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Ecotourism development in China: prospects for expanded roles for non-governmental organisations

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Abstract

China's flourishing economy is contributing to rapid development throughout the country, but prosperity is not evenly distributed and rural communities are experiencing social and ecological problems. Ecotourism has potential to foster both local economic development and environmental conservation. Capacity to promote and deliver ecotourism services is, however, poorly developed at present, particularly at the level of rural communities. We assess such capacity through an institutional analysis, focusing on interactions among public agencies, businesses, and civil society actors. Specifically, we study the roles and potential of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as an emerging class of development actors within China's civil society. We present a case study of an ecotourism demonstration project in the Laojunshan area of northwestern Yunnan Province in western China. A review of project documents and

field interviews supported analysis of Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats that the relevant actors perceive as constraining and enabling the ecotourism enterprise. NGOs served unique coordination functions across institutional sectors and mobilised critical resources for conservation and development. Recommendations for NGOs engaged in ecotourism in China include investment in training programmes with local people and community-based organisations, facilitating collaborations between businesses and communities, working directly with businesses, and promoting cooperatives.

Keywords:

- conservation
- community-based tourism
- NGOs
- stakeholders
- sustainability
- social institutions

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