active involvement in a CBE project is not unjustified provided the structure of the project ensures access to benefits for the poor.

The groups of households that are given special priority for participation do not seem to have the problems of meeting the other criteria that the poor households do. This group involves the farmers whose livelihoods were threatened by the elephants that are a key part in the success of the project. By providing these farmers with the opportunity for direct benefits from the project, they are less likely to kill the elephants in order to protect their crops. This means that the entire community may then have the chance to benefit from the success of the project. Other examples of groups like these being given special consideration were not found in tourism and rural development literature.

Finally, the households who undertake voluntary activities in the village are the third group of households taken into special consideration by the committee. These people volunteer to serve the village without payment,

becoming involved in roles such as village guards. The majority of these households are literate people in the village who are recognised and respected members of the community. It is possible that these households are more likely to meet the criteria set by the committee even without special consideration.

### **6.1.2 Household willingness to participate in the project**

This research found that household willingness was another key factor influencing involvement in Ban Na CBE project. The research identified three sub-factors influencing household willingness to be part of the project. The three sub-factors are: household labour availability, the level of awareness of households of the project; and a household's personal preference.

Household labour availability was an important factor that influenced their ability to be involved in the tourism activities in Ban Na. This was also highlighted in a number of other of rural development studies in developing countries (Richards, 1986; Williams, 1997). Households provided several reasons which prevent them from being involved in the project, such as having very small children; having no time to attend regular meetings or the training for the project; having permanent jobs and businesses; and having an insufficient labour force within the family.

This was the case for households who had permanent jobs and were busy with their own businesses. These households said that having no time meant they were not interested in participating in the project. These people are more likely to have secure income when compared to others in the community. They are those families who have more than enough food in the community. This finding agrees with a study conducted by Kayat (2002) who highlighted that employed people appeared to have less interest in being involved in the ecotourism project in Malaysia. It also affirms Dolisca et al. (2006) in the point that business owners are less likely to participate in development projects as they are busy with their own work.

The findings from this research indicate that those households who are aware of the financial benefits were more willing to participate in the CBE project. This finding supports Cheyre (2005), Dolisca et al. (2006), Lise (2000), Narayan (1995), Ogutu (2002), Pollnac and Pomeroy (2005), Stem et al. (2003), Studsrod (1995), Stone and Wall (2004), Udaya Sekhar (2003), Williams (1997), and Wunder (2000) who claimed that economic benefits play a crucial role in motivating people's participation in community development projects.

The level of household understanding of the project was another factor influencing their participation in the project. This finding has also been described by Briedenhann and Wickens (2004) who reported that a lack of understanding of project details resulted in a decline in the number of people participating in tourism activities in South Africa. In this case study, some households said that they did not want to be involved in the project because it might take them away from their regular activities. In addition to this, others still believe that the project is for a particular group of people only, not for the whole community. It is likely that this has occurred in Ban Na because it is their first experience with a CBE project and it was established fairly recently. Due to this, households might lack both knowledge and understanding of possible benefits from being involved in the project. This is supported by the finding that those households who had had previous contact with the project were more motivated in participation and were influenced by the previous awareness of the project benefits.

The study found that the majority of households wanting to participate in this CBE, of which there was an element of uncertainty, were not the poor. This research found that households who wanted to be involved in this project were often in a position of financial security and felt they had nothing to lose so would get involved. There is no evidence of this phenomenon in rural development literature.

This study also found poor households appeared to lack confidence as well as being afraid to learn to be involved in the project, especially young women. This finding is consistent with Burkey (1993) and Wilson et al. (2001) who reported that the lack of confidence and reluctance to change often decreased poor people's willingness to participate in rural development projects. This means that while the project aims to involve the poor households once again, this is a factor that stops them from participating actively.

### **6.1.3 Household ability to meet tourist expectations**

The household ability to meet the requirements of tourists was another key factor explaining their participation in the project. This factor is not found in rural development literature, and illustrates the specific characteristics of ecotourism as a rural development project. The tourists had preferences for certain facilities like toilets and rooms with also wanting to stay near the centre of the village and to stay with households who spoke English, and so they could easily communicate with them.

As found by Cheyre (2005), tourists have expectations for certain facilities when they stay in household homes. These expectations for things like a separate room to sleep in and a proper toilet are usually only able to be provided by the better off families and not the poorer households. This is reflected in the Ban Na CBE project, where better off households have more opportunities to be involved in the project activities, especially homestays, than the poor. This supports Barret et al., (2001), Kumar and Corbridge's (2002) theories that well-off people are more likely to harvest benefits from development projects. In this project, it was clear that all homestays were better off households in the community, because they had houses and other facilities to meet the need of tourists. This finding means that the poor are excluded from being hosts for tourists, although the guiding activities have fewer limitations for the poor in this community because they need no facilities to participate. However, the poor are still limited by other criteria such as literacy and lacking confidence as previously discussed.

In the literature, households with good roads and accessibility are more likely to participate in rural development projects than people in remote areas, as was the case in Mali (Abdulai & CroleRees, 2001). In this study, households did not identify this as a factor influencing their decision to become a part of the project. This is because the community operates its own ecotourism project, and the community is easy to access and is not far from the city while also being close to a highway road. However, household location within the village was highlighted in this study. In this project, tourists preferred to select their own place to stay, and seemed to prefer being close to the community centre while also wanting to stay with households who were able to communicate with them in English. This highlights the importance of location even on a small scale, such as within a village, since this influenced their ability to participate in the CBE project.

The ability of households to communicate was another factor that influenced tourists' choice of which place to stay. This finding has not been mentioned previously in the literature. General speaking, it is to be expected that in any type of business which provides a service to clients, communication is the most important part of the service offered. It is reasonable to note that in this study context, households speak Lao and they have to communicate with tourists who are non-Lao speakers. Thus, as suggested in both Shapley (2002) as well as Briedenhann and Wickens (2004), providing opportunities to improve the local capacity in communication skills plays a significant role in helping them to receive benefits from tourism projects.

#### **6.1.4 Other factors**

Women in developing countries face constraints in their participation in community development projects because they are too busy in their farms- and may be too tired to be involved (Dolisca et al., 2006; Haidari & Wright, 2001; Mosse, 1994). In this project, women were actively involved in the tourist venture not as guides but in homestays. As highlighted by Cheyre (2005), women's participation in ecotourism is dependent on their ability to continue to look after their children and their household responsibilities.



Hosting tourists in their homes enables the women to do both and hence, encourages their active participation. Ecotourism which includes homestay or other options for women involvement that allows them to be able to meet their child care and household responsibilities will ensure that women are not excluded from this type of project.

Another factor influencing participation by individuals is previous bad experiences they may have had with development projects (Njoh, 2002; Vos, 2005). In this study participants did not identify this as a factor influencing household involvement in the Ban Na CBE project. This is probably because the community had never experienced other development projects. According to local leaders, the tourism project is the first of its kind to be implemented in the community.

In addition to the above factors, age is another consideration influencing the ability of people to participate in many development projects (Dolisca et al., 2006; Wilson, et al., 2001). In this study, this was not a clear cut factor influencing household involvement in the project. Age is a factor in the guiding component of the ecotourism project, but not the homestays. Although guiding was undertaken by young fit people, the benefits of this were distributed at the household level, so the young would guide on behalf of their household and the benefits would be for all within it. In fact, guiding was an activity that could, in particular, benefit poorer households in this project because it needs no additional facility support like homestays. Although the poor still had limitations in their involvement in this activity due to other criteria such as literacy and lack of confidence as previously discussed.

In the following section, findings on the impacts of the Ban Na CBE project at household level are discussed.

## **6.2 Impacts of the project on local livelihoods**

The impacts of the project at household level in this study fell into three categories including environmental, socio-economic and socio-cultural. This is consistent with Mbaiwa (2005), Oppermann (1996, as cited in Sharpley, 2003) and Wunder (2003). The themes of environmental, socio-cultural and socio-economic impacts were used in this study; the findings will be further discussed in detail in the following sections.

### **6.2.1 Environmental impacts**

The Ban Na CBE project has both positive and negative environmental impacts. One positive environmental impact is that the project has enhanced the conservation of protected vegetation. This has resulted from an increased awareness in households gained through their involvement with the project. The finding was also reported in several other ecotourism studies (Bookbinder et al., 1998; Tungchawal, 2001; Walpole & Goodwin, 2000; Wallace & Pierce, 1996) and tourism studies (Binns & Nel, 2002; Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Scheyvens & Momsen, 2008). Ecotourism in Ban Na has also increased household environmental awareness, in general, which is reflected in the creation of their own regulations for protecting the forest and wildlife in their area. This suggests that ecotourism projects play a significant role in educating local people in the conservation of the environment.

Another positive environmental impact that was found in this study is the improvement of rubbish management in the village. Since the ecotourism project started, the village has created a rubbish disposal area and all households have bins to collect their waste. Prior to the project, rubbish was disposed of on the ground or in nearby bushes. The reduction of the amount of rubbish in the community which makes the community cleaner has occurred as a consequence of household awareness through their participation in the project. Consequently, the living conditions have improved due to a better standard of hygiene. This is consistent with findings in

Phanthavong (2009), where ecotourism has encouraged people to improve their management and disposal of both rubbish and sewage waste in Kiet Ngong Village, Lao PDR. Therefore, in both ecotourism projects in Laos, a common outcome from being involved in the projects is the fact that local people have changed their behaviour in regard to better rubbish management. This outcome has occurred through different sources, however; in Ban Na, the behaviour came from observing tourist behaviour towards the disposal of rubbish, whereas in the Kiet Ngong village, the behaviour of villagers was influenced by the training undertaken early on in the project. In addition, in the Ban Na CBE project the change in behaviour towards waste disposal has not occurred across the whole community, but rather more commonly with those who are actively involved with the project. This finding means that the level of participation influences the scale of environmental outcomes in the project. This was not found as an environmental impact in community development literature in developing countries.

However, a number of negative environmental impacts were also identified in this research. The increase in the amount of solid rubbish, dust and noise associated with tourists are key negative impacts. These impacts from tourists are consistent with Weinberg et al. (2002) and Neth (2008) who conducted ecotourism studies in Costa Rica and Cambodia. Currently, the Ban Na CBE project is still in an early stage of development with low numbers of households providing services and small numbers of tourists travelling to the area. Although impacts are still small, the project is experiencing a consecutive annual increase in the numbers of tourists. This suggests that, for the project to be sustained, the creation of strategies for proper management of solid waste, dust and noise problems are necessary, as an ongoing development of the project.

Chin et al. (2002) identified soil erosion and vegetation damage as the most pressing issues for environmental managers due to increased pressure from tourist numbers. Burger and Gochfeld (1993) and Diamantis (2004) cited evidence that tourist activities can disrupt animals in their natural habitat. These environmental impacts were not an issue in this case. It is likely to be

because of the regulations established by the Ban Na CBE project which included restricting the amount of people using the elephant tower (maximum of six people at one time) and time viewing restrictions (no viewing can take place after 4pm). These measures, thereby, restrict the number of tourists in the area at any one time and reduce the potential damage they could have on tracks and vegetation.

In the following section, the findings related to the socio-cultural impacts on the household livelihoods are discussed.

### **6.2.2 Socio-cultural impacts**

The Ban Na CBE project has resulted in building people's confidence and sense of pride in their culture. The majority of households expressed their happiness in seeing tourists coming to learn about their traditional lifestyle. This is consistent with the work of Weaver (1998) and Roberts and Hall (2001) who highlighted that ecotourism plays a considerable part in building confidence, sense of pride and positive self image among local people in developing countries.

One potential negative impact was identified in studies by Lankford et al. (1994), Nelson (2004) and Scheyvens (1999) which all suggested that the benefits from ecotourism projects can lead to confrontations between local people because of jealousy and the breakdown of relationships. At this point in time, there was no evidence of this occurring in Ban Na, where people maintained the strong social relationships they had prior to the ecotourism project. While this impact has yet to manifest itself, the potential for conflict does exist due to some dissatisfaction among some excluded households from being directly involved in the project.

Authors such as Ashley and Roe (1998), Neth (2008) and Phanthavong (2009) claimed that local culture could be disrupted by tourists who enter the local community. This was not identified as an impact in the ecotourism project in Ban Na. This may be a consequence of the regulations laid down

for visitors early on in the project establishment. These regulations require visitors to act in a manner in keeping with locally accepted norms and include things such as discouraging public nude bathing as it is impolite, and the requirement to take shoes off before entering local houses, dressing neatly while in temples, and asking permission before taking photos. This suggests that one way to reduce a disregard of local cultures in CBE projects is to ensure there are clearly written regulations at the beginning of the project and finding a means of communicating them effectively to all tourists at the beginning of their visit.

Although, in general, positive socio-cultural impacts benefit most households in this project, there can be negative socio-cultural impacts on members of the community resulting from the protection of wildlife, such as elephants, associated with ecotourism. Some community members, such as people whose rice farms have been destroyed by elephants, may be actively impacted on as a result of ecotourism. This was not identified as a socio-cultural impact in either tourism or ecotourism literature. This highlights that a CBE project has to consider the equity between socio-cultural impacts in a community and the needs of wildlife conservation.

In the following section, the socio-economic impacts of the CBE project at the household level will be discussed.

### **6.2.3 Socio-economic impacts**

The Ban Na CBE project has both positive and negative socio-economic impacts. This study identified the socio-economic impacts at two levels. The first level is the community impacts and the second level is the individual household impacts. The increase in income for households comes from the tourism activities, and from selling local products to tourists; these benefits extend to the whole community in both direct and indirect ways. The direct benefits to those households involved in the project include direct employment, whereas for those uninvolved, it was in the form of the village fund, and through selling local products to tourists and to those in the

participating households. This research finding differs from the work of Bookbinder et al. (1998), Cheyre (2005), and McLaren (1998) who claimed that the benefits from ecotourism occur only in households who participate and involved organisations in projects. In the following sections, community and household impacts in detail will be outlined.

### **6.2.3.1 The community level impacts**

The research findings indicated one positive socio-economic impact at the community level: the improvement of public infrastructure, in much the same manner as Nelson (2004) described. In Ban Na village, the improvement of infrastructure has been witnessed in the form of water supply upgrading. The infrastructure improvement was a result of an NGO funding scheme at the start of the project. In the case of Ban Na, there was no existing water supply. Households collect water by digging wells, but the wells are not deep enough to hold enough water for a whole year. The issue is that the village area includes a lot of underground stone, and this limits the ability of villagers to dig deeper wells. In order to create a deeper well, they would need to spend a lot of money hiring an expert, which would mean that household incomes could not meet the expense of the wells. Therefore a benefit of this project is that it has assisted people in Ban Na in overcoming their difficulty in accessing water supplies and to save time in collecting water. The improvement of infrastructure in Ban Na is different from other projects in countries such as Kenya and Cambodia where local communities have benefited from road improvements connected to the ecotourism projects (Neth, 2008; Otugu, 2002). The road is not important to Ban Na because the community is already close to the highway.

There was also one socio-economic downside at the community level. Living costs appeared to be increasing due to a higher demand for products to serve tourists coming to the community. This finding is similar to the research of Phanthavong (2009) who conducted an ecotourism case study in Kiet Ngong Village in Xepian, National Protected Area, Lao P.D.R. However, generally speaking, the higher living cost has not just occurred in Ban Na, but has

appeared in several places in Laos and so may also be linked to wider economic factors.

### **6.2.3.2 The household level impacts**

The vast majority of households in Ban Na have experienced positive socio-economic impacts from the CBE project, but it varies across households depending on their level of active involvement in the project. Those involved in guiding and homestays have a direct income from providing services to tourists. Those households who sell local products and handicrafts also gain income from selling the products. In addition, indirect benefits have been gained by those not involved, which includes the very poor that are unable to be involved for reasons discussed earlier, as they can access the village fund to assist their needs. Likewise, those households that have been disadvantaged by the project can also benefit from the village fund. This research finding differs with the work of Cheyre (2005) who claimed that the benefits from ecotourism occur only for households who are actively involved in ecotourism in Chile. The new source of the income has enabled households to increase their household educational expenditure and has also assisted them in building and purchasing farming materials. This is very similar to other reported cases in the Nam Na and Kiet Ngong ecotourism projects of Laos, where the increase in household income from rural tourism allows local people to have the power to spend more on their children's school fees and to buy better house materials (Gjadhur et al., 2008; Phanthavong, 2009).

In general, the majority of households in Ban Na village have gained benefits from the CBE project. However, the level of benefits depends on the level of participation in the project. This has occurred because of the nature of the project and the fact that from the beginning, it has set regulations that have ensured that the financial arrangements and the distribution of the financial benefits have been widespread throughout the community. For example, one of the first key regulations that was put in place at the beginning of the project was to limit participation to only one member per family, which has resulted in

more widespread participation. In addition to this, elements of the project, such as the village fund, provide advantages for the entire community. Factors such as this were not found as socio-economic impacts in either tourism or ecotourism literature.



## **CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS**

The intention of this research was to answer the research question, “How can the majority of households benefit from community based ecotourism projects in Laos?”. In order to answer this question, specific objectives were set to identify the factors influencing household participation in the project and to identify its impacts based on environmental, socio-economic and socio-cultural aspects at both community and household levels. A single case study was used to achieve the research objectives and respond to the research question.

The research framework that was developed is based on tourism, ecotourism and rural development literature. This chapter provides a summary of the key research findings, an assessment of research methodology and suggestions for further research to not only improve the method but also gain a better understanding of Community based ecotourism (CBE) projects.

### **7.1 Research conclusions**

CBE has the potential to enhance the socio-cultural, socio-economic and environmental circumstances of Lao rural communities who are located close to national parks. The socio-cultural benefits of a CBE project can be enhanced by the establishment of rules that detail the culturally acceptable behaviour of tourists. Local households are more aware of their traditional cultures as a result of an increased awareness of their culture’s value from participating in the project. CBE provides socio-economic benefits to community members based on its tourism activities. Community members with different circumstances are able to participate in a CBE project when there is a range of activities that are suited to the differing circumstances that occur in a community. Likewise, CBE can also lead to the management of natural resources and reduce the adverse effects of human interaction with the environment. This will occur both through an increased awareness of the community’s potential impact and also as a result of investment in improved

infrastructure, for example, the rubbish management was made possible by the project.

The village committee is a structure that can manage and establish rules and guidelines for CBE projects in Laos without external support from government or non-government agencies. The committee has the potential to manage the CBE effectively in terms of the equitable distribution of benefits across the community.

CBE can provide benefits across the community to those who are both actively and not actively involved. This study highlights that a broader view of benefits across community does not always require active involvement of all community members. This is mainly because of the CBE project rules that ensure assistance through the community fund, spread benefits from actively involved households to the rest of the community, and ensure those households not actively involved can access benefits.

Rules within the project can assist the long term sustainability of CBE projects as well as ensure equitable distribution of benefits across the community. For example, rules that minimise negative impacts on environmental resources. Conservation can be enhanced by the establishment of rules that restrict the number of tourists and viewing time so as to reduce vegetation damage and the disturbance of wild animals.

A majority of households can benefit from CBE projects in Laos when the management of projects includes rules for participation that limit the level of involvement of any one household, thereby, ensuring a maximum of households are actively involved and benefitting from the project. Not all households can nor should be actively involved in providing services to tourists, because some households will not be able to provide the types of service preferred by tourists.

This study highlights, also, that benefits from CBE can be accessed by all those in the community, even when, the active involvement of all households

is not possible. In a CBE project where some households are unable or unwilling to be actively involved, the benefits from the project can be equitably accessed through the establishment of a community fund set up as a fundamental part of the project.

Local households able to be actively involved in a CBE project, as with other community based development projects, tend to be those who are less poor. The poor are constrained from being actively involved as a result of lack of capacity, lack of available time and labour and lack of awareness of the rules around project involvement and potential benefits as well as a lack of personal confidence.

CBE with a homestay option provides an important opportunity for women with children and household responsibilities to be actively involved in a project and to gain direct benefits from the project.

## **7.2 Evaluation of research methods**

The initial literature review played an important part in developing the theoretical framework in this research because it helped to guide the researcher in both fieldwork preparation and fieldwork processes. However, the researcher has learned that having an open mind is a significant part in conducting a research study. For example, factors influencing people's participation in the project and its consequences were considered at only the household level in the initial framework. According to the research findings, both community and household levels were significant and, therefore, identified by the participants.

This research was applied to a single case study approach which was useful to address the research objectives, because it allowed the researcher to gain an insight into the case study. It also allowed the researcher to understand the situations raised by different interviewees when identifying factors influencing households' involvement in the Ban Na CBE project, and its impacts on both

community and individual levels. Although a multiple case study approach allows researchers to compare the results across case studies and, therefore, gaining richer information, considering the time and financial resources available for this research, as well as the complexity of research topic, a multiple case study is not recommended.

The snowball sampling strategy was considered an appropriate research strategy given the nature of this research, which was useful to select interviewees who could provide detailed information on a specific issue (Patton, 1990). By using the snowball sampling strategy, it allowed the researcher to ensure the richness of the information in the research and allowed for the researcher to have some flexibility in adding new contacts to the data collection sample.

The semi-structured interview was recommended for future research because it allowed the researcher to have both a focus and conversational exchange in interviews with research participants. It also helped the researcher to question in a flexible manner as new issues arose in the conversation. Household interviews were carried out based on community members who were involved and not involved in the CBE project. It is suggested that separate interviews of men and women in the same households would provide a better understanding of any gender issues associated with the level of participation in the project.

In addition, audio recordings were very useful in this research because it helped to store data for the researcher for further analysis. However, the researcher needed to provide an explanation of the purpose of using the recorder to interviewees and ask their permission beforehand. The researcher found that some local households were not comfortable or willing to be taped. In this situation, note taking was a very valuable strategy.

### **7.3 Suggestions for future research**

A range of research could be developed from this study. It is recommended that the next research study should consider a multiple case study approach to identify factors that influence people's participation in CBE or ecotourism projects across a range of projects. First, research could focus on multiple CBE projects in order to compare the factors influencing people's participation in the projects. Another research project could select case studies from both CBE projects and ecotourism projects. This would allow researchers to investigate factors influencing people's participation in both community ecotourism and general ecotourism projects and compare any differences that may arise.

While the participation of women was not found to be an issue in this CBE, it is important to note that this may not be the case in others and further research should be done into this. This could take place in the form of multiple case studies to compare different ecotourism activities, or could look more specifically at a single case study where the level of women's participation was known to be minimal.

This research found that the level of household benefits from the CBE project was influenced by the level of participation. It also identified many factors that influenced household involvement in the Ban Na CBE project. This suggests that future research could focus on the type of activities that could be implemented to increase the number of people involved.

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## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix 1: Ethical Approval



MASSEY UNIVERSITY

13 April 2010

Kongchay Phimmakong  
3/65 Linton Street  
PALMERSTON NORTH

Dear Kongchay

**Re: Local Perspective on Community-Based Ecotourism: A Case Study in Ban Na in Phou Khao Kouay National Protected Area, Lao PDR**

Thank you for your Low Risk Notification which was received on 8 April 2010.

Your project has been recorded on the Low Risk Database which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committees.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

Please notify me if situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your initial ethical analysis that it is safe to proceed without approval by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

**A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:**

*"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.*

*If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director (Research Ethics), telephone 06 350 5249, e-mail humanethics@massey.ac.nz".*

Please note that if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish requires evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to provide a full application to one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

Yours sincerely

John G O'Neill (Professor)  
**Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and  
Director (Research Ethics)**

cc Ms Janet Reid  
Institute of Natural Resources  
PN433

Assoc Prof John Holland  
Institute of Natural Resources (Ecology)  
PN624

Prof Peter Kemp, HoI  
Institute of Natural Resources  
PN433

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Massey University Human Ethics Committee  
Accredited by the Health Research Council

Te Kunenga  
ki Pūrehuroa

Research Ethics Office, Massey University, Private Bag 11222, Palmerston North 4442, New Zealand  
T +64 6 350 5573 +64 6 350 5575 F +64 6 350 5622  
E humanethics@massey.ac.nz animalethics@massey.ac.nz gtc@massey.ac.nz  
www.massey.ac.nz

## **Appendix 2: Information sheet**

Project title: “Local perspective on Community-Based Ecotourism: A Case Study in Ban Na in Phou Khao Kouay National Protected area, Lao PDR”

### INFORMATION SHEET

I am Kongchay PHIMMAKONG and I am undertaking a Master of Applied Science in Environmental Management at Massey University in New Zealand. This research project is being carried out to fulfil the requirements of my Master Degree. The aim of my research is to inform the development of community based ecotourism in Laos with particular emphasis on ensuring that all households within a community have access to the benefits of community based ecotourism.

To achieve the aim this research project has two specific objectives:

1. To identify and describe the factors that influence household involvement in a community based ecotourism project
2. To identify and describe the impacts on households of the project

The community-based ecotourism project in Ban Na is the case study for this research. Interview participants will include government officials and representatives of NGOs with knowledge of the ecotourism project and the Ban Na community at the national, provincial and district levels. At the community level household members will be interviewed from those households involved and not involved in the project, and interviews will also be sought with community leaders with knowledge of the community and or the ecotourism project.

Secondary data will also be obtained from annual reports and local official policy documents. For this, I have a letter of permission from Science Technology and Environment Agency requesting the cooperation of the Lao National Tourism Administration (LNTA), provincial, district and village level governments, and other relevant stakeholders.

With input from my research supervisors I will analyse and collate the data to answer the research questions. The majority of data will be collected through interview which I would like to tape with a tape recorder. The interviews will take between 1-3 hours. All information and ideas shared with me will be kept confidential and your name will not be used with out your approval. The data will be kept in secure storage in the Institute of Natural Resource, Massey University, Palmerston North and destroyed after the completion of the research project.

Furthermore, if you wish to obtain a summary of the research findings at the end of this project, please tell me at any time and a summary will be sent to you.

### **Participant's rights**

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any point;
- ask any question about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when the project is concluded.

If you have agreed for the interview to be tape recorded, you have the right to ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.

### **Project contacts**

The participant is welcome to contact the researcher or supervisors if she/he has any question regarding the project.

### **Researcher**

Kongchay PHIMMAKONG

Institute of Natural Resources  
College of Science  
Massey University  
Palmerston North, New Zealand  
Tel: +64 6 3550833 or +64 6 0211806628  
E-mail: [kongchaybeechn@yahoo.com](mailto:kongchaybeechn@yahoo.com)

**OR**

Ban Doonnoun, House no. 117, Xaythanee District  
Vientiane, Lao PDR  
Tel: 85621 740212  
E-mail: [kongchaybeechn@yahoo.com](mailto:kongchaybeechn@yahoo.com)

**Chief supervisor**

Ms Janet Reid  
Institute of Natural Resources  
College of Science  
Massey University  
Palmerston North, New Zealand  
E-Mail: [J.I.Reid@massey.ac.nz](mailto:J.I.Reid@massey.ac.nz)  
Phone: + 64 6 3505680

**Co-supervisor**

Associate Professor John Holland  
Institute of Natural Resources  
College of Science  
Massey University  
Palmerston North, New Zealand  
E-mail: [J.D.Holland@massey.ac.nz](mailto:J.D.Holland@massey.ac.nz)  
Phone: +64 6 3505565

*This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researchers named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researchers, please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director, Massey University Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, e-mail: [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz).*

Thank you for your cooperation

## Appendix 3: Written consent



INSTITUTE OF NATURAL RESOURCES  
Te Kura Mātauranga o ngā Taonga ā  
Papatuanuku  
Ecology  
Private Bag 11 222  
Palmerston North  
New Zealand  
T 64 6 356 9099  
F 64 6 350 5623  
[www.massey.ac.nz](http://www.massey.ac.nz)

Project title: “Local perspective on Community-Based Ecotourism: A Case Study in Ban Na in Phou Khao Kouay National Protected area, Lao PDR”

### CONSENT FORM

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) years

I have read the information sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information sheet.

Signature:.....Date:.....

Full name-printed.....

Contact details (optional).....



**Appendix 4: A letter of permission from The National Authority of Science and Technology**



ສາທາລະນະລັດ ປະຊາທິປະໄຕ ປະຊາຊົນລາວ  
ສັນຕິພາບ ເອກະລາດ ປະຊາທິປະໄຕ ເອກະພາບ ວັດທະນາຖາວອນ

ສຳນັກງານ ນາຍົກລັດຖະມົນຕີ  
ອົງການວິທະຍາສາດ ແລະ ເຕັກໂນໂລຊີ ແຫ່ງຊາດ

685  
ເລກທີ: / ສນຍ.ອວຕຊ  
ນະຄອນຫຼວງ ວຽງຈັນ, ວັນທີ  
26 APR 2011

**ໃບສະເໜີ**

ຮຽນ: .....

ເລື່ອງ: ຂໍພົວພັນເອົາຂໍ້ມູນ ເພື່ອມາປະກອບໃສ່ ໃນການຂຽນບົດ ວິທະຍານິພົນ ລະດັບ  
ປະລິນຍາໂທ

ຫ້ອງການ, ອົງການ ວິທະຍາສາດ ແລະ ເຕັກໂນໂລຊີ ແຫ່ງຊາດ, ຂໍຖືເປັນກຽດຮຽນສະເໜີມາຍັງ  
ທ່ານຊາບວ່າ: ທາງອົງການ ວິທະຍາສາດ ແລະ ເຕັກໂນໂລຊີ ແຫ່ງຊາດ, ໄດ້ມີພະນັກງານວິຊາການ  
ໄດ້ຮັບທຳນຽມສຶກສາ ໃນການຮຽນຕໍ່ ທີ່ປະເທດ ນິວຊີແລນ, ໃນຫົວຂໍ້ “ ບໍລິຫານ ແລະ ຈັດການຊັບພະຍາ  
ກອນທຳມະຊາດ” ເຊິ່ງໄລຍະນີ້ແມ່ນຂັ້ນຕອນໃນການເກັບກຳຂໍ້ມູນ ເພື່ອມາປະກອບໃສ່ບົດ ວິທະຍານິພົນ,  
ສ່ວນລາຍລະອຽດ ຜູ້ກ່ຽວຈະນຳສະເໜີຕໍ່ມ.

ສະນັ້ນ, ຈຶ່ງສະເໜີມາຍັງທ່ານ ພິຈາລະນາ ແລະ ອຳນວຍຄວາມສະດວກຕາມ ທາງທີ່ຄວນດ້ວຍ.

ໄຊ. ຫົວໜ້າ ຫ້ອງການ

ໝາຍເຫດຕິດຕໍ່ :  
ນ. ກິງໃຈ ພິມມະກອງ  
ໂທ : 261 799, 020 304 2746



ຕຳແໜ່ງ ຫອມຮັສມີ

