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**Global Environmental Governance and Politics of Ecotourism:
Case Study of Cambodia**

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Abstract

This paper aims to examine actors that influence decision-making for planning and policies of ecotourism in Cambodia, and hence to whom the outcomes of the projects are targeted. It will allocate community-based ecotourism (CBET) within the debates on governance in international relations, and explore the planning and policies of CBET in Cambodia as constructed through the global environmental governance (GEG) regime. This study is approached theoretically from diverse perspectives of political ecologists, which interpret events with reference to the behaviors or attitudes of actors in pursuit of their own political agendas. Thus, the exploration of neoliberalism as an emerging global economic concept and its relation with ecotourism, the GEG, and the politics of ecotourism will provide a useful theoretical approach in analyzing policy frameworks and discrepancies in the context of environmental governance and development in Cambodia. The study finds that ecotourism is strongly interrelated with structures of neoliberalism and global environmental governance. Contemporary patterns of economic growth, modernization and nation building all have strong anti-participatory traits. Therefore, it is crucial that ecotourism or CBET is regarded in the context of its wider political arena. As a neo-liberal form of development, it is a highly political choice. The integration of rural communities and local institutions into larger, more complex, urban-centered and global systems often stifles whatever capacity for decision-making the local community might have had and renders its traditional knowledge and fragile institutions obsolete. The necessary funding and support program from NGOs and donors is uncertain and insecure, while the local communities are left helpless when the outcomes of development are not conducive to or reach satisfaction of donor agendas. None of the policies set up by the government and NGOs and donors prioritizes the local communities and the security or sustainability of local livelihoods. The central challenge is to find ways of allocating limited government resources so as to obtain widespread replication of community initiatives. This paper also discusses and suggests a number of measures for the maximization of CBET benefits to the locals and concerned beneficiaries.

Keywords: Cambodia, community-based ecotourism, global environmental governance, neoliberalism.

INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism or the subset community-based ecotourism (CBET) has been employed as a tool for integrated conservation and development projects (Abbot and Bookbinders *et al.*, 1998; Thomas, 2001; Weinberg *et al.*, 2002; Stem *et al.*, 2003; Kiss, 2004; Choi and Sirakaya, 2006; Butcher, 2007). This concept can be traced back to around three decades ago when the discourse on sustainability has been rigorously advocated in the global policy arena. It is interrelated with the broader process of globalization, particularly with the global environmental governance. Conservationists have been challenged to design effective biodiversity conservation strategies in economically impoverished but biologically rich areas of the developing world. Increasingly, conservation programs are experimenting with economic incentive designed to provide benefits to local stakeholders and, in theory, make them partners in saving environment (Biodiversity Convention Network, 1995).

In Cambodia, ecotourism has made headway towards sustainable development since late 1990s (Yin, 2003). The emergence of such initiative is seen as a fruit resulting from combined efforts between the government and civil society with strong support from international organizations. These institutions use ecotourism and CBET as a sustainable tool to provide alternative economic activities to local communities who live in and adjacent to protected areas and whose traditional livelihoods are condemned as destructive and illegal. Environmental problems in Cambodia have been detrimental due to continuous transitions in political and economic systems, which persistently exploit its rich natural resources. The country receives international recognition environmentally when it is included in the Indo-Burma Biodiversity Hotspot (Birdlife International, 2007). Being a member country, it receives intervention in both conservation and development in favor of its agreement to enter the global environmental governance (GEG). International institutions, including donors and civil society, in Cambodia have increased remarkably over the last decades. These institutions insert critical influences over the political arena with regard to environment and development. Ecotourism or CBET has been one of the approaches introduced to Cambodia through this regime.

This paper aims to examine actors that influence decision-making for planning and policies of ecotourism in Cambodia, and hence to whom the outcomes of the projects are targeted. It will allocate CBET within the debates on governance in international relations, and explore the planning and policies of CBET in Cambodia as constructed through the GEG regime. This study is approached theoretically from diverse perspectives of political ecologists, which interpret events with reference to the behaviors or attitudes of actors in pursuit of their own political agendas. The exploration of neoliberalism as an emerging global economic concept and its relation with tourism, the GEG, and the politics of ecotourism will provide a useful theoretical approach in analyzing policy frameworks and discrepancies in the context of environmental governance and development in Cambodia.

Neoliberalism and Tourism

Neoliberalism emphasizes the economic value of the biodiversity, and a move away from traditional thinking about states as the most important political actors in the global system and recognition of the geo-political and economic changes. The central concept of neo-liberal development strategies is an emphasis on economic diversification, particularly a commitment to non-traditional exports, such as tourism (Sharpley and Telfer, 2002). The emphasis on outward oriented growth and the rise of neo-liberal development strategies have focused attention on tourism as a potential growth sector. It is clear that the expansion of the tourism industry and the sub-sector of ecotourism occurred against a setting of a rapidly changing post Cold War world, especially from early 1990s onwards (Milne and Ateljevic, 2001; Duffy, 2006). This period was marked by geo-political realignment, resurgence of a

belief in markets and an increase in demands of multilateral institutions on the developing world (Colclough, 1991; Milne and Ateljevic, 2001).

In this emerging system of global economy, according to Milne and Ateljevic (2001), the nation state is viewed as vital competitive assets on the supply side that play role in coordinating the tourism market campaigns and product development. In addition, there is a growing realization of necessity of global-local linkage. It is that localized cooperation, trust and networking are essential components in providing the right mix for successful tourism development outcomes. Therefore, community-based approaches become crucial to many tourism development plans around the world. Tourism becomes an exemplar of the expansion of neo-liberalism (corporate globalization) where capital has free rein, highlights the link between the growth of tourism, structural changes in the global economy and fundamental shifts in international relations. This approach has also been favored by organizations such as the ADB, the World Bank and the IMF, and by bilateral donors, which have made loans available in return for reforms that favor market-oriented growth (World Bank, 2005). They play vital roles in shaping the economic environment for tourism investment and development in much of the world. The increasing interest in global governance about the nature of international relations, development and environmental management can be regarded as part of this fundamental shift.

Global Environmental Governance

It is useful to provide a brief analysis of what global governance means and how it interlinks with neoliberalism that underpins ecotourism development in developing world. One of the most commonly referred definitions of global governance was provided by the Commission on Global Governance. It defined governance as “formal institutions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance, as well as the informal arrangements that people or institutions have agreed or perceived to be in their interest” (Commission on Global Governance, 1995:4). However, within the literature on global governance there are definite differences in the ways it is understood. Duffy (2006) cites the argument of Hardt and Negri (200) that it is a decentralized and deterritorialized regime of power which they call ‘empire’. Yet, in contrast, he suggests that global governance merely constitutes a further extension of the power of states in the global system despite the proliferation of non-state actors such as NGOs and international organizations.

Other scholars view global governance as a replacement for the term ‘multilateralism’ to indicate types of organizations which may be proliferating, but which are not controlled or supported by any centralized, sovereign authority, so they cannot be referred to as a world ‘government’ (Wilkinson and Hughes, 2002; Wilkinson, 2005). However, among these different ways of analyzing global governance, there are some agreements about its core meaning. In its essence global governance is normatively about: (1) dispersing power away from hegemonic centers of power (especially states); (2) extending and overcoming resistance to liberal democratic values and procedures, and; (3) ordering people and things through recourse to reason, knowledge and expertise (Selby, 2003 cited in Duffy, 2006).

The changes in global politics brought about by globalization have impacted on the ways that environmental problems are increasingly subject to transnational forms of management. The increasing phenomenon of global governance is an important new development for environmental management. In particular, the transboundary nature of environmental problems has meant that they have become an important arena for what might be termed global environmental governance. Forests, wildlife, climate change, pollution, amongst other things, are increasingly subject to international forms of management. This article is concerned with what might be termed ‘global environmental governance’, which focuses on the regulation of environments and the actors that impact on them. For the purpose of this paper, global environmental governance is defined as a set of neo-liberal ideas that

have been translated into neo-liberal environmental programme and policies. These policies aim to govern people, resources and activities through complex networks of actors, rather than through a single source of power and authority, such as a state. These policies are particularly matched with the 'co-operative management', that is the engagement between public and private actors to reach a consensus about how best to tackle and resolve environmental problems (Pimbet and Pretty, 1997; Brown, 2002; Berkes, 2004). Despite many critics, this model is viewed as the most appropriate and promising means of cooperatively resolving environmental problems (ibid.).

Politics of Ecotourism

The interest in embracing ecotourism as a development strategy is part of this global emergence of neo-liberalism as expressed through global environmental governance. Ecotourism has often been promoted as a means of achieving sustainable development for North and South alike. In terms of debates about the developing world, ecotourism is regularly presented as an engine of development (Weaver, 1998). It is often seen as a key element that can enable communities devastated by economic restructuring to regain and enhance their economic grip in regional and national economies (ibid.). The developing countries need to conserve their natural heritage, while creating a future for their people. Tourism can do 'both'. Actors as diverse as national governments, funding agencies (i.e. the World Bank and the ADB), development and environment NGOs, as well as the private sector have expressed this view (Weaver, 1998; Ferrari, 2002; Leksakunidlok, 2004; Ken, Carson, Riebe, Cox and Kaschke, 2005).

Developing countries are considered to have a comparative advantage in ecotourism since they attract tourists from the First World who seek sunshine, beaches and other natural and cultural attractions found in the developing world (Weaver, 1998). Their governments, which face financial problems, debts and an end to secure markets for their goods in former colonial powers, have looked into tourism as an answer to their problems (Weaver, 1998). Their national tourism policies tend to be geared towards the generation of economic growth. This trend suits the concept of ecotourism development for it is almost synonymous with neo-liberal definitions of economic growth, westernization and modernization for governments. This is also because tourism means employment, balance of payments, regional development and foreign exchange more than other elements (ibid.). However, this movement is rarely subject to careful criticism. Tourism and ecotourism are underpinned by a market-oriented strategy that neatly fits into the outlook of neo-liberalism, which stresses the importance of internal factors as facilitators or inhibitors of development (Duffy, 2006). This ideological basis of tourism growth indicates that it is very much a political process related to wider global changes.

THE CASE STUDY OF CAMBODIA

This part focuses on an investigation of how these issues are played out in the CBET sector in Cambodia, specifically the role of global donors and environmental NGOs. It places Cambodian CBET in the broader spectrum of integrated development and conservation projects (ICDPs). These can be ecotourism or community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) projects initiated by external global institutions, such as ADB and IFC or UNEP, UNDP and GEF (Men, 2007). Firstly, however, it is important to explain how this research was carried out. This research is a documentary review of previous studies of CBET and related tourism development and environment issues in Cambodia (mostly NGOs and university working papers), Cambodian government's plans and reports, donors' and NGOs' reports and documents. Despite some weaknesses, such information reflects incidents and agendas of concerned actors, thus addressing the objectives of the study.

The State of Environmental Management

The majority of natural resources in Cambodia are government-controlled. Starting with the introduction of Western land administration systems during colonial time, any land that does not belong to individuals automatically belongs to the government. The Ministry of Environment (MoE), which was formed in late 1993, has established 26 protected areas, counting for 18% of Cambodia’s total land area (Lacerda *et al.*, 2005). This figure represents one of the largest percentages in the region. Through the introduction of the modern state, most land and aquatic ecosystems that used to be managed by local communities have become state properties which result in *de jure* alienation and marginalization of local communities (Ferrari, 2002; Ken *et al.*, 2005). With an attempt to expose Cambodia’s case to global concern, the government is proposed to be participant of the GEG regime and to increase roles of multi-stakeholders in managing environmental problems in natural areas.

Because of the state emphasis on economic growth during the past decades and the strengthened nexus of government-business sector, local communities have been increasingly losing *de facto* control over local resources. In areas still *de facto* managed by local communities, the discrepancies between indigenous local systems and government-imposed land and resource use have been the source of tensions and conflicts over resource access and consumption (Dasgupta *et al.*, 2003). It is a common occurrence that logging, mining, plantation and other industrial companies (mostly foreign-owned under Cambodia’s economic concession laws) can easily obtain large scale concessions or even ownership over huge tracts of land. Contradictory, it is almost impossible and time-consuming for local communities to try to regain rights over land and resources inside or in places in close proximity to their localities. The balance of power has dramatically swung into the hands of the government-business sector nexus at the expense of local communities (Ferrari, 2002; Global Witness, 2001). Figure 1 illustrates the transformation of natural resources in Cambodia.

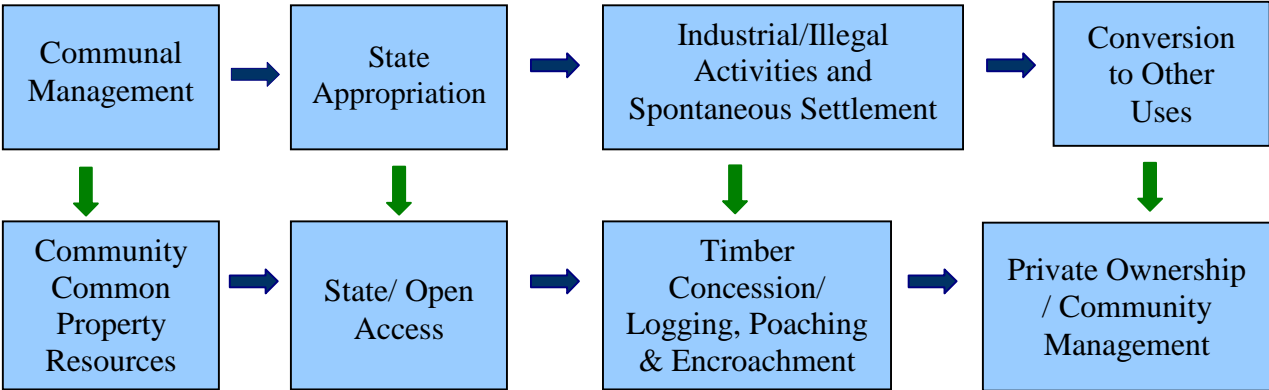


Figure 1: Transformation of natural resources in Cambodia
Source: Ferrari (2002)

This transformation makes the rich natural resources degraded quickly. For example, between 1960s and early 1990s, the forest coverage was estimated to have been reduced from 13.2 million ha to 11.2 million ha, respectively accounted for 73% and 62% of the total land area (Ken *et al.*, 2005). With the average annual growth rate of 2% Cambodia has a population of over 13 millions, of which 84% live in rural areas (NIS, 2007). Over 85% of these rural folks depend directly on declining natural resources, which they even have no proper access and ownership rights. In response to the problems of depleting resources and dependency on those resources, NGOs who are working on issues of community livelihoods and natural resource

management have put great efforts to assist with community organizing¹, conservation and development (ibid). The influence of this intervention and pressure on aid security makes the government adopt more decentralized policies to management, including endorsement for community-based initiatives.

Community participation and cooperative management have been inclusive to many government regulations, such as Five Years Socio-Economic Development Plan (2006-10), National Tourism Development Plan (2003), National Environmental Action Plan (1998-02) and Decentralization Plan of Cambodia. However, the extent to which local communities are engaged in the management of natural resources and the degree to which they have effective control over those resources vary greatly from one area to another in accordance with government priorities, the extent to which the business sector aimed at these resources and the strength of local organizations (See more in Ferrari, 2002).

Tourism in Cambodia

Despite its endless poverty and protracted war, Cambodian is proud of its rich cultural heritages, particularly Angkor Wat, which is one of the world wonders. The Khmer Empire's civilization left lots of architectural and archaeological sites to be explored by researchers and tourists. Tourism was strongly promoted and developed by the former King Norodom Shihanouk since 1950s as a means to improve the deteriorating economy. From 1962-1968 Cambodia received 174,574 foreign tourists at an annual increasing rate of 12.56%. The industry was halted by the coup d'état and the subsequent Khmer Rouge regime (see more in Krell, 1990). Nowadays, through strenuous government effort and foreign aid, Cambodia is one of the fastest growing tourist destinations in the region. Tourism reemerged when Cambodia government signed a contract with Vietnamese State Travel in 1986. At that time, there were some local travels and recreations and visits of foreign delegates from communist countries. After the UN-sponsored election and particularly in 1998 the government paid much attention to tourism. Tourism is given a greater importance, not only to earn more foreign exchange but also to expose the Cambodian situation to the world. In addition, it is hoped that expanding tourism could reshape the new image of Cambodia in the global system, especially among the non-communist countries, and to break through isolation caused by wars and internal politics.

The dual slogan for tourism in Cambodia is "culture and nature", but most investments are devoted to the cultural sites, particularly promoting the Angkor complex until it becomes the most important attraction. Tourism in Cambodia grows very quickly after 1993 with the rate of 21.3% per annum on average. According to the first quarterly report of the MoT (2008), the total number of international tourist arrivals in 2007 reached 2,015,128 with the growth rate of 18.53% as compared to those in 2006. Based on IMF statistics for 2000-2002, the Economic Institute of Cambodia projected in their Economic Watch that tourism would outgrow that garment industry by 2008 (EIC, 2005), representing one of Cambodia's best hopes for economic growth (ICEM, 2003) The obvious trends towards nature-based and ecotourism are noted, though Cambodia has not yet implemented an ecotourism development plan.

The management of ecotourism is under the responsibility of the MoE. The implementation of ecotourism is complicated by the environmental conflicts as mentioned earlier. Cambodia has become a key site of global interest in conservation and ecotourism partly because it contains high levels of biodiversity (also termed biodiversity hotspot), high rates of endemic species and is suffering from habitat loss. A common argument put forward

¹ The protracted war and the genocide regime severely damaged the cohesive social fabric, trust, and traditional reciprocity of Cambodian society. This instigates new culture of distrust, impunity and individualism among the modern Cambodians. Hence, any attempt at communal management needs to take this into account in order not to repent at its consequences.

by global donors, international financial institutions, and global and local NGOs alike is that once the environment is secured or 'saved' it will attract global business in the form of ecotourism or adventure tourism. The unique cultures, flora, fauna and landscapes mean that in terms of neo-liberalism the country has a 'comparative advantage' in nature, adventure and cultural tours. The form of ecotourism that is currently implemented occurs mostly in protected areas as part of CBNRM strategies initiated by NGOs. The next part of this paper explores how Cambodia fits into the broader debates about global environmental governance and neo-liberal forms of development.

Global Environmental Governance and the Politics of Ecotourism in Cambodia

It is important to analyze the roles of donor agencies and international environmental organizations in order to understand the promotion of ecotourism and CBET in Cambodia. This section provides an analysis of the broad features of global environmental governance and how it operates in the Cambodian context.

Cambodia has become a key site for global environmental governance partly because it contains high levels of biodiversity, high rates of endemic species and is well known to have severe environmental problems. The idea of an environmental crisis in a biodiversity hotspot and extremely poor country means that Cambodia has been identified by donors, NGOs and international development communities as a place that demands global attention and global action. In many ways Cambodia can be regarded as an object of prestige for donors and NGOs that are keen to be involved in conservation. Donors have been very influential because in the late 1990s the Cambodian government had been desperately looking for subsidies and external aids to back up the country's deteriorating economy caused by rapid economic transition. At that time, environmental protection was one of the most important funding priorities of global donors. The Cambodian government was more than willing to enter into relationships with donors to release funds in return for promises of greater attention to environmental conservation through multi-stakeholders involvement. Ecotourism was introduced subsequently as part of these conservation strategies.

Ecotourism development in the protected areas has been strongly promoted via integrated conservation and development initiatives. In his study to make inventory of ecotourism and CBET projects in Cambodia for the SNV, Men (2007) states that at present there are approximately 36 ecotourism and CBET projects being coordinated and funded by NGOs and donors such as the IFC-World Bank, ADB, UNDP, SGP-GEF, WWF, CI, etc. under the schemes CBNRM and ICDPs. No specific policy on CBET has been developed, but all projects strongly advocate collaborative approach, poverty alleviation and community participation. Major objectives of ecotourism and CBET objectives in Cambodia include: rural development, environmental education, biodiversity conservation, and decentralization. An emphasis on community values and priorities is usually motivated by NGOs. They seek to nurture more democratic, participatory, and bottom-up approaches to resource and environmental management as well as to improve people's livelihoods (Ken *et al.*, 2005).

In 2002, the Cambodian Community-Based Ecotourism Network (CCBEN) was established, comprising of concerned representatives of NGOs, donors, educational institutions and communities. It works in partnership with government and donor agencies to try to advocate pro-poor CBET in Cambodia as a way of alleviating poverty and protecting environmental, cultural and social resources. The larger development schemes for provincial, national and regional level have also been observed. The ADB-supported Ecotourism Master Plan for two key provinces in the Northeast of Cambodia, Ratakiri and Mondulkiri, was formulated by the Cambodian government with the Tourism Authority of Thailand and a Thai Consultation TISTR in 1999-2000 (MoT, 2001). There are various cross-regional ecotourism projects such as the Mekong Tourism Development Project (MTDP) supported by the ADB and the Biodiversity and Protected Areas Management Projects (BPAMP) supported by the

World Bank (*ibid.*). The Pro-Poor Sustainable Tourism Project of the SNV is also supporting the MoT to prepare national ecotourism strategies (Men, 2007). Some monitoring measures are also being developed. The Ecotourism Strategy (2005-09) supported through a World Bank's loan is being developed incorporating frameworks for monitoring and assessment of impacts by visitors on the resources and environment.

The active involvement of global donors and international institutions in environmental management (including ecotourism) and protected areas in Cambodia has assisted in the transmission of preservationist ideas. Paradoxically, it indicates a preservation narrative coexists with a neo-liberal discourse which promotes the introduction of market-oriented strategies through reliance on ecotourism to ensure that conservation pays its way. In particular, ecotourism or CBET is promoted as a strategy to secure conservation and promote development for all levels of society from local communities through to the Cambodian state.

The emphasis on community involvement and integrated conservation and development projects is clear amongst donors, local NGOs and local state agencies. For many NGOs, there is awareness that funding will not be forthcoming without at least some acknowledgement of the 'local people' factor. In many ways the promotion of CBET satisfies all of these competing and overlapping agendas in one neat neo-liberal package. NGOs are clearly capable of simultaneously holding multiple contradictory views of how best to conserve Cambodia's natural resources. While individuals in each organization may well favor one view over another, it is clear that organizations have to speak at the same time to a number of different agendas. They must simultaneously attempt to satisfy multiple audiences that may favor preservation, economic development initiatives, poverty reduction, education, community-based conservation, sustainable use and many more. This cross-cutting and contradictory discourse on preservation and community conservation is interspersed with a clear commitment to neo-liberal principles that suit donor agendas. As with many programs in protected areas, much of the discussion among donors about saving the environment has become intimately tied up with the idea that eventually conservation would have to pay its own way, usually through ecotourism development.

The notion that communities can manage natural resources and develop ecotourism fits well with the post Cold War ways of thinking about governance. In particular, it intersects with the argument that networks of actors can govern resources rather than leaving them in state hands. This is partly a reflection of how CBET has entered into the consciousness of donor and recipient alike. CBET is intended to maximize the participation by and benefits to impoverished and vulnerable people (Ken *et al.*, 2005; Brown, 2002; Denman, 2001; Pimbert and Pretty, 1997). In particular, local communities are expected to play a major role in deciding on the direction and scale of CBET development in their area. In response to the MoE's declaration that the environmental challenge was to fight against traditional local practices, such as grazing, slash and burn agriculture and hunting, CBET initiatives were suggested as alternative strategy for resource use to generate income for local communities. Cambodia has developed a number of CBET schemes, which have poverty alleviation, conservation and education as prime objectives.

The Challenges of Ecotourism Politics

Most of the ecotourism projects in Cambodia are run on the basis of community-based approach or so-called community-based ecotourism (Men, 2007). The CBET case is more complex than being just an example of negotiation to produce consensus amongst equal partners. It is not merely a case of dominant or powerful external actors producing a policy commitment to protected areas funded through ecotourism either. While above initiatives could be regarded as clear examples of the power of global environmental governance, it also can be regarded as an example of its limitations. Below is an illustration of challenges of ecotourism politics in Cambodia which occur so far.

Firstly, it brings back the concept of “classical approach” to conservation and denies local communities of access to livelihood resources. The vision of creating new conservation schemes, which will rely on CBET to pay their way in Cambodia indicates a partial resurgence of the classical approach (Brown, 2002), which was driven by conservation. Consequently, to many donors, global environmental NGOs and others, saving Cambodian environments means that they have to become denuded of people. While this narrative has been challenged by influential work on the need to integrate people and environments for conservation (see Pimbert and Pretty, 1997; Brown, 2002; Berkes, 2004), the vision of the human free Cambodian wilderness remains a powerful one. For example, the UNDP has been involved in developing Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve Projects; the ADB has been supporting the Biodiversity Conservation Corridors in Cambodia that aim to ensure that environmental resources in protected areas are managed in a sustainable way. Part of these projects is to ensure that human activities do not reduce biodiversity in the area, do not prevent the movement of wildlife populations or frustrate the expansion of ecosystems between protected areas. This means that areas that fall outside the boundaries of national parks are also subjected to forms of governance that will generally place restrictions on the activities of government organizations and more importantly local people.

Secondly, participation and benefits are hard to measure. It is nearly impossible to actually determine just how many people are involved in the CBET projects and what the quality of their involvement is. For example, some local communities in Chambok are guides, sell handicrafts and local fruits, provide home-stay and traditional transports for tourists (Rith, 2004). Similarly, indigenous people residing near Yak Loam protected area are guides, hire bathing suits, sell indigenous handicrafts and entry ticket to their cultural center, and charge for traditional music or dance performance (Yin, 2003). Some local people sell chickens, fruits, or NTFPs in ecotourism areas and to the neighboring hotels. In OSMOSE management of the Prek Toal hotspot in the Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve in western Cambodia, local communities are given priorities for employment as guides, rangers, and boat renters while local women provide foods for tourists (Neth, 2007). Virak Cheuy National Park is supported by BPAMP as it develops the institutional capacities of the state run national parks agency by training park rangers (some are indigenous communities living in the park) to become ecotourism guides.

Thirdly, there are issues of power and capability to manage and sustain the project. The current interest in handing over of CBET operations to local communities requires the development of dynamic and enthusiastic institutional arrangements. Since only a few ecotourism schemes have strong institutions that are capable of managing complex businesses for community development, it is not suited to every situation (Denman, 2001). For example, in Chambok in southwestern Cambodia, the management committee has a complex structural system and by-laws for ensuring that local communities are given priority for employment as guides or entrepreneurs (Rith, 2004; Men, 2005). However, it is clear that tourists are coming to Chambok with company guides and cheaper foods from outside and use no local transports. This undermines the initiatives run by local communities and environmental NGOs in the area. Furthermore, efforts towards CBET development in the area have been hampered by the illegal and unregulated logging and hunting in the neighboring areas of Phnom Srouch and Kirirum National Park, whose local residents receive less or no benefits from ecotourism (Rith, 2004). Also, the acquisition of capability and skills to become competent entrepreneurs in ecotourism are strenuous and time consuming affairs. The local communities have very modest entrepreneur skills and little power over outside guides and illegal activities, both of which directly impact on the success or failure of their CBET initiative.

Fourth, challenges derive from land ownership and resource accessibility. It remains to be seen if CBET developments are successful in Cambodia. Most of the protected area lands used as CBET sites is leased by the government with strong advocacy from donors and NGOs

(Rith, 2004; Yin, 2003; Neth, 2007). Yet, it is clear that some donors, who are critical of the influence of environmental NGOs in Cambodia, hold a very negative view of the increased interest in ecotourism to fund the expanded activities. In particular there are concerns that the donor and NGO driven activities will send a message that wildlife and habitats are more important than people's well-being. This triggers a separation of human and natural environments. In this respect, the security of funding from donors to develop infrastructural services and improve institutional arrangement and capacities of local communities is uncertain. It is still questionable if the Cambodian government will keep the land for the community without pressure from donors or when donors withdraw and private companies enter.

Fifth, it raises the issue of community participation and legitimacy. More widely, while CBET implies a high degree of public participation, critics have pointed out that communities are very rarely given the chance to respond meaningfully to schemes that are supported by NGOs, governments and/or the private sector. In this way CBET can only benefit small elite groups because the political nature of decision-making processes often can cut out communities and their interests. As a result, many community schemes have developed a weak form of participation (Rith, 2004). For example, local groups that assert land claims in tourist areas are redefined as disruptive by management committees, NGOs and the government, and some poor and vulnerable groups who could not participate in CBET and still retain their traditional livelihoods are considered as poachers or illegal groups (ibid.). This is because tourism development can become a struggle in which one powerful interest group attempts to legitimize its understanding of the appropriate use of space and time, while the less powerful group resists this control (Hall, 1994 cited in Duffy, 2006). It is clear that the notion of co-operative management is problematic in practice. In terms of CBET it is unclear how effectively communities are able to participate and retain control over their long-term development.

CONCLUSION

Ecotourism has been developed as part of broader structural changes in the global system. Ecotourism in Cambodia is strongly interrelated with structures of neo-liberalism and global environmental governance. Contemporary patterns of economic growth, modernization and nation building all have strong anti-participatory traits. Therefore, it is critical that ecotourism or CBET is regarded in the context of its wider political arena. As a neo-liberal form of development, it is a highly political choice. The integration of rural communities and local institutions into larger, more complex, urban-centered and global systems often stifles whatever capacity for decision-making the local community might have had and renders its traditional knowledge and fragile institutions obsolete. The necessary funding and support program from NGOs and donors is uncertain and insecure, while local communities are left helpless when the outcomes of the development are not conducive to or reach satisfaction of donor agendas. By accepting financial and technical assistances from NGOs, whose budgets are also dependent on other donors, communities and local developers bend to the wills of these outsiders. Dependency on external resources for ecotourism or CBET development brings in strong influence of external power and loses of local autonomy and control.

From the standpoints of donors and NGOs, the first priority of CBET development in Cambodia is oriented towards environmental conservation, leaving the needs and wishes of the local people as the second option. In contrast, the state government prioritizes economic growth that could obtain from financial aids (i.e. conservation and infrastructure development for tourism) and international recognition and investments. None of their policies set up by the government and NGOs and donors prioritizes the local communities and the security or sustainability of local livelihoods. Only small local elite groups and external investors can benefit the most from the development. The central concern is to find ways of allocating

limited government resources so as to obtain widespread replication of community initiatives. To maximize ecotourism or CBET benefits to local communities and concerned beneficiaries, the following measures should be taken into serious account:

1. Adopt the adaptive co-management (Berkes, 2004) because it captures two elements that make CBET work. It shares management power and responsibility as opposed to token consultation and passive participation, and creates a context that encourages the building of learning, stewardship and mutual trust.
2. Put more effort on community social capital building. Equity, empowerment and capacity building are often more important than monetary incentives for CBET. A workable CBET helps implement decision making processes that are legitimate, accountable, and inclusive, and that take into account multiple stakeholders and interests.
3. Maximize the use of local wisdom. Knowledge is power, and the use of local and traditional ecological knowledge is a mechanism for co-management and empowerment.
4. Create new CBET mechanism, which ensure a long term view. Building appropriate partnership between state, NGOs and rural communities requires new legislation, policies, institutional linkage and processes. It requires the creation of communication networks and participatory research linkages between the public sector, donors, NGOs and rural communities involved in protected areas management (Pimbert and Pretty, 1997).

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