

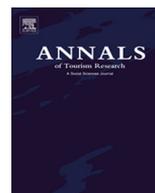


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# Ecotourism, gender and development in northern Vietnam

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### ABSTRACT

Community-based Ecotourism is increasingly recognized as a form of sustainable development designed to promote local livelihood, environmental conservation and culture. However, like all development projects, participation and benefits accrued are complicated by contextual factors and social structures, including gender. Using gender analysis tools commonly employed in Gender and Development research, this study investigates women's participation in a community-based ecotourism project in northern Vietnam. Applying Longwe's empowerment framework reveals a more equitable division of labor, increased income, self-confidence and community involvement, and new leadership roles for women. However, inequities of social class, childcare, and violence against women remained outstanding. The study concludes with recommendations for research and practice in community-based ecotourism from a gender perspective.

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## Introduction

Over the last several decades, community-based ecotourism (CBET) has come to be seen as a variant of sustainable community development (Björk, 2007; Scheyvens, 2002; Stronza & Gordillo, 2008). Done properly, CBET should contribute to the environmental conservation of wildlife and wilderness, allow local communities to generate new sources of livelihood predicated on this conservation, and reinforce or revive traditional culture and lifeways (Butler & Hinch, 2007; Honey, 2008; Zeppel, 2006). However, CBET is no stranger to the social, psychological and political complexities of development initiatives. Factors such as external partnerships, internal cooperation, capacity-building, funding, dependency, leadership, local institutions, development approaches, land rights, and

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relations of class, gender and cultural identity can all contribute to the success or failure of CBET projects (Farrelly, 2011; Jones, 2005; Lacher & Nepal, 2010).

With several notable exceptions (Dilly, 2003; Pleno, 2006; Reimer & Walter, 2013; Schellhorn, 2010; Scheyvens, 2007; Stronza, 2005; Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012), research in the field of ecotourism has been mostly “gender blind.” In a recent review of research in ecotourism, Weaver and Lawton (2007, p. 1168), for example, examine over 75,000 abstracts related to ecotourism in 6,000 periodicals, noting that ecotourism is now firmly established as an academic field of inquiry. And yet among the vast corpus of research in the field, the authors identify only two studies peripherally related to gender. To help address this gap in research, the present study undertakes a gender analysis of a community-based ecotourism project in northern Vietnam, with reference to wider scholarship in gender and tourism studies, and to the extant literature on gender in community-based ecotourism.

The literature on gender and tourism has provided increasingly complex analyses of gender identities, roles and relationships in tourism development policy and practice (Aitchison, 2005; Ferguson, 2011; Gentry, 2007; Hall, Swain, & Kinnaired, 2003; Kinnaired & Hall, 1994; Swain, 1995). In recent years, the “cultural turn” of post-structuralism in tourism studies has been increasingly present, encompassing issues such as hegemonic tourism discourses, cultural practices and power inequities, gender identity construction, host and tourist subjectivities, embodiment, sexuality and symbolic representation (Aitchison, 2005; Cabezas, 2006; Pritchard & Morgan, 2000; Tucker, 2007).

In an early edited collection in the field, *Tourism: A Gender Analysis* (Kinnaired & Hall, 1994), Kinnaired, Kothari, and Hall (1994, p. 24) proposed a “gender-aware framework” with three basic premises: “(1) tourism development processes and tourism-related activities are constructed out of gendered societies; (2) gender relations both inform, and are informed by, the practices of all societies; and (3) power relations surrounding tourism development processes represent an extension of the politics of gender relations.” The empirical case studies which followed showed how these premises played out in the gendered practices and ideologies of tourism. In some cases, social relations in tourism development acted to reproduce patriarchal norms of larger societies (e.g. England, Ireland and the Caribbean). Women who worked in marginal, low wage tourism jobs experienced an amplification of traditional reproductive labor in cleaning, cooking and serving tourists. In other case studies, where societies had more equitable gender norms (such as Western Samoa), women were able to capitalize on tourism opportunities (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1994), highlighting the importance of local context in understanding gender roles and relations.

A second major collection of articles on gender and tourism, published in the *Annals of Tourism Research* (Swain, 1995), combined analyses of the material conditions of gendered labor, power relations and ideology, with post-structural case studies focusing on cultural constructions of gender and sexuality among hosts and guests. Gender was taken here as a “system of culturally constructed identities, expressed in ideologies of masculinity and femininity, interacting with socially structured relationships in divisions of labor and leisure, sexuality, and power between women and men” (Swain, 1995, pp. 258–259). This hybrid of structural analysis and post-structural approaches to gender and tourism research has since been more widely adopted in the field (Aitchison, 2005). Tucker’s (2007) research on gender and tourism development in Turkey, for example, demonstrated how Muslim women, whose mobility was limited by patriarchal traditions to the private sphere of the home, adopted new gender roles in paid tourism employment in the public sphere, in the process promoting new gender identities and relations. By contrast, a recent case study by Ishii (2012) on Akha women’s involvement in tourism in Thailand found that when new income generated by women disrupted men’s patriarchal gender roles (as household heads), the resulting stigma sometimes led to alcohol and narcotics use by men, “gender antagonism,” and community dissolution.

The complex structural and post-structural themes found in gender and tourism studies are also reflected in research on gender and ecotourism in particular (Dilly, 2003; Pleno, 2006; Schellhorn, 2010; Scheyvens, 2000; Stronza, 2005; Swain & Swain, 2004; Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012; Walter, 2011). Findings of a comparative study of Bakiga people involved in community-based ecotourism in southwestern Uganda, for example, showed that women’s traditional gender roles changed with their participation in tourism, allowing them new income and autonomy (Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012). Women’s new roles – in housekeeping, gardening and tour guiding – were marginal and low paid, and their workload was intensified. However, increased income was spent on family needs,

and even the hiring of domestic helpers, marginally reducing women's reproductive labor. Moreover, women's participation in tourism promoted community development among a network of women, and allowed them to invest in and own property, thus further securing a measure of economic security, independence and increased confidence in their relations with men. In similar fashion, [Stronza's \(2005\)](#) research on a community-based ecotourism project in the Peruvian Amazon found that women assumed additional burdens of labor when working in an ecotourism lodge, but this also opened up new gender roles, and increased their decision-making power and involvement in community affairs.

However, ecotourism development does not necessarily produce new gender roles or relations, but may reinforce traditional gender divisions of labor. [Gentry's \(2007\)](#) research on ecotourism and other forms of tourism in Belize, for example, found a "housewifization" of women's employment. In this inequitable division of labor, women were employed as low paid hotel domestic workers, waitresses, and cooks, and men as higher paid tour guides, taxi drivers, boat operators, and maintenance workers. Likewise, in his research on an ecotourism project near Gunung Rinjani National Park in Indonesia, [Schellhorn \(2010\)](#) observed that local Sasak women were employed in guesthouses and restaurants in informal, low wage service jobs, where men had better paid, higher status formal employment.

Studies of gender and ecotourism have highlighted the importance in particular of women's new gender roles as tour guides. In many instances, this work has increased women's income, mobility, self-confidence and involvement in community development, and has in some cases led to changes in gender norms and relations, and the empowerment of women ([Pleno, 2006](#); [Reimer & Walter, 2013](#); [Stronza, 2005](#)). Empowering Women in Nepal (EWN), a training and leadership program for women trekking guides in the Himalayas, for example, has trained over 400 women ecotourism guides, many of whom have successfully started their own ecotourism businesses ([EWN, 2013](#); [Jackson, 2010](#)). As part of EWN's ecotourism training, women learn about patriarchy, women's rights, safety and assertiveness. Many have gone on to effectively challenge oppressive patriarchal relations in ecotourism guiding and in wider Nepali society. In other countries, however, women who become ecotourism guides without such training have been less successful at confronting male oppression: they have been accused of being prostitutes, endured the threat of male violence, have been positioned as too weak to guide, or simply pushed aside by more aggressive men guides ([Schellhorn, 2010](#); [Scheyvens, 2007](#)).

To date, beyond the studies discussed above, relatively little research has analyzed gender as a social construct in community-based ecotourism. The present study applies analytical frameworks from the Gender and Development field to analyze the gender dimensions of a community-based ecotourism project in Vietnam which focused on increasing the participation of poor women. Gender analysis undertaken for the study was framed by [Longwe's \(2002\)](#) five levels of empowerment (i.e., welfare, access, conscientization, participation and control), taking into account women (and men's) productive, reproductive and community labor, as explained in the next section.

### Gender analysis frameworks in ecotourism

Two main analytical models have been elaborated to explain the connections between ecotourism, gender and development; namely, [Walter \(2011\)](#) and [Scheyvens \(2000\) \(2002\) \(2007\)](#). [Walter \(2011\)](#) elaborates how gender analysis frameworks employed in Gender and Development project planning and research might be applied to community-based ecotourism; in particular, using Longwe's framework for women's empowerment ([March, Smyth, & Mukhopadhyay, 1999](#)). [Scheyvens \(2000\)](#) provides a model for the analysis of four dimensions of women's empowerment in ecotourism: economic, social, political and psychological. [Table 1](#) compares the main elements of the two frameworks.

The first model, Longwe's Empowerment Framework, is designed to understand how women's participation in ecotourism projects, as development projects, may or may not promote levels of empowerment for women, moving from welfare, access and conscientization to participation and control. This analytical model can be used to situate women's participation in an ecotourism project in relation to each of the levels, and provides a direction for movement up the framework towards greater equality and empowerment for women. In emphasizing women's empowerment, it offers a strong political ideology stressing the role of development projects in overcoming gender inequality ([March et al.,](#)

**Table 1**

Comparison of gender analysis frameworks.

Longwe Women's Empowerment Framework (March, Smyth & Mukhopadhyay, 1999)		Scheyvens (2000) Dimensions of Empowerment for Women
Control participation conscientization access welfare	↑ Increasing Equality	↑ Increasing Empowerment
Control – equal control in decision-making over factors of production and distribution of benefits		Political social psychological economic
Participation – equal participation in decision-making processes related to policymaking, planning and administration		Political – voice in all stages of ecotourism project; broadly representative decision-making structures; overcoming of cultural constraints on participation
Conscientization – conscious understanding of gender roles and a gender division of labor, and that these can be changed to be more equitable		Social – community's sense of cohesion confirmed or strengthened by ecotourism activities; equitable distribution of costs and benefits; income used for community projects; greater respect for women
Access – equal access to factors of production (land, labor, credit, education, public services)		Psychological – women at center of cultural preservation; new skills, increased self-confidence, self-reliance and pride; motivated to participate in community development
Welfare – equal access to material welfare (food, income, shelter, medical care)		Economic – participate in formal employment; establish own businesses; challenge restrictive social norms; adopt new gender roles; control ecotourism income; increased access to productive resources

1999). Although the five levels of empowerment are positioned as a hierarchy, they are in fact meant to be circular and mutually reinforcing in practice (Longwe, 2002).

Longwe's Framework also incorporates an analysis of the gender division of labor in reproductive, productive and community roles (March et al., 1999). This analysis might be equally applied to ecotourism (Walter, 2011). Reproductive labor refers to childcare, elder care and care of the ill, provision of meals, cleaning, housework, clothing, and the emotional labor of hosting guests. Productive labor means the production of food, shelter, handicrafts, teaching of language, dance, weaving, rituals, etc. to tourists, and income-generating activities such as tour guiding, vending and small business. Community labor involves activities such as organizing and running an ecotourism cooperative, attending meetings, developing policy, resolving conflicts, marketing, coordinating with tour businesses, and representing the project to outsiders.

Longwe's Framework is a transformative model of development which identifies gaps in gender equity and the potential for change in ecotourism project planning, implementation, outcomes and research. It has several limitations (March et al., 1999). It does not capture the complexity and fluidity of relationships, rights, claims and responsibilities between men and women, and does not explicitly consider other forms of inequality such as class or ethnicity. Moreover, it may encourage a focus on women rather than gender relations, and an understanding of empowerment as a linear, static process of change. Despite these limitations, it is a powerful analytical tool to understand women's participation in ecotourism projects (Walter, 2011).

The second model of gender analysis in ecotourism, Scheyvens's (2000) framework of empowerment for women, puts not women, but women-in-community, at the center of its analysis. This reflects its roots in the field of "tourism for development" (Scheyvens, 2002), as opposed to Gender and Development (March et al., 1999). Thus, the unit of analysis in Scheyvens's model is first, the wider community involved in ecotourism, and second, women within this community. As Scheyvens (2007, p. 186) puts it, "a much deeper appreciation of the complex nature of 'communities' is needed before ecotourism ventures are implemented, and...direct efforts must be made to support poorer, less powerful groups, which often include women, if ecotourism is to be effective in meeting conservation and development goals." As Scheyvens (2002, p. 130) further notes, the "same framework could be applied to analysis of the involvement of women, or other groups (indigenous people or local communities) in mainstream tourism initiatives as well." Thus Scheyvens's model captures much of the complexity not only of gender, but also of class, ethnicity, and social and community structures. On the other hand, women are only one of many possible marginalized groups in the model and may be de-emphasized in the wider concerns over other types of oppression.

As feminist scholars argue (e.g. Currie & Vernooy, 2010), it is possible to undertake both social and gender analysis in development projects related to natural resource management (including ecotourism), with a focus not only on women, but also on equitable distribution of benefits among women and men, and community transformation towards social justice. However, research in ecotourism, as noted above, is still mostly gender blind (Walter, 2011). As such, in these early stages of engagement with the field, it is important to highlight gender as an analytical category, allowing the possibility of broader, community-oriented analysis to later complement this gender focus. This study therefore applies Longwe's framework to investigate the gender dimensions of community-based ecotourism. Thus it does not directly address the complexities of community-level changes which may occur in ecotourism projects in relation to gender and its intersections with social class, caste, ethnicity, social structures, hierarchies of power, cultural norms and social context. This is taken as a limitation of the study, with the hope that further research on ecotourism may better address these analytical categories.

### Study site

The Giao Xuan community-based ecotourism project is situated on the alluvial coastal estuary on the Red River Delta adjacent to Xuan Thuy National Park, about 150 km. southeast of Hanoi. In 1989, the Park was recognized by the International Bureau of the Convention on Wetlands as Southeast Asia's first Ramsar site (i.e. a wetlands of international importance). In 2003, Xuan Thuy was officially upgraded and approved as a national park, and in 2004, recognized by UNESCO as part of the Red River Delta World Biosphere Heritage Site (Xuan Thuy National Park, 2013). The park itself covers approximately of 15,000 ha. of extremely biodiverse coastal wetlands, including mangrove forests, intertidal mud flats, islands and marshes. The park is a wintering area for migratory water birds and a stop-over in the migration of non-water birds. All told, the park has 219 species of birds and 110 aquatic plant species, 500 species of seabed organisms and zooplankton, and a large variety of marine animals such as shrimp, fish, crabs and oysters (Xuan Thuy National Park, 2013).

There are five buffer communities surrounding the Park: Giao Thien, Giao An, Giao Lac, Giao Hai and Giao Xuan. These buffer communities are situated on approximately 8,000 ha of land. No one now lives within the Park's core boundaries. However, small-scale collection of aquatic products is allowed provided it does not harm the natural environment in the core zone (e.g. using destructive fishing practices, cutting trees, hunting birds, polluting water) (Nguyen, 2012, p. 1). Currently, only small scale collectors, who are mostly women, are allowed access to the park, while commercial aquaculture, run by men, is forbidden. However, even in the buffer zones, population growth and economic development have created environmental problems which threaten local livelihood. These include over-harvesting of clams, oysters and crabs, over-fishing, clearing of mangroves for aquaculture, and pond pollution run-off (Elangovan, 2007a). This has led to a decline in biodiversity, loss of ecological services provided by aquatic plants and marine life, loss of natural habitat, and increased coastal sedimentation (MCD, 2007a).

As a potential solution to these environmental problems, in 2006, Giao Xuan commune (district) was chosen by the Centre for Marinelife Conservation and Community Development (MCD), a Vietnamese non-profit environmental organization, to be a pilot site for the development of a community-based ecotourism project. Giao Xuan is a coastal commune of almost 10,000 people known for its distinctive churches and pagodas, traditional architecture and cuisine, and rural lifestyle. Local ecotourism attractions include bird watching, boat trips through the mangroves, biking and trekking, accommodation and local cuisine in traditional Vietnamese homes, participation in rice farming and shellfish harvest, visits to local churches, pagodas and a marketplace, viewing of traditional opera (*cheo*), and trips to see the making of homemade fish sauce (*nuoc mam*), rice wine and processed jellyfish.

Across the community of Giao Xuan, the main sources of livelihood are wet rice cultivation (50%), coastal fishing and aquaculture (36%) and services (14%) (Than, 2011). Women comprise 51% of the local population and 60% of them are considered to be poor (MCD, 2007a). Commercial clam farming started in Giao Xuan in 1990, when the first nets were installed in the intertidal zone. Connections

with Chinese traders then provided a ready market for clams, the number of farms rapidly expanded, and many clam farmers, who were exclusively men, became wealthy (Le, 2008). By contrast, clam collecting, done by poorer women and girls, still produces relatively little income, and is often done under harsh conditions on land leased from rich farmers. It is estimated, on average, that women stand in ocean water from eight to 10 h a day, up to 20 days per month (MCD, 2007a). A good number of men migrate to Hanoi to do seasonal labor in construction or other temporary work as well. Women traditionally generate income in small trade, manage household property and budgets, cook, clean and take care of children. Following Confucian gender norms, wives are subordinate to their husbands, younger siblings to older siblings, and children to parents. Men traditionally are family breadwinners and control major financial decisions.

The Giao Xuan CBET project, entitled “Empowering women, improving lives, and conserving the environment through community-based eco-business in Xuan Thuy National Park area” was funded by the Small Project Facility of the European Commission in 2006. The project was implemented by MCD, and eventually secured US\$100,000 funding from the European Union and the McKnight Foundation for 2006–07. CBET funding then continued at reduced levels from 2008 to 2011 as part of a second larger project on sustainable livelihoods and environmental conservation in coastal areas, funded by the European Union and Oxfam Novib. After 2011, no additional external funding was provided. The development agency funders all required gender issues to be addressed in their ecotourism projects. As such, the Giao Xuan project’s overall objective was “to strengthen and develop the skills and capabilities of community members (especially poor women and fishermen) in conservation-based eco-business to address poverty and improve living standards through sustainable livelihoods that conserve the environment” (MCD, 2007a, p. 4). A variety of activities were collaboratively implemented by the local community, MCD, and other project partners with the aim of promoting community participation and benefits. Within this larger aim, a key objective was to: “Increase women’s participation and management of alternative sustainable livelihoods” (MCD, 2007a, p. 4).

A focus on poor women and gender issues was consistently incorporated into different project activities. At the project’s inception, the Giao Xuan Women’s Union was chosen as one of the two main partners that cooperated with MCD to plan and implement the project (MCD, 2007b). In a two day workshop in May, 2006, the results of a survey on the situation of women and gender issues were highlighted, and project objectives, activities and expected outcomes presented. The concepts of gender roles, gender equality, and a gender perspective on coastal wetland management were introduced and discussed among participants. In another three day workshop, local women learned communication skills that would help them deliver messages on environmental issues and conservation to community members. Gender roles and relations in wetland conservation and management were again emphasized in this second workshop. Local women also participated in “Training of Trainers” workshops on women’s leadership, with the aim of developing a core CBET group for “gender and development mobilisation, and gender empowerment” (MCD, 2007a, p. 7).

By 2012, six years after the Giao Xuan CBET project was established, the project had hosted approximately 2,000 domestic and international tourists. About 40 households now gain supplementary income from the project through guiding, homestay, food services and cultural performances, earning on average \$24 per month per household (Than, 2011). The Giao Xuan CBET Cooperative for Community Eco-tourism, founded in 2010, is now a legal entity, and the ecotourism project is recognized as a successful CBET model for other communities. Based on Giao Xuan’s success in meeting conservation, livelihood and gender equity goals, MCD plans to implement similar projects for other buffer communities in Xuan Thuy National Park. The Giao Xuan project has also hosted numerous CBET experts and community members from other provinces to visit and learn about the formation and operation of CBET in coastal areas.

## Methodology

This study used an interpretive case study to generate “thick, rich description” of data about the Giao Xuan CBET project, with the “intent of analyzing, interpreting, or theorizing about the phenomenon” (Merriam, 1998, p. 38). This approach allowed a detailed description of gender relations in the

CBET project, and the identification of complex relationships in a relatively undeveloped area of knowledge; that is, gender and development in ecotourism. Field research was conducted by a Vietnamese woman (Linh T. Tran) who was born and grew up in northern Vietnam. The field researcher considers herself an “indigenous-insider” (Banks, 1998) and has maintained close ties to research participants. An indigenous insider is someone from the community, who is seen as a legitimate member, and encourages the well-being of the community through the research.

Fieldwork for the study took place over four months. An initial field research trip lasted from August 2011 to October 2011, and a second was conducted in February, 2012. In-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation and document analysis were used as data collection methods. Initial interviews were conducted with leadership of the Giao Xuan CBET Cooperative, members of the Giao Xuan Women’s Union, six community Elders, managers at Xuan Thuy National Park, and MCD leadership and staff specialists in gender mainstreaming and ecotourism. Fourteen local participants were then recruited based on a purposeful sampling strategy (Merriam, 1998); that is, they were chosen because they had participated in the CBET project since it began in 2006. Purposeful sampling is “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). Before joining the project, all participants made their living in agriculture, shellfish harvest, aquaculture and fisheries. Participants were between the ages of 31 and 64. Nine were women and five were men. Two women and two men were tour guides, but only men guides transported visitors.

All interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, both individually and in groups. Each participant was interviewed from one to three times. In addition, three host family couples were interviewed between two and four times each. Each interview lasted from one to two hours and was audio-recorded. Participant observation was conducted during numerous activities in Giao Xuan, including joining CBET tours, living with local people in their houses, participating in everyday livelihood activities, and joining in local events. Documents in Vietnamese and English were reviewed, including annual project summary reports, periodic progress reports, the project website, and materials used in CBET training sessions. A constant-comparative method was used in data analysis (Merriam, 1998). This is an iterative process whereby research findings result from a cycle of identifying, reflecting, testing, revising, refining, and confirming emerging themes with empirical data until findings are mutually exhaustive and supported by rich data.

## Findings

### *Welfare*

In Longwe’s framework, the Welfare level indicates equal access to material resources such as food, income, shelter, and medical care. The CBET project clearly brought local women a new source of income, in work such as hosting tourists, tour guiding, cooking and musical performance. CBET income was supplementary income, varied depending on the particular activities in which participants engaged, and did not affect subsistence livelihood. For the 11 host families who participated in the study, CBET income was approximately \$47 per month, about twice the average household ecotourism income for other CBET members. This higher income reflected the longer-term involvement of these families in the CBET project. The ecotourism income gained by the 11 families was at least twice as much as they earned from wet rice cultivation, with significantly less input of labor.

Before the CBET project started, most local women worked as wage labor collecting marine and aquaculture products such as clams and oysters. For this, they had to submerge themselves up to their waists in water, and often contracted skin diseases. They reported daily earnings of about seven dollars, a sizable amount, but coming at the cost of their health. Ms. Lan, typical of the women, commented on the change in the nature of her work:

It’s so much easier to work in CBET. I just use my own knowledge, my understanding about my village to guide tours. I can easily earn 130,000 Dong (about \$6.00) in around two to three hours, compared to seven hours of hard labor in the water. With this income, I can have extra money for my family’s daily expenses or for my kids’ education.

From other interviews, it was evident that Giao Xuan women were economically empowered through their participation in the CBET. They had equal access or even better access to CBET income than men. All women in the project reported reduced physical burdens in their productive labor, more income and more control over this income. Most spent it on the welfare of their families. However, this spending was also dependent on social class. For example, some wealthier participants reinvested CBET income in renovating their houses to accommodate more tourists. By contrast, poorer families spent their income on basic Welfare needs such as food for their families or clothes for their kids. When large numbers of tourists arrived, wealthier families were able to host more tourists and thus earn greater income than poorer families. This may eventually lead to a self-perpetuating cycle reproducing social class inequities in which wealthier families become richer while poorer families stay poor. In this sense, social class was clearly a potential barrier for local community members in the Giao Xuan CBET project, and especially for poor women, to equally share in welfare benefits.

### Access

Access refers to equal access to factors of production such as land, labor, credit, education, and public services. Like many rural women in Vietnam, women in the Giao Xuan CBET project did not have much access to education. Of nine women interviewed, one graduated from elementary school, five from middle school, two from high school, and one from a local vocational school. Before the CBET project started, all of them made their living from wet rice cultivation, shellfish harvesting and occasional small business. One woman also had an administrative position on the local commune committee. In general, the women did not have opportunities to gain new knowledge or skills, to improve their productive labor capacity or to increase their mobility outside their home and local community. Through the CBET project, women above all gained access to education, and to a lesser but important extent, increased access to loans and credit for investment in ecotourism-related businesses.

Both men and women had equal opportunities to participate in all training programs and workshops offered by MCD in developing the Giao Xuan CBET project. These included areas such as communication, planning, leadership and management skills, hosting, tour guiding, and traditional opera performance. In some training activities, women outnumbered men. For example, 57% of participants in the CBET “concept and planning” workshops were women, who likewise comprised 70% of participants in CBET skills training, capacity building (business skills, reception, food services, local environmental knowledge), and pilot ecotour workshops (environmental interpretation, services, business planning, marketing) (MCD, 2007b; Than, 2011). At the same time, women’s burden of reproductive labor in housework and childcare sometimes prevented them from meaningful access to educational opportunities. For example, Ms. Ly, whose husband worked the entire week on a boat out at sea, had to drop out of evening classes when her children wanted to go home: “They didn’t want to sit still in the class, so I had to drop that lesson. This happened quite often, so I couldn’t learn that much.”

Under the CBET project, women in Giao Xuan could also obtain access to investment funds and bank loans to renovate homestay accommodations. Normally, to be eligible for a bank loan, a person had to be the (male) head of a household. However, in the CBET project, women who were not household heads could still access loans, as noted, for example, by Ms. Tam:

The project provided some initial funding for CBET participants to help us renovate our houses to host tourists. . . Each participant in the CBET project received six million Dong (approximately \$300). . . We pay a small interest rate per year and this money goes to the Community Fund – it’s used for some activities for all other community members. With this funding and some of our own money we could renovate the ceilings of our houses, our bathrooms – install flush toilets and water heaters in the bathrooms, buy new furniture, and drill wells to get water.

Each household could also borrow \$240 to \$340 from the bank at a preferential interest rate. However, because homestay renovations required a bit more than the combined funds offered by the CBET project and the bank, and future income from tourists needed to pay the loans was not guaranteed, some households chose not to make the investment. Only those wealthier households who could assume the financial risk were able to fully employ the loans for homestay renovation, pointing again to the importance of social class in the wider success of the CBET project.

### Conscientization

Conscientization means an increase in understanding of gender roles and the gender division of labor, and the realization that these can be changed to become more equitable. This was a significant finding in this study, and occurred not only for women but also for men. According to Giao Xuan women, as a result of their participation in the CBET project, they experienced changes in the way they understood gender roles, their capacity for new roles, violence against women, and gender relations. Men also gained new gender awareness and took on new gender roles. Conscientization took place through access to education, and in broader participation in the CBET project at both the family and community levels.

Several of the women spoke about the effects of increased educational access through the CBET project. Ms. Ha, for example, explained that, through project study tours, “women had the chance to go to other provinces to exchange our knowledge and experience in doing CBET. People from other provinces also came here to learn from us.” Ms. Thanh likewise spoke of increased mobility and access to information:

As countryside women, we recognize that our knowledge and understanding of the outside world has been so limited. Our “mobility” was just from the rice field to our house twenty-four-seven. The only source of information we had in learning about the outside world was the TV. But this has now changed.

Giao Xuan women pointed out that the gender division of labor in the community became clearer to them through their participation in the project. Ms. Nga, for instance, detailed the range of her usual reproductive, productive and community labor, but also her intensified reproductive labor in hosting tourists:

Women have a lot of work to do. Not a single job is not our responsibility. I have to cook, wash clothes and dishes by hand, take care of the chickens and pigs. I also have to cultivate wet rice, buy rice from other people in the community and sell it at my rice store. In addition, I participate in the women’s union of the commune... If a group of tourists comes and stays for five or seven days, then it’s worth our time preparing to host them, but sometimes just one or two tourists stay for only one night. We still have to prepare blankets, mattresses, beds, and after that we still have to wash them and dry them all up. It’s quite a lot of work...

All eleven local women in the CBET project acknowledged that hosting tourists brought benefits to them including widening their knowledge about other cultures, creating new social contacts and boosting their self-confidence. However, hosting invariably meant extra reproductive labor on top of regular cooking, cleaning, and taking care of kids. Notably, once some women identified the unfair division of labor, they successfully convinced their husbands to share domestic and hosting labor, and even gave them instruction on doing this work. Ms. Kim, for example, spoke of how participation in the ecotourism project had begun to shift gender roles in her family:

In hosting tourists, there are certain things that I have had...to teach my husband how to do. For example, before the CBET project started, my husband never paid attention to making a bed, so I had to teach him...He now knows how to arrange blankets, get matching cloth and pillows and such to accommodate tourists – he never had to do this before.

Another significant change for women who participated in the CBET project was the recognition by women of their capacity for non-traditional labor roles. Ms. Lan, for example, spoke of a new capacity to deal with life problems and financial management in her family. Other women found that increased self-confidence led them to become more active community members in areas such as the women’s union, public welfare and community leadership. Ms. Nga gradually became more involved in social welfare activities, and then moved into community governance. Today, she serves as a member of several different unions in the commune, works to recruit other women to join in communal activities, and acts as spokeswoman for the ecotourism project:

... Since I participated in CBET, I find that I have changed a lot. I have become more energetic and progressive. Before, ... I was too shy to talk to people, especially in public... But now things have changed. I had the chance to join many workshops both inside and outside the commune. I met with many people in these workshops. (Now) I host tourists at my house, spend time with them, and talk to them... I feel happy to meet people and feel confident talking with them. I don't even find foreigners strange any more! I used to just stare at them when I saw them (laughs)... I never dreamed of appearing on TV before, but now I've gotten used to it. People come here and interview me, they take pictures and film me.

Men in the Giao Xuan CBET project also gained a greater awareness of gender roles and the possibility of change. Since the CBET project started, local men have, for example, joined training programs for cooking, and now not only cook for tourists, but also help their wives with family cooking and housework. Mr. Kha, for instance, explained how his beliefs about the gender division of labor had changed:

When we host tourists, both my wife and I cook. I think it is a shared responsibility. ... I don't distinguish which work is my wife's and which work is mine anymore. It is family business so we both need to be responsible... In daily life, my wife is still mainly responsible for cooking, but I do help her. I find it entirely normal for a man to cook and help out with cleaning up in the family.

Another man in the project, Mr. Long, likewise started cooking for tourists and his family after changing his views about traditional gender roles. In fact, Mr. Long is now so enthusiastic about cooking that he seizes every opportunity to learn more: he watches cooking shows on television, questions tourists, and reads all the cookbooks he can get his hands on.

The knowledge, skills, and experience that Giao Xuan women obtained from participating in the CBET project also helped them become more aware of their status and rights as women. This area of conscientization did not generally extend to men. Ms. Lan pointed out that local women's awareness of their rights and capacity to protect themselves from family violence is an ongoing educational issue in the community. According to Ms. Lan, there are men in the community who often get drunk and beat their wives. However, she noted that the local authorities only intervene if women sue their husbands. Ms. Lan asked sarcastically: "I ask you, as a woman, who dares to sue her own husband?" She then spoke of a rare case in which a local woman did inform the local authorities after being beaten. Her husband was held for two days, but during this time, she had to bring meals to him, and do this on top of her domestic labor and care of young children at home. This created too much work for the woman, Ms. Lan concluded. She believed the woman was compelled to do this by oppressive community gender norms:

It is not at all simple. ... People will criticize her [if she does not bring meals to her husband]; they will judge her as a bad woman who dares to ignore her husband just because he beats her. They will think that if she dares to do so with her husband, how can she fulfill her role as a mother and take a good care of her kids?

Ms. Lan believed women could protect themselves by being strong, speaking out, and working together:

We as women often just take it and keep silent when our husbands beat us. However, having opportunities to learn about gender equality, we have now recognized that it is our right to raise our voices about this status. The more we try to endure, the more they keep doing it. We should not keep silent and endure the violence anymore. Men may beat us because of the demon of drunkenness. When they are not drunk, they still love their wives and kids. But it is really torture for us. ... To be honest with you, by myself. ... I cannot stop men from drinking and beating their wives. But I have been trying my best to raise the issue whenever I can in the women's union meetings and other communal meetings. I have been lobbying about gender equality. I have also discussed with other women in the community about how – first and foremost – to protect ourselves from being physically abused.

### Participation

Participation refers to equal participation in decision-making processes related to policymaking, planning and administration of both the ecotourism project and, by extension, the larger community. Giao Xuan women's participation in the workshops, activities and management of the CBET project helped them to become active leaders in their community. When the CBET Cooperative was established in 2010, four years into the project, two women were elected to be on the CBET Cooperative Management Board, and one woman became Head of the CBET Cooperative. When this capacity for women's leadership was demonstrated by the project, local government authorities also began to pay attention. Ms. Lan, for example, reported that the self-confidence, management and communication skills she gained in being a CBET tour guide then allowed her to actively contribute her ideas about community development to the authorities. As a result, she was appointed head of one of the villages in the commune. Ms. Lan recounted her experience:

The local authority knew about my success as a tour guide. They appreciated my skills in managing tour groups, and my contribution to CBET activities. The knowledge that I learned from CBET workshops also helped me contribute a lot of ideas and knowledge in our communal meetings about local environmental conservation. My abilities were recognized by the local authority – I am trusted and given many important tasks in the commune.

As noted earlier, the Giao Xuan's Women's Union acted as one of the two main partners that worked with MCD to set up and implement the CBET project. The agreed upon function of the Women's Union was in part "to facilitate local meetings, participation of women community members, (and) inputs on community gender relations" (MCD 2007a, p. 8). Local women were encouraged to actively participate in many activities of the project. For example, in 2006, women played a key role in planning, organizing and promoting a Community Coastal Clean Up activity on World Environmental Day which attracted more than 100 volunteers from different groups of the local community. In a series of community dialogues for the day, local women were likewise facilitators, promoters and key participants. These dialogues included awareness-raising on coastal wetland biodiversity protection and the need and rationale for ecotourism development in the local community (MCD 2007b). Many Giao Xuan women have remained involved in community activities even without direct support from MCD and the CBET project.

### Control

Control indicates equal control in decision-making over factors of production (land, labor, credit, education, public services) and equal distribution of benefits. Even while women in Giao Xuan are now more involved than before in decision-making processes in the family and community, they do not have equal control over factors of production or distribution of benefits. To some extent, CBET promoted a shift in employment for local women, who have moved from low wage laborers to owners of their own businesses and into jobs as tour guides.

To take on these new gender work roles, most of the women first had to negotiate with their husbands. Ms. Lan, for example, explained that her husband initially resisted her tour guiding plans for fear of losing her. As she explained, he believed that "once I had a chance to meet many people, I'd prefer people who are more educated than him or richer than him." Ms. Ha persuaded her husband not only to endorse her guiding work, but to provide domestic labor – including cooking, housework, childcare – while she was out on the job: "He was really supportive."

In economic decisions, Giao Xuan women normally control money for daily living expenses, food and children's education, but final decisions about the purchase of expensive items are made by their husbands. Local women in the CBET project do have control over new sources of income from ecotourism, but this is usually just supplementary income. Even when women are the main source of family income (30% of the families), they often make large decisions only in the absence of their husbands. Ms. Kim, for example, talked about relinquishing her decision-making control after her absent husband returned to Giao Xuan to retire:

When my husband worked far away from home, I was the one who made decisions in the family. However, since he has retired and stays at home, I need to discuss with him every single issue in the family. For example, if I want to sell a plot of land, I need to get his approval. If he doesn't want to sell it, I still have to respect and follow his decision. . . At the family level, it is still impossible to get rid of gender inequality. Husbands are still in the first position in the family to have final decisions in all matters.

At the community level, women reported that men were still largely preferred over women for leadership and administrative positions, and that decisions were not always made democratically, but by powerful men. However, within the group of people who participated in the CBET project, women seemed to have equal control in decision-making. Ms. Kim asserted that different tasks were given to members of the CBET Cooperative based on individual capacity regardless of gender or age. Most decisions were made by majority vote of the members in the CBET Cooperative, and CBET business permits went to all persons who participated in the CBET project regardless of gender.

Some women in the project also applied what they learned from the project to change policies in the commune. Ms. Tam, for example, actively lobbied for changes in solid waste management in Giao Xuan. She explained that before the CBET project started, people threw their garbage everywhere, with plastic bags and dead animals commonly thrown directly into the river. However, after she and others in the project established propagandizing programs and activities, the situation improved. Most of the households in the commune now pay a small monthly fee for garbage collection and the community is

**Table 2**  
Summary of findings.

Control participation conscientization access welfare	↑ Increasing equality	↑ Increasing empowerment
<i>Control</i>		
+ More equal gender division of household & outside labor		
+ Control over ecotourism income so it is spent on family welfare		
+ Strong voice in managing CBET project & benefits		
+ Increased mobility – decisions to travel to represent CBET Coop, obtain further training		
– Husbands still control major family decisions		
– Women still subject to male violence		
– Ecotourism loans have greater benefit for wealthier women		
<i>Participation</i>		
+ Strong participation in CBET Coop governing structures – women Head & Board members		
+ New leadership roles – woman appointed village head as result of CBET participation		
+ Women as CBET public spokespersons & media representatives		
– Weak public policy implementation against male violence		
<i>Conscientization</i>		
+ New understandings, changes in gender roles & relations		
+ Women have new roles in tour guiding, small business, leadership, CBET & community governance		
+ Men believe in more equitable gender division of labor – act as cooks & cleaners		
+ Women have new self-confidence & public voice – act as media spokespersons, speak out against male violence		
– Ideology of women as subservient to men		
– Patriarchal male violence		
– Men having major decision-making power mostly unchallenged		
<i>Access</i>		
+ Increased access to education & credit		
+ Greater access to men's labor		
+ Increased mobility, access to nonformal education		
+ Equal access to CBET education – useful vocational skills gained		
– Lack of childcare provision hinders full access to education, public opportunities		
<i>Welfare</i>		
+ Income from new work as hosts, cooks, tour guides, performers		
+ Healthier bodies with better working conditions – fewer skin diseases, less difficult physical labor		
+ CBET income provides better material welfare for families – food, clothing, housing renovations		
– CBET income & credit may favour wealthier families with more capital, act to reproduce social class		

noticeably cleaner. In short, some women, even though in small in number, have utilized the knowledge that they gained from the CBET project as a tool to promote control over community resources.

Table 2 provides a summary of findings on women's empowerment through their participation in the Giao Xuan CBET project. The table shows both increasing equity and empowerment as the analysis moves upward from welfare and access to conscientization, participation and control. It also shows several areas where results have been less impressive in each of the five categories, particularly in the highest level of "control."

## Conclusion

This gender analysis of the Giao Xuan CBET project shows how a gender perspective integrated into the planning and implementation of community-based ecotourism project may result in many positive benefits for local women participants. Findings of this case study contribute to a growing body of knowledge on ecotourism as sustainable development. In particular, they illustrate the complexities of integrating a gender perspective into community-based ecotourism, yet how this may result in positive benefits for local women. The study also demonstrates the general utility of applying gender analysis tools commonly used in Gender and Development projects to the specific case of community-based ecotourism. In terms of Longwe's empowerment framework, it is clear that women participating in the Giao Xuan CBET project experienced significant benefits at all levels. Moreover, changes were experienced by both men and women in their understandings and performance of gender roles, and to a limited extent in gender relations, towards a more equitable division of labor.

However, it is also true that in almost all cases, women's reproductive labor in hosting ecotourist guests in their homes was intensified, much in the same way as reported in ecotourism research by Tucker and Boonabaana (2012), Reimer and Walter (2013) and others. Unlike the Sasak women in Schellhorn's (2010) study of an ecotourism project in Lombok, Indonesia, however, women in Giao Xuan who took on new productive roles as tour guides did not experience social disapproval, and in some cases even gained the active support of their husbands, who themselves took on new gender roles in caring for children, cooking and household cleaning. In many respects, Giao Xuan women's experience was similar to that of women in Stronza's (2005) research in the Peruvian Amazon: they took on added burdens of domestic labor in tourism, but also assumed new roles which increased their decision-making power and community involvement.

Following Scheyvens' (2000) analytical framework, the importance of psychological, economic, social and political dimensions of women's participation in the CBET project was also evident, as were the connections between these dimensions. Giao Xuan women reported not only more income, but also greater self-confidence, more involvement and voice in community activities, and the adoption of new leadership roles in the local political arena. As Scheyvens' (2000, 2007) model makes clear, women's psychological empowerment can help motivate them not only to participate in community development, but also to present a stronger voice in political decision-making, challenge oppressive gender norms, gain greater respect, and foster changes in gender roles. In the Longwe model, this means connecting "conscientization" with empowerment at the levels of "participation and "control."

However, there are no simple or universal connections between the various dimensions of these empowerment models. As Kinnaird and Hall (1994) argue, tourism processes are reflective of the norms, relations and politics of larger gendered societies. In the case of Giao Xuan women, Confucian patriarchal norms disallowed women's fuller control over household income, and supported, in some cases, the intensification of reproductive labor and violence against women. Following Swain's (1995) work, it was clear that both men and women constructed new gender identities as a result of their participant in the CBET project. Several men became proud cooks for tourists and families, others learned to clean, make beds, and engage in the emotional labor of hosting tourist guests. Like the Muslim women in Tucker's study (2007), Giao Xuan women increased their mobility in taking on new guiding, community and leadership roles in the public sphere. However, as one Giao Xuan women indicated, even with new income, status and responsibility, women were unable to stop alcohol use and violence against women by men. It was not clear, but certainly possible, that this situation was

exacerbated by the questioning of patriarchal gender roles, as was the case with Akha women in Thailand (Ishii, 2012).

As findings indicate, inequities based on social class, childcare, and the problem of violence against women were not well-addressed by the Giao Xuan CBET project. In the first instance, families with more economic resources were more likely to take the risk of business loans to develop ecotourism accommodations, while those with less income could not do so, thus potentially reinforcing economic inequalities in the community. While a good number of men stepped up to take on new reproductive responsibilities (childcare, cooking, cleaning), some women with childcare responsibilities were not able to fully participate in the project trainings. This left open the question of whether this was based on social class (relative poverty) or the particular gender roles and relations in a given family. Finally, as noted, male violence directed against women and the patriarchal gender norms which supported this violence was a continuing problem for women in the project, with no direct project-supported amelioration in sight. Nonetheless, women were organizing themselves in the community to resist and change the situation. Women took on this community leadership in no small part due to increased self-confidence, communication skills, organizing capacity and agency promoted by their participation in the CBET project.

Following these points, practical implications for improving the CBET project might include interest-free ecotourism loans or a sliding fee structure for poorer families, the provision of childcare for women participants, and anti-domestic violence trainings for both men and women in the project. The latter might include such initiatives as MCD male staff proposing the formation of a CBET men's group to work at changing established patriarchal norms in Giao Xuan and pressuring male peers to understand and change their violent behavior.

Further research might be directed at understanding how changes in gender roles and relations in a community-based ecotourism project of this sort may be different or similar to other development projects; in particular, those centered on natural resources management or other forms of tourism. This study does not address, for example, the comparative advantage women may possess for ecotourism in their expert knowledge of particular wild foods, plants, food processing, marine life, wildlife, ecosystems, arts, crafts and livelihood production. Nor does it report in any great detail on the gender roles and relations of men in the project; these are discussed only in as much as they enter into the picture presented of women. A more comprehensive community study, following, for example, Scheyvens's (2000) community empowerment model, might better capture various dimensions of social class, ethnicity, culture, kinship, leadership structures and social context, as these interconnect with gender. However, the current study does demonstrate the power and rich insights afforded by the application of Longwe's (2002) empowerment framework, and as such, is a valuable contribution to research and practice in community-based ecotourism.

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