

# A Rural Tourism Model with Local Community Participation in Vietnam – The Case of Yen Thuong, Cao Phong

QuyenThịLan Phuong<sup>1\*</sup>, Do Van Nha<sup>1</sup>, Nguyen Duc Loc<sup>1</sup>, Nguyen Khac Viet Ba<sup>1</sup>, Nguyen Van Thao<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Vietnam National University of Agriculture

\*Email: qtlphuong@vnua.edu.vn

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## Abstract:

The research is conducted to propose a rural tourism model with local community participation in Vietnam, with the case of Yen Thuong mountainous commune. The methodologies involved: selecting case study, collecting data, processing data, system thinking dynamics, and developing a tourism model. In the research's results, firstly, the authors gave general information of potentials and orientations of rural tourism development in Cao Phong district, in which Yen Thuong commune is one of the strategies. Secondly, the authors developed the rural tourism model in Yen Thuong commune. In the model, 5 attractive destinations were subdivided with positions, current status - characteristics and orientation for future development. For operating the model, the community participation was identified, related to tourism activities. Importantly, in the operating system, the different elements of local community had to be coordinate in carrying out tourism activities and sharing benefits.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism has been defined by several professionals based on theoretical and practical basis. According to Sharpley R & J (1997), rural tourism encompasses a huge range of activities, natural or manmade attractions, amenities and facilities, transportation, marketing and information systems. Functionally, rural tourism has been considered rural – built upon the rural world's special features of small-scale enterprises, open space, contact with nature and the natural world, heritage, traditional societies and traditional practices, and connect with local families (Lane B, 1994). Also, rural tourism includes not just farm-based holidays but also special

interest nature holidays and ecotourism, educational travel, arts and heritage tourism, and, in some areas, ethnic tourism (Government of Alberta, 2010).

In both developed and developing countries, tourism is frequently supposed to be a viable means of raising the economic activity of regions, and an important element of economic diversification (Hall, 1994 and UNWTO, 2017). More specifically, it has been widely promoted as an effective source of income and employment, particularly in peripheral rural areas where traditional agrarian industries have declined (Sharpley, 2002).

Support for tourism in rural areas is based upon a number of perceived benefits, particularly

diversification of local economies through employment opportunities in both tourism related and traditional sectors, opportunities for income growth through the adoption of multiple activities, the creation of new markets for local products, revival of local culture and enhancement in local pride (Sharpley, 2002; Kheiri & Nasihatkon, 2016; Su *et al.*, 2018).

Beside several advantages, tourism also presents challenges and problems, such as the vast use of natural resources and negative effects on communities (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2017 and Nagarjuna, 2015). However, for some local community, tourism can be a driving force of the overall development, as local community becomes fundamental “in order to increase the benefits of tourism, and to minimize the negative impacts (Nagarjuna, 2015). In tourism models, participatory management is considered an essential element to avoid the negative impacts of conventional tourism on community members and the ecosystems (Burgos & Mertens, 2017). Along the same lines it is remarked that “local communities” involvement, enabling them to “reap the benefits from the development that is happening around their neighbourhood is of the utmost importance” (Salleh *et al.*, 2016).

According to Tosun (2006), there is a variety of possible forms of community participation in tourism, that are examines in different cases of nature, culture and socio-economic conditions.

Going with the process of rural constuction and development in Vietnam nowadays, many tourism activities associated with agriculture and rural areas have appeared and brough the improvement the appearance and the income for many localities. According to Dao The Tuan and Nguyen Xuan Hoan (2012), there are 05 types of rural tourism taken places in Vietnam by now: natural tourism, ecotourism, cultural tourism, village-commune tourism, and agricultural tourism. Besides, spiritual tourism is developing relatively fast in recent years.

Rural tourism and community based tourism were systemized and planned by theoratical basis (Sue Beeton, 2006). Implementing in Vietnam, many provinces have been promoted to develop rural tourism with local community, develop community through tourism activities. However, the rural tourism and community development has been spontaneous and fragmented, not commensurated with the potentials and advantages of regions in the country. Moreover, by now, there have been poor attachments between tourism development and agricultural production, ecological environment protection. Therefore, the rural tourism development has lacked sustainability.

Cao Phong is a mountainous district in Hoa Binh province, Vietnam. The district has the area of 25.600,25 ha, and 13 administrative units, with Cao Phong town and 12 communes. There are 3 ethnic groups living together in the district (Muong, Kinh, Dao), with the total population of over 40.000 people. In the period 2011 – 2018, the district’s socio-economy has develop ralatively well, the people’s living standard has been gradually improved (People’s Committee of Cao Phong district, 2018). Besides the climatic and soil conditions that are suitable to agricultural development, Cao Phong has diverse and attractive tourism resources such as: Bo waterfall temple in Thung Nai commune, Khanh pagoda historical relic in Yen Thuong commune, hero momument Cu Chinh Lan in Binh Thanh commune, caves in Dau Rong moutain, etc (H L, 2017). Moreover, the traditional culture and custom of ethnic groups also attracts tourists from other regions and foreigners.

Although the district has several potentials, by now, many of them have not been effectively exploited for tourism development. Besides, if the direction of developing the rural tourism is not right, the natural landcape, ecological environment and traditional culture will be negatively influenced.

This research is conducted to developing a rural tourism model with local community participation in Cao Phong province, with the case study of Yen Thuong commune. The model includes: subdividing the tourist attractive destinations to link tourism types, identifying the operation system of local community participation in tourism and some solutions. From that, the research will contribute to the rural tourism development strategy and promote effectively community capacity in participation.

## **2. METHODOLOGIES**

### **2.1. Selecting case study**

Yen Thuong commune is one of the strategic area in the tourism development orientation of Cao Phong district, with several attractive tourism destinations and traditional culture of Muong ethnic group. Most of the attractive destinations in Yen Thuong have been in the potential conditions. So, it is necessary to promote this area by a specific strategy. The research focused in Yen Thuong to concretize a strategic orientation for tourism development in Cao Phong district.

### **2.2. Collecting data**

The primary data was collected from departments of the district and commune administrative units (department of culture-information of Cao Phong district, different departments in People's Committee of Yen Thuong commune). The data related to the tourism development and planning in the district and commune.

The secondary data was surveyed from the following activities:

- Organization of meetings with People's Committee of Yen Thuong commune (June – August of 2019) and People's Committee of Cao Phong district (August of 2019) to discuss about the rural development orientations, the key tourism

destinations, and the role of local community in tourism development.

- Surveying the current status of tourism destinations, infrastructure-transportation and facilities, condition of homestays in Yen Thuong commune.

### **2.3. Processing data**

The primary and secondary data after collection were synthesized and processed for the research purposes. The data was processed by Excel and analyzed, synthesized in the form of tables, diagram according to evaluation and development criteria.

### **2.4. System thinking dynamics**

Systemizing by the rural tourism development for describing the relationship between factors, in which the key factors will guide the others. The key factors included: the identification of tourism destinations; the relationship between tourism activities and community involvement; the elements of local community; and the operation of rural tourism model.

The key factors will constraint and lead each other through intermediaries, contents, specific activities to achieve the goals.

### **2.5. Developing the model**

Based on the Tourism Law – Chapter III (National Assembly of Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2017) and theoretical and practical basis, the authors carried out to develop the rural tourism model for Yen Thuong. The model included: subdivision of tourist attractive destinations by positions, areas, characteristics and orientations; identifying the local community roles in tourism activities and the operating the model with local community participation; and solutions to implement effectively the model and promote effectively the community capacity.

### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1. Potentials and Orientations of rural tourism development in Cao Phong district, Hoa Binh province

According to the goals to develop tourism in Cao Phong district (People's Committee of Cao Phong district, 2017), by the end of 2020, the district will welcome 302.000 visitors, in which foreigners will be 2.500. The total receipts from tourism and services activities will be 133 billion VND; tourism development will create jobs for about 1.000 workers (with 400 direct workers); 100% officials in the tourism branch will be trained professional and tourism knowledge. By 2030, the district will welcome 652.000 visitors, in which foreigners will be 12.000; the total receipts from tourism and services activities will be 813 billion VND; tourism development will create jobs for about 4.000 workers (with 1.000 direct workers).

To achieve the above goals, the key missions must be planning orientations, attracting investments, improving infrastructure and services, developing tourism products, and promoting the roles of communities (People's Committee of Cao Phong district, 2018, 2019). The plan of shaping tourism routes includes: Binh Thanh-Thung Nai-Song Da lake; Cao Phong town-Xuan Phong; caves in Dau Rong mountain; and Tan Phong-Dung Phong-Yen Lap-Yen Thuong. Among them, the route Tan Phong-Dung Phong-Yen Lap-Yen Thuong will be an important and strategic route of Cao Phong's tourism, based on the potentials of diverse rural tourism types.

Based on the natural, socio-economic conditions and potentials of Cao Phong district, the below types of rural tourism can be developed:

- *Natural and ecological tourism*: based on the featured topography of hilly and mountainous region. Development of ecotourism corresponds to sustainable tourism, namely, ensures the economic, environmental and socio-cultural sustainability.

- *Cultural and community based tourism*: develop on the basis of cultural values of the community. It is managed, exploited and benefited by the community. The potential of Cao Phong is a high rate of population in ethnic groups. According to People's Committee of Cao Phong district (2018), the district department of culture-information has organized classes to give skills and knowledge of tourism development for communities in 03 communes: Xuan Phong, Thung Nai and Yen Thuong.

- *Spiritual tourism*: based on several spiritual destinations in the locality. Among them, Khanh pagoda historical relic in Yen Thuong commune is oriented to be an spiritual attraction with tourists from other provinces and regions.

- *Agricultural tourism*: including rural landscape sightseeing and enjoy local products. Tourism products must be exploited based on the core values of agricultural production, go with services, avoid mass development and "hot" growth. Agricultural tourism also help to develop the local economy, give jobs for workers, restrict people to leave rural areas.

#### 3.2. Developing a rural tourism model in Yen Thuong commune, Cao Phong district

##### 3.2.1. Potentials, challenges and orientation

Yen Thuong is a highland commune with many difficulties in socio-economic development. The commune is 20km far from the center of Cao Phong district, with Muong ethnic group accounts 99% of the population (People's Committee of Yen Thuong commune, 2019). Yen Thuong is an agricultural commune, however, the potentials for tourism development in the locality is extremely abundant. Yen Thuong is considered as one of the important areas in the planning orientation of Cao Phong.

Yen Thuong has a rich topography, natural and ecological landscape, traditional culture of Muong



ethnic group, attractive Khanh pagoda. However, the planning orientation in Yen Thuong has still faced difficulties in shaping the routes and site areas, restoring the traditional villages, diversifying tourism activities, improving infrastructure, and mobilizing the community participation.

To dealing with the above difficulties, as well as achieving the goal, the giving model for rural tourism of Yen Thuong has to be synchronous, sustainable, at the same time, protect ecological environment and Muong cultural identity, promote the community participation. The process of developing rural tourism model is as Figure 1 below:



**Figure 1: The process of developing rural tourism model**

### 3.2.2. Subdivision of tourist attractive destinations

The tourism zone has been formed based on the natural and manmade potentials of Yen Thuong commune. The zone located in the North-East and party center of the commune, with the total area of 220ha.

The main orientation is to develop “attractive destinations”, go with the convenient transportation, at the same time, honor the landscape value of the whole area. To achieve that, we have to avoid spontaneous construction and encroaching agricultural land.

The whole 220ha tourism zone is subdivided into 05 areas with specific characteristics and types of tourism (Table 1).

**Table 1: Structure of tourism areas in Yen Thuong**

No	Tourism areas	Area (ha)	Structure (%)
1	Khanh pagoda	5	2,3
2	Rom Khanh village and community	28	12,7
3	Rice terraces field	42	19,1
4	Tai Dai waterfall	45	20,5
5	Bo Vua ecological hills	100	45,4
<b>6</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>100</b>

1) Khanh pagoda – Spiritual tourism

- Position: Khanh pagoda located at the beginning of the route, with high terrain, solemn landscape.

- Current status: Khanh pagoda located on the national historical vestiges – Cao Phong-Thach Yen battle zone (ranked by Ministry of Culture and Information in 1996). The whole current land area is 2,3ha, includes the inside and the outside of the pagoda. The inside pagoda has 03 construction works: the main pagoda with 03 spiritual spaces, the showroom with historical items from the battle, and the memorial stele which is carved by monolithic stone. The inside pagoda area has based hills terrain and has 03 height level: the highest level is for the main pagoda and yard, garden; the second level is for the showroom, memorial stele and yard, garden; the third level is for the yard, grass, trees and the gate. The outside pagoda includes the hilly land, houses and gardens of some encroached households.



**Figure 2: Khanh pagoda (Survey in Yen Thuong – June, 2019)**

- Orientation: Khanh pagoda has been a famous spiritual area since many years and attracted a large number of visitors. The whole pagoda area includes the current and the expanded area, with the total area of 5ha. The current pagoda will be kept with architectural style and landscape. The expanded area includes the new upper pagoda, services, yard for festivals and gardens for sightseeing and vegetable. All the households will be cleared within the scope of area. For protecting the current pagoda and landscape, the new constructions will follow the architectural style.

In addition to the spiritual significance, Khanh Pagoda will become a cultural and historical destination of Cao Phong district and Hoa Binh province.

*2) Rom Khanh village and community – cultural and community tourism*

- Position: the area is Rom Khanh village, located beside the main road, with the area of 28ha.

- Current status: the population in Yen Thuong mainly is Muong ethnic group (99%). With the

cultural identity “steamed rice, stilt house, bamboo water, grilled port” and abundant human resource, Yen Thuong has many prospects to develop cultural tourism with local community participation. One of the most prospective areas is Rom Khanh village. By now, the number of households who registered the accommodation business (homestay) in Rom Khanh village was 7 households. According to the site survey’s results, these households have general features: traditional wood stilt houses of Muong people, house backs lean on the hills, facades overlook the fields and valleys, surrounding by yards and gardens, beautiful views. Particularly, the house of Mr. Bui Van Tuan has modern style: new wood stilt house, modern equipments, tile yard, rectangular shaping pond. The details of the homestay-households are presented in Table 2.

The whole surveying homestay-households have joined the tourism cooperative (established in June, 2019) and have committed to renovating their houses with sufficient amenities and green gardens.

**Table 2: Survey’s results of homestay-households**

<b>N o</b>	<b>Name of the head of household</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
1	Bui Van Son	700m <sup>2</sup>	Old wood stilt house, yard, empty garden
2	Bui Duc Nhung	1200m <sup>2</sup>	Old wood stilt house, yard, corn garden
3	Bui Thi Phien	1000m <sup>2</sup>	Old wood stilt house, yard, vegetable garden
4	Bui Tuan Dau – Village chief	600m <sup>2</sup>	Old wood stilt house, yard, vegetable and fruit trees garden
5	Bui Van Tuan	800m <sup>2</sup>	New wood stilt house, tile yard, rectangular shaping pond, garden
6	Bui Van Pha	1000m <sup>2</sup>	Old wood stilt house, yard, small pond
7	Bui Van The	800m <sup>2</sup>	Old wood stilt house, yard, vegetable garden



**Figure 4, 5: Old wood stilt houses with yards of Muong ethnic people that oriented for homestay business (Survey in Yen Thuong – June, 2019)**

- Orientation:

+ Rom Khanh village has oriented as a cultural and community tourism area, for experiencing the cultural identity of Muong ethnic people. To develop effectively, it is necessary to clearly identify the traditional cultural characteristics of Muong ethnic people about traditional costumes, home decoration, specific equipments, the way of living in a family, traditional food, yards and gardens.

+ The 7 households who registered the accommodation business (homestay) in Rom Khanh village need to improve their stilt houses to be fully equipped but retain the cultural identity of Muong ethnic people. To achieve that, those households do not concrete their stilt houses, at the same time, improve the green landscape surrounding houses and keep the beautiful views. Moreover, the main road in Rom Khanh village needs to be completed by the end of 2020.

## 2) Rice terraces field – agricultural landscape tourism

- Position: located next to the middle point of the commune main road, with the area of 42ha.

- Current status: the rice terraces field has beautiful and expansive observations, is surrounded by hills, mountains and rural villages. To form, people have spent many years to building up the foundation, the field, the shore, selecting farm land before choosing land for houses.



**Figure 3: Rice terrace after harvest (Survey in Yen Thuong – June, 2019)**

- Orientation: the 42ha rice terraces field has been a tourism destination to experience agricultural landscape. Therefore, all the field, surrounding hills, mountains and villages have to be maintained. It is possible to apply technologies to increase the rice productivity, but absolutely do not build houses and plant big trees that cover the visibility. This orientation is also a favorable condition for developing the tourism area - Rom Khanh village and community.

## 4) Tai Dai waterfall – natural and ecological tourism

- Position and current status: this is a small waterfall flowing down from the mountain, located not far from the main commune road, combines with the surrounding natural landscape. The area is 45ha.





**Figure 6: Tai Dai waterfall (Survey in Yen Thuong – June, 2019)**

- Orientation: the area has a specific characteristic of experiencing the natural landscape. Currently, the road to the waterfall is relatively convenient for motor vehicles. Therefore, in future, it is necessary to preserve the natural landscape and avoid construction.

5) *BoVua ecological hills – natural and ecological tourism*

- Position: located at the primeval forest in Khay village. It is the highest, largest and most pristine area

of the whole 220ha tourism zone, with around 1.000m high hills. The total area is 100ha.

- Current status: Bo Vua is a well which is about 1,000 meters higher than the sea surface, with cool water in summer, warm water in winter. According to the legend, Bo Vua was the place where the king once stopped and drank water. Near Bo Vua well, there is a small misterious black field that has never had any grass. Surrounding Bo Vua, there are around 1.000m high green hills that havenatural landscape, with green grass, purchase trees, myrtle trees... Bo Vua hills area has a great potential of tourism development. However, the wrong orientation is possible to destroy the natural landscape and ecological environment. According to the survey, the road to Bo Vua is very narrow, sloping, and has lots of bumpy rocks.



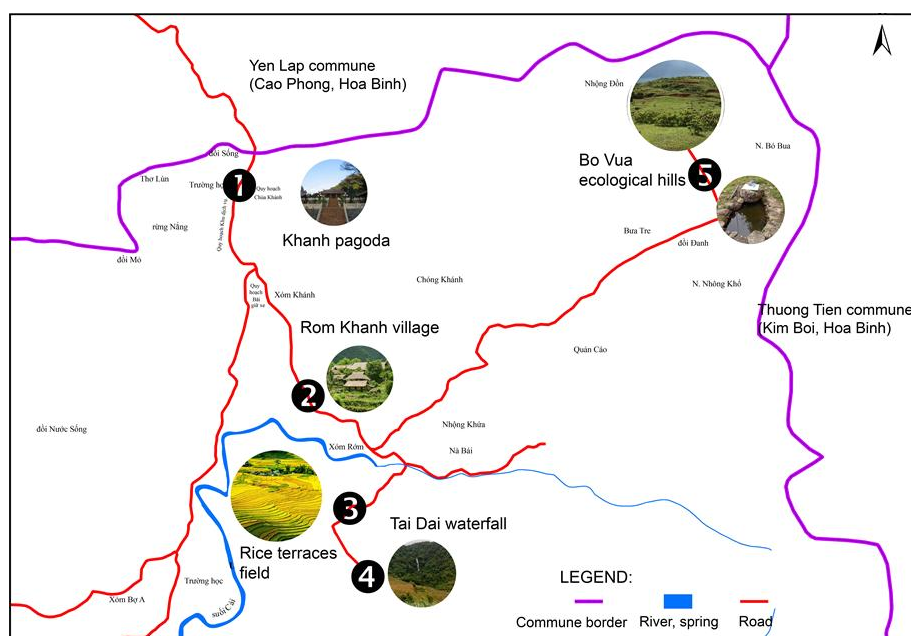
**Figure 7, 8, 9: Bo Vua well, black field, and ecological hills (Survey in Yen Thuong – June, 2019)**

- Orientation: This area has identified as an important natural and ecological tourism area in Yen Thuong. Tourists can visit, experience the landscape and go camping at gentle hills. To preserve the pristine landscape, it is necessary to only develop the experiencing tourism, avoid construction, control the number of visitors, do not allow cars and electrical cars to go up the hills. To overcome the transportation, only narrow trails should be built for motorbikes and pedestrians, and the visitors's safety needs to be ensured.

Following the orientation of tourism in Yen Thuong, the travel route is designed to reach all of the destinations in the most reasonable way, at the same time protecting the ecological landscape, environment and cultural identity. The travel route is also the main landscape axis to reach destinations.

From the district to Yen Thuong commune, pass the People's Committee, the route will be in the following order: (1) Khanh pagoda; (2) Rom Khanh village; (3) Rice terraces field; (4) Tai Dai waterfall; (5) Bo Vua ecological hills (Figure 10).





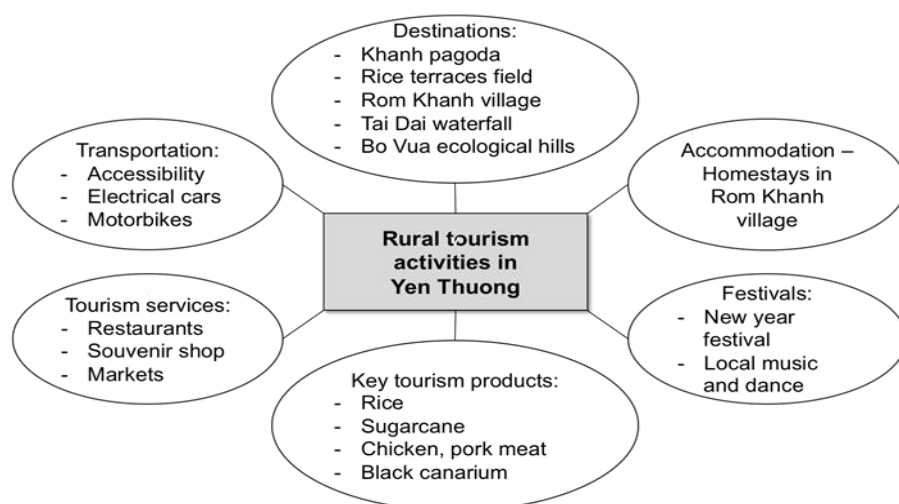
**Figure 10: The tourism route to attractive destination in Yen Thuong**

### 3.2.3. Identifying the community participation

For the effective and sustainable implementation of the tourism model in Yen Thuong, after the subdivision of tourist attractive destinations, it is necessary to set up the community participation with different roles and activities.

To develop Yen Thuong tourism, besides the attractive destinations and homestays, we identified other tourism activities including: transportation,

tourism services, festivals, key tourism products (details in Figure 11). Among them, development of key tourism products is very important, related to agricultural strength of Yen Thuong. For the successful operation of the tourism model, it is necessary to support the local community involvement in the whole activities by empowering the community.

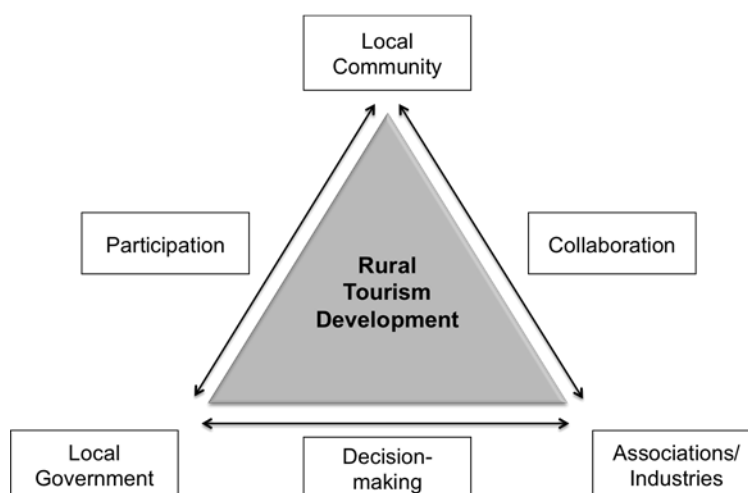


**Figure 11: Rural tourism activities in Yen Thuong**

According to People's Committee of Yen Thuong, the commune has abundant potentials of community capacity for tourism development. Following that, the local community is available to participate directly or indirectly in the below activities :

- Exploit and develop tourism destinations (5 destinations) by instructing, advertising and protecting natural and cultural landscape and environment;
- Taking visitors by local transportation (electrical cars or motorbikes);
- Giving accomodations (7 initial homestays in Rom Khanh village);
- Offering tourism services;
- Organizing festivals;
- Developing tourism products by producing, selling and advertising.

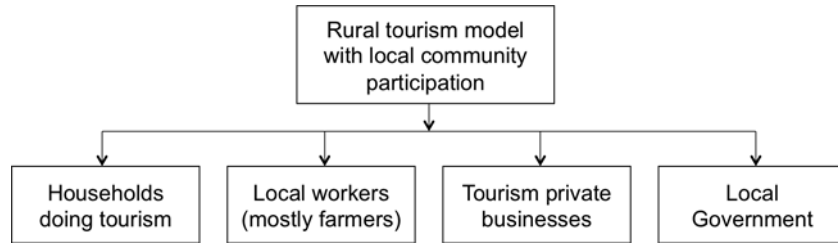
Applying the triangular model of rural tourism development (Inbakaran & Chhetri, 2003) with three corners as the local community, the local government and industries. These three corners have interactive relationships and interdependency in the process of effective communication of tourism activities. To carry out the diverse tourism activities in Yen Thuong, the local community and People's Committee have to both participate in all activities, the Committee and private industries have to take parts in decision-making, private industries and the community need to have a proper collaboration. In which, the community can have indirect participation in decision-making. Also important is that the host community's itself is often a vital part of the rural tourism products and act as an attraction for the visitors.



**Figure 12: The triangular model of rural tourism development (Inbakaran & Chhetri, 2003)**

For more suitable to social characteristic in Vietnam rural areas in general and ethnic groups in particular (like Muong people in Yen Thuong), local communities should be larger identified. So in the case of Yen Thuong, the elements of local community will include: households doing tourism activities; local workers participate directly or indirectly to tourism activities; private businesses that invest and

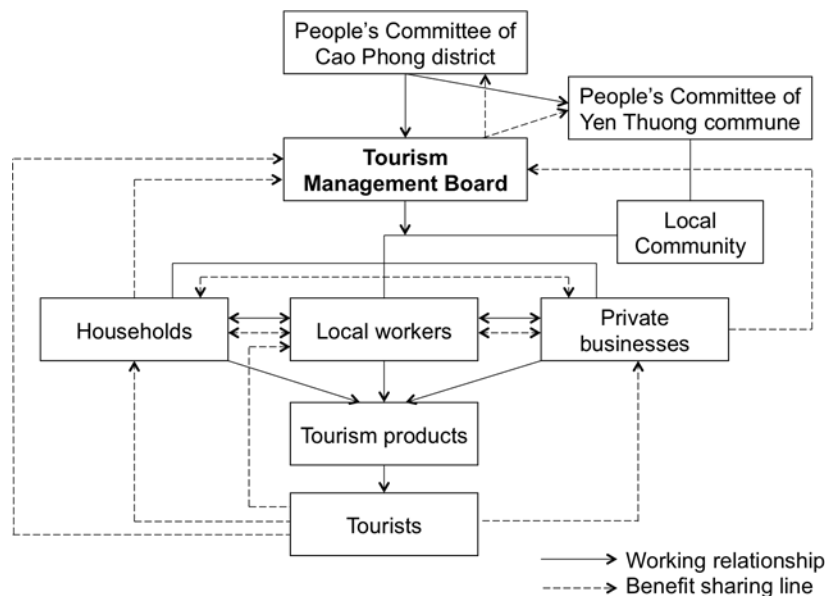
promote tourism; and the local government (People's Committee of Yen Thuong) who assume the main responsibility in organizing tourism activities. In fact, if the issue of organizing and managing tourism projects is assigned to the people without power, it will face great difficulties in implementing and maintaining activities.



**Figure 13: The local community participation in rural tourism model**

To develop in details the local community participation in rural tourism of Yen Thuong, it is necessary to establish a tourism management board.

The authors proposed the model's operating system as Figure 14 below:



**Figure 14: The operation of rural tourism model with local community participation**

- The tourism management board will be the head of the system, includes people from local government, and community participation. This board will coordinate all tourism activities (see Figure 11) taking places in the 250ha tourism area.

- The relationship between components is determined as follow:

+ A coordinated management relationship, with an appropriate sharing benefits between the board and the People's Committees of Cao Phong district and Yen Thuong commune.

+ A business cooperation between the board and households, local workers, private businesses. The board will have revenues: directly from visitors through sightseeing tickets; management fees from households, local workers, private businesses. Households, local workers, private businesses will get income from providing services directly to tourists or from business cooperation activities.

- The board will manage the tourism products, and through households, local workers, private businesses, sell to visitors. There will be a

collaborative and competitive relationship among households, local workers, private businesses.

For the effective and sustainable operation of the rural tourism model of Yen Thuong, it is necessary to insist the solutions as follow: enhancing the tourism management board to coordinate, manage and monitor all of the destinations and activities; training the local community by tourism skills and knowledge; improving the infrastructure and facilities; developing key tourism products for high quality; preserving the natural landscape, ecological environment and Muong's cultural identity.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Rural tourism encompasses a wide range of natural, manmade attractions and activities that take places in rural areas. In rural tourism models, community involvement is considered as a necessary foundation for effective development. In Vietnam, rural tourism with community participation is growing relatively fast recent years, and in some regions, it is increasingly being used as a development strategy to improve the social and economic well being of rural areas. However, the rural tourism development in many Vietnamese regions has been still spontaneous, lacked of detailed planning orientations and systematic forms of community participation.

In this research, the authors proposed a rural tourism model with local community participation in Vietnam, with the case of Yen Thuong commune, Cao Phong district. The district and the commune both have abundant potentials for rural development. The rural tourism model includes:

- Subdivision of 05 tourist attractive destinations by positions, characteristics and orientations. The diversity included spiritual, agricultural landscape, cultural and community, natural and ecological types of tourism. The orientations were proposed to exploit and develop all of the destinations, at the same time preserving the

ecological landscape, environment and cultural identity.

- Identification of the local community participation by setting up the relationship between tourism activities and community involvement; the elements of local community; and the operation of rural tourism model with local community participation. In the operating system, the tourism management board plays an important role in coordinating all tourism activities and elements.

The driving factors of the model are developing attractive destinations and identifying community involvement. When applying the model in Yen Thuong and broadly, it is necessary to insist the solutions as presented in the section 3.2.3. Also, the model's operation should be managed, monitored and evaluated periodically to gain experiences and issues need to be revised.

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