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Press Release

“MORE AND MORE LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN MYANMAR WANT TO GET INVOLVED IN TOURISM. WHAT DO THEY NEED TO BE SUCCESSFUL?”

MCRB, MRTI and HSF cohosted a second Communities and Tourism Conference in Naypyidaw on 13/14 June. It was attended by over 120 participants. These included existing community tourism projects, and new initiatives, tour companies, international experts and around 15 MPs from areas where communities had expressed an interest in participating in tourism. New destinations represented at the conference included Myeik archipelago and Lampi, trekking in Danu regions in Shan State, Ngayokeykaung, Gwa, tours in the Yangon area, Tamarind Lake Village, and Kantpetlet.

The six community tourism initiatives which presented at the first conference in December 2015 (Myaing, Indawgyi, Pa-O region, Kayah State, Upper Ayeyarwady dolphin project, and Thandaunggyi) spoke about their successful experiences of the last couple of years, some of them even winning international awards. However although they had all seen a growth in visitors, including Myanmar tourists, and some increases in community income from tourism, all faced challenges in marketing the product.

Other common challenges included continued restrictions on access and overnight stays by foreigners which reduced local earning potential, lack of skilled human resources and lack of local knowledge about what foreign tourists want and how they behave. All the projects highlighted the importance to the community tourism experience of promoting environmental awareness, and protecting and building pride in and knowledge of local culture.

Opening the conference, U Nyunt Win Naing, Chairman of Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute, highlighted that it was important for community tourism initiatives to learn from experience in Myanmar and neighbouring countries: *“Our three organisations have organised this conference to promote learning from the projects in Myanmar which are already up and running. We want to inspire the development of new community tourism products, and to build links between them and their target markets”*.

Dr Nicole Haeusler, Adviser to MRTI and GIZ added *‘Sometimes it’s the ordinary things the locals take for granted, like local cooking and farming or travel by oxcart, that the visitor finds most interesting’*. She highlighted successful projects she had recently visited in Luang Phabang which taught foreigners how to plant paddy, and a local story-telling show”.

Achim Munz, Country Manager of Hanns Seidel commented *‘More and more local communities want to get involved in tourism, because they see it can create local jobs and new sources of income, and reduce pressures for migration to the city. These communities are also increasingly asking their elected Member of Parliament how they can get started. Moreover they are often not clear about rules and regulations and how to apply for licenses. A lot of*

uncertainty and red tape still exists here. What can they do to be successful? What can the government do to help them, and what level of government should be involved? The discussions we have had have focussed on these questions, so that more communities can benefit from tourism’.

Vicky Bowman, Director of MCRB said. *“We need to recognise is that community tourism is a business. NGOs can be very helpful to get a project started. But the most sustainable community tourism initiatives are the ones driven by the natural entrepreneurs in the local community. They may be producing local food and souvenirs for a nearby tourism hub, or they may be running a small restaurant, guesthouse or adventure activity. For those entrepreneurs to be successful, the government needs to understand their challenges, including how they are hindered by unnecessary red tape, and make it easy for them to innovate and grow”.*

Background

1. The first conference on communities and tourism was held in Naypyidaw in December 2015.
<http://www.myanmar-responsiblebusiness.org/news/community-involved-tourism.html>
2. All the presentations and a report of the workshop will be available on www.mcrb.org.mm, and shared via the Community Tourism Teashop Facebook page.
3. Hanns Seidel Foundation has worked on the Myanmar government’s 2012 Responsible Tourism Policy and the 2013 Community Involved Tourism Policy
<http://www.hss.de/southeastasia/en/myanmar/our-work-in-myanmar.html>
<http://www.hss.de/fileadmin/suedostasien/myanmar/downloads/130530-Community-Involvement-in-Tourism.pdf>
4. Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB) published a Tourism Sector Wide Impact Assessment (SWIA) in February 2015, available at <http://www.myanmar-responsiblebusiness.org/swia/tourism.html>
5. Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute is a new non-profit organisation formed in 2016 to support responsible tourism development in Myanmar through knowledge sharing, training and research. For further details see www.myanmarresponsibletourism.org
6. The three organisations have also co-hosted multistakeholder workshops in Naypyidaw on responsible tourism (October 2015), and multistakeholder workshops in Ngapali in 2016 and 2017.

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