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Empowerment in Effective Communication Skills and Hospitality Services of Communities and Park Rangers in Human-Elephant Conflict Areas around Kui Buri National Park, Thailand

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A workshop related to community empowerment and human-elephant coexistence was held from June 20th to 22nd, 2023. Our aim was to empower local communities and park rangers to find best practices and sustainable solutions to reduce human-elephant conflict around Kui Buri National Park in Prachuap Khiri Khan Province, Thailand.

Kui Buri National Park has been experiencing human-elephant conflict (HEC) problems for the last 40 years. Many HEC mitigation measures have been adopted by various government agencies, private sectors, local communities, academic institutes, and NGOs. One of the successful long-term solutions for HEC, led by WWF-Thailand, was the establishment of community-based ecotourism activities through cooperation among local people, Kui Buri National Park (Department of National Park and Plant Conservation - DNP), provincial administration and NGOs. This project was later named "Kui Buri community-based ecotourism" and began actively serving tourists in 2006."

The workshop had three objectives: (1) Increasing English communication skills and knowledge in hospitality services for local communities and park rangers to support ecotourism, (2) developing effective HEC mitigation measures and management, (3) establishing a wildlife conservation network.

The target groups for the workshop included local people and park rangers involved in ecotourism, such as local guides, cooks, and tourist service park rangers. Participants were selected by the Kui Buri park chief and the head of the Kui Buri community-based ecotourism group.

The workshop content was developed from core information, gaps, and limitations identified over the last 10 years during field trips, guest visits, and wildlife research led by myself .

Academic field trips with International College for Sustainability Studies (SWUIC) were conducted annually since 2013, during which students evaluated the limitations and achievements of local community members and park rangers responsible for various aspects of ecotourism. The results indicated limitations in communication skills, including English language proficiency and hospitality services among local guides and park staff. Additionally, there was a lack of knowledge regarding elephant behaviour and wildlife conservation.

The HEC workshop was primarily conducted by university professors, with the participation of current SWUIC Thai and international students and alumni. The class assignment from the ecotourism management course to establish a guidebook for participants, which was intended to serve as a practical reference for ecotourism and hospitality services.

The first day of the workshop commenced with talks by two members of the IUCN SSC Asian Elephant Specialist Group. The plenary talk was delivered by Prof. Mostafa Feeroz. He discussed HEC on a global scale and presented a



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case study from Bangladesh, featuring photos, videos, and stories. Participants were deeply impressed and gained insights into the numerous HEC sites where people encounter problems and seek solutions, much like the situation in Kui Buri.

Dr. Mattana Srikrachang provided valuable knowledge on elephant behaviour. She explained how to identify elephants that enter community areas by gender and age class and specified dos and don'ts for behaviour when tourists visit ecotourism sites.

Effective communication skills and English communication were the focus of my presentation, which highlighted words, terms, and sentences that can be used in the field, including greetings from various cultures, international etiquette, appropriate and inappropriate words and behaviours, as well as common sentences used in real-life situations related to their daily jobs.

On the second day of the workshop, we focused on the topic of 'Service Mind and Hospitality Services for Ecotourism Management.' This session was led by Dr. Talissawan Saneewong Na Ayudthaya, the former Director of Sales and Marketing at Hilton Thailand, and Dr. Thanawan Worasingha, law expert and SWUIC-HTM lecturer. The topics covered included service etiquette, table manners, bedding, and international communication. Dr. Talissawan Umpornmaha provided valuable tips and knowledge on hospitality services for the participants.

On the third day of the workshop, the focus was on English communication for ecotourism management, with instruction provided by myself and SWUIC students. The primary objective was to enhance participants' understanding of the concept of ecotourism and its operational aspects. The subjects included theory of ecotourism and sustainable tourism, mammal identification and common English words and sentences for tour guides. Participants also learned useful sentences that tour guides can use to communicate do's and don'ts to tourists in various situations.

In the final three hours of the workshop, role-play activities were introduced to evaluate participants' performance in different case studies. Participants were divided into three groups: (1) Local guides, (2) local communities and (3) park rangers. Role-play games were used to as-





sess their comprehension of the content taught in the class. This segment also featured collaborative activities between SWUIC and international students.

Finally, we received feedback from the participants, who displayed great enthusiasm for learning and enhancing their skills. Participants thoroughly enjoyed acquiring new knowledge and engaging in ice-breaking games, which were led by our former student, Ms. Irin Somsupamongkol. After the workshop, we visited the site and engaged in discussions with the participants. It was evident that they found the guidebook to be a valuable resource for their actual duties. In November 2023, we successfully edited and published a second version of the guidebook, which we subsequently distributed to tour guides and park rangers.

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