

Benjamin Jungblut

Shortly after my arrival in the Gulf of Mottama, I realised the complexity of the issues at hand in the project area. The great ambition of the project to combine aspects of environmental, economic and social development tied in excellently with my studies of Sustainable Development that I started after finishing my degree at HAFL. Understanding the volatility of the encompassing ecosystem and the multitude of factors and actors influencing the everyday life of the local people was a striking contrast to the protected bubble of life in Switzerland. The sheer force of the tides, the unpredictability of the weather coupled with institutional and infrastructural limitations make for an extremely rough and challenging environment, even without the looming threat of severe poverty. Experiencing this hardship firsthand, and seeing how friendly and hospitable people were, was a very humbling experience.

More challenges became apparent during the planning and implementation of my research. Language barriers complicated the planning of the trials and the participation of the farmers. Furthermore, it was necessary to transform the local form of imperial measurement to SI units. This was coupled with a severe flood and high pest pressure that destroyed a large part of the crops. As frustrating as this was from a research perspective, it was representative of the issues the local farmers deal with in their decision-making. This process was a valuable experience that highlighted the difficulties of sound research design and brought into sharp relief the influence complex and volatile contexts have on the significance and reliability of collected data.

My biggest challenge personally was communication. I soon realised that I would not be able to go beyond very simple statements in the local language, and my interns spoke only very basic English. As I am communicative and usually use my eloquence to elaborate my thinking I had to find different, simpler means of connecting to the interns from YAU and learning from them about the country and their agriculture while trying to transmit some of my knowledge on research. Something that persisted throughout the time of my stay was the kindness of people and their willingness to help however they could despite limited means of communication. I was quickly incorporated into the project team and got interesting insights into the functioning of a development project. This culminated in what was my personal highlight of my contribution to the GoMP.

Towards the end of my stay I was able to participate in the planning workshop for the second phase of the project. Representatives from all the organisations involved as well as local and national stakeholders met to discuss the project's achievements so far and shape its future form. It was intense and fascinating to see the process through which the farmers' and fishers' need were to be translated into policies that would respect the national rules and regulations while reflecting the frameworks of implementers and donors. This event gave me a new perspective on the immense planning required to successfully achieve a project's goals. I look back very fondly at my time in Myanmar as it enabled me to take a glimpse behind the curtains of development and understand its challenges and limitations through applied research and personal experience. I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this collaborative project and would be happy to work with any of the partner organisations in the future.



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