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Participation for Benefits: A Case Study of Ratchaprappa Dam Project

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Abstract

The objective of this research was to study benefits from natural source management of tourism gained by people in the protected areas of Ratchaprappa Dam in Suratthani Province, Thailand. The researcher used in-depth interviews to collect data from 60 subjects under study. The subjects were key informants on a voluntary basis—business operators, tourists, and officers in Khao Sok National Park. The obtained data were analyzed by content analysis. The findings revealed that the villagers received benefits from the offseason products and developed entrepreneurship in sustainable tourism. They provided for tourists' activities, such as sightseeing the dam, seeing the morning mist, swimming, feeding fish, paddling and cave visit tours. All activities have helped the villagers earn additional income for betterment of living in their community.

Keyword: *Participation, Ratchaprappa Dam, benefits, sustainable tourism*

1. Background and Rationale of the Study

Tourism is an industry that plays an important role in generating income for the country (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2016). The tourism industry has created investment and employment in many other related businesses, resulting in local income distribution and various tourism developments in conservation areas. These adhere to sustainable tourism principles in line with the sufficiency economy concept. Nowadays, tourists prefer ecotourism with incentives in traveling for the values, needs, and places, as seen in the southern region featuring many tourist attractions, such as waterfalls, mountains, sea, and Ratchaprappa Dam. Surat Thani Province is one of the major tourist destinations for both Thai and foreign travelers. The number of tourists in this area increased to an average of 300,000 persons in 2016--generating income for the community at 65 million baht. Currently, most of the tourists are Thai, but the number of foreign tourists is increasing (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2017a). Chinese tourists have called Ratchaprappa Dam "Guilin of Thailand" for similarity in natural beauty of limestone mountains. The Dam is used as an irrigation reservoir--managing water to prevent flood, and generating hydro-powered electricity for the local communities (Seniwong, 2014).

Ratchaprappa Dam, originally known as Chiew Lan Dam, was constructed in 1982-1987 as a project under King Bhumibol's initiative. Its name was changed to Ratchaprappa

meaning the light of the kingdom by the Crown Princess Maha Chakri Siridhorn in 1987. The Dam carries multi purposes on energy, and water resource developments. Its system connects electricity with irrigation and water management; the water produced through the electricity generating system will enter the irrigation channels for agriculture and consumption of the local communities. It has also been planned that the Dam is to produce other relevant trickle-down effects on tourism to yield benefits in support of the local economy.

The dam construction had a substantial impact on the environment because the valleys were flooded, the soil fertility eroded, and the wildlife sanctuary with rare plant species eliminated. The forest area was gone and the surrounding vegetation dead; local people had to evacuate from the dam site to relocate themselves to the areas designated by the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT). Soon after the construction, the dam has become a tourist attraction for its scenery of beautiful limestone mountains like at Guilin in China, and the nearby green forest has gained back its fertility to attract both local and foreign tourists. The local communities responded to tourists' visits with silk weaving demonstration, and small businesses on local guides and souvenir products. In particular, the reservoir of the Ratchaprapa Dam is an important source of freshwater fisheries that can bring good income to villagers and support their rice planting (Community Strengthening Bureau of Sufficiency Economy, 2011; Steering Subcommittee of Sufficiency Economy, 2015).

Since the initial purpose of the dam construction was on hydro-powered electricity and irrigation, not on tourism, the researchers were interested in the dam's trickle-down effects on tourism for the local communities and would like to investigate the benefits of tourism management in the conservation areas. This was a case study of Ratchaprapa Dam in Surat Thani Province on benefiting people in the communities by sustainable ecotourism. The researchers would like to find out the benefits as perceived by tourists visiting Ratchaprapa Dam.

2. Literature Review

As known worldwide, *sufficiency economy* is first regarded as a philosophy in life to support reasonable existence by having enough of five basic necessities pertinent to Thai people—water, food, clothing, shelter and medicine. For a decent living to attain food through planting rice and growing fruit trees and vegetables, the government on the national scale has considered water management for effective irrigation as the foundation for economic development in agro production. In this regard, the dam construction fundamentally aimed at reservoir for irrigation and hydro power for electricity. Sufficiency economy however has its primary focus on individuals and small communities to be self-sufficient with five basic necessities for survival from acute poverty. Individual and small communities can proportionally allocate their land for a small pond, a planting area of fruit trees and vegetables, small poultry farming, and housing. Such allocation is for self-sufficiency of families and communities without resorting to buying commodities from outside businesses (Community Strengthening Bureau of Sufficiency Economy, 2011).

It requires knowledge of sufficiency economy, diligence, and great care in planning and work process in keeping a good balance in production and consumption. Work in sufficiency

economy helps individuals' adjustment to rapid and extensive changes in the social and cultural environment inside the country, and the economic trend in the outside world. What matters most for individuals and small communities is to survive from being poverty-stricken (Community Strengthening Bureau of Sufficiency Economy, 2011: 7). The sufficiency economy principles are based on moderation, reasonable spending, and good self-immunity for decent living. The Steering Subcommittee of Sufficiency Economy (2015) put emphasis on five domains: knowledge, prudence, integrity in operators check, planning for decision, and taking action on the decision made. The explanations are as follows:

1. Knowledge. It is important to have the knowledge of Thai local wisdom and traditional lifestyle to cope with changes over time of crises, as well as good understanding of sustainability of development.
2. Prudence. Individuals and family need to be moderate and cautious in making steps into investing, producing and calculating risks involved.
3. Integrity in operators check. This is guided in three steps:
Modesty refers to moderation in production and consumption.
Reasonableness means the practically appropriate level of sufficiency by taking into careful consideration all factors involving the use of water and expected results, for instance.
Immunity refers to preparation for effects from changes that might happen in the future, both near and far.
4. Planning. This is a condition prior to decision-making on activities that require both knowledge and morality.
Knowledge Condition. This includes scientific and academic knowledge to carry out planning and precautions in practice.
Moral Condition. This must be strengthened with awareness of morality—honesty, patience and perseverance in executing the target work with success.
5. Action. This means executed operations with expected results and received feedback.

As described, sufficiency economy has its foundation on water and its moderate use to generate five basic necessities for decent living of individuals and communities. Excess from investment and production can be distributed into the local or national economy for additional income or wealth, if desired. The bottom line is for individuals or communities to be self-sufficient and free from all poverty-stricken conditions. On this basis, sufficiency economy can extend itself to further benefit the country's economy, society, environment, knowledge source, and technology.

3. Scope of Research

The researcher was to collect in-depth interview data on *economic, social environmental and managerial benefits from sustainable tourism activities* from 60 key informants on a voluntary basis—business operators, tourists, and officers of Khao Sok Park. The participating operators and officers work in the communities and the government sector; they have been involved in managing and overseeing development in the Ratchaprapa Dam area as a tourist destination.

4. Research Objective

The objective of this research was to study benefits from natural source management of tourism gained by people in the protected areas of Ratchaprapa Dam in Suratthani Province, Thailand.

5. Research methodology

The researchers used a qualitative research method by in-depth interviewing 60 participants who were (1) business operators, (2) tourists and (3) officers of Khao Sok National Park. Twenty participants per group volunteered their responses to the interview questions. They were asked about the tourism management process in the community, appropriate tourist management styles, and the problems and existing obstacles in the operations of tourism management. The interviews were video- and audio-recorded with consent from the interviewees and the obtained data were later content-analyzed for a clear picture of the benefits gained from tourism activities to the local communities, as perceived by the business operators, tourists, and officers of Khao Sok National Park.

6. Data Analysis

The researchers systematically analyzed the in-depth interview data by using the content analysis method for results detailed as 29 classified items under seven issue categories: (1) economic benefits in 5 items, (2) social benefits in 6 items, (3) environmental benefits in 2 items, (4) management benefits in 4 items, (5) reception benefits in 2 items, (6) participation in leadership in 3 items, and (7) benefits and participation in control in 7 items (see Table 1 for 7 Issue Categories and 29 classified items of Participants' Responses).

Table 1: Interview Issues and Participants' Responses

Interview issues	Summary of Participants' Responses
Economic benefits	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. At present, most tourists are Thai people but the trend of foreign tourists is increasing. When tourists come in, the local community receives income from services provided by the community. 2. The people in the community can sell many souvenirs. 3. The benefit for communities is in the members earning benefit. 4. If looking at the economic direction, tourists are interested in reviewing their visit via online media. The word of mouth attracts more tourists. Aside from increased income for the community, the country also earns more domestic income. 5. If looking at the economic direction, tourists help create a good reputation for sustainable tourism development for the communities and the villagers to have a new career in small businesses in local guide services, restaurants and souvenirs.
Social benefits	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The community participates in providing services for tourist attractions. 2. Tourists' safety requires electricity for various hotels and accommodations. 3. Tourism provides for people in the village to show friendliness and warm hospitality to tourists. 4. Social security helps the local people to earn income from trade. 5. People can work to earn more income and reduce social problems related to drug. 6. Ratchaprapa Dam has beautiful nature; as a result, people in the area are proud of their location and make it known to foreign tourists.
Environmental benefits	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ratchaprapa Dam gives environmental benefits. It helps to reduce the severe flooding in the lower areas, and produces electricity from hydro power. 2. Cultivation in the local area of Tha Khun Subdistrict Khiri Rat Nikhom and Phunphin districts makes off-season plant growing possible by using water from the dam. The reservoir of the dam supports freshwater fishery for provision of economic products as well as a tourist attraction beneficial to the communities in the area.
Management benefit	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Employment benefits for community members in participating in planning for good management. 2. Budget allocation. 3. Allocated areas for earning income from small businesses. 4. Evaluation and reporting on tourism-related feedback.

The reception Benefit	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The participation in the organization is the mission performance of each individual or many people on coordinating various tasks for success. 2. There is agreement on the need and direction of change for participation in decision making on project operations, participation, and gained benefits.
Participation in leadership	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The community leaders take a very important role in community development; they lead communities to identify what is suitable and linked to national development. Leaders can bring about change in the communities. 2. The community leaders can inspire people to participate in tourism development and encourage the latter to feel confident in being part of success in tourism development. 3. The community leaders organize activities for participation for the latter's benefits and understand the participants' role in tourism development.
Benefit and participation in control	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There is management planning in the organization. The heads of each level have assigned tasks in each section to manage according to the plan to reach the work target. 2. Participation is vitally important because it allows people in the communities to do activities together, express opinions for improvement, and create a sense of unity for members in the communities. This is to empower people in the communities in that they themselves are the great drive for success in planned activities, and certainly with support from the local authorities. In fact, those who can take full credits for success have to be participating members of the communities. 3. The government and the public sector have created principles of participation together. To make each other aware of needs and existing problems, they are deeply involved in the activities and development plans of the communities toward the goal on sustainability. 4. There is a good opportunity for the public to participate in tourism operations or share suggestions as alternatives to government administration. 5. The process in which target people are provided with opportunities for tourism operations is to be explicated to the public. 6. There is a need to explicate the process in allowing people to get involved in carrying out tourism co-development, decision-making, problem-solving, creative knowledge and expertise sharing in conjunction with the use of appropriate technology, and support to monitor the performance of the organizations and their related staff members. 7. The people or communities develop their capacity to manage and control the use and distribution of resources and production factors that exist in their communities for economic growth and good social living with dignity. Participation of the public sector should be in the area of building awareness and encouraging the use of local wisdom for the local communities to reach sound and practical decision for their own benefits. The government or public sector should only take a scaffolding role in giving support for social and economic development—not dealing with direct or indirect exploitation in all forms that would affect tourism operations of the communities.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

The results on *economic benefits* point to income from tourists coming in the local communities. Tourism business operations range from cruising tours on the Dam, rafting, paddling, cave visiting, fishery and feeding fish tours, and seeing the morning mist tours, to accommodations, restaurants, and souvenirs. These bring all good income to people in the communities nearby Ratchaprapa Dam. The word of mouth has spread reputation of the Dam as a major tourist attraction in the South of Thailand (Seniwong, 2014; Janchai, 2016). Tourists sharing their comments and pictures online attract both local and foreign tourists. Undeniably, social media plays an important role in today's communication, and tourists rely on online sources for their choice of their planned travel.

Social benefits involve people in the communities taking care of tourist attractions and tourists' safety, and in turn feeling a sense of solidarity among the community members. The communities therefore need access to electricity for various hotels and accommodations. Friendliness and warm hospitality from people in the area create a sense of safety for incoming tourists, and help the local people to earn income from small tourism businesses. Social problems, such as drug and subservient livings have declined to a great extent, as observed and commented by all parties concerned (Janchai, 2016; Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2016). This was the former case with tourism safety management of Hua Hin District, Prachuap Khiri Khan Province in that the guidelines for tourism safety must arise from the strong cooperation of all stakeholders concerned--government, private sectors, local communities, and tourist authority offices. *Tourism safety management* requires (1) enforcing laws and imposing penalties for offenders seriously, (2) developing safety and sanitation systems in tourist destinations, (3) coordinating and cooperating among agencies, (4) having good, professional guides for tourists, (5) improving the quality of transportation, (6) developing mechanisms and methods for receiving incident reports, (7) developing the work system by the government sector, and (8) solving problems of deception and exploitation of tourists (Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2016, 2017a).

Tourism safety management also requires coordinating functions and responsibility from the private sector and the community. Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2016, 2017a) specifies functions and responsibility clearly. Functions for *the private* sector are (1) strictly abiding by law, (2) coordinating with government agencies, (3) improving the standard quality of tourist attractions and establishments, (4) improving the quality of personnel, (5) having systems for surveillance and security, and (6) having keen awareness for sustainable tourism. *The community* has duties of (1) helping monitor various risks, (2) reporting relevant risks to responsible government officials, and (3) assisting tourists in times emergency or natural disaster. Tourists themselves have duties: (1) being aware of potential dangers and (2) familiarizing themselves with information about destinations to visit (George, 2003; Community Strengthening Bureau of Sufficiency Economy, 2011).

Environmental benefits at Ratchaprapa Dam are abundant regarding alleviation of flooding and generation of hydro-powered electricity. In particular, irrigation for plant cultivation in the vast plain of Tha Khun Subdistrict in Khiri Rat Nikhom District and Phunphin District can support off-season plant cultivation and rice farming by using water from the Dam. In addition, the Dam's reservoir makes possible freshwater fishery as well as a new tourist attraction for the community in that area.

Management benefits involve people's participation in planning for operations and responsible persons in charge. Included are budget allocation, assessment, and tourism-related reporting (George, 2003). The tourism industry needs to promote and train people in the communities to provide tourism products and services efficiently. The community members with keen awareness of economic benefits from tourism have developed a sense of pride in the community identity, and therefore helped each other to prevent drug-related crimes

(Seniwong, 2014; Janchai, 2016). Community members currently tend to put long-term benefits before the short-term ones. Leadership of community leaders links local benefits to the national development policy in that planning and managing of various tasks with specific duties and responsibilities result in effective monitoring for follow-ups and evaluation. It is without doubt that all kinds of benefits derived from sustainable tourism at Ratchaprapa Dam cannot do without the consistent work process, effective management, and coordination/ cooperation from all stakeholders concerned (Steering Subcommittee of Sufficiency Economy, 2015; Ministry of Tourism and Sports, 2017a).

As seen in the interview results and discussion of the obtained findings, it was clear to the researchers that members of the communities in the Dam's areas have gained a great deal of benefits—be it economic, social, environmental and managerial. *Limitations of operations* on tourism products and services seemed to lie in after-operation assessment to provide feedback for further improvement. The interviewed participants did not pinpoint severe problems or obstacles in their tourism operations, most probably due to their rather effective problem-solving skills in good coordination and cooperation. The researchers, however, felt that the area of assessment for follow-ups and evaluation would be worth further exploration to make a complete picture of the communities' participation for benefits from sustainable tourism at Ratchaprapa Dam.

8. The Authors

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