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## **Creating a sustainable environment for the Asian Elephant: the case of Maesa Elephant Camp in Chiangmai**

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## **Abstract**

A century ago, there were a hundred thousand domesticated elephants in Thailand. Considered valuable, they were utilized for logging. As logging was regulated in 1989, most domesticated elephants became unemployed. With expanding opportunities in tourism, many elephants have been showcased in elephant camps. Together with their mahouts, they became part of the tourism attractions in the country with concentration in Surin and Chiangmai. Developing these sites created meaningful employment opportunities for mahouts and elephants. To sustain this industry, elephants are forced to work longer hours, and are sometimes harmed for entertainment. Most conservationists claim that the boom in the tourism industry is good for elephants. It offers a way to compensate elephants and its mahouts. However, to be sustainable, a comprehensive ecotourism development plan must be enforced to conserve the elephants. Most may advocate that letting elephants be in the forest is the best alternative. But, it is infeasible without all embracing, properly maintained, and guarded parks and sanctuaries.

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# 1. Elephant conservation in Thailand

## 1.1 The Asian wild elephant showcase

Tourism collaterals and promotional materials for Thailand showcase its stunning beaches with crystal-clear waters; colorful carts of fresh fruits at outdoor markets; and elephants winding through elephant camps and jungles with excited visitors riding on their backs.

Thailand is known as one of the primary habitats of the Asian wild elephant (*Elephas maximus*). It is one of the 13 economies in Asia that trades Asian elephants to fuel its tourism market (Wolverson, 2014). According to the Thai Elephant Conservation Center<sup>3</sup> (TECC) (n.d.), its current population of domesticated elephants is approximately 2,700 from a population of 100,000 during the 1850s. Furthermore, as per the statistics from TECC (n.d.), about 95 percent of Thai elephants are in privately owned, with the TECC's 80 elephants being the Kingdom's only state-owned elephants other than from a few in zoos and the King's ten revered white<sup>4</sup> elephants in the Royal Elephant Stable<sup>5</sup>.

**Figure 1: a domestical elephant with his mahout**



Source: © Maesa Elephant Camp

<sup>3</sup> The Thai Elephant Conservation Center (TECC) was established in 1993 under the Royal Patronage (the honor of being chosen to care for the King's auspicious royal elephants also known as the white elephants), cares for more than 50 Asian elephants in a forest located near Chiangmai. It is also known for its innovative work in elephant conservation and science.

<sup>4</sup> The term "white elephant" means something valuable but burdensome, whereas for the Thais, elephants are of immeasurable value. White elephants must be gifted to the King. Second, they are not white at all or albinos. They look like normal, gray elephants, properly called *chang samkhan* or "auspicious elephant."

<sup>5</sup> The Thai Elephant Conservation Center (TECC) holds the sacred trust of rearing all ten of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej (King Rama IX)'s ten white elephants. Six males are under the custody of TECC, and four females are kept in Sakol Nakorn province. White elephants are not allowed to breed, and nearly all are wild caught. Given these elephants' sacred nature, the Royal Stable is not normally accessible to the public, though some of the elephants are publicly shown on special occasions.

The term “domesticated” elephants is commonly used (see Figure 1); however, it can be misinterpreted to imply that these captive elephants are different species from wild elephants. As a matter of fact, nowhere in Asia has the elephant ever been selectively bred (the process that will cause rapid genetic change to wild species). Hence, both behaviorally and genetically domesticated elephants are technically wild elephants, similar to wild elephants living in protected areas.

In the previous century, elephants were employed for logging; and poached for their skin, meat, and ivory. In 1989, the Thai government regulated logging and prohibited it in protected areas. Consequently, it closed all natural forests and elephant trading was declared to be illegal (Wolverson, 2014). For environmentalists, this is a very favorable decision but elephants that were employed in logging became unutilized. With the rapid growth of tourism in Thailand, the elephants now play a vital role in providing entertainment and exhibits. In the contemporary period, most Thai elephants are employed in the tourism industry (see Figure 2) – in elephant camps.

**Figure 2: an elephant with his mahout and tourists**



Source: © Maesa Elephant Camp

## 1.2 Issues and constraints

Although elephants are of importance to the tourism industry of Thailand, several issues have aroused, especially among conservationists and animal rights groups. They have contended that tourists should not intrude in elephant camps<sup>6</sup> because it incentivizes elephant abuse. For instance, to prepare the elephants for the job, they are separated from their families at young ages and delivered to trainers, who according to Wolverson (2014) chain them, withhold their food and water, and regularly beat them with bamboo sticks to become controllable creatures.

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<sup>6</sup> Although the camp to be visited should be carefully chosen, the best thing that an ethical and elephant-loving tourists can do is to visit a camp and simply enjoy the company of elephants. Without work in tourism, the elephant owners will have no financial means to take care of them. Tourists may opt to visit the Maesa Elephant Camp (<http://maesaelephantcamp.com>)

However, in contrast to reports, according to the TECC, most Thai elephants are taken care of because it is inherent for the Thais to be humane. Most importantly, elephants are extremely valuable to harm a beautiful calf or a healthy, young breeding female, which can be worth as much as USD 22,000.00, while a healthy infant elephant is currently valued at USD 33,000.00. Likewise, the Asian wild elephant is endangered specie warranting intense protection given its enormous potential in conserving its kinship.

With elephant trading declared a criminal offense, according to Wolverson (2014), it is difficult to conclude that elephant trafficking has been totally eliminated. This is because of how valuable an elephant is in terms of monetary value. The demand for elephants in the tourism industry is also increasing given that the number of visitors to Thailand increases from 26.7 million in 2013 to 28 million in 2014, as reported by Wolverson (2014). Despite the political instability in Thailand in 2014 wherein the number of tourists fell by approximately 5 percent between January and April, elephant rides as an attraction remain to be popular and elephant tourism remained to be lucrative in India, Cambodia, and Lao PDR (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Elephant rides as a tourist attraction**



Source: © Maesa Elephant Camp

What is alarming is that for past decade or so, the monetary value of elephants, specifically infants, has surged substantially that it surpassed inflation (Nijman, 2014). Economically, the surge in price can be a consequence of expanding demand, stricter enforcement of Thai laws in regulating elephant-related activities, and rising difficulty in acquiring elephants due to diminishing populations in the wild.

Nijman (2014) reported that the elephant-tourism industry in Thailand has been a growing concern among animal activists and welfare groups due to reports on how elephants are treated for tourism



purposes. While efforts to continuously enhance the welfare of elephants employed in the tourism industry are being carried out, it is trivial that the tourism industry is the sole avenue for domestic elephants to be employed rather than be in the forest where they are more endangered.

Hence, given this backdrop and the abovementioned issues, this study aims to address the question: how can we create a sustainable environment for elephants participating in the tourism industry? To address this question, there is a need to justify first whether we should continue employing elephants or totally ban the participation of elephants in the tourism industry. Likewise, as suggested by Nijman (2014), there is also a need to develop “robust” systems and policies that prevent elephant abuses and penalize violators. These would lead to effective mechanisms to protect and conserve the wild populations of this endangered specie. The specific details of these mechanisms would still have to be pinned down as many stakeholders will have a critical role and will be affected.

### **1.3 Conservation efforts**

#### **1.3.1 The National Elephant Institute**

Tourists visiting Thailand and other developing economies often find themselves caught between moral obligations to the environment and curiosity about environmental resources (i.e. elephants). To satisfy tourists’ requirements (i.e. elephant curiosity and the need to protect this endangered specie), the National Elephant Institute (NEI), located in Lampang Province, was established as a national effort to promote eco-friendly tourism and address the various issues concerning Asian elephants (McCue, n.d.).

Founded in 1991 by the Forest Industry Organization, the National Elephant Institute (also known as the Thai Elephant Conservation Center) has reared more than 100 elephants, and has generated jobs and housing for elephant keepers (also known as mahouts) and their families. A mahout is an individual who takes care of an elephant from birth to tomb. A mahout begins as a young boy in the household when he is assigned a young elephant. The mahout and the elephant remain bonded with each other for the rest of their lives (Weeratunge, 2014).

Throughout history, mahouts have assumed a vital role in the domestication and training of elephants for tourism, transportation, logging, and to some extent, war (Lair, 1997). As reported by Nijman (2014), in the past, they are respected within society for qualifying to become a mahout and for enduring years of apprenticeship, economic hardship, and physical toil – young mahouts often follow the career paths of their fathers. They are partnered with adolescent elephants to form a lifetime relationship. This relationship is critical because it is the basis of the mutual trust between mahout and elephant. Today, the art, science, and culture of being a mahout are slowly dissipating due to

the lure of urban living. Moreover, being a mahout remains to be physically demanding, economically unrewarding, and socially undermined. Hence, to revive the golden days of being a mahout, a mahout training would be the best avenue for people to appreciate their work.

### **1.3.2 Mahout training**

A number of TECC's projects have addressed some of the economic issues propagated during the 1989 embargo on logging. This resulted to mahouts and their elephants being unemployed. Hence, the "mahout training" program was developed. This program aims to promote ecotourism that will pair tourists with a professional mahout and his elephant. Tourists would be asked to wear a baggy denim mahout pajama. The tourist, who now looks like a mahout, would then be introduced to the elephant. Basic commands on how to ride the elephant, mobilize the elephant, turn left and right, and stop are taught. Basically, it is a session consisting mostly of positioning oneself at the back of the elephant without any basket, saddle, or rope to pull oneself up. Eventually, one will get to learn how to ride and command the elephant just like a real mahout. According to McCue (n.d.), while riding the elephant on its bareback, one will get to appreciate and admire its strength, grace, and personality.

Homestay experience of mahout training can span one to three days. Tourists now assume the role of trainees who will spend significant amount of time with the real mahouts, learning their skillsets, and assist in preparing Thai food. Additionally, they also accompany the mahouts to the forest every day to bring and return the elephants. An in-depth mahout training includes the following activities:

- Dung papermaking – demonstration of how to make paper from fibrous elephant manure. The household members of some mahouts are employed in this engagement.
- Elephant hospital – here, visitors will see how mahouts help in the recovery of elephants. The elephants are given food, medicines, and therapy, similar to hospitals for humans.
- Elephant nursery – here, visitors will see baby elephants with their mother, usually around her tree-trunk legs.

Like most elephant camps in the country, the Maesa Elephant Camp (MEC) puts on an elephant show, thrice a day, for tourists. However, the show is not a circus-type. Elephants do not perform weightlifting or acrobatics; instead they demonstrate how they do logging techniques and paint abstract images from watercolors, which visitors could buy afterwards. Proceeds finance the needs of the elephants.

## 2. The case of the Maesa Elephant Camp in Chiangmai

### 2.1 The journey of Maesa Elephant Camp

At the dawn of the 1970s, the Thai government came up with an idea to make the province of Chiangmai to be a premiere tourist destination of Thailand. Consequently, many leading travel authorities and related parties involved in the tourism plan suggested to the municipality of Chiangmai that it should position its elephant camps as tourist destinations. From this recommendation, Mr. Choochart Kalmapijit, owner of Erawan Resort and local produced drinking water, decided to make an investment to establish the Maesa Elephant Camp (MEC) on 08 April 1976. The camp started from renting 30 rais (1 rai is equivalent to 0.395 acre) of existing elephant camp at Mae Mae Village in Mae Rim District, with five rented elephants from the Karen people who lived nearby. At that time, the show in Maesa Elephant Camp was similar to other camps focused on logs working. Each day, there were only five to 10 visitors to watch the show. With years of experiences in operating an elephant camp, together with a strong personal passion for elephants, Mr. Choochart decided to hire the unemployed mahouts and subsequently bought the elephants as a result of logging regulated and banned. This increased the employees of MEC as well as their responsibilities.

Today, MEC is a privately owned elephant camp, which is an hour away from downtown Chiangmai. It is located in the vicinity of a forest with a waterfall welcoming visitors. The camp currently houses 73 elephants and 80 mahouts. The elephants are owned by MEC but most of them go home with their mahout to their respective villages every night. Food is supplied twice a day for the and there is a full-time veterinarian, named Ronachid, who always checks on the elephants. The mahouts are also cognizant that the elephants must be well taken care of. The villagers are able to earn income at the camp by selling souvenirs to the visitors. The MEC ensures that everything is managed well demonstrating concern for the elephants, the mahouts, the surrounding villagers, and the overall environment.

### 2.2 Operating values and core competencies of business

*"We are the elephant keeper[s], the elephants are [in] our heart"* - this has always been MEC's value proposition. Since then, Mr. Choochart and his team ensured that the elephants' lives in the camp are excellent. The camp also grows its own Napier grass, banana, sugar-cane, coconut trees, and various herbal plants for the purpose of food and medical support. All mahouts are also well trained and made aware that the elephants must be well taken care of.

There is a peer-check among mahouts to ensure that elephants are well treated. At night, most of the elephants go home with their mahouts to the villages and return to the camp in the morning. Moreover, the households of mahouts as well as the villagers earn additional income by selling



bananas and souvenirs to visitors at the camp. All of these activities have been practiced at MEC over the years.

MEC is also the first elephant camp in Thailand with ISO 9001:2008 certification for **Camp Management Services and Entertainment**. Each day, the visitors can enjoy variety of activities, such as elephant show, elephant riding, mahout training, gallery Maesa, elephant museum, Maesa nursery, and elephant retirement home at MEC. According to Lonely Planet, MEC is:

*“one of Thailand North’s largest elephants camps. It is a bit old fashioned in its attitudes toward elephant entertainment but it enjoys a good reputation for the general welfare of the herd. The camp has a high fertility rate, which a good sign that the elephants are mentally and socially healthy.”*

## **2.3 Attractions at MEC: are they sustainable?**

### **2.3.1 Activities and programs.**

Thriving to be the elephant keeper and the elephants are their heart, the camp is extremely care and aware of the impact of all activities on the elephant’s well being. Throughout the years, there are many programs established and adjusted to allow elephants and mahouts to live, stay, and welcome the visitors in a happy and healthy condition. The camp’s landscapes and facilities have also improved accordingly to enhance the safety and nourish the experience. The following are the activities and programs, which MEC offers:

#### **The Elephant Show**

Elephant shows (see Figure 4) at MEC present the ingenuity and skills of the elephants. Within an hour show of three rounds a day (08:00; 09:40; and 13:30), visitors experience a warm welcome by a parade show, in which 20 elephants are marching to welcome them. The show continues with demonstration of how to get on and off the elephants, musical performance and dancing, how elephants sleep at night, log working show, mini football matches, massage show, picking show using their trunks, and a darts show. The highlight of the show is when the elephants demonstrate how they paint abstract and realistic images. The MEC pioneered this activity allowing them to be awarded by Ripley’s Believe It or Not for *The Largest Painting by a Group of Elephants* in 2004 through the painting done by eight elephants depicting Chaingmai’s beautiful rural scenery on 2.4 meters wide and 12 meters long tapestry. This masterpiece is displayed in “Gallery Maesa” where the visitors can visit to learn more about their artsy stories.

**Figure 4: Elephant rides as a tourist attraction**



Source: © Maesa Elephant Camp

### **Elephant Ride**

Riding on the back of an elephant through the lush tropical jungle of Maesa Valley is another delightful experience for visitors. During the ride, visitors can enjoy stunning view of Maesa, where the elephants walk the visitors through small rivers, villages, and tropical jungles. However, there are strict set rules and instructions when riding the elephant. Most importantly, riding the elephant without a mahout is strictly prohibited (see Figure 5).

### **Mahout Training (Baan Kwan Chang)**

Apart from day visits to watch an elephant show and to ride an elephant, and similar to NEI, visitors can take a short mahout training course (half day or one-day program) to spend the time and learn more about elephant's nature. In general, the course begins with an introduction of an elephant's anatomy, health care, body language to communicate with elephant, basic commanding and handling, bathing, feeding, riding, elephant museum and cemetery visit, and painting lessons. The mahout will teach the participants, step by step, and at the end of the program, successful participants will be awarded with certificate of achievement. This hand on practice is a memorable experience for participants to understand a life of mahout with his heart of elephant (see Figure 6).

**Figure 5: Tourists as mahouts riding elephants**



Source: © Maesa Elephant Camp

**Figure 6: Mahouts in training**



Source: © Maesa Elephant Camp

### **Maesa Nursery (Association for the Thai Elephant Procreation).**

As elephant produces one baby at a time, which takes around 18 to 22 months (note that not all elephants are productive). Hence, the number of natural pregnancy is getting smaller, while the number of elephants is dwindling in Thailand. With years of expertise in elephant rearing, MEC aspires to dedicate their technical know-how to help increase the population of elephants. At MEC, the pregnant elephants will be suspended for work for the next 10 months of their pregnancy. They will stay at the nursing house where they will be attended to by their mahouts and veterinary. Once the babies are born, the little elephants (calves) will live with their mothers until the age of two years. Thereafter, the elephant calves will start learning different skills from their mahouts who have been with them since they were born. Which calves will learn what, this depends on each elephant's preference and their nature.

In addition to the diffusion of the technical know-how of elephant rearing and increase population of Thai elephants and species, MEC also partners with various organizations, such as, but is not limited to the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of Chiangmai University and Thai Elephant Conservation Center at Lampang in conducting research on artificial insemination of elephants. MEC believes that if this proves to be successful, it can save the elephant specie in Thailand. The nursery opens daily and visitors can experience the childhood to motherhood.

### **Elephant Retirement Home**

Where did the elderly elephants live, what did they do, and who took care of them after they were not able to work? These are the questions raised by many visitors.

*“Long before, the retired elephants were led free in the jungle and lived nearby the camp. However, since they did not know how to live and have difficulty to find food by themselves, and some of them want to live nearby their mahouts. We have to take care of them” – Mr. Choochart Kalmapijit.*

**Figure 7: Elephant feeding**



Source: © Maesa Elephant Camp

Since then, Mr. Choochart and his team started the Elephant Retirement Home Project, which the elderly elephants, not only from MEC, but also from the other camps or owners who could not take care of them, stay and rest at Maesa Elephant Retirement Home. At this stage, the mahouts also retire from their career; however, they still receive some small incentives and can earn from cropping in the areas provided by the camp. At MEC, the elderly elephants will be well taken care of until they die and their remains will be buried at the camp's cemetery. Medicine mixing and feeding could be one of many activities visitors would enjoy at the retirement home (see Figure 7).

## **2.4 Beyond the show: a triple bottom line strategy**

From the prior exploitations of elephants, the MEC rescued the elephants, which were found to be valuable resources. There had been countless criticisms and endless debates on this move by MEC. However, engaging in such gargantuan responsibility is difficult. For instance, adult elephants can consume between 200 to 600 pounds of food; and can drink up to 50 gallons of water daily. Based on site visit, programs participation and interviewed with MEC's advisor, mahouts and staffs, in this section, we employ an analysis of the triple bottom line strategy to assess the sustainability of rearing elephants by MEC.

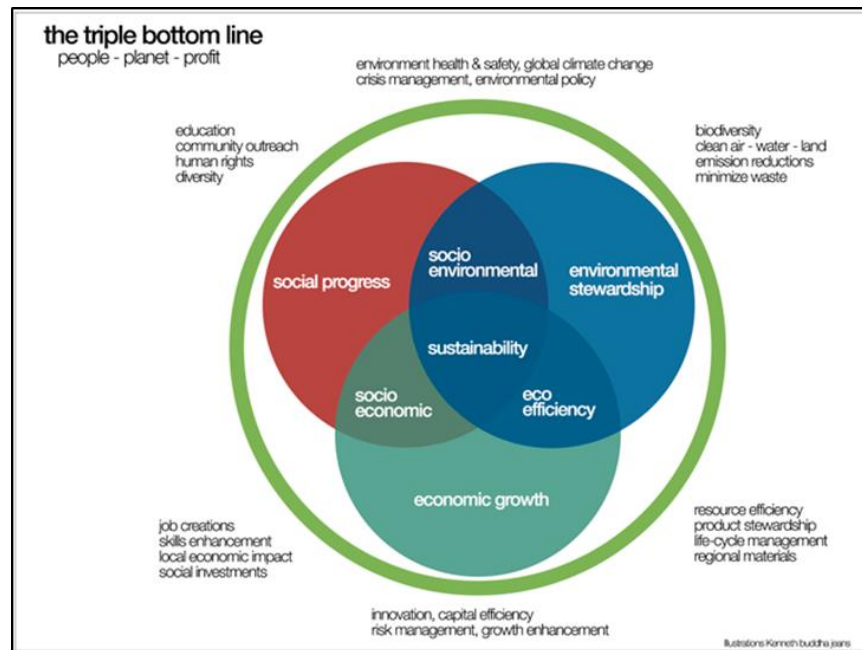
The triple bottom line strategy (see Figure 8; developed in 1994 by John Elkington; also known as TBL or 3BL) is an accounting framework with three components: (1) social, (2) environmental, and (3) financial. A number of firms and organizations have adopted the TBL framework to assess their functioning in a wider perspective to create sustainable business value (Slaper & Hall, 2011).

TBL demands that a firm's responsibility is with the stakeholders (refers to anyone who is directly or indirectly influenced by the decisions of the firm) rather than shareholders (Elkington, 1997). The



stakeholder theory provides more emphasis on coordinating stakeholder interests rather than maximizing shareholder wealth.

**Figure 8: the triple bottom line strategy**



Source: Narayanan (2013)

#### 2.4.1 Viewpoint of Elephant Caretakers – PEOPLE and PLANET (the relationship formed between elephants and mahout)

*“Elephant is like a baby, he needs attention most of the time”* said by one mahout who has been with Chang Somsak, an elephant, for the last 5 years.

*“If you take a closer look, there are two groups of elephants in our camp. The first group, we called ‘Chang Yang’ for riding and another group is ‘Chang Show’. Not all elephants in our camp can be Chang Show, and up to this point there are only 18 elephants, which can perform on the stage. Again this also doesn’t mean that everyday 18 elephants will perform. Our team has to rotate the performers and make sure that all elephants are in the mood for the show. This is the reason why our day starts very early in the morning and also end early in the afternoon, so that we (mahouts and elephants) can rest and relax. Most of us get up at 5 am and commute together from the village to the camp. Then we take them for a bath, feed and warm them up for the day. While doing so, we observe their mood and check their physical condition closely. Such as today, I feel that Chang Somsak might have some pains on one of his feet that’s why he walks a bit slow. Hence, I already reported to our advisor and we decided to call him off for today. Our vet will also follow up on him later on this afternoon...It’s not that they cannot work instead we will not force them to work here”.*

Another mahout whose elephant is now retired also affirmed on the previous statement. He further added that, once he had a thought to move out to seek work in the city, but he decided not to do it, he couldn't leave his elephant. He was glad that he stayed, although he had to go out and worked in the field, but during the break, he could always pay a visit and spent the time with his elephant at the retirement home. Moreover, he also mentioned that, he still and always felt bad when he had to punish his elephant when his elephant did something bad. For example, walked into neighbor farm and destroyed some of the trees, fought among others...He said *"like parents, we have to teach our kid to behave well, we have to use the hook to scare them sometime and every time we felt bad about it."* This is a strong bond that mahouts have with our elephants.

#### **2.4.2 Viewpoint of Elephant Camp Owners – PROFIT and PLANET (profit maximization versus cost minimization while being sustainable – with consideration for elephant conservation)**

According to MEC's advisor, about 95 percent of Thailand's captive elephants are privately owned. They are very valuable, value at around THB 2 million or USD 60,000.00 per elephant. They are special and very expensive to take care of. The costs for food and drink not including the medicine are also around THB 1,000.00 (USD 30.00) per day, per elephant. Simply, without putting them to work, the mahouts and elephant owners would have no means to take care of them. In many cases, the elephants end up roaming the streets begging for food, damaging farms, getting hit by cars, or being sent free to the forest to live independently. Evidently, many cannot survive. This is the sad reality that needs to be mitigated. Hence, MEC offers a solution – buy the elephants from the mahouts who cannot afford to rear their elephants and hires the mahouts to work in MEC as staffs. Mr. Choochart believes the best person to take care and understand the elephants the most in fact are their mahouts. Henceforth, the income of MEC does not go to the owner solely. The idea is to improve the lives of elephants and their respective mahouts. Currently, the camp has 73 elephants with more than 400 staffs. The camp always faces deficits most especially during the off-peak season of April to July. That is why Mr. Choochart has to handle other businesses, such as coffee shop, restaurant, resort, and drinking water to cover the high costs in MEC.

*"Whether this is low season or high season, we have visitors or not, the elephants have to eat every day and we have to pay for our staffs every month. This is our responsibility, this is our love to our elephants and this is our reality"* – MEC's Advisor.

In the future, Mr. Choochart and his team already have a plan to create more activities and programs that allow visitors to spend the time with elephants and take care of them. Thus, there will be less elephant shows.

### **2.4.3 View point of the Community Surrounding the Elephant Camp – PEOPLE and PROFIT (the role of the community who benefits from the elephant camp and show – community-based tourism)**

Most of the camp staffs are the mahouts and local people who live nearby. They are also the same people (families and relatives of mahouts) who sell elephant food as feeds. A huge proportion of the bananas, sugarcanes, and Napaier grass that are being sold to the visitors are their own produce. This is how they make additional income from the operations of MEC. The camp encourages local people to work, regardless their technical constraints (i.e., knowledge and skills). The compensation that the camp provides might not be as high as what the urban areas can offer; however, the mahout's family can preserve their close family ties.

Furthermore, since Mr. Choochart has to operate many businesses to support the activities at MEC, it is also most likely that the workers in his different business are the family members and relatives of MEC's staffs.

*“There was a time when we had very low numbers of visitor due to instability of the country, our salaries got cut by that and we were the one that volunteer to do it” – Mahout.*

## **3. The way forward: conclusions and recommendation**

Based on information and data we have gathered from MEC, their contribution to the conservation of elephants is through housing them in their own facility, spending on their welfare together with their respective mahout, and allowing tourists to appreciate them through personal encounters by being a mahout-for-a-day. Given the discussion in the previous section as well as the reports from the Tourism Authority of Thailand, it can be construed that the extent of the elephant employment and trade reflects that elephants are highly valuable resulting to high demand for them in profit-making activities. For instance, we have seen from accounts that the number of tourists visiting elephant camps has been incessantly rising. Consequently, it also continuously increases the demand for elephants

The much stricter government regulations on the utilization of elephants are evidences of enhanced political will and enforcement action. Hence, to complement existing regulations, we suggest the creation of policies and incentives for people to learn the technical-know how of elephant rearing – mahout training. There is a need for this occupation to be appealing to people of any economic status. Personal attachment and love for elephants is a necessary requirement but not sufficient and sustainable. Chances are, prospective mahouts are easily attracted by the lucrative opportunities the urban areas are offering, which is detrimental to the sustainability of elephant rearing. People will explore the benefits of being a mahout if there is a decent and worthwhile incentive. The government cannot depend on the inimitable care of mahouts' families for elephants. There is just no assurance. Of equal importance, there is also a need to encourage communities to work together with the



elephant camps, members of the elephant tourism value chain, and the government in designing and developing a community-based or multi-stakeholder tourism framework for the preservation and conservation of the Asian elephants.

Meanwhile, on a macro level, we concur with the recommendations of Nijman (2014) to enhance and sustain current enforcement efforts domestically and diffused in the region through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Wildlife Enforcement Network (ASEANWEN). In an industry as big and as delicate as the elephant tourism, tapping collaborative and supportive contributions (e.g., information sharing, joint programs, security assistance, financial help, training) is very crucial in the success of conserving the Asian elephants.

To complement the proposed partnerships with the domestic and international community and stakeholders, legal reforms are also needed so that elephant-protection laws become all encompassing covering all types of elephant populations (captive, domesticated, wild). What is essential is that it should be clear from the law the distinctive responsibilities for planning, leading, organizing, and controlling. That is, according to Nijman (2014), legal reforms should enforce, oversee, and manage the inventory (i.e., registration and identification) of all elephants so the laundering of wild-caught elephants will be mitigated. Similar to turtle conservation, the marking-recapture method may be applied to elephants. In addition, this will allow for the generation of data, track the whereabouts of the elephants, and understand more their patterns of growth and living.

Of course, contemporary methods such as stringent sanctions for illegal employment, capturing, hunting, trading the elephants and/or any parts thereof (i.e., ivory), should be fully enforced. Punishments can now serve as an effective deterrent or disincentive to abuse elephants. What's more and above all, the visitors and local people who are the key driver should also act as responsible watch guard, ensuring that all activities are not harmful to the nature norm. Because at the end, we want to live harmoniously together, visiting and spending the time with this sacred creature should be a memorable experience for a lifetime and for all. As such, the entertainment at (Maesa) elephant camp is not solely for sale.

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