Removing the blinkers: advocating for inclusion of biodiversity conservation and environment into tourism planning in Vietnam

by

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1.0. Biodiversity in Vietnam

Vietnam has been identified as one of Asia’s most biologically important countries. The long coastline, wide range of latitude and altitudes has contributed to abundant and diverse ecosystems, species and genetic resources. Key ecosystems include a variety of marine and coastal habitats, inland lakes and rivers, tropical rainforests, monsoon savannah, sub-alpine scrub-land and two important river deltas located in the north and south of Vietnam which provide extensive wetland habitats.

Investigations have shown that these habitats are home to more than 12,000 plant species, 5,500 species of insects, 2,470 species of fish, 800 species of birds, 275 species of mammals, 180 species of reptiles and 80 species of amphibians. Ten percent of the world’s mammal, bird and fish species are found in Vietnam and over 40 percent of local plant species are endemic. This decade has seen the scientific discovery of four new large mammal species in the central provinces.

The gene pool in Vietnam is of particular economic importance and has the potential for significant exploitation, especially in the research and production of medicines derived from plants. Research shows that approximately 5,000 plant species are used for economic purposes in Vietnam. In addition Vietnam boasts a wide variety of agricultural species of plants and animals which are currently threatened due to the increasing pressure for monoculture (WWF, 1999; IUCN, 1999).

2.0. Threats to Biodiversity in Vietnam

The last fifty years has seen a rapid increase in the demand for the country’s natural resources. The necessity of fuel, in the form of firewood, for a predominantly rural population of 78 million has greatly depleted the country’s forested areas. This, combined with logging and the effects of defoliants used by US forces during the war in the 1960’s and 70’s, has reduced the remaining forest cover to less than 30 percent, of which only 10 percent is still primary untouched forest (WWF, 1999).

The key threats to biodiversity in Vietnam include: Encroachment; Wildlife trade; Hunting/fishing; NTFP collection; Logging and subsequent erosion; Alien/invasive species; Forest fires; Pollution. Tourism – a potential multi-faceted threat to biodiversity – is rapidly emerging as a concrete issue for Vietnam and is arguably at a stage where it should be added to this key list.
3.0. Current experience integrating tourism into biodiversity

In October 1998, at a national workshop reviewing Vietnam’s Biodiversity Action Plan (VNBAP), IUCN Vietnam’s Capacity Building for Sustainable Tourism Initiatives Project (IUCN STP – see Figure 2) presented a paper on “Why tourism is an important factor in biodiversity conservation”. The presentation had several purposes:

- to raise awareness of the impacts of tourism on biodiversity and the environment in general;
- show the inter-relationships between biodiversity and a sustainable tourism industry;
- discuss the conservation value of ‘ecotourism’;
- highlight the issues pertaining to tourism and protected areas in Vietnam;
- advocate for inclusion of tourism as an issue for biodiversity in any new or revised edition of VNBAP, and recommend specific actions/projects to address tourism impacts on biodiversity conservation (and incorporate biodiversity conservation in tourism planning). The list of recommendations is included in Annex A.

IUCN STP was successful in having tourism placed on the agenda for Vietnam’s next BAP. Though the presentation was preaching to the ‘converted’ – the participants were mainly from the conservation/environmental protection fraternity – it was an introduction to a largely unfamiliar topic... due in part to:

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**Figure 1: Summary of Impacts of Tourism on Biodiversity**

Current trends in international and domestic tourism raise a number of (potential) problems for biological diversity in Vietnam:

- land conversion & clearing for hotel, resort, entertainment/recreation areas, golf courses, roads, airports – results in loss of wildlife habitat, disruption of breeding/feeding patterns, local extinctions, mortality…;
- in-filling of wetlands, destruction of mangroves – loss of habitat etc;
- deforestation due to fuel-wood consumption to meet needs of tourists and tourist development – loss of habitat etc;
- forest destruction due to increase in incidence of forest fires in touristed areas;
- air pollution - transportation – kills/stunts vegetation (unleaded petrol still to arrive in Vietnam, motorised transportation is increasing rapidly);
- introduction of exotic species by tourists and modes of transport;
- disturbance to animal behaviour, breeding and feeding patterns by tourists;
- geo-morphological restructuring eg: to construct golf courses and marinas – changes to local water catchments;
- contamination of water courses and sources by pesticide/fertilizer run off from golf courses – flora and fauna illness and mortality;
- construction on sensitive sand dunes - erosion, changes in beach profile, loss of dune habitat;
- uncontrolled sewage/waste disposal and contamination of water sources – death and illness of aquatic flora and fauna;
- dumping of rubbish by tour boats, which also release oil, use noisy and polluting engines, damage coral reefs with anchors;
- collection and damage to coral by reef walking tourists, souvenir sellers - in severe instances leading to unprotected coasts and shore erosion;
- collection of natural ‘souvenirs’ from reefs, caves, forests, and consumption of wild animals;
- water shortages due to use for golf courses, resorts, swimming pools, leading to local scarcity and salt water intrusion – disruption of breeding and feeding patterns, death of vegetation;
- development of large recreation/entertainment/sports complexes and associated infrastructure in or near national parks – habitat destruction, noise and pollution impacts;
- litter accumulation – mortality of wildlife from poisoning or suffocation… (Koeman, A., 1998).
- the relative adolescence/immaturity of Vietnam’s tourism industry;

- the general lack of awareness of or exposure to, the negative impacts of the world’s largest industry, and the implications for Vietnam in promoting tourism as a major economic sector;

- the weakness in cross sectoral planning in Vietnam, and

- lack of acknowledgement that tourism is a cross sectoral sector in itself...

4.0. Current experience integrating biodiversity into the tourism sector

With respect to bringing biodiversity, conservation and environmental considerations into the tourism sector, more concerted efforts are required. At the national level, the major targets are the Vietnam National Administration of (VNAT) and its Institute for Tourism Development Research (ITDR). These two bodies are responsible for tourism policy, planning, management, administration and research, as well as having considerable input into education and training in tourism (through several tourism training schools). Another key target is the powerful Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), which is responsible for all ‘sizeable’ tourism development/investment decisions.

The IUCN STP has instigated several initiatives with its counterpart, the Institute for Tourism Development Research (ITDR), in an attempt to introduce environmental considerations, including biodiversity conservation, into the everyday operations and considerations of ITDR, and has also established direct contact with key persons within VNAT (see Figure 3).

The process of engagement, dialogue, building mutual trust and respect is a vital, if slow one. Free information sharing is a valuable tool in this process. The regular provision of free materials to both ITDR and VNAT has been met with some surprise (free sharing of information is still rare in a country where for a long time it was closely guarded and controlled), but at the same time, appreciation. It is helping to raise the profile of IUCN and enhance the respect for the IUCN STP by illustrating that IUCN is ready and willing to share its knowledge, skills and international networks to assist Vietnam in achieving sustainable tourism.

4.1. The IUCN STP

The IUCN STP is IUCN Vietnam’s first project to specifically include environmental education and awareness raising activities. The two-year project is also the first project of its kind in Vietnam. In 1998 the project saw the assignment of its local counterpart, the Institute for Tourism Development Research of the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism.

The goal of the project has been "to identify and raise awareness of the negative socio-economic, cultural and ecological impacts of tourism, and contribute to the development of sustainable community-based models of tourism that can generate sustainable income for some of the country’s poorest and least advantaged communities, while at the same time helping to maintain Vietnam’s cultural and biological diversity".

Project objectives are several: networking and information exchange; research and analysis; education and training; advocacy, support for a pilot project, and project extension. Target groups include government at all levels, tour operators and guides, academics and students, protected area managers, tourists and the general public.

As part of the IUCN/ITDR collaboration, several activities have been instigated targeting other key tourism stakeholders:

- Convening of a "Workshop on Development of a National Ecotourism Strategy for Vietnam"
5.0. Challenges to Building Biodiversity into Tourism Planning

5.1. Tourism and protected areas in Vietnam

The tourism industry in Vietnam has been characterised by rapid, short-term ventures, an emphasis on large projects, and largely uncontrolled and unregulated development with respect to environment and conservation. Authorities are concerned with the lack of infrastructure and are focusing on improving accommodation, transportation and access to tourist sites, including to remote, protected and sensitive natural areas. There is also a definite move to develop more ‘attractions’ such as recreational/theme parks, golf courses, and resort complexes in rural/natural areas and also in the vicinity of Protected Areas (PA).

Little attention, meanwhile, is being paid to the consequences of enabling larger numbers of visitors to visit such areas. At present few, if any, PA in Vietnam have the capability or means to plan for, manage and develop (eco) tourism. There is a notable lack of interpretative information centres at national parks, other PA and also other natural tourism destinations.

The extent to which tourism poses a threat to Vietnam’s biodiversity is largely unacknowledged. The growth of domestic tourism (9.6 million in 1998) has perhaps the greatest implications for the environment and biodiversity conservation in Vietnam, given the low level of environmental awareness and environmentally responsible behaviour of the Vietnamese population in general and the culture of consumption of wildlife. This is likely to be exacerbated by the increasing numbers of visitors from north Asia (together, China, Taiwan and Japan make up 40% of the total international arrivals - which numbered 1.5 million in 1998), where similar...
Biodiversity is also threatened by tourism as a result of the conflicts between national park managers and provincial or district authorities on the priorities for, and development of tourism within, PA, and on the unclear delineation of responsibilities for tourism within PA. For example, there are problems of ‘cross-management’ ie: most National Parks are under Forest Protection Department management (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development), while tourism development is the mandate of the Province, and District. There are ‘uncertainties’ about who is responsible for what within PA eg: who should build (and profit from) guesthouses? Who should improve infrastructure? Who should protect historical and cultural features? Who should charge entrance fees?

Provinces are also commissioning Tourism Master Plans from ITDR. These tend to be ambitious proposals that call for investment in large recreational, accommodation and other developments. In the cases where National Parks or other PA are present, they are often the key attraction, and the Plans include tourism development around and within them. To date local people, and PA managers included, appear to have little input to these Plans, or ‘negotiating power’ in imposing limits on how far tourism can be developed within the boundaries of the PA or in the buffer zone. Further, there remains the problem of central control of small PA budgets, and limited PA control over tourism generated revenue (which could be directly targeted at conservation, environmental education, benefit sharing with local communities etc).

These issues are in urgent need of resolution if National Parks are to avoid serious degradation and loss of their current biodiversity, scenic and other features as a result of tourism development and if positive links between tourism and biodiversity conservation are to be achieved.

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5.2. Ecotourism

To the above issues can be added the challenges faced by the development of ‘genuine’ eco-tourism within and outside Vietnam’s PA system. ‘Genuine’ ecotourism is not well understood by tourism operators, PA managers, or government. For example, an official from the Department of Trade and Services in the Ministry of Planning and Investment (the department in charge of tourism) - has described a multi-million resort complex in the vicinity of the central highland resort of Da lat as ‘ecotourism’, apparently due to its location outside an urban area.

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**Figure 4:**

Tourism and the consumption of flora and fauna

In Vietnam the threats to biodiversity already posed by the collection and consumption of forest flora and fauna animals such as orchids, bear, boar, deer, snake, python, civet, monkey, wild cat, tiger, ..., marine flora and fauna such as coral, seahorses, turtles, birds…etc is being exacerbated by tourism. This is obvious in many tourist destinations, such as Tam Dao, Ha Long, Nha Trang, Sa Pa….

Hunting wild animals to supply traders offers villagers a lucrative option for economic improvement. Vietnam plays three important roles in wildlife trade: a) the country is a major trade corridor; b) it is a source area for wildlife, c) it is a consumer of wildlife products. Apart from trophies and a bustling national pet trade in birds and primates, the bulk of traded animals are destined either for culinary consumption or traditional medicinal preparations (WWF, 1999).

‘Wild meat’ or ‘forest meat’ restaurants are to be found throughout the country, including major tourism destinations and national parks. Wild-meat is openly displayed on menus, with very special offerings often available upon verbal request. These restaurants are especially popular for species that have health or sexual performance value.

It is difficult to separate out the impact of a growing tourism industry from the overall increase in trade in wildlife and the effect of increasing domestic purchasing power and demand. However, it is evident that the demand for floral and faunal products within the tourism sector is largely fueled by the domestic tourist or traveler.

The increase in international visitors from northern Asia is undoubtedly also beginning to make a contribution, and there is justified concern with the fact that China holds top spot both as Vietnam’s largest international market for wildlife, and as its largest international tourist market.
Ecotourism has gained considerable mention in the local media and amongst tour operators and authorities in the last couple of years. However, most descriptions of ecotourism fall far short of what ‘genuine ecotourism’ is supposed to be all about and indeed there are few if any activities that can be classified as ‘genuine’ attempts at ecotourism. The term is being ‘used and abused’ and in the process making little positive contribution to conservation, local community development or education. The link has yet to be made between efforts to successfully conserve and protect biodiversity – which are dependent on the involvement of local people - and the development of ecotourism as a positive force for conservation and socio-economic development (which also relies on the involvement of local people, amongst other stakeholders). Lack of ecotourism knowledge and skills are only part of the problem.

For PA, the ecotourism challenge includes keeping foremost a supply-oriented management perspective, adopting a participatory, community based approach to both PA management and tourism development, and finding the financial and technical resources to achieve both.

5.3. Indigenous communities

The relationship between biodiversity conservation, ecotourism/tourism and ethnic minorities (the term used in Vietnam to describe indigenous peoples) is a complex one. Collaborative management of PA is being discussed, as is the management of buffer zones, but little in the way of practical application is taking place. Ethnic minorities are concentrated in the upland areas of Vietnam and in or around virtually all PA. They are a major tourist draw-card for the country, yet where they are the focus of attention, they are receiving disproportionately low share of the economic benefits from tourism. As mentioned earlier, ecotourism has yet to provide the link between socio-economic improvement and conservation.

IUCN STP is proposing a three-year "Support to Sustainable Tourism" project to be implemented in Sa Pa District in the northern Province of Lao Cai. A joint collaboration between IUCN and SNV, the project will be the first Community Based Sustainable Tourism (CBST) project for Vietnam and as such a valuable pilot for a new approach to integrated local tourism planning and development.

The project objectives are to:

1. Establish mechanisms for an improved/more equitable sharing of the benefits of tourism among a greater part of the population and which support the active participation of the community in tourism decision making and implementation; and
2. Increase the capacity of local stakeholders in reducing the negative impacts of tourism, specifically in the field of environment and culture.

This will be done through four main project components: a tourism fee system; a Sa Pa Tourism Information and Training Centre; trekking activities; and capacity building for local authorities, local ethnic minority communities and other stakeholders.

The major challenge facing Sa Pa is to achieve improved, sustainable livelihoods that in turn directly benefits conservation. This is not helped by the fact that at present, few visitors come expressly to visit the Nature Reserve, which itself lacks the authority to charge entrance fees or undertake tourism activities. There is also a visible ‘divide’ between the Nature Reserve, which is managed by the Province, and the District.

5.4. Environmental Impact Assessment for Tourism

With respect to EIA, tourism has to date been a somewhat minor area of concern or responsibility for the authorities charged with EIA and environmental management. Tourism development of certain types and sizes is subject to EIA, however many small developments ‘fall through the net’. There has been no Strategic EIA undertaken, and the cumulative impacts of piecemeal tourism ie: many small impacts add up to a large environmental problem, are not being considered or tackled.

However, there are recent moves to improve the situation – an EU and Belgian funded project "Capacity Building for Environmental Management in Vietnam" is drafting guidelines on EIA for tourism development with the National Centre for Natural Science and Technology, and has requested a number of agencies to review the guidelines. It is also establishing formal links with ITDR.

In Vietnam the State dominates the tourism industry. This has somewhat conflicting implications for tourism development and biodiversity conservation. On one hand, there is the possibility to impose strict control on tourism development. On the other, there are conflicts of interest in a system that both regulates and is a key
5.5. National Capacities and Priorities

There are considerable challenges to overcome before there is hope of integrating biodiversity into tourism planning, strategies and action plans (Master Plans continue to dominate tourism planning) in Vietnam, not least of which is the lack of experience of VNAT and ITDR in working with NGOs (whether national or international) and environmental organisations. In addition, the absence of sustainable tourism on the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam’s (GOV) list of priorities for aid, and hence low donor interest in and support for sustainable tourism activities in Vietnam, is restricting concerted efforts.

With respect to donor disinterest, there are some indications that MPI (specifically the Department of Science, Education and Environment) will place sustainable tourism on the list of priorities for aid for Vietnam in 1999. If this is so, the donor climate may turn in favour of a variety of sustainable tourism, ‘tourism and environment’, or ‘tourism and biodiversity’ specific activities.

In a concerted attempt to start the ball rolling, IUCN is proposing to VNAT a three-year project in ‘Capacity Building in Environment for the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism’. The concept idea is being submitted by VNAT to the National Tourism Steering Committee, a new body established early in 1999.

6.0. Opportunities and Ingredients for success

6.1. National Level Initiatives

The GOV has taken several tourism-related actions in early 1999, which indicate its desire to chart a course towards sustainability and which provide some initial ‘ingredients for success’. The establishment of the National Tourism Steering Committee is the most prominent, the others being the issuing of an Ordinance on Tourism, and the launching of a State Tourism Action.

The National Tourism Steering Committee is charged with assisting the Government to direct and coordinate Ministries, sectors and relevant local authorities to develop and implement plans and national programs on tourism; and to deal with any problems between Ministries, sectors and host destinations during the implementation process.

The establishment of the Committee is a positive and constructive move. It is also ‘ground-breaking’ as its cross-sectoral composition indicates recognition of the need for collaboration in order to achieve sustainability. The Committee comprises 7 representatives: the Government Office (the Deputy Prime Minister and Chairman of the Committee), VNAT (Vice Chair), Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Public Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Culture and Information, and Vietnam Airlines.

However, the glaring absence of some key sectors - notably the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (wherein sits the National Environment Agency) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (wherein sits the Forest Protection Department in charge of Vietnam’s Protected Area system) – is of considerable concern. Expressing this concern, IUCN STP wrote to the Office of Government to appeal for reconsideration of the membership and mandate of the body.

The Ordinance on Tourism is the highest level legal document governing tourism in Vietnam. It comprises 57 Articles, six of which pertain to “Protection, Exploitation, Utility and Development of Tourism Resources”. VNAT has expressed a need for assistance in developing guidelines and policies to implement the Ordinance, however it is currently ‘fast tracking’ a draft Decree on environmental management at tourism destinations, to be finalised by the third quarter of 1999. An IUCN offer of assistance, whether in drafting or reviewing the Decree, was declined. This serves to highlight the weakness of the (still new) relationship between VNAT and IUCN, in comparison with other government institutions and sectors where it is actively involved (and invited) to assist in drafting and reviewing guidelines, regulations or management plans.

In the context of the above, and with VNAT planning for a Law on Tourism to be prepared by 2001 for submission to the National Assembly, IUCN believes it is time to actively work to develop a closer relationship with VNAT, and to explicitly offer specialist technical assistance.

6.2. Domestic Tourism Growth
The growth and size of domestic tourism and domestic visitation to PA and other natural areas in Vietnam can be viewed as a positive opportunity and incentive for conservation. The large number of domestic tourists in Vietnam is an important potential that is often lacking in other developing countries where few locals travel. The size of the domestic market may also provide the incentive for government to take action to protect its natural resources.

6.3. Slowdown in growth of international tourism

Since 1997, Vietnam has experienced a considerable slowdown in growth of international tourism. This has stimulated a ‘soul-search’ amongst tourism authorities and other national level bodies, and has led to the spate of national initiatives mentioned above. This slowdown is in effect providing time for evaluation and an opportunity for reform. In this respect, the time is ripe for initiatives that strive for sustainability, not only in economic terms, but also in environmental, social and cultural terms.

6.4. Lack of infrastructure

Vietnam has relatively recently opened up to the international economic system. Tourism is a relatively new industry. As a result, compared to some other developing countries, there is a lack of infrastructure (and what exists is generally poor). There is thus some degree of opportunity to establish appropriate infrastructure and developments in and around PA and other sensitive sites (or orient the upgrade of infrastructure in a more environmentally sensitive direction).

7.0. Immediate Priorities – Way Ahead

IUCN Vietnam has three immediate priorities:

a. Continuation of the IUCN STP in a second, two or three-year phase, placed within ITDR (STP II);

b. Implementation of the ‘Capacity Strengthening in Environment for the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism’ project; and

c. Implementation of the ‘Support to Sustainable Tourism in Sa Pa’ project.

The progress and achievements of IUCN STP require consolidation and extension if sustainable tourism (and all that it encompasses) is to be brought closer to centre stage.

All three activities will significantly strengthen the opportunity to promote and achieve the building of biodiversity into tourism strategies and plans, as well as promote sustainable use and benefit sharing.

ITDR has already expressed an interest to collaborate on a pilot ecotourism project, which could be one of several projects initiated by IUCN STP II. An ecotourism pilot is sorely needed in Vietnam. It would provide an opportunity to foster and demonstrate ‘cross sectoral’ collaboration (bringing together the key stakeholders such as FPD, National Park management, local communities -indigenous groups or Vietnamese - tour operators and government at various levels), to promote benefit sharing and show the positive links between ecotourism and conservation.

For the international conservation community, the time is ripe (and not a moment too soon) to offer its technical expertise to Vietnam - to tourism authorities and other sectoral agencies - to encourage and assist in the integration of biodiversity conservation and other environmental considerations into tourism planning and actions.

References:


ANEX A

Recommendations for Vietnam Biodiversity Action Plan Review
(Hanoi, October 1998)

There are projects that could be carried out in each of the three BAP Priority areas – Policy and Programmes; Management and Conservation Field Programmes; Complementary Actions.

Policies and legal issues:

- By-law regulations should be promulgated dealing with siting/location of tourism development, zoning and application of the Recreational Opportunity Spectrum within and near PA’s. These would establish levels of acceptable use, degree of modification etc based on ‘supply side management’ principles. This zoning could go nationally as well ie: certain PA’s are already more ‘developed’ and modified than others and receive more tourists than others – should tourism be concentrated in these areas rather than in less developed and modified or more sensitive PA’s?
- Develop guidelines and incentives/disincentives to promote better waste/sewage/disposal and treatment and recycling (eg: eco-toilets) as well as the use of alternative ‘clean’ energies (solar, wind, micro-hydro).
- Impose stricter penalties for consumption/sale/collection of protected flora and fauna.
- Work with VNAT, MARD/FPD, MoSTE/NEA and tour operators, to establish a system of accreditation of tour operators according to environmental, cultural etc practice. Eg: a ‘green star’ system. This would establish environmental standards for tour operators and businesses, especially those working in or visiting national parks, and help discerning tourists chose those operators who are more ecologically sound.
- Convene a national workshop to consider the development of a national ecotourism strategy for Vietnam. IUCN is currently developing a proposal for such a national (interactive, facilitated) workshop.
- Widen the scope of projects requiring EIA in order to include tourism projects on a variety of scales, sizes, levels of investment, location etc.

Awareness building:

- Undertake a major education campaign with MoET, VNAT, MOSTE and tour operators/guides targeting tourists ie: a national campaign targeting the domestic population (consider them all as a potential tourist).
  *Consider the fact that You are not the only Vietnamese traveller in your country - the impact you have
should be multiplied several million-fold... consider the impact of 76 million people on your favourite holiday destination..."

IUCN and ITDR are currently working on a booklet on responsible travel in Vietnam for both domestic and international visitors ("Travel one day, perfection the next" and "Treading Softly, a Guide to Eco-friendly Travel in Vietnam").

- Give priority to the establishment of a system of environmental education interpretive centres ie: at each national park in Vietnam and the most vulnerable/sensitive nature reserves (or those receiving most tourists), through a joint MARD/VNAT/MoET initiative. To include:
  - the development of educational material to be distributed for free (at the same time increasing the price of visitor entrance fees to part cover the cost of materials);
  - training of park staff in environmental interpretation, ecotourism principles;
  - training of local people as guides in environmental interpretation, environmentally friendly behaviour, language etc (see below, Capacity Building and Staff Training).

Improve inter-sectoral coordination and integrated approaches:

- Try to bring VNAT into the BAP process in some way. VNAT is another institution whose decisions and actions have considerable implications for biodiversity. This responds to the need to incorporate biodiversity concerns into sectoral programmes and plans. Similarly, try to get NEA to put tourism higher on its list of priorities.
- Lobby and assist VNAT with the establishment of an Environment Branch or unit within VNAT. This branch would work closely with MoSTE/NEA, MPI, MARD/FPD... IUCN has developed a concept paper for "Capacity Strengthening in Environment for the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism".
- Similarly, could an Ecotourism Unit be established in MARD/FPD?
- The above Branches and Ministries should establish contacts and form partnerships with local and international NGOs. NGO/Government links are very weak or virtually non-existent in Vietnam with respect to tourism, indicating the fact that tourism is not yet being considered as a development and conservation tool by tourism authorities.

NGO/Government should work to initiate dialogue between local communities, local government, PA managers and tourism operators to discuss tourism and ecotourism in order to facilitate partnerships at the local level and bring local people fully into the tourism decision making process (one aspect of the collaborative management of Protected Areas).

- Facilitate discussions/meetings between National Park and protected area managers, local government, local communities, private sector tour operators to encourage collaboration in the development of local tourism initiatives such as ecotourism.
- Undertake to establish greater linkages between the departments in MPI responsible for tourism and environment ie: Trade and Services Department and Science, Education and Environment Department.
- Consider the value of farms producing NTFPs for biodiversity conservation purposes in reducing the impact of tourism on biodiversity ie: NTFP farms can be tourism attractions in themselves, and through the sale of their products they can alleviate pressure on collection of such products from the forest to sell to tourists.

Capacity Building and Staff Training:

- Undertake intensive in-country training in ecotourism for national park managers, local government departments, tour operators, and representatives from local communities. IUCN is currently working on a proposal for ecotourism training for national park managers and development of a Vietnam specific manual.
- Provide in-country training in sustainable tourism and ecotourism principles to representatives from MPI, MARD, NEA, MOSTE, MoET, VNAT, plus invest in Bachelor/Masters level courses overseas for key persons. (So that no-one mistakes the Dan Kia resort, Victoria Hotel or Dong Mo Cultural Village for 'ecotourism'!)
- Work with local and international NGOs to help train local communities in community based sustainable tourism (ecotourism).

Management of PA’s and Buffer Zones:
• With respect to the problem of revenue from tourism being lost to the central government: undertake a review of the current system of revenue/funding of national parks and PA’s. Work towards establishing a system that allows tourism revenue generated by PA’s to be re-invested in tourism, conservation, community development etc, such as in Nepal’s Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP).

• Undertake study (including field trips) of ACAP, and review the Nepal Buffer Zone Management Rules (1996) to ascertain whether either system can be applied to PA’s and their buffer zones in Vietnam (integrated projects that include tourism, environmental conservation, community participation, revenue generation and sharing, buffer zone management...).

• Clearly allocate responsibilities for tourism in PA’s to the authority in charge of PA’s.

• Begin a process of establishing ecotourism action strategies for PA’s that include Limits of Acceptable Change, Regulations/Codes for operators and tourists, limits on numbers, entrance fees, ROS zoning (wrt level of acceptable use, modification, behaviour etc)...ie: ‘supply side management’ of tourism.

• Undertake intensive ecotourism training for FPD, FIPI and PA management and staff.

**Scientific Research:**

**Investigate the tourism-economy-environment nexus:**

• Investigate the links between environment and economics, using tourism as the case study. Eg: a tourism case study of Ha Long Bay, Ba Be, Cuc Phuong, Phan Thiet, Sa Pa or other destination, "explaining the links between economic development activities and environmental protection/biodiversity conservation".

Terms of reference for such a study could include a couple of the following options:

1) To show the potential economic benefits of tourism to the area (region, nation);

2) To show the linkages between tourism and other sectors, both positive and negative. For example, to show the economic costs to the tourism industry with the development of other areas (such as coal/mining) via the damage that can occur to the natural environment/ biodiversity, AND conversely, to show the impact tourism can have on biodiversity and hence industries such as fishing;

3) To attempt to value the environmental/biodiversity costs of tourism development in monetary/economic terms;

4) To consider the ecotourism potential of the area and how it could benefit biodiversity conservation and ameliorate the current impacts of tourism (ie: transform tourism from mass to eco);

5) To show the economic costs to the tourism industry (via environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, destruction of scenery) due to unplanned and uncontrolled development of tourism (tourism kills tourism).

The study will be valuable for Vietnam, as:

- it will highlight the economic-environmental-biodiversity impacts of tourism in a country focused on developing tourism with little consideration of the environmental impacts, impacts on other sectors, or the impacts of tourism on itself ('tourism kills tourism', 'tourism kills the goose that lays the golden egg' scenario);

- it will help educate environmentalists about economic thinking, and help economists and economic/tourism /investment planners understand why the environment falls within their domain and how they can and need to incorporate it into their decisions.

• Conduct research in key tourist areas on the impacts of tourism on the consumption of flora and fauna eg: increased consumption of wood, orchids, wild meat, coral...This could be undertaken in Sa Pa, Da Lat, Nha Trang, Tam Dao, Ha Long...
• Undertake a study to try to identify ‘carrying capacity’ or establish ‘limits of acceptable change’ in a series of PA’s or other natural area destinations.