Tourism, Poverty, and Income Distribution: Chambok Community-based Ecotourism Development, Kirirom National Park, Kompong Speu Province, Cambodia

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Abstract
Tourism is an important source of revenue in Cambodia, but there is much economic leakage and inequitable distribution of profits. Community-based ecotourism is seen as a good model for community involvement and a way of safeguarding the environment. A case study is presented of ecotourism development by the Chambok community in an area of Kirirom National Park where tourism offers alternative sources of income to logging and firewood and charcoal trading that are now banned. This study investigated the distribution of community-based tourism income in the Chambok community. A socioeconomic survey of 127 households was conducted and the degree of inequality of household income distribution measured using the Gini Coefficient.

The study found that tourism income is much less than that from firewood and charcoal trading—US$26 per year per household for tourism compared to US$200–500 from firewood/charcoal trading. Only 5% of total household income is generated from tourism-related activities. The Gini Coefficient of 0.5 indicates that the distribution of income from tourism among the villagers is unequal, but less so than other activities in the nonagriculture sector. Recommendations to improve ecotourism in the area include further capacity building for tourism-related activities, a marketing strategy that includes cooperation with tour operators and travel agents, and further

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efforts to raise local awareness and promote understanding of community-based ecotourism among the villagers.

Introduction

Tourism is considered an important source of national income in Cambodia. It contributed about 12% of the country’s total gross domestic product (GDP) in 2004 (Mingsarn 2006). The number of tourists increased dramatically from 177,000 in 1994 to 701,000 in 2003 (Beresford et al. 2004; Ministry of Tourism 2004). Tourism generates income by creating about 60,000 employment opportunities for the local people and through such activities as making handicrafts and providing services (Hach et al. 2001). The Government has adopted tourism as a strategy for poverty reduction (Padeco 2001). The national tourism development plan observed that domestic tourists played an important role in boosting income because of their tendency to patronize local products or services (ADB 2001; Padeco 2001).

A study conducted by the United Nations Development Programme revealed that in Cambodia there is much economic leakage in the sector. Tourism development in Siem Reap, for example, may have failed to develop local economy linkages (Beresford et al. 2004). Ecotourism should lead to a greater distribution of wealth and an increase in the standard of living due to the involvement of the local community. The UNDP study revealed that this is not necessarily the case. For instance, while Siem Reap is a major tourist destination, it is also one of the poorest provinces in the country (Beresford et al. 2004). The Ministry of Tourism has recently adopted a more conscious policy of promoting sustainable and equitable tourism as a means to national poverty reduction.

This study investigates the development impact of community-based ecotourism (or nature tourism) in the Chambok community to determine its effects on income distribution.

Community-based Tourism Concept

Community-based tourism (CBT) is a form of tourism that focuses on local empowerment. It basically features conservation, community development, cultural exchanges between tourists and the local community, and opportunities for tourists to witness or experience various aspects of the villagers’ lifestyle (Sproule 1995; Mann 2000). Gartrell and Wearing (2000) defined ecotourism as a “community-based activity where community members are involved in all aspects of management of the resource that is the focus of tourism, as well as management of their own lives.”
The Mountain Institute (2000) defined community-based tourism as a visitor-host interaction that involves meaningful participation by both parties, and generates economic and conservation benefits for local communities and the environment. Wearing and Larsen (1996) suggested that the community-based tourism approach has become an important element of the sustainable tourism development spectrum—tourism that meets present needs while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. Government agencies and nongovernment organizations (NGOs) consider community-based tourism to be an effective strategy to achieve development goals. They share the view that CBT gives benefits and incentives to local people to engage in conservation. It is also an effective approach for promoting cultural conservation, community development, gender empowerment, and poverty reduction.

Tourism and Poverty Reduction

Tourism can provide significant economic gains in terms of income and employment. CBT in particular has the potential to contribute to the preservation of natural resources in addition to boosting income. Lindberg (1998) estimated gross earnings from ecotourism in developing countries to be US$12 billion in 1998. More than one million United States citizens were estimated to have traveled abroad primarily for nature-based tourism in 1985 (McNeely et al. 1992 cited in Yin 2003).

In Cambodia, tourism has contributed significantly to the goals of promoting national growth and reducing poverty. The macroeconomic benefits of tourism include employment, GDP growth, foreign exchange earnings, and investment. Tourism generates about US$200 million per year in income and generates about 100,000 jobs (Ministry of Planning 2003).

Under the National Poverty Reduction Strategy, several measures have been proposed to enhance the potential of tourism in reducing poverty. These include (i) an integrated approach to dealing with tourism and poverty, (ii) establishment of poverty reduction development zones in high poverty areas and where tourism has a significant potential to contribute to growth of the local economy, (iii) public-private partnerships to support small and medium-sized tourism enterprises where the poor can benefit in terms of access to employment opportunities, (iv) sharing of best practices in tourism development with communities in order to gain knowledge through “learning by doing,” and (v) promotion of domestic tourism that can benefit small businesses. Domestic tourists, as well as budget and independent tourists or back-packers, are more likely to use the cheaper guesthouses, or avail themselves of home-stays provided by local people rather than stay in luxury hotels. Such tourists can be an important source of income for a community.
Methodology

The study was implemented in two stages. The first stage consisted of collecting information related to the development of community-based tourism (CBT) in Chambok. Most analysis consisted of reviewing secondary data. In addition, CBT management committees and Mlup Baitong\(^2\) staff at the site were interviewed.

The second stage involved the conduct of a socioeconomic survey of 127 village households, representing about 92% of households in Chambok and Beng villages.

The Gini Coefficient was used to measure the degree of inequality of household income distribution. This coefficient has a value between zero and 1 (Miyamura 1997; McCain 2003). A value approaching 1 indicates that income is distributed very unequally, while a value of zero means that income is distributed perfectly equitably.

Development of Community-based Ecotourism in Chambok

A community-based ecotourism site is located in Chambok commune, Phnom Sruich district, Kompong Speu Province. The commune is located on the outskirts of the Kirirom National Park about 110 kilometers (km) west of Phnom Penh City via national road No.4, a journey of about 90 minutes by car. Chambok commune administers nine villages with a total population of 546 families.

Community-based ecotourism began in the commune in 2000 with the support of Mlup Baitong. The organization sought to support the conservation of Kirirom National Park’s biodiversity and improve the livelihood of villagers in Chambok commune.

In August 2002, the Chambok commune development council, with the help of Mlup Baitong, entered into a two-year contract with the Ministry of the Environment to use 392 ha of the Kirirom National Park for a community forestry program, including 70 ha for ecotourism development. The ecotourism site includes beautiful natural forest, a 30-meter waterfall in a jungle setting about 4 km from the village, and other attractions, such as a trekking trail in the forest. No charges were imposed by the Ministry of Environment for the use of the land.

A pre-assessment conducted by Mlup Baitong in 2003 before the project started indicated that the commune depended mainly on forest resources. About 94% of households were engaged in a range of forest extraction activities, including collection of bamboo shoots, mushrooms, traditional medicine, and rattan. Several households are engaged in charcoal and fuelwood trading, which is causing serious damage to forest resources of the National Park (Mlup Baitong 2003).

\(^2\) Mlup Baitong is a Cambodian nongovernment environmental organization.
Several tourist activities and services have been set up in Chambok: ox carts for riding, souvenir shops, bicycles for rent, parking places, and food and home-stay services. An entrance fee to the national park is also imposed. About 22,000 tourists, mostly domestic, visited the site in 2003 and 2004.

Local Organization and Participation of Stakeholders

The management structure and process of participation by the local people and other key stakeholders were key factors in developing community-based ecotourism in Chambok.

The CBT committee has 17 members, including 5 monitoring committee members—a member of the Commune Council, a Mlup Baitong representative, and two members from the CBT committee (the chief and the vice chief). The role of the monitoring committee is to facilitate the planning and management of the ecotourism site at Chambok. Mlup Baitong staff play an important role by providing technical advice and training to CBT committee members.

There are 6 subcommittees working under the supervision of the chief and the vice chief of the CBT committee. They include persons in charge of accounting (1 person), entrance and parking fee ticketing (2 persons), ox-cart services (2 persons), guides and bicycle service (2 persons), patrollers and ground keepers (4 persons), and handicrafts and vending (2 persons). The main role of each subcommittee is to record business transactions and report income to the accountant and chief of the committee.

CBT committee members are elected for 3 years, from and by the villagers in Chambok commune. A monthly meeting is organized among committee members to report progress, activities, and issues that needed to be addressed.

Several key institutions were initially involved in developing community-based ecotourism in Chambok. They include Kirirom National Park, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Tourism, Provincial Culture and Tourism Department, District and Commune Council, tour and travel agents, Lutheran World Service, Mlup Baitong, and CBT management committee.

Three levels of stakeholders are presently involved in community-based ecotourism development in Chambok: At the government level is the Ministry of Environment, which contracted out the use of the land; at the NGO level is Mlup Baitong; and at the community level is the commune council and the CBT committee.

Mlup Baitong was instrumental in the development of CBT in Chambok. It brought together the national Government and the community to agree on developing Chambok as an ecotourism site. It encouraged the villagers to work together, and encouraged the village to work with national agencies. Mlup Baitong built capacities in the local community in the areas of natural resource management and development management, and also provided initial financial assistance to the community development program.
The other key stakeholders are the local community organizations, i.e., the commune council and the CBT management committee. These are responsible for directly implementing and managing the community-based ecotourism project.

**Income and Expenditures**

The number of domestic and foreign visitors to Chambok increased from 9,700 and 369, respectively, in 2003 to 11,155 and 600 in 2004. The increase in the number of tourists was due to promotional strategies that included a brochure and information campaigns on television and in magazines. The CBT committee also pursued strategies to cooperate with tour operators and travel agents in Phnom Penh through Mlup Baitong.

**Total Income**

The CBT committee in Chambok generated an income of about US$10,405 during 2003 and 2004. There are several income sources supervised by the CBT committee in Chambok. These sources, and their relative shares to total income are described below. The major sources and their shares are shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Sources</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entrance fee</td>
<td>3,535</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>4,184</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking fee</td>
<td>852</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>768</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ox-cart and bicycle service</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other income</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4,917</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>5,486</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Entrance Fees**

Entrance fees comprised over 70% of total income from tourism. Tourists visiting the National Park pay an entrance fee of riels (KR)1,000 (US$0.25) for domestic tourists, about KR12,000 (US$3) for adult foreign tourists, and KR4,000 (US$1.0) for a foreign child. The entrance fee collection is turned over to the CBT committee for its operations.
Parking Fees

Parking fees comprised about 14% of total CBT income. Vehicles of visitors are charged a parking fee of KR1,000 (US$0.25) for a motorbike, KR2,000 (US$0.50) for a car, and KR3,000 (US$0.75) for a bus or a truck. Half of this income goes to the CBT committee and the other half goes to the nearby Chambok pagoda, which provides the entrance checkpoint and owns the parking area.

Ox-cart Service

This is a local initiative to transport tourists from the village to the waterfalls about 4 km from Chambok pagoda. Tourists are not allowed to use cars or motorbikes within the site, only nonpolluting transportation, such as bicycles and ox carts, or they can walk to the waterfalls. Most tourists, both local and foreign, like the ox-cart ride, which provides a good source of income for the CBT committee and villagers. Ox-cart services are US$2.50 per ride and account for about 10% of the total income from ecotourism. The CBT committee obtains income from this service in two ways: a charge of 20% of ride fees from villagers who operate their own ox carts, or 40% of the ride fee for villagers who rent park-operated ox carts. There were about 1,130 ox-cart rides by tourists in 2003 and 2004. All villagers can participate in this service.

Bicycle Rentals

This was initiated by the women’s groups in the village. About 10 bicycles are available at the site every weekend. A bicycle can be rented for KR5,000 (US$1.25) per day, of which KR300 (US$0.07) is paid to the CBT committee.

Vending

All vendors at the site pay the committee KR300 per day. Only CBT members (including women’s self-help group members and committee members) who were trained by Mlup Baitong are allowed to sell at the site. They receive financial support through the credit program of the women’s self-help group. Villagers who do not live in the area are not allowed to sell at the site.

Guides

Thirteen English-speaking guides have been trained by Mlup Baitong. They are young villagers with secondary school education. The guide service is included in the entrance fee. At least one guide stands by at the site during weekends. He is paid
KR7,000 (US$1.75) per day when he guides tourists and KR4,000 (US$1.00) when there are none. Sometimes guides receive tips from tourists.

Art Performance

A new cultural initiative, which gives tourists an opportunity to see local traditional dances, started in 2004. A dance group was formed from among students in Chambok’s primary school. Under the coordination of Mlup Baitong, they receive technical support from the Provincial Cultural Department. A subcommittee has been formed to manage the group. The income generated from the performance is distributed as follows: 10% to the CBT committee, 5% to the primary school, 10% to the performance instructors, 15% for instrument maintenance costs, and 60% to the performing children.

Expenditures

Expenses are shown in Table 2. The major items were wages of CBT committee staff and forest patrollers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wages</td>
<td>2,683</td>
<td>2,175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Maintenance, Development</td>
<td>733</td>
<td>430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pagoda</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commune Administration</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village Meeting Hall Construction</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Development Fund</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>1,368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>599</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4,917</td>
<td>5,486</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The sources of income and items of expenditure of the CBT committee are summarized in Figure 1.

Household Income Distribution

This section examines the sources of household income and income distribution among households in Chambok. For the analysis, villagers were divided into five groups, each representing 20% of the total population ranked according to household income level.
In 2004, total income of the village was KR156,499,100 (US$39,124), or an average household income of KR1,232,276 (US$308). The highest income group absorbed just over half (53%) of the total income, while the lowest income group absorbed 5% (Table 3). The Gini Coefficient was 0.43, indicating that income was not equitably distributed among the population in the community. This compares with a Gini Coefficient of about 0.20 for the whole of Cambodia in 1999 (Mingsarn and Dore 2003).

Table 3: Distribution of Household Income in Chambok, 2004 (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Income</th>
<th>1st Quintile (Lowest 20%)</th>
<th>2nd Quintile</th>
<th>3rd Quintile</th>
<th>4th Quintile</th>
<th>5th Quintile (Highest 20%)</th>
<th>Gini Coefficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>0.377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>0.505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nontimber Forest Products</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>0.670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonagriculture Income</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>0.666</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Income</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>8.4</strong></td>
<td><strong>13.8</strong></td>
<td><strong>20.2</strong></td>
<td><strong>52.9</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.433</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources of Income

Sources of income in Chambok include agriculture production, nontimber forest products (NTFP)—gathering and selling bamboo and bamboo shoots, mushrooms, herbs, and firewood/charcoal—tourism, and other nonagricultural activities (trading and other service activities).

Agriculture

Agriculture contributes about half the total income for most households. In 2004, total income from agriculture was KR77,271,900 (US$19,317); average agricultural income per household was KR613,269 (US$153). The wealthiest population quintile held 46% of total agricultural income, compared to 23% for the next quintile, while the poorest group held about 5% (Table 3).

Table 4 shows that for agriculture, the income gap between the lowest 20% and the highest 20% of households was 9.1, i.e., the average income of the highest 20% was 9.1 times higher than the lowest 20%. This disparity is low compared to the nonagriculture and NTFP activities discussed below. Households own an average of 0.7 ha of land. Crops, including rice, and livestock are the main sources of agriculture income. The Gini Coefficient for agriculture income is also more favorable at 0.37 than that for nonagriculture income at 0.66.

### Table 4: Income Distribution from Economic Activities in Chambok, 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Agriculture</th>
<th>Nontimber Forest Products</th>
<th>Non-agriculture</th>
<th>Tourism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lowest 20% income group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Income (riel)</td>
<td>148,712</td>
<td>3,800</td>
<td>20,667</td>
<td>11,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Percent share to total income</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>highest 20% income group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Income (riel)</td>
<td>1,360,058</td>
<td>1,058,806</td>
<td>3,383,182</td>
<td>327,571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Percent share to total income</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>58.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Gap (ratio of highest income group to lowest income group)</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>278.6</td>
<td>163.7</td>
<td>27.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nonagriculture and Nontimber Forest Products

Activities other than agriculture (excluding tourism) contributed 31% of total household income. This included income from trading and services outside the village (grocery stores, employment in garment factories, etc). Total income from this sector in 2004 was KR8.11 million (US$12,029). The maximum household income in this sector was KR6.3 million (US$1,575) and the average household income was KR815,546 (US$203).

Income from NTFP made up 15% of the total household income. Total income from this sector was KR23,237,500 (US$5,809) with an average household income of KR249,866 (US$62). Before ecotourism came to the village, NTFP was an important source of income. Mlup Baitong’s pre-assessment study reported that 94% of households were engaged in various forest extraction activities, the most prevalent of which was the production of charcoal and wood for fuel (Mlup Baitong 2003). Villagers earn at least US$200–500 per year per from trading firewood and charcoal. These activities however, were banned after the area was developed as a community-based ecotourism site. Despite the ban, some families are still engaged in charcoal trading outside the protected area. Thus, firewood and charcoal production remains a major source of income in this sector.

Both the nonagriculture and NTFP sectors reflect highly unequal distribution of household income. Table 4 shows that the income gap between the lowest and highest 20% of the population was 163.7 for nonagriculture and 278.6 for NTFP. The Gini Coefficient for nonagricultural income was 0.67, similar to that for NTFP.

Table 4 shows that the highest 20% income group absorbed the bulk of income across all economic sectors: more than three quarters of nonagriculture and NTFP income, more than half the tourism income (discussed further below), and 45% of agriculture. In contrast, the share of the lowest 20% income group was less than 5% in all sectors.

One reason for the highly inequitable household income distribution is that the lowest 20% income group, lacking capital, is unable to find alternative livelihoods since the ban on charcoal and firewood trade was imposed. However, through credit facilities extended by Mlup Baitong, they can now borrow up to KR55,000 (US$14) for 6 months at 2–3% monthly interest. Loans are used as capital for livestock production (e.g., pig farming).

Tourism

Household income from tourism was only about 5% of total household income. Total income of all households engaged in tourism was KR7,872,500 (US$1,968), with an annual average household income of KR103,586 (US$26). Home-stays contributed the largest share to tourism income, but benefited only a few households in the village.
Only four home-stays are available on the site. Ox-cart and food services contributed the second largest share. Note that income from tourism was much less than income from charcoal (see Box).

Although tourism provides only a small proportion of total village income, it is more equally distributed than in nonagriculture and NTFP activities. The Gini Coefficient ratio of income distribution from tourism sector is estimated at 0.50, more favorable than the Gini Coefficient of 0.66 for nonagriculture activities.

The income gap for tourism between the lowest and highest 20% income groups is 27.6 (Table 4). This is a much smaller gap than that for nonagriculture activities, 163.7. It should be noted, however, that the CBT committee had the largest share of tourism income as wages.

Several factors could account for the unequal distribution of tourism income. First, community-based ecotourism itself is still new to the people of Chambok. The villagers generally lack the skills and knowledge to operate tourism enterprises and services effectively. Poor educational background of the villagers is a compounding factor in the acquisition of know-how. The survey revealed that most villagers have not completed primary school.

The survey asked the respondents how they plan to maximize opportunities and benefits from tourism development in Chambok. Almost half indicated that they planned to grow more vegetables and fruit trees. Only a quarter (27%) said they would like to run a home-stay. Fourteen percent had “no idea.”

**Box : Can Tourism Income Substitute for Income from Charcoal Trading?**

Before 2002, most villagers in Chambok were involved in firewood and charcoal trading. They constructed kilns in the forest and in gardens behind their homes. Each household had one or two kilns. A 54-year-old former charcoal producer said he could earn about US$500 per year from two kilns. A kiln can produce about 5 tons per year. The price of charcoal is KR200,000–250,000 (US$52–65) per ton. Charcoal making was an important source of income for his family. He used the earnings from charcoal to buy additional rice because rice from his farm was not enough to feed 7 people for the entire year.

He started his charcoal business in 1995, but had to stop in 2001 because of the government ban. Fuelwood for producing charcoal is cut from trees in the protected area of the Kirirom National Park and has caused serious damage to the forests there.

He became a member of the community-based ecotourism committee in Chambok in early 2003. He said, “My family earned about KR350,000 (US$87) from the tourism project in 2004 through home-stay and ox-cart services and by selling food. We earned much less from tourism than from charcoal.” He added that charcoal income was also more regular than tourism.

Source: Interview by Men Prachvuthy.
To address the lack of know-how, Mlup Baitong has taken steps to build the capacity of the CBT committee and the villagers in operating tourism enterprises and services. They conduct training in food processing for women’s groups, and in tourist guiding. Several women’s groups have been organized in each village to ensure that they benefit equally from tourism. There is an effort to reach all villagers for training in response to the finding that 56% of households (where some of the poorest families belong) are not involved in community-based ecotourism at all.

Mlup Baitong provides financial assistance to the villagers through a credit facility. Survey data showed, however, that the villagers would rather invest in agriculture production than in tourism activities.

Ecotourism in Chambok has not realized its full potential and its income-generating capacity remains limited. Tourist facilities and activities at the site do not match the demands of tourists. For example, food services are not widely available at the site; tourists have to order 2 or 3 days in advance. The long walk from the entrance to the waterfalls is inconvenient for most local tourists. There have been instances where tourists have complained about inadequate amenities and decided to change plans after they arrived.

Ecotourism does not necessarily cater to the interest of most local tourists. Ecotourism is a niche market (Lindberg 1998) whose primary targets are those who have a special interest in nature-oriented travel or desire to see areas with unique attributes in terms of topography, climate, hydrology, wildlife, vegetation, and archeological/historical resources (Hawkins et al. 1998; Honey 1999). By the very nature of ecotourism, the number of tourists who would be interested in visiting Chambok is limited. Nevertheless, the number of tourists to Chambok has been increasing. The key challenge is to sustain and maximize the ecotourism potential of Chambok so that larger benefits can accrue to the community.

Conclusion

CBT in Chambok presents a good model for engaging the local community in tourism as a means of safeguarding the natural environment. Tourism activities offer alternative sources of income to logging and firewood and charcoal trading that are now banned.

Tourism income, however, has not matched that from firewood and charcoal trading—US$26 per year per household for tourism compared to US$200–500 from firewood/charcoal trading. Only 5% of total household income is generated from tourism-related activities, with farming remaining the major income source.

The Gini Coefficient of 0.5 reflected that income from tourism was unequally distributed among the villagers, but more equitably than in the nonagriculture sector. Income from agriculture was the most equitably distributed, with a Gini coefficient of 0.3.
One way to improve the distribution of ecotourism benefits among the villagers in Chambok is to intensify capacity building for tourism-related activities, especially targeted at poorer households. Improvement in food services and handicraft production would attract more tourists and more spending per visit.

Second, a better marketing strategy is needed. It is important to establish cooperation with tour operators and travel agents in the city. In promoting the site, the unique cultural heritage and traditional practices of the village should be highlighted as the main attractions.

Third, Mlup Baitong could help further to raise local awareness and promote better understanding of community-based ecotourism among the villagers. Workshops could be organized to study the experience of community-based ecotourism in neighboring countries, such as Thailand. These workshops would stimulate creativity and help the local community to generate better business ideas.
References


