

Coastal Resource and Livelihood Management through Ecotourism, Thailand

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Many coastal communities have developed their natural resources as ecotourism destinations, usually to complement more direct consumptive uses. This approach is one example of growing community participation in, and benefits from, natural resource management. This study sought to synthesise and share the experiences and lessons of coastal communities in Thailand, in order to expand the reach and impact of local eco-tourism management. It took the form of a detailed comparative analysis of 4 leading communities in different coastal locations, which sought to assess the interactions between key aspects of sustainable management: (1) natural resource and environmental quality, (2) quality of tourism, and (3) livelihood quality. The study also aimed to shed light on management models and community benefits.

Ecotourism in the study communities has both internal and external origins, either as a product of community trial and learning or as the result of encouragement by outside agencies. In each case it has been developed on the basis of existing natural resource capital and the latent tourism potential. Although it is difficult to pinpoint one specific goal for ecotourism, both income generation and the regeneration of local natural resources are common, inter-linked objectives. And, though ecotourism initially varied in importance from community to community, its success has since made it a key element in community strategies for restoring and protecting their natural resources.

There are clear differences in the quality of tourism among the study communities, attributable to differences in their tourist target groups and variations in environmental quality. In terms of community benefits, ecotourism has contributed more to an improvement in the overall quality of life than to higher individual incomes. It has also contributed to developing community leaders and skills through continuous learning, adjustment of roles and building confidence. A process of social development can be seen at the level of communities and at the level of networks, where links are being formed between communities, and between communities and the private sector. This is leading to the integration of natural resource conservation and community development goals, and also to the infusion of commercial tourism models and methods.



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A variety of community-based tourism models are emerging through local processes of learning and adjustment. Most communities are well aware that they must focus on ecosystem and livelihood security, rather than income alone, so these models have a reduced vulnerability to external economic fluctuations.