

Outlook and future perspectives for the Myanmar coastal zone

Myanmar is the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia with a continuous coastline of almost 3000 km extending along the Bay of Bengal and Andaman Sea. In the north, much of the coast is largely undeveloped with poor transport infrastructure, but in many coastal areas there is high human population pressure. Rapid development of coastal areas is forecast



A Report by Christoph Zöckler

The Scoping Paper outlines current knowledge of the Myanmar coastal zone, the status of its biodiversity and the threats that endanger it. The next phase of the project is likely to focus on two areas. Firstly, building and expanding the existing knowledge base on coastal biodiversity. Secondly, enhancing the legal and administrative framework and the tools and mechanisms that need to be developed to promote sustainable coastal development. This will build the basis for any kind of sustainable development and requires a Strategic Environment Assessment (SEA). A wide range of options and expertise are required.

We propose the development of a network of protected areas and finally we consider the promotion of eco-tourism to be an attractive and sustainable development option that can showcase the sustainability principles in supporting biodiver-

sity conservation and promoting the livelihoods of local communities. The following sections will outline the basis for further options for proposals.

[Improving the knowledge base \(threat assessment for coastal biodiversity\)](#)

There is considerable data and information available on biodiversity, outlined in earlier sections of this report. Without intending to provide a comprehensive assessment, the report illustrates a wide range of information on coastal biodiversity, but also clearly identifies the following gaps:

- Recent data on mangrove extent and mangrove diversity;
- Recent assessment of extent and nature of coral reefs;
- Clearly defined extent of intertidal mud and sand flats and data on their value for biodi-

versity;

- Recent data on the numbers and distribution of all marine turtle species;
- Recent data on numbers and distribution of the Dugong and the Irrawaddy Dolphin;
- A clearly defined habitat classification map of coastal Myanmar; and,
- A comprehensive evaluation of coastal ecosystem services.

Developing a coastal network of Protected Areas

Based on existing information on coastal biodiversity, the present coverage of protected areas is insufficient to protect Myanmar's most valuable and fragile coastal biodiversity. Recent efforts in securing large areas of the Gulf of Mottama and also intentions to secure the area around Nan Thar as protected areas are encouraging. Strategically, however, it is important to prioritise coastal areas for biodiversity conservation as has been emphasised in the NBSAP (2011). In this respect the coast has been under-represented and requires substantial recognition. Many more areas can and should be included in the protected area network. We recommend to focus in particular on Kyauk Phuy Island and Manamaung Island in Rakhine state, and most of the southern and central coastal zone in the Tanintharyi region.

The NBSAP mentions the KBA approach and the corridors as interconnected landscape sites. The KBA approach identifies almost 30% of the coast as worth protecting, even though the baseline for biodiversity information is still thin (NBSAP 2011). In particular the Rakhine Yoma Range and the Sundaic Subregion (Tanintharyi has been highlighted for significant improvement in site protection.

A wide range of many different forms of protected areas is available at national and international level. Most importantly, the community based user approach within these protected sites is crucial when it comes to outline and propose new sites. The Gulf of Mottama is a visible example of how these modern conservation approaches can be applied to the coastal zone of Myanmar.

Some of the proposed sites deserve an internati-

onal recognition and protection status. The Ramsar site designation process is an appropriate tool for this. It explicitly allows and encourages the wise use principles and hence a strong local community and user involvement. Most importantly, all the sites serve as assets for the local population that can sustainably use these sites and promote sensitive eco-tourism and invite the rest of the world and showcase what sustainable development really can look like!



Coastal small scale fisheries

Opportunities for sustainable development

The sustainable development of Eco-tourism is the most reliable option for the promotion of sustainable coastal development without jeopardising the wealth of coastal biodiversity and ecosystem services. Hence, in this section we focus on the development of this activity rather than others, partly also as we feel other areas such as fisheries require a different set of skills in promoting sustainable approaches and criteria.

The government of Myanmar's statements imply that all tourism development should be 'eco' or preferably 'sustainable'. The main, and predictable problem will be that the capacity to deliver on all these sustainability promises, will be threatened by the intensive new wave of tourist oriented and related developments that are proposed. It is therefore of utmost importance to stress a planning process that automatically involves all three sustainability pillars, to really ensure sustainability. The tourism related development can and should be a good test case. We propose to

jointly develop a framework that sets out the approaches and criteria to promote a process of developing eco-tourism. It will be best to develop this framework with all partners who have a vested interest in the protection of coastal biodiversity and the livelihoods of local communities, and also with regional and national government agencies. ArcCona and its partners will be happy to assist in facilitating a process that will enable the sustainable development of eco-tourism.



Coastal village near Dawei, Gulf of Martaban

Tourism

As has been demonstrated in this report, the coastal areas of Myanmar have impressively rich and diverse natural resources. However, they are often being depleted, or threatened, by industrial development and unsustainable activities. These threats need to be addressed, with the full commitment of all stakeholders if a new kind of sensitive tourism is to develop in the country. The government makes reference in published statements to the value of encouraging 'eco-tourism'. However, if the government's own commitment to 'eco-tourism' is to be implemented practically, all tourism development should take account of a range of factors which would make every tourism initiative 'sustainable' and success should not just derive from establishing 'eco-tourism' niche development.

In 2013 the government announced a Master Plan for tourism, aiming for over 3m arrivals in 2015 and 7.5 m by 2020 (arrivals by air in 2012 were nearly 600,000). The Plan focusses stron-

gly on 'sustainability' and 'social responsibility' as well as equitable payment of benefits arising from higher levels of tourism. It also focusses on the need for new and up-graded roads and other infrastructure in order to accommodate the needs of tourists.

The National Sustainable Development Strategy states very clearly the Government's desire and commitment to, for example, the development of tourism in certain protected areas. One of the most prominent, and attracting increasing international interest, serves as an example of the potential, but of problems to be resolved also. Any eco-tourism development should involve the local communities right from the start to ensure strong buy-in and also engage the communities as local guardians for 'their' biodiversity assets. Beach Management Units can be established that secure the well being of tourists as well as a direct income source for the local community from eco-tourism. This approach also prevents the alienation that arises when only foreign investors benefit from such developments.

The Lampi Marine National Park in the Myeik (Mergui) Archipelago is one of many national parks the government wishes to promote as places to visit. Lampi island is 11km by 50km and the protected marine area includes its inshore waters. Lampi island is one of about 800 in the Mergui Archipelago, covering over 36,000 square kilometres, and geographically associated with the Surin Islands of Thailand. The local people, the Moken, are glamourised in the western press as 'sea gypsies'. Reports have shown that Lampi island and the surrounding marine areas are being impacted by over fishing with dynamite and other means, wild animal trapping and other problems. However, the Mergui Archipelago is being promoted strongly by tourism agents, in Europe for example, as a wonderfully pristine area where it is possible (the implication is) to go unhindered or constrained by any sustainability principle. The islands of the Mergui Archipelago are widely dispersed and very vulnerable to intensifying random tourism. The growing sales of high powered and large ocean going private boats - their new owners attracted by the

Mergui marine landscape, for example, demonstrates the urgent need for a practical sustainable development strategy for coastal and other areas such as these.

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