

Minutes of the 4th Steering Committee Meeting of MuEuCAP
23 September, 2020 Virtual Meeting coordinated by
University of Natural Resources and Natural Sciences (BOKU), Vienna

Present (virtually):

Dr Marcela Suarez-Rubio, Project Coordinator, University of Natural Resources and Natural Sciences, Austria
Prof Dr Ni Ni Oo, Rector, Myeik University, Myanmar
Prof Dr Mie Mie Sein, Pro-Rector, Mawlamyine University, Myanmar
Prof Dr Kaythi Tin, Pro-Rector, University of Mandalay, Myanmar
Dr Thein Aung, Chairman, MBNS (Myanmar Bird and Nature Society)
Assoc Prof Dr Alfonso Marzal Reynolds, University of Extremadura, Spain
Dr Lutz Fehrmann (representing Prof. Christoph Kleinn), University of Göttingen, Germany
Dr Swen Renner, Curator of Birds, Natural History Museum Vienna, Austria
Dr Paul Bates, Project Manager, University of Natural Resources and Natural Sciences, Austria
Dr Sai Sin Lin Oo, National Project Coordinator, University of Mandalay
Daw Saw Myat Ohnmar, Project Outreach Officer, Myeik University

Temporary associate members of the Steering Committee:

Prof Dr Thant Zin, Head of Zoology, University of Mandalay, Myanmar
Dr San San Aye, University of Mandalay, Myanmar

Absent/Regrets: Prof. Christoph Kleinn, University of Göttingen, Germany

Item 1: Call to order/Opening Remarks: At 09.30 hours, Dr Marcela Suarez-Rubio (BOKU), the Chairperson and project Co-ordinator opened the meeting. She introduced Prof Kaythi Tin (Mandalay) who is newly appointed to the Steering Committee. Dr Marcela (BOKU) outlined the different roles of the various members.

Item 2: EU's extension of the MuEuCAP's project - Dr Marcela (BOKU) informed the Committee that because of the Covid situation, the EU has granted a 12 month extension to all Erasmus+ projects. Therefore, the MuEuCAP project, which was originally scheduled to complete by 14th October 2020, has the option to extend to 14th October 2021. Dr Marcela pointed out that currently it is difficult to determine the programme for next year.

Item 3: Budget amendment – Dr Marcela (BOKU) informed the Committee that the EU secretariat has orally improved proposed changes to the MuEuCAP budget, but a final confirmation letter is still awaited. These changes primarily involve moving money from travel to staff costs. Dr Marcela (BOKU) thanked the Myanmar partners for submitting their financial reports. She explained that she is currently checking through all the administration, including timesheets and joint declarations to ensure that all staff costs are correctly claimed.

Action Point 1:

- **Dr Lutz Fehrmann** (UGOE) and **Dr Alfonso Marzal Reynolds** (UEx) need to submit original documents (timesheets and joint declarations) to Dr Marcela (BOKU) that include the university stamp and the signature from the relevant person.

Action Point 2:

- **Dr Marcela** (BOKU) will inform each university/MBNS:
 - how much money has been claimed in travel, cost of stay, and staff costs
 - how much money is remaining in the respective university budgets (once she has compared the claims with the financial reports).

In answer to a question from Dr Alfonso (UEX), Dr Marcela (BOKU) informed the Committee that, for the sake of the auditing procedure, she prefers original signatures and stamps to electronic versions.

Item 4: Resumption of activities in Myanmar – Dr Marcela (BOKU) asked each university representative the status of their universities and countries in respect to covid. The answers were as follows:

- Dr Marcela (BOKU) – noted that Austria is currently undergoing a second wave of infections; university staff need permission from the university Directorate to travel; need a covid test to travel (even to Germany); Myanmar is currently listed as a ‘yellow’ colour in terms of risk destinations for covid infection.
- Dr Lutz (UGOE) suggested that the system in Germany was similar to Austria and it would be very difficult currently to travel to Myanmar
- Dr Alfonso (UEX) explained that the system in Spain was the same as Austria and Germany with a sharp spike in cases recently during a second wave.
- Dr Paul Bates (BOKU) informed the Committee that currently a special visa is needed to visit Myanmar from the UK and this can only be issued at the Myanmar’s Ambassador’s discretion
- Prof Dr Ni Ni Oo (Myeik) noted that there has been a recent rapid rise in infection cases in Myanmar and that university staff are not allowed to travel. It is not possible for foreigners to travel to Myanmar. Currently, Myeik University is closed, with no taught courses since March. There are no students at the university, and staff attendance is carefully regulated. Dr Ni Ni Oo suggested that it may be possible to restart the universities next year, at the earliest.
 - A short discussion about online learning was initiated by Dr Lutz (UGOE), who noted that online courses were working well in Germany. Daw Saw Myat Ohnmar (Myeik) noted that lack of access to computers and good wifi was a problem for many Myanmar students and some staff. Dr Sai Sein Lin Oo (In-country Coordinator) explained that the Ministry of Education was requesting help with this matter from the EU.
- Prof Dr Mie Mie Sein (Mawlamyine) confirmed that Mawlamyine University is closed and that Mawlamyine is a high-risk area for covid.
- Prof Dr Kaythi Tin and Prof Dr Thant Zin (Mandalay) confirmed that the University of Mandalay is closed, but they are trying to prepare for online learning.

Item 5: Training workshops online – Dr Marcela (BOKU) invited the Committee to think about alternatives to conventional workshops in Myanmar, most particularly focusing on online teaching and training. She noted that some of the outstanding workshops, which are still required for the project, could be delivered online.

Action Point 3: Test the feasibility in terms of European staff commitments and Myanmar online provision and Myanmar staff and student availability, to deliver the following workshops online:

- Protected areas management (led by **Dr Swen Renner**, NHM, Vienna)

- Writing an abstract
- Writing/designing a poster and an oral presentation
- Didactics (in Myeik and Mawlamyine Universities)
- Scientific English (in Myeik and Mawlamyine Universities) (led by **Dr Paul**, BOKU).

Dr Marcela (BOKU) noted that Myanmar staff who visited Europe for training in January/February 2020 as part of WP3 (the Practical Testing of the Curriculum), need to write, present, and be evaluated on their teaching skills.

Action Point 4:

- Myanmar staff (**Prof Aye Aye Myint, Dr Aye Khet Soe, Dr Naw Zar Chi Linn**) who received training in 'Scientific writing (BioCEP-622)' at BOKU to prepare online presentations, with advice from **Dr Marcela** (BOKU), via a dedicated Zoom meeting(s)
- Myanmar staff (**Dr Aung Myo San, Dr Htet Htet Lin, Dr Sabae Oo**) who received training in 'Ecology, biodiversity and conservation biology (BioCEP-621)' at UEx to prepare online presentations, with advice from **Dr Alfonso** (UEx), via a dedicated Zoom meeting(s).

In addition, those Myanmar staff that attended training visits to Europe in November 2019, and who previously presented on their subjects as part of the March 2020 workshop in Myeik, need to present again but this time, online, taking into account feedback. This would be part of WP 4 (Realisation of the curriculum).

Action Point 5:

- Myanmar staff (**Dr Zin Lin Khine, Dr Khin Swe Oo, Dr Nay Myo Hlaing**) who received training in 'Statistical methods for environmental protection (BioCEP-621)' at BOKU to prepare online presentations, with advice from **Dr Marcela** (BOKU), via a dedicated Zoom meeting(s)
- Myanmar staff (**Prof Soe Soe Aung, Dr Kyu Kyu Mar, Dr Aung Aung Aye**) who received training in 'Methods in Biodiversity Conservation and Environmental Protection (BioCEP-614)' at UGOE to prepare online presentations, with advice from **Dr Lutz** (UGOE), via a dedicated Zoom meeting(s).

Item 6: Dissemination event – Dr Marcela (BOKU) noted that originally the dissemination event had been scheduled to last two days and was designed like a conference, with one key-note speaker and with staff and students to present their work. She asked the committee how feasible it might be to undertake these activities online. The online version could include presentations by all staff who went to an EU university for training and an opportunity for those NGOs that hosted internships to present about their work.

Action point 6:

- Look at the feasibility and most suitable platform (Zoom?) for hosting an online event.

Meanwhile, Dr Lutz (UGOE) suggested that the current situation is a big opportunity to embrace the future and switch to online teaching and learn online methods. Dr Alfonso (UEx) added that in view of possible overloading the internet at peak times, it is also important to learn how to record presentations so that they can be watched by students anytime, anywhere. Daw Ohnmar (Myeik) suggested that although access to technology was difficult for undergraduates, it was quite feasible for staff and postgraduate students, especially as the number of individuals was limited. She noted

that Dr Sai (In-country coordinator) and herself could act as translators. Dr Sai agreed with Daw Ohnmar and suggested that 70-80% of Myanmar staff were familiar with online teaching.

In addition to the dissemination event, Dr Marcela (BOKU) suggested that it would be good to convert to online one or two units of the curriculum and make a call for students and staff to participate these online workshops to join this practical testing/realisation of the curriculum (see also Action Point 5 above). Dr Sai (In-country coordinator) noted that Myanmar staff and students might need support from their universities to purchase data packages for their mobile phones. Dr Marcela (BOKU) agreed.

Action point 7:

- Prepare a pilot study and agree a platform (e.g. Zoom) for a virtual online realisation of the curriculum.

Item 7: Purchase of Equipment – Dr Marcela (BOKU) asked the Myanmar universities about the status of their equipment purchases.

- Daw Ohnmar (Myeik) noted that they had bought most the items but that many were more expensive than the original budget (e.g. books) and that others were not available. However, she said that for some items the numbers had been decreased to help balance the budget.
- Prof Dr Mie Mie Sein (Mawlamyine) suggested that Mawlamyine had so far bought 35% of equipment but that some, such as the binocular microscope with camera attached, were very expensive. She noted that the covid situation had made it difficult to buy some of the items.
- Prof Dr Thant Zin (Mandalay) suggested that Mandalay had bought some 20% of equipment.

Dr Marcela (BOKU) noted that:

- the equipment budget could only be exceeded by 10%
- the books were important and should be bought despite the increase in prices as they are important for teachers
- it was possible to change the specification of an item, if the original brand was not available or currently too expensive
- no new items could be added to the approved list.

Action Point 7:

Dr Marcela (BOKU) asked all universities (**Daw Ohnmar** (Myeik), **Dr Thant Zin** (Mandalay) and **Dr Mie Mie Sein** (Mawlamyine)) to ensure that:

- A sticker including MuEuCAP/EU logos were attached to each item of equipment/book
- The item was added to the university equipment inventory

Action Point 8: Dr Marcela requested **Daw Ohnmar** (Myeik), **Dr Thant Zin** (Mandalay) and **Dr Mie Mie Sein** (Mawlamyine) to send by Wednesday 30 September 2020:

- A pdf of all receipts (keep originals in Myanmar until next workshop)
- Evidence of the purchase, including a photo of the item/book with its logo sticker affixed
- Evidence of the item listed in the inventory
- A list that includes what equipment has
 - already been bought and is available in the university (with prices)
 - been ordered but not yet delivered (with prices)

- not yet ordered (estimated prices).

Item 8: Final suggestions and questions –

Action Point 9:

Dr Lutz (UGOE) and Dr Alfonso (UEx) agreed to share:

- good examples of online teaching
- materials on how to prepare good online teaching materials

Dr Paul (BOKU) agreed to share information of how to use extra features of Powerpoint.

Dr Marcela (BOKU) asked Dr Thant Zin (Mandalay) about progress of the BioCEP curriculum with the Board of Studies and the possible impact of the upcoming autonomy of the University of Mandalay. Dr Thant stated that currently there are no BoS meetings and the autonomy was ongoing.

Dr Marcela (BOKU) reminded all committee members of the need to fulfil the relevant action points relating to equipment lists, online courses, and the budget. She thanked everyone for their participation in the very productive meeting.

There being no other topics for discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 11.00 am.