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_________________________________________________

John A. Young

In Prek Toal, a poor subsistence fishing village on Cambodia’s Tonle Sap Lake, the conservation organization Osmose is using ecotourism revenues to finance poverty intervention programs and promote conservation in a threatened ecosystem. This thesis examines local perceptions of tourism as a measure of Osmose’s success. Limited awareness of tourism and conservation stems from abject poverty and limited opportunities for direct participation in Osmose’s top-down program. Corrupt resource management and a degrading ecosystem threaten economy and life in Prek Toal. This case study illustrates the link between community participation in tourism planning, facilitating a local conservation ethic, and empowering local efforts to fight corruption.
Ecotourism, Poverty, and Conservation in Prek Toal, Cambodia

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Kathryn Conway, Author
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It was nearly three years ago that I last visited Cambodia, a visit specifically undertaken for the purpose of gathering the data for this thesis. In the time since, I’ve wondered—more than once—if I would finish the task I started there. Thank you to all my friends and family, coworkers, bosses, and roommates, whose patience, encouragement, chocolate care packages, edits, forgiveness for sleep-deprived crankiness, and enduring faith helped me overcome too many self-doubts and finally write these words. I would like to thank the members of my committee for the gift of your time. I would like to acknowledge the Anthropology Department and Graduate School for kindesses that made the thousands of miles between me and the University less of an obstacle. I owe a very special acknowledgement to my major professor, John Young. Your patience is extraordinary. Now have I earned a visit to Hawaii? Finally, to the people of Prek Toal Village and Osmose, you have given me impressions that I will carry with me the rest of my life. Thank you.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Tourism has been a significant influence in my personal development and certainly my career choice. I attribute the hours I spent as a child flipping through the pages of my father’s dusty, old National Geographic magazines to my incessant curiosity about the peoples and landscapes of the world. That led me to anthropology, even before I knew what anthropology was. As soon as I was old enough to use my passport without my parents by my side I started collecting stamps in it. With those stamps came impressions, perceptions, and eventually some strong ideas about how tourism works for local communities and even more so, how it fails them. I became a critic. Then I heard about ecotourism.

There is a lot of talk these days about the increasingly important role of eco- or sustainable tourism both domestically and internationally. This nature-based approach to what is often considered the world’s largest and most rapidly expanding industry offers economic incentive for environmental conservation. Finally, many argue, here is an approach to economic development that not only puts food on the table but does so in a way that does not compromise the ability of our children to do the same. I became interested in the expanding niche ecotourism fills within environments favorable to conservation efforts. Even more, I wanted to know if ecotourism offers a sustainable alternative to more traditional natural resource based economies, especially those struggling with resource decline.

The principles of sustainable development, catch-phrase for the 21st century, are embodied in the defining characteristics of ecotourism. Ecotourism involves small
groups of people that do not stress the carrying capacity of communities or environments, is managed in a way that promises communities economic benefit, and is fundamentally connected to the preservation and long-term health of surrounding ecosystems. Ecotourism has been touted as the “magic bullet” of sustainable development because it fills the economic niche created by modernizing an economy but it doesn’t have the same negative repercussions as traditional development strategies involving raw resource extraction. We can, so to speak, have our cake and eat it too. Or can we?

Two short visits to Cambodia in April 2000 and April 2003 inspired me to investigate the intersection of tourism, conservation, and sustainable development there. The two weeks I spent traveling around Cambodia in the spring of 2000 left me with a distinct impression of the country’s determination to move past the horrors inflicted by decades of war and civil unrest. With little economic opportunity in a region already satiated by the industrial prowess of neighboring Thailand, Malaysia and increasingly Vietnam, some say Cambodia’s strongest hope for development lies in tourism. Indeed, tourism in Cambodia is booming.

Most people visit this small, poor Southeast Asian country to see the ruins of the once vast and powerful Khmer Empire. Angkor Watt and other ruins strewn throughout the jungle surrounding the small city of Siem Reap have gained an international reputation that draws more visitors each year. During my first visit to the country I often found myself alone among the stones. Three years later the significant increase in people touring these ruins depicted a much changed Cambodia.
In 2003, I saw crowds of people where before there had only been silence, a proliferation of guest houses, restaurants, and hotels, and dramatic improvements to in-country travel. What hadn’t changed at all in those years, however, was the highly visible level of poverty, especially on the periphery of Siem Reap and in the surrounding countryside. The magnitude of the tourism-induced changes, coupled with the persistent poverty of people never yielding in their generous smiles, impressed on me the desire to return and help.

As tourism continues to grow in Cambodia new opportunities for tapping into a seemingly endless flow of visitor dollars are being sought out and developed faster than *Lonely Planet* can publish new editions. Keeping in tune with the global eco-labeling trend one of the newest flavors in Cambodian tourism is a visit to a floating village. Marketed as “ecotourism,” these half or full-day excursions from Siem Reap offer tourists something different from the typical 3-5 days touring Angkor. In addition to the unique, threatened natural beauty of the Tonle Sap Great Lake, a visit to one of its floating villages gives tourists a glimpse of traditional, rural life, and the poverty associated with fewer opportunities than their upland counterparts. Based out of Siem Reap is Osmose, a small non-profit organization promoting conservation through the use of ecotourism to help the floating village Prek Toal mitigate the constraints of poverty and the resource decline associated with widespread environmental degradation.

In December 2005, I returned to Cambodia for a third time. Hoping to make a difference in the lives of this small community in Cambodia I partnered with Osmose
to study the intersection of ecotourism, conservation, and sustainable development. Using the fundamental tools of cultural anthropology, the ethnographic method and participant observation, I studied perceptions of people living in Prek Toal of tourism’s impact there. I wanted to know if Osmose’s ecotourism provides a culturally appropriate supplement to the traditional way of life that is environmentally sustainable and economically viable. Also, not everyone in a host community gets involved in tourism—who does, and why? What are the impacts of tourism, and are they distributed equally throughout the host community? Where does tourism take place and how does it alter relationships between communities and their environments? What other factors are influencing the success of tourism? What other factors are influencing people’s lives in Prek Toal?

Osmose’s ecotourism promotes conservation in a protected ecosystem by offering economic alternatives to a mostly subsistence-based community. Additional benefit is garnered for the community by using some of the ecotourism revenues to fund poverty intervention programs in the village. Osmose’s philosophy is one founded in conservation ideology but with a firm grasp of the socio-economic conditions that must be met in order to promote a conservation ethic. It is the poorest families that are most likely to be forced by necessity to forage and hunt in the threatened ecosystem. By helping these families, Osmose believes, they are limiting one of the risk factors to that ecosystem’s long term health.

The story isn’t quite so simple, I learned once I arrived in the field. Complicating Osmose’s tri-part model of conservation (ecotourism + poverty
intervention = conservation) were a host of other factors that stretch far beyond the parameters of the small organization’s expertise or management capacity. Resource management on the Tonle Sap Lake, as in the rest of the country, suffers from endemic corruption and ineffectiveness. The real culprits causing irreversible damage to the lake’s biodiversity are the richest fishermen trying to harvest commercially, not the poor fishermen who struggle on a daily basis to feed their families. Additionally, it was not long into data collection before I figured out what I’d learn over and over again throughout the rest of the ethnographic interviews: the average Prek Toal villager has limited, if any, understanding of tourism and does not connect the occurrence of tourism in their community with environmental conservation there.

If ecotourism is truly the “magic bullet” of sustainable development it has to do more than just provide economic incentive for governments and leaders to conserve resources. It has to actually provide people with the ability to substantially improve the conditions of their lives and do so in a way that can be continued by generations to come. In Prek Toal, Cambodia, ecotourism has only just barely begun to make a dent on community livelihoods.
CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND

2.1. Cambodia overview

Cambodia is a small Southeast Asian country about the size of Missouri sandwiched between neighbors Vietnam to the east, Thailand to the west, and Laos to the north, and bordered to the south by the Gulf of Thailand. Ninety percent of Cambodians are ethnic Khmer. Small ethnic minorities of Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cham (Muslim) make up the other 10% (Central Intelligence Agency 2007). For 30 years Cambodia suffered the injustices and atrocities of war, including the terrifying 4 year Khmer Rouge Regime. The year 1999 marked the first full year of peace. Since then the country has only barely begun to heal, a process that is further complicated by socio-cultural ailments facing much of the developing world today (U.S. State Department 2007).

Poverty is extensive in Cambodia. Cambodia’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita at the time of this study was US$300; approximately forty percent of the population lived below the internationally defined US$1 per day poverty line. At the same time, Cambodia ranked 130th out of 173 countries on the United Nation’s Human Development Index. Such a low placement on the Index indicates the country’s level of poverty in contrast to other nations (USAID 2005).

Life is not easy for the approximately 14 million mostly poor Cambodians. The country’s literacy rate is low, especially among women. The birth and population growth rates are high—among the highest in Asia. Education is not a well established
institution. There is virtually no infrastructure outside the large cities of Phnom Penh and Siem Reap, and most of the country consists of rural agricultural areas.

Cambodian government experiences endemic corruption at every level, due in part to their inability to pay a living wage to government employees. Over 50% of the country’s population today is under 21 years old. Creating enough private sector jobs for this largely uneducated majority, especially those living in the extreme poverty of the countryside, is one of the greatest economic challenges facing Cambodia (Central Intelligence Agency 2007; U.S. Department of State 2007; USAID 2005).

Approximately 80% of Cambodia’s population relies on agriculture, forestry, or fishing for their livelihood. Although industry is mostly limited to textiles, an economic sector threatened by lower priced competitors in China and India, the national economy is growing at over 10%. This growth is largely due to the rapid expansion of tourism. In 2005, Cambodia surpassed the one million mark in annual visitors. Most of these people visit this economically weak, impoverished country to see, ironically, the remains of its once powerful, rich empire—that of the Khmers. Their legacy, the temples of Angkor, make up one of the most heavily visited archeological sites in the world, and are considered by some to be one of the Seven Wonders of the World (Central Intelligence Agency 2007; U.S. Department of State 2007).

The Angkor temple complex is located just a few kilometers from Siem Reap. Built primarily between the 9th and the 12th centuries, the temples of the Angkor complex are some of the most magnificent architectural monuments in the world. The
zenith of the Khmer empire, once the dominant power in the region, was between the 10th and 13th centuries. Centuries of infighting and invasion from neighboring Thai and Vietnamese empires slowly weakened the old country to the point of near collapse. The temple complex was largely abandoned in the 15th century when the bulk of the population moved south to Phnom Penh.

Four centuries later, facing imminent demise in a weakened state the Cambodian king asked the French to become protectorate. The French colonial rule lasted from 1863 until the Japanese dissolved it in 1954. It was under the French that the Angkor temples were rediscovered and efforts begun to restore them to their pre-ruin splendor. This effort continues today (Central Intelligence Agency 2007; U.S. Department of State 2007).

2.2. The Tonle Sap Lake

The two most prominent physical features of the Cambodian landscape are the Mekong River and the Tonle Sap Lake. These waterways are the source of immeasurable wealth for the country culturally, economically, and nutritionally. Both the river and especially the lake have historically been filled with abundant life: fish, dolphins, crocodiles, snakes, birds. The Khmers were so impressed by the riches of the Tonle Sap Lake they left a record of it in the detailed bass reliefs etched into the walls of the now ruined Angkor complex. Today, as then, the great Tonle Sap Lake is considered the heart of Cambodia. The Mekong River enables that heart to beat (Bonheur & Lane 2002; Goes 2005).
Every year during the monsoon rains between May and October water levels in the lower Mekong delta rise high enough to force a unique hydrological phenomenon along the adjoining Tonle Sap River and lake. The Mekong River forces the Tonle Sap River to backflow into the Tonle Sap Lake. As a result the lake grows up to four times its dry season size by the October to January high water season. When the rains cease the lake gradually shrinks. The constant ebbing and flowing of the Tonle Sap Lake, from 250,000 hectares to 1.25 million hectares, gives life to an incredibly rich and diverse ecosystem. It is fitting that in Cambodian folklore the Tonle Sap Lake is considered the source for all life (Bonheur & Lane 2002; Goes 2005).

The Tonle Sap Lake is the fourth most productive fresh water fishery in the world with an annual catch of over 300,000 tons. In terms of yield per size, the Tonle Sap is ten times more productive than the North Atlantic. The Tonle Sap Lake provides the vast majority of animal protein consumed by Cambodians each year, up to 80%. Additionally, coping with the lake’s rising and receding water levels has led to the development of a way of life as unique as the hydrological heartbeat causing it (Bonheur & Lane 2002; Goes 2005).

2.2.1 Human population on the Tonle Sap

The Tonle Sap’s wealth of resources has long been the source of subsistence livelihoods, perhaps as far back as the zenith of the Angkor civilization or even further. This wealth has more recently been the cause of ever increasing in-migration to the Lake region by desperate people from less productive areas of the country. Moved by
the pressures of a rising population, a lack of infrastructure, few and low paying jobs, and a government unable to provide better options, this influx of impoverished peasants is straining the capacity of the Lake to provide. There are approximately 170 villages in the Lake region, and all depend on the local ecosystem for survival. The lake’s fisheries are the most important resource, evidenced in part by the over 100 documented forms of fishing equipment used by Tonle Sap fishermen, ranging in scale from small scale subsistence to large scale commercial (Bonheur & Lane 2002; Goes 2005).

Also speaking to the importance of the Tonle Sap’s fisheries are the unique villages that have adapted to life literally on the lake. Villages in the Tonle Sap region of Cambodia have adapted to the ebb and flow of water levels there by building villages either on stilts or on floating platforms and houseboats. Houses range in quality from palm thatch houses to sturdy, painted wood planked homes with corrugated metal roofs. Villages floating on the lake, like any others in Cambodia, include schools, shops, restaurants, temples, even places to buy gasoline. The primary form of transportation in one of these seasonally flooded villages is a small paddle boat, a canoe-like boat with room for three larger or maybe five smaller-sized people, including the boat paddler. Vegetable or cooked food vendors paddle from home to home selling their wares from their paddle boats. The Tonle Sap region is one of the poorest in all of Cambodia (Goes 2005).

People are not the only life forms to have adapted to the unique hydrology of the Tonle Sap Lake. The seasonally flooded forest provides the foundation for the
Tonle Sap’s biodiversity. Frequently mistaken for mangrove, the Tonle Sap’s forest is better identified as a seasonally flooded fresh-water swamp forest that is made up of specially adapted trees and shrubs able to withstand months of complete submersion. The forest not only puts nutrients into the ecosystem with the decomposition of its deciduous leaves, it more importantly provides habitat for the fish, birds, snakes, crocodiles, and small mammals that make a home in the lake (Goes 2005).

2.2.2 Environmental threats

In addition to socio-economic troubles, Cambodia is also undergoing rampant environmental degradation. One of the most significant environmental issues facing the country is deforestation. Cambodia has the largest remaining virgin forests in SE Asia. Upland dry forests and lowland seasonally flooded forests are, however, being clear cut at an alarmingly high rate. In regards to life in and on the Tonle Sap Lake, deforestation is an especially pressing issue. Population pressures both on the lake and off are creating an increased demand for firewood and raw materials to make fishing gear. Loss of flooded forest due primarily to firewood collection threatens the stability of the entire ecosystem (Goes 2005; Lopez 2002).

Another serious environmental threat on the Tonle Sap is over-harvesting its fish resources. A combination of increasing population on the lake and inefficient resource management has created a situation in which too many people are taking too many fish. A great deal of this problem stems from the power of rich commercial fishermen who use illegal fishing methods (Goes 2005; Lopez 2002).
The Tonle Sap Lake’s rich fisheries, water-birds, snakes, and crocodiles, are also threatened by over harvesting and habitat loss. Some of these species may face extinction. Of particular importance for this study are the large water birds that nest in the region. There are over one hundred species of water birds breeding and feeding on the lake. Among these, eighty-nine are abundant and fourteen are considered significant internationally. Over harvesting the birds has been induced by increasing human population on the lake. Waterfowl are considered a cleaner meat than domestic animals like ducks or chickens. Hunting the birds and their eggs in nesting areas has historically been a lucrative business for poor people, as well as an important food source (Goes 2005; Bonheur & Lane 2002).

On a much larger scale, one of the most significant environmental threats to the integrity of the Tonle Sap ecosystem is the altered hydrology created by China’s dams on the upper Mekong River. Though this is a well recognized threat, no one is quite sure what kind of impact the dams will have when they are all in place. Dams on tributaries of the Mekong have already lowered high-season water levels significantly. The resulting reduction in sediment flow from dams on the Mekong itself will likely have a negative impact. Also, water flow regulated by the dams will likely cause inundation of the flooded forest year round, not just seasonally. The extent of change caused these modifications, though unknown, is speculated to be severe (Bonheur & Lane 2002).
2.2.3 Fisheries management in Cambodia

Since governed by the French at the beginning of the 20th century, and with the exception of a brief hiatus during the Khmer Rouge Regime, Cambodia’s fisheries have been allocated by a fishing lot system in which the highest bidder wins rights to fish for two years in a given area. The fishing lot system began during a time of great abundance, before many of the modern pressures facing Cambodia today such as population growth and habitat deterioration. In recent decades, however, the fishing lot system became a serious hindrance to the ability of poor villagers to catch enough for subsistence (Bonheur & Lane 2002; Ratner 2006).

There are approximately sixty of these commercial fishing lots of varying sizes on the Tonle Sap Lake that combined cover 80% to 90% of the shoreline. The larger lots are about 200 square kilometers and the smaller ones are about 20 square kilometers in surface area. While the smaller ones are auctioned for roughly US$2,000, larger fishing lots can go for upwards of US$200,000. The sale of rights to these fishing lots is an important source of national revenue but little is returned to the management of the resource through the Department of Fisheries budget. Enforcing laws that regulate type of fishing gear and seasons for legal catching is weak and ineffective against the political and economic power of the wealthy elite who control the larger fishing lots. These “fishing lot tycoons,” or “Takei Lot” in Khmer (Lopez 2002: 361) employ personal militias to police their fishing areas and are known to have strong political connections, a combination ripe (and well known) for corruption (Lopez 2002; Bonheur & Lane 2002; Tarr 2003).
Open access fishing accounts for the other 10% to 20% of the lake’s surface area not covered by commercial lots. Within these areas, middle-scale and small-scale fishing is permitted. Middle-scale fishing is regulated through licensing and fees, and is allowed in most of the public fishing areas. Family or small-scale fishing does not require any license and is allowed in all public areas as well as commercial lots during the closed season. The commercial season is roughly four months long during the dry months before the spring monsoon (Bonheur & Lane 2002).

The majority of the one million people living on and around the lake are too poor to bid for even the smaller commercial lots, pushing them further into the margins of subsistence living. Difficult fishing conditions for poor fishermen inspired widespread protests in 2000. Cambodia’s president responded by reforming fisheries management. The revised management plan reassigned approximately 50% of the fishing lots as community fishing areas. To compensate for the lower fish stocks and increased competition, the type of fishing gear legally allowed in these community fishing areas was increased from small scale to medium scale. The progressive nature of the new policies (most of which at the time of this study had not actually been implemented yet) hides the reality that common pool resource management does not compensate for the population induced over-harvesting. These reforms also included a massive overhauling of fisheries management personnel that made management even more inefficient and subject to intensive bribery than before the reforms (Tarr 2003; Ratner 2006).
Releasing half the country’s fishing lots from private to public use has had dramatic environmental ramifications. The creation of community fishing areas has led to an increase in the number of users and an increase in the use of illegal fishing gear among wealthy commercial fishermen and subsistence small-scale fishermen alike. The rising population in the lake region means more people are competing for a limited, though once abundant, resource, which requires more effort. The effect is self-perpetuating, and it is leading to the rapid degradation of the lake’s fisheries (Ratner 2006).

In addition to the creation of community fishing areas with the fisheries reforms of 2000, some previously commercial lots were renamed “government research” lots. From all accounts available, no research is conducted on these lots. Instead, the creation of such designated areas has allowed another opportunity for corruption in fisheries management by bypassing the usual auction procedure (Goes 2005). Near Prek Toal, the research site for this study, is fishing lot #2—a research lot.

Fishing lot #2 is the biggest and most productive area on the entire lake, and it has been leased to a private fisherman who lives part-time in Prek Toal, and part-time in the nearby upland town Battambang. This lot is unofficially purchased for about US$50,000 a year and has an estimated annual value of half a million US dollars (Goes 2005). The extent of this man’s power is so great he has been considered one of the single largest obstacles to conservation and development in the area (Goes 2005). As the manager of fishing lot #2, all activities in the area, including tourism, have to
abide by his rules. Twenty-five percent of fees charged by Osmose for a tour to see the birds in fishing lot #2 are garnished by the lot manager (Ratner 2006; Goes 2005).

Large commercial fishing lot lessees and small scale subsistence fishermen both employ a range of legal and illegal fishing methods causing serious resource decline. Pumping flood recession ponds dry to catch every single fish, excessively large nets or small, mosquito mesh nets, electro-shock, and the use of grenades are just a few examples of the more commonly referenced methods (Tarr 2003). Fisheries officers, police, and other officials are known to turn a blind eye to these practices in exchange for a fee (Ratner 2006; Tarr 2003).

2.2.4 Cambodia’s natural resource management

Complicating the issues of resource degradation and the socio-economic causes contributing to that degradation are factors contributing to poor resource management in Cambodia. A general lack of infrastructure, poorly chosen and undereducated staff, and under-funded agencies mean policy is extremely centralized and top-down, public participation in decision making is virtually non-existent, and there is little transparency in governance. A lack of coordination among and competition between different levels of government, international organizations and NGOs further prevents effective, efficient resource management. Additionally, there is a high level of mistrust for government officials. These factors foster an environment for corruption and inhibit the success of initiatives to protect resources
and provide more sustainable economic opportunities to the impoverished people of Cambodia (Bonheur & Lane 2002).

2.2.5 Biosphere designation

Recognizing the significance of the Tonle Sap’s high level of biodiversity and the increasing threats to its stability the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) nominated the lake a biosphere reserve in 1997 under their Man and the Biosphere program (MAB). This program began in 1970 to focus on the ecological, social, and economic aspects of biodiversity loss and the reduction of that loss. The Tonle Sap is one of over one hundred Biosphere Reserves in the world, a network used as a vehicle for knowledge-sharing, research, education, and decision-making. The MAB program operates along three fundamental lines of action. First, the biosphere reserves are intended to ultimately minimize biodiversity loss through research and capacity-building for ecosystem management. Second, the program promotes environmental sustainability. Third, biosphere reserves establish links between cultural and biological diversity. It is precisely with these three actions in mind that in 2001 the Cambodian government acknowledged the Tonle Sap biosphere reserve by royal decree (Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve 2007).

When the Tonle Sap was declared a biosphere reserve three core areas were designated as having extreme significance for their high level of biodiversity. One of these, the Prek Toal core area, is considered the most important among the three (Bonheur & Lane 2002; Goes 2005). The Prek Toal core area is the last remaining
habitat regionally and in some cases internationally for certain threatened large water-bird species, particularly stork, pelican, and ibis (Tonle Sap Biosphere Reserve 2007; Goes 2005). Shortly after the lake became a biosphere reserve the internationally recognized and operating NGO Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) began working with the Cambodian government to facilitate the three action items of UNESCO’s Man in the Biosphere program in this core area (Goes 2005; Wildlife Conservation Society 2007).

Conservation activities in the Prek Toal core area and neighboring village involve protecting the water-bird colonies from egg and chick collection, as well as gathering baseline research and monitoring the bird populations. UNESCO funds were used to build an environment center in Prek Toal village, located just five kilometers from the same-named core area. A partnership between UNESCO, the Cambodian government, and WCS pays the salaries for the 20 former bird egg and chick collectors who were trained as rangers to now protect the birds. These rangers are based out of the environment center and are also tasked with assisting researchers in gathering data in the core area (Goes 2005; Wildlife Conservation Society 2007).

2.3. Prek Toal Village and Core Area

Prek Toal village is a medium sized community of approximately 800 families situated within the Tonle Sap Great Lake region of Cambodia. The vast majority of villagers are Khmer but Prek Toal is also home to small numbers of three ethnic minorities: Vietnamese, Cham, and Chinese. Most of the families living in the
floating village live a simple subsistence life revolving around fishing. Those fortunate enough not to rely on a basic hand-to-mouth livelihood are still very much tied into the local fishing economy as middlemen or merchants providing support services to the community. In addition to subsistence fishing activities, Prek Toal villagers, particularly the very poor, have historically relied on harvesting the lake’s other resources to supplement their diet and provide income: turtles, large snakes, water-snakes, macaques, water-birds and their eggs, and crocodiles, as well as wild vegetables (Goes 2005).

Fishing activities primarily feed the family but supplemental catch is sold to pay for rice and occasional vegetables, fruits, and/or meats. The meager income gained by the average villager in Prek Toal is typically less than US$1 per day. Some very poor households do not own fishing equipment so earn wages working as laborers for larger fishing operations. Raising and then selling farmed fish and crocodiles are other common economic activities in the village for its wealthier inhabitants. Despite the recognized poverty of Prek Toal, its abundant natural resources mark it as one of the more well off villages in the Lake region (Goes 2005).

The many varieties of large water-bird species nesting in the Prek Toal core area are what first drew attention to the significance of the Tonle Sap Lake in regards to its incredible level of biodiversity and the threats to its sustainability. Seven species of water-birds that nest and feed in the Prek Toal core area are threatened globally: oriental darter, black-headed ibis, spot-billed pelican, painted stork, milky stork, lesser adjutant, and greater adjutant. These bird colonies were virtually unknown to the
international community until they were “discovered” in 1994. Immediate concern about the level of threat posed by villagers collecting eggs and chicks from the colonies led to a 1996 survey to measure precisely these things. Results of the study showed urgent need to curtail the level of collection in order to preserve the stability of the bird colonies. In 1998, an environmental research station was built in Prek Toal village as a joint effort of the Cambodian national government and the United Nations to monitor the bird colonies (Goes 2005; Bonheur & Lane 2002).

In 2001, the internationally operating non-governmental organization (NGO) Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) began a conservation program for the Prek Toal bird colonies. As a part of this program 25 rangers, half salaried by WCS, were hired among former bird egg collectors to police the Prek Toal core area and protect the birds from poachers. The rangers work out of the Environmental Center and also participate in tourism activities by guiding tourists into the core area. Most of the tours into Prek Toal are facilitated by a smaller, regional NGO, Osmose. About half of the $40 Osmose charges for one of their tours is garnished by the Environment Center (Goes 2005).

2.4. Osmose

In light of tourism’s quick growth in Cambodia, particularly in Siem Reap, and in the potential to benefit economically from the industry’s expansion beyond the boundaries of Angkor, Osmose is bringing tourists to Prek Toal village. Osmose began their operation in Prek Toal in 2001 out of awareness of the environmental
threats facing the Prek Toal core area and related socio-cultural impacts on Prek Toal village. An offshoot of the much larger WCS, Osmose’s work links conservation (including environmental education), poverty alleviation, and tourism. Ecotourism activities run by the organization into the core area fund their programs and offer economic alternatives to some villagers who formerly relied on resource harvest for their livelihood. The name “Osmose” is French for “osmosis,” and employs a secondary meaning of the word—to be in balance with something or someone. Osmose was chosen as the name for this organization to represent their attempts to facilitate harmony between man and nature.

Recognizing the potential for desperate villagers to unsustainably harvest resources in the core area, Osmose’s poverty intervention programs target the poorest families in Prek Toal village. Alternative income generation related to tourism (boat paddling and handicraft production), conservation related employment (rangers), and material, educational, and health assistance (medical care assistance, food handouts, education, giving paddleboats and occasional houses) are considered a short term conservation strategy. Environmental education for over 1,200 village children with trips into the bird protected area is considered a long-term conservation strategy because it promotes awareness of the linkages between a healthy ecosystem and a healthy community. By helping those most in need Osmose hopes to limit threats to the core area and facilitate long term conservation while at the same time improving the quality of life for the people of Prek Toal (Goes 2005; A Boat Journey 2005).
Rising popularity of Cambodia as a tourist destination and subsequent infrastructural improvements in and around Siem Reap have made birding excursions to the Prek Toal core area more common. Visitor numbers in the core area doubled annually between 2000 and 2003, reaching just under 900 visitors during the 2003 season. In addition to Osmose’s ecotourism trips there are several other tour vendors that irregularly offer trips to the core area. Osmose brings the majority of tourists to Prek Toal, and is the only organization or business incorporating cultural tourism opportunities in the village with a visit to the core area. Osmose offers a number of different tour options ranging from half day to overnight trips. The most common trip taken is a full day tour split between the village and the core area with lunch served in the village (Goes 2005; A Boat Journey 2005).

The conservation orientation of Osmose’s programs means that carrying capacity has been a concern. Tourist traffic to the core area to see the birds must be kept at a low enough level it does not disrupt the birds. During peak, high water season, there can be upwards of five tourist boats at the same bird viewing platform at one time. The noise produced with the boat traffic moving these tourists into and out of the core area is enough to cause Osmose to worry that there is already a negative environmental impact from tourism. Osmose would like to avoid increasing the volume of tourists too much to ensure carrying capacity is not breached and conservation efforts are successful (personal communication with Osmose staff December, 2005).
One of the guiding principles of Osmose’s work in Prek Toal village is that local people must see tangible benefit from the ecotourism activities meant to inspire conservation. One way Osmose connects villagers directly with the ecotourism activities taking place in the village is by hiring villagers as boat paddlers. Paddling tourists around Prek Toal village for a day or half day earns a local man or woman $5—equivalent to what a typical family there makes in almost a full week from fishing related work. In order to keep this opportunity equally distributed Osmose’s policy is to keep a list of qualifying paddlers (i.e. representatives from the poorest families) and rotate through. There are about twenty on that list. Osmose typically has between five and eight trips a week during the high water season and need between two and four boat paddlers per trip. In conclusion, Osmose uses ecotourism as an incentive for conservation while generating funds that can pay for poverty intervention programs such as rice giveaways and medical cost assistance, thus contributing in small, incremental improvements to the overall quality of life in Prek Toal family by family.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

It took two months to piece together the basic details of this study. In October 2005, I decided to do my project in Cambodia, preferably undertaking field work over the approaching winter holiday break. By early November I had, through a series of contacts and email inquiries, connected with Osmose and convinced them to allow me to visit in December. I was in Cambodia for exactly one month. Upon return to the United States I began organizing and then analyzing the data.

Like so many anthropologists before me the research plan I took with me into the field was not the research plan I ended up following. During my first week in Cambodia I spent my time at the Osmose office learning about the organization’s work in Prek Toal village. I learned about recent events in the region that ended up influencing the way I organized my research. I also made contacts with staff, local people, government administrators, and eventually my interpreter/assistant. The things and people I met in that first week caused me to completely modify the methodological framework I had written before leaving for Cambodia. The following recap, then, is what I did do, not what I planned to do. To a large extent my research methods were dictated by forces beyond my control—they were born from the flexibility and adaptability that characterize anthropology as a unique social science discipline.
3.1. Fieldwork timeline

My first week in Cambodia was a chance to get my feet wet before jumping into the meatier, ethnographic interviews and participant observation. Over the course of my first week in the country I made introductions and began the process of revising the plans I had made before arriving for how I would collect information and from whom I would collect that information. I spent at the Osmose office in Siem Reap, learning about the organization and its operation in Prek Toal village. I also visited the Osmose office in Prek Toal village, where I was able to peruse the files they had collected on the approximately 100 Osmose-assisted families in the community. While I got to know the Osmose staff in both the main, Siem Reap office and the smaller, more classroom-like office in Prek Toal, I also began learning more about the community in which I would be working.

My first week in Cambodia was a time to make important connections with other people. I spent considerable time during that first week speaking with Frederic, one of Osmose’s founders, about how I would conduct my research and how it would benefit the community and Osmose. Frederic’s invaluable input heavily influenced revisions to my original research plan, including my sampling technique and the process by which I acquired consent. During this week I was introduced to the man who became my translator, Pich. We negotiated the terms of his employment and undertook a practice interview supervised by Frederic, who was fluent in Khmer and English as well as his native French.
Week two I spent in Prek Toal conducting ethnographic interviews and practicing the mainstay of cultural anthropology research, participant observation. From Monday through Friday morning I conducted 26 ethnographic interviews. I slept and ate at the environment center in Prek Toal village. Transportation between the environment center and the various households at which I interviewed was a paddle boat manned by a series of local villagers for $5/day. Friday afternoon Pich and I took the regularly scheduled boat from Prek Toal back to Chong Kineas and then a taxi to Siem Reap. Over the weekend while Pich was off duty I transcribed my interview notes and spoke informally with NGO personnel throughout the community to gain a better understanding of international development and conservation work being done in this part of Cambodia.

Week three was very much a repeat of week two. Pich and I returned to Prek Toal village by lunch on Monday and stayed through the week, conducting an additional ten interviews. During week three I visited the bird colonies in the Prek Toal core area, much like a typical tourist with one of the Osmose groups. At the end of the week, like the weekend before, I transcribed interviews and began piecing together my initial impressions of Osmose’s operation in Prek Toal.

During my fourth week in Cambodia I informally presented my initial findings to Osmose staff, conducted follow-up informal meetings with Osmose staff and other international development workers in Siem Reap, and spent some time touring the ancient ruins that bring so many visitors to Cambodia each year.
3.2. Translator/assistant

One of the most important aspects of this study was the use of an interpreter. Not only does an interpreter bring significant bias into the study, but in this particular case my interpreter doubled as an informant and research assistant. I had the good fortune of beginning my research at the same time another researcher was finishing and was able to hire translator. Sharon (the researcher) had been working in Prek Toal village with Pich (the interpreter) for nearly a year studying water-snake harvest.

Pich (pronounced ‘pik’) brought unexpected benefit to my project in addition to his translation ability. Over the course of the year Pich worked with Sharon in Prek Toal he had build a solid rapport with the community, a rapport the short duration of my project did not allow me to build myself. Pich’s good standing in the village and solid relationship with many of the people at the environment center and Osmose provided me with a strong foundation from which to begin my research. Pich was very familiar with Osmose, with interview research methods, and his English ability was superb.

The bias of working with an interpreter cannot be understated. Pich brought his own set of preconceived notions, expectations, and goals into the field. These were at least partly influenced by his experience working with Sharon. Additionally, Pich’s emotional state and energy level each day was an influence in the quality, type, and amount of data collected each day.
3.3. Sampling

Of the approximately 800 households in Prek Toal, Osmose had collected detailed information on about 100, information gathered over the course of the organization’s then five-year operating history in the community. Much of the information in these files had been collected during a preliminary household economic survey in 2000, and the information was used in designing and implementing Osmose’s programs in the community. These are families that Osmose has assisted, once or continuously since the implementation of their poverty intervention programs. For the sake of continuity and convenience I thought it might be useful to choose my sample from this population, and made arrangements with Osmose to have access to their files once I arrived in the country. It was my intention to choose between 20 and 30 families out of the 100 represented in the files and interview them, supplementing the information acquired through the ethnographic process with that already gathered by Osmose.

It was not until I arrived in Cambodia and began going over Osmose’s files that I realized the significance of that information. My primary goal was to measure the impact of ecotourism in Prek Toal, and by default, Osmose’s ability to reach into the community to achieve their program goals. By limiting my sample to a population that had been assisted in one way or another by this organization I would be significantly biasing the study. I realized that in order to garner a more accurate sense of how Prek Toal as a community felt about tourism there I would have to sample from the entire village, not just one specific sub-set.
The linear lay-out of Prek Toal allowed an easy alternative method for selecting interviewees. I began at the south end of the village on the eastern side of the canal on which the village is situated and interviewed about every 20th house, moving first north and then, crossing to the western side, moved from north to south. When I was not able to interview at the 20th house for whatever reason I went to the next house in the direction I was moving, and then the next, and so forth until I found a willing and able interviewee. I traveled between the houses via paddleboat with a paid paddler and Pich.

During the time of my interviewing there was a traditional funeral going on in one section of the village. Out of respect for the family of the deceased I did not interview that area. I likely cut out about 20 houses by eliminating that corner of the village.

Interview #18 posed an interesting difficulty. This interviewee was an old man, the father of a previous participant, who was just a month away from his 100th birthday. This man was very preoccupied with talking about his birthday party, and his long life, and not very amenable to answering interview questions. Instead of taking notes I simply enjoyed the unique opportunity to visit with him and did not count this interview in the data set. Not counting interview #18, I conducted a total of 27 interviews using the 20th house method.

In addition to the interviews in my sample, I also conducted several informal interviews with leaders and others in the community. These interviews I refer to as “selected” or “out of the sample.” I conducted eight such interviews. I spoke with the
commune chief, the village chief, a fisheries management officer, a fisheries
management NGO staff member, an official at the environment center, a ranger from
the environment center, the environment center cook, and a worker at the handicraft
studio. See Table 1, “Simplified Participant Information”, for a simple breakdown of
relevant variables. For more detailed participant information, see Appendix A.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Occupation</strong></td>
<td>Fishermen</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(among only</td>
<td>Middleman</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sampled)</td>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic level</strong></td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(among only</td>
<td>Not-as-poor</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sampled)</td>
<td>Assisted</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(among all</td>
<td>Not assisted</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participants)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(among all</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participants)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td>Khmer</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(among all</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participants)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cham</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1

As per the custom in Prek Toal village, when I came to a residence I was
invited in to speak with the household or representative of the household in the front,
main room and accepted. For the most part, then, the interviews were conducted while
seated on the floor in this room with Pich and the interviewee(s). Sometimes the
female head of household was the primary interviewee; sometimes the male head of household was the primary interviewee; sometimes both the female and male head of households answered the questions together while at other times additional family members or neighbors participated as well. I did not limit the audience in any way or attempt to be specific about who participated in and who was excluded from this study.

3.4. Consent process

When I arrived in Cambodia and began speaking with the Osmose staff about my intentions in Prek Toal I was strongly advised to reconsider my method of seeking consent. Following protocol from the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), the consent process that had been approved for this study before I left for Cambodia involved Pich reading in Khmer a summary of the longer, more in-depth English version of the consent forms. Both forms were to be signed by the interviewee or by Pich as proxy. However, recent events in the Lake region suggested that this process would have fostered a sense of fear and/or mistrust in the interviewees resulting in significant bias.

Just several weeks before my arrival in Cambodia another Tonle Sap Lake village had been cheated out of access to their community fishing lot by a government “researcher” who had asked the village chief for a signature under false pretenses. Frederic at Osmose wisely advised me not to ask for a signature from interviewees nor have Pich sign anything on their behalf. This highly illiterate population had grown extremely untrustworthy of documents they could neither read nor understand. My
modified consent process involved a summary of my intentions similar to what Pich would have read had we followed pre-assigned protocol but did not ask for any signature, just a verbal yes or no in response (See Appendix B). Confidentiality was assured in this process, though more often than not interviewees denied this option and without solicitation gave consent to use their name in association with what they said. To maintain confidentiality after data collection I have given pseudonyms to all participants, even those who voluntarily denied it. The presence of the paddler transporting Pich and I during these interviewees had potential to compromise confidentiality so I asked this paddler to as much as possible stay removed from the interviews.

3.5. Data collection

3.5.1 Interviews

The ethnographic interviews that make up the bulk of data collected for this project were open-ended, semi-structured interviews. Time I spent on each interview ranged from approximately 40 minutes to over two hours; the average time taken for each interview was about one hour. I took detailed pen and paper notes during the interviews and then transcribed them later. There were several questions I asked in every interview in order to have some baseline data to compare. These questions regarded, for the most part, household size and make-up, food security, and general awareness of “tourism” and “conservation.” I began with these questions and then
branched off into new, non-scripted lines of questioning that stemmed directly from answers given by the interviewees or other information brought up in the course of conversation with them. Depending on time availability and answers to previous questions I did not necessarily ask all the questions on the interview script. See Appendix C for a list of the primary questions asked during these interviews.

3.5.2. Participant observation

It was my intention to participate in as many tourism activities in Prek Toal as possible. Once I arrived in the community, however, I learned that the participant observation aspect of my data collection was more appropriately done while simply living and working in the community and did not necessarily require going on actual tours. Over the course of the nearly two weeks I spent in Prek Toal village I probably saw fifteen tour boats moving through and within the community. Though I did end up going on a tour into the Prek Toal core area to see the birds so many visitors go so far out of their way to see, I was also a participant by simply being in the village. The insight I gained by observing tourism activities in Prek Toal is not reflected in any direct accumulation of data. Rather, these observations are more subtly incorporated into my analysis of the ethnographic data and recommendations made as a result.
3.5.3. Additional data collection

In addition to ethnographic interviews and participant observation I also had informal conversations with Osmose staff, a representative from the United Nations team managing the Tonle Sap biosphere reserve, and other Siem Reap based NGO personnel. These conversations contributed to my general understanding of the issues complicating resource management, conservation initiatives, and tourism development in Cambodia. The knowledge I gained through these interactions influenced my perception of the issues researched in my project and greatly contributed to my data analysis and recommendations.

3.6. Data management

I employed a grounded theory approach for data management. Barney Glaser and Anself Strauss are credited with pioneering grounded theory, or discovering theory from data. “In discovering theory, one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence, then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept” (Glaser & Strauss 1967: 23). This inductive content analysis involved looking for meaning in the data instead of testing it against a hypothesis. I identified recurring themes in the interview transcripts and then grouped them into general categories for comparison and discussion. Quotes from the interviews are used to illustrate the themes that emerge from those comparisons. The themes are then discussed within a context of current literature to produce recommendations (Bernard 2006).
CHAPTER 4: LITERATURE REVIEW

Included in this brief review of current literature are several topics that will help frame this study’s findings in later discussion. The role of anthropology in tourism research, for starters, justifies this study as a topic for an Anthropology Masters Thesis. Like the interdisciplinary nature of applied anthropology work so too is tourism; a great deal of the information included in this chapter comes from disciplines other than anthropology. Balancing the often competing agendas of conservation and development through the promotion of ecotourism is perhaps the most critical topic to review in this chapter. Poverty, being an overwhelming condition of the study participants, is another important piece to consider here, especially as it fits together with the other topics. Finally, corruption as it relates to resource use and management warrants a short review. This literature review is by no means comprehensive; it is merely enough of a sampling of existing research to contextualize the findings in a thorough coherent discussion.

4.1. Anthropology and tourism

Valene Smith defines tourism as temporary and voluntary travel to “a place away from home for the purpose of experiencing a change” (1989:1). Similarly, the United Nations affiliated World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines tourists as people “traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited” (World Tourism
Anthropology and tourism are very similar: both are concerned with the study of other peoples, their cultures and social rituals. Indeed, tourism “can be an ideal context for studying issues of political economy, social change and development, natural resource management, and cultural identity and expression” (Stronza 2001:261). Tourism is undoubtedly an agent of socio-cultural and environmental change (Potts & Harrill 1998). Because of the conflicts inherent in these changes, tourism offers a chance for anthropologists to contribute valuable insight to the growing pool of knowledge used to influence policy and program implementation.

The sheer volume of literature available about the anthropology of tourism, or tourism anthropology, or the ways in which anthropology lends insight into studies of tourism, etc., is proof that indeed, anthropology is an appropriate venue for the study of tourism. Anthropologists act as mediators, bringing together the diverse interests of conservation, development, government, local community, and tour operators in a collaborative effort crucial for successful community-based tourism (Stronza 2005). Anthropological research methods are well suited to the study of tourism (Stonich 2005) and have potential to fill gaps in existing knowledge such as host perspectives (Stonich 2005; Burns 2004). Anthropologists can also mitigate the negative effects created by the common imbalance created when an ecotourism project focuses too much on conservation and not enough on local people (Wallace & Diamente 2005).
4.1.1 The local perspective

Stronza (2001) identifies some knowledge gaps in the anthropology of tourism. Tourism, especially tourism in developing countries, is often criticized for its tendency to negatively impact socio-economic systems but little research has been done to garner a sense of how local people feel impacted. The common assumption within tourism research that tourism is imposed on locals and not sought by them is evidence of insufficient analysis. Well documented negative socio-economic impacts of tourism include: the disruption of subsistence activities by wage labor and the precarious nature of reliance on revenues from an industry prone to booms and busts, and an intensification of wealth stratification that then leads to social conflict.

Negative impacts aside, what is lacking in tourism research is the local perspective, “how locals themselves perceive the array of pros and cons associated with tourism” (2001:269).

Culture is impacted by tourism, too, and usually these changes are assumed negative. Cultural commodification and the erosion of traditional culture are seen as inevitable impacts of tourism. The positive side of this change is that in the same ways tourists’ preconceived notions of host communities’ cultures can influence how those hosts look and act in tourist settings, so too can those notions reinforce traditional culture and identity. Tourism, then “can become an empowering vehicle of self-representation…” (Stronza 2001:271). Again, missing from tourism research is the ethnographic perspective, knowledge of the extent to which local people determine
their interactions with tourists. Similarly, at the time of this article’s publication, little work had been done to explore local perceptions of tourists (Stronza 2001).

Anthropological research regarding alternative forms of tourism such as ecotourism has done better at identifying associated benefits as well as costs. Advocates of ecotourism tout its ability to produce revenues for conservation and local development. Local participation is emphasized as crucial for successful ecotourism endeavors, as is collaboration among communities, governments, conservation groups, and tour companies. Despite the more positive outlook for ecotourism, however, it is flawed by the same fundamental approach as conventional tourism, leaving gaping holes in data and analysis. Ecotourism best practices tend to stress prescriptive strategies that are external to local communities, thereby limiting what can be learned about how local people receive benefit or negative impact from tourism (Stronza 2001).

The role of anthropology in taking tourism research forward, particularly ecotourism research, is in filling these existing knowledge gaps. Ethnographic data collection reveals local perspectives on tourism, and whether or not it is perceived to be helping or hurting local people. Identifying why and how local people become involved in tourism research is one of the most tangible ways anthropology can inform the growing pool of tourism research. External prescriptions to monopolize potential benefits while minimizing potential negative impacts are only part of the equation to successful, effective programs. Information gained about the specific circumstances
governing life in a host community is also relevant, if not more important (Stronza 2001).

4.2. Ecotourism as conservation and development

Tourism is the world’s largest and most quickly expanding industry (Smith 2001; Honey 1999; World Tourism Organization 2005). The greatest degree of expansion is taking place in least developed countries (LDCs), not only for the economic benefits to the hosts but also for the cost advantage to the guests (Smith 2001; Mowforth & Munt 2003). Tourism in these places is often seen as an opportunity to develop economically, to become a player in the global market. In addition to its feasibility as a strategy for sustainable development, tourism has also been targeted as a means to alleviate poverty in LDCs (Economic and Social Commission 2003). Multilateral lending institutions such as the World Bank support tourism as a way to encourage foreign exchange earnings and balance of payments in developing nations (Mowforth & Munt 2003; Honey 1999; World Tourism Organization 2005). Ecotourism particularly is seen as a solution to the risks associated with conventional, neoliberal development, a way to develop local economies without compromising the integrity of local ecosystems or cultures (West & Carrier 2004). In this way ecotourism is very closely linked to the concepts intrinsic to sustainable development: environmental protection, economic growth, and social equity (International Institute for Sustainable Development 2005).
Tourism is associated with a plethora of negative impacts. The commodification of culture, undue pressure on environmental resources, intense pressure on local infrastructure, high percentage of economic leakage outside the community, large scale market-driven cultural change, and increasing reliance on the global economy are all associated with the introduction of tourism in a community (McLaren 1998). Conversely, tourism also provides an additional source of local income, education, a bridge between disparate cultural gaps, peace promotion, a method of reducing poverty, and incentive for introducing new technology. Ecotourism has become a catch phrase in the industry for its potential to monopolize on the positive impacts while avoiding the negative (World Tourism Organization 2005; McLaren 1998).

Ecotourism is defined by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people” (The International Ecotourism Society 2005). Ecotourism, by definition, advocates the principles of sustainable development. Defined by the Brundtland Report of 1987 (Smith 2001), sustainable development incorporates three goals: environmental protection, economic growth, and social equity. It is within this framework that government agencies and non-governmental organizations concerned with sustainability have targeted ecotourism as an appropriate strategy for development.

Martha Honey (1999:25) redefines ecotourism in a context of its historical development and its popularity as a tool for sustainable development.
Ecotourism managed within these parameters can be a positive resource in pursuing the goals of sustainable development. Since the 1970’s rise of the environmental movement and the need to eradicate Third World debt, multilateral agencies such as the World Bank and now USAID have promoted ecotourism as a development tool and conservation strategy. The Third World, too, has turned to ecotourism as an environmentally friendly foreign exchange earner. With the recent privatization trend and increasing globalization, ecotourism has taken a firm hold in Third World nations (Honey 1999).

Unfortunately, the potential benefits of ecotourism are too often compromised by its short-term economic gains. There is a fine line between eco-tourism and tourism. Even ecotourism can destroy the resources on which it depends, thereby undermining not only the host communities and their environments, but also the principles of sustainable development that it can potentially uphold. The goal, says Honey, is to move tourism permanently from its place as a mere niche within nature travel to something that acts as a vehicle for “greening” the whole industry, not just “greenwashing” it (Honey 1999).

Brundtland Report, has had a strong influence on the development of sustainably minded tourism. In fact, Smith writes, the WCED born Rio Earth Summit “identified Travel and Tourism as one of the key economic sectors that could make a positive contribution to achieving sustainable development” (2001:191). Ecotourism has naturally evolved out of the environment created by initiatives such as Rio’s landmark Agenda 21, an agreement between 179 governments world-wide to work toward sustainable development (Smith 2001).

Smith defines ecotourism as “nature-based tourism that reputedly supports environmental conservation, social responsibility with respect for indigenous culture, sensitivity to the economic balance sheet” (2001:194-195). Ecotourism promotes resource preservation, provides opportunities for economic gain, and encourages more wide-spread environmental awareness among populations traditionally not inclined to be so. Ecotourism also stresses environmental carrying capacities, requires a great deal of economic inputs, and intrudes upon local and sometimes isolated cultures. Of the risks associated with ecotourism the greatest is its growth potential. Ecotourism is only feasible on a small scale; successful ecotourism ventures risk becoming “‘economic’ tourism, not ecotourism” (Smith 2001:196).

Worldwide recognition of the role tourism can play in reducing poverty and promoting sustainable development, particularly in developing countries, is growing. The impacts of tourism are both positive and negative, but when planned and implemented carefully, pro-poor tourism can be achieved. Pro-poor tourism is a term used to indicate tourism strategies oriented to eliminate or reduce poverty, and can be
considered a form of ecotourism. Unlike regular tourism in which few of the economic benefits reach the poor, pro-poor or ecotourism is community based and takes a bottom-up approach to development. Sustainable tourism, as this type of tourism is also called, also incorporates stakeholder involvement (i.e. local NGOs, minority or marginalized social groups, business associations, municipal governments, etc.); local ownership of tourism infrastructure; accountability for use of public goods; establishing local business linkages; sustainability of the resource base; community goals; cooperation between stakeholders; impact assessment of carrying capacity; monitoring and evaluation; and appropriate training and education (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific 2003).

Cater (1994) writes of the Third World’s comparative advantage in terms of their extensive and unspoiled diverse natural resources. This, combined with their balance of payment difficulties creates a situation where ecotourism, capitalizing on their bountiful resources, plays hero. Although in theory ecotourism would have a symbiotic relationship with the host community and environment, in reality ecotourism is subject to the same risks as regular tourism, and sometimes even to a greater extent. Ecotourism usually attracts people to natural areas that may be more prone to disruption, thus even small numbers of visitors can have a large negative impact. Third World nations are less likely to have the policies in place to protect sensitive areas, even if they are relied upon for ecotourism generated revenues. Additionally, the average ecotourist’s profile indicates that these individuals, usually
coming from wealthy, developed countries, are likely to have infrastructural and service requirements that lead to changes in traditional ways of life (Cater 1994).

To prevent the negative aspects of ecotourism and to keep ecotourism in line with the goals of sustainable development, three steps must be taken by the governments of the Third World. First, there needs to be market intervention in order to force tourism companies to pay for environmental externalities through methods such as user fees in national parks. Second, there needs to be integration between ecotourism and other development strategies. Third, and perhaps most important, governments need to ensure local people are involved. Local participation in tourism of any kind is the single most powerful factor for success. Because ecotourism activities typically involve resources that local people depend on for survival, ecotourism needs to ensure they are not only involved in the process of ecotourism development, but that their access to resources is not compromised as a result (Cater 1994).

4.2.1 Case study: Bay Islands, Honduras

Anthropologist Susan Stonich has spent over twenty years studying the dynamics of tourism as economic development and impetus for conservation in the Bay of Islands, Honduras. While Stonich does not focus specifically on ecotourism, her analysis of tourism’s relationship to people, poverty, and environment is worth discussing here. Stonich’s primary analytical tool for her assessment of tourism development has been political ecology, a way of looking at human-environmental
interactions which tends to focus on the structural, economic, social and political processes underlying environmental change. Political ecology is most commonly defined as combining the concerns of ecology and political economy to address “the constantly shifting dialectic between society and land-based resources, and also within classes and groups within society itself” (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987:17). In other words, political ecology “attempts to understand how environmental and political forces interact to affect social and environmental changes through the actions of various social actors at different scales” (Stonich 1998). Using political ecology as an analytical framework meant Stonich looked at several factors influencing resource use: ideologies, international interests, global economy, role of the state, class and ethnic structures, relationships among users, and diversity of local resource use decision making. Underlying a political ecology analysis is recognition that environmental degradation and poverty in developing countries is directly related to socially institutionalized unequal access to resources (Stonich 1998).

Tourism in the Bay Islands started slowly in the 1960s. Attracted by the beautiful beaches and pristine, protected coral reefs, tourism growth became explosive during the 1990s, nearly doubling every year. Land speculation by outside real estate investors and in-migration by poor mainlanders looking for work are two of the most powerful influences on recent tourism inspired change. Large tracts of the best real estate have been turned into upscale resorts and housing subdivisions. Local people have lost access to important resources and face increased competition for tourism-
created jobs. Meanwhile, tourism development has led to massive environmental degradation such as contamination of local drinking water.

Stonich has been very critical of tourism development; her work illustrates the complex power relationships between resource user groups and their influence on the local biophysical environment. In the Bay Islands, the people with the least amount of power and influence on decisions relating to resource use are most directly linked to the negative impacts associated with those decisions (Stonich 1998). Tourism in the Bay Islands has exaggerated local inequalities. Tourism there has expanded the divide between the marginalized poor and the more powerful wealthy; has reduced access to local natural resources on which the poorest people are most heavily dependent for their livelihoods; has led to inflated prices for necessary goods and services; has increased outside ownership and control of local resources; and has degraded the biophysical environment (Stonich 1998).

In another critique of tourism development based on her work in the Bay Islands, Stonich (2005) contextualizes her work by giving a brief history of integrated conservation and development projects (ICDPs). ICDPs were the brainchild of World Wildlife Fund (WWF) during the international focus on sustainable development during the 1980s. These projects were begun as a response to concerns about how to balance the often opposing requirements of environmental conservation and economic development. The first generation of ICDPs fell painfully short of success by excluding local people from the new management plans. In this first generation, conservation was the priority and local people were viewed as the source of
environmental degradation in protected areas. The 1990’s second generation of ICDPs was more successful, largely due to the inclusion of local people in management plans. These projects prioritized the importance of grassroots development and collaborative management between communities and governments (Stonich 2005).

In the Bay Islands, most tourism development has avoided the integration of conservation. Where conservation is an aspect of the management plan it ignores the interests of the average local resident. Only minimal efforts are put into training local people to guard the protected areas, guide the tourists, or produce crafts to sell to the tourists. As a result, there is growing hostility regionally by local people who have diminished access to local resources and who receive few benefits from the tourism activities happening there (Stonich 2005).

The overwhelming emphasis on conservation in the study sites is on regulation and enforcement, and in this way is closely similar to the first generation of ICDPs. Three lessons learned by WWF in assessing the two generations of ICDPs apply here: strict enforcement is costly financially and politically and does not by itself prevent the illegal use of resources; resource users’ attitudes and behaviors are not necessarily changed by compensation; people’s resource use patterns are hard to change and doing so requires understanding their lives’ dynamic socio-political and economic circumstances (Stonich 2005).

Stonich’s research in the Bay Islands informed a long list of recommendations to improve conservation and development through tourism. The underlying
assumption of these recommendations is that effective community participation relies on an understanding of social relations. Included on this list are: identifying all relevant stakeholders, the existing power structure and how it links stakeholders, and the costs and benefits of current program trends; facilitating collaboration between stakeholders to determine best practices for program implementation, conflict resolution, power equity, and networking; and ensure community representatives are accountable, local people benefit economically and in other ways from projects, and cultural survival is integrated into programs (Stonich 2005; Stonich 1998).

4.2.2 Case study: Baja Sur California, Mexico

Emily Young (1999) also explores the relationships between tourism, conservation, and economic development within a political ecology framework. Like Stonich, Young claims unequal access to natural resources and poverty are intimately connected in developing regions, and that any effort to promote resource conservation needs to address the “interconnected ecological, resource use, and socioeconomic concerns,” (Young 1999:582) as well as the critical role of local participation. This author looks specifically at ecotourism as a mode for economic development and conservation in the small-scale fisheries of Mexico’s Baja California peninsula. Young explores whether or not employment in ecotourism is a viable, economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable alternative to more extractive forms of livelihood.
The waters surrounding Baja California Sur contain Mexico’s richest fisheries. Since the 1970s, the region’s inshore commercial fisheries, particularly small-scale producers, have grown tremendously. This growth has led to increased conflict over local resource access and significant environmental degradation, including the near extinction of certain species. Meanwhile, tourism in the region has also experienced explosive growth. Many stakeholders (i.e. fishermen, government officials, environmental organizations) have turned their attention to whale watching ecotourism as an economic alternative to fishing that promotes conservation while providing livelihood opportunities for local people. Young (1999) used ethnographic methods and participant observation to determine the extent to which whale watching is truly a viable alternative to fishing for Baja Sur.

Several factors have influenced the gross explosion and then decline of commercial fishing since World War II in the two communities where Young conducted her work. The introduction of new fishing technologies like gill nets, refrigeration, and motor-boats has enabled more intensive harvesting. Additionally, the rapid growth of the fishing industry attracted a steady and strong flow of immigrants from more impoverished areas of Mexico. Between 1980 and 1992, the size of the fishing population increased by over 400% in Baja Sur. The inevitable has happened: such large scale harvesting could not be sustained and local people now complain that it is increasingly less likely to have a good harvest (Young 1999).

By their nature, common pool resources are susceptible to mismanagement and overexploitation. In fisheries, one way of preventing Garret Hardin’s “tragedy of the
commons” is through community-based governance based on regulating access. Likewise, eroding the strength of the community’s ability to govern and regulate these resources is commercialization and centralized management that also transfers decision making power from producers to processors and retailers. This scenario can be catastrophic, leading to short term catch maximization and in the long term, chronic over harvesting (Young 1999).

Though whale watching ecotourism has been happening in Baja Sur since about the 1970s, it has only been since the late 1980s that local people began becoming involved in it. Since then it has become increasingly more common for local fishermen to take tourists out on their boats on off-fishing days. Looking at the conditions precipitating the environmental decline of the local fisheries, Young speculates that whale watching could eventually meet a similar fate. The marginalization of local people by state policies favoring large, commercial, outside interests has not only lead to commercial over harvesting of fisheries in Baja Sur, it has served as a disincentive for small-scale producers to restrict their harvest as well. As it has grown in economic importance, ecotourism, too, has induced conflicts over resource access, often pitting large ecotourism companies against small-scale, local fishermen.

In the two Baja Sur communities in which Young conducted her research, tourism has been managed differently and had different results. In one community, a local whale tourism company was formed by local government. This company hired mostly outside operators to undertake the tourism activities, with the exception of one
local boat driver. There was a great deal of frustration expressed by the community about their limited ability to be involved, and ultimately to profit individually from tourism. Young’s second community established an ecotourism cooperative in which all interested community members could take turns participating in tourism activities, thus spreading the benefits out among more broadly among the local population.

Establishing a more effective community-based institution to manage and regulate tourism activities in the area has worked better than in the first community. There have still been conflicts regarding appropriate resource use, however. Both towns have experienced competition over access to resources, especially as tourism grows in economic importance regionally. The resulting behavior has been reckless, short-sighted, and focused on individual gains instead of collective benefits. These actions threaten to scare away the whales and doom tourism to the same fate as local fishing.

The bottom line in Young’s two study communities is that ecotourism suffers from the same potential risks of mismanagement and exploitative practices as fishing. The benefits from ecotourism are not enough to relieve some of the extractive pressures on the inshore fisheries. Regional conflicts over access to and use of fish resources have only worsened with the addition of ecotourism to the regional economy. The common-pool status of fish and whales and local people’s unequal access to those resources prompted unsustainable behavior in Baja California Sur. Any efforts to identify effective strategies for implementing alternative economic opportunities in marine areas need to consider the dynamic conditions influencing use of local
resources. Young (1999) concludes with the suggestion that resolving conflicts over
resource use concerning ecotourism could potentially lead to the resolution of more
deeply entrenched conflicts over fishing, and ultimately even the destructive over
harvesting of the commercial fisheries.

4.2.3 Case studies: Zimbabwe & Nepal

Sanjay Nepal (1997) investigated the impact of tourism as conservation and
development in protected areas. Of specific importance to Nepal’s study is whether or
not ecotourism adequately addresses the livelihood needs of local people. The
author’s work is based largely on tourism literature, on personal observations in
protected areas, and seven years of experience in protected areas management.
Nepal’s analysis is from a historical dependency perspective.

Given the trend internationally for tourism to operate from the developed core
to the poor and developing periphery (Azarya 2004), tourism in developing countries
exhibits four symptoms of dependency on the more powerful core regions (Nepal
1997). First, tourism development is at least initially dependent on the global political
economy. Second, once tourism becomes the principle economic activity at the local
(village) level the local economy becomes vulnerable to the fickle booms and busts of
the international tourism industry. Third, tourism in developing regions depends far
more on nature than on the built environment. Finally, and most importantly, tourism
in developing regions usually implies villages and households are dependent on the
decisions of the elite few who are involved in tourism, thereby contributing to the disparity between rich and poor (Nepal 1997).

Tourism in protected areas involves remote, rural, poor communities who rely on natural resources for subsistence. Protecting natural areas usually involves restricting access to those natural resources, further marginalizing an already marginalized population. Ecotourism, or sustainable tourism, is hailed as a way to mitigate the negative impacts of protected area development on local people. A complicating factor in prescribing tourism as the be all, end all solution to meeting livelihood needs in these protected areas is how to limit the breadth of tourism so as to not compromise the integrity of the natural areas while at the same time meeting stakeholder needs. Given the current growth of tourism world-wide, and particularly in developing regions, tourism in protected areas is likely to grow. So too are the number of protected areas in the world. Finding a balance to tourism development, conservation, and livelihood is at the crux of all sustainable or eco-tourism programs (Nepal 1997).

Meeting livelihood needs in sustainable tourism is a difficult and rarely successful challenge. Though tourism is associated with improvements to local livelihoods, Nepal claims the beneficiaries are only a small handful of rich and powerful outsiders and a few local elite. Conversely, the vast majority of local people near protected areas are impacted in negative ways from tourism development there. Local people lose access to a resource base on which they were previously dependent for subsistence and/or commercial livelihood. When outsiders control tourism it is the
cause of income disparity, which then leads to conflict. Likewise, local people are often denied the services readily available to tourists, like healthcare (Nepal 1997).

Nepal discusses two case studies of tourism that met conservation and livelihood needs. In detailing the extent to which each program was successful, the author presents a short list of necessary components for similar program success elsewhere. Both of these case studies, the Zimbabwean CAMPFIRE and the Nepalese ACAP projects, demonstrated the critical importance of community participation in finding the difficult balance between conservation and livelihood improvement through tourism (Nepal 1997).

Zimbabwe’s CAMPFIRE (Communal Areas Management Program For Indigenous Resources) program was a collaborative effort of national government and NGOs to empower local communities in wildlife-based tourism decision making, thereby distributing the benefits of tourism while limiting the negative impacts of creating the protected area. There are over twenty different Districts, or communities bordering national parks, in Zimbabwe. The program was started with the hope it would alleviate community frustrations about their proximity to protected areas (such as wild animals destroying their crops) and the negative behavior that resulted (such as illegal poaching of wild animals). CAMPFIRE is a revenue sharing concept founded on a trust fund that is financed by the sale of rights to sport hunt and operate safari tours on communal lands. Democratically elected local committees redistribute money from the Trust in various ways as deemed necessary by their individual communities. Some examples of how this money is used include: compensation for
fields destroyed by wild animals from the neighboring national park, subsidies to lower the cost of meat, money to builds fence to protect crops. Within a few years of program implementation the previous problems with illegal resource harvest were significantly reduced. CAMPFIRE’s success is due to its ability to link tourism with tangible, positive benefits for local people, and the presence of local people in deciding how those benefits are received (Nepal 1997).

The second case study involves the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) in Nepal. This conservation area was founded on the premise that local people are the natural custodians of the area in which they live. Community participation in natural resource conservation is at the very core of ACAP. Like the Zimbabwean Trust, the Annapurna Project charges user fees to tourists that are put into an endowment. Money from the fund is then distributed by community decree for community development projects related to health, education, conservation, etc. Just as with the CAMPFIRE program, ACAP has been remarkably successful in mitigating the negative impacts imposed on local people with the establishment of a protected area by engaging them in its management and ensuring direct, tangible benefit from the tourism taking place there (Nepal 1997).

Nepal identifies some common elements for the success of Zimbabwe’s CAMPFIRE and Nepal’s ACAP. First, the benefits of tourism of tourism should outweigh the costs of living within or near the protected area, and the link between the benefits received by local people and the conservation of the protected area should be clearly visible to local people. There should also be some choice in how benefits are
received. Second, local participation is critical. The people with the most at stake in the success or failure of these tourism projects should be directly involved in planning and implementing them. Finally, programs must include social, economic, and political components that engage community participants, governments, and conservation groups. Threaded among all three of these elements is the insistence that community needs be placed above those of the tourism industry. Tourism projects should only be one part of the local economy to avoid the potentially devastating effects of dependence on a fickle industry. By linking tourism projects with community development there is a way to use tourism to fund the development of support industries like farming, handicraft production, and horticulture, to name a few. If done right, balancing conservation and local development through tourism helps alleviate the potential conflicts between local people and protected area authorities (Nepal 1997).

4.3. Poverty

“Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom” (The World Bank 2008).

Most governments, international organizations and agencies use the World Bank’s $1 dollar and $2 dollar per day minimum to classify household extreme poverty and poverty around the globe. Many of the world’s poor people rely on their
natural environment for subsistence and sustenance. These are largely rural poor people in developing countries—in the very same places where ecotourism is heralded as a clean form of economic development (Mock & Steele 2006). Eradicating global poverty and hunger is the first on the list of eight Millennium Goals established by the United Nations Development Program in 2000 (United Nations 2008). Sustainable development projects, including some ecotourism ventures, usually include poverty alleviation as at least a core goal, if not the primary motivation for implementation (Barkin 2003).

Poverty in rural areas and ecotourism are similar. Both rely on the integrity of surrounding natural resources to survive. Both are likewise impacted when those resources are compromised. Similarly, both have the capacity to cause harm to the resources through overexploitation. Because of its reliance on stable, pristine natural places, ecotourism in poor areas (e.g. Cambodia’s Tonle Sap Lake) is as dependent on the integrity of the natural resources as the people living there are for their subsistence livelihoods. If ecotourism is to be truly sustainable, poverty alleviation should be more than just a small piece of the overall tourism development program, it should be a core philosophy. While the studies presented in this literature review up to this point have focused on tourism’s ability to promote conservation and economic development, this section will look specifically at two studies that keep the importance of poverty alleviation in clear focus. Additionally, this section will explore a non-tourism analysis of the connection between poverty and fishing as an example of the important link between natural systems and the people who depend on them.
It is the poorest peoples in the world who rely most heavily on natural resources for day to day survival. Nearly half the jobs world-wide rely on fisheries, forests, and agriculture; most of these are in rural, poor areas. In addition to rural cash economies depending on nature, many of the rural poor live subsistence based livelihoods. The high level of dependence that poor, rural people, especially in the developing world, have on their natural surroundings is disproportionate to their level of control over those resources. Making matters worse, corruption and mismanagement of natural systems in developing areas often leads to degraded ecosystems and increased poverty. To truly tackle global poverty, development programs need to incorporate mutually dependent ecosystem management and democratic governance: giving a voice to local people and empowering them to use it to improve their lives. Alleviating poverty is directly linked to sustaining natural systems—a feat that will require local participation in resource management, more equal access for poor people to natural resources, and feasible models for developing nature-based services and products (Mock & Steele 2006).

4.3.1 Case study: Monarch Butterfly Reserve, Mexico

In Mexico’s Monarch Butterfly Reserve, a combination of unique local, national, and international forces have influenced the direction and impact of tourism development. This case study, explored by David Barkin (2003), is largely an example of a failed opportunity for ecotourism to benefit local people and contribute to alleviating their poverty. Barkin reiterates Nepal’s (1997) heed that ecotourism, or
any tourism, as development should only be one piece of a diversified local economy that fits the needs and means of local communities. Since the inception of the Butterfly Reserve in 1986, profound change has been forced on the poor people located nearby. These people, the traditional stewards of the forest landscape, have had little say in management decisions that directly affect their livelihood. The consequence of outside based, top-town management that has not incorporated local opinion or participation and that has significantly limited their resource-based livelihood has led to the deterioration of local economy and community (Barkin 2003).

Establishment of the Butterfly Reserve was sponsored by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) through a national Mexican NGO and funded by a well meaning but uninformed group of Mexican businessmen not long after international attention was brought to the remarkable transcontinental journey of the migratory Monarch butterfly. No consultation with local people occurred before establishing the Reserve. Local communities in the area had traditionally relied on small-scale, family based timber and cottage industries like artisan pottery, supplemented by subsistence agriculture, to sustain their rural, peasant economies. Before the creation of the Butterfly Reserve, these communities were poor. That poverty was already a source of tensions created by Mexico’s ineffective development policies that favored the powerful elite. Creation of the Reserve virtually fenced off their primary source of livelihood—the forest—without compensation for the lost resource. Meanwhile, the economic opportunities associated with the development of protected area tourism were not capitalized effectively. Ecotourism planning was an afterthought, minimal
infrastructure to support the tourists was incorporated into the Reserve’s management plan, and the few jobs created were sub-contracted to just one of many communities in the area. The lack of alternative economic opportunity for increasingly marginalized local people left them frustrated and forced to resort to illegal logging at the expense of ecosystem health and out-migration for low-wage jobs far from families and community. Ecotourism has expanded with the substantial increase in annual visitors but local people are not participants, a fact that further exacerbates the associated problems of environmental degradation and social decay (Barkin 2003).

Barkin offers an alternative model to the current tourism plan in the Monarch Butterfly Reserve that puts community needs at the core. First, there needs to be recognition that local people have a right to participate in management of and receive benefit from any activities reliant on the natural resources in question—the forest and the Monarch Butterfly. Regional ecotourism is dependent on the Monarch, which is in turn dependent on an intact, pristine habitat. Ensuring the long term sustainability of both will depend on local participation. Facilitating local participation relies on strengthening traditional sociopolitical organizations within the community. Second, there must be diversification in production activities so income generation is not dependent on any one sector and the community is not just a shell of tourism-oriented services. Finally, a concerted effort to expand the seasonal nature of tourism to a more year-round industry will greatly improve its sustainability. More recent, grassroots initiatives among the communities surrounding the Reserve have considered some of these options for improving the effectiveness of ecotourism in improving livelihood.
These initiatives have been met with substantial opposition by powerful outside interests who have political and economic stakes at risk. Eliminating the spiraling condition of poverty involves empowering local people with decision making power to control local natural resources and ultimately, their own future (Barkin 2003).

4.3.2 Case studies: Urban and Rural South Africa

Poverty is sometimes identified in terms of employment rates. In places where there is little opportunity for employment, or where local industry on which the community is dependent has collapsed, local people are poor. Examining the different paths of development for ecotourism in two South African communities, Hill, Nel, and Trotter (2006) identified some strengths and shortcomings of tourism as a strategy for poverty reduction.

One of the tourism projects was undertaken in a moderately sized town and was an initiative of the municipal government. This community had recently experienced high unemployment due to the collapse of the local mining industry, on which the local economy had been dependent. The tourism project involved the creation of a wild game park, as well as the construction of amenities and other related tourism infrastructure.

The second tourism project was done in the commercial hub of a remote, rural, mountainous region. Capitalizing on the beautiful and pristine landscapes of their surrounding environment, this tourism project was started by a local NGO with collaborative partners and involved constructing a hiking trail and guest amenities.
There were over twenty communities in the cooperative that started the tourism project but the trail only passed through four; guest houses were built in these four communities for visitors to stay the night in along their way.

Tourism development in both communities led to the creation of jobs, thus impacting poverty by offering income generating opportunities. Initially, there was a surge of employment opportunities as facilities were constructed, and then employment fell to just a handful of permanent jobs. Only those employed permanently by tourism expressed positive livelihood improvements and a decline in poverty. The unequal spread of benefits was noted by community members who felt they had been excluded from potential opportunity. According to the authors, however, the earnings made by the few who benefited were shared across extended family households and spent locally, multiplying the effect of the benefit (Hill et al. 2006).

Both projects were implemented as collaborative efforts between community leaders and institutions, and outside groups like government, conservation groups, and private consultants. These partnerships and the sharing among them of resources, information, and skills contributed to program success and exemplified the positive role such partnerships can have in general for sustainable development projects. At least some degree of program success in both instances was attributed to the central role local participation played in planning, implementing, and managing these projects. Overall, the development of skills, some sustainable employment, and local economic
development were the primary and most tangible benefits associated with both projects (Hill et al. 2006).

The process of implementing and then the benefits received from the two South African tourism projects illuminated some shortcomings of tourism as poverty alleviation and economic development. First, poor, disadvantaged communities frequently have issues of land access and tenure. Without more open access to resources, development schemes and their associated livelihood improvements could be hindered. Second, the small-scale nature of ecotourism means there is a limit to the level of employment available before reaching saturation. The combination of limited access to local resources on which the ecotourism activities depend and limited opportunities for direct livelihood improvements means tourism should be only one piece of a diversified local economy that can more broadly address community needs and lead to poverty alleviation.

4.3.3 Poverty and fishing

Poverty and fishing-based livelihoods often go hand in hand. Bene (2003) uses an analysis of literature regarding fisheries to inform his hypothesis that “the social and institutional mechanisms which take place within and around the fisheries play a very important role in the maintenance, alleviation, or aggravation of poverty in fisheries-dependent communities” (Bene, 2003:950). As a common-pool resource, fisheries are often harvested by those with access to no other sources of income or subsistence resources. The nature of this use pattern has historically been given both
as an answer to why poor people fish, and also to explain why fisheries are often overfished to the point of depletion. Poverty, though most often associated with lack of food, is a multidimensional state that includes low income, low social status, lack of political voice, limited access to amenities like education and medical care, and poor health. By this definition, rural areas and their lack of development are more prone to impoverished conditions. Fishing communities are typically rural and isolated, have inadequate services, are poorly organized and without a political voice, and susceptible to natural disasters and accidents. Fishing communities and poverty, therefore, go hand in hand.

More important than the relationship between poverty and fisheries is the role of politics in access to, control of, and redistribution of resources. Resource use depends on social status (including cultural, political, and economical status), as well as the “institutional arrangements which legitimize and govern these commands” (Bene 2003:959). How the “social, cultural, and political elements which shape the relationship between poor people and these natural resources, and between poor and less poor people” is the emphasis of Bene’s paper (2003:959). In terms of poverty and fisheries, the most important factor is resource access. Reduced access to fishery resources given the already impoverished state of many rural fishermen perpetuates their state of poverty and powerlessness (Bene 2003).

Influencing use of and access to resources are: economic exclusion, social marginalization, class exploitation, and political disempowerment. The economic exclusion of poor people in fisheries contributes to their demise. Fisheries are far
from truly open access resources. Rights to fish in the most productive areas of a fishery are often privatized or granted to a powerful individual in exchange by government officials for a bribe. The most profitable gear is also the most expensive, limiting use by poor fishermen who can not afford to buy it. In these ways, access to the fishery is substantially reduced for poor fishermen by the wealthier, powerful elite (Bene 2003).

Other factors influence access and use of fishery resources by poor people. Social marginalization based on class, ethnicity, or family affiliations restricts access to fishery resources. Class exploitation, too, restricts access of the poor by the rich. This oppressive relationship is experienced in fisheries when wealthy, powerful fishermen with resource access obligate poor, less powerful fishermen who then owe them gratitude for allowing rights to fish in the productive fishery. Cambodia’s fishing lot system and its water-lord lessees is an example of class exploitation in fisheries. Finally, political disempowerment, or the exclusion of poor people from important political and economic decisions, reduces poor people’s access to fishery resources as well. The imbalance of power in rural fisheries means the controlling elites can and do justify their actions through the institutions they create and administer. The poor are powerless against this process even though they are usually the most negatively influenced by it. Using Cambodia’s fishing lot system as an example, Bene calls the process resulting from common-pool resources being commandeered by lot lessees and local elites an “enclosure of the commons. Again, it is the poorest people in the community who most greatly feel the effects of the
resource on which they depend for subsistence effectively being closed by the imbalance of power and lack of government accountability (Bene 2003).

4.4. Corruption

As potential sources of wealth, the natural systems on which people and industry both depend are susceptible to mismanagement due to corruption, especially in places lacking strong infrastructure and history of democracy (Mock & Steele 2006). Poverty is one of the key ingredients for corrupt practices, which when combined with insufficient civil service salaries means developing nations are at highest risk for corruption (Gray & Kaufmann 1998). Where motivation is ripe for corruption, opportunities are plenty, thanks to the broad discretion employed by many government officials in developing countries, inconsistent and ineffective public policies, weak accountability, and an unbalanced political-legal relationship (Gray & Kaufmann 1998). Frequently, it is the use and disbursement of developing countries’ natural resources that are the cause of corruption inspired decisions. The outcome of these decisions hits poor people hardest, as they are the least powerful in negotiating bribes and most likely to suffer from consequential resource degradation (Mock & Steele 2006). This section will review two articles discussing the role of corruption in natural resource management and the importance of community-based management plans as way to alleviate corrupt practices, secure sustainable use of resources, and lead to more tangible benefits for the community.
4.4.1 Case study: Rajasthan, India

Robbins (2000) asserts that corruption is not something that happens in an institutional vacuum, it is merely an alternative institution likely to occur under certain conditions. Built on mutual trust and cooperation, corruption happens between agents who exchange materials for obligations. Corruption in natural resource management is “the use or overuse of community (state, village, city, etc.) natural resources with the consent of a state agent by those not legally entitled. It is the extension of existing non-economic relationships (family, ‘friendship’, and other socially obligating relations) to determine access to these use rights through normative systems of expected exchange” (Robbins 2000:425). One of the most potent characteristics of corruption is the way it feeds off and reinforces “the power schisms that already plague access to natural resources while extending them into common goods legally established to be shared by all” (Robbins 2000:430). Corruption is particularly potent where there is a high degree of inequality between social actors, and where common pool resources are heavily relied upon (Robbins 2000).

Using an Indian case study as context, Robbins (2000) explains the unsustainability of corruption from the perspective of institutional ecology. The author also shows how this perspective might inform solutions to corruption in natural resource management. Corruption in the villages adjacent to the wildlife preserve is wide-spread, encompassing use of local resources by rich and poor alike. Institutional ecology assumes that a sustainable natural resource management system is one in which changes are made as necessary to adapt to ecological changes. Corruption is an
unsustainable institution because it renders useless the norms and rules that respond to ecosystem change while strengthening the inequalities ultimately causing unsustainable use. “Feedback information about ecosystem response is thereby impaired, flexibility is minimized, and change is made largely impossible. It is thus the very inequity of the institution under corruption, which hinders flexibility and information flow and disables ecological sustainability” (Robbins 2000:432).

In the villages surrounding a wildlife preserve in the Indian state of Rajasthan, state foresters are at the root of a complex, community wide system of corruption that supplies a regional illegal forest products market. Although traditional harvest of resources at subsistence levels for local people is permitted within laws governing the wildlife preserve, a much larger harvest is permitted through bribery between local officials and user groups. This allowance is embedded in the preexisting power structures of India’s caste system. Foresters, for example, who come mostly from a high caste, dictate the conditions under which bribery for illegal harvest occurs, and favor exchanges with family members and other social elites. Meanwhile, poor villagers from lower castes are powerless to resist the unequal exchanges, resigned in their complacency to pay more for resources than they would otherwise have to (Robbins 2000).

Anti-corruption measures in India have typically taken the form of additional levels of bureaucratic power and oversight. This approach to solving the wide spread corruption in places like the villages in Rajasthan, though, relies on the belief that corruption is caused by the absences of state authority. Robbins (2000) argues that
corruption is not the absence of state authority, it is the remaking of it. Including an additional level of that authority only means one more level of government will need to be bribed. A better approach to solving corruption, the author states, comes from an institutional ecology perspective. Reorganizing the institutions of local power through the creation of community-wide, bottom-up oversight would have a better chance of holding foresters and other government officials accountable than simply another level of bureaucracy. Because this type of management would also foster an increased flow of information among resource users it also increases the likelihood of sustainable resource use (Robbins 2000).

4.4.2 Case study: Tanzania

Robbins’ (2000) case purporting the importance of reorganizing local institutions for better control of natural resources implies decentralization of management. Brockington (2008) argues that reorganization alone will not have success. It is the way these new structures operate that has an impact on their effectiveness in more equitable, sustainable governing. By discussing the operation of local taxes and development projects in Tanzania, Brockington (2008) explores the role of community managed natural resources for conservation and improved local governance, the relationship between increased taxation and effective democracy, and the connection between democracy and corruption. Brockington’s (2008) research about the performance of local governments was compiled anthropologically during a year on site in Tanzania.
Local government in Tanzania operates without a substantial degree of accountability, transparency, or justice. Complaints were frequent among villagers about the lack of money being spent by the government on their development needs despite the high amount of money raised by taxes, like “milking a cow without feeding it” (Brockington 2008:114). There was a strong and widespread belief that local taxes were instead spent on corrupt, illegal activities. Logistics of tax collection, distribution, and administration were substantially flawed, leading to inconsistent, inequitable taxation, no clear knowledge of the amount of money raised or spent, and exploitation by government officials, among other things. Wealthy, migratory herders openly bribed officials to ignore complaints about the cattle grazing local crops before harvest, exasperating already tense relationships between local and migratory peoples. Additionally, local people feared economic or physical consequences for speaking out against government abuses. Taken together, these are all examples of how local government inspired little faith in local people about its ability to effectively, honorably do its job. “The expectation was that money will be misspent and positions abused for personal profit” (Brockington 2008:118).

Democracy and transparency are not necessarily prerequisites for community-based conservation, however. In fact, community-based conservation could strengthen local democracy and build transparency in the long term. Advocating for better management of natural resources on which all in a community depend might give incentive for community-sponsored initiatives that could potentially impact other institutions of power. Overlooking or downgrading the scale of problems inhibiting
effective natural resource management, like those in Tanzania, could therefore be an impediment to successful local action.

Achieving adversity-inspired community empowerment and accountable, effective government is central, then, to eliminating corruption and sustainably managing natural resources. Success, though difficult, comes from winning rights instead of being given them, a process of local learning in which the community identifies problems, fights for solutions, and learns to maintain them:

“New power structures, or rights which are fought for, are likely to be stronger because their presence will have required the active engagement of villagers. The struggles will have altered the cultures of democracy which guide the elected and appointed officials and the electorates. Yet this suggests that villagers will actively oppose the abusive practices which weaken the system, and there is little evidence of this, which leads to the conundrum” (Brockington 2008:122).

The conundrum of which Brockington spoke was the overwhelming acceptance of corrupt activities despite the severity of their unpopularity (Brockington, 2008).

4.5. Conclusion

In the study of tourism anthropology, a critical and missing piece is the host perspective (Stronza 2001; Stonich 2005). Tourism is often criticized for its negative impacts and lack of substantial benefit for local people (Smith 1989; McLaren 1998). Ecotourism has emerged not only as one of the fastest growing niches within tourism but one that supposedly avoids negative impacts to the hosts while providing them benefits (Honey 1999). In the developing world, ecotourism is of particular relevance because it promotes conservation of resources otherwise subject to less sustainable use

Exploring how local people perceive these potential costs and benefits is necessary for moving past the prescriptive strategies of past program development toward a more integrated, community oriented approach (Stronza 2001).

Ecotourism can be a very effective method of sustainable development because of its emphasis on responsible resource use, economic development, and livelihood improvement. Because by nature ecotourism draws visitors to ecologically sensitive areas, carrying capacity is one of the greatest concerns with ecotourism development (Smith 2001; Honey 1999; Cater 1994). Ecotourism is more likely to be sustainable if there is integration between it and other development strategies (Cater 1994; Barkin 2003; Hill et al. 2006), if local people are involved (Stonich 2005; Nepal 1997), and accountability for resource use through devices like protected area user fees (Economic and Social Commission 2003; Cater 1994).

Without a doubt, two of the most important factors for successful ecotourism are local participation and recognized benefit for local people (Stonich 1998; Stonich 2005; Cater 1994; Young 1999; Nepal 1997; Hill et al. 2006). While conservation is at the heart of most ecotourism development, when implemented from the top down it can lead to the marginalization of local people by limiting access to natural resources depended on for subsistence or traditional economies (Nepal 1997; Barkin 2003). Unequal access to resources is associated with environmental degradation in developing areas (Young 1999). Environmental degradation threatens not only local livelihoods but the potential to improve them through ecotourism (Barkin 2003).
Local participation reduces the possibility for resource conflicts and improves the chances for recognizable, appropriate local benefits (Stonich 2005; Barkin 2003). Additionally, community-based ecotourism can be a catalyst for successful conservation efforts.

A community orientation and grassroots initiatives are also important for poverty alleviation (Barkin 2003; Hill et al. 2006). The same fundamental requirements for successful ecotourism apply to alleviate poverty. Collaboration among stakeholders and economic diversification are crucial for both endeavors (Hill et al. 2006). Expanding economic opportunity in an equitable manner that does not compromise the surrounding ecosystem and that uses community input can improve local quality of life. Improving local quality of life in this way can also empower disadvantaged communities to demand equal access to, appropriate use of and accountability in natural resource distribution from unjust or corrupt resource management regimes (Barkin 2003; Bene 2003).

It is in the world’s poorest places, like the Tonle Sap region of Cambodia, that natural resources play the most crucial role in meeting the basic needs of local people (Mock & Steele 2006). The poverty, centralized governance, dependence on common pool resources, and widespread inequalities in these places create an environment ripe for corruption (Gray & Kaufmann 1998; Robbins 2000). While poverty is one of the key ingredients for corrupt natural resource management, conservation can mobilize communities to deconstruct that corruption through effective, community based initiatives (Brockington 2008). Grassroots planning and collaborative participation,
like in successful ecotourism development and poverty alleviation efforts, are the keys to ending corruption plaguing resource dependent communities in the Third World (Robbins 2000; Brockington 2008).
CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

Tourism happens on the periphery of life in Prek Toal. Few people are involved so the families who receive direct benefits are limited. Community wide, the level of general awareness of tourist activities is low. Similarly, perceptions of any negative impacts associated with tourism are also limited. Most of the participants within the sample did not convey a high level of interest in talking about tourism, or conservation for that matter. Instead, most of the participants were more interested in talking with me about my life—where I came from, why I was in their village, and in some cases, whether or not I would buy them a new paddle boat or a bag of rice. In this study, it was the outliers, both from within the sample and those I specifically selected from outside it, whose participation had substance. This short list of interviews lent insight into the mechanics of tourism in Prek Toal and how tourism fits into the larger cultural and physical environments.

The lack of substantial insight from the majority of interviews is still important. The inconsistency and low volume of information produced from these interviews implies tourism is largely removed from the every day lives of these people. Poverty in Prek Toal is common. Living in the margins of life leaves little room for contemplating somewhat abstract concepts like tourism or conservation when neither is directly impacting the quality of that life, for better or worse. What matters to people is how they will feed their families, cover the high cost of medicine, or ensure their children have a happy life.
While the type and level of information varied significantly between interviews, embedded throughout all were reoccurring themes. These themes were consistent throughout interviews in the sample, out of the sample, and those few from both groups who became key informants. The reoccurring themes revealed in this study are:

- Poverty is commonplace
- Fishing is everything in Prek Toal
- Exposure to tourism is shallow but widespread
- Osmose helps poor people
- Tourism is good
- Tourism has few benefits and few negative impacts
- Tourists come to see the birds and the floating village
- Prek Toal is changing
- Bird conservation and tourism are connected and threatened by corruption

In light of the inductive methods employed for managing data, only participants’ responses are counted. For example, out of ten not-as-poor participants four said they do not understand tourism and four said they do. Two said nothing at all about understanding or not understanding tourism. These findings are represented accordingly: 40% of not-as-poor participants said they do not understand tourism, and 40% of not-as-poor participants said they understand tourism. The missing 20% remains unaccounted.
Although I use percentages to represent the findings they are by no means statistically valid. The percentages merely simplify the findings for more straightforward understanding.

5.1. Theme: poverty is commonplace

Before going to Prek Toal I was warned by Osmose staff that some of the households I would be visiting during the interview process would be so poor I would not be able to enter their homes at risk of causing the floating home to sink. At first I thought this comment was over-dramatized and I wondered how anyone could possibly live in such wretched conditions. I wrote off the warning and forgot about it until a few days later. I had just arrived in Prek Toal, met my paddle boat driver for the day, and was moving down river toward the southern end of the village—where we would start the survey. As the boat slowly moved toward the household for the first interview, paddles breaking soft splashes in the quiet morning lake, I began to reconsider my initial disregard of that warning. Indeed, as the ramshackle home grew closer and closer I realized the extent of truth in that warning, and also that it hadn’t been issued as a warning at all, but rather to prepare me for the kind of abject poverty I would see in the village. To conduct that first interview I had to stay in the paddleboat, situated right next to the sloppy, sloping frame of an entry way into the home. The following description of this family’s home, and my initial reaction to the conditions of life associated with such poverty, comes from field notes:
The so-called house looked barely held together. Bamboo sides, straw roof peppered with bird-sized holes, a floor that hardly qualified as one. At question number two I became even more distressed by the extent of this family’s poverty. The interviewee, a man, looked an age going on ancient. Crow’s feet define the outside of his eyes, his teeth are half-way rotted out, yet when asked his age he said 28—the same as me. I think he’s lived twice the lifetime I have at this stage. His wife looked equally aged. Their five children were filthy, poorly dressed. As they sat at the door to their house to speak with us floating on our paddle boat I think they must have been sitting in half an inch of water. The floor to the right of the doorway dipped at least three or four inches below the water level, and throughout the house there were puddles where the skimpy bamboo floor boards had given out under the weight of these slight people living such a heavy life.

The man answered most of the questions but his wife offered her two cents every now and again while three of their small children watched the exchanges. At one point the interview was stalled because one of the smallest children had climbed outside onto their decrepit paddle boat, walked to its end and climbed up the scrawny upper branches of a tree mostly submerged under the expanded lake. Cambodian parents are loving, gentle, kind, but by no means have I seen any extent of the discipline more common in families at home. Usually kids run around doing pretty much anything. I was surprised then when this Cambodian father abruptly stopped the interview and prepared to get up to rescue his small child. Apparently this child cannot swim, despite living, quite literally, in water.

It wasn’t until the interview was over I realized the importance of the interview’s pause, why the interviewee had become so distracted by his child’s tree climbing adventure. About eight months ago, according to our next interviewee, that first family’s youngest child had died because of water. The four month old baby was placed on the floor to sleep as is the norm in a family too poor to even have enough of the customary hammocks to sleep its masses, and at some point during the night the baby had either rolled into the part of the floor beneath the water level or the floor had given out under him. Drowning is the most common way for children of the lake to die.

For possessions this family had nothing. The house was one room, with a corner sectioned off as a raised platform for the parents’ bed. The rest of the space was completely bare—not even clipped pictures from magazines I’ve seen decorating many of the other poor houses here. A limited supply of cooking equipment and the colored straw mat acting as a mattress were the only material items I saw in this match-stick abode.
Over the course of the time I spent in Prek Toal village conducting interviews and observing village life I witnessed a new way to describe “poor.” I visited houses where twenty people were sleeping in a space smaller than the size of my bedroom. I saw children watching me interview their parents while picking lice out of each other’s hair. I saw people dumping their human waste into the lake on one side of the house while filling a drinking cup with water from the other side of the house. I had conversations with people about the difficulties they have getting enough food for their family to eat more than once a day, if at all. I saw kids sitting in the doors of houses watching other kids paddle by on their way to school—only watching and not joining them because their family did not have money to send them as well. If poverty means struggling to meet basic needs, including food, shelter, and health, then many Prek Toal villagers fall within that category.

Material possessions, health, education, food security, and quality of life were all used to determine whether interviewees were very poor, poor, middle, or rich. These criteria were suggested by the village chief and corroborated by Osmose staff as appropriate and usual measurements of economic status. The village chief speculated that the numbers of very poor, poor, middle, and rich people in the village are 30%, 40%, 25%, and 5%, respectively; Osmose agreed this breakdown was more or less accurate according to their studies and hands-on experience working in the community. When I asked the chief how he differentiates between the different economic groups he said “by the jewelry they wear and their fishing gear and equipment, like engine boats, and some rich people have workers.” The difference between middle and rich
is exemplified by the economic differences between the commune chief (a local politician one level higher than the village chief) and the man who controls fishing lot #2.

“Rich people have three or four boats and higher quality of business. Medium have maybe one boat and don’t have workers working for them. The commune chief is not poor, he’s rich. The guy who runs lot #2, he’s very rich. Lot number two guy is even richer than the commune chief, who compared to that guy would be considered medium” (Village chief, from interview transcripts).

For the purpose of this findings chapter I further reduced the economic categories to simply “poor” and “not-as-poor.” To determine whether a family was “poor” or “not-as-poor” I relied on visual cues like the quality of their home and material possessions, mention of material wealth such as fish farms, crocodile farms, and motor boats, answers to questions regarding food security, and self-reported economic status. For this last element I simply asked participants if they were very poor, poor, middle, or rich. See Appendix A for a detailed breakdown of this information.

Separating the poorest sampled participants from the not as poor among those interviewed through the 20th house sampling method reveals that poverty may be a factor influencing perceptions of Osmose, tourism, and conservation in Prek Toal. Differentiating between families that have tangible signs of wealth (crocodile farms, fish farms, and motor boats) and those that have tangible signs of poverty (lacking a paddle boat and regularly not having enough food to eat) is a simple way of breaking down the sample population into two groups. I will use these two groups as a side-by-side comparison throughout the rest of this chapter.
5.2. Theme: fishing is everything in Prek Toal

Prek Toal is a fishing village. Every household fishes in some capacity, whether for their dinner, for small amounts of money to buy rice, or for large profit. The primary mode of economic activity in the village is fishing, evidenced not only by the proliferation of fishing nets and traps or the smell of drying fish permeating the air, but by the very existence of the village. The floating village would likely not hold a lure for people if it were not for their ability to subsist off the resources so near by. Life is difficult in Prek Toal; many interview participants stated a desire to move to the upland for a better quality of life. “I want land on the upland so I can live there and it would be a much better life than here on the lake, and my children could then someday have that land or business. Life would be easier” (Samphy, from interview transcripts). Life in Prek Toal, though, has historically come with the security of knowing breakfast or dinner was only one throw of a fishing net away. “All people in Prek Toal rely on fishing” (Phirun, from interview notes).

Over half of all study participants were directly linked to fishing for their livelihood; all others were indirectly linked to fishing. Many of those directly linked to fishing directly were subsistence fishermen who only sell small quantities of their small catch, just enough to pay for rice and not always even that. “Sometimes we only have enough food for the morning meal, not the evening meal—it depends on how well I fish” (Ponleak, from interview transcriptions). Households not reliant on fishing as their primary income provide support services for those that do, such as the
non-fishing laborers and the rangers. Most participants reported household reliance on fishing for subsistence even if their primary livelihood was not fishing. The study included interviews with a store owner, a nurse, and government officials; all said they or another household member at least sometimes catch fish for the household to eat.

Families involved with tourism were also at the very least subsistence fishermen. Some families involved with tourism sell fish to a middleman, and in one case a participant involved with tourism was a middleman himself. Of the families whose primary livelihood was fishing, six were also involved in tourism.

5.3. Theme: exposure to tourism is minimal

Though most people recognize that tourism is taking place in the village, tourism and tourists are largely unfamiliar to the people of Prek Toal. This could be due to the small percentage of people directly involved in tourism. Of the twenty-seven households interviewed in the sample, almost all reported seeing tourists in the village but less than 20% said their family had ever been involved in tourism. With just a few exceptions, boat paddling was the only mode of involvement in tourism reported by study participants.

Over half of the sampled participants said they do not really understand what tourism is or how it operates in Prek Toal. Involvement in tourism provides a household with additional income. I expected to find that exposure to tourism through involvement and the associated economic benefits would facilitate understanding of tourists and their activities in Prek Toal; I was wrong. Households receiving benefit
from tourism through the economic opportunities of involvement also had inconsistent understanding. Three of the five households in the sample receiving economic benefit from direct involvement in tourism said they do not understand it. What, exactly, they do not understand about tourists and tourism is not clear.

Within the sample, poor participants reported not understanding tourism twice as often as not-as-poor-participants even though the former were more involved in tourism than the latter (see Table 2). The not-as-poor participants’ stronger responses suggest poverty influences level of understanding. Perhaps being poor limits a world view that extends far enough from the home to encompass tourism. Or, perhaps being poor limits receptivity to conversations with a comparatively rich foreigner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poor vs. Not-as-poor &amp; Exposure to Tourism</th>
<th>poor</th>
<th>not as poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number in group</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See tourists at least occasionally in PT</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in tourism</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't really understand tourism</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

5.4. Theme: Osmose helps poor people

Osmose is extremely well known in Prek Toal. Nearly all of the study participants had at least heard about Osmose and knew a little about the organization. Overwhelmingly, villagers recognized Osmose for their poverty intervention programs. Giving poor people food, money for medical care, paddle boats, and new houses were given as examples of Osmose’s assistance. The participants who discussed this aspect of Osmose’s program speculated that between twenty and thirty families receive
assistance. Only a small handful of participants were also aware of Osmose’s tourism or conservation activities. Osmose’s well known reputation as an organization that helps poor people speaks verses about the scale at which they operate in Prek Toal. Everyone knows about Osmose even though not everyone benefits from Osmose.

Some participants recognized that Osmose is involved in other things in addition to helping the poor: conservation, education, food security, medical care, and tourism. About one third of participants acknowledged Osmose’s involvement in tourism. A third also said Osmose manages the handicraft studio and helps people by involving them in the crafts being made and sold there. About 25% of participants associated Osmose with conservation education for kids, and about 25% said the organization builds floating gardens for people. Only three interviews of thirty-four connected Osmose to bird protection. Deviations from this general trend in understanding can be found by differentiating between poor and not-as-poor. The latter group, as a whole, made a much stronger connection between Osmose and tourism. Similarly, participants in the poor group more often commented on Osmose’s floating garden assistance.

5.5. Theme: tourism is good

“Tourists are very nice, very beautiful, very friendly.” (Heng, from interview transcripts). “I want lots of tourists to come to Prek Toal because all these people will have opportunities instead of collecting resources. That’s why I want a lot of tourists
to come to this village—because more people will have a job to do” (Nimith, from interview transcripts).

Despite that tourism was largely unfamiliar to participants, especially among the poor, comments about tourists and tourism were overwhelmingly positive throughout all the interviews. Over half of participants said tourism is good because it benefits some people in Prek Toal. A small group of participants said tourism is good because it is making the village more developed and richer. One participant said tourism is good because it protects the environment. I frequently heard requests from study participants to return to Prek Toal with friends and to spread word of their village in my home town so more tourists might come. When asked if they would like to be more involved in tourism most participants answered with a firm “yes!” When asked if they would like to see tourism grow bigger in their community, the answer, especially among the not-as-poor group, was also usually “yes.” Tourism, though minimally understood and far from the lives of most villagers, is so good they want more of it.

“Please announce to the people in the world what you know about this village and the bird conservation area. I used to collect and sell the resources but now, since I got the ranger job, I understand the importance of protecting the resources. Now I protect the natural resources. I am a ranger, I work for conservation, and I want tourists to come always” (Nimith, from interview transcripts).

Differentiating between poor and not-as-poor once again shows a trend in participants’ responses (see Table 3). Not-as-poor participants were more aware of the realities of tourism currently and in the future. Poor participants, on the other hand, had less to say. The not-as-poor group demonstrated a stronger perception that
tourism has the potential to grow in Prek Toal, and that this tourism growth would be good.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poverty &amp; Overall Perception of Tourism in Prek Toal</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Not as poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number in group</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism is good because some people in PT receive benefit</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is potential for tourism to grow in PT and it would be a good thing</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

Differentiating between participants who have received help from Osmose and those who have not also shows a trend in the data. In Osmose assisted households, participants more often indicated that tourism is good because it benefits local people (see Table 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helped by Osmose &amp; Overall Perception of Tourism</th>
<th>helped</th>
<th>not helped</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number in group</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism is good because some people in PT receive benefit</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

5.6. Theme: tourism is making only a small impact

5.6.1 Negative

I expected to find strong evidence that tourism is making an impact in some way on the lives of people in Prek Toal village. Seeing tourists in the village was a commonly noted phenomenon. That the presence of tourists in the village is significant enough to be noticed implies the likelihood of impact. Participants, however, reported only limited, tangible benefits and even fewer negative impacts. Fifty-nine percent of all participants and 63% of only those within the sample said
tourists have no negative impacts for the village. This perception is reflected in statements from participants such as:

“Tourists come in a good way. They just come to take photos of poor people and poor houses. They are friendly” (Heng, from interview transcripts). “More and more tourists in this village doesn’t mean anything negative because they just come here to visit and be happy,” (Veata, from interview transcripts).

Perceptions of tourism’s negative impacts were restricted to only a small handful of study participants; one of these was a key informant from within the sample. This key informant, Nimith, mentioned two ways tourism was harmful for the community but couched his discussion of these in a long tribute to benefits associated with tourism. Nimith had a sense of the bigger picture, of tourism’s impact not only locally but regionally. One of the negative impacts he mentioned was the noise of airplanes flying overhead and the disturbance it caused in the protected bird area. “More and more people means more and more sounds from airplanes and other things that are crushing the environment” (Nimith, from interview transcripts). Not long before going into the field, I heard almost the exact same thing from Osmose staff in a casual conversation about the environmental effects of regional tourism.

Another negative impact Nimith associated with tourism is the changing style of dress in the village, particularly among younger women. This sentiment was expressed by one other participant in the study, a very poor man with no connection at all to tourism and who said very little about tourism in any other regard (Ponleak). It is the Khmer custom for women to cover their arms and legs. As foreigners move through the village with increasing frequency due to the expansion of the tourism
regionally the local people are more frequently exposed to foreigners’ style of dress.

“It is maybe okay from [the tourists’] tradition to wear the short-sleeved shirts, but if someone in my family were to wear such clothes… that’s only okay for married woman. For single women, that’s not good—they shouldn’t dress like that (Ponleak, from interview transcripts).

“Before, the Khmer people used to wear clothes that didn’t show their skin from wrist to ankle. And after the tourists come they wear the sexy clothes. The Khmer women started to wear the sexy clothes just like the tourists. And this is the way they lose their tradition” (Nimith, from interview transcripts).

Nimith was a WCS Ranger, and had direct ties to the Environment Center.

Before working as a ranger and occasional tour guide on the WCS payroll, Nimith was a bird-egg collector and a middleman fisher. His livelihood switch caused his household income to decline, but his quality of life, he said, had gone up. Nimith was proud to work for WCS, to protect important resources, and to work with tourists when the visited Prek Toal specifically to see those resources (the birds). People come from all over the world to see the birds—they are important and conservation is good, according to Nimith. He had a worldview and knowledge base that was substantially broader than most of the other people I talked to from Prek Toal, as evidenced by his connection of tourism regionally and locally and its impact on environment and culture. Nimith’s worldview was likely influenced by his connection to WCS and his work in conservation. In contrast, most villagers are not involved with WCS, are not involved in conservation, and are therefore not influenced in the same way Nimith was. Nimith’s understanding of the bigger picture, his impassioned dedication to his work,
and his strong belief in the importance of conservation and viability of tourism, were likely born out of his experiences being trained as and then working as a ranger and occasional tour guide.

Another negative impact of tourism that was only brought up by one participant is the frustration of fast boat drivers speeding through the village. This person did not associate the impact with tourists themselves. Rather, she put the blame on the Cambodian boat drivers transporting the tourists. In other words, the impact she perceived is related to tourism but in her eyes tourism is not responsible, the local boat driver is.

“Tourists do nothing bad to the village. The bad thing is the boat driver, who drives the tourists, and goes so fast it makes big waves that rock the houses and damage the houses. The boat that carries the tourists in this village goes fast and carries a lot of people and makes big waves. The tourists don’t know anything. The problem is the driver, they drive fast and don’t care that they make big waves that break everything. Other people in the village drive fast, too” (Veata, from interview transcripts).

This comment suggests at least one instance in which tourism is indeed impacting Prek Toal, albeit in a small way, and exemplifies a disconnect between changes occurring in the village and the activities causing them. Local boat drivers might drive fast regardless of whether or not they have tourists paying for a place on their boat, but the increase of tourism regionally has likely caused an increase in the frequency of boats moving through the village. While it is indeed the boat driver making the choice to speed through the village, it is ultimately the desire of tourists to go from place to place that has given that boat driver cause and economic means to do so.
Another participant mentioned one final negative impact of tourism—the environmental contamination associated with tour boats coming in and through Prek Toal. This interview participant was an educated, somewhat wealthy man who worked for a local NGO as a collaborative partner in fisheries management. Like Nimith, this man framed his remark about tourism’s impact in a bigger-picture context, adding that the impact of tourists was far less severe than the impact of local people in that extent anyway. “All the activity they do—coming by motor boat and fuel going into the water, for example—they impact the environment. However, this is small in comparison to the impact of the people living in the community (Vithu, from interview transcripts). While tourist activity might cause some environmental impact, villagers living in the community doing the same things have a much larger impact overall. Tourists are low in number but there are many people living in the village, so the impact of the latter is much more substantial than the former, and tourism really is not impacting the local environment any more so than would already be done by local people in the course of every day live.

5.6.2 Positive

I was surprised by the lack of insight regarding tourism’s potential or realized positive impacts in the community. Most interview respondents perceived boat paddling to be the only direct way to benefit. Additionally, most participants agreed that only a small group of families receive benefit from tourism, and there was widespread cynicism about tourism’s ability to benefit more than just that small group.
in the future. In general, not-as-poor participants had more to say about tourism’s benefits than poor participants.

Overall, participants just did not have much to say about tourism’s benefits. When I asked questions regarding tourism’s benefits in the interviews I received a lot of shrugs, polite smiles, and simple “I don’t know” answers. Seventy percent of all participants said the primary way to benefit from tourism in Prek Toal is paddling the tourists around the village. Less than half of participants talked about benefit through handicraft production, and less than a quarter said only the Environment Center and people who work there receive benefit from tourism. When asked about the potential for tourism to grow in Prek Toal, about a fifth of participants said tourism has minimal potential to benefit more than just a few people in Prek Toal, and just over a quarter said cooking for tourists might be a way for more families to benefit. Nimith was one of the few participants who had some firm ideas about tourism’s benefits:

“A lot of ways that villagers benefit from tourists is through Osmose who makes a package tour for people who come to see the birds. And also people who live here who take the tourists to see the birds as guides. And also people who sell food, the restaurant owners. And people who are paddling the boats. And the handicraft production. There are a lot of ways for villagers to make money from tourists” (from interview transcripts).

Perceptions of tourism’s impacts differ between poor and not-as-poor groups (see Table 5). Not-as-poor participants more often expressed awareness of tourism’s potential to benefit local people through boat paddling, handicraft production, and cooking activities. Interestingly, this group also more often expressed cynicism about tourism’s potential to benefit more than only a few people. These perceptions
demonstrate a more accurate understanding of how tourism operates in Prek Toal than their poorer neighbors, and suggest that poverty could be a factor influencing awareness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poverty &amp; Perception of Tourism's Benefits</th>
<th>poor</th>
<th>not as poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number in group</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary way to receive benefits from tourism is boat paddling</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A way to receive benefits from tourism is handicrafts</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A way to receive benefits from tourism is cooking</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism has minimal potential to benefit more than just a few people in PT</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The environment center (and people who work there) benefits from tourism</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

Participants in a household that had received assistance from Osmose expressed a more positive outlook about tourism. Osmose families perceived greater potential benefit through activities in addition to boat paddling, and Osmose families were less cynical about tourism’s benefits being limited to a small number of recipients. Most of the families receiving assistance from Osmose were on or had been on the list of names used to allocate this particular economic opportunity to needy families. Assistance from Osmose, then, implied potential benefit from tourism, a connection supported by this data. Participation in Osmose’s program leads to more positive perceptions of tourism in terms of the scope of its potential benefits. Soriya exemplified this greater understanding:

“People who paddle for the tourists, they benefit. And people like her sister, they make the handicrafts and get benefit from that. It’s good for the village because they come and spend money and go around the
world and come to our country and don’t do anything bad here” (from interview transcripts).

Participation in tourism activities is limited. There was a common assumption among interview participants that boat paddling, as the primary mode of involvement, was limited to a small group of people. Nearly all interview participants commented about the limited opportunities to be involved in, and thus benefit from, tourism. If given the opportunity to be more involved in tourism activities, though, most participants would take it.

5.7. Theme: Birds and the floating village are attractions

“Tourists come to Prek Toal first to see the birds, second to see the floating village, third to see the activity of the floating village—the tools and activities of fishing people” (Heng, from interview transcripts). “Most of the tourists that come, they take photos and want to see the poor people or the very poor people and they take pictures of their houses” (Makara, from interview transcripts).

According to the perceptions of interview participants, tourists visiting Prek Toal have two things on their agenda: seeing the birds, and seeing the floating village. Seventy-six percent of interview participants mentioned the birds as a tourist attraction, and sixty-eight percent said the village was a draw as well. A few participants also made reference to local culture and fishing activities, crocodile farms, and fish farms as interesting to visiting tourists.
Differentiating between poor and not-as-poor participants shows a trend in the data (see Table 6). Once again, poverty seems to have an impact on perceptions of tourism. Perceptions from the not-as-poor participants were more in line with the realities of tourism in Prek Toal. In general, these participants were more aware of tourist activities in the village. This group more frequently mentioned the environment center as a tourist destination, as well as mentioned the birds, the Khmer way of life, the floating village, and crocodile farms as tourist attractions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poverty &amp; Perception of What Tourists Do in Prek Toal</th>
<th>poor</th>
<th>not as poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total in group</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourists go to Environment Center</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist attractions: birds</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist attractions: Khmer way of life (incl. fishing)</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist attractions: floating village</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist attractions: crocodile farm</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6

5.8. Theme: Prek Toal is changing

Prek Toal has grown and continues to grow. Over eighty percent of study participants talked about the various changes that have accompanied this growth. Participants reported both socio-cultural and environmental changes: more and bigger houses, more people, greater wealth, a collapsed crocodile market, and fewer fish, birds, and snakes. Poverty seems to be an influence in the extent of changes perceived while help from Osmose does not.

“Wealth has increased, it just belongs to most of the rich people in the village. For the poor people nothing has changed—they’re still poor. The rich—they buy
more houses, more fishing gear” (Chivy, from interview transcripts). Eighty-two percent of participants said Prek Toal is bigger than previous generations. More boats, more houses, and more people were all mentioned as evidence of this growth. Sixty-two percent of participants said the village has also grown wealthier. Twenty-one percent said that the new wealth has all gone to rich families and that the poor are just as poor; all participants who said this were poor themselves. Seven participants, or 20%, referenced the lake’s bountiful resources and their lure to people from the upland who move to Prek Toal for a fishing livelihood.

“The problem facing this community is declining fish resources. Fishing is declining fast; people here can’t farm rice, they can only fish. For this community there is only fishing. The population is increasing and too many demands on the fish will prevent them to ever come back like before. They will only continue to decline. If people can’t fish anymore how will they be able to feed their families?” (Munney, from interview transcripts).

Half of the interviews contained reference to the decline in local fish stocks, and complaints that it was getting increasingly difficult to make a living. “Fishing business is going down from year to year. It’s more and more difficult because now in the lake there are no longer big fish to collect, there are only small fish. Middlemen do not want to buy all these small fish” (Samphy, from interview transcripts).

A few study participants discussed possible reasons for the fisheries decline. Three respondents blamed the fishery decline on recent fisheries management changes such as public access to fishing lot #2. Three participants (Vithu, Munney, and Kiri) said the decline is due to over fishing from population increases and the excessive use
of illegal fishing methods, and the government corruption that allows the illegal activity.

An even greater number of participants noted changes regarding the water-birds Osmose is attempting to protect with their dynamic program in Prek Toal. “The birds are finished, finished. I don’t know where the birds have gone” (Rachany, from interview transcripts). Sixty-two percent of participants perceived a decline of the local bird population. Just one participant said the bird population had gone up during the previous five years.

Phala, a seventy year old man who had been born in Prek Toal, who was proud to still have all his teeth and generous with a big smile to show them off, had a lot to say about changes to the environment and the village, among other things. This man had been a middleman fisher before getting too old and handing the business over to others in his family. Collectively, his household also had a fish farm and a crocodile farm, and they had a motor boat as well. This man fell somewhere between the “middle” and “rich” classification:

“There are a lot of threats to the birds compared to before, a long time ago. Out of ten birds before there are only three left. In this village before, there would be at least ten to twenty birds in one house. Before, you couldn’t dry the fish outside like this—the birds would eat them. Before, you could see the birds everywhere. A lot of people in the village took the birds as food. Now you cannot collect the birds because now there are workers to guard them, there is security—like the rangers—and the law says you cannot collect the bird eggs or hunt the birds.

When I was young, for one hundred families there were only small houses. People didn’t use bamboo to float the houses, only small trees. No one used metal string to tie up the houses, they used tree bark. Now the houses are bigger, they use things like metal string. In that time, from my village to the open lake was about five hundred meters
only and the big waves would come into the village. Now the lake becomes smaller and smaller, so the village is farther from the center of the lake. Before, in the high [water] season, the big waves would come to this area. Now they don’t.

There are less fish than before, and more people fishing. The government has started to restrict the fishermen, so the fishermen cannot collect as many fish as before. It’s difficult to collect the fish because of the fishing lot [system] and laws on fishing gear, type.

When I was young, the population was only about seventy households. Now there are eight hundred. After the Khmer Rouge regime many families came here to fish. Fishing is easier than growing rice or vegetables, a way to get food faster. More and more people increase. Also, the population increases from families that have lots of kids” (from interview transcripts).

Samphy, a middle-aged grump who tried to convince me he was poor despite the evidence to the contrary, also had a lot to say about changes to the village. This man did not seem eager, at first, to talk with me. By the time we were half way through the list of questions I used to start interviews, though, a small crowd of family and neighbors had joined us in the doorway to watch, and I had the feeling Samphy enjoyed being in the spotlight. Samphy had a crocodile farm, and two motor boats, so I placed him somewhere between “middle” and “rich.”

“When I was young there were a lot more birds, a lot of birds and people would catch them to eat. Now there are not as many birds because they have lost a lot of food—like the small ponds and small streams everywhere around the Tonle Sap. People from the upland come here and go everywhere on the lake and fish in all these places and there is no more food for the birds.

Prek Toal has changed a lot. It has grown a lot in population and number of houses. When I was young there were only four or five engine boats in the whole village. Now there are too many to count. Houses have gone up seventy percent since I was a child. Families have more and more kids, which makes more and more families. And people move here from outside. People who come from everywhere else cannot hunt, fish [for food]. They move here and can find food.

It is difficult to fish now. Before, using one hundred meters of gillnet we could get an entire boat full of fish. Now we put ten times
the amount of gillnet in the water and only get small fish. It’s always been somewhat difficult to live on the lake. The fishing lot [system] now makes it difficult to fish; there is less space for people to fish. People have lost the places where they used to be able to fish. People sell the fish lot that isn’t theirs to sell, they sell it to another middleman when it isn’t supposed to be sold, limiting the space average people in the village have to fish in. Then this middleman sells the rights to fish in the area to smaller middleman. It [they system] doesn’t work. It isn’t fair.

Chivy, a middle-aged woman with a house full of kids, an illegally caught pet monkey on a choke-leash of rope, and a husband who works as a policeman, was the only person I talked with who said the bird population has gone up over the last five years. Chivy discussed the same changes to the village and environment that other participants mentioned: declining fish, increasing people, and a decline in birds until five years ago. Chivy talked about the importance of bird conservation. Her children attend Osmose’s environmental education classes; she showed me their study books, provided by Osmose, and reiterated the same conservation philosophies I had previously heard from Osmose staff.

I expected to find that the poorest people in Prek Toal would be more aware of declining fish stocks in the lake since their lives are the most dependent on subsistence fishing. Again, I was wrong. Participants in the poorest households said substantially less about changes to the physical environment, including the decline in fish and bird populations (see Table 7).
Poverty & Perception of Changes in Prek Toal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>poor</th>
<th>not as poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total in group</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT village is bigger (people, eng. boats, &amp; houses) than previous generation(s)</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People from upland moved to PT to subsistence fish</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish stocks in lake declining, harder to make a living</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New fishing management policy makes it difficult to earn a living fishing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snake population in lake declining</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird population declining</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird population has slightly increased over the last five years</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7

I also expected to find that Osmose families would be more aware of environmental changes in Prek Toal. The data, however, is inconsistent and shows no discernable trend. Whether or not a household has received assistance from Osmose does not appear to be a factor influencing perceptions of change in Prek Toal.

5.9. Theme: conservation and tourism vs. corruption

Within the sampled participants there were just a few references to a connection between tourism and bird conservation. Interviews with selected participants, however, included in-depth discussion about this connection. “Tourists make the conservation of the birds. Without tourists, bird conservation wouldn’t happen” (Sann). By providing economic incentive to conserve the resource Osmose links tourism and conservation, even though few people in the community recognize this link. Phala summed up the connection better than anyone else: “Osmose? They teach kids how to conserve the birds, how to care for the birds. They bring more people to see the birds. Osmose and the birds is like, in the Khmer way, husband and
wife—the conservation and the tourists” (from interview transcripts). This man was
describing the delicate relationship between bird conservation and tourists by using an
analogy. In Prek Toal, like in a marriage, Osmose is the institution linking two co-
dependent entities.

Current tourism activities in Prek Toal are oriented around what villagers refer
to as the “bird protection area.” The health of the bird species that nest in the
protected area is dependent on the health and integrity of the local ecosystem. The
same fish populations feeding the people of Prek Toal are sustaining the birds.
“Tourism cannot support the livelihood of people without natural resources. We have
to make the resources come back. If all these resources are gone, the tourists will be
gone, and all economic opportunity will be gone” (Nimith, from interview transcripts).
While tourism might not benefit more than a small handful of families in the village,
the industry is reliant on the same primary resource on which the entire community is
built. The most important link between conservation and tourism is the stability of the
local ecosystem. This link was not a regular part of the interview conversations but
the few instances in which it did arise warrant attention.

Wide-spread corruption within fisheries management, according to Munney, is
the biggest threat to the sustainability of local fisheries, and therefore also threatens
the birds nesting in the protected area. Putting an end to that corruption is the first and
most important step toward sustainable development for Prek Toal, as without it the
fisheries are surely doomed. And without fish, there is nothing in Prek Toal.

Environment is not a problem facing the community, the problem
facing the community is declining fish resources. Fishing is declining
fast. People here can’t farm rice, they can only fish. For this community there is only fishing. Population increase and too many demands on the fish will prevent the fish to ever come back like before; they will only continue to decline. If people can’t fish anymore how will they be able to feed their families?

There is a hope for the community in lending from non-profits or other countries who first take stock of the natural resources in the area and then demand promises from the people for returns for their loans. First you have to stop all the illegal activity, which will help resources come back. Then people can borrow money to buy gillnets and fish.

Without corruption everything will be okay. Now, everything is corruption, illegal activity. People that get salary from government don’t make enough to live so they have to do corruption to afford to live. If you stop corruption, the natural resources will come back.

Tourism will not grow more and more in the future because in Lot #2 there are less and less fish. When there are no fish there will be no birds. Without the birds, there will be no tourists” (from interview transcripts).

According to Munney, the key to ensuring lasting success of tourism in Prek Toal means first ensuring the sustainability of the local fishery, a resource plagued by corruption and ineffective management. Putting an end to illegal fishing activity is the first step toward a sustainable fishery. A sustainable, well-managed fishery will lead to improvements in the lives of local people and a sustainable, stable bird population. A stable bird population means tourists will want to come. A sustainable fishery means the village will survive and there will be a venue for tourists venturing to see the birds. “Fishing and tourism are related because if there are no fish, there are no birds, so there will be no tourists in Prek Toal. If tourists just want to see a floating village they will just to go Chong Kineas because it’s easier to get to. There’s nothing special here without the birds.”
The illegal fishing methods to which Munnay refers are done, he says, by rich people in the village not poor people. The poor fishermen just use gillnet and other small-scale fishing methods. Small-scale fishermen only take small numbers of fish. “Big scale, they take a lot of fish” (Munnay, from interview transcripts). Chivy said the same thing: “Only people who do large scale fishing use the illegal method” (from interview transcripts).

Vithu, who worked for a local NGO trying to improve fisheries management, talked about the different kinds of illegal fishing methods: “Electro gear (electric shock) is one type. Uyi—mosquito net, or small fishing nets. Barricade, a third type. Nori—big scale size net to catch the fish, formed in a V shape with cylinder traps in the middle. These are the types of illegal fishing gear that [the NGO] works to stop” (from interview transcripts). In addition to working to control illegal fishing on the Tonle Sap, this organization was also working to ensure the community fishing lot (#3) was indeed granted access and fishing rights.

Vithu also shed some light on the mechanics of fishing lot #2. Officially this fishing lot belongs to the government for research. Unofficially it has been leased to an individual who then subleases fishing rights to other, smaller middlemen. Most of the community fishes in lot #3; they are not allowed to fish in lot #2.

In Prek Toal, talking of corruption is not a kosher topic of conversation. The man in charge of fishing lot #2 has a lot of wealth and power—more so than anyone else in Prek Toal. His house is the largest in the village, a floating mansion. His fishing business employs a large crew of laborers. This is the man to whom most
people are referring when they talk of corruption. As my interviews progressed during my time in the village and I learned more about the difficulties with fisheries management and corruption I began incorporating questions relating to this into interviews when it was appropriate. No one would talk to me about the man in charge of fishing lot #2. The village chief and a fisheries management officer both asked me to skip questions about this powerful man. Pich, my friendly, outgoing, confident, worldly translator told me straight up “hell no” when I asked if we could interview the lot #2 man. Pich said no because he was scared for his life—Pich, who was conscripted into the Cambodian Army to fight the Khmer Rouge when was only sixteen years old—was scared for his life by one man. This man travels around Prek Toal surrounded by an entourage of well armed men on an armada of motor boats, the third-world, water-world equivalent of a gangster SUV motorcade.

5.10. Conclusion

Tourism in Prek Toal is not making a large impact either positively or negatively on the lives of people in the village. Tourism was considered a good thing even by people who did not recognize its potential benefits. Most people perceived only limited ability to receive tourism’s potential; that boat paddling is the only way to receive benefit from tourism was common in all interviews. For both the poor and the not-as-poor, tourism was experienced largely as something that happens on the periphery of their lives.
Poor people participate more in tourism, though nearly everyone interviewed noted seeing tourists in the village. Not-as-poor people, however, had more to say about tourism and tourists. The not-as-poor group much more often noted the economic benefits associated with tourism and expressed a desire for tourism to grow in the village. This group also had a better grasp of the realities of tourism: who participates, where tourists go and what they do, and the potential of tourism to benefit more villagers in the future. Poverty appears to be a strong influence on the extent to which a study participant was aware of activities outside their realm of experience.

Osmose is a familiar name in Prek Toal village. Most study participants identified the organization for their work helping poor people and not for their work in tourism or conservation. Families that had been helped by Osmose more frequently acknowledged the potential benefits of tourism than did families that had not been helped. This suggests that involvement in Osmose’s poverty intervention programs increases exposure to other work the organization does, thereby expanding their awareness of other things happening in the village.

Almost all interview participants said that fishing is becoming a more difficult chore, whether at commercial or subsistence levels. The not-as-poor group was much more expressive than the poor group about resource decline in the region, including fish and birds. A few participants talked about the influence of corruption in fisheries management and how that was degrading the resource. Though this theme was not prevalent in interviews the sheer weight of it makes it an important topic to discuss, especially to the extent it impacts other more common themes.
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

In her discussion about how the research tools of anthropology can better inform the growing body of literature relating to tourism and ultimately influence the implementation of better policies and programs, Stronza (2001) stresses the importance of local perspectives. Ethnographic research can help find answers for two important questions: is tourism helping or hurting local people, and why and how do local people get involved. Recognizing that tourism is linked to a multitude of other variables, Stronza also points to the importance of gathering information about the specific circumstances governing life in a host community.

In light of the current trend advocating ecotourism as the best way to promote resource conservation and develop local economies, I went to Cambodia intending to study exactly these things. Prek Toal is a painfully impoverished community adjacent to one of the most important water-bird habits in the world. From the perspective of the local people, what have ecotourism activities and conservation efforts meant for their lives and livelihoods? My goal was to use the information I gathered to help Osmose improve the effectiveness of their ecotourism and conservation project, and ultimately help them better help the poor people of Prek Toal.

The bottom line is simple: tourism in Prek Toal is a very small part of the local economy. Though there is some tangible benefit for the few families who participate directly, most villagers perceive little impact, neither as benefit nor cost, from tourism activities in the community. There is an overwhelming belief among villagers that boat paddling for the tourist groups is the only way to participate in and benefit from
Ecotourism has been widely endorsed around the world as a more sustainable option for economic development (Smith 2001; Mowforth & Munt 2003). One of the biggest issues with ecotourism is carrying capacity (Smith 2001; Honey 1999; Cater...
Ecotourism is by definition a small endeavor, and therefore is limited in the scope of economic possibility that it can provide the host community. Indeed, in Prek Toal, Cambodia, ecotourism is a very small endeavor. Only a handful of families receive tangible benefit from the tourism activities taking place in the community. The greatest potential to receive benefit is from boat paddling, which because of its inconsistency is an unstable, unreliable source of household income. Negative impacts, though, due to the small size of the ecotourism operation, have been limited as well. Carrying capacity is not yet an issue for tourism in Prek Toal, and may never become an issue. If Osmose keeps their tourism operation small, the consequences of tourism will be kept to a minimum—and so will the benefits.

6.2. Poverty: subduing life

The single most overwhelming characteristic of life in Prek Toal is poverty. Poverty was an obvious, visual feature of the lives of most study participants. The prominence of poverty was likely an influence on how these participants experience the world, on their perspectives of tourism and conservation, and even how they reacted to me. So much of what I hoped to hear about tourism and conservation was unaddressed, unanswered, empty silence. Poverty created that silence by limiting possibility, worldview, and understanding.

The kind of abject poverty I witnessed in Prek Toal is common for rural areas in a developing country like Cambodia. Also common in these places is the significance of natural resources for local people (Mock & Steele 2006). It is in these
areas—poor, rural, undeveloped—that intact, stable ecosystems play a most vital role (Barkin 2003; Bene 2003). The Tonle Sap’s rich resources are the most important things to the survival of the people who live on and around it. Improving the quality of life for Prek Toal means protecting the resources on which all people there depend and giving them viable, sustainable options for economic opportunity.

Osmose’s tri-part framework of conservation, tourism, and poverty intervention is most recognized for that last aspect—helping the poor. In this regard, they have had amazing success. Nearly everyone in Prek Toal knows of Osmose even though only a fraction of the community participates in its various programs. While tourism provides little food for thought, Osmose’s poverty alleviation programs feed people. The tangible ways in which Osmose operates on a person-to-person level in Prek Toal are more profound than tourism will ever be as a peripheral economic activity, or conservation as a generally obscure concept not having much influence on local lives.

I expected to find that study participants who had received assistance from Osmose in some way would be more aware of the important connections between conservation, tourism, and improvements to their lives. For the most part, participation in Osmose’s programs was experienced only as poverty intervention. The connection between the money available for those projects and the tourism activities providing it was lost on most study participants. Likewise, the connection between tourism activities and the importance of protecting the bird resources on which tourism depends was also not frequently made.
Consistency is an important factor enabling successful poverty alleviation through tourism development. Hill et al. (2006) showed that only those who are permanently employed by tourism expressed positive livelihood improvements and a decline in poverty. Barkin (2003) also discussed the importance of consistency by suggesting tourism at the Butterfly Reserve expand from seasonal to year-round in order to improve benefits for local people. In Prek Toal, irregular participation in Osmose’s programs is not enough to connect conservation, tourism, and livelihood improvement. Participation must be regular and have consistent, direct benefits associated with it. Paddling for tourists in the village once a month does not provide villagers enough of an economic reprieve to see beyond the confines of their impoverishment.

Nimith received regular, tangible benefit from tourism. Nimith also expressed a recently acquired conservation ethic. This WCS Ranger was one of the few study participants who understood the links between conservation, tourism in the protected area, and the associated economic benefits that improve livelihood. The conservation ethic expressed by Nimith gave me hope that if Osmose’s program evolves to include greater and more consistent tangible benefits for local people that ethic could become more widespread in the community. Thus, poverty alleviation through tourism employment could eventually lead to community-sponsored conservation.
6.3. Local perceptions: experiencing ecotourism

Though Prek Toal shares some similar characteristics with other tourism case studies, the data does not allow much of a comparison for how things work now. Instead, these case studies offer insight into the potential success or failure of future tourism in Prek Toal. In Prek Toal now, villagers only experience tourism from a distance. Benefits are not shared by many, but neither are negative impacts. For Prek Toal, tourism has not made much of an impact good or bad because the operation is small enough its presence is hardly noted.

Ecotourism used to promote conservation can negatively impact local populations by reducing access to important resources (Stonich 2005; Barkin 2003). In Prek Toal, conservation initiatives effectively closed off a resource area to the community but it has not been experienced negatively. The fishing lot system has meant the now protected bird area has always been closed to most villagers in Prek Toal. Like in Nepal’s (1997) CAMPFIRE case study, the few Prek Toal villagers who relied on the now conserved resources have been retrained as rangers and given good jobs by WCS, thereby improving their livelihood. If Nimeth is representative of other WCS Rangers, the group speaks positively and knowingly about conservation and tourism. These are the only people in the village to do so.

Active community participation in tourism planning and managing is critical for capitalizing on tourism’s potential benefits while minimizing the associated costs. Nepal’s (1997) Zimbabwean and Nepalese case studies showed how community-managed tourism can promote environmentally sound economic development.
Stonich (1998; 2005) illustrated with her Honduran case study how tourism can fail the host community when local people are not included.

Active community participation in Osmose’s tri-part program has been weak if existing at all. To some extent, the rangers employed by WCS are collaborators on the project but they have more to do with the conservation component than tourism. In developing and implementing tourism as conservation and development in Prek Toal, there has been no community-inspired vision or goal setting. Local people are not engaged at all in managing tourism, they are only occasionally employed by it. Though alleviating the abject poverty in which so many Prek Toal villagers live has been from the beginning a part of Osmose’s plan, conservation lies at its core—not community.

Osmose manages their program from the top down. They are an outside organization that works cooperatively with higher levels of Cambodian government. A grassroots orientation is a better way to avoid the potential costs associated with tourism development like resource competition and increased marginalization of the poor (Young 1999; Nepal 1997; Hill et al. 2006). Osmose should expand their network of poverty intervention and children’s environmental education to include an advocacy component that facilitates grassroots organizing. In Zimbabwe’s CAMPFIRE program, the potential cost associated with reduced access to resources was mitigated by providing local people with the necessary tools for managing tourism and its benefits (Nepal 1997). In Prek Toal, Osmose could help build and empower a community organization to do the same.
Tourism has the potential to cause intense conflicts between users just as much as other natural resource-based industries like fishing (Young 1999). For this reason it is important to ensure benefits from tourism are equally distributed among the community, and also to ensure tourism is not the primary mode of local economic activity (Young 1999). The scale of ecotourism activities in Prek Toal currently is small enough it has not produced conflict between those who participate in it and those who do not. Additionally, fishing is still the predominant livelihood—not tourism. The limited scope of economic benefits from tourism was relatively well known throughout the village and it appeared to be without resentment or frustration. Most villagers would take the chance to become involved in tourism—and reap the economic reward associated—if given the opportunity. They do not expect it nor hold it against their neighbors for having the opportunity when they do not.

If tourism does indeed grow in Prek Toal, the degree to which local people experience it in a positive or negative way could be determined by the way in which it grows. The Tonle Sap’s fisheries are expected to continue declining if current management does not change drastically and soon (Bonheur & Lane 2002; Goes 2005). As the primary source of livelihood becomes increasingly more difficult, there is the chance that ecotourism could grow, via Osmose or some other organization. If ecotourism does become a bigger business in Prek Toal while fishing devolves into a less stable one, conflict will inevitably enter the picture.

Resource conflicts, as Young (1999) points out, tend to follow patterns. In her study, conflicts in tourism mirrored conflicts in fishing; this was likely a result of
similar management for both industries. In Prek Toal, fisheries management is riddled with corruption and most people in the community are resigned to accept their place in life, not to challenge the forces miring them in poverty. If (hypothetically) fishing becomes a less viable livelihood while tourism becomes more of one, it is more likely that the water lords currently controlling the most productive fishing areas will shift their focus to tourism. In that scenario, the poor will stay poor and the rich will get richer, just as is occurring now due to fisheries reform.

Ecotourism will not be an economic option in the future if the birds which tourists come so far to see start disappearing. Threats to the bird habitat and food source are significant (Bonheur & Lane 2002; Goes 2005). Sustaining the resource on which tourism and local people depend is an important part of ecotourism (Young 1999). Osmose’s conservation efforts in the bird area have had amazing success. What about fishing, though? The fisheries on which all life on the Tonle Sap depends—people, birds, and other species—are threatened by a host of culprits (Bonheur & Lane 2002; Goes 2005).

Ecotourism in Prek Toal is directly dependent on two things: ecosystem integrity and village culture. The latter depends on the former. Everything in Prek Toal boils down to fish. Without the fish, the birds will disappear and so will the village. Without the birds and the village, there will be no tourism. Even if the village stays, without the birds, there is nothing special to draw the tourists when other floating villages are more easily accessed from major tourist centers.
The people of Prek Toal had little to say about tourism. Most people see tourists in the village, or passing through it, but many do not understand why the tourists visit or what they do when they are there. Those who do understand the nature of local tourism usually recognize that the protected bird area is the primary draw for visitors to the community, and after that, these visitors like to see the unique floating village and the fishing way of life. Most participants in this study recognized that a few villagers benefit from tourism, mostly through paddling the tourists around the village. That is about all they had to say. The more important discussion comes from what they did not say.

6.4. Corruption: resource exploitation and poverty

Corruption and its impact on fisheries management is another circumstance governing life in Prek Toal. Corrupt management in Prek Toal is contributing to resource degradation. The consequences of that have an immeasurable impact on every villager’s life whether they openly expressed it in interviews or not. Corruption and the illegal fishing methods it allows threaten ecosystem stability, thereby threatening not just the fishing livelihoods on which the community is built, but also any potential for tourism to supplement those livelihoods in the future.

Poverty is one of the key ingredients for corruption in many rural, developing areas (Gray & Kaufmann 1998). Cambodia’s Tonle Sap region is no exception. Additionally, the inequitable allocation of resources under Cambodia’s current fisheries management policies means a gaping power schism already exists for
corruption to exploit (Bene 2003). I suspect there is a high degree of complacency among even the poorest fishermen competing with too many others for already declining resources, though this was not explored in interviews. While the poor fishermen might have to resort to illegal methods to find their families’ dinners, it is the rich, commercial fishermen using illegal methods on a much larger scale who are causing severe environmental degradation. Forced by the severity of their poverty into complacency, though, the poor have become accomplices in the corruption that is keeping them poor.

Eliminating corruption and the destructive, illegal fishing methods it enables is critical to alleviating poverty in Prek Toal. Paradoxically, alleviating poverty in Prek Toal might help subdue corruption and destructive fishing methods. Rampant corruption threatens the fish resources in the Tonle Sap and the people who depend on the fish. Corrupt resource management fuels inequalities between the rich, powerful elite and the poor, powerless majority (Bene 2003; Robbins 2000). Restricted access to a resource already threatened by a host of other variables perpetuates the state of poverty in Prek Toal. By stabilizing the resource and more equitably allocating it poor fishermen will have a better chance of reaching sustainable subsistence and improving their quality of lives (Bene 2003).

The same grassroots efforts suggested for improving the success of ecotourism ventures applies to alleviating corruption. Community participation is vital for overcoming the multifaceted forces behind corruption (Robbins 2003). Brockington (2008) suggests that an appropriate venue for generating community participation to
fight corruption is through the establishment of community-based conservation. The
difficulty in this fight, though, is in convincing local people to oppose abuses to the
system—the corruption they themselves have accepted to some degree. A possible
solution to this conundrum is providing alternatives to local people so that opposing
corruption is not associated with as great a cost. In Prek Toal, such an alternative can
come from the program Osmose has already started.

6.5. Osmose: an evaluation

Is Osmose’s tourism really “eco” tourism? The tourism activities being
facilitated by Osmose, according to the TIES definition, are indeed “eco” tourism.
This rather broad definition says simply that to qualify as ecotourism the activities
must be responsible, in natural areas, and in some way benefit local people. Yes,
Osmose’s tourism does benefit local people, it takes place in a natural area, and it is
done responsibly. Is that enough to really qualify as ecotourism—a concept that
embodies wholesomeness in culture, environment, and economy?

Smith (2001) takes the TIES definition one step further by including
environmental conservation and social responsibility as conditions of ecotourism.
Again, by this interpretation, Osmose’s is ecotourism. Osmose is known more for its
efforts to help the poor than its work to ensure successful bird conservation in the core
area or the tourism activities enabling their entire program. For a tourism company,
Osmose is very socially responsible. According to Smith’s definition, then, Osmose is
indeed conducting “eco” tourism.
Honey’s (1999) definition of ecotourism is much more specific than the previous two; according to this interpretation, Osmose’s activities might not pass muster. Included in Honey’s definition is that ecotourism “directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities,” among other things. While some families in Prek Toal receive economic benefit from tourism, it is not enough to be considered community-wide economic development. Political empowerment is not an aspect of Osmose’s program at all. In conclusion, yes, by some definitions, Osmose is promoting true ecotourism. It could be better.

While Osmose has done a noteworthy job in Prek Toal establishing a link between conservation, ecotourism, and poverty alleviation, it could be stronger. Osmose has created a framework that has the potential to effect truly profound change in Prek Toal. By creating more opportunities to expand the benefits of ecotourism to a greater number of community members, and more consistently, Osmose could effectively inspire a community-wide conservation ethic. This would provide substance and form to Osmose’s work of contributing to the alleviation of poverty, while building a local voice to speak against the very things causing that poverty. Future success for ecotourism development in Prek Toal will require realigning Osmose’s focus from conservation to community, adopting a new strategy for development that engages local people not just treats them, and ensuring ecosystem stability by targeting corruption as well as appropriate resource use. Together, these three things will lead to sustainable “eco” tourism and a more sustainable community.
6.6 Conclusion: what tourism is now and how to make it better

Ecotourism has the potential to successfully promote conservation and economic development (Nepal 1997), and to some extent alleviate poverty (Hill et al. 2006). Ecotourism as conservation, development, and poverty alleviation, on the other hand, can also fail miserably (Stonich 1998; Young 1999; Barkin 2003). Repeatedly, local participation is emphasized as the most critical component of a successful program (Stonich 1998; Stonich 2005; Cater 1994; Young 1999; Nepal 1997) but it is not enough to truly improve the impoverished conditions of life in some host communities. Tourism as a mode of sustainable development and livelihood improvement works best as one piece among many in a diversified local economy (Barkin 2003; Hill et al. 2006).

Recognizing the links between local conservation efforts, the economic opportunities brought by tourism to protected areas, and associated livelihood improvements of both is dependent on consistent, tangible benefits to local people (Barkin 2003; Hill et al. 2006). These benefits are best facilitated through collaborative stakeholder management of tourism activities (Nepal 1997; Young 1999; Stonich 1998). The same management scheme is also appropriate for achieving sustainable use of the natural resources on which ecotourism activities, and the poor host communities, are dependent (Bene2003; Robbins 2000). Eventually, successful community-oriented conservation initiatives can empower local people to oppose the corruption that so frequently undermines sustainable resource use in developing areas (Brockington 2008).
In Prek Toal, Cambodia, tourism is not making enough of an impact for many in the community to experience its costs and benefits. The small scale of tourism in Prek Toal has kept the issue of carrying capacity in check. Local people do not understand tourism yet they see enough to want more. The economic benefits of tourism are witnessed by villagers who remain on the sidelines, just as they remain trapped by poverty in the margins of life.

Osmose has built a strong reputation in the village for their work helping poor people. Conversely, their work in conservation and tourism is relatively unknown except by a small number of people who are directly involved in conservation and tourism activities. These are the villagers who receive consistent, tangible benefits from tourism. These are the villagers who have developed a conservation ethic that stems from their ability to link conservation, tourism-generated income, and livelihood improvement. These are the people who inspire hope that Osmose’s operation will have long-lasting, positive results leading to less poverty and more sustainable resource use. Though finding a balance between the expansion of ecotourism activities and minimizing the potential environmental, economic, and cultural costs is a daunting challenge, I believe Osmose can do better to improve local livelihoods through tourism.

Osmose is in the unique position to facilitate collaborative stakeholder management in Prek Toal. Osmose is organized, is well-respected in the community, and has the necessary financial and human resources to become their advocate. This advocacy should begin with a concerted effort to actively involve local people in
tourism planning and management in addition to the passive participation of their current program. Osmose must shift their organizational focus from conservation to community. Engaging local people through a grassroots, community-wide effort to work with other partners (i.e. WCS, Osmose, Environment Center) will help spread information and benefits.

This management group, like those discussed by Nepal (1997) and Young (1999) will become empowered by decision-making and the ability to direct tourism’s benefits. Leading this group should be members in the community who already understand the link between conservation, tourism, and livelihood improvement because they receive consistent, tangible benefits from it—villagers like the ex-bird egg collectors now employed as WCS Rangers. Nimith, for example, could teach his newfound conservation ethic by helping other poor villagers also see the connections between conservation, tourism, and livelihood improvement. Though ecotourism will always have to be small scale to be sustainable, collective benefit will be realized through the sharing of information. Ideas about how to create new opportunities for local people are a likely outcome as well.

Community-oriented, stakeholder management would empower local people with the ability to make decisions that directly affect their lives, not only regarding tourism, but also conservation and potentially corruption as well. The spread of a conservation ethic throughout the community would set up the second phase of Osmose’s advocacy work. The same strategy that could better implement and manage tourism and the distribution of its benefits could promote conservation. Grassroots
advocacy for both conservation and tourism development would continue building
economic and political power for the management group. Eventually, they might have
enough strength to stand against corruption—the very thing causing the discrepancy of
wealth and power now coloring life in Prek Toal.
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APPENDICES
Appendix A: Indicators of Economic Status and Other Variables

| Interview # and Variables | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4  | 5  | 6  | 7  | 8  | 9  | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 | 31 | 32 | 33 | 34 | 35 | 36 | total |
|--------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|------|
| Not enough food on a regular basis | x  | x  |    | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  |    |    |    | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | 12  |
| Livelihood: fishing       | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  |    |    |    | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | 16  |
| Livelihood: middleman    |    | x  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 2   |
| Livelihood: laborer for other fisherman | x  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 1   |
| Livelihood: laborer - Firewood collector | x  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 2   |
| Livelihood: laborer - Cake-maker |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 2   |
| Livelihood: laborer - houseboat fixer | x  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 1   |
| Livelihood: laborer - Handcraft artisan |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 1   |
| Livelihood: laborer - all | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 7   |
| Livelihood: store owner  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 1   |
| Livelihood: Ranger       |    |    |    |    | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 4   |
| Livelihood: Nurse        |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 1   |
| Livelihood: Policy/Government |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 1   |
| Livelihood: Cook         |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 1   |
| Additional indicator: fish farm | x  | x  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 1   |
| Additional indicator: crocodile farm | x  | x  | x  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 1   |
| Additional indicator: Paddle boat | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 8   |
| Additional indicator: No paddle boat | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 9   |
| Additional indicator: Motor boat | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 3   |
| Additional indicator: Osprey | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  | x  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    | 13  |
| Self-reported status (1 = very poor, 2 = rich) | 1  | 2  | 3  | 2  | 2  | 2  | 2  | 3  | 2  | 2  | 1  | 2  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 2  | 1  | 1  | 1  | 3  | 2  | 1  | 3  | 2  | 2  | 3  | 3  | 3  | 3  | 3  | 3  | 3  | 3  | 3  | 13  |
| Researchers perception: Poor, not-as-poor | P  | P  | P  | n  | n  | n  | n  | P  | P  | P  | P  | P  | n  | P  | P  | n  | n  | n  | n  | n  | n  | n  | n  | n  | n  | n  | n  | n  | n  | n  | n  | n  | n  | 4   |
| Ethnicity (Khmer, Vietnamese, Chinese, ChMA) | k  | k  | k  | Y  | V  | k  | k  | k  | k  | k  | k  | k  | k  | k  | k  | C  | k  | k  | k  | k  | k  | k  | M  | K  | k  | k  | k  | k  | k  | k  | 13  |
| Sex (Male, Female)        | M  | M  | M  | M  | M  | M  | M  | M  | M  | M  | M  | F  | F  | F  | F  | F  | F  | F  | F  | M  | F  | M  | M  | M  | F  | M  | M  | M  | M  | M  | 14  |

Participants included in 20th house sampling method.

Participants selected outside 20th house sampling method.
Appendix B: Introduction and Oral Consent Script

Johm riab sua [hello]. Kh’nyohm ch’muah [my name is] Katie. I am a student in the United States. I am here to study the impacts of tourism on your village. I would like to ask you some questions and listen to you talk about your life. Will you speak with me? It might take an hour, or as long as you have to speak with us?

Before we begin I need to explain a little more about my study so you are able to give informed consent. I will ask you a lot of questions about you and your family and your life in Prek Toal. Many of these questions will not seem to be important, and will not be related to tourism. I ask that you answer the questions anyway, no matter how insignificant they seem, and that you answer them from your heart. There are no right or wrong answers. This is not a test. In order to understand the good and bad impacts of tourism I need to understand your life, your community, and your culture. I will use the information you provide to write my thesis at my university in the United States. I would also like to use this information to help direct tourism policy and programs in Prek Toal to be more beneficial for your community.

Throughout this interview I will be taking notes and I will also record the interview so I can listen to it later just in case I missed something important while we’re talking today. Your identity will remain confidential. I will be the only person who can connect you with what you say. Your confidentiality will be maintained through the use of pseudonyms. My notes and the recorded interviews will be carefully locked up so no one can associate you with what you say today. If the results of this study are published in any way your identity will remain confidential.
If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study. You are free to skip any questions during the interview that you would prefer not to answer. If you choose to withdraw from this project before it ends, the researchers may keep information collected about you and this information may be included in study reports.

If you have questions after the interview has finished you can find me at the environmental station for the next two weeks. If that time has passed and you have questions you can contact someone from Osmose for my contact information or ask them to contact me and ask me your question.

After hearing this information will you agree to participate in this study?
Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. What is your full name?

2. How old are you?

3. How many people live with you? What are their ages?

4. How long have you lived in this house? In Prek Toal? Where were you before?

5. What do you usually eat? Where does your food come from? Do you have enough to eat on most days?

6. Has this changed at all since you were a child/first moved to Prek Toal?

7. What kind of work do you do? Or, how do you spend your time each day? What brings income to the household?

8. What is most important to you in life? Second most important? Other important things?

9. Do you have everything you need? Everything you want? What is missing that you would like to have in your life (i.e. material possessions, food items, experiences, opportunities, emotions, etc.)?

10. Can you define tourism? [Pich the translator checks to see if their basic understanding of tourism is correct. If necessary he helps them more correctly or better understand using the following simple definition: tourism is the act of visiting places for the purpose of enjoyment.]

11. How often do you see tourists in your village?

12. How often did you see tourists in your village five years ago? Ten years ago? Fifteen years ago?
13. Do you think tourism has influenced your life at all?
14. When during the year do the most tourists visit your village?
15. Why do you think tourists come to your village?
16. What do the tourists do when they come to your village?
17. Can you explain how tourism operates in Prek Toal?
18. Do you have any contact with the tourists? Does anyone who lives in your house have contact with the tourists?
19. Did you or anyone who lives in this house have contact with tourists five years ago? Ten years ago? Fifteen years ago?
20. How do the tourists behave in your village?
21. Has your village changed or grown at all since you first came here or were a child?
22. In what ways has the village changed or grown?
23. In your opinion, is tourism good or bad for your village?
24. Do you think tourism has had any negative impacts in the village?
25. In your opinion, does tourism benefit the people of Prek Toal? Who benefits? In what ways?
26. Would you like to see tourism grow here?
27. Do you like the tourists? Why/why not?
28. How do you describe a tourist?
29. Do you know what conservation is? [Pich the translator checks to see if their basic understanding of the concept is correct.]
30. Do you know why there is conservation happening in the bird colonies?
31. Do you know of conservation happening near here? Do you think it’s good or bad?

32. What level of education did you reach? Can you read and write?

33. Do you know the organization Osmose? Do you know what Osmose does? Does Osmose have anything to do with local conservation? Tourism?

34. Does anyone in your household have contact with anyone from Osmose? Has anyone in your household ever been involved in Osmose’s programs? Has anyone from Osmose ever been to your house?

35. On a scale of one to ten (one being low and ten being high) can you rate your level of happiness? Please explain why it is that level.

36. Is this the same level or different from your level of happiness five years ago? Ten years ago? Fifteen years ago?

37. Do you consider yourself very poor, poor, middle, or rich? Why?

38. Do you think conservation and tourism go together?

39. “Ecotourism” [word is not translated into Khmer but the definition is] is usually defined as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people.” Do you think the tourism in Prek Toal could be considered “ecotourism?” Please think about this carefully before answering. There is no right or wrong answer. I want to know how you feel about this, not what you think the answer should be.