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Using Ecotourism as a Rural Development Tool in Cambodian Protected Areas: Analysis of State and Global Politics

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Abstract

Many studies have focused on the positive impacts of ecotourism, resembling a proper innovation in rural development. Being an alternative approach, ecotourism is perceived to have positively changed local livelihoods and environmental conservation. Its benefits to rural protected areas lie with increased local ownership and participation, economic growth and diversification, job creation and variation, decreased mobility of locals, improved infrastructure and social services, cultural revitalisation, increased social capital, etc. However, little attention has been given to the interplay of state and global politics in manipulating strategic planning and management of rural protected areas. This question concerns whether management structures and principles of ecotourism should be central and intimidating or be participatory, cohesive and coherent. Failing to consider different micro and macro politics of actors and beneficiaries within rural development practice could lead to paradoxical or ambiguous development of ecotourism across multi-sectoral interests.

This article examines the politics of ecotourism from different viewpoints of actors and benefit recipients, which influence decision and policy making and planning of community-based economic development and conservation through ecotourism initiatives in rural areas. It presents a wide range of debates on environmental governance and poverty alleviation in poor but natural resources rich areas of Cambodia after having been incorporated into global networks. By using data from different case studies, especially on community-based ecotourism (CBET) at a Chambok site and an ecotourism project in Boeung Tonle Chhmar (BTC) core area, this study provides a good example of North-South relations. Moreover, it identifies structural change due to neoliberalism, global environmental governance, access to common property resources, development focus, interest conflicts, dichotomy of ecotourism and policy framework for ecotourism development in rural protected areas.

Keywords: Common property resources, global environmental governance, neoliberalism, north-south relation, ecotourism