ECO-TOURISM
IN
CAMBODIA

Country report presented by
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INTRODUCTION

Sustainable Development requires part of Cambodia's land areas to be set aside as protected areas. Such areas, which include National Park, make important contributions to human society by conserving the natural and cultural heritage for the enjoyment of people and ensuring ecological balance as nation population increase.

Ashwell (1997) has described Cambodia's biological heritage as following: Cambodia possesses many features of international significance. It retains one of the highest proportion of land as natural habitats (forest and wetlands) in the world, and one of the least disturbed for the country.

The landscapes of Cambodia have provided the Cambodian people with a wealth of natural resources for many centuries. The maintenance of this landscapes has ensured the stability of Cambodian society and culture through the protection of soil, the regulation of hydrological regimes, and the provision of the vast range of natural products. These resources remain of fundamental importance to the subsistence of Cambodian predominantly rural population, and to the future development of the nation.

The extent of dependence upon plant resources is one illustration.... of the 2,300 species of plant described in Cambodia, approximately 40 percent have a traditional use, primarily as food and medicine. Over 220 of these species are major components of 45 habitats of the country. They provide opportunities for sustained income through community participation in natural resource management, especially in protected area and buffer zone management.

II. NATIONAL POLICY ON ECO-TOURISM

A. State of Protected Areas System

From the ecological viewpoint, Cambodia can be divided into seven relatively homogeneous biodiversity regions, namely (i) southwestern coastal ranges and marine water, (ii) northern lowlands, (ii) northeastern forests, (iv) Kompong Cham, (v) Mekong Delta region, (vi) Tonle Sap Floodplains, and (vii) northwestern region. Of these, regions (I), (iii) and (vi) are considered of higher priority for conservation action than the rest.

Protection of habitats is not new in Cambodia. Prior to 1957, about one third of the country had been subjected to the same form of inventory and classified into 173 forest reserves and six wildlife reserves. Many sites recently declared protected areas were well known to Cambodia society as places of recreation and nature conservation early in the century. A 10,800-hectare area around Angkor temples was declared a national park in 1925, the first in Southeast Asia.

In 1993, King Norodom Sihanouk decreed a new National Protected Areas System, giving the Ministry of Environment authority to supervise, develop, and manage an area of 3,327,200-ha in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture. The new System designates seven national parks, nine wildlife sanctuaries, three protected landscapes, and three multiple-use management areas. The 1993 Royal Decree on "The Creation and Designation of Protected Areas" of fragile and critical habitats constituting total of 19 percent of the country. Four management categories were distinguished, namely (i) national park, (ii) wildlife sanctuaries, (iii) protected landscapes, and (iv) multiple-use management areas. This framework is the basic for developing a national protected system in Cambodia.
B. Constraints to biodiversity protection

The promulgation of the decree was a major achievement. It has ensured, for instance, that no logging concessions have been issued in protected areas although it could not prevent illegal logging from taking place there. Not unexpectedly, a number of problems remain. these are briefly described below.

The selection and delineation of protected areas embodied in the decree was based on information available on the early 1990s. That information was completed and uncertain. As a result, adjustments of boundaries or addition are now necessary that would better represent the existing natural habitats.

The system of protected areas that emerged in 1993 was largely administrative; the ability of the State to effectively manage these areas emerging much more slowly. The first national park to be inaugurated was Ream, in 1995. The preparation of management plans and formal adoption of national parks for management continues to be dependent on foreign funding and to date, only about 20 percent of the total area designated as protected is under some form of active management.

The state's inability so far to manage protected areas has not been countered ( with the exception of the Angkor ecocultural site ) innovative ways of financing the protected area system. The potential for making protected areas an engine for economic development in buffer zones is yet to be realized even if much preliminary thinking along these lines has taken place. The concept requires that the protected area of interest be made a part of wider zones and a wider complex of resources to be manage. This often allows the benefits of conservation activities to be captured by linked activities and partly " recycled ".

C. Potential of Cambodia’s protected areas for Eco-tourism Development

As human populations increase and the pressures of urban living, especially Phnom Penh residents, encourage people to seek solitude with nature and a number of visitors to National Parks and protected areas continues to rise.

At present National Parks which are considered as tourist attraction site are: Kulen National Park, Kirirom National Park and Bokor National Parks. Some of the factors which make this above national park attractive to visitors are:

**Kulen National Park:** close to Angkor Wat, Eco-cultural site high cultural interest and cultural attraction with well known historical and cultural heritages. At present Kulen National Park is developed by private investment. Kulen National Park is situated in Siem reap province about...... km from Phnom Penh capital.

**Kirirom National Park:** ( officially called Preah Suramarith-Kosomak National Park ) is situated about 114 km western hilly area from Phnom Penh. Kirirom National Park is designated, as being particularly beautiful, as protected pine forest area associated with a rich diversity of flora and fauna.

**Bokor National Park:** ( officially called Preah Monivong National Park ) is situated in coastal province Kampot in a highly mountainous area. In the year 60 Bokor was a famous recreational site of Cambodia where visitors enjoyed panorama view and casino. At present recreational infrastructure and services in the park are not yet developed. A part from the above mentioned Parks visitors could enjoy a coastal and marine protected area.

**Preah Sihanouk National Park or “ Ream “ National Park:** Ream is a coastal park situated approximately 18 km east of Sihanouk ville town and 194 km south of Phnom Penh. Its 21,000 hectares, which include two islands provide excellent examples of Cambodia’s diverse coastal environment. Mangrove forest and associated mudflats within the Park support a rich diversity of flora and fauna. Mangrove communities are an important habitat for fish species crustaceans,
particularly crab and shrimp. The mangrove also support endangered wildlife species, including large water birds.

Not only National Park are dedicated to Eco-tourism site but also some Cambodia’s wetland area such as Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve could attract visitors to enjoy its wilderness and untouched beauty of wetland vegetation, small and large water birds etc. The Tonle Sap Lake was designated as multiple-use Protected Area by Royal decree in November 1993, after which the Lake successfully nominated as Biosphere Reserve in October 1997 under Man and Biosphere Reserve Program of UNESCO. The Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve aims to fulfill three complementary functions: conservation of landscapes, ecosystems, and species diversity, culturally, socially, and ecologically sustainable development, and research, monitoring and education.

Management of Tonle sap Biosphere Reserve is based on zoning into three zones (namely core areas, buffer zone, and transition zone) of different management purpose. The core areas are demarcated for long term protection and conservation likewise the national park. Three locations are defined as core areas of Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve: **Prek Toal** (31,382 ha.), **Boeng Tonle Chhmar/Moat Khla** (32,969 ha.) and **Stung Sen** (6,586 ha.). These three core areas are unique ecosystem of high conservation value. To go to **Prek Toal**, visitors should take motor boat. Boat travel is about one hour from Siem Reap province to Prek Toal village (Battambang province) where we could learn about the culture and tradition of the floating villages, watch very nice water birds. Unfortunately access to Prek Toal by road is not available.

**D. Situation of Eco-tourism**

Tourism has become one of the economic activities in CAMBODIA. Except Angkor Wat temple, which was conferred the status of a national park in 1925, Cambodian people like spending their weekend in National Parks. National Parks described in the above paragraph are the most popular Eco-tourism site in Cambodia.

The Ministry of Environment is responsible for management and Protection of all national park and also responsible for development of Eco-tourism in these National Parks, but due to financial problem recreational infrastructure and services are not yet developed, the Cambodian government must, therefore, encourage private investment to develop Eco-tourism such as in Kirirom National Park and Bokor National Park. The need for legal framework and institutional capacity building is the high priority for the government. The lack of legal instrument for the management and protection of the National Parks could be constrain to the development of Eco tourism; almost all national parks are threatened by various illegal activities, including land encroachment and illegal logging. At present these issues are being addressed through a combination of law enforcement, education and community development programs. Since 1994, The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Environmental Technical Advisory Programme (ETAP) has contributed technical and financial support to develop a management plan and to build a capacity of staff to manage the "REAM" National Park, a Coastal Park, but the ETAP’s assistance ended mid 1999.

The Cambodia government has a strategy to improve the management of national parks by improving legal framework, human resources, financial resource mobilization and management planning and implementation.

**III. LESSON LEARNED**
Because of budget constraints and limited technical staff the Ministry of Environment call for financial and technical assistance from outside to manage national parks e.g. UNDP, provided some financial and technical support to the Ministry of Environment to conduct ecological surveys in Preah Sihanouk National Park. Additional technical assistance for managing protected areas is being provided by World Bank funding for the Virak Chey National Park and by European Commission for the Bokor National Park.

Experience in Cambodia suggested that national agencies alone can not effectively manage and protect National Parks. It is therefore important that the Ministry of Environment develops a participatory planning and implementation process (for both government and non-government stakeholders) and simultaneously build the capacity of its staff and the communities living near national parks to facilitate local participation. To keep their interest, it is also important that these communities benefit directly from park activities especially from Eco-tourism activities. In addition, experience in Cambodia suggest also that conservation efforts or Eco-tourism development are undermined if local poverty is not addressed as an integral part of the management. Benefits might include providing employment for some of the local people in adjacent communities in Eco-tourism activities.

IV. RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER COOPERATION IN ASEAN

The regional and sub regional cooperation is very important for the conservation and management of protected areas that some its parts have significant potential for environmentally friendly Eco-tourism. Cambodia’s government strive to strengthen cooperation amongst countries in the region. e.g. recently Cambodia ratified ASEAN agreement on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.

Suggestions:

- ASEAN Countries should cooperate together in the development of Eco-tourism by exchange in experience and information.
- To assist countries which face some problem of the management of protected areas by providing funding and technical assistance.