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1. Introduction

Bu Gia Map National Park is located in a transitional area from the Central Highlands to Southeast of Vietnam. The park plays a key role in conserving wild animals and their habitats at both national and regional levels. It is within the home range of many endangered species such as yellow-cheeked crested gibbons, black-shanked doucs, Indo-china tigers, Asian elephants and other globally threatened species. The park combined with six other protected areas creates a green corridor crossing the border between Vietnam and Cambodia. These protected areas create the largest habitat for wildlife in the Indo – China region, making it possible for the continued existence of many endangered species for generations to come.

The park is one within the home range of many globally threatened species. Since the park is located in a border area adjoining other protected forests in Vietnam and Cambodia, it creates a large habitat for wild animals. There are many endangered species in the park such as the yellow-cheeked crested gibbons, black-shanked doucs, silver langurs, Asian elephants, Indo-china tigers, pangolins, dhole and other globally threatened species.

The Bu Gia Map National Park contributes significantly to the conservation of many endangered species. The park combined with six other protected forests creates suitable habitats that are large enough for the conservation of many large species such as Asian elephants and Indo-china tigers. These species require a large spectrum of food, meaning that the large habitat can provide enough sources of food for them. For example, the Asian elephants have to travel up to 40 km² a day to search for food, meaning that a large habitat may enable them to form a herd that is large enough for them to breed successfully.

In Bu Gia Map National Park, wild animals are abundant, and this resource potentially helps park managers develop wildlife tourism activities to generate additional incomes for villagers. Park managers can develop ecotourism activities related to community activities and natural landscapes in the park.

In order to balance benefits between wildlife conservation and additional incomes for local people, this project assesses current ecotourism potentials in Bu Gia Map National Park to create a dynamic community-based ecotourism program in the park. The project team has identified villagers' assets that are helpful for tourism activities to enlist the help of local people. Also, the project team found possible new tours for tourists within the park to attract more visitors for the coming years.

2. Project goals and objectives

Goals: This project aims at creating a potential community-based ecotourism in Bu Gia Map National Park to balance the benefits of wildlife conservation and local needs. It harnessed potentials of local people that contributed significantly to the development of ecotourism in the park.

Objectives:

- a. To identify possible assets to enlist the help of local people in developing a community-based ecotourism program in Bu Gia Map National Park.
- b. To train local people in conducting ecotourism activities in Bu Gia Map National Park and its buffer zones.
- c. To map the all possible tours inside the park.
- d. To mitigate harmful impacts caused by villagers on the park by creating a new source of livelihood for local people.

3. Project activities and results

a. Assessing local people's assets

The project team interviewed 120 villagers to understand the current cultural assets that are helpful for the development of a community-based ecotourism program in Bu Gia Map National Park. A random sample was created to select the group of informants based on the lists provided by the head of villages in the buffer zone of the park. We conducted interviews with local people during the first three months of the project to identify their assets and potentials for a community-based ecotourism program in Bu Gia Map National Park.



Figure 2 - Group discussion



Figure 1 - Interview in the field

Cultural events and festivals

Cultural events and festivals play an important role in maintaining their identities. These festivals and events make them different from other groups in the buffer zone. Thus, they contribute to attracting visitors in the program.

Interviews indicated that villagers still hold numerous cultural festivals that attract visitors because of their unique identities. All respondents said that these cultural festivals are important for their daily activities. Therefore, cultural festivals and events can contribute significantly to the participation of local people in community-based ecotourism program in Bu Gia Map National Park.



Figure 3 - Gong playing team



Figure 4 - Traditional wine

Harvest festival

This festival is hosted by indigenous people to celebrate their crops by the end of their harvest. In these festivals, local people dance drink and share their food with each other, and visitors can join with them to enjoy the cultural atmosphere of indigenous people. This festival allows them to guide visitors and foster the participation of tourists. As a result, this festival is incorporated into the ecotourism program in the park.

Animal sacrificed festivals

This festival is held by local people at any time in the year when they have all conditions. However, this festival spends a large amount of money, and it is impossible for local people to integrate into their ecotourism activities. This event also leads to brutality to animals. Therefore, the project team decided not to include this event in the ecotourism program in Bu Gia Map National Park. This festival will be introduced via written documents for visitors to understand the cultural identities of indigenous people.

Gong festivals

This festival can be held at any time in the year, and it is easy for local people to host because it does not spend a lot of money. Local people host this event by dancing and drinking together. They drum their gongs, and they sing traditional songs. This event helps local people show their cultural identities, and they spend little money for it. This is one of the easiest ways for local people to host their festival. This festival has been selected to incorporate into the community-based ecotourism program in the park.

Sacred Forests

Respondents indicated that they still remain several sacred forests in the park where they are afraid of cutting down trees because these areas are for worshipping their ancestors. These

sacred forests have their own stories that illustrate their traditions and beliefs. These stories can be told by local people when they participate in tours in the field to introduce the origins of these forests to visitors.

Traditional food

Food is special for local people because it contributes to making villagers' culture unique. This food can be products that are attractive to visitors because it tastes different from other food items of other groups. This food is prepared by local people with a special taste that can attract visitors. It is cheap and easy for local people to create these products. This food has been listed as one of special characters of indigenous people in the community-based program.



Figure 6 – Indigenous people collected traditional products



Figure 5 - Traditional sticky rice

Handicrafts

Local people produce a large number of handicrafts that are beautiful and attractive. Indigenous people said that they still make these handicrafts to sell to local markets, and these products are attractive to visitors. However, all respondents said that they did not have chances to sell these products to tourists because they were still isolated from ecotourism program in Bu Gia Map National Park. All respondents hoped to have opportunities to sell these products to tourists because they can advertise their products and remain their cultural identities. In addition, this will allow them to have a stable income source that limits their impacts on the natural forests in the park.



Figure 7 - Traditional cloth



Figure 8 - Traditional basket

Traditional songs and music

Informants said that they still own a large number of folklores and dances. They are able to play these traditional songs to serve for visitors. However, there has not any program that boosts their strengths to generate their additional incomes. Local people reported that these folklores and songs often attract the interest of visitors. Therefore, they said that they can add these folklores, dances and dances to the ecotourism program in Bu Gia Map National Park.



Figure 9 - Traditional instrument



Figure 10 - Gongs in a village

b. Tours in Bu Gia Map National Park

With this project, we created tours with all natural landscapes and sites that are helpful for community-based ecotourism activities in the park. We designed four main trails that help the Department of tourism to organize their tours with the participation of local people. We only created natural landscapes within the park and cultural tours in villages.

Four main trails:

- Bat cave – Dak Ka – Natural well in Dak Bo – Wildlife trails;
- Historical sites – Deer cave – Dak Ka – Luu Ly;
- Wildlife Observation Sites – Natural grassland in Dak Nong province;
- Guard Station 2 – Dak Ka – Luu Ly.

We designed additional activities in villages with the participation of local people to show their cultural identities. These activities include:

- Gong festivals;
- New harvest festivals;
- Traditional handicrafts tour;
- Folklores.

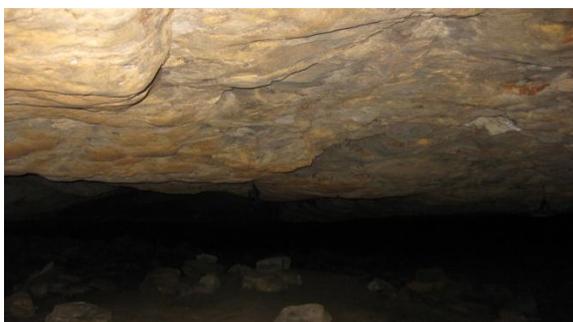


Figure 11 - Bat cave



Figure 12 - Luu Ly water fall



Figure 13 - Grassland



Figure 14 - Adventure tour

Training local people in ecotourism

With this project, we trained for 10 local people who will directly participate in ecotourism activities in Bu Gia Map National Park. Local people were trained in skills and knowledge of ecotourism and communication:

Although we only trained 10 local people in skills and knowledge of ecotourism during the park, we could train 20 participants in the field because we combined the field training with other activities inside the park with the participation of local people.

All trainees comprehended necessary knowledge and skills to make a tour inside the park. Local people understand and know how to tackle problems occurred during their activities in the field. With this dynamic training program, we helped local people deal with different situations when they guide visitors in the field.



Figure 15 - Indigenous people attended the training



Figure 16 - Indigenous people practiced their skills

Knowledge:

- Contemporary philosophy and ethics toward ecotourism
- Basic ecological and geomorphological principles
- Wildlife and vegetation dynamics and interrelationship
- Environmental impact occurrence and management relating to ecotourism

- Ecologically sustainable development and environmental management principles
- Cultural heritage and cultural heritage management principles
- Business management theory
- Ecotourism business practices
- Communication and interpretation theory relating to natural and cultural heritage

Skills:

- Ability to apply philosophical and ethical practice in ecotourism management
- Skills in communicating the dynamics, interrelationship and management of natural and cultural heritage
- Skills in business management and ecotourism business practices
- Skills in application of leadership theory
- Skills in recognizing, evaluating and resolving tourism-related environmental, social and cultural impacts
- Ability to implement ecologically sustainable development principles pertaining to ecotourism

c. Creating a community-based ecotourism program in the park

In order to create a dynamic community-based ecotourism program, we organized meetings with local people and managers to discuss steps and activities in moving forward to this important program. We outlined and created a program with specific roles of all stakeholders who participate in the program. These meetings specifically indicated the rights and responsibilities of park managers and local people in the community-based ecotourism program in Bu Gia Map National Park.

Park managers will support local people:

- Develop and advertise community-based ecotourism activities in the park and its buffer zones.
- Train local people in ecotourism knowledge and skills;
- Providing coordination between the CBE project and other related projects in the buffer zone;
- Providing technical assistance through established government departments for the environment, social services, or cooperatives;
- Providing market research and promotional assistance through the tourism bureau;
- Providing direct financial support for CBE enterprises.
- Reducing, deferring, or exempting tax payments from the community.
- Developing and implementing policies which allow for the flexible development of CBE enterprises for years to come.

Local people will have rights and responsibilities:

- Report ecotourism activities to park managers;
- Pay taxes to the Department of Tariffs under the regulation of the Vietnamese law;
- Limit impacts of visitors on natural landscapes in Bu Gia Map National Park such as noise, garbage, and other waste items inside the park;
- Combined with park managers and forest rangers organize tours inside the park;
- Comply with terms and conditions of park managers regarding ecotourism activities.



Figure 17 - Discussed ecotourism programs at the provincial level

Activity 1: Public Campaign Plan

This activity will provide an opportunity for public sector agencies, community leaders, operators and media to exchange views on problem-solving and planning of promotion and development, in order to reach consensus on how to make Bu Gia Map National Park a model for ecotourism.

Activity 2: Continued training plan

This plan will educate local people on how to be good hosts, how to look after the safety of visitors and how to give local information and advise visitors on preserving the environment.

Activity 3: Promotion of Handcrafts

This activity will allow park manager to promote the production of handcrafts and souvenir items with local identity for sale to the visitors; to create jobs and occupations and distribute income among the indigenous people.

Activity 4: Preservation of the Cultural Environment

This activity will aim at training indigenous people in the benefits of preserving their identities and customs. This will result in the compatibility of cultural identities and the conservation of wild animals and their habitats in Bu Gia Map National Park.

Activity 5: Improvement of accommodation and home stay activities

This activity will encourage local people remain their traditional houses that are attractive to visitors. This is a way to help indigenous people generate additional incomes while preserving their identities. Indigenous people will know-how and support operators to develop and improve their facilities and surroundings in the direction of environmental protection.

Activity 6: Marketing Promotion

Park managers will provide an opportunity for local operators to learn and understand how to systemically promote their products in the tourism industry. Some operators were chosen to participate in familiarization trips from which they will gain experience in selling their products in the marketplace.

4. Conclusion

Over the last one year, we have conducted this project with the active participation of indigenous people. Local people have their own identities and strengths that enable them to develop community-based ecotourism activities. They did not know the necessary steps to develop a dynamic ecotourism program, meaning that this project encouraged the development of local community with account for the conservation of wildlife.

This project identified the strengths of local people that are helpful for community-based ecotourism activities in Bu Gia Map National Park. Local people own numerous customs, folklores and other traditions. These identities can be integrated into the conservation programs of Bu Gia Map National Park to balance the benefits between wildlife conservation and community development.

Local people actively participated in the project because they had chances to generate additional incomes and preserve their cultural identities. All participants expressed their interests in this project because they were able to find an alternative for the exploitation of natural forests.

This activity will enable them to create a win – win solution for wildlife conservation in the park for years to come.

This project created new chances for handicrafts for years to come. Local people still make handicrafts, but they did not have opportunities to sell these products to potential customers. By participating in this project, local people created a small showroom in Bu Gia Map National Park. Many visitors are interested in these products, and indigenous people have chances to sell these products to valuable customers.

With this project, we created a community-based ecotourism program between park managers and indigenous people. This program strengthens the cooperation between park managers and local people. It will not only improve the relationship between villagers and forest rangers but also enlist the support of indigenous people in wildlife conservation activities for years to come.

Difficulties

Although we had numerous advantages during the project, we still had some difficulties.

- Time conflicts between the crops of villagers and project. When we identified the strengths of local people, they had to harvest their crops. We had to travel a large area to access into their farms to conduct interviews with them. As the time conflicts occur, we could only trained theory for around ten local people.
- We did not have the database of the geographic area of the buffer zone of the park, meaning that we could not map the tours in the buffer zones. This resulted in the incomplete map of community tourism activities.