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A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy in Development Studies at Massey University New Zealand

David F Redman
2009
Abstract

This thesis looks at the potential for using tourism as a poverty alleviation strategy in the context of Vietnam and the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). The theoretical basis for this research stems from the growing recognition within development rhetoric of the place of tourism as a key industry in many developing nations, and the formation of a Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT) approach. The fieldwork section of this thesis looks at the barriers and opportunities for those in the poorer communities of Lang Co, a small town on the central east coast of Vietnam, to supply the burgeoning tourism industry with locally produced products that are compatible with their current livelihood strategies.

Results show that there are many opportunities for the poor to benefit from the rapidly growing tourism industry in Vietnam and the region. There is a strong recognition of tourism in national and regional development strategies, there is a rich cultural, environmental and social context driving the tourism industry and there are several initiatives taking place, such as the Vietnamese National Tourism Law, which include many elements of pro-poor tourism principles. However, this thesis has found many barriers also prevent poorer people from benefiting from tourism. In the case of Lang Co, the poor were often limited in their ability to participate in the industry by debt and lack of access to credit, lack of education and training opportunities, a declining natural resource base and by a lack of awareness and participation in the planning of the tourism industry. More widely, the tourism industry is centrally driven and focused on high growth and large infrastructure type developments which in some cases conflict with the principles of PPT and the ability of people at the ground level to participate.

This research highlights the complexity of attempting to use tourism as a poverty reduction strategy given the wide range of stakeholders involved and various levels involved the planning and implementation of the tourism industry. The potential applicability of a concept of pro-poor tourism in a rapidly changing context such as Vietnam is contingent of the ability of the poor to have influence on an industry which is having an increasing effect on their lives and livelihoods.
Acknowledgements

I firstly would like to thank all those who participated in this study and were extremely welcoming and generously open with their personal information. I would like to thank all those at SNV who collaborated with this research, and shared their resources with me. I would like to thank my two research assistants in dealing with me through the long hot days in Lang Co and without whose help I would have been extremely lost.

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<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APEC</td>
<td>Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of South East Asian Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIC</td>
<td>Bank Information Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBT</td>
<td>Community Based Tourism</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMEA</td>
<td>Council for Mutual Economic Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPC</td>
<td>Commune People’s Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>Department For International Development (U.K)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doi Mo</td>
<td>Renovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOT</td>
<td>(Vietnamese) Department of Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPI</td>
<td>Department for Planning and Investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPC</td>
<td>District People’s Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIA</td>
<td>Environmental Impact Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GAD</td>
<td>Gender and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>GMS</td>
<td>Greater Mekong Subregion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GTZ</td>
<td>German Development Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HCMC</td>
<td>Ho Chi Minh City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIED</td>
<td>International Institute for Economic Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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ICRT  International Center for Responsible Tourism
MDG  Millennium Development Goal
MTCO  Mekong Tourism Coordination Office
NTA  National Tourism Association
NGO  Non Government Organisation
ODI  Overseas Development Institute
OECD  Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PPT  Pro Poor Tourism
SPS  Safeguard Policy Statement
SME  Small to Medium Enterprise
SNV  The Netherlands Bilateral Development Organisation
SOE  State Owned Enterprise
UNWTO  United Nations World Tourism Organisation
VCA  Value Chain Analysis
VND  Vietnamese Dong (currency)
VNAT  Vietnamese National Association of Tourism
WTO  World Trade Organisation
WTTC  World Travel and Tourism Council