

## **Multistakeholder discussion on Tourism in Mrauk U**

### **10 - 11 July 2019**

### **Narrative Report**

#### **I. Opening Remarks**

UNESCO and Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB) jointly organized a multistakeholder discussion on Tourism in Mrauk U. The event was held in Yangon and it was an opportunity to discuss tourism issues at Mrauk U from different perspectives. The main aim of the event was to involve local communities in the planning of a sustainable approach to tourism. An approach that can promote inclusive and social growth while ensuring the effective protection of cultural heritage assets.

The event opened with the remarks from UNESCO (Ms. Min Jeong Kim, Head of UNESCO Myanmar), the Department of Archaeology and National Museum (U Than Htike, Director of Mrauk U branch) and the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism (U Moe Aung, Deputy Director of Mrauk U branch).

The main elements emerged from the opening remarks were:

- All participants recognized that the current security situation and the ensuing humanitarian crisis in Rakhine State do not provide an enabling environment for the development of tourism sector in Mrauk U. Since 2017 the number of tourist arrivals in the area has been declining. Not only the ongoing conflicts and the political instability, but also lack of infrastructures, accommodations, and difficult transportation and accessibility are among the causes. Relevant authorities are aware that Mrauk U is not yet prepared to receive a high number of visitors at the moment, and they are willing to support several activities, including capacity building for local community, to improve the situation in the near future.
- The Government of Myanmar has renewed its intention to finalize the submission of the World Heritage Nomination Dossier (draft) by September 2019. As part of the process, the relevant authorities will have to submit a Tourism Management Plan for the site, with the double objective of minimizing the negative impact of tourism while emphasizing the possible benefits for the local communities. The 2-day multistakeholder discussion is the occasion to encourage a better understanding of sustainable tourism practices and identify priority actions for Mrauk U.

#### **II. Presentations**

During the multistakeholder discussion, several presentations were shared with the audience.

Key messages included:

a. Introduction to the Multistakeholder discussion – by Ms. Vicky Bowman (MCRB)

- Multistakeholder workshops and wide impact assessments on tourism have been already conducted in 2016 and 2017. The organization's input and recommendations on the importance of tourism sector were also included in the Rakhine State Socio-economic Development Plan.
- The planning phase of tourism development is particularly critical, as it involves a large number of stakeholders with different expectations. In complex situation such as Mrauk U, all relevant parties should bear in mind that tourism, if poorly managed, can bring to additional conflicts.

b. World Heritage and Sustainable Development – by Mr. Michele Romano (UNESCO)

- World Heritage sites are of extraordinary importance not only for local residents but also the international community. They are often fragile and exposed to different kind of threats including uncontrolled development, illegal trade, natural and man-made disasters. Tourism can be undoubtedly seen as one of the main threats for World Heritage sites, if not managed properly. On the other hand, if planned carefully, it can bring benefit to local communities in the long-term.
- The development of the tourism sector should take into account the protection of the cultural assets, therefore a Tourism Management Plan is now mandatory for the inscription of the World Heritage List. The plan should take into account the social, cultural and economic impact as well as respect the overall World Heritage standards for conservation of cultural heritage. Finally, the development of the Tourism Management Plan should be based on the inclusion of the local community, which is fundamental for the long-term sustainability of Mrauk U.

c. Myanmar New Tourism Law and Tourism Development – by U Win Min (MCRB)

- The new Myanmar Tourism Law (Union Hluttaw Law No. 26/2018) has been enacted, together with the establishment of three newly formed tourism committee: i) the National Tourism Development Central Committee, ii) the Tourism Committee and, iii) the Regional Committee(s).
- The overall scope of the new legal framework is to decentralize the management structures while strengthening the planning of tourism destinations. It also aims to promote

environmental conservation, rights of ethnic communities and legal expertise for tourism sector.

- It is clear that there is an overall interest to support the tourism industry nationwide, but the new law demands a great level of cooperation and coordination among different departments and actors from the private sector.
- For the specific situation of Mrauk U, it is also suggested to i) provide training and capacity building programs for tourism planners, ii) promote the role of Destination Management Organizations, iii) organize multistakeholder consultations to foster coordination and, iv) support responsible business practices for the tourism sector.

d. Suggestion for development of Tourism Management Plan – by Daw Khin Than (MHT)

- The historical value of Mrauk U is outstanding. The site is rich in cultural and natural heritage in both tangible and intangible forms which need protection. Lack of maintenance, illegal dumping of waste, encroachments and, more recently, conflict, are threatening the conservation of these assets.
- Tourism can potentially benefit the local community and play an important role in the overall regional development. However, if not planned carefully, it can also have a negative impact on cultural heritage.
- Particular attention should be given to local traditional business and festivals, which are disappearing because of lack of demand and modernization. The proposed Tourism Management Plan should also help in the protection of these small-scale local businesses and, in general, it should aim to ensure the balance between conservation of heritage and development.

e. Experiences from Kalaw Tourism Organization – by Daw Ohnmar Cho (KTO)

- KTO is one of the best examples of the sustainable approach taken by an organization towards tourism development. This local organization was founded with the main objective of strengthening economically and socially inclusive tourism sector in Kalaw. They have been involved in several activities to raise awareness on attractions of Kalaw as well as environmental conservation and waste management.
- The main lessons learned from the presentation was the critical importance of collaboration between different stakeholders, both from the private sector and the governmental institutions at various levels.

f. Experiences from Pyu Ancient Cities – by U Kyaw Myo Win (Dept. of Archaeology)

- The Pyu Ancient Cities were nominated in 2014 as the first World Heritage site in Myanmar. Especially in the years immediately following the nomination, the number of tourist arrivals saw a dramatic rise (from 600 in 2011 to 9000 visitors in 2014). It can be assumed that the World Heritage nomination has increased the site's visibility among domestic tourists, given that the majority of visitors are from Myanmar.
- In terms of benefits for local communities, it has been observed that the World Heritage status leads to the increased interest from the international communities and national authorities, which brought direct and indirect support for infrastructure development of the area.
- Consequently, the local community has become more engaged in heritage conservation by demonstrating an increased awareness of the correct behavior for maintaining the cultural assets of the site.

g. **Linking Mrauk U and Kalaw – by Ms. Kyawt Aye Than (Mrauk U Guide Association)**

- The group of Mrauk U's representatives which participated in the Study Tour to Kalaw shared with the audience the lesson learned from the destination management practices in Shan State. Thanks to the activity, the participants gained a preliminary insight into sustainable tourism development, which includes strong advocacy for economic inclusivity and environmental awareness.
- The critical role of local Destination Management Organizations was also emphasized, together with the importance of involving the local community in all the aspects of tourism development, from decision making to integrating communities in waste management and organic product development.
- The Study Tour was an opportunity to support a better understanding of the tourism industry and to share best practices for participatory approach and quality tourism that can be applied in Mrauk U.

### III. Group discussions

Over the course of the two-day multi-stakeholder meeting, participants were divided into 4 different groups based on their relevant professional backgrounds and expertise: (1) Infrastructure Development, (2) Legal Framework, (3) Destination Management and (4) Community Management. The objective was to encourage group members to generate collective ideas for potential development of sustainable tourism in Mrauk U.

### **a. Group 1 – Infrastructure development**

Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) mechanism needs to be established before the construction of any buildings within or near the monument zone, protection zone, and heritage zone. Rules and regulation for infrastructure development should be clear, transparent and well understood by local community.

Having said that, the group proposed a series of priority infrastructure and interventions linked to the development of sustainable tourism for Mrauk U:

- Information center and museum
- Improved waste management system
- Improvements in road network, including drainage system.
- Renovation of the old palace and development of the jetty area.
- The linkage between waterways and potential development of new water transport routes to help promote the protection of Mrauk U's hydrological features.
- First Aid stations for both international and domestic tourists.
- Protection and preservation of wells and historical drainage canals.
- Identification of new routes and proper signage.
- Development of clean green public spaces.
- Security and police station.
- Clean eating and sleeping places for tourist.
- Night market with the promotion of regional cuisines and entertainment.

### **b. Group 2 – Legal framework**

With the objective of formulating a legal and regulatory framework for the sustainable development of tourism in Mrauk U, the group suggested the following laws and policies be developed, enacted and reinforced:

- Tourism law/ by-laws (Myanmar Tourism Law – Union Hluttaw Law No.26/2018).
- Cultural conservation law/ by-laws (The Protection and Preservation of Cultural Heritage Regions Law – Union Hluttaw Law No.6/2019)
- Environmental law (Environmental Conservation Law – Union Hluttaw Law No. 9/2012).
- Myanmar Investment law.
- Laws concerning the management of water resources.
- Land Acquisition Act of 1894.
- Development of Mrauk U master plan.
- Tourism service permits and travel restrictions to be thoroughly reviewed and updated after conducting a situational analysis.

- Zoning classifications.
- Rules and regulations to be introduced to help solve the problem of domestic tourists staying at monasteries and monks charging money from tourists as this is creating serious social and religious issues that are often overlooked.
- A management plan for Mrauk U.
- Coordination between different departments to be strengthened for effective implementation of laws and reinforcement.
- Rule of law, law enforcement, effective prosecution against actions that break the law.
- Research to be carried out to identify the carrying capacity of destination sites
- Formation of regional authority for tourism management in Mrauk U.
- The efficiency of the tourism police to be reviewed.
- Develop dos and don'ts guidelines at temples.

### c. Group 3 – Destination management

Main outcomes of the discussion on Destination Management were:

- DMOs are needed for i) effective tourism planning, management, and monitoring, ii) improving the quality of local tourism industry, and iii) protection and promotion of local culture, traditions and heritage of destinations.
- Furthermore, the group agrees that DMOs should play a crucial role in i) increasing local community awareness of tourism, ii) serving as a platform to work in close cooperation with tourism stakeholders, local community and the government, iii) taking a lead role in engaging dialogues between diverse stakeholders, and iii) working for the sustainable development of tourism which is in line with the local needs, wants and requirements.
- With specific reference to the situation of Mrauk U, it has been proposed that a Destination Management approach should be used for the site. This will support the sustainable management of the destination, improving the visitors' experiences while taking into account the needs of local residents, business and the environment.
- It was also highlighted that Mrauk-U is a tourism destination with foreseen potential but also a cultural heritage site with significant heritage values. In this regard, the need to balance between heritage management and tourism is highly acknowledged.

### d. Group 4 – Community management

The group suggested the formation of Mrauk U Tourism Organization (MTO) with local parliamentarians, government departments, CSOs, tourism stakeholders, community leaders, and tourism experts. The group also identified the roles of organization members and needs for community as seen in the proposed table.

Organization members	Responsible roles
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Members of parliament	Representatives of general public (listen to local voices and present issues in parliament)
Local government	Issuing/Rejection of license, permit and planning budget
Local CSOs	Engage in activities, networking, and implementation of projects
Hoteliers	Provide financial support and other supports
Religious leaders	Provide advice, guidance and bringing people together
Community leaders	Sharing historical and cultural knowledge (oral tradition) among communities

The group finally identified the main needs of the community that should be addressed:

- Training and capacity building to develop the tourism sector (marketing/PR, language, fundraising skills, conflict management, disaster awareness and preparedness, product development, food, and hygiene).
- IT training, with specific reference to administration management skills that can help the establishment of local business.
- Awareness-raising campaigns (cultural heritage protection, environmental conservation, waste management, legal awareness, pros and cons of tourism).
- Development of HIA mechanisms to balance the development of infrastructure with the need for conserving the cultural heritage assets of the site.

#### IV. Panel discussion – Facilitator, U Win Min (MCRB)

A panel discussion was also organized in order to emphasize recommendations from key speakers. These include:

1. Daw Moe Moe Lwin, director and vice-chairperson of Yangon Heritage Trust underlined the role of cultural heritage in the tourism sector in Myanmar. She emphasized that it is important for concerned stakeholders to understand the value of their own heritage and make an effort to conserve for future generations. For places with outstanding cultural assets, such as Mrauk U, the focus should always be first placed on preservation rather than tourism development. An awareness campaign should also be organized to share the updated knowledge of cultural heritage with the public. Listening to local people voice in conservation is also essential, as their consensus is of paramount importance in the planning process.
2. U Kyaw Min Htin from Myanmar Tourism Marketing highlighted on the economic importance of tourism sector and how it can contribute to the overall development of Mrauk U. Tourism can generate both income and employment opportunities, especially when a destination is well managed. Tourism can help support the overall development of local communities and consequently contributes to achieving the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In



Mrauk U, like in the rest of the country, the tourism industry is in dire need of human resources. Investing in capacity building of local communities can help to fill this gap.

3. Daw Mra Sabai Nyun from Rakhine Thahaya Association advised on how tourism should be developed for Mrauk U from the perspective of local people. Every destination is unique and different in their own ways, therefore a specific tourism management plan should be developed for Mrauk U. This should be based on the town's geographical features, socioeconomic status, community and background of heritage. The local community should be at the center of planning process as it has clearly demonstrated strong will in preservation of heritage and sense of ownership throughout the preparatory process for World Heritage nomination. Taking this into consideration, she asserts that authorities should be aiming for development of inclusive tourism strategy for Mrauk U. Local people should be perceived as facilitators, liaison person and decision-makers of their own heritage rather than passive recipients of decisions made by authorities. Over the past months, local people have demonstrated their willingness to participate in cultural heritage conservation thus they should be included more in the overall effort to protect and manage the site.
4. Dr. Zin Nwe Myint, Professor at the Department of Geography, University of Yangon, pointed out that, local people must first be aware of the principles of heritage conservation since the Mrauk U's tourism industry will be mainly based on heritage. The commitment of local communities is very important to build a strong management system, but local authorities should be more willing to take part in the decision-making at local level. At present, the lack of coordination among government bodies, institutions and communities can be seen as the main challenge to overcome. The fact that there is no linkage between different entities and everyone works on their own makes it almost impossible to successfully execute projects.
5. U Thet Lwin Toe from Myanmar Tourism Federation (MTF) gave a brief situational analysis of Mrauk U where the tourism sector is greatly affected by the recent conflicts. Despite being on the list of international travelers before, Mrauk U's tourism is now suffering from ongoing conflicts that have resulted in high cancellation rate from international tourists. Regardless of the potential and wealth of cultural resource, tourism in Mrauk U is in decline at the moment. To mitigate the situation, he suggested that community needs to get more involved and master plan must be developed for Mrauk U. Development of plans must be consistent and tourism goals should be set. In order to increase tourist arrivals, the government should work on reconciliation process in order to end the conflict. With the leadership from experts and involvement from community, sustainable tourism for Mrauk U can be developed.

Finally, the panelists made their final remarks, on how to achieve the sustainable tourism development in Mrauk U, balancing between the protection of the heritage, and the overall development of the region;



- Developing a shared vision for Mrauk U is critical. Sharing goals and objectives among different stakeholders will help bring sustainable development for Mrauk U. National planning law is already enacted and implemented, but it must be interpreted into a version that is relatable to Mrauk U.
- Local communities' role needs to be strengthened through capacity building programs. These should be based on an updated needs assessment that is to be conducted in Mrauk U.
- The government involvement is key in the conservation of cultural heritage and successful implementation of sustainable development projects in Mrauk U. Lack of budget and shortage of human resource have always been the challenge for government departments in execution of projects and this is particularly the case for Department of Archeology that requires specific expertise and considerable amount of funds. In order to protect valuable cultural heritage of the country, it is recommended to introduce criteria in planning process that allows allocation of extra budget to places with unique cultural values.