Establishing a Community-Based Tourism Network in Timor-Leste

Community-based tourism (CBT) is an alternative form of tourism, which aims to maximise benefits to local people and achieve community development objectives by building community capacity and empowerment. A CBT network is a collaborative or partnership relationship connecting several CBT initiatives.

Aim of this project summary

This summary provides the basis for a discussion about the opportunity to establish a community-based tourism (CBT) network in Timor-Leste and aims to evaluate the prospects for implementing the proposed network.

Previous research has shown that the majority of stakeholder group representatives consider the prospect of a network as a viable strategy for strengthening CBT in Timor-Leste. The project summary presents the views of a majority of the respondents about the phases of the future network development and its possible structures.

What tourism should be developed in Timor-Leste?

Research participants identified several prospective tourism niches, which could assist the people of Timor-Leste: nature-based, cultural and historic, adventure tourism and CBT. Tourism products within these niches could complement one another and create a distinctive Timor-Leste tourism brand. At the same time CBT appealed to respondents as a strategy for pursuing sustainable development (with a focus on socio-cultural, environmental and economic benefits for communities). Nevertheless, tourism should not be viewed as a panacea for development ills and resources should not be withdrawn from other activities, such as agriculture in favour of tourism.

Despite the capacity of CBT to bring benefits to Timor-Leste, it currently faces several challenges:

- Lack of access to vocational education and training
- Limited management skills and knowledge of CBT within communities
- Lack of ongoing support for CBT - a short-term project orientation prevails
- Lack of financial opportunities
- Lack of physical infrastructure and its unsatisfactory state
- Intra-community conflicts
- Conflicting land use priorities

What is a CBT network for Timor-Leste?

A CBT network managed by tourism professionals can bring together individual CBT initiatives, such as the ones at Atauro, Tutuala, Lo’ihunu, Com, Maubisse, Liquiça, government departments, NGOs, the private sector and education providers.

What would a CBT network do?

- Strengthen local economy in rural Timor-Leste through tourism development;
- Marketing and promotion;
- Collecting information on CBT generally and disseminating information on CBT in Timor-Leste to visitors;
- Capacity building and training;
- Lobbying government to support CBT and advocating on behalf of the interests of participating communities;
- Environmental, sanitation and hygiene education.

Principles of a CBT network for Timor-Leste

- The network should be built upon a spirit of trust and solidarity.
- The network should operate through cooperation and discussion.
- The network should set common CBT goals and objectives.
- The network members should be able to achieve those objectives overcoming differences of background and opinion.
- It should aim towards what is realistic and achievable.
- The network should be inclusive, not exclusive.
- The network should assist negotiations regarding the tourism development between various groups of stakeholders for the benefit of all.
- The network should be flexible and should evolve in response to changing circumstances.
- The network should help empower communities, not disempower them.
- The network should act in supporting and advisory capacity to the members.

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CBT Network development stages and structures

The following graphs provide structure, links and actions between stakeholders required to progress through each of the six stages of the CBT network development process.

1. Steering committee formation
A steering committee that includes stakeholders from different groups has to be formed to achieve consensus on what the network should do and how to do it.

2. Recruitment of the management team
The steering committee has to recruit a management team that is able to manage the network development process.

3. Funding strategy
Management team should develop and propose a financial strategy to the steering committee, upon approval of the steering committee it should be submitted first to the government and in case of refusal to international donors.

4. Development of standards and principles
Through wide consultations the management team should develop standards and principles of CBT that are relevant for Timor-Leste context and must be applied by the network members and other organisations involved in CBT.

5. Development of operational plans
At this stage the network will start admitting members who will gradually form a directorate. In consultations with member representatives and the steering committee the management team can develop one-year and three-year operational plans.

6. Launch of the network
This stage establishes final operational structure of the network and functions of the stakeholder groups involved.