PRO-POOR TOURISM: PUTTING POVERTY AT THE HEART OF THE TOURISM AGENDA

Caroline Ashley, Charlotte Boyd and Harold Goodwin

This paper examines how tourism affects the livelihoods of the poor and how positive impacts can be enhanced. In doing so, it assesses the relevance of tourism to the poverty agenda, and the factors that encourage or constrain economic participation of the poor in the industry. In conclusion it outlines strategies for promoting pro-poor tourism – PPT.

Policy conclusions

- Tourism development has not, to date, incorporated poverty elimination objectives. It remains driven by economic, environmental and/or cultural perspectives at national and international levels.
- Given the massive impact that tourism has on many of the world’s poor, how and how far pro-poor tourism can be promoted needs to become a central issue.
- The poverty impacts of tourism include a wide range of impacts on livelihoods of the poor – not just jobs or incomes – with differential costs and benefits.
- Participation by the poor in tourism, and the benefits they gain, depends on a range of critical factors including the type of tourism, planning regulations, land tenure, market context, and access to capital and training. Many of these can be influenced by changes in policy or external support.
- There is plenty of unexploited scope for adapting tourism interventions to enhance livelihood benefits to the poor from tourism.
- PPT strategies must be commercially realistic. Although the private sector cannot be expected to prioritise poverty objectives, it must be included in the process of developing PPT.

Introduction: Putting poverty at the heart of the tourism agenda

Lack of focus on poverty within the tourism agenda

The International Development Target of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015 has been widely adopted. A number of prominent development agencies, including the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID), are developing sustainable livelihoods approaches in response to these targets.

In the tourism sector, national governments and donors have generally aimed to promote private sector investment, macro-economic growth and foreign exchange earnings, without specifically taking the needs and opportunities of the poor into account in tourism development (i.e. what we term here ‘pro-poor tourism’). Donor-supported tourism master plans focus on creating infrastructure, stimulating private investment and attracting international tourists. Investors are often international companies and local elites, whose profits are generally repatriated abroad or to metropolitan centres. Links with the local economy are often weak, with the possible exception of employment.

Since the mid-1980s, interest in ‘green’ tourism, eco-tourism and community tourism has grown rapidly among decision-makers, practitioners and advocates. All of these focus on the need to ensure that tourism does not erode the environmental and cultural base on which it depends. But these generally do not consider the full range of impacts on the livelihoods of the poor.

The current challenge for governments and donors in tourism development is to respond to changes in broader development thinking, by developing strategies to enhance impacts of tourism on the poor. Recent research in India, Indonesia, Namibia, Nepal, the Philippines, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe helps to shed light on the issues involved.

Can tourism really be pro-poor?

Tourism is a complex industry driven by the private sector, and often by large international companies. Governments have relatively few instruments to influence this sector, particularly in developing countries where fiscal and planning instruments for capturing non-commercial benefits are generally weak.

Nevertheless, as a sector for pro-poor economic growth, tourism has several advantages:
- The consumer comes to the destination, thereby providing opportunities for selling additional goods and services.
- Tourism is an important opportunity to diversify local economies. It can develop in poor and marginal areas with few other export and diversification options. Remote...
areas particularly attract tourists because of their high cultural, wildlife and landscape value.

- It offers labour-intensive and small-scale opportunities compared with other non-agricultural activities (Deloitte and Touche, 1999), employs a high proportion of women (UNED, 1999), and values natural resources and culture, which may feature among the few assets belonging to the poor. However, the poorest may gain few direct benefits from tourism while bearing many of the costs. It is important to mitigate those costs, while maximising the benefits to the fairly poor (e.g. casual workers and the semi-skilled). Strategies for promoting PPT are emerging, suggesting that there is potential for much more to be done. In the past, the search for market niches (e.g. community tourism, eco-tourism) has been dominant. Strategies to enhance net benefits to the poor need to be developed across the whole industry, drawing on a range of expertise in pro-poor growth.

**What factors influence economic participation by the poor in tourism?**

Benefits to the poor from tourism depend on whether and how they can participate economically in the industry – though the non-economic impacts discussed below must also be considered. A wide range of factors ranging from the local (assets, gender, livelihood strategies) to the policy environment (tenure, regulations) and commercial context (market segments) influence their participation, and all embody constraints which can be reduced.

**Human and financial capital of the poor**

Particularly important skills in tourism include language, and an understanding of tourist expectations. Training for small-scale tourism often has to begin with what is a tourist?, because being a tourist is such an alien experience for the poor. Financial capital is critical for the poor to be able to expand informal sector activities within tourism. Poor entrepreneurs have generated their own capital over time, by starting small and reinvesting profits over several years. However, they may be squeezed out if outside investors drive rapid growth in the industry – as occurred at Boracay Island in the Philippines (Shah, 2000).

**Social capital and organisational strength**

Where the poor have access to dynamic and flexible forms of social capital, the potential for participation may be greater. For example, in Bali, most restaurants are managed either by

<table>
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<th>Livelihood activities</th>
<th>Conflicts between tourism and current activities</th>
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<td>Livestock</td>
<td>Compete for water and grazing</td>
<td>Cash for investing in herds</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Exclusion of livestock from core wildlife areas</td>
<td>Jobs near farm so tourism worker can continue as farmer</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Litter and environmental damage harm livestock</td>
<td>Cash in dry years limits livestock de-stocking</td>
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<td>Can increase tension and decrease cooperation with neighbours</td>
<td>Can boost community management of RNR, including grazing</td>
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<td>Agriculture (crops)</td>
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<td>Crop damage by wildlife (elephants)</td>
<td>Can boost community management of RNR</td>
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<td>RNR harvesting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Livelihood strategies</td>
<td>Lost access to grazing and bush foods</td>
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<td>Cope with drought</td>
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<td>Additional livelihood opportunity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diversify</td>
<td>Risky investment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Minimise risk</td>
<td>Earnings lagged</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintain liquidity and flexibility</td>
<td>High initial investment</td>
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**Source:** Ashley, (2000)
Box 2  Leakages and linkages

On average, around 55% of tourism expenditure remains outside the destination country, rising to 75% in specific cases such as the Gambia and Commonwealth Caribbean (DBSA), but as little as 25% for large economies such as India. Leakage occurs due to use of imported skilled labour and luxury products, repatriation of profits by owners, and the considerable role of marketing, transport and other services based in the originating country. What is important from a poverty perspective is not simply how much stays in the country, but how much is within the destination and spent on goods and services of the poor.

Tourism regulations covering tourist activities, qualifications of workers, or service standards are often geared to the more desirable tourist assets. Regulations and bureaucracy can greatly facilitate local sales to tourists. For example, where land is privately owned from the start, local residents are less likely to be forced out, but often sell up early in tourism development to outside speculators. As a result, they may end up as workers in the industry, but not owners or decision-makers.

Tenure over land and natural resources can give the poor market power, and enable them to negotiate and secure benefits from tourism. Tenure may be over land, wildlife, or other tourism assets, but it needs to include rights of exclusion, so that access can be charged for. At Maheny in Zimbabwe’s southeast lowveld, the local community has gained significantly from a lease agreement for two lodges. This was only possible because the community and local authority controlled the lease rights, the local council used its power to support community interests, and the CAMPFIRE programme provided a supportive policy context. There are many other examples where a few private entrepreneurs exclude local people in order to gain key assets, often through unauthorised land-grabbing. For example, Sabang is the gateway town for St. Paul’s National Park in the Philippines, and 20–30 years ago contained much public land, almost all of which has now been privately exploited. The local authority lacks effective power to prevent breaches of planning regulations.

Planning gain

Where the poor lack rights to negotiate directly with tourism companies, government authorities can promote their interests. For example, control over planning approval can be used to require or encourage investors’ commitments to benefiting local communities. Within South Africa’s Strategic Development Initiative, investors’ plans for boosting local development are one criterion for selecting between bids for tourism concessions (Koch et al., 1998). This approach can only work where local authorities have effective power and desirable tourist assets.

Regulations and bureaucracy

Tourism regulations covering tourist activities, qualifications of workers, or service standards are often geared to the more formal sector enterprises and may impinge most on those lacking contacts and capital.

Near Sa Pa in Vietnam and in Upper Mustang in Nepal, regulations ostensibly designed to protect ethnic minorities from socio-cultural intrusion have also prevented them from participating in and benefiting from tourism (Shah, 2000). However, in Namibia, accommodation classifications that excluded very basic but clean campsites and homestays are being revised, as are guide training systems that were suitable only for those with English, formal education and access to the capital city. As in many other countries, there is a strong case for ‘local guide’ registration systems.

Box 3  How does participation by the poor differ by market segment?

Domestic or regional tourists are particularly important clients for self-employed sellers and owners of small establishments (the skilled poor and not-so-poor). Studies in Yogyakarta (Indonesia) and elsewhere in South East Asia show that domestic and other Asian tourists tend to buy more from local vendors than Western tourists (Shah, 2000). Budget and independent tourists, particularly backpackers are also more likely than luxury tourists to use the cheaper guest houses, home-stays, transport and eating services provided by local people. They tend to stay longer at a destination than group tourists and interact more with the local economy, but spend less per day, often bargaining hard over prices.

Nature-based tourism (including ‘eco-tourism’) does not necessarily provide more opportunities for the poor than ‘mass tourism’. Nature tourism does offer four advantages: it takes place in less developed areas, often involves smaller operators with more local commitment, has a higher proportion of independent travellers, and if marketed as ‘eco-tourism’ may stimulate consumer pressure for socio-economic benefits. But it remains a niche in the market, can be heavily dependent on imports, and can spread disruption to less developed areas.

Mass tourism is highly competitive, and usually dominated by large suppliers who have little destination commitment, and are unlikely to use local suppliers. But it generates jobs and negative impacts may not spread beyond immediate localities. More knowledge is needed on how local economic opportunities can be expanded and negative impacts minimised in the mass tourism segment, given its size.

Cruises and all-inclusives are rapidly growing segments, but likely to generate few economic linkages. The Gambian Government has recently decided to ban ‘all-inclusives’ in response to local demands.

The informal sector is where opportunities for small-scale enterprise or labour by the poor are maximised. For example, at Bai Chay, Ha Long Bay in Vietnam, almost a dozen local families run private hotels, but local involvement in tourism spreads far beyond this, to an estimated 70–80% of the population. Apart from those with jobs in the hotels and restaurants, local women share the running of six noodle stalls, many women and children are ambulant vendors, and anyone with a boat or motorbike hires them out to tourists. However, the informal sector is often neglected by planners.

Access to the tourist market

Tourists often stay in accommodation that is owned by outsiders and local élites, and spend time at attractions from which local poor people – for instance, suppliers of goods and services – are excluded. Access to the tourism market is most constrained where ‘enclave tourism’ and all-inclusive packages develop. Often the only option for local people then is hawking, either at the enclave entry and exit points or at roadside. Organised markets, particularly at prime sites, can greatly facilitate local sales to tourists. For example, women craft-sellers have sites within some parks in KwaZulu Natal (South Africa), while at Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe, one of the demands of local communities is for a market at the Park entrance.

Linkages between the formal sector and local suppliers

Formal sector tourism enterprises can provide a market for the labour and products of the poor. But often labour and luxury goods are imported from outside the locality (Box 2). There is some evidence that where the local élite, rather than external élite, own formal sector enterprises, they are more likely to use local suppliers (Shah, 2000).

Tourism segment and type of tourist

Community tourism is often thought of as the main avenue for the poor to participate in tourism (for example through community run lodges, campsites or craft centres, which are often supported by NGOs). However, poor individuals engage
in all types of tourism through self-employment (e.g. hawking, or small enterprise) and casual labour. There is a lack of data on how participation of the poor varies by market segment, but emerging trends indicate the importance of domestic/regional tourism, the need to assess participation of the poor in mass tourism, and the vital role of the informal sector in any segment (see Box 3).

How does tourism impact on the livelihoods of the poor?
Assessing the livelihood impacts of tourism is not simply a matter of counting jobs or wage income. Participatory poverty assessments demonstrate great variety in the priorities of the poor and factors affecting livelihood security and sustainability. Tourism can affect many of these, positively and negatively, often indirectly (Elliott et al., forthcoming). It is important to assess these impacts and their distribution.

Economic impacts
Tourism can generate four different types of local cash income generally involving four distinct categories of people:
- Wages from formal employment.
- Earnings from selling goods, services, or casual labour (e.g. food, crafts, building materials, guide services).
- Dividends and profits arising from locally-owned enterprises.
- Collective income: this may include profits from a community-run enterprise, dividends from a private sector partnership and land rental paid by an investor.

Waged employment can be sufficient to lift a household from insecure to secure, but may only be available to a minority, and not the poor; Casual earnings per person may be very small, but much more widely spread (Ashley, 2000; Shah, 2000), and may be enough, for instance, to cover school fees for one or more children. Guiding work, although casual, is often high status and relatively well paid. There are few examples of successful and sustainable collective income from tourism. Cases from Kenya and Namibia illustrate that it can match wage income in scale, can in principle benefit all residents, is often particularly significant for communities who do not have other options to earn collective income, but can be problematic to manage (Elliott et al., forthcoming; Ashley, 2000).

Negative economic impacts include inflation, dominance by outsiders in land markets and in-migration which erodes economic opportunities for the local poor (Shah, 2000).

Impacts on assets and other activities of the poor
Tourism development can change poor people's access to assets and to related livelihood options (see Box 4). On the positive side, it can generate funds for investment in health, education and other assets, provide infrastructure, stimulate development of social capital, strengthen sustainable management of natural resources, and create a demand for improved assets (especially education). On the negative side,
tourism can reduce local access to natural resources, draw heavily upon local infrastructure, and disrupt social networks.

Social impacts
Local residents often highlight the way tourism affects other livelihood goals – whether positively or negatively – such as cultural pride, a sense of control, good health, and reduced vulnerability. Socio-cultural intrusion by tourists is often cited as a negative impact. Certainly sexual exploitation particularly affects the poorest women, girls and young men. The poor themselves may view other types of cultural change as positive. Tourism can also increase the value attributed to minority cultures by national policy-makers. Overall, the cultural impacts of tourism are hard to disentangle from wider processes of development.

The overall balance of positive and negative livelihood impacts will vary enormously between situations, among people and over time, and on the extent to which local priorities are able to influence the planning process. A key principle is to consider the many ways in which tourism affects different components of livelihoods, and a ‘sustainable livelihoods framework’ (Carney, (ed) 1998) helps to provide a checklist (Table 2).

Taking distribution of livelihood impacts into account
The poor are far from a homogenous group. The range of impacts outlined above will inevitably be distributed unevenly among poor groups, reflecting different patterns of assets, activities, opportunities and choices. The most substantial benefits, particularly jobs, may be concentrated among few. Net benefits are likely to be smallest, or negative, for the poorest. A review of 24 case studies in Asia indicates economic gains for all sections of the community, but with those already better off gaining most (Shah, 2000).

Impacts differ between men and women. Women can be the first to suffer from loss of natural resources (e.g. access to fuelwood) and cultural/sexual exploitation, but may benefit most from physical infrastructure improvements (e.g. piped water or a grinding mill) where this is a by-product of tourism. Where a local elite does not exist, migrants may move in to exploit new opportunities. The poverty impact of this depends on whether migrants are poorer groups, more willing to work for lower returns to escape desperate conditions elsewhere, or skilled entrepreneurs seizing new opportunities before local skills have a chance to develop.

Policy implications: What strategies enhance the poverty impacts of tourism?
Despite innumerable case studies of tourism development, there is relatively little assessment of practical experience in strategies to make tourism more pro-poor. Nevertheless, lessons can be drawn from a wealth of small initiatives (many from ‘community tourism’ or ‘conservation and development’ programmes), supplemented by expanding knowledge on ‘pro-poor growth strategies’ (among poverty experts). Building on the analysis above of issues affecting participation and impacts, several policy implications clearly emerge.

Strategies
1. Put poverty issues on the tourism agenda
A first step is to recognise that enhancing poverty impacts of tourism is different from commercial, environmental, or ethical concerns. PPT can be incorporated as an additional objective, but this requires pro-active and strategic intervention. There may well be trade-offs to make - for example between attracting all-inclusive operators and maximising informal sector opportunities, or between faster growth through outside investment, and slower growth building on local capacity. But at least the trade-offs should be addressed.

2. Enhance economic opportunities and a wide range of impacts
On the evidence above, two approaches need to be combined:
   • Expand poor people’s economic participation by addressing the barriers they face, and maximising a wide range of employment, self-employment and informal sector opportunities (see proposed actions in Table 3).
   • Incorporate wider concerns of the poor into decision-making. Reducing competition for natural resources, minimising trade-offs with other livelihood activities, using tourism to create physical infrastructure that benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3 Actions to enhance economic participation of the poor in tourism enterprise</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Barriers to participation of the poor in tourism</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of human capital</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of finance, credit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of organisation. Exclusion by organised formal sector interests</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location – far from tourism sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of market power. No ownership/control over resources of market value. No bargaining power with investors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulations and red tape. Exclusion from registered and promoted categories of tourism facility/service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate access to tourist market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited capacity to meet requirements of tourism market</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under-development of domestic/regional/ independent tourism by comparison with international tourism and all-inclusives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government support targeted to formal sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New tourism opportunities conflict with existing livelihood strategies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. A multi-level approach
Pro-poor interventions can and should be taken at three different levels:

- **Destination level** - this is where pro-active practical partnerships can be developed between operators, residents, NGOs, and local authorities, to maximise benefits.
- **National policy level** - policy reform may be needed on a range of tourism issues (planning, licensing, training) and non-tourism issues (land tenure, business incentives, infrastructure, land-use planning).
- **International level** - to encourage responsible consumer and business behaviour; and to enhance commercial codes of conduct.

4. Work through partnerships, including business and governmental and non-governmental institutions within the destination, and also require a supportive national policy framework.

**Box 5 Principles underlying PPT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>poor people must participate in tourism decisions if their livelihood priorities are to be reflected in the way tourism is developed.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A holistic livelihoods approach</td>
<td>the range of livelihood concerns of the poor - economic, social, and environmental, short-term and long-term - need to be recognised. Focusing simply on cash or jobs is inadequate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution</td>
<td>promoting PPT requires some analysis of the distribution of both benefits and costs – and how to influence it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>blue-print approaches are unlikely to maximise benefits to the poor. The pace or scale of development may need to be adapted; appropriate strategies and positive impacts will take time to develop; situations are widely divergent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial realism</td>
<td>ways to enhance impacts on the poor within the constraints of commercial viability need to be sought.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>as much is untested, learning from experience is essential. PPT also needs to draw on lessons from poverty analysis, environmental management, good governance and small enterprise development.</td>
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</table>

**References**


**Caroline Ashley** and **Charlotte Boyd** are Research Fellows at ODI, Portland House, Stag Place, London SW1E 5DP. Email: c.ashley@odi.org.uk and c.boyd@odi.org.uk.

**Harold Goodwin**, can be contacted at the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Greenwich, Medway University Campus, Kent M4 4TB. Email: ftsl@ftsl.demon.co.uk

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