

# Women Role Development of Tourism Business in Myanmar

Myo Aung, Valliappan Raju, Amiya Bhaumik, Ibrahim Alrajawy

**Abstract:** Women received lack salary and income from tourism business Myanmar because of lack of Government policy and lack of capacity building to women. Thus, this research has main objective to develop women role in tourism business as guide, operators and owners of businesses. Research methods will be applied in field observation, interview to women and literature review related women roles and its policy level in Myanmar and other countries. This study will recommend concept, strategy and policy level promotions of tourism sector in Myanmar for women development in their roles and livelihood.

**Index Terms:** Tourism business, Government policy, women role, strategy, livelihood, Myanmar

## I. INTRODUCTION

Myanmar is a Southeast Asian nation with 53.37 million population (2017, World Bank data) in complementary of 100 ethnic groups adjacent of Andaman Sea, the Bay of Bengal, India, Bangladesh, China, Thailand and Laos. This also known as Golden Land that covers an area of 676,578km<sup>2</sup> (One World Nations Online, 2019). The role of gender and tourism has been jointly popular according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization that supported to function in gender equality and the empowerment in the world (Blahoutova, 2015).

Myanmar obtained independence in 1948 from British Empire and military controlled politics during 1962 to 2011. Thus, Myanmar has long civil war since 1962 to now due to ethnic conflict and lack of equality policy to poor, women and ethnic people.

Since 2015, new Government of National League Democracy party win country politics and open foreign direct investment and relief policy control for trade, tourism and SMEs than previous army Government. Thus, more tourists visited Myanmar and that support country GDP like other business sectors. Women are mostly caretakers for their respective family create part time job under flexible discipline, which tend to less income (International Finance Corporation, 2017).

Therefore, women role must be considered to develop in tourism business in terms of income, job opportunity, capacity and livelihood (Ministry of Hotel and Tourism, 2013). However, there is a temptation to resort to mobilize for gender inequalities between urban and rural women in

Myanmar economy (DFAT, 2016).

In (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2019), there are found the policies to improve gender equity in several OECD countries like Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Israel and Norway for women representatives on boards of Public limited and State owned enterprises, that practices must be replica in other countries like Myanmar and ASEAN countries.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Tourism business challenges in Myanmar

Although Myanmar tourism business sector significantly increased in 2012, there became as normal in 2013 and 2014 due to a lack of human resources and tourism infrastructure. Moreover, regard of the Hotel and Tourism Ministry, this sector declined 38 percent in financial year 2015-2016.

Beyond that Myanmar hosted about three million visitors in 2016 because of country developing in transportation, infrastructure, lodging facilities, human resources and tourist destination's security (Hnin, 2017).

Since 1993, there had been visa relaxation and relative freedom of travel granted to individual tourists, the tourists arrival bounced back. There are inconvenient of tourists who are waiting at least one week process for visa approval during 1980s to 2000s (Thett, 2012). Moreover, there are poor in responsible tourism practices and policy by relevant stakeholders in Myanmar, thus Myanmar Tourism Master Plan has been initiated in 2000s to now (Asian Development Bank, 2012).

There are challenges in civil war for tourists visiting to ethnic States like Kachin, Shan, Kayah and Rakhine States since 1962 to now (The Asia Foundation, 2017). Beyond that, there are lack of investment in hotels and restaurants for tourism business due to lack of direct investment of foreign investors (Ministry of Hotel and Tourism, 2013) & (EUROCHAM Myanmar, 2018).

### B. Women role development strategy, policy of tourism business in ASEAN countries

Southeast Asia has rich and diverse set of natural and tangible cultural tourism resources in both rural and urban areas through unique 11 natural and 17 cultural heritage sites as UNESCO World Heritage (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2015). The major source market is intra-ASEAN with 46% share of tourists in 2014.



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Myo Aung, Lincoln University College, Malaysia.

Valliappan Raju, Lincoln University College, Malaysia.

Amiya Bhaumik, Lincoln University College, Malaysia.

Ibrahim Alrajawy, Lincoln University College, Malaysia.

Moreover, the highest tourists arrival countries were China (>31%), Japan (>13%), Republic of Korea (> 10%), Taiwan (9%) and Australia (8%) during 2010-2013 (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, 2015) & (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2015). Thus, it is important to promote women role development in tourism business in ASEAN countries (Patrice Ollivaud, Peter Haxton, 2019).

According to (Wageningen University, 2008), the analysis of women empowerment through tourism development in Asia countries showed that women roles are inequality especially in rural areas for example the education facilities and individual women value in Nepal, India, Myanmar and other poor countries. Therefore, some Non-Governmental Organizations help to change empowering women through providing training, participation in ecotourism activities and employment as tour guide and services in tourism sector.

Furthermore, in India there has been developed an ecotourism center to support women in maintaining tribal culture and traditional life style to be learnt by outsider's visitors. Also, tourists are shown leopard and sloth bear in sanctuary as well as women guide 18 ft statute of Lord Hanuman ( a Hindu deity) and danced as tribal show in night.

It is noticed that in travel and tourism sector, a number of sector companies initiated strategies to empower women in management and leadership roles through using effective policies as below (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2019);

- Promote women's access to excellent quality employments and its opportunities
- Build women' education and training
- Provide equal pay to women in similar work as men
- Ensure women leadership roles
- Support quality childcare, social benefits, maternity assistance
- Ensure flexible work environment
- Support women's entrepreneurship and the equal access to grants

### C. Capacity building process in women empowerment in tourism business

According to (International Finance Corporation, 2017), globally women earn less than men, earning on average 60 to 75 cents for every one USD of men's income through average 37% of GDP by women. Thus, women will need more capacity building than men to reduce gap of income between every men and women.

Before capacity building process to women, there must be occurred the analysis upon the degree of gender progress on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), gender research upon health, education, literacy, etc. Capacity building process must include gender awareness training to all actors as well as it must create enabling the business environment and SME development for women.

Thus, it must have tourism capacity building framework focuses to improve the business environment, seeking trade and market innovations, women access to business

information. There are vocational skill training in handicraft, woodcraft, metal craft, garment skill to women in Ugandan and Kenya for their tourist selling products like baskets, hats, mats, kitchen accessories and wood products, etc (Desmond, 2014).

### III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is using scientific study in literature review, field visit and interview to women tourists/ local visitors and women headed households of villages in ecotourism sites to observe women perceptions, impacts of tourism and suggestions for tourism development in villages.

Literatures are collected from books, reports and web sites related women empowerment in tourism business of Myanmar and other related countries like China, Thailand, India, etc.

Field studies are done to Mandalay, Yangon, Hapan, Bagan, Popa where women involved in tourism business as staffs, sellers of souvenir, restaurants, and hotels, etc. Questionnaires are developed to ask women tourists/local visitors and women villagers living near tourist destinations. It is applied with simple random sampling method to select interviewees to reduce researcher's bias.

There are 71 tourists/visitors by interviewing structured questionnaires and using SPSS software analysis in descriptive and cross tabulation to learn their purpose of visit, satisfactions on visits and suggestions to improve tourism in Myanmar. According to 'Reliability Statistics', there is good result with 0.775 cronbach's alpha.

Beyond that 59 women villagers and related tourism business near Popa ecotourism destinations are interviewed in March, 2019 using structured questionnaires to observe their socioeconomic, suggestions to improve tourism and analyzing tourism business opportunity. This questionnaire's results are fine with 'Reliability Statistic' 0.777 in cronbach's Alpha in SPSS.

### IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

#### A. Current Tourism business in Myanmar

As a growing tourism and popular destinations, Myanmar has more tourists rather than from any well executed destination planning and brand marketing (Business Innovation Facility, 2016). The growth of Myanmar' tourism is 3 million in 2014 with two- thirds come from East Asian source markets.

In 2013, Myanmar had 2 million international tourists' arrivals and in 2012 is just 1 million. There is the high scenario projection of over 3 million arrivals with US\$ 3.61 billion of visitor's expenditure by 2015. Thus, forecast of 2020, there will be a low scenario of 2.8 million arrivals, a medium forecast with 4 million and a high forecast with 7.4 million of tourist's arrival.

According to UN human development index, Myanmar is one of the poorest countries in the world ranking at 149 out of 168 countries in



2015 (Business Innovation Facility, 2016). Economic growth is averaging 5 per cent in 2010s with a per capita income of US\$ 702 by UNDP country report (2013-2015). Moreover, Myanmar is 26 percent of the national population under poverty with the more rural poverty of 1.8 times than urban people of Myanmar.

Now, Myanmar is increasing tourists' arrival and its

consequences by tourism towards more economic opportunities for local community as local services decreased on opening tour agencies, souvenir shops and food, etc. Meanwhile, Myanmar Tourism Master Plan forecast that direct industry employment from 293,700 in 2012 to 424,450 in 2015 as following Table.

Table (1): Direct Tourism Employment in Myanmar (2012-2020)

Business sector	Conservative			High	
	2012	2015	2020	2015	2020
Accommodation	44,055	63,668	84,458	125,403	224,670
Food and beverage	146,850	212,225	281,528	418,009	748,901
Recreation and entertainment	29,370	42,445	56,306	83,602	149,780
Transportation services	58,740	84,890	112,611	167,204	299,560
Travel services	14,685	21,223	28,153	41,801	74,890
TOTAL	293,700	424,450	563,056	836,018	1,497,801

Source: (Ministry of Hotel and Tourism, 2013)

### B. Women Tourists/local visitors findings

Popa National Park has been established since 1987 as natural conservation and ecotourism destination in Myanmar. It is one of the most popular ecotourism site like Inlay lake, Bagan, Mandalay, Yangon and Nga Pali beach of Myanmar's tourist destinations.

There are 47 women local visitors and 24 women tourists are asked questionnaires while they visited Popa Ecotourism site in Myanmar. 49 respondents of visitors (tourists/ local visitors) are Buddhism, 16 women is Christian and other religion is 6 women. 45% and 38% of visitors are '18-40 year old' and '41-60 year old' respectively.

#### Purpose visit to Popa National Park destination

Table (2): Purpose of visit by visitors

Purpose of visit	Yes	No
To visit Popa Mountain Nature	11 (15%)	60 (85%)
Visiting traditional spirit culture	4 (6%)	67 (94%)
Visit to local villages near Popa	4 (6%)	67 (94%)
To learn local knowledge	4 (6%)	67 (94%)
Wildlife bird and monkey watching	13 (18%)	58 (82%)
Relax of holiday	18 (25%)	53 (75%)
Pilgrimage visit	39 (55%)	32 (45%)

Source: Field interview (March, 2019)

Most of women want to visit 'Pilgrimage visit' and most are not interested in 'Visiting traditional spirit culture', 'Visit to local villages near Popa', and 'To learn local knowledge'. Thus, it will need more advertising and awareness rising to value local culture and knowledge to visitor for further development of tourism visit in there.

#### Satisfaction on women visit places

Table (3): Visitor's satisfaction on visit and activities

Agenda	Very satisfied	Satisfie	Neutra	Dissati fied
Popa mountain environment	32 (45%)	34 (48%)	2 (3 %)	3 (4%)
Local culture practices	22 (31%)	37 (52%)	11 (16%)	1 (1%)
Local food, products	29 (41%)	26 (37%)	11 (16%)	5 (7%)
Wildlife watching	18 (25%)	35 (49%)	13 (18%)	5 (7%)
Hotel, restaurant accommodation	7 (10%)	33 (47%)	19 (27%)	11 (16%)
Safety	40 (58%)	27 (39%)	2 (3%)	-

Source: Field interview (March, 2019)

58% of women are very satisfied with 'Safety' situation of tourism site and 45% are very satisfied with 'Popa mountain environment', thus it is important to b better safety and good nature environment for women visitors.

### C. Women villagers near Popa mountain tourism destination's finding

#### Socioeconomic status of women respondents

All 59 respondent women are Buddhism. Out of 59 women, 13 women (22%) is single, 4 women is married, 4 women divorced and 38 women (64%) are widow. Age range of respondent women are '18-40 years old' is 7 women, '41-60 year old' is 26 women (44% of total), 'Over 60 year old' is 26 women (44% of total).



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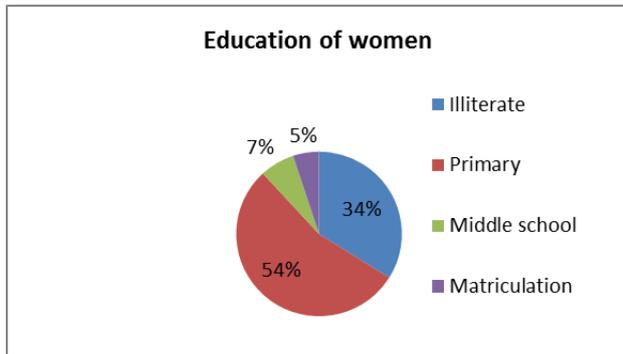


Figure 1: Women villager's education status

Most of women are illiterate (34% of total respondents) and primary education (54%) and no woman is graduated. This is challenging to build capacity of women in Myanmar, particularly at village rural area.

Table (4): Main occupation of women respondents

	Farmer	Casual labor	Local product seller	Staff	Grocery shop	Other
Women	34 (58%)	11 (19%)	4 (7%)	2 (3%)	2 (3%)	6 (10%)

Source: Field interview (March, 2019)

34 women headed household (58% of respondents) are farmers in villages of Popa tourism site and only a few women worked as staff of Gov/Company and small shop selling local products and vegetable, etc as shown in Table (4).

Table (5): Monthly income of women headed household

	Below 33 \$	33-98\$	99-196\$	> 196 \$
Women HH	6 (10%)	33 (56%)	12 (20%)	8 (14%)

Most of women HHs (56%) have monthly income of 33-98 USD. Therefore, most of women hh are poor than other men headed hhs.

Regarding to Table (6), women villagers hope 'Become more income from tourism business', 'More selling local products to visitors', and 'More job opportunity from tourism' as strongly agree with 49%, 56% and 48% respectively

Table (6): Monthly income from tourism sector

	Below 33\$	33-65\$	66-131 \$
Women HH	5 (25%)	8 (40%)	7 (35%)

Only 20 women out of 59 respondent women have income from tourism related business ranging 33\$ to maximum 131 \$ per month.

Table (7): Women's perceptions on tourism's impact

Perception	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree
Become more income from tourism business	29 (49%)	28 (48%)	2 (3%)
More selling local products to visitors	33 (56%)	25 (42%)	1 (2%)
More job opportunity from tourism	28 (48%)	29 (49%)	2 (3%)

Table (8): Suggestion to develop tourism business in Myanmar

Suggestion	Highly needed	Need	Neutral	Not need	Strongly not need
Supportive Gov; policy & strategy for women	33 (56%)	24 (41%)	2 (3%)	-	-
Infrastructure (road, water, electricity) supporting to destinations	42 (71%)	16 (27%)	1 (2%)	-	-
Advertising for tourism marketing in Myanmar	33 (56%)	23 (39%)	3 (5%)	-	-
To conserve natural environment of tourism destinations	42 (71%)	17 (29%)	-	-	-
Create opportunity to women's participation in tourism development process	29 (49%)	24 (41%)	4 (7%)	1 (2%)	1(2%)
More safety and security process	39 (66%)	20 (34%)	-	-	-
Financial access to women for tourism business investment	30 (51%)	23 (39%)	3 (5%)	3 (5%)	

According to Table (7), there are highly needed to improve in 'Infrastructure (road, water, electricity) supporting to destinations', 'To conserve natural environment of tourism destinations' and 'More safety and security process' by responding of 71%, 71% and 66% of women, respectively.

## V. DISCUSSION

### A. To function 'Tourism business development framework'

Myanmar is poor in functioning and cooperation among community, women, private sector and Gov; department as applying 'Tourism business development



framework' to develop sustainably and more benefits to poor community particularly women inclusion in these booming business.

Therefore, it will need assessment research and study of tourism sector focusing models, infrastructure, management, capacity building programme and networking to international hotels, travel agency and foreign direct investment incentives for this sector.

It must be planning, implementation and monitoring/evaluation along framework inclusion with women leaders and actors using bottom up approach in investment, operations and revising development process.

### **B. Gender equity policy and strategy in tourism business**

Since 2000s, Myanmar has facing more women violence's cases in rural and urban area due to lack of gender awareness by people, and private companies thus gender equity policy and strategy must be essential to state and agreed by all stakeholders of tourism business like hotels, restaurants, art works, and shops.

Moreover, visitors must be protected by gender abuses and violence through law and legal protection by police and community as well. There has some rape, thief and robbery cases due to poverty and ethnic arm conflict in Karen, Shan, Kachin and Rakhine States.

Gov; staffs must be provided capacity building in gender related policy and strategy to ensure tourism sector that will make more impressive by tourists as well as more gender equality to stakeholders of tourism business.

### **C. Empowerment women in tourism business**

Most are Myanmar women are poor in education and no skill in tourism sectors as communication, hospitality, handicraft making, etc.

#### *Capacity building to women*

Therefore, private sector and Government must support vocational training to women in poor villages by using simple methods and marketing products producing within a month as semi-professional training. Because of they are working in housekeeping more than 3 hours away their home is not possible to build their capacity. Incentives must be provided these women for their livelihood to buy food while no income during training days.

Private sector can support on job training to them thus internship program by guiding of Gov; will ensure youth women to do internship job in hotels, restaurants, tour guide and travel agency, etc.

#### *Financial access to tourism business*

All of women are poor in rural areas, thus they are not afford to become SMEs related tourism business in Myanmar as well as private bank and micro finance feel low credit to them.

Thus, Private Public Partnership program and CSOs must trust to women to access finance at least 1,000 USD with no interest investment. Thus, it will need more coaching on

business plan and effective using budget in this loan.

This program must be monitored by women organization from villages, townships and district levels if using loan of Gov; bank to ensure applied cash efficiently.

### **D. Networking of women tourism business groups**

There must have coordination and networking mechanism among women tourism business groups to strengthen more job opportunity and revenue from tourism business.

Thus, networking must be done for information sharing, responsible business, environmental conservation around tourism destinations, marketing and advertising activities.

CSOs, LNGOs and Gender monitoring groups must coordinate to ensure gender violence and gender equity all activities of tourism business and social security of women. Tourists women must be safety and enjoying all destinations of Myanmar through networking with women tourism business groups.

## **VI. IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

This article will imply for poor women to become successful senior staffs or owners of SMEs through capacity building, empowerment to them. Therefore, these women based approach will be applied by other countries' tourism like Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines, there will lack of women's opportunity to initiate tourism business.

However, there will be challenges to do in depth analysis on what kind of capacity building to what status of women. Thus, this article must be followed up more time and budget in depth assessment of women capacity gap in Myanmar.

Women will become more social standard and economic sector modal than men in tourism, particularly handicraft making, operating souvenir business, and senior level of tourism companies to compete other women of developed countries.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

Myanmar is one of poverty country particularly for ethnic women thus capacity building and policy must be functioned for them. It will need more assessment and recommendations among all stakeholders of tourism in Myanmar. Thus, women will improve dignity and livelihood for their family and country as well.

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### AUTHORS PROFILE

Author-1  
Photo

**Myo Aung** personal profile which contains their education details, their publications, research work, membership, achievements, with photo that will be maximum 200-400 words.

Author-2  
Photo

**Valliappan Raju** personal profile which contains their education details, their publications, research work, membership, achievements, with photo that will be maximum 200-400 words.

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