

Name: SOM Chanthida

Student ID: 47-096834

Department: Graduate Program in Sustainability Science, Graduate School of Frontier Sciences, The University of Tokyo

Completion: September 2011

Title of thesis: Community-Private Sector Partnership in Community-Based Ecotourism Development: Contribution to Sustainability
A Case of Chambok in Kompong Speu, Cambodia

Supervisor: Prof. YOKOHARI Makoto

Advisor: Prof. YARIME Masaru

ABSTRACT

Community-based ecotourism has been opted as one of the policy tools to be implemented in rural areas of the developing countries in order to assist local communities pursuing sustainability, which has been a trendy global orientation since the 1990s. In this study, sustainability in a community is achieved when the three imperatives – social equity, economic viability and ecological conservation – is converged. In the context of developing countries like Cambodia, these imperatives have been translated as social development, local economic development or rural poverty alleviation and natural resources conservation. Since community-based ecotourism is a business venture as much as it is a development policy tool, the involvement of and the partnership with the market actor / private sector is necessary. However, the market and development sectors have frequently perceived to have different orientation and agenda. Therefore, the potential results of their partnership have also been questioned by scholars, policy-makers and practitioners. Yet a few studies, especially in Cambodian context, have been conducted to explore this dimension and determine its contribution/effect on sustainability.

In this light, this study examines the contribution of community and private sector partnership in community-based ecotourism development to sustainability of the community in Chambok commune, Cambodia. Particularly, it: 1) identifies enabling factors and motivations that drive the two parties to collaborate with each other; 2) examines the characteristics and challenges of the partnership for both CBET community and the involved private sector; and finally 3) determines the emerging positive and negative outcomes of the partnership, as well as its influence on sustainability of CBET community. As a result, this study proceeds to suggest appropriate ways/mechanisms to enhance the positive contribution of the partnership between CBET community and private sector for community sustainability.

This research is located in Chambok commune, Kompong Speu of Cambodia. This CBET site is selected for this study for its longevity and prominence in the country. It is the second oldest and nominated as the best model of CBET development site. In addition, it is one of the few sites that have extensive experience working with many tour operators (TOs are the selected private sector for this thesis). To conduct the field study, the author uses mixed methods: qualitative and quantitative techniques. The qualitative technique includes semi-structured interview, observation, and document review of reports and policies relevant to the topic. A pre-designed guiding list of questions has been prepared based on the author's familiarity and experiences in Chambok CBET development. On the part of quantitative questions, 109 households (who were CBET members) were randomly selected for a face-to-face survey interview, and 69 international tourists were conveniently selected to fill self-completed questionnaire survey.

The findings of the study have been classified into two major parts based on the original research questions. The first findings suggest that current partnership in Chambok emerges as a result of different stakeholder efforts and the enabling environment created by contemporary Cambodian development policies. The pro-poor national tourism policies of the Ministry of Tourism together with the natural resource decentralization policies of the Ministry of Environment give the impetus for stakeholder collaboration and partnership in CBET development. In the CBET venture, each stakeholder has different functions in providing technical and financial supports to Chambok community in terms of marketing and promotion, capacity building, and linking community with TOs. However, the whole Cambodian tourism partnership scenario in general and in Chambok in particular was actively promoted by the civil society organizations such as the specific facilitating NGO (i.e., Mlup Baitong in the case of Chambok), Cambodian Community-based Ecotourism Network (CCBEN); and Development Alternative Inc., (DAI); and supporting donor agencies.

The second finding indicates challenges to the partnership. They include limited human resources from both sides and financial resources from the community side. TOs' human resources, as illustrated in the reviewed literature, contain limited knowledge and understanding of CBET principles, while they have extensive experiences in fulfilling market demands. The local community, having been prepared as conservationist and development agents rather than tourism entrepreneur, have limited skills and budget required to fulfill TOs' expectation and request. The situation leads to low commitment from some TOs to fulfill the partnership arrangement. Despite challenges, the third finding of the study suggests that current partnership contributes to sustainability of CBET community in particular from the economic viewpoints. TOs act as marketing intermediaries for the community and the buyers of CBET products that package Chambok with other destinations for sale to international tourists. As a result of the partnership, community could increase economic profit/revenue from CBET development through increased international arrival to the site. This increased tourism revenue positively affect members' income and local employment. Though the positive outcome for the local community is more visible in terms of economic benefits, it indirectly generates social and environmental benefits for the community in terms of enhancing community participation and building unity in CBET development and the community as a whole, as well as promoting community commitment to natural resource conservation in the area.

Nonetheless, the current partnership has also produced some negative outcome for the community, including the increasing dependency on TOs that may decrease opportunity to grasp more economic benefits from international tourists since most of the trip organizations are controlled by TOs. Other critical problem is derived by the emerging challenges mentioned above. TOs' market-orientation and lack of local respect and understanding coupled with the community's eagerness to fulfill TOs' requests in order to expand their economic opportunities may lead CBET at Chambok to develop in undesirable ways. Tourism development at Chambok may lose the local flavor and uniqueness of CBET's site specific tourism strategies, while the local community may gradually lose their opportunities for enhancing and implementing locally-developed initiatives.

Although the current negative outcomes of partnership are still minimal, it provides critical signal for possible fatal negative impacts that must be cautious and taken into account by both parties for the future of CBET development in Chambok. The possible major problem is the stated diversion from CBET principles due to market-oriented design adopted by both community and TOs. Without proper preventive strategies action, this diversion could trigger declination in CBET fundamentals, leading to various possible negative environmental impacts and conflicts of interests among original CBET stakeholders that have been promoting CBET as tool for conservation.

Learning from the experiences of CBET development and partnership implementation in other places, the author realizes that the partnership is normally imperfect, especially at the early stage, but time and efforts may lead to better partnership outcomes. The longer time the partnership is maintained the better understanding of the involved parties on each others' needs. The positive outcomes can be triple if each party takes time to understand each other and the site's specific context, then try to negotiate for a common ground that would result in the uniqueness of products and services offered rather than blindly request or follow the impracticable. There is also a space for strengthening policies related to CBET development. Though CBET is labeled as a sustainability tool, the conservation and social dimensions are better promoted and planned in the CBET development design than the economic or entrepreneurship dimension. This design is founded to be affective in governance arena, but leave the community incompetent in the midst of the competitive tourism industry. CBET also would not work in the developing context where local community is poverty ridden. The antidotes for such shortcomings can be the encouragement of wider stakeholder participation (especially private sector) from the early stage of CBET development and balance the provision of capacity building strategies to include conservation, governance and entrepreneurship skills. The original facilitating agencies should endeavor to ensure that from the beginning the economic-based partnership should be formed based on the understanding of CBET fundamentals.

Key terms: *Community-Based Ecotourism, Sustainability, Partnership, Private Sector, Tour Operators*