Good Practice in the Chambok Community-Based Ecotourism Project in Cambodia

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Introduction

Cambodia is situated in Southeast Asia. It covers an area of 181,035 square kilometres and has a total population of 13.66 million. The national population growth rate was 1.9 per cent per annum in 1998–2005 (National Institute of Statistics, 2005), the highest in Southeast Asia. Around 83 per cent of the population lives in rural areas. The GDP per capita per annum is US$385 (National Institute of Statistics, 2006) with the GDP growth rate at 13 per cent in 2004. More than 50 per cent of the annual national income is generated from donor assistance (around US$500 million to US$600 million per year). The average monthly household expenditure (estimated in 1999) is around US$95. The proportion of the population living under the poverty line (below US$0.50 per person per day) is 34.7 per cent. The literacy rate is 67.1 per cent, representing 74.4 per cent for men and 60.3 per cent for women (National Institute of Statistics, 2005).

After nearly three decades of civil war, Cambodian social and economic infrastructure has been seriously damaged, particularly in remote areas. Transportation and communication systems, school buildings, health care centres and other public and private facilities were cut off, damaged or abandoned. Human resources and public and private assets were seriously affected. There were also declines in solidarity, conservation, education, social tolerance and law enforcement, while poverty, crime, disorder, and ideological and political discrimination increased. In addition, natural resources, especially forests and wildlife, have declined due to uncontrolled exploitation. The nation’s forested land covered 73 per cent of the country’s land area before the 1970s, but decreased to only 40 per cent by 1992 (Dennis and Woodsworth, 1992). The situation was worsened by millions of land mines being left in rice fields.
and forests, rendering thousands of hectares uncultivable and leaving hundreds of people dead or disabled every year.

Kampong Speu province is located to the west of the capital Phnom Penh and hosts the Kirirom National Park, previously characterized by dense forests. Owing to low yields from rice and vegetable cultivation, limited available agricultural land and the danger of land mines, most of its people make their living from forest resources. Interestingly, around 94 per cent of households are engaged in a wide range of forest extraction activities in this study’s area of interest, the commune of Kampong Speu (Mlup Baitong, 2003a). These activities include timber cutting, charcoal and fuel-wood production, non-timber forestry product collection and wildlife hunting. Frequently, these activities are uncontrolled and have led to rapid deforestation and severe degradation of wildlife resources. Consequently, the livelihoods of the villagers have been greatly affected and many (66 per cent) are very poor and in debt (Mlup Baitong, 2003a). Predictably, unemployment has also been increasing.

**Project formulation**

Realizing the need to protect and best utilize natural resources, an environmental organization, Mlup Baitong, has been working in the case-study area through the Chambok Community-Based Ecotourism (CBET) project. Mlup Baitong began this project by assessing the feasibility of attracting tourists to the area based on the existence of a 30-metre waterfall (see Figure 1.1), a bat cave with three bat species and the beauty of the remaining forest. Mlup Baitong started providing informal training on several related environmental topics, especially on the usefulness of the forest and its resources to villagers, and then introduced the idea of an ecotourism project to the Commune Development Council, which enthusiastically embraced it. Several workshops were conducted to explore the possible impacts of the project and to clarify the difference between ecotourism and typical commercial tourism. Another step was to support villagers’ election of a management committee (MC) from among the nine commune villages. A committee of 13 representatives was elected, including 2 advisory positions for representatives of the Commune Council and National Park. The by-laws also mandate that at least three of the seats on the MC are reserved for women. Following the elections, clear goals and specific objectives were defined.

One of the most important hurdles for Mlup Baitong and the community was convincing the Ministry of Environment to cooperate in this project, since approximately half of the project site’s area is located within the National Park, under the Ministry’s jurisdiction. Fortunately, the Ministry was mindful of the need to support villagers’ livelihoods to ensure protection of the park and, consequently, in August 2002, Mlup Baitong signed a two-year renewable agreement with the Ministry of Environment for a ‘Community Conservation Area’ of approximately 70 hectares in the park.
Rules and regulations for the site were drafted, as were by-laws for the governance of the organizing committee (see Figure 1.2). Various stakeholders, including officers from the Provincial Department of Tourism, Provincial Department of Environment, Kirirom National Park and the Provincial Governor, were invited to a series of meetings to obtain consensus and final agreement on these crucial documents governing the site.

The practicalities of establishing the site were organized by the villagers themselves, but supported and facilitated by Mlup Baitong. First, Mlup Baitong arranged for Cambodia Mine Action Committee (CMAC) to conduct an assessment of the site. Once the site was declared safe, the construction of nature trails began. Villagers organized themselves to build the trails and other necessary facilities, while Mlup Baitong supported the villagers with ‘food for work’ in accordance with the standards of the World Food Programme. Finally, training on basic ecotourism services skills were provided. The Chambok community-based ecotourism site was officially opened on 4 January 2003 with the participation of district, provincial and ministry officials.

Figure 1.1  A 30-metre waterfall uphill from the Chambok ecotourism site

Source: Mlup Baitong
Project goals and objectives

The project aims to empower Chambok community members to actively participate in the sustainable management of natural resources in their community, to reduce poverty and improve livelihood. To achieve this goal, three main objectives were: 1) protection of forests and natural resources; 2) provision of income generating alternatives to poverty-stricken and forest product-dependent communities; and 3) education of local people and visitors about environmental conservation.

Project description

Site geography and coverage

The CBET project is located in the remote jungle area of the northeastern border of Kirirom National Park in Chambok Commune, Phnom Sruich district, Kampong Speu province. Most of the site lies on the eastern slope of the Kirirom highland, which is part of Cambodia’s southwest Cardamom mountain ranges. Traveling to the city of Sihanouk Ville along National Road No. 4, visitors must

Figure 1.2 A community meeting to establish community regulations

Source: Mlup Baitong
turn right at the small town of Treng Troyeng, approximately 88km from the capital city of Phnom Penh (see Figure 1.3). Continuing the journey on gravel roads for about 20km, one reaches the Chambok commune. An old forest trail was built when Kirirom served as a popular hillside resort for the wealthy during the 1950s and 1960s, and still connects the commune center to a 30m waterfall about 4km away. The project site covers 161 hectares of forest bordering approximately 750 hectares of forested community protected areas and 300 hectares of community forest.

**Project beneficiaries**

The target beneficiaries of this project include around 500 households of the 9 villages of Chambok commune. The beneficiaries can be divided into three main categories of MC members, service providers and community members. The MC is made up of 13 elected members, while the service providers include entrance fee collectors, tour guides, ox-cart drivers, homestay owners and coordinators, restaurant workers and souvenir vendors. The last two of these have been separately supervised by the Women’s Association, which is composed of 13 women’s self help groups (WSHGs). About 100 men and 200 women from 300 households
have been employed in ecotourism services on a voluntary and rotational basis. The service providers get a daily wage according to regulations. The remaining community members benefit from community development activities through a community fund raised by the ecotourism project and from better access to non-timber forestry products, which have been well protected and successfully controlled by this project.

Implementing and coordinating agency

Mlup Baitong, literally translated as ‘green shade’, is a dynamic and respected national NGO. It was first established in 1998 as a project of a British NGO to address the problems of deforestation in Cambodia, with a focus on educating the general public on conservation of natural resources. In January 2001, Mlup Baitong became independent, established its own board of directors and drew up a set of by-laws. Mlup Baitong is the initiator and the implementing and coordinating agency for the Chambok CBET project.

To effectively manage this project, Mlup Baitong has dispatched some of its staff, including a programme coordinator, a project officer and a project assistant, to handle the work on the site. A counterpart from the Ministry of Environment is also contracted to coordinate communications between the project and the Ministry. Other staff of Mlup Baitong, working in the same area but on different projects, also may serve as support staff. Volunteers may occasionally join the team. Mlup Baitong sometimes contracts with external experts to deliver training or other required work that is beyond its capacity.

Besides being the project implementer, Mlup Baitong also acts as coordinator linking the local community to other institutions such as governmental agencies or NGOs. It also coordinates during conflict resolution between communities or between community and public authorities in some instances.

Project components and activities

To run this project successfully and to achieve all the above objectives, Mlup Baitong has divided the project into components. This division guarantees smooth and effective management, better implementation and easier follow-up and monitoring. There are five main components, each containing several supporting activities.

The first component of the project is the construction or renovation of infrastructure and facilities. This includes building forest trails, trail stairs, small bridges, an entrance fee ticket-sales booth, an entrance gate, rest shelters, a 96m² information centre, a 380m² botanical nursery with water supply system, ox-carts, toilets, 20 homestays, a 40m² restaurant, a car parking lot and vending kiosks.

The second component is building the capacity of MC members and service providers. In this component the project has provided training on general
environmental knowledge and on project planning, implementation and management. The project also organized a visit for MC members and the Commune Council Chief to several ecotourism sites in Thailand and Cambodia to improve their understanding of ecotourism implementation.

The establishment and marketing of income generation services make up the third component. This includes establishing systems for entrance fee collection, car parking, ox-cart riding, tourist guiding, food preparation, souvenir vending, traditional dancing performance and homestays. The project has actively participated in the Cambodian Community Based Ecotourism Network (CCBEN) and contacted several tour companies for tourism product advertisement.

The next component involves keeping the ecotourism site environmentally friendly. Several key activities have been implemented to support this component. The project assists the community in setting up rules and regulations for waste management and educates villagers, service providers and visitors on relevant environmental topics. The MC regularly supports activities such as cleaning of the site, installing garbage bins and educational signs, and patrolling the forest to prevent fires and illegal forestry activities.

The last component is the establishment and support of the Women’s Association to improve the livelihoods of its members. In this component, the project introduced the WSHGs, supported their formation and provided the groups with support for microenterprises, including souvenir selling, preparing guest meals and renting bicycles to visitors. These activities have been carried out through a savings group approach.

**Key technical inputs**

To ensure the success and sustainability of the project, technical inputs are provided to MC members and service providers. Inputs include training on environmental issues, facilitation skills, problem solving, report writing, micro-project/business design, project implementation and management, implementation of relevant laws, forest protection methods, and tourism service techniques and management. The last of these includes teaching community-based ecotourism concepts, bookkeeping, accounting, financial management, tour guiding, first aid, hygiene and sanitation, basic English conversation and computer skills. In addition, the concept of self help groups was also introduced to the Women’s Association.

In particular, techniques of micro-project/business designing, implementation and management have been critical inputs provided to MC members. They have been trained on how to plan, implement and manage all sub-projects of CBET, and have been supported in implementing small projects by themselves (see Figure 1.4). The objective of this approach is to strengthen the capacity and ownership of MC members in project planning, implementation and management to strive towards community-based organization (CBO) establishment and to ensure the sustainability of CBET after Mlup Baitong withdraw (scheduled for 2009).
Project timeframe

The Chambok ecotourism project can be divided into three main phases. The first phase, or project establishment, was completed in 2002. In this step, Mlup Baitong mobilized resources, searched for experts, promoted and explained the project to relevant stakeholders, with a special focus on community members and government institutions, and enlisting their support to establish this innovative project.

The second phase from 2003 to 2006 was project improvement in which all activities were focused on developing infrastructure, facilities, tourism services, marketing and capacity building for MC members and service providers. The aim of this step was to achieve natural resource protection and income generation for the community members.

The last phase, from 2007 to 2009, is project graduation in which the responsibilities for managing project activities, including planning and implementing, which were previously done by the project staff, are gradually being passed on to MC members through the micro-project approach. This is the transitional period towards CBO establishment. However, project improvements achieved in the second phase will continue to enhance the quality of the project.
From 2010 onwards there will be a period of self-management. Mlup Baitong plans to assist the MC in establishing a CBO, through which MC members will manage all project development activities. From this time, the income generated from the CBET is expected to be adequate to support the project expenses and to contribute to community development.

**Total project cost**

The total cost of the project from 2002 to 2009 is US$226,000. This cost has been broken down into five main components (see Table 1.1). Overhead costs constitute all administration costs and a small portion for the salary of supporting staff. Project staff costs include staff salaries and benefits. Productive input costs contain all expenditures for materials, equipments, community capacity building and infrastructure. Project operation costs account for expenses of communication, transportation, food and sundries for project planning, monitoring and evaluation. Project staff development costs consist of staff training and exposure visit expenses.

All project costs have been funded by foreign donors including Oxfam Novib, Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, Oxfam Great Britain, Keidanren Nature Conservation Fund, Asian Development Bank, Blacksmith Institute, Canada Fund, McKnight Foundation and UNDP/Economic Commission. There was no direct financial support from the Cambodian government or private companies. However, the government contributed some support to the building of roads and land mine clearance, while tour companies assisted with advertising.

The yearly CBET project activity planning and budgeting are regularly conducted before project implementation. Usually several consultation meetings with representatives from the project beneficiaries are conducted to collect ideas and comments as inputs for the project plan. In addition, a mid-year-planning review is also conducted to revise some project activities and allocate the budget to respond to the project situation and external influences.

The CBET MC conducts monthly meeting to share the activities accomplished and the problems encountered. Minutes of each meeting are written and submitted to the project staff. Project staff include a project officer, a project assistant and, intermittently, a counterpart from the Ministry of Environment and a volunteer. The staff regularly monitor the CBET activities during working days.

**Table 1.1 Project cost breakdown**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost Categories</th>
<th>Overhead</th>
<th>Project Staff</th>
<th>Productive Inputs</th>
<th>Project Operation</th>
<th>Staff Development</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost US$</td>
<td>$20,340</td>
<td>$65,540</td>
<td>$101,700</td>
<td>$31,640</td>
<td>$6,780</td>
<td>$226,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-Site Expenses</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$45,880</td>
<td>$101,700</td>
<td>$18,980</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$166,560</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and take turns observing activities during weekends and holidays. The project is supervised by the programme coordinator who visits the site once a week on average. Besides regular communication by phone with the project staff, the executive director has come to Chambok and met with CBET committee members an average of six times per year, usually on weekends.

Monitoring is also done through monthly programme meetings, organized by the programme coordinator at the field office. Several ad hoc meetings with relevant stakeholders have also been conducted with staff from other related projects working in the same or nearby areas. Monitoring information is documented in monthly activity reports, which are written by the project officer and edited by the project coordinator before being submitted to the executive director. Besides this, incidental reports on any illegal activities are also submitted by the coordinator to relevant local authorities, including the commune council and the director of the Kirirom National Park. In serious cases, the incidental reports must be submitted to the executive director so that he can take further action.

A project progress report is submitted to each relevant project sponsor according to its specific requirements. Each month or two, the executive director submits a consolidated report to the board of directors. Also, an external project evaluation is conducted every three years, and an evaluation report is submitted to all project sponsors and some of the main stakeholders.

**Impacts and outcomes**

The project’s efforts to raise environmental awareness have resulted in service providers, villagers and local visitors participating in keeping the ecotourism site clean, green and sustainable. For example, waste and water pollution issues, which frequently happen in tourism sites, have not happened in Chambok. The success of this project, especially in terms of raising environmental awareness and sustainable practices among visitors, has been frequently cited as good practice by guest speakers on radio, TV shows and panel debate programmes.

The conservation efforts have resulted in the prevention of forest fires and illegal logging and hunting inside the ecotourism site. More than 1100 hectares of forest have been properly managed. Illegal activities, which often happen in those areas, have largely stopped, with most villagers previously involved in logging or hunting becoming farmers, tour guides or tourism service providers. Of particular interest is the complete elimination of 72 charcoal kilns that operated in the project site before the establishment of this ecotourism project (see Figure 1.5). These charcoal kilns, which consumed hundreds of trees every day, were responsible for severe destruction of forest. Also, no major destruction of natural resources has occurred in the surrounding forest areas connected with the Chambok CBET site, thus allowing the forest a proper chance to regenerate.

Mlup Baitong plans to gradually phase out its support for the Chambok Ecotourism site by 2009. The graduation plan involves handing over responsibilities
of managing the site to MC members step by step. Training on related topics has been provided to MC members including formal training, coaching and exposure visits. A micro-project approach in which the MC members are trained to design and implement activities for the management, maintenance and improvement of the site has been used since 2006 to strengthen their capacities and ownership, and to familiarize the MC members with the management and ownership of the project. As a result, most MC members can develop and implement a plan to improve facilities at the site without assistance. Currently, around 60 per cent of project activities, previously done by the project staff, are planned and implemented by MC members. The improvement of MC members’ capacity is an invaluable element of sustaining the project.

In 2006, the total benefits generated by the community from all tourism services amounted to more than US$10,000 (Mlup Baitong, 2006) (see Table 1.2). A substantial part of the income from the ecotourism services goes directly on the daily wages of the workers and the remaining income is saved in the local bank as a community fund that will be used to support very poor families, construct and repair infrastructure, and support the WSHG members in creating small businesses. By mid-2007, the fund savings had accumulated to US$5000 (Mlup
Baitong, 2007). About 500 households directly benefit from this project through increased access to non-timber forest resources, including bamboo, bamboo shoots, mushrooms, raisins and rattan, and through the sale of agricultural products, including coconuts, bananas, vegetables, chicken and other livestock. Furthermore, 300 people have been employed in ecotourism services on a rotational basis, improving their livelihoods. Lastly the emigration of young villagers to cities has significantly declined.

Figure 1.6 shows the development of the project’s outcomes over the past four years. It should be noted that the number of visitors in 2005 fell due to bad road conditions.

To date, ecotourism activities have had positive impacts on food security as well as environmental appreciation and awareness. In addition, the project has enabled a number of people to change their jobs to more environmentally sustainable occupations, giving the forest and wildlife a chance to regenerate.

### Table 1.2  Project costs and benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Costs</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tangibles</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overheads $20,340</td>
<td>1100ha forest land preserved/managed $1,100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Staff $65,540</td>
<td>Revenue of $10,000/year in 2006 $25,000 (total to date)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productive Inputs $101,700</td>
<td>Information Centre $20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Operation $31,640</td>
<td>Roads and trails $35,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Development $6780</td>
<td>Equipment $5000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong> $226,000</td>
<td><strong>Total</strong> $1,185,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Intangibles**
- Community cooperation and social solidarity
- Environmental understanding of residents and tourists
- Non-destructive ownership of forest land and project
- Increased capacity for management and leadership
- Improved reputation for Chambok, Kirirom National Park, Miup Baitong, protected areas and community-based ecotourism
- Understanding of dispute resolution processes
- Structure and participation among council
- Changed attitudes towards forest land
- Opportunities for sustained income generation
- Potential for duplication and scaling up throughout Cambodia
- Improved English skills
- Establishment of sustainable forest nursery
Behind all the successes mentioned above lie a number of challenges to the running of this project. The low level of education among villagers is a major obstacle to project implementation. At the start of the project in 2002, no one in Chambok commune had completed primary education. Mlup Baitong has spent a large amount of time building capacities of MC members. Sometimes Mlup Baitong had to teach skills repeatedly in order to enable MC members to take responsibilities in running projects. But even though slower than desired, progress has been made.

Since community-based ecotourism is a new concept for villagers, it has been difficult for Mlup Baitong to convince villagers, MC members, local authorities and tourists to adapt to the innovative approaches and procedures. The difficulties include limited awareness of biodiversity protection and conservation, and the protection of the site from litter. Mlup Baitong also gets many complaints about prohibiting car or motorbike travel in the site, instead making tourists walk on long forest trails. Yet Mlup Baitong continues to work hard to raise awareness of nature conservation and waste management.

Mlup Baitong faces big difficulties in protecting the forest in and around the site from illegal cutting, hunting, forest fires, forest land encroachment and clearance. It has cooperated with relevant government institutions and other stakeholders to set up effective mechanisms to deal with these issues. Sharing related
Employment generation and participatory area development

Information, cooperating in banning illegal activities, setting up clear internal regulations for community forestry and community protected areas, and participatory patrolling are the best solutions to these difficulties.

Mlup Baitong is challenged by the lack of expert project staff, which considerably limits the project’s successes. During the project establishment phase in 2002, Mlup Baitong, aware of the lack of experts, invited a young Japanese expert in ecotourism to assist in designing and establishing the project for one year. This gave an opportunity for some Cambodian staff involved in the project to gain experience through practice.

Despite these challenges, the community-based ecotourism project holds great potential for developing community solidarity, improving livelihoods, protecting resources and relieving poverty in an equitable and sustainable way. There are encouraging results in the Chambok Commune, including a strong sense of community ownership of the project, increased confidence and solidarity and active participation in protecting resources they previously felt helpless to protect. In addition, the stable income from the project supplements daily living for many families, while tourists can appreciate the beauty of nature and the local indigenous knowledge of plants and animals. Villagers report that wild animal sightings have significantly increased during the patrols, they are all becoming supporters of conservation.

**Lessons learned**

Natural resources, including forests and wildlife, are the core of ecotourism. Mlup Baitong has combined the establishment of community forestry and community protected areas with the CBET project. In addition, the community has acquired the rights to manage forest resources in the project area. Mlup Baitong has developed good cooperation with relevant government institutions from the beginning of the project and has consequently received good support from them in return. These are critically important factors in the success and sustainability of the Chambok CBET project.

The CBET project belongs to community members. An appropriate community management committee and by-laws have been clearly established through a participatory approach. Equitable involvement and benefit sharing among community members was carefully taken into account during project implementation. This approach has encouraged community members’ participation, support and cooperation in avoiding internal conflicts. The approach of WSHGs has been combined with women’s income generation through tourism services such as food preparation, souvenir selling, bicycle rental and ox-cart rides. This combination is viewed as an effective way to promote gender balance between men and women.

Mr Touch Morn has been the head of Chambok CBET’s MC since the start of the project. He is the only MC member with sufficient understanding and
capacity to manage the project and to explain the project implementation and achievements to visitors and delegations visiting the site. During the past three years, most CBET committee members have come to rely heavily upon him. This situation results in problems with the project implementation and an over-reliance on him. If Touch Morn decides to resign from his position or is not selected as the head of the MC for the next mandate, this will have serious consequences for the sustainability of the project. Mlup Baitong seeks to encourage and support Touch Morn’s continued success, but is training others to enable them to take over his responsibilities.

Mlup Baitong plans to gradually phase out its support for the Chambok ecotourism site by 2009 through the micro-project approach, which appears to be an achievable objective. Although this approach only began in 2006, it appears an appropriate mechanism to strengthen MC members’ ownership and to sustain the project.

Good practice

CBET’s MC members have gradually improved their management competencies, which is a major factor in the sustainability of the ecotourism attraction. Community-based ecotourism has been demonstrated to be an appropriate approach for Cambodia to contribute to environmental conservation while improving community livelihoods.

Because of the reputation of Chambok as a successful and unique model of community-based ecotourism in Cambodia, 47 delegations visited the site between January 2006 and June 2007. These include national and international NGO workers, university students, researchers, government officials and international delegations. Some visits were arranged by travel agents; some were coordinated by Mlup Baitong partners; some were facilitated by government ministries; and others were organized by individual groups.

This project has been recognized by the Ministry of Tourism as a good model of pro-poor community-based ecotourism in Cambodia. In early 2006, the Chambok CBET project was given an award for its successful efforts to involve the Chambok Commune Council in its activities by the Commune Council Support Project, which works closely with the Ministry of Interior. In July 2006, the Cambok CBET project received a bronze medal from the prime minister through the Ministry of Environment for best practice in natural resource protection and community livelihood improvement.
Potential for scaling up or replication

One significant result of sharing the best practice in CBET is that the Ministry of Tourism has requested Mlup Baitong to replicate the concepts of this project in other Cambodian provinces. Currently Mlup Baitong has decided to replicate this successful model in Steung Treng province by establishing community-based ecotourism in O’Reusey Kandal, Sieng Bok District. In addition, Mlup Baitong has also submitted a project proposal to establish another project in Kosh Sampeay in the same district.

Recently, Mlup Baitong has been invited by the Ministry of Tourism to apply for a grant for CBET establishment in Ratanakiri province. Mlup Baitong also plans to facilitate the community in Kosh Kong province to establish a project in O’Back Rotes commune.

Besides this, best practice and the experiences of Chambok CBET have been disseminated to many groups of visitors from other interested organizations through presentations by Mlup Baitong staff or the head of CBET’s MC.

Conclusions

The Chambok CBET project has been implemented successfully and the CBET committee members have gradually improved their management capability, which is a necessary factor for the sustainability of any ecotourism attraction. Chambok CBET has been viewed as a best practice CBET model in Cambodia and is ideal for scaling up or replicating its practices throughout Cambodia. However, the Chambok CBET MC has also been viewed as sometimes weak and it requires further support in capacity building for financial management, management structure, English communication, marketing, planning and problem solving.

Community-based ecotourism can be considered an appropriate environmentally friendly approach for community livelihood improvement while natural resources are protected and conserved for sustainable development. However, ecotourism alone could not generate enough revenue to support the basic needs of all community members. Improving environmentally friendly agricultural techniques and other businesses are other aspects that must also be integrated to maximize total community benefits.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their greatest thanks to all of Mlup Baitong’s staff for their hard work in developing this ecotourism project from a concept into reality. Great appreciation also goes to all community members who have strived hard to protect and conserve their natural resources. Extended thanks are
dedicated to all project sponsors, both governmental and non-governmental, for their support. Together, we continue to make an impact.

Notes

1 Executive Director, Mlup Baitong Cambodian NGO.
2 UNDP-Cambodia.
3 UNDP-Cambodia.

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