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PRESS RELEASE**'ENVIRONMENT IS TOP CONCERN FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN NGAPALI'**

Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF) and Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB), co-hosted the first ever multistakeholder workshop on responsible tourism in Ngapali from 11-13 May. It was attended by around 100 local stakeholders and international beach tourism experts. Parliamentarians from Rakhine State Parliament, local government officials from General Administration Department, Thandwe and Ngapali City Development Committees, Ministry of Hotels and Tourism and the Tourist Police, hotel owners and managers, tour guides and tourism professionals, restaurant and shop owners, fishermen and local villagers were all present, as were civil society organisations. The workshop was addressed by U Min Aung, Minister of Development Affairs for Rakhine State who identified the *'participation of local communities as the only way to develop responsible tourism in Ngapali'*.

Workshop participants were polled on their top concerns for tourism in Ngapali. Most participants identified the environment (29%) and benefits for community (21%) as well as lack of local participation in decision-making (15%). Solid waste management (34.5%) and sand mining (23.5%) were identified as the most urgent environmental problems. Illegal fishing using explosives and cyanide, and water and waste water management were also raised.

The workshop also discussed land use planning and zoning. Over three quarters of participants preferred tourism to expand along the coast rather than go high-rise. Main issues concerning land were inaccurate land records (23%), lack of information (20%) and land grabs (17%) as well as public access to the beach. In particular it was noted that some hotels had gone beyond their boundaries to block the access roads which were a legal requirement.

The workshop heard from international experts who had worked on beach destinations such as Bali (Indonesia), Cebu (Philippines) and Halong Bay (Vietnam). These destinations had previously experienced similar problems to those now emerging in Ngapali, such as sand mining, poor waste management and illegal fishing. In some cases they were working to resolve them, particularly where government, business and the local community had worked together to 'co-manage' the destination. Some areas had established Destination Management Plans (DMP) through a multistakeholder process; in Myanmar, Inle Lake is the only tourist destination to have a DMP.

Hanns Seidel Foundation and Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute presented their work on developing 'bed and breakfast (B&B)' accommodation in Myanmar including a new Handbook for B&B owners. In Myanmar there are now licensed B&B operations in Thandaunggyi and Pa-O Self-Administered Zone. In the workshop poll, three-quarters of participants thought that the B&B sector should be developed in Ngapali. Local employment, entrepreneurship and capacity-building were discussed, along with the challenges of providing year round employment in a destination with a six month peak tourist season.

Commenting on the interest in B&B, Achim Munz, Resident Representative Hanns Seidel Foundation Myanmar, said: *"B&B is a growing opportunity for the locals, many of whom started their careers working in the large resorts or restaurants, to start running their own accommodation. We need the process for*

licensing and registration of B&B, and small guesthouses to be clarified, so that local businesses are not wrapped up in red tape. At the workshop, there was a clear appetite for all licensing processes to be decentralised to the state or even township level.'

Vicky Bowman, Director of Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business said: *"This workshop was the first opportunity for different stakeholders to come together to discuss the direction they want to see tourism take in Ngapali. All voices need to be heard as the new government seeks to develop Ngapali as a world-class tourism destination. An inclusive process for destination management planning is vital".*

"There were inevitable and understandable differences of opinion. However, there was almost unanimous agreement that stopping sand-mining was key to protecting Ngapali's future. Some progress has been made on that in recent months. But it will be important not to simply displace the problem to white sand beaches down the coast, out of sight. That risks causing the erosion of beaches which would otherwise have potential to generate tourism income for local communities in the future."

MCRB and HSF will work in association with the newly formed Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute (MRTI), to support Ngapali-based tourism stakeholders as they take forward specific actions on the priority issues identified in the workshop.

Background

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

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