

NATURAL RESOURCE GOVERNANCE

Challenges and Potentials of Community-Based Ecotourism in Livelihood Improvement A Case Study of Preah Nimith CBET, Cambodia



Khuon Komar, Lonn Pichdara and Nhong Sodavy

Special Report No. 19

November 2021

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CDRI
Cambodia Development Resource Institute

Phnom Penh, September 2021

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ISBN-13: 9789924500308

Citation:

Khuon Komar, Lonh Pichdara and Nhong Sodavy. 2021. *Natural Resource Governance: Challenges and Potentials of Community-Based Ecotourism in Livelihood Improvement: A Case Study of Preah Nimith CBET, Cambodia*. CDRI Special Report No. 19. Phnom Penh: CDRI.

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Layout and cover design: Men Chanthida

Edited by: Susan E. Watkins

Printed and bound in Cambodia by Go Invent Media (GIM), Phnom Penh

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CBET	community-based ecotourism
CBNRM	community-based natural resources management
CDRI	Cambodia Development Resource Institute
CNRE	Centre for Natural Resources and Environment
ETDC	Emerald Triangle Development Cooperation
FA	Forestry Administration
FC	forestry community
GMS	Greater Mekong Subregion
KSL-1	Kampong Sralaov-1 commune
KSL-2	Kampong Sralaov-2 commune
MOT	Ministry of Tourism
NGO	nongovernmental organisation
NSDP	National Strategic Development Plan
PLFETC	Preah Lean Forestry and Ecotourism Community
SDP	skill development program

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency for its long-term resource partnership with the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI) that made this research in a remote eco-tourism site in Preah Vihear province possible. The project's success is owed to the kind support of many individuals from subnational administration at both provincial and local levels. We would like, in particular, to thank the provincial deputy governor for his warm welcome, facilitation and guidance which enabled the research team to achieve the project objectives. Our thanks also extend to the Provincial Department of Planning for providing information and data, especially Preah Vihear's five-year development plan and three-year rolling program, as well as the provincial departments of Environment, Women's Affairs and Tourism, and Preah Vihear Forestry Administration Cantonment. We would especially like to thank the head and other members of Preah Lean Forestry and Ecotourism Community for their kind support and engagement throughout the project cycle and for organising a consultative meeting with local stakeholders. We wish to express our gratitude for the guidance and support of CDRI's executive director, director of research, which ensured the success of this research, as well as the Centre for Natural Resources and Environment (CNRE) team, namely Nong Monin, Duong Sivmuy and Seng Sokunpiseth. Their indomitable team spirit and high-quality work ensured smooth project implementation from project inception to the preparation of this working paper.

Abstract

Community-based ecotourism (CBET) has long been considered an effective natural resource governance policy for both forest conservation and livelihood improvement in developing countries around the world. Cambodia is no exception. The Cambodian government has been promoting and establishing CBET sites countrywide. Preah Nimith CBET, located in a remote part of north Cambodia, is in the vicinity of a protected area, mountains and the Mekong River, near the Cambodia-Laos border. Although this CBET venture has been established for nearly a decade, it remains a little-known tourist destination among both local and foreign visitors. Like many established CBET ventures in Cambodia, Preah Nimith CBET can sustain its activities but cannot move to the next level of improvement in terms of organisation, ecotourism packages, facilities and infrastructure. This qualitative study draws on information collected from consultative meeting with CBET members, local authorities, Provincial Department of Tourism staff, and NGO staff in Preah Vihear province. The study found that to improve its management practices, Preah Nimith CBET needs 1) sustained technical and financial supports, and capacity building on ecotourism, preferably provided by specialised NGOs or international organisations, 2) improved roads and other basic infrastructure such as piped water supply, electricity supply and sanitation services, 3) publicity through awareness raising campaigns, and 4) networking with nearby CBET communities in Preah Vihear and Stung Treng provinces.

1. Introduction

Community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) initiatives have increasingly been promoted, especially in developing countries, as a win-win solution for conserving natural resources while improving the welfare and livelihoods of local people (Leach, Mearns and Scoones 1999; Berkes 2007). Community-based ecotourism (CBET) is a form of CBNRM and has become a popular approach for funding the conservation of natural resources (Yin and Vang 2015). It is often used as a means to add value to and thereby protect biodiversity “based on the principle that biodiversity must pay for itself by generating economic benefits, particularly for local people” (Kiss 2004, 232). The International Ecotourism Society recently revised its definition of ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of the local people and involves interpretation and education” (TIES 2015). Most CBET projects produce modest cash benefits. However, in the words of Kiss (2004, 234), “the economic impact is hard to judge ... in the absence of specific data, baseline and contextual information, and quantitative analysis”. As Coria and Calfucura (2012 cited in Lonn et al. 2018, 4) point out, “Ecotourism has achieved mixed results, and is not a panacea, as there have been many success stories, but also many failures”. Many studies have evaluated the direct benefits of ecotourism (e.g. poverty reduction, household income gains and job creation), but few have looked at the indirect benefits (e.g. changes in the environment and ecosystem services) (Lonn et al. 2018). The natural resource management literature mentions many obstacles thwarting successful CBET implementation, notably lack of proper physical infrastructure, weak rule of law and lack of good governance, poor management skills, ambiguity regarding the legal status of CBET schemes, and inadequate technical and financial supports to improve and secure the sustainability of CBET schemes (Walter and Sen 2018; Lonn et al. 2018).

In Cambodia, ecotourism took off slowly at first, with CBET sites mainly linked to natural landscapes and village life, but is now booming and attracting many tourists. Today there are 266 ecotourism sites across all 25 provinces. Thirteen of these are CBET schemes, some of which evolved from forestry communities (MOT, 2019). One such CBET site and the subject of this study is the newly established Preah Lean Forest and Ecotourism Community (PLFETC), also known as Preah Nimith CBET, located in a remote area near Cambodia’s northern border in Preah Vihear province.

This research aims to study the constraints, effectiveness and potential of CBET management in PLFETC with a focus on forest conservation and livelihood improvement. PLFETC is located in Kampong Sralauv-2 (KSL-2), a remote commune in Chheb district, Preah Vihear province, on the Cambodia-Laos border. Consistent with international literature and best practice, the study considers policy and strategy at national, subnational and local levels to identify any cross-cutting issues and develop appropriate recommendations for all levels of government. The study also provides some views on how the three administrative levels can work together according to their respective mandates.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 looks at the concept of ecotourism. Section 3 provides an overview of ecotourism in Cambodia, covering strategic policy framework for CBET, the general situation of tourism in Cambodia including the impact of Covid-19 on tourism, and background information about Preah Nimith CBET based on consultation with community members. Section 4 discusses the support in place for CBET initiatives, based on government policy and strategy, tourism law and regulations, and highlights the key players in CBET development and management, including best practices in Cambodia. Section 5

puts forward some recommendations for local tourism development. Section 6 concludes by highlighting the support Preah Nimith CBET needs for future success.

1.1 Ecotourism as a concept

In community-based ecotourism (CBET), tourism destinations are managed and run by local community members in consultation with the wider community, and tourism revenues and other benefits stay within the community. By contrast, in general tourism, visits to tourist attractions are usually marketed and organised by travel agencies, most of the profit leaves the community and accrues to a few individuals (Khanal and Babar 2007). The main positive impacts of CBET are more equitable distribution of tourism benefits, community participation in and control over tourism management and development, and conservation empowerment (i.e. building a local conservation movement). By managing the interactions between the host community and visitors, the negative impacts of tourism on the environment of a destination can be minimised.

Ecotourism is a form of sustainable travel through which tourists experience, appreciate and enjoy nature and local culture at tourism destinations. It helps minimise the negative effects of tourism activities while providing the incentive and the impetus for natural heritage conservation. Done well, CBET can sustain community wellbeing, raise environmental awareness and add value to biodiversity conservation. The local community receives direct financial benefits and livelihood opportunities are improved. At the same time, the natural and cultural resources of the tourism destination are safeguarded for future prosperity. The income generated through CBET means the host community can exploit natural capital without harming ecosystem health and local livelihoods. Through CBET, visitors have the chance to meet local people, enjoy their hospitality, join them in their everyday life, and learn about their culture and environment.

1.2 Ecotourism in Cambodia

1.2.1 Policy and strategy framework

The Cambodian government, as set out in National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP) 2019–23, acknowledges that environmental management, and climate change adaptation and mitigation, are the main challenges facing sustainable socioeconomic development today (RGC 2018). The NSDP emphasises the urgent need to ensure the long-term viability of ecosystem functions, biodiversity and natural resources, and environmental biosafety. This necessitates effective strategic solutions for strengthening management systems, supporting protected area capacity development, delineating environmental management zones, registering state-owned public land, and developing well-designed management plans for protected areas.

The 2009 Law on Tourism serves to manage tourism development in a way that is sustainable and reduces poverty; protect and maintain the natural resources, culture and customs upon which the tourism sector is founded; make Cambodia a quality tourism destination through the creation of a quality assurance system to ensure service quality, travel safety and security, tourist comfort and satisfaction; and build international friendship and understanding through the tourism industry (RGC 2009, 1).

The draft national policy on ecotourism was reportedly approved by the Council of Ministers and submitted to the National Assembly in late 2018 (Cheng 2018). A spokesperson for the Council of Ministers is cited in the *Phnom Penh Post* of 20 November 2018 as stating that “The policy will develop the ecotourism and tourism community and is a mechanism to protect and conserve natural areas. ... the Kingdom’s ecotourism sector is a priority and the ‘green gold’ that would help develop the economy” (Cheng 2018).

In 2016, The Ministry of Tourism (MOT) officially issued a book on Cambodia Community-Based Ecotourism Standard by indicating 8 main criteria consisting of 169 small detailed criteria for the proper practices of CBET (MOT 2016). The standard book also shows the scores required for getting the certified certificate by MOT.

The Ministry of Tourism (MOT), as mandated by the Law on Tourism (Article 5), is responsible for tourism policy and planning implementation. In so doing, the MOT works in consultation with other ministries and national and subnational institutions responsible for different aspects of Cambodia's tourism industry, tourism associations, and travel and tourist businesses. Tourism Development Strategic Plan 2012–2020 sets out clearly defined roles and responsibilities, as well as priorities for tourism development, at three levels – regional, national and subnational (RGC 2012). In addition, local plans have been prepared in line with subnational policy and planning.

Tourism is a cross-sectoral sector with implications for many different areas of the economy, including, but not limited to, environmental management, agriculture, forestry and fishing, rural development, land management, and cultural affairs. For instance, the Law on Natural Protected Areas, promulgated by Royal Kram NS/RKM/0208/007 and enacted in 2008, aimed at ensuring the management and conservation of biodiversity and sustainable use of natural resources in protected areas, is also related to ecotourism (RGC 2008). The scope of this law (Article 2) is protected areas, as defined by the 1996 Law on Environmental Protection and Natural Resource Management (RGC 1996), the 1993 Royal Kram on the Establishment of Natural Protected Areas, the 2001 Royal Kram on the Establishment and Management of the Tonle Sap Biosphere, as well as other related legislation. The Ministry of Environment (MOE) has the primary responsibility for the governance of natural protected areas. It has its own environmental protection and natural resources conservation administration, which is tasked with managing natural protected areas in line with government policy. Similarly, the objective of the Sub-decree on Forestry Community Management, enacted in 2003, is to implement the 2002 Law on Forestry. It sets out the procedures for forestry community establishment and forest management by forestry communities.

A key mechanism for reviving Cambodia's tourism industry post-Covid-19 is the draft Siem Reap Tourism Development Master Plan 2020–35. Siem Reap, because of its proximity to Angkor Wat, one of the most famous and the largest of all cultural world heritage sites, has become a global tourism destination. Today, it is renowned as one of the world's leading centres for the conservation and care of cultural and natural heritage, through the preservation and restoration of archaeological sites and artifacts and the conservation of the natural environment through protected areas. The master plan aims to maximise the socioeconomic advantages of tourism by tapping the potential of other tourist attractions in and around Siem Reap, especially the many archaeological sites scattered across the Angkor area, Stung Siem Reap, Tonle Sap Lake and Kulen Mountain, in line with national policy. In Siem Reap alone, tourism revenue from international tourists is forecast to reach USD4,765 million by 2035, and that from local tourists USD1,280 million. To support the master plan, the government has allocated USD1.5 million to build 38 roads in Siem Reap province (Chea 2020).

1.2.2 Tourism in general in Cambodia

This section provides a snapshot of tourism development progress to date, especially regarding ecotourism. Cambodia plans to welcome some 12 million tourists by 2025. Official statistics from the MOT put international tourist arrivals at 6 million in 2018, more than double the number in 2011 (see Table 1), so the estimate of 12 million arrivals by 2025 seems logical enough.

Table 1: International tourist arrivals, 2010–2019

Year	No. tourist arrivals	Year-on-year increase (%)
2019	6,610,592	6.6
2018	6,201,077	10.7
2017	5,602,157	11.8
2016	5,011,712	5.0
2015	4,775,231	6.1
2014	4,502,775	7.0
2013	4,210,165	17.0
2012	3,584,307	24.0
2011	2,881,862	14.0
2010	2,508,289	-

Source: Cambodia: tourism statistics report, March 2020 (MOT 2020)

In accordance with national decentralisation policy, some functions related to tourism development and promotion have been transferred to subnational administration (provincial, district, municipality), based on Decision No. 39 of May 2017. The Decision tasks district administrations to manage, develop and conserve the protected areas and forests within their jurisdiction, including the establishment, management and support of protected area and forestry communities. Municipality/district administrations are also responsible for solid waste management and wastewater treatment.

In its 2014 country diagnostic study *Cambodia: Diversifying Beyond Garments and Tourism*, the Asian Development Bank reiterates that “Cambodia will need to diversify its tourism offerings if the government is to meet its target of 8 million tourists and 8 million to 10 million domestic tourists in 2020” (ADB 2011c cited in ADB 2014, 29–30). In *The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2013*, Cambodia was ranked 106th out of 140 countries and commended for achieving “a high score in the prioritization of tourism, price competitiveness, and affinity for travel and tourism, but received low scores for health hygiene, tourism infrastructure, information and communication technology, and cultural resources” (WEF 2013b cited in ADB 2014, 30).

1.2.3 Impacts of Covid-19 on tourism

Travel and tourism industry across the world has been the hardest hit by national and global responses to contain the spread of Covid-19. Revised estimates published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in June 2020 pointed to a 60–80 percent decline in international tourism that year, depending on the duration and extent of travel restrictions (OECD 2020). Cambodia is no exception and tourism is its hardest hit sector. Economically, the immediate outlook for Cambodia is grim, as starkly laid out by the World Bank’s May 2020 Cambodia Economic Update (Ly et al. 2020, 3):

Cambodia’s economy is likely to register its slowest growth since 1994, contracting between -1 percent (baseline) and -2.9 percent (downside). Poverty could increase between 3 and 11 percentage points from a 50 percent income loss that lasts for six months for households engaged in tourism, wholesale and retail trade, garment, construction, or manufacturing. The fiscal deficit could reach its highest level in 22 years, and public debt is expected rise to 35 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) by 2022.

The Asian Development Bank predicted even greater contraction of up to -5.5 percent (The Asia Foundation 2020, 12). In response, the Cambodian government revised its forecast growth of 6.5 percent for 2020 down to -1.9 percent, midway between the World Bank’s predicted range.

More specifically, before the pandemic, tourism was Cambodia's second strongest growth driver, contributing about 18.7 percent of GDP growth in 2019. However, the number of international tourist arrivals started to decline sharply by the end of the year. By January and February 2020, overall tourist arrivals had fallen by just over 25 percent. By the first quarter of 2020, Siem Reap's tourist arrivals had declined by 45.6 percent. And by April 2020, tourist arrivals had come to a virtual standstill with contraction of 99.6 percent year-on-year (The Asia Foundation 2020).

The impact of the pandemic on Cambodia's tourism sector in 2020 is starkly obvious in the temporary or complete closure of almost 3,000 tourist sites and the laying off of around 45,400 tourist sector workers. In Siem Reap, as of July 2020, 18 hotels and 96 guesthouses had closed and a further 172 hotels and 99 guesthouses had suspended operations, according to the Provincial Department of Tourism as cited in local media (Amarthalingam 2020). However, an official report from the ministry of tourism affirmed that the international tourist arrivals in Cambodia in 2020 reached only 1.306 million, a decline of 80% from 2019 (Khmer Times 2020).

The outlook for tourism economic recovery is uncertain, leaving the sector much more dependent on domestic tourism. There were small signs of recovery in June 2020, with a 0.87 percent (642,226 people) month-on-month increase in the number of domestic tourists, 50 percent of whom visited the seaside, 20 percent northwestern and 7.46 percent northeastern provinces (Fresh News Asia 2020) and the remaining to other local tourist sites. In July 2020, the overall number of tourists rose by 15.20 percent (740,028 persons) month-on-month, with increases of 15.50 percent in domestic visitors (723,238 persons) and 9.99 percent in foreign visitors (16,790 persons). This emerging trend could be a positive sign for domestic tourism.

Even if domestic tourism takes off, it cannot make up the revenue gap left by international tourism. The massive drop in international arrivals throughout 2020 due to Coronavirus is estimated to have cost Cambodia's tourist sector USD3 billion in foreign revenues (The Cambodia Daily 2020). Angkor Foundation affirmed that ticket sales for Angkor Wat serve as a useful indicator. Only 387,860 tickets were sold in the first half of 2020 and 389,630 in the second half, representing year-on-year decreases of 68.8 percent and 72.0 percent, respectively (Fresh News Asia 2020).

1.3 CBET in Cambodia

CBET in Cambodia has grown rapidly, largely as a result of government efforts to develop the tourism sector. Although it is perhaps too soon to assess whether or not CBET is helping to address the broader issues of poverty reduction and equitable benefit-sharing, it is reasonable to conclude that it has contributed to income generation and job creation for ecotourism community members, community development and natural resource protection (Phe 2019, 9).

Increasing numbers of tourists are coming to Cambodia to visit ecotourism sites. In 2019, about 430,000 tourists reportedly visited Kratie and 340,000 visited Stung Treng (WWF 2020). According to the MOT (2019 cited in WWF 2020), there are four ecotourism communities in Kratie province – Koh Trong, Koh Phkao, Koh Sam Seb and Koh Dambang, and six in Stung Treng province – Borey O'Svay, Koh Preah, Koh Han, Preah Rumkel, Phnom Chumroksat and O'Russey Kandal. In Preah Vihear province, the Chheb Vulture Restaurant is a vulture-feeding project to support population numbers. Kratie province is home to Irrawaddy dolphins and a new turtle conservation centre devoted to protecting the population of (endangered) Cantor's giant soft-shell turtles.

2. Methodology and study area

2.1 Methodology

The study took a traditional qualitative approach. Data was collected from focus group discussions involving 30 local people and authority figures. The discussants included the leader and members of Preah Nimith CBET, vendors, officials from the provincial departments of Tourism, Environment, and Women’s Affairs, and Provincial Forestry Administration Cantonment, as well as Preah Vihear Provincial Hall (Table 2). All collected data was clustered into four themes for analysis: 1) governance of Preah Nimith CBET, 2) challenges and opportunities, 3) effectiveness of CBET in forest conservation in the nearby community forestry and livelihood improvement, and 4) recommendations and suggestions.

Table 2: Focus group discussion sampling frame

Gender	Institution	Position
Female	Provincial Department of Women’s Affairs	Director
Male	Provincial Department of Women’s Affairs	Deputy director
Male	Provincial Department of Women’s Affairs	Head of office
Male	Provincial Department of Environment	Deputy director
Male	Provincial Department of Environment	Head of office
Male	Provincial Department of Environment	Deputy head of office
Male	Provincial Department of Environment	Head of office
Male	Provincial Forestry Administration Cantonment	Head of office
Male	Provincial Forestry Administration Cantonment	Deputy head of office
Male	Provincial Department of Tourism	Head of office
Female	Provincial Department of Tourism	Secretary
Male	Provincial Department of Tourism	Deputy head of office
Male	Provincial Department of Tourism	Staff
Mixed group	Preah Nimith CBET	Leader, Members Vendors
Mixed group	Preah Vihear Provincial Hall	Deputy governor Officers from various provincial departments

To find out about the real situation of CBET in Preah Nimith, the research team organised an initial fact-finding meeting with local authorities, community members and other local people. The main objective was to gain in-depth understanding of the advantages and disadvantages and operational limitations of CBET in the area. The local knowledge relayed at the meeting was useful and supplemented the facts and information obtained from the desk study. The local perceptions and insights into CBET engagement and management were invaluable. The researchers collected information on the living conditions, demographics and other socioeconomic aspects of the community, administration of CBET, road linkage in the area, and the current situations of Preah Nimith and a neighbouring CBET.

3. Findings

3.1 Administration of Preah Nimith

Cambodia's subnational administration consists of four tiers: province (*khets*), district and municipality (*khan*), commune (*khum* or *sangkat*) and village (*phum*). The village is the basic geographical and administrative division. As required by the Law on Commune/Sangkat Administration of 2011, at the commune level, a three-year rolling plan and annual plan for the project implementation need to be prepared for each commune.

3.2 Demography

Up until 1997, there were few settlements in the study area, only several small villages along the Mekong River (CNMC 2012). Overall improvement of the road network made the area more accessible, attracting new settlers and investors (CNMC 2012). For example, as confirmed by Preah Nimith CBET, the laterite road linking the communes of Kampong Sralaov-1 (KSL-1) and Kampong Sralaov-2 (KSL-2) was constructed relatively recently in 2010. As Table 3 shows, the number of families in Chheb district, which has eight communes, increased by almost 11 percent in just four years, from 5,020 families in 2016 (total population 22,556, of which 11,485 are female) to 5,561 in 2019 (total population 24,433, of which 12,246 are female). The proportion of female-headed households in Chheb district declined from 9.6 percent of total households in 2016 to 7.9 percent in 2019.

Table 3: Population change in Chheb district, 2016–19

Description	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total population	22,556	22,919	24,354	24,433
Annual growth rate (%)	8.0	1.6	6.3	0.3
Male population	11,071	11,045	12,269	12,187
Female population	11,485	11,874	12,085	12,246
No. of females to 100 males	103.7	107.5	98.5	100.5
No. of households	5,020	5,211	5,392	5,561
% of female-headed households	9.6	9.3	9.0	7.9
Average household size	4.5	4.4	4.5	4.4
No. of people aged 17 and under	10,838	10,907	11,069	10,845
% of people aged 17 and under	48.0	47.6	45.5	44.4
No. of people aged 18–60	10,289	10,632	11,759	11,454
% of people aged 18–60	45.6	46.4	48.3	46.9
No. of people aged 61 +	1,429	1,380	1,526	2,134
% of people aged 61+	6.3	6.0	6.3	8.7

Source: Commune Database (MOP 2019)

Disaggregation by age cohort shows that young people (aged 17 years and under) accounted for 44.4 percent of the total population in Chheb in 2019. This suggests the urgent need for a robust job creation program in order to absorb new labour market entrants and secure the future for children and families.

3.3 Socioeconomic factors

The statistics and information below are from the 2019 Commune Database of Chheb district, publicized and provided by the Chheb district administration.

Land ownership. According to the 2019 Commune Database for KSL-2 commune, 84 families own less than 1 ha of ricefield and 63 have no ricefields, 35 families have less than 1 ha of farmland and 45 have no farmland at all (MOP 2019).

Migration for work. Of people aged over 18 years, 2.4 percent (36 persons) travel to find work in other provinces, and 11.2 percent (166 persons) go abroad looking for jobs.

Professional skills training. Only 3.7 per 1,000 people in the 18–35-years age cohort have attended professional training school.

Health. There are no cases of HIV/AIDS in KSL-2 commune and no recorded deaths from malaria or tuberculosis, but there are 32.5 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants from dengue fever.

The birth rate per 1,000 females between the ages of 15 and 45 is 111.1; of these births, 94.5 percent happened in a health centre. Among children aged 9–12 years, 70.9 percent were vaccinated. The average distance from the village centre to a health centre is 18.3 km.

Vulnerability. The 2019 Commune Database for Chheb district notes that 3.3 per 1,000 inhabitants are vulnerable, and 3.3 have a disability. There are no orphans below 18 years, only 4.1 percent of inhabitants are older than 61, and no one lives alone. There are no homeless people, and no one is living on publicly owned land. There are no families living in the protected or conservation areas. No one had been affected by typhoons or flooding, but 73.1 per 1,000 inhabitants had been affected by drought.

Household sanitation. In the whole district of Chheb, there is no solid waste collection service. Twenty-five percent of households have proper latrines, 4.4 percent live less than 150 m from a water source, 14.9 percent have safe water for their daily use, and 76.6 percent habitually use clean water.

Civil registration. Only 8.2 percent of newborns (under one month old) have been registered for a birth certificate, and just 0.8 percent of children aged 0–5 years have a birth certificate. No families in Kampong Sralauv-2 commune have a land title.

Land conflict and domestic violence. Land conflict affects 6.5 per 1,000 inhabitants. Domestic violence afflicts 6.5 per 1,000 families, 1.6 of which have escalated the issue to local authorities. There are no recorded deaths as a result of domestic violence.

Schooling. Regarding school attendance, 84.6 percent of 3 to 5-year-olds go to kindergarten; 81.2 percent of 6-year-olds attend primary school and the remaining do not. 74.2 percent of 6 to 11-year-olds in Kampong Sralauv II attend primary school; and only 7.1 percent of 12 to 14-year-olds attend secondary school. Among the eight communes in Chhen district, Kampong Sralauv II and Chheb II commune (5.8%) rank the lowest number of children from 12-14 year old who attend secondary school.

Education services. The primary school was built in 2005. The average distance from the village centre to primary school is 0.3 km, to secondary school 2.5 km, and to high school 6.5 km. There is one teacher per 39 students at primary school and one teacher per 7.2 students at secondary school; no children from KSL-2 commune were attending high school in 2019. Regarding school sanitation, primary schools have 3.1 toilets and secondary schools have 8.1 toilets per 100 students.

3.4 Road network

Recent road network development has made the study area much more accessible, which in turn has attracted new settlers and intensified the exploitation of natural resources, such as forest clearance for agricultural and urban developments. The laterite road between KSL-1 and KSL-2 was built in 2010, and that from Preah Rumkel commune (Thala Borivat district, Stung Treng province) to Preah Nimith waterfall was built in 2015–16.

The main interconnection roads in the border zone that can serve tourism services in the region. National Road No. 64 from the triangle area, where the borders of Cambodia, Laos and Thailand meet, runs parallel to the Cambodia–Laos border for 147 km through Chaom Ksan district, Preah Vihear town to Thala Borivat district of Stung Treng province. It makes the temples of Preah Vihear and Angkor Wat, and other ecotourism sites in this region, including Preah Nimith waterfall, easily accessible to tourists travelling from Laos and Vietnam. The road from Thala Borivat to Preah Vihear, starting from Sam Ang commune, Thala Borivat district, through Chheb district to Preah Vihear is 135 km long.

An important feature of the road linkage from the triangle area, from Chaom Ksan district in Preah Vihear province to Thala Borivat district in Stung Treng province, is the GMS Southern Economic Corridor. This consists of the 1,150 km Northern Corridor linking Bangkok–Siem Reap–Stung Treng–Ratanakiri–O Yadav–Pleiku/Qui Nhon (Vietnam). This road will greatly benefit the provinces of Stung Treng and Preah Vihear, too, in terms of communication and tourism facilities at holiday destinations and tourist attractions (See annex 1: Map of proposed new roads for intergovernmental agreement).

Preah Nimith waterfall can be reached by two laterite roads from National Road No. 64, which is about 40 km away. From Preah Vihear town, through Chheb district, visitors can turn left at the 541 km road marker pole, where a sign to Preah Nimith can be seen on the left-hand side. Visitors can also get there from Stung Treng town, through Preah Rumkel commune in Thala Borivat district.

3.5 Potential, challenges, and opportunities of Preah Nimith CBET

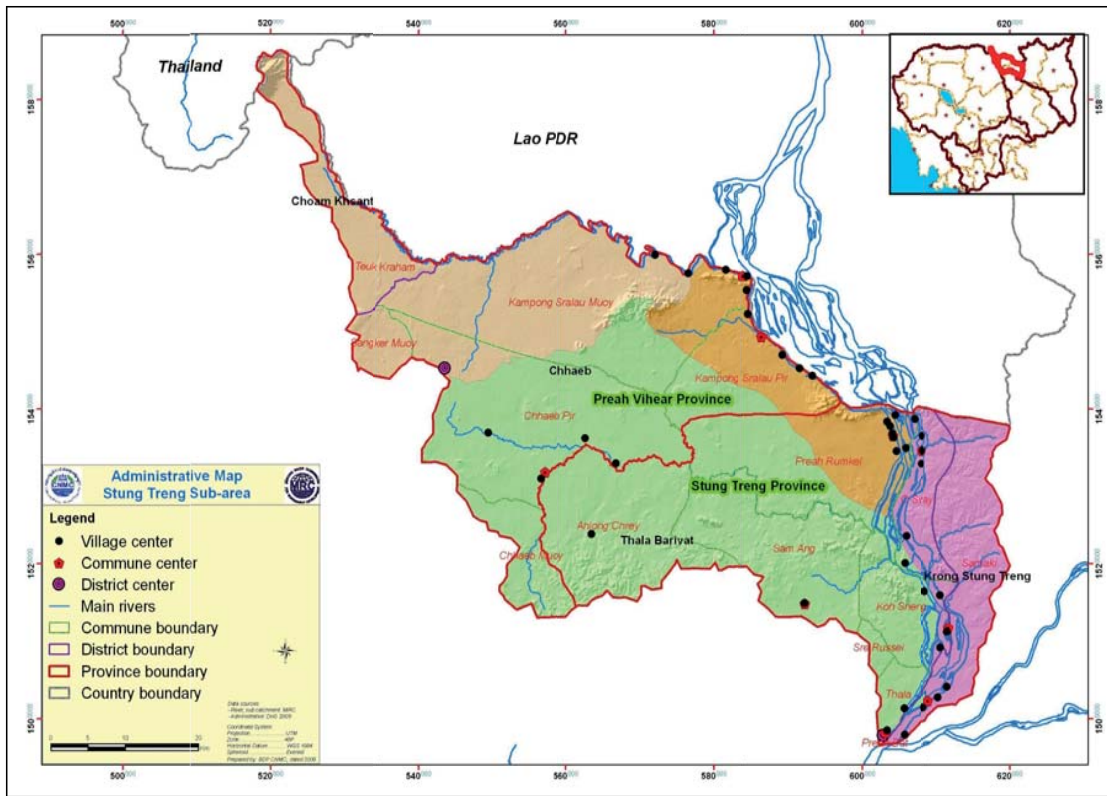
Preah Nimith CBET began as a forestry community (FC), which was formed in 2006 and remained operational with no registration with the Forestry Administration up to 2010. It was registered at the Forestry Administration (FA) in 2011 as a Forest Community (FC) and then amalgamated into a joint CBET site with three neighbouring FCs in 2015. The official name of the combined ecotourism site is Preah Lean Forestry and Ecotourism Community (PLFETC). Together, the four community forests cover 1,233 ha.

The four FCs that make up PLFETC are Preah Nimith FC of Kampong Sami village, Preah Indra Phkay Reah FC of Kampong Preah Indr village, Trapaing Kbal Damrey FC of Kampong Chrey village, and Prey Kang-har Thom FC of Kampong Krasaing village. They agreed to jointly establish an ecotourism community in order to benefit from tourism activities, thereby adding value to their community forests and forestry activities. The total number of the members of PLFETC are 700.

The PLFETC known as Preah Nimith CBET is situated in KSL-2 commune, where Preah Nimith waterfall is located, and borders Preah Rumkel commune in Thala Borivat district, Stung Treng province, where Sopheakmith waterfall is also a tourist attraction. The provincial administration and Provincial Department of Tourism affirmed that although Preah Nimith

CBET is at its early stage and still learning how to best manage its affairs, the community has performed well in protecting the natural resources in its vicinity.

Figure 1: Administrative map of Chheb district, Preah Vihear province



Source: CNMC, SA-6C

3.5.1 Potential

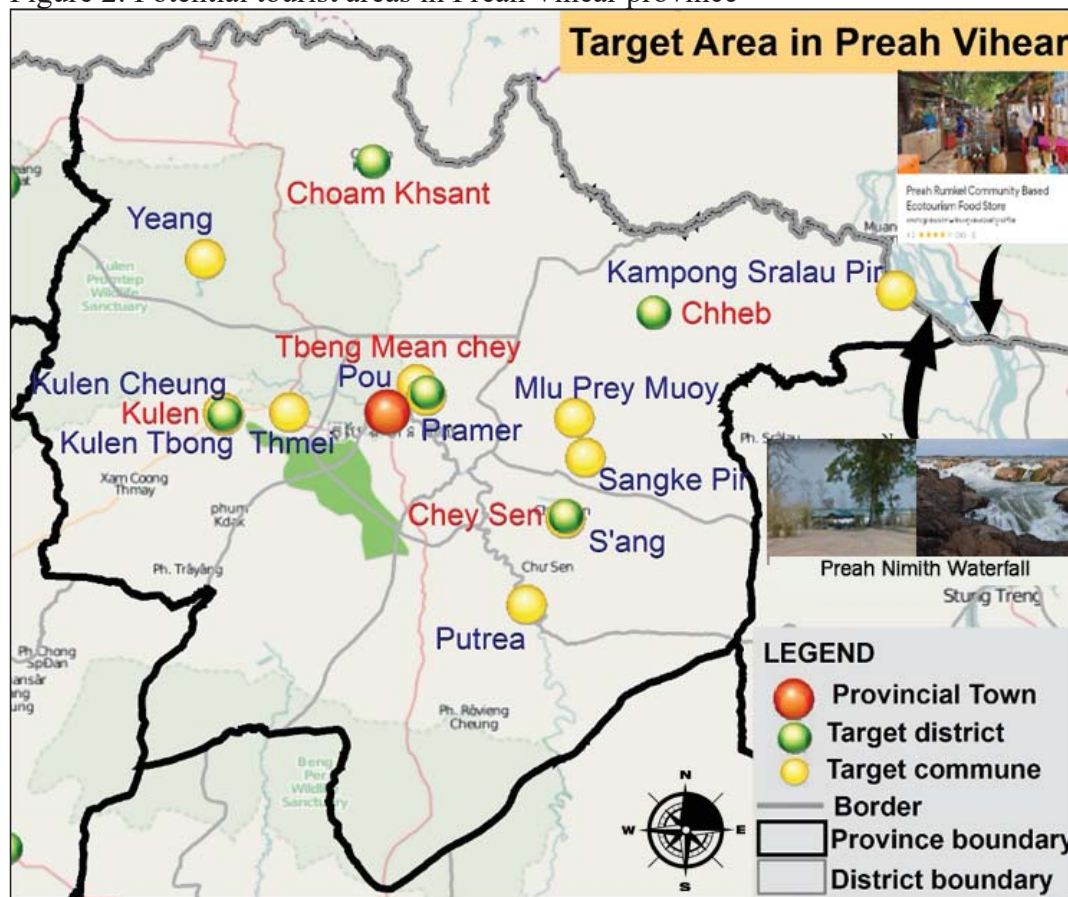
Preah Nimith CBET (or PLFETC) has collected entrance fees since the Khmer New Year holiday in 2011. Recognising the area’s potential as a lucrative visitor destination, a company called Sovann later tried to lobby PLFETC and its members, wanting to lease the area in order to run and manage tourism businesses in the area. Some PLFETC members were in favour of the company’s proposal, but others did not agree with that request, causing an internal conflict and leading to restructure it. In 2017, they agreed that each forestry community would appoint one permanent member to the committee as a focal point for any urgent communication. So far this management arrangement has been successful. They can communicate with each other right away should any illegal activities be discovered within the community forests.

Rice cultivation is the main occupation, followed by fishing, and collecting tree resin, mushrooms and vegetables in the forest. The mushrooms (*pset pak*) and vegetables (*prech* leaves from *sleuk prech* trees) fetch high prices on the markets in Laos and Thailand and provide additional household income. Because of this, community members believe they need to protect their forest and use forest resources in a sustainable way to both improve their living conditions and secure their livelihoods. Forest products, especially mushrooms and *prech* leaves, could be secondary or tertiary sources of income for local people in the community.

The World Tourism Organization, at its 32nd conference on 30 June 2020, confirmed that Cambodia has been prioritised to receive technical and other support towards restarting its tourism sector post Covid-19 (Fresh New Asia 2020). Shortly afterwards, on 5 August 2020, Cambodia signed a memorandum of understanding with Switzerland, securing support via the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation for tourism vocational training and capacity building in the five northeastern provinces (Kratie, Stung Treng, Ratanakiri, Mondulkiri and Preah Vihear) for five years from 2020 to 2024.

PLFETC could possibly benefit from the customers of the independent casino that has been built next to the waterfall. However, PLFETC members expressed their concerns about quiet encroachment of “the propertied and powerful”. In this regard, local authorities must maintain governance and provide assurance that the activities of the casino owner will not be allowed to adversely affect PLFETC, especially in relation to the land officially registered as belonging to PLFETC.

Figure 2: Potential tourist areas in Preah Vihear province



Source: Preah Vihear province

- Consultative Meeting with PLFETC members

The meeting with community members was held on 22 October 2020 at the community building on the bank of Preah Nimith waterfall. They reported that PLFETC’s revenue in 2018 and 2019 amounted to about USD20,000 each year. At the time, there was no figure available for revenue in 2020. They have spent the money on rest rooms for visitors, forest patrol guards, road repairs, village guard uniforms (40 persons), school materials and incentives to encourage children to attend school, dug wells, tables for students and

teachers, conservation activities for 2 ha of newly planted trees, growing trees to replant 1 ha, and bush clearance along roadsides and river banks, particular in the waterfall area.

- What does PLFETC offer to visitors?

The main attraction open to visitors is Preah Nimith waterfall; the waterfall is more spectacular in the wet season than in the dry season. Most of the products sold at the site are imported from Laos and Thailand, including big fish. This is because it is more convenient to cross the Mekong to buy goods, which takes only 5 to 10 minutes by boat, rather than travel down the river or by road to Stung Treng town or Preah Vihear town, which takes far longer.

- What forest products have PLFETC benefited from?

Community members collect *sleuk prech* (*prech* leaves) from the forest in the protected areas for markets in Laos or Thailand where they fetch a high price. *Sleuk prech* can fetch 50,000 to 60,000 riels/kg or even more, depending on the season. Wild mushrooms also fetch high prices on Thai and Lao markets, from 50,000 to 60,000 riels/kg. These forest products provide tertiary sources of income for local people, after rice cultivation, fishing and crop farming.

- Activities of the community using tourism revenue

Some revenue has been used to repair local roads in the commune, plant trees, patrol protected areas, and clear bushes along roadsides and the banks of the waterfall.

- Available and potential tourist sites to be explored

The community would like to organise treks up the mountain opposite the waterfall, from where visitors can view the Mekong and Preah Nimith waterfall. On the way up the mountain, visitors can experience walking through the forest, where they will see wildlife such as pheasants, monkeys and gibbons, and visit a pagoda and a bat cave. Above the waterfall, where the river is calm, the community plans to organise boat tours and fishing trips on the Mekong. At the same time, visitors can get a taste of local people's way of life, which is quite different from that of people living downstream in that it is influenced by Lao culture and community living. What can visitors explore in KSL-2's neighbouring communes?

In KSL-1 commune, to the north of KSL-2 commune, there are organised boat tours along the Mekong from where visitors can enjoy sunrise and sunset and riverbank scenery. Unlike KSL-2 commune, KSL-1 commune has some guest houses and local restaurants serving Khmer, Lao and Thai food on the bank of the Mekong. Visitors can also observe the traditional style of housing, which is unique to the region. The commune is a quiet place to relax – away from since the bustle of town. The distance from KSL-1 commune to Preah Nimith waterfall is 28 km.

Preah Rumkel CBET, located in Thala Borivat district, Stung Treng province, is a well-known tourist spot. A laterite road, built in 2015/16, runs from Preah Rumkel CBET to Preah Nimith waterfall, which is 9 km distant. Preah Rumkel dolphin pool is one of the most cherished Mekong mammal wildlife preservation areas (CNMC, 2012). There are homestays where visitors can experience village life.

3.5.2 Challenges

Lack of infrastructure is holding back the hospitality business. There are no guesthouses and no homestays in Preah Nimith CBET. Most visitors make a day trip to Preah Nimith just to see the waterfall. Many of them bring a picnic because there is no clear information about what

services are available at the site. Visitor information is poor, including about how to reach the site, what there is to see, and whether food and drink is available.

The subnational and local authorities claimed that the access road to Preah Nimith CBET has been improved, albeit with laterite. According to community members, the government plans to asphalt laterite roads in 2021. Quality transport infrastructure is essential to facilitate tourist movements between one targeted site to another and to attractive sites within the country. Equally important for tourism competitiveness are quality environmental infrastructure and services to support the collection, treatment, and storage of solid waste and wastewater; availability of piped clean water supply; and access to reliable electricity. We believe that infrastructure improvements and service delivery in secondary destinations have not kept pace with demand, mainly due to funding and capacity constraints for construction and maintenance, low population density in rural areas, and limited decentralized planning.

The subnational and local authorities claimed that the access road to Preah Nimith CBET has been improved, albeit with laterite. According to community members, the government plans to asphalt laterite roads in 2021. This points to the importance of a “fit-for-purpose” infrastructure strategy, which was emphasised by the Asian Development Bank in its 2017 *Tourism Sector Assessment, Strategy and Road Map for CLMV*.

High-quality transport logistics and infrastructure, including the quality of roads, are key enablers of tourism and for moving tourists seamlessly to various attractions, both within Cambodia and between Cambodia and other GMS countries. Equally important is environmentally sensitive infrastructure to provide tourist areas with water supply, waste disposal, pollution control and electricity supply services while protecting the natural environment, ecosystem services and cultural heritage sites that attract tourists in the first place. However, infrastructure development and service delivery improvements continue to lag behind demand (ADB 2017). The main obstacles to progress, not only in Cambodia but across the Mekong region, are “funding and capacity constraints for construction and maintenance, low population density in rural areas, and limited decentralized planning” (ADB 2017, 16).

Preah Nimith initially received some support from Ponlork Khmer, a local NGO, specifically in aspects of management and information sharing via its website. However, this NGO closed down in 2016. Since then the community has received no support from development partners or NGOs. Community members stressed the urgent need for capacity building, awareness raising, and technical support for strengthening forest monitoring practice and other community management systems.

3.5.3 Opportunities

There are distinct positive spin offs from China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) for tourism development. Chief in importance are transport infrastructure development and connectivity, trade facilitation and openness, and policy communication. The BRI has already generated significant economic returns for Cambodia. For example, improvements in the transport and logistics value chain as a result of the Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone and the Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville expressway (to be completed in early 2023) will enable Cambodia to achieve its industrial development and export diversification goals. The impacts from the BRI can support responsible tourism sector development

and conservation and restoration of ecosystems, and, in turn, conservation of the natural environment can support socioeconomic development, in line with Cambodia Vision 2035.

In Coronavirus-ridden 2020, domestic tourism showed an upward trend, according to the Chairperson of the Cambodian Association of Travel Agents, while visits to heritage sites fell drastically. More local tourists visited areas of outstanding natural beauty, mountains, waterfalls and forests, and went camping and trekking. As mentioned in Section 1.2.3, the numbers of local tourists in June and July 2020 increased by 0.87 percent and 15.2 percent month on month, respectively (Fresh News Asia 2020). These figures represent increases of 65 percent and 75 percent compared to pre-pandemic levels. Overall, these are positive signs that local tourism is helping to soften the blow of Covid-19 and of a move towards greener tourism. Consequently, more tourism businesses, local tourist agents, hotels and guest houses are reopening.

In Preah Vihear province, apart from the cultural sites and the Chheb vulture-feeding restaurant, Preah Nimith waterfall could be promoted as a tourist site. Apart from the waterfall, visitors could explore more of the area once the community has actioned its plan to organise mountain treks to view the Mekong River scenery, forest trekking, and visits to a bat cave and a pagoda. PLFETC could cooperate with communities in neighbouring communes, for instance in KSL-1 in the north, where there are guesthouses and restaurants, to organise boat trips on the Mekong River, and in Preah Rumkel district of Stung Treng in the south, where homestay accommodation is reserved for tourists. At the same time, the community must also pay attention to publicising and distributing visitor information.

Adjacent to Preah Nimith is the Stung Treng Ramsar site in Preah Rumkel commune. The area is a wetland of international importance, which “supports a globally distinct type of seasonally inundated riverine forest not found above the Khone Falls in Lao PDR, nor further downstream of the Mekong. There are remnant areas of tall riparian forest, and significant reed beds” (Springate-Baginski, Allen and Darwell 2009, 122). This unique ecosystem not only houses many endangered fish species, but is also an important habitat for globally and/or regionally threatened wildlife including Irrawaddy dolphins, various birds (Green Peafowl, White-shouldered Ibis and Spot-billed Pelican), the Siamese Crocodile (*Crocodylus siamensis*), and plants of biodiversity significance (CNMC, SA-6C 2012). Many people depend on the biodiversity of this sub-area for their livelihoods. In addition to the Ramsar site, there are 17 deep pools in the Mekong which are important fish habitats, particularly for high-priced fish. Some are spawning grounds for endemic species, and some are habitats for endangered species. Kratie is also home to Irrawaddy dolphins, as well as a new conservation centre devoted to protecting the population of endangered Cantor’s giant softshell turtles.

The Emerald Triangle Development Cooperation (ETDC), initiated by Cambodia and established in June 2000 by Cambodia, Laos and Thailand, mainly focuses on tourism and agricultural development in the border provinces of the three countries (Ubon Ratchathani and Si Saket provinces of Thailand, Champasak and Saravane provinces of Laos, and Preah Vihear, Stung Treng and Oddar Meanchey provinces of Cambodia). Two main reasons for the establishment of the EDTC are to narrow the development gaps within the ASEAN region and between GMS countries, and to alleviate poverty in the abovementioned provinces as these are some of the poorest areas in the region. The ETDC has shifted its focus from being tourism-oriented to a broader sector approach, from central government cooperation to more local government participation. “‘Emerald’ indicates ‘green’ development because the area is so green and has long been rich in historical, cultural and natural attractions” (Hatsukano 2012, 34).

4. Discussion

The aim of the 2003 Sub-decree on Community Forestry Management, as stated in Article 1, is to determine “the rules for the establishment, management and use of community forests throughout the Kingdom of Cambodia” (RGC 2003, 1). It stipulates in Article 4 that “Power in leading and managing a CF Community is gained through the election of community members” (RGC 2003, 2). Community forests are state public property and the Forestry Administration is mandated to register and demarcate community forestry boundaries (Article 3). Forestry communities can seek direct financial support for their development from donors, development partners and NGOs (Article 31), and this is what Preah Nimith CBET needs to do in order to strengthen its management and develop the area as an ecotourism destination.

As defined in the Law on Tourism (Article 11) the MOT has shared responsibilities in cooperation with other concerned ministries and authorities in important areas affecting or affected by tourism industry. As ecotourism is a community-level nature-driven subcomponent of tourism, the MOT has the mandate to prepare national tourism policies, plans and strategies, which incorporate regional development plans, ASEAN and other tourism plans, for submission to the government. Subnational tourism development plans reflect their localities. Only through the subnational development plan can ecotourism communities benefit from, in terms of soft infrastructure, training in managerial skills, awareness raising and publicity, and so on.

As the key players at subnational level, only the provincial administration and provincial line departments can seek assistance through development partners, NGOs and partnerships with private-sector entities to help strengthen and develop the capacity of local ecotourism communities. Despite the provision in Article 3 of the Sub-decree on Community Forestry Management, local ecotourism communities themselves have little chance of directly obtaining support from international organisations and NGOs, but can closely cooperate with them.

Poor communication and information from Preah Nimith CBET, as well as from subnational authorities, could be one of the reasons why many visitors do not know about this place.

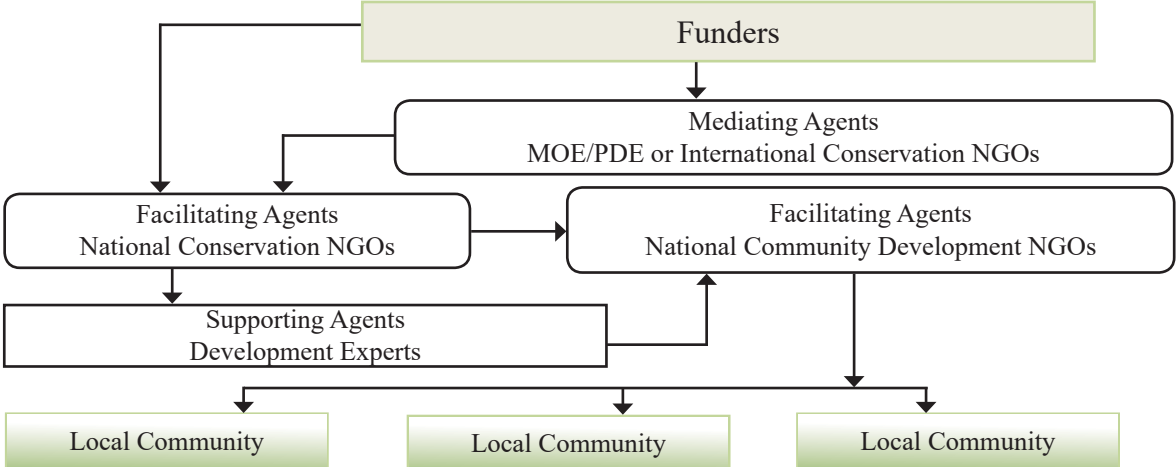
Cambodia has made concerted efforts to promote local CBET initiatives. For instance, villagers in Chambak commune, Kampong Speu province, are developing CBET with support from Mlup Baitong, a local NGO. Minority communities in Ratanakiri are working on CBET with assistance from an organisation called DRIVE. The Lutheran World Federation, Osmose NGO and the World Wildlife Fund are also providing support for CBET initiatives (Kanal and Babar 2007). In addition, for example, ecotourism activities are becoming an integral element of local livelihoods in many areas. A model example of this is Preah Rumkel, where local people are engaged in providing homestay accommodation, taking tourists on guided walks or boat tours to watch wildlife and experience local culture, and providing transport, catering and other hospitality services. The Partnership for Forestry and Fishery Communities, implemented by a consortium of four NGOs led by WWF-Cambodia, has been working with local communities to develop CBET sites since 2014. Through building local capacities and strengthening ecotourism-related skills, the Partnership aims to improve the management and quality of ecotourism, thereby generating additional income and improving general living standards, while protecting the local natural environment (WWF 2020).

Some scholars and practitioners contend that CBET should be strategised. Take Neth (2019), for example, who argues that ecotourism and CBET should be an international intervention strategy due to the complexity of tourism development and conservation requirements. He points out that rural communities, due to their lack of knowledge and resources, will need significant support and stakeholder collaboration for the successful operation and management of CBET. Similarly, Lash and Austin (2003 cited in Rith 2010; Neth 2019) argue that ecotourism and CBET projects should be developed based on two strategic development models – the conservation/NGO model (Figure 3), and the government agency/industry association model (Figure 4). These models are to be employed during the intervention stage only, with a view to enabling local communities to eventually manage and operate ecotourism sites and activities independently.

Conservation/NGO model projects are usually funded by development partners and/or international organisations through government agencies, international and national conservation NGOs (Figure 3). National NGOs could play an important role by working in close cooperation with local communities to manage CBET, preparing local tourist development plans, and providing skills training in hospitality, management and related skills. At subnational level, the Provincial Department of Environment and the Provincial Department of Tourism play important roles in providing guidance to local ecotourism communities. The members of Preah Nimith CBET affirmed that the provincial department teams generally visit the site twice a year, especially before important national events such as Khmer New Year, and usually to provide some instruction in strengthening forest protection, security for visitors, implementation of regulations, and hospitality services.

In Cambodia, international funders operate through two types of facilitating agents, the Ministry of Environment and Provincial Departments of Environment for national level projects, international NGOs (i.e. WWF-Cambodia, IUCN Wildlife Alliance) that contract a local conservation NGO such as Mlup Baitong (as in the case of Preah Rumkel CBET), and national conservation NGOs (Neth 2019).

Figure 3: Conservation/NGO model



Source: Adapted from Rith 2010; Neth, 2019

Government agency/industry association model projects are typically funded by grant or loan from international development organisation through a national tourism organisation. National tourism organisations do not implement ecotourism/CBET projects directly, but hire local or foreign development consultants to support community-based interventions in a specific CBET site (Figure 4). Preah Nimith CBET, for instance, received support from Ponlork Khmer, a local NGO, which implemented a training program and provided management skills. This support started in 2011 and ended 2016.

Figure 4: Government agency/industry association model



Source: Adapted from Rith 2010; Neth, 2019

Some successful practices can be found in Cambodia for some CBETs. For instance, Chambok CBET in Phnom Sruoch district, Kampong Speu province, is in a similar situation to Preah Nimith CBET. Chambok CBET also joined forces with six villages in Chambok commune. It is situated in a community forest on the boundary of Kirirum National Park, which offers various attractions. It is highly visited due to its easy accessibility, proximity to Phnom Penh, and properly developed services (i.e. tour guides, accommodation, transport, food and beverages).

Another success story is Preah Rumkel CBET, located 9 km south of Preah Nimith CBET in Preah Rumkel commune, Thala Borivat district, Stung Treng province. This CBET was established in 2007 with support from Mloup Baitong, an environmental NGO. It lies along the Mekong River and features beauty spots where Irrawaddy dolphins can be seen and the Sopheakmit Waterfall. It is known by many visitors, both local and international, largely due to the work of Mloup Baitong. Furthermore, tourists can easily obtain information about visiting the area on the Tourism of Cambodia website.¹ However, this website has no tourist information about Preah Nimith, which used to be publicised on Ponlork Khmer’s website. This suggests that support from international organisations, NGOs or private donors would be helpful in the further development of Preah Nimith CBET.

1 www.tourismcambodia.com/activities/community-based-cbt.

5. Recommendations

Local community members were concerned about whether the government and the local authorities will allow them to continue operating CBET services. Since embracing CBET, the livelihoods of community members, and of other people in the commune, have benefitted considerably from forest conservation activities. Community forest areas have been clearly defined and registered as natural tourism sites. To ensure the sustainability and development of these natural sites, local people felt that all local authorities involved in ecotourism across all related sectors should protect them from illegal encroachment and from being designated privately owned land.

As stated in Article 5 of the Law on Tourism, “The Ministry of Tourism shall prepare the policy and plan of tourism development for the Kingdom of Cambodia in consultation with relevant-line ministries. The Tourism Plan comprises the National Tourism Development Plan, the Regional Tourism Development Plan and Local Authority Tourism Development Plan. The local authority shall prepare its own local tourism development plan” (RGC 2009). To be along with the national development plan, Preah Nimith CBET therefore needs to make sure that its further development is incorporated into the provincial tourism development plan.

The MOT launched in September 2020 Phase 2 of its Skill Development Program (SDP II) for the five northeastern provinces of Kratie, Stung Treng, Preah Vihear, Ratanakiri and Mondulakiri. The aim is to provide tourism skills training to young people with low skill levels so they can secure better paid jobs (Fresh News Asia 2020). This program is in line with the Strategic Plan for Tourism Human Resources Development 2017–2025. The Preah Vihear Provincial Department of Tourism should take responsibility for engaging young people from Preah Nimith forestry and ecotourism community in this training. To that end, and to give the program the best chance of success, authorities should make sure that young people are aware of this program and how to access it, and then support their next steps when the training ends. This would help improve community management skills.

The government launched the Siem Reap Tourism Development Master Plan 2020–2035, which will help restore and promote tourism in Cambodia as international travel picks up post Covid-19. In addition, Preah Vihear province is part of the 1,150 km Northern Subcorridor link of the GMS Southern Economic Corridor between Bangkok in Thailand, Siem Reap, Stung Treng and Ratanakiri in Cambodia, and O Yadav, Pleiku and Qui Nhom in Vietnam. Preah Vihear administration and provincial departments should be ready to seize the opportunities these developments will bring to the area. They should prepare a plan to attract tourists to the province’s cultural and natural sites, including Preah Nimith Waterfalls in KSL-2, Mekong River boat trips in KSL-1, and dolphin pools in Preah Rumkel commune.

At a meeting with the Seventh Committee of the National Assembly on Education, Youth, Sport, Cult, Religion, Culture and Tourism on 13 August 2020, the minister for tourism confirmed the roadmap to restore and uphold the tourism sector post Covid-19. The road map sets out the government’s priority measures, including building tourists’ trust and confidence in Covid-19 and other safety measures, setting the right price, cooperating with international “travel bubble” guidelines, facilitating travel within and to the country, and promoting Cambodia as a responsible, peaceful and welcoming tourism destination. The Provincial Department for Tourism should pay more attention to promoting tourism attractions and services through online platforms and social media, which are an increasingly popular way for visitors to learn about Cambodia and Cambodian culture; find information (in their own language) about what there is to see and experience, where and how to get there, and the services available; research and book

accommodation and restaurants; make travel arrangements; and so on. The main challenges facing Preah Nimith CBET are the lack of visitor accommodation, such as guesthouses and homestays, and proper road access, which would facilitate tourism and encourage tourists to stay longer. The information on tourism could be significantly improved and should include information about all ecotourism communities, including Preah Nimith which is currently not mentioned.

In November 2020, the MOT and Mayato Green Company of Japan signed a memorandum of understanding intended to develop the green belt tourism value chain. Under this partnership, and with the aid of Japanese technology, Cambodian farmers will learn how to grow high-quality vegetables and other horticultural products using safe levels of inputs to serve the tourism sector and possibly for export to Japan (MOT 2020). The Provincial Department of Tourism and the Provincial Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery could take advantage of this opportunity by disseminating information about these new horticultural techniques in Preah Vihear, including Preah Nimith community.

Close cooperation between the subnational authorities, including line departments, of Preah Vihear and Stung Treng provinces, and between Preah Nimith CBET and Preah Rumkel CBET, is needed to attract more visitors to the area. The two communities could learn from each other's experiences, best practices and management systems, perhaps through exchange visits of management committee members. This would require the involvement of all subnational authorities.

6. Conclusion

The provincial administration of Preah Vihear, in cooperation with related line departments, especially the Department of Tourism, is implementing its tourism development plan for the five years to 2024. This provincial plan is consistent with National Strategic Development Plan 2019–2023, which stresses the need to ensure the sustainability of ecosystems and the services they provide, the conservation of nature and biodiversity, and environmental biosafety. Natural protected areas are a key strategy towards achieving these critical objectives. But to be effective, they need strong governance and management structures, which, in turn, necessitate capacity building, land zoning, registration of state-owned public land, and well-designed management plans.

There are several opportunities that the provincial administration could capitalise on. First is international and regional cooperation as envisaged in Cambodia Vision 2035, for instance, the GMS Southern Economic Corridor, the Emerald Triangle Development Cooperation, and bilateral arrangements between Cambodia and Thailand and between Cambodia and Laos. Another angle is optimising the role of development partners, for example, through development partner use of national strategies, institutions and procedures, such as in the drafting of the Siem Reap Tourism Development Master Plan 2020–2035, and through development partnerships such as the vocational tourism training program with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and horticultural upgrading and development with Mayato Green Company of Japan. At a more local level, the provincial administration could explore opportunities for cooperation and resource sharing with neighbouring provincial and district administrations where tourist sites are also earmarked for development.

Subnational administrations should consider the ways in which they could benefit from regional, national and local cooperation initiatives and growth in domestic tourism. Preah Nimith Waterfall and other tourist sites in the commune and across the province stand to attract increasing numbers of local tourists. Local tourists today are more interested in visiting natural protected areas and outdoor recreation than cultural attractions, and this trend is set to continue.

The priority for PLFETC is to secure the support it needs from local NGOs and development partners, in particular to strengthen its management structure and capacities. The expansion of schools in this remote region as a direct result of government policy has already made a difference in that people, especially younger generations, can now communicate in Khmer. The subnational administration should incorporate the strengthening of Preah Nimith CBET into the provincial development plan.

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Annex 1: Proposed new roads for intergovernmental agreement on Asian highway network (new route 64 from Thai border – Poipet – Siem Reap – Preah Vihear – Stung Treng)



New AH Route (NR#64) from Thai border-Poipet-Siem Reap-Preah Vihear-Stung Treng-O Yadav-Quy Nhon(VN)

Annex 2. Guiding questions for FGDs and KIIs

1. What are the current ecotourism activities in the Preah Nimith area?
 - a. Is Preah Nimith CBET legally recognised (i.e. officially registered at ministry level)?
 - b. What types of ecotourism activities does Preah Nimith CBET offer?
 - c. What types of visitors does it attract? Foreign (percent)? Khmer (percent)?
 - d. Is the number of tourists visiting the CBET increasing or decreasing? Why?
 - e. Do the roles and responsibilities of the line departments involved in CBET overlap in any way, whether directly or indirectly? The tentative plan is to meet representatives from the provincial departments of Planning, Environment, Tourism, Agriculture and Women’s Affairs, as well as related offices in Chheb district.
 - f. At the local level, the plan is to also meet the heads of Kampong Sralauv 1 and Kampong Sralauv 2 communes, together with the heads of selected CBET communities, to discuss CBET management and practices in the area.
 - g. Do any indigenous people live in the destination area? If so, can they can be promoted as an attraction, or used as guides, or provide accommodation in traditional villages and houses?
 - h. Have any land concessions been granted to private companies in the area? If yes, have there been any negative impacts on local communities?

2. What are the challenges and what practices can be improved?

- a. CBET is nature-oriented, so intensity of interactions with nature and social sensitivity need to be observed.
 - b. Visitors' willingness to pay, group size and type, and length of stay also need to be clarified.
 - c. Information about the location such as accessibility, ownership, protected areas and fragility of resources should be provided by the local CBET.
3. What are the ecosystem services that local livelihoods depend on?
- a. CBET activities can be categorised into three groups, those that depend directly on nature (birdwatching), are enhanced by nature (camping, trekking), and those where the natural setting is secondary (swimming).
 - b. What is the extent of public participation in community planning towards sustainable tourism development when implementing ecotourism projects?
4. What evidence is there of the effectiveness of ecotourism in conserving forest and improving local livelihoods?
- a. Have there been any improvements in revenue and employment?
 - b. What was the total revenue from CBET in 2019 and 2020? Has revenue increased or decreased?
 - c. How is the income generated from ecotourism activities divided? What is it used for (e.g. paying staff, buying schoolbooks and materials, donation to pagoda, donation patrolling the community forest)?
 - d. Who controls the development and implementation of ecotourism projects?
 - e. Have there been any improvements in social wellbeing, education and infrastructure?
 - f. How is the local population involved (e.g. form of empowerment)? Is the community given the responsibility for decision making? Does it at least have some say in decision making and tourism development (information gathering, consultation, initiating action and evaluation)?
 - g. Do they find any negative impacts on the environment reduced, environmental awareness of the local community increased, and provision of employment for the population?
 - h. Does CBET provide some budget for forest protection/forest patrol activities in the community forest?
 - i. Has the forest cover in community forests changed since the CBET was established? Has forest cover increased or decreased?
 - j. How do you know whether the forest cover in community forests has increased or decreased?
 - k. Are deforestation activities in community forests increasing or decreasing? Why?
 - l. How can the deforestation rate in community forests be reduced?
5. What suggestions do local people have for improving ecotourism practices?
- a. How are host communities and local people involved?
 - b. Have they participated in a "public participation program" so that they understand the benefits and potential hazards of introducing CBET?
 - c. What are the key issues concerning profitability and sustainability?

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