



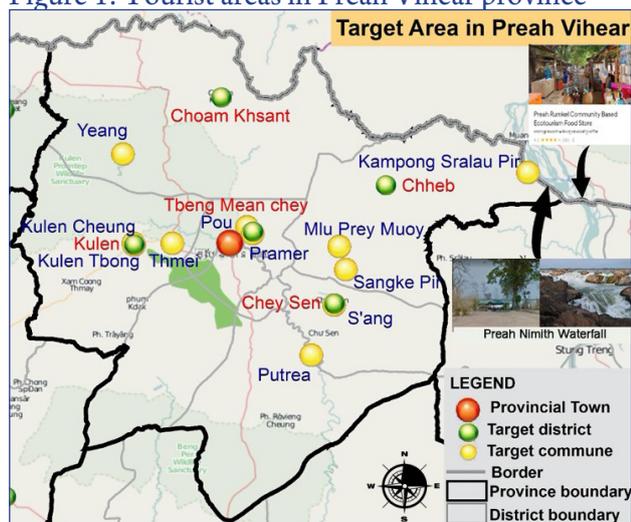
## Strengthening Community-Based Ecotourism for Livelihood improvement in Preah Nimith CBET, Preah Vihear, Cambodia

### Key Messages

- “For women, rural communities, indigenous peoples, and many other historically marginalized populations, tourism has been a vehicle for integration, empowerment, and generating income” as stated by the UN Secretary-General on World Tourism Day 2020. Similarly, the Cambodian government considers tourism to be the “Green Gold” of Cambodia with the potential to generate revenue for the nation, diversify income for local people, create jobs, improve living standards, and attract local and foreign investors.
- National Strategic Development Plan 2019–2023, in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, targets environmental sustainability and climate change adaptation for Cambodia’s socioeconomic development. To that end, it addresses the need to ensure the long-term viability of ecosystem functions, the conservation of nature and biodiversity, and environmental biosafety.
- Protected areas are a key strategy towards achieving sustainability goals. To be effective, protected areas need strong governance and management structures, which necessitate community participation, capacity building, land zoning and registration, and well-designed management plans.
- National tourism policy can be a mechanism to protect and manage natural areas by encouraging communities to engage in inclusive local socioeconomic development and environmental conservation.
- Ecotourism, a unique subset of tourism generally defined as a form of sustainable travel through which tourists are immersed in the culture and natural landscapes of a country, can help to minimise the negative effects of tourism while providing incentives and impetus for natural heritage conservation.
- Community-based ecotourism (CBET), if done well, can sustain local community wellbeing, raise environmental awareness, add value to natural forest and biodiversity resources, and empower a local conservation movement. The local community receives direct financial benefits and livelihood opportunities are improved. At the same time, the natural and cultural resources of the tourism destination are safeguarded for future prosperity.
- Cambodia’s ecotourism sector is booming and attracting an increasing number of visitors. There are 266 ecotourism site nationwide, 13 of which are CBET initiatives. But rural communities, given their limited knowledge and resources, are hard pressed to expand the economic and conservation benefits of ecotourism without significant support from local and subnational authorities.
- The Law on Tourism stipulates that only provincial administration and departments can seek assistance from private sector partners, development partners and international NGOs to support local CBET ventures. Therefore, the only way that CBET communities can benefit from the subnational development budget and access other financial and technical supports is through inclusion in subnational development planning.
- A feasible way forward, due to the complexity of tourism development and conservation requirements, could be to incorporate CBET into international intervention strategy. Such a strategy should be applied in the initial stage of CBET development only, for the specific purpose of

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Figure 1: Tourist areas in Preah Vihear province



Source: Preah Vihear province

enabling local communities to manage and operate ecotourism services themselves. Interventions could be funded by development partners and/or international organisations through government agencies and international or national conservation NGOs, or in the form of grant or loan from international development funders through national tourism organisations involved in ecotourism.

### The Case Study

- **Preah Lean Forestry and Ecotourism, known as Preah Nimith CBET**, is in Kampong Sralauv-2 commune, Chheb district, Preah Vihear province, located in the remote north on the border with Laos, marked by the Mekong River. Although it has been established for almost 10 years, it remains a lesser-known visitor attraction largely due to its hard-to-reach location, poor road access, and lack of tourist information. The community has managed its affairs without any NGO support since 2016. Growing numbers of visitors are coming to view the beautiful natural waterfalls of the Mekong and the community has identified other natural sites that could attract even more visitors and perhaps encourage them to stay longer. But, to develop these sites and expand onsite services, the community needs significant external support.
- Due to the area's remoteness and lack of road connectivity, most household goods, including vegetables, are imported from Laos. Many of the

older generation speak Lao and cannot speak Khmer fluently having fled to Laos to escape civil war in their youth. However, the expansion of schools in this area since 2005 as a result of government policy has already made a difference in that people, especially younger generations can communicate in Khmer. It seems that the area has been isolated from the provincial town and urban areas for a long time.

- The main challenges for Preah Nimith CBET are lack of accommodation, such as guest houses and homestays, poor road access, and lack of tourist information about the CEBT and onsite services. Digital technology has changed the way visitors research, plan and organise their trips. Online platforms are a popular and convenient way to learn about ecotourism sites, where they are, what there is to see, how to reach them, service provision, accommodation, and so on. Preah Nimith does not have its own website, having previously relied on the website of Ponlork Khmer (local NGO) for publicity. Although the Tourism of Cambodia website provides some tourist information, it does not mention Preah Nimith CBET.
- Despite the above challenges, Preah Nimith ecotourism community plans to expand its tourist activities by developing (1) a market opposite the waterfall, (2) a hillside site for visitors to view the magnificence of the Mekong and the waterfall, (3) forest walks to watch wildlife and visit a bat cave, and (3) boat trips to view the river islands and observe the way of life of local people living along the Mekong River.
- **Chambok CBET** in Phnom Sruoch district, Kampong Speu province, is an example of successful CBET practice. It is situated in a community forest on the boundary of Kirirom National Park, which offers various attractions. Chambok is highly visited due to its easy accessibility, proximity to Phnom Penh, and properly developed services (i.e., guides, accommodation, transport, food and beverages). Its establishment in 2002 was facilitated by local authorities, with support from the Ministry of Environment, Mloup Baitong NGO and UNDP-Cambodia. It has its own website providing visitor information.

## Policy considerations

- Preah Nimith CBET should be strengthened in terms of soft infrastructure. Since there are only two CBET in the province, the concerned subnational administration should prioritise and incorporate the strengthening of the Preah Nimith CBET into their development plan.
- The MoU on Partnership for Green Belt Development, signed by the Ministry of Tourism and Mayato Green Company of Japan in 2020 aims to support appropriate technology to Cambodian farmers in growing high quality and safe vegetable and other agricultural products to serve the tourism sector and may further export to Japan. Taking this opportunity, the Provincial Department of Tourism and Provincial Forestry Administration, in close cooperation with that of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery shall prepare their related five years' development and three years rolling plans, incorporating the Preah Nimith CBET into the plans. The main objective is to have targeted local people group trained on vegetable growing, chicken farming, with technical and modern skills, aiming at supplying those local products to visitors and local markets, rather than import them from neighboring countries. Consequently, this kind of pilot project could be a self-supply for the local people and should be prioritised as well.
- The MoU signed between the Ministry of Tourism and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, signed on 05 August 2020, on the cooperation to provide professional skill training to low-level youth in the field of tourism, Phase II 2020-2024, for the five North-Eastern provinces, namely, Kratie, Stung Treng, Preah Vihear, Ratanakiri, and Mondulakiri goes along with the existing Skill Development Program (SDP) of the Ministry's human resources development plan for 2017-2025. The provincial department for tourism of Preah Vihear shall take this opportunity to include some young generation, as many persons as it can, from the Preah Nimith forestry and ecotourism community to attend the said training. This would help the community to get more skills and improve their management at the local level.
- Looking into best practices of other CBETs in Cambodia, i.e., Chambok CBET, which was facilitated by local authorities and the Ministry of

Environment and Mloup Baitong organization, and Preah Rumkel CBET, supported by Mloup Baitong organization, etc. ...., it is evident that the presence of local NGOs, NGOs, and international organizations, together with concerned local authorities facilitation to support the local CBET is the main key for the strengthening and development of the targeted local CBET. The Preah Nimith CBET used to get support from the Ponlork Khmer organization for the first few years after its establishment, but it has not received anything since 2016, such as training and other necessary managerial skills to strengthen this remote CBET so that it can cope with current tourism development trend. With this regard, the Preah Vihear sub-national administrations concerned need to consider this accordingly so that they can get benefit from that available cooperation, both at national and external/regional levels to have Preah Nimith CBET strengthened and to attract more tourists not just only for the Preah Nimith waterfall, as well for other tourist sites in the province, since the trend of the visitors is now moving to natural protected sites, recreation areas, rather than to cultural ones.

- As a far remote CBET, the Preah Nimith CBET should not be and cannot stand alone. Its neighboring communes and/or districts are Kampong Sralauv-1 commune, which shares the same district of Chheb, Preah Vihear, and Preah Rumkel CBET in Preah Rumkel commune of Thala Borivat district, Stung Treng, and the Kampong Sralauv-1 commune, where there also targeted tourist sites. Both have their own particular targeted tourist sites. In this connection, close cooperation among the concerned sub-national authorities of the two neighboring provinces, Preah Vihear and Stung Treng, as well as their concerned departments, and especially between the Preah Nimith CBET and Preah Rumkel CBET to expand their cooperation, aiming at attracting more visitors to visit more possible sites located within their respective jurisdiction. It would also be great if they can share their website for information dissemination in terms of available tourist sites and service delivery. The two communities may exchange their experiences on best practices and management, including the exchange of site visits of their managers, with the involvement of the concerned authorities at sub-national levels.

## Recommendations

- National government and subnational governments can ensure their readiness to fully engage in and capitalise on a flurry of new opportunities and partnership activity. The opportunities that exist to support tourism development or start a tourism business include:
  - Cambodia's prioritisation by the World Tourism Organization (June 2020) to receive technical and other supports to revitalise and further develop tourism post Covid-19;
  - Partnership agreement (Nov 2020) between the Ministry of Tourism and Mayato Green Company for green belt development in the field of tourism to support appropriate modern technology to Cambodian farmers in growing vegetable and other agricultural products for tourists;
  - Should improve road connectivity as a result of the BRI be included here.
  - Siem Reap Tourism Development Master Plan 2020–35.
- To ensure efforts are focused in the right direction and policy supports implemented simultaneously, there are three levels of recommendation:
  - National: Ministries and other agencies involved in tourism development should:
    - Instruct Preah Vihear subnational administration to prepare and incorporate in its five-year development plan a focus on CBET in general and Preah Nimith CBET in particular, in accordance with the strategy, policy and national plan for tourism development.
    - Seek international and/or regional organisations and NGOs to provide Preah Nimith CBET with capacity development and financial support in line with Cambodia's "Green Gold" policy for tourism.
    - Instruct the provincial departments of tourism and local administrations to promote cooperation between neighbouring communes, districts and provinces towards building a CBET network to strengthen and promote tourism in remote sites.
  - Subnational: Preah Vihear Provincial Department of Tourism and other provincial departments must:
    - Prepare appropriate plan for tourism development, focusing on Preah Nimith CBET as the priority target.
    - Consult Preah Nimith CBET to prepare a list of local staff/young people to participate in tourism vocational training and horticultural training.
    - Seek support from international organisations and NGOs to assist Preah Nimith CBET and discuss with Stung Treng Department of Tourism for any cooperation between the two provinces to improve their tourism cooperation.
    - Preah Nimith CBET cannot set up a website, but if communication and information relating to local CBET can be made through the subnational website, it would most helpful to the local CBET in disseminating tourism information for visitors, both national and international.
  - Local: Members of Preah Nimith CBET should:
    - Prepare a development plan, especially for the intended expansion of tourist sites and activities.
    - Have a clear plan to nominate community members, staff, and young people to participate in the training to be organised under the Ministry of Tourism plan in terms of tourism and vegetable growing for tourists.
    - Share experiences and discuss opportunities for future cooperation with neighbouring ecotourism communities, such as Preah Rumkel CBET in Thalaboriwat district, Stung Treng province.