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The Potential of Ecotourism to Contribute to Local Sustainable Development

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

Alavanh PHANTHAVONG

2009

**The Potential of Ecotourism to Contribute to
Local Sustainable Development:**

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

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Philosophy in Development Studies at
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ABSTRACT

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

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

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

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the study

The development of tourism, particularly ecotourism, in our area is good because it is not only an important means for natural and cultural conservation, but also an important tool for socio-economic development as well. However, there is still great concern about how to sustain it, since we do not have any benchmarks or reference points to use for tracking our progress in a sensible manner (Head of Tourism Office at Phathoumphone District, personal communication, September 11, 2009).

Tourism, which is unquestionably not a new phenomenon, has been widely debated in every corner of the globe. It has also been categorized as one of the fastest expanding industries in many countries around the world (Fennell, 2003; Lao National Tourism Authority, 2006).

On an international scale, the significance of tourism to a country's economy can be great. Not only is tourism the biggest industry in the world, it is also one of the biggest international employers. Economically, if both international and domestic tourism are taken into account, tourism generates US\$2 trillion in income a year, which in fact is the equivalent of 12% of the whole world's economy (Ulack & Casino, 2000). In the context of employment, tourism has an equally powerful effect, since it is the largest employer in many countries. One out of every 16 jobs worldwide is in the tourism sector, which adds up to a massive 50 million jobs in the Third World alone (Ulack & Casino, 2000).

On a national scale, the influence of tourism on socio-economic development cannot be ignored. It is often the major source of foreign currency for a host country, while also serving as a prime motivator for sustained investment in the small businesses and public infrastructure needed for tourism to flourish. Along with the socio-economic role it plays as an employer for service and production workers in urban areas, it also creates work for those living in more remote rural areas, thus ensuring income is distributed throughout a country's regions (Lao National Tourism Authority, 2006).

Within particular communities, tourism's developmental role is also key. The introduction of tourism to a community can stimulate previously slow segments of the

local economy, as well as provide opportunities for expansion and development for up and running local businesses and industries. On the social level, it is reported that after tourism enters a community, there is often increased unification of the local residents as they work together toward a common cause (Fennell, 2003).

Over time, tourism has served as an essential vehicle for development with the potential to bring massive benefits to the developing world (Ulack & Casino, 2000). It is also viewed as a crucial driving force for national socio-economic development in the Third World because it can generate a huge amount of foreign currency to help balance the foreign debt of these nations (Dombroski, 2005; Whenlan, 1991).

Lao PDR is seen as one of the poorest nations on the globe and in fact, over 33% of the nation lives in poverty. It is categorised at 133 out of 177 countries on the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index. This rating is due to several factors.

First, Lao experiences significant food shortages each year, with 66% of the rural population relying on subsistence agriculture (Rigg, 2005) as a means of earning a living and providing for household needs. More than 80% of the workforce is engaged in this form of work, and 53% of the GDP is earned in this way. Thus, the standard of living for the majority of the country depends on a household's ability to manage crop production well enough to provide adequate food and income (Bourder, 2000).

Second, the ways in which this agriculture is practiced have been shown to be somewhat problematic. For example, in Bolikhamxai, Khammouan, and Savannakhet which are located in the central region of the country, agriculture is a factor in many of the identified causes of local poverty, as listed below:

1. Low agricultural productivity
2. Unstable agricultural production due to environmental factors
3. Limited access to physical resources for production (land and water)
4. Limited access to information to improve farming methods
5. Vulnerability of organisations
6. Limited access to credit
7. Limited job opportunities (low off-farm income)
8. Low education levels

9. Poor health facilities

10. Poor social infrastructure (JICA, 2000 as cited in Rigg, 2005, p. 26).

Thus, there is high food vulnerability which has led to low life expectancy and high infant, maternal, and child mortality. For instance, the mortality rate for children under 5 is 107 per 1,000 live births.

Third, development is still lagging in many areas of the country, with electricity absent in seven out of ten villages. And finally, moderate-to-low levels of literacy in rural areas have also contributed to the problem of national poverty, with a mere 55% literacy rate among adult women (NZAID, 2006; Rigg, 2005).

After the Lao government declared an “open door policy” as a means of increasing the integration of external economic relations, the Lao tourism industry emerged and in the late 1980s, became officially recognised as a tool for national development. As a new economically oriented mechanism, tourism programmes were adopted, promoted, and applied in order to motivate all types of national socio-economic development (Leksakundilok, 2004). Since Lao PDR opened its doors to international tourists, the tourism sector has become the second highest earner of foreign currency for the country. This is because Lao PDR possesses a stunning natural environment and inhabitants that still practice their cultural traditions. These two key factors shape the foundation for tourism development in this country (Harrison & Schipani, 2007).

According to Harrison and Schipani (2007), the Lao government has used tourism as a tool for national development over the last two decades. Particularly prominent are the roles of ecotourism, pro-poor tourism, and community-based tourism which are now the primary focus of the country’s poverty-alleviation strategy. The importance of these approaches to tourism is based on the crucial role they play in providing foreign currency exchange and employment in target communities. Thus, the Lao government has put great effort into the promotion of sustainable tourism development by taking important first steps to implement social and environmental policies and programmes, particularly in cooperation with various international organisations and non-governmental organisations (Yamauchi & Lee, 1999).

These initial steps have been relatively straightforward and have effectively formed a strong foundation for the future growth of this industry in Lao. However, in preparing to

move forward, the government is finding it difficult to access guidance on what their next steps should be. In order to ensure true sustainability and thus secure the future of ecotourism for the long-term, leadership will need to go well beyond its focus on economic motivations and social development programmes to identify, acquire, and implement tools related to both the preservation of rare and delicate ecosystems, and mastery of the international tourism and service industry.

According to Keyser (2002), there are three significant features that characterise sustainable tourism: quality, continuity, and balance.

- *Quality* - Sustainable tourism provides quality experiences for visitors, while improving the quality of life of the host community and protecting the quality of the environment.
- *Continuity* - Sustainable tourism ensures the continuity of the natural resources upon which it is based and the continuity of the culture of the host communities.
- *Balance* - Sustainable tourism balances the needs of the tourism industry, the supporters of the environment, and the local community. It emphasises the pursuit of mutual goals and promotes cooperation among visitors, host communities, and destinations (p. 318).

Once again, the challenge lies in finding ways to translate these goals into specific steps that produce results which can be measured to show whether or not progress is really being made. In reality, it is not easy to meet the prerequisites of sustainable tourism development, partly because of the difficulty of the tasks involved, and partly due to the lack of documentation relevant to the situation in countries such as Lao PDR, Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and China. Thus, this research aims to assess ecotourism's contribution to community development in such places as Laos, and to identify specific strategies for sustaining ecotourism.

1.2. Personal rationale to conduct this research

When I first came to New Zealand, my intention was to complete a Masters degree in education because my work experience has centred on education. By chance, I experienced some difficulties with following this plan which prompted me to consider other avenues of study. Eventually I decided to transfer to the field of Development Studies and it turned out to be a very positive choice. Ever since beginning my

academic exploration of the development field for my post-graduate diploma, I have felt excited and stimulated by the opportunity to build up my personal knowledge regarding issues relevant to development. I have gained a better understanding of these matters, from both a historical perspective as well as a current view of development topics around the world today. I find that I am challenged and edified by working to gain a greater knowledge of the relationship between humans, the environment, and development.

All these factors have significantly influenced the direction of my academic life, placed me firmly in favour of development work, and given me a great opportunity to take part in development research specifically targeted at the local level. The decision to conduct this study on ecotourism and community development has been grounded in several factors.

The first is my past experience studying for my postgraduate diploma degree, during which I prepared a bibliography on ecotourism. At that time, I discovered the story of a place where the development of ecotourism had resulted in both positive and negative effects on the host community, as well as those living in the surrounding area. It appeared to me that the negative consequences could be deterred if appropriate strategies were applied during the process of ecotourism development. Thus, I became challenged with the idea of finding suitable strategies for making ecotourism successful and sustainable.

Another factor in my decision to conduct this research is the reality that there are 20 National Protected Areas in my country, Lao, and while the government has promoted them as a tool for natural conservation and poverty alleviation, there is a lack of research on ecotourism and how to sustain it. The problems involved in determining how to proceed are quite real and quite complex, as illustrated by Wall's assessment, "Ecotourism is not automatically sustainable; however, if it is to be sustained and if it is to contribute to sustainable development, it must be economically viable, environmentally appropriate, and socio-culturally acceptable" (1997, p. 490). Thus, as I am Lao, I desire to make a contribution to my country's national development, particularly at the community development level.

In searching through the minimal relevant research on ecotourism and sustainable development in Laos, I found the most recent and available studies (Harrison &

Schipani, 2007; Schipani, 2007; Schipani & Marris, 2002; Yamauchi & Lee, 1999) were all written only about the Lao Nam Ha ecotourism project. Thus, by focusing on a different location, my research can also make a contribution by showing lessons learned from another ecotourism site in Laos.

Additionally, I chose the Xe Pian ecotourism project as my research site because to date, there had not been any detailed research conducted to fully analyse the consequences of this ecotourism venture in the Xe Pian area. Hence, I was very keen to explore the contribution of ecotourism to local sustainable development, and to find ways for the project to avoid the risk of becoming unsustainable in the future.

1.3. Research aim, objectives and key questions

The primary aim of this research was to assess the Xe Pian ecotourism venture in Champasak Province with a view to suggesting strategies that will contribute to local sustainable development. In order to fulfil this research aim, three objectives were set up as follows:

- To assess the existing contribution of ecotourism to community development in the Xe Pian ecotourism project in Champasak Province.
- To identify the current environmental, economic, cultural, and social risks that exist within Xe Pian ecotourism.
- To make recommendations to help ensure the sustainability of future ecotourism activities.

The research questions below were constructed to ensure these main objectives were met (see Figure 1.1).

1. What are the social, cultural, economic and environmental impacts, both positive and negative, on local livelihoods from the Xe Pian ecotourism project?
2. What are some desirable strategies that local people and other stakeholders suggest to enhance the outcomes of the Xe Pian ecotourism project?

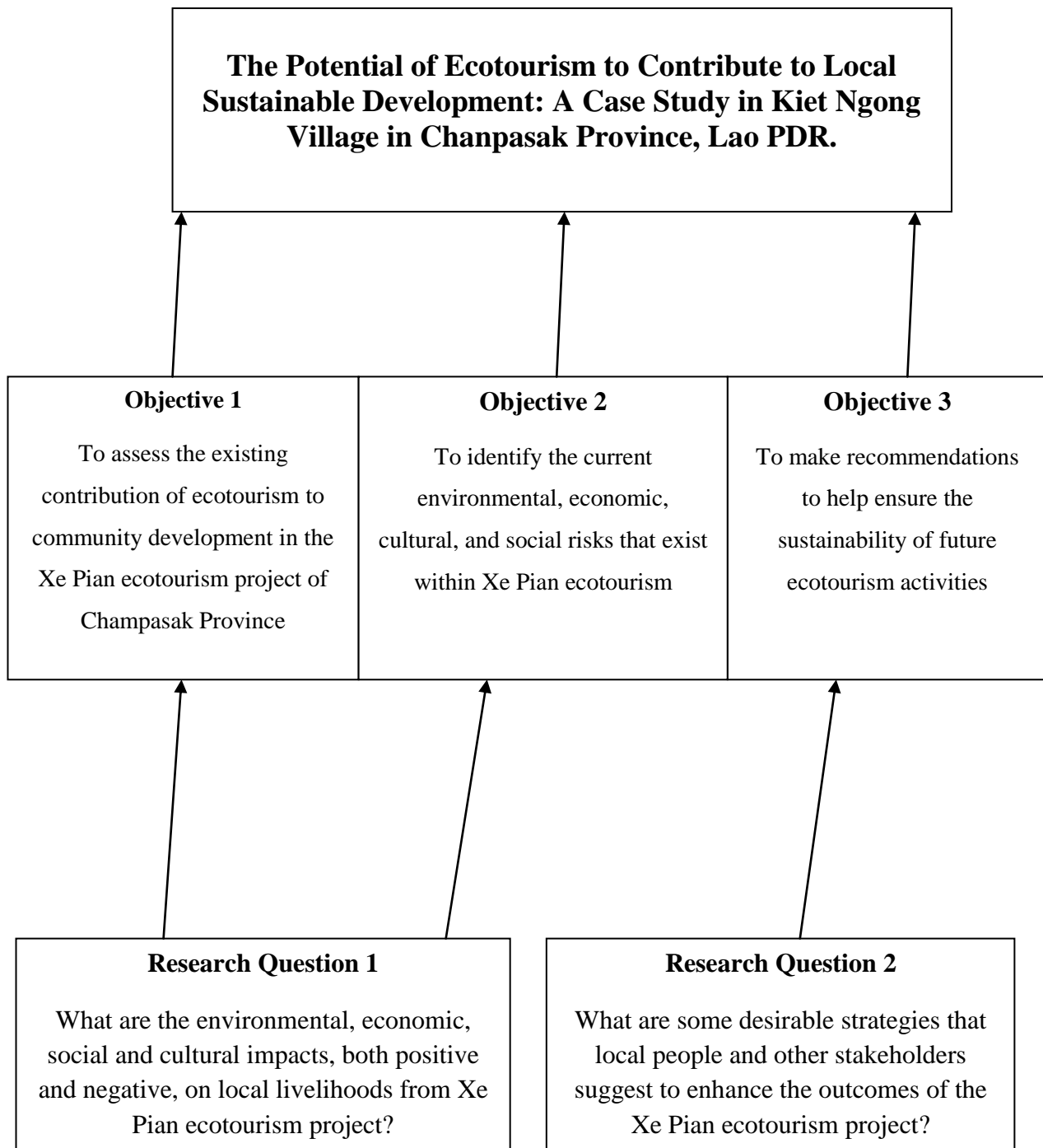


Figure 1.1. Diagram outlining the purpose of the research. (Source: Author)

1.4. Introduction to the research site

1.4.1. Xe Pian National Protected Area

The Xe Pian National Protected Area (NPA) is located in the southern part of Lao PDR and is surrounded by two provinces, Champasack Province (Pathoumphone and Khong districts) and Attapeu Province (Sanamxia district). The Xe Pian NPA makes up an area of 240,000 hectares (see Figure 1.2) and was officially established in 1993. This declaration was set out in Prime Minister's Decree No. 164/PM of 29 October 1993, which included the Xe Pian NPA as well as 17 other areas (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2000).

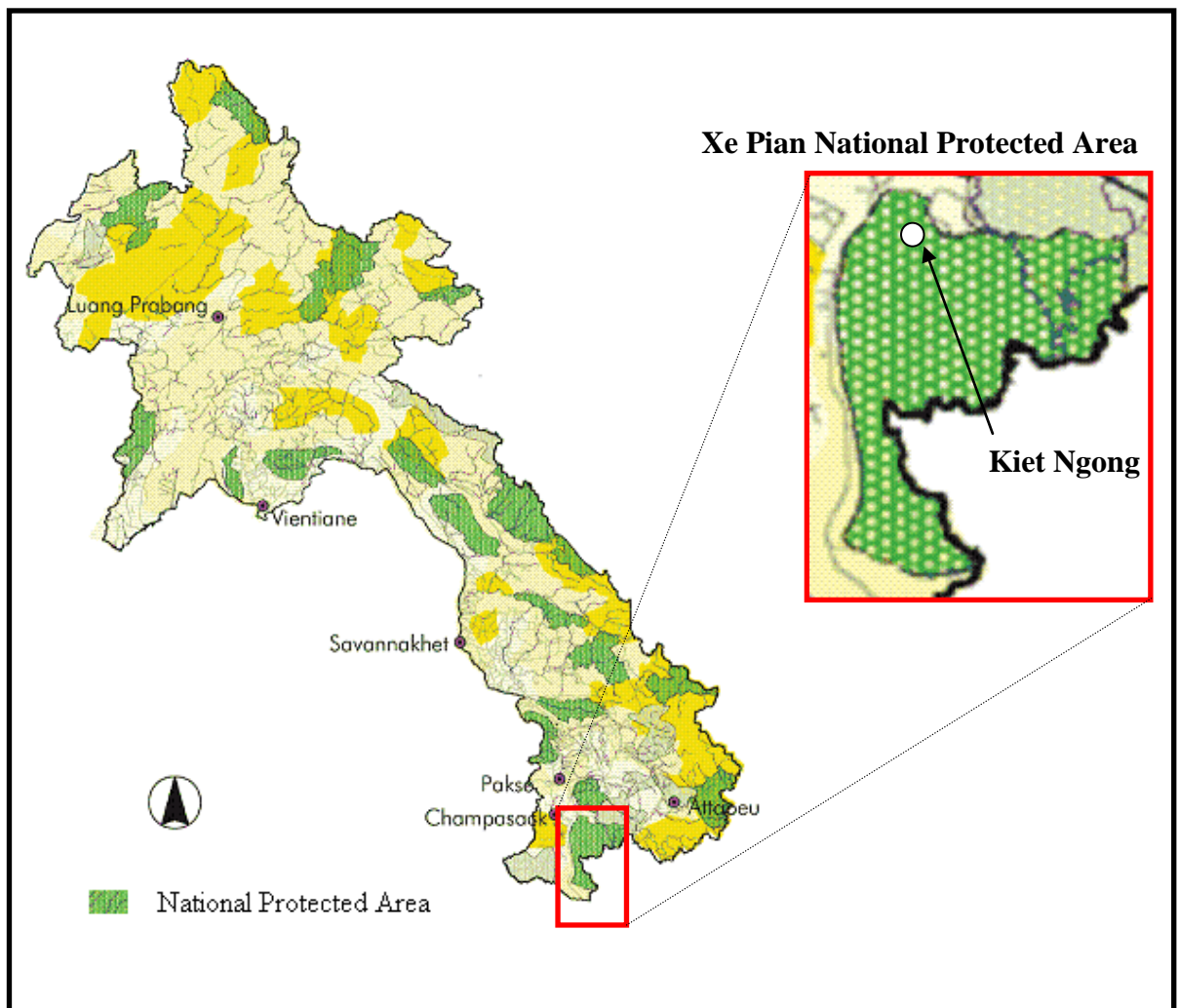


Figure 1.2. Map showing the location of the Xe Pian National Protected Area in Lao PDR

Before Xe Pian was designated as an NPA, it consisted of various individual villages (Poulsen & Luanglath, 2005). Inside Xe Pian NPA, there are now 11 villages from two different provinces, including the districts of Pathoumphone and Sanamxia. The population stands at 3,686 people. However, there are 47 villages located on the boundary of Xe Pian NPA with a total population of 23,148 people from three districts: Pathoumphone, Khong, and Sanamxia (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2000) (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1

Summary of the Villages and Populations Inside and Outside Xe Pian NPA

Village Type	Villages situated inside Xe Pian NPA, with their population		Villages situated on the boundary of Xe Pian NPA, with their populations		
	Districts	Villages	Persons	Villages	Persons
Pathoumphone		4	1,256	23	11,431
Khong				17	10,177
Sanamxia		7	2,430	7	1,540
Total		11	3,686	47	23,148

Source: Adapted from Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (2000)

Nearly all the people who live within Xe Pian NPA and on its boundaries are subsistence rice farmers who rely almost totally on resources from the protected area to secure a balanced diet and obtain construction materials (Poulsen & Luanglath, 2005).

Xe Pian is surrounded by tropical lowland forest and wetland with 53% semi-evergreen forest, 26% deciduous dipterocarp forest and 14% mixed deciduous forest (FOMACOP, 2000). Significant species highlighted for preservation include the endangered tiger (*Panthera tigris*); the Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*); the bangteng (*Bos javanicus*); the giant ibis (*Pseudibis gigantean*); and the Siamese crocodile (*Crocodylus siamensis*) (Duckworth et al., as 1999 cited in Poulsen & Luanglath, 2005). Apart from this

diversity of extraordinary wildlife species, there is also a complex and unique habitat including wetlands with large water birds and areas of lowland forest hosting large mammals. A biological survey revealed 62 mammal species, 334 bird species, 44 reptile species, 21 amphibian species, and 176 types of fish. Consequently, Xe Pian NPA is ranked as one of the top three most biologically important protected areas in Lao PDR, and among the top ten in South East Asia (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2000; Provincial Department of Tourism, 2007).

Due to these significant features which constitute important attractions, Xe Pian NPA was identified as having high potential for success as an ecotourism site in terms of its wilderness, remoteness, rivers, wetlands, scenery, wildlife, and cultural features. These factors offer a wide range of ecotourism activities, including trekking, elephant rides to view wildlife and cultural sites, and canoeing and river boat trips for wildlife viewing and bird watching (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2000).

Initially, the introduction of ecotourism to the area was seen as having the potential to bring a wide range of benefits to both local communities around and within the Xe Pian NPA as well as the Xe Pian NPA itself. The anticipated benefits for local communities included:

- Additional/alternative sources of income from guiding, homestays, and the sale of craft materials;
- Increased income in regional centres such as Pakse, Attapeu, and Don Khong, from accommodation, food sales etc;
- Multiplier effects through the purchase of local goods and services for tourists;
- The introduction of toilets and waste disposal for tourists would likely to lead to their adoption by local people with consequent improvements to local health;
- Increased attention by the government to the protection of natural resources on which local people depend for elements of their livelihood; and
- Increased pride taken by local inhabitants in their culture and their surroundings (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2000).

The potential ecotourism benefits for the Xe Pian NPA were identified as:

- Creation of support for maintenance of the protected area among local communities and local government;
- Demonstration of the potential of protected areas to make a real contribution to local economies;
- Improved monitoring of the condition of the area and of human activities through the increased presence of local people and visitors in the area;
- Improved knowledge of the biodiversity of the area, particularly the avifauna, through the sightings reported by tourists with appropriate expertise; and
- Creation of a model ecotourism situation which could be used as a demonstration site for other protected areas (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2000).

However, there were also relevant challenges to the sustainability of Xe Pian, and these will be highlighted in the following section.

1.4.2. Key issues of Xe Pian NPA

The Provincial Department of Tourism (2007) indicated there were many key issues that threatened to harm the Xe Pian NPA. First and foremost, international and local animal trade played a large role in encouraging local people to poach animals from the protected area, especially because there were few job opportunities locally. Another threat to Xe Pian NPA was unsustainable practices concerning resource use; for example, there was significant over-harvesting of rattan. Some local people harvested too much rattan for their commercial purposes and this potentially threatened forest habitats. Additionally, the concentration of human activity in such ecologically sensitive sites as the wetlands and river banks threatened to disturb wildlife and also caused general disturbance to habitats, prompting wildlife to flee crucial areas. More importantly, general poverty and food deficiency played a significant role in causing local people to hunt in the protected area, and to convert important habitats to agricultural land.

1.4.3. The study area village: Kiet Ngong

There are a total of 11 villages located in Xe Pian NPA (see Figure 1.3), but only 5 villages have taken part in ecotourism activities since Xe Pian ecotourism began. All 5 villages have similar features in terms of their socio-cultural, economic and political contexts. However, Kiet Ngong village was chosen to be my study site for a number of reasons. One key factor is the suggestions made by the staff of Xe Pian NPA management group. They advised me that Kiet Ngong is an entrance village in the NPA, and as such is more easily accessible than other sites. For me, this meant that in addition to minimising logistical challenges during my fieldwork, Kiet Ngong would prove to be a richer source of data because its location encourages a higher level of tourist traffic than some of the other villages that are farther afield. Additionally, the staff reported there was greater involvement in ecotourism activities on the part of local residents at Kiet Ngong, which would offer a more comprehensive representation of the local people for my study. Finally, there were many people whom I initially contacted before conducting research – both inside and outside of the government – who spoke of Kiet Ngong as a good example of the kind of profound impact that ecotourism can bring to local development. Altogether, these factors made Kiet Ngong the most suitable village for carrying out data collection.

Kiet Ngong is located in the south east part of Phatoumphone District in Champasack Province. It is one of the 11 villages that is situated inside the Xe Pian NPA. Kiet Ngong is 358 years old and the founders of Kiet Ngong Village are “Grandpa Boun” and “Grandma Champa” (Phatoumphone District of Statistics, 2008). The population totals 957 residents, comprising 503 females and 454 males from 183 households. The inhabitants are all of the Lao Loum ethnic group, and their main activities are rice farming, at 90% of the employed population, fisheries at 5%, and service jobs such as construction and seasonal farm workers as well as educators at 5% (Phatoumphone District of Statistics, 2008; Provincial Department of Tourism, 2007).

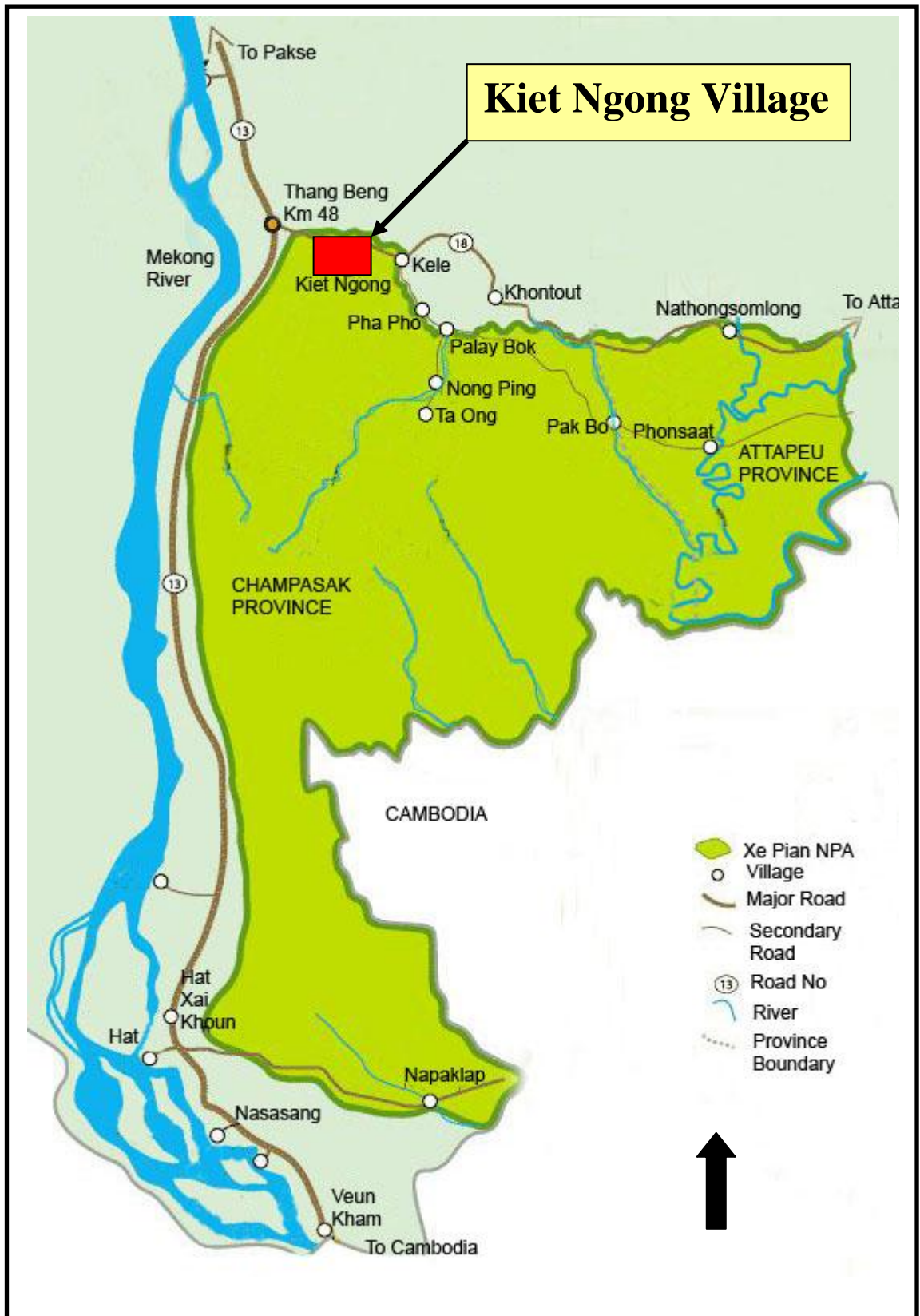


Figure 1.3 Map showing the location of Kiet Ngong Village in relation to the National Protected Area. (Source: adapted from Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, 2000)

Table 1.2

The Households of Kiet Ngong Categorized According to Living Conditions

Annual earnings per household	Households with food deficiency	Households with enough food to eat, but no extra revenue	Households with enough food to eat and extra revenue
No. of households	15	155	13

Source: Provincial Department of Tourism, 2007

According to the statistics shown in Table 1.2, above, the majority of people—approximately 85%—live with no extra revenue. The proportion of the population that does not have enough food is about the same as the proportion with enough food and extra revenue (Provincial Department of Tourism, 2007).

In the past, Kiet Ngong Village was one of Lao's national army bases, and was used for implementing a national revolution to fight off the French in 1949. Nine French army forces were killed and 80 French soldiers were captured there. At the present time, Kiet Ngong has been developed as a village focussing on historical, natural, and cultural tourism (Phatuomphone District of Statistics, 2008). In early 2004, an information centre, a restaurant, and an elephant platform were built in Kiet Ngong Village after financial support was received from an Asian Development Bank project. In 2005, the main road which provides access to the village and another 4 km road which provides access to Phou Asa Mountain were built with provincial financial support. During 2004 and 2005 an Australian investor, Massimo Mera, built a guesthouse named the Kingfisher Ecolodge on the banks of the big lake. It has six rooms which can accommodate up to sixteen visitors per night, and serves both international and traditional meals. In 2007, electricity and a communication system were installed and other services were set up with financial support from the Xe Pian ecotourism project and other village funds.

Kiet Ngong has many activities which attract tourists, such as elephant rides to view the natural landscape and cultural sites (especially Phou Asa Mountain), elephant rides for sightseeing within the Xe Pian National Protected Area, forest treks to see endangered wildlife and many extraordinary giant trees and plants, canoe trips along the big lake to have a closer look at local fishing techniques, walks through the wetlands to spot water

birds and various species of large mammals, hikes along the historic track that tells the story of ‘Mr Phadeang and Mrs Air,’ and walks past the Giant Rock (*Hin Huoa Ya*), a sacred place with superb views (Phatumphone District of Statistics, 2008).

1.4.4. Xe Pian Ecotourism Project

This section of the chapter introduces the Xe Pian ecotourism project, which is the main focus of this thesis. The Natural Ecotourism Project in Xe Pian NPA was initiated over a 2-year period from 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2009 by a multi-party collaborative endeavour of the Lao National Tourism Administration, WWF-Laos, the Champasak Provincial Tourism Department, the Xe Pian National Protected Area Management Unit, the Pathoumphone District Tourism Office (DTO), the Provincial Tourism Policy, and the Pathoumphone District Agricultural and Forestry Office (see Table 1.3).

The initial implementation of ecotourism activities targeted five villages—Kiet Ngong, Pha Lai, Nong Ping, Ta Ong, and Pha Pho—located in Xe Pian NPA in Pathoumphone and Sanamxia Districts, Champasack Province, Lao PDR. Approximately 4,487 local residents from 919 households within the five targeted villages were expected to benefit from this development.

Table 1.3

Details of the Xe Pian Ecotourism Project and its Main Objectives

Project Title	Natural Eco-Tourism Project in Xe Pian NPA
International Project Number	LA003701
Project Implementation Period	1 April 2007 – 30 March 2009
MoU Signing Date	23 March 2007
Total Budget (in Euros)	245,581 (204,651 donor / 40,930 government contribution)
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve physical and human capacities for supporting and developing ecotourism in Xe Pian NPA in order to allow ecotourism to reach its maximum economic potential in the future without compromising its sustainability. 2. Assist the Provincial Tourism Office with developing a sustainable ecotourist strategy and planning for ecotourism by

Objectives of the Project	<p>integrating with the NPA as one of the project components.</p> <p>3. Creation of village ecotourist products that can result in revenue generated by tourist activities for increasing the income and achieving the poverty alleviation of the people within the project site.</p> <p>4. Encouraging village inhabitants and tourists to conserve the NPA's natural resources for sustainable ecotourism and to attract tourist revenue.</p>
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Source: Adapted by the Author, from Eshoo (2009)

The primary mission of the Xe Pian ecotourism project is to support the development of facilities in the Xe Pian NPA. This encompasses a bird conservation area and watch tower in the Kiet Ngong wetlands; improvements to the Kiet Ngong Visitor Information Centre; development of a new Kiet Ngong Community Guesthouse; creation of a check post and entrance signs to Xe Pian NPA and the target villages; construction of a *salas* (a place where locals gather together for relaxation), public toilets, and a bridge along the Ta Ong Trail; improvements to the Ta Ong community guesthouse; and trail improvements to the Ta Ong Trail and the new Kiet Ngong-Ta Ong 3-day Camping Trail (Eshoo, 2009).

In addition, the project has also assisted local administrators and ecotourism stakeholders in the development of a 15-year ecotourism strategy and action plan for Xe Pian. It also created the Xe Pian NPA Management and Tourism Development Fund and two sustainable funding sources to support it: the park entrance fees and Xe Pian NPA souvenirs. As a result of these improvements, \$6,741 was derived from the sale of entrance tickets during the first 3 months of operation.

Five new ecotourism products were also formed by the project, including the 3-day Kiet Ngong—Ta Ong camping trail, 1- and 2-day camping trips around the Kiet Ngong area, traditional massage in Kiet Ngong, and Xe Pian souvenirs. Additionally, the project made improvements to eight existing tourism products, including the Ta Ong Trail 2-day trek, bird watching and canoe trips around the Kiet Ngong wetlands, half-day and full-day treks around Phou Asa Mountain, Phou Asa Elephant Treks, the Elephant Jungle Safari, the Kiet Ngong Community Guesthouse, and a homestay in Kiet Ngong. The project also set up sources of funding for the Kiet Ngong Village development fund, including elephant rides, the community guesthouse and homestay, and souvenir

sales. Due to these developments, there has been a considerable increase in economic gains. To be more specific, the total estimated gross revenue from ecotourism to local people in Xe Pian increased significantly from \$31,223 in 2006-07 to \$58,675 in 2008-09; thus the project is viewed as playing an essential role in making an immediate impact on alleviating poverty in the target villages (Eshoo, 2009).

The project also endeavoured to develop human resources in target villages and among private sector and public stakeholders, with the aim of supporting ecotourism. Major training and capacity building activities included the first-ever bird watching guide specialist training in Lao PDR, training of trainers and training of provincial guides, village guide trainings, village cooking and homestay trainings, village guesthouse management planning and operation trainings, traditional massage training, and boat safety training.

As a consequence, a number of families in the target villages have received economic benefit from ecotourism. It is estimated there were 117 families who benefited economically from 2006 to 2007, and this number increased to 203 families in 2008-2009. Furthermore, the two poorest and most remote villages in the protected area, Ta Ong and Nong Ping, now have nearly 100% participation in ecotourism as a result of project trainings and service group formation. Therefore, Eshoo (2009) argued that the project has had a significant impact on poverty alleviation and conservation awareness among local people, both of which were accomplished by spreading the benefits of ecotourism to many of the poor.

Lastly, the project created a host of marketing materials, including the official website for Xe Pian, and has been featured in a variety of international guidebooks and television programs, including NBC's Matt Laurer Show. The project has also helped to build awareness of ecotourism and conservation in Xe Pian among high-level and mid-level government officials, private sector guides, tourists, and villagers.

Overall, the project appears to have achieved a fundamental level of success and has laid a solid foundation for developing ecotourism further in the Xe Pian NPA (Eshoo, 2009). With Xe Pian's unique natural attractions and biodiversity, and the added protection of continued monitoring and follow up on activities initiated by the project, it is predicted that Xe Pian will continue to develop into a regional model for community-

based ecotourism. However, my research was designed to review the project's effect on Kiet Ngong Village using a more critical lens.

1.5. Outline of the thesis

This thesis has been divided into seven chapters (see Figure 1.4):

Chapter One introduces background information on the research topic. It states the study objectives and key questions, and gives a description of the study site, the Xe Pian NPA, Kiet Ngong Village and the Xe Pian ecotourism project.

Chapter Two discusses the concepts of sustainable development and ecotourism, placing a special focus on the emergence of sustainable development, its diverse definitions and its scope. The ecological, economic, and social dimensions of sustainable development are also highlighted. The chapter then reviews the emergence of ecotourism and examines the multiplicity of its definitions. The potential positive and negative consequences of ecotourism are critically assessed and case studies are provided as concrete examples. This is followed by an exploration of various strategies for sustaining ecotourism so that it successfully contributes to sustainable development. Chapter Two concludes by looking at the potential connection between ecotourism and pro-poor tourism.

Chapter Three will present a closer look at development and tourism in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). First, there is documentation of the high hopes for the GMS area, followed by an overview of tourism in the GMS and the pattern of tourism development that has been established. The chapter also provides a look at the development of tourism and ecotourism in Lao PDR, in which its history and the contributions made by tourism and ecotourism to the national social and economic development are critically examined, as are the obstacles to tourism development in Lao PDR.

Chapter Four explains the fieldwork that was carried out for this project, with particular emphasis on the research process and methods. The steps involved in fieldwork preparation, selecting a research assistant and addressing ethical issues are discussed. The chapter then explains the process that was used to enter the study area, the methods adopted for the fieldwork, and the rationalization behind them. This is

followed by a description of practical issues, the constraints of the research, and the process of analysis.

Chapter Five moves on to present the findings from the study site. This includes both positive and negative environmental, economic, social, and cultural effects, as well as an analysis of each of these aspects. The recommendations of various stakeholders on how to sustain Xe Pian ecotourism are then presented.

Chapter Six reflects back to the theory presented in Chapter Two in order to examine whether ecotourism activity in Kiet Ngong village has reached its potential for contributing to local sustainable development. This analysis is carried out in the light of the evaluation criteria developed in Chapter Two's literature review, as well as in comparison with the existing ecotourism literature.

Chapter Seven is the concluding chapter, wherein I offer a brief summary by putting together the research aims, the relevant theories, and the research findings of the case study. I then wrap up the thesis by providing some key recommendations for improving and developing contemporary practices and policies for ecotourism in Kiet Ngong Village in order for it to have the capacity to contribute to Kiet Ngong's sustainable development.

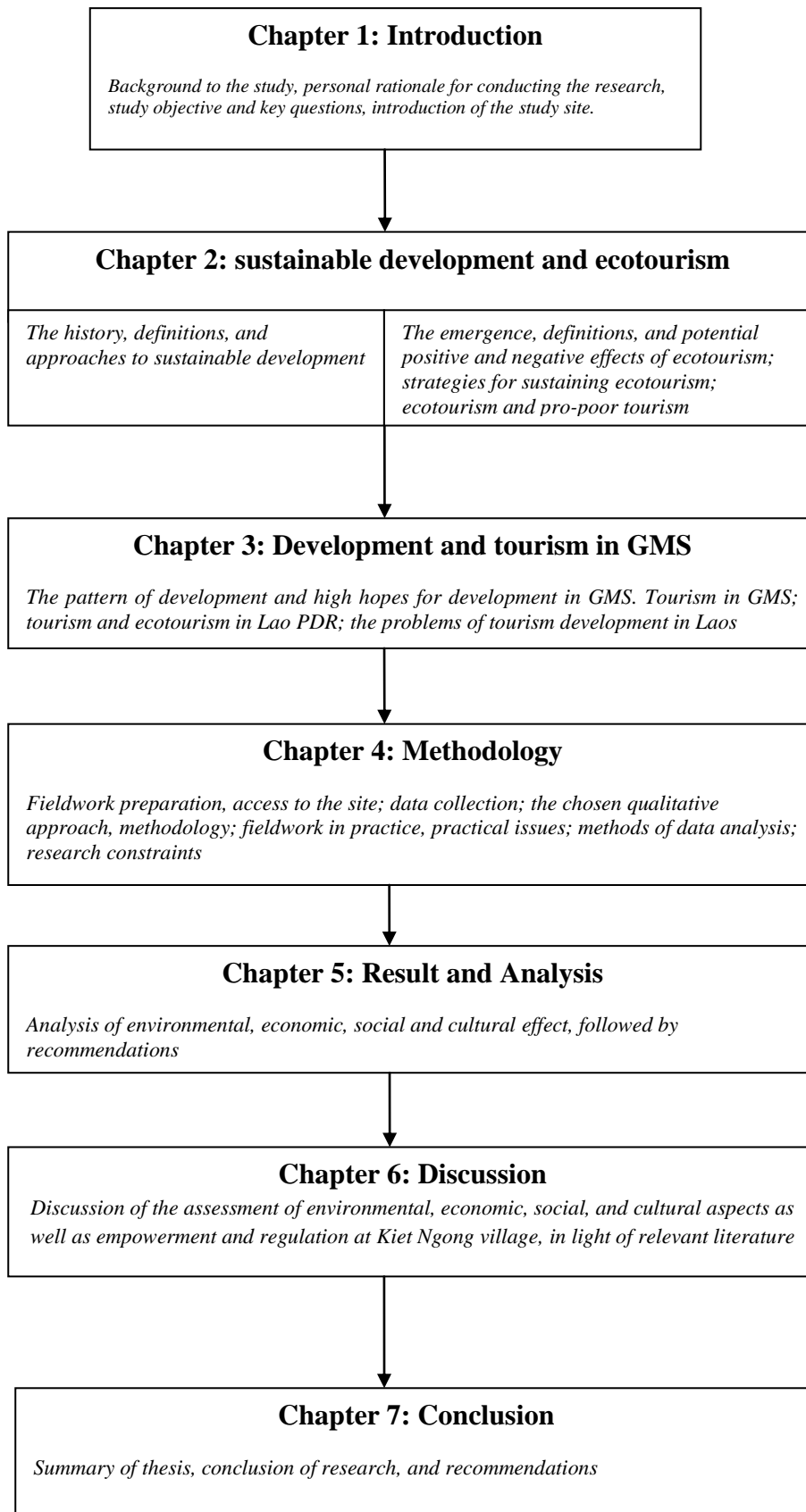


Figure 1.4. Diagram of the outline of the thesis. (Source: Author)

CHAPTER TWO: Sustainable Development and Ecotourism

2.1. Introduction

The linkage between ecotourism and sustainable development has been explored by many academics recently. This is well represented by Wall (1997), who clearly indicated that ecotourism has the potential to contribute to sustainable development on the grounds that it is often viewed as a sustainable form of tourism. However, in order to contribute to sustainable development, ecotourism must be economically viable, ecologically sensitive, and culturally appropriate. In fact, these three factors are held to be the three primary prerequisites for achieving sustainable development (Wall, 1997). Likewise, Frey and Yaneske (2007, p. 21) also claimed that the main elements for sustainable development are:

- economic growth generated by sustainable patterns of production and consumption of resources, to enable
- the social well-being and equity of all humanity and equitable access to resources now and in the future, while
- protecting the environment and the services it provides for humanity.

By looking at the key principles contained in these two writings, it can clearly be seen that their principles overlap considerably. Thus to some extent, ecotourism, as argued by Buchsbaum (2004) who researched ecotourism and sustainable development in Costa Rica, is being constructed upon the philosophy of sustainable development because of the intertwined relationship between the two.

This chapter will expound on the nature of ecotourism and sustainable development, beginning with a discussion of the concept of sustainable development. This includes its history, definitions, and scope, followed by an approach to sustainable development characterised by a primary emphasis on ecological, economic, and socio-cultural factors. Next, the concept of ecotourism will be highlighted with special focus on the emergence of ecotourism; the revision of the definition of ecotourism; and the potential positive and negative impacts of ecotourism on local people's livelihood, with special consideration of the economic, environmental, and socio-cultural aspects. This is followed by a number of strategies for making ecotourism sustainable so as to successfully contribute to local sustainable development.

2.2. Sustainable development

2.2.1. The history of sustainable development

Binns (2002) and Rist (1997) have written that Western modernisation theory dominated discourse on development after the Second World War, and as such, greatly encouraged the expansion of scientific awareness, an escalation of output, and the opening up of markets so as to promote the economy and eventually establish a welfare state. This notion is well represented by Rostow's unilinear model (1960), which visualized development as powered by the primary engine of economic growth to move in a single direction through various stages, from the traditional society to the modern age of high mass consumption (Binns, 2002). According to US President Harry S. Truman, Rostow's economic growth model (often used interchangeably with the term 'development model'), was the only solution to problems with generating progress in underdeveloped countries (Public Paper of the Presidents, 1949, pp. 114-115, as cited in Rist, 1997, p. 64). Similarly, Dodds (2002) reported that development discourse began after the end of the Cold War and the speech by President Truman on January 1949 calling for Western knowledge, skills, wealth, and technology to aid the Third World countries.

However, in the 1970s the view of development as a process based on capital accumulation and consumption began to be questioned due to concerns about scarce resources and the limitations of sustainable growth. This alternate perspective was stimulated by the ideas of an international group called the 'Club of Rome', and by the oil crisis of 1973/1979. Atmospheric pollution, acid rain, global warming, accumulating hazardous wastes, depletion of the ozone layer, habitat destruction, and rising health threats have led to an emerging awareness of the constraint capacity of the biosphere to absorb the by-products of human actions (Carruthers, 2001). These concerns were expressed for the first time by the developed world at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972 (Adams, 1990). Out of this environmental discourse and in response to these worldwide problems, the model of sustainable development emerged.

It is interesting, as Keyser (2002) points out, that the issue of global environmental awareness has gradually increased since the 1960s. People's awareness of environmental problems rocketed during the mid-sixties, bringing new attention to the issues of pollution, the destruction of rare habitats, and acid rain. However, Keyser also stated that people were very doubtful and questioned whether the unlimited growth of industry and economic development was the main cause of environmental crisis. From that point, the idea of sustainability emerged, as well as a new approach to the process of development. This was needed, since people began to perceive that the earth's limited resources could not indefinitely support the current level of population and industrial growth. As a result, the idea of developing resources in ways that promoted their sustainability began to be considered and practiced during the mid-sixties. It wasn't until the release of *Our Common Future*, the World Commission on Environment and Development's (WCED) Brundtland report in 1987, however, that the term 'sustainable development' was coined (Keyser, 2002, p. 373). According to Keyser (2002), the main purpose of sustainable development was the bringing together of two contrasting ideas: economic development and environmental conservation. This history is corroborated by Garrod and Fayall (1998), who also reported the origin of the term "sustainable development" as the 1987 Our Common Future report authored by the WCED . They saw the term as encompassing more than just concerns about economic development and environmental conservation, and described it thus:

The vision put forward by the Brundtland report was one of the economic development that was not simply concerned with attaining maximum economic growth (i.e. pursuing economic efficiency) but also with issues of fairness between individuals and groups making up today's society (intergenerational equity) as well as fairness between the present generation and those that are to come (intergenerational equity). (Garrod & Fayall, 1998, p. 200)

It is interesting to consider sustainable development as a socio-ecological process characterized by the fulfilment of human needs while maintaining the quality of the natural environment indefinitely. The linkage between environment and development was globally recognized in 1980, when the International Union for the Conservation of Nature published the *World Conservation Strategy* and used the term "sustainable

development" and promoted the concept (IUCN, 1980 as cited in Holmberg & Sandbrook, 1992).

2.2.2. The definitions and scope of sustainable development

It is difficult to precisely define sustainable development (Rogers, Jalal & Boyd, 2008). This is supported by Elliott (2006), who highlighted that there were considerable discussions and contestation in relation to the meaning and practice of sustainable development during the decade of 1990s. In fact, there were more than 70 definitions of sustainable development in circulation in the early 1990s (Holmberg & Sandbrook, 1992).

It is imperative to point out, however, that there is difficulty in defining many socially and culturally relative terms because the definitions often serve particular groups, organisations, and individuals in achieving their desired purposes (Mawhinney, 2002). Thus, when National Strategies for Sustainable Development wrote, "Sustainable development is economic and social development that meets the needs of the current generation without undermining the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (2000, as cited in Mawhinney, 2002, p. 3), it is obvious their definition was constructed to contain elements of the social agenda of the organisation. In contrast, the World Wildlife Fund (1991, as cited in Mawhinney, 2002) defined sustainable development as "improving the quality of life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting systems" (p. 3), whilst the Local Government Management Board of the UK (1993, as cited in Mawhinney, 2002,) viewed sustainable development as:

Reducing current levels of consumption of energy and resources and production of waste in order not to damage the natural systems which future generations will rely on to provide them with resources, absorb their waste and provide safe and healthy living conditions. (p. 3)

However, the first and most popular quoted definition of sustainable development is found in the Brundtland Commission Report (1987): "Development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Rogers, Jalal & Boyd, 2008, p. 22).

The scope of sustainable development goes beyond focusing solely on environmental issues, however. More broadly, sustainable development policies encompass three general policy areas: economic, environmental, and social. In support of this, several United Nations texts—including, most recently, the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document—refer to the interdependent and mutually reinforcing foundational pillars of sustainable development, namely economic development, social development, and environmental protection.

Additionally, the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity elaborated on the concept further by stating that cultural diversity is as necessary to humankind as biodiversity is to nature. Cultural diversity has become one of the roots in which a modern understanding of development is embedded, not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means of achieving a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual existence. In this paradigm, cultural diversity becomes the fourth policy area of sustainable development (UNESCO, 2001).

2.2.3. The approaches to sustainable development

There is still a big question to be answered: *What, precisely, is to be sustained?* The environmentalist emphasis is on the sustainability of natural resources and the issue of designing development activities that can bring tangible progress whilst maintaining ecological processes. For others, it is the present (or future) levels of production and consumption that need to be sustained. They argue that the impact of global population growth will inevitably increase demands on the environment and therefore sustainable development must incorporate this reality. At the same time, people must recognize environmental limitations and change their consumption practices (Redclift, 1987).

Sustainable development represents a compromise, in that it suggests that the twin goals of environmental sustainability and human economic development are compatible, attainable, and mutually inseparable (Simon, 1989; Redclift, 1991). Overton (1999) claimed that sustainable development must deal with a long-term strategy rather than a short-term policy agenda. However, in order to be sustainable, our environmental, economic, and social systems need to show a high degree of stability and integrity over a very long period of time.

2.2.3.1. Ecological sustainable approach

“Ecological Sustainability” usually means “Environmental Sustainability”, and according to Overton (1999), the environmental rationale for sustainable development is very strong. He further pointed out that environmental sustainability is the process of ensuring the current course of interaction with the environment is pursued, with the notion of keeping the environment as pristine and natural as possible. Sustainability requires that human activity utilises natural resources at the rate at which they can be replaced naturally. This idea agrees with Elliott's writing (2006), which maintained that environmental sustainability needs to sustain ecological diversity, productivity, and resilience.

To accomplish this, Overton (1999) called for a decrease of resource use. In other words, people ought to stop the process of cashing in ecological 'capital' (non-renewable resources) and begin to rely on the sustainable 'interest' only. Although economic growth is important for development, such growth should not harm the environment. Thus, the term “ecodevelopment”—development based upon responsible and sustainable use of environmental resources—is useful in portraying the necessary balance (Adams, 1990). Ecodevelopment is achieved through effective environmental management, indicating careful management of the earth's resources in such a way that natural productivity is increased while basic human needs continue to be met (O' Riordan, 1981 as cited in Overton, 1999).

Rees (1990) stated that while economic growth is essential, human beings need to change their attitudes and their social organization, and work to control and balance their rate of consumption and waste discharge in order to sustain the environment without causing problems. In other words, development should accommodate environmental preservation by limiting population and economic growth and by using appropriate technology, both of which can be facilitated through participatory planning and understanding the limits of biosphere (Shiva, 1992). The economy can continue to produce increased output, even with minimal input; but this must occur in such a way that damage to the stock and quality of natural resources does not occur over time. In this way we will use the 'interest' in order to continue our growth and development, but not the environmental 'capital' (Rees, 1990). Thus, the ecological approach requires that sustainable economic development be achieved through using natural renewable

resources at a rate less than or equal to the rate of regeneration. In addition, humans must also commit to producing pollution at a rate less than or equal to the rate it can be safely absorbed into the environment.

2.2.3.2. Economic sustainable approach

The economic approach to sustainable development calls for the use of economic means in organizing natural resources for continuous development, without depleting the resource base. Economic sustainability requires the achievement of poverty reduction, equity, and efficient use of resources (Elliott, 2006). In 1987, the WECD deliberated on a better quality of economic growth that would use improved technology, trustworthy and environmentally concerned models, and calculations that would not lead to environmental harm.

On the other hand, Third World countries have more recently claimed that current models which label their development as environmental exploitation affect their opportunities for economic enhancement; they argue that growth is essential to alleviate national poverty. In their view, since Western countries have exploited Third World natural resources for Western development, they have no right to interfere in the Third World's use of their own natural resources for Third World benefit (Elliott, 1999).

Within this economic perspective, many economists differ in their views on sustainable development and the choice of tools for economic analysis. Some believe economics cannot deal properly with environmental issues because the environment is not a commodity. Others convert the environment into a series of tradable commodities stressing that previous failures on the part of economics to address environmental problems were caused precisely because of its practice of viewing environment as external to economy. These latter economists take on board current environmental concerns and address the issue of sustainability. Their challenge has been to calculate the value of the environment using the market value system. If calculated, however, it appears unlikely that such figures could possibly reflect ecological and cultural values, or accurately represent differences between First and Third World economies. It becomes even more complicated to apply market values in this way when one considers

the fact that the Third World's environment is still undervalued, and that its environmental damage costs less.

An additional viewpoint argues that environmental issues cannot be included in economic models because the discipline deals with private goods. Economists have yet to establish an ideal way to address environmental issues because economics is not equipped to place a value on the environment in terms of future generations; disagreements still exist amongst economic experts about how to do this. Hence, from the economic perspective, sustainable development promotes economic growth but it must be bounded by the limits of technological advances and nature's ability to replenish resources and absorb waste (Adams, 1993; Overton & Scheyvens, 1999).

2.2.3.3. Social sustainable approach

The social sustainable livelihood approach claims that poverty and the environment are interconnected. It calls for appropriate action to address the issues of poverty, inequality, and injustice. This notion is strongly supported by Elliott (2006), who stated that social sustainability requires maintaining social elements such as cultural diversity, social justice, and participation. She held that human development can be placed above environmental wellbeing, as it is human livelihoods that play the key role in the creation of a relationship between economic development and natural resources. On this basis, the social aspects of development should be given priority (Chambers, 1986). Purdie (1995) claimed all people, individuals, and groups have the right to a secure and viable livelihood and thus, development should enthusiastically support them.

Rural populations that exist in remote areas of the Third World often are engaged in an intense struggle to secure livelihoods. They experience adverse social, economic, and political conditions (Murray, 2000). Dasman (1988) reported on indigenous people who rely heavily on the local natural environment, known as 'ecosystem people'. They utilise the available natural resources for their survival, possess in-depth knowledge of natural cycles, and express their opinions and thoughts on nature through their cultural beliefs, principles, legends, stories, and religions. Therefore, development agencies should highly respect and consider these cultural beliefs, and regard local knowledge as

an asset from which to work when promoting sustainability and the protection of natural resources.

In the Third World, many times people depend exclusively on the natural environment for food, water, energy, health, shelter, income, and employment. If the environment is degraded, then their livelihood is spoilt and their opportunities in life are degraded as well. Such people typically have severely limited options, and are often forced to persist in practices that continue to degrade their surroundings even further, just to survive (Adams, 2001; Chambers, 1995). Social sustainability proponents also believe that sustainable development is best understood in terms of people-oriented activities, and the sustainability of a human community (Allen & Thomas, 2000).

While the three perspectives on sustainable development described above each have a unique focus in their approach, they also share a number of common characteristics and goals. Thus, overall, it can be said that sustainable development seeks to meet five broad requirements:

1. The integration of conservation and development
2. The satisfaction of basic human needs
3. The achievement of equity and social justice
4. The provision of social self-determination and cultural diversity
5. The maintenance of ecological integrity. (Jacobs & Munroe, 1987 as cited in Holmberg & Sandbrook, 1992, p. 27)

2.3. Ecotourism

2.3.1. Emergence and definition

The term ecotourism has attracted huge interest among people in every corner of the globe and has become increasingly popular and widespread in recent years, both in the literature and in the marketplace (Bottrill & Pearce, 1995). However, there is considerable debate over how the term emerged, what the term means, and what it should mean. Oram (1995) argued that the concept of ecotourism can be traced back

only to the 1980s. Its invention resulted from increased recognition of the adverse impact caused by conventional mass tourism to natural areas. This idea is consistent with those expressed by Valentine (1992, as cited in Oram, 1995), who stated, “Originating in a worldwide reaction against mass tourism, the idea of nature-based tourism, which was protective of nature as well as enjoying it, has come to fruition in last five years” (p. 3).

Oram further points out that the concept of ecotourism is probably equally based in recent widespread and growing interest in the natural environment and a corresponding recognition of the importance of conserving natural environmental quality. The idea of visiting and experiencing high-quality natural environments and helping protect them from harm is now an acceptable and marketable one. This notion is totally supported by Scheyvens (2002); she reported that ecotourism has largely emerged as a response to the increasing demand for remote, natural, and exotic environments on the part of Westerners. She describes this rising interest as coming from those who wish for more interaction with the environment, and growing as a result of growing world environmental problems and disappearing cultures.

However, the definition of ecotourism is far from straightforward. The literature identifies a variety of key elements depending on where, when, and by whom the term ecotourism is applied. Since the publication of the first definition of ecotourism nearly 25 years ago, there is still little consensus among experts about its definition (Bjork, 2000). Thus, ecotourism is currently defined differently by different academics and organisations whose various interests and objectives impact the meaning they bestow on it. Nevertheless, the first formal definition of ecotourism—which also happens to be one of the most widely quoted and accepted—was introduced by Ceballos-Lascurain in the 1980s (Blamey, 2001 as cited in Donohoe & Needham, 2006). In his definition, conservation, as it applies to the environment, wild plants, animals, and culture, is the main basic component of ecotourism (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987 as cited in Oram, 1995): "Travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated area 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" (p. 4).

Subsequently, the definition was developed by different academics and researchers. One concrete example is Ziffer's (1989) perspective, which encompassed the key elements of promoting the economic well-being of the local population; encouraging a local, self-management approach; enforcing regulation; appropriate marketing; and contribution to community development. She viewed ecotourism as:

A form of tourism inspired primarily by the natural history of an area, including its indigenous cultures. The ecotourist visits relatively underdeveloped areas in the spirit of appreciation, participation and sensitivity. The ecotourist practices a non-consumptive use of wildlife and nature resources and contributes to the visited area through labour or financial means aimed at directly benefiting the conservation of the site and the economic well-being of the local residents. The visit should strengthen the ecotourist's appreciation and dedication to conservation issues in general, and to the specific needs of the locale. Ecotourism also implies a managed approach by the host country or region which commits itself to establishing and maintaining the site with the participation of local residents, marketing them appropriately, enforcing regulations, and using the proceeds of the enterprise to fund the area's land management as well as community development. (p. 6)

After that, Young (1992) favoured a definition that focused on encouraging better ecotourists who help maintain the environment as well as the local culture. He defined ecotourism as travel to natural areas that fosters environmental understanding, appreciation, and conservation and sustains the culture and well-being of local communities. The key element in this definition is almost the same as that of the definition constructed by the Ecotourism Society in the US, with the exception of sustaining local culture which is excluded in this definition; it does, however, state that people have to take personal responsibility during travelling and occupation of a natural area, as this will not only create sustainability for the ecotourism site but also enhance the well-being of the local community (Knack, 1993).

Additionally, Valentine reveals another dimension of ecotourism in his definition—specifically, the idea of appropriately managing the environment so as to contribute to

the protection of the tourism area itself. He theorized that ecotourism is restricted to that kind of tourism which is:

- Targeted toward relatively undisturbed natural areas
- Non-damaging and non-degrading
- A contributor to the continued protection and management of the protected areas involved
- Subject to an adequate and appropriate management regime (1993, p. 108).

While both Valentine (1993) and Doan (n.d.) extend their conceptualization of ecotourism to include sustaining the natural environment, Doan goes a step further to encompass education, sustainable development, and local involvement. He writes:

Ecotourism is a natural-based tourism forms that should enhance the understanding by visitors of nature (and where possible, the nature-related culture of surrounding indigenous community) through education and interpretation programme; directly and indirectly contribute to conservation efforts and sustainable development, with the active involvement by local community. (n.d, p.259)

Even more comprehensive is the definition of Wallace and Pierce (1996), which is considered to be one of the widest in the literature. It acknowledges the importance of a broader number of variables than can be found in other definitions. To these authors, ecotourism is:

Travel to relatively undisturbed natural areas for study, enjoyment, or volunteer assistance. It is travel that concerns itself with the flora, fauna, geology, and ecosystems of an area, as well as the people (caretakers) who live nearby, their needs, their culture, and their relationship to the land. It views natural areas both as “home of us” in a global sense (“eco” meaning home) but “home to nearby residents” specifically. It is envisioned as a tool for both conservation and sustainable development-especially in areas where local people are asked to forgo the conservative use of resources for

others. Such tourism may be said to be true ecotourism when it features six principles. (p. 848)

As stated, Wallace and Pierce (1996) provided six fundamental principles, including minimising any negative impact on both infrastructure and participant numbers, increasing awareness and education opportunities, increasing support for conservation, promoting democratisation (the participation of all stakeholders in decision-making processes), providing for community benefits, and providing educational and experiential opportunities for locals.

Additionally, Sirakaya, Sasidharan, and Sonmez (1999) reviewed the existing literature on ecotourism definitions and provided a supply-side view of ecotourism, based on the findings of a nationwide survey of 282 US-based ecotour operators. Their content analysis of ecotourism definitions revealed that:

Ecotourism is a new form of non-consumptive, educational, and romantic tourism to relatively undisturbed and under-visited areas of immense natural beauty, and cultural and historical importance for the purposes of understanding and appreciating the natural and socio-cultural history of the host destination. (p. 168)

Bjork (2000) also presented an extended definition of the concept of ecotourism, which has been used and misused in many ways. He claimed that ecotourism is not farm tourism, nature tourism, or adventure tourism, but a unique tourism form that has become very popular due to the greening of markets, increasing knowledge of the fragility of the environment, better informed managers, and the recognition that there is a close relationship between good ecology and good economy. Bjork (2000) defines ecotourism as:

An activity where the authorities, the tourism industry, tourists and local people co-operate to make it possible for tourists to travel to genuine areas in order to admire, study, and enjoy nature and culture in a way that does not exploit the resources, but contributes to sustainable development. (p. 197)

The popularity of this definition may come from its less exacting requirements on local communities, since 'sustainable', as a concept, can be interpreted in many different ways.

Fennell (2001), who works in the Department of Recreation and Leisure at Brock University in Canada, also researched the concept of ecotourism through an examination of 85 definitions of the term using a content analysis methodology. He reported that from 1991 to 1993, natural areas, conservation, culture, benefits to locals, and education were the variables most often cited in definitions of ecotourism. However, from 1994 to 1996, conservation, education, ethics, sustainability, impact, and local benefits were the most common variables mentioned.

Fennell felt it imperative to point out that more recently, at the penultimate meeting of the International Year of Ecotourism in 2002, five distinct criteria were suggested for use in defining ecotourism, namely: nature-based product, minimal impact management, environmental education, contribution to conservation, and contribution to community (Fennell, 2003). Fennell's own definition encompasses these aspects, though they are not linked in a set way to sustainable development:

Ecotourism is a sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, and which is ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented (control, benefits, and scale). It typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to the conservation or preservation such areas. (2003, p. 25)

In short, although several definitions of ecotourism have been presented, the core dimensions are very similar and have been expanded to incorporate ideas about ecotourist responsibility, environmentally friendly destination management, profitable links to conservation efforts, and sustainable development of the local human population. In addition, the similarities and differences found in various definitions tend to match the overall concept of tourism development according to the perspective of the definers, as well as their purpose in its application.

Fennell's (2003) definition has been selected for use in this study on the grounds that it includes all the main principles, such as educational opportunities, planning

considerations, ethical responsibility, provision of community benefits, ecological conservation, local participation, and preservation.

Table 2.1

Summary of Key Components Used to Define Ecotourism in the Current Literature

Authors' names	year	key components in definition
Celballos-Lascurain	1987	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation of environment, wild plants, animals and culture
Ziffer, K	1989	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation of wildlife and natural resources • Economic well-being of local population • Encouragement of local-self management approach • Enforcement of regulation • Appropriate marketing • Community development
Yong, M	1992	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation of the environment • Education • Sustaining culture • Well-being of local community
Ecotourism Society, in Knack, R	1993	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation of the environment • Education • Well-being of local community
Valentine, P	1993	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation of the environment • Contribution for continued protection and management • Appropriate management regime
Doan, N. T. K	n.d.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation of the environment • Education • Sustainable development • Local involvement
Wallace, G & Pierce, S	1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation of the environment • Educational opportunity for both tourists and locals • Local benefits

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Democratisation
Sirakaya, E., Sasidharan, V., & Sonmez, S	1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation of the environment • Education • Appreciation of nature, socio-culture, and history of the host community
Bjork, P	2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation of the environment • Education • Appreciation of environment and culture • Sustainable development • Cooperation of all stakeholders (authorities, tourism industry, tourisms, and local people)
Fennell, D. A	2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation of the environment • Education • Ethical responsibility • Planning • Preservation • Community benefits • Local participation

Source: Summarised by the author (2009)

2.3.2. The potential positive and negative impacts of ecotourism on local people's livelihood

As there is no consensus about the meaning of ecotourism, the term is used loosely and in some marketing campaigns, opportunistically (Goodwin, 1996). At the same time, the impact from ecotourism on the host community and the host environment can be both positive and negative. Specifically, there is potential for both benefit to and destruction of the environment, the culture, and the existing social order. This section of the chapter is intended to explore the potential effect on a local population's livelihood and the surrounding environment when ecotourism is initiated in a given area.

It has been established that the potential costs and benefits of ecotourism are seen in the form of its economic, environmental, and socio-cultural aspects (Weaver, 1998). The

impact from both positive and negative influences is summarised and represented in Table 2.2, below:

Table 2.2

The Impact of Ecotourism on a Local Community

	Economic	Environmental	Socio-cultural
Positive Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local revenue from ecotourists • Establishment of local employment • Indicate revenue (multiplier effects) • Stimulates peripheral rural economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouragement to care for environment • Ecotourists' assistance with habitat enhancement • Education in protected areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aesthetic/spiritual experiences • Fosters awareness among residents and ecotourists
Negative Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start off the costs • In progress charge • Doubtful revenue • Damage to crops by wildlife 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accomplishment = rapid growth • Tourism causes damage and stress • Financial value on nature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intrusion on local culture • Cultural influence • Displacement of local culture due to parks

Source: Adapted from Weaver (1998)

Major aspects of points illustrated by Table 2 will now be discussed further, referring to the work of authors other than Weaver as well.

2.3.2.1.Potential positive economic impacts

Regarding its potentially positive economic impact, Weaver (1998) reported that ecotourism can provide economic benefit in terms of income and employment. One concrete example is from Harrison and Schipani's (2007) work, which outlined the contribution of Nam Ha ecotourism to the livelihoods of local residents through the enhancement of social and human capital. Not only does such tourism play a significant role in foreign currency exchange, but it also provides employment which improves the livelihoods of the local poor in Laos. In particular, there are approximately 2,000 rural

people from eight separate villages living inside and outside the Nam Ha ecotourism sites; a number of them provide tourists with local food and lodging, guide services, and locally made handicrafts and as a result, their communities receive substantial direct economic benefit. The gross revenue generated by the Nam Ha Eco-guide Service, which offers trekking and river tours, from October 2000 to February 2002 was US\$ 34,400. As such, the revenue from ecotourism contributed up to 40% of the total village income. A large of proportion of this income was spent on essential medicine, rice, clothing, and household items.

Additionally, in Weinberg, Bellows, and Ekster's (2002) research in Costa Rica, ecotourism was found to have brought about a variety of positive changes including more jobs and increased incomes, resulting in an improved standard of living for the local population. Gould (2004) also presented a case study of ecotourism in Uganda, Africa in which he reported that ecotourism brought employment and income to the local community. Significantly, he noted that local people had become employed as national park officials, tour-guides, campground operators, and craft and food producers.

Similarly, Lindberg, Enlriquez, and Sproule (1996) researched ecotourism in Belize and concluded that it achieved three ecotourism objectives: generation of local economic benefits, generation of financial support for protected area management, and generation of local support for conservation. In their survey of the resulting economic impact, both direct and indirect local benefits were noted in four of the communities studied (San Pedro, Caye Caulker, Gales Point, and Maya Center). Their research indicated that over 50% of the inhabitants received direct benefit from local ecotourism, while 70% of non-tourism jobs were perceived to be dependent on tourism.

2.3.2.2.Potential positive environmental impacts

In terms of the potential for positive environmental impact, Weaver (2006) pointed out that ecotourism plays a significant role in bringing about the greatest environmental benefit. He attributed this to its key role in providing a direct financial incentive for the preservation of relatively undisturbed national habitats. This also contributes indirectly to protecting watersheds and the overall quality of water. Likewise, Lindberg (2000)

claimed that ecotourism is seen as playing a crucial role in financing the establishment and maintenance of protected areas. For example, White and Dobias (1991, as cited in Lindberg, Enriquez & Sproule, 1996) used their case study from the Philippines to point out:

Tubbataha [National Marine Park in the Philippines] is a clear case of tourism contributing to marine conservation and resource management. It is probable that if no tourism existed at the site, it would not have been declared a national park nor would a national foundation have been formed for its protection. (p. 547)

In addition, Fang's (2002) research on ecotourism in Sichuan, China revealed that ecotourism there appears to play an important role in protecting the natural environment. Managers of the areas involved took measures to effectively control logging, encourage sound energy use, and enforce visitor rationing policies, all of which in turn resulted in a 6.7 million hectare increase in forested area, with a vegetation cover of nearly 90%.

Likewise, Stone and Wall (2004) studied ecotourism and community development in Hainan, China. Their main objective was to assess the current status of ecotourism at two protected areas where it was being promoted as a strategy for balancing regional economic growth and conservation objectives. According to their research findings, the majority of community residents generally supported conservation and were optimistic that tourism growth would yield benefits for the local community.

2.3.2.3.Potential positive socio-cultural impacts

Regarding any potentially positive impact on socio-cultural conditions, Weaver (1998) highlighted that ecotourism plays an essential role in building the confidence of local people, encouraging local ownership and instilling a sense of pride and positive self-image. In addition, ecotourism not only increases the knowledge and understanding of tourists, it enhances the experience of locals as well. Furthermore, Gould (2004) claimed that ecotourism can create opportunities for community empowerment. This idea is clearly echoed by Scheyvens (1999), who examined the prospects of community empowerment; she argued that a successful locally based ecotourism project can result

in the empowerment of a local population that encompasses economic, social, political, and psychological aspects.

Such potential social and cultural benefits are intimately linked with improvements in economic conditions, especially in terms of upgrades to the public infrastructure and improvements in social welfare of the community as a whole. This is best presented by Nelson (2004), who studied community-based ecotourism in Northern Tanzania and found it played a crucial role in improving rural livelihoods and conservation there. While the local economies were firmly based on pastoralist livelihood production, tourism came to contribute an essential and growing source of diversification. Nelson described the resultant improvement to individual households and the community's social infrastructure as well, stating that village revenues had increased rapidly over the 5 years previous to the time of the study, and as a consequence, the village budget had increased more than 20-fold during that time, leading to numerous socio-economic benefits.

2.3.2.4. Potential negative economic impact

Along with its potential for positive influence, ecotourism can also have a negative impact on local areas and populations. Weaver (1998) identified start-up costs, ongoing expenses, uncertain revenues, and damage to local crops by protected wildlife as the main economic costs of ecotourism. Specifically, the most obvious direct cost is the financial outlay necessary for launching a viable and appropriate operation. This includes the acquisition of land for establishing protected areas, restoration costs, the development of a suitable management plan and other required regulatory procedures, the training of local personnel, and the promotion and marketing of the area as an ecotourism destination. In addition, the construction of both the superstructure—such as accommodation and an interpretation centre—and the infrastructure—such as roads, car park, trails, waste-disposal units, and energy systems—must be financed. Subsequently, costs are incurred on an ongoing basis for the maintenance of these facilities, upgrading of skills, habitat protection, and the enhancement and continued promotion of the site. Also, compensation must be provided for local farmers who experience crop and livestock predation by wildlife ranging forth from their protected-area sanctuaries (Weaver, 1998).

Research by Stone and Wall (2004) documented these types of negative economic consequences to an area surrounding the ecotourism site at Hainan, China. Results from their survey indicated that 25% or more of the local residents who participated responded that the park has had either no effect at all, or only a negative effect on their lives, mainly due to lost jobs and land (Stone & Wall, 2004).

2.3.2.5. Potential negative environmental impacts

Ironically, the environmental effects of ecotourism can be negative as well. Weaver (2006) reported environmental costs resulting mainly from the removal of native vegetation during the construction of an ecolodge, mediating attractions, trails, and other footprint facilities. Archer and Cooper (2001, as cited in Gould, 2004) described another facet of ecotourism's destructive environmental impact. They pointed out several types of direct environmental damage, such as pollution, littering and waste, soil erosion, and impairment of plants and animals resulting from the establishment and operation of ecotourism projects. Similarly, Weinberg, Bellows and Ekster (2002) analysed two case studies in Costa Rica and found that ecotourism created pollution and contamination in terms of waste, traffic, and noise level (mainly due to an increase in the presence of motorcycles, cars, and trucks).

Oram (1995) made some interesting claims concerning ecotourism—especially when he called it 'big business'. While it can provide opportunity for foreign currency exchange and economic reward and thus contribute to the preservation of natural systems and wildlife, according to Oram, it is true that:

Ecotourism also threatens to destroy the resources on which it depends. For instance, tour boats dump garbage in the water off Antarctica, shutterbugs harass wildlife in national park, and hordes of us trample fragile areas. This frenzied activity threatens the viability of natural systems; at times we seem to be loving nature to dearth. (p. 5)

Furthermore, purchasing a certain craft item through an ecotourism project in Kenya resulted in the extinction of a rare plant species (The Ecotourism Society of Kenya, 2003 as cited in Gould, 2004).

Mowforth and Munt (1998) pointed out that when the development of tourism exceeds the carrying capacity of the local community, it causes a variety of negative effects. These consequences, such as the displacement of indigenous/local people, local cultural degradation, distortion of local economies, erosion of social structures, environmental degradation, diversion of scarce resources on which locals depend, and the outbreak of diseases, have been observed around the world. Nowak (2001) offered a concrete example of this from his observations of East Africa's great ape ecotourism, where he witnessed how ecotourists brought money that helped the animals and improved the living standards of the local people, while also exposing the animals to human disease. In addition, whale watches have been linked to a wide variety of behavioural changes in targeted cetaceans, resulting from the density of the presence of boats (Higham & Luck, 2002).

2.3.2.6. Potential negative socio-cultural impacts

Negative socio-cultural consequences from ecotourism have also been documented. Scheyvens (1999) stated that the lure of tourist dollars may contribute to escalating competitiveness within or between local populations, as well as feeding a host of social problems such as resentment, jealousy, relationship breakdown, social inequality, loss of respect for elders, and intensifying the difficulties of disadvantaged groups. In addition, two Costa Rican case studies by Weinberg, Bellows and Ekster (2002) illustrated ways in which the growth of ecotourism has presented significant challenges. Expanding ecotourism development in Costa Rica has created urbanisation, and with it has come a loss of local customs, values, and the small-town, community feeling that once characterised the locale. The researchers highlighted an increase in concerns about cultural changes, social inequality, and uncontrolled population growth (Weinberg, Bellows, & Ekster, 2002). One community leader commented:

A lot of people who worked in the cheese factory began to leave work in hotels, and so more people from outside were brought in to work. The idea of a small town community, of friendships and the relationships changed.
(p. 374)

Another potentially negative socio-cultural consequence of ecotourism is cultural intrusion, which can occur through tourists coming into close contact with native workers. In some cases this leads to native workers realising they can obtain a higher standard of living in an industrialised country, and considering the possibility of leaving their own country to go live in the tourists' country of origin (Schluter, 2001 as cited in Gould, 2004).

2.3.3. How can ecotourism be made sustainable in order to contribute to sustainable development?

Wall (1997) asserted that ecotourism is not automatically self-sustaining, and if it is to contribute to sustainable development, it must become economically viable, environmentally appropriate, and socio-culturally satisfactory. This approach aligns with Chalker's (1994) view that in order for sustained ecotourism to exist, three interconnecting issues must be addressed:

- It must not damage the environment – it must be ecologically sound
- It must respect the social and cultural traditions of the host country
- It must not exploit local people and should ensure, as far as possible, that benefits flow to local residents. (p. 99)

Wall (1997) further explained that if ecotourism could not become financially viable and remain stable, then providing the vital facilities, conveniences, and services required by most ecotourists would not be possible on a long-term, dependable basis. In such a case, the potential economic benefits of ecotourism for both industry providers and locals would not be realised. What is more, if the environment and its treasures are not preserved, then the resource base for ecotourism is ruined and as a consequence, no tourists will come to visit. Lastly, if ecotourism is not culturally and ethically acceptable and local residents do not benefit from its existence, they will likely become hostile toward it and may work to undermine it.

Fortunately, however, there is a strong tendency for ecotourism to contribute to sustainable development. This is due to the fact that it employs the principles of sustainability with relation to economic, environmental, and social dimensions. At the

same time, economic viability, environment protection, and socio-cultural appropriateness are the three key prerequisites to achieving sustainable development (Wall, 1997). Still, many strategies must be brought to bear in order to follow the principles of sustainability of ecotourism, and thus contribute to sustainable development.

Cater (1993) researched ecotourism in the Third World with special focus on obstacles to sustainable tourism development. She reported that without sufficient understanding of the underlying factors, careful planning, and capable management, ecotourism can indeed fail to become sustainable. She also suggested the following steps for any form of tourism development, in the interest of supporting sustainable ecotourism:

- Meet the needs of the host population in terms of improved living standards, for both the short term and the long term.
- Satisfy the demands of a growing number of tourists and continue to attract them in order to meet the first aim.
- Safeguard the natural environment in order to achieve both of the preceding aims. (Cater, 1993, p. 85)

Similarly, Wall (1997) prioritised careful planning and management in promoting sustainable ecotourism. These include education, training, and enhanced access to capital for the local population so as to facilitate their access to certain levels of control concerning the ecotourism initiative.

Additionally, empowerment has become an integral part of developing tourism sustainability (Scheyvens, 1999). Sofield (2003) observed that communities in many countries are left outside the decision-making process so that policies and decisions are made *for* them, not *by* them. One consequence of this practice is the frequent inability of governments, planners, and developers to implement policies or maintain the sustainability of an initiative. Thus, Sofield advised that in order to avoid this situation, community empowerment should be put in place. He stressed that “without the element of empowerment tourism development at the level of community will have difficulty achieving sustainability” (2003, p. 9).

This idea is consistent with Theophile (1995, as cited in Scheyvens & Purdie, 1999), who claimed that “empowering local communities to evaluate the tradeoffs and strike this balance for themselves is at the heart of any successful ecotourism venture” (p. 224). Interestingly, Akama (1996) would appear to concur, suggesting that communities need to be empowered, both socially and economically, in order to decide for themselves what forms of tourism development they wish to pursue, as well as who will bear the costs and share the benefits of such development.

Additionally, Scheyvens (1999) claimed that an ecotourism venture should be considered successful when local communities have some measure of control over it and are able to share equitably in the benefits gained from the ecotourism activities. In order to achieve sustainable ecotourism, Scheyvens has developed an empowerment framework that can be used as an appropriate mechanism for aiding analysis of the social, economic, psychological, and political effects of ecotourism on local communities. It can help assess the degree to which local people have control and therefore, can take full advantage of the ecotourism happening in their region. There are four key components (economic, psychological, social, and political empowerment) to capture the ways in which ecotourism initiatives can build or detract from a local community's empowerment, as illustrated in Table 2.3, below.

Table 2. 3

Signs of Empowerment and Disempowerment

	Signs of Empowerment	Signs of Disempowerment
Economic Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Ecotourism brings lasting economic gains to a local community. √ Cash earned is shared between many households in the community. √ There are signs of improvements in communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> X Ecotourism results in small cash gains for the local community. X Most benefits go to local elites, outside operators, and government agencies. X Only a few individuals or families gain direct financial benefits.
Psychological Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Self-esteem of many community members is enhanced. √ Increasing confidence of community members lead them to seek out further education and training opportunities. √ Access to employment and cash leads to an increase in status for traditionally low-status members of the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> X Many people have not share in the benefits of ecotourism. X They may face hardships because of reduced access to the resources of protected areas. X They are confused, frustrated, disinterested or disillusioned with the initiative.
Social Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Ecotourism maintains or enhances the local community's equilibrium. √ Community cohesion is improved as individuals and families work together to build a successful ecotourism venture. √ Some funds raised are used for community development purposes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> X Disharmony and social decay. Many in the community take outside value and lose respect for traditional culture and their elders. X Disadvantaged groups bear the brunt of problems associated with the ecotourism initiative and fail to share equitably in its benefits
Political Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ The community's political structure, which fairly represents the needs and interest of all community groups, provides a forum through which people can raise questions relating to ecotourism venture and have their concerns dealt with. √ Agencies initiating or implementing the ecotourism venture seek out the opinions of community groups (including special interest groups of women, youths and other socially disadvantaged groups). √ Provide opportunities for them to be represented on decision-making bodies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> X The community has an autocratic or self-interested leadership. X Agencies initiating or implementing the ecotourism venture treat communities as passive beneficiaries, failing to involve them in decision making. X The majority of community members feel they have little or no say over whether the ecotourism initiative operators or the way in which it operates.

Source: Summarised from Scheyvens (1999)

In short, empowerment is a powerful mechanism for supporting sustainable ecotourism because it places local community members at the core centre of running the ecotourism

venture. However, if local people are empowered but not held accountable, they may use their position in unlimited ways and in the process, impinge on the well-being of others or the environment. Therefore, regulation must also be taken into account when creating a social framework that supports sustainable ecotourism.

Regulation plays a significant role in promoting sustainable ecotourism on the grounds that it serves as a crucial mechanism for protecting environmental sustainability and creating appropriate methodology to be practiced by both outsiders and insiders. Dombroski (2005) theorised that, in an ecotourism venture in western China, regulation has played an essential role in ensuring environmental sustainability and protecting the local people’s way of life. For example, the establishment of internal regulation in the community significantly helped to reduce conflict related to ensuring equitable access to tourism opportunities, as compared to previous instances without regulation. Since the relationships between village entrepreneurs remained harmonious, working conditions were much more relaxed and enjoyable for all. The idea of using regulation for sustainable tourism development is also supported by Weaver (2000), who felt that sustainable mass tourism was possible through regulation.

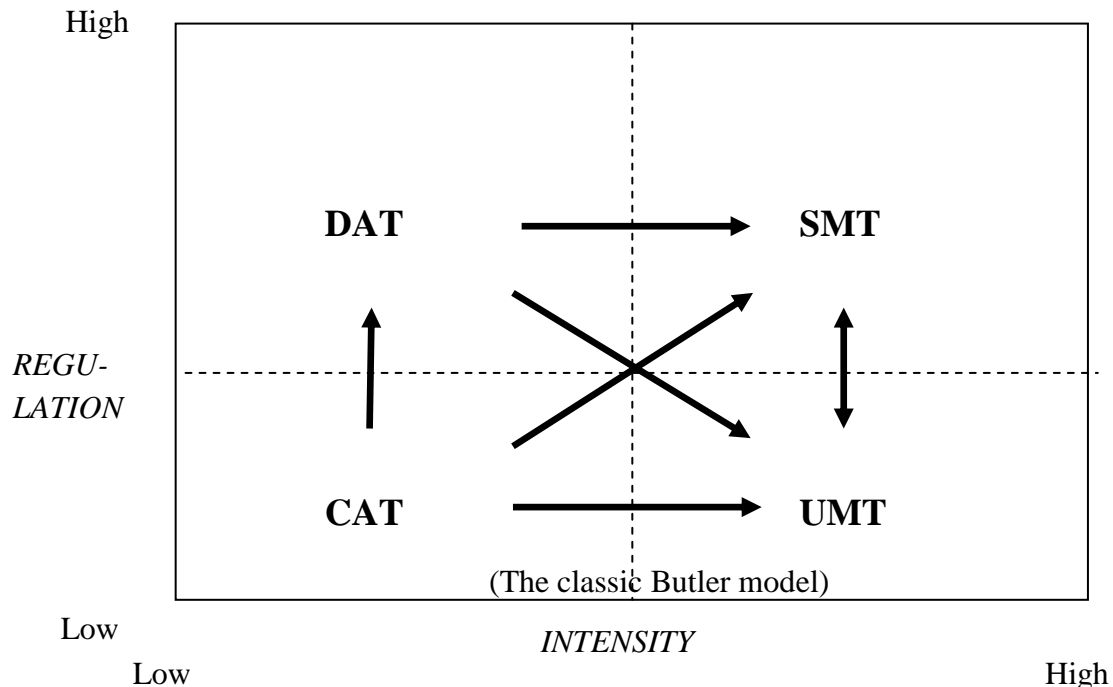


Figure 2.1 Destination development scenarios. Source: Reproduced from Weaver (2000)

Weaver (2000) formulated a broad contextual model of tourism destination development by employing categories of intensity and regulation (see Table 4, below).

His model consists of four inclusive tourism development states, including circumstantial alternative tourism (CAT), deliberate alternative tourism (DAT), unsustainable mass tourism (UMT), and sustainable mass tourism (SMT).

In this framework, Weaver illustrated that there are seven possible scenarios of transition from one state to another which are based on the variables of destination, scale, or intensity and the extent to which regulation conducive to sustainability is present and enforced. First and foremost, Weaver stated that small-scale destinations where regulation is absent or minimal experience circumstantial alternative tourism (CAT). Next, small-scale destinations that have a regulatory environment in place fall under the category of deliberate alternative tourism (DAT). Weaver recognised that the boundary between these categories is transitional, and this is represented by the dotted line dividing them in the matrix.

A third possibility is unsustainable mass tourism (UMT), which is experienced by large-scale destinations lacking in regulation; this contrasts with sustainable mass tourism (SMT) that (theoretically) exists when regulations are implemented and enforced. In this context, it is possible to reflect on ecotourism in variable ways: CAT and DAT, UMT, and even SMT. The end result will depend on the degree to which regulation contributes to the ecotourism venture.

Sharpley (2006) supported local participation in tourism development; he stated that ecotourism can be viewed as a way of transferring power to local tourism providers through encouraging local participation or control in tourism development. This is combined with the attraction of tourists who are seeking more balanced encounters with local communities. He further explained that philosophically, there are three pillars that support the foundation of ecotourism development. These are as follows:

- **Environment:** Ecotourism is low-impact tourism that should be managed in such a way that it contributes to the conservation of the flora and fauna of the natural areas.
- **Development:** Ecotourism should encourage local participation and control, and development should aim toward a tourism that is of sustainable socio-economic benefit to local communities.

- **Experience:** Ecotourism should provide opportunities for learning and meaningful encounters between tourists and the environment/local community (Sharpley, 2006, p. 10).

Tosun and Timothy (2003) also put forward strong support for community participation in the tourism development process. They theorized that seven benefits arise from including the local population when setting up an ecotourism venture.

Firstly, community participation is a vital element in the implementation of tourism plans and strategies on the grounds that if local people are enabled to present their opinions at the start with a fair and open process of policy and plan development, they will then be ready and willing to accept the end results of such a process. This is best presented by Broadbent (1988, as cited in Tosun & Timothy, 2003) who explained how a plan made solely through bureaucracy, without local input, is difficult to implement primarily because those on whom a project depends will not necessarily understand and cooperate with plans in which they have no say. Similarly, Murphy (1983, cited in Tosun & Timothy, 2003, p. 5) stated that “the lack of sufficient consultation and planning at the local level has certainly contributed to the delay and demise of many projects and policies proposed by the central planning agencies.”

Secondly, community participation plays a significant role in contributing to sustainable practices. A community-based approach to tourism development is prerequisite to sustainability, since as it becomes apparent to the local population that they are receiving benefits from tourism, they will certainly support such activities by protecting the environment and their cultural heritage (Tosun & Timothy, 2003).

Thirdly, community participation can promote tourist satisfaction because the local community is a crucial element in the product (Tosun & Timothy, 2003). Willingness to participate and support for the industry on the part of local people are factors that create a satisfactory tourist experience. This is clearly presented by D’Amore (1983, as cited in Tosun & Timothy, 2003); he stated that “another component of supply of tourism resources is the attitude and behaviour of the hosts, since these qualities form a significant part of the tourist experience” (p. 6).

The fourth benefit is the helpful input that can come from community participation as locals assist tourism professionals to design better tourism plans. Tosun and Timothy

(2003) claimed that planning *for* people is an old-fashioned and inappropriate approach, while planning *with* or *by* people is a new, more suitable method. This idea is strongly supported by Midgley (1987, as cited in Tosun & Timothy, 2003), who stated that “by failing to involve the ordinary people, these developers impose external solutions and foster paternalism; they also frequently make mistakes that are monumentally costly and wasteful” (p. 7).

The fifth benefit of local participation is about creating a fair distribution of costs and benefits among all stakeholders (Tosun & Timothy, 2003). The authors explained that disconnection between local people and the power structures among interest groups resulted in unfair and unequal distribution of the costs and benefits of tourism development. In particular, local people tended to receive limited and unequal benefits from tourism, since they lived with the negative consequences of it while outsiders, as exploiters, received huge benefits.

The sixth benefit describes how local participation promotes assistance for satisfying locally identified needs (Tosun & Timothy, 2003). They pointed out that many existing tourism projects have failed because the real needs of a community were not taken into account. Thus, tourism development patterns must reveal and respond to the requirements and wishes of the local population in order for an ecotourism project to be truly viable.

And finally, the seventh benefit of local participation relates to the wider context, in that it deals with the strengthening of the democratisation process in tourism destination countries (Tosun & Timothy, 2003). Increasing awareness and interest within the community about local and regional issues can play an important part in their overall participation in self-government on a larger scale. In other words, the more local citizens participate in a community-centred tourism development process, the more feedback and input we will get and eventually the gaps between local and bureaucratic decision makers will be reduced.

Likewise, Cole's (2006) research on ecotourism in eastern Indonesia led to her support for local participation because she considered it to be an essential tool in developing tourism sustainably. Specifically, she felt community participation to be necessary for achieving local support and approval of tourism development projects while ensuring that the resultant benefits would meet local needs.

Additionally, research by Scheyvens and Purdie (2002) about ecotourism in the Pacific Islands revealed ecotourism initiatives that demonstrated ineffectiveness in promoting community-based development and resulted in unequal benefit distribution. In order to address these issues, the authors recommended the following valuable principles for reasonable ecotourism development in the Pacific Island region:

1. Indigenous ownership or part-ownership
2. Indigenous control through appropriate structures and organisations
3. Community support, based on consultation and involvement in decision-making processes
4. Mechanisms to ensure that younger generations are taught appropriate cultural norms and skills so the activity can be continued in the future, if they desire
5. Prior education for tourists about the local culture and appropriate behaviour on their part
6. Small scale of operations (e.g., keeping visitor numbers relatively low)
7. Government policies to promote indigenous participation in tourism and the provision of government support structures (e.g., technical expertise, coordination of marketing for special events)
8. Equitable system for distributing benefits among communities
9. Avoidance of major capital works that would require bank loans and outside involvement, where possible; use of intermediate technology wherever practical (e.g., composting toilet systems rather than flush toilets requiring imported components and trained plumbers to maintain them)
10. A view of ecotourism as part of a broad, integrated development strategy which sets up training programmes for local people and involves other possible sources of revenue; for example, harvesting and marketing non-timber forest products and sustainable farming practices, neither of which undermines important subsistence activities

11. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the social, economic, and environmental impact, with findings widely discussed with all stakeholders (Sofield, 1991; Ziffer, 1989 as cited in Scheyvens & Purdie, 1999, p. 225)

However, although there is significant theoretical support for active community participation as described above, it must be noted that in practice this process is difficult to achieve for several reasons. Firstly, local residents lack knowledge, confidence, time, and interest in ecotourism (Goodson, 2003 as cited in Cole, 2006), and secondly, a lack of ownership, capital, and resources all constrain the ability of local residents to fully control their participation in tourism development (Scheyven, 2003). Additionally, the concept of tourism development is new for locals, especially in remote areas of less developed countries; decisions are usually made by bureaucrats in a highly centralised system, and planners believe that locals are too ignorant and too uneducated to be involved. More importantly, locals often do not actually have the knowledge they need to participate in the development process (Cole, 2006).

Summary

In my approach, sustainable ecotourism must include empowerment and regulation aspects. In terms of empowerment, I intend to use some key ideas from Scheyvens' framework in order to help create my own framework and regulation concept. I have constructed a framework identifying the signs of empowerment and disempowerment, and a framework identifying the signs of regulation and under-regulation. (See Table 2.4, Empowerment Framework for Determining the Impacts of Ecotourism Initiatives on Local Communities and Table 2.5, Regulation Framework for Determining the Impacts of Ecotourism Initiatives on Local Communities).

Table 2.4

Empowerment Framework for Determining the Impacts of Ecotourism Initiatives on Local Communities

	<i>Signs of Empowerment (✓)</i>	<i>Signs of Disempowerment (X)</i>
Economic empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ecotourism provides continuous economic gains for a local community. ✓ Cash earned is equitably shared between many households in community. ✓ Cash earned is spent on individual family improvement. (e.g. each house is made of more permanent materials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> X Ecotourism results in small cash gain for the community as a whole. X Most cash gains go to local elites, outside operators and government agencies. X Only a few individuals and families receive direct financial benefits.
Psychological empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Self-esteem of many community members is enhanced. ✓ Increasing confidence of community members lead them to seek out further education and training opportunities. ✓ Access to employment and cash leading to an increase in status for traditionally low-status community members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> X Many people have not shared in the benefits of ecotourism. X They may face hardships because of reduced access to the resources of protected areas. X They are confused, frustrated, disinterested or disillusioned with the initiative
Social empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ecotourism maintains or enhances the local community's equilibrium. ✓ Community cohesion is improved as individuals and family work together to build a successful ecotourism venture. ✓ Some funds raised are used for community development purposes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> X Disharmony and social decay. Many in the community take on outside value and lose respect for their traditional culture and their elders. X Disadvantaged groups bear the brunt of problems associated with the ecotourism initiative and they fail to share equitably in its benefits
Political empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The community's political structure, which fairly represents the needs and interest of all community groups, provides a forum through which people can raise questions relating to ecotourism venture and they can have their concerns dealt with. ✓ Agencies initiating or implementing the ecotourism venture seek out the opinions of community groups (including special interest groups of women, youths and other socially disadvantaged groups). ✓ Provide opportunities for them to be represented on decision-making bodies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> X The community has an autocratic or self-interested leadership. X Agencies initiating or implementing the ecotourism venture treat communities as passive beneficiaries, failing to involve them in decision making. X The majority of community members feel they have little or no say over whether the ecotourism initiative operators or the way in which the initiative operates

Source: Scheyvens, 1999 and Dombroski, 2005

Table 2.5

Regulation Framework for Determining the Impact of Ecotourism Initiatives on Local Communities

	Signs of Regulation	Signs of Under-regulation
Social regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Local stakeholders have regulation to control migration into ecotourism area. E.g. migration can only be through marriage to the indigenous people. √ Local community have self-regulation to ensure community's equilibrium 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> X There are no measures to control in migration to the ecotourism area X Only high status people in the community have an opportunity to seek for further education and therefore to be employed in the ecotourism venture
Environmental regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Local government set up the laws/regulation to protect wildlife and the environment in the protected area. √ Local community set up a social contract and understanding to limit access to resources in the protected area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> X Local people overuse natural resources because local government do not have any forms of laws and regulation to maintain wildlife and environment. X Local community do not have any forms of social contract to safeguard the environment
Economic regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Local community has agreement with stakeholders about some type of schedule of payment to community members √ Local government set up specific dates for sharing ecotourism benefits with local community. √ Local government set up some rules for outsider investors to share their ecotourism benefits with local community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> X There is no agreement about any type of schedule of payment to community members X Local government do not set up specific dates for sharing ecotourism benefits with local community. X Local government does not set up some rules for outsider investors to share their ecotourism benefits with local community.

Source: Author; based on Weaver, 2000 and Dombroski, 2005

2.3.4. Ecotourism and pro-poor tourism

Exploring the principles of ecotourism naturally leads to consideration of whether ecotourism can be promoted as pro-poor tourism (PPT). Pro-poor tourism is not viewed as a well-defined product or a subdivision of tourism, but rather as an approach to tourism development and management (Ashley, Roe, & Goodwin, 2001). Ashley et al. (2001) reported that “PPT overlaps with ecotourism, but they are not synonymous with each other” (p. 3). The following section will explore the concept of PPT and its similarities with ecotourism, as well as the differences between the two.

Any type of tourism that produces net benefits for the poor is defined as pro-poor tourism (Ashley, 2002). Net benefits are viewed as benefits that are, by definition, far greater than the costs related to the economic, environmental, social, and cultural aspects of tourism (Ashley et al., 2001). Pro-poor tourism has emerged from within the viewpoint that tourism can play a crucial role in bringing about pro-poor economic growth, a type of prosperity that provides the poor with unrestricted opportunities in terms of dynamic participation and considerable payback from a specific economic activity (PPT Partnership, 2004 as cited in Chok, Macbeth, & Warren, 2007).

The main focus of PPT is to place emphasis directly on tourism destinations in the South and make circumstances of poverty the central focus of the practice of developing tourism. Poor people and poverty are put into the PPT framework and from there, tourism is seen as one component of the household, local, and national economies and environments that impinge on them (Ashley et al., 2001; Chok et al., 2007).

The key principles of PPT acknowledge that poverty is not one-dimensional in terms of a lack of income generation from tourism, but is multi-dimensional (Chok et al., 2007). The core principles are illustrated in Table 2.6, below.

Table 2.6

Major Principles of Pro-Poor Tourism

PPT principles	
Participation	Poor people must participate in tourism decisions if their livelihood priorities are to be reflected in the way tourism is developed.
A holistic livelihood approach	Recognition of the range of livelihood concerns of the poor (economic, social, and environmental; short-term and long-term). A narrow focus on cash or jobs is inadequate.
Balanced approach	Diverse actions needed, from micro to macro level. Linkages with wider tourism systems are crucial. Complementary products and sectors (for example, transport and marketing) need to support pro-poor initiatives.
Wide approach	Pro-poor principles apply to any tourism segment, though strategies may vary between them (for example, between mass tourism and wildlife tourism).
Distribution	Promoting PPT requires some analysis of the distribution of both benefits and costs—and how to influence them.
Flexibility	Blueprint approaches are unlikely to maximise benefits to the poor. The pace or scale of development may need to be adapted; appropriate strategies and positive impact will take time to develop; situations are widely divergent.
Commercial realism	PPT strategies have to work within the constraints of commercial viability.
Cross-disciplinary learning	As much is untested, learning from experience is essential. PPT also needs to draw on lessons from poverty analysis, environmental management, good governance and small enterprise development.

Source: Chok et al., 2007, p. 37

Ecotourism places a focus on preserving the environment and cultural base, but it lacks a full consideration of its impact on the livelihoods of the local poor (Ashley, 2000 as cited in Chok et al., 2007). Benefits may be provided for local residents, but the biggest concern for ecotourism promoters is the environment. Significantly, the preservation approach focuses on the need for providing local incentives, especially in cash, in order to protect the environment and support activities which provide alternatives to unsustainable practices (Ashley et al., 2001). Conversely, PPT's primary goal is to distribute net benefits to the poor, with environmental concerns being just one part of the overall strategy that contributes to this goal (Ashley et al., 1999 as cited in Chok et

al., 2007). In other words, “What ecotourism uses as means, pro-poor tourism viewed as the end” (Chok et al., 2007, p. 39).

2.3.5. Summary

This Chapter’s intention was to discuss the concepts of sustainable development and ecotourism. The first part explored the emergence of sustainable development and its diverse definitions and scope. The ecological, economic, and social dimensions were also reviewed. The second part examined the emergence of ecotourism and a range of its definitions. The potential positive and negative consequences of ecotourism were critically assessed, and various strategies for sustaining ecotourism have been highlighted and empowerment and regulation have been viewed as the most promising strategies, along with the possible connections between ecotourism and pro-poor tourism. It found that PPT overlaps with ecotourism, but they are not synonymous with each other.

In the following chapter, we turn to look at development and tourism issues in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS).

CHAPTER THREE: Development and tourism in Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS)

3.1. Introduction

The GMS is an area of great social, cultural, political, and biological diversity, which consists of five countries and one province. These are Lao PDR, Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar, Thailand, and Yunnan Province in Southwest China (see Figure 3.1).

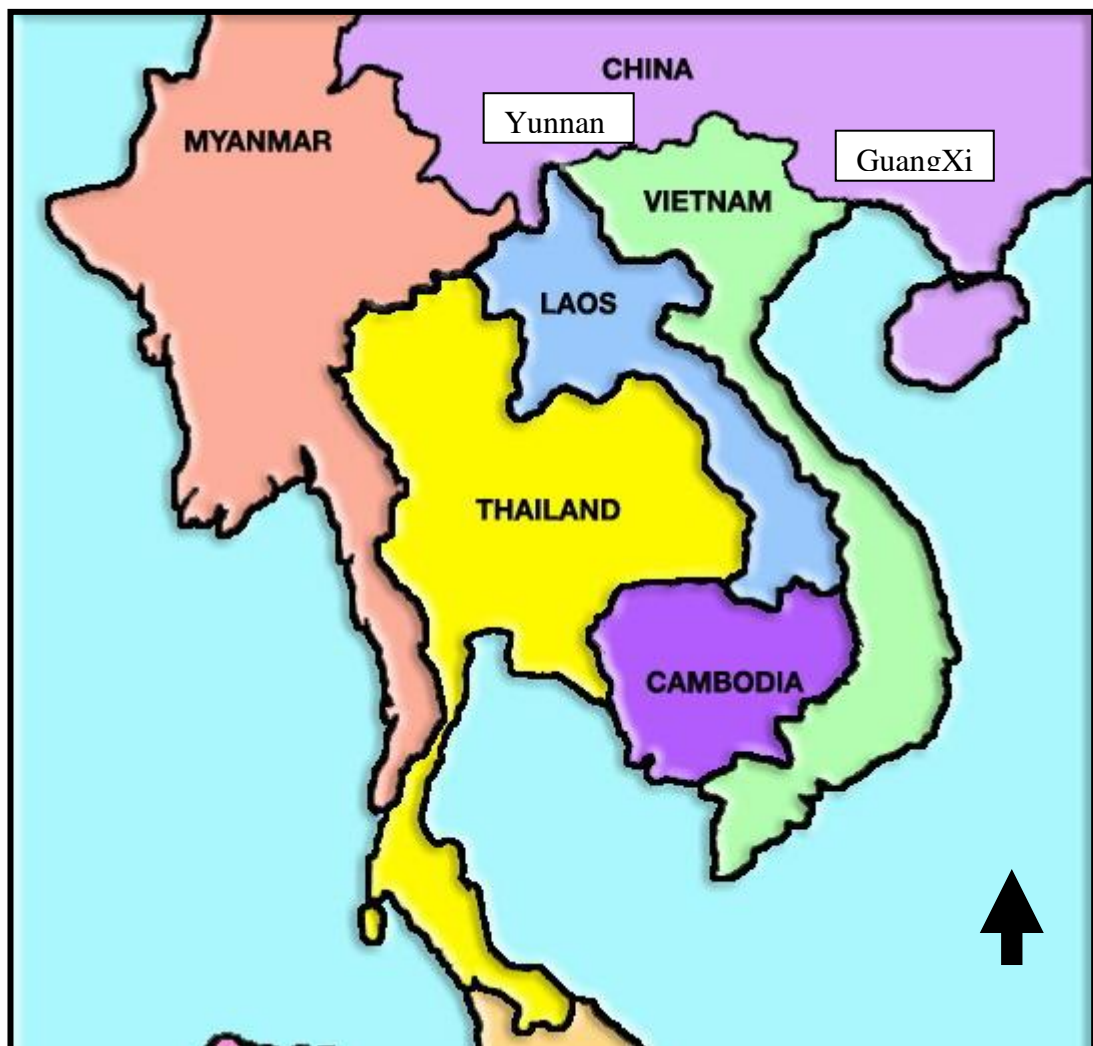


Figure 3.1 Map showing the Greater Mekong Subregion. Source: <http://www.gms-ain.org/UploadFiles/2007326171524767.jpg>

These countries share a general connection through the Mekong River, which is the longest river in Southeast Asia and is ranked as the tenth longest river in the world (Yu, 2003). The area of the GMS covers almost 2.5 million square kilometres and is located in the northern part of Southeast Asia. The total population is about 302.91 million

people, and is made up of more than 70 ethnic and linguistic groups (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2005). More than 180 million of these people in the GMS earn a per capita income of between \$260 to \$2000, and live in remote areas where life is directly reliant on the quality and quantity of natural resources such as water and soil, and natural ecosystems such as forests, rivers, coastal zones, wetlands, and marine ecosystems (ADB, 2005).

The GMS possesses an abundance of a wide variety of natural resources including forests, fisheries, water, minerals, energy, wildlife, and also a rich cultural heritage. These resources have played a crucial role in supporting the district's social and economic development (Yu, 2003). However, the region is still ranked as one of the most underprivileged areas in Asia. Specifically, it accounts for 61.88 million, or 20.43%, of the population living below the poverty line. Moreover, many parts of the Subregion continue to lack access to basic health and education services, and most of the poor are generally established in rural and remote mountain areas as shown by demographics contained in the GMS Atlas of the Environment in 2004 listed in Table 3.1 (ADB, 2005).

Table 3.1

GMS Demographic Characteristics

Country	Population ¹	% Annual Average growth	% Rural Population	Per Capita GNP (\$)	Population Below Poverty Line	Share of GMS Population Below Poverty Line
Cambodia	13.3	2.5	84.1	260	4.78	7.72
China: -Guangxi -Yunnan	48.89 42.40	0.7 1.2	68.3 81.7	N/A N/A	4.86 1.36	7.86 2.20
Lao PDR	5.35	2.5	80	260	1.85	2.99
Myanmar	51.14	2.3	72.3	N/A	11.71	18.92
Thailand	62.91	0.8	78.4	2000	8.12	13.12
Vietnam	78.92	1.6	76	390	29.2	47.18
Total	302.91	0.7-2.5	77.26	260-2000	61.88	100

Source: GMS Atlas of the Environment, 2004 as cited in ADB, 2005

¹ Based on Greater Mekong Subregion Atlas of the Environment, 2004. All numbers are for year 2001, except for Yunnan Province which is for year 2000.

Regarding development in the GMS, there has been a substantial change in terms of the social and economic aspects over the last three decades. Currently, the GMS is considered to be one of the world's fast growing regions (ADB 2002, 2005, 2007). However, there is an overwhelming discrepancy in rates of development found in GMS member countries.

This chapter will begin with a discussion of the pattern and strength of development in the GMS region as a whole. Next, the constraints of development will be highlighted, followed by a report on the current high hopes held for development in the GMS. Then, the idea of tourism development in the GMS will be explored with special consideration given to regional ecotourism, followed by Lao ecotourism in particular.

3.2. The pattern and strength of development in the GMS

The Mekong countries have acknowledged that regional cooperation plays an essential role in speeding up their economic and social development. Countries in the region have worked hard to overcome past divisions and join their economies through relatively liberal trade and investment laws (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 1996). One concrete example is that of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, who reached consensus to set up a medium-term development scheme encompassing a shared commitment to:

- Foster economic and social development, and ensure the benefits of growth are broadly distributed, including strategies for poverty alleviation with a focus on rural development, women's needs, and the reduction of inequality between regions, as well as the provision of upgraded services in education, health, and family planning.
- Pursue the transition to a market-based economy, implying a broad agenda of structural reform in the macroeconomic, financial, legal, and institutional areas.
- Provide an incentive framework for expansion of the private sector, encouragement of local savings, and attraction of foreign investment.
- Establish systems of good governance and strengthen the conditions for political stability and social cohesion.

- Attach high priority to developing human resources and building local capacities at all levels and in all areas affected by the transition process in the public and private sectors.
- Strengthen the non-government sector and public participation, including opportunity for women.
- Build up physical infrastructure, complementing the development of urban and industrial areas with investment in rural infrastructure.
- Manage and preserve natural resources and the environment with special attention to the sustainable management of forests, water and marine resources, and prevention of flood and drought.
- Integrate into the regional and world economies. (OECD, 1996, pp. 3-4)

Many different development projects can be facilitated under this agreement because of its breadth.

Additionally, the development movement has shown an astonishing dynamism in terms of the existing economic and political atmosphere in the GMS. This is demonstrated through the diverse directions development projects are taking and the existence of donor-supported activities, the opening up of trade, and ongoing development in major corridors as well as human resources (King, 2002). Furthermore, economic integration has been prioritised in the approach to development in the GMS over the last decade. Significantly, there are many international programmes assisting the enhancement of the GMS' economic co-operation, such as the GMS Program of the ADB, the ASEAN-Mekong Basin Development Co-operation (ASEAN-MBDC), the Forum for the Comprehensive Development of Indochina, the Working Group on Economic Co-operation (MITI) Initiative, The Mekong River Commission (MRC), and sub-activities of the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) and other multi-national organisations. Many of these initiatives focus on tourism.

The most significant development in the region is that supported by the ADB. The GMS Economic Cooperation Program was founded in 1992 and has played a crucial role in sustaining economic cooperation in the region (King, 2002). The ADB has provided loans of US\$770 million and mobilised US\$230 million in co-financing for 10 priority

GMS projects (ADB, 2002 as cited in Yu, 2003) There are nine priority sectors of cooperative activities which comprise transport, telecommunications, energy, tourism, human resources development, environment, agriculture, trade, and investment (Krongkaew, 2004; Than, 1997). Thus, Yu (2003) argued that the programme has played a significant role in contributing to the establishment of commercial relations among GMS member countries regarding cross-border trade, energy development, investment, transport, water resource usages, and labour mobility.

Additionally, on 29 November, 2001 all the countries in the GMS agreed to implement a new tactic over the next 10 years, with the aim of strengthening regional cooperation. Under this new GMS strategy, the six member countries acknowledged that enabling environmental policies and effective infrastructure connections will play a crucial role in facilitating cross-border trade, investment, tourism, and other forms of economic cooperation, and in developing human resources skills and competencies (Maekawa, 2001 as cited in Sofield, 2008).

The overall goal of regional cooperation is to work toward the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with the intent of achieving considerable poverty reduction and the sustainable development of biodiversity and other natural resources (Maekawa, 2001 as cited in Sofield, 2008). Boosting connectivity, enlarging competition, and generating a greater sense of community among the GMS countries are the general strategies for subregional cooperation (Sofield, 2008).

The development of infrastructure is the most important issue needing immediate implementation in order to progress toward these goals. This includes the sharing of the resource base and promoting the flow of goods and people (ADB, as 2002 cited in Leksahundilok, 2004). Along these lines, the six member countries prioritised five road upgrading schemes to begin boosting the region's economy (Than, 1997). Even so, it has been argued by the ADB that removing trade barriers should be given priority, and improving infrastructure should be of secondary importance. It stated, "Infrastructure improvements are a necessary but not sufficient condition for expanding subregion trade and investment. Tariff and non-tariff issues must also addressed, including pricing policies, foreign exchange controls, procurement policies, and the role of state enterprises trading monopolies" (ADB, 1993 as cited in Than, 1997, p. 44).

3.3. Constraints to development in GMS

Cooperation between the countries of the Mekong Region has been established for a long time. For example, the Mekong Committee (MC) was formed in 1957 (See Table 3.2) to facilitate collaboration between four countries in the Lower Basin, namely Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia. In 1970, the Indicative Basin Plan was formed, and in 1978 the Interim Mekong Committee (IMC) was established by three of the countries—Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam; however, this alliance did not achieve much because of the war, political upheaval, and economic re-orientation taking place in the region. As a consequence, the development planned by such cooperative efforts could not be achieved.

Likewise, the mission for economic integration among countries in the GMS will not be easy to achieve, on the grounds that each country has many differences in their political, economic, accounting, and legal systems (Than, 1997). They are all operating at different levels of development as well, and these diverse levels of development and political instability in GMS members may indeed slow down the process of development in some of the countries (Krongkaew, 2004).

In the political context, it is significant that Thailand is a democratic country that has never experienced socialist or communist rule, although its democracy is fairly fragile. Meanwhile, China, Vietnam, and Lao PDR are still communist countries and are ruled by one party. Myanmar continues to struggle with moving away from a dictatorship regime to become democratic society (Than, 1997), while Cambodia is a country that has experienced much in recent times—civil violence, social unrest, and political fighting. Its ongoing internal problems include political instability, as well as insufficient capital, infrastructure, and human resources (Krongkaew, 2004). Overall, these political systems can hinder development because of the markedly different political directions GMS countries find themselves pursuing.

It is noteworthy that in the midst of all this political divergence, there is cooperation between the former socialist economies and the capitalist economies, especially Thailand, a capitalist state whose economy is already market-oriented. Conversely, the other member countries have experienced socialist regimes that have attempted to step away from the state-controlled approach to development and move toward a market approach. As a consequence, there is an urgent need to develop the experience and

expertise of the socialist countries when it comes to implementing a modern, capitalistic development methodology (Krongkaew, 2004).

Than (1997) further pointed out that territorial disputes among the GMS countries are another obstacle to economic collaboration. For instance, there are current territorial disputes between Thailand and Myanmar, Vietnam and Cambodia, Vietnam and China, and Thailand and Cambodia that sometimes cause armed clashes and create conflict. As a consequence, there are limitations placed on trade, transport, and the movement of the people in these border areas. Apart from that, existing legal and accounting systems are thought to hinder progress as well, because they are unreliable and can make foreign investment difficult. As a consequence, the confidence of overseas investors is decreased (Than, 1997). In addition, a lack of access to the sea has proved to be an issue, in that it has slowed the process of development in some parts of the GMS. This is especially the case for Yunnan, which is located inland in the south-western corner of China, far away from the more economically prosperous coastal areas and Lao PDR. Yunnan receives only limited benefits from GMS collaboration, even though it has undergone economic reform and has opened up to global economies (Krongkaew, 2004).

Leksakundilok (2004) reported that the 1997 economic crisis in Asia was another hindrance to development and had a significant impact on the economy of the Mekong countries as a whole. In addition, he found the many decades of war in the region continue to have an effect on the long-term development of the economy because all the GMS countries still lack high quality educational services, productive skills, and basic infrastructure.

3.4. High hopes for development from Subregion cooperation in GMS

Taking a global picture of development in the GMS, it has been clear that developmental strategies make regional cooperation a priority in order to generate both bilateral and multilateral benefits among GMS countries. One significant note is the speech from Mr Kimimasa Tarumize, the president of Asian Development Bank, who spoke during the Second Conference on Subregion Economic Cooperation on 30-31 August, 1993, expressing high hopes for economic co-operation. He stated there would

be future constraints with respect Subregional cooperation in the area but that, nonetheless, success was expected. He looked forward to considerable gains in trade, investment, finance, technology, infrastructure, natural, human resource development, and environmental protection. Greater employment and income generating opportunities were to be supplied as a result of these collaborative economic growth efforts. Eventually, this would significantly play an important role in improving the living standards of the population in the region (ADB, 1993). Likewise, King (2002) also reported that the Mekong summit, held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, highlighted the strong focus by GMS country members on the development of economic corridors. Their programme of economic cooperation comprised ten major road and infrastructure projects. The potential development of economic corridors is projected to play a key role in integrating the GMS countries economically and physically. Particularly, the Asian Development Bank (2001) believes that when the major transport infrastructure projects are completed, the benefits will be enormous. The advantages they have listed include increased trade and investment in all GMS countries and reduced poverty, as new roads would lead to increased development in the various regions and remote areas and create more efficient economic links to coastal cities and ports.

3.5. Tourism in the Greater Mekong Subregion

Member countries have acknowledged the tourism sector's potential for making concrete contributions to socio-economic development in the region, and for this reason all member countries have agreed to make tourism one of their 11 flagship programs in the 10-year strategic framework of the Great Mekong Subregion Cooperation Program (ADB, 2002; Khanal & Babar, 2007). Significantly, it is believed that tourism programs will play a crucial role in helping achieve the goals of poverty reduction and sustainable development for all participating countries (ADB, 2002).

There are excellent tourism products to be developed in the GMS on the grounds that there is a wealth of diverse natural resources and a mixture of cultural heritages. There is the Mekong River streaming through all the GMS countries, starting from Yunnan and meandering down to Cambodia and Vietnam; from it stretch five main watersheds: Mekong, Ayeyarwardy, Salween, Chao Phraya, and Red River. Apart from that, there is also a wide range of ecosystems in the GMS, from alpine and temperate environs in the

mountainous areas of the north, to the rich marine ecosystems of coastal Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, and Guangxi. Additionally, the GMS is identified as an area that maintains the highest proportion of subtropical and tropical rainforest protecting the earth; four natural sites in the GMS have already been named on the UNESCO World Natural Heritage list, while many others have been nominated.

In addition, the GMS is rich in cultural and historical assets. Especially interesting is the site of a strong Bronze Age civilization in northern Vietnam dating back to the 1st century AD, as well as features of Hindu and Buddhist influences which prospered in the 16th and 17th centuries AD. Currently, there are 10 GMS sites registered on UNESCO's list of World Cultural Heritage sites, including the immense Angkor Wat complex in Cambodia.

Due to the diversity of natural, cultural, and historical resources, the GMS attracted 16.4 million international tourists in 2004. This created \$14.8 billion in total receipts and \$2.3 billion in government revenue. Approximately 3.8 million jobs were derived from the increase in international visitors in 2004. Altogether, this represents significant economic benefit for the whole region. It is also expected that in the near future, the number of international tourists will increase threefold, indicating an estimated 46-52 million visitors will have come to the GMS by 2015 from countries such as Japan, China, members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Korea, the United States, France, Germany, Australia, and India.

Because of this rapid increase in the number of international tourists travelling to the GMS, it has become the fastest growing tourism destination in the world. According to World Tourism Statistics, the number of international tourist arrivals are expected to grow to approximately 1 billion people by 2010, and to 1.6 billion by 2020 (ADB, 2005).

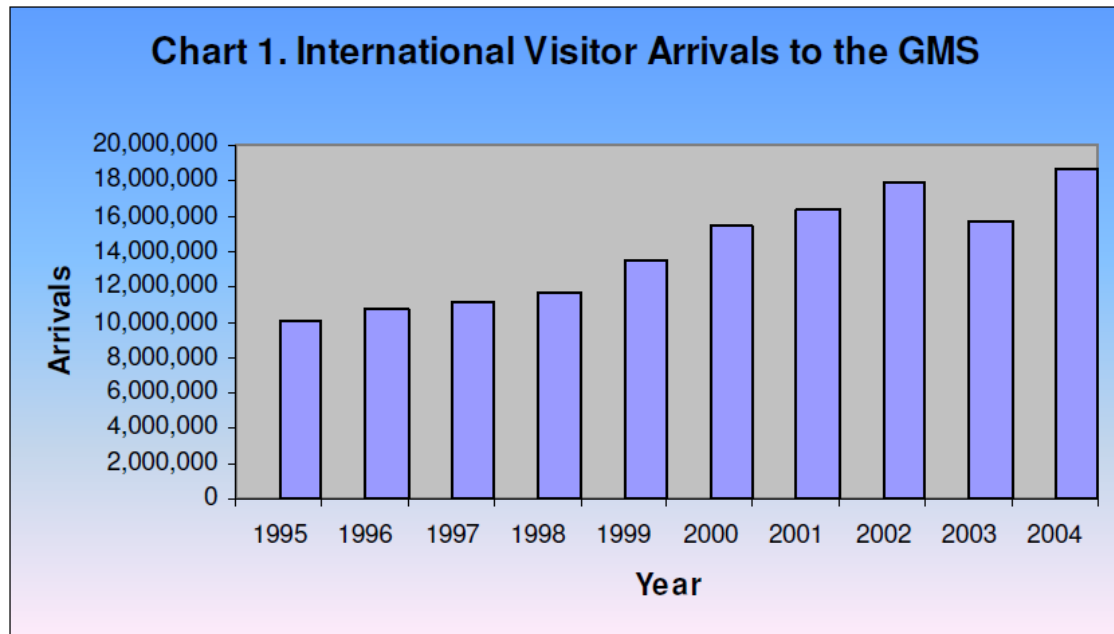


Figure 3.2. Number of international visitors to the Greater Mekong Subregion from 1995-2004. Source: ADB, 2005

Figure 3.2 illustrates the overall growth trend in the number of international visitor arrivals in the GMS between 1995 and 2004. It clearly indicates that the yearly average increase in international arrivals was slightly above 8% between 1995 and 2002, excluding border pass travellers. The overall annual average growth rate was approximately 7% between 1995 and 2004 (ADB, 2005). Additionally, the tourism sector is viewed as a significant vehicle for poverty reduction and broad-based economic growth because it brings foreign exchange and increased employment (ADB, 2002).

It is clear there is a cooperative approach to tourism development in the GMS. Specifically, all the GMS countries agreed to establish a working group in 1993 which comprised senior representatives of national tourism organisations (NTO). Their primary mission has been to promote the GMS as a single tourism destination, expand tourism-related infrastructure, improve human resources in the tourism sector, improve the standards of management of natural and cultural resources to increase conservation and tourism, and promote community-based tourism projects (ADB, 2002, 2005).

In addition, since 1996 there has been a yearly meeting which is officially called ‘The Mekong Tourism Forum’. This meeting is financially supported by the ADB and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

(UNESCAP). The main mission of the meeting is to encourage the private sector to get involved in the development of subregional tourism, as well as to build up dialogue between the private and public sectors (ADB, 2005).

Furthermore, after the Asian economic crisis in 1997 tourism became the fastest growing industry and it has since been promoted as an important sector of the economy, capable of generating government revenue for economic recovery in all GMS countries (Leksakundilok, 2004). Significantly, each country launched a tourism promotion year. For instance, *Amazing Thailand Years* were held from 1998 to 2000; and *Visit Laos Year* took place in 1999-2000, the *Visit Indochina Year* in 2001, the *Visit Myanmar Year* in 1996, and the *Visit Bangkok Year* in 2002. As a consequence, the number of tourists in the GMS increased significantly, up to a nearly 7.5% rise in 2001. Specifically, over the last decade the growth of tourist numbers has averaged 26% per year in Cambodia, 25% in Lao PDR, and 20% in Vietnam (ADB, 2002).

More importantly, the GMS countries decided to ask for financial assistance from the ADB in order to support their 10-year GMS strategic framework. This strategy is believed to have played a significant role in increasing and distributing the benefits of subregional tourism, as well as establishing more environmentally and socially accountable behaviour. The strategic framework document clearly stated the objective of tourism co-operation as:

To develop and promote the Mekong as a single destination, offering a diversity of good quality and high-yielding subregional products that help to distribute the benefits of tourism more widely; add to the tourism development efforts of each GMS country; and contribute to poverty reduction, gender equality and empowerment of women, and sustainable development, while minimizing any adverse impacts. (ADB, 2007)

Thus, tourism is viewed as a driving force for socio-economic development and poverty reduction. This can be clearly seen at Phnom Penh in Cambodia where, in November 2002, the leaders of all six countries decided to implement the GMS medium-term cooperation framework. In this plan, the tourism sector was positioned as a key player in socio-economic development and poverty reduction, as a motivator for the conservation of natural assets and cultural heritage, and as a sign of peace in the GMS (ADB, 2006).

As a result of the GMS countries' request, the ADB has played a key role in providing funds for the Mekong Tourism Development Project (MTDP). This project is a 3-year plan to facilitate regional tourism which has four major components for each country. These include tourism-related infrastructure improvement; Pro-Poor, community-based tourism development; subregional cooperation for sustainable tourism; and implementation assistance, human resource development, and institutional strengthening (Sofield, 2008). The ADB provided funding to both private and public developers who subsequently are creating ventures that are economically and environmentally sustainable. In short, the goal of GMS countries to build tourism in the region cooperatively has thus far been well supported by the ADB.

3.6. The development of tourism and ecotourism in Lao PDR

The tourism industry has expanded quickly and is considered to have played a significant role in bringing foreign currency into Lao PDR since the country first opened its doors to international tourists in 1989 (Hall & Ringer 2000; Harrison & Schipani, 2007; Yamauchi & Lee, 1999). The pattern most commonly observed in the past was that of small groups of tourists on package tours, but recently the Lao government has relaxed visa requirements in order to expedite the expansion of the tourism sector (Yumauchi & Lee, 1999). Since their 1995 move to prioritise the tourism sector as a crucial tool for economic development (Leksakundilok, 2004; Schipani & Marris 2002), tourism revenue has grown rapidly and become a key export industry for Laos. In 1997, it was estimated that the tourism sector had the potential to generate US\$73.3 million in revenue, making it the third largest source of export revenue at that time (Yamauchi & Lee, 1999 as cited in Leksakundilok, 2004).

Then came the Second National Tourism Development Plan, which was published in 1998. It placed emphasis on the importance of four types of tourism, namely conventional sightseers, special interest tourists, cross-border tourists, and domestic tourists. These categories were viewed as a main source of bringing in foreign currency exchange and the local benefits which eventually contributed to environmental conservation (Harrison & Schipani, 2007). The following year, tourism was reported as Lao PDR's most significant export by the National Tourism Marketing Plan in 1999.

Harrison and Schipani (2007) further highlighted that in the beginning of the 21st century, tourism was viewed as an essential tool for poverty reduction with primary focus on small-scale tourism. The government's National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy indicated that:

Tourism is now a major contributor to national income (7%-9% of GDP) and employment. Tourism is a labour intensive industry and contributes to poverty reduction. The Lao PDR's tourism strategy favours pro-poor, community-based tourism development, the enhancement of specific tourism-related infrastructure improvements, and sub-regional tourism co-operation. (Lao PDR, 2004 as cited in Harrison & Schipani, 2007, p. 200)

Clearly, tourism is currently a driving force for Lao PDR's economic growth and a critical factor in its national socio-economic development. The tourism industry is now ranked as the Lao PDR's second highest foreign exchange producer, estimated at US\$233.3 million and accounting for approximately 8% of the GDP (Gujadhur, Linpone & Panyanouvong, 2008). The number of tourists has increased dramatically, from 14,400 in 1990 to 1.62 million in 2007. It is expected that the number of tourists will reach 2.3 million by 2010, and that at the same time the overall revenue from tourism will increase by approximately 10% per annum, reaching US\$250-300 million (Lao National Tourism Administration [LNTA], 2007). The positive impact of this tourism growth has been declared in the National Growth and Poverty Eradication Strategy, the Sixth National Socio-Economic Development Plan (2006-2010), and the Lao PDR's National Tourism Strategy (2006-2020) (Gujadhur, Linpone & Panyanouvong, 2008).

Of these tourists, 82% originated from nearby countries in the region, and many stayed only a night or two (Hall, 2007). Only 5.5% came from the Americas, while a mere 1% were from Europe (LNTA, 2006); however, tourists from these countries tend to spend significantly more during their time in Laos. To build on this advantage, the government has prioritised certain countries as prime targets for investing in tourism promotion, namely Japan, Australia, Thailand, France, the UK, Germany, the US, and Canada (LNTA, 2006).

The Lao National Tourism Strategy, which is the main policy-level document supporting the development of the tourism sector, was endorsed by the Lao government.

The strategy puts a strong focus on the development of tourism products and services based on the country's natural, cultural, and historic sites. Presently, there are 1,493 official tourist attractions, including 849 ecological tourist sites, 435 cultural sites and 209 historical sites (LNTA, 2007). Additionally, nature-based tourism products such as ecological tours, adventure tours, and community-based expeditions have improved significantly. The National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan 2004-2010 has been supported by LNTA and this has set guidelines for ecotourism development throughout the country, with a focus on the potential within the 20 existing NPAs (Gujadhur, Linpone & Panyanouvong, 2008).

3.6.1. Ecotourism in Lao PDR

The latest tourism development strategy to be put forward is that of ecotourism (Harrison & Schipani, 2007). Laos is one of the countries that has chosen to prioritise ecotourism as an appropriate tool for poverty reduction in the nation. According to Harrison and Schipani (2007), the Lao government has been using tourism as a tool for national development over recent decades. The role of ecotourism, pro-poor tourism, and community-based tourism is now the primary focus of a poverty-alleviation strategy, on the grounds that these types of tourism play a crucial role in providing foreign exchange and employment. In addition, multilateral and bilateral donors also maintain strong support for the Lao government's position. Many infrastructure projects aimed at facilitating tourism transport, for instance, have been financed by the ADB, and The Netherlands Development Agency (SNV) is another key player in this donor-assisted, community based tourism (DACBT).

Ecotourism, which in Lao is primarily focused in National Biodiversity Conservation Areas (NBCA) along with their nearby communities, initially emerged in this country in 1999 (Leksakundilok, 2004). Since then, ecotourism development has become a Lao government priority. The central government encourages provincial governments to promote NPAs as tourism destinations by supplying practical guidance and using the Nam Ha project as a model of success (The PAD Partnership, 2003). Additionally, Yamauchi and Lee (1999, as cited in Leksakundilok, 2004) reported that the Lao government has composed broad guidelines for ecotourism development with special

focus on capacity management, sustainable use of resources, respect for cultural and natural diversity, and the involvement of local residents in decision making.

Currently, there are several NPA ecotourism projects either up and running or about to commence, namely Xe Pian, Phou Khao Khouay, Phou Hin Poun, Phu Xang He, and Nam Ha. However, Nam Ha is considered to be the ideal, as it is a thriving ecotourism initiative set up in cooperation with the local community and yielding benefits for local conservation efforts (The PAD Partnership, 2003). Likewise, Nam Ha is arguably an excellent model of ecotourism development in Laos on the grounds that the cash income is distributed among villagers, while the negative impact is minimal (Lyttleton & Allock, 2002 as cited in Leksakundilok, 2004). It is interesting to point out that the Lao National Tourism Authority (LNTA) recently received the '2007 Ecotourism Spotlight Award' from Ron Mader's Planeta.com in recognition of their outstanding ability to promote ecotourism (LNTA, 2007).

3.6.2. The problems of tourism development in Lao PDR

Along with the great benefits described above, Lao PDR has experienced many difficulties in the 1990s regarding tourism development, as well as economic development (Than & Tan, 1997 as cited in Hall & Ringer, 2000). The most obvious problem faced by tourism expansion efforts is the lack of qualified and trained staff. Approximately 480 tourist guides and 1300 qualified hotel staff were required by 2000 to fully serve the tourism industry (Hall, 1997). Because of the ongoing inability to meet this demand, the standard of service is still low and this is considered to be a deterrent for tourism growth (Hall, 1997; Hall & Ringer, 2000).

Another problem is the lack of accommodation, especially a shortage of hotels of international standard. More precisely, The LNTA estimated the demand for accommodation would increase from the total of about 2,560 rooms in 1994 to 3,260 rooms in 1996 and 6,760 rooms in 2000 (Asia Travel Trade, 1995 cited in Hall, 1997).

The last, and perhaps most significant, problem is the less-than-adequate international and domestic air transportation network, as well as outdated communications (Asian Travel Trade, 1993 as cited in Hall, 1997; Hall & Ringer, 2000). In response to this problem, the Lao government is constructing roads with the cooperation of China,

Cambodia, Vietnam, and Thailand in order to form a regional network connecting every country in the region. They are attempting to improve all major transportation infrastructure with the assistance from the UNDP, the ADB , and other private sector organisations (Asia Travel Trade, 1995 as cited in Hall, 1997).

3.7. Summary

This chapter has described the development issues experienced by the GMS countries with special focus on the patterns, strengths, and limitations to tourism development in the region. Many subregional collaborations within the GMS have been set up in order to work towards the 2015 Millennium Development Goals of poverty reduction and the sustainable development of biodiversity and other natural resources. The ADB is a key supporter of development in GMS countries and supports pro-poor and sustainable development through a variety of programmes and projects. The aims are to strengthen connections in the GMS by integrating the markets of the member countries (including the private sector) and to increase the role of minorities such as women and some ethnic groups. Some achievements are a gradual improvement in the way the natural resources are being managed and protected so that their value is maintained, both for their integrity and their role in ecotourism. This is occurring alongside gradual growth in the economic development of the region.

After presenting an overview of tourism development in the GMS, the chapter turned to look at the development of tourism and ecotourism in Laos as well as some difficulties encountered during the course of this development. In particular, this overview demonstrated the strong connection between tourism, development, and their impact on the degree of inequality and poverty within GMS countries. Whilst Laos is one of the least developed countries in the GMS and its developments are very recent, other countries, such as Thailand and Vietnam, with stronger economic, political, and legal systems have made more progress in supporting tourism and ecotourism efforts. The result has been a great diversity in the rates of development progress throughout the GMS region.

The following chapter contains a discussion about the methodology used in this research. This includes descriptions of the fieldwork preparation, methods, practical issues, and limitations of the research as well as the process of data analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR: Methodology

4.1. Introduction

Thus far, the concepts of ecotourism and sustainable development, along with their relationship, have been explored in depth, and development and tourism in the GMS has been discussed. Moving forward, this chapter will focus intently on fieldwork preparation, as well as the methods and methodological considerations that were applied in this research. Semi-structured interviews, private walks and observations, informal and formal interviews, a questionnaire survey, and secondary sources have been utilised in the process of gathering data, with the main aim of examining the impact of Xe Pian ecotourism on local people's livelihoods. An additional goal of the project was to obtain recommendations for making Xe Pian ecotourism sustainable so that it can be promoted as a means for achieving poverty reduction and will serve to provide a sustainable strategy for local development.

This chapter will begin with a description of the processes involved in fieldwork preparation and selecting a research assistant, a discussion of ethical issues, and an explanation of the process required for entering the study site. The process of data collection will also be covered, as well as the rationale for the type of methods adopted, followed by specific considerations addressed in undertaking the fieldwork with special focus on practical issues and the constraints of the research. Lastly, a detailed account of the process of data analysis will be provided.

4.1.1. Fieldwork Preparation

Fieldwork preparation plays an essential role in supporting the smooth, effective, and efficient collection of data. It provides a clear direction and a deeper understanding about the process of the research: what to do, where to go, and whom to choose as helpers, guides, or companions. Ultimately, it leads to achieving a positive outcome in research (Leslie & Storey, 2003). This idea has been strongly supported by Nash (2000) and Robson, Willis, and Elmhirst (1997); they claim that having sufficient and appropriate preparation for fieldwork is not only a crucial element in facilitating a positive experience in the field, but also a major influence on the ultimate success of a research project.

Initially, in preparing for this research project, I read the pertinent current literature and wrote a broad literature review, drawing on a variety of relevant academic sources to thoroughly explore my topic. Doing so helped me develop an inclusive understanding of my own area of study. Additionally, this work assisted me with the construction of appropriate research questions and helped me decide how to best analyse my data at a later stage. This type of preparation was strongly supported by Gray (2004), who argued that reviewing writings by many other investigators and theorists plays a vital part in the formulation of an inclusive perception of the research topic at hand, as well as helping to construct research questions, choose a methodology, and facilitate data analysis. Likewise, Hart (1998) asserted that “The aim of doing research is to demonstrate skills in library searching; to show command of the subject area and understanding of the problem; to justify the research topic, design and methodology” (p. 13).

I also sought direction from the secondary materials I received from the director of the Xe Pian Ecotourism Project and other key people involved in Lao ecotourism, which were sent to me in New Zealand, with the aim of gaining a solid base of general information about my research site. Studying these materials allowed me to become familiar with the development history and the broad social context of my target village and its people before my visit there (a more detailed discussion of this factor is provided below).

Additionally, I engaged in cautious consideration of all relevant ethical issues before travelling to the research site. This included completing an in-house ethics document provided by Massey University’s Development Studies Department and submitting it to my supervisors (Regina Scheyvens and Glenn Banks), as well as discussing ethical issues with them. I also read through the information and completed the screening questionnaire supplied by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. By following this procedure, I endeavoured to conduct my research in a moral and principled way (further detail provided below).

In addition to preparatory work for my research, I drew up a Working Plan before leaving for my research site to carry out my fieldwork (see Appendix 1). This comprised a timeframe, the activities involved, and the places data would be collected. Many different types of questions and interview methods were developed for use with specific participants. All possible contributors were also identified at this stage.

Apart from the primary preparatory work described above, I also contacted all important information sources, such as those engaged in Lao ecotourism activities and projects, via Email or telephone so as to get additional general information about ecotourism activity and development in different parts of Laos. These efforts resulted in extra information, including reports, management plans, statistics, and action plans. All key stakeholders in Xe Pian were contacted in order to provide them with an initial brief notification concerning the purpose of my research and to request that they provide some assistance once I arrived at the research site.

4.1.2. Selecting a Research Assistant

For this research, a local individual was hired as a research assistant (RA) and as such, they played a crucial role in guiding and facilitating the research process. As Leslie and Storey (2003, p. 131) claimed, “Research Assistants can be an enormous asset during fieldwork”. Specifically, an RA not only provides support with the nuts and bolts of data gathering and the interviewing process, but also helps with the cultural aspects of fieldwork. For example, an RA can assist analysts in gaining access to research participants and by facilitating their acceptance into the target community (Ellen, 1984). These ideas—on access and acceptance—are supported by Berg (2007). Berg commented that in gaining access to the study site, the assistance of someone from the local community is a necessary formality and that such a person can also serve as a guide/facilitator and promote the credibility of the researcher. Devereux and Hodinott (1992) further stated that the right RA can serve as an ambassador-at-large, directing and screening the research process so that the researcher is enabled to make the most of the fieldwork data. For these reasons, as part of my search for the right RA, I followed the approach of Leslie and Storey (2003) whereby I endeavoured to assess the candidate according to set criteria. In particular, he or she needed to have a good education; good communication skills; be perceptive, intelligent, and possess innate patience; be dependable; have a sense of humour; and have the capacity to get along with the survey population.

Eventually, Mr BangOn Khamechant was the only one to be suggested by Phouvong Phoummarchant (Head of tourism office at Phatoumphone District). He seemed to be the most suitable person according to the set of criteria. Firstly, he was familiar with the

social and cultural conditions of my study site because he was a local man who was born in the nearby village and grew up there although he had moved away to live in DonDeang village. Secondly, he was well-known, accepted and respected by locals. He also had experience in terms of coordinating work because he had worked with many projects which emerged in the community. Thirdly, he also had a good qualifications in communication skills. Lastly, he was an easy-going, cheerful, active, and hard working man. He liked learning and exploring any challenges.

4.1.3. Ethical Issues

“Every society has its own history, tradition and ethical codes, and you have a responsibility to behave in manner that respects the culture as well as the physical environments you encounter” (Nash, 2000, p. 146).

Ethical issues are the most critical aspect of conducting a research project and as such, need to be considered watchfully at every stage, from the inception of a research project through the write up of its results (Scheyvens, Nowak & Scheyvens, 2003). Significantly, Madge (1997, as cited in Scheyvens, Nowak & Scheyvens, p. 139) asserted that ‘ethical research should not only “do no harm”, but also have potential “to do good”, to involve “empowerment”’.

In this section, I will go into deeper detail about the ethical considerations I mentioned to earlier in this chapter. The ethical issues which surfaced before and during the data collection process will be highlighted first, followed by ethical considerations surrounding the production of data and data analysis practices.

Prior going into the field to commence my research, I read through Massey University Human Ethics Committee’s document on ethical practices and completed their screening questionnaire. Based on my responses to their questions, my project was categorized as posing a low ethical risk (see Appendix 2), on the grounds that it was judged to possess only minimal potential for harming research participants. In addition, I, as the researcher, had also acknowledged issues of confidentiality and informed consent, and participated in an in-house meeting of academic staff at the School of People, Environment and Planning for a formal internal ethics review of my research process. This comprised myself, two of my supervisors (Dr Regina Scheyvens and Dr

Blenn Banks), and Dr Nawal El-Gack. In the in-house meeting, a discussion of relevant ethical issues took place. I was asked many questions to which I responded fully, and was provided with much valuable information in terms of ethical principles for conducting my research. Specifically, participants at the meeting narrated their own experiences so as to supply me with important knowledge to guide me in acting ethically at all times.

Thus, each time I conducted an interview in the field, I started by briefly introducing myself to all participants and offering information about my background, my work, and my current status as a student. Additionally, I provided an Information Sheet (see Appendix 3), translated into the Lao language, to participants to ensure they had a clear understanding of the title and the purpose of my research. Before asking the first interview question, I also carefully explained all participant rights as established by the Massey University Ethics Committee (2009). These state that a research participant has a basic right to:

- Decline to answer any particular question
- Withdraw from the study at any time
- Ask any questions 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
- Be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded
- Receive a copy of the research findings

By doing this, I was able to help participants feel comfortable about taking part in my research.

Importantly, a consent form was signed by most participants before commencing their interview (see Photo 4.1). However, some participants, including those who were illiterate, preferred to make a verbal agreement instead because this was more comfortable for them, and because they were somewhat afraid of the consequences of ‘signing’ something in writing that they did not understand. In addition, I asked for permission to take notes, use the tape recorder, and take photos prior to conducting any form of data collection.



Photo 4.1: A consent form being signed by a local participant during data collection in Kiet Ngong village, Lao PDR.

In addition to all these ethical considerations, I also acknowledged existing power inequalities between myself as the researcher and the participants, in terms of differences in opportunities for accessing a better education, and in social and financial status. In order to avoid mishandling such issues, I made a strong effort to carry out the interviews in a respectful, polite, responsive, frank, sensitive, and well-behaved way. I also wore simple, clean clothes when interviewing village participants, and more formal clothing when interviewing government and project staff (see Photo 4.2).



Photo 4.2: The researcher is showing respect before beginning a formal interview with Mr Peaum, the 65-year-old head of the local religious group at Kiet Ngong, Lao PDR.

After I finished all individual interviews, group interviews, and the rest of the research process, I organized to keep all the raw data, information, findings, and tape recordings

in a secure place. Then I recorded information in my diary, translated it, and created a summary in a professional way.

I also reminded all the participants that all the information I had collected was to be used only for academic purposes, and would not be used to bring any harm to the participants. Their names have not been used unless permission was given. Significantly, I also provided them with the names and contact details of my supervisors in case they had further enquiries about my research.

4.1.4. The Process to Enter to the Study Site

As described above, almost all the key stakeholders involved in tourism activities and potential contributors to my research were contacted prior to the start of my research. I was advised by Mr Air, a provincial tourism staff person, that Permission Letters for conducting research must be officially submitted to the LNTA, the Champasack Province Tourism Office, the Xe Pian National Protected Area Office, and the Xe Pian Ecotourism Project in order to notify them all of the purpose of my research and ask for their cooperation. This process was supported by Nash (2000); he highly recommended obtaining official research permits for conducting data collection in the field, remarking that this is a vital step, especially if the fieldwork is to be carried out in a National Park or other environmentally sensitive area, in order to avoid awkward situations in the field.

On the first day of my arrival in Champasack Province, I was welcomed formally and warmly by the head of the Champasack Provincial Tourism Office. Permission was then given to me to carry out my research at the provincial level. Fortunately, I had the opportunity to introduce myself to the Chief Technical Advisor for Xe Pian Ecotourism Project, Mr Paul Eshoo, on the same day. Mr Eshoo not only provided strong support for my project by allowing me to make photocopies of documents related to my research, he also played a significant role in assisting my introduction to Mr Phouvong Phommachant, head of the Tourism Office at the district level. Mr Phouvong welcomed me officially and played an important part in helping me find an appropriate RA who met the criteria I had selected.

After this, my research assistant led me to my study site, Kiet Ngong village, and introduced me to Mr Heaung Phuommachant, the head of Kiet Ngong village. The village head then welcomed me in a friendly way by providing lunch and accommodation for me (Photo 4.3), and allowing me to conduct my research in Kiet Ngong village.



Photo 4.3: The head of Kiet Ngong village welcoming the researcher and research assistant in a friendly atmosphere by providing lunch on the first day of their arrival

4.2. Data Collection Process

The upcoming sections will present three main issues in more depth, namely the research approach, the data collection process, and the associated methodologies. First and foremost, the research approach will be highlighted, including an outline of both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

4.2.1. Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods

For this research project, I decided to use a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Bryman and Burgess (1999) state that qualitative research is characterised by three factors: (a) the search for an understanding of the world through the behaviour patterns and thoughts of people, (b) the pursuit of information from natural situations, not experimental ones, and (c) the development of new theories instead of testing existing ones. Furthermore, as Smith (1994) pointed out, qualitative methods are more subjective than the objective gathering of statistical data.

It is important that qualitative techniques be used to explore people's perspectives of the world around them so as to gain a better understanding of their behaviour (Henn, Weinstein & Foard, 2006). Similarly, Brockington and Sullivan (2003) reported that the most obvious way to take advantage of the benefits of qualitative methodology is to explore the meaning of a people's world. These positive aspects of the qualitative approach to data collection and analysis proved it to be an appropriate match for my research project, and thus I chose to adopt it as part of my research methodology. Qualitative research is essential if we are to understand what makes the world meaningful for people, because it offers powerful techniques which can reveal a great deal on such topics (Brockington & Sullivan). Thus, I mainly used the qualitative approach to collect my data, although I collected a little quantitative data via the questionnaire. The main reason for combining qualitative and quantitative techniques is that the quantitative approach is considered to be a powerful aide to development studies research. This is because precise and accurate results are provided, as well as a picture of broad patterns and phenomena and evidence to construct policy formulation (Overton & Diermen, 2003). Additionally, the combination of the two can bring a positive outcome to research (Brocking & Sullivan, 2003).

Therefore, I decided this project would include both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

4.2.2. Data Collection Techniques

4.2.2.1. Semi-Structured Interviews

A semi-structured interview is viewed as a simple, inoffensive verbal interchange where one person—usually the interviewer—endeavours to draw information from another person by asking open-ended questions (Longhurst, 2003). Gray (2004) and Chambers (1997) assert that semi-structured interviews are non-standardised and often used in qualitative research. Even though semi-structured interviews involve the preparation of a list of topics and questions, the interviewer may diverge from the script when new or important matters (such as new or unintended information or research directions) arise. Participants' responses are documented (hand written notes are taken) or possibly recorded. The list of questions are usually predetermined and prepared prior to the interview, but the interviewer should allow the interviews to be conversational so that participants are free to explore other issues as they arise (Longhurst, 2003). Due to the characteristics of the semi-structured interview, Gray (2004) reports that it is very useful and valuable tool to collect information on people's thoughts, feelings, and dream patterns that support their lifestyles.

In acknowledgment of the quality of data gained from semi-structured interviews, the semi-structured interview process was adopted for this research. It was viewed as the most appropriate approach for conducting interviews with local residents, because I needed to learn how ecotourism had impacted on their lives. Prior to interviewing, I carefully formed a semi-structured questionnaire and outline in collaboration with my two supervisors. A list of all the important issues that I wanted to explore was set up in prioritised order, which not only played a crucial role in saving time for me and the participants, but also helped me keep on track with my research questions (see Appendix 4).

Both closed- and open-ended questions were adopted in my research. Careful consideration of both the positives and the negatives associated with each were explored before devising the research questions. Ruane (2005) and Nardi (2003) differentiated between the two types, commenting that closed-ended questions provide a set of predetermined or fixed response alternatives for the respondents to choose from when answering the questions, whereas open-ended questions provide the freedom for respondents to devise their own unique answers to the questions posed. They also

compared advantages and disadvantages between two. Closed-ended questions are not only easy to answer, which leads to reduced time requirements, but also cut down on non-responsiveness as well. Since closed-ended questions are easy to answer, respondents may circle responses on an instrument that do not really ring true and the real differences or similarities in respondents' answers can be misrepresented or obscured. Open-ended questions, on the other hand, do not put words in respondents' mouths. They offer respondents the chance to say what they think and describe what they do. Open-ended questions also help the researcher to discover unexpected things. At the same time, open-ended questions are harder to code and require respondents to work harder in the sense that they have to write something in order to provide an answer. As a consequence, this type suffers from a lower response rate (Nardi, 2003; Ruane, 2005).

By weighing both the advantages and the disadvantages of using closed- and open-ended questions, I ultimately decided to use more open-ended questions, since my research mainly emphasised gaining understanding of the unique viewpoints of local residents. It was strongly suggested by Ruane (2005) that open-ended questions are suitable for obtaining respondents' unique perspectives on an issue or topic, especially concerning their hopes for the future and changes that they have encountered in the past.

4.2.2.2. Informal Interview

The informal interview is viewed as going beyond the unstructured interview, with informal conversation that makes it the most open-ended technique for interviewing (Patton, 2002). The informal interview was implemented in this research design specifically for collecting data from typical local residents who are really free, in order to gain a wide range of information from various groups of people and obtain a deeper understanding of the social context of the target community. Ruane (2005) asserted that one of the most essential instruments for gaining high levels of understanding about social issues is the informal interview. He remarked that "Much understanding is gained by listening to the noises, sounds, talk, and conversations of the field" (Ruane, p. 169). Ruane also stated the information gained from informal interviews can be supplemented by intensive, in-depth interviews with key members of the field at a later stage.

This informal interview technique was practiced in a relaxed atmosphere that resembled a dialogue between acquaintances. If such an interview is carried out by an equal—as was intended in this case—then the interview is considered to be “non-violent, in that there is no symbolic violence in the dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewees that would bring about a significant distortion of the responses” (Kumar, 1993,). For the purposes of this study, the informal interview technique that was used was less structured and consisted of nine simple questions (see Appendix 5) which were believed appropriate for those local residents who had only a short period of time in which to be interviewed. More specifically, those who declined to take part in a semi-structured interview due to limitations on their time, but were agreeable and willing to have a chat were interviewed using this technique. Thus, the informal interview was implemented to accommodate participants’ requirements.

However, along with the strengths offered by informal interviewing, including flexibility, spontaneity, responsiveness to individual differences, and situation changes, the weaknesses were also acknowledged, especially in terms of time consumption. It often took a greater amount of time to collect systematic information using this technique, on the grounds that several conversations were needed with various local people before a consistent set of questions has been posed to each targeted participant in the setting (Patton, 2002).

4.2.2.3. Formal Interview

The formal interview technique has also been adopted for use in my research. It was primarily used with government staff at the LNTA, and at the provincial, district, and village levels, as well as with staff at the Xe Pian ecotourism project. Formal interviews were conducted in this research project for two main reasons. First and foremost, it would have been inappropriate to have an informal interview with high-ranking people. Secondly, each targeted key participant had limitations on their time.

This formal interview was constructed along the lines of the standardized open-ended interview (see Appendix 6), mainly because this type of interviewing ensures consistency across interviewees. This is due to the fact that interviewees were asked the same questions—the same stimuli were introduced—in the same way and in the same

order, which encompassed standard probes and also transitions (Patton, 2002). For instance:

Probes:

- How long have you been working in this district?
- What did you do?
- What changes, good or bad, have you seen from Xe Pian ecotourism since you started working here, in terms of environmental, economic, cultural, and social aspects?
- What are the main strengths and weakness of Xe Pian ecotouism?
- What improvements would you like to see in the future?

Transition: Okay, tell me more about...

By adopting the standardized open-ended interview, variation among interviewers can be minimised when a number of different interviews must be evaluated. Also, the interview is highly focused so that interviewee time is used efficiently and analysis is facilitated by making responses easy to find and compare (Patton, 2002).

However, the weakness of using the standardized open-ended interview approach has also been taken into account for this project. Specifically, this approach did not permit the researcher to pursue topics or issues that were not anticipated when the interview questions were written. Additionally, using standardized interview techniques reduced the extent to which individual differences and circumstances could be queried (Patton, 2002).

In short, many different factors, described above, led me to use informal and formal interview techniques for this project. Both are viewed as important tools for collecting data on the grounds that they provide in-depth and detailed information on a particular topic and provide participants with opportunities to expand their ideas, explain their views, and identify what they regard as the crucial factors (Gray, 2004; Denscombe, 2007).

4.2.2.4. Private Walks and Observations

Private walks and observations were also used in this research (see Appendix 7). One obvious benefit of engaging in private walks is that it assisted me in becoming familiar with the location of the study site and the available facilities and provided me with a chance to informally mix with the local residents. During private walks I had a chance to talk with the local people about my research. I had an opportunity to chat with them about the visible and invisible impacts of Xe Pian ecotourism and to observe their daily lives along with the many local improvements that have been carried out (See Photo 4.4).



Photo 4.4: The researcher building relationships with local people in Kiet Ngong village by engaging in a private walk and joining them for coffee at a local coffee shop

However, I bore in mind that scientific observation is not simply a question of looking at something and then noting down the facts. Observation allows the researcher to study input from all the five senses—sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste—of the participants. It also allows the researcher to objectively note the attitudes and behaviour of people (Gray, 2004). This approach, in a methodological sense, is totally supported by Adler and Adler (1998, as cited in Flick, 2002):

Beside the competencies of speaking and listening which are used in interviews, observation is another everyday skill which is methodologically systematized and applied in qualitative research. Not only visual perception,

but also those based on hearing, feeling, and smelling are integrated. (Flick, 2002, p. 135)

Thus, in recognition of the positive aspects of private walks and observation, these research tools were adopted for use in my research.

4.2.2.5. Questionnaire Survey

The survey questionnaire is a practical means of collecting information about survey participants' norms, behaviours, and attitudes. Additionally, by administering a standard set of questions to any sample of individuals, attitudinal information is also obtainable (McLafferty, 2003). For this research, a questionnaire survey was adopted and constructed using five open-ended questions which mainly targeted foreign visitors as participants (see Appendix 8). Several advantages of using open-ended questions have been noted, including the fact that respondents are not constrained in answering questions this way. Participants can express in their own words the fullest possible range of attitudes, preferences, and emotions, whereas fixed-response questions offer only a limited set of pre-determined expressions (McLafferty, 2003). In this research, the primary purpose of the questionnaire was to generate comprehensive information about the attitudes, behaviours, perceptions, and awareness of tourists concerning Xe Pian ecotourism activities, as well as their own activities and experiences. All survey questions were intentionally kept simple, and complex phrases and long words that might lead to confusion among respondents with different primary languages were avoided (McLafferty, 2003). This basic approach seemed to be appropriate for tourists who stayed for just short periods of time. In reality, it was difficult to conduct an interview with them; thus, provision of questionnaire survey sheet seems to be the most effective alternative way to collect data from them.

4.2.2.6. Secondary Data Sources

Secondary data defines information that has already been gathered for a specific purpose (as primary data) but is later made available, often in another format, for other researchers to utilize, quite often for different purposes (White, 2003). Secondary data

sources include published government statistics, local and regional government reports, local newspaper and magazine archives, university research, NGO and other organisational reports, local government maps, and company reports (Overton & Diermen, 2003). In particular, secondary data sources often play a major role in helping to write a literature review. Early examination of obtainable data can be instrumental in the formulation of a research project and in facilitating the identification of any gaps in understanding. Secondary data can also supply the rationale for picking from various available options in the areas, groups, or case studies targeted for analysis (White, 2003).

In this research project, secondary sources of information were used to supplement both the literature review and the data collected using the primary qualitative methods described above. This included official documents such written reports from the LNTA, Champasack Province, Phatoumphone District, and the Xe Pian ecotourism project, along with books, articles in newspapers and Internet websites.

4.3. Fieldwork in Practice

4.3.1. Practical Issues

This section will contain a discussion of the difficulties that became apparent during fieldwork, how these were handled by the researcher, and lessons learnt in the field.

The amount of time involved in asking for permission to conduct research was the most obvious difficulty experienced in my fieldwork, because I had to go to different places to submit my request and apply for permit documents and official letters from a variety of offices, including the Department of English (my place of work), the Faculty of Letters, the National University, the LNTA, Champasack Province, Phatoumphone District, Kiet Ngong village, and the Xe Pian National Protected Area, as well as the Xe Pian ecotourism project. This process took approximately 8 days.

As Lao PDR is my home country, I am well acquainted with these conditions and understand fully the slow process of obtaining permission. The bureaucratic requirements for gaining permission to carry out research in this field are often very time consuming, involving several different levels of government as well as the Xe Pian National Protected Area. It was important for the officials to take an adequate amount of time to consider my research, because there is still a good deal of political concern in

Laos which exercises significant influence over academic processes. Political officials consider the positives and negatives of each research project in order to ensure nothing is involved that could bring harm to their country. In order to deal with this issue, I went to meet with the officials and hand in my documents in person instead of passing them through a secretary or receptionist, which could have caused the process to take an even longer period of time.

Another practical issue involved the local residents' reactions to being asked open-ended questions as part of the data collection process. During the interviews, I found that local participants lacked the confidence to express their own ideas in response to the open-ended questions I had prepared. This appeared to be because they had to create a narrative about the changes they had experienced in terms of environmental, economic, social, and cultural aspects, identifying and expressing their own perceptions. In contrast, most of them seemed to prefer closed-ended questions because they did not have to come up with responses that were very long. Even more significantly, these participants seemed to be very happy and pleased to mention the positive impact of the change they had experienced, but appeared to feel embarrassed when mentioning any negative changes, or even the limitations to the positive changes, that had occurred. Additionally, some older local residents also had difficulties with understanding questions because they were illiterate and had never attended school.

To address the matter of a lack of confidence, I started chatting with participants prior their interviews, casually asking about their daily lives, families, and hobbies. When these individuals felt more comfortable, relaxed, secure, and confident, I would then transition into asking them my research questions. In addition, I attempted to encourage participants by conducting mutual, two-way communication with them. Specifically, I not only told them briefly about my own story of how I had come to study in New Zealand, but I also tried to get involved in their stories as well, by asking them more questions to encourage them to keep speaking out more.

I should also acknowledge that building trusting relationships and rapport with local residents plays an essential part in smoothing the way for carrying out interviews, as was suggested by my supervisor, Dr Regina Scheyvens. Each day, in the early morning, I went to the coffee shop where local people of different ages gathered to drink coffee and chat about a variety of current issues emerging in their village that day. This helped

me to build relationships with the locals and as a consequence, I got to know more people. This was very helpful for me in facilitating a smooth data collection process.

At this point I learned that building trust and rapport in a relationship was the most important element in data collection, because it could make local participants feel more respected and secure in my presence. As a result, my research assistant and I were able to gather rich information from them.

Another obstacle to the interviews was the influence of the head of the Kiet Ngong village. On the first day of data collection, the head of village offered me his assistance to lead me to each household so I could engage in the interviews. At first I agreed to have him with me and my assistant because it made it very easy to access the villagers. However, I soon found out the participants I was interviewing were uncomfortable speaking out in front of the village head because they were afraid of the consequences, especially if they mentioned any negative factors or results. I noticed that when I interviewed a woman who ran a homestay in the village, she first looked at the head of the village before she spoke.

That was when I realised that the quality of my data was being compromised because it was not totally coming from the true perspective of the local people. In order to tackle this issue, I had to politely ask the head of the village to leave. I explained respectfully to him that his presence was unfortunately creating a negative influence on the quality of my data, and after that he agreed to stop accompanying me. From this event, I learned the cooperation between a researcher and the head of a community plays a significant role in creating easy access to local residents; however, it is necessary to consider if this cooperation could negatively influence the quality of data as well.

In addition to the difficulties described above, several problems also emerged in the process of doing my research, including changes in prearranged plans, the length of time I was able to stay at the data collection field site, questions about the methodology of the data collection, and changes to the research questions included in the semi-structured interviews.

Initially, I had planned to stay at the study site for a month in order to collect data, but I ended up staying for only 13 days due to financial constraints. The main factor causing the financial limitation was that I had to pay not only for my own food and

accommodation, but for those of the research assistant as well. This was because even though he was born nearby, he now lived in another village which was far away from the study site.

Secondly, a group discussion was previously planned in order for the heads of each group I had identified to share their various points of view about the impact of Xe Pian ecotourism and their recommendations on how to sustain ecotourism. However, it was not feasible to do this because they each had different time periods when their schedules were free. Thus, I interviewed them individually instead of using a group discussion.

The third important change I made during my fieldwork was to adjust the research questions in the semi-structured interview. It became apparent that some of the questions were not appropriate to ask the local people, as their reactions revealed the topics to be unpleasant for them. I observed during the interviews that almost all of them felt too embarrassed to respond—and some would even not respond—to certain questions, namely, “*What food do you eat in a normal day? (Before and after the ecotourism project began)*” and “*How many meals do you eat per day? (Before and after the ecotourism project began)*”. At this point in the interview, participants would just respond “normal” or “the same”. Therefore, I realised asking things of this nature was useless and I avoided using such research questions.

To deal with the problems described above, I always kept in mind that making working plans in advance is an ideal strategy for the data collection process. However, a significant amount of flexibility is needed during data collection in order to manage unforeseen difficulties. It is true that determination is also needed, and that this is a relevant and necessary quality for a researcher to possess. Scheyvens and Nowak supported this position in their 2003 writings about the role of personal issues in fieldwork, and went on further to suggest that fieldwork is an adventure, and thus, it is normal to have hardships and discomfort during fieldwork. Researchers cannot foresee all the challenges they will face and so the best thing to do is be prepared for the adventure as thoroughly as is conceivably possible. Preparation should include consideration of a wide array of personal issues. “We should take advantage of the opportunities to learn that fall outside our data gathering activities, even when these involve a degree of discomfort” (Scheyvens & Nowak, 2003, p. 107). Thus, being

prepared to face difficulties and draw on personal flexibility when encountering unpredicted obstacles is very useful in conducting research.

From this lesson, I have learned that every plan should not be fixed in stone, because there are always potential risks. Therefore, flexibility should be employed, and careful preparation be made, as this is important to overcoming any difficulties. In addition, passion is required because a researcher can expect to confront physical difficulties, disturbance, and uncertainty. If one is not entirely excited by one's research, it may be unfeasible to see it through these testing moments.

4.4. Limitations of the Research

This research was established at a particular point in time and place, where Kiet Ngong village was viewed as a tourist destination and well supported by the government and nongovernmental bodies, as well as local residents. The research examination is restricted to living memory, as the current circumstances in Kiet Ngong were compared with previous circumstances by key ecotourism stakeholders and the local residents. The local situation could easily change in the future, and could even end up worse than it was in the past. Thus, the most significant research limitation of this project is that it is merely a snapshot of a specific time (considered to be low season). Therefore, the collected data only reflects the impacts of ecotourism development at a specific time.

Another limitation was the amount of time consumed in securing permission to carry out the fieldwork on site. Actually, conducting research in Lao PDR requires permission at all levels of officialdom in order to clarify the purpose and show the importance of the research, from the ministry level to provincial, district, and village levels. This factor forced me to change my working plan as well as the scope of the research, because it not only significantly increased the financial cost for conducting the research, but also led to a shortage of time which precluded gaining input, such as the attitudes and recommendations of other local residents in nearby villages concerning ecotourism development in Kiet Ngong. Thus, the data set that was collected is not complete, since there was no opportunity to record others' views for corroboration with those of the Kiet Ngong residents.

Political issues created another research limitation because they had an effect on the quality of the data collected. To be more precise, both my research assistant and myself were warned by the central government, as well as local bodies, that any mention of politics had to be avoided in the research. In addition, the head of the village attempted to always keep his eye on us, and monitored every stage of the data collection. To some extent, local residents who took part in the research were thus not confident in their responses and appeared to feel they had to be careful with every word they shared. They seemed to use caution when they spoke, in order to avoid negative consequences to themselves, even though we had signed consent forms that stated the data would remain anonymous.

4.5. Analysis of the Data

The current literature includes plenty of articles concerning qualitative methodologies and how to make use of them (Denscombe, 2007). One of the most recognized and accepted processes for implementing qualitative analyses involves five basic steps:

- Preparation of the data
- Familiarity with the data
- Interpreting the data (developing codes, categories and concepts)
- Verifying the data
- Representing the data (Denscombe, 2007, p. 288).

From Gray (2004) and Dey (1993), there is an understanding that description plays a crucial role as the first step in placing the basic data analysis. However, good research needs to undertake uncomplicated but multifaceted explanations of any findings, and this is achieved by adopting methods that help in interpreting, understanding, and explaining the data. Throughout any analytical process, especially where a fresh approach is adopted or new data used, there will inevitably be new findings and increased understanding. Data, a key component of any analysis, can be broken down into constituent parts and connections can be made between the concepts which provide the basis for new descriptions (Dey, 1993; Gray, 2004). Thereafter, the main objective of an analytical process is to produce a comprehensible, logical, and well-founded account of what has been established. Furthermore, in accordance with a logical approach, findings are best presented sequentially, “as though analysis proceeded

straight through the various facets of description and classification to connecting concepts and producing an overall account” (Dey, 1993) (see Figure 4.1).



Figure 4.1. Qualitative analysis as a single sequential process. Source: Reproduced from Dey (1993, p. 53)

Dey (1993) asserts that the nexus of qualitative analysis is where the interconnected processes of description and classification meet. Further, the essence is in seeing how the applied concepts interconnect with each other (see Figure 4.2).

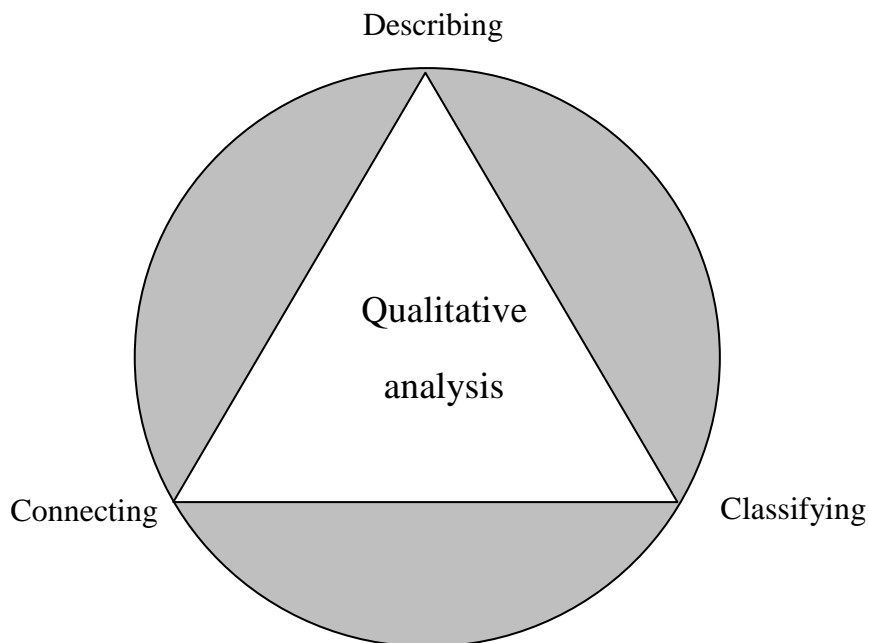


Figure 4.2. Qualitative analysis as a circular process. Source: Dey (1993), p. 31 and Gray (2004), p. 328

For this research, Dey’s (1993) structure for qualitative analysis will be utilised in the process of data analysis along with the basic steps from Denscombe’s (2007) approach. It is widely acknowledged that the first step in the process of qualitative analysis is to build a detailed and complete description of the phenomenon being contemplated. However, description also involves an indication of the context of any action, the

motivations of the agent (actor), and the process in which the action is implanted (Dey, 1993).

To accomplish these steps for this research project, the data was initially transcribed. This included all raw data which had been recorded by cassette tape recorder from formal and informal interviews, as well as raw information which had been noted down during the semi-structured interviews, on the survey questionnaire, and on the private walks and observations. This step was implemented straight away following every dialogue.

The second stage of qualitative analysis is classification. It has been argued by Dey (1993) that classification is seen as being a fundamental component of the analytical process for the reason that it places the conceptual foundation upon which a sound research superstructure is based. He conceded that without first classifying the data in some meaningful ways, it is hard to know what is being analysed. Furthermore, without adequate classification, it is impossible to make any meaningful comparisons between different bits of data (Dey, 1993). For this step of this research project, coding of the interview notes and the transcriptions was implemented, related key concepts were categorised by their main themes, and these were then documented as to their positive or negative aspects and the similarity or difference of each theme.

The last stage of the qualitative data analysis is establishing connections. Dey (1993) explained that this step includes developing and then examining the connections between the substantive variables. A common approach is to identify whether an association exists between different variations of a data item. Once data has being adequately classified, regularities, variations, and singularities become very apparent. Dey also advised that by studying identified correlations, a picture of the data can be constructed that is both clearer and, at the same time, more complex in that it provides more detail than first thought. In other words, by examining the connections between different variables, association can be identified (Dey, 1993). For this study, the substantive connections from different aspects of the research findings are built and examined by using the thematic headings.

4.6. Conclusion

The description of the process of fieldwork preparation, selecting a research assistant, ethical issues, and also the process of accessing the fieldwork site has been covered in a detail in this chapter. In addition, an account of the process of data collection in the field was given, as well as a rationale for each type of methodology that was employed. The chapter then presented the fieldwork in practice, with special emphasis on practical issues, the lessons learnt, and the constraints of the research.

This chapter reported that asking for permission to conduct this research at the various levels of both government and non-government bodies slowed down the process of data collection. Consequently, it impacted negatively on the work plan. Also, the lack of confidence and education of local participants led to indefinite information in some cases. Receiving assistance from the village head helped the researcher to access the local participants more easily, but his presence also sometimes undermined the quality of the data collected because people seemed inhibited answering questions in his presence. Making working plans in advance is an ideal approach, but it was found that flexibility is also needed during data collection in order to manage unpredicted difficulties. Lastly, this chapter described the process adopted for qualitative analysis of data. The results of the data collection and analysis will be presented in the remaining chapters of this thesis

CHAPTER FIVE: Results and Analysis

5.1. Introduction

This chapter examines the research findings with the aim of analysing whether or not ecotourism in Kiet Ngong village can be a feasible means for contributing to local sustainable development, in the light of issues previously outlined in the literature review chapter.

This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part presents the negative and positive environmental, economic, social, and cultural issues in relation to the Kiet Ngong villagers' livelihoods since the Xe Pian ecotourism project commenced. These findings are based on data collected from responses to semi-structured interviews with 15 people from Kiet Ngong households, including 7 women and 8 men. Five participants were selected from three different levels of socio-economic status: poor class, middle class and high class. The second part of the chapter discusses the main recommendations from various key stakeholders concerning Xe Pian ecotourism, followed by further analysis. These include suggestions on ways to sustain Xe Pian ecotourism so that it eventually can contribute to local sustainable development.

5.2. Environmental Impacts

5.2.1. Positive Environmental Impacts

First, we will consider responses to the open-ended research question concerning locals' perspectives on the most positive environmental changes to come from Xe Pian ecotourism. Thirteen out of 15 local respondents stated that after the Xe Pian ecotourism project began, there was a positive change in environmental protection because the government allocated land specifically for this purpose and restricted the area where residents are allowed to cut down trees for local use.

In addition, 7 of the participants stated that local guns had been collected with the purpose of protecting wildlife, with one participant stating that:

In the past we heard the sound of the *bang, bang, bang, bang* from the local guns everywhere at daytime and nighttime because they shot wildlife.

However, since their guns were collected by the government, the sound of *bang, bang, bang, bang* disappeared (Local resident, personal communication, May 10, 2009).

This idea is also revealed during a formal interview with Phouvong Phuommachant, head of the tourism office at Phatuomphone District:

Government has not only categorised the animals local people are allowed to hunt for their daily consumption and banned people from hunting endangered species, but also seized the guns of residents who reside inside the Xe Pian National Protected Area with the aim of wildlife conservation for tourism sustainability (P. Phoummachant, personal communication, April 29, 2009).

Seven out of 15 people also found their village to be cleaner due to training provided by the ecotourism project on how to dispose of household rubbish (see Figure 5.1).

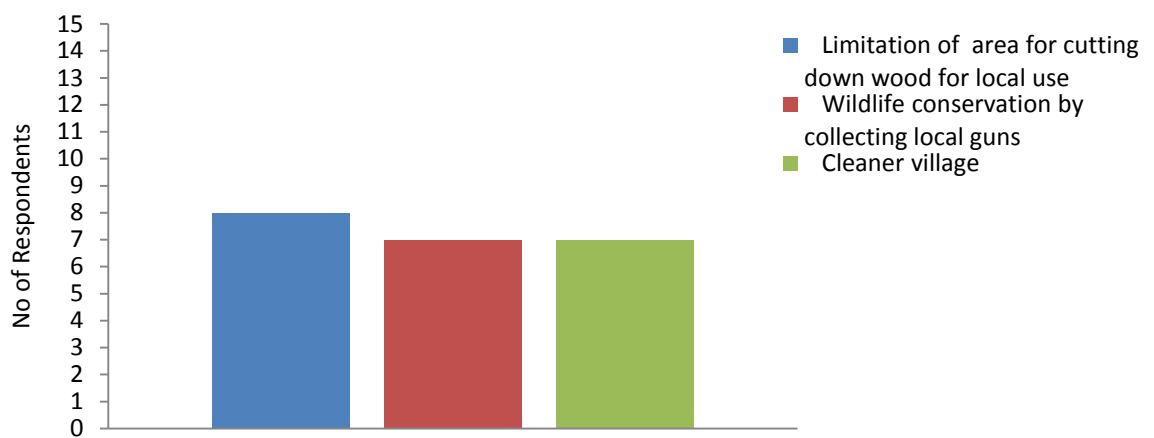


Figure 5.1 The number of local respondents perceiving positive environmental impact at the Xe Pian ecotourism site in Kiet Ngong Village, Lao PDR

Positive environmental practices have especially been evident in the case of waste disposal customs. Of the local villagers interviewed, 13 interviewees reported that before the ecotourism project began, they threw their household rubbish on the ground, in rivers, and in nearby bushes, while only 3 of them responded that they collected their household rubbish in bins and then got rid of it by burning it (see Figure 5.2).

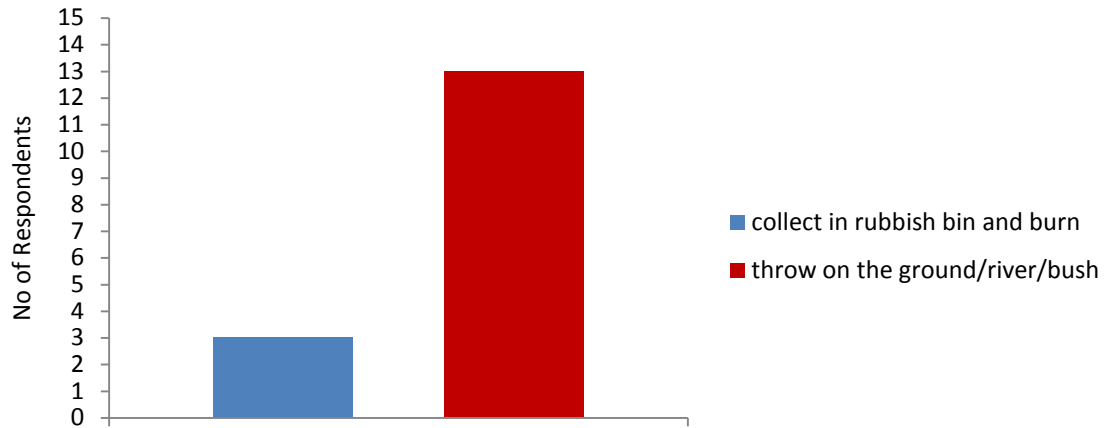


Figure 5.2 The number of local respondents disposing of their household rubbish in a variety of ways *before* the Xe Pian ecotourism project began in Kiet Ngong Village, Lao PDR

However, all of these local correspondents stated that since the ecotourism project started, they have collected their household rubbish in bins. Some choose to then throw the rubbish in the village disposal area while others still collect and burn their rubbish, but significantly, none of them throw it on the village grounds, in rivers, or in the nearby bush (see Figure 5.3).

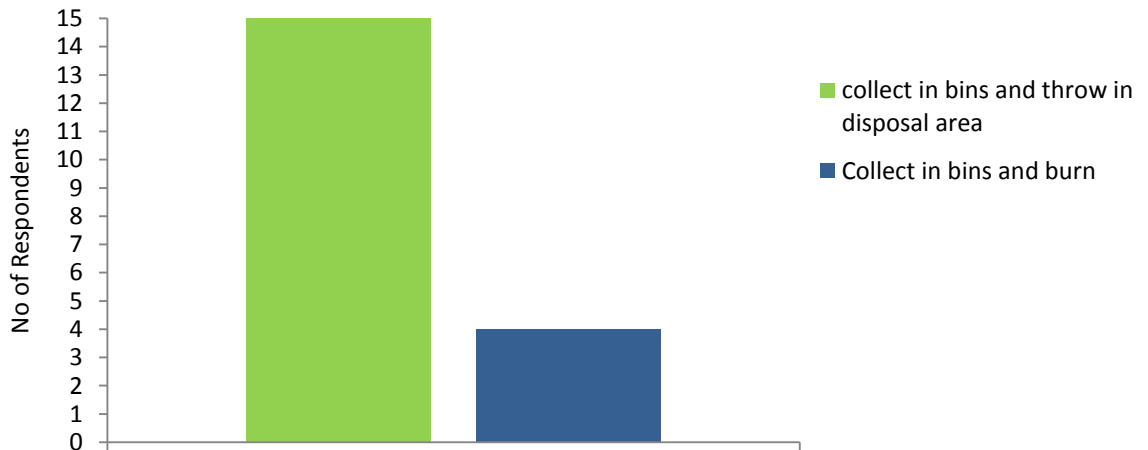


Figure 5.3 The number of local respondents disposing of their household rubbish in a variety of ways *after* the Xe Pian ecotourism project began in Kiet Ngong Village, Lao PDR

Interestingly, ecotourism itself has been identified as an effective vehicle for the transmission of better social local behaviours concerning household rubbish disposal practices. In particular, these ideal practices did not result from training alone, but were

spread through social means and came from the tourists themselves. For example, it was well noted that during their visits, tourists never intentionally dropped their rubbish on the village ground; instead, they collected it and put it in rubbish bins. As locals witnessed these positive actions, they began to absorb them and exhibit similar good behaviours themselves.

Next, we examine the results of the closed-ended question on firewood collection. The most significant point to note is that before the ecotourism project was initiated, 13 local respondents said they collected firewood in the Xe Pian National Protected Area three times or more per week, while four interviewees reported doing so one or two times per week. However, after Xe Pian ecotourism began, only seven local respondents collected firewood three times or more per week from the NPA, a drop of nearly half, and four of them said they collected firewood once or twice per week (see Figure 5.4):

The main reason for the decrease in the frequency of weekly firewood collection is that some local families who were ranked at middle class use electricity for their cooking. Thus, the number of people doing firewood collection has decreased (Head of the Kiet Ngong village, Personal Communication, August 11, 2009)

Overall, there was a decrease in the frequency of firewood collection after ecotourism commenced, indicating an increased awareness of the importance of forest protection on the part of the local population.

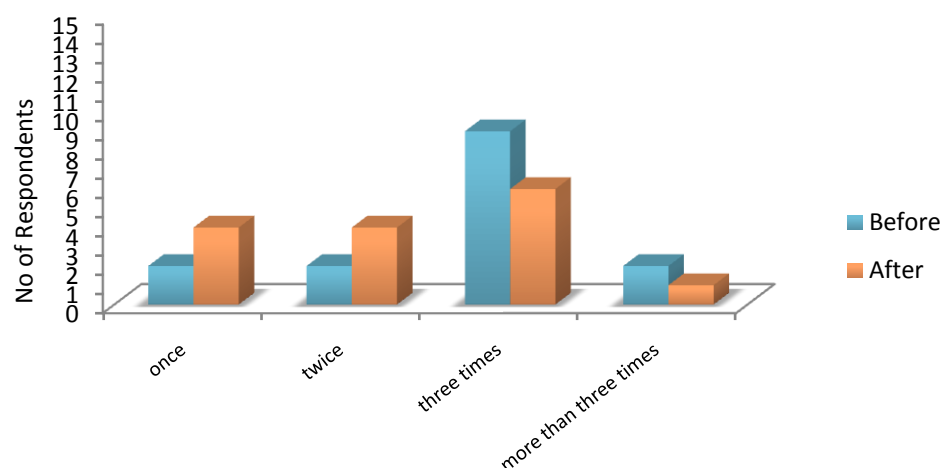


Figure 5.4 The number of local respondents collecting firewood at various weekly frequencies in the Xe Pian National Protected Area before and after ecotourism commenced.

In addition, the ecotourism project set up training in order to increase environmental awareness and promote wildlife conservation. Fourteen local respondents said during the interviews conducted for this study that they attended forest conservation training, followed by 11 people who reported attending both forest tour education and rubbish disposal training, and 5 people who reported receiving wildlife conservation training. This is also evident from the Summary 2004-2008 and Strategy for Economic and Social Development in Phatoumphone District. It showed that there was financial support from an ADB project and WWF project for conducting training in order to develop tourism in Phatoumphone District, which includes five villages:

- Training for raising awareness to protect nature, historic sites, and tradition, and for reducing air pollution and household rubbish disposal at the district level. There were 79 participants (18 females) from district offices and villages.
- Training for trekking guides at the village level at two districts: Phatoumphone and Sanasomboun Districts. There were 31 local people involved (5 females).
- Training on forest tours, restricting forest boundaries, and making forest paths for trekking at Bane Maisingsumphan in Sanasomboun District for one week. There were 9 participants (1 female).
- Training for trekking guides at tourism provincial offices for 45 days.
- Training for trekking guides at Ta Ong village for one week. There were 12 participants. An additional training at Palai village over one week had 13 participants, and at Kiet Ngong village a 15-day training had 12 participants (Phatoumphone Tourism Office, 2009).

While environmental training has been comprehensive, it is clear that women have had less access to training than men.

In support of the environmental protection programme, Mr Phouvong Phoummachant, head of the tourism office at the district level, also highlighted that:

The government has encouraged villagers who reside in the Xe Pian National Protected Area to follow regulations and laws strictly, with the aim of forest protection and wildlife conservation. The government has also appointed the heads of each village who select local guards to defend

against any illegal wood cutting and wildlife hunting (Phouvong Phoummachant, personal communication, April 29, 2009).

5.2.2. Negative Environmental Impacts

Apart from the positive environmental changes described above, some harmful environmental changes were also discovered during this study. Interviews with local residents revealed that 3 out of 15 believe the Xe Pian ecotourism project has resulted in some negative effects on the environment. Specifically, in response to the question “*Can you explain to me what kind of negative environmental changes you have seen in your surroundings since the project started?*”, all of the local respondents indicated that the clearing of native forest in the area in order to carry out improvements to the infrastructure necessary for supporting ecotourism in the village—including road expansion, electrical post setting, information tourism centre construction, and parking area construction—resulted in significant negative environmental impact (see Figure 5.5).

In addition, 6 out of 15 reported they noticed that the quantity of rubbish in the area made up of the plastic bags and plastic water bottles that tourists typically bring with them had also increased, as had the creation of more services for tourists. Another six reported negative environmental consequences resulting from increases in private car and van services coming to the area for tourists after Xe Pian ecotourism began, stating this had resulted in the production of more dust, air pollution, and noise which disturbs the wildlife as well as locals.

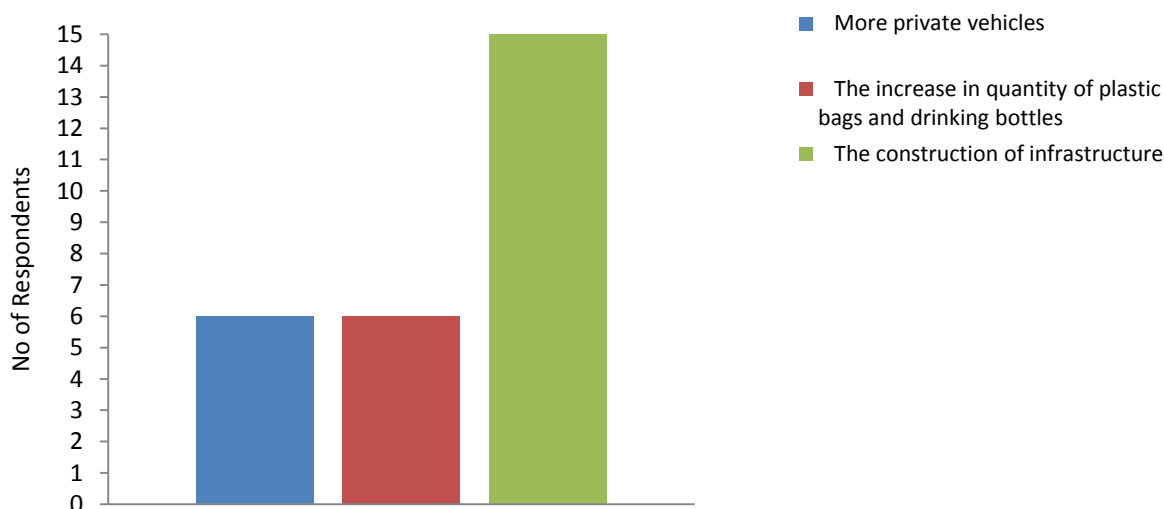


Figure 5.5 The number of local respondents (out of 15 people) indicating three main causes for negative environmental impact from Xe Pian Ecotourism at Kiet Ngong Village, Lao PDR

This is clearly evident from one 65 year-old female interviewee who resides close to the side of the village road:

In the past I could easily see wildlife, especially deer, standing in front of my house, but now there is none. They move away to live in the deep forest because they are afraid of the noise of the cars and vans coming into the village (Personal communication, May 7, 2009).

During a formal interview with the head of the village, he reported on additional environmental problems:

There is still some negative environmental impact from locals' actions with regards to expansion of the rice fields, illegal wildlife hunting for their daily consumption, and illegal wood cutting for their construction needs (Personal communication, May 10, 2009).

This reality is also supported by the head of the tourism office at the district level. He provided further details, saying that:

It is hard to keep local people from destroying forests and wildlife because they are located inside the National Protected Area. They mainly rely on

nature for their survival. There is no other employment for them (Phuovong Phommachant, personal communication, April 10, 2009).

Some negative effects on the environment were found in the report from the Provincial Department of Tourism. It stated that the current problems with ecotourism in Xe Pian NPA are hunting, destruction of habitat, conversion of forest to agricultural lands, logging for use in the home (making furniture), and forests burned in order to create agricultural fields and hunt the animals (2007, p. 14).

This information can be viewed as a constraint on the positive environmental change previously reported.

5.2.3. Analysis of environmental impact

Table 5.1 summarises both the positive and the negative environmental effects that have emerged since Xe Pian ecotourism began. This table was utilized in the analysis process that was applied to the environmental consequences identified in this research project.

Table 5.1

Summary of positive and negative environmental impacts of Xe Pian ecotourism since it began in Kiet Ngong Village, Lao PDR

Positive Environmental Impact	Negative Environmental Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restriction of wood cutting for local use in the area and a decrease in firewood collection • Village looks cleaner • Wildlife conservation through the collection of locals' guns • The improvement of household rubbish disposal • Encouragement for local people to strictly follow laws and regulations protecting the surrounding forest and wildlife • Establishment of local guards to look after the forests. • Provision of Forest Tour Education, Forest Conservation Training, Rubbish Disposal Training and Wildlife conservation Training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The improvement of infrastructure like road widening, electricity posts setting, Tourist Information Centre construction, and parking area construction brought negative impacts on environment. • The increase in quantity of plastic bags and plastic drinking bottles. • More private cars and vans coming to the village. <p data-bbox="890 1659 1445 1733" style="text-align: center;">Limitation of positive environmental impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing rice field expansion • Continued illegal wildlife hunting • Ongoing illegal wood cutting

By comparing the positive and negative environmental changes stemming from Xe Pian ecotourism since it began, it can be seen that the project has resulted in an overall positive effect on the local environment. For example, even though there are negative environmental consequences seen from forest clearance for infrastructure improvement, there is also better forest and wildlife protection management. In particular, forest and wildlife conservation training, rubbish disposal training, and forest tour education conducted by the Xe Pian ecotourism project have been effective in achieving the aim of improved forest and wildlife protection. Specifically, the local government collected the local residents' guns and allocated local guards to look after the forest with the aim of protecting wildlife. When wood cutting for local use was restricted in an area of forest, locals were encouraged to follow the law and regulations strictly. The village was also cleaner because of improved household waste disposal.

However, it is important to address the limitations placed on the positive environmental impact of ecotourism through the actions of local residents who must access the forest and wildlife due to the fact their livelihoods require that they continue their reliance on nature for sustenance. This is seen through ongoing rice field expansion, continued illegal wildlife hunting, and ongoing illegal wood cutting.

5.3. Economic Impacts

5.3.1. Positive Economic Impacts

Findings from this study's semi-structured interviews point to a positive economic transformation of the local people's livelihoods as a result of increased local ecotourism. Most local respondents reported during interviews that before Xe Pian ecotourism began, the majority of local residents worked as farmers who mainly grew rice for their subsistence consumption. Fishing and gardening activities were their secondary work. Specifically, all 15 local respondents named rice farming as their primary work prior to tourism, and 13 people reported fishing as their secondary occupation. This was followed by gardening, which was selected by 6 respondents as an additional work source (see Figure 5.6). This is evident in the Phatuomphone District of Statistics (2008); it showed that the main activities of Kiet Ngong villagers are rice

growing, fishery, and other service jobs. These activities accounted for 90% (165 households), 5% (9 households), and 5% (9 households), respectively.

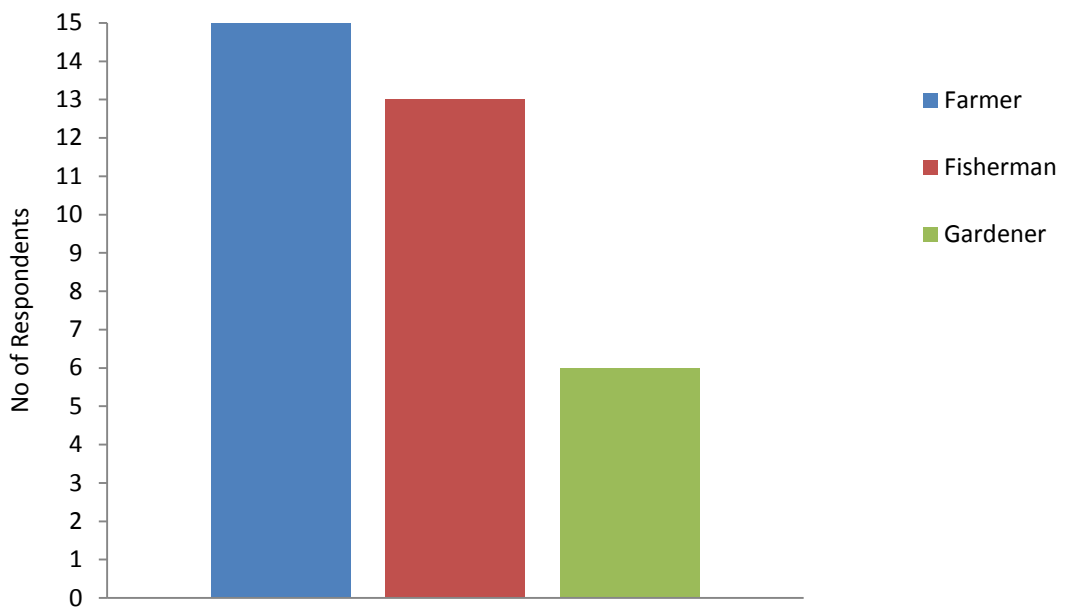


Figure 5.6 The number of local respondents (out of 15 people) occupying the three main work roles of Kiet Ngong Villagers previous to when ecotourism began in Lao PDR

However, after Xe Pian ecotourism was set up, positive economic change came to the locals as they responded to new needs for tourist service professionals in the form of trekking guides, tourist receptionists, elephant ride organisers, boatmen, elephant raisers, and elephant riders. These service jobs have provided extra income for local people apart from their main activities like rice growing and fishing (Figure 5.7).

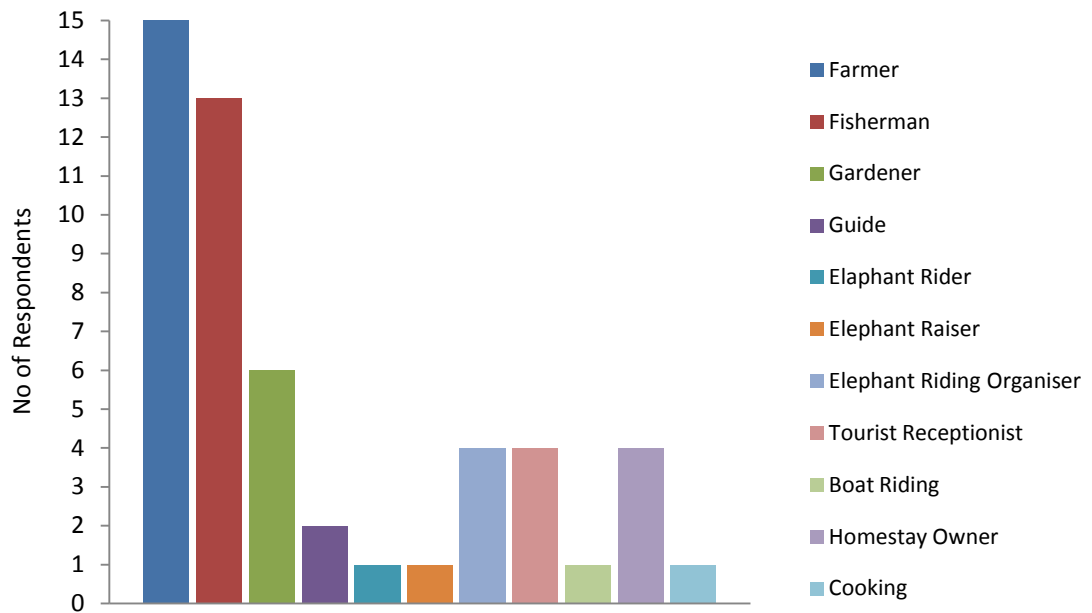


Figure 5.7 The number of the local respondents (out of 15 people) employed in main and service jobs held by Kiet Ngong villagers following the growth of ecotourism in Lao PDR

Thus, it can be concluded that since the emergence of the Xe Pian ecotourism project, considerable economic diversification has been experienced by the local people. Mostly this has not meant rejection of previous livelihood activities, but the addition of new roles which provide a source of income. This phenomenon was discussed during the interview with Mr Paul Eshoo, who served as Chief Technical Advisor for the Xe Pian ecotourism project for 2 years. He stated that after the Xe Pian ecotourism project was initiated, many tourist service jobs and employment opportunities arose from it to the advantage of local residents who were able to earn additional family income. He provided verification as listed below:

- Thirty families benefited directly from the elephant ride service, as they worked as elephant queue organisers (see Photo 5.1), elephants caretakers, elephant riders (see Photo 5.2), and elephant owners.



Photo 5.1 Local staff at the information centre. Source: Eshoo (2009)



Photo 5.2 The elephant ride service. Source: Eshoo (2009)

Specifically, there are 15 families who own the elephants and another 15 families who help to take care of them. In 2008-09, there were 4,386 Phou Asa elephant tours and 8,085 tourists, with an estimated gross revenue of US\$47,555. There were also 102 jungle safaris with 147 tourists and estimated revenue of US\$3,715. The total estimated gross revenue of US\$51,217. Of this revenue, 77% (US\$39,478) went back to these 30 families, which totalled an average of US\$1,315.93 per family. Of the remaining, 8% (US\$4,102, or US\$113.93 per family) was split among the 36 families who manage the information office, 8% went to the district, and 7% went to the village.

- Thirteen local people from 13 separate families benefited by working as forest trekking guides.

According to my data, the village has 13 trained guides and they had the following tours:

1. Half-day treks: 74 tours, 180 tourists, US\$258
2. Full-day treks: 53 tours, 118 tourists, US\$195

3. Camping (1 night, 2 night, Ta Ong 3-day): 11 tours, 24 tourists,
US\$261

Thus, the trekking guides grossed an estimated US\$714, which is an average of US\$54.92 for each of the 13 guides.

- Thirty families were involved in canoe service activities, such boatmen and boat queue organisers.

According to the statistics I gathered from the village, in year 2008-9, the canoe group had 37 groups and 46 tourists, with an estimated gross revenue of US\$230. The village reported to me that they actually had 25 families in the canoe group. So, this is an average of US\$9.20 per member. However, the actual amount per member would vary, the work was not split equally. There was clearly a low return from canoe tours however.

- Twenty families ran their own homestays.

According to the statistics from Pual Eshoo gathered from the village, in year 2008-09, the homestay group had 128 groups and 258 tourists, with a gross estimated income of \$1,858. This is an average of US\$92.90 per homestay family. These are estimates, and the real amount for each family may not be the same because sometimes tourists stay in one house a long time, and sometimes the group is not organized enough to share the work equally.

- One family sold handicrafts and other souvenirs.
- Four local people were employed at Kingfisher Ecolodge.

For both of these activities people made approximately US\$ 45 per month.

- Twenty-seven families are expected to benefit directly from employment connected to the community guesthouse provided by the Xe Pian ecotourism project (this facility was not yet open at the time of data collection).
- Ten families are expected to benefit from employment related to massage activities (see Photo 5.3) (these individuals were being trained at the time of data collection and expected to be in service soon).



Photo 5.3 Massage activities as demonstrated by individuals in training.

This service was opened just about one month before the project ended. They had 12 tourists and grossed about US\$49, which is an average of about \$4.90 per person/family.

In short, only the owners of the elephants would earn enough money to allow them to give up farming. Apart from that, it is obvious that the income of those employed in ecotourism is still limited.

Additionally, during the private walk and observation carried out as part of this research project, I discovered that Xe Pian ecotourism has created small private business opportunities for locals. For example, I met a 65-year old lady who ran her own small shop which sold foodstuffs, fruits, candy, and drinks to both locals and visitors. She told me:

In the past, I only farmed and raised animals for my family's survival. Now, I have quit those activities. I only run my private business and I enjoy it because I can generate income for family spending and saving (S. Vongxay, personal communication, May 7, 2009).

In addition, Mr Phouvong, who is the head of the tourism office at the district level, shared statistics from a report on the income from tourism between 2004 and 2009. Specifically, he stated that 1940 million kip (US\$164900) had been earned from Xe Pian ecotourism activities during this time period. This report on the total income from tourists was based on information that came directly from local villages involved in Xe Pian ecotourism; in other words, this amount of tourist income has gone directly to the local people.

As a result of economic improvements to local individual households derived from the Xe Pian ecotourism project since its initiation, the local standard of living has also improved considerably. This has become apparent in terms of the ownership of increased numbers of household items, as detailed below in Figure 5.8.

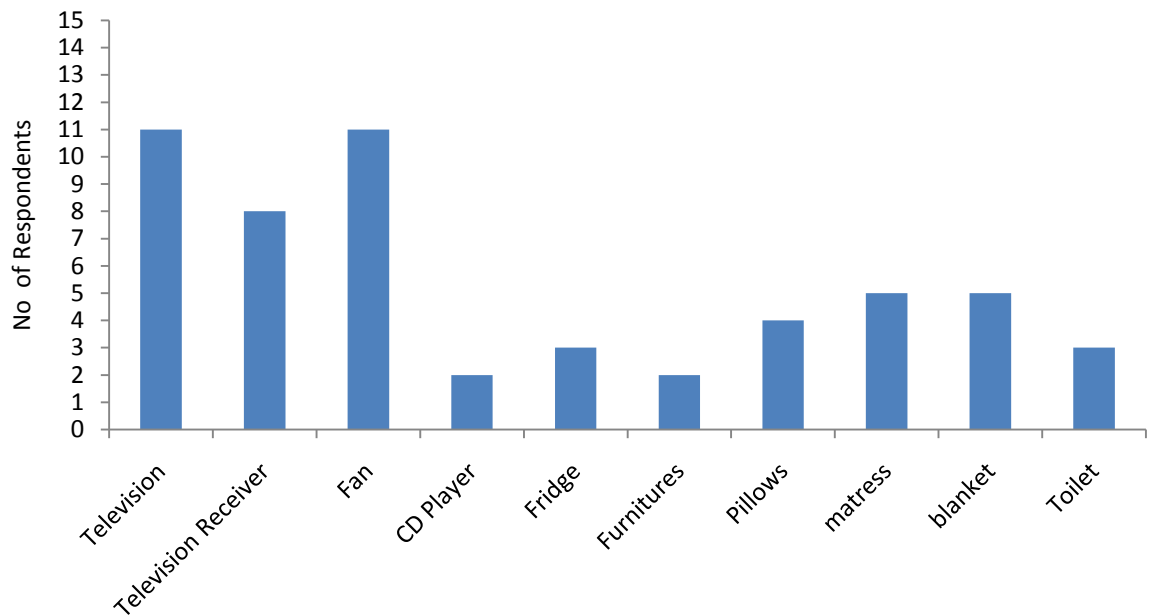


Figure 5.8 The number of local respondents who acquired various household items after the Xe Pian ecotourism project commenced in Kiet Ngong Village, Lao PDR

In responses given during this study's semi-structured interviews, it was observed that 11 local respondents reported buying a television, a television signal receiver (see Photo 5.4), or a fan after they experienced increased financial capacity. Approximately 5 people further reported that they now possessed more pillows, mattresses and blankets, and 2 of them stated they had purchased CD players, fridges, toilets, or new furniture.



Photo 5.4 Economic improvements at Kiet Ngong, Lao PDR

It has been concluded that ecotourism development in Kiet Ngong village has brought several economic benefits, both directly and indirectly, and as a consequence, produced considerable change in the purchasing capacity of household items. However, some negative economic impact was also noted, and this will be highlighted in the upcoming section.

5.3.2. Negative Economic Impact

The preceding section highlighted several economic benefits derived from Xe Pian ecotourism, both directly and indirectly. By comparison, not many local participants mentioned negative economic consequences from the Xe Pian ecotourism project during the semi-structured interviews carried out as part of this research study. The exception was those involved in the canoe ride service unit, who complained that the earnings gained from ecotourism were not distributed equally and fairly, stating, “We receive a low income from the boat ride service compared with other tourist service units. Our boat service is seasonal. When summer season comes, we cannot run our service. Consequently, we have insufficient income for our families” (Boatman, personal communication, May 8, 2009). As shown earlier, their earnings were also very low overall compared with other activities like elephant rides. As a consequence, some of the boat ride service members have left the boat service. Their complaint has been passed on to the head of the tourism office at the district level through formal discussion. Thus, it could be argued that economic earnings gained from ecotourism at Kiet Ngong have been fairly limited and not all households have benefited.

In addition, informal interviews with those local people who were not involved in any ecotourism activities revealed a problematic situation from their perspective. They pointed out that:

Our living conditions have been tough since ecotourism started because we do not have any income, but the price of food ingredients sold in the village has increased considerably. At the same time, we are also banned from hunting animals for our families’ consumption." (Local residents, personal communication, May 8, 2009)

In this case ecotourism has not only impacted negatively on local people’s livelihood in terms of reducing their access to their own resources, but it also has increased the price of food sold in the village. This can be viewed as one of the negative economic effects on local people’s lives.

5.3.3. Analysis of economic impact

Table 5.2 below presents a summary of both positive and negative effects on the local economy from Xe Pian ecotourism. This table was utilized in the process of analysing the economic impact of this venture.

Table 5.2

Summary of the Positive and Negative Economic Impact from Xe Pian Ecotourism Since it Began in Kiet Ngong Village, Lao PDR

Positive economic impact	Negative economic impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created tourist service jobs for locals as trekking guides, elephant riders, elephant raisers, elephant queue organisers, tourist receptionists and boatmen. • Increased job opportunities for locals, e.g., working at Kingfisher Ecolodge • Provided indirect jobs for locals, e.g., running private shops and handicraft stores. • Generated extra income for locals • Increased purchasing power of residents as seen in purchases of household items such as TVs, TV signal receivers, fans, CD players, fridge, furniture, pillows, mattress, blankets, and toilets. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unequal and unfair distribution of tourism income • Increase of the price of food sold in the village • Not all villages can access ecotourism jobs • Insufficient income from some tourist service jobs

Economic improvement has occurred in the village due to the creation of tourist service jobs, employment opportunities, and indirect jobs for local residents. These help to provide extra income to some families and as a consequence, the number of household items acquired by local citizens has increased significantly. However, apart from this positive economic result, there have been some negative economic repercussions as well. These are evident in the price increases for foodstuff in the village, and the claims of unfair distribution of the economic gains among various tourist service groups. As a consequence, some tourist service members have quit their tourist work. Thus, it seems that this ecotourism project does not currently generate benefits equally and fairly to all local residents.

5.4. Social Impacts

5.4.1. Positive Social Impacts

Data collected through the informal and formal interview processes, coupled with observations from walks around the village, reveal information about the social change resulting from the emergence of Xe Pian ecotourism. It appears there have been some positive changes regarding the improvement of social behaviour, infrastructure, and construction of community facilities.

A majority of the local people stressed that ever since Xe Pian ecotourism started, it has played a significant role in helping to build up local people's solidarity. Specifically, it has created social cohesion as villagers have worked together in a group or unit. In addition, households have begun providing assistance to each other when needed, a phenomenon hardly ever seen before ecotourism began. Particularly, during an informal conversation a local respondent asserted that:

In the past our local people's solidarity was weak because solidarity was seen in small groups of people living nearby each other's household. Also, each individual household struggled to find enough for their family's daily consumption. Thus, locals did not care about other people's obstacles. However, at the present time our local people's solidarity is tight in a bigger group because local people have more interaction since it brought them work and they gather together at the tourism workplace. This can create a

good atmosphere to exchange general ideas about everyday family life and tourist issues among the members. This can play a crucial part in creating solidarity in Kiet Ngong (Local resident, personal communication, 28 April, 2009).

Infrastructure enhancement is another positive social change seen in the area, as witnessed in the form of electricity installation, road widening (see Photo 5.5), and well digging.



Photo 5.5 Road improvement and electricity installation in Kiet Ngong Village, Lao PDR

In terms electricity installation, this change has brought social happiness to locals. Particularly, they now have lighting in their houses which plays a crucial role in enabling their children to learn at night, as well as providing the opportunity for people to listen to radio and watch TV in their free time. In addition, road improvements have created better access for social interaction, because locals no longer have to walk through mud roads, bush, and streams to reach each other. Deep wells were also dug with the aim of improving water supplies for the local community as a whole.

Construction for local use was also observed as a factor of positive social change since ecotourism in the region had started. Particularly, the primary school's library, office, and concrete fence were built with financial support from the Xe Pian ecotourism project and Kingfisher Ecolodge. A new village office was also built with financial support from the Xe Pian ecotourism project (see Photo 5.6), along with the tourist information centre parking area and the elephants' platform. The construction of

community facilities has played a crucial role in creating social happiness among the villagers, who were proud of these improvements.



Photo 5.6 The new village office of Kiet Ngong

5.4.2. Negative Social Impacts

Despite the positive social developments discussed above, there have also been some negative social changes. The most significant of these is the presence of corruption at the local level. The emergence of economic benefits has played a key role in making some local residents behave selfishly; for example, some of the elephant queue organisers have been observed to give first place in the queues to their relatives. It was also claimed that the past head of the village was corrupt in that he was known to be taking more than his share of ecotourism earnings and using them for his own sake. It appears that currently this has been improved to some extent because there is a new village head.

Another key point to note concerning negative social change in the village is that the cohesiveness and effectiveness of the local people has been weakened to some extent because of their jealousy of each other. Specifically, those who are involved in tourism activities and administration appear to function in more active roles, such as participating in seminars, workshops, trainings, and meetings. In contrast, those who are not involved and do not gain any benefits—especially poor families—are not interested in joining any activities. Thus, ecotourism has highlighted these differences, and as a consequence, some weaknesses in social solidarity within the community have surfaced.

5.4.3. Analysis of Social Impact

The table below (Table 5.3) provides a summary of both the positive and the negative social effects which have emerged since Xe Pian ecotourism began.

Table 5.3

Summary of the Positive and Negative Social Impact from Xe Pian Ecotourism Since it Began in Kiet Ngong Village, Lao PDR

Positive Social Impact	Negative Social Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Builds up social solidarity as people worked together to develop ecotourism • Infrastructure improvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Road improvements provides better local access – Electricity installation brings brightness to locals; children can study at night as well as listening to the radio and watching TV. – New wells improve standard of living . • Construction of community buildings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – New primary school library, office and fences and New village office – Tourist information centre, parking area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates corruption in society • Makes some selfish locals, as a result of the emergence of economic benefits to some people. • Creates jealousy in the community

The most significant point to note is that Xe Pian ecotourism has strengthened social solidarity in the community to some extent. However, some negative social outcomes have also been observed by a few local residents, in that jealousy has been aroused, especially between individuals who have benefited and ones who have not. This is linked to environmental outcomes as well. Those who have benefited from ecotourism, either directly or indirectly, care about forest and wildlife conservation. In contrast, those people who have not gained any benefit from tourist activities do not appear to care for forest and wildlife conservation.

Positive social change has also come about from improvements in infrastructure, such as road improvements, electricity installation, well digging, and construction of new

community buildings. These activities have brought communal benefits, thus it is not only those directly involved in tourism who have benefited.

Thus, even though the issue of corruption exists, the total positive social impacts override the negative. It appears common to have issues of jealousy and corruption arise whenever finances are concerned (Scheyven, 1999).

5.5. Cultural Impacts

5.5.1. Positive Cultural Impacts

In order to gather data for this part of the study, semi-structured interviews were carried out in conjunction with a formal interview with the head of the local religious group. Additionally, formal and informal discussions with locals and other stakeholders took place in the community. The data revealed that 13 out of 15 local respondents participating in the semi-structured interviews perceived positive cultural change had taken place as a result of the ecotourism project



Photo 5.7 Elephant festival: the resulting of cultural promotion by the central government of Lao PDR. Source: Eshoo (2009)

They attributed this change in cultural promotion to the fact that local people were being encouraged to maintain their cultural and traditional practices in order to preserve them. In particular, citizens were encouraged to retain their local style of dress, and also preserve the style of their houses. Additionally, the head of the religious group described another positive culture and tradition change. He asserted that:

Since Xe Pian ecotourism started, the number of local residents coming to the temple to give alms to the monks has increased noticeably compared to previous times, because local people have more income and more happiness and they also want to help preserve cultural practice in order to promote

tourism in the community (R. Peaum, personal communication, May 7, 2009).

Apart from this, temples in the village and tourist attractions—especially Vat Phou Asa Temple—have also been promoted by the Xe Pian ecotourism project, with the aim of attracting tourists to the area to visit them. More importantly, the head of the tourism office in the Phatoumphone district reported that an elephant festival (see Photo 5.7) is held every year at Kiet Ngong village, in late January or early February, in order to advertise the area and boost the number of tourists. Kiet Ngong village has also been endorsed by the government as a cultural village. In short, there has been significant positive cultural change since the ecotourism project was initiated. This is because of the many efforts to support locals in maintaining the cultural practices and sites that are so important to sustaining a viable tourism trade.

5.5.2. Negative Cultural Impacts

Along with the significant positive cultural changes mentioned above, negative factors have also been noted to affect cultural practices since ecotourism began. The data collected for this study showed that one local respondent reported some negative cultural influences attributed to the Xe Pian ecotourism project. As has been stated by the head of the religious group, “After the Xe Pian ecotourism project began, there was disrespect for the elderly from the younger generation because they are a bit stubborn” (R. Peaum, personal communication, May 7, 2009). He further stated:

The style of dress when coming to the temple has been changed a bit and the new generation has not followed traditional practices properly when coming to the temple. For example, they do not take off their slippers when entering the temple areas. The main factors for them to change may result from witnessing foreign visitors and viewing from TV.” (R. Peaum, personal communication, May 7, 2009)

The head of Kiet Ngong village proposed that:

Since we have economic improvement derived from tourist income earnings in our village, local people have capacity to purchase TVs, but this created

negative cultural impacts in the way of Kiet Ngong villagers practice and behave, especially the newer generation wanting to follow the new style of dressing, acting, and behaving (Head of Kiet Ngong village, personal communication, August 13, 2009) .

However, it is imperative to note that this change has resulted not only from the economic improvement from tourism, but also as part of the general social change which is occurring everywhere in the country.

5.5.3. Analysis of Cultural Impacts

The table 5.4 below provides a summary of positive and negative cultural changes emerging as a result of the Xe Pian ecotourism project.

Table 5.4

Summary of the Positive and Negative Cultural Impact Resulting from Xe Pian Ecotourism Since it Began in Kiet Ngong Village, Lao PDR

Positive Cultural Impact	Negative Cultural Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages locals to maintain cultural and traditional practices • Promotes the maintenance of temples and cultural attractions • Endorsement of Kiet Ngong as a cultural village • Improvement of cultural activities, such as holding an elephant festival in Kiet Ngong village every year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates disrespect for the elderly from newer generations who have become a bit stubborn. • The style of dress of those attending temple has become more casual. • Newer generations do not follow traditional practices properly when entering the temple—i.e., they do not take off their slippers

Overall, the data, as summarized in the table above, indicates that many factors have brought about both positive and negative cultural changes to the local people since Xe Pian ecotourism was commenced. The most significant factor is the ongoing encouragement of the residents to maintain local cultural and traditional practices.

Particularly, they have been supported in wearing their traditional style of dress, and local attendance at the temple has been promoted.

The government has cooperated with local residents, not only endorsing Kiet Ngong as a cultural village, but also supporting the maintenance of temples and cultural attractions. Additionally, it has improved cultural and traditional activities such as the annual elephant festival, with the aim of promoting Xe Pian as an ecotourism site and boosting the number of tourists who choose to travel there.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that along with these positive cultural effects, some negative effects have been felt as well. These have been made evident in the clothing styles of newer generations when they attend temple, which have changed slightly. A few younger local people have continued to disrespect their elders and have chosen to ignore the encouragement to maintain traditional dress and customs. These behavioural changes cannot be solely attributed to ecotourism, however.

In summary, the research findings illustrate that Xe Pian ecotourism has brought many positive and negative changes to local people's livelihoods, as well as their surrounding environment. However, most Kiet Ngong villagers who took part in this research revealed optimistic views about ecotourism's positive influence, and they appeared confident that ecotourism development would ultimately produce more benefits for them as well as their village as a whole. At the same time, negative consequences are unavoidable and can be addressed by taking local perspectives and other key stakeholders' views into account.

In the forthcoming section, I will present a variety of valuable recommendations from different points of view including both locals and other important stakeholders in order to help maintain Xe Pian ecotourism so that it will be able to contribute to local sustainable development.

5.6. Recommendations from locals and other key stakeholders on how to maintain Xe Pian ecotourism

5.6.1. Recommendations from local residents

Figure 5.9 illustrates the number of local respondents (out of 15 people) expressing support for specific ideas on how to help sustain Xe Pian ecotourism in Kiet Ngong village, Lao PDR.

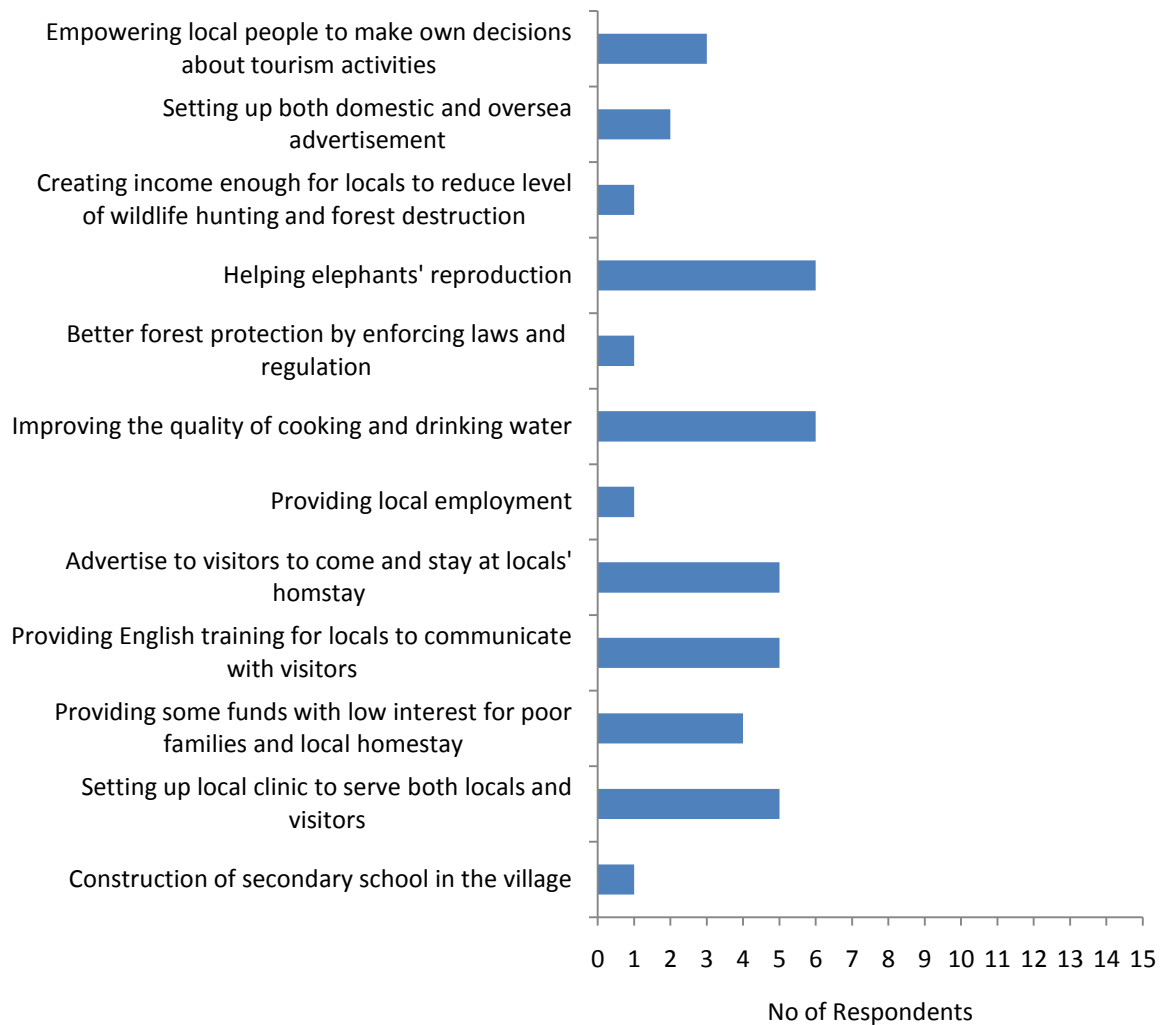


Figure 5.9 The number of local respondents (out of 15 people) supporting various ideas for sustaining Xe Pian ecotourism in Kiet Ngong village, Lao PDR

During semi-structured interviews conducted as part of this research project, local respondents expressed different points of view concerning measures that might be taken to sustain Xe Pian ecotourism in the interest of contributing to local sustainable development, especially in Kiet Ngong village. In response to the question, "What

recommendations would you like to share in order to maintain Xe Pian ecotourism so that it will contribute to Kiet Ngong's sustainable development?", local respondents identified elephant breeding, improvement in the quality of drinking and cooking water, advertisement of local homestays, provision of training in English, the availability of funds at low interest for poor families, and the establishment of a local clinic to serve both locals and visitors, as the most crucial and urgent actions to be taken in order to maintain Xe Pian ecotourism. These different ideas come from people with various rationales, including diverse tourist service groups and regular residents.

Significantly, it has been stated by the majority of local residents involved in the elephant ride service that the elephant ride is the most important tourist activity in Kiet Ngong village and generates the highest local income. According to these participants, if there is no elephant breeding, ecotourism will disappear in 20 years, because their elephants are too old and they do not have a male elephant for elephant reproduction. Thus, it is imperative to have an elephant breeding programme.

Another important action item is to improve the quality of the cooking and drinking water. This idea was mentioned mostly by homestay owners who claimed that the main reason tourists do not come to stay at their homestays is the lack of readily available water, and the low quality of whatever water is available. Additionally, some homestay owners asserted that developing advertising for the local homestays is the most essential next step, because most tourists who come to the area stay at the Kingfisher Ecolodge, a foreign-owned establishment, due to their better advertising campaign. Thus it is imperative to initiate advertising campaigns, both inside the country and in foreign countries, to boost the number of tourists and provide some funding for further development of local homestays.

Also, many local people pointed out that training in English should be provided in order for locals to be better able to communicate with foreign visitors. They claimed that none of the local residents know sufficient English, and as a consequence, they are sometimes misunderstood in their communication with tourists. This idea has been supported by the Provincial Department of Tourism (2007) which highlighted that the main cause of tourists' difficulties in contacting the village and make arrangements for trekking tours is the villagers' very limited English language skills. When they do receive calls, villagers often do not fully understand what the tourists want.

It is interesting to point out that many local people, especially those who were not involved in ecotourism activities, claimed that construction of a local clinic would serve both locals and tourists in urgent medical situations, and thus was an important developmental step to take. In addition to this, the provision of funds for offering loans at low interest to poor local residents was recommended, with the understanding that these funds would be used to improve the condition of village houses so that the owners might run a homestay businesses to generate family income. Obviously, this would have to be combined with better marketing campaigns, as there would need to be more tourists to support more homestay businesses.

Apart from these ideas for maintaining Xe Pian ecotourism, viewed as important requirements by the locals who suggested them, approximately 3 out of 15 local respondents supported additional steps for continuing the project. These included securing more local empowerment (e.g., decision making on natural resource control), providing funds to improve local homestays, ensuring adequate incomes from tourism, increasing law enforcement, providing additional employment, and constructing a secondary school in the village.

Regarding local empowerment, local people stated they needed to be granted their rights to have control over and make decisions about tourist activities in order to develop better wildlife and forest protection management. Specifically, they explained that the government has promoted ecotourism as a tool for nature conservation and local development; however, at the same time, peat mining is allowed at the tourism site, which certainly has a negative impact on the ecosystem. Similarly, evidence has been presented by the head of a local religious group that the government has been collecting a gate fee from visitors for the purpose of improving management and these funds have been managed by them. This has clearly been illustrated by the head of the tourism office at Phatuomphone district. He spoke out, saying that:

A gate fee has been collected by the staff of Xe Pian National Protected Area and it has been attributed to government. However, some of the fee is also shared with the local villages who can propose plans that will bring benefits to the community as a whole. But these proposed plans have to be endorsed before the villages can get their share. (P. Phuommachant, personal communication, August 13, 2009)

Instead, residents desire that proceeds from the gate fee be given directly to locals to spend on forest protection.

Furthermore, a few local respondents expressed the view that tourist income needs be delivered consistently to avoid people having to leave their tourist service jobs because of insufficient income. Another interesting point to consider is that a few locals claimed law enforcement to be weak in Kiet Ngong, explaining that it is hard for locals to monitor themselves, and that government staff hardly ever come to check on and punish people who frequently engage in illegal hunting and wood cutting.

It is also noteworthy that locals suggested having a secondary school in their village with the aim of maintaining ecotourism. They stressed that education is the most crucial element in enabling children to grow and develop the ability to take on tourist service jobs in an effective way in the future. It appears some people, such as those at the tourism information centre, have difficulties with writing, reading and calculating numbers. Thus, education would be a plausible solution for this issue.

5.6.2. Recommendations from the head of the tourism office at Phatoumphone District

During an informal interview with Mr Phouvong, who has 4 years of experience working in the tourism office of Phatoumphone District, he claimed that in order to maintain Xe Pian ecotourism as a contribution to local sustainable development, two main objectives need to be accomplished: *encouragement* and *relocation*.

Initially, he said

“In order to maintain ecotourism, we need to maintain the wildlife and forest. In order to maintain the wildlife and forest, we need to reduce the amount of wildlife hunting and the amount of forest destruction in every village located inside the National Protected Area” (Phouvong Phoummachant, personal communication, April 10, 2009).

He conceded that the main cause of wildlife extinction and forest destruction is the local people residing inside the park, because their livelihoods continue to rely mainly on natural products and wildlife. Therefore, he felt that in order to sustain ecotourism, local

people must be encouraged to take part in tourism activities in every village inside the park. Mr Phouvong also suggested that these tourism activities be linked to each other in order to deliver equal tourist earning benefits to every village. This approach may help reduce wildlife hunting and forest destruction to some extent.

Additionally, because the key destructors of nature and wildlife are the local people residing inside the park, Mr Phouvong believed that in order to maintain ecotourism, all villages inside the park should be relocated to outside the park. However, he stated that it is hard to move residents without a budget, and with no guarantee of employment. There once was a plan for carrying out these relocations, but it failed.

5.6.3. Recommendations from international tourists

The graph below (Figure 5.10) depicts the number of international tourists supporting various views concerning ways to help sustain Xe Pian ecotourism.

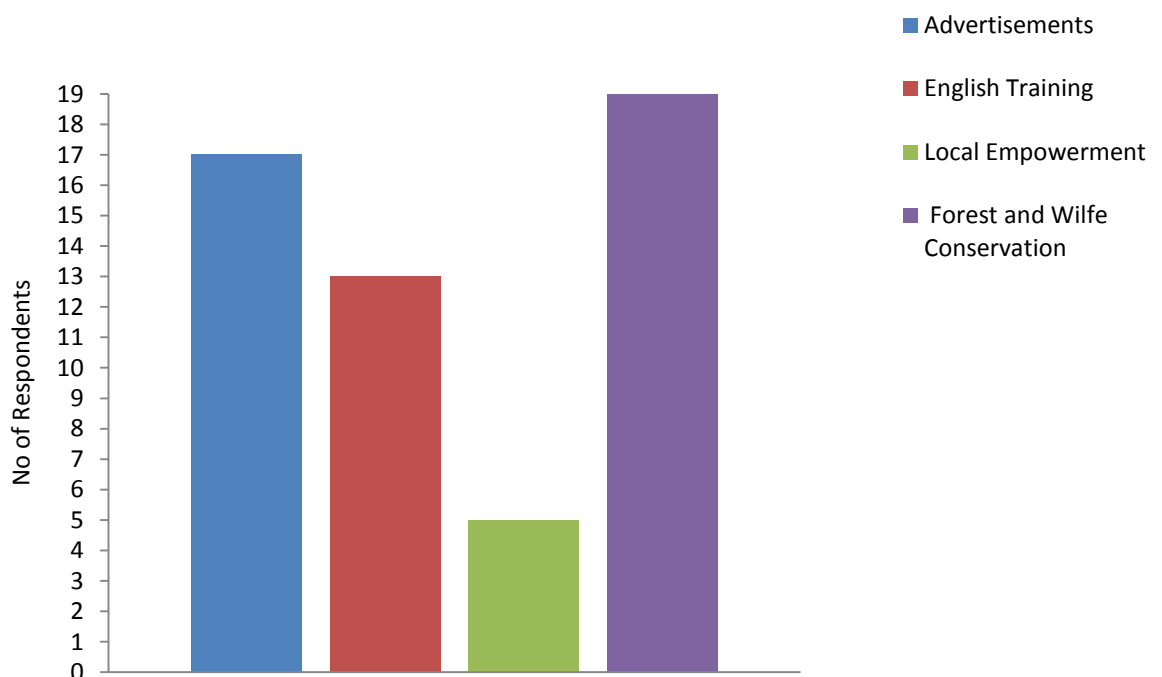


Figure 5.10 The number of tourists supporting various views on how to sustain Xe Pian ecotourism in Kiet Ngong village, Lao PDR

In response to an open-ended survey, 19 international visitors gave four distinct main recommendations for sustaining Xe Pian ecotourism in order to contribute to local

sustainable development. These included promotion of forest and wildlife conservation, promotion of advertising, training in English, and increasing local empowerment.

The most significant of these recommendations involves encouraging locals to preserve the forest and wildlife, because these are the most vital elements of ecotourism. To be more specific, 19 tourist respondents suggested that forest and wildlife conservation be promoted further, as it is evident to them that some wildlife has died out. They report that it is already hard to find such animals as have been advertised on brochures or Internet websites. This information could be used to raise awareness among locals about the importance of maintaining the forest and wildlife.

International tourists also observed that each household appeared to keep logs under their house. They concluded that villagers are still cutting wood within the ecotourism site (see Photo 5.8). This evidence is supported by a report from the Provincial Department of Tourism about the current problems with ecotourism in Xe Pian NPA; it stated that the main reason that tourists cannot see much wildlife there is the continuation of hunting and the destruction of natural habitat. Additionally, forests are not only burned for making agricultural fields and hunting animals, but also cut down for use in making furniture for homes (2007, p. 14).



Photo 5.8 Evidence of locals using logs in the construction of their houses. Source: Author

Additionally, 17 tourist respondents supported increased advertising as another key recommendation for maintaining Xe Pian ecotourism. They stated this would be one way to introduce the tourism site and its ecotourism activities to more outsiders.

Finally, 13 tourist respondents suggested providing training in English to the local people on the grounds that it would help in creating dialogue between tourists and

locals, especially with the local guides. This is also evident in the report about the current problems with ecotourism in Xe Pian NPA from the Provincial Department of Tourism; it illustrated that tourists were not satisfied with village guide services because they did not provide enough information, instead simply showing the way the trail goes. The main cause of this is limited fluency in English, as well as lack of experience; consequently, guides do not fully understand what tourists want (Provincial Department of Tourism, 2007). Meanwhile five tourists supported increasing local empowerment as a means of furthering local control over natural resources and decision-making about tourist activities.

5.6.4. Recommendations from the chief technical advisor of the Xe Pian ecotourism project

A formal interview was carried out with the chief technical advisor of the Xe Pian ecotourism project, who has had 2 years of work experience there. He suggested that in order to maintain Xe Pian ecotourism, better forest and wildlife protection must be an integral part of the action plan for the Xe Pian National Protected Area. He stated that “To have good ecotourism, you have to have a good ecosystem”. He further said that “if we cannot see wildlife, the value of ecotourism is very low”. He believed that if good protection of the areas could be maintained, then in 5 or 10 years, wildlife would easily be observed. He cited KaoYia National Park in Thailand as an example, stating that it had experienced the same kinds of problems and had solved them by implementing better forest and wildlife protection management practices.

To accomplish this, he suggested the firm enforcement of laws and regulations as a means of protecting forests and wildlife, on the grounds that law enforcement is very weak in the Xe Pian National Protected Area. He reported that actually, there are no government staff inside the NPA because all the staff stay inside their office all the time. He said he believed they should be out of the office, working to watch for problems in the Protected Area and if they see something illegal happening, they should tell the offender, "You cannot do that!" Although the government has appointed local people to monitor themselves, the chief technical adviser believes it is very difficult for them to look after themselves in this way.

Another significant suggestion was made by Paul Eshoo:

I believe for the villages to be inside the protected area, they need to have more support from the National Protected Area Office, to always be included in ecotourism, and to have better coordination so that they can help protect the important species of the park. However, the local people are an important part of the ecosystem and have the right to live there under the law and according to their long history of being in that area. It is also ok for them to hunt non-protected species according to the law. However, I recommend that in areas where tourists go, there be no hunting and no disturbance. (Paul Eshoo, personal communication, August 3, 2009)

It is imperative to note that his primary suggestion was to stop peat mining in the Xe Pian ecotourism site. He explained that peat mining involves the digging of a big hole, and as a consequence, water collects in these big spaces. This then leads to the destruction of the ecosystem in the area. Ultimately, at some point in the future, ecotourism could disappear because of the destruction caused to the forest and wildlife. Thus, he strongly recommended that halting peat mining be seen as the most important step in maintaining ecotourism.

5.6.5. Analysis of recommendations

Table 5.5, below, contains a summary of various recommendations from different key informants for maintaining Xe Pian ecotourism so it will continue to contribute to local sustainable development. It was used in the process applied to analysing recommendations recorded during this study.

Table 5.5

Summary of the Different Recommendations for Sustaining Xe Pian Ecotourism from Different Key Informants

Core Informants	Recommendations for Sustaining Xe Pian Ecotourism
Local residents in Kiet Ngong Village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elephant breeding • Improving the quality of drinking and cooking water • Advertisement of local homestays • Provision of training in English • Provision of funds with low interest for poor families • Setting up a local clinic
Head of Tourism Office at Phatoumphone District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging local people to participate in ecotourism activities, thereby reducing forest destruction and wildlife hunting. • Linking tourism activities in each village with the purpose of distributing tourist earnings benefits equally and fairly • Relocating all residents outside the National Park
International tourists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting forest and wildlife conservation. • More advertisement of ecotourism • Training in English for locals • Local empowerment
Chief Technical Advisor of the Xe Pian Ecotourism Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting better forest and wildlife protection • Implementing stricter laws and regulating enforcement • Promote having more support from Xe Pian National Protected Area for local people's involvement in ecotourism and better coordination between locals and Xe Pian NPA staff. • Supporting locals to reside inside National Protected Area because the local people are an important part of the ecosystem. However, non-protected species are allowed to hunt due to the law. Also no animal hunting or disturbance in the area where tourists go. • Stopping peat mining inside the Xe Pian National Protected Area

Looking at the bigger picture illustrated by the data in this table, it can undoubtedly be seen that along with some similar suggestions on how to sustain Xe Pian ecotourism, there were some overwhelming discrepancies in the recommendations offered by local residents and other key stakeholders.

The most significant point to note is that there were opposite recommendations made by the head of the tourism office at Phatoumphone District, who suggested people be relocated outside the park, and the chief technical advisor of the Xe Pian ecotourism project, who claimed that the local people are an important part of the ecosystem and they have a right to live inside Xe Pian NPA under the law and according to their long history of being in that area. He further said that it is permissible for them to hunt non-protected species for their daily consumption, according to the law; however, no hunting or disturbance should be visible in the area where tourists go.

However, foreign visitors expressed another perspective which was dissimilar, and appeared to offer a softer approach to maintaining forest and wildlife protection. They urged the use of education as a means of protecting the forest and wildlife. Particularly, raising awareness among the local residents about the positives of maintaining the forest and wildlife was considered to be a plausible remedy.

Another pragmatic approach was also suggested by the chief technical advisor of Xe Pian ecotourism project, and the local residents themselves. They claimed that better forest and wildlife protection could be accomplished by making use of current laws and regulations through increasing their enforcement. If such restrictions were implemented strictly and sincerely by the government, then significant improvement in results should be attainable.

Another key feature of the recommendations is that there were comparable recommendations made by both local residents and international tourists regarding local empowerment, training in English, and advertising. To be more specific, both local residents and international tourists shared the same points of view that local empowerment (in terms of political empowerment and decision-making concerning plans for nature protection) and economic empowerment (taking control of tourism earnings benefits) should be taken into account for Xe Pian ecotourism to be sustained. This view stems from the fact that the government has carried on with peat mining inside the NPA without any consideration of the local residents or ecotourism, and that

the government also collects a gate fee at the site which it does not appear to share with local residents.

Additionally, training in English has been suggested by both locals and foreign tourists, who stated that the language barrier hampers their communication. Thus, providing training in English for locals was expected to create a better atmosphere for conversation and cross-cultural sharing, while avoiding miscommunications as well.

Lastly, additional advertising was viewed as a crucial remedy for maintaining ecotourism. These marketing campaigns would advertise not only the tourism attractions, tourist activities, and local people, but also local homestays as well. Some tourists were not aware that locals provided accommodations in good condition for a reasonable price (US\$3 per night). The majority of foreign tourist stayed at the Kingfisher Ecolodge, apparently because of its better advertising as well as the better condition of its accommodation, which include air conditioning and Internet access. Such facilities come with an expensive price, however (US\$38 per night). By launching more advertising, local residents may be able to raise their income from tourist earnings, as tourists would be more aware of the options available to them.

It is noteworthy to highlight that elephant breeding was the most pressing concern of local residents related to maintaining Xe Pian ecotourism, along with improvements to the quality of drinking and cooking water, financial support through low interest loans to the poor, and the construction of a local medical clinic.

In short, there are diverse suggestions from various points of view among the different levels of power involved with Xe Pian ecotourism activity. They all have quite a different 'stake' in the area: tourists want a clean, green, unchanging environment and power to the locals. At the same time, local people want nice houses, a comfortable life, and they do not want people to tell them what to do in their own village; whereas, the government wants to take control of tourism resources in order to generate income or development nationally. It is not easy for this author to weigh and judge the importance of all these recommendations, and all of them are equally significant when it comes to taking into account how to sustain ecotourism.

CHAPTER SIX: Discussion

6.1. Introduction

The literature review in Chapter Two presented the history and definitions of sustainable development and ecotourism, as well as linkages between them. Also, the theories behind strategies for sustaining ecotourism were reviewed. Chapter Five presented the results of field research carried out in Kiet Ngong village using semi-structured interviews, private walks and observations, informal and formal interviews, a questionnaire survey, and other secondary data sources to gather information. In an effort to address the aim, objectives, and research questions, this chapter intends to compare the wider international and theoretical literature with the collected data in order to analyse whether ecotourism in Kiet Ngong village is a viable vehicle for contributing to local sustainable development.

This chapter is comprised of three sections; the first section will discuss an assessment of the Xe Pian ecotourism project's contribution to local development from the time it started. The second section will identify the current ecotourism risks that may make Xe Pian ecotourism unsustainable, by adopting a theoretical framework constructed in Chapter Two which builds on empowerment and regulation. At the end of this chapter is a concluding section, which briefly sums up all the issues mentioned.

6.2. The assessment of the existing contribution of Xe Pian ecotourism

6.2.1. The assessment of environmental impacts

Extensive research conducted by diverse academics such as White and Dobias (1991, as cited in Lindberg, Enriquez & Sproule, 1996), Fang (2002), Lindberg (2000), Stone and Wall (2004), Alexander and Whitehouse (2004), and Weaver (2006) points out that the most obvious benefit of ecotourism development in a given area is the conservation of the natural environment and wildlife. This was also seen in the case of ecotourism in Kiet Ngong village. As documented in Chapter 5, since the initiation of the ecotourism project, Kiet Ngong residents have chosen to encourage protection of the forests and wildlife by raising awareness about protecting nature, reducing air pollution, and promoting household rubbish disposal. They also, for the most part, have followed laws

and regulations such as those which forbid owning guns and hunting endangered species. Additionally, the research findings, as discussed in Chapter Five, have indicated that ecotourism at the study site has contributed not only to forest and wildlife conservation, but also to maintaining an acceptable level of cleanliness and hygiene in the whole village.

The majority of the local participants remarked that ecotourism development in the village made their surroundings beautiful, clean, and hygienic. This idea was strongly supported by comments from the headman of the Kiet Ngong village who stated that:

Ecotourism is good because since ecotourism development came to the area, the forest is thicker, the village is cleaner because of the new means of household rubbish disposal, and local hygiene is better because about one-third of the total local residents now have their own toilet instead of going into the bush like they used to do in the past. (B. Khetkaysar, personal communication, August 10, 2009)

However, Tisdell (1996), Archer and Cooper (2001, as cited in Gould, 2004), and Weaver (2006) all highlighted the fact that one significant negative environmental consequence of ecotourism was the destruction of natural resources due to the construction of facilities supporting ecotourism. This phenomenon is seen as well in the case of Kiet Ngong village. All participants who took part in the semi-structured interviews reported that road expansion, electrical post setting, information tourism centre construction, and parking area construction resulted in a significant negative environmental impact. Thus, the evidence is conclusive that negative impact is derived from the construction of any ecotourism facilities, even though such construction is common and hard to avoid. As claimed by Oram (1995), Weaver (2001), and Yang (2006), it can be normal for the development of ecotourism to destroy the resources on which it depends. This issue can be overcome by considering a suitable level of building for physical structures, with the aim of ensuring adequate capacity for providing tourism services while not damaging the value of the surroundings (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1993).

In addition, local residents claimed the growth of ecotourism has led to an increase in daily rubbish, including plastic bags and plastic drinking bottles. The problem of increased daily rubbish has also been noted in other contexts by Tisdell (1996); Weinberg, Bellows and Ekster (2002); Stem, Lassoie, Lee, and Deshler (2003); and

Archer and Cooper (2001, as cited in Gould, 2004). The villagers reported that negative environmental consequences resulting from an increase in private car and van services for tourists coming to the area included the production of more dust, air pollution, and noise which disturbed the wildlife as well as the locals. Again, concerns about environmental pollution are supported in the literature (see for example Archer & Cooper (2001, as cited in Gould, 2004) and Weinberg, Bellows & Ekster (2002)).

However, it must be recognised that seizing local people's guns, restricting wood cutting in the area, and enforcing strict laws and regulations for the purpose of protecting forest and wildlife may all impinge on local people's livelihood, since their standard of living still depends mainly on forest products (Lindberg & McKercher, 1997; Scheyvens, 1999; and Stone & Wall, 2004). As was evident in the research findings documented in the previous chapter, local people still destroy forests by expanding their rice fields, cutting down trees illegally, and poaching wildlife in the area. In order to combat these issues, a community participatory approach should be adopted to ensure the local people's voices and needs are taken into account and any benefits or gains are shared fairly and equally.

Authors such as Tosun and Timothy (2003) consider the community-based approach to tourism development to be a prerequisite to sustainability. If it becomes apparent to the local population that they are receiving benefits from tourism, they will certainly support such activities by protecting the environment. Likewise, Barkin's (2003) work which highlighted the failure of ecotourism at the Monarch Butterfly Reserve in Mexico noted that the primary reasons for failure were: (a) the business did not undertake any prior consultation with local communities; (b) no compensation was offered for reclassification of the land; (c) no consideration was given to creating alternative opportunities that contributed to the locals earning a livelihood; (d) the paucity of local linkages; and (e) the lack of local participation in decision-making and management. Barkin's findings remind us that without adequate community participation, ecotourism in Kiet Ngong could also fail.

6.2.2. The assessment of economic impacts

It is obvious that ecotourism development has several potential economic advantages for the target village and other nearby villages. One of the more direct of these is the creation of more job opportunities and income potential for local residents, as well as the people in neighbouring communities (Gould, 2004; Harrison & Schipani, 2007; Lindberg et al., 1996; Weaver, 1998; Weaver, 2001; Weinberg, Bellows & Ekster's, 2002). This has, in fact, been observed to be the case in Kiet Ngong village, where the development of the Xe Pian ecotourism project has brought significant economic benefits to local residents, both directly and indirectly.

The WWF Technical Final Report in 2009, prepared by Paul Eshoo, showed that Xe Pian ecotourism offered direct economic benefits by providing job opportunities, with 161 local people being involved in jobs related to the ecotourism industry (Eshoo, 2009). These positions were in the forms of trekking guides, elephant riders, elephant raisers, elephant queue organisers, tourist receptionists, boat queue organisers, boatmen, homestay managers, cooking units, and traditional massage units. In addition, indirect economic benefits were realised by those local people who decided to run private shops and handicraft stores. For instance, there were six private shops in Kiet Ngong village, compared with two prior to ecotourism, and 21 Kiet Ngong resident are now involved in handicraft activities. These indirect economic benefits are similar to ecotourism in Belize as described by Lindberg et al. (1996). As a consequence, economic improvement in Kiet Ngong has led to a substantial transformation in the capacity of villagers to purchase more household items.

Despite the positive economic benefits from Xe Pian ecotourism, there is quite a lot of concern about the economic aspects of sustainability. Most of these jobs were casual, performed according to demand, rather than on a full-time basis. In addition, many local participants mentioned that their earnings from ecotourism were restricted, as they were generated by tourist service jobs which were lower on the pay scale than many other jobs. Consequently, some local people chose to quit their jobs, especially those in the boat service group, due to low earnings and insufficient tourist numbers. This finding supports the research of authors like Wall (1997) and Cater (2006); namely, that when ecotourism industries generate insufficient profit for local residents, significant concern

arises that can weaken long-term financial viability and local commitment to conservation.

Another negative economic impact brought on by ecotourism, as identified by those local participants who were not involved in the ecotourism activities, is the increase in the price of foodstuffs sold in the village. They claimed that food prices had been increasing steadily since the introduction of ecotourism, presumably because of the increase in demand driven by tourists. However, at the same time, those villagers who had not received any benefit from ecotourism could not afford to buy more expensive food.

Unequal and unfair distribution of tourism income is also viewed as another risk factor for the sustainability of ecotourism in Kiet Ngong village. In particular, it was reported by the local people that only the elephant ride service group received significant tourism benefits, while the boat ride service group received the least because of their seasonal service. Additionally, entrance fees have been collected by the government staff from the Xe Pian management unit and while some amount of money has been shared with locals, in order for this to happen, they must first write a proposal concerning the purpose of its use. As noted earlier, many residents have a low level of education and would struggle to write such a proposal.

Some local people also reported that most of the tourism benefits go to the foreign investor who runs the Kingfisher Ecolodge. This concern was highlighted by Wall (1997), who stated that if ecotourism is not economically viable for locals, environmental and natural resources will be destroyed and the facilities and services required to support ecotourism will not be accessible. If local people do not benefit from ecotourism's existence, they will become hostile toward it and may work to undermine it. Scheyvens (1999) likewise stated that if an ecotourism venture cannot bring economic benefits and employment, especially for the local community, then there will not be sufficient interest in it. The community may even end up undermining the ecotourism initiative by destroying natural resources through cutting down trees and hunting animals, because these are the major sources of their livelihood. Lindberg and McKercher (1997) and Stone and Wall (2003) also reported that the emergence of ecotourism development has regularly damaged local people's livelihoods and limited their right to use their own resources. If locals do not receive benefits regularly, they

will consequently be unhappy with and antagonistic toward ecotourism development. Therefore, in terms of sustainable ecotourism, it is imperative to find appropriate ways to replace the people's previous livelihood sources in order to sustain natural resources for the ecotourism ventures.

6.2.3. The assessment of the social impacts

The research findings reported in the preceding chapter show that ecotourism in Kiet Ngong village has contributed both positively and negatively to social conditions, in both tangible and intangible ways. The first positive intangible social enhancement is that of social solidarity since the majority of the local residents work together, sharing common issues and helping each other in facing difficulties. This constructive result of ecotourism can be considered a distinctive force in contributing to the village's social sustainability. Another intangible social enhancement that has been observed during this study is the improvement of local behaviour through contact with different role models. Ecotourism has provided an opportunity for locals to meet and be in contact with tourists, and witness their positive behaviours such as refraining from littering and leaving plastic rubbish on the ground. Local people began to observe this eco-friendly courtesy and exhibit similar good behaviours themselves. However, the case of Kiet Ngong village only partially reflects the picture painted by Weaver (1998) who highlighted that ecotourism can play an essential role in building the confidence of local people, encouraging local ownership, and instilling a sense of pride and positive self-image.

In terms of this tangible social enhancement, Nelson (2004) reported that potential social benefits are closely correlated with improvements in economic conditions, especially in terms of upgrades to the public infrastructure and improvements in the social welfare of the community as a whole. In Kiet Ngong village, positive change in terms of infrastructure has been witnessed in the form of electricity installation, road widening, and well digging. Additionally, construction for local use is also viewed as a tangible social enhancement. This is because the construction of community facilities has played a crucial role in creating social happiness and enjoyment, since the new buildings not only helped strengthen locals' solidarity, but also gave families the chance to earn additional income.

Along with these positive factors, however, some negative social effects have been observed. The research findings outlined in the previous chapter describe the main concerns about the social consequences of ecotourism, as voiced by a few local residents, namely, the introduction of corruption, selfishness, and jealousy. Scheyvens (1999) wrote about similar themes, suggesting that the lure of tourist dollars may contribute to increasing competitiveness within or between local populations. She also noted that money from outside a community can feed a host of social problems such as resentment, jealousy, social inequality, and the escalation of difficulties for disadvantaged groups.

6.2.4. The assessment of the cultural impacts

The research found that ecotourism development in Kiet Ngong village has brought several positive cultural changes. Local government and the ecotourism project have supported locals in maintaining cultural practices and sites, with the aim of attracting tourists to the area to visit them. At the same time, local people have also strongly supported these efforts. This was observed in the ways the majority of locals chose to maintain the traditional styles of their houses and in their dress. This research finding conflicts with the work of Weinberg et al. (2002), who claimed that when ecotourism development occurs, there is a loss of small town values and customs, as well as changes in the local culture.

On a related point, Scheyvens (1999) stated that competition among the local people for financial benefits may result in the loss of respect for elders. This has been observed in Kiet Ngong along with some change in the style of clothing and behaviour of young people when going to the temple. However, these negative changes have been voiced by only a few local residents who view it as a common phenomenon which occurs everywhere in the country; as such, it is not to be associated only with tourism.

In summary, this assessment of the local people's own understanding of and thoughts about the impact of ecotourism in Kiet Ngong village, combined with the researcher's analysis, points to the highlight of the research findings, namely that the majority of local participants expressed an optimistic point of view that the positive effects of ecotourism have overridden the negative effects. The villagers were sure that the

development of ecotourism in the area would be a driving force contributing to local sustainable development, even though there were some negative consequences. They also affirmed that the negative effects of tourism do not mean they want to see no more development of ecotourism in the area.

6.3. Empowerment and Regulation in Kiet Ngong

There are many key elements to making ecotourism sustainable, such as the empowerment of local people, regulation by the government, education of locals and tourists, and robust participation. However, in this research I have emphasised two main aspects, *empowerment* and *regulation*. I strongly believe these are the primary elements that will help to develop ecotourism in Xe Pian NPA, due to the fact that it is such a new destination and as such, it is in great need of effective strategies that can be applied to ensure its long-term survival.

Therefore, for this study, local empowerment is seen as the most important measurement for successful ecotourism development. This perspective has been supported strongly by many academics, including Akama, (1996), Scheyvens (1999), Sofield (2003), and Theophile (1995, as cited in Scheyvens & Purdie, 1999) who claim that empowerment is an integral part of developing a thriving tourism industry that is truly sustainable. If there is a lack of empowerment at the community level, it has been shown that sustainability in tourism development is difficult to achieve.

In the forthcoming section, I will use an empowerment framework, modified from Scheyvens' (1999) framework, to discover whether ecotourism development in Kiet Ngong has empowered local residents. Scheyvens' empowerment framework helps identify the ways in which communities are being affected by tourism development. This will be followed by the application of a regulation framework, constructed in the literature review chapter.

6.3.1. Empowerment in Kiet Ngong

The following empowerment framework, shown in Table 6.1, was derived from the literature review, with findings from Kiet Ngong documented in the third column. Each of the four components are then discussed in further detail below.

Table 6.1

Signs of empowerment and disempowerment in Kiet Ngong

	Signs of empowerment (√) or disempowerment (X) present	Specific illustrations from the Xe Pian ecotourism project in Kiet Ngong village
Economic empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Ecotourism provides continuous economic gains for the local community. √ Cash earned is equitably shared between many households in community. √ Cash earned is spent on individual family improvement. (e.g. each house is made of more permanent materials. X Ecotourism results in small cash gain for the whole community. X Most cash gains go to local elites, outside operators, government agencies. X Only a few individuals and families receive direct financial benefits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Tourism brings jobs and shared benefits to the locals. √ Cash earned is spent on individual household items. X Ecotourism does not provide continuous economic gains for the local residents. X Cash earned is not equitably shared between many households in Kiet Ngong. X Although a significant amount of money goes to locals, the majority of profits still go to outside-owned guesthouse (Kingfisher Ecolodge) and tour operators, and government agencies.
Psychological empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Self-esteem of many community members is enhanced. √ Increasing confidence of community members leads them to seek further education and training opportunities. √ Access to employment and cash leads to an increase in status for traditionally low-status community members X Many people have not share in the benefits of ecotourism. X They may face hardships because of reduced access to the resources of protected areas. X They are confused, frustrated, disinterested or disillusioned with the ecotourism initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Ecotourism project provides a number of local residents with essential training and skills relevant to the local tourism industry. This builds up their self-confidence. √ Self-esteem of many Kiet Ngong villagers is enhanced as their social life has improved because they meet more people, and as a result have become more open-minded. √ The majority of local people are interested in and happy with the ecotourism initiative. X There is no English training for locals, making many frustrated that they cannot communicate with outsiders. X Education level of all villagers is still low. Only primary education is available in Kiet Ngong, and there has been no education improvement. X Some people, especially the boat service group, want to go back to their own traditional practices for meeting basic survival needs, because their tourism income is insufficient and inconsistent. They are disappointed with ecotourism.

Social empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Ecotourism maintains or enhances the local community's equilibrium. √ Community cohesion is improved as individuals and families work together to build a successful ecotourism venture. √ Some funds raised are used for community development purposes. X Disharmony and social decay. Many in the community take on outside values and lose respect for their traditional culture and their elders. X Disadvantaged groups bear the brunt of problems associated with the ecotourism initiative and fail to share equitably in its benefits X Resentment and jealousy are present among villagers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Some funds raised are used for community development. √ Community development includes infrastructure improvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Road broadened -Electricity installed -Wells dug √ Construction of community building <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -New primary school library, office and fence -New village office √ A tightened social solidarity has been observed in Kiet Ngong, as villagers come together to meet the challenges they now have in common regarding ecotourism development. X Some resentment and jealousy exists among local residents, especially between those who benefit from tourism and those who do not. X A few from the younger generation appear to have lost respect for their traditional culture and their elders.
Political empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ The community's political structure, which fairly represents the needs and interest of all community groups, provides a forum through which people can raise questions relating to the ecotourism venture and have their concerns dealt with. √ Agencies initiating or implementing the ecotourism venture seek out the opinions of community groups (including special interest groups of women, youth and other socially disadvantaged groups). √ Provide opportunities for them to be represented on decision-making bodies. X The community has an autocratic or self-interested leadership. X Agencies initiating or implementing the ecotourism venture treat communities as passive beneficiaries, failing to involve them in decision making. X The majority of community members feel that they have little or no say over the whether the ecotourism initiative operators or the way in which they operate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Kiet Ngong community has its own community political structure. √ Villagers were involved in the ecotourism planning meeting, the meeting regarding the prices and services, and the meeting about conservation and ecotourism. √ The entire village was invited to talk about tourism, and to meetings and trainings with village tourism groups in which there was discussion about how to work out various problems and issues. X A few people felt they had little say and ownership in the process. X People do not feel empowered to write proposals for using gate funds.

Source: Scheyvens (1999) and Dombroski (2005)

Economic Empowerment

The Xe Pian ecotourism project appeared to have a degree of economic empowerment, as indicated by the fact that it brought direct and indirect jobs to locals, and benefits were shared among the different group members. Consequently, these jobs have created additional economic benefits for the Kiet Ngong residents, as seen in the increased

number of their household items. However, there is still considerable concern because there were many signs of economic disempowerment, or at least signs that economic gains were not being provided regularly and to sufficient numbers of people. This was particularly so for the boat service group who could not work in the summer when there is no water in the river. Thus, some members of this group had given up their ecotourism-related jobs. Additionally, the cash earned was not equitably distributed among the members, especially the elephant ride group, because it appeared that some elephant queue organisers were giving preferential treatment to their family members. Also, many locals complained that they received only a few of the benefits they could see were coming from the ecotourism project, while the majority of the money went to the outside-owned guesthouse (Kingfisher Ecolodge), tour operators, and government agencies. It was reported by a group of receptionists that:

The majority of ecotourism benefits go to Kingfisher Ecolodge because a large number of tourists go and stay with them. This is because they have a business networking system with tour operators, as well as the fact that their guesthouse has better conditions: luxury furniture and internet access and their own trekking guides. Every day we sit in our information centre office and look at the vans full of tourists driving past, on their way to the Kingfisher Ecolodge. (Receptionist group, personal communication, May 15, 2009)

Another sign of economic disempowerment was also observed in the imbalance that existed concerning people's access to the tourism jobs. In particular, middle- and high-class households had greater opportunities for acquiring tourism jobs because they were better educated, enjoyed better living conditions, or owned an elephant. For instance, Mr Veang, who is 57 years old, reported that:

There are four of our family members involved in tourism activities; two elephant riders, one homestay runner, and one tourist receptionist. Eighty percent of our family income is from tourism activities and so now we have quit rice farming. (K. Veng, personal communication, May 7, 2009)

Also, Mr Si, who is 67 years old, said that:

Ninety percent of our family income comes from tourism activities because there are five family members who have jobs related to tourism: two tourist receptionists, one elephant raiser, one elephant rider, and one homestay manager. (B. Si, personal communication, May 7, 2009)

Some poor families, on the other hand, had not taken part in ecotourism jobs because they lacked knowledge or financial support. At the same time, they faced additional hardships in their living conditions because they had been forced to rely only on agricultural and vegetable products from the forests since the introduction of the government ban on wildlife hunting and logging in the area.

Besides this, there was concern about the entrance fee collected by the local government, the Xe Pian management unit. Of the total collected fees, 70% was kept within the management unit, while 30% of it was shared with locals for small-scale community development. To access this fund, a written proposal describing how the funds would be spent needed to be submitted before the funds would be allocated.

In summary, it seems that economic disempowerment was more significant than any economic empowerment in Kiet Ngong village, because earned benefits were not widely distributed between the many households in the village. The benefits were not consistently shared, and the majority of the money went to an outside-owned guesthouse and government agencies. This research finding is in line with the idea of economic disempowerment outlined in Scheyvens' (1999) framework.

Psychological Empowerment

It was observed that Kiet Ngong residents' confidence has been improved as result of the provision of specific knowledge and skills through the trainings offered in relation to the project. In particular, Xe Pian ecotourism provided a number of Kiet Ngong residents with essential training and skills relevant to the local tourism industry. The WWF Technical Final Report on the project's progress from April 2007 to March 2009, prepared by Paul Eshoo, provided evidence that:

1. Twenty members of the Kiet Ngong Homestay group were trained. This included not only intensive hospitality and housekeeping training, but also cooking training to ensure a high standard of quality for tourists, both vegetarian and non-vegetarian.

2. Twelve Kiet Ngong residents were trained to be local guides.
3. Ten people from the boat service group were also trained.
4. Ten local people were instructed on how to do massage.
5. Thirty-six Kiet Ngong residents took a class on how to welcome and greet tourists.

There was bird-watching training for some Kiet Ngong villagers, and in addition, other residents participated in study tours of the Khao Yia National Park in Thailand. These participants had a chance to learn about park patrolling, the basics of tourism management, and becoming involved in wildlife tourism activities.

Furthermore, the majority of the Kiet Ngong residents expressed interest in these opportunities and appeared happy to have ecotourism activities in their area, because this assisted them not only with economic improvements, but with contributions to the enhancement of a local sense of wellbeing, as well. Thus, as a result of their new knowledge and the opportunity to come into contact with tourists from all over the world, locals became more open-minded and interacted more among themselves, as well as with the outsiders.

However, a sign of psychological disempowerment was also noticed, in that education levels for all villagers remained significantly low and English training had not been provided. These two factors are thought to have limited local people's confidence to some degree. Additionally, some local people lost confidence in taking an active role in the ecotourism activities as in their experience, tourism work provided insufficient and inconsistent income for their families. This led to a desire to go back to meeting basic survival needs through traditional practices, especially hunting; such a trend could be seen as the ultimate result of the process of economic disempowerment.

Overall, psychological empowerment appeared to be more significant than psychological disempowerment in Kiet Ngong, because the majority of local people were interested in and happy with ecotourism development in their area. However, it is still questionable as to whether or not psychological empowerment has actually been fully provided in the Xe Pian ecotourism project, on the grounds that the training process was designed, planned, and implemented by outsiders. Also, women often missed out on these training opportunities, as did poorer villagers who were less likely to be involved in tourism. Project advisors and trainers served as knowledge

transmitters, while local people were seen as knowledge receivers. What is more, it is important to consider the assumptions inherent in the concept of ‘training’. For example, why were local people trained to greet in ‘the Lao way’, but tourists were not trained to greet residents in the local way? This seems to reflect the reality of the power relations that exist between tourists and communities in developing world tourism (Church & Coles, 2007).

Social Empowerment

The Xe Pian ecotourism project demonstrated social empowerment. A portion of the ecotourism benefits were allocated and re-invested in small-scale development activities in order to expand community-based ecotourism in the area. For example, funds were used for road expansion, electricity installation, expansion to the source of cooking and drinking water, and improvements in the education and health sectors. Also, some money was used to fund trail maintenance and conservation activities in the protected areas. In addition, social solidarity has tightened among a large number of households since ecotourism started. However, some signs of social disempowerment were noted. Resentment and jealousy on the part of disadvantaged groups was still seen. Some members of the younger generation were also described as having lost respect for their traditional culture and for their elders, especially when going to the temples. Overall, however, social empowerment seems to have been more significant than social disempowerment, because the latter was expressed by such a small number of local people as to be considered insignificant. In Xe Pian, it is imperative to consider the locals’ requirements as the central issue of any tourism development, and to remember it is not the outsiders’ role to judge which changes are the best for them. Sustainable ecotourism development can only become stronger when it commits to take this point of view during planning.

Political Empowerment

There is evidence that Xe Pian has politically empowered locals. Particularly in Kiet Ngong village, it has been observed that the voice of the community has been taken into account in the Xe Pian ecotourism development (Eshoo, 2009). For example, this was made clear in a personal communication from the Kiet Ngong headman who stated that, “Every time, all villagers were present at the project planning meetings and were given the chance to voice their opinions about the project’s resources. Villagers are also the

ones who are responsible for managing their tourism services groups” (B. Khetkaysone, personal communication, October 12, 2009).

Additionally, the ecotourism project treated Kiet Ngong residents as active beneficiaries by involving them in decision making; locals discussed any issues and how to handle the problems by themselves. Eshoo (2009), in his report, documented that the project held many different types of meetings with the villagers, including awareness meetings in which the entire village was invited to talk about tourism; meetings and trainings with village tourism groups in which they discussed how to work out various problems and issues; meetings to discuss prices for village tourism services; meetings about protection of the natural attractions; and meetings about how to use village development funds.

Kiet Ngong village also had its own political body that included as its members a headman and representatives from women’s groups, youths’ groups, and religious groups. This body presented the needs and interests of the whole community and protected the cultural rights of affected indigenous people. There was also regular dialogue with communities, guides, tourist staff, and government officials about the importance of minimising environmental impact and the linkage between a successful ecotourism industry and the conservation and protection of the natural assets upon which it depends.

However, Paul Eshoo’s report (2009) also contained information that indicated political disempowerment, in that a few of the local people claimed they had little say in the ecotourism development in their area:

There are probably at least a few people who don't feel ownership. We tried to get the village to realize that they must take ownership, but that's not an easy task. I can give you many examples of how we tried to get them to take ownership. I think that only time will tell if they do take more ownership. I don't think that the majority feel that they don't have a say; but it's partly their culture of not being able to speak that supports this. There were many times when the villagers had internal problems and would not speak with each other to work out their problems. Things got better over the two years, and we really tried to get them to understand that we were not coming back and that they were on their own to sort out the problems and maintain their

tourism businesses. The headman of Phalai village called me about one month ago to tell me that he cleaned up the trail on his own with the other village guides. That's ownership! (P. Eshoo, personal communication, October 8, 2009)

Eshoo further asserted that in the last stage of decision making, which concerned factors such as prices and permission, the community needed to seek official approval from the Xe Pian NPA, a process which was normally carried out by the government and is normal practice for a communist state like Laos.

By looking at the bigger picture through applying the framework, political empowerment seems to be more significant in Kiet Ngong than any political disempowerment, because locals were invited to take part in meetings, to raise any issues, and to voice their concerns about ecotourism development. Local representatives were present during all the meetings. However, there is still a concern that in the end, any process of local decision making will require official approval by the government body. Using the empowerment framework, this can also be taken as a sign of political disempowerment. This perspective has been explored by Sofield (2003, as cited in Dombroski, 2005) who reported that in ideal political empowerment:

Authorities responsible for development must accept and respect the right of the community to make a decision for or against its involvement and the use of its resources in tourism development; and then to have the power to carry out that decision. (p. 150)

In short, I believe that economic empowerment is as important as political empowerment in Kiet Ngong village. If there are both economic and political empowerment, it is feasible that psychological and social empowerment may occur automatically. For example, if the local people have enough food and income, and their voice is acknowledged as being important at every stage of ecotourism development, then as a result the local sense of wellbeing will improve, along with social conditions. Alternatively, the local people could become concerned about the negative effects of ecotourism on their community. In particular, they may come to feel their physical and social quality of life could be jeopardised, their culture disrupted, and any economic gains undermined by the loss of livelihood that resulted from being denied access to the area's natural resources.

I also believe it is imperative to treat the local community as active beneficiaries and place their economic and political empowerment at the centre of any development. However, it is important bear in mind what will happen if only some people control these and selfishly keep the benefits and power in their own families, with no concern for the community as a whole. More importantly, if local people are only empowered, they may use this in an uncontrolled way which may impinge on the wellbeing of others and on the environment. Thus, in order to address this issue and create a healthy balance, regulation must also be taken into account in sustainable ecotourism development.

6.3.2. Regulation in Kiet Ngong

The following regulation framework, contained in Table 6.2, is derived from literature discussed in Chapter 2 that corroborates findings from Kiet Ngong, which are displayed in the right hand column. Each of the three components (social, environmental, and economic regulation/underregulation) are discussed further below.

Table 6.2

Signs of Regulation and Underregulation in Kiet Ngong

	Signs of regulation (√) and underregulation (X)	Specific illustrations from the Xe Pian ecotourism project in Kiet Ngong village
Social regulation/underregulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Local stakeholders have regulation to control the migration movement to ecotourism area. E.g. migration can only be through marriage to the indigenous people. √ Local community have self-regulation to ensure community's equilibrium X There are no measures to control the migration movement in the ecotourism area X Only high status people within the community have an opportunity to seek further education and therefore to be employed in the ecotourism venture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Villagers have agreed upon the price of the souvenir commodities they are selling and the price of tourist services. √ Villagers all have the same right to own a certain amount of land that they can use for agriculture. √ Local regulation to control migration movement. X No limitation on the number of babies. X Middle and high class people have a better chance than poorer families to become involved in tourism training and services.

Environmental regulation/underregulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Local government set up the laws/regulation to protect wildlife and the environment in the protected area. √ Local community set up a social contract and understanding to limit the degree of people accessing to the protected area. X Local people overuse natural resources because local government do not have any forms of laws and regulation to maintain wildlife and environment. X Local community do not have any forms of social contract to safeguard the environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Local government protocol regulates forest use. √ Local communities cannot access forest or natural resources in the reserve. Fines are imposed for breaking the protocol. √ Local people are not allowed to own guns. √ Local government also bans expanding the rice fields in the reserve. √ Local agreement on limitation of the use of an elephant (no more than two times per day). X No regulation to control the number of visitors in the area. X Hunting is still occurring despite regulations. X Rice field expansion is still occurring.
Economic regulation/underregulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Local community has agreement with stakeholders about some type of schedule of payment to community members √ Local government set up specific date of sharing ecotourism benefits with local community. √ Local set up some rules for outsider investors to share their ecotourism benefits with local community. X There is no agreement about any type of schedule of payment to community members X Local government do not set up specific date of sharing ecotourism benefits with local community. X Local set up some rules for outsider investors to share their ecotourism benefits with local community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Ecotourism project and local community agree on the schedule of payments to community members, but these depend on type of services. √ Local government set up specific percent for sharing ecotourism benefits, but they need to apply for this funds. X No rule for the outside investors to share ecotourism benefits with local community.

Source: Weaver (2000) and Dombroski (2005)

Weaver (2000) claimed that any form of tourism has the potential to be unsustainable without applying some degree of regulation. This idea has been supported by Dombroski (2005) who highlighted that regulation plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable ecotourism on the grounds that it has become an essential mechanism for protecting environmental sustainability, protecting the local people’s way of life, and creating a suitable method for safeguarding both outsiders and insiders.

Social regulation

There has been self-regulation, a form of social regulation, within the Xe Pian ecotourism project in order to ensure the Kiet Ngong community’s equilibrium. Specifically, Kiet Ngong villagers have agreed upon the prices for the souvenirs they are selling, as well as the tourist services, such as the homestay, elephant ride, and boat ride. What is more, external social regulation has also been imposed to ensure local equilibrium in terms of land allocation; in this way, social regulation has led to

environmental regulation. This is evident from comments during a formal interview with the head of the tourism office at Phatoumphone District, who stated that:

Each village has a certain amount of land that they can use for agriculture, which is allocated to them by the government. So, in that sense, the number of people living in a village is managed because they cannot expand their land without approval. (P. Phoummarchant, personal communication, May 15, 2009)

In addition, local people control the amount of immigration, because permission from the family needs to be given and a written endorsement from the headman needs to be signed. LeBar and Suddard (1960) reported that, according to Lao traditions, anyone getting married needs to get permission from family as well as authorization from the village headman to complete their marriage papers. Therefore, the headman could potentially deny someone permission to marry if he thought it was not good for the village. So in these ways, local people control migration to villages located inside the Xe Pian NPA.

However, signs of social underregulation have been observed in Kiet Ngong because, like the rest of Laos, there is no agreement on how population growth is to be managed. Additionally, the absence of a social contract was apparent from the observed imbalance concerning access to the tourism jobs in the area.

Environmental regulation

The local government introduced a set of rules for forest use which state that using the specified Park resources is illegal; this has been a very contentious issue. For example, local people could not access the forest or natural resources freely in the reserve, and if they did not abide by this rule, a heavy fine would be incurred. The local government also issued a rule that local residents were not allowed to own guns, so as to protect wildlife. In addition, rice field boundaries could not be expanded without official approval from the park management unit.

Apart from this, the local community developed a social contract about using the elephants inside the park. They agreed that each elephant should not go into the national park more than twice a day, because local people were not only concerned about the

environmental destruction caused by the elephants, but also wanted to protect the elephants' health.

On the other hand, underregulation was observed in that there was no regulation controlling the number of tourists visiting and staying in the area, as compared to the number of villagers living inside the park. Paul Eshoo stated that:

For the Ta Ong Trek, we discussed the issue of how many people can go and sleep in Ta Ong each day. They said that not more than ten per day/night. This was never written in the contract. However, it has been discussed with the provincial tourism office guide service unit, with the Kingfisher Ecolodge, and with the villages. They stick to this. In Kiet Ngong, there aren't any limits written in a contract. (P. Eshoo, personal communication, October 8, 2009)

Economic regulation

The Xe Pian ecotourism project established a set of guidelines in an attempt to ensure the regular and equitable distribution of gained income. Specifically, the data revealed that in Kiet Ngong, 5,000 kip (US\$5) from each elephant ride went to the village development fund and an additional 5,000 kip (US\$5) went to the village administration. Also, 15% of the sales receipts from souvenirs at Kiet Ngong went to the Kiet Ngong village development fund and 15% to the Xe Pian NPA conservation and development fund. According to the established guidelines, 30% of the total entrance fees collected go back to the villages in the form of small-scale development, although this process depended on the villages writing a proposal for the use of this village development money.

However, underregulation was also observed concerning economic factors, especially related to the role of the national government. This is because although outside investors gained benefits from the local environmental assets, there was no rule requiring them to share the profit they gained from ecotourism with the local community.

Overall, the type and amount of economic regulation appeared to be appropriate. There were many agreements to ensure that any ecotourism benefits were fairly and equitably shared among community members, and a portion of the funds were spent on

community development. However, there was also concern about corruption, which was visible in the village administration. As Paul Eshoo stated :

Most villagers prefer to receive money directly by providing services to tourists because they do not trust the village administration to do village development activities. So, we tried to help more villagers to work in tourism and get money directly (P. Eshoo, personal communication, October 8, 2009).

Summary of regulation issues

In summary, one important element of social regulation is the idea of social commitment among the community members. This form of social regulation appears to be a crucial tool for ensuring that social benefits are equitably distributed to all households in a community. This idea draws on the case study conducted by Dombroski (2005); she claimed that social commitment played a significant role in reducing any conflict among community members since they had equal right of access to ecotourism benefits as a result of a collective community agreement on benefit sharing.

Environment regulation is also believed to have an essential role, particularly in maintaining natural resources and thus contributing to the sustainability of the project, since the natural environment is crucial to maintaining an ecotourism venture. If the natural environment is destroyed, ecotourism will also collapse. The research found that in Kiet Ngong village there was some environmental regulation, but locals still illegally accessed natural resources in the surrounding area. Therefore, environmental regulation of the Xe Pian project was only partial and remains a largely unresolved issue. It appears that members of the local community still need to access the area's natural resources in order to secure their own livelihoods, despite the state's regulation of the environment.

Lastly, economic regulation is considered by locals to be the most vital part of the ecotourism venture, and therefore it needs to perform effectively. It should not only guarantee a fair distribution of ecotourism benefits among the community members, but also allow for some funds to be raised for local development. The concern is that currently, there are some forms of economic regulation but these apply only to locals and not to the administrative local government and community leadership; thus, the

village funds derived from ecotourism are not being used effectively for community development.

6.4. Conclusion

In analysing this case study it was found that much information from the research data matched the broader literature. As with the development of any ecotourism project, Xe Pain ecotourism has had both positive and negative effects on the local community. Positively, there is protection of the environment and wildlife; direct and indirect employment is provided and the economic wellbeing of locals is enhanced. Public infrastructure, education, and health are improved and there is also promotion of maintaining the cultural and historical traditions and sites that serve as tourist attractions. On the negative side, construction of the facilities supporting ecotourism has led to the destruction of natural resources. Increases in daily rubbish, the price of foodstuffs, and air and noise pollution have been unavoidable. Corruption, selfishness, and jealousy have been fostered, and the lure of financial benefits among community members led to an increase in competition. Consequently, a loss of respect for elders and changes in dress and general behaviour can be seen.

However, in Kiet Ngong, the positive effects on the environment, economy, social conditions, and culture were found to be more significant than the negative effects, because the development of ecotourism was observed to be a key means for protecting wildlife and the environment, bringing in additional income, enhancing social well-being, and maintaining culture in the area.

The empowerment framework can be a useful tool for understanding ecotourism sustainability on the grounds that it helps identify the areas in which local people are empowered and disempowered. In addition, the status of local forms of regulation and underregulation can be documented through the use of a regulation framework. It is imperative to point out, however, that while these frameworks can indicate whether local residents have experienced empowerment and whether regulation has occurred, they cannot indicate the real needs of these people. Thus, the two frameworks are considered to be an appropriate mechanism for gaining a general understanding about the sustainability of ecotourism, but need to be used in combination with other approaches which emphasise the perspective of the grassroots people. Such approaches include ethnography and other participatory methods.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Conclusion

7.1. Introduction

The goal of this research was to examine the potential of the Xe Pian ecotourism project for facilitating local sustainable development through working with Kiet Ngong residents and other key stakeholders.

It has been documented that other countries, such as Thailand and Vietnam, have been successful in establishing viable ecotourism projects that have managed to provide sustained economic benefits to local populations while meeting the challenges of providing for tourist needs and interests and maintaining the ecosystem involved. Many other initiatives within the GMS are dedicated to helping poor rural populations improve their living circumstances by making the most of the natural resources that surround them. By going beyond hunting and harvesting to leveraging these resources through ecotourism development, it is believed these populations will find a long-term solution for rising above subsistence-level living. Thus, the focus of the case study was on attempting to explore both the positive and the negative impacts of Xe Pian ecotourism on local people's livelihoods and to find strategies for sustaining ecotourism derived from the perspective of the local people, as well as the opinions of involved outsiders.

This chapter comprises three main sections: firstly, it begins with a brief overview of the thesis, tracing the key themes that emerged throughout the research; secondly, it outlines the main conclusions drawn from the outcomes of the research; and thirdly, it provides recommendations for the planners and policymakers of the Xe Pian National Protected Area Management Unit, for the Xe Pian ecotourism project team as well as suggestions for further research.

7.2. Summary of the Thesis

The primary aim of this research was to assess the Xe Pian ecotourism venture in Champasak Province with a view to suggesting strategies that will contribute to local sustainable development. In order to fulfil this research aim, three objectives were set up, as follows:

- To assess the existing contribution of ecotourism to community development in the Xe Pian ecotourism project in Champasak Province
- To identify the current environmental, economic, cultural and social risks that exist within Xe Pian ecotourism
- To make recommendations to help ensure the sustainability of future ecotourism activities.

The research questions below were constructed to ensure these main objectives were met:

1. What are the social, cultural, economic, and environmental impacts, both positive and negative, on local livelihoods from the Xe Pian ecotourism project?
2. What are some desirable strategies that local people and other stakeholders suggest to enhance the outcomes of the Xe Pian ecotourism project?

This investigation was conducted within the context of strong national interest and investment in ecotourism on the part of the Lao government. Lao PDR is one of the countries that has chosen to prioritise ecotourism as an appropriate tool for poverty reduction in the nation. According to Harrison and Schipani (2007), the Lao government has used tourism as a tool for national development over recent decades. The role of ecotourism, pro-poor tourism, and community-based tourism is now the primary focus of the Lao government's poverty-alleviation strategy, on the grounds that these types of tourism play a crucial role in providing foreign exchange and employment. The central government encourages provincial governments to promote NPAs as tourism destinations and has composed broad guidelines for development with special focus on capacity management, sustainable use of resources, respect for cultural and natural diversity, and the involvement of local residents in decision making.

At the same time, a closer look at specific ecotourist programs in Laos can reveal a number of challenges. In particular, the Provincial Department of Tourism (2007) has indicated that there are many key issues plaguing the Xe Pian National Protected Area. First and foremost, increasing population pressure is disturbing wildlife and damaging the environment. Poaching for trade and for food is also an issue.

Kiet Ngong village, which is located inside Xe Pian NPA in Champasack Province, Lao PDR, was the case study for this research project. Data was gathered by employing

both quantitative and qualitative methods, consisting of semi-structured interviews, informal and formal interviews, private walks and observation, and questionnaire surveys.

According to the research results, the findings at Kiet Ngong match the broader literature on the topic of sustainable ecotourism. In that it has had both positive and negative effects on a community. Positively, there is protection of the environment and wildlife; direct and indirect jobs are provided and the economic well-being of local inhabitants is enhanced; public infrastructure, education, and health are improved; and there is also the promotion of cultural and tourist attractions. Negatively, the construction of the facilities supporting ecotourism did lead to the destruction of natural resources. The increase in daily rubbish, the price of foodstuffs, and air and noise pollution are all problems the local residents have to bear. Increased opportunity for corruption, selfishness, and jealousy have also been brought into village society, and the lure of financial benefits has led to an increase in competition among community members.

However, the results of this research revealed that in Kiet Ngong village, ecotourism's positive impact on the environment, economy, social conditions, and culture was shown to be more significant than its negative consequences. This is because the development of ecotourism has come to be viewed as a key means for protecting the wildlife and environment, bringing in additional income, enhancing social well-being for most people, and maintaining the culture of the area.

Having presented a brief summary of the study and its results, the forthcoming section will now summarize the conclusions that can be drawn from the research findings. In this respect, I do not maintain that these findings are universally relevant, but rather that they may be applicable to other Lao socio-cultural settings and thereby may help provide understanding for investigating similar ecotourism projects in other contexts.

7.3. Conclusions of the Research

Three main conclusions from this research serve to answer the question "How can Xe Pian be sustainable so as to contribute to local sustainable development?" Firstly, Xe Pian ecotourism has the potential to play an integral part in contributing to local

sustainable development if local residents are equipped in terms of economic and political empowerment (Dombroski, 2005; Scheyvens,1999; and Sifield, 2003). I believe when the economic and political empowerment of Kiet Ngong villagers is placed at the centre of any development efforts this potential can be optimally realised. This involves addressing the primary concerns of the local population, including food and income issues, ensuring that they have a voice in the decision-making processes, and improving the quality of life. The ultimate effect of the ecotourism project on the economic well-being of local inhabitants and the continuity of their culture should be prioritised. Only then will economic and political empowerment, and the psychological and social empowerment that flow from them, be effected.

Secondly, if Xe Pian ecotourism is regulated in both internal and external contexts, it will have the potential to sustain its own ecotourism site. Internal regulation must be constructed within the community itself in order to ensure that benefits gained from tourism have been delivered fairly, equally, and regularly among community members. This could be done by setting up a meeting among locals with the aim of meeting internal requirement and agreement. Doing this will play an important part in creating harmony among local residents and reducing conflicts, because every local resident will be able to access the benefits of tourism. This approach has been strongly supported by Dombroski (2005).

External regulation should be created for both government agencies and outside-owned private businesses such as the guesthouse owners and tour operators, in order to provide them with the means for demonstrating their commitment to sharing some tourism benefits with the local people. This could be done by the collaboration among government and private bodies as well as locals in order to decide the percentage of tourism income to be shared with locals. This regulation is a reasonable step to take, since these external participants gain benefits from the local assets while at the same time, the local people are the ones who provide a key element of the tourism experience and serve as the primary protectors of the environment. If locals receive sufficient ecotourism income, they will not harm wildlife or the environment; instead, they will become committed to helping protect the environment that supports ecotourism.

Additionally, Xe Pian ecotourism is presently viewed as sustainable because of its small scale of operation. However, should the number of tourists increase considerably, it may

become unsustainable on the grounds that environmental assets will be destroyed and wildlife will migrate to other places to avoid the growing presence of humans. This has been supported by Weaver (2001), who postulated that small-scale tourism is often only circumstantially sustainable because of its scale and suggested that when tourist numbers increase, small-scale tourism has the potential to become unsustainable. Thus, limitation of the number of tourists coming to Xe Pian each day should be taken into account.

Thirdly, the community-based ecotourism development approach should be adopted in Xe Pian ecotourism (Tosun & Timothy, 2003). This involves taking such steps as ensuring that any local administrative board or committee includes local residents, because community participation in administrative roles is key to the success of ecotourism development. This also ensures that the voices of those most affected by the ecotourism project are not lost, but rather become a significant factor in administrative decision-making. While some may argue that local residents are too limited in their education to be capable of making such contributions (Cole, 2007), this limitation should instead be viewed as an opportunity for further education and training, perhaps even supported by scholarship funds for locals (Dombroski, 2005), thus providing local residents with the tools to effectively represent their own interests.

It is imperative to point out that these findings are not discrete, they are linked. For example, if villagers are empowered, as in the first conclusion, they will be in a better position to play a strong role in community-based ecotourism.

7.4. Recommendations

While the overall progress of the Xe Pian tourism project has been strongly positive, there are, as with most challenging projects, areas that could benefit from specific ideas and recommendations. In drawing from the results of this research to propose the recommendations outlined below, I would like to voice my recognition of the fact that these suggestions are in no way complete or perfect solutions. My goal in presenting them is to offer insight into a way forward that will make further development of the Xe Pian tourism project easier and more effective. These recommendations are therefore

meant to simply build on the successes that have already been accomplished in order to continue with the growth of the project that is sought by all parties involved.

7.4.1. Recommendations for the government administrative unit

Ecotourism specialists and researchers should never take for granted the right to speak on behalf of communities and prescribe top-down, western-style solutions for them. The development of ecotourism can be extremely destructive to the host community in terms of the environment, economy, social fabric, and cultural heritage, especially if it lacks integrated strategies, comprehensive planning, and participation by all levels of the community. To accomplish sustainability, tourism research, policy, and institutions must include a community voice from the very beginning. Direct participation by the local community in all phases of planning and implementation is an important factor in minimizing any negative impact from ecotourism on local people. Indeed, such participation has the potential to create a positive cultural and environmental influence.

Local people also need to participate in the benefits of ecotourism. In addition to equity considerations, sharing revenues with local people to reduce their dependence on the protected area for subsistence has been shown to enhance protection of the site (see examples from Lindberge, Enriquez & Sproule, 1996; Fang, 2002; and Stone & Wall, 2002). In addition, if local people are involved in decisions about and participate in management of the protected areas, they maintain a sense of control over their relationship with their habitat; such a sense of control over their own fate may strengthen their cultural identity. This idea has been solidly supported by Cercena (1991), who contends that participation is the agent by which people make good use of their abilities to direct the activities taking place around them, and manage the resources at their disposal.

More importantly, local people, despite the differences in their levels of formal education and experience, have the sense and capability to judge what is best for them. The local people of Kiet Ngong, this project's site, are able to identify their problems and evaluate their experiences based on their own perspectives. They are able to present effective solutions, even though these might be different responses than those promoted by outsiders. However, in combination with this local self-direction, government

controls are also necessary to coordinate infrastructure development with local planning, and provide checks on the speed and quality of ecotourism development.

An additional recommendation is to provide for capacity building at Phathoumphone District tourism office (DTO). This is needed because although the DTO is a new organisation, it has come to provide a crucial link between the villages, guides, the provincial tourism department (PTD) and the National Protected Area Management Unit. Phathoumphone DTO will continue to play an important role in monitoring the impact of tourism in Xe Pian, supervising private sector activities and tourism expansion, upgrading the skills of local businesses and communities who welcome tourists, and ensuring the overall quality of tourism services. However, currently the training and capacity-building in tourism management at the DTO is somewhat uneven, and may require a boost in skills and financing to effectively take up these new and growing responsibilities. Consequently, it will be up to the PTD to supervise, support, and even train Phathoumphone staff – and all the DTOs – to effectively decentralise provincial tourism administration.

Private investment should be allowed wherever there is potential for tourism development, but a proper legal framework is needed to ensure that locals get a share of the employment and revenue generated from tourism growth in the region. An effective example of this can be seen in South African ecotourism where the private sector is being strongly promoted and has performed well in improving both the local economy and natural conservation (see Spenceley, 2003). Additionally, actively promoting private sector opportunities for both domestic and foreign investors should be prioritised. Such businesses and organisations not only help to introduce and advertise ecotourism on a wide scale while urging visitors to come visit, they also greatly assist the local economy by providing employment opportunities for locals and creating or identifying market outlets for handicrafts produced by local people. Consequently, through increasing their numbers the local economy will be improved, the community base for the ecotourism site will be strengthened, and residents will have effective alternatives for supporting themselves without turning to the protected area for subsistence.

It should be noted that in the case of the Xe Pian ecotourism project, the idea of moving the villages located inside the park to the outside would seem unworkable by many

standards. Firstly, the financial cost of carrying out such a relocation would be greater than any benefit. Specifically, the government would have to provide satisfactory compensation to the local people, especially for the land that would need to be allocated for agricultural enterprise of a scale sufficient to provide adequate food for all residents. Water sources would need to be set up and developed. If all such factors were not provided for, the people could be forced to move back to their original settlement in order to survive. Rugendyke and Son's (2008) findings concerning the Cuc Phoung ecotourism site in Vietnam provide a clear warning on this subject. They reported that local people who were removed to settlements outside the ecotourism site wanted to move back to their own settlement because they experienced food shortages in the new resettlement areas due to the infertile soil and unreliable sources of water for their agriculture.

7.4.2. Recommendations for the Xe Pian ecotourism project

Since the Xe Pian ecotourism project started, the basic infrastructure and training supporting ecotourism in Kiet Ngong have been provided. The tools for generating revenues from ecotourism for conservation and village development have been put in place. There has been improvement in the marketing of ecotourism and the development of private sector tour services. Awareness about protecting wildlife, forests, wetlands, and rivers has been raised among officials, villagers, the private sector, and visitors, with the result that such protection has been improving. There has been broad participation by locals in ecotourism activities, and the income from ecotourism, which has increased considerably over time, has contributed somewhat to the alleviation of poverty in Kiet Ngong village.

However, alongside these findings of significant accomplishment, several areas of serious need were also identified. One of the most pressing issues requiring a solution is that of elephant breeding. In Kiet Ngong, elephant rides are the most popular activity among visiting tourists. While offering this attraction could well boost tourist numbers, the ability to provide elephant rides is compromised by the fact that almost all of the elephants are female and very old. The local people do not have a budget adequate for covering the costs of elephant reproduction. Thus, the Xe Pian ecotourism project may need to consider providing financial support to help resolve this issue.

Furthermore, trekking guides in Kiet Ngong need more training in how to interact with visitors and improve their communication skills. Results from this study indicate that many tourists have complained in the past because some trekking guides only lead them on the trails and do not provide sufficient narrative and explanation of the protected area during the trek. The local tourism receptionists could also benefit from increased training in English, so they can improve their ability to avoid making any mistakes in their work, and be able to create a warm and positive atmosphere when conversing with visitors.

The Xe Pian ecotourism project could also contribute toward the further growth and improvement of tourism at the site by focusing more attention on the poorer households in the village. For example, poorer families who have felt unable to participate could be supported and encouraged to take part in ecotourism activities by the provision of funds to upgrade the condition of their houses in order to make them acceptable and comfortable as homestays. If helped to participate in this way, instead of detracting from the site, the poorer households would help to maintain the environment. As it is now, they do not experience any of the benefits from ecotourism and thus are not really interested in cooperating with the project's goals.

Of special note, the gender roles observed during fieldwork in the Kiet Ngong village indicate a specific opportunity for maximizing the effectiveness of future training initiatives. Due to their roles in village life, women trained to recognize ecological issues could have a significant impact on the success of sustainability efforts going forward. If women were encouraged more to participate in ecotourism training and activities, they would also be supplied with an alternative livelihood option. Customized trainings and seminars could teach women new skill sets and provide them with opportunities for moving out beyond the world of their own households and earning income, all the while raising consciousness in regards to the environment (see Fleno, 2006 and Scheyvens, 2002).

Handicrafts development is another area of particular relevance to women's role in ecotourism development. There is potential for upgrading and further developing handicrafts in Kiet Ngong, and other villages as well, which could expand tourism benefits for women and encourage more cultural activity. Handicrafts promote traditional arts and skills, and support the continuation of cultural knowledge. Encouraging growth in handicraft production could provide consistent benefits,

particularly for the local women, but this would require support from a handicrafts expert or product designer who could help add value to existing products and identify new opportunities.

Most importantly, the findings of this research would recommend that the Xe Pian ecotourism project employ a full-time community development specialist to carefully monitor and devise ways for sustainable community development to proceed from this point, as one of the outcomes of introduced ecotourism. This would entail hiring a foreign or Lao technical assistant whose primary job would be to liaise with other government and donor agencies for the purpose of providing technical and advisory support concerning the ways in which villagers can benefit from the income of ecotourism through broad-based livelihood improvement strategies. Additionally, the role of the community development specialist would include offering assistance to Lao agencies in monitoring and mitigating the negative impact of the modernization that accompanies the regular presence of both tourists and money.

7.4.3. Recommendations for further research

The thesis findings provide guidelines for further study of this topic in other communities. Research findings presented in this thesis may be used by development planners, decision makers, donors, project managers, and non-government and local community organisations to set up policies or design strategies for promoting effective approaches to ecotourism development, and to plan for sustainable and successful future development interventions in Laos. However, it is imperative to note that since this research was limited to just one community situated inside a park, there is need for further investigation into the many varieties of environmental, economic, social, and cultural situations that exist outside of parks. It has become clear that successful continuation of ecotourism in this location will require an equal amount of attention and effort to be placed on similar communities in outlying areas.

Another area requiring further research is the role of private investors and the contributions they could make in promoting ecotourism and ensuring its success. Because of the amount of resources that can be brought to bear when private investment is a factor, investigation into its potential impact and ways it can network with local communities and business interest will be important going forward.

Additional research into the types and effectiveness of ongoing training for locals who are willing to participate would also be valuable. In particular, studies that identify programs which can increase the empowerment of local residents so they are willing to step forward in the management of ecotourism projects are recommended, so that more information about how to help communities manage their own ecotourism endeavors themselves will be available.

Finally, an exploration of gender differences in training and work opportunities related to ecotourism is also needed. The ways in which women's experiences with ecotourism development differ, and the consequences to the women themselves and their families, certainly deserve closer attention in future research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Working Plan

Working Plan

The table below illustrates the important activities, the process of data collection, and the time that researcher will spent when returning home and at the study site.

Time (in 2009)	Place	Activities
12 th -13 th April	Palmerston, Ackland, Bangkok, Lao airport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaving Palmerston North, Via Ackland and Bangkok airport, and arrive Lao airport On 13th.
14 th -20 th April	Vientiane Capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staying in Vientiane capital, preparing all stuffs that will be used in study site (translating and typing in Lao, and printing semi-structure interview sheet). • Visiting Ministry of education for asking permission and Lao National Tourism Administration (LNTA) for cooperation for the research. • Collecting some necessary statistics at LNTA
21 st April	Vientiane Capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaving from Vientiane to Champasak province
22 nd April	Champasak province	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arriving at Champasak
23 rd April	Champasak Province	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visiting and asking permission from the province for further cooperation at the district, ecotourism project, and village level
24 th April- 20 th May	Study site (Bane Ta Ong)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visiting the head of the village, asking for permission • Collecting data
21 st -22 nd May	Champasak- Vientiane	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Returning back to Vientiane
23 rd -29 th May	Vientiane Capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collecting some more necessary data in Vientiane, arranging data, packing, and also spending some time with daughter for relaxing before heading back to Massey University
30 th May	Vientiane, Bangkok,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaving Lao PDR via Bangkok airport
1 st June	Palmerston North	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arriving Palmerston North

Appendix 2: Massey University Human Ethics Low Risk Notification



Massey University

19 March 2009

Alavanh Phanthavong
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PALMERSTON NORTH

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT
TO THE VICE-CHANCELLOR
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Dear Alavanh

Re: Examine the Potential of the Existing Ecotourism for Local Sustainable Development: A Case Study in Kiet Ngong village in Champasak Province, Lao PDR

Thank you for your Low Risk Notification which was received on 18 March 2009.

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 Sylvia Rumball, Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (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

Sylvia V Rumball (Professor)
**Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and
Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (Research Ethics)**

cc: Assoc Prof Regina Scheyvens
School of People, Environment and
Planning
PN331

Dr Henry Barnard, HoS
School of People, Environment and
Planning
PN331

Assoc Prof Glenn Banks
School of People, Environment and
Planning
PN331

Massey University Human Ethics Committee
Accredited by the Health Research Council

Appendix 3: Information Sheet



Massey University

School of people, Environment and planning

Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa

Project Title: The potential of ecotourism for local sustainable development: A Case Study in Kiet Ngong Village in Champasak Province, Lao PDR.

INFORMATION SHEET

I am Alavanh PHANTHAVONG. I am a Master's student in Development Studies at Massey University in New Zealand. Currently, I am doing a research in order to fulfill the requirements of my Master's degree. The main purpose of my research is to analyse ecotourism at Xe Pian and to consider whether it contributes to local sustainable development.

The research project has three aims: to assess the existing ecotourism's positive and negative impacts on local livelihoods with special focus on environmental, economic, social, and cultural aspects; and to consult local people and other stakeholders about strategies that could contribute to sustainable development in future.

Additionally, my research will hopefully help people in the field of development to practice ecotourism in a way that will contribute to sustainable development.

In order to accomplish this research, I would like to invite local residents, domestic and international tourists, staff in the ecotourism project as well as government officials at every level to participate in this research project.

Regarding secondary data collection, I have a *Letter of Permission* for doing this research from the Ministry of education. This letter includes a request for cooperation from concerned government organizations especially the Lao National Tourism Administration (LNTA), provincial, district, and village level government, and other relevant bodies.

All information and ideas being shared will be kept confidential. Real names will not be used unless participants approve of this.

Individual participants will be involved structured interviews. This will take between 20 and 30 minutes per person.

Group discussions will take between 30 and 40 minutes.

Questionnaire surveys for tourists will take between 15 to 20 minutes to complete .

The information collected from the field will merely be used for the purpose of writing my thesis and I will not use or disclose it for other purposes. The name of participants will be only used in the thesis if I have consent from the owner of that information.

Participant's Rights

Participants 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 time
- ask any questions 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 it is concluded. Please inform me during my time in Lao PDR if you would like me to send you a summary of findings within 8 weeks of my return to New Zealand.

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.

If completing a Questionnaire, completion and return of the questionnaire implies consent. You have the right to decline to answer any particular question.

Researcher

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All research participants are invited to contact the researcher (myself) or my supervisors at any time if you have questions or comments about this research.

Thank you for your cooperation

Appendix 4: Semi-structured interview



Massey University

School of people, Environment and planning

Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa

Questions for Semi-structured interview

Name of village:

Date:.....

Description of participant (age, sex):

I. Environmental aspect

1. What changes have you experienced since the ecotourism project started?

.....
..

2. Can you explain to me what kind of changes you have seen in your surroundings since the project started?

.....
...

3. Where do you get firewood from? (before and after the ecotourism project).

Before	After
.....
.....
.....

3a. How often do you collect firewood in a week? (before and after the ecotourism project).

	Before		After
once	<input type="checkbox"/>	once	<input type="checkbox"/>
twice	<input type="checkbox"/>	Twice	<input type="checkbox"/>
Three times	<input type="checkbox"/>	Three times	<input type="checkbox"/>
More than three times	<input type="checkbox"/>	More than three times	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. Where do you dispose your household rubbish? (before and after the ecotourism project).

	Before		After
Burn	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
bury	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Throw on the ground/river/bush	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Where do you grow rice site? (before and after the ecotourism project).

Before		After
.....	
.....	
.....	

6. Where do you have gardens ? (before and after the ecotourism project).

Before		After
.....	
.....	
.....	

7. Are there any restrictions from the ecotourism project allowing/not allowing you to plant rice and make gardens?

.....

.....

.....

8. What are some unique features (wildlife/plants, etc) of your environment?

Before		After
.....	
.....	
.....	

4b. Do you receive any form of training on how to look after or conserve the environment from ecotourism project?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	
No	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	

4c. If yes, what forms of training?

.....
.....

II. Economic aspect

1. Has your economic situation changed since the project started? If so, please explain

.....
.....

2. What food do you eat in a normal day? (before and after the ecotourism project).

Before	After
.....
.....
.....
.....

3. What kind of jobs do you or family members have in the past/present?

Past	Present
.....
.....
.....

3a. Which of these jobs are directly or indirectly linked to tourism?

.....

4. Can you draw the proportion of your household income from the ecotourism project?

.....

5. What new household items have you obtained since the ecotourism project started?

.....

III. Cultural Aspect

1. As a result of the ecotourism project, what cultural practices have been affected?
(Could be positive or negative?)

.....

Please explain.....

2. How do you feel about living in the community?

	Before ecotourism		After ecotourism	
Happy	<input type="checkbox"/>		Happy	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ok	<input type="checkbox"/>		Ok	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not happy	<input type="checkbox"/>		Not happy	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>		Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

2a. What things that make you happy?

.....
.....

2b. What things that make you unhappy?

.....
.....

3. Are some cultural attractions being promoted by the ecotourism project? If so? What are they?

.....	
.....	
.....	

Appendix 5: Informal Interview

Informal-Interview

Social perception

This informal interview or discussion will be conducted in Ban Ta Ong. It aims to ask the normal local people who is really free in order to gain a wide range of information from different people. However, consent form will be signed at any time.

Key informants	Place	Questions to be asked
Local residents	Kiet Ngong Village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you feel happy or unhappy to see tourists coming to your village? Explain..... • Do you feel happy or unhappy to communicate with visitors? Explain..... • Do you comfortable or uncomfortable with tourists taking your photos? Explain..... • Do you think tourism bring positive or negative impacts on local residents? Explain..... • Is community cohesion improved as individuals and family work together? Explain..... • Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the level of income you earn from tourism? Explain..... • Do you feel confused, frustrated, disinterested or disillusioned with the Xe Pian Ecotourism Project? Explain..... • Do you think tourism bring conflicts to the individuals or community as whole? Explain.....

Thank you for your participation

Appendix 6: Formal Interview

Formal-Interview

This formal-interview aims to ask many key stakeholders involved in the ecotourism project and also other government officials at provincial, district, village levels, and relevant bodies in order to assess the social, environmental, cultural, and economic change in Ban Ta Ong.

Key informants	Place	Questions to be asked
Staff/Project Manager	Xe Pian Ecotourism Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please explain how Xe Pian ecotourism emerged here. Was it gov't/NGOs/business people and/or individuals in the community who initiated this? What were different interest groups wanting to achieve by developing ecotourism here? • How long have you been working on this ecotourism project? What changes, good or bad, have you seen since you started working here (environmental, economic, cultural). • To what extent does ecotourism here improve the livelihoods of local people (e.g. does it help just a few, or many people – please explain)? • What do you think are the main strengths of this ecotourism project? • What do you think are the main weaknesses of this ecotourism project? What improvements, if any, would you like to see in future? • Has the Xe Pian ecotourism project invested infrastructure improvement? • What are they? • How much has it spent? • Are there any funds raised for livelihood improvement?
Government Officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provincial level • District level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long have you been working on this province/district? • What changes, good or bad, have you seen from the Xe Pian ecotourism project since you started working here (environmental, economic, cultural, and social). • What do you think are the main weaknesses of this ecotourism project? What improvements, if any, would you like to see in future? • Has local government invested infrastructure improvement? • What are they? • How much has it spent? • Are there any funds raised for livelihood improvement?
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long have you been working as the head of Kiet Ngong? • What changes, good or bad, have you seen from the Xe Pian ecotourism

Head of Kiet Ngong	Kiet Ngong Village	<p>project since you started working here (environmental, economic, cultural, and social).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think are the main weaknesses of this ecotourism project? What improvements, if any, would you like to see in future? • Has Kiet Ngong village received any infrastructure improvement from the Xe Pian Ecotourism project? • What are they? • How much has it received?
Religious leader/s	Kiet Ngong Village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long have you been as a religious leader? • What changes, good or bad, have you seen from the Xe Pian ecotourism project since it started in your community? • Are there more people coming to or less people coming to temple? • Has the style of wearing changed since the Xe Pian Ecotourism started? • Do younger people still respect the elders? • What improvement would you like to see in the future? • What things would you like to do to maintain ecotourism?
Teacher/s or School director/s	Kiet Ngong Village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long have you been as teachers/school director? • Does school affect from the Xe Pian ecotourism project? • What changes, good or bad, have you seen you work here? • Are there more or less children attending school? • Does school receive any funds from the ecotourism projects to upgrade the quality of education or build more schools? • What improvement would you like to see in the future? • What things would you like to do to maintain ecotourism?
Health worker/local clinic manager	Kiet Ngong Village	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long have you been working here? • Are there any more health clinic buildings built resulting the fund raised from the Xe Pian ecotourism project? • What improvement would you like to see in the future? • What things would you like to do to maintain ecotourism?

Appendix 7: Private walks and observation

Private walks and observations

What to observe:

Are there any significant community improvements?

- Number of school building
- Number of road constructing
- Number of local clinic buildings
- Waste management/ sanitation systems
- Number of wells/source of cooking water
- Style of the house

After observation, I will have formal discussion with head of village if these improvements derived from the Xe Pian ecotourism.

Appendix 8: Questionnaire Survey

Questionnaire surveys for tourists

Description:.....

Sex:.....

Age:.....

Nationality:.....

Date:.....

1. What inspired you to visit Xe Pian National Protected Area?
.....
2. How long will you stay here?
.....
3. What are your favourite activities that you did during your visit to Xe Pian National Protected Area?
.....
4. What interactions have you had with local people?
.....
5. Have you noticed if ecotourism is impacting positively or negatively on local people lives?
.....
6. What are your suggestions as a tourist for future development of Xe Pian ecotourism?
.....

Completion and return of this questionnaire involves consent. You have the right to refuse to respond any particular enquiry. Respondent's names will not be used in the written thesis

Thanks for your participation.