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**FOR RELEASE*****'Building a successful tourism destination requires local level planning and management'***

Over 200 participants from government, private sector, local community-based tourism (CBT) organisations, development partners and independent experts attended the 3rd National Conference on Communities and Tourism in Kalaw from 6-8 June.

The conference was organised by Hanns Seidel Foundation, Myanmar CBT Network, Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB), and Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute (MRTI) with the cooperation of Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, and supported by the German Cooperation (GIZ). It brought together tourism businesses, guides and communities from across Myanmar, with a particular focus on those working in tourism in Shan State.

The opening day of the conference was addressed by U Tint Thwin, Director-General of the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, German Ambassador, Dorothee Janetzke-Wenzel, and Daw Pyone Kaythi Naing, Pyithu Hluttaw member for Kalaw. Several speakers highlighted their programmes to support tourism SMEs, and local community tourism initiatives supported by GIZ, and UKAid's Business Innovation Facility.

During the ceremony, Kalaw municipality was awarded the ASEAN Clean City Award. This was due to the combined efforts of the Kalaw municipal authorities, local residents, and the recently formed Kalaw Tourism Organisation (KTO), who worked to reduce rubbish burning by residents, and improve collection facilities.

Daw Pyone Kaythi Naing outlined her vision of Kalaw's tourism potential as a wellness retreat destination, building on recent initiatives such as the Kalaw marathon, trekking, horse riding and cycling activities. This meant that the forests, natural and cultural heritage needed to be celebrated and preserved. She reflected on her experience in Luang Phabang, Laos, and Cameron Highlands, Malaysia, and emphasised that 'We can only get Kalaw's tourism future right if urban planning is coordinated at township level. Decisions need to be taken locally, to promote balanced and sustainable economic growth, and maintain Kalaw's unique character as a cool, pine clad hill station with a multi-ethnic culture, where the streets are clean and the air is fresh'.

Achim Munz, Country Director for HSF, linked the discussions to the ongoing debate in Parliament on a new draft Tourism Law, in which decisions such as licensing of accommodation should be decentralised to State/Region level, or even closer to communities at a local administration and municipality level. 'Based on the opportunities for decentralisation in the 2008 Constitution, a new Tourism Law could empower States and Regions as well as local administration and provide an opportunity to reduce the red tape which accumulates from multiple levels of permitting, and raise and retain local funds to manage and market tourism destinations. This will help to create local jobs for local people '.

Vicky Bowman, Director of MCRB highlighted the need for the whole tourism value chain to work together at local level. 'Businesses in Kalaw are pioneers within Myanmar in establishing the KTO, which has brought together hotels, guesthouses, restaurants, local tour and trekking operators, transport providers, and guides, and works hand in hand with the local authorities. You can see and breathe the outcome of that cooperation in Kalaw's fresh air and clean streets. I hope to this approach to business-led destination management will be taken up by other destinations in Myanmar'.

U Nyunt Win Naing, Chair of MRTI added "This third conference was an opportunity to share experience from different destinations about building inclusive and innovative businesses that support tourism in communities. We are pleased to be able to announce a new collaboration with the Business Innovation Facility (BIF) building on MRTI's Responsible Tourism awards, which will particularly recognise inclusive and innovative community tourism products'.

The conference was an opportunity for networking and learning from existing tourism activities in Myanmar, with workshops on community tourism projects, accessing markets and developing products, waste management, responsible investment and destination management.

The organisers estimate that the three day conference was led to at least US\$20,000 of funds injected into Kalaw's economy, as a result of accommodation, food and beverage and transport services. Since many participants extended their stay to enjoy local 'green season' tourism in Southern Shan State, the actual contribution to the local economy may have been significantly more.

Providing conference-branded, refillable aluminium water bottles to all participants, and making water dispensers available at meeting venues is estimated to have led to 1800 500ml plastic water bottles not being used.

### Background

HSF and MCRB have previously organised two Conferences on Communities and Tourism in December 2015 and June 2017 in Naypyidaw.

The full agenda for the conference, and details of the organisers are available here.

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