

# MPED SUCCESS STORY – VIETNAM

This article is part of a series written to highlight some of the success stories from FCM's Municipal Partners for Economic Development (MPED) program. MPED projects seek to improve local governance and economic policy development around the world while, at the same time, emphasizing the importance of gender equality and environmental sustainability. From 2011 to 2014, the City of Victoria, Canada, worked with the City of Thai Nguyen, Vietnam, to support and improve local economic development in Thai Nguyen.

## Community-based tourism helps local tea producers grow their business in Thai Nguyen, Vietnam

The highland region around Thai Nguyen, Vietnam, has long been associated with tea production. One of the varieties — an aromatic green tea found in Tan Cuong village — is one of the best-known teas in the country, and is exported throughout Asia.

With support from FCM's MPED program, the City of Victoria, B.C., the City of Thai Nguyen set out to develop community-based tourism around the tea production industry. Thai Nguyen developed a model to support local tea producers to set up a homestay service for tourists. Visitors are invited to stay in a tea producer's house, often on a plantation, have a traditional meal, and learn about local teas.

Le Quang Nghin is a 48-year-old tea producer who started to operate a homestay service through the program.

To prepare for this new service, he received training from the provincial tourism association and other service providers mobilized by the City, learning approaches to growing tea in a more sustainable way, taking classes in English and cooking, and going on study visits to Dien Bien and Son La provinces.

Mr. Nghin believes there is excellent potential in tourism, and explains how the new focus has led to some unexpected benefits. "There is a lot more cooperation between producers now," he says. "Previously, we worked as a family business and brought six or seven people in for the seasonal harvest. Now, the producers work together. If a tourist requests specific varieties of tea, we support each other."

Thai Nguyen has seen a rise in the number of tourists visiting the city; while most of these are from other areas of Vietnam, there are also international tourists interested in experiencing life on an authentic Vietnamese tea plantation.

"Some tourists just come to see how tea is produced — and they can help with the tea picking," adds Mr Nghin. "Others come just to buy our tea. When they arrive, I welcome them and invite them to drink some tea. Then, I visit the plantation with them and ask what it is that particularly interests them" he says.

Mr Nghin indicates that the busiest time of the year is during the annual tea festival, an initiative launched by the City in 2011. "In one day, we can sell 100 kilos of tea. We do some marketing on the radio, and we have been working with the City's Department of Culture to produce television commercials. I have gone from being a tea producer to a businessman," he says.

