

# Myanmar on its Way from Tourism Boycott to Responsible Tourism Management: The Important Role of Stakeholder Dialogues

## Introduction

Ask yourself this question: ‘How can a country that has been facing calls for sanctions and boycotts by Western human rights organisations for the past 20 years conceivably be involved in sustainable tourism planning?’

In 2000, Tourism Concern and Burma Campaign designed a postcard to support their calls to boycott the travel guide publisher Lonely Planet. The card showed tourists being warmly welcomed by locals after their plane had landed. On this same postcard, behind a fence and invisible to the tourists, one could see various kinds of human rights violations being committed. Tourism, it was argued, would cause severe violations of human rights, such as forced labour and displacement, so tourists were advised against visiting the country, and foreign companies were told not to invest there.

Now, however, only one decade later, the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism (MoHT) has published a Responsible Tourism Policy and a Policy on Community Involvement in Tourism. The question is, what to make of these measures – and how exactly were these policies developed? Was it a job for tourism consultants who, behind closed doors, formulated some well-phrased documents which were then attractively laid out, printed and presented to the public as a showpiece – but totally unrepresentative of reality? To make it clear from the start, this was not the way it happened. In fact, the policies were the result of a stakeholder process which, in this form, has probably never been accomplished in any other country before at such a level in tourism, and which may be an important platform, not only for sustainable tourism development in Myanmar, but also for an important contribution to the internal peace-building process in the country.

This paper presents an overview of this stakeholder process. One of the authors witnessed the development of these two tourism policies over recent months as a tourism consultant and co-author; the other did on-site research during the boycott. This paper is therefore not just a review of academic publications or systematic in-depth field research but, rather, it reflects the authors’

subjective, first-hand experiences of a country in the process of transition. The paper begins with an introduction to the key theoretical concepts used in the research on stakeholder dialogues. It then provides a brief overview of tourism development in Myanmar and background information on the attempted tourism boycott since 1996. The main part describes the processes, experiences, and lessons learned in connection with the development of the policies on responsible tourism and community involvement in tourism as an important tool for the promotion of democracy and peace in this country of transition. The final part discusses the challenges that arise and possible future steps to be taken.

### **Stakeholder Processes in Tourism: A Tool for Democratic Development and Peace-Building**

Sustainability in all its aspects – social, institutional, economic, and environmental – involves important elements of strategies designed to achieve long-term peace between countries, regions or ethnic groups. A higher level of sustainability in a society requires a change in the mind-set of those involved, as well as innovation, inventiveness, and, above all, people who are not only inspired by the potential of sustainability but are also willing to implement change at all levels of the society in which they live.

The same applies for the implementation of responsible and sustainable tourism. Our globalised world needs innovation to promote sustainability in tourism, and to do so, people must be able to think together, to cooperate both across sectors (hotels, transport, restaurants, guides, etc.) and across cultures, and to respect differences. According to the Collective Leadership Institute, working towards a more sustainable world makes it necessary to bring together different worldviews and to resolve conflicts of interest in order to promote responsible business activities, people-oriented public services, and a strong civil society (Kuenkel et al. 2011). This also applies to the development of responsible tourism. The key stakeholders in tourism planning are the private sector, national and international NGOs, government at all levels, local communities, development agencies, international organisations such as UNWTO and the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA), and of course the tourists themselves – although it is difficult to integrate ‘the tourists’ into a stakeholder dialogue, due to lack of representation.

Given this, stakeholder relationships must be based on trust to increase the ability of those involved to communicate and partner with multi-stakeholders: *‘The different actors [...] need to communicate respectfully, in a way that shows that they appreciate each other, despite serious differences in opinion’* (Kuenkel et al. 2011, 13). Such a collaborative approach can become the norm in the daily business of dealing with the challenges of sustainable development, such as peace building, democratisation, sustainable economic development, and good governance, all of which are important elements of responsible tourism development for any destination.

According to the Collective Leadership Institute, at the core of stakeholder dialogue is the principle of 'collective leadership', meaning that a group of leaders contributes to a more sustainable future by assuming joint and flexible leadership for the benefit of all involved. Leaders do not necessarily have to be political or business leaders; more importantly they need the strength, the willingness, and the ability to contribute to the sustainability of society. In the case of tourism, leaders can be representatives of ministries, tourism associations, local communities, destination management organisations, local guides, and so on.

Stakeholder dialogues are structured conversations about certain issues of common interest or concern between:

- People from different sectors or constituencies
- People with different perspectives and points of view
- People with different interests

These conversations support planning and decision making, help to resolve problems, and contribute to finding innovative solutions or to the design and implementation of joint interventions for change. Ideally, stakeholder dialogues lead to a practical outcome, such as a tourism policy which could otherwise not have been achieved and which is easier to implement because all the stakeholders involved have experienced a higher degree of ownership. In high-quality stakeholder dialogues differences, sometime even conflicts, hold the potential for innovative solutions and can achieve goals that ultimately benefit everyone. This can lead to:

- Trust-building between different stakeholders
- Forward-looking and constructive cooperation between participants
- Innovative solutions to existing economic or social challenges
- A higher quality, and broader acceptance, of decisions
- Ownership of and commitment to implementing agreed-upon results
- Collective responsibility for change
- Sustainable outcomes
- Long-lasting cooperative structures (Kuenkel et al. 2011, 18)

According to Hemmati (2007), the value base of stakeholder dialogues includes the following elements:

- Being transparent and accountable
- Ensuring equity among all stakeholders
- Focusing on the contribution to the common cause
- Promoting collective leadership
- Ensuring reliable processes
- Being open to iterative learning (participants must adopt a learning attitude which creates a favourable atmosphere for new ideas and solutions to emerge which otherwise would not have emerged)
- Promoting consensus building
- Ensuring participation and engagement among the participants

- Respecting legitimacy (outcomes must be legitimate).

In order to ensure that stakeholder dialogues can be implemented successfully, the Collective Leadership Institute has developed a Dialogic Change Model that is divided into four phases.

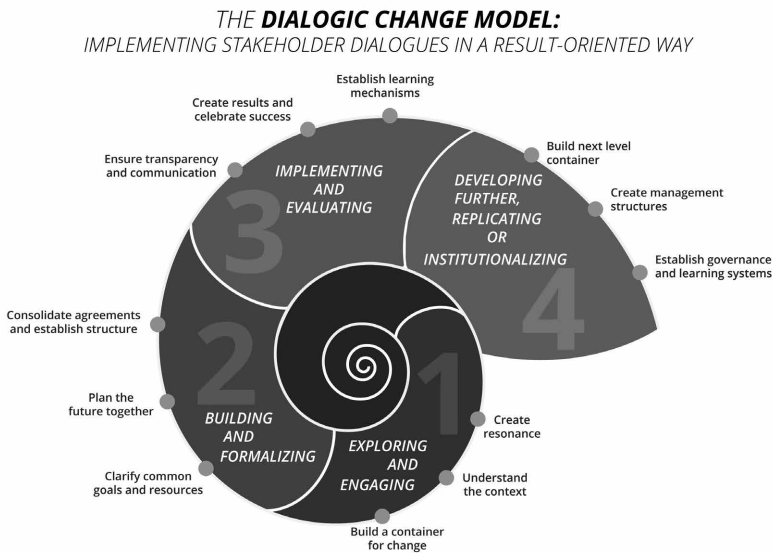
Table 1: Overview: The Four Phases of Stakeholder Dialogue

Phase 1	Exploring and engaging	Understanding the context, understanding stakeholders
Phase 2	Building and formalizing	Clarifying goals and commitment, establishing resources, creating formal agreements, planning process and joint implementation
Phase 3	Implementing and evaluating	Implementing agreed-upon or recommended activities, creating showcases for change, evaluating progress and outcomes
Phase 4	Developing further; replicating and institutionalizing	Bringing the dialogue to the next level, expanding or replicating dialogue activities, creating long-lasting structures for change

Source: Kuenkel et al. (2011, 53)

The Collective Leadership Institute uses a snail shell model to illustrate the four phases as a spiral-like process of cyclical continuity, with the radius of the shell exponentially increasing in size as the snail develops. This is to signify that the process starts off rather small and becomes more expansive over time.

Figure 1: The Snail-Shell Model of Stakeholder Dialogue Processes



Source: Kuenkel et al. (2011, 54)

These processes of the stakeholder dialogues were part of the formulation of two tourism policies for Myanmar. The phases are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

### Tourism Development in Myanmar

Myanmar is a country emerging from five decades of inward-looking policies and international isolation that have kept the international community, development agencies, global businesses – and the international tourism industry – at bay. The second-largest country in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Myanmar has much more to offer as a destination than most of its neighbouring countries: snow-capped mountains, endless sandy beaches, the pristine Myeik Archipelago, 36 protected areas, outstanding examples of religious and secular architecture such as Bagan, a deep-rooted belief in Buddhism, and a youthful population of about 60 million. (Häusler, Nicole et al. 2013.)

Myanmar is considered to have the richest ethnic diversity in Asia, with officially 135 different ethnic groups living in the country, the Burmese being by far the largest. Other ethnic groups include Shan (9% of the population), Karen (7%), Mon, Rakhine, Chin, Kachin, Karenni, Kayan, Chinese, Indian, Danu, Akha, Kokang, Lahu, Naga, Palaung, Pao, Rohyinga, Tavoyan, and Wa (each constituting 5% or less of the population; Ekeh and Smith (2007)). Armed conflicts between ethnic minority groups and the military regime were at one

time a serious issue in Myanmar. For decades, embassies, journalists, travel writers, and tourism pressure groups had asked international visitors to stay away.

In 2003, the mounting pressure eventually led Burma Campaign to try to mobilise European media and NGOs to ‘boycott’ tourism after Lauda Air started offering the first direct flight between Europe and Yangon. The main argument, besides the condemnation of the human right violations, was the statement from the Nobel Peace Prize winner of 1991, Aung San Suu Kyi, claiming that the country was not ready for tourism and that the greater part of the money spent by the tourists was going directly to the regime.

At that time, most of the tourism businesses in Myanmar were directly owned by the government or like-minded persons, or were in the hands of foreigners – mostly Chinese, but also some Westerners. Overnight stays in private accommodation (B&B, community-based tourism, etc.) were prohibited, and local guides did not dare talk about politics.

On-site analyses (e.g., Baumgartner et al. 2003) showed that, despite the negative aspects and even within a military regime, tourism development could nevertheless benefit the population directly in several ways – for example:

- Job creation (albeit with rather low levels of income)
- Direct and indirect financial benefits for farmers and craftsmen
- Access to education (e.g. through in-house language training at companies)
- Access to information (e.g. through using the companies’ internet access)

Furthermore, a boycott as it was originally intended was unlikely to be successful. According to Cortright and Lopez (2000, 2002) of the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, five criteria must be fulfilled for sanctions to be effective:

- Sanctions must cause costs of more than 2% of the target countries’ GDP.
- The most important boycotting country must have an economic power of at least 10 times that of the target country.
- The target country must have more than 25% of its foreign trade with the sanctioning countries.
- Sanctions must be quick, comprehensive, and with full cooperation of all trading partners that could eventually bypass the sanctions.
- Caused costs for the sanctioning state(s) must be low.

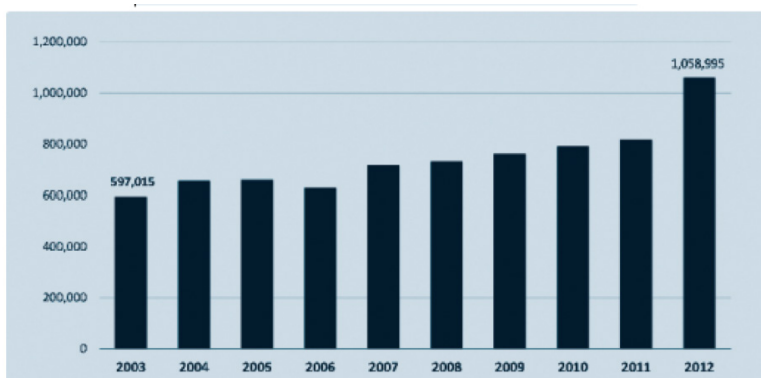
At that time, tourism contributed only 1.6% to the GDP, so not even this criterion would have been fulfilled. The only way was to appeal to the (European) tour operators’ sense of responsibility to provide their clients with comprehensive – and accurate – information and to try to bring as much added value as possible directly to the population.

## Opening of the Country Leads to a Tourism Boom

The process of political and economic reforms, which has been well underway since 2011, has led directly to a sudden and rapid increase in the number of international tourist arrivals. In 2011, encouraged by the changing political situation, the opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), announced the abolishment of the total travel boycott. By 2012, the country's political opening-up had already resulted in an enormous increase in the number of tourist arrivals as well as in the number of national and international investors willing to invest in tourism. Within 20 years, between 1990 and 2009, the number of international visitor arrivals rose from 8,968 to 762,547. Roughly one third of these arrivals are believed to have been individuals from neighbouring communities crossing the border, and 'border tourists' from Thailand entering the country for less than 24 hours on 'visa runs'. By 2012, Myanmar had recorded 1,058,995 international visitor arrivals, so that for the first time in the history of its tourism industry the country had received over one million international visitors.

In the past ten years, an average annual growth of 6.6% has been recorded; by 2012, the growth rate had increased to 29.7%. Currently, the majority of international tourists who come to Myanmar visit one or more of the following destinations: Yangon, Bagan, Inle Lake, Mandalay, Kyaiktiyo ('Golden Rock'), and Ngapali Beach. The Master Plan has set a high target of 3.01 million international visitors by 2015, and of 7.48 million by 2020. Based on this high growth scenario, tourism income is projected to increase from a baseline of \$534 million in 2012 to \$10.18 billion by 2020, with the corresponding number of tourism-related jobs rising from 293,700 to 1.49 million (MoHT, 2013b).

Figure 2: International visitor arrivals in Myanmar 2003–2012



Source: MoHT (2012)

Myanmar is perceived as an unspoiled land. This is not only a competitive advantage, but also an important reason for maintaining Myanmar's spiritual

values and culture. However, there is a risk that tourism growth may become unsustainable, and may have massive negative impacts on the environment, the culture, and the Myanmar society. Although as yet the country has no mass tourism infrastructure, some negative impacts of tourism can already be observed in Bagan, at Lake Inle, and at the 'Golden Rock' (Kyaiktiyo Pagoda), particularly with regard to waste and water management.

MoHT and the Myanmar Tourism Federation (MTF), an umbrella organization of various tourism businesses, recognise that the rapid tourism development may succeed in boosting the sector and creating swift economic development, but may fail to make sustainable tourism development in the country successful in the long run.

Numerous challenges were identified in workshops conducted at several destinations in Myanmar in 2012, which were organised by MoHT and MTF, in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the German Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF), including:

- A demand for hotels outstripping supply during high season
- Insufficient measures to interpret, protect, and conserve heritage assets
- Poor waste management in all its forms
- Insufficient stakeholder involvement in planning processes
- A lack of tourism-related research
- A lack of human, technical, and financial resources

Existing tourism products in Myanmar have also been found to comply only partially with the criteria of sustainable tourism. But, with its enormous economic power, tourism has the potential to create positive impacts in the future – provided that regional value chains are involved, and small and medium-sized tourism businesses and the informal tourism sector are engaged and supported. Moreover, mechanisms must be identified to ensure that appropriate prices are paid for the use of natural resources and land by those involved in tourism to ensure the long-term preservation of these resources.

### **Paving the Path Towards Responsible Tourism Management**

To ensure a coordinated response to the transformation of the country and the resulting increase in tourist arrivals since the political opening-up of Myanmar, sustainable tourism development in the country requires new competencies for locally responsible tourism leaders. Change initiatives towards responsible tourism development must be created which can be supported collectively by all parties involved. According to the Myanmar government, conditions for the implementation of sustainable tourism immediately after the political opening were favourable. The rationale behind the current efforts is that *'the Ministry also recognises that the success of rapid tourism development would not only have a boost on the sector and create a swift economic development, but that it would also have challenges in the long-term success for sustainable tourism development in the country'* (MoHT 2012, 2).



Since early 2012, MoHT, in collaboration with MTF and HSF, has initiated coherent processes directed at responsible tourism practices and goals. The very first meeting of the Tourism Working Group on the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) in Myanmar took place in Bagan over three days in November 2011. At this meeting, representatives from MoHT, PATA, GMS, and ADB, international experts, and national tourism stakeholders discussed potential directions for the industry. On one of the days the participants held an open-minded and level-headed discussion on sustainable tourism planning in Myanmar – something which just six months earlier would have been inconceivable.

In February 2012 MoHT, in cooperation with MTF and HSF, held a three-day event called Responsible Tourism Working Days in Nay Pyi Taw. Originally, MoHT had planned to organise a two-day conference with key speakers well-known in the area of sustainable tourism, but it was decided that, rather than just spend the time listening to experts, it would be better to hold an event which would promote stakeholder dialogue to learn more about the status-quo thinking of stakeholders in responsible tourism.

On the first day representatives of no fewer than 22 ministries and other public sector institutions hosted plenary sessions and workshops which focused on the contributions that their institutions would have to make to promote sustainable tourism development, and the activities that should be given priority. On the second day, representatives of about 50 tour operators engaged in an equally intensive discussion about the private sector's contribution to sustainable tourism development, and on the third day the 150-plus participants summarised the results of the two workshops held at the conference, producing a Joint Declaration on Responsible Tourism.

Despite their long years of professional experience, the international facilitators were surprised by the willingness of both the government and the private-sector representatives to contribute and get involved; such an intensive exchange was something they had rarely seen in any other country. Probably one of the main reasons why the Burmese were so eager to participate in the discussions was that after decades of isolation they felt a real urge to discuss things and engage in open dialogue. It felt as if the energy that had been bottled up for decades was being released after the cork had finally been pulled out. And of course they were also testing the waters, so to speak, to see how far they could go at a forum such as this.

The Joint Declaration includes four action points, which must be accomplished as soon as possible to promote responsible tourism development:

- Establishment of a Myanmar Tourism Policy to create clear guidelines and define the responsibilities of the parties involved
- Creation of formal training and education opportunities for the hospitality and tourism sector (quality improvement)
- Creation of informal training opportunities for local communities to raise awareness of tourism benefits and costs, and to encourage local involvement (community-based tourism, supply chain management)

- Implementation of regular stakeholder meetings of the public and private sectors, with the goal of implementing the first three action points as efficiently as possible through strong networking

### **Developing Policies: Working in Silence or Open Discussion?**

Since the Responsible Tourism Working Days, MoHT and MTF have been making concerted efforts to implement these four action points, with the primary focus being on the development of a policy. Why it is so important to work on a tourism policy while a country is undergoing such a transformation process is explained by Hall (2011, 39f.):

‘For many people tourism is perhaps the antithesis of politics. The term ‘tourism’ conjures up images of leisure, free time, and play. It is overseen that tourism and tourism research are inseparably linked to issues of politics. Decisions affecting the location and character of tourism development arise out of politics as does, of course, whether an individual is even allowed to travel or whether certain locations, subjects or communities are available to study. Politics is also closely related to the development of policies given that politics is concerned with both the exercise of power and influence in a society and in special decisions over policies. Policies are therefore what governments decide to do or not to do about issues and problems that require government interventions. Policies are therefore more than just a written document as they are extremely broad concept that covers such matters as (a) the purpose of government action; (b) the goals and end that are to be achieved; (c) the means to achieve goals; usually referred to as plans, proposals or strategies; (d) the decisions and actions that are taken with respect to policy, including implementation’.

In May and June 2012, the development of the Responsible Tourism Policy was facilitated by a team of three foreign and two local tourism consultants. Over 350 participants from the public and private sectors attended ten seminars in five tourist destinations to discuss responsible tourism development in Myanmar. Stakeholder dialogues often venture into unknown territory. Different forms of organisations with different internal structures, mandates, purposes, values, and decision-making procedures come together, in many cases for the first time, and they must understand and mediate between different, and sometimes contradictory, worldviews. Different forms of planning must be negotiated.

Although quite nervous at the beginning, the facilitators soon started to feel comfortable in this unknown territory when the discussions during the workshops became surprisingly open. The tensions at the beginning were due to the fact that for many years Myanmar’s national politics had been dominated by the military, which had led to a very quiet society (albeit with disruptions due to uprisings in 1988 and 2007). In interviews with representa-

tives from the private tourism sector conducted in May 2012, respondents described how they perceived cooperation:

- ‘People from Myanmar are not team players; teamwork is only useful in monasteries, not in business’
- ‘Another thing we don’t understand is synergy: combining the strengths of different aspects’
- ~~(Kasüske 2012, 77)~~

These statements show that stakeholder dialogue in general, and in tourism in particular, had not been of great value to Myanmar society in the past.

Seating order was an interesting and very important element at the first stakeholder workshops. The setup of a room has a much greater influence on the results of a meeting than one would think. The specific seating order often determines how people communicate with each other. In the past, the most frequently used setup at meetings in Myanmar was the conference setting, usually comprising a panel or a speaker’s podium at the front of the room, with the meeting facilitator standing in front of a row of chairs. The most powerful and high-ranking members of the military and government were offered very comfortable chairs or sofas in the first few rows, while the other participants silently listened to the speakers, with seldom a chance to ask questions.

At the beginning of the workshops on the policies, the facilitators preferred a U-shape setting because it allowed a smaller number of stakeholders to enter into a livelier exchange of perspectives and positions. However, this setup also establishes a hierarchy between the ‘important’ people in the front (facilitators, resource persons, and politically high-ranking participants). This is the recommended setup for the early stages of a stakeholder dialogue because it maintains the hierarchy. The ideal form is a round-table setting because it allows for input, exchange, and conversation among the stakeholders sitting around the table. For the afternoon sessions of the workshops, the facilitators always divided the participants into sub-groups and used the round-table setting. The outcomes of the group work were presented to and discussed with all the participants at the very end of the workshops.

Two final workshops were held to analyse and discuss the results of this exchange. The draft of the policy was presented at the concluding national conference in Nay Pyi Taw. The draft was discussed sentence by sentence by all participants, and further amendments and modifications were made. The policy contains a strategic vision, nine overall aims, and 58 specific action points for the implementation of sustainable tourism practices. The strategic vision that inspired the guidelines of the policy is aimed at the improvement of living standards, the economic empowerment of local communities, the conservation of cultural and natural resources, and responsible behaviour of all tourism stakeholders:

‘We intend to use tourism to make Myanmar a better place to live in – to provide more employment and greater business opportunities for all our people, to contribute to the conservation of our natural and cultural herit-

age and to share with us our rich cultural diversity. We warmly welcome those who appreciate and enjoy our heritage, our way of life and who travel with respect.' (MoHT, 2012, 6)

The policy has nine overall aims:

- To make tourism a national priority sector
- To promote broad-based local socio-economic development
- To maintain cultural diversity and authenticity
- To conserve and enhance the environment
- To compete on product richness, diversity, and quality, not just on price
- To ensure the health, safety, and security of visitors
- To strengthen institutions which manage tourism
- To create a well-trained and well-rewarded workforce
- To minimise unethical practices (MoHT 2012)

In addition, 58 action points were formulated, but it was not yet clear who would be responsible for their implementation. When, at the final conference, the facilitators asked who among the participants wanted to assume the different roles (leaders, advisors, liaisons) involved in the various action points, the representatives of more than 25 ministries and MTF raised their hands according to their areas of interest and responsibility. At conferences, such a procedure can create an enormous level of ownership, great commitment to implementing agreed-upon results, and the sense that all of those involved in such a process share a collective responsibility for change.

Furthermore, the policy provides guidelines on how to evaluate and monitor tourism development. Surprisingly, terms such as 'civil society,' which played no role in the politics of the former military government, were adopted as a crucial component of the policy without argument. As the roles and tasks of every single participant in the implementation of a sustainable tourism strategy were explained, it became clear that the roles of local communities and civil society organisations would be just as crucial to the process as the roles of the government and the private sector. At the end of the process, the policy was approved by the cabinet and published in English and the Myanmar language.

### **Tourism and Local-Community Involvement**

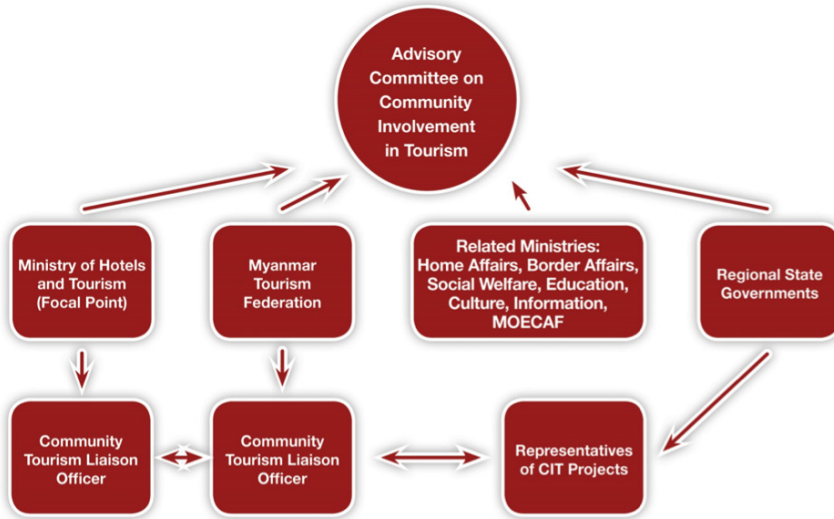
After the publication of the Responsible Tourism Policy and the debates and conferences held in the previous months, calls for stronger involvement of local communities in tourism planning became louder. In response, it was decided that a Policy on Community Involvement in Tourism with new regulations would be developed, not only to create better opportunities for the local population to participate in tourism, but also to prevent or minimise the negative impacts of tourism growth.

Kasüske (2012) notes that the concept of community participation in tourism is still associated primarily with income and employment generation. Few

of the people interviewed during her field research even considered community involvement at self-reliant level. This may have to do with the prevailing imbalance of power in the country, caused by the former military regime, which prevented the empowerment of local communities. But there is also an imbalance of power within the tourism industry. The constraints identified include the dominance of a few major destinations and the small number of private sector stakeholders. According to Kasüske (2012, 81f), “community participation has been regarded as a means to achieve this for a long time because it is associated with fewer power disparities amongst stakeholders and increased opportunities for economic benefits of local communities – in short, with social, institutional and economic empowerment.” Given this, the development of the Policy on Community Involvement in Tourism by MoHT and MTF was a major step towards redressing the imbalance of power in the area of tourism.

In February 2013 a team of three national and international consultants organised workshops in various destinations (Yangon, Bagan, Inle Lake, Kyauing Tong, Loikaw). At a concluding conference in Nay Pyi Taw, the draft of the policy was again discussed in great detail. During the afternoon session, minimum and advanced standards for community projects in tourism were defined in round-table-setting sub-groups, which were then discussed in the forum at the end of the conference. Subsequently, the draft was also distributed via email, and the recipients were encouraged to comment. Critical and important aspects, such as overnight stays of foreigners at local homes, were discussed in detail with the minister himself and more than 20 employees of MoHT. In May 2013 the policy was published in English and the Myanmar language. Roles and responsibilities were defined again for all tourism stakeholders, including domestic and international visitors. An advisory committee on community involvement in tourism will soon be set up to promote stakeholder dialogue at various levels.

Figure 3: Communication Process between Stakeholders and Advisory Committee on Community Involvement in Tourism to review regularly the Policy on Community Involvement in Tourism in Myanmar



Source: MoHT (2013, 7)

Important elements for national peace building processes in Myanmar include, for example, one of the core principles:

‘Local Community Participation in Tourism Must be Informed and Willing – Prior to any involvement in tourism, local communities must be provided with sufficient information about the tourism industry to be able to make informed decisions regarding how their future will be impacted. Local people should be willing to participate in tourism and be aware of the potential impacts as well as learn about mechanisms to manage the impacts from the very beginning’ (MoHT 2013a, 14)

This officially gives communities the opportunity to participate in decision-making on tourism development in their region.

In response to the high level of ethnic conflicts in the past, another core principle was included which states that the culture, traditions, and beliefs of every ethnic group must be respected:

‘The culture, traditions and beliefs of every individual can contribute to a person’s well-being, in other words: culture shapes and determines how a person develops and manifests as a human being. Tourists – as well as the private and public sector – need to respect the cultural heritage, traditions and beliefs of every individual in Myanmar’ (MoHT 2013a, 14).

The Policy on Community Involvement in Tourism is perhaps the only policy of its kind in the world. Adapted to local circumstances, it could be used as a blueprint in other destinations. In any case, it should be noted again that such policies must be developed in a stakeholder dialogue – otherwise, it is unlikely that they could be implemented successfully.

Finally, it is important to note that both policies must be regarded as ‘living’ documents, meaning that the aims, core principles, and action points they contain are not ‘carved in stone.’ On the contrary, they should be continuously adapted to the state of tourism development in Myanmar. In fact, as stated in the policies, the documents should be continuously reviewed in close collaboration with a wide range of tourism stakeholders. Currently, the plan is to hold a tourism stakeholder forum every two years to review the action points and priorities.

### **Lessons Learned**

In the course of the process described in the previous section, the following points were found to be particularly noticeable:

#### ***Seating order***

During the Responsible Tourism Policy workshops, local co-ordinators at some locations were still reluctant to accept the facilitators’ suggestion to arrange seats in a U-shape to break up hierarchical structures and to allow eye contact during discussions. At subsequent workshops in these regions, this was no longer an issue.

#### ***Fear***

The participants of the workshops were actively involved, showed a great interest, and apparently were very eager to discuss the issues at hand. However, while discussions were surprisingly open during some of the workshops, there were still some limitations as to what could be said. Although some participants expressed more general criticism of the planned activities of ‘cronies’, highly successful businessmen with close relationships to the military, they did not dare mention names in public because they were afraid that this would have repercussions for them and their families.

#### ***Selection of stakeholders***

While invitees to the Responsible Tourism Policy meetings were almost exclusively private- and public-sector representatives who had been selected by MoHT, MTF, and local authorities, the subsequent workshops were also attended by representatives of civil society organisations and even representatives of the communities. Thett (2012) criticises that, although the workshops were held in major tourist destinations, the decision-making was not a ‘bottom-up’ process because MoHT and MTF invited only participants they knew.

However, this has changed very quickly. At a workshop in the ancient temple city of Bagan in April 2013, local tour guides, tourist police, and representatives of local communities (who are increasingly affected by visits of tourists in their villages) were invited to discuss and decide on rules and regulations for visits to local villages. After 50 years of military rule, it was a touching moment for all involved to see representatives of the private sector (guides), government (police), and civil society (representatives of communities) sit around



tables and discuss the do's and don'ts for tourists. Representatives of ethnic communities near Kyaing Tong (Golden Triangle: village tours are extremely popular among Thai tourists) were invited to the meetings that led to the development of the Policy on Community Involvement in Tourism, but it took a long time to persuade them to attend because they were not used to being asked for their opinions. Eventually, some of them attended the workshop at a 3-star hotel 'in their natural shoes' (i.e. barefoot), and were surprised by the interest shown by others in their opinions. This invitation definitely broke the ice.

### **Location**

If local communities and representatives of the private and public sectors are to meet for stakeholder dialogues on an equal footing, more meetings should take place at communal places such as Buddhist monasteries or other communal public places rather than at 3- or 4-star hotels. Although such events are often more difficult to organise (catering, sufficient seating, the problem of power cuts and heat etc.), they are more efficient overall, especially for the communities.

### **Participation**

The issue of participation is still debated 'differently'. During the discussion on the level of participation by the local population in tourism planning, most of the parties involved took a pragmatic view. They clearly expressed that they did not want to be kept out of the decision-making process. Typical statements included, 'No, we don't want to go back to those times.' However, it will not be possible in the foreseeable future to achieve the (Western?) ideal of Myanmar as a state that always gives its population good opportunities to participate in decision-making. Therefore, they argued that the Buddhist Middle Path should be taken, meaning that most decisions should still be made by the government, but that the local communities should become increasingly involved in decision making.

### **Phases of stakeholder dialogues**

Myanmar has successfully implemented Phases 1 and 2 of the Dialogic Change Model at the macro-level. During the implementation of Phase 1 ('Exploring and engaging'), the participants identified common goals and resources, such as the consolidation of common agreements (in this case, the two policies). Core elements of a successful stakeholder dialogue were applied, such as inviting stakeholders from different sectors and constituencies with different perspectives, points of view, and interests. This has clearly contributed to: building trust among stakeholders; forward-looking and constructive cooperation between various participants; a higher quality and broader acceptance of decisions; and ownership of and commitment to implementing agreed-upon results. The next steps (Phases 3 and 4) will be to: ensure transparency and communication; achieve the desired results; establish learning mechanisms and systems; and create management structures.



## Outlook and Recommendations

It might be said that very few countries have ever witnessed a debate on responsible tourism development that had a national scope as broad as the debate that has taken place in Myanmar, a debate that involved nearly all state ministries and also the private sector. Hopefully, more representatives of civil society organisations and (ethnic) communities will be sitting around the table when the policy is due for review in a few years.

There is no doubt that the policies recently developed provide a solid foundation, and not only for responsible tourism planning. If Myanmar could achieve only half of the goals in the next few years – after all, the goals set in the policies are demands for the desired maximum – it would already have achieved more than most other tourist destinations.

The good news – but also the challenge – is that the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, the Myanmar Tourism Federation, the Hanns Seidel Foundation and, perhaps, some other partners are already planning to initiate such stakeholder dialogues on responsible tourism management at the meso- and micro-levels in destinations with a rich ethnic diversity. Most of these areas have been affected by decades of military conflict between the Myanmar and ethnic armies. With ceasefire agreements having been signed in the past few months, and more due to be signed in the near future, remote areas with a large number of ethnic groups and nearly untouched biodiversity can become ‘untouched destinations’ for eco-, adventure, and cultural tourism.

The aim of these stakeholder dialogues will be:

- To introduce responsible tourism to minimise or maximise certain environmental, economic, and social impacts.
- To teach local stakeholders the value of such dialogues in order to promote not only sustainable tourism development but also conflict resolution, regional development, and public-private dialogues.

What, then, are some of the ensuing challenges? At the moment, a dynamic can be observed that is positive and fast-paced, but also (physically) exhausting for all stakeholders involved. In order to pursue this path, training and workshops must be conducted to educate local trainers, not only on responsible tourism, but also on how to facilitate stakeholder dialogues, which will help ensure that tourism can continue to be responsible in the long run. In the future, stakeholder dialogues in Myanmar will probably also involve more stakeholders, such as local and international NGOs, development agencies, and international organisations, which will give new impetus to the dialogue process. Of course, the success of these efforts will depend largely on Phases 1 and 2.

It remains to be seen whether Myanmar’s tourism stakeholders will be able to put these efforts into practice and, if they do, how and to what extent. After all, the country is still experiencing political, economic, social, and environmental changes, all of which must be dealt with simultaneously. Furthermore, there are high expectations and some pressure coming from international

NGOs who expect the tourism sector to deliver sustainable tourism products as soon as possible. According to Gössling et al. (2012, 900), long-term thinking (at least 25 years) is a necessary framework for shaping short-term policy. Whilst Myanmar may not need 25 years to deliver the first successful results, it should be realised that such a process may need a few more years before successful (= sustainable) outcomes can be achieved.

This paper has shown that Myanmar's political situation has had a considerable influence on national and tourism development. Political and economic opening and stability are thus critical in the country's transformation to democracy, internal peace, the improvement of the well-being of its population, and the growth of international tourism. The world is extremely complex, and so is the situation in Myanmar. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution, but it is very likely that a process based on transparency, open dialogue, reliability, mutual understanding, and participation in tourism will make an invaluable contribution to the process of internal peace-building in Myanmar. In addition, participants in the workshops expressed their interest in, and willingness to use, this stakeholder process in tourism as a model for dialogue processes in other sectors of Myanmar's economy, which will hopefully lead to further peace-building opportunities in the country.

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