

Abstract

SESSION 3:

From Vision to Reality: Aligning the Global Agenda with Local Benefits

WORKSHOP 3.3:

Blue Economy Development: Where are we now? Where are we headed?

Thailand Investment Opportunity in Ecotourism

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Tourism is recognized as one of the main economic sectors of Thailand. The coastal- and marine-based tourism is one of the major attractions with tourist destinations both within areas designated as Marine National Parks (MNPs) and outside. The extent to which coastal and marine resources can continue to be a major revenue earner depends on how much attention is given to sustainability issues, and how much resources are spent on conservation and restoration. Based on information from three of the most visited MNPs, Surin, Similan and Lanta, what is apparent is that there is a wide gap between what needs to be done to look after the natural resources and what actually is done. There are indicative plans, which look into potential sources of revenue beyond revenues, which MNPs are collecting in the form of entrance fees. However, to pursue these other revenue sources, it is necessary for resources managers, particularly those in the public sector, to look outside of the box both about funds mobilization and how funds are used.

The fundamental principle should be how to make tourism sector pay more than the financial cost of visiting the sites. Essentially, what tourists pay at most covers the expenses of travelling to the sites and during the visits. Little if any of what is paid is used to cover the expenses for restoring and conserving the resources. There is also the issue of incentives for those who are willing and capable to provide the manpower, the time and the skills to look after the marine resources. Put these two elements together, and it seems that one of the potential mechanisms could be the concept of Payment for Ecosystems Services (PES). A study has been done by Nabangchang (2014) exploring the potential to introduce PES as a mechanism to generate adequate funds for one of the most popular island destination sites in the Gulf of Thailand. The principle of paying the returns to natural resources, similar to payments for factors of production, was accepted by stakeholders who recognize the economic benefits in conservation of coastal and marine resources, particularly investments in restoring damaged coral reefs. A number of other studies conducted by Nabangchang also demonstrated that there is willingness by the general public to contribute to coastal and marine resources conservation where these involve conservation of iconic marine endangered species. Other sources of potential funding are related to the indirect benefit of mangroves and seagrass, and their potential to generate Blue Carbon. However, given the area of coverage, there is the economy of scale issue to consider.



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About Orapan Nabangchang:

Dr. Orapan Nabangchang is an Associate Professor of economics at Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University. She completed her Bachelor Degree from the University of York, UK in the field of Politics and Sociology; her Masters in Rural Development from the University of East Anglia, UK and her Ph.D. in Land Economy from University of Cambridge, UK.

Dr. Orapan has done extensive research on the land and environmental issues of Thailand and Southeast Asia. She is also currently Deputy Director of the Economy and Environment Program for Southeast Asia (EEPSEA) and Director of the Economy and Environment Institute of the Lower Mekong Sub-Region (EEI-LMS). Both agencies' main mandate is to build capacities of environmental economists in this Region. Dr. Orapan has conducted research for agencies that are interested in the theory and application of environmental economics, such as the Court of Justices, the Department of National Park Wildlife and Plants, and the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources. Her main areas of interest and research are in the economics of marine and coastal resources.