

Tourism–Agriculture Linkages and Rural Livelihood Diversification in Sin Suoi Ho, Vietnam

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ABSTRACT: This study examines tourism–agriculture linkages and rural livelihood diversification opportunities in Sin Suoi Ho, a mountainous ethnic minority community in Lai Chau Province, Vietnam. The study focuses on the interaction between tourism development, agricultural production, and local value creation. During the first six months of 2026, Sin Suoi Ho recorded approximately 18,825 tourist arrivals and more than VND 14.6 billion in tourism revenue, while agriculture remained an important productive base, particularly through tea and other agricultural activities. A case study approach was employed using official secondary statistics, local socio-economic reports, tourism and agricultural development resolutions, and documentary analysis. Descriptive and comparative analyses were used to examine tourism development, the agricultural production base, emerging tourism–agriculture linkages, and constraints affecting local value creation. The findings show that tourism is emerging as a complementary economic activity alongside agriculture rather than replacing traditional production. Tourism creates potential channels for local value creation through homestays, local food, agricultural products, cultural experiences, trekking, and nature-based activities. However, the available evidence does not permit the measurement of household-level tourism income or causal effects on livelihood diversification. The main challenge is therefore not a lack of tourism or agricultural resources, but limited conversion of these resources into higher-value products and services retained within the local economy. Strengthening tourism–agriculture linkages, local processing, branding, community capacity, and local supply chains can enhance the contribution of tourism to broader rural livelihood opportunities.

KEYWORD: Tourism; rural livelihoods; community-based tourism; ethnic minority communities; Sin Suoi Ho.

Date of Submission: 09-10-2026

Date of acceptance: 20-10-2026

I. INTRODUCTION

Rural tourism has increasingly been recognized as a potential mechanism for revitalizing rural economies, diversifying household livelihoods, and strengthening the use of local natural and cultural resources. Unlike conventional tourism concentrated in urban and highly developed destinations, rural tourism is closely associated with rurality, local communities, natural and cultural resources, and visitor experiences. A systematic review by Rosalina et al. [1] identified sustainable development, community-based features, rural location, and tourism experiences as important dimensions of rural tourism, while also emphasizing that rural destinations, particularly in developing contexts, continue to face constraints related to internal resources, human capacity, infrastructure, and destination management. These characteristics indicate that the contribution of rural tourism should not be assessed solely through tourist arrivals or tourism revenue, but also through its capacity to interact with existing rural economic activities and contribute to broader livelihood transformation.

From the sustainable livelihoods perspective, rural households commonly depend on multiple economic activities rather than a single source of employment or income. Tourism can therefore become one component of a broader livelihood portfolio by creating supplementary employment, expanding household income opportunities, and facilitating access to new markets. Tao and Wall [2], in their study of tourism as a sustainable livelihood strategy, argue that tourism should complement rather than displace existing livelihood activities because rural households often combine several livelihood strategies simultaneously. This perspective is particularly relevant in mountainous rural areas, where agriculture, forestry, livestock production, handicrafts, and other natural-resource-based activities continue to provide the foundation of household livelihoods. Tourism may create additional opportunities for households to utilize these existing assets through accommodation, food services, cultural experiences, transportation, handicrafts, and the commercialization of local agricultural products.

However, the relationship between tourism development and rural livelihoods is neither automatic nor uniformly beneficial. Tourism development may generate employment and income while simultaneously creating new pressures related to infrastructure, natural resources, cultural change, market dependence, and unequal access to tourism opportunities. Research on community-based tourism has demonstrated that the sustainability outcomes of tourism may vary according to the stage of destination development and the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental conditions experienced by local residents [3]. Similarly, studies of rural tourism have identified

limitations in human resources, infrastructure, planning, marketing, investment, and technological capacity as important constraints affecting the ability of rural communities to capture and retain tourism benefits [1].

An important dimension of this relationship concerns the interaction between tourism and traditional agricultural livelihoods. In many rural destinations, tourism does not develop independently from agriculture but creates opportunities to transform agricultural products and rural resources into tourism experiences and higher-value products. Local food, agricultural landscapes, farm activities, handicrafts, and traditional production practices can become components of tourism products, thereby creating new channels through which local resources enter tourism value chains. Recent research on agritourism similarly emphasizes the potential of integrating agricultural activities with tourism experiences to diversify farm income, create employment, stimulate local enterprises, and strengthen rural economies [4].

The integration of tourism with traditional livelihoods is particularly important in mountainous ethnic minority communities. These communities often possess distinctive cultural identities, traditional knowledge, indigenous production practices, vernacular architecture, landscapes, and locally specific agricultural products that can constitute important tourism assets. At the same time, their livelihoods may remain highly dependent on agriculture and natural resources, while access to markets, infrastructure, finance, technology, and professional tourism skills can be relatively limited. Recent research in mountainous areas of Vietnam indicates that community-based tourism can generate livelihood opportunities but that its outcomes depend strongly on local participation, community capacity, value-chain integration, and the distribution of tourism benefits. For example, a recent study of community-based tourism in Dien Bien and Cao Bang found that income stability, equitable income distribution, cultural preservation, quality of life, environmental sustainability, and community engagement are closely associated with the development of tourism among ethnic minority communities [5].

Evidence from other rural areas of Vietnam further suggests that tourism should be understood as a complementary component of livelihood diversification rather than as a complete substitute for traditional economic activities. A recent study of lagoon fishing communities in Thua Thien Hue Province found that tourism could contribute to increasing household income, but that abandoning traditional livelihood practices entirely in favor of tourism did not necessarily constitute a sustainable livelihood strategy [6]. This finding reinforces the importance of examining tourism within the broader livelihood system of rural households and understanding how tourism interacts with agriculture and other traditional activities rather than treating tourism as an isolated economic sector.

In Vietnam, these issues have become increasingly relevant as rural and mountainous localities seek to promote community-based tourism, cultural tourism, ecotourism, and locally based agricultural products as mechanisms for rural economic development. Community-based tourism has increasingly been associated with opportunities for cultural preservation, local economic development, community participation, and sustainable resource use. At the same time, recent research has identified persistent challenges associated with social exclusion, unequal participation, weak community cohesion, and the uneven distribution of benefits when tourism development does not adequately reflect local social and institutional conditions [7].

Within this broader context, Sin Suoi Ho Commune, Lai Chau Province, Vietnam, provides an appropriate case for examining the relationship between tourism development and rural livelihood diversification. Sin Suoi Ho is a mountainous rural community where tourism development has emerged alongside continuing agricultural production and other traditional livelihood activities. Community-based tourism, particularly in Sin Suoi Ho village, has become an increasingly important component of local economic development. Local tourism development includes homestay accommodation, cultural and culinary experiences, trekking, traditional activities, and nature-based tourism associated with destinations such as the Pavi ancient stone road, Bach Moc Luong Tu, Ta Lien Son, and Pu Ta Leng. The local development strategy also emphasizes the conservation and promotion of ethnic cultural identity as an integral component of tourism development.

The recent development of tourism in Sin Suoi Ho is reflected in local economic statistics. According to the People's Committee of Sin Suoi Ho, approximately 18,825 tourist arrivals were recorded during the first six months of 2026, generating an estimated VND 14.6 billion in tourism revenue. Tourism development has therefore become increasingly connected with local economic activity and service provision. During the same period, accommodation and food services generated approximately VND 3.5 billion, while travel and tourism-support services generated approximately VND 8.5 billion, demonstrating the growing economic significance of tourism-related activities within the local service economy.

At the same time, agriculture remains an important foundation of the local rural economy. Local development documents indicate that Sin Suoi Ho maintains approximately 665 ha of tea, while agricultural development also includes rice, maize, fruit trees, livestock, cold-water fish, medicinal plants, and other locally adapted products. The local agricultural development strategy explicitly promotes the transition from small-scale subsistence production toward commodity-oriented agriculture, value-added products, processing, market linkages, and the integration of agricultural production with tourism development. The development of local

OCOP products and the creation of distinctive agricultural products are also identified as important directions for increasing local economic value.

These developments suggest that Sin Suoi Ho is experiencing an emerging tourism–agriculture–livelihood nexus, in which tourism and agriculture may increasingly interact through local food, agricultural products, cultural experiences, homestays, and other community-based tourism activities. The local policy framework explicitly promotes stronger connections among agricultural production, processing, consumption, local products, and agricultural tourism, while tourism policy emphasizes community-based tourism, cultural identity, local employment, and distinctive tourism products. Nevertheless, policy intentions and the coexistence of tourism and agriculture do not, by themselves, demonstrate the extent to which tourism has changed household livelihood portfolios or increased household income. Such effects require household-level evidence that is not available in the present study.

Accordingly, this study adopts a community-level perspective. Rather than attempting to estimate the causal effect of tourism on individual household income, the study examines whether and how tourism creates additional economic interfaces through which existing agricultural, cultural, and environmental resources can be incorporated into local tourism activities and value chains. This distinction is important because livelihood diversification can involve the emergence of new economic opportunities and value-creation pathways even when the precise income contribution of tourism to individual households cannot be quantified.

Existing international research has extensively examined rural tourism, community-based tourism, sustainable livelihoods, and agritourism [1–4]. In Vietnam, recent studies have also examined community-based tourism in mountainous and rural areas, including tourism participation, local livelihoods, community development, and sustainable development [5–7]. However, relatively limited empirical attention has been given to the interaction between tourism development and agricultural production in a mountainous ethnic minority community where both sectors are developing simultaneously. In particular, there is a need for community-level evidence showing how agricultural products, cultural resources, and tourism services can be connected to create additional local value, while distinguishing documented economic linkages from potential livelihood effects.

This gap is particularly relevant to Sin Suoi Ho because the locality is pursuing two parallel development orientations: tourism development as an increasingly important service-sector activity and commodity-oriented agriculture based on locally adapted products. The coexistence of these two orientations raises an important analytical question: under what conditions can tourism complement rather than replace agriculture and contribute to rural livelihood diversification through stronger local value chains?

Against this background, the present study examines tourism–agriculture linkages and rural livelihood diversification in Sin Suoi Ho, Vietnam. Rather than treating tourism as a substitute for agriculture, the study conceptualizes tourism as a potential complementary mechanism through which existing agricultural, cultural, and environmental resources can generate additional economic opportunities. The study pursues three objectives: (1) to examine the current scale and structure of tourism-related and agricultural economic activities in Sin Suoi Ho; (2) to identify emerging linkages between tourism, agriculture, local products, and community-based tourism and examine their potential contribution to rural livelihood diversification; and (3) to identify the major constraints affecting local value creation and propose directions for strengthening tourism–agriculture integration.

The study makes three contributions. First, it provides community-level empirical evidence on the coexistence of tourism expansion and a diversified agricultural production base in a mountainous ethnic minority destination. Second, it identifies tourism–agriculture integration and local value retention as an important mechanism through which tourism may complement existing rural livelihood activities. Third, it shifts attention from tourist growth alone toward the capacity of rural communities to convert agricultural, cultural, and tourism resources into locally retained economic value.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1. Research design

This study adopted a qualitative-dominant case study design supported by descriptive and comparative analysis to examine tourism–agriculture linkages and rural livelihood diversification in Sin Suoi Ho, Lai Chau Province, Vietnam. The case study approach was selected because Sin Suoi Ho represents a mountainous ethnic minority community where community-based tourism has developed alongside continuing agricultural production and the promotion of local products.

The unit of analysis was defined at the community and economic-activity levels rather than at the individual household level. Specifically, the analysis focused on (i) tourism-related economic activities, including accommodation, food services, tourism support, cultural experiences, and nature-based tourism; (ii) agricultural and local-product activities; and (iii) the linkages through which agricultural, cultural, and environmental resources may be incorporated into tourism products and services.

This analytical choice is important because the available data do not contain household-level observations on tourism participation, household income, income shares, or differences between tourism-

participating and non-participating households. Therefore, the study does not attempt to estimate the causal effect of tourism on household income or to calculate a household livelihood-diversification index. Instead, it examines the documented emergence of complementary economic opportunities and the mechanisms through which tourism may strengthen the value of existing rural resources.

The study consequently interprets livelihood diversification as an emerging community-level process involving the coexistence and interaction of agriculture, tourism services, local products, cultural activities, and other non-farm economic opportunities.

2.2. Study area and data sources

The study was conducted in Sin Suoi Ho Commune, Lai Chau Province, Vietnam, with particular attention to Sin Suoi Ho village, which has emerged as a focal area for community-based tourism development.

The analysis relies primarily on secondary documentary data and official local development documents. The main quantitative source is the 2026 socio-economic development report of Sin Suoi Ho Commune, which provides information on tourism arrivals, tourism revenue, trade and service activities, agricultural land use, agricultural production, and local development conditions. The report recorded approximately 18,825 tourist arrivals and more than VND 14.6 billion in tourism revenue during the first six months of 2026 [8].

The study also examined two local policy documents issued in March 2026: Resolution No. 11-NQ/DU on tourism development associated with the preservation and promotion of ethnic cultural identity, and Resolution No. 10-NQ/DU on commodity-oriented agriculture and key agricultural products for 2026 - 2030 [9, 10]. These documents were used to identify current development orientations, policy targets, constraints, and intended linkages between tourism and agriculture.

Because the present study does not contain a systematic household survey, structured interviews, or a documented sample of residents or tourism businesses, the manuscript does not treat “field investigation” as an independent primary-data source. Contextual interpretations are derived from the documentary evidence and are explicitly distinguished from directly measured household-level outcomes.

2.3. Analytical approach

Three complementary analytical procedures were employed.

First, descriptive analysis was used to summarize tourism and agricultural activities, including tourist arrivals, tourism revenue, trade and service production, agricultural land areas, and selected agricultural outputs.

Second, comparative analysis was used to examine the relative position of tourism-related services within the local service economy and the coexistence of tourism development with agricultural production.

Third, documentary and thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes concerning tourism–agriculture linkages, local products, community participation, value creation, human-resource constraints, infrastructure, branding, processing, and market linkages.

The analysis therefore combines quantitative description with qualitative interpretation rather than attempting econometric estimation or causal inference.

2.4. Analytical framework

The analytical framework consists of three interconnected dimensions.

First, the existing rural production base includes agriculture, local products, cultural resources, and natural landscapes. Second, tourism-related opportunities include accommodation, food services, trekking, cultural experiences, nature-based activities, and direct sales of local products. Third, the analysis examines the linkages between these resources and tourism activities, focusing on the potential for converting locally available resources into higher-value tourism products and services.

The framework assumes that tourism contributes to livelihood diversification most meaningfully when it complements rather than displaces existing productive activities. The expected pathway is therefore:

Agricultural/cultural resources → local products and experiences → tourism consumption → local value creation → broader livelihood opportunities.

Where these linkages remain weak, tourism growth may generate less local value because visitor expenditure is not sufficiently connected to locally produced goods and services.

2.5. Data processing and interpretation

Quantitative information was organized and checked for internal consistency before analysis. Descriptive indicators included absolute values, proportions, and derived ratios where the denominator was clearly defined. For example, tourism-related accommodation, food, and travel-support services were compared with total recorded trade and service production. This ratio is interpreted only as the share of these activities within recorded trade and service production and is not treated as tourism’s share of the entire local economy.

Qualitative information from local policy documents was coded according to major themes, including tourism development, agricultural production, local products, value-chain integration, human resources,

infrastructure, branding, digital capacity, and local value retention. Findings were triangulated across the socio-economic report and the two development resolutions [8–10].

Where local statistics contained different reported figures, the narrative figures in the official socio-economic report were prioritized because they were presented as the commune’s official six-month performance indicators.

2.6. Data reliability and research limitations

To enhance data reliability, priority was given to information obtained from official local government reports and formally issued development and policy documents. Quantitative information was cross-checked across available sources where comparable indicators were reported, and inconsistencies in tourism statistics were examined before analysis. When different figures were reported across statistical tables and reporting formats, the figures presented in the official narrative socio-economic report were prioritized because they represented the commune’s reported six-month performance indicators.

The study has several limitations. First, it relies primarily on official secondary statistics and policy documents, which limits the ability to directly measure household-level livelihood outcomes. The available data do not distinguish between tourism-participating and non-participating households, nor do they provide information on the proportion of individual household income derived from tourism. Consequently, the study does not estimate the causal effects of tourism on household income, poverty reduction, or livelihood diversification at the household level.

Second, the study identifies emerging and potential tourism–agriculture linkages based on documented local economic conditions and development orientations. These linkages are therefore interpreted as potential mechanisms for local value creation rather than as statistically established causal relationships. Third, the study focuses on a single mountainous ethnic minority community, and the findings should consequently be interpreted as case-specific evidence rather than statistically generalizable results for all rural or ethnic minority communities in Vietnam.

Future research should complement the present community-level analysis with household surveys, tourism-business surveys, and longitudinal data to examine tourism participation, changes in household income composition, employment, agricultural production, and the distribution of tourism benefits across different groups of local residents.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. The emerging economic significance of tourism in Sin Suoi Ho

Tourism has emerged as an increasingly important component of the local rural economy of Sin Suoi Ho. The official socio-economic report indicates that the commune received approximately 18,825 tourist arrivals during the first six months of 2026, generating more than VND 14.6 billion in tourism revenue. The local authority explicitly identifies community-based tourism, particularly in Sin Suoi Ho village, as an important contributor to local socio-economic development [8].

This magnitude of tourism activity is noteworthy when considered against the structure of the local service economy. During the same period, total trade and service production was estimated at VND 52.9 billion, of which retail trade accounted for VND 37.6 billion, accommodation and food services for VND 3.5 billion, travel and tourism-support services for VND 8.5 billion, and other services for VND 3.3 billion [8].

Table 1. Structure of trade and service activities in Sin Suoi Ho, first six months of 2026

Economic activity	Value (VND billion)	Share of total (%)
Retail trade	37.6	71.1
Accommodation and food services	3.5	6.6
Travel and tourism-support services	8.5	16.1
Other services	3.3	6.2
Total	52.9	100.0

Source: Authors' calculation based on the socio-economic report of Sin Suoi Ho Commune, 2026.

The data indicate that tourism-related services constitute an important component of the recorded local service economy. Accommodation and food services generated approximately VND 3.5 billion, while travel and tourism-support services generated approximately VND 8.5 billion, giving a combined value of approximately VND 12.0 billion. Relative to the total recorded trade and service production of VND 52.9 billion, these tourism-related categories represented approximately 22.7%. However, this figure should not be interpreted as tourism accounting for 22.7% of the entire local economy because the denominator covers recorded trade and service production rather than total commune-level economic output.

The available figures also imply tourism revenue of approximately VND 0.78 million per recorded arrival when total tourism revenue is divided by the reported number of tourist arrivals. This should be interpreted only as an implied ratio between reported tourism revenue and recorded arrivals, rather than as average individual

tourist expenditure, because the statistics do not provide information on length of stay, visitor composition, or the distribution of expenditure across different services.

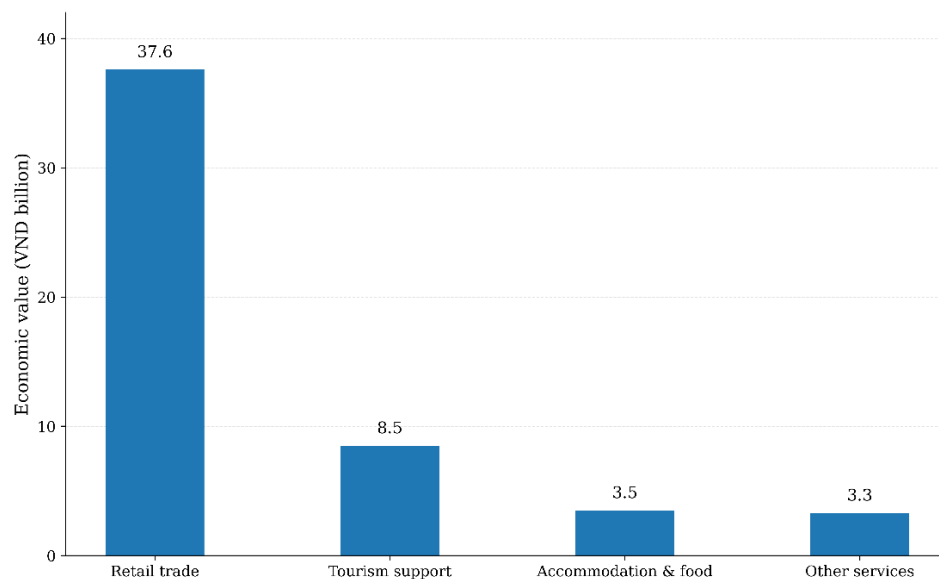


Figure 1. Structure of trade and service activities in Sin Suoi Ho

Source: Authors' compilation and calculation based on the socio-economic report of Sin Suoi Ho Commune, 2026.

The finding supports the interpretation that rural tourism can function as a complementary economic mechanism by creating additional market interfaces and opportunities for local participation rather than simply increasing visitor numbers. In the Sin Suoi Ho case, tourism is becoming embedded within accommodation, food, travel support and other local service activities.

However, the evidence also indicates that tourism has not yet become the dominant pillar of the entire rural economy. Retail trade remains the largest component, while agriculture continues to provide an important production base. Therefore, the appropriate interpretation is not an agricultural-to-tourism transition, but an emerging multi-sector rural economy in which tourism provides an additional livelihood and market channel.

3.2. Agricultural production remains the productive foundation of rural livelihoods

The second major finding concerns the continued importance and diversity of agricultural production. Rather than disappearing under tourism expansion, agriculture remains spatially extensive and economically significant.

The 2026 socio-economic report records 665.05 ha of tea, including 565.15 ha of productive tea. Tea production reached approximately 1,100 tonnes during the first six months, equivalent to 37% of the annual target of 3,000 tonnes and approximately 100 tonnes higher than the same period of 2025. Fruit trees covered approximately 750 ha, with estimated production of 1,236 tonnes during the first six months. Rice and maize also remained important components of local agricultural production, with 959 ha of seasonal rice and 627 ha of spring–summer maize reported for 2026 [8].

Table 2. Selected agricultural production indicators in Sin Suoi Ho, 2026

Agricultural activity	Area (ha)	Six-month production	Additional indicator
Tea	665.05	1,100 tonnes	37% of annual target
Fruit trees	750.00	1,236 tonnes	—
Seasonal rice	959.00	—	Planned cultivated area
Spring–summer maize	627.00	—	100% of planned area
Vegetables	20.00	—	Continued production
Coffee	28.00	—	Existing production
Medicinal plants	50.00	—	Existing production

Source: Authors' compilation from the Sin Suoi Ho socio-economic report, 2026

The pattern is analytically important because it demonstrates that tourism development is occurring alongside an already diversified local agricultural production system. The production base is not concentrated in a single agricultural activity but includes tea, fruit trees, rice, maize, vegetables, coffee, medicinal plants, and other locally adapted products. These data describe the structure of local agricultural production rather than the

livelihood portfolios of individual households. Nevertheless, this production diversity provides a substantial resource base for developing tourism-related products, local food, farm-based experiences, and other forms of tourism–agriculture integration.

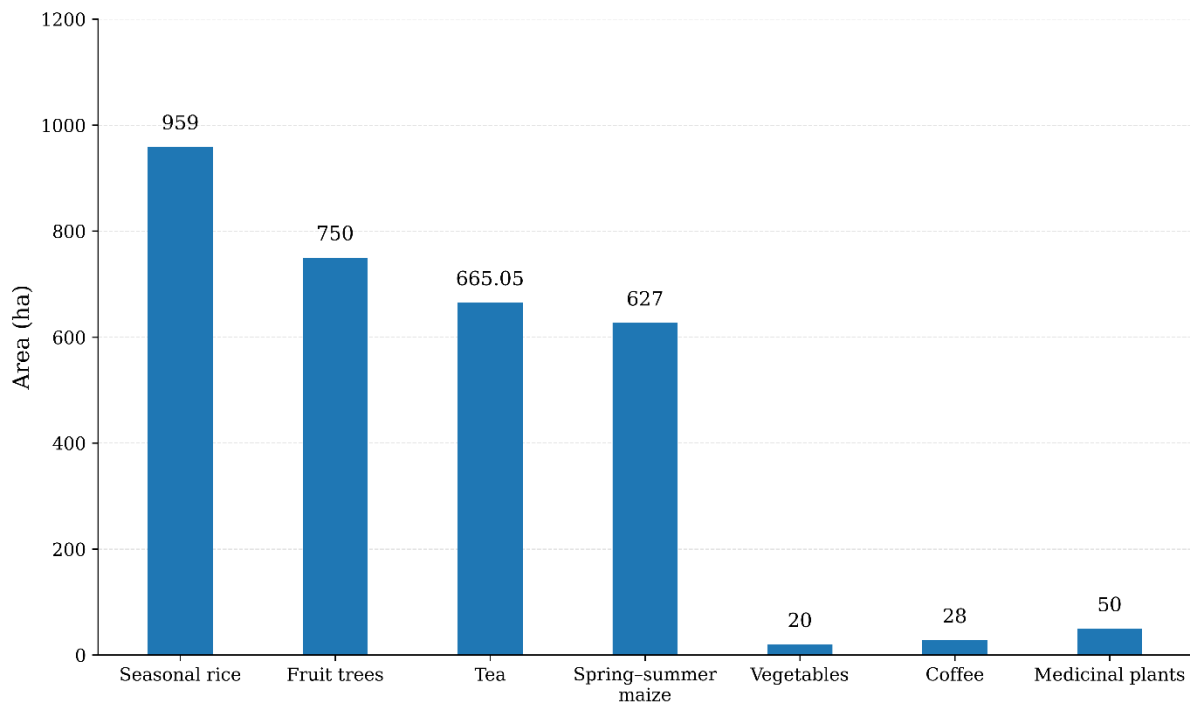


Figure 2. Selected agricultural land uses in Sin Suoi Ho, 2026

Source: Authors' compilation and calculation based on the socio-economic report of Sin Suoi Ho Commune, 2026

This finding changes the interpretation of tourism development. Tourism should not be conceptualized as an alternative to agriculture. Rather, it provides an opportunity to increase the value generated from existing agricultural assets.

The local agricultural development resolution explicitly recognizes this potential. It identifies agriculture as a foundational sector while simultaneously requiring stronger links among agricultural production, processing, consumption and agricultural tourism. It specifically promotes models combining agricultural production, tourism experiences and on-site consumption [10].

3.3. Tourism–agriculture integration as a mechanism of livelihood diversification

The most significant result of the case study is not simply that tourism is growing, but that local policy and production conditions create the foundations for an emerging tourism–agriculture linkage.

The agricultural development resolution identifies tourism integration as one of the three breakthrough directions for agricultural development. It calls for agricultural products to be connected with community-based and ecological tourism, visitor experiences, on-site consumption and product promotion. It also specifically identifies tea, medicinal plants, specialty rice and cold-water fish as products with potential for integration into tourism [10].

Similarly, the resolution on tourism development proposes tourism products based on the sequence “eat – stay – experience – cultural interaction”, including agricultural experiences and local products [9].

These two policy streams reveal an important institutional convergence.

Table 3 should be interpreted as an analytical synthesis of documented resources, tourism applications, and development potential rather than as direct measurement of household-level income effects. The “linkage status” categories represent the authors’ interpretation of the evidence contained in local development documents and should therefore be understood as indicative rather than statistically measured levels of integration.

The central mechanism is the conversion of an existing agricultural resource into multiple forms of tourism value. For example, tea may generate value through primary agricultural production and commodity sales, but it can potentially generate additional value through landscape-based experiences, tea tasting, direct visitor sales, branding, and product differentiation. A similar mechanism may apply to specialty rice, medicinal plants, cold-water fish, local food, and traditional crafts.

This suggests that the contribution of tourism to livelihood diversification may depend less on the simple expansion of visitor numbers than on the extent to which tourism creates additional markets for locally produced goods and services.

Table 3. Potential and emerging tourism–agriculture linkages in Sin Suoi Ho

Local resource	Tourism application	Potential livelihood/value effect
<i>Tea</i>	Tea-field visits, tea tasting, product sales	Additional agricultural and tourism value
<i>Specialty rice</i>	Local cuisine, product sales, agricultural experience	Higher market value and product differentiation
<i>Medicinal plants</i>	Agricultural/forest experience, product demonstration	Product diversification
<i>Cold-water fish</i>	Food experience, farm visits	Local food market opportunities
<i>Local food</i>	Homestay meals, culinary experiences	Demand for locally produced food
<i>Traditional crafts</i>	Demonstration, visitor participation, souvenirs	Local cultural-product opportunities
<i>Agricultural landscape</i>	Farm-based experiences	Additional tourism-market opportunities

Source: Authors' synthesis based on local tourism and agricultural development resolutions [9; 10].

3.4. Emerging livelihood diversification opportunities

The evidence indicates that Sin Suoi Ho possesses multiple economic activities that can provide complementary livelihood opportunities, but the available data do not allow the study to determine the extent to which individual households have actually diversified their income sources through tourism. The more defensible interpretation is therefore that tourism has expanded the range of potential economic interfaces between local residents, agricultural production, cultural resources, and visitors.

Table 4. Current livelihood diversification pattern in Sin Suoi Ho.

Livelihood component	Evidence	Potential role in livelihood diversification
<i>Agriculture</i>	Extensive tea, fruit, rice and maize production	Primary production base
<i>Tourism accommodation</i>	Community-based tourism and homestays	Potential revenue from accommodation services
<i>Food services</i>	Local cuisine and accommodation-related food	Potential demand for local agricultural products
<i>Tourism support</i>	Travel and visitor-support services	Potential non-farm employment opportunities
<i>Local products</i>	Agricultural and cultural products	Potential direct visitor market
<i>Cultural experiences</i>	Traditional culture, crafts and local lifestyles	Potential conversion of cultural resources into economic value
<i>Trekking/nature tourism</i>	Pavi, Bach Moc Luong Tu, Ta Lien Son, Pu Ta Leng	Diversification of tourism products

The coexistence of agriculture, accommodation, food services, tourism support, local products, cultural experiences, and trekking indicates that tourism is becoming embedded within a broader multi-activity rural economy. These activities provide different potential entry points for local economic participation:

- Homestay → potential revenue from accommodation services
- Local food → food-service revenue and demand for local agricultural products
- Tea and other agricultural products → direct product sales and product differentiation
- Traditional crafts → cultural-product and visitor-participation opportunities
- Trekking → guiding and visitor-support services
- Cultural experiences → service and experience-based revenue

Importantly, these pathways should be interpreted as potential livelihood mechanisms rather than measured household income effects. The evidence supports the existence of multiple economic opportunities and linkages, but it does not quantify how many households participate in each activity or how much income each activity generates at the household level.

3.5. The main constraint: tourism growth has not yet been fully converted into local value creation

Although tourism has generated substantial visitor flows, the evidence suggests that the major challenge is now not simply attracting more tourists, but increasing the proportion of tourist expenditure retained within the local community.

This distinction is important.

The local tourism resolution sets ambitious targets of 15–18% annual growth in tourist arrivals and at least 15% annual growth in tourism revenue, while also targeting 60%+ trained local tourism workers, 3–5 distinctive products, 50% standardized homestays, 2–3 standardized trekking/cultural routes, and gradual digital adoption by all tourism establishments [9].

However, the same document identifies weak product differentiation, limited infrastructure, insufficient professional skills, weak linkages and limited digital capacity as constraints.

Table 5. Constraints affecting tourism-led livelihood diversification

Constraint	Evidence	Potential consequence for livelihoods
<i>Small-scale agricultural production</i>	Fragmented production structure	Limited supply capacity
<i>Weak value-chain integration</i>	Production–processing–consumption linkages remain weak	Low local value retention
<i>Limited processing</i>	Agricultural products mainly remain primary products	Low value added
<i>Weak branding/traceability</i>	Local products have limited market recognition	Restricted market access
<i>Human-resource limitations</i>	Tourism skills and foreign-language capacity remain weak	Lower service quality
<i>Infrastructure constraints</i>	Tourism-support infrastructure remains limited	Reduced visitor expenditure
<i>Weak digital capacity</i>	Digital marketing still developing	Limited market reach
<i>Limited product diversification</i>	Tourism products remain relatively simple	Shorter visitor engagement

Source: Authors' synthesis from local development documents [9; 10]

The table demonstrates that livelihood diversification is constrained not by a lack of resources but by limited conversion of resources into higher-value economic products.

This leads to a more precise interpretation of the research findings: Sin Suoi Ho does not primarily face a shortage of tourism resources; rather, it faces a value-capture problem.

The commune possesses agricultural resources, cultural resources, landscape resources and an established tourism market. The development challenge is therefore to connect these assets through local value chains and increase the proportion of tourism-related economic value retained within the community. In this study, “local value capture” refers to the capacity of local residents and locally based enterprises to convert agricultural, cultural, environmental, and tourism resources into higher-value goods and services and to retain an appropriate share of the resulting economic benefits within the local economy.

This perspective shifts the analytical focus from tourism growth alone toward the quality of linkages between tourism and the local production system. A destination may receive increasing numbers of visitors while generating relatively limited livelihood benefits if food, products, services, and tourism inputs are supplied from outside the community. Conversely, stronger local sourcing, processing, branding, direct sales, and community-based services can increase the local economic multiplier of tourism without requiring an equivalent increase in visitor numbers

3.6. Tourism–agriculture integration as a mechanism for rural livelihood diversification

Based on the empirical evidence, the relationship between tourism and rural livelihood diversification in Sin Suoi Ho can be conceptualized as a resource-to-value mechanism. The mechanism begins with existing agricultural, cultural, and environmental resources. These resources can be transformed into local products and tourism experiences, which create opportunities for visitor consumption. When goods and services are supplied locally, tourism expenditure can be converted into locally retained economic value and thereby broaden the range of livelihood opportunities available within the community.

The mechanism can be expressed as:

Agricultural and cultural resources → local products and tourism experiences → visitor consumption → local value creation → diversified livelihood opportunities.

A contrasting pathway occurs when linkages between tourism and local production remain weak. In this situation, tourism may continue to grow, but a smaller proportion of visitor expenditure is connected to local agricultural products, processing, cultural products, and locally supplied services. The result is a weaker potential contribution of tourism to livelihood diversification.

The framework therefore suggests that the key issue for Sin Suoi Ho is not simply whether tourism is growing, but whether tourism growth is sufficiently embedded within the local production system to create and retain value locally.

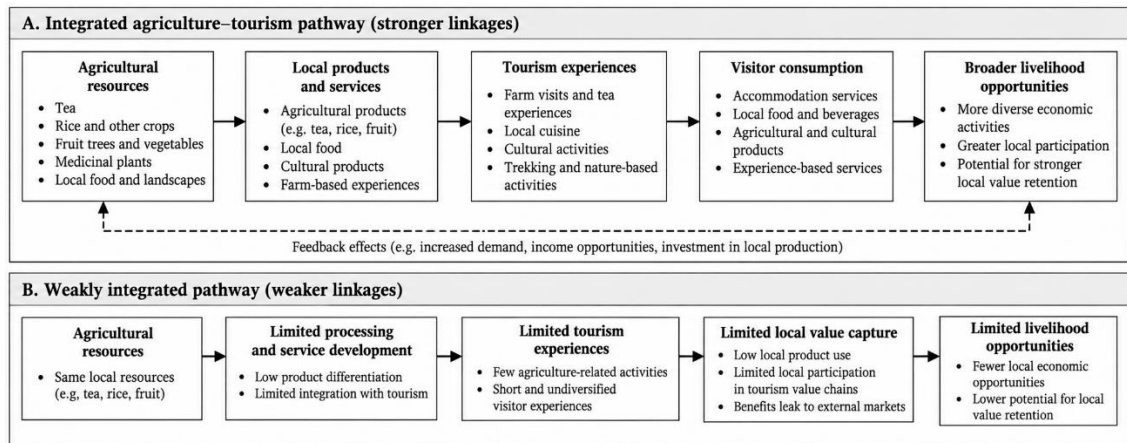


Figure 4. Tourism–agriculture mechanism for rural livelihood diversification in Sin Suoi Ho.

3.7. Discussion: tourism as a complementary livelihood mechanism

The findings provide three broader implications for understanding tourism and rural livelihood diversification.

First, tourism expansion and agricultural development do not necessarily represent competing livelihood strategies. In Sin Suoi Ho, a substantial agricultural production base coexists with an expanding tourism and service economy. This supports the interpretation of tourism as a complementary economic activity rather than evidence of a transition from agriculture to tourism.

Second, the potential livelihood contribution of tourism is strongest when tourism is connected with existing local production systems. A visitor who stays in a locally operated homestay, consumes locally produced food, purchases tea or other agricultural products, participates in cultural activities, and uses locally provided tourism services creates multiple points of local value capture. By contrast, tourism expenditure that relies heavily on externally supplied products and services may generate weaker local livelihood effects.

Third, local value retention is a critical condition for translating tourism growth into broader rural livelihood opportunities. The case of Sin Suoi Ho suggests that increasing visitor numbers should therefore be accompanied by stronger local sourcing, processing, branding, product development, community capacity, and market linkages.

These findings are consistent with the sustainable-livelihood perspective proposed by Tao and Wall [2], which emphasizes tourism as a potential complementary livelihood strategy rather than an automatic replacement for existing rural activities. They are also consistent with research on community-based tourism and agritourism showing that tourism benefits depend on community participation, local capacity, value-chain integration, and the interaction between tourism and existing rural resources [3–7].

Table 6. Summary of empirical evidence and analytical interpretation

Empirical evidence	Quantitative result	Scientific interpretation
<i>Tourist arrivals</i>	18,825 in first 6 months of 2026	Tourism has reached substantial local market scale
<i>Tourism revenue</i>	> VND 14.6 billion	Tourism generates significant economic circulation
<i>Tourism-related services</i>	VND 12.0 billion	Tourism is linked with a broader service network
<i>Tourism-related share of trade/services</i>	22.7%	Tourism-related activities constitute an important service component
<i>Tea area</i>	665.05 ha	Agriculture remains an important productive resource
<i>Tea output</i>	1,100 tonnes/6 months	Agricultural production remains economically active
<i>Fruit-tree area</i>	750 ha	Agricultural production is diversified at the local production-system level
<i>Rice area</i>	959 ha	Food production remains important
<i>Maize area</i>	627 ha	Multiple agricultural activities coexist
<i>Tourism products</i>	Community, ecological, trekking	Tourism itself is diversifying
<i>Policy direction</i>	Agriculture + tourism + local products	Institutional basis for integrated livelihood diversification

<i>Major constraint</i>	Weak value-chain linkages	The main challenge is local value capture rather than a shortage of resources
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Source: Authors' compilation and calculations based on official Sin Suoi Ho socio-economic and development documents [8–10].

IV. CONCLUSION

This study examined tourism–agriculture linkages and rural livelihood diversification in Sin Suoi Ho, a mountainous ethnic minority community in Lai Chau Province, Vietnam. Based primarily on official socio-economic statistics and local tourism and agricultural development documents, the study shows that tourism is emerging alongside, rather than replacing, the existing agricultural production system.

During the first six months of 2026, Sin Suoi Ho recorded approximately 18,825 tourist arrivals and more than VND 14.6 billion in tourism revenue. Tourism-related accommodation, food, and travel-support services represented approximately VND 12.0 billion of recorded trade and service production. These figures demonstrate the growing economic significance of tourism-related activities but should not be interpreted as evidence of tourism's direct contribution to household income.

Agriculture remains an important foundation of the local rural economy, with approximately 665.05 ha of tea, 750 ha of fruit trees, 959 ha of rice, 627 ha of maize, and other agricultural activities. This production diversity provides a substantial resource base that can potentially be connected with tourism through local food, agricultural products, farm-based experiences, cultural activities, and direct visitor markets.

The central finding is that the potential contribution of tourism to rural livelihood diversification lies not simply in increasing visitor numbers, but in strengthening the connections between tourism and existing local production systems. The emerging mechanism can be summarized as: agricultural and cultural resources → local products and tourism experiences → visitor consumption → local value creation → diversified livelihood opportunities.

However, the study also identifies important constraints, including fragmented agricultural production, weak production–processing–market linkages, limited processing and branding capacity, human-resource constraints, infrastructure limitations, and insufficient digital and market connectivity. These constraints limit the ability of local actors to convert available resources into higher-value goods and services and to retain a larger proportion of tourism-related economic value within the community.

The findings therefore suggest that the sustainable development pathway for Sin Suoi Ho should not be based on replacing agriculture with tourism. Instead, tourism should be embedded within the existing rural production system and used as a mechanism for adding value to agricultural, cultural, and environmental resources. Priority should be given to strengthening tourism–agriculture linkages, improving local product quality and branding, expanding value-added processing, developing community capacity, strengthening local supply chains, and increasing local sourcing within tourism services.

From a broader perspective, the Sin Suoi Ho case contributes to the discussion of tourism as a complementary rural livelihood mechanism in mountainous ethnic minority communities. Its main implication is that tourism growth alone does not guarantee livelihood diversification. The development outcome depends substantially on the strength of the linkages connecting visitors with locally produced goods, services, cultural resources, and agricultural products.

The conclusions should nevertheless be interpreted within the scope of the available evidence. Because the study relies primarily on secondary statistics and documentary evidence, it does not estimate household-level causal effects, household tourism participation rates, or the proportion of household income derived from tourism. Future research should therefore combine this community-level analysis with household surveys and longitudinal data to examine differences between tourism-participating and non-participating households, changes in income composition, employment, agricultural production, and the distribution of tourism benefits across different social groups.

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