



The Role of Tourism in Socio-Economic Development in Lao PDR in the Modern Time

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Abstract—This study used the qualitative method and the secondary data was used, which based on the study found that the tourism industry is a crucial sector that contributes to the international, regional and national economic development for several countries in the world. The tourism industry in Lao PDR has assumed a crucial role in the socio-economic development-taking place in Lao PDR. The tourism is a significant element within the future economic strategy of Lao PDR, and the industry's growth builds upon a diverse and exciting portfolio of natural, cultural and heritage resources, the tourism has been put as a priority on the development of the sector as complementary to existing areas of economic activity. The Lao government has launched the program of infrastructure maintenance and installation to promote the national tourism. However, there are some challenges and constraints in the tourism development and promotion in Lao PDR that they should be solved by the concerned sectors for the better sustainable tourism in the future in Lao PDR.

Keywords—Tourism, Role of tourism, Challenge, Constraint, Lao PDR.

I. INTRODUCTION

Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), is a land-locked country situated in the heart of Southeast Asia. It covers approximately 236,800 square kilometers and shares borders with five countries such as China to the north, Cambodia to the south, Vietnam to the east, and Thailand and Myanmar to the west. Lao PDR consists of 17 provinces and one capital (Vientiane Capital), a population of approximately 6.5 million, spread among 49 ethnic groups [1], that the ethnic groups are grouped into four broad ethnolinguistic categories such as Lao-Tai, Mon Khmer, Hmong-Iu Mien and Chine-Tibet. Most of the minority ethnic groups live mainly in the northern uplands of Lao PDR near the borders that about 85% of this population live in rural areas. The Buddhism is the most widely practiced religion. Lao PDR has two seasons such as the rainy season, which extends from May to October and the dry season from November to April [2]. Its transport system depends heavily on the road network as well as through natural calamities. Although considerable network rehabilitation has been achieved, network coverage must be further extended to remote areas to enable their access to social services, trade, and

income and employment opportunities [3]. Lao PDR is the heart of the Greater Mekong Sub-Region (GMS), which compared to its neighbors, Lao PDR is smaller, with a lower population, and is rich in natural resources. This combination of favorable geographic location and abundant natural resources means that Lao PDR has great potential for rapid socio-economic development, even as it must ensure the protection of its production environment and ecosystems in the long term. Given its strategic location, Lao PDR aims to become a land link and center of logistics for the GMS. In recent decades, the development of road networks and transport within the country has given rise to the rapid north south and east west economic corridors with international linkages [4]. The tourism is one of the industrial sectors that rapidly grow widely in many countries around the world. At present, many countries have paid special attention to the development and promotion of tourism, as it is a key sector for socio-economic development [5]. The current tourism industry is a very sound concept and is growing very fast in the world. The tourism is a critical sector that contributes to the regional and national economic development for several countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, Singapore, etc. The tourism is the provision of services for all travelers worldwide with the aim of income generation, recreating employment, economic contribution, promotion of better relationship with different countries, learning alternative cultures and experiences and etc. so, tourism does stimulate enormous investment infrastructures, create new tourism jobs and businesses, most of which can help to improve the living conditions of the local people. The tourism does not only serve the travelers, but it also brings advantages back to both direct and indirect stakeholders, who are provide the services and products for the travelers as well. Subsequently, tourism becomes a popular industry attracting various residents to form their business in the tourism sector [6]. Since 1989, the tourism industry in Lao PDR has been geared up to welcome international tourists, and within just two decades, tourism has assumed a crucial role in the socio-economic development taking place in Lao PDR, from its northern to the southern parts. The tourism is a major element within the future economic strategy of Lao PDR, and the industry's development builds upon a diverse and exciting portfolio of natural, cultural and heritage resources, which are dispersed across the country. The tourism industry in the Lao PDR is in its infancy when compared to regional and international competitors. It is only recently that the country has placed priority on the development of the sector as complementary to existing areas of economic activity. The tourism sector in Lao PDR is also fragmented and dominated,

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in organizational terms, by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). These businesses in Lao PDR as worldwide are seen to under-perform in their capacity and capability to operate effective business systems, including those related to training and development [7]. The Lao government has launched the program of infrastructure maintenance and installation as the construction of the road, telecommunication, electricity and water supply, airports, hotels, restaurants, tourist's sites, the supply of foodstuffs and souvenirs, etc. To attend facilities for all stakeholders who might engage in the tourism industries; even the national or international tourists, the services providers and promoters themselves. With this regards, the government has taken into account of human development, cultural preservation and protecting the regional environment while promoting the tourism industry development [8]. Therefore, this study aims to find out the role of tourism, the challenges and constraints of the tourism in socio-economic development in Lao PDR in the modern time.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study used the qualitative method, which secondary data was collected from some local and international published and unpublished books, e-book, journals, and other documents such as the constitution, policies, the law on tourism and textbooks of the Lao tourism by observation, summarization, analysis, interpretation, and explanation.

III. RESULTS OF STUDY

A. *The role of tourism in socioeconomic in Lao PDR*

The meaning of tourism

The tourism is the travel of the people from one's location to other locations or countries with the purpose of visiting, sightseeing, relaxation, entertainment, cultural exchange, sport, health promotion, research and study, exhibitions, meetings, etc, that is without any intention to seek work or undertake a professional career in order to make a profit in any form.

Types of Tourism Resources

The tourism resources are divided into two types such as nature tourism resources and human made tourism resources.

1) *The nature Tourism Resources*

The nature tourism resources consist of landscape scenery, cliffs, caves, plateaus, high mountains, volcanoes, flatlands, forests, plants, wild and aquatic animals, insects, flowers, rivers, islands, beaches, ponds, marshes, waterfalls, rapids, hot springs, natural occurrences, and others.

2) *The human made Tourism Resources*

The humanmade tourism resources consist of (1) cultural tourism resources are arts, architecture, ethnologic sites, antiques, anthropologic sites, pagodas, buildings, houses, artistic literature, traditional festivals, cultural events, ceremonies, rites, livelihood practices, trade centers, and exhibition halls; (2) historical tourism resources are museums,

monuments, houses of worship, the birth places, residences and working places of essential people, and battle fields; and (3) manmade tourism resources resembling nature are national parks, amusement parks, zoos, and simulated sites.

3) *The tourism policy in Lao PDR*

The Lao government has provided the policy to promote and develop the tourism in Lao PDR as the state centrally and uniformly administers the conservation, protection, and development of cultural, historic, and nature tourism throughout the country in a sustainable manner and with the participation of the community; the state considers tourism to be a component of the national economy and to promote products and services that enhance the export reputation, create employment, generate income and improve the livelihood of the multi-ethnic Lao people; the state and society encourage the advertising of activities, festivals, cultural events, ceremonies, beautiful national traditions, and the heroic heritage of the multi-ethnic Lao people, in order to promote domestic tourism and attract foreign tourists; the state respects and protects the legitimate interests of tourists, including assuring their safety; and the state supports international cooperation in tourism to exchange lessons and information, to build and train officials, to attract assistance, to encourage investments, and to advertise Lao tourism, in order to support tourism development and provide an international standard of tourism services [9]. The central policies concerning tourism development in Lao PDR are to implement an open-door policy involving cooperation with foreign nations in economic and cultural matters; to promote tourism development to alleviate poverty and stimulate local production; to create employment opportunities; to generate and distribute income among the multi-ethnic Lao people; to develop, promote and conserve the arts, culture, and beautiful traditions of the Lao people; and to preserve and protect ancient archaeological sites, historic monuments, and the natural environment [10].

B. *The strategy on the tourism*

1) *The objective of 2006-2020 tourism strategic plans*

The tourism strategy is a master plan document to define policy, guidelines and overall goal of the development and promotion of tourism, which will be in line with the party congress resolution, national socioeconomic plan and strategy in order to strengthen and develop tourism, which to become an industrial sector that generate foreign exchange revenue for the country; to provide more employment; to promote the cultural conservation and preserve the proper norms and customs that is including the protection of abundant natural resources; to develop products in order to contribute the poverty reduction of all ethnic groups. This strategy is the ground strategy for international integration, which is also fundamental for formulating the plan and action plan for short and medium term for development and promotion of tourism in the macro-tourism management, tourism development plan, tourism business and activities management, advertisement promotion and tourism marketing, human resource development, international cooperation, cooperation with line sectors, etc. The tourism strategy is also for raising awareness

of significance and benefits gained from tourism of the line sectors, local authorities, entrepreneur, villages, and communities.

2) *Strategy and overall goals*

The strategy and overall goals on development and promotion of tourism 2006-2020 in Lao PDR, which has been proposed as (1) to develop Lao PDR to be globally well-know tourism in terms of culture, natural and historical tourism in sustainable and participatory manner that can actively contribute to socioeconomic development and poverty reduction of all ethnic groups; (2) to develop and promote the tourism that must be complying with actual capacity, with development focus and specific targets with the aim at maintaining good picture and reputation of our country; (3) to develop and promote the tourism that shall be in line with support to local socio-economic development that will undoubtedly contribute to the growth of the national economic framework continuously; (4) to develop and promote the tourism, which shall be attached to national security natural protection, protection of culture and proper honors and customs of all ethnic groups; (5) to develop and promote the tourism that shall be in line with the promotion of responsibilities of all sectors and localities, and of all economic industry and general public areas, which all aims at the growth in tourism industry in order to be part of international and regional integration; (6) to strengthen tourism cooperation with international organizations and other countries; especially the countries in Asia-Pacific, ASEAN, and Mekong Sub-region; (7) to continue to update regulations and conditions that are necessary to facilitate the entry-exit process in country traveling that to link to neighbor countries in order to make Lao PDR to be integrated transit country including regional and international integration; and (8) to continue the improvement of organizational machinery and management mechanism in tourism that is including tourism development plan, advertisement and promotion of tourism; creation and development of tourism products with diversified forms; tourism awareness raising; personnel development in tourism sector; support and promotion of investment in tourism activities; collaboration with sectors and localities [11].

3) *Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan 2005-2010*

The Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan, which formed in 2004, aims to promote sustainable practices in the vital tourism sector. The strategy envisaged that by 2010 Lao PDR would like to become a renowned destination specializing in forms of sustainable tourism that benefit natural and cultural heritage conservation, local socioeconomic development and spread knowledge of the country's unique cultural heritage around the world. Thus, there are principles are (1) to minimize adverse impacts of tourism on national nature and culture; (2) to increase awareness among all stakeholders of the importance of ethnic diversity and biodiversity conservation; (3) to promote responsible business practices, which work cooperatively with local authorities and people to support poverty alleviation and deliver conservation benefits; (4) to provide a source of sustainable income, conserve and manage the Lao PDR

protected area network and cultural heritage sites; (5) to emphasize the need for tourism zoning and visitor management plans for sites that will be developed as eco-destinations; (6) to use environmental and social baseline data, as well as long-term monitoring programs, and to assess and minimize adverse impacts of tourism; (7) to maximize the economic benefit of tourism for the national economy, especially local businesses and people living in and around the protected area network; (8) to ensure that tourism development does not exceed the social and environmental limits of acceptable change, as determined by researchers in cooperation with residents; and (9) to promote local styles of architecture and infrastructure that are developed in harmony with the Lao culture and environment, that use local materials, that minimize energy consumption, and that conserve local plants and wildlife [12].

C. *The implementation of the tourism development policy*

The IV Party Congress of the Lao People's Revolution Party (LPRP) in 1986, which defined the new integrated and open door policy to the world, the tourism has gradually been raised important. The Laotian tourism has developed and expanded rapidly, and it gradually came to play an important role in social and economic development. The government's new comprehensive policy and enlarged international cooperation policy changed from spontaneous tourism to market-oriented business operations, which enabled Laotian tourism to grow steadily. The Lao government has identified and declared the implementation, development, and promotion of cultural, natural and historical tourism as to foster the growth in tourism and other service sectors. The Lao government has improved and developed the infrastructure developments such as the road constructions to link from the northern to the central and the southern parts; the communication technology provides for easy and reliable communication with the outside world, the national electricity grid, and water supply. The Lao government has been attempting to extend more entry and exit checkpoints in various parts to link with many different countries. Also, visa exemption for some member countries has been allowed. The airport facilities have been upgraded and expanded to foster the growth in the tourism. There are currently total seventeen international checkpoints that the tourists can get a visa on arrival along the thirteen checkpoints. There are now three international airports in Vientiane Capital, Luang Prabang, and Pakse. Furthermore, the country has entered into visa-free agreements with eight other ASEAN countries and recently declared a visa exemption for Japanese tourists staying for two weeks or less, except Indonesia and Myanmar [13]. The tourism promotion and development in Lao PDR over the past two decades have generated a dramatic expansion of domestic tourism with consolidated networks. Concepts of tourism have been applied by the government's tourism promotion policy such as natural, cultural and historical tourism, emphasizing community participation and conservation of natural and tourism resources for sustainable community development, and the local communities have accepted the government policy by developing tourist destinations to attract more visitors. On the one hand, the Lao government opened its borders with neighboring countries to facilitate for foreign tourists and support the investment in infrastructure to link tourist

resources. The Lao National Tourism Company, founded in 1989, was the first tourism company that operated tourism business in the name of the government. Until 1991, this company monopolized tourism in the country, sometimes as a joint-venture business with private shareholders, before private tourism companies emerged. In 1992, the government of Lao PDR set up the Lao National Tourism Authority and commissioned it to leverage the expansion of tourism. Subsequently, various policies and provisions associated with tourism were announced, resulting in the dramatic growth of the industry [14].

Through implementing and promotion of the tourism policy, the tourism sector has been rapidly and increasingly growing up. In general, from 1990 to 2005, the number of tourists entered in the Lao PDR increased at the average rate of 27.6% per annum. In 1990, there were only 14,400 tourists, 37,113 in 1991 with 2,250,000 US\$ as revenue. From 1990 to 2000, the Visit Lao PDR Year had begun, which reflected the huge increase of tourists, for example, there were 737,208 tourists in 2000 and earned the revenue of 113,898,285 US\$, which was considered the largest income in all exporting economic sectors that the tourism sector has been rank as the number one of exports. In 2004, after the hosting of ASEAN Fair, the number of tourists increased to 894,806 persons and earned 118,947,707 US\$ as revenue. In 2005 there were 1.1 million tourists entered in to Lao PDR, which based on the recent growing number of tourists and regular flow rate, it is estimated that there will be 1.6 million tourists in 2010; 2.2 millions in 2015; and 3 million in 2020 with expected revenue of 250-350 million US Dollars per year [15]. As the World Travel and Tourism Organization (WTTC) indicated that the travel and tourism is the growing industry which generates 9% of global GDP and travel in South East Asia leads the world in the expansion. Culture tourism has also become the greatest growing segment of tourism. These trends stimulate Lao PDR' position as a tourism destination as the country located in the region. The outstanding of country's natural resources, the uniqueness of cultural heritage and the government support make Lao PDR won the World Best Tourist Destination in 2013. The Tourism Industry is one of the most important and significant economic sectors in Lao PDR (Lao PDR) because it provides huge sources of income to Lao economy. The WTTC reported that visitor exports are a key component of the direct contribution of the travel and tourism in Lao PDR. It generated LAK 3,951 billion in 2013 and is expected to grow by 9.1% in 2014. The WTTC also forecasted that tourism industry in Lao PDR ranked the fourteenth in the Asia Pacific countries in the contribution to GDP. The direct contribution of the travel and tourism to GDP was LAK 3,893.8 billion (4.7% of GDP). It forecast to rise by 8.7% to LAK 4,230 billion in 2014 and is expected to grow by 5.8% to LAK 7,436.6 billion (4.4% of GDP) in 2024. Also, the total contribution of the travel and tourism to GDP was LAK 11,803.7 billion in 2013 (14.2% of GDP) and is expected to grow by 8.7% to LAK 12,829.6 billion (14.3% of GDP) in 2014. It forecast to rise by 6.1% pa to LAK 23,301.8 billion by 2024 (13.9% of GDP). MICT1 further reported that the tourism sector contributed approximately 514 million US\$ to the Lao economy in 2012. This was a 26.43% increase over the previous year. The

number of tourists who visited Lao PDR has increased gradually since 2004. It reached 3,330,072 people in 2012, which was a 22.43% increase over the previous year. The share of Thai tourists was top, accounting for 58.18% of visitors (1,937,612 people), followed by Vietnamese at 21.18% (705,596 people) and Chinese at 10.47% (348,637 people) [16]. International visitor arrivals to the Lao PDR totaled 4.68 million in 2015, a 13% increase compared to 2014. Thailand is the largest source market and accounts for 49.6% of international arrivals, followed by Viet Nam (25.4%) and the PRC (10.9%). The main medium- and long-haul markets are the Republic of Korea, France, and the United States. The fastest-growing market, from a substantial base, is the Republic of Korea. Long-haul overnight international visitors stay an average of 7.5 days and spend \$77 per day, while intraregional visitors are entering with a passport stay an average of 3 days and spend \$43 per day. About 33% of all reported visitor arrivals are lower-spending daytrippers who mainly enter at Vientiane Capital, Savannakhet, and Luang Namtha. The main purpose of the visit is leisure, religious pilgrimage, or business. There is also an active gaming industry, with border casinos in Savannakhet and Bokeo provinces. The most popular destinations are Vientiane Capital, Savannakhet, Vientiane Province, and Luang Prabang. Less than 1% of international visitors use inbound tour operators, but half combine their visit to the Lao PDR with a visit to Thailand. The Lao PDR has 2,449 guesthouses and hotels, with 48,386 bedrooms, of which less than 10% are five-star rated. After recently reducing barriers to international investment in tour services, the number of registered operators more than doubled to 336 between 2009 and 2015. However, the number of actively licensed tour guides (604) is insufficient to meet demand. International airports in Luang Prabang, Pakse, Savannakhet, and Vientiane are served by 9,900 flights per year, with 1.16 million scheduled inbound seats. The Lao PDR allows tourist visa on arrival for 180 countries and tourist visa exemption for citizens of all ASEAN member states [17]. The tourism envisioned as a potent economic force in the Lao PDR; questions arise as to how villagers can be empowered to use and access its economic potential in a participatory manner. Rural villagers and the tourism industry are mutually dependant on one another: it is rural village life and culture and the surrounding environment which are the main attractions for tourists [18]. On one hand, based on the strategic framework for sustainable development in Lao PDR, progress or achievements in ecotourism in this context have focused on the number of tourists arrivals, revenues generated from tourism industry overall, revenues from ecotourism and/or responsible tourism and the Community-Based Tourism (CBT), number of tourism-attraction conservation projects and state of the environment at tourism sites. In this regards and however, the key progress and achievements since 1990 are in the view of steady growth of tourist arrivals and revenues; policy, direction and management that promoting sustainability aspects in this sector. With more favorable enabling policy, infrastructure and promotion namely open up policy, market mechanism and investment promotion including tourism marketing; tourists and revenues increased sharply for past twenty years. The socioeconomic development plan 2006-2010, tourism development strategy to 2020, ecotourism strategy 2010

including provincial tourism development sites management plans set a clear direction, policy and principle that tourism development in Lao PDR should follow the sustainable and pro-poor practices as well as the community-based and ecotourism with promotion focus on natural, cultural-heritage and historical tourism. In practice, although there is no precise information and assessment, it can be said that the majority of product development and marketing are in line with these policies [19].

D. The challenges and constraints of the tourism development in Lao PDR

However, even tourism development and promotion in Lao PDR have seen mainly as the primary instrument for stimulating new economic activities; it somehow may have a negative impact if there is ineffective planning structure, especially, adverse effect on the environment of the country. In contrast, if there is a proper plan for tourism development, plenty of direct and indirect stakeholders would sure be able to benefit from it. A tourism characteristic has a vital role in increasing the number of labors market. The tourism activities are also highly depended on the availability and quality of the labor input as it is the primary variable driving the value and quality of the tourism. Therefore, there are some challenges of the tourism promotion and development in Lao PDR that are the impacts from global situation such as (1) international political turmoil, international terrorism, epidemic diseases, which will binder the long distance travelers; (2) increase in oil price that affect the service cost, (3) competition on tourism market is high, each country have used high technology and upgrade their standards and quality services; on the other hand, they lower the costs to attract more tourists to their own countries; (4) Lao PDR has poor and limited infrastructure such as roads communication linking our country to neighbor countries, access roads to main tourism site, limited telecommunication network and international transport, most of the transport modes are in old condition, especially airplanes; (5) entrepreneurs undertaken tourism businesses are facing with in sufficient fund; lack of experience; Limited professional skills; (6) organizational structure and personnel management in tourism cannot yet catch up with the growth of tourism; (7) implementation of policy and regulations to facilitate the entry into and exist out of the country are not equal, some places are too lax in terms of restriction that sometimes affect the national security, and some areas are too strict that in turn, hinder the travel without reasons; (8) in general development of tourism sites is still at primary level, which at some places, infrastructures are not available, and service modes do not attract tourists; and (9) the restriction and cessation of unwanted exotic culture including drug, women and child, prostitution are still needed particular attention [20].

However, in parallel with progress and achievement, challenges facing the tourism industry and ecotourism in Lao PDR remain, particularly preservation of natural, cultural and heritage, the essential tourism resources from threats and appropriate marketing Lao PDR as a well-known green tourism destination. There are some details of constraints are as following.

E. The Poverty

There is high poverty that has hindered development particularly in achieving sustainable development in Lao PDR. Eradicating poverty by 2015 as targeted is a big challenge given average poverty reduction rate about 2.3 percent per year for eighteen years, 1992/1993 to 2010 and current status poverty 26 percent. Achieving 2015 target; from 2010 to 2015, at least poverty reduction should not less than 5.2 percent per year on average, and in this regard, it requires efforts and investment more than double compared to the previous period.

F. The low human resources and capacity management

The constraint of the low human resources and capacity management are the human development index is low and slowly improved or 0.001 for twelve years, from 0.518 in 1995 to 0.619 in 2007 and still ranked 138 out of 187 countries in 2011. It indicates that hardship of Lao PDR to move sustainable development. In addition, the tourism management are unclear division of responsibilities among stakeholders, particularly management of tourism and ecotourism assets, for example, natural asset or heritage; lack of integrated planning and decision making, including coordination, given that tourism is multi-sector; leading to number of tourism resources are being at risk due to increase of development projects; lacking of national experience and capacities in the ecotourism industry, especially among other stakeholders and rural communities; and financial constraints due to inadequate domestic and international funding, including limited access to favorable credit for investment. On the other hand, the tourism and hotel management courses were offered as the required course at the National University of Laos in Vientiane from 2005 [21].

G. The products, marketing, and information

The constraint of the products, marketing, and information, are lacking financial support for marketing and capacity in marketing. Budget allocation for product development and marketing is limited, which Lacking budget and budget allocation are considered as core elements hindering sustainable development. Limited budgets caused insufficient budget allocation as well as ineffective mainstreaming and implementation of activities specifically for realizing sustainability. It is also same for the private sector is still small scales. So the majority of development and marketing depend on foreign support through projects and programs; limited information and interpretation about tourism sites; and lack of progress and enhancement of unique and quality products. Furthermore, lacking guidelines, research, and development, multi-faceted and more dynamic aspects of sustainable development, without guidance, good and sufficient information may not only constrain sustainable practices but also can affect policies and program planning and implementation

H. The infrastructure and facilities

The constraint of the infrastructure and facilities are inadequate infrastructure, leading to insufficient access to existing and potential tourism sites, which is including the lacking of core institutions, with no specific responsible body for sustainable development, may lead to inefficient and

ineffective sustainable development efforts in the medium and longer term. Also, the degradation of the environment and natural resources that progress often gives rise to opportunity costs for environmental and natural resources. If future financing, law enforcement, capacity, and technology transfer and an integrated approach are not appropriately applied, the natural resource could be at risk and unproductive, leading to a negative impact on sustainable development.

I. The external factors

The constraint of external factors is increasing the world oil prices, the regional and global political and economic instability, natural disasters and infectious disease outbreak. Therefore, social and economic inequality and disparities may worsen if serious action is not be taken to address these widening development gaps, which will lead to such increases mean increased risks for sustainable development [22].

J. The lesson learned

Based on the previous performance and the growth of the tourism development and promotion in Lao PDR, there are some lessons learned such as (1) dissemination of the government's laws and party's policies on the tourism development and promotion to all social sectors to profoundly and correctly understand is the key factors and could not be ignored; (2) institutional strengthening with both central and levels is the fundamental factor to the success in the tourism development and promotion that there should be enough numbers of qualified, capable, creative staffs who are endeavored to their responsibilities, together with the improvement of working style, maintain internal solidarity; (3) planning and development of tourist sites shall have to be in line with the policy of tourism development that is natural, cultural and historical tourisms. Thus, the infrastructure development must equally be distributed throughout the country, especially the remote areas in order to make all provinces become the unique cycle of tourism and linked to each other; (4) to increase coordination with sectors and local authorities is the key factors both for raising the awareness on tourism development and infrastructure and facilities development. The tourism management and development must support the cooperation, coordination, participation of all levels and sectors concerned including communities and other associations to secure for safety, quality service, setting of reasonable fees, promotion of domestic goods production, production of souvenirs, promotion of fairs and traditional festivals to boost tourism; (5) organization structure and personnel system at central, provincial, district levels have to be improved and developed sufficiently to meet the demand of qualitative standards, the provisions and regulations must be adequate and updated, and the knowledge and understanding of social public towards tourism should be deepened; (6) internal agency coordination between public and private should be harmonized and continuous, and the mandate of the organizational machinery should be balanced and strictly with the tourism development and promotion; and (7) to seek for cooperation and assistance from international organizations on markets in neighboring countries in order to develop and promote Lao tourism into regional and global integration [23].

K. Maintaining the Integrity of the Specifications

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IV. DISCUSSION

Based on this particular study found that the tourism has played an essential role in socioeconomic development, commerce, investment, cross-cultural exchange in Lao PDR, and it has provided an opportunity for Lao PDR with international cooperation in the region and the world. The tourism in Lao PDR helps people to better understand and know well about Lao PDR, and it also helps to encourage international peace and friendship in the modern time. Thus, the Lao government has designated the tourism as a priority sector for its contributions to the socioeconomic development as well as the poverty reduction in the country, which it has focused on sustainable development form of tourism based on cultural, natural, and historic resources, so that Lao PDR will become a place for recreational tourism on cultural, historical, natural, exchange, and learning for domestic, regional and international tourists. As Asian Development Bank (2008) stated that "Since 1989, the tourism has assumed a crucial role in the socioeconomic development taking place in Lao PDR, from its northern to the southern parts. The tourism is a major element within the future economic strategy of Lao PDR, and the industry's development builds upon a diverse and exciting portfolio of natural, cultural and heritage resources, which are dispersed across the country. It is only recently that the country has placed priority on the development of the sector as complementary to existing areas of economic activity. The tourism sector in Lao PDR is also fragmented and dominated, in organizational terms, by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)." In term of support the further sustainable tourism development, the Lao government has improved and developed the infrastructure developments such as the road constructions to link from the northern to the central and the southern parts; the communication technology provides for easy and reliable communication with the outside world, the national electricity grid, and water supply. The Lao government has been attempting to extend more entry and exit checkpoints in various parts to link with many different countries. Also, visa exemption for some member countries has been allowed. The airport facilities have been upgraded and expanded to foster the growth in the tourism, which is also to support the goal of the government as well as the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (2012) asserted that "Lao PDR is the heart of the Greater Mekong Sub-Region (GMS), Lao PDR has great potential for rapid socio-economic development, even as it must ensure protection of its production environment and ecosystems in the long term. Given its strategic location, Lao PDR aims to become a land link and center of logistics for the

GMS. In recent decades, the development of road networks and transport within the country has given rise to the rapid north south and east west economic corridors with international linkages.” However, there are some challenges and constraints of the tourism development and promotion in Lao PDR, as results of the study found that the tourism development and promotion in Lao PDR somehow might have negative impact if there is ineffective planning structure, especially, negative effect on the environment of the country, and there are some challenges of the tourism promotion and development in Lao PDR that are the impacts from internal and global situation such as international political turmoil, international terrorism, epidemic diseases, socioeconomic changes, poverty in the country, ineffective infrastructure, unqualified human resources, weak management, and facilities, etc. Therefore, those issues should be paid more attention to improve and develop by the concerned sectors that to support to the sustainable tourism strategy, which Lao PDR will able to implement and made number of progress towards sustainable development, particularly integrated planning and decision making and or mainstreaming sustainable aspects in national socio-economic development and sectors development plans and implementation, growth, and achievements regarding to three pillars of sustainability namely economy, social and environment including poverty reduction.

V. CONCLUSION

The tourism industry is growing very fast in the world; it is a critical sector that contributes to the international, regional and national economic development for several countries in the world. It provides services for all travelers worldwide with the aim of income generation, recreating employment, financial contribution, promotion of better relations with different countries, learning alternative cultures and experiences, etc. Since 1989, the tourism industry in Lao PDR has been geared up to welcome international tourists; the tourism has assumed a crucial role in the socio-economic development taking place in Lao PDR, from its northern to the southern parts. The tourism is a significant element within the future economic strategy of Lao PDR, and the industry’s development builds upon a diverse and exciting portfolio of natural, cultural and heritage resources, which Lao PDR has placed priority on the development of the sector as complementary to existing areas of economic activity. The Lao government has launched the program of infrastructure maintenance and installation as the construction of the road, telecommunication, electricity and water supply, airports, hotels, restaurants, tourist’s sites, the supply of foodstuffs and souvenirs, etc., which facilitates to all stakeholders whom might engage in the tourism industries. The Lao government has taken into account of human development, local culture preservation and protecting the local environment while promoting the tourism industry development. However, there are some challenges and constraints in the tourism development and promotion in Lao PDR that they should be addressed by the relevant sectors for the better sustainable

tourism in the future, especially the tourism management and infrastructure developments.

DISCLOSURE OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author does not have any conflict of interest.

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