MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR CHI PHAT COMMUNITY-BASED ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND CONSERVATION

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MISSION STATEMENT

Wildlife Alliance is the leader in providing direct protection to forests and wildlife. Our mission is to combat deforestation, wildlife extinction, climate change and poverty by partnering with local communities and governments.

Why Cambodia?

Wildlife Alliance has focused its conservation programs on the Indo-Burma “biodiversity hotspot” since 1997, in Myanmar (Alaungdaw Kathapa National Park), in Thailand (Kao Yai National Park) and in Cambodia (7 National Parks of Bokor, Lumphat, Samlaut, Botum Sakor, Dong Peng, Peam Krasop and Southern Cardamoms).
The Cardamom Mountain Range is the second largest contiguous forest in South East Asia. It is one of the planet’s 32 biodiversity hotspots. It is an important archeological corridor and the largest carbon sink in Cambodia.
Our challenge when we started in 2002 in the Cardamoms was to fight a complete chaos of forest fires, land grabbing, slash and burn agriculture and wild animal killings. It looked like a war zone.

9 years ago, Chi Phat rainforest was up in flames - forest fires were everywhere - wildlife was being decimated for commercial trade to Thailand, Vietnam and Phnom Penh. It was so extreme, that we called Chi Phat the “Circle of Death”.

So we started in 2003: we identified that 280 families were causing this destruction. Why? Because they were the poorest, landless farmers of the province that owned nothing - not even a buffalo - and had only the forest to survive on.
Ecotourism: the Alternative Solution

- We worked with local people and local authorities to turn the situation around.
- The project was launched in 2007 after extensive consultation and participatory planning with the community and local authorities.

- 100 families are earning direct revenues from eco-tourism
- 20 families are earning indirect revenues from eco-tourism
- 75 families are producing vegetables, fruit and livestock
- 50 families are working in the Reforestation Nursery

Of the 280 families who were burning the forest and killing wildlife BEFORE, 245 families have jobs TODAY
How did we do it? Empowerment

- WA used as guideline the APPA methodology from the Mountain Institute that coaches the community to own, manage and operate its own ecotourism product.

- We provided on-going training for hospitality, eco-guiding, computers, English and accounting.
How did we do it? Investment

WA invested in infrastructure:

• 200 km of forest trails and 5 night camps
• 20 mountain bikes
• 8 kayaks
• 13 guesthouses and 11 homestays
• Visitor center with restaurant, tourism booking office, exhibition room and meeting room
• Retrofitting of 1 large boat, 6 medium boats and 15 rowing boats
• Retrofitting of main road
• Establishment of a waste management service
• “On the job training”

WA invested in manpower:

• 2 permanent WA staff working in Chi Phat to coach the community
• Start-up financial support in the direction of the management team of CBET
Our marketing strategy has been from the beginning in 2002 to promote the entire Southern Cardamoms as an ecotourism destination.


Agreements with 10 international tour operators and 5 national

Marketing to other hotels and lodges
Our goal is that the community will protect its own forests and wildlife. This requires a 180% change in mindset from raping and pillaging the forest to protecting it as an economic asset. **This is a long-term change that will require many years.**

Where are we today, after only 5 years of CBET? “If we continue cutting the forest, there will be no more forest for our children” say people of Chi Phat today. They have 95% stopped burning the forest for slash and burn but they are still hunting and logging.

Therefore, the key to protection is law enforcement. The community is starting to agree with and recognizes the value.

Without this law enforcement component, the nature assets of ecotourism (landscape, wildlife) will be soon destroyed.
The University of Otago’s "Living in the Shadow of Angkor" project is so named because people tend to encapsulate any culture's history by the star attractions -- and if Cambodian history is on anyone's radar at all, then it is all about Angkor.

But the Living in the Shadow of Angkor project found that a culture was living in the Cardamoms from about 1395AD and then well into the 17th century, and certainly at the same time as the decline of the lowland Kingdom of Angkor in the 14th and 15th centuries AD.

- This is a previously unrecorded culture living in remote mountain jungles.
- They have no connection to Angkor.
- They had a fascinating burial practice unlike any recorded in the time before or during the Khmer empire.
This Burial Jar Site explored for the first time in 2012 in an expedition led by archeologist, Dr. Nancy Beaven from OTAGO University, New Zealand, and the Cambodian Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts.
We knew that Chi Phat alone would not be enough to attract international tourism. We had to protect the entire province and landscape. This is what created the conditions for international investors to come in and develop other ecotourism destinations that are complementary to Chi Phat.
Chi Phat Today

Chi Phat is “the ecotourism gateway to one of Southeast Asia’s largest remaining tracts of rainforests” (Wall Street Journal)

CARDAMOMS: “Top Ten Regions in the World” for Lonely Planet

Thank You