

Expanding Community Based Tourism in Myanmar: Lessons learned from Myaing and Thandaunggyi



Executive Summary

Community-based tourism (CBT) is a relatively new tourism initiative in Myanmar. Currently, six locations are conducting CBT. Myaing and Thandaunggyi, as two of the earlier CBT projects, offer lessons on how CBT can be implemented in other states and regions. Based on the findings of a study on these two CBT projects, this policy brief offers policy recommendations for regional governments to implement CBT as part of their local development activity.

Introduction

Community-based tourism (CBT) is tourism that is owned, operated and managed directly by the community with the goal of improving local socio-economic conditions. CBT is a relatively new tourism initiative in Myanmar. The first projects in Myanmar were initiated in 2014, and as of 2017, are seen in six locations across the country. This policy brief builds on a report conducted by Another Development on CBT in two of the abovementioned sites: Myaing Township, Magway Region; and in Thandaunggyi, Kayin State.

Myaing is located in Magway region. ActionAid Myanmar, a non-governmental organization, initiated the CBT project to showcase rural Bamar culture. A two-year exclusive contract with a tour agency brings foreign visitors to four villages that rotate hosting duty. USD 55 is charged per visitor, of which USD 10 goes to a community development fund.

Thandaunggyi is located in northern part of Kayin State. With technical support from international organisations the Hans Seidel Foundation and Peace

Nexus, the local community initiated a bed-and-breakfast CBT project relying on the scenic attractions and religious significance of the area. The project is an important component of supporting peace building between the government and the Karen National Union (an ethnic armed organization) in the region.

This policy brief is aimed at helping regional governments develop community-based tourism in their respective states and regions, to promote local development.

Issues

Myaing and Thandaunggyi's CBT cases and their issues cannot be generalized for initiatives across the country in other locales due to the unique context of each CBT project.

In Myaing, the non-governmental organisation ActionAid Myanmar was involved in the initiation of the CBT while in Thandaunggyi, external partners provided technical support and community members themselves had to manage and carry out the activities.



Findings

The study focused on five key issues concerning the respective CBT projects: i) community participation; ii) economic impact; iii) environmental impact; iv) social impact and v) cultural impact. The following is a glimpse of some of the main findings. Overall, respondents in both Myaing and Thandaunggyi were generally positive of CBT and its impact. The CBT project in Myaing was more well received by respondents compared to Thandaunggyi. The sustainability of both approaches to CBT remains to be seen. The involvement of external entities (ActionAid in Myaing and other entities in Thandaunggyi) affect the viability and success of their respective CBTs.

I. Community Participation (The pie charts can use as info graphics)

Myaing, Magway Region



Thandaunggyi, Kayin State



Regarding decision making, community participation is high in Myaing (66.7%) and only community members were responsible, while in Thandaunggyi, a group of people were more responsible (56.8%) and external people were also involved (15.9%).

Women's participation was equal in Thandaunggyi, while more women participated in Myaing.

II. Economic Impact

In Myaing, 94.4% of respondents agreed that household income increased due to tourism, while 60.7% and 91.7% reported that CBT created new jobs

for the community. 91% also stated that tourism encouraged wide profit distribution within the community.

In Thandaunggyi, 60.7% stated that household incomes increased, while 59.6% said that there were new job opportunities. 53.8% of respondents also reported that CBT encouraged wide profit distribution in the community.

III. Environmental Impact

In Myaing, 97.1% of respondents reported that CBT increased awareness of the environment and natural resources and 97.2% stated that systematic waste management was developed because of CBT. In Thandaunggyi, 53.6% stated that CBT raised awareness of the environment and natural resources while 49.1% said that CBT helped develop systematic waste management.

IV. Social Impact

72.2% of respondents in Myaing stated that CBT improved electricity in the community, while 83.3% reported the improvement of local roads and 75% said the water supply had been improved, which could also be used for irrigation. In Thandaunggyi, 39.2% of respondents said that CBT had improved the community's electricity supply, whereas 51.8% stated local roads being developed and 32.1% reported the improvement of the water supply.

V. Cultural Impact

In Myaing, 88.2% of respondents said community members improved their language skills due to interacting with foreign guests. 91.2% stated that community members acquired new knowledge and also to preserve local culture and traditions. 67.3% of Thandaunggyi respondents stated community members improved their language skills due to interaction with foreign visitors, while 68.6% reported that community members acquired new knowledge. 57.4% said that CBT helped to preserve local culture and traditions.

Conclusion

Based on the main findings listed above, community-based tourism is seen mainly as a positive contribution to the respective communities. However, it is difficult to compare the situation and impact of CBT in Myaing and Thandaunggyi in every detail as these two have very different backgrounds and both have been in operation for around one year.

The study has highlighted the perception of

the communities in Myaing and Thandaunggyi's CBT initiatives to explore what kind of model could develop to promote CBT in other areas and communities. Both initiatives have community participation although they have very different backgrounds to compare these two CBT projects.

The management of Myaing's CBT initiatives is mostly done by ActionAid Myanmar. In Thandaunggyi's CBT, the community members themselves have to manage and carry out CBT activities except technical support. This highlights the involvement of local people in CBT initiatives of these two regions.

The participation of the communities could be said to meet the medium level of community involvement as community members participate in CBT initiatives. However, control of management and decision-making still has some way to go. Myaing's CBT are well organized as ActionAid Myanmar had a good relationship. However, community mobilization for CBT initiatives in Thandaunggyi has a bit weak in due to unstable areas, but the site area of Thandaunggyi's CBT is geographically larger than that of Myaing's CBT. Community mobilization of CBT initiatives in Thandaunggyi should be done through community advocacy in the long run to promote the participation of local people in tourism development.

Recommendations

Clear CBT strategy

- Regional and local governments can adopt a **clearly defined CBT strategy** to enable local communities, development partners and the private sector to initiate CBT projects. The government can also help promote public-private partnerships to leverage the resources available.

- Linking CBT to local economic development**, including infrastructure, electrification and livelihoods. Development partners and the private sector can be leveraged to coordinate with CBT projects for job creation and income generation activities, such as locally producing handicrafts and souvenirs, value-added local produce and goods (such as textiles and toiletries)

- Linking CBT to health and social development**, such as health education and sanitation for the local communities.

- Highlight CBTs in rural development and**

Promoting Community Participation

- The community should be at the centre of the CBT project, especially in the planning, implementation and management. A consultative and feedback mechanism can be developed to identify opportunities for CBT, and once a project is initiated, to ensure that it is equitable, and is beneficial to the community.

- While learning from the success and challenges of other CBT projects, communities should be strongly encouraged to develop their own approach to CBT that fits the local context.

Linkages to private sector

- Opportunities for the involvement of responsible private sectors and public-private partnerships can be identified. This can help to improve the impact of CBT projects. Income generation activities, such as locally producing handicrafts and souvenirs, value-added local produce and goods such as textiles and toiletries.

This briefing paper was produced from "AD Policy Brief Workshop" conducted in November 2017, and part of AD's report "Community-Based Tourism in Myaing and Thandaunggyi: Assessing Community Participation and the Impact of CBT Initiatives on Host Communities".



Another Development (AD) is a local Myanmar think-tank and a non-profit organization. AD's work focuses on five main thematic areas: Human Rights; Multiculturalism; Decentralization and Federalism; Rural Economic Development and Social Enterprises; and, E-government and E-citizen.



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