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Community Decisionmaking Participation and Collaborative Management in Ecotourism Development - A Case Study in Tangkahan, North Sumatera

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Abstract

Generally active local participation in decisionmaking is a precondition for benefits reaching communities. In developing countries, however, this paradigm is difficult to put into practice owing to various constraints. Based on a study in the Tangkahan, Leuser National Park, it is demonstrated that long decisionmaking processes as radical step to set up the view how the local community can benefit sufficiently from tourism rather than destructive activities such as illegal loggers. Thus, to have a say in the management area is only one of many ways to ensure that local people benefit from ecotourism. Rather, the modes of participation are related to the institutional arrangements and the different stages of tourism development present in a community.

Management of natural resources surrounding national park faces many problems, especially when it related into land tenure system and benefit shared among parties. Conflict of interest often rise into different stage of many stakeholders due to lack of forest regulation, top down approach and law enforcement. As a new destination in North Sumatra, Tangkahan is an interesting alternative to the famous Bukit Lawang orangutan rehabilitation centre. There is no such rehabilitation centre, but the location is definitely more remote and far from being as touristy as Bukit Lawang. The villagers of Tangkahan try to participate in the integration of their own subsistent livelihoods into the local economy. Illegal logging was common until three years ago. Then, illegal loggers from local villages (2000 household) were convinced to use ecotourism as a tool for increasing an alternative income besides farming. At this point however the ex-loggers expectations are not met due to a lack of promotion and a low standard of products and services to meet visitor satisfaction (IUCN, 2004), the Park only attracts small visitor numbers.

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