



# ASIAN HORIZONS

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## **India**

### **Agri-Tourism**

In India, the concept of agri-tourism was initially developed by the Agri Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC). The promotion and development of this concept has the potential to impact farmers across the country as, in the long term, it would allow them to supplement their incomes.

The concept of agri-tourism adds to the concept of rural tourism; agri-tourism aspires to attract tourists by giving them an insight into various farming practices across the country through inexpensive holiday packages that include educational experiences. Agri-tourism brings in additional revenue to the farmers but also initiative from their side and the entire community to build and maintain the adequate infrastructure to sustain a small-scale tourism industry.

In India, the ATDC started the agri-tourism project on a pilot basis in Baramati, Maharashtra, in 2005. This saw an influx of around 8,700 tourists between October 2005 and October 2006 and by 2008, around 21,000 tourists had visited farms in Baramati. The role of ATDC is to provide consultancy, sales and marketing, and training to farmers for establishing agri-tourism centers on their farms. A 5-day training costs around USD 56. Expressing interest in this concept, 20 district collectors from Bihar visited Baramati for training in the concept of agri-tourism.

In 2007, ATDC launched the Maharashtra State Agri Tourism Vistar Yojana, a policy through which a certain number of farmers were chosen to start agri-tourism centers – 52 farmers in 2007 and 25 farmers in 2008. These farmers were also encouraged to start cooperatives amongst themselves, also to enable the receipt of loans from National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD). Eventually, the Maharashtra State Agri & Rural Tourism Co-operative Federation Ltd. (MART) was established in 2008 to coordinate the planning, financing, marketing and liaison between various state and central agencies in relation to agri-tourism.

This venture is scalable across the country as it requires low investment, and the returns have the potential to supplement the farmers' regular agricultural revenue. In recent years, the Indian government has sanctioned funds to encourage rural tourism, which could be further used to promote agri-tourism. Tie-ups with co-operative banks could give these farmers easy access to loans. At present, the Pune District Cooperative Bank is offering loans for agri-tourism.

There is tremendous scope for private sector involvement in this field. Private organizations or foundations could partner with farmers' cooperatives to support them with marketing and publicity. Currently, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Yes Bank are partnering to study the growth of agri-tourism in Uttar Pradesh. Another way to scale up would be to tie-up with vendors from the tourism industry for a larger intake.

Based out of Pune, Maharashtra, agri-tourism has generated interest in various other states including Haryana, Bihar, Sikkim, Rajasthan and Punjab. There is potential to replicate this in other states with their own specialties in focus, whether it is about specific crops, farming practices or the available produce. One successful example of agri-tourism are the vineyards in Nashik, Maharashtra. Other than selling wines, these vineyards also educate tourists about the various processes involved in producing wine. Replication of agri-tourism could bring a tremendous growth to the rural sector in India, which is still largely dependent on agriculture.

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## India

### Creating Ownership amongst Producers and Artisans

Some recent initiatives have looked at uplifting the status of artisans and farmers by making them a part of successful inclusive businesses. These initiatives give artisans and farmers an opportunity to own small percentages of the company. As a result, they receive a share of profits from the final product, thereby creating a sense of ownership amongst them. In the future, this trend could help producers scale up their production and make their earnings more sustainable.

Organic Cotton Farmers  
with their produce



Source:  
<http://www.zameen.org/Buy>

Zameen Organic is a farmer-owned marketing company specializing in selling fair-trade and organic, pesticide-free cotton. It also works on supply management by establishing ties with various wholesalers as well as textile companies for various projects. Zameen Organic replaces the many middle-men involved in sourcing, processing and selling the final product and gives farmers direct and continuous access to brands. Other than the fund from *Aavishkaar*, a micro venture capital fund, the farmers pay close to USD 21 per ton of raw cotton sold to Zameen as organization development fund. Two farmer representatives are on the company board to represent the farmers' views. Certification of cotton as organic and fair-trade is beneficial to

these farmers in two ways – being a niche variety they are more sought after by larger brands and they are better for the farmers' health as well as the soil's health as they do not use harmful chemicals. Zameen Organic has a partnership with Agriculture and Organic Farming Group (AOFG), an NGO seeking to help registered farmer cluster associations to be able to sell organic and fair-trade cotton to buyers adhering to stringent international requirements.

Another company which thrives on fair-trade policy is *Rangasutra*, a producer-owned crafts company. A producers' company is a merger between a private entity and cooperatives. Five craft cooperatives namely, *Vasundhara Gramothan Samiti*, Rajasthan; *Bajju*, Rajasthan; Action North-East Trust, Kojrajhar, Assam; Pan Himalayan Grassroots Foundation, Almora, Uttaranchal and *Urmul Marusthali Bunker Vikas Samiti*, Phalodi, Rajasthan contributed USD 187 each, along with 5 other founding members to start this company. *Rangasutra* combines traditional craft including weaving, embroidery, and horticulture and markets it to the urban crowd. *Rangasutra* has held fairs where other such groups have also participated. They also tie up with big brands and offer a certain quality of traditional craft to them. Started in 2005, this venture has been successfully demonstrating its products by supplying to brands like Fab India and Numanu, a Paris-based design house.

Some successful examples of producer-owned companies in India are Fab India and Mother Earth. Fab India, a retail brand, works with more than 22,000 artisans through various cooperatives acting as supplier companies. Mother Earth is another retail brand run by Industree, a social enterprise funded by the Future's Group. Mother Earth is part producer-owned with rural craftsmen and farmers holding a 14% share.

There is high demand for special crafts and even organic cotton. However, handicraft workers and farmers see little of the profits due to the presence of middle-men. Companies where producers of raw material or specialized handicrafts are part-owners, work to eliminate the need

for middle-men and fulfill necessary requirements of designing and marketing goods in a saleable manner. A potential drawback could be that as these companies scale up, business requirements could overrule the benefits provided to the artisans and farmers; they could also force artisans to create stuff corresponding only to market requirements or restrict their ability to sell to brands other than the ones associated with the company. Foundations and private companies could intervene by assisting rural producers in marketing their goods and integrating them with modern avenues and platforms like e-shopping.

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## Bangladesh

### Evolving Teaching Techniques and Opportunities

In recent years, Bangladesh has witnessed new programs aimed to enhance education and learning amongst poor rural people. This has included the use of information technology, mass media and provision of scholarships to those in need of financial aid. These initiatives are likely to provide these people with an opportunity to develop their IT skills in order to improve their competitiveness; this could widen the scope of employment opportunities available to them.

Grameenphone (GP) in collaboration with JAAGO Foundation, a youth-based local organization, launched a pilot project based on the concept of online classroom, in remote and rural areas. The process entails connecting rural classrooms with classrooms in Dhaka through video conferencing, thereby allowing for live interaction between students and teachers. The classes will be taught by a single teacher and required books, stationery and equipment will be provided accordingly. This method was launched in December 2012 and had its first online school in Tongi in the Gazipur district. Upon success, Grameenphone plans to expand its model to its cyclone shelters located in the southern coastal belts of the country.



The Bangladesh Open University (BOU) has played an active role in distance learning through mass education and training for rural women and agricultural workers. Some of the methods used include lectures on the television and radio, audio cassettes, teleconferences, email, face-to-face tutorials and printed material for self-study. In 2009, BBC Janala was launched, as part of an initiative by English in Action (EiA) and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). Its aim is to create easy access to the English language for 25 million people (primarily 15 to 45-

year olds) living on less than £ 2 (USD 3.16) a day, in Bangladesh by 2017. They primarily rely on mobile phone services as an inexpensive educational tool. BBC Janala provides SMS quizzes as well as three-minute audio lessons encompassing 'Essential English,' 'Pronunciation,' 'English for Work' and more, at 50 paise (USD 0.01) per minute. By September 2011, a total of 15 million calls were received, 250,000 audio lessons were downloaded, and 100,000 copies of audio CDS were sold.

In addition to direct ways of creating educational opportunities, there are also indirect means in the form of scholarships through organizations and banks. For instance, Grameen Shikkha started a *Scholarship Management Program* in 2008, designed for rural meritorious boys and girls, which provides lifelong scholarships to ensure completion of studies. As of May 2011, about 3,200 students from 64 districts had been granted scholarships. Since 2007, a commercial bank, Prime Bank, has been granting scholarships and long-term financial support to underprivileged students at the college and university levels through its Prime Bank Foundation. Till date, the Foundation has provided 1,277 students with monthly stipends of approximately Tk 2,200 (USD 27.7) per student. The Dutch-Bangla Bank Ltd (DBBL) has a CSR program of Tk 1.02 billion (USD 15.1 million) reserved for scholarships, 80% of which are allotted to rural students. In

2012, DBBL provided Tk 300 million (USD 3.7 million) to 2,030 students for higher studies for their entire academic term. The Islami Bank Bangladesh Ltd. (IBBL) provides scholarships to 800 poor meritorious students every year as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility program.

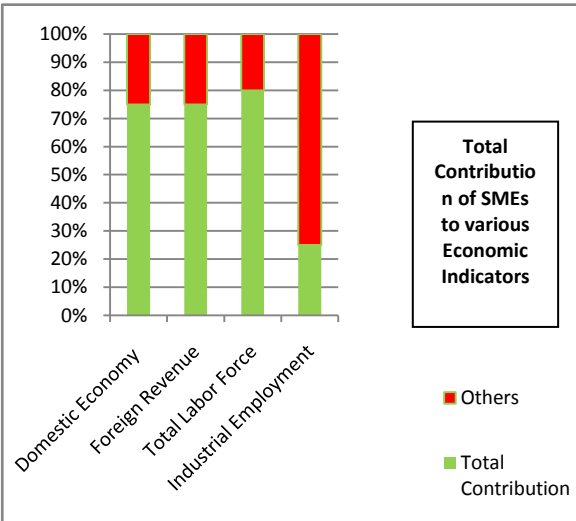
As Bangladesh transitions towards becoming a digital country, the introduction of new learning methods is likely to help the rural poor complete their schooling, and prepare better for changing employment opportunities in the future. The provision of scholarships could set a positive trend amongst poor children and encourage their families to pursue education rather than labor. In the long run, this could have a significant impact on literacy levels, child labor and employment.

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## Bangladesh SMEs to Empower Women

There are 6 million SMEs in Bangladesh, roughly 4.5 million of which are in rural areas. In Bangladesh, SMEs lack sufficient access to loans and know-how as financial institutions prioritize large corporations. In order to remove this financial barrier, some policy changes have been made by the government and financial sector. These changes have the potential to empower small women entrepreneurs in the country.



Acknowledging the sector's potential to reduce urban-rural income disparity and to promote a gender-balanced economy, the Bangladesh Bank (BB) in coordination with SME Foundation organized a 2-day, 7-city SME Financing Fair for banking and non-banking institutions in February 2011. BB introduced a Refinance Scheme which provides SMEs loans at a lower rate (10%). BB allocated 15% of the scheme's fund for women entrepreneurs alone. Tk 41.1 million (USD 517,000) worth of loans sanctioned were awarded to social entrepreneurs at the first fair in Chittagong. BB has also instituted a region-based SME cluster development scheme implemented by banks which capitalizes on locally available raw materials.

In July 2011, the Central Bank redefined SMEs to include microenterprises and cottage industries in all its SME loan policies and programs. For the first time, it also included and gave definition to women entrepreneurs. The move is expected to aid in gender mainstreaming as well as in positioning women entrepreneurs to benefit from government schemes. Banks in Bangladesh are expected to increase financial access to cottage and microenterprises under the new guideline provided by the government. In December 2012, the Central Bank issued a directive to all banks to implement processes to clarify the SME financing policy by training employees sufficiently to provide information and disburse loans efficiently. The Central Bank has also made refinancing funds available to banks from the BB, Japan International Corporation Agency and Asian Development Bank.

In recent years, numerous schemes and programs have attempted to build the capacity of those wishing to start their own SME and have also disbursed loans and credit. In October 2011, the government introduced a revolving fund of Tk 600 million (about USD 7.5 million) for microcredit to encourage self-employment among unemployed educated youth in fisheries and livestock. The Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock will run this grant, providing loans interest-free and with no payments for the first year. The Ministry of Finance is also injecting an additional USD 247 million (to the previously allotted annual USD 1.2 billion) to float skill building projects with an emphasis on small and medium scale enterprises as well as agriculture. Since December 2008, the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) has provided USD 21,000 in soft term loans and training facilities for 536 people in Chittagong under the poverty alleviation program to facilitate ventures in poultry raising, confectionery, welding, tailoring, laundry and computer training centers.



While these policy changes have boosted SME growth, SMEs continue to face obstacles, such as lack of access to infrastructure and utilities, lack of access to support centers and information regarding markets, development and bureaucratic procedures. Moreover, lack of access to affordable technology, poor labor productivity and lack of skilled labor are restricted SME growth. Support from the government in reducing high interest rates, boosting export markets, developing research facilities and implementation of the IP law may boost this trend. Foundations could assist in devising methods for providing technical and financial support through such schemes to improve the success ratio and possibly increase the number of people benefiting in the long run.

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## Bangladesh New Hope for Fish Farmers

In recent years, Bangladesh has expanded its fisheries industry in an effort to alleviate the plight of fishermen. These methods include cage fish farming and local pond fish farming, and are most useful to rural farmers as they provide new income-generating opportunities and consistent supplies of protein-rich food to their families.

**Fish Cages in Bangladesh**



Source:

[http://www.cd3wd.com/cd3wd\\_40/cd3wd/practact/small\\_fish\\_farming.pdf](http://www.cd3wd.com/cd3wd_40/cd3wd/practact/small_fish_farming.pdf)

In 2011, the *Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank* (RAKUB) introduced a special credit program called ‘Rakub Fisheries Village’ for fish cultivation in the northwest parts of the country. This program encourages small fish farmers to raise fish using scientific and advanced technologies. Fisheries’ villages of 10-12 ponds were created at promising places in 16 districts belonging to the Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions. Till date, Tk 46.1 crores (USD 5.7 million) has been granted to 1,879 farmers. Speed Trust, a local NGO has been providing cages worth Tk 12,000 (USD 151) each, free of cost to farmers to cultivate fish in several villages in Kalapara upazila. Additionally, it supplied 22,500 tilapia fry, valued at Tk 84,000 (USD 1,055) for cultivation in the Pakhimara

Canal. This system helps farmers earn up to Tk 30,000 (USD 377) every year. Similarly, in 2011, the Cereal Systems Initiative for South Asia in Bangladesh (CSISA-BD), in partnership with USAID, began exploring cage culture projects for landless women in Patuakhali Sadar upazila. They found that a single 9 cubic meter cage brought in 370 kilos of fish every three months, with net returns of USD 150 per cycle. This project is currently taking place in 31 districts.

In 2010, Practical Action Bangladesh, a development organization based in the UK, introduced the Pathways From Poverty - Shiree project in collaboration with the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Government of Bangladesh. The project is designed for people who live in Sundarganj, Sadar, Shagata and Fulchhari upazilas that are threatened along the banks of the Teesta and Brahmaputra rivers. In order to encourage fish cultivation, the organization provides basic training, cages and fingerlings for free. On average, a cultivator sells 30 kilos of fish and earns Tk 3,000 (USD 38) every four months. Concurrently, Practical Action introduced the concept of ‘growing’ fish in local ponds via self-designed cages called ‘hapa’ in Faridpur and Rajbari. Young fish are placed into each hapa, and fed scraps and waste till they grow into their complete size. The cages are built from bamboo poles, netting and floats; they can contain about 300 fish at once.

Shiblee Hatchery & Farms Ltd., a local organization in Bangladesh, established in 2010, involves numerous landless farmers for cage fishing along the Adhamanki River. Upon cultivating chemical-free fish, they are transferred to high-end clients across Dhaka. The company intends to develop a contract farming model, whereby fish farmer will be trained with technical advice, provided access to finance and equipment, and given hatchlings. Additionally, each farmer will be presented an area by the river with 10 bamboo fish cages (30m x 8m) to breed about 500 tilapia fish per cage. Eventually, this arrangement will transition into a micro-entrepreneur system, granting farmers independence and franchise-based partnership with Shiblee.

According to the Department of Fisheries (DoF), 41% of the yearly fish production occurs in ponds and ditches. Therefore, there is tremendous potential to enhance fish farming as only 11% of pond resources have been used so far, and this method creates 25 types of job opportunities within this sector. With the modernization of fish cultivation techniques that are easily replicable, there is new hope for coastal farmers and their families who live in and along inundated lands. However, some of the limiting factors include inbreeding of fish that may slow down production and low water quality of open water bodies due to repeated cultivation.

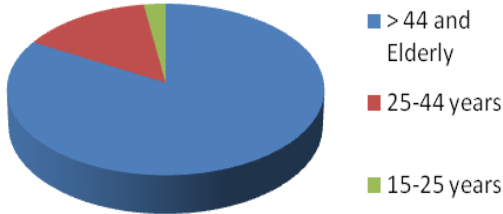
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## Indonesia Tackling Illiteracy

In recent years, Indonesia has witnessed a trend of educating poor, rural children through literacy programs and community volunteering, especially in the province of Bali. This trend could have a long-term impact on the lives and future employment prospects of thousands of Balinese youth.

**Illiterate Population by Age in Bali at Present**



Source: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/bali-daily/2012-08-10/rp-66-billion-allocated-fight-illiteracy.html>

The Indonesian Education Ministry stated that in 2010, more than 750,000 students dropped out of elementary or junior high school and 1.26 million students were unable to continue their transition to high school due to financial reasons. According to the Bali Education Agency, there are 335,163 illiterate people in Bali out of a population of 3.9 million people. Economic hardship and lack of easy access to schools has resulted in students having irregular attendance or dropping out during to work.

In 2012, the Bali administration set aside USD 700,000 for illiteracy eradication programs for 16,000 people above the age of 15 years. The basic program, costing USD 262,000 from the central government, teaches reading, writing and arithmetic to 7,000 participants. The advanced program, costing USD 431,000, provides various skills based on location and needs of each village to 9,000 participants. Both programs have groups of 10 students that are taught by a single tutor. Another 2,000 illiterate people will be funded through the provincial budget. The implementation of these programs depends on the participation of community-based learning groups in each hamlet. In order to receive government funds, each group is required to submit a proposal and obtain authorization from customary hamlets, high-level institutions and the regency-level education agency.

The Lentera Anak Bali Foundation, a local child protection organization established in early 2012, teaches poor and illiterate child laborers between 6 to 15 years of age in Denpasar. These children originate from Karangasem and move to beg or work as porters in the market. In order to increase class attendance, the Foundation provides food and a savings account to each student. Anak Alam Community contributes school supplies and food programs to poor children from disconnected villages in Kintamani, Bangli. The students lack appropriate footwear, and are forced to walk in farm sandals or barefoot. The organization conducts public events to raise awareness and collect cash donations and used shoes for their cause.

There are several independent community members that are providing learning for free. In February 2012, university students created a group called *Kampoeng Ilmu* (Knowledge Village) in Tambakan, Buleleng where they teach students each week. Similarly, Siu Ajak Liu began a program linking foster parents to underprivileged students whereby they provide financial aid and educational assistance to those who are deprived of an education.

Gradually, learning and educational initiatives such as these will provide better opportunities and resources for thousands of poor children in Bali. Additionally, it will encourage intra-personal growth and development amongst them, thereby deterring practices such as child and manual labor, as they will be better prepared for alternative avenues of employment in the long run.

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## **Vietnam**

### **Clean Drinking Water Initiatives**

Recently, Vietnam has undertaken initiatives to widen access to clean and safe drinking water for poor households. In the long run, this trend will positively impact the health of poor Vietnamese.

A majority of the Vietnamese population has no access to piped water. Many are forced to use groundwater, which is highly contaminated with arsenic. In coastal communities, a shortage of drinking water has led to people buying water from unsafe sources. In 2011, 78% of the total population had access to clean water; whereas only 45% of those living in rural areas did.

*Piped Water:* In 2012, the government of Vietnam announced its intention to create access to clean water for 85% of its population by 2015. A budget of VND 27,600 billion (USD 1.32 million) has been created for facilities like clean water treatment plants, tanks and pipelines. To implement the National Rural Clean Water Supply and Sanitation Strategy, the Vietnam Bank for Social Policies (VBSP) provides loans to local village committees and households to construct infrastructure for safe water. Using this loan facility, residents of the Cu Kty commune in the highlands of Dak Lak province, set up a pipe water system. 600 households took a loan of VND 50,000 (USD 2.50) per month from VBSP and constructed four wells and installed water pipelines. This facility for credit is likely to bring in socio-economic empowerment. Also, access to clean water supply could reduce the total number of people buying water from unsafe sources.

*Arsenic Contamination:* In the Red River Delta where arsenic content in water is extremely high, about 11 million people have no access to safe water. In 2008, Singapore-based development NGO Lien Institute for the Environment (LIFE) introduced household arsenic treatment system for Van Mon and Phuong Tien villages in the delta. At the time, villagers were using water with 0.3 mg/l arsenic content, whereas the WHO standard of safety is 0.01 mg/liter. LIFE's system yielded considerable success with 96% of the households reducing arsenic content in water to the safe levels in the 8-month long project. In 2011, the Institute of Biochemical Technique developed an arsenic test kit for less than 1 USD (VND 20,000). The government plans to mass manufacture the kit. The availability of low cost technologies in regions with high arsenic levels can help people verify the water contamination before using it for cooking and drinking.

*Saline Water:* With a coastline of 3,260 kilometers, the salinity in Vietnam's water is high. Ho Chi Minh City's Municipal People's Committee, in 2008, set up a water treatment facility to process sea water using the Reverse Osmosis system. Today, this facility supplies more than 1.3 million gallons of potable water per day and benefits 66,000 district residents. In 2012, South Korean private water company Doosan Vina, as a part of its CSR initiative, set up a small desalination plant for the An Binh islet in the coastal province of Quang Ngai. Costing USD 1 million, the project provides residents with fresh water.

In the long run, increased efforts by the government and private sector to provide clean and safe water to the poor in Vietnam is likely to lower health hazards specific to arsenic contamination. According to the 2008 WHO report, around 20,000 Vietnamese die every year from contaminated water. Provision of piped and treated water could also result in savings for poor households in rural areas. Foundations can provide technical and financial assistance to local research institutes for developing low cost water filters and treatment systems.

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## Thailand Reviving Silk Industry

In recent years, Thailand has renewed attempts to ensure sustainability of the traditional silk industry through several projects and initiatives. This has spurred the expansion of Thai silk production leading to more sustainable income generation opportunities for local communities, especially for women in the northeastern region.

Silk production in the Northeast		
Mulberry Plantation	20,752 (hectares)	83.4 %
Cocoon Production	1,535 (tonnes)	55.9 %
Silk yarn production	1,080 (tonnes)	97.5 %

Source: The Queen Sirikit Institution of Sericulture. 2007

Thailand is renowned for its 'yellow silk' and has approximately 450,000 people engaged in its silk based industry which contributes USD 176.5 million to the country's annual revenue. Silk manufacturing, production and sericulture - silk farming, raising worms for raw silk - is highly concentrated in the country's northeast (approximately 200,000 households) which is amongst the poorest regions of Thailand.

In 2008, Warm Heart, a community-based NGO in the Phrao district of Chiang Mai province in the northeast, started a Silk microenterprise program for women. The NGO provides training at the facility center of the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives in Phrao on the silk manufacturing process, sericulture, spinning, weaving and making organic dyes. Artisans can sell their final products at retail prices to the NGO and are paid 50% of the profit while the other half is reinvested in the project. Low levels of education and lack of job opportunities in Phrao region has resulted in forced economic migration. Skills training in the different operations of silk production could create a number of income generating opportunities within the region.

To promote tourism and showcase the traditions of silk handicrafts, the Thai government in 2011 initiated the 'Thai Silk Route Project' which links famous silk producing provinces of the northeast. Under this project, the Ban Nong Hoi village in Chaiyaphum province is being promoted as a Thai silk village. It has an integrated silk production with a silkworm raising group of 200 housewives, a mulberry plantation and skilled weavers. Promotion as a silk village has increased its reputation as a quality supplier of raw silk amongst manufacturers and tourists, leading to increased sales and revenue. The tourism project has also helped villagers earn additional income by providing home stays to tourists at 100 Baht (about USD 3) per person per night. The project has given an impetus to both tourism and silk production, creating independent occupations and economic development of the village.

The recent introduction of eco-friendly silk from Eri worms in Thailand has also led to the emergence of a collaborative model between the farmer's group, silk weavers and private silk companies. Eri worms grow on cassava leaves, a major crop in Thailand, instead of traditional mulberry leaves which are seasonal. This initiative has led to new opportunities for additional income for both cassava farmers and silk weavers. In 2012, Thailand's Kasetsart University and the private silk manufacturer, Spun Silk World Company, introduced a project with 35 silk farms to raise silk worms on cassava leaves. Farmers can either sell these leaves to silk farms or raise silkworms themselves and earn additional monthly revenue of 5,000-10,000 Baht (USD 165-330). In 2007, the Agricultural Land Reform Office and private silk company Thai Num Chok



Textile started contract farming among cassava farmers in the Nakhon Ratchasima province to sell Eri silk cocoons to the company.

This trend of bolstering the silk industry has the potential to develop Thailand's northeast through provision of small and independent trade opportunities like mulberry plantations, raising worms, selling cocoons, and raw silk supply for farmers and women's groups. It could also encourage entrepreneurship among weavers and prevent forced economic migration. The limiting factors could include the absence of subsidies and financial support for silk farmers and weavers from the government. Foundations could partner with local farmers' co-operatives, and women's groups, and provide entrepreneurship training in different aspects of silk production, to create self-sustainable income generating opportunities.

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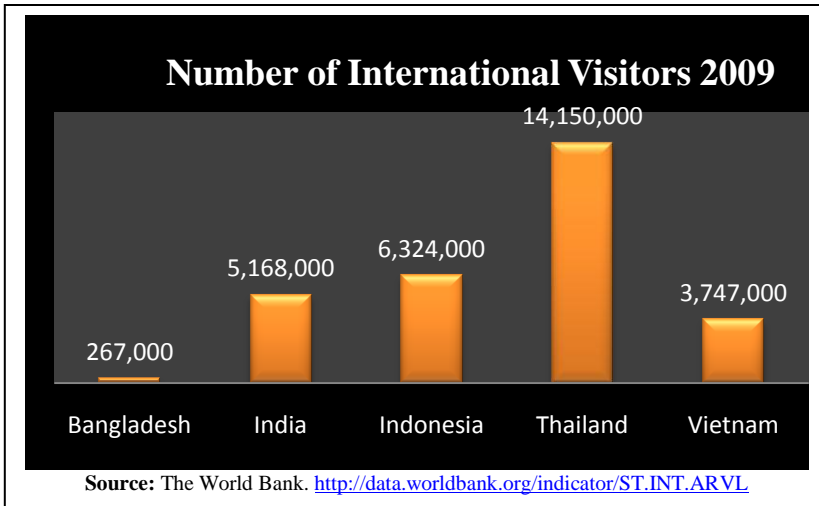
## TRENDS

### Tourism and Economy

In recent years, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam have enhanced their tourism industries in interesting and diverse ways. This has boosted public infrastructure in several areas in these five countries and has led to increased employment opportunities among their citizens. Most importantly, it has paved the way for a new and growing industry besides agriculture, which has traditionally been the predominant sector in each of these countries. The tourism sector contributes about 2.3% to the overall GDP of Bangladesh, 6% to India, 3% to Indonesia, to Thailand, and 5.8% to Vietnam.

#### *Large-Scale Initiatives*

The governments of all five countries have played a significant role in mobilizing the tourism industry. They have done so by providing significant funding as well as by creating programs and partnerships with private organizations and non-profit organizations.



In Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) takes care of domestic and foreign tourists across the country. In addition to BPC, banks including Bangladesh Bank may soon play a role in enhancing economic development in the country via the tourism industry. Currently, the government of Bangladesh is making efforts to enter the international arena in the tourism sector. It aims to implement a national tourism policy and increase private sector participation and contribution. At the moment, Kuakata,

Cox's Bazar, Khagrachhari and Bandarban are being constructed as tourist zones. Within the next ten years, it aims to earn USD 5 billion through local and international tourists. By 2021, it is looking to increase the number of tourists visiting Bangladesh by about one million, which will help provide income-generation opportunities for approximately 500,000 people.

In India, the central government has been collaborating with several state governments to promote rural tourism in underdeveloped regions of Northeast India (NEI). In 2011-12, the Ministry of Tourism allocated USD 0.42 million for tourism projects and USD 16.76 million for infrastructure development in places that will be developed as rural tourism destinations in NEI. Concurrently, the central government relaxed travelling restrictions imposed on tourists to several northeastern states; Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland have been removed from the list of Protected Area Regime under the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order 1958, initially for one year. In 2009, the government of Tripura introduced 'heli-tourism'; helicopters that are used to connect rural areas to promote tourism. Pawan Hans Helicopters, a national aviation company, received USD 2.6 million from the Government of India to develop heliports in 20 rural tourist spots. Around 75% of the fare has been subsidized by the central government. Earlier this year, Manipur introduced heli-tourism to increase access to rural tourist spots.

Over the past few years, Indonesia has witnessed the growth of specialty tourism, being referred to as ‘Grief Tourism’, around areas that have experienced natural disasters. Indonesia is prone to natural disasters and sees frequent impediments in the growth of its tourism industry. In October 2010, Mt. Merapi’s volcanic eruption in Yogyakarta, Java killed 350 people and internally displaced about 400,000 people. As a result, it saw its tourist numbers decline by almost 70% - 90%. Presently, this site has been included as a ‘Volcano Tour Package’ to the list of sites that Yogyakarta offers to tourists; scores of tourists are taken to the village closest to the volcano to see the extent of devastation as a result of the eruption. The region had also seen a brief increase in tourism post the earthquake in Yogyakarta in 2006. Similarly, Aceh, the site of the destructive 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, may soon be on the list of the government’s tourism promotion. Its capital, Banda Aceh, has a newly built tsunami museum that highlights the enormous destruction brought about by the Aceh tsunami and the province’s recovery since then. Another monument that attracts tourists and earns the locals money is the ‘Boat House’, an Aceh tsunami monument located in Lampulo Village, Banda Aceh.

In Vietnam, provincial authorities along with private stakeholders have begun Community-Based Tourism (CBT) in an effort to combat poverty by combining rural development and cultural preservation. Since 2007, the Provincial People's Committee in Ha Giang province has developed 29 distinct villages, showcasing its 22 ethnic groups. These include traditional houses offering home-stays, paved roads for transportation, and sanitation facilities. Attractions for tourists include traditional handicrafts, folk art performances and traditional markets selling livestock, exotic fruits and vegetables. The People’s Committee provides financial support of VND 100 million (USD 4,800) to each household participating, and VND 50 million (USD 2,400) to a shop offering cultural products. The body also offers the local families a loan to upgrade housing facilities to rent out to tourists. Around 330,000 tourists visited the province in 2011, up from 300,000 in 2010.

### ***Small-Scale Initiatives***

Parallel to the large-scale initiatives taking place, small and specific efforts are also being made at the local level by non-governmental and community-based organizations. These are working to enhance the overarching programs implemented by governments in some of these countries.

In India, Endogenous Tourism Project (ETP), a rural tourism development project was launched in Sualkuchi, Assam in 2008, as part of the Government of India’s initiative to promote rural tourism in NEI. CEE North East (CEE NE), a government-run environmental group is the main implementation partner of this project, with assistance from the Gandhmow Trust Tourism Development Society, a village tourism committee, and *Aaloran*, a local NGO. CEE NE is training the local population in making various products such as bamboo craft and cotton weaving. The youth are being trained in traditional dancing and singing and as tourist guides. Also, during the last 5 years, North East Social Trust (NEST) and North East Craft and Rural Development Organization have been working to develop rural tourism destinations in Assam’s tribal village of Dagrob as well as its Dhubri district.

In Vietnam’s Dien Bien Province, communities have developed eight cultural villages by voluntarily donating 7,000 square meters of land for construction of handicraft, culture and housing facilities for tourism. Over VND 7 billion (USD 0.33 billion) was earned in revenue

after 65,000 tourists visited the province in 2012. The number is likely to increase by 15% by 2015 through the development of 10 more villages. Private travel companies are also partnering with local communities by customizing CBT (community based tourism) packages. Hanoi-based tour operator, Footprint, works with community leaders of Taphin village in the Sa Pa district for CBT packages on a rotation basis. Origin Vietnam Travel has a cultural CBT project in the Cong Dam School in Bai Tu Long Bay where it employs local guides and labor. To promote the CBT model, the Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT) has also proposed setting up the Northwest Travel Destination Management Board. The initiative will receive a USD 14.3 million grant from the European Union and USD 1.43 million from the Vietnamese Government. Stakeholders have also formed the Vietnam Community Based and Responsible Tourism Network to raise awareness and lobby for CBT initiatives.

*Future:*

In the future, tourism is likely to expand employment and income-generating opportunities in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam. These could range from hospitality and tour-guide provisions to souvenir making and public infrastructure services. The tourism sector could broaden the options for employment amongst people, especially since there is a wide array of skills and type of work available as a result of initiatives that have been implemented.

Bangladesh has tremendous potential for tourism, especially eco-tourism considering its forests, wildlife, mangroves and overall natural habitats. This will be highly beneficial to the local populace as they live amongst these regions and help preserve it. Also, adventure tourism is being tapped into in some parts of the country. The country's main shortcoming is its lack of organizational structure, and e-payment systems.

As tourism opportunities have continued to grow in the past few years, certain aspects could prevent the growth of this trend. In Indonesia, the current development of 'Grief Tourism' is likely to grow over the next few years primarily because it has given a boost to areas impacted by disaster, and the country continues to be prone to earthquakes and tsunamis. However, the ethics of such a trend are being debated. Also, locals worry about the safety of tourists, especially in volcano eruption sites as these are prone to more eruptions. In Thailand, the lack of regulation in the tourism industry and reckless practices has steadily destroyed the island's ecology and cultural heritage. Consequently, there is loss of ethnic culture, increase in waste, impact on marine systems and conversion of agricultural land for real estate purposes. If the present pattern of tourism continues, then it will have an adverse impact not just on the environment and but also on the country's tourism as a whole, resulting in a possible loss of revenues and employment in the future.

The community-based tourism model could act as a means to alleviate poverty by combining rural development and cultural preservation. In the coming years, the CBT model could be replicated across the region to showcase specific communities and their traditions thereby increasing tourism and providing employment opportunities. However, lack of awareness on implementation of CBT, problems in communication with foreign tourists, poor infrastructure, sanitation facilities and planning in the region remain as the major challenges for the effective execution of the model.

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