

SYMBIOSIS BETWEEN AGRICULTURE AND COMMUNITY-BASED ECOTOURISM:
TOWARDS AGRO-TOURISM PRODUCT DIVERSIFICATION IN CAMBODIA

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ABSTRACT

Chi Phat Community-Based Ecotourism (CP-CBET) in Cambodia is the most well-known rural tourism destination in country-wide context, as well as regional and global in scales. Since its initial endeavor and establishment with support from key stakeholders, particularly Wildlife Alliance, a nongovernmental organization, started in 2006 and officially hosting tourists from 2008—CP-CBET has encountered challenges as well as outstanding achievements. Success can be described as employment and community development, environmental conservation, and better socio-cultural understanding among local villagers, tourists, business entrepreneurs, and local authorities. Remaining challenges are inadequate human resources, lack of standards and quality measures, weak institutional framework, lack of government enforcement and political will, and finally insufficient product development. Due to these challenges and the contextual suitability of this study area with 31.5 percent of the people living in poverty and 91.9 percent depending on agriculture, the link between CP-CBET and agriculture is crucial.

Thus, the aim of my research is to analyze feasibilities (potential and opportunities) and constraints for possible linkages between CP-CBET and agriculture as an integrated tool towards agro-tourism product diversification from the viewpoints of the key stakeholders—villagers, local authorities, sellers of agricultural products, representatives from provincial public institutions, INGO, and international tourists as demand side perspective. The question is to what extent

ecotourism and agriculture in CP-CBET can be integrated to enhance and strengthen sustainable rural tourism development.

This research uses a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods in collecting primary data. Secondary data was derived from journal articles and books, public institutions, I/NGOs, and CP-CBET. The quantitative method includes a survey of 158 families out of 550, a response rate of 28, 7 %, and 64 visitor-completed questionnaires (approximately 69.56% comparing the same month in 2010). The qualitative method uses a semi-structured interview with 12 key informants representing stationed I/NGO, CP-CBET, public institutions, and sellers of agricultural products. Data from the quantitative method will be analyzed through basic SPSS in the form of frequency and multiple responses, while the summation of content analysis is used to analyze qualitative data from in-depth interviews.

On the supply side, results show that local agricultural products within Chi Phat community would certainly not be able to meet the demand of the whole population and tourists. As a result, high importation of meats, vegetables, and fruits from outside like the capital Phnom Penh and other peripheral areas are evident. Causes of mismatch between supply and demand are due to not only production-related factors like individualistic and traditional farming, inadequate agricultural supportive infrastructure, and unclear market demand; but also miscommunication among supply-demand itself. Secondly, the only and very weak existing connection between CBET and agriculture is locally made souvenirs. Finally, however, the good news is that a strong desire among local villagers regarding feasible linkages between the two sectors was found representatively significant.

On the demand side, visitor survey illustrates that tourists' post-purchase satisfaction regarding services and products delivered by Chi Phat community is high. In relation to tourist awareness of agriculture as both products and services, they unconsciously realized that the foods

they ate were local. This is due to their perceived expectation that all foods in the community are local, and above all, grown using few or no chemicals (organic). Another aspect of agriculture as leisure or educational activities is that tourists were very unlikely to participate due to not only the prepared packages of tour companies and itineraries of CBET, but also much pride that community have on their major attractions as well as neglect of interest or significance of agro-tourism.

Though weak tourist awareness of agro-tourism products in Chi Phat, they showed strong interest in the event that CBET would diversify their tourism products into a broader range to include agro-tourism. In addition, tourists also revealed a strong willingness to pay for local foods as well as participating in related agricultural activities.

In addition, qualitative results show us that representatives from CBET though less aware of issue of agro-tourism product diversification, strongly supported the idea of merging the two sectors. They believe introducing agro-tourism will bring more income as well as various leisure activities for tourists, especially for those tourists who seek cheaper package and village-based tours.

In spite of being fully aware of the inadequacy of financial support from higher levels of the government, representatives from PDoT and PDoA show strong support and determination concerning both moral and technical expertise. This can be illustrated by relevant trainings and improved techniques of agriculture and tourism.

Piecing previous studies, data analysis and interpretation, and policy together, this thesis proposes a new rural tourism development system in which linkages of tourism and agriculture function as the core of sustainable rural tourism development.

First, on-going support (law and regulations and subsidies) such as trainings both agriculture and tourism from line departments as well as stationed I/NGO, marketing and

promotion through travel and tour operators, and finally the solidarity and mutual understanding among key stakeholders to support and advocate this developmental platform.

Second, with the aforementioned support of local agricultural producers and farmer's co-ops will be able to produce more and supply CBET through cooking unit. Another important aspect of agriculture is that not only products, but also agricultural sites and activities can be developed as attractions. Therefore, the guiding unit in CP-CBET should contact farmers and map out a feasible itinerary in accordance with farmers' agreement.

Third, seasonality in the tourism sector usually brings lower numbers of tourists or less demand either for foods or agricultural activities. In response, as indicated in the in-depth interviews with wholesalers, they are more than welcome to buy agricultural products from local farmers. It is also critical in this period to provide necessary training to enhance production capacity as well as to strengthen communication between local farmers and key players in the area.

Cautiously, this system requires mutual understanding and negotiation over time to reach a formal consensus among stakeholders. For example, establishment of contracts between farmers, CBET as well as wholesalers is critical to safeguard perceived risks. Another important issue is that on-going support from relevant institutions like PDoT, PDoA, NGOs, and Friends of Chi Phat must be maintained so that success is guaranteed.

Since this is a feasibility study which covers overall potential aspects, opportunities, and constraints of linkages between CP-CBET and agriculture; recommendations also represent a holistic broad solution. Thus, author's thesis would like to suggest two levels of future research, namely niche specialized research on local foods and a broader scale of tourism destination branding of Ecotourism in Cardamom Mountain Range.