

NEVER ADVANCE IN NORTHERN RAKHINE STATE OF MYANMAR, WITHOUT SMART STRATEGIES OF CULTURAL TOURISM AND ECOTOURISM INITIATIVES

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ABSTRACT

Myanmar has very long civil war in ethnic areas since 1958 to now due to lack of peace building, lack of democracy practices and poverty in rural area like Kachin State, Shan State, and Rakhine State. This article will apply literature review and expertise interviews through field visit to observe good strategy for cultural tourism and ecotourism in unrest of Northern Rakhine State. It has two main ethnic groups under different religious (Muslim and Buddhism) and diverse culture along hillock, mountains, rivers and sea shore with natural forest. This article will support smart and sustainable strategies for cultural tourism and ecotourism development. That will support peace and dignity of local people of Northern Rakhine State.

Keywords: Cultural tourism, Ecotourism, Northern Rakhine State, Smart strategy, Natural forest, Poverty

INTRODUCTION

Myanmar has recently seen an unprecedented growth in international tourist arrivals. Visitor numbers surpassed the over two million (2,907,207) in 2016 and over 3 million (3,443,133) arrivals in 2017 (Naing, 2018). The Government of Myanmar wants the country to become a prime tourism destination and tourism bears a significant potential for economic and human development.

However, Northern Rakhine State had religious and ethnic conflicts since 1960s to now (Heinrich Boll Stiftung (The Green Political Foundation), 2020), it has opportunity to develop tourism sector, particularly religious tourism and ecotourism for community' peace and livelihood development (Stokke, Kristian et al., 2018).

Myanmar (Burma) is a multi-religious country. According to the 2014 census, Buddhism is the dominant religion, of 88% of the population, practiced especially the Bamar, Rakhine, Shan, Mon, Karen people and Chinese ethnic groups. The new constitution provides for the freedom of religion; thus, it is found that 6.2% of Christianity and 4.3% of Islam, 0.5% of Hinduism, 0.8% of Tribal religion, 0.2% of other religion and 0.1 % of non-religion population (Wikipedia, 2020b).

Islam is a minority religion in Myanmar, practiced by about 4.3% of the population. In the early Bagan era (AD 652-660), Arab Muslim merchants landed at ports such as Thaton and Martaban. Arab Muslim ships sailed from Madagascar

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Aung

to China, often going in and out of Myanmar (Previous name as Burma). Arab travelers visited the Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal south of Myanmar.

The Muslims arrived in Myanmar's Ayeyarwady River delta, on the Tanintharyi coast and in Rakhine in the 9th century, prior to the establishment of the first Myanmar (Burmese) empire in 1055 AD by King Anawrahta of Bagan. The population of the Muslim increased during the British rule of Myanmar because of new waves of Indian Muslim immigration (Wikipedia, www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/, 2020).

Islamic culture can have a positive impact on the development of tourism in some places (CABI, 2020). As Turkish Ambassador in Iran explained: 'The Islamic culture and its real values have remained unknown for a long period. However, the rise of international tourism brought different aspects of Islamic tourism into light. Holding cultural programs such as photo exhibitions about Islamic monuments can play a prominent role in increasing the knowledge of people about Islamic tourism and attracting them to these places.

Rakhine State is bordered to the west by the Bay of Bengal and Bangladesh and to the north by India. To the east, the imposing Yoma Mountains partially divide Myanmar's most western state from the central lowlands (Zaw, Khin et al., 2017). It has good weather and diversified Buddhism, Hindu and Islamic religious and ethnic culture.

OBJECTIVES OF ARTICLE

Myanmar has attractive diversified culture and natural forest to promote cultural tourism and ecotourism in ethnic States like Kachin, Shan, Rakhine, Mon and Kayin States (Htun, 2009). Thus, overall objective is to find strategies inspiration for cultural tourism and ecotourism in Northern Rakhine State (Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathaydaung townships) due to poverty and unrest situation to advance economic development and peace in this region.

This study article will find as;

- To observe current challenges of Northern Rakhine State (NRS)
- To find good opportunity for peace and livelihood development in NRS
- To set up smart strategies to initiate cultural tourism and ecotourism in NRS

In (Kotler, Philip & Keller, Kevin Lane, 2009), it was learnt that the current century brought a series of new challenges: the steep decline of the stock market, which affected savings, investment, and retirement funds; that also increase unemployment, corporate scandals and finally the rise of terrorism. Thus, peace and economic development for local ethnic communities are essential in ethnic, politics and religious related conflict areas (Christophersen, Mona & Stave, Svein Erik, 2018) like northern Rakhine State.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is important to do literature review related culture tourism, ecotourism' theories and practices that will be relevant to Northern Rakhine State.

Secondly field observations and key informer interviews must be conducted to learn ground situations for cultural tourism opportunities and proceeding strategies development in NRS.

There are distrust and unrespect to others among ethnic groups, particularly between Bengali Muslim and Rakhine' Buddhism for long time ago. There must be setting up conceptual frame work of strategies development in NRS as (Figure 1).

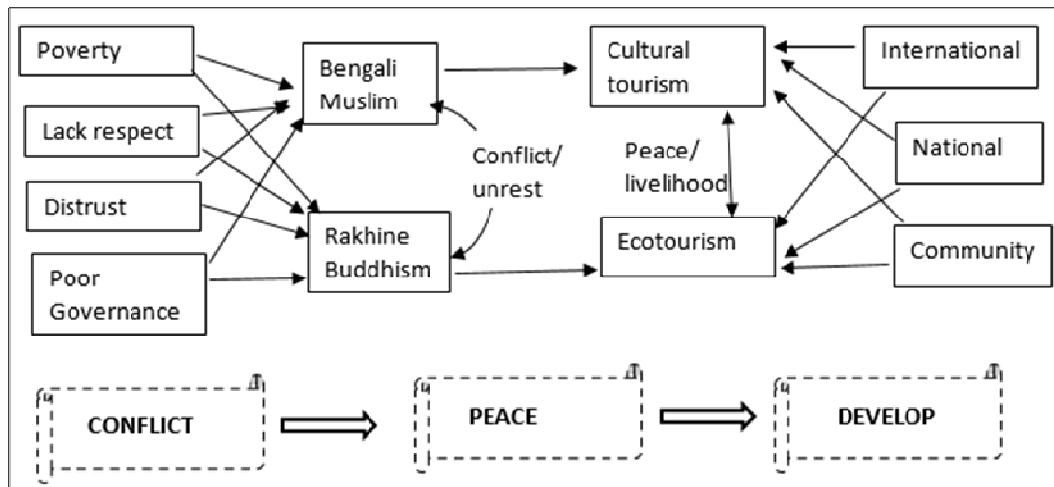


Figure 1: Strategies development in NRS' conceptual framework.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory and practices of cultural tourism

Culture and tourism have always been inextricably linked. Cultural sights, attractions and events provide an important motivation for travel, and travel in itself generates culture (Richards, 2018). The emergence of cultural tourism as a social phenomenon and travel helped to increase cultural understanding as well as rebuild shattered economies. As incomes and consumption continued to rise in the 1960s and 1970s, so did international travel and the consumption of culture. Moreover, growth in cultural tourism was also marked by fragmentation into a number of emerging niches, like heritage tourism, arts tourism, gastronomic tourism, film tourism and creative tourism.

According to UNWTO defines in 2017 as

Cultural tourism is a type of tourism activity in which the visitor's essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/ products in a tourism destination. These attractions/ products relate to a set of distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries and the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions.'

Cultural tourism also developed a division between general and specific cultural tourists with the former consuming culture as a part of a general holiday experience and the latter travelling purposefully to engage in culture of some destination. Cultural heritage tourism has long existed and facilitates harmony among people, it supports culture and helps renew tourism (Ismail, Norhasimah et al., 2014).

Motivation is important in cultural tourism to consume culture and those for whom culture is a secondary motivation. In categorizing motivations in terms of the degree of 'cultureness' that combines length of stay and a high to low cultural experience dimension. Motivations of cultural tourists are often linking their

Aung

satisfactions to revisit. Cultural tourism has had an important dimension, particularly income derived from tourism can support cultural heritage.

According to (Ismail, Norhasimah et al., 2014), cultural heritage tourism is traveling to experience the places and activities that represent the stories and people of the past and present, which include historic, cultural and natural attractions. Cultural heritage is an appearance of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, places, objects and artistic expressions.

Roles of ecotourism in country development

As (Kiper, 2013) revealing that it perceived an effective tool for sustainable development in developing countries by economic development and conservation strategies. Carefully planned ecotourism sites under community based and active participation in environmental conservation are key to succeed and sustainable benefits to respective communities as defined by (Kim, Marin et al., 2019).

Ecotourism destinations are mostly environmentally sensitive because of ecotourism activities directly involve with bird watching, trekking, mountaineering, horse riding, staying in forests, etc as revealed in (Steven, Rochelle et al., 2014). In order for ecotourism to gain sustainable development, it must ensure land use sustainability for community and its environs also (Kiss, 2004; UNWTO & OAS, 2018).

Peace and dignity in tourism destinations

According to the United Nations has proclaimed 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism Development to fight against poverty and foster mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue (UNESCO, 2020). Therefore, the United Nations General Assembly acknowledged that it is important of tourism in fostering better understanding and leading the rich heritage of various civilizations to the high strengthening of peace in this tourism destinations and countries.

Moreover, 'World Travel & Tourism Council' expressed that tourism sector has ability to drive peace, security and understanding within the respective communities thus, 'Institute of Economics and Peace (IEP) also partnered to explore the interlinking of peace and tourism, particularly conflict locations (World Travel & Tourism Council , 2020).

As (Malta Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, 2020), the president of Malta Marie-Louise ColeiroPreca addressed a tourism forum in Turkey that the sustainable tourism is a form of tangible diplomacy, not only bringing people in contact with one another, but also building respect among diverse people and valuing their human dignity and their peace as well.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Tourism sector assessment in Myanmar

According to (CEIC, 2020), tourism sector is positive with increase number of tourists. There is 716,000 tourists in 2007; 731,000 in 2008; 763,000 in 2009; 792,000 in 2010; 816,000 in 2011; 1,059,000 in 2012. After 2012, there has high increase in tourists with 2,044,000 in 2013, 3,081,000 in 2014; 4,681,000 in 2015. Due to conflicts in Rakhine State, tourists visiting decrease nearly double with 2,907,000 in 2016.

There is rapidly increase tourism revenue in Myanmar as 196 USD million in 2009; 254 USD mn in 2010; 319 USD mn in 2011; 534 USD mn in 2012; 926 USD mn in 2013; 1,789 USD mn in 2014; 2,122 USD mn in 2015; 2,197 USD mn in 2016. But due to conflict of Rakhine State in 2017, this tourism revenue decrease with 1,969 USD mn in 2017 and 1,651 USD mn in 2018 (CEIC, 2020) attributed by decrease number of tourists from Europe and America.

Furthermore, the expenditures of Myanmar' tourism also slowly fluctuated with 34 USD mn in 2005; 40 USD mn in 2006; 39 USD mn in 2007; 49 USD mn in 2008; 52 USD mn in 2009; 53 USD mn in 2010; 132 USD mn in 2011; 265 USD mn in 2012; 131 USD mn in 2013; 119 USD mn in 2014; 144 USD mn in 2015 and high increase of 584 USD mn in 2016.

Regarding to SWOT analysis for cultural tourism and ecotourism development in northern Rakhine State (Maungdaw, Buthidaung and RathayDaung Tsp) (**Table 1**) according to field observations and KII interview' results as;

Table 1: SWOT analysis on cultural tourism and ecotourism.

STRENGTH	WEAKNESS
1. Historical and diversified cultures of ethnic groups (Rakhine, Myo, Dianet, Thet and Bengali) 2. Attractive Buddha Parami (trying life) and historical places in PhaWut Chaung, Wet Kyein, Rathaydaung' villages and OoDaung villages for tourists of Thailand, Cambodia and Lao and local visitors from Myanmar 3. Attractive Hindu religious culture in AgamuNaw village for tourists in Bangladesh, Indonesia and India 4. Attractive Muslim culture and religious in most villages of Maungdaw 5. Good natural forest and community plantations for ecotourism initiatives 6. Community will be willingness to participate in cultural tourism and ecotourism activities (home stay, trekking, cultural visit, wildlife seeing (wild elephant, bird seeing), restaurant, motel, village visit, etc) 7. Attractive river route of May Yu river along Buthidaung and Rathadaung' villages 8. Attractive coastal and hill destinations along Maungdaw' villages	1. Unrest and un-trust each community between Bengali, and Rakhine 2. Poor infrastructure of roads, electricity, school and basic health care facilities 3. Communities are poor in education, knowledge in cultural tourism and ecotourism activities 4. Poverty of communities 5. Lack of communication skill and marketing skill for tourism development in NRS 6. Poor governance management and policy to develop cultural tourism and ecotourism
OPPORTUNITY	THREAT
1. Peace building, resettlement and development activities will be appeared in NRS within 5 years 2. Grant and technical support from	1. Insurgent and international influences to unrest and conflict again 2. Lack investment of tourism sector from foreign countries and private sector

Government, private sector and international organizations in NRS than other regions of Myanmar		3. Poor support of Gov; in infrastructure development in NRS 4. Competition from other places in similar services of cultural tourism and ecotourism	
3. Quality tourists will become interested in cultural tourism and ecotourism of NRS 4. New destinations and global interest places of NRS to visit			
Strengths	Weakness	Opportunities	Threats
8	6	4	4

Therefore, it is important to support and cooperation by Gov;, private sector and international organizations to develop cultural tourism and ecotourism as sustainable gains and community based approaches.

Peace building in NRS

It was stated in (Mckay, 2019), conflict dynamics in Rakhine State are deeply rooted in a complex and traumatic history of violence confrontation with expansionist powers, poverty, lack of respect to other's culture and religious beliefs. To date, influential religious leaders and religious social service networks have been engaged by aid, policymaking and peacebuilding actors of national and international organizations.

In (Home Office, 2019), the Bengali Muslim living in 3 townships: Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathedaung. Thus, 85-95% of the population of Maungdaw and Buthidaung is Bangali Muslim (Myanmar Gov; named them as Bengali Muslim but some international agency named as Rohingya). Moreover, there has small of minorities, including the Kaman, Mro, Khami, Dainet and Maramagyi.

As (Wikipedia, www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki, 2020c), violent clashes have been ongoing in the northern part of Myanmar's Rakhine State since October 2016. Insurgent attacks by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) have led to sectarian violence perpetrated by Myanmar's military and the local Buddhist population against predominantly Muslim civilians. Clashes between insurgents and the military in 2017. Following attacks by ARSA on 25 August of 2017, Myanmar's army forces led a crackdown against Muslim living in villages of Maungdaw, Buthidaung and Rathaydaung of northern Rakhine State (NRS). Consequences by this, Bengali Muslim refugees quickly began fleeing to Bangladesh. By 12 September-2017, authorities in Bangladesh and aid agencies were reporting 370,000 refugees had fled to Bangladesh.

Thus, in partnership with Myanmar Health Assistant Association (MHAA), UNICEF had supported mobile health services in Buthidaung, Maungdaw and Rathedaung providing basic maternal and child health services (UNICEF, 2019). Moreover, UNICEF worked with the Communicating with Communities (CwC) group in Rakhine and identified key areas for strengthening CwC work to develop both accountability and engagement with local communities in NRS.

Moreover, State Counsellor Daw Aung San Suu Kyi held second anniversary of the 'Union Enterprise for Humanitarian Assistance, Resettlement and Development in Rakhine (UEHRD) to establish collaboration effort to solve

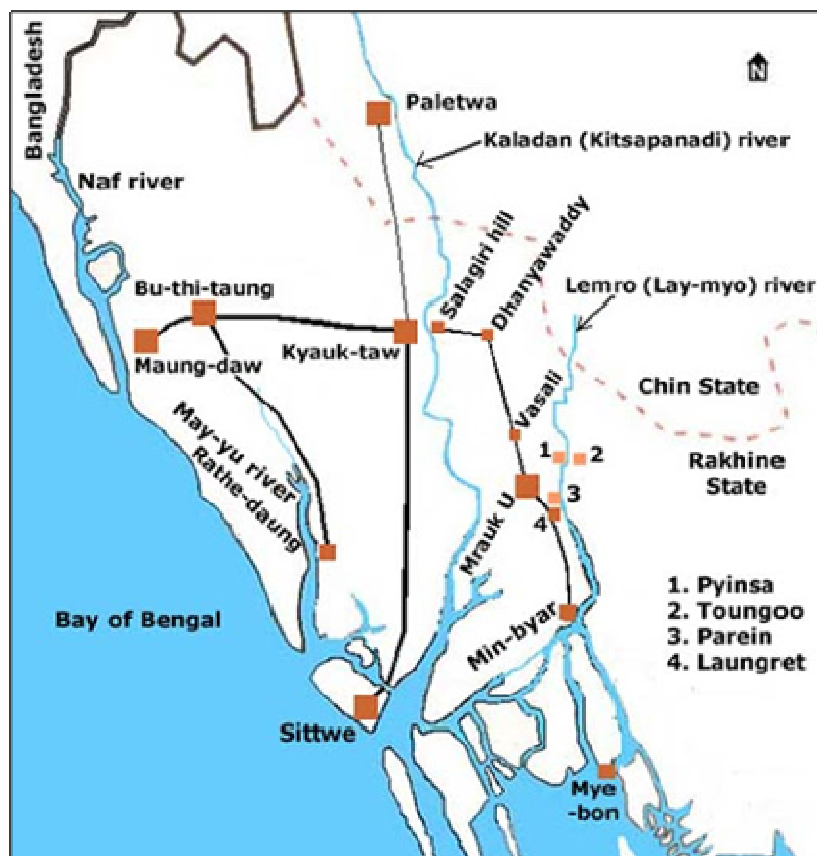
conflicts in Rakhine State. Union Minister Dr. WinMyat Aye is leading the UEHRD through visiting at least 50 times during 2017 to 2019 (Global Newlight of Myanmar, 2019). She highlighted that country expectations for the long-term development of the Union. If the ongoing problem of Rakhine State could be solved with the collaboration efforts of the people.

Therefore, northern Rakhine State will become peace and stability through UN, Government, INGOs and local community involvement through trust building and helping each other's like other parts in country.

Innovations for cultural tourism and ecotourism activities

As (Ministry of Information, 2020), Rakhine State has attracted for economic development although it has lagged behind other Regions and States. Thus, successive governments have called for investments for overall developments of the State. Investors took a wait and see position after disturbances in 2012 and 2017 of NRS.

Northern Rakhine State is located with 3 townships across easily transportation with towns of Bangladesh, Bay of Bengal and other towns of Rakhine State like Naf River and Cox Bazar town of Bangladesh, and Kyauk Taw, Sittwe townships and May Yu River.



Map 1: Location and accessible map of northern Rakhine State.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON SMART STRATEGIES

Nowadays, tourism led economic growth has become outcome for the public strategy and policy based on economic, social and cultural of respective local communities (Kisi, 2019). Thus, (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2015) recommended that tourism industry must have positive effects on employment,

Aung

gross revenue, and production as well as must mitigate negative impact to its environment.

International organizations and other countries' government' strategies for cultural tourism and ecotourism development in northern Rakhine State

- Supporting peace building and solidarity to ethnics of Myanmar.
- Technical support to cultural tourism and ecotourism development in northern Rakhine State.
- Assisting by loan of world bank and ADB to SMEs related to cultural tourism and ecotourism sector of NRS.
- To be confident on foreign direct investment in tourism sector of Rakhine State and northern Rakhine State.

National level of Myanmar' Government and private sector's strategies

- To ensure peace and solidarity process to all ethnic groups of NRS.
- To promote ecological balance for ecotourism development in NRS.
- To preserve natural, historical, social and cultural assets in NRS.
- To invest by national private sector in cultural tourism and ecotourism in Rakhine State and northern Rakhine State.
- Gov; loan support to SMEs of cultural tourism and ecotourism businesses in NRS.
- Gov; policy support in infrastructure development (road, electricity, education, health facilities), networking to international organizations, technical support to initiate and develop cultural tourism and ecotourism businesses.
- Gov, private sector and INGOs/UN must support poverty alleviation in NRS to ensure livelihood development and basic human rights.
- Government must improve governance role and policies in administration, economic and tourism sectors.
- Research & Development must be applied for factor analysis influenced to cultural tourism and ecotourism' innovations and its development in NRS.

Community level strategies

- Unity and peace in community level particularly Bengali Muslim and Rakhine ethnic community in NRS.
- Learning and doing approach for cultural tourism and ecotourism process.
- Capacity building to community for peace building, business knowledge, tourism management' theory and practices.
- Persuade community to participate in environmental conservation and establishing community forest for ecotourism destination development in each village.

- CSOs must be empowered for peace, economic and tourism in concept, theory and practices.

If above these strategies are well functioned in northern Rakhine State, it will develop cultural tourism and ecotourism as well as peace and dignity for living communities in NRS within 1future 10 years.

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