

# Employment and Trade in Angkor Park: Some Preliminary Observations on the Impact of Tourism

Mr. Brett M. Ballard the Project Advisor for the Analysing Development Issues (ADI) Project, outlines the results of a small-scale survey undertaken to find out how tourism affects the people that are living in Angkor Park.\*

## Introduction

Tourism now forms an integral part of Cambodia's development strategy in terms of attracting foreign direct investment and stimulating people's income through new employment opportunities. Since the late 1990s, the number of international tourists arriving in Cambodia has increased dramatically. An increasing percentage of these tourists now go to Siem Reap to visit Angkor Wat and other ancient temples as a result of the government's 'open skies' policy that allows direct international flights to Siem Reap. The Ministry of Tourism estimates that by the year 2005 there will be 1 million foreign tourist arrivals in Siem Reap alone. The number of domestic tourists visiting Siem Reap is also increasing, though the number has fluctuated according to the condition of transport infrastructure.

The increase in tourist arrivals has sparked dramatic growth in the service sector associated with tourism. For example, since the year 2000, the number of hotels and guesthouses in Siem Reap has increased by 34.2 percent and 60 percent respectively. The number of restaurants has increased by 50 percent and there are now 75 travel agencies operating in Siem Reap.

Investments in infrastructure and services have helped create many new employment and trade opportunities in the construction, transport, and service sectors in Siem Reap. APSARA<sup>1</sup> estimates that as many as 1,000 people from nearby villages have found employment in the construction sector. APSARA itself employs about 800 people as guards, cleaners, temple renovators and office staff, and as many as 90–95 percent of the guards and cleaners are from villages located in or near Angkor Park. These estimates do not include vendors, tour guides, or people employed in service sectors such as transport, restaurants, and hotels.

In July 2002, the Analyzing Development Issues (ADI) project conducted a small-scale study to learn more about how people who live in Angkor Park are

affected by the tourism industry in Siem Reap. The ADI researchers visited nine of the 20 villages in Angkor Park during two days of fieldwork. The researchers used semi-structured questionnaires to collect quantitative and qualitative data from household interviews, focal group discussions, and village chief interviews. One team interviewed an official from APSARA and the provincial governor's office, and another interviewed 15 vendors who sell handicrafts or operate food stalls in Angkor Park. This report summarises the main observations concerning the distribution of employment and trade opportunities among people who live in Angkor Park. These observations may also apply to other areas around Siem Reap town, and as a result could suggest ways that policy makers and project planners can design strategies to direct a greater share of tourism benefits to local people living in and around Angkor Park.

## Employment and Trade

Village location, social relationships, and village circumstances (e.g. land use and migration patterns) are all factors that influence employment and trade opportunities. Gender plays an important role and will also raise many questions concerning the impact on the family.

## Location

Generally speaking, more people in villages located along roads and/or near popular temples appear to receive economic benefits in terms of income from employment or small-scale trade, or both, than people in more distant villages. The role of village location as a factor of employment in Angkor Park is understandable given APSARA's preferential hiring policies for park residents. It is also understandable in the construction sector as people who live in villages closer to Siem Reap are able to travel there more easily, and may already have prior experience in the urban labour market. This is especially evident in Tek Sean, which is located next to Siem Reap town. Many of the households there have at least one family member who works in Siem Reap. In fact, people have become so deeply integrated into the local labour markets that many households have sold their agricultural land to outside buyers. The other village closest to Siem Reap, Kravan, also has a significant number of people working in the construction industry in Siem Reap. The village chief there said that 30–40 people work in construction and as park guards.

These numbers drop off in some of the villages located further away from Siem Reap. In Rohal, about five to six people work in construction and six to seven are employed in the park by APSARA. In Pradak, about 20 people work outside the village, though it is not entirely clear what portion of these have tourist-related employment. There were very few reports of any outside employment in Arak Svay, which is located some distance away from Siem Reap and is well off the main road.

The two cases of Kok Thnaot and Nokor Krauv, however, suggest that location is not the only factor that influences how or where one finds employment or trade opportunities. In Kok Thnaot, which is located several

\* The ADI project provides training for Cambodian NGO staff in research and analysis. ADI is a project of the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC)

kilometres west of Angkor Thom, the village chief indicated that as many as 150 people — mostly young people, 50 percent of whom are women — now work in construction and as park guards, and that this number is increasing each year. The village chief in Nokor Krauv, located several kilometres north of Angkor Thom, also reported that as many as 80 percent of the households have a family member working in construction in Siem Reap, while 30 percent of households also have a family member working in Angkor Park.

### **Social Networks**

A second important factor concerns the role that social networks play in helping people navigate their way through the tourist-related labour and vending markets. People most often learn about jobs through friends and relatives, as well as APSARA staff or village officials in the case of park employment. In Kok Thnaot, the village chief said people paid intermediaries to help them find jobs. In some cases, construction contractors, or their agents, went to villages to inform people about the availability of jobs. NGOs and other organizations may also play a role, as several people indicated they had heard about jobs from staff of the Angkor Participatory Development Organisation. In response to a question concerning problems they had finding jobs, three household respondents each in Pradak, Thnol Toteung, and Nokor Krauv indicated that they lacked connections with family or friends who could help them find employment. Several people also indicated that they did “not know how to find jobs” and could not afford to pay the necessary fees to intermediaries or bribes to company staff or contractors.

Social networks also play an important role in small-scale trade (e.g. handicraft sales and food stalls). For example, one household respondent in Tek Sean observed that people with family members who were police or local officials were able to establish small businesses more easily than others. Otherwise, it was necessary to pay police fees for operating a small business. The vendors who were interviewed for this study confirmed this assessment. Of the 12, only one said that they had not paid fees to the police. The others reported paying various amounts each month, mostly in the range of \$5–10 per month. However, none of the vendors cited these fees as an obstacle that prevented them from operating their business. In fact, it appeared that some vendors felt they were benefiting from certain services that the police provided, such as protection and security.

One obstacle that the vendors faced was a lack of capital with which to open a stall and acquire merchandise or food for sale. All of the respondents except one reported that they had to borrow money from one informal source or another in order to start their business. Most of the vendors also said they had to acquire merchandise on credit from suppliers in Siem Reap or local producers. These kinds of informal arrangements are often facilitated through family relationships, friends, or community members. As with the labour markets, this suggests that people often rely on social networks to

secure sufficient capital with which to start up and then operate a small business.

### **Land Use Patterns**

One of the most consistent impressions across all of the villages was that land use patterns had not appreciably changed over the past several years in terms of the amount of village land classified as rice, *chamcar*, and forest. All of the village chiefs indicated this was because APSARA's rules and regulations have more or less prevented people from expanding the amount of land used for rice cultivation and *chamcar* plantations, and limited people's ability to harvest forest products, such as rattan and various resins (e.g. *chor chheu*). Moreover, people are not allowed to cut firewood or make charcoal in Angkor Park.

Land use and ownership patterns, however, are in fact changing in several villages where both the price of land and the number of transactions have been increasing recently. In Tek Sen, as noted above, some residents said that nearly all the families have sold their agricultural land to outside buyers, while retaining their residential plots. These families were motivated to sell their land by the rapidly increasing land prices in the area, as well as a belief in the continued growth of tourism that will guarantee jobs for the foreseeable future. In Nokor Krauv, where 11 percent of the households do not have land, the village chief reported that many people are seeking construction jobs and other forms of employment in Siem Reap. It appears that several families have sold their land for distress reasons, and that employment in Siem Reap is only enabling them to maintain subsistence level livelihoods.

In some villages, farming has been intensified as a result of the introduction of small-scale irrigation technology. The effects of irrigation, however, vary from one village to another. In Nokor Krauv, competition over scarce productive land resources appears to be increasing, and is played out in terms of distress sales, and — in some cases — land-grabbing. In Thnol Toteung and Pradak, however, the number of land transactions has not yet increased significantly. In Thnol Toteung, where people are not so actively engaged in the tourist industry, land continues to be the primary source of family livelihood. In Pradak, the same is true, despite the fact that many people are engaged in selling handicrafts and other local products to tourists. In Kok Thnaot, there are some land transactions, but they involve people selling land to one another within the village and the price has not changed.

One possible explanation for such variations is that in the two most distant villages, Thnol Toteung and Pradak, there is sufficient land for most people to produce at least some rice, as well as opportunities for people to supplement household income from handicrafts sales and other products. As a result, people may not yet feel compelled to make the long trips to Siem Reap or within Angkor Park in search of employment. Also, many people in Thnol Toteung have continued earning income from cutting firewood and selling charcoal. The

only difference is that they no longer do this in their own village because of the APSARA rules. Rather, they now travel further away to Banteay Sre and Phnom Kkulen to cut firewood and make charcoal for sale in Siem Reap. While APSARA has indeed been effective in terms of reducing deforestation within Angkor Park, the net effect is that at least some of the ecological problems associated with cutting firewood or making charcoal have been exported outside the park boundaries.

### ***Population Pressures***

It is also important to consider the population pressures on the local ecology associated with natural birth rates and increasing in-migration. In effect, APSARA regulations have locked in place the amount of land that can be cultivated for rice, while reducing or eliminating *chamcar* production and access to nearby forests. As a result, population growth relative to fairly constant rice production (except when irrigated) and limited access to forest products may be pushing a number of people into the labour and vending markets. This is probably most evident in Kok Thnaot where existing land is increasingly being subdivided to accommodate the growing number of young families, which ultimately reduces the amount of land each family has to cultivate. This helps explain why so many young people on Kok Thnaot are now joining the labour markets in order to maintain a certain level of livelihood, despite their village's more distant location.

In terms of in-migration, the most visible impact was observed in Tek Sean, where as many as seventy families have recently migrated from elsewhere in Siem Reap province, or other provinces, and occupied public land along some of the village roads. These migrants have come to Siem Reap in search of jobs in the construction industry or other forms of employment. There is also some evidence of increasing in-migration in other villages, at least some of which may be attributed to the employment and trade opportunities associated with the tourist industry. In Nokor Krauv, ten families have migrated there recently from Kompong Cham and Phnom Penh in order to earn money in the tourism sector. In Kravan, ten families who had once lived in the village have returned in order to find jobs in the tourism industry. In Pradak, the village chief knew of three families that had migrated there in order to earn money from the tourist trade.

### ***The Division of Labour Between Men and Women***

Among the interview respondents, men held nearly all the construction jobs in Siem Reap as well as temple renovation jobs in the park, while two-thirds of the vendor operators were female. However, there seems to be a greater mix between men and women in terms of employment by APSARA for cleaning and grounds maintenance jobs in the park. Not surprisingly, some women indicated that childcare represented significant obstacles, particularly with respect to potential employment in Siem Reap or further away from home within Angkor Park. It also appears that illiteracy among women, espe-

cially young adults, also limits their employment options in Siem Reap. Several men also mentioned illiteracy as a factor that limited their employment options. The lack of literacy skills, as well as specific vocational skills, has relegated many employees to a status of low entry subsistence wage earners.

The fact that many park labourers and vendors are female suggest that women are now playing a much greater role in terms of household income. The income earned by the vendors who were interviewed is used to supplement household incomes in about half of the families whose primary occupation was either rice farming or wage labour. The other half reported that their primary occupations and sources of income involved small-scale trade, which suggests that many vendors may now depend almost entirely on the tourist industry for their main source of livelihood. The income earned varied from one vendor to the next in the range of \$3–20 per month. Not surprisingly, monthly income also varied according to seasonal fluctuations in the number of tourists: income declines during the rainy season when there are fewer tourists, and increases during the dry season when the number of tourists peaks. It would seem that any such income fluctuations would be most difficult for single women heads of household to manage.

More comprehensive surveys are needed in order to better understand the social implications of labour market trends pertaining to gender. For example, what are the implications for women in terms of managing the household while their husbands are away working in Siem Reap or elsewhere? What are the implications for child care and school attendance when parents work away from home? Another important question concerns the potential problems associated with the possibility of people working away from home in Siem Reap eventually spreading HIV-AIDS or other STDs back to their families and communities. While there is no evidence of this from our study, observations elsewhere suggest this is a real possibility, especially in an area where the sex industry appears to be expanding.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In rural areas such as Siem Reap, where the Angkor Park World Heritage Site is located, well-governed tourism can have a significant and positive impact on the livelihoods of local people. However, people must have certain skills and access to resources in order to secure meaningful employment and trade opportunities. There must also be effective measures for minimizing the social costs associated with undesirable activities that often accompany rapid growth in tourism.

Officials at both APSARA and the provincial government are committed to increasing the share of tourism benefits for people living in and around Angkor Park and reducing the negative impacts of tourism. For example, APSARA has adopted a policy of preferential employment for people who live in Angkor Park, while the provincial government is studying ways to help local farmers sell more of their agricultural produce for the

*(Continued on page 16)*