

Nguyen Thanh Nam  
Hanoi University of Culture  
Vietnam

**GENDER IN COMMUNITY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT  
(CASE OF COMMUNITY TOURISM VILLAGE QUYNH SON, BAC SON  
DISTRICT, LANG SON PROVINCE, VIETNAM)**

**Introduction**

Development is a process that takes place in the context of global restructuring, in which gender equality is a fundamental component. However, in development policies, gender is still blurred. In the service economy, women are still quite slow to advance because of influencing factors such as parenting or unpaid work. Tourism is also one of the most important service economic sectors contributing to the development of many countries in the world, including Vietnam. Although tourism contributes to the well-documented social and economic development of many countries, in recent years, studies in Vietnam have paid little attention to what the tourism industry has to offer for women and men, as well as the relationship between tourism and gender equality. According to UNWTO, tourism presents both opportunities and challenges for women, which makes the gender equality perspective need to be promoted in tourism. This article discusses women's participation in Community-Based Tourism (CBT), in the context of the development of Quynh Son community tourism village, Bac Son district, Lang Son province - a northern border province of Vietnam. In order to understand gender issues in local CBT activities, the method used was mainly to analyze documents, observe and chat with households doing tourism, combined with in-depth interviews. Some members of the community help make research more comprehensive.

## 1. Gender research in community-based tourism

Tourism is an activity formed and developed according to the needs of human life. Nowadays, as science, technology, transport and economy develops, human life is improved, which leads to an increasing demand for tourism. Depending on the individual's economic conditions, modern people are thinking of devoting a portion of their annual income to tourism. Among the human needs, the demand for tourism has never been satisfied, the more people travel, the more their lives will be improved, thus forming many types of tourism.

The term Community - Based Tourism comes from the form of village tourism: it is the type of tourism that tourists visit villages, learn about customs, wildlife, festivals; it is also possible that some guests want to explore the diverse ecosystems, rugged terrain, many mountainous and deep but sparsely populated areas with difficult living conditions for transportation and support especially for tourists. These guests are in great need of assistance, such as leading the way to avoid getting lost, overnight accommodation and meals which have been facilitated by the local people to provide services; at that time, tourists often called the trip with the support of indigenous people - this was the premise for the development of community-based tourism. Nowadays, CBT is considered by governments, economic and social organizations of many countries and it has become a new field in the tourism industry. In addition, non-governmental organizations create conditions to help and participate in this field so that the social, cultural, political, economic and ecological issues within the village premises become agents provide services to tourists and attract many tourists to visit, indigenous people also have income from providing services and serving visitors, so the type of tourism is based on the community is increasingly popular and meaningful not only to tourists, local authorities but also the whole community.

In fact, community-based tourism has been formed, spread and created a rich and diverse range of products and services for tourists in the 80s and 90s of the last century. In Africa, Australia, Latin America, community tourism is developed through non-governmental organizations. Community-based tourism is strongly developing in Asian countries, including ASEAN countries: Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand; or in other regional countries such as India, Nepal, Taiwan. This type of tourism exists with many different names: *Community - based Tourism*, *Community - development in tourism*, *Community - Based Ecotourism*, *Community - Participation in Tourism...* Pachamama (Organization aiming at introducing and preserving culture Native America region) gave its opinion on Community-Based Tourism: "CBT is a type of tourism that tourists from outside come to the local community to learn about customs, lifestyle, belief and enjoy local cuisine. The local community controls both the impacts and benefits through the process of participating in this form of tourism, thereby strengthening self-management, enhancing livelihoods and promoting traditional values of local".

Although there are many different concepts as well as different names, in general, the basic characteristics of a CBT can be listed as follows: local communities participate in or

are responsible for implementing and operating travel activities; members of the community can share socio-economic benefits from tourism; tourism activities can contribute to raise awareness and knowledge of the outside world for local communities. The local community is in control of the values of tourism resources to provide visitors with the opportunity to learn and raise their awareness when having the opportunity to access the tourism resource systems. Visitors are external agents, a premise for economic benefits and they will have certain impacts along with the enjoyment of values of natural and human ecology when coming to a local community. CBT is able to create employment opportunities for people with different backgrounds, abilities and skills. In order to develop potential skills in any society, tourism needs to find ways to attract talents from all communities, especially those that have not fully participated in all labor activities today. In the context of the global tourism labor market today, women deserve special attention at the strategic level. That is the content of gender research in CBT.

The term "gender" in Scott and Marshall's view refers to the social constructs that make up the difference between men and women. Gender perspective was introduced from the West into Vietnam in the early 1990s. The feminist theory and gender viewpoint of the Western countries came from questions like: What about women? How can we change and improve society to make it a fairer place for women and for everyone? What about internal differences among women?<sup>1</sup>. The efforts of feminists over the past four decades to answer these questions have led to answers that are theories of gender difference, gender inequality and gender oppression. Nowadays, in Vietnam, gender issues are paid much attention to in sciences such as Gender Studies, Gender Sociology, and Social Work. Gender equality and women's empowerment have made some real-life advancements, in areas such as education, politics, economics, family, etc. gender gap, there is still a gap in access to basic social services and education and health care opportunities. Child marriage, gender discrimination, mistreatment of women, sexual abuse of women, prostitution, trafficking of women and children... Social issues and violations of equality and respect for human dignity of women - still not effectively addressed in many localities in Vietnam.

In Vietnam today, the tourism industry creates jobs that are especially important for women. More and more women have a job in tourism industry due to the attraction of a clean and pleasant working environment, relatively good working conditions and flexible working hours and high promotion opportunities. The percentage of women working in restaurants, hotels and tourism service establishments is 56% higher than the general labor force because there is an enabling environment for women participating in hotel and tourism businesses in Vietnam. In particular, because of indirectly related jobs to tourism, the tourism industry as a whole has significant career opportunities for women. In leisure time, it is important to create employment opportunities for women, especially in rural and remote areas. Community-based and pro-poor tourism initiatives will have a significant impact on creating opportunities for women in rural communities, improving skills, jobs, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Lengermann & Niebrugge- Brantley (1998), *Sociology and Social Theory, 1830-1930*, McGraw-Hill.

earning income for women. women, helping more and more women take control of their own future. Gender studies in CBT also contribute to raise awareness among businesses and tourists about the risk of exploitation of women. For women, in the context of the country's current tourism development, it requires them to have access and control over resources and opportunities to increase relative power in society as well as to control their lives better.

## **2. Conditions for developing community-based tourism in Quynh Son, Bac Son and Lang Son villages**

The community tourism village Quynh Son is located in Bac Son district, 80 km Southwest of the center of Lang Son city along National Highway 1B. The village consists of 5 villages: Don Riec 1, Don Riec 2, Tan Son, Na Rieng 1, Na Rieng 2. The main resident feature of the locality is the Tay (one of 53 ethnic minorities in Vietnam).

### *Travel resources*

Local tourism resources are divided into two basic groups: natural tourism resources and humanistic tourism resources. Regarding the natural resources, the locality has many caves in the mountain, interspersed among limestone mountains, which are land mountains and flat valleys creating a wonderful and pristine landscape. The beautiful natural landscapes in the locality are Caxto caves (*Tham Tung* cave), floating rocks, *Na Lay* peak... Quynh Son is home to rich human resources. This is the residence of Tay families with a long history and typical cultural features. The villages of the Tay ethnic group in Quynh Son were formed with many stilt houses built on the traditional stilt architecture, made of wood, spacious and airy space, in harmony with the landscape. nature of mountains and forests, fields... Mr. *Duong Cong Chai*, a family head with an old house on stilts in the locality, said: "The whole village has a common feature - one direction, one family. All of the Tay people here are *Duong*, including *Duong Cong*, *Duong Dinh*, *Duong Doan*, and *Duong Huu* and *Duong Than* in other communes." The houses are entirely wooden stilt houses. The direction Southwest of this house has been maintained since the time of his father, up to now probably 12 years already. Partly due to the dependence of the arc of the village, the three sides are mountains, all the houses were laid down, swept in one direction, and enjoyed the cool southern wind. Nowadays, roads are more developed so that houses built later, houses can have different directions, but mainly in the village are old houses, wooden houses made from ancient times, all in the same direction of the Southwest. There are 450 households in Quynh Son commune, up to 400 households are wooden stilt houses built for a long time. Like Mr. *Duong Cong Chai* home was built in 1939 until now as intact as the old rafters, mossy tile roofs, polished wood over time. In order to build a model of a local community-based tourism village, the *Tourism Development Center* of Lang Son Province, in conjunction with the *District Department of Culture and Information*, organized a stilt house construction program of 5 qualified households for from 30 to 50 guests staying. These houses on stilts are rebuilt according to the ancient stilt architecture, each house is

invested from 1 to 1.5 billion per house according to the socialized area. The total area of each house is about 700m-1000m in a beautiful, airy position with views to the mountains or fields. The unique cultural tradition of the local Tay ethnic group is the Then singing songs which was recognized as the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the World in 2019. The people have many unique dishes in New Year such as black rice cake, sticky rice, wormwood cake, meat and egg ant... to everyday dishes such as sour bamboo shoots cooked fish, dishes from forest vegetables, grilled catfish, dishes processed from chicken, duck... Bac Son district has famous tangerine specialties in the market of the whole province and some northern provinces. Bac Son tangerines are grown in unicorns, valleys and hill gardens, and they taste good and sweet. In the locality, Quynh Son communal house festival is held every 2 days on the 12th and the 13th of the first lunar month of the New year, with many traditional rituals and games, special folk performances such as the Praying Ceremony, the procession of village tutelary God ceremony to go to the field, playing chess, swing, sing, canopy dance, betel nut dance... The *Long Tong* Festival is held in spring with traditional rituals to pray for good crops and fun activities such as: throwing *còn*, playing chess, swinging... The system of historical relics, famous landscapes of the commune includes Quynh Son communal house (architectural art relics of provincial level), Ra Rieng bridge (provincial historical relics), exotic old banyan trees, Tien wells, craft tile making villages...

#### *Ability to provide basic tourism services*

In CBT activities, the ability to provide basic services is essential because the better the service, the greater the level of guest satisfaction increases and therefore the level of attraction also increases. However, as a mountainous district in the northeastern region of Vietnam, this supply capacity of Quynh Son tourism village is not good. Local households have used the national electricity grid, but due to low monthly payment capacity, the use of electrical equipment is limited. Clean water systems have not been built, most households use well water or slot water. The commune is connected to ADSL broadband Internet, commune officials are equipped with computers to facilitate the management and information exchange. These infrastructure conditions have an impact on tourism development in the commune.

#### *Accessibility to tourist destinations*

The transportation system is quite good between the tourist attractions of the commune (except for visiting the Caxto cave in the valley). There are paved roads in the commune, from Bac Son town to the center of the commune is only about 2 km. Tourists coming here can choose many forms of transportation such as walking, motorbikes, terrain bikes...

#### *Behavior between community and tourists*

The local labor force is plentiful, but the education level of many people is not high, which limits travel tourism, especially communication with foreign visitors in foreign languages. However, the local Tay people have a tourist-friendly attitude.

### **3. Situation of tourism activities in Quynh Son, Bac Son, Lang Son community tourism villages and women's participation in local tourism activities**

#### **3.1. Situation of tourism activities in Quynh Son community tourism village**

Through local research, Quynh Son community tourism village has only been formed to welcome tourists since 2010. With its development time, it is not so long and not many tourists know about this tourist destination. These are the restrictions that directly affect the number of tourists. Mr. *Duong Cong Van's family* in *Don Riec 2* village is one of the first 5 households implementing the model. Although trained and toured a number of community tourism villages inside and outside the province, but when implementing the fact also encountered some difficulties due to inexperience, domestic reception was difficult, the reception of international visitors is even more difficult due to disagreements about customs and traditions, so in the early years of implementing this model, it only welcomed a few dozen visitors. Realizing the economic efficiency from this model, his family has gradually learned from the reception and introduction to tourists about the cultural identity and traditions of the *Tay* people, learn about how to prepare dishes, how to suit tourists, from which tourists have come to his family more and more. Mr. Duong Cong Van of Don Riec 2 village, Quynh Son commune said: "In the first few years of joining the community-based tourism model, there were no guests but in the last 3 years, my family often has groups of tourists coming to stay so the income is quite stable and can live off a living despite the calendar". Like Mr. Van's family, Mr. Duong Cong Chai's family in Na Rieng 2 village is also one of the households that attracts many visitors. In 2018, his family received 140 international visitors, 600 domestic guests including those who came and stayed at the family 2 to 3 times. According to the statistics of Quynh Son commune, in 2016 the number of tourists to Quynh Son commune was 2,000 people, in 2018 the number of visitors to nearly 3,000 visits including domestic and international visitors.

According to the survey, it was found that some families in Quynh Son took the initiative, boldly borrowed capital, combined with investment from the project of building and repairing traditional flukes to serve tourists visiting, including accommodation and catering. From 5 households implementing the model to now, Quynh Son commune has 8 households implementing reception and more than 30 households are eligible and qualified to welcome tourists to visit and stay. The combination of the government and the people will help the community based tourism activities to develop more sustainably, be able to actively control the impact of tourism rather than efforts from one side.

### 3.2. Participation of women in local tourism activities

According to the reference frame of the CBT model of Pretty<sup>2</sup>, it can be seen that the level of participation of the local community is low and passive. The majority of the first 5 participating households who are directly doing CBT in the locality are chosen by the locality to persuade people to accept the model. Currently, the homestay host village mainly concentrates in Don Riec 2 and Na Rieng 2 villages, while the village has 5 villages. The people only participate in the main tourism activities such as organizing accommodation activities, catering services and performing arts shows for guests. The number of participants is not all in the village, but only concentrated in 5-8 main households. One of the reasons that local indigenous people participate in CBT is the barriers of their education, customs, habits and livelihoods. In recent years, local authorities have been very interested in investing and preferential policies for the development of CBT, but due to low education, people are familiar with traditional agricultural practices. Many households do not dare to change the production model - from agriculture to tourism services. They only convert when they see the first families to make a profit from community tourism before they join. The local Tay ethnic group are long-lived indigenous people so they retain many identities, these cultural features are tourism resources, but at the same time some conceptions about the family along with local customs and practices also hinder the tourism participation of people including women.

Stemming from the traditional family characteristics of the Tay people: the family (*Reun, Tu Re*) is a patriarchal sub-family is a popular type. Families can have 3-4 generations living. The paternalism in the Tay ethnic group is very high, reflected in the role of family head and property inheritance. The man owns the family. The head of the household owns all the property and has the right to make decisions in the house. A wife has the right to give opinions in the house, but the right to decide always belongs to her husband. When a father in the family dies, the eldest son is the father who heads the family to raise the children when they are young. The Tay families often prefer boys and have clear rules in the relationships between family members. The Tay family is an economic unit, in which the division of labor by gender is very clear: men undertake the heavy labor in agriculture such as slash-and-burn, house building, plowing... and women work jobs are weaving, raising, caring for children, doing housework... Therefore, when participating in family travel activities, women must be agreed with her husband and husband's family. Women are only allowed to participate in jobs such as welcoming guests, cooking and they must arrange these jobs so that they do not affect the traditional jobs of the family.

For the form of community tourism, the main accommodation method is homestay, so when having an overnight stay, women still have to ensure that the traditional cultural features do not violate community regulations. In the Tay family there is a tradition of a division of sleeping places for women... In the locality today, many Tay women have low

---

<sup>2</sup> Pretty, J (1995), *The many interpretations of participation*, In Focus, 16, 4-5.

education levels because they were not encouraged to study in the past, which hinders their communication with guests or creativity in local tourism practices.

Studies in some ethnic minority areas with CBT activities in the northern mountainous areas of Vietnam such as Mai Chau (Hoa Binh), Sa Pa (Lao Cai), it always affirms that men occupy a dominant position in the activities of access and control of resources in CBT development. Men are able to use accommodation facilities and have higher family decision-making power than women. The notion that men are the pillars, the heads of the families of the Hmong, Thai, and Muong ethnic groups... also affects the decision-making power of women and men in local tourism activities. However, in Quynh Son community tourism village, in some households, there was a sharing in "working together" of men and women in the family. Mr. Duong Cong Chai said: "Everything was worried, but propagated, so my wife and I also felt honored because our house was chosen as a tourist, introduced to everyone the ancient stilt house because it was the hand that his father built. Actually, these modern devices were not used by the family before, even as the solar hot and cold. But then officials came down to advise, explain how to operate, and then save energy efficiency... we found that this was a new and progressive one, so we learned to follow it. Now, only water heaters are used for solar energy systems, but when there are a lot of customers, they must combine and turn on the batteries to keep hot water". And Mrs Duong Thi Doan, she is Mr. Chai's wife, said that their children all went out to live separately, so the house is empty like this. She said it was happy to meet many people from all over the world. When asked whether they can speak English or not, *Doan* laughed: "We do not know Western language, foreign visitors here must go through guides. But the tour guide was not always there, and we could still communicate with the guests, mostly to signal. The two sides kept waving their hands, signaling and understanding each other forever, but we are also getting used to this type of conversation". Mrs *Doan* said that there are a lot of memories of Western guests, and the important thing is that their sincere and enthusiastic behavior will be remembered by everyone, and then they will introduce people later.

In order to attract more tourists to admire the natural landscape and experience the local Tay ethnic culture, Quynh Son Commune has opened lute classes for the community and folk songs both preserve the traditional cultural values and are ready to perform for tourists when needed. Participants in these classes are mainly local women. Not only learning technology, learning to invest in installing modern appliances, the women here also have to learn how to make dishes as she said "has never been in this life." As more and more foreign visitors come to Bac Son, the travel companies contact families to make homestays, instructing how to make some basic dishes such as making crepes, mixing salads, or vegetarian dishes... for customer service. Mrs. Doan shared "Guests come to homestay because they want to feel the cultural life here, although they integrate into the rustic life but many dishes they cannot eat, so we are willing to learn to best serve tourists"...



#### **4. Conclusion**

In ethnic minority areas of Vietnam like Quynh Son commune, Bac Son district, Lang Son province, women have many opportunities to participate in tourism activities but also face barriers to customs, language, education, or gender notions. In order to develop CBT with the participation of all people, especially ethnic minority women, the state management agencies in charge of tourism should have policies on giving women's rights through travel. Governments need to implement tourism strategies with a gender perspective or design a tourism strategy across from a gender perspective to be a practical part of the national tourism strategy and be prioritized within the budget. The first step is to investigate the reality of women living in tourist destinations and of those who travel as workers. Women in ethnic minority areas need to be strengthened to have access to tourism skills training, capital support and business capacity building for women starting careers related to tourism in the local community. Women's Unions in localities also need to have plans to support women in tourism-related activities, especially community-based tourism activities such as improving microfinance for women in households. In short, they need to be given the opportunity to participate in tourism activities in the local community - the service activities where the current labor force is mainly female.

## References

- Anh T.T.V, Hung L.N (2000), *Women, Gender and Development*, Phu Nu Publishing House, Hanoi.
- APEC Tourism Working Group (2010), *Effective Community Based Tourism*.
- Bich M.H (2007), *Gender research: some methodological reflections*, Sociology Magazine No. 3 (99), Vietnam.
- David Tresillian (2004), *Poverty Alleviation and Community - Based Tourism: Experiences from Central and South Asia*.
- Hung L.N, Loc N.T.M (2000), *Sociology of Gender and Development*, Hanoi National University Publishing House, Hanoi.
- Huong B.T, Cuong N.D.H (2007), *Researching models of community based tourism in Vietnam*, Hanoi University, Hanoi.
- Lengermann & Niebrugge- Brantley (1998), *Sociology and Social Theory, 1830-1930*, McGraw-Hill.
- Liedewij van Dreugel, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen (2013), *Community based tourism: local participation and perceived astronomical - a comparative study between two communities in Thailand*.
- Pretty, J (1995), *The many interpretations of participation*, In Focus, 16, 4-5.
- Que Vo (2006), *CBT - Theory and application*, Khoa hoc & Ky thuat Publishing House, Hanoi.
- REST (1997), *Community Based Tourism: Principles and Meaning*.
- Scott.J & Marshall.G (2005), *A dictionary of Sociology*, Third Edition, Oxford; Oxford University press.
- The Asean secretariat (2016), *ASEAN Community based tourism Standard*, Jakarta.
- The mountain Institute (2000), *Community based tourism: for conservation and development: a resource kit*.
- Thinh H.B (2008), *Sociology of gender*, Hanoi National University Publishing House, Hanoi.
- Thinh H.B (2008), *Some incorrect interpretations related to gender and feminism*, Journal of Family and Gender Studies, No. 1.
- Yen B.T.H (2012), *Community Based Tourism*, Giao Duc Publishing House, Ha Noi.

Nguyen Thanh Nam

**Gender in community tourism development (case of community tourism Village Quynh Son, Bac Son District, Lang Son Province, Vietnam)**

Community - based tourism is considered as a type of tourism that brings many sustainable economic benefits to indigenous people in many countries in the world. Vietnam is a country with great potentials for natural landscapes, historical values, indigenous culture of ethnic groups with habits and lifestyles, rich culinary culture of regions, it is the basis for development of community based tourism. In many ethnic minority areas, the villages have become actors to provide services to tourists, and indigenous people also have income from tourism activities. Community-based tourism is increasingly popular and meaningful not only for tourists, local governments but also for the whole community. In developing countries like Vietnam, local tourism has provided an important source of employment for women, providing them with many opportunities of income. The study of women involved in tourism is also a topic of interest in the field of tourism and sociology in Vietnam. This paper discusses the issue of women participating in tourism activities in a tourism village in the ethnic minority areas of Northern Vietnam - Quynh Son village, Bac Son district, Lang Son province.

**Keywords:** gender, Community - based tourism, community tourism village.

**Płeć w rozwoju turystyki opartej na społeczności lokalnej (przypadek wioski turystycznej Quynh Son, dystrykt Bac Son, prowincja Lang Son, Wietnam)**

Turystyka oparta na społeczności lokalnej jest uważana za rodzaj turystyki, który przynosi wiele trwałych korzyści gospodarczych rdzennej ludności w wielu krajach na świecie. Wietnam jest krajem o dużym potencjale, pełnym naturalnych krajobrazów i wartości historycznych, bogatej kulturze rdzennych grup etnicznych, regionalnej kuchni, a to jest podstawą rozwoju turystyki opartej na społeczności lokalnej. Na wielu obszarach mniejszości etnicznych wioski stały się podmiotami świadczącymi usługi dla turystów, a ludność rdzenna osiąga dochody z turystyki. Turystyka ta jest coraz bardziej popularna i ma coraz większe znaczenie nie tylko dla turystów, samorządów lokalnych, ale także dla całej społeczności. W krajach rozwijających się, takich jak Wietnam, turystyka lokalna stanowi ważne źródło zatrudnienia dla kobiet, zapewniając im wiele możliwości uzyskania dochodu. Badania nad kobietami zajmującymi się turystyką są również przedmiotem zainteresowania w dziedzinie turystyki i socjologii w Wietnamie. Niniejszy artykuł omawia kwestię udziału kobiet w działalności turystycznej w wiosce turystycznej na obszarach mniejszości etnicznych północnego Wietnamu - wiosce Quynh Son, dystrykcie Bac Son, prowincji Lang Son.

**Słowa kluczowe:** płeć, turystyka oparta na społeczności lokalnej, wioska turystyczna.

*Translated by Anna Oleszak*

