

Tourism and Community Livelihoods in Ba Be Commune after Administrative Restructuring: Emerging Governance Challenges and Policy Implications

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ABSTRACT: *This study analyzes the relationship between tourism development and community livelihoods in Ba Be commune (Thai Nguyen province) in the context of administrative restructuring based on the merger of three communes: Cao Thuong, Nam Mau, and Khang Ninh, starting in 2025. After the merger, Ba Be commune has an area of 148.08 km², a population of 11,773 people, and possesses outstanding tourism resources including Ba Be Lake, unique ecological and cultural values, and a pre-existing community tourism network. The study uses various methods, including data collection and processing, field surveys, and comparative analysis, to assess the impact of administrative restructuring on livelihoods, tourism activities, and local governance mechanisms. The results show that tourism is gradually becoming an important economic sector, creating jobs for approximately 300 local workers. Homestay systems, water transport services, cuisine, and traditional cultural products contribute significantly to improving household income. However, the development process still faces many challenges such as inconsistent tourism infrastructure, environmental pressure in the lake area, land use violations, limited human resource quality, and the professionalism of tourism products. This article proposes a group of solutions focusing on community-based tourism management, strengthening linkages between tourism spaces after mergers, developing diverse livelihoods, and enhancing the role of local people in resource conservation and heritage value exploitation.*

KEYWORD: *Community tourism; sustainable livelihoods; administrative restructuring; Ba Be Lake; local development.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of public governance reform and territorial reorganization, numerous countries worldwide have implemented administrative boundary adjustment programs to enhance governance effectiveness, optimize resource allocation, and stimulate regional development. Existing studies indicate that the restructuring of administrative units not only transforms governance systems but also generates substantial changes in development spaces, accessibility to public services, and livelihood opportunities for local communities [1], [2]. In rural and mountainous areas, where development resources remain constrained, administrative restructuring is frequently accompanied by expectations of creating new growth drivers through the mobilization of territorial resource advantages and the promotion of place-based economic sectors.

Among the economic sectors capable of facilitating livelihood transformation, tourism has increasingly been recognized as a strategic instrument for advancing inclusive and sustainable local development. According to the perspective of the United Nations Tourism Organization (UN Tourism), tourism not only generates direct economic value through revenue generation and employment creation but also contributes to the establishment of cross-sectoral value chains, supports resource conservation, strengthens social capital, and expands livelihood opportunities for local communities [3]. From the sustainable livelihoods perspective, numerous studies have demonstrated that tourism development can enable communities to diversify income sources, reduce dependence on traditional agriculture, and enhance adaptive capacity to socio-economic changes and external shocks [4], [5].

However, the impacts of tourism on livelihoods are not always distributed equitably across communities. Several studies have shown that the benefits generated by tourism tend to concentrate among population groups that participate directly in tourism service supply chains, whereas other groups may experience increasing pressures associated with resource competition, rising living costs, and transformations in local social structures [6], [7]. Consequently, within the context of administrative restructuring and the expansion of development spaces, assessing the role of tourism in shaping community livelihoods requires a broader analytical perspective that considers interactions among local governance mechanisms, access to livelihood assets and productive resources, and the distributional equity of tourism-derived benefits across different resident groups.

In Vietnam, tourism has been designated as a spearhead economic sector under Resolution No. 08-NQ/TW issued by the Politburo on 16 January 2017. In recent years, numerous localities have actively promoted

community-based tourism, ecotourism, and cultural tourism as strategic pathways to generate employment, improve household income, and enhance the utilization and valorization of indigenous resource assets and local cultural capital. Concurrently, the process of administrative unit restructuring has been implemented nationwide with the objectives of streamlining governance structures, improving administrative efficiency, and expanding the development space for socio-economic growth.

Within this context, Ba Bể Commune (Thai Nguyen Province) was established through the administrative consolidation and reorganization of the former communes of Nam Mẫu, Khang Ninh, and Cao Thượng under Resolution No. 1683/NQ-UBTVQH15 dated 16 June 2025 issued by the Standing Committee of the National Assembly. Following the administrative merger, the commune encompasses a total natural area of 148.08 km² and a population of 11,773 inhabitants, comprising the Tày, Nùng, Dao, Hmong, and Kinh ethnic groups. Local livelihoods are characterized by a diversified livelihood structure combining agriculture, inland fisheries, and an increasing dependence on tourism-related services, including homestay operations, tour guiding, and the production and sale of traditional handicrafts. Ba Bể also possesses significant comparative advantages for tourism development owing to its distinctive natural and cultural resource endowments, particularly Ba Bể Lake—a nationally designated tourism destination recognized for its freshwater ecosystem and landscapes of high conservation value. The most outstanding value of Ba Bể Lake lies in its exceptional geological landscape. In 1995, at the World Freshwater Lakes Conference held in the United States, Ba Bể Lake was recognized as one of the world's 20 special freshwater lakes requiring priority protection. At the end of 2004, Ba Be National Park was designated as an ASEAN Heritage Park. On 2 February 2011, Ba Bể was officially recognized as Vietnam's third Ramsar site (officially named Ba Bể National Park Ramsar Site) and became the 1,938th Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. Subsequently, on 27 September 2012, the Prime Minister issued Decision No. 1419/QĐ-TTg granting Ba Bể Lake the status of a Special National Heritage Site.

In recent years, the locality has actively promoted multiple tourism modalities, including ecotourism, community-based tourism, festival tourism, cultural tourism, and resort tourism. Simultaneously, development efforts have emphasized the conservation and valorization of the traditional cultural assets of ethnic minority communities to create distinctive tourism products and strengthen the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of the destination..

In recent years, the relationship between tourism development and community livelihoods has become a widely examined topic in international scholarship. Most studies have focused on analyzing the contribution of tourism to local economic growth, employment generation, poverty alleviation, and improvements in community living standards [4], [5], [8]. Other streams of research have adopted a destination governance perspective, emphasizing the effective utilization of tourism resources, enhancement of management efficiency, and the promotion of sustainable tourism development [7], [9].

From the sustainable livelihoods perspective, tourism is regarded as a strategic mechanism through which communities can expand access to livelihood capitals and strengthen resilience to external shocks and socio-economic disturbances [5], [10]. Nevertheless, recent studies have also highlighted that the benefits generated by tourism are not distributed uniformly across communities. Variations in geographical location, degree of participation in tourism value chains, and access to productive assets and development opportunities may result in substantial disparities in livelihood outcomes among different resident groups [6], [11].

In parallel, existing studies on the consolidation and restructuring of administrative units have primarily concentrated on issues such as organizational efficiency, administrative decentralization, improvement of public service delivery, and the enhancement of local governance capacity [1], [2], [12]. By contrast, there remains a notable research gap concerning the indirect effects of the restructuring of administrative and territorial governance spaces on changes in community livelihoods, particularly in destinations experiencing rapid tourism expansion and accelerated socio-economic transformation.

For the Ba Bể Lake area, existing studies have predominantly focused on resource assessment, ecosystem conservation, community-based tourism development, and the valorization of local cultural assets. However, there remains limited empirical evidence examining the relationship between tourism development and transformations in community livelihoods within the context of newly established administrative units. This research gap highlights the need for an interdisciplinary approach capable of clarifying the role of tourism in livelihood transition processes and providing an evidence base to support sustainable local development policymaking.

Against this contextual and research background, the present study pursues three principal objectives. First, it aims to describe the current status of tourism development in Ba Bể Commune following the process of administrative restructuring. Second, it seeks to analyze changes in community livelihoods under the influence of tourism activities within the context of an expanded local governance and territorial management framework. Third, the study proposes policy implications to promote tourism development in ways that simultaneously enhance community livelihoods and advance sustainable development outcomes.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

2.1. Research design

This study adopted a case study approach combined with mixed qualitative–quantitative analysis to examine the relationship between tourism development and community livelihoods under the context of administrative restructuring in Ba Be Commune, Thai Nguyen Province, Vietnam.

The case study design was selected because Ba Be represents a newly restructured administrative unit characterized by simultaneous processes of territorial integration, tourism expansion, and livelihood transition. Such a context provides an appropriate setting for exploring interactions among tourism development, resource governance, and community adaptation under institutional change.

The unit of analysis comprised both community livelihood systems and local tourism governance arrangements within the newly established Ba Be Commune.

2.2. Data sources and collection procedures

This study integrated both secondary and primary data sources to ensure triangulation and improve analytical reliability.

- *Secondary data*

Secondary data were collected from official and documentary sources to reconstruct the development context and examine institutional changes after administrative restructuring.

The main sources included: legal documents and resolutions on administrative restructuring; tourism development plans and sectoral reports; socio-economic statistical reports; administrative records issued by local authorities; reports on tourism development and environmental management in Ba Be Commune; scientific publications and previous studies related to tourism, governance, and livelihood transformation.

The secondary dataset covered four analytical dimensions: (i) demographic and socio-economic conditions after administrative restructuring; (ii) tourism resources and destination development; (iii) livelihood structures and local employment patterns; (iv) institutional arrangements for tourism governance and resource management.

Document analysis was conducted through systematic coding and thematic synthesis to identify recurrent patterns and emerging governance issues.

- *Primary data*

Primary data were collected through field investigation and stakeholder consultation conducted in 2025.

Fieldwork focused on selected tourism-intensive areas within Ba Be Commune, particularly locations where tourism activities and livelihood transformation were most evident.

Information was collected through: direct field observation; semi-structured interviews; informal stakeholder consultation.

Respondents included: local residents participating in tourism activities; households not directly involved in tourism; homestay owners; tourism service providers; commune authorities; village leaders; representatives of local organizations.

Field observation concentrated on tourism infrastructure conditions, tourism service operation, environmental conditions, land-use practices, and community participation in tourism development.

The use of multiple respondent groups enabled the study to capture diverse perspectives regarding opportunities and constraints associated with tourism development following administrative restructuring.

2.3. Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted through an integrated process consisting of descriptive analysis, comparative analysis, and thematic interpretation.

First, descriptive analysis was employed to summarize demographic characteristics, tourism development indicators, livelihood conditions, and governance-related observations.

Second, comparative analysis was applied to identify differences in tourism conditions and livelihood structures across the former administrative units of Nam Mau, Khang Ninh, and Cao Thuong and to assess changes associated with post-merger governance arrangements.

Third, thematic analysis was conducted to interpret stakeholder perspectives and identify recurring governance challenges affecting tourism and community livelihoods.

Analytical interpretation was organized around three themes: livelihood transformation; tourism governance transition; sustainability implications.

Data processing and organization were conducted using Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word, while qualitative information was synthesized through iterative coding and cross-source validation.

2.4. Reliability and research limitations

To enhance research credibility, the study adopted a data triangulation strategy, integrating documentary evidence, field observations, and stakeholder perspectives. Information obtained from interviews and field observations was cross-checked with administrative reports and secondary sources to reduce reporting bias and improve consistency. However, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study relied primarily on cross-sectional evidence collected during the initial stage of post-restructuring implementation; therefore, long-term livelihood outcomes and institutional adaptation processes remain beyond the scope of the present analysis.

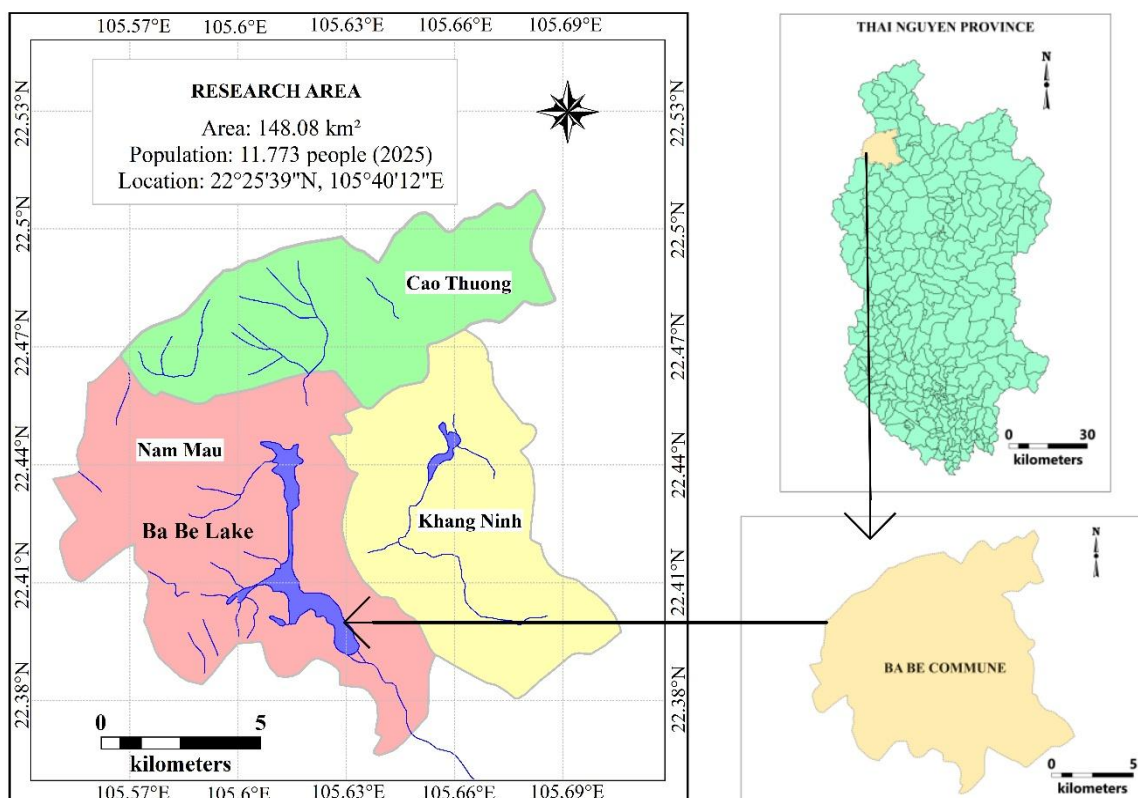
Future studies should adopt longitudinal approaches and incorporate broader comparative datasets to improve understanding of the long-term relationship between tourism development, governance transition, and community resilience.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Socio-demographic characteristics and study context of Ba Be Commune

Ba Be Commune was established following the administrative restructuring and consolidation of three former communes, namely Cao Thuong, Nam Mau and Khang Ninh. After restructuring, the commune covers a total area of 148.08 km² with a population of 11,773 people in 2025. The commune is characterized by a multi-ethnic population structure, including Tày, Nùng, Dao, Mông and Kinh communities, whose traditional livelihoods, settlement patterns and cultural practices contribute significantly to the local tourism economy [13], [14]. Located within the Ba Be Lake tourism area, the commune possesses a combination of natural and cultural resources supporting the development of ecotourism, community-based tourism and cultural tourism. The area includes the Ba Be Lake landscape system, surrounding limestone ecosystems, ethnic villages and traditional cultural activities that have become important assets for local livelihood diversification. Tourism services in the commune currently include accommodation, food services, boat transport, community-based experiences and cultural performances, creating income opportunities for local households while strengthening linkages between tourism and community development [14].

The survey results indicate that females accounted for 57.43% of respondents, exceeding the proportion of males (42.57%). This distribution suggests the active participation of women in local economic activities and reflects the service-oriented nature of tourism-related livelihoods in the study area. Female participation is particularly visible in accommodation services, food provision, retail activities and household-based tourism businesses.



Source: Authors' compilation based on administrative boundary data from the People's Committee of Ba Be Commune (2025).

Figure 1. Location and administrative structure of the study area in Ba Be Commune, Thai Nguyen Province, Vietnam.

Regarding age structure, respondents were concentrated in economically active groups, with the 38–47-year-old cohort representing the largest share (30.26%), followed by the 18–27 and 48–57 age groups. Respondents aged over 58 accounted for the smallest proportion. The age composition indicates that tourism and associated livelihood activities are mainly supported by the working-age population, who are also likely to play major roles in household economic decision-making and adaptation to changing tourism conditions. Occupational characteristics reveal a relatively diversified local economy without a single dominant employment category. Service-related occupations - including self-employment, accommodation services, food and beverage businesses, retail activities and tourism-related services - constituted an important component of local employment. At the same time, agriculture and other traditional occupations remained present, suggesting that tourism has not fully replaced existing livelihood systems but instead functions as a complementary source of income [14].

Household income levels remained concentrated in the low-to-middle income categories, with the largest proportions distributed in the VND 3–6 million and VND 6–9 million per month ranges. Households earning more than VND 12 million per month represented only a small proportion of the sample. This pattern indicates that local livelihoods continue to rely on relatively modest income sources and suggests that tourism currently serves as an additional rather than dominant economic strategy for many households [14].

Overall, the socio-demographic profile of respondents reflects a rural tourism destination in transition, where administrative restructuring, livelihood diversification and tourism expansion are occurring simultaneously. These characteristics provide an important contextual basis for analysing how tourism contributes to community livelihoods under the emerging governance conditions of Ba Be Commune.



Source: Survey data from 2025

Figure 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of surveyed households in Ba Be Commune

3.2. The role of tourism in community livelihood transformation

The findings indicate that tourism development in Ba Be Commune has generated significant transformations in the local livelihood structure through three principal mechanisms: (i) expanding opportunities for income generation and employment creation; (ii) promoting livelihood diversification and labor reallocation; and (iii) converting local cultural assets into productive economic resources. These changes reflect an ongoing transition from a livelihood system predominantly dependent on natural resource extraction toward a more diversified and integrated model in which tourism increasingly serves as a strategic driver of local development.

(1) Expanding household income opportunities and strengthening economic resilience

One of the most evident outcomes of tourism development in Ba Be Commune is the creation of supplementary income streams for local households. In addition to conventional economic activities such as agriculture and inland fisheries, local residents have increasingly participated in tourism value chains through homestay accommodation services, food and beverage provision, inland water transport, tour guiding, and community-based tourism experiences.

Local statistics indicate that by mid-2025, the Ba Be Lake tourism area and surrounding attractions welcomed more than 96,000 visitors, representing an increase of approximately 30,000 arrivals compared with the same period in the previous year. Revenue generated from entrance fees reached approximately VND 2.49 billion, indicating both growing tourism demand and increasing circulation of financial resources within the local economy. Concurrently, tourism-related activities created employment opportunities for approximately 300 workers through both direct and indirect tourism sectors. The expansion of the tourism service system further demonstrates the sector’s economic multiplier effect. By 2025, the locality had developed a network of 78 accommodation establishments with approximately 735 rooms and operated 175 tourist boats serving lake-based

tourism activities alongside other experiential tourism products. These developments suggest that tourism revenue is not concentrated among a limited number of actors but is distributed across the community through interconnected local service networks [14].

Overall, tourism in Ba Be has not replaced traditional livelihoods entirely; rather, it has emerged as an increasingly important supplementary income source that enhances household economic resilience and reduces vulnerability to market fluctuations and environmental uncertainties.

(2) Promoting livelihood diversification and occupational restructuring

Beyond its income effects, tourism has contributed substantially to occupational restructuring within local communities, particularly in areas with intensive tourism engagement.

In community-based tourism villages such as Bo Lu and Pac Ngoi, the number of households participating in tourism-related activities has reached 52 and 97 households, respectively, whereas only approximately 45 households continue to depend primarily on traditional fishing activities. Tourism-based occupations include homestay operation, food supply services, cultural performances, handicraft production, tourist transportation, and various visitor-support services.

This transition reflects a gradual shift from resource-dependent and subsistence-oriented livelihoods toward a service-oriented local economy characterized by higher value creation. Nevertheless, the observed transformation remains adaptive rather than substitutive. Most households continue to maintain multiple economic activities simultaneously, including agriculture, fisheries, and tourism-related businesses.

Such diversified livelihood strategies play an important role in distributing economic risk, reducing dependence on a single income source, and strengthening community adaptive capacity under conditions of economic uncertainty and the seasonal nature of tourism demand.

(3) Transforming cultural resources into livelihood assets and reinforcing local identity

In addition to generating economic benefits, tourism has created incentives for the conservation and revitalization of local cultural heritage as a form of community livelihood capital. This process is evident through the integration of cultural resources into the local tourism value chain. Traditional Tay ethnic brocade weaving has been revitalized through training initiatives and the establishment of a conservation model in Pac Ngoi Village, producing handicraft products for the tourism market. Simultaneously, intangible cultural heritage has increasingly been incorporated into tourism experiences, notably the Ba Be Long Tong Festival—recognized as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage—as well as seasonal community festivals that serve as important cultural attractions.

Traditional stilt-house architecture has also been preserved and adaptively reused for homestay development, while local cultural clubs featuring Then singing, Tinh lute performance, Khen dance, and community art groups continue to operate in support of tourism activities. These developments suggest that cultural resources are no longer perceived solely as symbolic heritage but increasingly function as productive assets capable of generating economic returns while simultaneously reinforcing local identity.

From a sustainable development perspective, the evidence suggests that tourism in Ba Be Commune has become an effective mechanism for livelihood transformation by simultaneously generating economic value, preserving cultural identity, and strengthening endogenous community development capacity. Nevertheless, ensuring long-term sustainability will require continued investment in community-based tourism governance, human resource development, and strategies to reduce excessive dependence on tourism-led growth.

3.3. Emerging Governance Challenges for Tourism Development and Community Livelihoods after Administrative Restructuring

The findings indicate that administrative restructuring has created favourable conditions for expanding the tourism development space in Ba Be Commune; however, it has simultaneously generated a new set of challenges related to destination governance, resource-use coordination, and the long-term sustainability of community livelihoods. These challenges reflect an ongoing transition from fragmented administrative management toward tourism governance within a larger and more integrated territorial system.

(1) Tourism infrastructure development has not kept pace with destination expansion

Although tourism activities have continued to grow and local authorities have invested in tourism facilities and destination infrastructure, the supporting infrastructure system remains insufficient to meet development demands under the expanded governance and management space following administrative consolidation.

Field observations and consultations with local stakeholders indicate that several essential tourism facilities remain inadequate or operate below expected standards. These include docking and landing facilities for

tourist transport, destination signage systems, visitor rest areas, public sanitation facilities, and public spaces designed to support tourism experiences. In addition, several supporting service spaces, particularly night-market activities, remain unstable and have not yet generated sufficient destination attractiveness to encourage longer visitor stays.

These limitations suggest that current tourism growth continues to rely primarily on the exploitation of existing natural and cultural assets rather than on destination quality enhancement and tourism value upgrading.

(2) Environmental pressure and increasing complexity in governing common-pool resources

Alongside the expansion of tourism activities and increasing demand for tourism-related investment, pressure on environmental resources in the Ba Be Lake area has become increasingly evident. Emerging concerns include upstream solid waste accumulation, land-use pressure, and construction activities occurring within ecologically sensitive areas.

According to local government reports, 16 violations related to land management and construction order were recorded in 2025, including four cases of encroachment on protected forest land and twelve cases of unauthorized or non-compliant construction activities.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings reflect typical characteristics of Common Pool Resource Theory, whereby multiple actors simultaneously utilize a shared resource system while institutional arrangements for authority allocation, monitoring, and responsibility-sharing fail to evolve at the same pace as development. In the case of Ba Be, where the area simultaneously functions as a residential space, tourism destination, and conservation landscape, tensions between resource utilization and environmental protection are likely to intensify in the absence of effective coordination mechanisms.

(3) Challenges in destination governance capacity and tourism human resource quality

Following administrative restructuring, tourism development in Ba Be has shifted from a localized community-scale model toward a governance framework involving multiple actors, including local government, community residents, sectoral management agencies, and tourism-related business operators. However, institutional coordination mechanisms among these stakeholders remain under development and have yet to reach full operational effectiveness.

At the same time, tourism activities continue to be dominated by household-based businesses operating at small scale with limited professionalization. Accommodation services, food and beverage operations, and tourism experiences remain largely driven by short-term market demand, while product integration and value-chain connectivity remain weak. In addition, the quality of local tourism human resources has not yet fully responded to the requirements of an increasingly competitive and rapidly evolving tourism market.

Table 3. Emerging tourism governance challenges after administrative restructuring in Ba Be Commune

Challenge category	Observed manifestations	Implications for tourism development	Implications for community livelihoods
Tourism infrastructure	Insufficient docking facilities, destination signage, public sanitation facilities, and unstable operation of night-market activities	Reduced visitor experience quality and shorter length of stay	Limited capacity to increase local tourism expenditure
Resource governance	Upstream waste accumulation; 16 land-related violations (4 cases of protected forest encroachment; 12 cases of unauthorized construction)	Increased pressure on landscape quality and environmental resources	Reduced livelihood sustainability
Human resources	Household-based business structure; weak inter-sectoral linkages; low professionalization	Constraints on tourism product upgrading	Limited income improvement
Institutional coordination	Overlapping objectives between tourism expansion and conservation management	Higher governance and coordination costs	Lower efficiency in benefit distribution

Source: Authors' compilation based on field investigation and secondary data.

The findings reveal a noteworthy paradox: while administrative restructuring expands the scale of governance and creates opportunities for integrated destination development, it simultaneously increases the complexity of governing common resources and coordinating tourism development. This observation aligns with the Collaborative Governance approach, which emphasizes the importance of multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms in destination governance. At the same time, the findings suggest the early emergence of pressures

associated with overtourism in protected areas, where tourism growth may gradually exceed environmental carrying capacity and governance capability if appropriate regulatory instruments are not introduced.

3.4. Policy implications for sustainable tourism development and strengthening community livelihood resilience

The findings suggest that tourism development in Ba Be Commune under the post-restructuring governance context should move beyond expansion-oriented growth and instead prioritize governance quality, local value creation, environmental stewardship, and livelihood resilience. Based on the identified governance constraints and development opportunities, several policy implications are proposed.

(1) Establishing an integrated destination governance model and strengthening institutional coordination

Tourism governance should gradually transition from fragmented administrative management toward an integrated destination management approach based on coordination among commune authorities, the management authority of Ba Be National Park, local communities, and tourism businesses. In operational terms, priority should be given to defining clear management responsibilities, establishing inter-agency coordination mechanisms, and strengthening local implementation capacity. Particular attention should be paid to developing tourism governance at the commune level following administrative restructuring, including consideration of assigning selected cultural and spiritual attractions—such as An Ma Temple—to commune-level management in order to improve destination integration and strengthen local benefit retention.

Administrative reform should accompany this transition through simplification of procedures related to investment approval, land clearance, tourism service licensing, and infrastructure development in order to create a more enabling environment for responsible tourism investment.

(2) Upgrading tourism value chains and improving destination competitiveness

Rather than pursuing growth based primarily on visitor numbers, Ba Be should prioritize increasing economic value generated per visitor through destination diversification and product upgrading. Investment should focus on gradually improving tourism-support infrastructure, including visitor access facilities, docking stations, public sanitation systems, signage, public spaces, and destination interpretation facilities. Simultaneously, tourism routes and destination clusters should be developed to strengthen spatial integration among tourism areas and improve visitor circulation.

Tourism product diversification should prioritize experience-based and place-based offerings, including community tourism, ecotourism, cultural tourism, spiritual tourism, and nature-based recreation. Existing tourism assets should be linked with thematic tourism experiences, local gastronomy, and high-value local products to increase destination attractiveness and extend visitor length of stay. Destination promotion should increasingly utilize digital communication channels, destination branding, festivals, and community-based events such as night markets to strengthen market visibility.

(3) Diversifying livelihoods through local value-chain integration and community participation

Tourism should function as a catalyst for building integrated livelihood systems rather than replacing traditional economic activities. Local development strategies should promote stronger linkages among tourism, agriculture, OCOP products, traditional crafts, and cultural experiences. Specific emphasis should be placed on expanding community tourism associated with traditional villages, indigenous architecture, local food systems, brocade products, and agricultural experiences such as flower cultivation and local food production.

Communities should be encouraged to develop tourism services linked to local identity while improving service quality at homestays and community-based tourism sites. Capacity-building interventions should focus on practical skills including guiding, hospitality operations, visitor management, and experience design.

At the same time, local authorities should strengthen tourism awareness campaigns to reinforce the understanding that tourism development is not solely a government responsibility but a shared responsibility among communities, businesses, and public institutions.

(4) Strengthening environmental regulation and implementing spatial control for protected destination management

Given increasing environmental pressure and land-use conflicts, environmental governance should become a central pillar of tourism policy in Ba Be. Priority actions should include strengthening land-use monitoring, maintaining effective ticket and visitor control systems, improving environmental inspection mechanisms, and enhancing enforcement against illegal construction and unauthorized land conversion.

Environmental investment should prioritize waste collection and treatment systems around Ba Be Lake and support infrastructure for environmentally responsible tourism operations.

Development planning should also align with long-term strategic directions established under Decision No. 1407/QĐ-TTg, which emphasizes three strategic priorities: (i) superior conservation of geological landscapes, ecosystems, and indigenous cultural heritage; (ii) sustainable tourism development toward establishing Ba Be as a National Tourism Area before 2030; and (iii) integrated spatial planning supported by coordinated infrastructure and regional connectivity.

Consistent with this orientation, tourism development should adopt a functional spatial approach based on differentiated destination zones and strengthened regional integration. Tourism products should be aligned with the comparative advantages of each area, including community-based tourism, ecological recreation, environmental education, cultural experiences, and spiritual tourism.

Finally, market development should continue to prioritize domestic tourism while progressively increasing the share of international visitors, particularly environmentally responsible and high-value market segments capable of generating greater economic returns while reducing pressure on environmental carrying capacity.



Figure 5. Policy framework for strengthening sustainable tourism and livelihood resilience under post-restructuring governance.

Figure 5 illustrates the proposed policy framework for enhancing sustainable tourism development and strengthening community livelihood resilience under the post-restructuring governance context in Ba Be Commune. The framework suggests that sustainable destination development should not rely solely on tourism expansion but instead emerge from coordinated interventions across four interconnected dimensions: governance reform, tourism value upgrading, livelihood diversification, and environmental regulation.

Governance reform provides the institutional foundation for improving coordination among local authorities, protected-area management agencies, tourism businesses, and local communities. Tourism value upgrading focuses on increasing local economic returns through higher-quality experiences rather than increasing visitor numbers. Livelihood diversification enhances community adaptive capacity by strengthening linkages among tourism, agriculture, OCOP products, and local cultural assets. Environmental regulation functions as a cross-cutting mechanism to maintain ecosystem integrity and control development pressure within the protected landscape. Collectively, these interventions contribute to building a more resilient tourism system capable of balancing economic development, environmental conservation, and community well-being.

Therefore, tourism sustainability in Ba Be should be understood as the outcome of governance quality, livelihood resilience, and environmental stewardship rather than tourism growth alone.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study examined the evolving relationship between tourism development and community livelihoods in Ba Be Commune under the context of administrative restructuring. The findings demonstrate that the consolidation of former administrative units has not only altered territorial boundaries but has also transformed the scale and governance structure of tourism development, generating both new development opportunities and emerging institutional challenges.

The results indicate that tourism has increasingly become an important driver of local livelihood transformation. The expansion of tourism activities has contributed to diversifying household income sources, creating employment opportunities, and facilitating a gradual transition from traditional livelihood systems toward service-oriented economic activities. Tourism development has also supported the conservation and economic revitalization of local cultural resources through community-based tourism, traditional handicrafts, cultural performances, and homestay services closely associated with indigenous identity and local cultural heritage.

However, the study also reveals that tourism-led livelihood transformation in Ba Be remains incomplete and uneven. Economic benefits generated from tourism continue to coexist with agriculture and traditional occupations rather than fully replacing them. At the same time, the rapid expansion of the destination under the

new administrative structure has generated governance pressures related to infrastructure provision, environmental protection, land-use control, and coordination among multiple stakeholders involved in tourism development.

A particularly significant finding is that administrative restructuring creates a governance paradox: while territorial integration expands development opportunities and enables the emergence of an integrated destination system, it simultaneously increases the complexity of governing shared tourism resources and balancing competing objectives among tourism growth, environmental conservation, and community well-being. Recorded land-use violations, increasing environmental pressure, and institutional coordination challenges indicate that governance capacity has not yet fully adapted to the changing scale of destination development.

From a theoretical perspective, the study suggests that sustainable tourism outcomes depend not only on tourism growth itself but also on the capacity of governance systems to coordinate stakeholders, regulate resource use, and maintain local livelihood resilience. This finding reinforces the importance of governance-oriented approaches in understanding tourism sustainability within protected and institutionally transitioning destinations.

From a practical perspective, the study highlights four strategic priorities for Ba Be Commune in the coming period: (i) strengthening integrated and community-based tourism governance; (ii) upgrading tourism value rather than relying solely on increasing visitor numbers; (iii) promoting livelihood diversification through stronger linkages among tourism, agriculture, local products, and cultural assets; and (iv) enhancing environmental governance and spatial management to protect ecosystem integrity and maintain destination quality.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the long-term success of tourism development in Ba Be should not be measured solely through increases in tourist arrivals or tourism revenue, but also through the extent to which tourism contributes to conserving environmental resources, strengthening community resilience, preserving local identity, and creating inclusive and adaptive development pathways under the post-restructuring governance context.

This study has several limitations. The analysis primarily relied on household survey data, field observations, and administrative reports collected during the early phase of post-restructuring implementation; therefore, long-term livelihood outcomes and institutional adaptation processes could not yet be fully assessed. Future research should adopt longitudinal research designs and incorporate comparative analyses across tourism destinations undergoing similar administrative transitions in order to better understand the long-term implications of governance restructuring for tourism sustainability and community well-being.

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