

Evaluation PUM: Case study report Myanmar  
Annex C to Final Report



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# Evaluation PUM: Case Study Report Myanmar

## Supporting the Tourism Sector in Myanmar

### Annex C to Final Report

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# 1 General

## 1.1 Introduction

**This report presents the results of an ‘embedded’ case study focusing on the impact of PUM on the tourism sector in Myanmar.** Within this case study, we analyse the potential for PUM to have impact at the level of a sector or cluster, based on five separate PUM cases. Three of the cases studied were standalone cases with individual SMEs, while two cases were part of the new PUM-led tourism programme that started in 2020. The goal of comparing these five cases is to assess whether differences can be detected between PUM activities carried out as part of the new ‘programmatic approach’ (focused on strengthening economic clusters), and the more traditional standalone missions.

**A key hypothesis that this case study aims to test is that PUM’s new ‘programmatic approach’ amplifies PUM’s impact and makes it more sustainable.** As illustrated in our Theory of Change (in Chapter 2 of the overall PUM evaluation report), the amplification of this impact is expected to occur through three main channels: (1) spillover effects through economic clusters and supply chains, (2) demonstration effects, and (3) cooperation, cost and knowledge sharing. In addition, the programmatic approach is expected to be more efficient through economies of scale.

**The results from this country case study are used in our overall PUM evaluation report, where they are triangulated and synthesised with the results from other information sources.<sup>1</sup>** As such, the results described in this case study report are compared with other evaluation findings that emerged from other information sources, including a similar case study for Uganda, our PUM Stakeholder Survey, the existing PRIME survey data, portfolio data analysis, document analysis, and interviews with PUM management and Dutch government representatives.

**The main results of the five client case studies (summarised in Table 1 below) suggest that PUM’s effectiveness and its ability to achieve sustainable and systemic results does not only depend on whether it followed a ‘programmatic’ approach.** Rather, its effectiveness is possibly more importantly influenced by other factors, including the characteristics of the client selected (including their access to qualified human resources and finance), the quality of the alignment with experts, and various external contextual factors that significantly affected the tourism sector’s development prospects (including most importantly COVID-19 and the most recent military coup of February 2021). This having said, the potential for PUM to generate indirect effects is significantly higher when using a programmatic approach that include a large number of stakeholders.

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<sup>1</sup> “Triangulation” refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Patton, 1999). Triangulation also has been viewed as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources.

This case study also did not yield conclusive evidence for differences between programmatic and non-programmatic cases in other respects. Efficiency was higher when experts could provide tailored advice and reach multiple stakeholders simultaneously, but there are trade-offs to consider when support is provided solely through remote means. PUM's support was consistently seen as providing additional value to its clients, even when there were other international alternatives, or in fewer cases, local alternatives of high quality.

**Table 1** There is no evidence that 'programmatic' cases scored better than standalone cases

PUM case	1. UMTA	2. MDL Masterclasses	3. UniLeisure	4. Asian Tour	5. Shekinah
Type of case	Programmatic	Programmatic	Standalone	Standalone	Standalone
Date	Jan 2020	Aug 2020	Jan 2019	Feb 2020	May 2019 Nov 2019
Effectiveness	+	++	+	+++	+++
Sustainability	-	+/-	--	+	++
Efficiency	+	++	--	++	+++
Relevance	++	++	+	+++	+++
Additionality	+	++	+	+++	+++
Coherence	-	N/A	+	+++	N/A

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics. "+++" very clearly positive, "++" clearly positive, "+" somewhat positive, "0" minimal or none, "-" somewhat negative, "--" clearly negative, "+/-" conflicting evidence, "N/A" absence of evidence.

## 1.2 Background country and sector

Due to its long isolation, Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, is the poorest country within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This is generally seen as the result of the country's previous isolation and the dominance of the military regime for more than half a century. During 1962-2011, the country was ruled by the military, which pursued a highly isolationist policy with minimal international trade or tourism. GDP per capita (nominal) is currently around US\$ 1,300, or a little over US\$ 100 per month (World Bank 2019, IMF 2020). The UN's Human Development Index places Myanmar at 145 out of 189 countries and UN-recognised territories (UNDP, 2019) and the country was ranked in 2020 as the 22nd most fragile state (Fund for Peace, 2020).

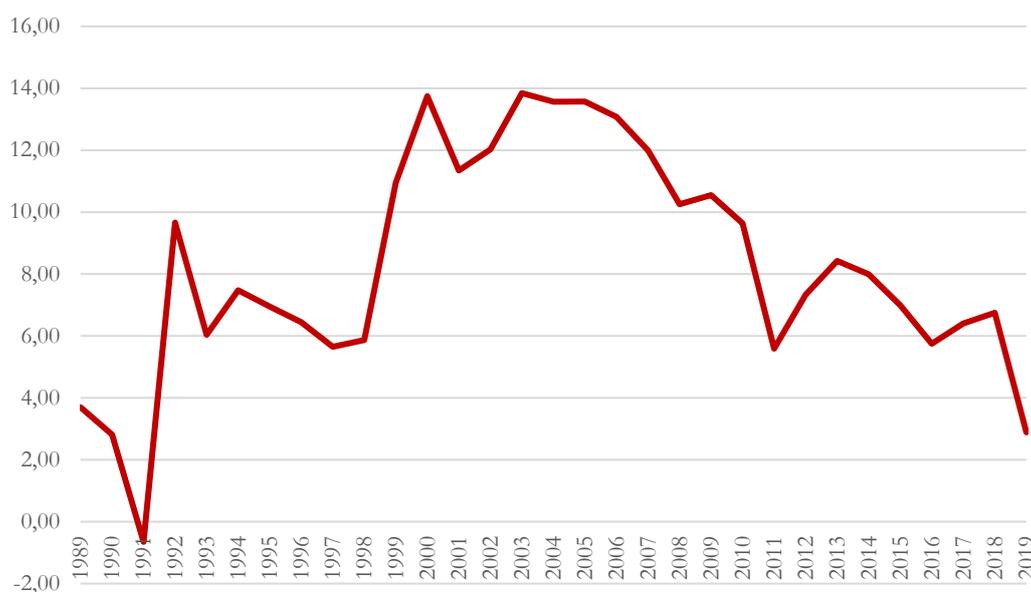
Myanmar underwent significant reform periods in 1988 as well as since 2011, unlocking rapid economic growth. Following mass protests in 1988, Myanmar reformed away from totalitarian socialism and started allowing the private sector to gradually expand. Among other reforms, it started permitting some foreign investment to enter the country, while also starting a long transition towards democracy.<sup>2</sup> Ending decades of military rule, a civilian government came to power in 2011 and pursued further reforms towards a mixed economy and a liberal democracy.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/place/Myanmar/Myanmar-since-1988>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

Following elections in 2012, the United States and the European Union began to lift economic sanctions among other restrictions. The Myanmar currency, the Kyat, was allowed to float in value as part of economic reforms, encouraging foreign investment and tourism.<sup>4</sup> As a result, Myanmar's GDP grew at rates above 6 percent between 1992 and 2018 an average of 7.1 percent from 2009-2019.<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 1** Following reforms in 1988, Myanmar's GDP reached double-digit growth rates between 2001-2009, but has slowed down since 2003.



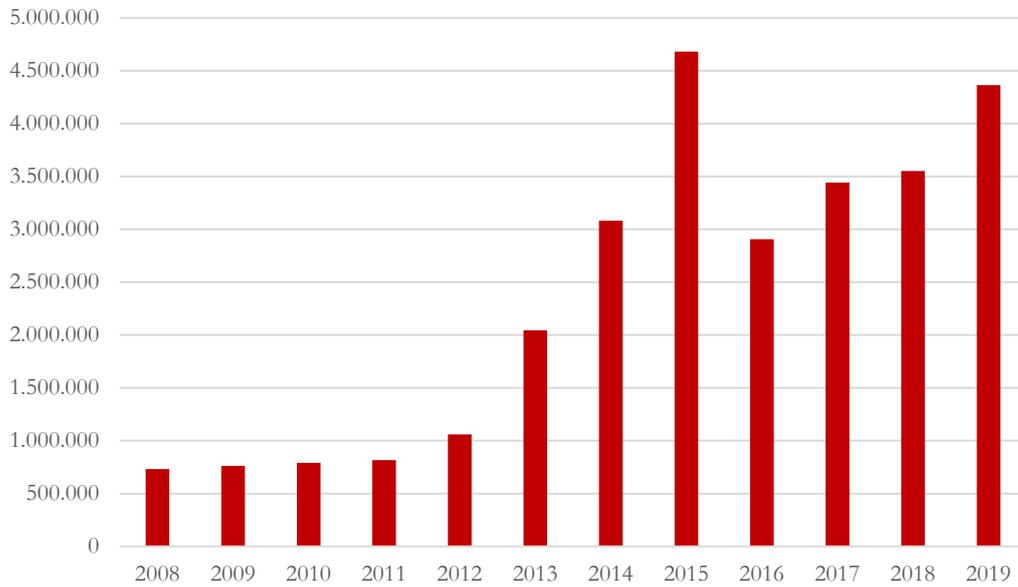
**International tourism to Myanmar had been virtually non-existent for decades, but took off in 2012.** While the number of tourist arrivals grew at a meagre 3 percent annually between 2005-2011, democratic reforms and a further opening up of the country led to a dramatic rise from 2012, averaging 56 percent growth annually from the period of 2012 until 2015. In its Myanmar Tourism Master Plan of 2013, the government targeted an ambitious increase [from 1.0 million in 2012] to 7.5 million international visitors by 2020 by a wide range of initiatives including strengthening tourism related institutions, building human resource capacity, and improving tourism infrastructure.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> World Bank

<sup>6</sup> Myanmar Tourism Master Plan 2013, Ministry of Hotels and Tourism. <https://tourism.gov.mm/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/myanmar-tourism-master-plan-english-version-min.pdf>

**Figure 2** Annual international arrivals to Myanmar took off in 2012 and dipped from 2016 following the Rakhine conflict



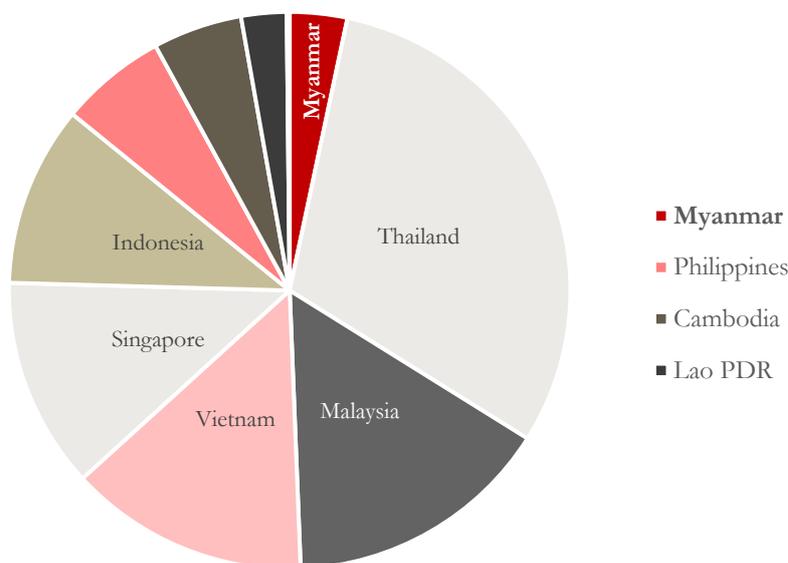
Source: Myanmar Ministry of Hotels & Tourism: 2009 – 2020, <https://tourism.gov.mm/statistics/>

**Myanmar’s tourism sector is much less developed than in its ASEAN neighbours.** Despite the country’s much larger geographical size and population, Myanmar’s tourism industry pales in comparison to its ASEAN neighbours, including countries that are much smaller. Although Myanmar comprises 8 percent of the population of ASEAN, the country only attracts 3 percent of ASEAN’s total international visitors.<sup>7</sup> The Union of Myanmar Travel Association estimates a direct workforce of 800,000 in hospitality, with a total of 1.2 – 1.5 million, including jobs indirectly related to tourism such as horse carts or weaving.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> <https://seasia.co/2020/02/11/revealed-tourist-arrival-to-asean-countries-2019>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-tourism-sector-braced-50-job-cuts-amid-covid-19-downturn.html>

**Figure 3** In terms of total annual international arrivals, Myanmar ranked 8<sup>th</sup> out of 10 ASEAN countries in 2019.



Note: Brunei ranks 10<sup>th</sup> with 213,000 visitors; not visible on the chart due to scale.

Source: SE Asia Co, Tourist Arrival to ASEAN Countries 2019. <https://seasia.co/2020/02/11/revealed-tourist-arrival-to-asean-countries-2019>

### 1.3 External factors hindering tourism development

**The Rakhine conflict of 2016-2017 had a major negative impact on the tourism sector.** Tensions between Buddhist and Muslim communities in the north-western state of Rakhine near the border with Bangladesh broke into full-scale violence in 2017 with the involvement of the Myanmar military. More than a million Rohingya fled to safety across the border to Bangladesh amidst widespread allegations of ethnic cleansing and genocide by the Myanmar military.<sup>9</sup> This tarnished Myanmar's international reputation as a peaceful and welcome destination for tourists. As Figure 2 shows, annual international arrivals steadily increased again from 2016, but by 2019 had not yet rebounded to their 2015 peak, and the earlier target of 7.5 foreign visitors by 2020 had been lowered to 5 million—which is now called a “dream” in the aftermath of COVID-19.<sup>10</sup>

**In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic battered the global tourism sector and Myanmar was no exception.** The World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) estimates a 70 percent drop in 2020 demand for international tourism globally as of August 2020.<sup>11</sup> The UNWTO also estimates that a global return to 2019 levels of tourist arrivals would take between 2.5 and 4 years. The Union of Myanmar Travel Association (UMTA) predicted in April 2020 that more than half of those employed in hotel and tourism would lose their jobs due to COVID-19.<sup>12</sup> Most tour operators and

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/rohingya-crisis-myanmar>

<sup>10</sup> <https://mmbiztoday.com/myanmars-dream-to-receive-5-million-tourists-blown-away-by-covid-19/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.unwto.org/news/international-tourist-numbers-down-65-in-first-half-of-2020-unwto-reports>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-tourism-sector-braced-50-job-cuts-amid-covid-19-downturn.html>

hoteliers have resorted to downsizing or reducing salaries.<sup>13</sup> “Wholesale and retail businesses alike are struggling, especially the hotel and tourism industry,” remarked U Maung Maung Lay, vice president of the Union of Myanmar Chamber of Commerce and Industry.<sup>14</sup> A survey from the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism published on December 3 claims that tourism revenue has dropped more than 80 percent, with a decline of US\$ 2.3 billion in revenues.<sup>15</sup> The Myanmar government has offered some financial support however, including low interest 1 percent loans to the tourism sector, or announcing deferral of land lease payments for 47 hotels.<sup>16</sup>

**The military coup of February 2021 seriously threatens Myanmar’s economic security, political stability and further jeopardises Myanmar’s tourism sector, as well as the presence of international actors in the country.** A general election was held in November 2020 to elect members for both houses of parliament in which the National League for Democracy (NLD) party led by Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) secured a landslide victory.<sup>17</sup> Responding to poor polling of military associated parties, the military alleged unsubstantiated claims of election fraud.<sup>18</sup> On 1 February 2021, the military detained NLD leaders including ASSK, and declared a state of emergency for a year. They also seized executive, judicial, and legislative power for a year.<sup>19</sup> The United States along with European countries have condemned the coup in Myanmar and are expected to respond, perhaps with a reintroduction of sanctions against Myanmar,<sup>20</sup> while China is rumoured to be supporting the Myanmar military.<sup>21</sup>

**Although it is too early to analyse the full implications for the tourism sector, the military coup is widely expected to substantially tarnish Myanmar’s international reputation and reduce its attractiveness to Western tourists.** All domestic and international flights to and from Myanmar were suspended through May 2021 (continuing the COVID-related ban on commercial flights since March 2020).<sup>22</sup> There is also likely to be a reduction in the number and type of international organisations that remain in Myanmar to provide support, but as of the writing of the report it was too early to confirm this. Dutch government representatives predicted that they might no longer support government-to-government programmes, but may consider directly supporting SMEs in a fragile state.

**Multiple sources suggest that the Myanmar governments disinterest in developing the tourism industry has hampered its growth.** Some sources have claimed that this is due to the governments interest in mitigating interaction and influence from Western tourists to Myanmar citizens, but this requires validation from further interviews still pending. Other sources suggest simply that the government has failed to recognise the potential value of tourism. As such, they

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/smes-myanmar-struggle-survive-covid-19-pandemic.html>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/tourism-revenue-myanmar-dips-80-during-covid-19.html>

<sup>16</sup> [https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/sites/default/files/blog/specialreports/958736/Myanmar\\_Okkar\\_Thiri\\_CRR.pdf](https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/sites/default/files/blog/specialreports/958736/Myanmar_Okkar_Thiri_CRR.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-asia-34806439>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/myanmars-military-refuses-rule-out-coup-over-election-fraud-claims>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/tatmadaw-seizes-power-under-state-of-emergency-to-rule-for-a-year/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/02/02/myanmar-coup-biden-response-democracy-promotion/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/02/01/is-china-backing-myanmar-coup-biden-united-states/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/all-flights-and-myanmar-suspended.html>

underinvest in the tourism sector. Multiple sources confirmed the need for Myanmar to brand itself internationally as a tourist destination, especially in light of negative media attention following the Rakhine conflict. According to the Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute (MRTI), while a budget of US\$ 1 million to develop the marketing plan and materials required, perhaps only 10 percent of this figure was being received by the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism. Organised and concerted efforts at a sector level, likely including the engagement of government ministries could invest in rebranding Myanmar internationally as tourist destination.

**A number of other sector-wide bottlenecks hamper the development of the tourism industry in Myanmar.** Tourism infrastructure lags other neighbouring countries. Myanmar has only three international airports, Yangon, Mandalay, and Nay Pyi Taw. None of these have regularly scheduled flights to Europe or the Americas, limiting Myanmar's appeal as a destination for Western tourists. While a domestic flight market has grown in the last few years, local flights remain significantly more expensive than neighbouring countries like Thailand or Malaysia, as low-cost carriers have not yet entered Myanmar. In 2019, Myanmar had a hotel capacity of approximately 80,000 rooms<sup>23</sup> compared to 756,000 rooms in neighbouring Thailand<sup>24</sup> or 322,000 in Malaysia<sup>25</sup>. A half century of isolation have left a lot of technical skills to catch up. A number of PUM sources suggested the relatively limited English language skills as a potential bottleneck to attracting Western tourists. According to the MRTI, IT and marketing skills are far behind other countries in the region, particularly for government ministries including the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism.

## 1.4 Overview of case studies

**For the purpose of this evaluation, we selected five PUM cases in the Myanmar tourism sector, of which two 'programmatically cases' and three standalone cases.** The two programmatic cases were both part of PUM's Tourism Programme in the Mandalay region, and were considered by PUM to be using the new 'programmatically approach'. The other three cases were standalone cases in the economic capital of Yangon and in the small town of Patheingyi.

**The three cities were chosen so as to cover a good mix of tourist destinations.** In particular, Yangon and Mandalay were considered two relatively developed tourist destinations, while Patheingyi was considered a small city without significant international tourism to date. Overall, the three cities in conjunction offered a good variety of tourist destinations:

1. **Yangon** (population 4.5 million)<sup>26</sup> is the economic capital and most populous city in Myanmar, formerly known as Rangoon, with the most international flights in the country. It is also the home of the Shwedagon Pagoda, the country's most popular heritage and religious site. Allegedly constructed more than 2,600 years ago, it is considered the oldest Buddhist pagoda in the world and attracts many Buddhist pilgrims and international tourists alike.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Myanmar Ministry of Hotels & Tourism; <https://tourism.gov.mm/statistics/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1154496/thailand-number-of-hotel-rooms/>

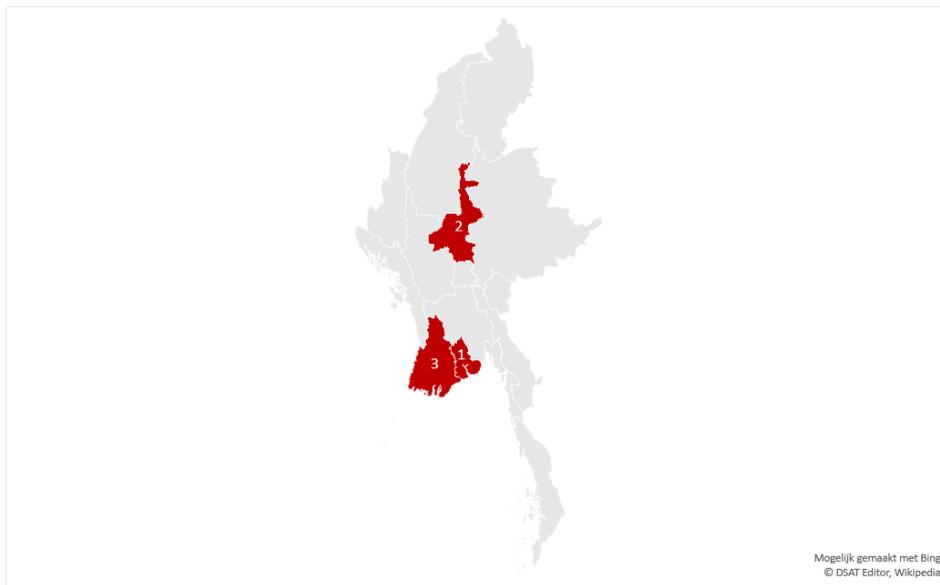
<sup>25</sup> <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/malaysia/number-of-hotels-and-hotel-rooms/number-of-hotels-rooms>

<sup>26</sup> <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/cities/myanmar>

<sup>27</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shwedagon\\_Pagoda](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shwedagon_Pagoda)

2. **Mandalay** (population 1.2 million)<sup>28</sup> is Myanmar’s second city, gateway to the ancient city of Bagan and Myanmar’s pre-colonial royal capital, and rests among Myanmar’s preeminent destinations for international tourists.
3. **Patheingyi** (population 0.2 million)<sup>29</sup> is the capital of the Ayeyarwady Region, resting on the banks of a river in the southwestern part of the country. Even prior to recent events it had not yet attracted much international tourism yet, but was considered to have potential for tourism: a charming city with a laid-back vibe<sup>30</sup> along with a railway station, small airport, nearby beaches, and religious sites.<sup>31</sup>

Figure 4 The Myanmar cases were located across 3 cities: Yangon (1), Mandalay (2) and Patheingyi (3)



Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics

## 1.5 Description of the Myanmar tourism programme

Since 2017, PUM has increasingly implemented activities through its new ‘programmatische’ approach. This approach, further described in our main evaluation report, is aimed at integrating the services of PUM in a more clustered and cohesive manner, focusing on strengthening economic clusters in a smaller number of countries and sectors.<sup>32</sup> The number of PUM activities that took place within a programme increased from 5 percent in 2018 to 13 percent in 2019. Four out of 71 PUM programmes were started in Myanmar, of which two in tourism and two in dairy.<sup>33</sup>

**PUM’s Tourism programme in Myanmar’s Mandalay region is a recent PUM programme that started in January 2020.** The aim of the programme was to “improve and professionalise the

<sup>28</sup> <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/cities/myanmar>

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> According to a PUM representative who visited this city, it is a “beautiful city not far from the ocean, with an interesting city centre, life is there like Thailand 50 years ago, so great potential to be developed.”

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/myanmar-burma/west-coast-beaches-and-the-delta/patheingyi-bassein>

<sup>32</sup> PUM annual report 2017

<sup>33</sup> PUM Cases 2017-2020.xls

services provided by the tourism sector in Mandalay.”<sup>34</sup> One interesting aspect is that PUM itself is in the lead of this programme, unlike many other PUM programmes which are led by a partner organisation (e.g., the Uganda SKY programme, our other case study). The programme started with a scoping mission in January 2020 by the former PUM Tourism Sector Coordinator.<sup>35</sup>

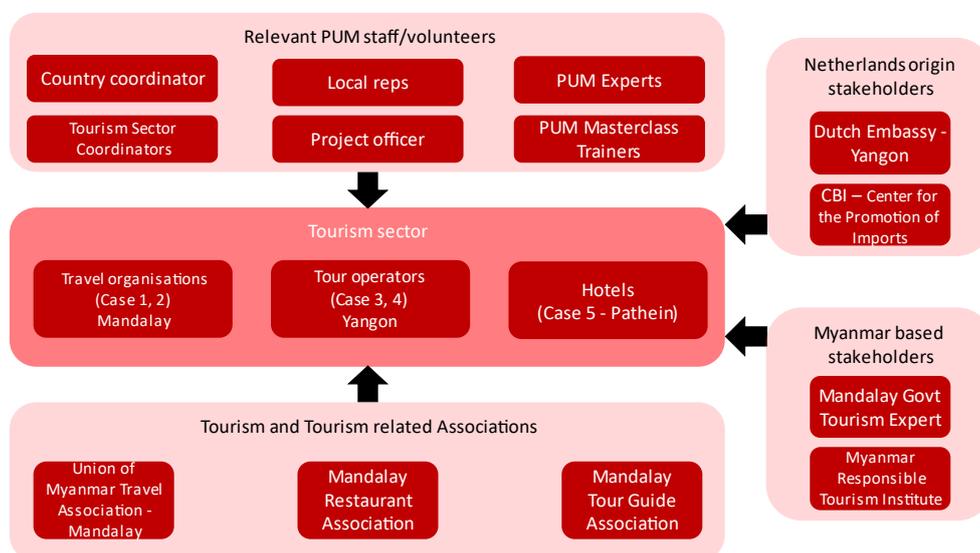
**As of September 2020, two programmatic cases were completed in Mandalay.** Since no other programmatic cases had been completed, both were selected for evaluation:

- **The first case involved the Union of Myanmar Travel Association in Mandalay.** This Union (UMTA-Mdy) had requested support via the PUM local representative in Mandalay. The main goal was to develop a concrete action plan based on the Regional Tourism Development Plan that would help Mandalay transition from a theoretical policy phase to a concrete set of actions.
- **The second case was a series of Masterclasses organised by the company Myanmar Upper Land Culture & Travel.** This was a follow-up from the first UMTA Mission and consisted of a series of remote (online) ‘classes’ in which 35 tourism-related SMEs participated.

## 1.6 Stakeholder mapping

In order to obtain a full view of the tourism sector in Myanmar, the evaluation team interviewed a wide variety of stakeholders. Figure 5 below shows a graphical overview of the most relevant stakeholder groups in this cluster. These include PUM’s Country Team, PUM experts, travel and related associations, and stakeholders from Netherlands and across Myanmar.

Figure 5 A wide range of stakeholders were interviewed for this report



Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics

<sup>34</sup> Country Impact plan 2020 - Myanmar Final

<sup>35</sup> PUM Expert Interview, Dec 2020

## 1.7 List of interviewed stakeholders

For each case study within the Myanmar tourism sector, the evaluation team interviewed a variety of stakeholders in order to obtain triangulated findings. SEO's local consultant in Myanmar was able to interview clients, relevant PUM experts and lecturers, sector coordinators, local representatives, as well as local trainers, interpreters and consultants, and representatives from CBI and the Dutch Embassy across the relevant case study cities of Yangon, Mandalay, and Patheingyi. He also followed up afterwards by phone and email to clarify some issues with various stakeholders. At the same time, the local consultant and SEO's team in the Netherlands carried out virtual interviews with PUM experts and staff. In total, the evaluation team interviewed a wide variety of stakeholders, whose points of view were triangulated to obtain the consolidated results presented in this report (see Table 2 for the detailed list of interviewees).

**Table 2** Detailed list of interviewees

Nº	Stakeholder	Relevant individual case
1	PUM country coordinator	All
2	PUM sector coordinator tourism	All
3	PUM former sector coordinator tourism	All
4	PUM project officer	All
6	PUM expert 1	Case 1
7	PUM expert 2	Case 3
8	PUM expert 3	Case 4
9	PUM expert 4	Case 5
10	PUM Masterclass coordinator	Case 2
11	PUM Masterclass Expert	Case 2
12	Local Masterclass Trainer	Case 2
13	Local representative Yangon	Case 3,4
14	Local representative Patheingyi	Case 5
15	Mandalay Government Tourism Expert and local representative for PUM	Case 1,2
16	Mandalay Restaurant Association	Case 1
17	Mandalay Tour Guide Association	Case 1
18	Union of Myanmar Travel Association-Mandalay - Secretary	Case 1
19	PUM Mission interpreter	Case 1,2
20	UniLeisure representative	Case 3
21	Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute	Case 3,4,5
22	CBI Representative	Case 4
23	Asian Tour representative	Case 4
24	Owners of the Htike Myat San Hotel and Shekinah hotels	Case 5
25	Netherlands Embassy - Yangon	All

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics

## 2 Overall Findings

### 2.1 Effectiveness

#### 2.1.1 Definition

**Effectiveness is defined as “the extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups.”<sup>36</sup>**

Following the reconstructed Theory of Change for PUM (presented in the overall evaluation report), we measure PUM’s effectiveness in terms of three main levels of results:

- Immediate outcomes: increased **knowledge** gained by PUM clients.
- Immediate outcomes: increased **knowledge** gained by PUM clients.
- Intermediate outcomes: improved **practices** used by PUM clients.
- Ultimate outcomes: improvements in client **performance**, measured as changes in 1) revenue; 2) profits; 3) employment.
- Indirect effect potential: the potential for **indirect effects** on the sector broadly, e.g. through other stakeholders.

**For ease of comparison, the conclusions from each client case with regard to effectiveness are summarised in a simple scoring table below.** It is worth noting that changes in knowledge and practices were relatively easier to score than changes in performance, as limited information was available on the latter. Changes in knowledge and practices were assessed based on both (a) the perceptions of various stakeholders (with different and sometimes opposing interests), and (b) direct observation by SEO’s local consultant. Changes in performance, on the other hand, were much harder to assess as PUM did not provide consistent monitoring data on this. These changes therefore often had to be assessed mainly based on reported perception among stakeholders, as a result of which the evidence for such changes is considered less strong.

#### 2.1.2 Case study findings

**There was general agreement among stakeholders that there had been significant knowledge transfer across all five case studies.** PUM clients and experts agreed on the usefulness of knowledge sharing particularly around marketing and HR management (topics such as branding, online reviews and staff training). This was further corroborated by sector experts who noted general knowledge gaps in these areas. While the standalone cases in Yangon and Patheingyi yielded tailored knowledge transfer, the programmatic cases of Mandalay provided a much broader breadth of topic areas, involving a wide range of stakeholders. When knowledge transfer was not especially effective (UniLeisure and some of Mandalay Masterclasses) it was due to a poor alignment of the PUM expert with the PUM client, where expertise with the topic was the most limiting factor or with remote lecturing methods (some masterclasses) or because of expert unfamiliarity with Myanmar culture and context. Nevertheless, most Mandalay Masterclasses were seen as effective at knowledge transfer due to a strong selection of expert lecturers who could

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<sup>36</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

explain the selected topics well for the Myanmar context. The cases of Asian Tour and The Pathein Hotels were especially effective due to the selection of a client with capacity for growth and the alignment with the right PUM expert.

**Table 3** There was generally strong evidence for changes in knowledge, some evidence for changes in practice, but limited examples of changes in business performance.

PUM client	1. UMTA	2. MDL Masterclasses	3. UniLeisure	4. Asian Tour	5. Shekinah
Type of case	Programmatic	Programmatic	Standalone	Standalone	Standalone
Date	Jan 2020	Aug 2020	Jan 2019	Feb 2020	May 2019 Nov 2019
Direct effects on knowledge	++	++	+	+++	+++
Direct effects on practices	+	N/A	+	++	+++
Direct effects on performance	0	N/A	0	N/A	++
(Potential for) indirect effects	++	++	0	+	+

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics. “+++” very clearly positive, “++” clearly positive, “+” somewhat positive, “0” minimal or none, “-” somewhat negative, “--” clearly negative, “+/-” conflicting evidence, “N/A” absence of evidence.

**Only in some cases did the knowledge transfer from PUM missions translate to significant adoption of new practices.** In two out of three standalone cases, both clients and experts agreed that PUM was very effective at improving practices related to marketing and staff management (in particular, establishing strong online presence via social media, and using job descriptions and formal work contracts to clarify staff roles and expectations). In some cases, changes in practices were already visible online (e.g. improved company websites and increased presence on travel websites). With regard to the programmatic cases, the advice provided to UMTA resulted in effective adjustments to their fee structure in order to grow their membership by allowing tour operators to join as associate members (with discounted fees). With regard to the masterclasses, the COVID-19 pandemic and associated stop in international tourism prevented participants from implementing what they learned into business practices (apart from hygiene measures) but stakeholders were upbeat about the potential for future changes in practices.

**With the exception of one standalone case, there was limited evidence that PUM had led to improvements in the final outcomes of client performance.** This was due to the combination of most missions being fairly recent, and the negative external environment (COVID-19 and the military coup). One standalone client (Shekinah) showed strong evidence of positive changes in performance, particularly a significant rise in sales and hotel occupancy (*see Detailed Case Study 5 for further detail*). The masterclasses and the advice provided to Asian Tour had potential for leading to improved performance, but this could not yet be observed due to COVID and the limited time that had passed since the mission. For UMTA and UniLeisure, it was unlikely that the advice would lead to improved performance. Programmatic cases therefore did not score better than standalone cases in this regard.

**External factors significantly limited PUM’s direct effects on practices or performance, which could have been foreseen to some extent.** In the case of UniLeisure, the effects on

business practices and performance were curtailed because of the client's limited access to finance. If this had been better assessed beforehand, it may have become clear that the client would not have been able to invest in changes advised by the expert, such as hiring new staff. In other cases, COVID's negative impact on the tourism sector naturally overshadowed any possible impact PUM may have had, and reduced sales revenues for SMEs to be able to implement the advice. The timing of the masterclasses was therefore not the best. With hindsight, they should probably have been postponed given the risks to the tourism sector (although the duration of the global pandemic was not foreseen by everyone).

**Four out of five cases showed good potential for indirect effects, particularly the programmatic cases.** In all cases except UniLeisure, PUM experts and clients identified the advice provided as being relevant to other tourism-related SMEs across Myanmar, implying good potential for knowledge sharing or demonstration effects. However, at the time of the stakeholder interviews in December 2020 and January 2021, there was no indication yet that such indirect effects had already occurred. PUM experts considered it likely that there would be knowledge sharing over time, especially if and when the demand for tourism services recovers.

**Remote coaching, such as conducted in the Mandalay Masterclasses, has potential for effective knowledge transfer if certain conditions are met.** The masterclasses appear to have been effective in communicating information such as international standards for COVID-19 safety protocols, managing hotel revenues, or social media marketing. But some courses were not seen as effective. The reason for this lack of effectiveness appeared to be a poor selection of the expert trainer. In the context of remote coaching, the expert needed to be proficient lecturing in English, digitally savvy, (skills that may be less relevant for a mission on location), and familiar with the cultural characteristics of masterclass participants. A longer preparation period for the lecturers and masterclasses organisers, including culture-specific training and a better understanding of the participants' requirements (rather than just the organisers) were the most commonly cited suggestions by organisers and interpreters for improving effectiveness for remote learning.

## 2.2 Sustainability

### 2.2.1 Definition

**Sustainability is defined as “the extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue or are likely to continue.”**<sup>37</sup> Just as for effectiveness, we focus here on the sustainability at three levels: the sustainability of (a) increases in client knowledge, (b) improvements in client practices, and (c) improvements in client performance.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

<sup>38</sup> Note that this is a broader definition of sustainability than the one used in the Preparation Report provided by PUM, where sustainability is only defined in terms of knowledge, i.e., as “the preservation of knowledge at the level of clients after PUM's intervention has ended”

## 2.2.2 Case study findings

**Table 4** The limited effects on practices and performance are likely not sustainable due to the disruptive long-term effects of COVID-19 and the military coup on tourism to Myanmar

PUM client	1. UMTA	2. MDL Masterclasses	3. UniLeisure	4. Asian Tour	5. Shekinah
Type of case	Programmatic	Programmatic	Standalone	Standalone	Standalone
Date	Jan 2020	Aug 2020	Jan 2019	Feb 2020	May 2019 Nov 2019
Sustainability of direct effects on knowledge	+	++	+	++	+++
Sustainability of direct effects on practices	+	N/A	++	+	++
Sustainability of direct effects on performance	0	N/A	0	N/A	+
Sustainability of (potential) indirect effects	N/A	N/A	0	N/A	N/A

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics. “+++” very clearly positive, “++” clearly positive, “+” somewhat positive, “0” minimal or none, “-” somewhat negative, “--” clearly negative, “+/-” conflicting evidence, “N/A” absence of evidence.

**The improvements in knowledge are expected to be somewhat sustainable in almost all cases.** This is because knowledge transfer was largely effective (see previous section), and the type of knowledge gained would likely be remembered for a longer period. Moreover, PUM experts usually stayed in contact for some time with their clients via email or WhatsApp, which clients generally appreciated. In some cases, experts continued to be in touch with clients personally, providing them with them informal support following the PUM mission. However, there was agreement among experts that clearer guidelines from PUM regarding the timing, frequency and substance of follow-up contact could be an opportunity to further improve impact and sustainability. Strong and affordable nationwide internet connectivity across Myanmar affords an opportunity for more structured remote coaching, although the new military government could potentially limit some forms of internet connectivity to the outside world.

**PUM’s direct effects on practices will likely only be sustainable for clients with sufficient financial backing and higher resilience to the pandemic.**<sup>39</sup> Entrepreneurs who had already implemented some changes and who were likely to remain in business despite the COVID-19 pandemic appeared more likely to continue the new practices, or implement them once tourism recovers. Among the standalone cases, these were the larger organisations: The Patheon Hotels and Asian Tour. These were (1) more able to invest in changes advised by PUM and (2) appeared less likely to go out of business because of the pandemic. On the contrary, financial constraints limited

<sup>39</sup> A possible exception is Case study 2, where one content area from the masterclasses was identified as immediately relevant during the pandemic: the implementation of COVID-19 safety protocols for hotels opening as quarantine centres. It is well possible that this has led to a long-term improvement in safety practices.

other cases' (UniLeisure) capacity to invest in growth as advised by PUM (e.g., by hiring new employees). Interviews with PUM clients and experts suggested that The Patheon Hotels and Asian Tour were either earning enough revenues during 2020 to “break even” or had sufficient capital reserves to likely survive a cessation of business resulting from COVID-19. It is not clear to what extent their businesses will be impacted by the February 2021 military coup, however,

**Given the highly disruptive effect of COVID-19 on the sector, in combination with the military coup, any positive direct effects on business performance that PUM had generated will likely not be sustainable.** Every stakeholder interviewed confirmed an extremely significant reduction in tourism revenues in 2020, since the onset of the pandemic. This was further corroborated by a survey from the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism published on 3 December 2020, stating that tourism revenues had dropped more than 80 percent for the sector as a whole, with a decline of US\$ 2.3 billion in revenues.<sup>40</sup> This drop in revenues naturally also limited the ability of all PUM clients to implement changes in business practices. In some cases, certain changes even had to be (at least temporarily) reversed, such as the hiring of new employees following the PUM mission to Shekinah Hotel. The impact of the military coup of February 2021 remains to be seen, but will likely significantly dampen any potential revival of the tourism sector in Myanmar.

**Whether or not PUM's indirect effects on the sector are sustainable i.e. sector transformation in the long run mostly depends on external factors outside of PUM's control.** While there was initial enthusiasm for PUM's programmatic missions in Mandalay, the onset of the pandemic significantly curtailed stakeholders' motivation and willingness to invest in developing the tourism sector. Moreover, the introduction of a new post-COVID-19 nationwide plan, the Myanmar Tourism Strategic Recovery Roadmap 2021-2025,<sup>41</sup> led by the UN World Tourism Organisation and LuxDev, led to a reprioritisation away from the PUM-led action plan. Finally, the reputational damage to the country from the most recent military coup in February 2021 will likely limit the impact PUM may have had on the sector for some time to come, unless democratic reforms were to resume.

## 2.3 Efficiency

### 2.3.1 Definition

The OECD-DAC Network on Development Evaluation defines efficiency as the extent to which an intervention “delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way.”<sup>42</sup> The terms ‘economic delivery’ and ‘timely delivery’ are subsequently defined as follows:

- **Economic delivery of results** is defined as “the conversion of inputs (funds, expertise, natural resources, time, etc.) into outputs, outcomes and impacts, in the most **cost-effective** way possible, as compared to feasible alternatives in the context.”<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/tourism-revenue-myanmar-dips-80-during-covid-19.html>

<sup>41</sup> Ministry of Information, Myanmar, “MoHT holds meeting on tourism recovery roadmap.” <https://www.moi.gov.mm/moi:eng/news/2356>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

<sup>43</sup> This is consistent with the definition in the ToR, where efficiency is defined as “a measure of how economically PUM converted resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) into results”.

- “**Timely delivery of results**” means “within the intended timeframe, or a timeframe reasonably adjusted to the demands of the evolving context. This may include assessing operational efficiency (how well the intervention was managed).”<sup>44</sup>

### 2.3.2 Case study findings

**Table 5** Efficiency varied widely between cases, but support tailored to a specific client sometimes had higher efficiencies than more general support provided in programmatic cases

Client case studies	1. UMTA	2. MDL Masterclasses	3. UniLeisure	4. Asian Tour	5. Shekinah
Type of case	Programmatic	Programmatic	Standalone	Standalone	Standalone
Date	Jan 2020	Aug 2020	Jan 2019	Feb 2020	May 2019 Nov 2019
Efficiency	+	++	-	++	+++

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics. “+++” very clearly positive, “++” clearly positive, “+” somewhat positive, “0” minimal or none, “-” somewhat negative, “--” clearly negative, “+/-” conflicting evidence, “N/A” absence of evidence.

**Efficiency was high when multiple people could be engaged by PUM experts simultaneously.** In principle, this would appear as a positive feature of PUM’s programmatic approach. However, this was not restricted to programmatic cases only. In particular, in the standalone cases of the Pathein Hotels and Asian Tour, efficiency was maximised when the PUM expert led team-wide workshops or staff training seminars, engaging many employees at the same time. While the programmatic approach engaged a wide variety of stakeholders, different outcomes emerged in the two programmatic cases. A change in focus and priorities (due to the COVID-19 pandemic) limited the efficiency of the UMTA Mission, as the Mandalay Responsible Tourism Action Plan 2020 had not begun implementation and was superseded for some stakeholders. However, the Masterclasses engaged 35 participants, who had strongly positive reviews for two out of three cohorts: tour operators and hoteliers.

**Remote coaching presented efficiency advantages, but it had trade-offs with effectiveness that should be carefully considered.** While there are time and cost savings to remote missions (e.g. flights, lodging), there are downsides as well. Communication barriers, especially intercultural, and the loss of informal conversations and networking (e.g. during coffee breaks) were a drawback of remote coaching during the Mandalay masterclasses. PUM and local organisers agreed that more preparation including discussion of expectations from the participants could enable more efficient courses, by better tailoring the content or expert selection. One PUM local representative remarked that the trade-offs of a volunteer-run programme are more visible during remote missions: There were perceptions of limited engagement from volunteer experts (who may otherwise be fully engaged without competing priorities during a mission on location.)

**Misalignment between PUM expert and case need was one of the biggest drivers of low efficiency.** In cases rated as having had low efficiency (e.g. UniLeisure and some of the Mandalay Masterclasses for tour guides), this was typically due to a poor alignment of the PUM expert with

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

the PUM client, where expertise on on specific topics was the most limiting factor, or for remote missions, a lack of familiarity with Myanmar culture and context. A better understanding of client needs and more careful selection of PUM experts could improve efficiency in similar situations.

## 2.4 Relevance

### 2.4.1 Definition

**Relevance is defined as “the extent to which the intervention objectives and design respond to beneficiaries’, global, country, and partner/institution needs, policies, and priorities, and continue to do so if circumstances change.”**<sup>45</sup> In the case of PUM, Relevance is more concretely defined as “contributing to the Ministry’s policy objectives on private sector development, solving gaps in knowledge and skills for SMEs in developing countries and thereby contributing to sustainable economic growth and job creation, especially for the poor, youth (and females).” Relevance is also related to “the **countries** and **sectors** where PUM is active as well as the individual companies and volunteers.”<sup>46</sup>

**Following this definition, we distinguish three types of relevance:**<sup>47</sup>

- Relevance of PUM support to the sector/country.
- Relevance of PUM support to its clients.
- Relevance to Dutch Private Sector Development (PSD) objectives.

### 2.4.2 Case study findings

**Table 6** The PUM advice appeared to be most relevant for its clients in the successful standalone cases

PUM client	1. UMTA	2. MDL Masterclasses	3. UniLeisure	4. Asian Tour	5. Shekinah
<b>Type of case</b>	Programmatic	Programmatic	Standalone	Standalone	Standalone
<b>Date</b>	Jan 2020	Aug 2020	Jan 2019	Feb 2020	May 2019 Nov 2019
<b>Relevance</b>	++	++	+	+++	+++

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics. “+++” very clearly positive, “++” clearly positive, “+” somewhat positive, “0” minimal or none, “-” somewhat negative, “--” clearly negative, “+/-” conflicting evidence, “N/A” absence of evidence.

**Relevance to clients was increased by experts’ ability to identify and clarify the most significant issues for the client.** The ability of PUM’s experts to train clients on international best practices and business strategy was seen as particularly relevant for Myanmar SMEs by many clients interviewed. A consistent feedback, heard across a variety of stakeholders, was that PUM’s unique value lies in providing a senior, international expert available full time during onsite missions. This focused interaction allowed for PUM experts and clients to have detailed discussions

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

<sup>46</sup> Preparation report, page 27.

<sup>47</sup> The relevance of PUM with respect to the Dutch policy objectives is discussed in the overall final report.

and to tailor the mission to the client's needs and the expert's competencies. This led to the identification or clarification of issues deemed relevant by client and expert, particularly in marketing and management, as discussed above.

**Access to finance remained an unaddressed yet sector-relevant issue.** Finance was explicitly identified by multiple clients as a major bottleneck to growth and investment in their business in Myanmar. High interest rates of 13-18 percent, collateral requirements, and an underdeveloped financial sector were cited by multiple sources as a barrier to growth for tourism SMEs. In some cases, clients were expecting or hoping that PUM support give them access to finance, for instance by improving accounting practices or connecting them with local or international investors. However, this need was not met in these cases. In the UniLeisure case, the question remains whether another SME with more capital available to invest in recommendations may have been a more relevant SME for a PUM mission. (Still UniLeisure was able to benefit slightly from the mission, introducing job descriptions for hiring and clarifying roles with staff.) Alternatively, a clearer identification of the need for access to finance during the application may have led to a more relevant expert that was better equipped to assist UniLeisure with sourcing new investments.

**The tremendous influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism sector greatly impacted the relevance of PUM missions.** No business, particularly in tourism, was spared the effects of the pandemic. Missions that took place during the pandemic (Asian Tour and Mandalay Masterclasses) had to be adjusted to deal with the impact of the coronavirus on tourism. For example, Asian Tour's initial request for the PUM Mission was support in preparation for international trade shows in Europe; whose cancellation due to the pandemic reduced or delayed the relevance of some aspects of the mission, such as communications planning and contacts identified for a trade show in Berlin. Still, the three other focus areas during the mission: marketing, team building, and CBI document review remained highly relevant, even if delayed in applicability. During the Mandalay Masterclasses, the most relevant topics were related to COVID safety protocols, such as international standards on disinfection (already usable for those hotels resuming operations as quarantine centres) or designing new tour products for pandemic-era tourism with clear communication of COVID safety principles.

**With regard to the relevance of the advice provided to clients, this depended highly on a number of factors.** First, focusing on IT and marketing skills seemed relevant as such skills are underdeveloped according to the Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute. Second, multiple PUM experts remarked that general English-speaking skills were low., which also constraints tourism development. Third, focusing on clients with limited financial capacity to implement recommendations was found to make some advisory missions less relevant (e.g., as in the case of UniLeisure).

## 2.5 Additionality & Coherence

### 2.5.1 Definition

Following the Donor Committee For Enterprise Development, the concept of additionality can be divided into ‘input additionality’ and ‘development additionality’.<sup>48</sup>

- **Input additionality** is the extent to which “the public input resources are additional to what might anyway be invested or done by the applicant/partner company and other parties.”
- **Development additionality** is the extent to which public resources contribute to changes in development-relevant results that would not have materialised without them.<sup>49</sup>

The notion of *coherence* can be understood as the compatibility of PUM’s interventions with other PSD-interventions. This concept relates to both internal and external coherence, which are defined (in light of this study) as:

- **Internal coherence** is used to examine the synergies and interlinkages between PUM’s activities and other PSD-activities finance by Dutch development cooperation.
- **External coherence** looks at the consistency of PUM’s interventions with other stakeholders’ interventions on PSD in the same sectoral or country context, including complementarity, harmonisation and co-ordination with other stakeholders. In short, it concerns adding value towards private sector development locally while avoiding duplication of efforts.

### 2.5.2 Case study findings

Table 7 PUM Missions provided unique value to clients and the sector, particularly in light of few quality local alternatives

Client case studies	1. UMTA	2. MDL Masterclasses	3. UniLeisure	4. Asian Tour	5. Shekinah
Type of case	Programmatic	Programmatic	Standalone	Standalone	Standalone
Date	Jan 2020	Aug 2020	Jan 2019	Feb 2020	May 2019 Nov 2019
Additionality to local market	++	+++	+	+++	+++
Additionality to international market	<i>The SMEs do not seem to have access to commercial international consultants</i>				
Additionality to other development organisations	+/-	++	0	+++	+++
Coherence	-	N/A	+/-	++	N/A

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics. “+++” very clearly positive, “++” clearly positive, “+” somewhat positive, “0” minimal or none, “-” somewhat negative, “--” clearly negative, “+/-” conflicting evidence, “N/A” absence of evidence.

PUM’s support was consistently seen as providing positive unique value to its clients. Even in the cases where efficiency or relevance was limited, almost every stakeholder reiterated the

<sup>48</sup> DCED (2014), “Demonstrating Additionality in Private Sector Development Initiatives”, Donor Committee For Enterprise Development.

<sup>49</sup> The OECD-DAC (2016) makes a slightly different distinction, between ‘financial additionality’ and ‘additionality in value’, but this distinction applies more to financial investments. See OECD (2016), *Understanding Key Terms and Modalities for Private Sector Engagement in Development Co-operation*, 2016, p. 4.

positive unique value provided by PUM missions and experts. Most succinctly put, PUM's unique value is in providing tailored support in business strategy with senior international experts, which was not offered by any other alternatives. For example, CBI provides simultaneous coaching to 23 SMEs simultaneously; Swiss Contact and GIZ work directly with the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism, or AIESEC provides junior interns rather than senior experts. International expertise was uniformly seen as being of high value to the Myanmar tourism, a sector in its relative infancy and with great opportunity to learn from international standards and practices.

**There was no evidence to suggest that PUM was crowding out local or regional market providers.** Various local stakeholders such as local representatives or industry experts provided different reasons for this, while all agreeing that PUM was not substituting local options. Many local stakeholders suggested that there were few local options providing high quality advice comparable to PUM. One local expert was identified who provided useful support for hotels in the areas of property and staff management. However, the PUM expert in this case was seen as highly complementary to the local consultant, not as a substitute. The client was in fact happy paying for a local consultant and seeking a PUM mission afterwards. Local organisations like Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute provided workshops and seminars, but these were seen as providing a different value compared to PUM missions. There were no mentions of regional providers coming from neighbouring countries such as Thailand, India, or Cambodia.

**PUM and CBI provide distinct and complementary value to the tourism sector.** CBI was commonly cited as a PSD programme broadly similar to PUM in its goals, but with a very distinct approach and value. While CBI also uses Dutch experts, the tourism programme currently advises 23 SMEs over a 4-year period, visiting each SME onsite for 4-5 hours per year according to a source from CBI (compared to PUM's 2-week mission). Although CBI provides much less onsite support to each SME, their sustained support has some unique value compared to PUM's standalone missions.

**PUM's onsite missions were almost always seen as additional to other development organisations.** According to almost all sources interviewed, PUM fills a niche relative to other international providers, who offer more generic expertise (e.g., CBI) or work with interns or students (e.g. AIESEC or universities) who provide administrative support like content writing. In other cases, organisations like ITC or ILO only provide workshops and seminars, rather than tailored onsite support. As such, it is possible that remote classes offered by PUM may be less additional and more similar to other international support. However, as one local stakeholder remarked, the skills gap in Myanmar may be so wide and the demand by SMEs so high, that any effective support is appreciated and useful.

**In one case, there was some redundancy between a PUM mission and a later mission by LuxDev and the UN World Tourism Organisation.** There was disagreement between interviewees about the potential additionality of a PUM Mission in Mandalay that had yielded a Responsible Tourism Action Plan. One source suggested that it was largely superseded by a LuxDev and UN WTO led Myanmar Tourism Strategic Recovery Roadmap 2021-2025. However, other sources suggested that the Mandalay Action Plan would remain relevant and could be implemented in parallel with the Tourism Strategic Recovery Roadmap as tourism resumes to Myanmar.

**There was some complementarity between the PUM programme and CBI initiatives but with opportunity to improve coherence.** In one case, a PUM client found significant complementarities working with CBI documents and advice. The focus of PUM's mission was to review CBI documentation and use it to provide advice directed specifically at the client. While the client had followed CBI's advice to design a new website, she received tailored support and feedback from the PUM expert to go about doing so. A more systematic collaboration between PUM and CBI, perhaps mediated by the Dutch embassy or NGOs, could likely find more opportunities for coherence.

## 3 Conclusions

### Effectiveness

1. PUM's effectiveness and its ability to achieve sustainable and systemic results does not only depend on whether it followed a 'programmatic' approach. Rather, its effectiveness is possibly more importantly influenced by other factors, including the characteristics of the client selected (including their access to qualified human resources and finance), the quality of the alignment with experts, and various external contextual factors that significantly affected the tourism sector's development prospects (including most importantly COVID-19 and the most recent military coup of February 2021).
2. Evidence across a variety of stakeholders showed that PUM missions in Myanmar had effectively provided significant knowledge transfer (e.g. in marketing and staff management), and triggered some adoption of new practices (e.g. in HR practices).
3. However, given the impact of the pandemic on tourism, added to how recent the missions had taken place, evidence of increased performance was only found in one case.
4. Effectiveness of remote coaching was highest when experts were well chosen; further effectiveness could be achieved with more preparation and better understanding of participant needs.
5. While it was too early to observe indirect effects on other stakeholders, the potential for PUM to generate indirect effects seemed high, particularly when following a programmatic approach that includes a large number of stakeholders.

### Sustainability

1. There was limited evidence on the sustainability of PUM's impact, due to the short time elapsed since the missions took place and the sudden stop in the tourism business resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic (followed by the February 2021 military coup).
2. However, some evidence suggested that SMEs with enough capital to invest in business changes and to survive the pandemic were more likely to see sustained impact.
3. There was not sufficient time since the programmatic missions to make a strong conclusion about the sustainability of this approach in Myanmar. However, the breadth and number of stakeholders engaged suggested that some clients could retain the benefits and potentially share across the sector in the long term, contingent on the return of international tourism to Myanmar.

### Efficiency

1. There was no conclusive evidence for differences between programmatic and non-programmatic cases with regard to efficiency. Efficiency was higher when experts could provide tailored advice and reach multiple stakeholders simultaneously, but there are also trade-offs to consider when support is provided solely through remote means.
2. On site missions were particularly efficient when PUM experts engaged with multiple participants simultaneously, through workshops or staff-wide trainings. This did not require a programmatic approach per se, but could also be done for individual clients with a substantial number of staff members.

3. Remote coaching enabled PUM to implement missions even while travel was not possible, but there are trade-offs to this approach: communication barriers, personal engagement, and the ability to immerse oneself, contextualize, and tailor support.
4. Efficiency was reduced by a mismatch between experts and clients, when knowledge or personal/ cultural fit was a limiting factor.

#### Relevance

1. The content of PUM's support was in general seen as highly relevant for clients, particularly due to the tailored advice provided in marketing and staff management, or pandemic preparedness (Mandalay Masterclasses).
2. Access to finance remains a key bottleneck for SME's in Myanmar, not currently addressed by PUM.
3. Other key bottlenecks such as lagging infrastructure and international reputation could benefit from broader sector engagement.
4. In hindsight, the Myanmar tourism sector may not be most relevant country and sector for PUM to have focused on, given its political fragility and weak international reputation particularly following the Rakhine crisis of 2015. In fragile states like Myanmar it may be more relevant for PUM to focus more on sectors that are less sensitive to politics and less likely to be impacted by international sanctions, such as agriculture.

#### Additionality & Coherence

1. PUM's support was consistently seen as providing positive unique value to its clients, particularly due to tailored onsite support provided by senior international experts.
2. **PUM is highly additional to the local market in Myanmar without any observed crowding out effects.** It provided a niche offering in the Myanmar tourism sector, bringing in international expertise that was simply not available in the local market.
3. **PUM was also highly additional relative to the international private sector market,** as SMEs in Myanmar could not afford international consultant market rates and the evaluation team did not find any relevant international private options for support.
4. **PUM's additionality relative to other development programmes was complementary in some cases, but less unique and in one case somewhat redundant.** There was coherence between PUM's efforts and those of CBI and ITC found in some of the cases. However, in one case, there was disagreement between stakeholders whether the PUM mission (with UMTA Mandalay) was redundant to later international efforts by LuxDev and UN WTO

## 4 Detailed Case Study Findings

### 4.1 Client 1: Union of Myanmar Travel Association-Mandalay (UMTA-Mdy)

#### Description client

**The Union of Myanmar Travel Association (UMTA) is an NGO that incorporates all (leading) registered travel and tourism-related companies in Myanmar.** The national association was founded in 2002 and has distinct chapters for major cities or destinations.<sup>50</sup> As of January 2021, the Mandalay chapter of UMTA had 12 active members.<sup>51</sup>

#### Description PUM support

**A PUM expert visited UMTA’s regional association in Mandalay (“UMTA-Mdy”) in January 2020 in order to develop a tourism development action plan for the region.** The original aim of this PUM case had been to set up a Regional Tourism Development Plan to develop ‘responsible tourism’.<sup>52</sup> During the mission, the PUM expert and stakeholders decided to make this more concrete by developing an action plan that would help Mandalay transition from a theoretical policy phase to a concrete set of actions to structurally develop tourism in Mandalay.

**In addition to UMTA, the organisations involved in this mission included various other travel and tourism-related associations.** The participating associations included the Myanmar Restaurant Association (Mandalay Zone), Myanmar Tour Guide Society, and the Myanmar Hospitality Professionals Association.<sup>53</sup> In addition, a representative from the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism participated.

**The mission lasted 14 days.** During this period, the PUM expert conducted interviews and workshops with 13 organisations across the tourism sector of Mandalay, with a focus on developing an actionable strategic plan to develop responsible tourism across Mandalay.<sup>54</sup> This mission led to a follow-up PUM mission six months later: the Mandalay Masterclasses organised by Myanmar Upper Land Culture & Travel (Case Study 2).

#### Effectiveness

**The PUM mission was effective in transferring knowledge to a wide variety of tourism stakeholders across Mandalay.** The PUM expert and PUM local representative organised interactive workshops with 13 different organisations, including the Mandalay organisations of restaurants, tour guides, hoteliers, and tour operators as well as government officials.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Union of Myanmar Travel Association Website. <https://www.umtanet.org/index.php/en/>

<sup>51</sup> PUM Client Interview, January 2021.

<sup>52</sup> PUM Client Requests Spreadsheet

<sup>53</sup> PUM Expert Deliverable – Actionplan Mandalay 2020

<sup>54</sup> PUM Expert Interview, December 2020; PUM Expert Report, January 2020

<sup>55</sup> PUM Expert Report, Jan 2020.

**Multiple sources reported a high degree of satisfaction with the mission, which was mostly related to the knowledge transfer aspect.** The PUM local representative, PUM expert, and other participants in the mission categorised the workshops as successful, engaging, and meeting or exceeding expectations. In an interview, the PUM expert described it as her “favourite and best organised mission” among 13 missions completed with PUM. One of the workshop participants commented that “the workshop was great, such an eye opener for other people in my association, as they hadn’t previously been in touch with foreign experts. That was their first time, they were very motivated to attend.”<sup>56</sup>

**Although the workshops focused on the articulation of goals, there was some high-level knowledge transfer as well.** One illustrative example was the introduction of the concept of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in the workshop with the Mandalay Restaurant Association, which led to improved collaboration between a quarantine centre and a restaurant providing catering, according to one of the workshop participants.

**Table 8** A major output of the workshops and mission was a set of detailed steps for Mandalay tourism

<b>Concrete steps towards successful responsible tourism development in Mandalay</b>	
1	Strengthen the focus on responsible tourism
2	Create an organisation to develop responsible tourism on Mandalay level
3	Develop training and certification
4	Develop a structured Mandalay destination marketing strategy

**With regard to effects on business practices, two key changes were noted among stakeholders as a result of the PUM mission; fee structures and sector wide collaboration.** First, according to a PUM client, the discussion from the workshop led to the idea of lobbying the UMTA HQ in the economic capital of Yangon to allow associate members to join the UMTA with a cheaper fee structure. This led to an increase in the membership of the UMTA. Second, according to multiple participating clients and the expert, the PUM mission led to some positive collaboration across a wide variety of stakeholders in the Mandalay tourism sector. The PUM expert believed that her goal of enabling the association to work together was largely achieved through the united plan. One participant remarked, “because of the workshop, we met people from associations we didn’t know existed. This was a little bit positive.” He continued to say that due to the pandemic, they had not kept in touch, but the connections could be useful following the resumption of business and tourism after the pandemic effects had waned.

**However, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly reduced the potential effects this PUM mission could have had on business performance.** Nearing the end of the 2-week mission, a detailed action plan authored by the PUM expert with significant input from various stakeholder workshops was delivered in January 2020. International flights to Myanmar were suspended in March 2020<sup>57</sup> and were not expected to resume until May 2021 (as of February 2021).<sup>58</sup> One of

<sup>56</sup> PUM Client Interview, Jan 2021.

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alert-full-history/aFv8t8QnEdDsHp4ZF/myanmar-extended-quarantine-measures-implemented-due-to-covid-19-march-19>

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/all-flights-and-myanmar-suspended.html>

the participants remarked that they “had planned to form a study group to continue with motivation, but the pandemic happened and everything stopped.”

**A subsequent nation-wide reprioritisation of goals for the tourism sector also hindered the effectiveness, according to one source.** The pandemic’s impact to tourism led to the introduction of a new nationwide plan. Starting in August 2020,<sup>59</sup> the UN World Tourism Organisation and Lux Dev, the Luxembourg Aid and Development Agency, began the development of the Myanmar Tourism Strategic Recovery Roadmap 2021-2025<sup>60</sup>. According to the PUM Local Representative, this became the new priority superseding the PUM led Mandalay Responsible Tourism 2020 Action Plan. The imperative for Mandalay Tourism sector was to draft a new regional master plan 2021-2025 based on the national roadmap. According to one source, this has meant that the PUM led roadmap has not been actively followed, limiting its effectiveness. “I wanted to implement [the PUM expert’s] project, but COVID-19 caused so many changes and the new Luxembourg plan, otherwise we could have found a way,” remarked the PUM Local Representative. However, other sources suggested that the Mandalay Action Plan would remain relevant and could be implemented in parallel with the Tourism Strategic Recovery Roadmap.

**In terms of indirect effects, the creation of and implementation of the Mandalay tourism masterclasses continued the spirit and knowledge transfer of the mission.** This masterclass programme (described in Case Study 2) resulted from a key recommendation from this mission, i.e. the creation of a training programme across the tourism industry in Mandalay, specifically for hoteliers, tour guides, and tour operators. This was implemented seven months later in August and September 2020, where 13 masterclasses were taught remotely by 6 PUM experts as well as 4 outside experts (2 local, 2 Dutch). Each masterclass lasted 1.5 hours and was followed by 30 min for Q&A.

## Sustainability

**The PUM mission did not have a sustainable (durable) impact on the tourism sector, due to two key external factors that severely hindered implementation of the action plan.**

**First, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and second, the subsequent adoption of a new nationwide tourism recovery plan.** However, the subsequent prioritisation of the post-COVID Myanmar Tourism Strategic Recovery Roadmap 2021-2025 has limited the long-term sustainability of the mission.

**One key initiative from the mission persisted in the establishment and implementation of the Mandalay Tourism Masterclasses.** As mentioned under effectiveness, the masterclasses that followed this initial meeting led to key knowledge transfer to 35 students ranging from tour operators, hoteliers, and tour guides. *Further detail to be discussed in Case Study 2.*

<sup>59</sup> PUM Local Expert Interview, Jan 2021.

<sup>60</sup> Ministry of Information, Myanmar. MoHT holds meeting on tourism recovery roadmap. <https://www.moi.gov.mm/moi:eng/news/2356>

**However, there was some knowledge transfer and at least one change in business practice that could have potential for durable effects.** Stakeholders interviewed mentioned a number of key learnings from the workshops that were still remembered as was the introduction of various stakeholders to each other for future collaboration. Moreover, the change in fee structures to grow the UMTA membership had already been in place, and there was no evidence to suggest this would be reversed.

### Efficiency

**The PUM mission’s efficiency was limited by onset of the pandemic, however it had some efficiency in reaching and collaborating across a wide number of stakeholders, as well as introducing the Mandalay Masterclasses.** 23 senior participants from 13 organisations<sup>61</sup> participated in the workshops enabling the PUM expert to efficiently reach a broad number of stakeholders within the resources borne by one mission. According to the PUM Expert, PUM provides great value for money compared to the market rate for her mission estimated at EUR € 20,000 – 30,000 in the Netherlands.<sup>62</sup> The PUM Local Representative suggested that PUM’s impact could be increased with a resident country coordinator.

### Relevance

**The PUM Mission focused on key topics that were initially relevant to the development of the Mandalay tourism sector.** The topics of the workshops related to the development of responsible tourism in Mandalay as selected by the Union of Myanmar Travel Association in the initial request to PUM. The topic covered remained consistent with the PUM mission’s original request. These led to the drafting of a number of highly relevant initiatives such as ‘strengthening the focus on responsible tourism’ including information leaflets and an online portal, and ‘developing the quality of training and certification.’ There were some highly relevant topics identified by the PUM Expert such as marketing, health and safety, conservation that were not able to be covered during this mission due to a lack of time, a need to prioritise. In particular, some of the stakeholders requested support in marketing, but this was outside the scope of the PUM expert’s domain and considered by her to be a second step after a strategic plan which was the priority of the mission. An unanticipated pandemic and a new strategic roadmap developed by LuxDev and UN WTO changed the long-term relevance of the project. However, the identification and subsequent implementation of the masterclasses were a output that was highly relevant. The PUM Local Representative suggested that PUM’s relevance could have been higher working in the private / SME sector, given the “saturation of the government sector with all the INGOs.” *Further discussed in Case Study 2.*

**Some of the key bottlenecks for the Mandalay tourism sector are nationwide and although addressable through a programmatic approach, may take sustained involvement over a longer period to address.** The involvement of a wide variety of stakeholders across the tourism sector in Mandalay was a strong first step for broader collaboration. The Myanmar tourism sector has not yet rebounded to its 2015 peak<sup>63</sup> which suffered a sharp drop following the Rakhine conflict

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<sup>61</sup> PUM Expert Report

<sup>62</sup> PUM Expert Interview, December 2020.

<sup>63</sup> Myanmar Ministry of Hotels & Tourism, <https://tourism.gov.mm/statistics/>

and its associated negative international attention. While stakeholders across the project including a local representative and sector experts also state that the Myanmar government's disinterest in tourism since 2015 also limited the growth in the sector, it seemed that Mandalay's government might be more proactive.

### **Additionality and Coherence**

**The PUM mission was quite additional to local alternatives in Mandalay which were perceived as distinct or of lower quality.** Interviews across multiple stakeholders revealed two providers. The UMTA discussed working with local youth led organisation Yone Kyi Yar for research and problem finding reports focused on tourism in Mandalay. However they commented that the mission is very different from PUM as Yone Kyi Yar focuses on reports, research, and government advocacy. The Mandalay Restaurant Association was only aware of one organisation providing support for restaurants. The Mandalay Zone Myanmar Hospitality Professional Association, provides trainings but were not perceived to be as high quality as PUM's support. As such he requested PUM to provide trainings on topics such as restaurant management, food and hygiene training, and marketing, which he did not believe could be offered by other organisations.

**The PUM mission was less additional relatively to other international alternatives available in Mandalay.** According to the PUM local representative, other development organisations provide support to the tourism sector in Mandalay including CBI, Swiss Development Corporation, Swiss Contact, Goethe Institute, and GIZ. However, they typically focus on different areas than PUM, working directly with the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism rather than with SMEs. According to the UMTA, Swiss Contact and GIZ work directly with the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism and focus on HR development. Projects include developing a free training school program in conjunction with the Ministry. Another German organization, Foerderverein Myanmar e.V foundation organisation, was supporting HR development and tourism assistance development. Netherlands based Prince Claus fund provides funds for cultural heritage preservation in Mandalay. However, there was not much complementarity pursued in this matter.

**PUM support was perceived by many stakeholders as adding value to other existing options.** One of the clients remarked that PUM's advice, "although not unique, was very helpful and useful... For us working with PUM was very effective, we received great advice." He remarked that it was also additional for them because the technical and theoretical concepts discussed in the workshops added to the practical experience of the Mandalay tourism sector. PUM's support was seen by a PUM Local Representative as unique in that PUM experts work directly with the private (SME) sector, compared with other organisations who work primarily with governments (with the exception of CBI which works with both the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism and the private sector).

**The new Myanmar Tourism Strategic Recovery Roadmap 2021-2025 introduced by LuxDev and UN WTO superseded the action plan that resulted from PUM's mission for some of the stakeholders.** While the PUM Mission published an action plan for Mandalay in January 2020 (Mandalay Responsible 2020 Tourism Action Plan), a new roadmap was devised later in 2020 by LuxDev and UN-WTO at the national level. It appears that PUM was not aware of this, while LuxDev and UN-WTO could not be reached to confirm as to whether they had been aware

of PUM's Action Plan. One stakeholder in the Mandalay Tourism Executive Committee interviewed commented that this rendered the PUM mission action plan as deprioritised and less relevant. However, other stakeholders remarked that both plans could still be pursued in parallel. Given the unprecedented and unpredictable changes in circumstances from the pandemic, it is not clear that there could have been a way to improve complementarity. From interviews with PUM experts based in the Netherlands, it was not clear that they were familiar with the new roadmap or its implementation.

## 4.2 Client 2: Myanmar Upper Land Culture & Travel (Mandalay)

### Description client

Myanmar Upper Land Culture & Travel is a Mandalay based tour operator. They offer private tours to tourist sites targeting international tourists in Mandalay as well as in nearby areas such as Pyin Oo Lwin, Sagaing, and Amarapura.

In cooperation with the Regional Tourist Board in Mandalay that falls under the Ministry of Tourism, the local PUM representative in Mandalay and his company 'Myanmar Upper Land Culture & Travel' developed the idea to organise masterclasses for the tourism sector in Mandalay. The topics were selected by the Regional Tourist Board and included topics such as business continuity ("how to survive the pandemic and get ready for the future") and the development of new products and services.<sup>64</sup>

### Description PUM support

Following the January 2020 PUM Mission to the Union of Myanmar Travel Association-Mandalay (see Case study 1), a need was identified to conduct masterclasses to further the learnings. In August and September 2020, a total of 13 masterclasses were taught by 6 PUM experts as well as 4 outside experts (2 local, 2 Dutch). Given the COVID-19 pandemic, these masterclasses were conducted remotely. Each masterclass lasted 1.5 hours and was followed by 30 min for Q&A. In total 35 participants followed the masterclasses (max 15-19 students max per class). Classes were organised into groups based on profession: hotel managers, tour guides, and tour operators.

### Effectiveness

**About half or slightly more of the 13 PUM Masterclasses appear to have been effective at knowledge transfer according to participants, trainers, and the local representative.** The PUM local representative claimed that that the masterclasses had a lot of impact in imparting new knowledge; particularly when the experts and topics were well chosen and aligned. The most effective modules appeared to be for the tour operators, followed by those for the hotel professionals. A wide variety of knowledge transfer examples were provided for a number of the courses. For the tour operators, this included topics such as communicating COVID safety protocols to better market new products, and effectively managing trips with tour groups. Two of

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<sup>64</sup> PUM Remote Coaching Schedule & Outline, Sept 2020.

the three lecturers for the Tour Operator courses were actually Dutch experts not formally associated with PUM but selected for fit with the course topics requested. These along with the third course taught by a PUM expert for tour operators were among the most effective courses at knowledge transfer according to multiple sources. Among the hotel professional courses, some examples of knowledge transfer include allocating and managing hotel revenues, kitchen organisation, and social media marketing. Further examples are provided below.

**Table 9 Example Knowledge Transfer for Selected Classes (5 out of 13)**

Class	Participants	Example Learning
1.1a. What and How to do as Tour Guides with Locals	Tour Guides	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing communication guidelines with vendors and hawkers</li> </ul>
3.2 Tourism related Digital Marketing	Hotel Professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Targeting potential customers using social media advertising</li> <li>Timing posts optimally for maximum reach</li> </ul>
4.1 Providing Safety Measures	Hotel Professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Safe social distancing, disinfecting standards</li> </ul>
5.1 New Product Development during / after Pandemic	Tour Operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicating COVID safety protocols in new products</li> </ul>
5.4 How to become a better Tour Operator	Tour Operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying and marketing to the right audience</li> </ul>

**However, some of the classes were less effective for a variety of reasons.** Multiple sources suggested that about half of the courses were effective while the other half were less effective or applicable. A common refrain was that a strong PUM expert is not necessarily a strong lecturer, particularly through remote means. Some lecturers were less experienced with lecturing or were not well digitally prepared. Another common trend identified among those less effective courses was an unfamiliarity on the part of the expert of Burmese culture or the infrastructure of Myanmar. In these cases, while the content may have been well communicated, some of it was perceived as not being applicable to the Myanmar context. For example, vast differences in kitchen organisation between the West and Myanmar made it hard for participants to follow those lessons. There was a consensus between the PUM organiser and the PUM local representative that 3 of the 4 sessions for the tour guides were not effective. In this case, the absence of a PowerPoint presentation, and weak English on the part of the lecturer added to some of more common issues of inexperience with Myanmar or with remote teaching.

**Due to the onset of the pandemic, most of the course content has not been able to be implemented in practice.** While there was general consensus about the interest in the course content for at least half of the courses, much of the lessons could not yet be applied due to the cessation of tourism from the pandemic. For example, one interview remarked that “During the COVID crisis, they won’t be able to do much, but once the industry recovers, they will know how to [run more effectively].” For example, the digital marketing content was perceived to be “very relatable and applicable [but] when COVID is no longer an issue, this will be useful.” There was also a concern that some of the information not yet applied could be easy to forget given the span of time without practice.

**However, business practices from the course on COVID hygiene and safety measures appear to have already been implemented by some of the participants.** One source remarked that the hygiene and safety measures learned in the course, processes such as disinfecting doorknobs and sanitizing surfaces, as well as technical information like the percentage of alcohol required for safe disinfection was already applicable to the hotels that have resumed operations as quarantine centres. As hotels resume business initially as quarantine centres, then for domestic visitors, and finally international tourists, these business practices could be readily and usefully applied across the sector.

## Sustainability

**As the Masterclasses reached 35 participants across sectors, it is more likely to have a sustained impact, however not enough time has passed to reach a conclusion.** The classes were administered between August and September of 2020. While there was a general conclusion of the effectiveness of at least some of the courses, there has not been much implementation due to the pandemic. However, with the possible resumption of tourism to Mandalay with the cessation of the pandemic, it is likely that knowledge from other courses could be implemented as well. In at least some cases, the lecturers are still in contact with some of the participants. For example, one lecturer remarked in December 2020 that he was still in informal contact with four hotel participants via email and WhatsApp. Further research may be conducted to gather evidence of the long-term sustainability of the intervention.

## Efficiency

**Remote classes provided high-cost efficiencies but with some trade-offs.** Many of the costs traditionally associated with physical missions such as flights, lodging, and meals were saved by the PUM programme or the PUM clients. Additionally, a wide number of participants were engaged across the 2-month programme, with 35 students total across the 3 participant types (tour guides, hotel professionals, and tour operators.) Although cross-cultural communication appeared to have been relatively effective, one of the expert lecturers as well as a PUM source remarked that the interpretation was somewhat challenging to do online. A number of sources suggested that many of the informal conversations and networking that happen in live sessions (e.g., during coffee breaks, after sessions) were also lost. One expert lecturer whose sessions were widely seen as effective commented that he still prefers the direct 1-on-1 approach which allows for tailored expertise remarking the value of “seeing the feel of the hotel” whereas “remote limits the sense.”

**Efficiency could potentially be improved with certain measures.** According to multiple sources, there was not a systematic or organised common approach. This meant that there was a high degree of variance in the presentations. Guidelines or examples for remote presentations could improve the efficiency of lectures. Multiple sources agreed that more up-front preparation including discussion of expectations from the participants could better align contents. “Speak with the participants beforehand, not just the organisers,” one PUM interviewee advised. The PUM Local representative suggested that longer preparation time (e.g., 3 months in advance), including for selection of the right experts, and discussions on presentation of material could improve efficiency. Providing the classes earlier in the year could also improve efficiency and effectiveness; both to avoid typical “Summer holiday” period of the Dutch experts and the busy preparation season for tourism providers in Myanmar.

## Relevance

**The topics were chosen by the Myanmar Regional Tourist board and were generally seen as relevant issues.** Multiple sources suggested that the content in at least half of the classes was relevant for Mandalay's tourism sector either immediately or following the resumption of tourism after the pandemic. As described in the Effectiveness section, many topics were found to be relevant to the hotel professionals and tour operators, in topics ranging from marketing (e.g., social media, targeting) to finance (e.g., revenue management). The most relevant topics related to COVID safety protocols, such as international standards on disinfection (already usable for those hotels resuming operations as quarantine centres) or designing new tour products for pandemic-era tourism with clear communication of COVID safety principles.

**Relevance could have been improved if all the experts were more aware of the local context.**

Some of these topics related to staff management or kitchen management. "Here we don't lay off people with just three months' salary. There is more of a personal relationship," one source remarked as an example. The local representative remarked that he would have liked to incorporate this type of training for the experts in advance but it was not possible due to the PUM experts time limitations as volunteers.

**However, the most pressing issue of business surviving during the COVID pandemic appeared elusive.**

The topic at the front of most minds was how to deal with the COVID pandemic. The PUM Local Representative remarked, "How could we challenge the COVID-19? This topic was difficult, no one could really answer." Some of the courses did deal directly with pandemic related issues as noted above and were considered especially relevant. To the extent that the masterclasses could address the COVID-19 pandemic, they appear to have. However, the pandemic remains the primary bottleneck to Mandalay (and global) tourism.

**Some of the other key bottlenecks for the Mandalay tourism sector are nationwide and although addressable through a programmatic approach, may take sustained involvement over a longer period to address.**

The involvement of a wide variety of stakeholders across the tourism sector in Mandalay was a strong first step for broader collaboration. The Myanmar tourism sector has not yet rebounded to its 2015 peak<sup>65</sup> which suffered a sharp drop following the Rakhine conflict and its associated negative international attention. Stakeholders across the project including a local representative and sector experts also state that the Myanmar government's disinterest in tourism since 2015 also limited the growth in the sector.

## Additionality and Coherence

**The PUM mission was quite additional to local alternatives in Mandalay which were perceived as distinct or of lower quality.** The Mandalay Restaurant Association was only aware of one organisation providing support for restaurants. The Mandalay Zone Myanmar Hospitality Professional Association, provides trainings but were not perceived to be as high quality as PUM's support. As such he requested PUM to provide trainings on topics such as restaurant management, food and hygiene training, and marketing, which he did not believe could be offered by other organisations.

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<sup>65</sup> Myanmar Ministry of Hotels & Tourism, <https://tourism.gov.mm/statistics/>

**Although other international options for support in, the PUM masterclasses appear to have been rather additional to these options.** Participants and the Local Representative agreed on the effectiveness of some of the classes. According to the PUM local representative, other development organisations provide support to the tourism sector in Mandalay including CBI, Swiss Development Corporation, Swiss Contact, Goethe Institute, and GIZ. However, they typically focus on different areas than PUM, working directly with the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism rather than with SMEs. According to the UMTA, Swiss Contact and GIZ work directly with the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism and focus on HR development. Projects include developing a free training school program in conjunction with the Ministry. Netherlands based Prince Claus fund provides funds for cultural heritage preservation in Mandalay. However, there was not much complementarity pursued in this matter.

### 4.3 Client 3: UniLeisure Travel (Yangon)

#### Description client

**UniLeisure Travel (hereafter: UniLeisure) is a Yangon-based tour operator that has been operating since 2014.** The business focuses on inbound tourism with approximately 40 percent of revenues coming from tour packages and 60 percent received from individual bookings such as air tickets, hotels, or car rentals (as of 2019). As of 2020, UniLeisure had 5 employees, which included the owner, his wife as co-manager, and three junior staff. The business provides a combination of different travel products such as tours, airline tickets, hotels and transportation. UniLeisure offers day trips as well as curated multi-day packages for domestic destinations across Myanmar.

**Most UniLeisure customers are of Asian origin.** The business began with 70 percent of its customers coming from Singapore, and the majority remains of Asian origin as of 2019; approximately 40 percent Chinese, 40 percent Singaporean, 10 percent Myanmar with only 5 percent coming from Europe.<sup>66</sup> UniLeisure is a member of the UMTA (Union of Myanmar Travel Association) and PATA (Pacific Asia Travel Association).<sup>67</sup>

**UniLeisure has faced a significant decline in revenues since 2017.**<sup>68</sup> According to the PUM Expert's Report, the primary reasons for the decline in revenue were threefold: (1) employees' lack of experience in the travel industry; (2) the Rakhine conflict and its impact on international tourism to Myanmar;<sup>69</sup> (3) the limited financial capital of the client. Given that the first and third reasons affect the level of revenues more than the change, it is plausible that the Rakhine conflict, and resulting major negative impact on Myanmar's reputation as a travel destination, had the largest impact.

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<sup>66</sup> PUM Client Interview Dec 2020; PUM Expert Report.

<sup>67</sup> <https://unileisuretravel.com/about-us/>

<sup>68</sup> PUM Expert Report

<sup>69</sup> The Rakhine conflict of 2016-2017 had a major negative impact on Myanmar's tourism sector. More than a million Rohingya fled to safety across the border to Bangladesh amidst widespread allegations of ethnic cleansing and genocide by the Myanmar military. For more on this, see: <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/rohingya-crisis-myanmar>

**Table 10** UniLeisure revenues have declined steadily since 2017

	2017	2018	2019
Revenue (in USD)	253,000	180,000	90,000

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics based on PUM Client Interview, Dec 2020

**To counter the decline in revenues, UniLeisure started exploring additional support and foreign investment.** In 2018, UniLeisure applied for additional investments from Rockstart, a start-up accelerator based in the Netherlands, but was not successful in its application. However, through Rockstart the Client learned about the PUM programme; applied for PUM support at the end of 2018 and received an on-site PUM expert visit in January 2019.

### Description PUM support

**In January 2019, a PUM Expert provided support on location to UniLeisure in a two-week onsite mission.** The client's original request was for support with organising and training his team to grow his business through investments and marketing. On Day 1 of the mission, the precise topics to be covered were refined through a discussion between the Client and the Expert. The list of topics agreed on included (a) staff management, (b) branding, (c) pricing, and (d) website content.

**Table 11** The Expert provided recommendations in four areas

Topics	Outputs and Recommendations
<b>Staff Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hire skilled staff with backgrounds in tourism</li> <li>Implement formal Job Descriptions (JDs) to hire and guide new staff</li> <li>Implement a more systematic way of working and organising back office / front office</li> </ul>
<b>Branding Strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rebrand from Business to Business (B2B) towards Business to Consumer (B2C) to increase margins</li> <li>Target the higher margin segment MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions)</li> </ul>
<b>Pricing Strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborate with B2B tour operators to lower costs and increase competitiveness</li> </ul>
<b>Website Content</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve website content (provided examples from NL)</li> </ul>

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics based on PUM Client Interview Dec 2020, PUM Expert Report

**There was no formal follow-up mission but some informal contact remains.** In particular, the Client noted that he had continued to have informal contact with the PUM Expert every one or two months throughout 2019 and 2020 (at least until August 2020). The Expert confirmed that they had remained in touch and noted that this was the PUM Client he had had most follow-up contact with. While most of the discussions remain casual and social, they have also discussed sourcing new investments, although none has yet been secured (as of December 2020). The Client remarked that the PUM Expert appeared available to discuss further business issues if needed, but the COVID-19 pandemic has naturally limited the need in 2020 due to the virtual cessation of tourism (described further below). As another important touchpoint, the client commented that the Expert had offered to visit European tourism exhibitions on the client's behalf. However, no such exhibitions have yet taken place due to the pandemic. According to the Client, the contact is

entirely informal and neither intermediated by PUM nor remunerated. The Client said he feels comfortable reaching out to the Expert if the need arises, but thus far the main issue they have discussed is new investments.

## Effectiveness

**Both Client and Expert considered the PUM mission as successful, but its effectiveness with regard to changing business practices and improving business outcomes has been limited to date.** On the one hand, there was clear knowledge transfer in the areas of branding and pricing strategy, and the Client appreciated the recommendations from the mission according to the client interview. On the other hand, the Client confirmed that only one major business practice had changed since the PUM Mission. As described further below, this was the implementation of formal job descriptions for hiring and managing staff.

**With respect to knowledge transfer, it is plausible that the PUM mission contributed to some improvements in knowledge regarding branding and pricing strategy.** According to the Client, the most relevant PUM advice (outside staff management, which is discussed below) was related to branding and pricing strategy. In particular, they discussed an evolution of the UniLeisure business from its current 80 percent focus on Business to Business (B2B) towards Business to Consumer (B2C) activities, which have higher margins. An additional area discussed was the idea to target the lucrative MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) segment in hospitality and tourism. The Expert's advice on increasing pricing transparency and sharing commissions with B2B agents (as long the business remains predominantly B2B) was also considered to be very helpful by the client. Overall, the Client rated the mission as 3.5 stars out of 5 in our interview on December 2020.

**At the level of business practices, UniLeisure has thus far not been able to implement much of the advice.** According to the Client, this is because the recommended change in strategic focus (which the Client would like to adopt) would require further substantial investments in staff training, so as to deal with the higher demands of B2C or MICE customers. In addition, it would require an improved consumer-facing website. While the Expert did provide some technical assistance on website content, particularly by providing examples of successful B2C websites, the Client was not able to implement this advice due to limited manpower in web development and content writing.

**Following the PUM mission, the Client did implement one major change in business practices in 2019, relating to staff management.** The Client remarked that the most important change was the implementation of formal job descriptions (JDs). Following the Expert's advice, UniLeisure incorporated formal JDs to identify roles, hire new staff, and establish employee expectations. While UniLeisure previously had staff with diverse backgrounds, they have now implemented a clear emphasis on hiring skilled staff with backgrounds in tourism. According to the Client, three new staff with tourism backgrounds were hired in the second half of 2019 using formal job descriptions. "Before the JDs, I had to be involved in every step of the job, now I can share my responsibilities and focus on my own duties, as the staff can [now] manage operations and reservations [on their own]" Additionally, the PUM mission discussed the idea of hiring low

cost staff such as retired tour guides or interns, which was implemented in December 2019, with an intern from AIESEC-Singapore.

**There were two main constraining factors that limited the effectiveness at the level of business practices, one of which could have been foreseen while the other was unexpected.**

- **First, financial constraints** prevented the company from implementing the capital-intensive changes advised by the Expert. While the Client would have liked to implement the Expert's recommendations, it had only a limited ability to invest, which the Expert allegedly presumably could have foreseen. One example noted by the Client was that their financial constraints prevented them from hiring the additional skilled staff required to grow the business. Further capital would have been required to hire the staff that could manage the evolution towards a B2C business. The Client also remarked that new staff with technical capacities would be needed for web development and content writing. Since the Client does not have the financial means to hire such new staff, the new website remains a work in progress.
- **Second, the COVID-19 pandemic and associated policy responses** obviously had a severe negative impact on the demand for tourism services in 2020. The various international and national lockdowns and travel restrictions imposed implied an effective cessation of business and has stifled the ability to implement changes. In particular, the suspension of international flights to Myanmar from 29 March 2020 through 31 December 2020 simply halted all inbound and outbound tourism. As a result, the Client remarked that the business entered a "survival mode" as no changes in their business would be able to attract any customers. However, he remarked that the "PUM report was the right direction for me ... I just need to wait and see if I can manage to find a little bit of financial support, then I think I will be able to make some changes."

**While COVID-19 naturally could not have been foreseen, the limited impact at the level of business practices and revenues in 2019 suggests that this lack of effectiveness was not only due to the pandemic.** On the one hand, both Client and Expert confirmed positive changes in terms of improved knowledge and a willingness on the part of the client to improve business practices. On the other hand, it was not possible to implement these changes due to financial constraints and the sudden stop in tourism flows resulting from COVID-19. As a result, it is not surprising that the client has earned zero revenues since March 2020.<sup>70</sup>

## Sustainability

**While the knowledge imparted during the PUM intervention is likely to remain with the client, the improvements in business practices have not yet had sustainable results yet at the client level.** With the exception of the implementation of formal JDs, much of the advice has not been implemented yet due to the constraints noted above. This having said, the potential for sustainable effects at the client level has improved because the PUM client and the expert have remained in regular informal contact as a way to discuss new issues, although there has been no discussion of a follow-up mission.

**There also is no evidence (yet) that the PUM advice provided had sustainable indirect effects on other companies within the sector via horizontal or vertical spillovers.** On the one

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<sup>70</sup> Client Interview, Dec 2020

hand, the PUM expert identified the advice provided as being relevant to other tour operators in Yangon and across Myanmar, implying good potential for knowledge sharing or demonstration effects. On the other hand, this PUM case remained a standalone case for which no sector-wide knowledge sharing was reported. However, it is possible that there could be more knowledge sharing over time especially when the demand for tourism recovers again as the COVID-19 policy measures are relaxed further.

## Efficiency

**The client suggested that the background of the PUM expert could have been more aligned to his business needs.** Although the client was overall pleased with the PUM support and the expert, the client did express that the PUM expert background could have been more aligned to his leisure travel business rather than the expert's B2B background. This led some of the advice to be perceived as more theoretical than directly practical. The client also perceived greater expertise on behalf of PUM in industries such as manufacturing or medical, relative to tourism where the client saw fewer experts available from PUM. This was a case in which expert knowledge was somewhat a limiting factor.

**As much of the knowledge transfer has not yet been implemented, although this PUM mission produced some positive impact, it may not have been entirely efficient.** Only one key business practice, the implementation of JDs, appears to have been changed as a result of the PUM Mission to date. There has been positive knowledge transfer to the client, however financial constraints and the impact of the pandemic on tourism has limited the efficient implementation of these skills and knowledge to date. However, it is possible that the efficiency of this mission improves in the long run once tourism resumes to Myanmar, particularly in light of the ongoing informal communication between the client and the expert.

## Relevance

**The topics addressed by the PUM expert were discussed and agreed with the Client in advance and as such were relevant to the Client.** A detailed discussion was held on day one between Expert and Client to clarify the topics of support during the PUM intervention. In that sense, both Expert and Client presumably agreed on the relevance of the topics chosen. According to the Client, the most relevant topics for UniLeisure were staff management (where improvements were indeed made following the PUM mission), as well as branding and pricing strategy.

**As already noted above under Effectiveness, however, some of the recommendations provided by the Expert were not sufficiently relevant for the Client given the existing financial constraints.** While appreciative of the recommendations and the time spent, the Client perceived the Expert advice to be more theoretical than practical, given the financial constraints. He also considered the Expert's background to be somewhat unaligned with his needs.

**The main issue was that the constraint of limited funding was not addressed by the PUM Expert.** UniLeisure has been eagerly attempting to source new investors since 2017, which has not yet been addressed. This has limited their ability to implement some of the capital-intensive changes recommended by PUM, including hiring skilled staff and completing the website redesign. Although the intervention has not yet created new job growth, it was expected that following

further investment, the client would hire further skilled staff members. While this was an area of discussion during the PUM mission, no new investors had been found. According to the client, a key limitation in this regard was the client's inability to prepare detailed financial documents, which he was not able to receive support from the PUM expert on.

**Some of the key bottlenecks for UniLeisure are sector wide and difficult to address through standalone cases.** The client remarked that efforts to support the Myanmar government attract tourism nationally would be a welcome investment. The Myanmar tourism sector has not yet rebounded to its 2015 peak which suffered a sharp drop following the Rakhine conflict and its associated negative international attention.<sup>71</sup> While the violence has largely since abated<sup>72</sup>, international tourism to Myanmar in 2019 had not yet reached its 2015 peak, even prior to the travel lockdowns of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

### Additionality and Coherence

**At first sight, the additionality of the PUM support is somewhat questionable, as UniLeisure already had access to support from a number of international organisations.**

- **First, the Client obtained support from the International Trade Centre (ITC) in HR, which is an area that was also covered by the PUM Expert.** In particular, UniLeisure participated in a 5-day training program including 15 workshops hosted by ITC, which included training in HR management. The PUM mission also covered staff management, but the difference is that the PUM Expert provided tailored advice to issues discussed more theoretically during the ITC workshop (thus contributing to 'coherence'). Moreover, there were limits to the ITC support the Client could receive. In particular, the Client was unable to join a follow-up seminar from ITC which was limited to tour operators who had a proven track record of working with European clients, which the client did not. Also, according to its website, ITC is running an Inclusive Tourism project in Myanmar from December 2017 to June 2021, fostering economic opportunities through the development of sustainable tourism products in Myanmar. This project is focused particularly in Kayah State and Tanintharyi Region, hence outside of Yangon.<sup>73</sup>
- **Second, UniLeisure hosted one intern provided by AIESEC's Singapore chapter, who also worked on website design.** AIESEC, an international student-run organisation, provides college students for internships of 6 weeks to 6 months to support businesses around the world. The AIESEC intern provided to UniLeisure stayed for 6 weeks and assisted the Client with content writing for the website; an area on which the PUM expert also provided advice.<sup>74</sup>
- **Third, the Client also identified website support via the startup-accelerator Rockstart, based in the Netherlands, although it was unsuccessful in its bid to attract new investment.** UniLeisure hired Dutch-based Multitude for a website redesign, a contact found through Rockstart. For unclear reasons, however, this collaboration proved unsuccessful and the client ultimately began a new website on his own using Wordpress.<sup>75</sup> The PUM expert

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<sup>71</sup> Source: Myanmar Ministry of Hotels & Tourism: 2009 – 2020, <https://tourism.gov.mm/statistics/>; Interviews with PUM Local Reps and Experts

<sup>72</sup> <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/rohingya-crisis-myanmar>

<sup>73</sup> However, ITC does provide national support for Myanmar's tourism industry as well: <https://www.intracen.org/NTF4/Myanmar-tourism/>

<sup>74</sup> Ibid

<sup>75</sup> PUM Client Interview, Dec 2020

followed up by providing some ideas and examples for the website during the mission,<sup>76</sup> but it is not clear why UniLeisure could not have hired a better expert via Rockstart (and whether this would have been at market rates). Note also that it was through Rockstart that the client learned of the PUM programme, suggesting that there could be opportunities for Rockstart and PUM to work together and improve coherence.

**According to PUM representatives, PUM is still unique in that other programmes do not offer hands-on, onsite support in the area of business strategy.** Both the Client and PUM representatives noted that PUM is the only organisation that offers hands-on support by a visiting expert on location, providing “tailored strategic advice”. This is different from support provided by international providers (supported by the Netherlands) such as ITC and CBI, who offer more generic sector wide expertise. It is also different from the support provided by junior interns, students, or technical consultants who provide more tactical support like website content writing. From the Client’s perspective, the unique value of PUM lies in the deepening connections and insights into the lucrative European market. *Further analysis of local market providers will be added following further research in Mandalay and Patheingyi.*

## 4.4 Client 4: Asian Tour Myanmar (Yangon)

### Description client

**Asian Tour Myanmar (hereafter: Asian Tour) is a Yangon based tour operator that has been operating since 2007.** Their primary focus is on inbound European tourists. Besides its two owners, Asian Tour has 2 additional managers and 3 staff members focused on operations, reservations, and communication. Asian Tour also works with 10 freelance guides including those that serve English and German speaking clients. The client experienced steady growth since beginning operations in 2007 along with the rise in international tourism to Myanmar.<sup>77</sup>

**However, since 2016 revenues have declined each year, reflecting the drop in Myanmar tourism since the 2015 crisis in Rakhine state.**<sup>78</sup> The financial information of Asian Tour has been provided only for two twelve-month periods; however, they show around 80 percent decline in both revenues and profit since 2014. In March 2020 Asian Tour stopped its operations as international flights to Myanmar were suspended and they remain shut.

**Table 12 Asian Tour revenues and profit have sharply declined since 2014**

	May 2013 – Apr 2014	Jan 2019 – Dec 2019
Turnover	US\$ 1,051,737	US\$ 204,942
Profit	US\$ 165,276	US\$ 33,055
Staff	5	8

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics based on PUM Expert Report Feb 2020

<sup>76</sup> Ibid

<sup>77</sup> PUM Expert Report: Asian Tour

<sup>78</sup> PUM Client Interview, PUM Expert Report, Various Sector Experts

## Description PUM support

The original request by Asian Tour was to receive PUM support to attract new customers through the development of a new village tourism product and support marketing in international trade show. Asian Tour requested a PUM mission in December 2019, with a PUM expert arriving in February 2020. The PUM Expert spent 13 days in country with the Client. The original idea in December was to explore and develop products tied to village tourism for the international market.<sup>79</sup> Asian Tour sent a follow up request in January to request advice to prepare for marketing roadshows in Berlin, Copenhagen, and Stockholm in March 2020 (which however were eventually cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic).<sup>80</sup>

The focus of the support evolved during the course of the 13-day mission. Asian Tour had planned to purchase rural land in the Yangon region to prepare the village tourism product. However, Asian Tour ultimately decided not to purchase this land and therefore the needs of the mission evolved, but still focused on marketing and attracting new customers.<sup>81</sup> Upon mutual agreement, the mission subsequently covered (a) marketing and communications, (b) trade show preparations, (c) reviewing CBI documents (d) team building.<sup>82</sup>

**Table 13** The Expert and Client discussed a variety of topics, yielding concrete outputs

Topics	Outputs and Recommendations by PUM Expert
Marketing & Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drafted list of key differentiators for Myanmar Tourism</li> <li>• Provided feedback on website</li> <li>• Advised renaming of tour types and tour names for improved search engine optimisation and client communication</li> <li>• Advised on social media and online reviews strategy</li> <li>• Improved email marketing</li> </ul>
Trade Show Preparations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepared list of travel agents in Germany to contact for ITB Berlin Tourism Trade Fair</li> <li>• Revised email content for ITB Berlin</li> </ul>
CBI Document Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revised SWOT Analysis and EMP (Export Marketing Plan) first drafted with CBI</li> <li>• Reviewed Training Manual of Elevator Pitch for Roadshows and Portfolio Manual provided by CBI</li> </ul>
Team Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Held teamwide workshops to draft Unique Selling Points (USPs)</li> <li>• Practiced German language skills with staff</li> </ul>

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics based on PUM Client Report, Feb 2020, Interviews with PUM Client and Expert Nov-Dec 2020

## Relevance

The PUM intervention with Asian Tour was highly tailored to the clients need and helped the client address key issues in marketing, communication, and team building. While the initial PUM request was for support to develop products for village tourism; a mutual discussion early in the mission between the client and expert led to the identification of more relevant issues. The PUM expert explained the relevance of marketing to a client that had traditionally relied on

<sup>79</sup> PUM Expert Report: Asian Tour; PUM Client Interview Nov 2020

<sup>80</sup> PUM Expert Report: Asian Tour

<sup>81</sup> PUM Client Interview Dec 2020

<sup>82</sup> PUM Expert Report: Asian Tour; PUM Client Interview Nov 2020

Myanmar's relative attractiveness to international tourists prior to 2016. The client also remarked that the PUM experts background and experience was highly relevant to their business.

**Some of the key bottlenecks for Asian Tour are sector wide and difficult to address through standalone cases.** The Myanmar tourism sector has not yet rebounded to its 2015 peak<sup>83</sup> which suffered a sharp drop following the Rakhine conflict and its associated negative international attention. International tourism to Myanmar in 2019 had not yet reached its 2015 peak, even prior to the travel lockdowns of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Multiple stakeholders including the local representative and sector experts also state that the Myanmar government's disinterest in tourism since 2015 also limited the growth in the sector.

## Effectiveness

**Both Client and Expert considered the PUM mission generally as "effective".** They both provided a number of examples to illustrate that various changes were made following the PUM mission (described below). However, it is important to take into account that (a) both Client and Expert inherently had some bias that may have caused them to be optimistic about effectiveness; (b) neither provided reliable information on a counterfactual scenario in which COVID-19 had not happened and the tourism sector in Myanmar would have continued to grow in 2020. Where possible, we consulted third parties (other types of stakeholders with different interests) or data on business outcomes to arrive at a truly "triangulated" view, but it was not always possible (yet) to identify a third type of stakeholder sufficiently familiar with the project to provide an in-depth view of effectiveness.

**Both Client and Expert considered the PUM advice as effective in terms of improving knowledge and business practice in the area of marketing.** According to both the Client and Expert, there significant knowledge transfer between Expert and Client during the mission in February 2020. A wide variety of marketing and communication initiatives were implemented as a result of the mission, including improved website content, product communications, and email marketing, evidenced by changes visible on the client's website that align with the recommendations made on the PUM Expert report.<sup>84</sup> According to Asian Tour and the PUM Expert, they considered themselves "too busy" for marketing prior to the PUM mission, but owing to the PUM advice they now have re-evaluated it as a priority, thanks to a perception of the PUM experts expertise in tourism and marketing. The PUM mission also covered preparation for upcoming international trade shows including marketing content and communications plans<sup>85</sup>.

**The PUM advice also appears to have been effective in terms of improving team building.** The expert hosted a team-wide workshop to identify Unique Selling Points (USPs) to help Asian Tour differentiate from its competitors. Many of the changes proposed at that time have already been implemented and are visible on their marketing and website, including tour products renamed by the expert or the communication of new Unique Selling Points such as 'Your Local Family'.<sup>86</sup> The PUM mission also instilled the practice of wider team engagement, including junior members according to the Client, which had previously only held team meetings among the management.

<sup>83</sup> Myanmar Ministry of Hotels & Tourism, <https://tourism.gov.mm/statistics/>

<sup>84</sup> PUM Expert Report, Feb 2020; Client Website; <https://www.asiantour-myanmar.com>

<sup>85</sup> PUM Expert Report, Feb 2020

<sup>86</sup> Client Website; <https://www.asiantour-myanmar.com/about-us/>

However, after the mission, recognising the knowledge of all team members, they now regularly include all staff for key meetings.

**Both the client and the expert claimed that the on-site nature of the mission greatly improved its effectiveness relative to the potential value of a remote mission.** The presence or effectiveness of these features would have been severely limited with remote coaching or in a large group setting with multiple clients. Furthermore, the PUM expert remarked that “face to face support is better than remote coaching as you can really understand what the needs are.”

**The cessation of international tourism has limited impact on business outcomes to date.** A refreshed website and new travel products are available,<sup>87</sup> but with the cessation of international flights to Myanmar as of March 2020, there has been not been significant business impact of these changes (e.g., towards driving new tourism). While the client is now better prepared for international trade shows, the cancellation of e.g. the ITB Trade Show in Berlin has meant that Asian tour has not yet been able to apply its new trade show learnings. There has been no additional staff hired nor any staff laid off since the PUM mission in February 2020.<sup>88</sup>

## Sustainability

**There has not been practical impact yet due to the COVID-19 onset in Myanmar immediately following the PUM Mission.** Both the client and the PUM expert agreed that there were new changes in business practices as well as some knowledge transfer (as described above), but minimal business impact yet due to the pandemic’s impact on tourism demand. The PUM mission completed on February 20, 2020, while Myanmar suspended all commercial international flights from March 29<sup>th</sup> to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020. This left little time for evidence of impact on business outcomes. The cancellation of trade shows in Europe that the client had intended on visiting, for example, meant that the trade show preparation from the mission could not be practiced. However, according to the client, some changes have been enacted such as teamwide workshops and improved email outreach. Additionally, new tour product names and website content recommended in the PUM client report are already visible on the client’s website. According to the client, the PUM client and expert remained in contact soon after the mission but have not met recently, and discussed the viability of digital products like virtual tours, but decided not to implement them.

**There also is no evidence (yet) that the PUM advice had sustainable indirect effects on other companies within the sector via horizontal or vertical spillovers.** The client mentioned occasional informal meetings with a group of 10 other tour operators where they discussed PUM broadly, but they did not yet discuss any of the specific advice to date. However, it is possible that there could be more knowledge sharing over time through this or similar fora, especially as tourism resumes. *Further analysis on sustainability to follow with comparison of programmatic approach cases in Mandalay.*

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<sup>87</sup> Client Website; <https://www.asiantour-myanmar.com>

<sup>88</sup> PUM Client Interview, Nov 2020.

## Efficiency

**Both Client and Expert considered the PUM mission efficient in that the PUM expert was able to work intensively with the Client as well as reach many of the Client's staff members simultaneously through hands-on advice.** The client expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the expert's time spent on the ground, which enabled them to identify the key issues, provide hands-on coaching, as well as lead team workshops with the entire staff.

**The efficiency of the mission was negatively impacted by the lack of involvement from the local representative.** The client noted that there was some miscommunication with the local representative during the early parts of the application that led to some confusion and delay. These communication problems were confirmed by the PUM expert, who said he was also initially unable to establish effective contact with the local representative, although he said he was able to manage well independently on the ground. The expert noted that the PUM local representative was not responsive to his emails and was unable to meet the expert except for a very hasty meeting before his departure.

**Additionality, efficiency could further be improved through structured follow-ups.** While the client suggested that a longer mission duration of up to a month, would have been preferable, the PUM expert advised that a more structured follow-up process including remote coaching could further improve the efficiency of the intervention. This would better assist smooth implementation of the knowledge transfer.

## Additionality

**While a few limited alternatives exist for different types of support, multiple sources confirmed the unique value provided by the PUM programme.**

- First, the hands-on approach by a visiting expert providing tailored strategic advice, along with connections and insights into the lucrative European tourist market were perceived as unique value offering of PUM. According to the client and the expert, this fills a niche relative to other international providers, who offer more generic sector wide expertise (e.g., CBI) or interns or students (e.g. AIESEC or other universities) who provide more tactical support like content writing.
- CBI's support was perceived as helpful, but it was seen as very distinct from the hands-on, tailored support provided by the PUM Expert onsite.
- Asian Tour also received support from AIESEC-Singapore which provided a college student for one month in October of 2019. AIESEC, an international student run organization, provides college students for 6-week – 6-month internships to support businesses around the world. This support was much more tactical than PUM, including IT support as well as content writing.

While some other options exist for technical assistance to tourism providers like Asian Tour, none provide the unique value of a senior expert providing tailored advice onsite to a specific organisation

**The client was aware of one local NGO providing support for tourism, the Myanmar Responsible Tourism Institute (MRTI), but they did not approach them for support.** According to an independent interview with the MRTI, they provide trainings, seminars, and

workshops solely on the topics of responsible and sustainable business, and do not provide any support on general business growth such as the marketing, communications, and team building topics during this mission. While there exist a few other options for business support in the tourism sector in Myanmar, none have been identified that provide tailored strategic expertise on a wide variety of business practices and issues.

**Taken everything together, many PUM expert as well as PUM clients believe that SEO is adding value.** A PUM client stated her high satisfaction with the PUM intervention remarking that small companies like hers cannot get such expertise otherwise. In her view, PUM is “a great fit for a small company.” According to MRTI, the rates they charge for consultancies (per day: US\$ 150- 350, local expert; US\$ 300 - 500, international expert) were only accessible to larger companies. According to a PUM Local Rep, there were no quality providers of tourism consulting in the local market; and that the fees charged by these providers are much higher than the value provided.

## Coherence

**The PUM Mission found significant complementarities working with CBI documents.** Asian Tour has been receiving CBI support since 2018 during a 4-year plan to continue through 2021 which includes remote coaching on a variety of subjects.<sup>89</sup> This included regular trainings in Yangon; according to the Client 5 – 6 trainings in 2019 were hosted lasting 2 to 4 days each of which she attended all. According to the client, it was CBI’s advice that she took to develop a new website. The PUM expert provided additional advice to improve the website that dovetailed with the original advice provided by CBI.

**A key focus of the PUM Mission was reviewing and advising on documents shared by CBI, according to the PUM Expert Report.** He wrote, “CBI sends a lot of information and manuals. The purpose is to prepare you by reading it all, but practice learns you also need support. It’s hard to read documents of 100+ pages and act on the information.” This included PUM reviews of a SWOT and Export Marketing Plan (EMP) plan as well as trade show contacts and preparation documents. According to the expert, this provided significant additional value, as the PUM expert could help interpret and tailor the advice given his expertise and understanding of the situation at the client.

**The PUM programme is distinct from the CBI initiative and there remains opportunities to further improve coherence.** The differences were distinct between the two initiatives. The client remarked on the tailored advice and the close relationship built with the PUM expert who focused “on our agency alone.” This was rather different than the paper reports and sector wide advice provided by CBI, which worked with 24 travel agencies simultaneously.<sup>90</sup> The PUM expert suggested that there could be more alignment and coherence between the two programmes if there were more direct communication or collaboration with CBI.

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<sup>89</sup> PUM Client Interview Nov 2020, PUM Expert Interview Nov 2020, PUM Client Report Feb 2020

<sup>90</sup> PUM Client Interview Nov 2020, PUM Client Report Feb 2020

## 4.5 Client 5: Shekinah and Htike Myat San Hotels (Pathein)

### Description client

**Shekinah and Htike Myat San are two hotels in the small town of Pathein, capital of the Ayerwaddy Region.** Htike Myat San opened in 2012 and caters to a budget clientele with a nightly rate of MMK 20,000 – 30,000 (US\$ 15 – 23). In 2018, Shekinah Hotel opened and caters to a more upscale clientele with rooms ranging from MMK 40,000 – 50,000 (US\$ 30 – 37).<sup>91</sup> The small Htike Myat San budget hotel has 26 rooms, 2 divisions (front office and housekeeping). The bigger luxury Shekinah hotel has 48 rooms, all regular hotel divisions. As of May 2019, Htike Myat San had 13 staff (full time equivalent, fte) while Shekinah had 54 fte.<sup>92</sup> As of December 2020, there was a significant reduction to a total 15 staff working full time across the two hotels due to the impact of the pandemic on tourism and business travel.<sup>93</sup>

**The majority (approximately 90 percent) of the customers at the two hotels were visitors from the capital Yangon who came by road.** Prior to the pandemic, the share of foreign customers was around 5 percent for Htike Myat San (mostly backpackers) and 15 percent for Shekinah (mostly international tourists, businesspeople, and expats from Yangon).<sup>94</sup>

### Description PUM support

**Two missions were conducted by the same PUM expert in May 2019 and in November 2019 to advise management and train staff in methods to increase occupancy and revenues.** The first mission in May 2019 focused on training staff particularly in customer service and English communication, and to advise management on marketing. The second mission, in November 2019, had a focus on selling and upselling by staff, online marketing as well as to continue staff training initiatives.<sup>95</sup> The PUM expert also provided advice on the introduction of environmentally friendly policies in both missions. As the smaller Htike Myat San had been in operation for 8 years (at the time of the PUM missions) and was running mostly smoothly, the main focus during the mission was on the bigger Shekinah hotel.

### Effectiveness

**The Client and Expert agreed that the PUM missions were highly effective in improving knowledge as well as key business practices.** There were significant examples of knowledge transfer that led directly to changes in business practices (see Table 14, such as upselling and cross-selling). Stakeholders provided a variety of examples of practices implemented following the PUM missions. The most important of these included staff training and changes in HR management including improving customer service, encouraging up-selling and cross-selling, as well as the introduction of job contracts and a Human Resources administrative position to manage the large team. In the second mission after a 6-month break, the PUM expert helped evaluate and sustain

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<sup>91</sup> PUM Client Interview Jan 2021

<sup>92</sup> PUM Client Report Nov 2019

<sup>93</sup> PUM Client Interview Jan 2021

<sup>94</sup> PUM Client Interview Jan 2021

<sup>95</sup> PUM Client Report Nov 2019, Client Interview Jan 2021

the previous measures in staff training. Across both missions, environmental sustainability was another topic that has had lasting effectiveness, with the client remarking a reduction in amenities cost of 5 percent by having trained staff on new measures such as recycling unused amenities and limiting the use of plastic bags.

**Table 14** The Expert provided recommendations in four areas:

Topics	Outputs and Recommendations
<b>Staff Training</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educating staff in customer service (e.g. proactive communication, starting with a smile, comfort with engaging with visitors)</li> <li>• Encouraging staff to upsell (e.g. upgrade rooms) and cross-sell (e.g. towards restaurant or pool bar)</li> <li>• Training staff in English language and communication</li> </ul>
<b>Staff Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hired a Human Resources admin to decrease staff turnover</li> <li>• Introduced job contracts with clear provisional period (3 month), incentives and bonuses</li> </ul>
<b>Online Marketing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved web presence on Facebook, TripAdvisor, and Booking.com including new photos and customer reviews</li> <li>• Introduced price discounts for low season</li> </ul>
<b>Environmental Sustainability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced amenities cost by 5%, by reusing unused amenities, using fewer plastic bags, etc.</li> </ul>

Source: SEO Amsterdam Economics based on PUM Client Interview Dec 2020, PUM Expert Report

**Another clear direct effect on business practices was that, following PUM’s advisory missions, the client improved its presence on key sites such as Facebook, TripAdvisor, and Booking.com.** The PUM expert advised to proactively build or manage these pages, add and improve photographs, and ask customers for reviews. One indication that this was a direct effect of PUM’s advice is that all of Shekinah hotel’s TripAdvisor reviews were posted since the first PUM mission in May 2019. Furthermore, Shekinah hotel had a 5-star rating (highest possible) and was ranked #2 across all hotels in Pathein as of January 2021.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, all of Shekinah hotel’s reviews from Booking.com were posted later than May 2019 as well. As of January 2021, Shekinah had received an average score of 8.2 (very good) and was featured on the site as one its top picks.<sup>97</sup>

**With regard to direct effects on business performance, there are indications that revenues and profits improved following the mission.** According to the client, Shekinah hotel’s (pre-COVID) occupancy and profitability increased notably following the mission as a result of the changes brought in by the mission. While Shekinah hotel’s occupancy was averaging 55 percent in 2018 and early 2019; between August 2019 and February 2020 the occupancy reached an average of 70 percent.<sup>98</sup> In a similar time period, profits by increased 16 percent.<sup>99</sup> According to the client, these increases were due to the PUM mission, particularly an increase in repeat customers resulting from improved customer service. “As the customer service has become stable, long-term staff remember customers’ preferences, so the customers are happy to return again.” However, it was

<sup>96</sup> Trip Advisor, Shekinah Hotel. [https://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotel\\_Review-g674636-d16706175-Reviews-or5-Shekinah\\_Hotel-Pathein\\_Ayeyarwady\\_Region.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotel_Review-g674636-d16706175-Reviews-or5-Shekinah_Hotel-Pathein_Ayeyarwady_Region.html)

<sup>97</sup> Booking.com, Shekinah Hotel. <https://www.booking.com/searchresults.en-gb.html?si=ai%2Cco%2Cci%2Cre%2Cdi;ss=pathein;label=opensearch-plugin>

<sup>98</sup> PUM Client Interview Jan 2021. These numbers do not appear to be corrected for seasonal effects.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

not possible to verify the potential impact of other causes (e.g. an overall rise in Patheingyi tourism in 2019) in contributing to this.

**Another key direct effect was a decrease in staff turnover.** Although this was not an area specifically requested for support, the PUM expert identified high staff turnover as a problem, as the hotels appeared to have lost 3-5 staff members monthly. Following the PUM expert's advice, the hotels introduced job contracts and clearly explained roles and responsibilities as well as clear incentives (salary, leaves) and 3-month probationary periods. An HR admin was hired to manage the human resources of the large team and improve clarity and communication across the team. According to the client, this led to a significant reduction in staff turnover, from 3-5 per month to 1-2 every two months (following the PUM mission and through April 2020).<sup>100</sup>

## Sustainability

**While the client reported a significant increase in the hotels' occupancy and profitability following the changes made after the PUM Mission, the long-term sustainability of these changes is unclear.** On the one hand, the potential sustainability was high given that practices and new policies had been implemented, and new (HR) staff had been hired. On the other hand, COVID-19 had a negative impact on performance. Although Shekinah hotel's occupancy increased from 55 percent to 70 percent for a 6-month period following the PUM missions, occupancy had dipped to 12 percent as of January 2021.<sup>101</sup> According to the client, revenues for Shekinah hotel fell by 70 percent between March 2020 and January 2021, and the hotel had not made any profits. Although this means they have not earned any profits in the last 10 months, their revenues were still sufficient to cover most operating costs, in part because, since mid-September 2020, Htike Myat San had been operating as one of Patheingyi's 5 quarantine hotels, averaging 70 percent occupancy with similar occupancy and revenues to previous years. However, there are substantial uncertainties regarding the further development of COVID-19, changes in COVID policies, and what impact the military coup will have on the tourism to Patheingyi. However, given that the vast majority of the Htike Myat San (95 percent) and Shekinah's Hotel (85 percent) customers are from Myanmar, the reputational impact of the coup to international tourism may impact these hotels less.

**The follow-up mission in November 2019 was effective in that it improved the sustainability of the first mission, by ensuring that key changes had been properly implemented and offering additional support.** After the first mission in May 2019, the PUM expert revisited during a follow-up mission in November 2019. During this second mission, the expert continued the staff training in customer service and English language skills. According to the client, this helped to ensure the long-term sustainability of the changes as the staff were able to improve their confidence and consistency in the skills trained. Improvements in online marketing were also reviewed and implemented. For example, the expert noted in the follow-up mission report that professional replies to TripAdvisor reviews had been implemented, and that the client was able to provide new advice to improve their online presence such as adding a TripAdvisor logo to the front desk to remind customers of reviews. According to the expert, there was potential for a third follow-up mission following the loosening of travel restrictions. However, it is as of yet

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<sup>100</sup> PUM Client Interview Jan 2021.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

unclear whether Myanmar will retain its status of focus country for PUM, given the recent political developments.

**There is no evidence (yet) that the PUM advice had sustainable indirect effects on other stakeholders within the sector via horizontal or vertical spillovers.** The client mentioned sharing some ideas with other hotel owners in Patheingyi but suggested that many of them were hesitant to invest financially in new changes. The PUM expert suggested that there could be horizontal spillovers as hotel staff could bring their learnings to other businesses, although there is no direct evidence of this to date.

## Efficiency

**Both Client and Expert considered the PUM mission efficient in that the PUM expert was able to work intensively with the Client, identifying key issues on the ground, as well as being able to train the Client's staff members directly.** The client expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the expert's time spent on the ground, which enabled them to identify the key issues and provide hands-on coaching across the team. For example, it is unlikely that training a large team of staff in customer service or English communication would have been as effective using purely remote means. Similarly, being on the ground and interacting with staff directly, the PUM expert was able to identify novel issues not initially discussed like high staff turnover, which they were able to address with measures such as job contracts and the introduction of HR administrative staff.

**While there were additional costs for the follow-up mission, it was considered a worthwhile investment from both the client and the PUM expert.** Many business improvements introduced during the first PUM mission were reviewed to ensure proper implementation such as ongoing staff training and management. Both client and PUM expert were considering a potential but rather tentative third follow-up mission later in 2021 or 2022.

## Relevance

**The mission addressed some of the most relevant issues for hotels in Patheingyi such as customer service and online marketing.** As discussed above, these appear to have meaningful changes in business metrics like occupancy and profitability as confirmed by the client (although strict causality is difficult to prove conclusively).

**However, other major issues were not addressed by PUM:**

- English language skills

A major issue identified by the PUM expert was the poor English language skills of the hotel staff. While she was able to address it in a limited way during her missions through personal trainings, and suggested other opportunities for follow-ups (e.g. hotel-specific conversation trainings), it was an important bottleneck outside of the purview of PUM missions.

- Access to finance

According to the client and the PUM expert report, access to finance was a significant barrier to developing the business including "A substantial loan from the bank ... with an interest rate

of 13 percent [among] loans from family and friends, against an interest of 18 percent.”<sup>102</sup> When asked, the client mentioned that the biggest unmet need was access to finance and would have preferred more support, direct or indirect in accessing affordable finance options for their business.<sup>103</sup> According to the PUM Local Representative in Pathein, some of the other INGOs do provide financial support.

**The client also faces city or sector wide bottlenecks that are difficult to address through standalone cases.** According to the PUM Local Representative, Pathein is not perceived as having much to offer for domestic tourists outside of shopping of local crafts and souvenirs (e.g. umbrellas and sweets), and as such is only regularly visited by domestic tourists en route to the Ngwe Saung or Chaung Thar beaches on the Ayerwaddy coast. Tourism education opportunities are limited for prospective employees in and around Pathein. The Myanmar tourism sector has not yet rebounded to its 2015 peak<sup>104</sup> which suffered a sharp drop following the Rakhine conflict and its associated negative international attention. International tourism to Myanmar in 2019 had not yet reached its 2015 peak, even prior to the travel lockdowns of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Multiple stakeholders including the local representative and sector experts also state that the Myanmar government’s disinterest in tourism since 2015 also limited the growth in the sector.

## Additionality and Coherence

**Additionality of PUM relative to the local market seems highly complementary as although there are a few limited options, the support provided was distinct.** According to the PUM Local Representative, there are no organisations based in Pathein that provide support to SMEs. This generally requires SMEs to visit Yangon themselves to access direct support or through remote workshops. The client did work regularly with a private sector consultant from Yangon during the setting up of the Shekinah hotel. They worked with this paid consultant from one year prior to the opening of the hotel and paid for 3 modules: property advice, management, and staff training at a cost of MMK 5,000,000 (approx. US\$ 3,750) each. This support was perceived as complementary to the PUM advice as the client was happy to work with both the paid consultant for local expertise and the PUM expert for foreign experience and international ideas. Therefore, it did not seem that the PUM programme was cannibalizing on local paid support options.

**Additionality relative to other development organisations is high as only a few organisations have provide any support in Pathein.** Some alternatives do exist for different types of support including INGOs like Swiss Contact and ILO, or a private sector consultant from Yangon. The client was planning on participating in Swiss Contact’s planned staff trainings in Pathein for 4 months from February 2021, while ILO provides remote trainings on COVID-19 safety protocols.

**While a few limited alternatives exist for different types of support, multiple sources confirmed the unique value provided by the PUM programme.**

- First, the hands-on approach by a visiting expert providing tailored strategic advice with international expertise was perceived as unique value offering of PUM. The PUM expert was

<sup>102</sup> PUM Expert Report Nov 2019.

<sup>103</sup> PUM Client Interview Jan 2021

<sup>104</sup> Myanmar Ministry of Hotels & Tourism, <https://tourism.gov.mm/statistics/>

perceived as an ‘expert’ with significant expertise including in international best practices, which was a unique offering over the junior trainer from Swiss contact with only local experience.

- The PUM local representative argued that PUM’s long term presence over many years to develop SMEs provides unique value over the fixed terms of other international donors who are only actively present during a specified project time frame (e.g. 18 months).

**Pathein’s small size suggests that there were few opportunities for coherence with other Dutch PSD projects.** One such project was identified by the PUM local representative, as VNG International has a waste and water management project for the period 2019-2021. However, there is not much collaboration between VNG and PUM. Although the PUM local representative has attempted to cooperate with them, his perception was that the city development corporation that manages the project was not interested in a PUM expert (although not confirmed independently).