



**ASSESSMENT OF THE FEASIBILITY OF
COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM IN HPA-AN,
KAREN STATE, MYANMAR**
*IN TRANSITION PERIOD TO FOSTER LOCAL
OWNERSHIP AND SUPPORT FOR PEACE BUILDING*

Authors: Carol Moet Moet Aye, Maw Htun Aung, Mai Hla Aye

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Abstract:

Dubbed as the last frontiers in Indo-China Peninsula; Myanmar attracted a sustained attention from international travelers who look for a new exciting adventure in Asia. Myanmar is one of the linguistically and ethnically diverse country in the South East Asia countries adorned with beautiful natural beauty such as snowcapped mountains, free flowing iconic rivers, plains that are dotted with ancient civilizations, plateau that sustained a different way of lives, idyllic untouched white sand beaches, and rich flora and fauna, which are, if all combined, a surety for the boom of the tourism sector. However, the sixty years of civil wars have impeded the tourism sector as all of the potentials places for tourism were used as battle fields and collaterals of civil wars¹. However, with the introduction of 2008 constitution albeit with flaws, political institutions such as the parliaments, the independent high court and the executive branch led by the president emerged. The long time oppressed National League for Democracy was allowed to participate in the By-election of 2012. Most importantly, government and fragmented armed groups started the negotiation of nation-wide cease fire agreement, as a first step towards peace and national reconciliation. Due to the reforms, Myanmar has seen a dramatic increase of tourists

¹ Burma's Longest War, Anatomy of the Karen conflict, Ashley South, 2011.
<http://www.ashleysouth.co.uk/files/TNI-BurmasLongestWar.pdf>

since 2010; according to the tourism ministry, the figure released for the year 2014 broken the tourist arrival record with 3.5 million and the industry analyst forecasted that the trend will continue. With the dawn of nationwide cease fire on the horizon, the tourism sector could be a useful tool in rehabilitation of internally displaced persons from the refugees camps along the border, and such is the reason that Karen state, Hpa-an was chosen to conduct the study. With the backdrop of tourism master plan that favor the clusters of hotels to be a part of the growth strategy, this approach could undermine the local indigenous governance that existed for generations to manage the natural resources, and this will sideline the local community in benefiting from the share of the growth. A discontent local community, who has suffered the consequences of the civil war, will be a recipe for the renewed conflict. Another perspective of tourism, Community Based Tourism, is that it can promote the living standards of the local community by empowering the local community in marketing their own services and products to the visitors. Beside, tourism, in Myanmar cases, could be potentially a tool to bridge the cultural understanding between different ethnic groups in Myanmar. It could be a tool to rehabilitate the resettled community in Karen state to rediscover their cultural identity, in empowering local economic status, and preservation of local heritages and promotion of cultural understanding to reduce social tension in the post conflict society. A preliminary study for the feasibility of the community based tourism in the Hpa-an was already conducted which will be followed by a more thorough assessment that involved the participation of local community to identify the feasibility of the community based tourism that emphasized the local community as a business owners and change agent of their development processes.

Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Myanmar becomes an emerging and the next fast-growing tourism destination in Southeast Asia after the country has captured the attention of the international media due to its political and economic reforms launched by the current quasi-civilian government. For the first time in her history, Myanmar received over one million international visitors (including day trippers from the border posts) in 2012. The number of international visitors increased by thirty percent compared to 2011. The total income from tourism activity was \$534 million in 2012, compared to \$319 million in prior year 2011, a seventy percent jump². The increase in tourism activities of Myanmar will have to provide an opportunity for local communities – especially the rural poor and the marginalized people – to take up gainful employment or create other income generating opportunities in tourism sector in order to maintain the growth and distribution of benefits. In the future, consideration to local communities' meaningful participation in the development of tourism sector and

²http://www.myanmartourism.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=368&Itemid=359

business enterprises will be a critical ingredient for success of the sector in addition to the already existed public and private economic activities.³

Under prevailing circumstances, tourism in Karen state appeared to have strong potential for growth and meaningful positive impacts to the local communities. Karen State befell in the planning of the East – West Economic Corridor between Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar, furthermore it is also the main border gate, where eighty percent of bilateral trade occurred, in the region between Thailand and Myanmar . The East – West Corridor will create significant road and infrastructure development in the future. This will notably increase the cross-border traffic and visitors flows within the region. The border was partially opened for international visitors since last August 2013. It is estimated that the international visitor arrival to the region will increase steadily in the coming years.

³ Policy on Community Involvement in Tourism, Ministry of Hotels and Tourism (<http://www.harrison-institute.org/Community%20Involvement%20Tourism%20in%20Myanmar.pdf>)

Due to the cease-fire agreement between the Government of Myanmar and Karen National Union (KNU), many refugees camps along the border were planned to use all available economic resources to bring development to the region and jobs to the returnees to maintain stability of the region during the transition period.

Hpa-an, the capital of Kayin state is only a five-hour drive from Yangon on a paved road, which passes through popular tourist site of Kyaikhtiyo (“Golden Rock Pagoda”). It is also only one hour away from Mawlamyaing, which had an airport operating daily flights to Mae Sok in Thailand (It had stopped the operation for the moment). The road from Hpa-an to Myawaddy to the Thai border currently takes five hours and traffic runs in different directions on alternate days and this will change once the anticipated Asia Highway is in operation.⁴ It possess area of outstanding natural beauty such as ranges of mountains, waterfalls, lime stone caves, historic pagodas, and the green dotted paddy fields framed by winding rivers- which all can be a perfect recipe for a successful tourism place.

⁴ Pilot Workshop in Karen State on Community Involvement in Tourism and the Peace Process, 2014(<http://www.hss.de/fileadmin/suedostasien/myanmar/downloads/2014/140224-EN-Workshop-in-Hpa-an.pdf>)

Therefore, promoting linkages between community tourism development and local economic development including the creation of jobs is a key to fulfill the needs of the communities in Karen State in post cease-fire agreement. Community participation also needs to be an integral part of a strategy for holistic tourism promotion from the local to the national levels planning and implementation.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

According to the experiences from other countries, there were a number of challenges related to the integration of local communities towards sustainable and responsible tourism development. Community development is the core of the Community-Based Tourism (CBT). On the other hand, in some cases CBT projects posed some risks to both the hosts and the tourists. Some studies found that the revenues generated from CBT were relatively small and sometimes did not even outweigh the costs. The CBT projects can also fail because of lack of access to markets per se lack of marketing skills and poor local governance. Other researchers had also found out that limitations to participation of the local community occurred access to resources such as local human resources development and financing. The main

question is how can the community members participate while there is little or no discussion about local community participation in planning and development of tourism sector development.

This study will explore in what ways the community members can involve in CBT programs, both as an individual supplier or entrepreneur and as a community where the community needs are met along with the tourism sector. The researchers will also be looking at and documenting the development of community based tourism policy at Karen state throughout the project lifespan to and will also liaise with local authority to influence the current tourism policy and formulation. The findings presented here will be the first phase of the project, thus exclude the interfacing phase with the authority.

1.3 Rationale of the Study

The Community-based tourism (CBT) sites in countries like Thailand and Indonesia were predominantly visited by tourists from western hemispheres. The CBT enabled the communities who wish to be involved in tourism to share their native place's natural beauty and spiritual significance of different sites in a way that maintains – and possibly enhances – cultural, social and

environmental integrity whilst providing economic opportunities for those involved.

Maximizing the benefit for local communities required a holistic view in which “sharing the cultural and spiritual significance of different sites” entails much more than the mere interpretive experience of just delivering facts and figures of the community or the ethnic group. There are various ways to encourage community involvement in the tourism industry and to attract community support and participation to distribute the benefits equitably. The community participation is a crucial determinant to ensure that local communities will benefit from tourism and that their lifestyles and values are being respected.

The central theme of the research is to develop a policy paper in coordination with the local civil society groups to study the feasibility of CBT in Hpa-an region and to identify the gaps, opportunities and challenges under current socio-political situation.

1.4 Scope and Limitations of the Study

Karen State consists of one city and nine towns, but according to the limited time frame and the large size of Karen State, this study took place in Hpa-an and its surrounding areas that is twenty kilometers

away from the city including Kyone Htaw waterfall, Kyaukalap pagoda, Mt. Zwegabin, Saddan cave and their surrounding communities. Some areas like Kyone Htaw waterfall is a DKBA (Democratic Karen Benevolent Association) controlled area but others were directly administered by Karen state government. It was difficult to gain access the primary data because the regional



Saddan Lake

government officials were unwilling to provide all relevant information related to the tourism activity in Karen state as well as the data published by the government was contradictory and inaccurate at its best. The case study analysis and desktop research were employed due to the limited time frame. To help control the limitation of data bias, detailed interviews were conducted with civil society organizations including youth groups, religious leaders, women groups, and NGOs so as to determine their knowledge and understanding and the concept of CBT.

The study also failed to look at the existing tourism sites such as in Danu region, Bagan, Ngapali, Twente and Inle region, where an informal and quasi community based tourism projects are located⁵.

⁵ Danu trail is an initiative to bring the community participation in the Pindaya region which is in close proximity to major tourist draw Inle lake (<http://www.danutrails.com/#about>), There were some community based tourism initiatives in Inle, Bagan, Twente (<http://www.responsiblemyanmar.org/responsible-tourism/community-based-tourism/initiatives>)

Chapter II

Profile of Karen State

2.1 Demographics Characteristics of Karen State

Karen State is one of the seven states of Myanmar. The capital city is Hpa-an, which is also spelled as Hpa-an. The Karen state is a mountainous region with the Dawna Range running north to south along the state. It is bordered by Mae Hong Son, Tak, and Kanchanaburi provinces of Thailand to the east; Mon State and Bago Region to the west and south; Mandalay Region, Shan State and Kayah State to the north. It has a hot and humid climate because of the mountain ranges that lie as its backdrop and its close proximity with the sea. The main rivers in the state are Thanlwin (Salween River), Thaungyin (Moei River), Gyaing and Attaran.

Karen state has the population of 1,933,281 (2014 Census) and the total area of 30,382.8 km² (11,730.9 sq mi)⁶. The major ethnic group is Karen and it has some other ethnic groups such as, Padaung, Bamar, Shan, Pa-O, Mon, Rakhine, and Burmese-Thai. The main religions people adhered are

Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Animism.

The region that formed today's Karen State was part of the successive Burmese Kingdoms since the formation of the Pagan Empire in mid-11th century. The British then, seized the southern part of today's Kayin State after the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-1826), and the rest after the Second Anglo-Burmese War of 1852. Towards the end of the British colonial era (1945-1948), the Karen leadership insisted on a separate statehood covering today's Kayin State and much of Mon State and Taninthayi Region, within the British Empire. They refused to sign the Panglong Agreement of February 1947, which was the basis for the 1947 Constitution of Burma, and the Karen leaders boycotted the pre-independence elections of April 1947. In 1949, the KNU led the rebellion that continued up to 2012.

The English name of the state was changed to Kayin State from Karen State in 1989 by the military government. The Kayin State consists of one city and nine towns. It has three districts, seven townships and 4092

⁶ 2014 census Myanmar, <http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/myanmar/census/>

villages. In Karen State, there were three Karen political parties namely; The Karen Peoples Party (KPP), The Ploung-Sgaw Democracy Party (PSDP) and The Karen State Democracy and Development Party (KSDDP).

According to official statistics, less than ten

percent of primary school students in Kayin State reached high school. All higher education institutions are located in Hpa-an. Healthcare services are weak also especially worse in conflict ridden areas like Kayin State. The public health care system in the state is almost non-existent.



Mount Zwegabin

Chapter III

Field Visit Finding: Preliminary Survey for Community-Based Participatory Tourism in Hpa-an, Karen State

3.1 Purpose of the Trip

Multiculturalism is one of the Another Development's theme areas out of five theme areas of programmatic intervention. The program intend to help create a society that are tolerant of differences in gender, ethnicity, religions, sexual orientations and to dispel the discrimination that existed and manifested as physical and cultural violence. Thus, AD team observes the current problem existed in Myanmar to be deeply related to prejudice, and misunderstanding on ethnicity, gender and religion. AD's one of tools to tackle the issue is promoting community tourism, local heritage preservation and increased inbound tourism in the ethnic minority areas. The trip is to implement one of the AD's plans to undertake two ethnic areas- Karen and Chin- to be the potential areas for conducting research and consulting in order to identify the opportunity for the community to be the major benefactors of the upcoming tourism boom. In another words, the project could create a business model that will empower the local stakeholders to be equipped with the necessary capacity to influence the

policy makers in the states and the union level, thereby, raising the stake of the local community in the tourism sector. Karen state lies strategically in the proposed east-west economic corridor envisaged by Asia Development Bank and border with Thailand. The geographic endowment also favors Karen state with diverse landscapes and eco-systems that are suitable for tourism development. Due to the cease-fire agreement between the Government and Karen National Union, many villages were planning to and there is a need for the policy maker to use all available economic resources to bring development and jobs to maintain stability of the region. AD team conducted assessment of feasibility of community tourism around Hpa-an area.

3.2 Objectives:

- To conduct preliminary survey for Community-Based Participatory Tourism to identify potential tourist hotspot, cultural heritage and traditional beliefs and practices
- To map the stakeholders
- To explore potential business opportunity for local community

3.3 Field Trip Observation in Narrative

On 7th March, team went to Kyone Htaw waterfall as the first destination. It was more than two hours' drive from Hpa-an. the waterfall is surrounded by forest. Surrounding villages namely; Ka Maw Let, Myaing Gyi Ngu, Moe Aye Myaing and Ma Ae. It is a type of block and plunge waterfall as the fall is high and spread. It is also formed into a young river where people can swim. It is the spot for local community to go for picnic and relaxation, the only cave is that everyone who visited the place has to observe the vegetarian meals only.

The waterfall is located in Myaing Gyi Ngu and it is controlled by the head monk. He allows the shop to open but they do not need to pay tax to anyone, which is the likely area of contention in the future should there is a tourism boom.

One of the shop seller said "I have been living here for almost ten years and it was a black area⁷ in the past, but now it is the brown area and visitors are allowed to come. Besides, we don't need to pay tax to anyone and MyaingGyiNgu head monk allows us to

⁷ Black Area Referred to the area where there is active armed conflict in Myanmar

stay here. On the other hand, we do not have regular income but we get more money especially in summer time".

After waterfall, team continued to the Myaing Gyi Ngu Pagoda and monastery. It was named after the monk named U Thuzana, a very powerful monk politically and spiritually, he is also the patron of Democratic Buddhist Karen Association (DKBA). It is situated at the confluence of Zunzalat River and Salween River (Than lwin). The scenery is amazing as it was situated on the confluence of the rivers. There was a boat service in the river which is run by the local people for transportation. A number of activities are going on the river including finishing. This place was also a vegetarian Buddhist refuge.

The team also went to Kyauk Ka Lat Pogoda: a stupa sits on a standalone rock where its image had reflected in the lake below and provides a striking image of tranquility and peace. There were some villages near Kyauk Ka Lat Pagoda such as Hlaing, Taw Pone, Kaws Kha Dee villages. As soon as the visitors arrived there, a spectacular elevated view of the surrounding lake await. The lake was constructed around the pagoda giving it the name of Kyauk Ka Lat, which means "water garden". From the top of the Pagoda, the view was

filled with paddy field, bird's sanctuary, and the mountains as a frame. Mt. Zwegabin was the backdrop of the pagoda and the lake in the foreground made it an extraordinary view from the Pagoda. At the same time, the seasonal migratory birds complemented the natural beauty of the pagoda. It took about thirty minute drive from Hpa-an and it was also a vegetarian observant zone.

After that, the team continued to the base of Mt. Zwegabin. It was one of the most sacred mountains in the country and there was a pagoda that sits on top of it. It is located seven miles south of Hpa-an and is 2,734 feet above sea level. The mountain range runs twenty miles from north to south. At the base of Mount Zwegabin, sits Lumbini Garden, which possessed thousands of statues of the Buddha. There was a monkey feeding event every day around 11am and the temple trustees provide free lunch service for those who arrived before noon. It was said that encased in the pagoda was a strand of Buddha's hair. It was an awestruck moment to look up the wonderful rock mountain from the base.

After Mt. Zwegabin the team continued the trip to waterfall with a swimming pool under the rock mountain. The pool was opened to public and very popular among locals as they can splash water during the hot season.

But, the team found out it was not suitable place for tourists.

In the afternoon, the team met with the local community youth groups who set up the youth center called Varanda – Youth Community Café. It was a non-profit community project aiming to promote local products, responsible consumption, and employment opportunities for youth and holding social dialogues in Hpa-an. The meeting purpose were to build community based tourism network to collect local information including tourists information, local transportation systems, stakeholders, cultural and historical information, to learn local beliefs and sensitivity, opportunities and challenges of tourism sector. Team also discussed the business opportunities for local community.

In the evening, the team enjoyed the night scene by the bank of the Than Iwin River-a hip spot for young people to hang out. The place has the potential to become the plaza or esplanade type recreational zone for the visitors.

On the second day, the team made trip to Saddan Cave, a place of religious site which was located in an interesting underground limestone cave environment. It was around forty minute drive from Hpa-an. There were

eight villages in its surrounding area namely; Kawt Sein Ban, Lah La Mane, Kawt Thein Kee, Moo Ta Kwee, Kawt Wah Sue, Kawt Mu Dah, Kawt Kite and Htar Naw Tawt. It was one of the biggest caves in Hpa-an. The pilgrimage nature of the cave was evident in its many small shrines and Buddhist iconography that greeted the visitors at the entrance.

As visitors descended the stairs into the cave, lighting is intermittently provided by fluorescent lamps, and the ground was damp and moisten. Stalactites and stalagmites loomed from the roof and the floor of the cave. There was a hole or an opening in the middle of the cave which gave the visitors a chance to enjoy the natural light in the middle of the walk after walking in the dark.

Furthermore, the cave was home to a colony of bats. The visitors will find this entire atmosphere quite intriguing and memorable; local adherents of the faith probably don't even notice it. The cave itself eventually opens up into a lake encircled by hills. A boat service was provided by local fishermen to let visitors enjoy the ride in the lake which then transport the visitors along the hand dug canal that lead to the green lush paddy fields close to the entrance of the

cave. It was an awe inspiring, breath-taking trip for many of the visitors including locals and foreigners alike.

Precautions when visiting the cave included bringing torches for added illumination, and preparation for making the descent barefoot.

After that, the team made trip to Mochilee (Mawsaree) villages, the indigenous community. It is closed to Mt. Zwegabin and located at the base of the mountain. It was a very quiet place with a very green environment. The community practices a combination of Christianity and Animism. Before leaving Hpa-an, the team went to Kantharyar lake with a bridge at downtown. It was a sight- seeing area of downtown and it provides the beautiful scene of Mt. Zwegabin.



Kyone Taw Waterfall

Chapter IV

Summary of the Findings

4.1 Findings of the Trip

In Karen State, only three locations were opened for foreign tourist. They are Hpa-an, Kawkareik and Myawaddy. There were still insurgent prone areas thirty miles from Pa-an. For example, Hlaing Bwe - a town very close to Hpa-an- is still considered a brown area. Internal issues among different armed groups such as DKBA (Democratic Karen Benevolence Army), KNU Brigade 7(Karen National Union) and BGF (Border Guard Force) was a big challenge in Karen State for implementation of coherent economic policy. Most of the young generations grow up with conflicts and illegal trading. On the other hand, many young people migrated to Thailand as migrant workers in search of education and better paying jobs. In the government administrative institutional support, there was a cultural affair ministry and the budget was allocated for it. However, the program only focused on the majority Bamar culture and did not adequately promote the local indigenous culture and preservation⁸. In state level,

⁸ Myanmar has eight national races namely, Kachin, Kayah (Karenni), Kayin(Karen), Chin, Bamar, Mon, Rakhine (Arakan) and Shan, where Bamar took up sixty percent of the ethnic composition and a dominant group.

there is cultural affair department and tourism department. It operates museum but the efficiency and the effectiveness is questionable. There was no program for promoting local Karen's culture and literature except some organizations that work for the promotion of Karen's literature and culture. The government tourism branch office was based in Mawlamyaing and covered both Karen and Mon states. People could only learn culture and literature at Karen boarding schools and religious schools.

There were neither local tour companies nor operators. However, some hotels, guest houses were acting as tour companies. They were Soe Brother Guest House, Grand Hill Hotel (Karen State Development Public Company), Chit Lay Myaing (which is owned by General Chit Thu) which brought Thai tourists into Karen through the border. Tabakawis only operating for out bound trip and there was a luxury Hpa-an Lodge whose owner is from France.

A numbers of Hotels and guest houses were operating in Hpa-an. The hotels are HotelZwekabin, Green Hill, Parami, Hotel United, Hpa-an Lot, Hotel Peace, Paradise. The guest houses are Soe Brother, Galaxy,

Kantharyar, Shwe Hpa-an, Than LwinOo, Than Lwin and Parami. The transportation options in Hpa-an were cars, motorbikes, bicycles and Toke Toke (a bicycle turned into passenger vehicle).

The cultural heritage and significant places around were Pogodas, Le Kay, Potakee village (village constituted like Amish in the US) , Caves (KawKaThaung, KyauKaLat, Pa Don , Padung cave, YaThaePyan, Kawt Gone, Bat Cave),KyoneHtaw waterfall, Mt. Zweekabin, Mt. Hpapat, Lone Nya, Lone Pa Ni, and Mochilee (Mawsaree) villages. One of the remarkable leisurely potential activity would be a boat trip in Than Lwin River (Salween River).

4.2 Festivals, Music and Food

The most significant of all festivals is Karen New Year Festival. Other festivals were related to religion such as Lat Chi Pwe in August, Kauk Thit Sa Pwe (New Harvest Festival), Mee Pone Pwe (Lighting Festival in February), Ayo Kauk Pwe (Worship Service for the ancestors) and Traditional Weddings. Karen Done Yane(Karen Group Folk Dance) is one of the most significant dance among others. The traditional foods are Tar La Paw (Mixed Vegetables and Fish) and Tar Hae Poe.

4.3 Local Handicraft

The local handicrafts were not well developed and the merchandising and marketing was confined only in their vicinity. The items that can be found in the region are traditional Karen clothes, farmer's equipment and small souvenirs.

4.4 Civil War and Conflicts Issues

Many of the participants recalled and lamented the forced labor issues where the civilian were deployed in active battle fields to carry the army's supplies and ammunition. Some step on landmines and lost their legs. Many still recalled the battle of Marneplaw between the KNU and the government army which broke out in 1993.

4.5 Four Principles of Saw Ba U Gyi

In Karen community, Saw Ba U Gyi's four principles are still held as the guiding Principles of the Revolution of the Karen National Union and Karen people.

1. Surrender is out of the question.
2. The recognition of the Karen State must be completed.
3. We shall retain our arms.
4. We shall decide our own political destiny.

4.6. Identification of Gaps and Constraints in Existing Legal and Institutional Frameworks

Government of Myanmar drafted a tourism master plan that looked the period between 2013 and 2020 with set goal of seven million tourist arrival from the current arrival of one millions. The master plan detailed out six strategic areas that the GOM will prioritize in order to fulfill the set goals of tourism as an engine for the economic growth and distribution. The program includes 1: Strengthen the institutional environment, 2: Build human resource capacity and promote service quality 3: strengthen safeguards and procedures for destination planning and management 4: Develop quality products and services 5: Improve connectivity and tourism related infrastructure 6: build the image, position and brand of tourism Myanmar. The plan also include the cross cutting themes such as gender equality, environmental sustainability, partnerships, innovative financing, regional cooperation, ensure access for disabled people and consultation and participation.

There is only one objective that mentioned the community involvement in tourism which is stated in the key objective 3.6:

strengthen community involvement in Tourism. According to the stated work plan under these objectives, there will be demonstration sites that promote the participation of women, ethnic groups and the poor. There is no explicit policy position or plan that favored the participation of local community in the planning, monitoring and managing of the tourism sector in their region⁹.

Likewise, the human resource development plan stated in the master plan didn't have adequate plan to equip local community to own and operate the tourism enterprises that will boom in their indigenous place. Besides, the master plan come before the overhauling of the tourism law thus some of the legal hurdles were not put forth to amend.

As an overall trajectory, the tourism master plan sought to brand Myanmar as a cultural and adventure destination. In this case, a successful destination will not emerge itself without the collaboration and participation of the community in the planning, execution and operation of the tour services. In other

⁹ Myanmar Tourism Master Plan 2013-2020, Final-Draft Report, June 2013, Ministry of Hotels and Tourism,. <http://www.harrison-institute.org/Myanmar%20Tourism%20Master%20Plan%202013-2020.pdf>

words, to have a successful tourism program, the empowerment of local community – program and planning that will transform the local community members into suppliers or the business owners will be required and only then it can guarantee the sustainable tourism growth and development.

Since the community tourism was not a priority in the master plan, important local destination governance strengthening was absent in the plan. Many of the destinations expansion envisaged in the plan are not all ownerless. Some of the destinations especially that are closely linked with religious institutions are managed by the local trustees or local villagers. Without understanding the local dynamics entailed, if destination management committee handed down by the Ministry of tourism took the place of local trustees, a conflict is inevitable and in the worst case scenario, can tarnish the reputation of the tourism sector as beneficial.

The master plan did not consider the recent decentralization trend that occurred within the government institutions. Although the union government still controls the major processes of tourism development, the monitoring, implementation of the program

and the administration has to be closely coordinated with the state and region governments. Moreover, in order to achieve the stated objectives, the cooperation of the ethnic armed groups and their interests will have to be accommodated.

For the community tourism to take place and gain momentum, certain administrative practices and provision will have to dismantle or streamline the processes such as century old guest registration requirement¹⁰. Only then, the community operated home stay sites could thrive and create another market for the tourism sector.

The current legal framework (the existing tourism law) does not acknowledge the community tourism. As a result, equitable distribution of benefits from the sector became a far fetch reality for the community and this in the long run will cause community grievances and breakdown of the sector. Therefore, it is needed in the new law on tourism that the community tourism be clearly stated so that the community can play a key role in creation of cultural destinations as well as management of eco-tourism.

¹⁰ Midnight Intrusions, Ending Guest Registration and Household inspections in Myanmar, Fortify Rights. 2015.
http://www.fortifyrights.org/downloads/FR_Midnight_Intrusions_March_2015.pdf

Chapter V

Conclusions, Opportunities, Recommendations and Challenges

5.1 Peace Process and Tourism

There is a good lesson to be learnt in regards to the relationship between tourism and peace, starting from the late 1990s and into the early 2000s, former Prime Minister encouraged Myanmar business firms to develop Thandaunggyi, a resort type town in Northern Karen State, and many companies invested in the hotel projects there. However, when the 2004-2005 ceasefire with the KNU broke down, most projects had stopped immediately. The villagers trained to implement community-based tourism were left stranded with no customers, as Thandaunggyi was declared a restricted area where the visitor access was impossible.

It showed the importance to strengthen cease-fire and build lasting peace in order to sustain any project in the conflict areas. Ensuring the local communities and other local stakeholders are pro-actively involved and benefit from tourism development are distributed fairly – and the benefits accrued not just went to the leaders and large domestic companies – can strengthen the support for the peace process and contribute

to sustainable tourism development in the future.

There are several reasons that CBT can support the peace process.

- Greater inclusivity of civil society and local community in economic development can build public support for peace and people can see the tangible results immediately.
- High levels of public involvement from different stakeholders including government and community can create a two-way flow of information, greater transparency and public dialogue.
- It created on-going dialogue and consultation between the public decision makers and the local community and the civil society. This is to strengthen the flow of information, get to know each other's opinions and create trust between the stakeholders.
- Involving ethnic and local business leaders in tourism development can stimulate greater interest and support for the peace process on both sides. At the same time this should also stimulate entrepreneurship in the local communities. The development of business partnerships between business leaders

and the local potential entrepreneurs can be fostered.

- Presence of more foreign visitors can give local communities a more global perspective. The cultural exchange that the local community made with the visitors will help the local community in restoring their identity quickly and create a sense of belonging to their indigenous place quickly.

5.2 Conclusions

Community based Tourism is relatively a new concept in Myanmar and the institutional and the regulatory frameworks are not yet ready to support this part of market segment of tourism development. The current master plan nor law did not explicitly support or prioritize the community based tourism except some clauses that

5.3 Key Challenges

- Decade long civil war and mass migration of local people for jobs to Thailand had caused lack of well-developed human resources that can readily lead or took up the jobs.
- The local transportation mode and infrastructures are not yet ready to cater the needs of the discerned visitors.
- The current lack of active cooperation mechanism between Karen State government, KNU, religious leaders and local civil society.
- Hpa-an area is rich in natural resources and adorned with mountain ranges, thus industrial development are being planned which could cause the social and environmental integrity in the long run.

mentioned the involvement of community in the processes. According to the plan, Myanmar is gearing towards cultural and experiential tourism which people are of the central most important to become a successful destination choices, yet, the plan seem to be missing the critical part to make the whole industry a success which is community participation and meaningful involvement.

Although there were some sporadic community based tourism initiatives already started in parts of Myanmar, the official recognition and support to the grass-root community is urgently required attention from the policy makers. Hpa-an is in a good place to test the community based tourism policy for the state and region government as it has not yet been touched by the mass tourism arrival.

- The legal and institutional framework are not constructed to deliver the program outputs in a decentralized way; thus, with the recent waves of decentralization in the government institutions, the local government will have both capacity and legal constraints to lead the CBT policy formulation and support.

5.4 Key Opportunities/Recommendations

- Community-Based Tourism can be a rapporteur between local culture and the visitors and it can provide new opportunities for cultural and information exchange between local stakeholders, civil society and visitors thereby increased understanding on diversity and multiculturalism.
- The willingness of State Government and KNU Brigade(7) to cooperate in a dialogue with local civil society that can eventually lead to an inclusive and local driven tourism development in Karen State that will benefits and include the local community.
- The role of civil society can be strengthened through the principles of community involvement in tourism.
- Community-Based Tourism can stimulate inclusive and broad based local economic development in a post-conflict setting and therefore it can strengthen the ceasefire towards securing sustainable peace.
- The government has already established a border trading post in Myawaddy and thus allowing visitors through the Myawaddy could draw more visitors who are Thais or who visited Thailand.
- The local government should be considered as a key player in delivering program output in the tourism sector development particularly in community based tourism. The constitution has given the preservation of cultural heritage in the hands of local government thus cooperation between the central government and the state and region government is crucial, not just for the Karen state, but for the whole master plan implementation.

Annex I

Trip ToR (Term of Reference)

1. Establish local network and identify potential partner for tourism policy
2. Collect data and information related to tourism and hospitality in Hpa-an
3. Preliminary identification of cultural heritage of local site
4. Stakeholder mapping
5. Explore types of local transportation systems and options
6. Explore local sensitivity and belief system, local context
7. Explore the tourist information
8. Development of short survey to collect data about the preference of the visitors to the area food, accommodation, experience, traditional issues

Annex II

1) Research Questions

- a) Who are the key stakeholders in CBT and what are their roles?
- b) What are their main motivations, their opportunities and their constraints of participation in CBT projects?
- c) What are the alternative options for affected communities?
- d) To what extent are CBT policy tools responsive to the local governance and support for peace building?

2) Research Objectives

- a) To identify the key stakeholders in CBT project
- b) To explore the role of the key stakeholders in CBT project
- c) To explain the factors and conditions encouraging to participate
- d) To describe the constraints of participation in CBT project
- e) To assess and monitor the responsiveness of policy tools to the communities and their motivations



Another Development Policy Think Tank
62, 5th floor, Nyaung Tone Street, Sanchaung Township, Yangon
(+95)95661508, office@anotherdevelopment.org
www.anotherdevelopment.org