

HNE Eberswalde
Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development
University of Applied Sciences

Internship-project on the topic of:

Tourism and Gender Empowerment in Myanmar



Name:	Nela Blahoutová
Student ID:	13208868
Master's Program:	Sustainable Tourism Management
Lecturer:	Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Strasdas
Internship with:	the Myanmar Tourism Federation
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I. The summary

This paper aims to report on the implementation of a project which was undertaken during my internship in Myanmar. The internship took place on the basis of cooperation between the Myanmar Tourism Federation and HNE Eberswalde, Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development. The project's topic was tourism and gender empowerment in Myanmar. The aim of the project was to acquire the first insight into the topic and to give recommendations on the steps to be taken in the upcoming years.

The importance of the topic of gender and tourism has been recognized in recent years. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, tourism has the potential to contribute to greater gender equality and to the empowerment of women in line with the Third Millennium Development Goal. However the situation of women working in tourism is often not ideal. Women often only occupy lower-skilled jobs, are not represented in decision-making positions and there is sometimes a wage gap between the men and women working in tourism. The numbers of women employed in tourism and the ways they profit from this industry differ significantly in various countries. There is no such data from Myanmar as yet.

Myanmar was ruled by a military junta from 1962 to 2011. The long isolation of this Buddhist country from the rest of the world has naturally evoked the interest of tourists. Tourist arrivals have been on the increase and Myanmar tourism has developed rapidly since the country "opened up" and it became possible for international tourists to enter the country smoothly. At the same time, many international organizations are also arriving to support sustainable and responsible tourism. The Myanmar Tourism Federation and the Hanns Seidel Foundation have jointly played a key supporting role in the development of responsible tourism in Myanmar and they also decided to support this project in September 2014.

The paper has been divided into three main parts, just like the project itself: the secondary research, the quantitative research and the conference. The secondary research was undertaken in order to acquire the initial knowledge about the problem area and to prepare for the qualitative research. The qualitative research aimed to find answers to the research questions. Women working in tourism management in Yangon¹ were interviewed and the results were later presented at the conference. The final section reports on the Conference on Tourism and Gender

¹ The biggest city in Myanmar.

Empowerment in Myanmar which was held in Myanmar in 2014. The overall aim of the conference was to discuss the problematic issues with women working in tourism in Myanmar together with the invited speakers. The speakers presented good practices and their views on the topic. Discussions took place among all the participants during the interactive part of the conference.

On the basis of both the research and the conference, it does not seem that women have a subsidiary role in Myanmar society. They hold certain positions or posts, but on the other hand they are missing in decision-making positions in government (with the exception of opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi). The role of Myanmar women in tourism is significant and it also seems that there are many women working in tourism in Myanmar. There are many employment opportunities for them and the outcomes of the interviews have proven that there are nearly equal employment opportunities.

However, some of the outcomes indicate that there might be some problematic issues such as the perception of tourism jobs within Myanmar society. The situation might be different in the various regions of Myanmar. When it comes to career opportunities for women working in tourism in Myanmar, the outcomes suggest that there are probably no significant problems in career advancement within the tourism sector in Myanmar. The outcomes show that there is no wage gap; however this is not based on any statistics or figures.

The outcomes have undoubtedly confirmed the importance of the topic and the need to continue working on it. Some important issues in this area have become apparent, such as sex tourism in Myanmar. The recommendations for the next steps have been suggested on the basis of the outcomes of the three parts of the project.

Firstly, data on this topic should be monitored and collected in Myanmar. Training should be offered to women at the grass root levels in other regions (other than Yangon) in order to encourage them to apply for key managerial and decision-making positions. The education of tourists and rising awareness is also important (e.g. in the case of sex tourism). Women could be encouraged by helping and supporting the creation of networks for women. Good practices should be presented in order to inspire them. Finally, more research on the topic could definitely be undertaken within the different regions in Myanmar or at the grass root levels.

II. Acknowledgments

My biggest thanks undoubtedly go to Mrs. Nicole Häusler who was a great support for me throughout my stay in Myanmar and I really appreciate that she gave me the opportunity to work with her and to learn so much from her. Secondly, many thanks to the Hanns Seidel Foundation which enabled me to carry out the interviews and co-organized the conference on “Tourism and Gender Empowerment”. I am also very grateful to the Myanmar Tourism Federation and to all my colleagues for making my stay so pleasant. I would also like to thank all the people I met and who helped me to experience Myanmar as I did and to gain valuable life experience. My project could not have been implemented without all the women who were interviewed or who came to the conference as speakers or participants. My thanks also go to my whole family which supported me throughout my stay. Finally, many thanks to Mr. Wolfgang Strasdas for his comments and opinions concerning the implementation of this project.

Kyeizu tin ba de, thank you!

III. The List of Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ATF	ASEAN Tourism Forum
EWN	Empowering Women of Nepal (NGO)
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
HSF	Hanns Seidel Foundation
ILO	International Labor Organization
LDC	Least Developed Country
MOHT	Ministry of Hotel and Tourism
MTF	Myanmar Tourism Federation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
WITEP	Women in Tourism Empowerment Program

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“The education and empowerment of women throughout the world cannot fail to result in a more caring, tolerant, just and peaceful life for all.”

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (1995)

INTRODUCTION

The framework of the internship

This project thesis has been written within the framework of an internship with the Myanmar Tourism Federation (MTF). The MTF is an umbrella organization of eleven tourism associations in Myanmar. The internship took place on the basis of cooperation between the MTF and HNE Eberswalde, Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development. The internship placement was mediated by Mrs. Nicole Häusler, the Senior Tourism Advisor, who has been working on behalf of the MTF and the GIZ since January 2014. The internship took place between 1st September and 31st December 2014.

The realization of the project, which this thesis reports on, was enabled by the MTF and the Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF). These partners work together to play a key supporting role in responsible tourism development in Myanmar. The project's topic was chosen and discussed with Mrs. Nicole Häusler and Mr. Achim Munz, the resident representative from the HSF. They have already considered the importance of this topic in the past and it has also been mentioned in policies which these partners have worked on earlier. It was agreed with them that research on the topic of tourism and gender empowerment in Myanmar is needed in order to organize an event where the results of the research could be presented, amongst other things.

Other activities

The internship's contents were highly varied and included meeting many of the MTF's cooperating partners. There are already many international development organizations based directly in Yangon, Myanmar or Asia which are willing to support responsible tourism and sustainable development in Myanmar. During the internship, I had the possibility to get to know many of them and to join in the events which they organized, such as various meetings, workshops and conferences. As I have already mentioned above, the key organization for my project was the HSF and I had the possibility to work on several projects with this foundation.

This involved two workshops aimed at tourism and peace building (September and December 2014) where I was in charge of taking notes, assisting during the workshop days and writing the final project reports.

A large part of the internship involved cooperation with the International Labor Organization (ILO). Mrs. Nicole Häusler, two employees of the ILO and I carried out an institutional assessment of the MTF and its 11 member associations from September 2014. This work consisted of carrying out interviews with tourism associations and the subsequent formulation of recommendations for the MTF. I gave presentations on the topic of sustainable tourism for two tourism associations (the Myanmar Tour Guide Association and the Ngwe Saung Zone Hotelier Association).

Throughout the internship, I was also a member of the team preparing an MTF brochure aimed mainly at distribution on the occasion of the ASEAN Tourism Forum (the ATF). The ATF was held in Myanmar for the first time ever in January, 2015.

As an amanuensis, I was also asked to attend workshops on Ecotourism Policy and Management Strategy which took place over several days.

Lastly, I was also able to join the group involved in the consultations for the new draft Myanmar tourism law and to provide supportive research on tourism law.

The aim of the project

The aim of the project was to acquire initial insight into the topic of gender equality and gender empowerment and tourism in Myanmar and to give recommendations on the next steps which should be implemented within the coming years on the topic “Tourism and Gender Empowerment in Myanmar”. The recommendations for the MTF and the HSF were supposed to have been suggested on the basis of the results of both the secondary and qualitative research and the outcomes of the conference.

The individual sections of the project had the following specific aims. The secondary research was realized in order to acquire initial knowledge of the area at hand and to prepare for the qualitative research. It was considered that the secondary research may answer the research question or highlight any difficulties in conducting quantitative research. The quantitative research focused on answering the research questions and the results were supposed to be presented at the conference. The overall aim of the conference was to discuss the issues at hand

with women working in tourism in Myanmar together with invited speakers who were supposed to present good practices and their views on the topic and subsequently to identify the biggest problem areas.

The research questions were:

- 1) What is the role of women in Myanmar society?
- 2) What are the employment opportunities for women in tourism in Myanmar?
- 3) What are the career opportunities for women in tourism in Myanmar?
- 4) Is there a wage gap between women and men working in tourism in Myanmar?

The methodology

The following section presents the methods which were used and explains the reasons for using them. The text has been divided into three parts, similarly to the project: the literature research, the qualitative research and the conference.

The literature research

The main sources for the secondary research were: the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Report on Women and Tourism, the ILO data, the 2013–2020 Myanmar Tourism Master Plan, the Myanmar Responsible Tourism Policy and the Community Involvement in Tourism (CIT) Policy and various internet websites related to the topic. Key words such as gender empowerment, women in Myanmar, tourism in Myanmar, gender equality in Myanmar, etc. were used. The book *Refiguring Women, Colonialism, and Modernity in Burma* (2011) by Chie Ikeya also served as one of the sources due to fact that Myanmar used to be a colonial country. The advantage of the secondary research method was its relatively low costs, but for all that the lack of sources made the research difficult.

The qualitative research

It was decided to carry out research as there is a lack of data on this topic in Myanmar. The qualitative research method was chosen, because it was believed to be the most convenient due to the character of the research questions and aims. The qualitative research enabled us to take a deeper look at the topic. The topic related to gender is highly connected with social relationships, norms, values and culture and these dynamics are not easy to uncover and understand (Adato,

2010). Therefore, it was assumed that the qualitative research would enable the acquisition of a better understanding of these topics than the quantitative research.

It was decided to carry out semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were chosen due to their relatively high flexibility, as the wording and order of the questions does not necessarily have to be the same for all the respondents (Vaus, 2013). At the same time, the interviewees were able to talk about the topic in detail and in depth. It also enabled both the researcher and the respondent to discuss the topics which were most important or interesting to them. The objective was to understand the point of view of the interviewees, not to make quantitative generalizations. Given the nature of the questions, personal interviews were preferred rather than group interviews. The decision was made not to record the interviews, as this could have influenced the willingness of the interviewed women to speak openly about personal/delicate topics. The contact was realized in person and not via telephone because of the language² which the interviews were planned to be carried out in. Another reason for this was the poor telecommunications system in Myanmar. A big disadvantage of the personal interviews was the time demands and the associated high costs. The researcher could also never be certain that the respondent had answered honestly. However, this also applies in the case of qualitative research.

Given that the topic of tourism and gender empowerment in Myanmar is very wide, I was asked to only interview women with managerial posts in tourism. This was due to their easy access and to the presumption that all these women would speak English fluently and that no interpreter would therefore be needed during the interviews. A total of ten interviews were planned while taking into consideration the timeframe and the financial issues.

The following section sets out the research questions and briefly explains their purpose:

1) *Do you like your work?*

This question was mainly asked with the purpose of starting the interview in a pleasant and friendly/free way. The second reason of that was to find out, if the women were working in the tourism sector on the basis of their own decision and if they were happy with that.

2) *Do you think that women in Myanmar have the same employment opportunities as men?*

² English was not the native language for either the researcher or the interviewees.

This question aimed to find out the interviewed women's opinion with regard to gender equality in employment opportunities within the tourism branch in Myanmar.

3) *Do you think women earn the same amount of money for the same job³ as men in Myanmar?*

This question referred to the wage gap between the women and men working in tourism in Myanmar. Its aim was to get the opinion of the interviewed women with the option that some of them may have been able to provide concrete data from their companies.

4) *What do you think is the reason for this – the role of women in society, the family, ...*

By asking this question, I aimed to find out about any broader factors which might influence the potential wage gap between the men and women working in tourism in Myanmar and to learn about the role of women in Myanmar.

5) *Do you think that the fact that you are a woman has somehow influenced your career? In what way?*

This question was aimed at acquiring information about whether the interviewed women had had experience of their gender influencing their careers.

6) *Are you satisfied with the situation for women in tourism in Myanmar?*

This question aimed to find out, if the interviewed women found the current situation for women working in tourism satisfying.

7) *What do you think is the highest level a woman can achieve in your "sector"?*

The purpose of asking this question was to find out about the options for advancement for women in tourism and to find out, if there was a "glass ceiling".

8) *Do you think that it is important for women to have the same opportunities? Why?*

This question aimed to find out, if the interviewed women were aware of gender equality rights, why they considered them to be important or whether they considered it natural for women and men to have the same opportunities.

9) *Do you think it would be good, if there were more women at professional levels than now? Why?*

³ This was always taken as being within the tourism sector.

The aim of this question was to find out, if the interviewed women thought it would be beneficial, if there were more women working at professional levels in tourism than now and what their arguments for that were.

10) How do you think it would be possible to get more women at professional levels than now?

This question aimed to acquire information as to whether it is purely up to women, if they want to advance in their careers or if the society/other factors influence that.

11) What would you advise women who would like to have a professional career?

This was a so-called test question. By asking this question, I wanted to verify whether the women would speak more about what women must do or if there would be the tendency to say that e.g. they can do whatever they want, but it is still very difficult for them to advance higher in their careers because of society/stereotypes etc.

The conference

The conference was considered a good opportunity to present the results of the research and to discuss these results and the best practices for gender empowerment in tourism. It was planned that the conference organization would take into account Myanmar culture and respect its norms and the rules which form or influence the course and form/design of conferences. The focus was intended to create scope for discussion, interactivity and the freedom to express ideas and share experience and knowledge.

The breakdown of the work's structure

The following page sets out the breakdown of the work's structure based on consultation with the MTF and the HSF. It was discussed with the MTF and the HSF in the third week of September. It was decided that the literature research would be completed by the end of September followed by qualitative research within the tourism management sector. The research should have been completed during October. The conference on Tourism and Gender Empowerment in Myanmar was planned to have been completed by the beginning of December 2014. The implementation of the project had to be permitted by the Union Minister for Hotels and Tourism, U Htay Aung. The implementation could only begin after he had agreed to it (the third weekend in September).

Problems, difficulties

Myanmar is a challenging place for completing an internship, as it is one of the least developed countries in the world. The project was implemented in Yangon, which is the biggest city in Myanmar. The work in Yangon was made difficult mainly because of the black-outs, the slow and somewhat unreliable internet connection and the complicated transport situation. The cultural habits and associated working procedures also greatly influenced the work.

The breakdown of the work's structure for the "Tourism and Gender Empowerment in Myanmar" project

Month	September			October				November				December – January, February				
Week	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16. – 24.
Date	8.- 14.9.	15.- 21.9.	22.- 28.9.	29.9.- 5.10.	6.- 12.10.	13.- 19.10.	20.- 26.10.	27.10.- 2.11.	3.- 9.11.	10.- 16.11.	17.- 23.11.	24.- 30.11.	1.- 7.12.	8.- 14.12.	15.- 21.12.	22.12.- 20.02.15
Work	Choice of topic	Literature research	Preparation of research	Research				Analysis of interviews	Preparation of conference	Confe- rence	Project Report for the HSF	Project thesis for HNEE				
With whom	MTF, HSF	----	----	Interviewees				----	MTF, HSF	MTF, HSF	----	----				

The secondary research

During the first weeks, I was supposed to undertake literature research on the topic of gender equality, tourism and gender empowerment, both in Myanmar and also in other countries, according to the breakdown of the work's structure. Before doing that, I had to quickly familiarize myself with the tourism development and policies which have been written about in Myanmar. I was not able to spend as much time on the literature research as I wanted to, because of my workload consisting of other activities.

My work was also complicated due to the lack of written literature and that is why I later decided in favor of internet research. However, the very slow internet connection meant that the internet research took longer than I expected; actually I spent time on the internet research right up till the end of my project's implementation.

The qualitative research

Taxis are the main source of mobility in Yangon, but not all taxi drivers can speak English and not all of them know Yangon very well. Many of them come to Yangon from rural areas and villages to earn money as taxi drivers, even though they do not know the city very well. In addition, the number of cars is increasing rapidly in Myanmar and traffic jams make mobility very unreliable from the point of view of time. Significant time reserves therefore have to be taken into account. Even though I had been warned of this fact, it still negatively influenced my time planning. I did not manage to do as much as I had wanted to during my working hours. I solved this problem by working in my free time.

According to the breakdown of the work structure, I was supposed to carry out the interviews during October. However, this was not possible for many reasons. This was partially due to the fact that I first had to be introduced to the interviewees in accordance with cultural customs (if not in person, then at least via e-mail). This was undertaken, but nevertheless not all of the contacted potential interviewees answered the e-mails or they answered them later than I expected. I contacted the potential interviewees in order to arrange a meeting with them. However, all of them were very busy and the meetings were postponed many times. The duration of the research was therefore prolonged until 14th November.

On 15th November, a discussion was held on the option of carrying out more interviews during the pre-exam consultation with the lecturer. It was suggested, that the interviews should not be

carried out with women at the management levels, but with tourism employees and that their answers should be compared with the answers from the “management women”. However, this was subsequently discussed with the MTF and then rejected due to a lack of time and also due to financial issues.

The conference

At the very beginning, it was planned to organize a two-day workshop which would take place outside of Yangon in order to make the participants take two days off and spend the whole time concentrating on one specific topic. This was considered because the number of conferences and workshops in Myanmar is quite large and it has been experienced and observed that many participants leave such events after the “welcoming remarks/speeches” or that to a lesser extent they leave after the “key point” presentations. However, when visiting a workshop outside Yangon they usually stay and do not leave, because their homes or offices are far away.

However, given that the conference was planned for the end of November/the beginning December, which is the high tourism season in Myanmar, it was not possible to make a reservation at a suitable hotel for the given period and, after discussing it with the interviewees, it was also discovered that not many people working in tourism would have been able to attend the event. The decision was therefore made to organize just a one-day conference in Yangon on 25th November. The date was chosen symbolically because the United Nations General Assembly has designated 25th November as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

THE PROJECT

The literature research

Women in tourism

The following section presents some of the information which has been written so far about the role of women in tourism in general. It aims to highlight some of the facts which are already known about this topic and it should serve as a bridge to the project's core topic.

Job creation is one of the undeniable positive impacts of tourism. The UNWTO and the ILO consider tourism to be one of the world's largest employment generators, especially for those segments of the population with less access to the labor market, such as women (the ILO/UNWTO, 2009). According to the UNWTO, it is estimated that 6 to 7% of the overall number of jobs worldwide (direct and indirect) are in tourism (the UNWTO, 2012). Tourism is twice as effective in terms of job creation as the automotive, telecommunications and financial industries (Beyer, M., 2014). The advantage is that most of the jobs require little formal training, but, on the other hand, the jobs in tourism are often seasonal and physically demanding due to shift work (the BMZ, 2012).

Women make up between 60 and 70% of all the workers in the industry (the ILO, 2013). Men and women usually occupy different occupations in tourism. Women often work as waitresses, chambermaids, cleaners and flight attendants in tourism, whereas men are employed as barmen, gardeners, drivers and pilots, etc. (Vargas & Aguilar, 2012). Women also tend to carry out a large amount of unpaid work in family tourism businesses (the UNWTO, 2012). The situation differs in various countries when it comes to the numbers of women employed in tourism. Equality in tourism says: *"While a small number of countries, such as Egypt and the UAE, have an extremely low female participation in tourism employment, in most countries women comprise more than half the tourism workforce (85.63% in Lithuania, for example)"* (2013, p. 3). This difference is also true when speaking about the benefits to women from tourism development. Tourism helps empower women in some regions. On the other hand, in other countries/regions it affects the lives of women negatively and perpetuates existing economic and gender inequalities (the UNWTO, 2010).

Even though women make up the majority of the tourism workforce in most countries, their situation is not ideal. There is a wage gap between women and men working in tourism (the UNWTO, 2010). Women tend to earn less than men, typically about 10 to 15% less than their male counterparts (ibid.).

The next problem is that women are overrepresented in lower skilled jobs and occupy less managerial posts. They are also underrepresented at the executive levels of top companies worldwide. Equality in Tourism therefore says: *“The tourism industry is failing to promote women to the highest levels of decision making despite having a larger pool of female talent from which to draw”* (2013, p. 7). The findings of this women’s non-profit network have shown that, while consumer-facing industries in general tend to have the highest number of women on their boards, this is not the case in the consumer-facing tourism industry. It has also been ascertained that women are the key household decision makers in tourism and influence up to 80% of the purchasing decisions. (Equality in Tourism, 2013)

The representation of both genders at all levels of tourism is important. Currently, the biggest imbalance mainly occurs at the higher decision-making levels. Overcoming this imbalance is essential for sustainable development (Harcourt, 2011). The issue of tourism development and gender equality also comes up against another fact. When there is such an imbalance, it leads to disproportionate responsibility for reproduction and community resource management between men and women (Pandey, 2004). Men take decisions concerning the use of the social and economic resources in tourism and women are often limited to enjoying the presumed benefits of tourism development.

Given that most of the academic literature and research agrees on fact that there are often inequalities and that women are often disadvantaged in tourism, the UNWTO is establishing a new program within its Action Plan. It is called the Women in Tourism Empowerment Program (WITEP) and it is the next phase of the UNWTO’s work on gender and tourism. The pilot implementation phase of the WITEP is currently being designed and it is under negotiation with potential partners from the public and private sectors. The program aims to tackle inequality by promoting women’s economic empowerment through partnerships with hotel chains and other stakeholders which will involve improving employment/entrepreneurship opportunities for women by facilitating their access to jobs and/or participation in supply-chains and by creating possibilities for career advancement. After the WITEP has been implemented, the Tourism and

Gender Portal will be developed in order to provide awareness-raising resources and space for dialogue and the exchange of information, ideas and best practices. (UNWTO, n.d.)

The authors agreed on the fact that women might be or have been empowered through ecotourism or community based tourism. Ateljevic states: *"In many cases women have a close connection with the physical environment of their community. Maasai women, for example, have special knowledge of walking routes, craft production and useful plants, all of which can be related to the development of tourism products and services (van der Cammen, 1997) (2008, p. 9).* In South Africa, the concept of bed-and-breakfast accommodation was crucial for women's empowerment and the once white dominated bed-and-breakfast sector in South Africa's tourism is now dominated by black women. Research by Rogerson (2004) showed that 35 of the 44 studied enterprises were operated by women (Ateljevic, 2008). Another case involves Costa Rica where there was a project promoting women as tourism entrepreneurs through the creation of eco-lodges, zoo breeding and permits to use natural resources for tourism interests (e.g., waterfalls). Yet another example comes from Mexico where training women in whale watching has increased their knowledge of marine resources and provided them with a cash income. (Vargas & Aguilar, 2012)

As in other sectors, gender equality is undoubtedly important for many reasons. *Gender equality is acknowledged as smart economics* (Hagen & Willems (2012). It is known that when there is workforce diversity, societies and economies flourish (the UNWTO, 2010). Women's involvement at local levels of tourism improves local living conditions, strengthens the women's economic autonomy and reforms the socio-cultural patterns associated with gender. Many sources have also stated that when women earn an income, they reinvest a higher proportion of it in the well-being of their families and thus subsequently in their communities (OECD, CARE, n.d.). Many people therefore believe that educating girls is the most efficient tool for breaking the cycle of poverty in developing countries, as educated girls grow into educated women who work, have healthy children and are then more likely to educate their children.

Tourism in Myanmar

Myanmar, officially The Republic of the Union of Myanmar and also known as Burma, is a country located in Southeast Asia. With an area of 676,577 km², Myanmar is the second largest country in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the 40th largest country in the world.

Myanmar ranks 150th out of 187 countries with regard to its Human Development Index. (the MOHT, 2013) According to provisional results of the 2014 Myanmar Census, the total population of Myanmar is 51,419,420⁴ (the Ministry of Immigration and Population, 2014).

Myanmar has much to offer as a tourism destination. The history of the country, its culture, cuisine, religion and also its beautiful nature are the main reasons why tourists come to Myanmar. The especially long period of isolation due to its political regime in the past has contributed to the country's "attractiveness" and evoked the curiosity of international tourists. Domestic tourism is also extensive in Myanmar; pilgrimage tourism is especially popular. However, some areas are prohibited for tourists or not recommended to visit and permission is needed in Myanmar in some cases. There are various reasons for this, but mainly it is because of security.

Tourist arrivals have begun to increase since the "opening up" of the country and the initial reform strategies for the tourism sector, which were implemented in March 2011 and included enabling the smooth entry of international tourists into the country. The country experienced an increase of 29.7% between 2011 and 2012. 2012 was the first year when Myanmar received over 1 million international tourists. A year after that, there were over 2 million tourist arrivals. The biggest group of incoming tourists consisted of visitors from Thailand, followed by China, two of Myanmar's five neighboring countries. Arrivals from the other three bordering countries (India, Bangladesh and Laos) are much lower. When it comes to tourist arrivals from Europe, France is in first place followed by the United Kingdom and Germany. There are also many arrivals from North America and Australia as well. (the MOHT, 2014)

The Ministry of Hotels and Tourism (the MOHT) has recognized that emerging and fast-growing tourism development might have a negative impact on the country. That is why many international organizations have entered the country in order to help Myanmar develop its tourism in a responsible way. The Myanmar Tourism Master Plan 2013–2020 has been formulated. *"The Master Plan sets out a vision for sustainable tourism development and includes strategic programs, priority projects and activities in a long-term (2013–2020) implementation framework and a short-term (2013–2015) action plan"* (the MOHT, 2013, p. 1). Two policies drawn up by the MTF and the HSF in close collaboration with the MOHT were essential for

4 The Government of Myanmar conducted its most recent census in March/April 2014. Currently the questionnaires are in the capital of Myanmar and the main census results are planned for release in May 2015.

drafting the Myanmar Tourism Master Plan. They were the Myanmar Responsible Tourism Policy and the Community Involvement in Tourism Policy (CIT). The topic of gender equality in tourism has been included in each of these documents (including the Myanmar Tourism Master Plan).

The Myanmar Tourism Master Plan

The implementation of the Master Plan emphasizes seven cross-cutting themes: Gender Equity, Environmental Sustainability, Partnerships, Innovative Financing, Regional Cooperation, Ensured Access for Disabled People and Consultation and Participation. The Myanmar Tourism Master Plan promises, that: “*all tourism policies and development planning will include a gender analysis. Men and women will have equal access to economic opportunities, skills training, employment, resources and decision making*” (the MOHT 2013, p. 23). The Master Plan also says that the MOHT will take the lead in monitoring the implementation of the Master Plan and when possible the *MOHT will collect the monitoring data at the beginning and completion of each activity disaggregated by gender and ethnicity* (MOHT, 2013, p. 41). However, the statement is currently far from reality and there have been no statistics on this topic from the MOHT so far.

The Myanmar Responsible Tourism Policy

Women have also not been forgotten in the Myanmar Responsible Tourism Policy, because, as this policy states, responsible tourism also means ensuring equality in the employment conditions of women. The second aim of this policy involves “*broad based local socio-economic development*” which includes *spreading benefits in the community and encouraging local entrepreneurship and civil society engagement to secure livelihoods for women and youth and to alleviate poverty* (Häusler et al., 2012, p. 9).

The Community Involvement in Tourism (CIT) Policy in Myanmar

The authors of the CIT Policy also highlighted the importance of the role of women in tourism in Myanmar. They emphasized the role of women in tourism in these following points. Firstly, women play an important part in managing and creating socioeconomic opportunities for families and communities. Secondly, they consider the enhancement of employment opportunities for women to be a fundamental determinant in realizing the fruitful development impact of tourism. According to the policy, female employees are often seen as a “cheap”

alternative to male employees, whereas they often lack tenure rights, the right to maternity leave or any option of investing in their career development. Thirdly, the CIT Policy states that education and training aimed at expanding women's skills can enhance the socio-economic situation of families and improve family and community life. (CIT, 2013) Therefore *“Community Involvement in Tourism (CIT) needs to ensure that equal employment conditions for women and men are being established and implemented”* (Häusler et al., 2013, p. 24).

Women in Myanmar

When it comes to numbers, there are more women in Myanmar than men. The gender ratio is 93, which means that there are 93 males (48.2%) for every 100 females (51.8%) in Myanmar (the Ministry of Immigration and Population, 2014). Some people have already occupied themselves with the role of women and gender issues in Myanmar. Most of them agree on the fact that the status of women in Myanmar may have mainly been influenced by Buddhism, the colonialism era and the military regime in Myanmar in the past.

Buddhism has undoubtedly shaped Myanmar society and culture to a significant extent. When it comes to gender issues, Buddhists believe that the new Buddha will come to the world as a man. Therefore, many people consider that this gives men domination in Myanmar society and that they can reach a higher mental level than women. Myanmar women do not change their names when they marry and they can divorce their husbands. The rules regarding divorce are quite specific in Myanmar. If a woman leaves her husband for a year, he can then file for divorce. On the other hand, a man must leave his wife for three years before she can get an automatic divorce. Myanmar people, especially women, often joke that a woman can make up her mind two times faster than a man. However, the original reason for this was that men were likely to be away from their families because of business or professional duties for longer periods of time. (Mya Sein, 1958)

Chie Ikeya has described the women in Myanmar in connection with colonialism in Myanmar. Ikeya explains that the situation for women was not always ideal and that they often had to struggle. She says that *“The “tradition” of gender equality and the high status of women in Burma developed as a result of the multi-dimensional and multiply motivated representational practices by colonizing and colonized women and men who co-authored essentially and powerfully gendered and racialized discourses of colonialism, modernization, and nationalism”*

(2006, p. 75). Her book and articles provide views of various authors on the topic of women in Myanmar, their role in society, the family etc. The views and opinions vary very much depending on the origins of the authors and the time when they were writing. Another factor is who they compare or contrast Burmese women to – the position of women in Myanmar has often been compared with the position of women in the West, Europe or in other Asian countries, especially India. Harold Fielding Hall, a late nineteenth-century British officer described Burmese women thus: *“You see, she has had to fight her own way; for the same laws that made woman lower than man in Europe compensated her to a certain extent by protection and guidance. ... In Europe and India for very long the idea was to make woman a hothouse plant, to see that no rough winds struck her, that no injuries overtook her. In Burma she has had to look out for herself: she has had freedom to come to grief as well as to come to strength”* (Ikeya, 2006, p. 57). Religion-related comparisons also occur often, the most frequent of which is Buddhist women vs. Muslim or Christian women. A large amount of attention has also been paid to intermarriage; especially between a Burmese Buddhist woman and an “Indian⁵” man. Burmese women were much criticized and society was against Buddhist-Muslim marriages, because the women had to adopt their husband’s religion and customs and it was therefore believed that the Burmese culture and race was under threat. Most of the scholars were, however, impressed and astonished by the gender equality and the high status of women in Myanmar. As an example, another British officer, R. Grant Brown stated: *“It has often been said that the women do most of the hard work of the country. But this is not because they are the slaves of their husbands, as among savage warlike races. On the contrary, they occupy a position of independence and responsibility, ...”* (Ikeya, 2006, p. 54).

On the other hand, the military regime did not strengthen the role of women in Myanmar at all. Military rule has undermined the status of women, especially at higher levels of government and commerce. Moreover, many women and girls were victims of violence and brutal gang rapes during the various civil wars and armed attacks against the ethnic groups living in Myanmar. (Ikeya, 2012)

⁵ The term “Indian” was not correct. It stereotyped immigrants from the Indian subcontinent as lower-class and lower-caste Muslim and Hindu men and women, typically of a skin color darker than that of the indigenous races of Burma.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has researched gender (in)equality in Myanmar and come up with following outcomes. A Gender Inequality Index (GII) has been suggested which explores inequality in three dimensions: reproductive health (measured by maternal mortality and adolescent fertility rates), empowerment (the share of parliamentary seats held by each gender and the attainment of secondary and higher education by each gender) and economic activity (measured by the labor market participation rate for each gender). *Myanmar has a GII value of 0.437, ranking it 80 out of 148 countries in the 2012 index* (the UNDP, 2013, p. 4). When it comes to education, women in Myanmar are even better off: *18 percent of adult women have reached a secondary or higher level of education compared to 17.6 percent of their male counterparts* (ibid.). The participation in the labor market is lower for women. *75% of women work in Myanmar compared to 82.1% of men* (ibid.).

Myanmar women have a constitutional right to participate in politics. However, there is a remarkable absence of women in leadership roles in the political and economic spheres. Just 4.6% of the parliamentary seats are held by women in Myanmar (ibid.). The nonprofit international development organization, the Asia Foundation, carried out research into the perception of women/men in leading positions. The survey results show a *remarkable consistency between men and women in the strongly held view that men make better political and business leaders than women, suggesting that this is a firm social and cultural position that calls for greater awareness of gender rights and equality, not only among men, but also among women* (2014, p. 77).

Women in Tourism in Myanmar

As there is no available data on this topic, it seems that nobody has concerned themselves with women in tourism in Myanmar (with the exception of the policies mentioned in the chapter on “Tourism in Myanmar”). The paragraphs above suggest that this is an important topic. The following is a brief summary of the arguments in favor of taking an interest in this issue: Myanmar is one of the least developed countries⁶ and the tourism industry plays a key role in its development and in improving its economic situation. In developing countries where women have less access to education and often have greater household responsibilities, tourism offers

⁶ Myanmar has been listed as an LDC by the UN since 1987. In 2014, the UN announced that Myanmar still retains its LDC Designation (Zaw, 2014).

low industry entry barriers, flexible working hours and part-time work and it therefore presents potential opportunities for employment (the UNWTO, 2010). Based on personal experience/observation rather than statistics (as there are no statistics on this), there are already many women working in tourism in Myanmar. As Myanmar aims to contribute to achieving the third Millennium Development Goal⁷, the tourism sector is one of the areas where it should take into consideration the fact that gender equal societies and businesses perform better and are essential for sustainable development. Tourism may be the ideal tool to empower women and it can serve as a model for other industries in Myanmar. In some other countries, women's participation in tourism has not only contributed to poverty reduction and to the modification of the gender social structures, but also to changes at the decision-making levels within the communities. There are very few women in politics in Myanmar; tourism might therefore also constitute a chance to encourage them to join politics.

The qualitative research

About the research

The interviews for this research took place in the period from 9th October – 14th November 2014. Ten women with long-term professional experience in tourism management were interviewed. Their positions varied, such as the managing directors of hotels and tour operators.

Before the research, all the women received an e-mail with an attachment⁸ containing the interview questions in order to give them an idea/overview of what kind of topics would be discussed. Each of the women was promised that the data would be treated confidentially and that her name would be kept anonymous. This was emphasized in order to encourage them to speak as openly as possible. Each of the women had the option of refusing to answer any of questions, if she felt uncomfortable answering them or for any other reasons. However, none of the woman made use of this option and the women answered all of the questions quite broadly. As has already been said in the Methodology chapter, the interviews were deliberately not recorded. This might have influenced the openness of the women.

⁷ The UN's third millennium development goal aims to promote gender equality and to empower women.

⁸ See the attachment in Appendix I.

One “test” interview was carried out with the aim of finding out, if questionnaire worked and if it was suitable for purpose. After that, one question was changed because it was not neutral, as is necessary in research.

Each interview usually took about 25 – 35 minutes and the interviews mainly took place in the offices of the interviewed women. At the beginning, there were two warm-up questions about the kind of work the women did and whether they liked their jobs. After that, there were ten questions related to the topics of gender equality and empowerment in Myanmar. All of these questions were related to the tourism sector.

The results of the research

Do you like your work?

All of the women answered this question with certainty and without any doubts. They all stated that they liked or even loved their jobs and enjoyed working in the tourism sector.

Do you think women in Myanmar have the same employment opportunities as men in Myanmar?

Most of the women think that the employment opportunities for women and men in Myanmar are the same. They think it does not depend on the gender, but on the abilities, knowledge and experience of the people who want to work in tourism in Myanmar. As there are many employment opportunities which are suitable both for women and men in comparison with other industry sectors, most of the women think that women especially have equal opportunities in the tourism sector.

However, there were some doubts in some cases. Terms such as “nearly equal”, “nearly the same” and “70% the same” opportunities were used. One woman thinks the “invisible borders” for women sometimes exist and that women might have difficulties at some point. The following answers were given, after I asked about what kind of difficulties women might have: women might feel a lack of respect from colleagues and they have to be more careful about what they say and how they say it. The form of speech and the choice of the right and polite words is especially important in Myanmar, but this also applies to men. According to the women, age also matters, so young women might especially have problems these problems.

Some of the women mentioned the business sector as the most challenging sector in tourism, because the women believed that there are “business networks” which are difficult for women to penetrate. Men meet while playing golf or tennis and attend many events and some women simply have no time for this, because they have to take care of their families. They also thought that they would not be welcomed at such events. It is more difficult to succeed without access to these circles of people. Therefore, some of the women thought that in this case, it would be easier, if they were men.

It was also mentioned, that it greatly depends on the region and on the degree of tourism development there. In some areas, where tourism has already developed, and where people are “used to it”, nobody gives a second thought to women working in tourism and it is considered to be normal job for them. However, one woman said that women might have had some problems with perception by Myanmar society in some regions in the past (or even still nowadays). Sometimes, it is not considered right for women to work in tourism, because they work with foreigners and that is not considered to be appropriate.

The meaning of the word tourism and the perception of what tourism means differs among Myanmar people. Some of them used to connect (or still connect) tourism only with pilgrimage tourism and then they are confused and somewhat disappointed when they see the behavior of the tourists. In some cases, Myanmar people think that international tourists only come to drink alcohol, have fun, have sex and enjoy themselves. Therefore, jobs in tourism are considered to be “dirty” jobs in such cases and not appropriate for women. Jobs in spas which are sometimes in hotels can be a particular problem. It is especially considered unsuitable for women to touch foreigners. According to the interviewed women, this is changing with time and with the development of tourism.

Most of the women who mentioned critical points about unequal opportunities said that it greatly depended on the specific companies/organizations and regions in Myanmar and that they could not say, if it was like that in the whole tourism sector/Myanmar.

Do you think women earn the same money for the same work as men in Myanmar?

All the women answered the question about fair wages between men and women in the tourism sector in Myanmar almost identically.

All were of the opinion, which is not based on any statistics, that women earn the same money for the same work as men. Some of them emphasized the fact that the wages were fair in

tourism; however, it might be different in other industries. For example, one of the women reported that women working in the rice fields earn 20% less than men, because it is believed that they are not as productive as men and that they cannot, for example, carry as much as men. Therefore, they get less money. However, she believes that this is not possible in tourism as the jobs in tourism are suitable for both genders and neither gender can be more or less productive.

All the women agreed that experience, abilities and qualifications are the decisive factors when it comes to wages and that gender plays no role.

What do you think is the reason for that – the role of women in society, the family, ...

The women think that the role of women in Myanmar society in general has always been good. Women are respected, their rights are considered and they feel safe. Many women used the comparison with India and other Asian countries and said that Myanmar women are very lucky in comparison with them. They think that there is generally gender equality in Myanmar and they very often mentioned two well-known women as “proof and examples”: the last Myanmar queen Supayalat and the Nobel Peace Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

One woman stated that she thought that Myanmar women are sometimes discriminated against as there are still some old Myanmar tradition or rules which are offensive to women. She mentioned one example and spoke about discrimination against women who are menstruating. They are forbidden to do many things, because it is believed that they are “dirty”. Another example involves going out. Myanmar girls or women are unwilling to be seen going out alone, without an escort, in the evening. This woman said that it was for reasons of security. She is of the opinion that women should not be forbidden to go out alone for reasons of personal security, rather that efforts should be made to ensure that there are no dangers awaiting them outside. She cited washing clothes as another example. Some families do not wash the clothes of men and women together, because the male clothes might be “devalued” by the female clothes. She said it might depend very much on the family the woman is brought up in and on their religion. She said that very often these rules are not written down anywhere; they are simply passed from generation to generation.

The women expressed the opinion that the role of women has changed considerably in recent years. They were not able to say exactly how long the change has been taking place, but some of them used examples from their own families. The oldest generation of “grandmothers” mainly used to be housewives who were not employed, but stayed at the home to take care of the family.

The younger generation of “mothers” already had their own jobs, usually working as employees. In their opinion, the youngest generation is the most courageous, independent and self-confident. They want to earn their own money, realize their potential and some of them even run their own businesses.

When it comes to the role of women in the family, women take care of the children, cook and take care of the household in general. The interviewed women said that the woman in the family has the say with regard to the family finances and takes care of the family budget. Some of them joked that this “tradition/rule” has always saved the Myanmar economy. However, men have the leading position in the family. They are the “head” of the family. According to the interviewed women, women are treated nicely in the family and also with respect by their husbands, fathers or brothers. One woman mentioned that the role of women might be totally different in each family. She believed that boys might be more privileged in some families, mainly in villages, and she used the example of access to education. If the family has no money to send all the children to school, the son will probably be chosen to go to school and not the girl.

Many of the women think that the role of women in tourism is very important, because jobs in tourism are suitable for women; they can make use of their skills and highlight their strengths. At the same time, their presence in tourism is beneficial for this industry, because they have different abilities and strengths than men. On the other hand, some of the women mentioned that it is important that no gender dominates the tourism sector too much, because men’s abilities are also beneficial and both genders should complement each other. Some of them highlighted the point that gender equality is good for harmony in every sector of industry.

Do you think that the fact that you are woman has somehow influenced your career? In what way?

Most of the women said that the fact that they are women has not influenced their careers or that they have not noticed it. However, there were two women whose careers had been negatively influenced. Two other women thought they had had some difficulties because of their gender. One of them said that the problem was slightly with her family, as they were not happy when she decided to work in tourism, because they didn’t consider it to be a good job for her as a woman. The second woman said that her career had been influenced because she had to be careful what she said and that she was always polite etc. She thought that she would not have to be so careful, if she were a man.

Are you satisfied with the situation for women in tourism in Myanmar?

Most of the women are happy with the situation for women working in the tourism sector. They do not think that women are somehow discriminated against, however some of the women expressed the worry that some employers might discriminate against women, because of the possibility that they might plan to have a family. Some employers might not want to hire women because of maternity leave⁹. However, none of the women has experienced this in her life and the women are of the opinion that it very much depends on the organization/company that the women work for.

Some of the women emphasized that they are happy with the situation in the tourism sector in Myanmar, but not with the situation in other sectors. They believe this should be improved in other sectors and that it is something women or both genders should work on. No specific industrial sector was mentioned; only one woman said that she thought there should be more women making laws and policies, for instance.

What do you think is the highest level a woman can achieve in your “sector”?

The women think that women can achieve any possible career level in tourism that they want. They believe that, if women are hard-working, do their best and are patient, they can even achieve a ministerial post. Of course, they have to have the necessary abilities to do the job.

Do you think that it is important that women have the same opportunities? Why?

The women definitely think that it is very important for women to have the same opportunities.

Firstly, this is because it is part of their rights; equal rights = equal opportunities.

Secondly, the interviewed women think that this is important, because women are needed in tourism and, if they put the same effort into their work/career, there is no other option than for them to have the same opportunities and the same wages as men. Every gender can bring different ideas, knowledge, perspectives, views and vision to tourism. Many of the women highlighted that this should work both ways: it is necessary that both women and men are given the same chances, because there is no purely “women’s” or “men’s” work.

⁹ Maternity leave was recently discussed in Myanmar. Maternity leave is provided to female employees for six weeks before and six weeks after the expected date of childbirth accordance with the Social Security Act of 1954. A recent proposed draft of the new Social Security Act includes changes such as the requirement of a minimum of one-year service and a six-month contribution to the social insurance. (Park, 2014)

Do you think it would be good, if there were more women at professional levels than there are now? Why?

Most of the women answered that they thought it would be good, if there were more women at professional levels than now. They think there are already a lot of women in tourism management, but that there could also be more of them. They think it would not be good, if management were male dominated. They also believe that there is an increasing trend of women at professional levels.

The rest of the women said that they do not mind how many women or men there are and that they are of the opinion that there should be people with good qualities and abilities. They think there could be more women because of their quality and not because of any quotas.

How do you think it would be possible to get more women at professional levels than now?

Most of the interviewed women think that it mainly depends on the decisions of women. If they want to achieve a professional level, they have to struggle for it and work hard and then they can achieve it. Most of the women do not think that the society has a significant influence on this, however it is also important that society is open-minded. The rest of the women think that it depends about 50% on the women and about 50% on society.

All the women think that the family and the immediate environment have the greatest influence on this. They think that support from family and friends is very important. Families should understand that a woman needs time for her career and for her interests and they should help her, if possible. Women can only balance a family and career life, if they are well supported.

What would you advise women who would like to reach the professional levels?

At the end of the interview, the women were pleased to give advice for those who would like to reach the professional levels and be successful in tourism management.

These points were mentioned most often:

- Self-confidence, believing in themselves, being brave and handling criticism
- Education (not just getting a degree, but constantly studying, not just about tourism but in general, general knowledge and language knowledge are very important as well)
- Realizing what they would like to do, what they are interested in and what they are passionate about
- Realizing where their strengths lie and making use of their special abilities or skills

- Learning how to balance work and family – considered a very big challenge
- Networking – learn to be social and not overly shy, meet other people

The conference

Preparation and organization

The conference was organized by the Myanmar Tourism Federation in cooperation with the Hanns Seidel Foundation. The MTF was mainly in charge of the conference's content, such as the preparation of the agenda and inviting the quest speakers. All the content was discussed with the HSF which financed the conference and paid the fees for the invited speakers and all other associated items. The HSF also booked the venue and the necessary equipment. The list of invited guests was prepared partly by the MTF and partly by the HSF and the invitations were then sent by the HSF. The sixty or so invited guests included representatives of the MOHT, the MTF, various women's and gender-focused organizations, tourism-related NGOs and organizations, general managers and employees from hotels and tour operators and others. About forty participants, including the organizers, attended the conference. The whole event was approved by the MOHT, as is always necessary when holding such events. The letter of approval was arranged by the HSF.

On the day of the conference, the MTF was in charge of compering the conference and the HSF was in charge of registering the participants. Representatives of both organizations wrote welcome notes; the Chairman of the MTF, U Yan Win, and the resident representative, Achim Munz, on behalf of the HSS.

After the conference, the final report on the conference was compiled by the MTF and sent to the HSF.

The program

The opening

As with any similar traditional event in Myanmar, the event was opened with opening speeches and remarks. Firstly, the Deputy Minister from the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, H. E. Dr. U Tin Shwe, emphasized the importance of the topic and thanked the MTF and the HSF for

organizing this event. The welcoming remarks by U Yan Win, the Chairman of the Myanmar Tourism Federation, followed after that. U Yan Win briefly introduced the MTF and said he believed that the conference was a “milestone in the development of tourism in Myanmar”. Mr. Achim Munz, the resident representative from the HSF gave more concrete data on the topic of gender empowerment in his welcome note. He highlighted the importance of gender equality, not only within tourism, but also in politics. He said that even though there were more women than men in Myanmar, the leadership was still dominated by men. He gave reasons why tourism, like many other sectors, could benefit from empowering women: according to him, it helps to strengthen the stability of the country’s economy and entire communities.

The following speaker was a woman, Mrs. Yin Myo Su, the General Manager of Inle Princess Resort and a winner of the Goldman Sachs & Future Global Women Leaders Award. Her point of view on gender empowerment was important, because she spoke about the development of tourism in various parts of Myanmar. She highlighted the importance of women working in tourism from her own experience as the owner of hotels in various regions in Myanmar. She also mentioned the differences between raising girls and boys in Myanmar. She is convinced that boys in Myanmar are brought up more under pressure “*You are a boy, so you must be strong, hardworking, etc.*” in comparison with girls who are subjected to lower expectations. Girls must work harder for recognition later in life, which is quite often frustrating for them. That is why Mrs. Yin Myo Su believes it is important to empower women from childhood and that the family and society as a whole play an important role in this. A group photo was taken after the opening.

The contents of the presentations

Equality in Tourism: Why Gender Matters

Nicole Häusler, Senior Tourism Advisor, the Myanmar Tourism Federation

In her presentation, Mrs. Nicole Häusler focused on an explanation as to why gender actually matters. At the beginning of the presentation, she introduced the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), which is an index designed by the United Nations Development Program with the aim of measuring gender equality. The GEM is an attempt to measure the extent of gender inequality throughout the globe’s countries, based on estimates of:

- a women’s relative economic income,
- participation in high-paying positions with economic power and
- access to professional and parliamentary positions.

Mrs. Häusler gave a summary of the report by the Gender Equality Network to give some idea of the situation in Myanmar. Just two out of 36 union-level ministerial positions are held by women in Myanmar. Women hold four ministerial positions at the state and regional level. There are 26 women in the nation's parliament out of a total 664 seats. Women are well represented in the judiciary, but there are no female Supreme Court judges. As such, according to the gender index of 2012, Myanmar is ranked as eighth out of nine East Asian countries, only performing better than Laos.

Mrs. Nicole Häusler said that the topic of equality in tourism is as important as in any other sector and that not only Myanmar is facing this challenge, in that men control the most resources and decision-making processes in tourism all over the world. She pointed out that the gender dimension has already been recognized in Myanmar's tourism policies and that now it is time to deal with this topic actively. This conference therefore represented an opportunity to commence doing so.

Mrs. Nicole Häusler outlined the topics which could be discussed on the day of conference by all the participants. These were: gender discrimination in tourism workplaces, women in the tourism sector working as entrepreneurs, hospitality training and gender issues, sex tourism and lastly women as travelers, an overlooked but highly important target group. The last suggested topic was used as a bridge to the keynote speaker, Mrs. Lucky Chhetri, who spoke next.

3 Sisters' Journey: Small business to global change

Lucky Chhetri, the keynote speaker

Mrs. Lucky Chhetri was invited as the keynote speaker. She is the founder and executive director of Empowering Women of Nepal (an NGO) and 3 Sisters Adventure Trekking Pvt (Ltd), a trekking agency specializing in providing trekking tours with female guides in the Himalayas.

Mrs. Lucky Chhetri is a regular speaker at (inter)national seminars and workshops on the topic of women's empowerment. She has been consulted by many international organizations regarding tourism development issues in Nepal. Mrs. Lucky Chhetri has featured along with EWN and 3 Sisters Adventure Trekking in (inter)national documentaries and their story has been published and aired by the worldwide media.

Mrs. Lucky Chhetri and her sisters have been awarded many prizes such as:

- the Global Women's Leadership Network, recognition as 10 Leaders of Impact, 2014

- the Virgin Holiday Responsible Tourism Award, London, World Travel Market, 2012
- the National Geographic Geo-Tourism Challenge Competition sponsored by National Geographic and Ashoka's Changemakers for Women's Empowerment in Tourism, 2008
- Woman Entrepreneurs of the Year, awarded by the Rotary Club of Pokhara Mid-Town, 2006
- the 'Woman Social Entrepreneur in Tourism' award by Pokhara Lady Jacees, 2006
- the Ashoka fellowship: The Global Association of Leading Social Entrepreneurs, 2004

Mrs. Lucky Chhetri was invited with a request to present best practices and to share her knowledge and experience of gender empowerment in tourism. At the beginning of her presentation, she familiarized the audience with Nepal as a tourism destination and informed the conference of the role and position of women in Nepalese society. She identified the lack of access to education and limited employment opportunities as the biggest problems facing women in Nepal. There are strong expectations from society or from their families for women to marry and take care of children. Nepalese women are generally unrepresented in the decision-making process. Mrs. Lucky Chhetri and her sisters were conscious of these problems and at the same they realized that some of the women travelers who had been to Nepal had had bitter experiences with male tour guides, because they did not feel safe with them. Therefore, the idea of providing services for solo female travelers was born. The aim was to offer reliable female trekking services and through it to make job and education opportunities for women living in the mountains. The sisters agreed on a combination of helping both locals and travelers and therefore founded 3 Sisters Adventure trekking and the EWN. The EWN works in partnership with 3 Sisters Adventure Trekking to promote and empower Nepalese women and girls through adventure tourism and sports. Together, they combine a practical skill-based training program with gainful employment opportunities, specifically focused on the trekking industry. Responding to the gross inequality of women in Nepal, the EWN offers unprecedented opportunities for Nepali women and girls to improve their quality of life. Mrs. Lucky Chhetri mainly highlighted the importance of training women, which includes special skills such as history, geography and languages, but also hygiene; human rights are also discussed with the women.

Education for work for the lost generation in hospitality

Khin Sanda Win, the Managing Director, Inle lake view resort and spa, the Loft Yangon, Sandatour

Khin Sanda Win joined the tourism industry in 1992. She shared her experience and has invested in areas like the Shan State to develop the lives of ethnic tribes by lifting their economy in the agriculture sector and education. She has also established a foundation to continue helping the ethnic tribes and migrant workers returning home to Myanmar. At the conference, she spoke about the so-called lost generation (people aged 20-40) who are the “result” of the 1988-2010 period, when the former military junta suppressed the schools and universities. Like the previous speaker, she expressed the importance of education for women in Myanmar. She said that she hires international experts at her hotels and lets them share their knowledge and educate the local staff. She follows the rule that education is always important, not only for the staff of one hotel, but for the whole town/village. She thinks it is very important to educate the Myanmar people and to help them to run their businesses, because many of them are tempted to leave the country, because they see higher living standards in various (not only Asian) countries.

Sex tourism in Myanmar - perceptions in civil society

Dr. Andrea Valentin, Tourism Transparency

Mrs. Andrea Valentin has been involved in responsible tourism projects in Myanmar since 2011. She has established Tourism Transparency in Germany, a small NGO which researches the impacts of tourism and campaigns for open, accountable and responsible tourism development in Myanmar.

Mrs. Andrea Valentin contributed with a presentation on a sex tourism research project. The results of the research are as follows: poverty and unemployment, rape and trafficking are the main reasons why Myanmar women enter into sex work. Rape is a reason to take up sex work, because a girl is considered to be “ruined” or unmarriageable” once she has been raped. When it comes to trafficking, Myanmar women are promised employment opportunities by brokers and are then handed over to brothels. Some studies suggest that 60% of girls working as sex workers in Myanmar are under the age of 18. Their salary is very low; the lowest paid work is in so called KTV bars, where they earn 5000 MMK (about US\$ 5) to 10,000 MMK (about US\$ 10). The clients are mainly local men. There are very few foreigners as clients; some of

them tend to be expatriates in Yangon. Some organizations stress the importance of educating local clients on the importance of using condoms, because the interviewees reported that local men do not use them.

Myanmar is in the fortunate position that it has not yet developed into a full-blown industry (as in Thailand or Cambodia's thriving child sex industry, for example). On the other hand, this may easily and quickly change with the opening up of the border crossings and the predicted continuation in the rise of tourist arrivals. Mrs. Andrea Valentin concluded her presentation with the following recommendations. Additional research would be useful, as a greater variety of stakeholders needs to be included in the ongoing discussions and more awareness is needed. Building awareness in the tourism sector, the government and among tourists is important in order to mobilize the government to take legal measures and to improve the enforcement of the law for the protection of women. The next recommendation involved encouraging cooperation between tourist generating and receiving countries in order to determine the jurisdiction and the punishment of those involved in illegal practices. Marketing campaigns and the tourism image are very important as well (not objectifying women by promoting the KTV and bar girl scene, for example).

The results/outcomes of the discussions

After the presentations by the invited speakers, the participants were asked to split into groups of about 6 people. The groups were asked to discuss gender equality and gender empowerment within the tourism sector in Myanmar and to suggest what they considered to be the important issues which needed to be worked on in the future. They had a lively debate and then presented the results of their discussions. Each group suggested about 2-5 issues/topics which they considered important. Their ideas were noted on flipcharts. After that, each of the participants was asked to choose the two most important topics and to label them on the flipcharts with a sticker. Ten major issues were identified, including the prioritization of topics:

- Sex tourism (13 votes from the participants)
- Conferences, workshops, training on this topic etc. at grass root levels for employers and employees (12)
- Curriculum development which integrates gender equality topics (9)
- More research in the near future (6)

- Management training for women in rural areas and other regions, not just Yangon (6)
- Encouragement of SMEs, especially for female entrepreneurs (4)
- Monitoring – collecting data on women and tourism, sharing best practices (4)
- The Women’s Entrepreneur Network (3)
- Capacity building/exchange programs (1)
- Bringing women into higher positions with the MTF (0)

THE CONCLUSION

The outcomes

The aim of the project was to acquire the first insight into the topic of gender equality and gender empowerment and tourism in Myanmar. The recommendations for the MTF and the HSF were supposed to be suggested on the basis of the findings of all three parts of the project.

The answers to the research questions have helped in the formulation of recommendations. The research questions were:

- 1) What is the role of women in Myanmar society?
- 2) What are the employment opportunities for women in tourism in Myanmar?
- 3) What are the career opportunities for women in tourism in Myanmar?
- 4) Is there a wage gap between women and men working in tourism in Myanmar?

The first research question that was asked at the beginning was related to the role of women in Myanmar society. Their role has been influenced by many impacts in the past and will certainly continue to be as tourism develops, for example. It would be inappropriate to make any comprehensive generalizations, as the roles of women vary in different regions. However, it does not seem that women have a subsidiary role in Myanmar society. They hold certain positions or posts, e.g. the woman always decides on the family's finances. On the other hand, it is obvious that women are missing in the decision-making positions in government (with the exception of opposition leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi).

The second research question was related to the tourism sector and the employment opportunities within it. The results of each of part of the project pointed to fact that the role of women is significant in tourism in Myanmar. It also seems that there are many women working in tourism in Myanmar. There are many employment opportunities for them and the outcomes of the interviews prove that there are nearly equal employment opportunities. However some of the outcomes indicate that there might be some problematic issues such as the perception of tourism jobs within the society in Myanmar. Again, the situation might differ in various parts of Myanmar. Tourism development also brings negative impacts all over the world and the same is true in Myanmar as well. Sex tourism was identified at the conference as the most problematic issue.

The following research question regarded the career opportunities for women working in tourism in Myanmar. Generally, there is a problem that the majority of women almost all over the world have lower-skilled jobs and occupy less managerial posts. There is an imbalance and this project neither confirmed nor disproved that the situation is the same in Myanmar, as there is no data available on this. The outcomes of the interviews and the conference suggest that there are probably no bigger problems in career advancement within the tourism sector in Myanmar. The interviewed women rather expressed the opinion that it would not be good to have a quota for this, but that there might be more women in higher positions in tourism, if they were qualified and skilled enough. The results might have been different, if the interviews were conducted with women from other regions or other posts. It would be especially interesting to conduct some comparative research.

The final question was about whether there is a wage gap between women and men working in tourism in Myanmar. The outcomes showed that there is no wage gap. However, this is not based on any statistics or figures. It would therefore be interesting to conduct some more research on it, but this might be difficult, as the topic is very sensitive and the data is confidential.

Recommendations

The outcomes have undoubtedly confirmed the importance of the topic and the need to work on it. The following points are ideas which might be implemented in future.

- **Monitoring, collecting data:** As there is no data on the employment of women in tourism in Myanmar, the cooperation between the government and the private sector might be supported to ensure the proper measurement of employment in the tourism industry.
- **Education & training:** Women at the grass root levels, other regions apart from Yangon might be educated and training might be offered to them in order to encourage them to apply for key managerial and decision-making positions. The education of tourists is important as well (e.g. in the case of sex tourism).
- **Awareness-raising:** Information about gender equality might be especially spread with an emphasis on the advantages of gender balanced businesses, companies etc. among a wide variety of stakeholders (i.e., suppliers, consumers, etc.).

- **Networking:** It might help/be supportive to create networks (websites, social media groups, meetings and social events) in order to help women to acquire contacts, professional advice and access to information.
- **Good practices:** Good practices and solutions to problems might be presented. For example, many of the interviewed women mentioned the challenge of balancing their household duties, especially taking care of their children, and their careers. Solutions might be suggested to them, such as childcare facilities in this case, which in turn could create new jobs etc.
- **Additional research:** More research could be conducted into the topic; different regions in Myanmar, research at the grass root levels etc.. There might also be a focus on education: an important topic which has not been included in this project due to its scope.

Personal reflections

The implementation of a project like this was very challenging, because it was the first time I had had the opportunity to do such a thing on my own. The project undoubtedly has a few limitations. Even though I am satisfied with the scope of my internship and the project as well, there are some things which I would have done differently. I wish I had had more time to devote myself more intensively to the topic and to spend more time on the literature research and the preparation of the interviews. I would also consider formulating the first research question differently. It is a very complex question. Answering the question as to the role of Myanmar women in society requires much more time and I am therefore not fully satisfied with the answer. Secondly, I would like to comment on the qualitative research. Even though the interviews went very smoothly, the number of interviewed women was quite small. If I had had the financial resources and the time, I would have conducted more interviews and talked to women in different positions or to women in regions other than Yangon. My project would certainly have looked different, if I had had time to work on it and nothing else, but I am very glad that I had the chance to work on several tasks and to learn from them. All in all, I think that the objective of the project, to acquire the first insight into this topic, has been fulfilled and I can learn from the mistakes I have made in my potential future projects.

Lessons learnt

The project's delicate topic

Before working on this project, I had never realized that the topic of gender equality and gender empowerment was such a delicate and personal topic. I think that before starting this project I did not sufficiently realize how careful I would have to be when speaking to the interviewees. I do not think that it influenced my project very much, but it mainly played a role during the presentation of the interviews. I also mentioned it at the end of my presentation. This was appreciated by the audience and I got feedback on this area. This confirmed to me that my thoughts on this were correct and that I am not the only who is aware of this. When next realizing a similar project, I will definitely spend more time on the literature research concerning the specific topic in advance, if possible. I would also give more consideration to the ethical, cultural and religious aspects. Unfortunately, I did not have the possibility to do so in Myanmar because of a lack of time.

Language issues

As a person who has already had experience of living abroad and who has faced the challenge of speaking a foreign language, I did not expect significant difficulties because of the language barrier. As such, I was all the more surprised at how this complicated my internship, my work and the implementation of the internship project. Many of the partners I worked with were native German speakers and they often used their native language. It was mostly challenging to switch between two foreign languages very often and, as there are almost no native Czech speakers in Myanmar, I never had opportunity to speak my native language. However, I appreciated this opportunity and I think it was a very valuable experience for my future career.

When it came to communication with the local people, I spoke with them in English. Despite the fact that Myanmar was a British colony in the past and there is quite a lot of English literature, not everybody spoke English very well; this was also the case with the MTF staff. The Myanmar language is very difficult to learn and I did not have big ambitions to learn it since I did not consider it possible in such short time. I would consider learning the local language when next visiting Myanmar or another similar country for a longer time. By using just a few basic words or sentences in the Myanmar language, I was able to experience how unbelievably happy this

makes the local people and how they appreciate it. Moreover I believe it can break the “ice”, for example, at the beginning of an interview or help to make unpleasant situations more relaxing.

Cultural differences

As a tourism student who has had intercultural communication lectures, I was aware of the importance of understanding the cultural differences between Myanmar and my home country. That is why I studied the Myanmar culture in advance before I arrived in the country. No matter how hard I tried, there were always situations where I had to react spontaneously and no preparation could help me. I think that only experience can help people to manage these situations as smoothly as possible.

The biggest cultural differences which made the work in Myanmar difficult were the different perception of time. The meaning of a word such as “deadline” is completely different than, for example, for German or Czech people. I had to be patient and to learn to ask about some concrete time plans or schedules very politely. Impatience or dissatisfaction is seen very unwillingly in Myanmar. Sometimes, I also had the feeling that simple words such as “yes” were understood differently by my colleagues and by me. I have realized that Myanmar people avoid refusing anything and that in real life a simple “yes” can simply mean “yes, I am listening” and not “yes, I will do it for/send/help/... you etc”.

When working in a country such as Myanmar, people also have to understand the hierarchical structure of society very well and it is also advisable to respect it, if you do not want to have problems. In my case, I had to learn that age matters very much and that my student “status” ranked me in a certain position. When carrying out the interviews, it was preferable that I had been introduced (if not personally, then at least by e-mail) to the interviewees by someone who they knew and trusted. Otherwise, they might have refused to meet me.

On the other hand, I had a very valuable opportunity to meet many people, mainly working in tourism, but not only from this sector, and I got to know Myanmar people as nice people who are willing to help when possible.

The internship with the MTF

The fact that I was the first intern at the MTF influenced my internship very much. It was the first internship of this kind in my life so it was a very new experience for me and for my

Myanmar colleagues as well. It was challenging, because the internship “concept” is not very well known in Myanmar. I think that it was not only because of the cultural differences that my Myanmar colleagues were unsure about what kind of tasks they could give me, how much work I could manage per day etc. I cannot imagine working at the MTF and implementing the project without the assistance of Mrs. Nicole Häusler, who has already experienced working with interns and helped to smooth the progress of the whole internship. However, I am sure that once the MTF becomes more experienced with interns, the cooperation with them will work very effectively. I would emphasize not just international interns, but also local ones. The knowledge and experience exchange among international and local interns would be very interesting and valuable as well.

International development aid

International development aid is a very debatable topic and it has been much criticized and defended. For me, this was the first time I could experience it in real life. I can express my knowledge based on this short experience.

Many international development aid organizations, NGOs, foundations, etc. already exist in Myanmar and many more are coming. In my opinion, this is very positive, if they work effectively and meaningfully. Even though their work seems to be being done out of good intentions and persuasion, I sometimes had the feeling that there are too many of them. The competitiveness among them is strong and I do not think that the local people can understand this. Some of the international development aid organizations are willing to share information about their activities and projects and are willing to work with others. In other cases, personal interests and benefits are preferred and the cooperation with others is not very sought-after. There is the threat of overlaps and this can lead to ineffective help and support.

It was also interesting for me to meet former interns, who had also done their internships in Myanmar. This meant I could learn how useful the internship might be for my further career development. I could see that these people, who already had some knowledge of the country, were aware of their special knowledge and made use of it. From this perspective, my view of short-time internships and projects abroad has changed quite positively, because I have personally seen “proof” that people who have had the chance to get a sense of the country and development cooperation in past were coming back.

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Appendix

The email for the interviewees

Dear ladies,

I would like to ask you the following questions when we meet. **I want to make you sure that the data will be treated in a confidential way and that your names will be kept anonymous.**

Thank you for your support in advance!

- 1) What is your job?
- 2) Do you like your work?
- 3) Do you think women in Myanmar have the same employment opportunities as men?
- 4) Do you think women earn the same amount of money as men for the same work in Myanmar?
- 5) What do you think is the reason for that – the role of women in society, the family,...
- 6) Do you think that the fact that you are woman has somehow influenced your career? In which way?
- 7) Are you satisfied with the situation for women in tourism in Myanmar?
- 8) What do you think is the highest level a woman can achieve in your “sector”?
- 9) Do you think that it is important that women have the same opportunities? Why?
- 10) Do you think it would be good, if there were more women at professional levels than now? Why?
- 11) How do you think it could be achieved that there were more women at professional levels than now?
- 12) What would you advise the women who would like to achieve the professional levels?

Note: All the questions are related to the tourism sector.

The conference agenda

**AGENDA: “Tourism and Gender Empowerment in Myanmar”
Tuesday, 25th November 2014**

Venue: the Kandawyi Palace Hotel, Yangon

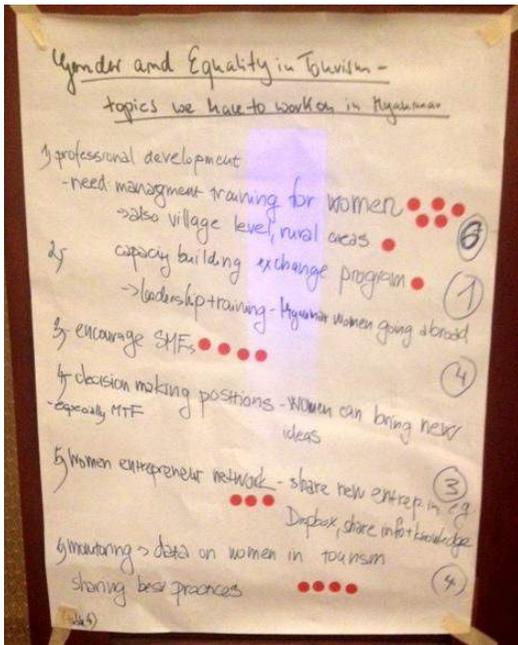
Moderator: Daw Kyi Kyi Aye, Senior Advisor, the Myanmar Tourism Federation

- 8.30 am Registration
- 9:00 am Opening Address by H. E. Dr. U Tin Shwe, the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism
- Welcome Remarks by the Chairman of the Myanmar Tourism Federation
- Welcome Note by Mr. Achim Munz, resident representative, Hanns Seidel Foundation
- Welcome Speech by Mrs. Yin Myo Su, Inle Princess Resort, the winner of ‘Travel + Leisure’s 2014 Global Vision Awards, Editor’s Pick: the Visionary and Winner of 2013, Goldman Sachs & Future Global Women Leaders Award
- *Group Photo Session* -
- 9.45 am Input by Nicole Haeusler, the Myanmar Tourism Federation: Equality in Tourism. Why Gender matters?
- 10.00 am Keynote speech by Lucky Chhetri, Founder and Executive Director of Empowering Women of Nepal (NGO) and 3 Sisters Adventure Trekking Pvt (Ltd), Pokhara, Nepal; “3 Sisters’ Journey: small business to global change”
- 10.45 am *Coffee Break*
- 11.15 am Khin Sanda Win, Managing Director, Sanda Hotel Co. Ltd.: Education for work for the lost generation in hospitality; Q & A
- 11.45 am Nela Blahoutová, the MTF/HNEE Eberswalde/Germany: Results of the survey on gender issues within Myanmar’s Tourism Management Sector (qualitative research); Q & A
- 12.15 pm *Lunch break*
- 13.15 pm Dr. Andrea Valentin, Tourism Transparency: “Sex tourism in Myanmar - perceptions by civil society”; Q & A
- 13.45 pm Group Discussion: Equality and Gender in Tourism – is there anything we have to work on here in Myanmar? Including Presentations and a *coffee break*
- 16.00 pm Wrap up and Farewell

Photos of the Conference



1. Group photo session



2. Suggestions of participants



3. Interview with local television