

EVALUATION DEPARTMENT

REPORT 10/2017 COUNTRY EVALUATION BRIEF



Myanmar



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The purpose of this **Country Evaluation Brief** is to present relevant knowledge about donors' development efforts in Myanmar. The brief systematises relevant findings from existing evaluations of development interventions in the country. The idea is to present the findings to the reader in a succinct and easily accessible format.

Readers who want to explore key issues in depth can access the underlying reports through the reference list. At our website, you can also find a set of short “Evaluation Portraits” summarising the key contents of those documents.

The Country Evaluation Brief was researched and produced by Particip GmbH in consortium with Menon Economics.

Oslo, December 2017
Per Øyvind Bastøe, Evaluation Director

Farm workers harvest rice in a paddy field on the outskirts of Naypyitaw, May 2017. PHOTO: HEIN HTEET / EPA

Main findings

MYANMAR IS UNDERGOING a major political, economic and social transformation, accompanied by the opening up to foreign investment and overseas development assistance (ODA) following decades of economic sanctions. The change process is fraught with risks and challenges that call for sustained commitment to democratisation and peace. A point in case is the fresh outbreak of violence against the Rohingya minority.

MYANMAR HAS PURSUED wide-ranging macro-economic reforms facilitated by loans provided by international finance institutions. Since 2013, the macro-economic situation has improved significantly, but a deepening of reforms is needed to consolidate early gains achieved.

MULTI-DONOR PROGRAMME funding has contributed to expanding basic social service delivery, including in the health and education sectors. However, the programmes have not been sufficiently targeting vulnerable populations or conceived to measure impact.

THE EVIDENCE BASE on the effects of ODA on environmental protection and resilience to natural disasters and climate change is limited. Existing evaluations highlight contributions of development projects to policies and laws, but that the government needs more capacity and resources to ensure their effective implementation.

THE POLITICAL REFORM process has opened up the space for donors and international agencies to provide support related to governance and human rights to state institutions, civil society, and the private sector. More strategic interventions are required for this support to enhance accountability, transparency and effectiveness.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE has been provided to local communities in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis in 2008, and to refugees in camps along the Thai-Myanmar border, among other areas. The support has contributed to improved service delivery and greater community resilience in targeted locations.

THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT SHORTCOMINGS in terms of the integration of cross-cutting issues in development interventions and the attention given to these issues in evaluations. Gender equality is the most commonly identified cross-cutting issue, but is often not addressed in a conscious and meaningful manner.

MYANMAR

Estimated population: 56,890,418
(CIA 2017; 2016 est.)

Population under the age of 15: 25.77%
(CIA 2017; 2016 est.)

Urban population: 34.1% (CIA 2017; 2015 data)

Annual urbanisation rate (average rate of change of the size of the urban population): 2.49%
(CIA 2017; 2010-15 est.)

Human Development Index (HDI): 145 (of 188)
(UNDP 2017b; 2015 data)

Gender Inequality Index (GII): 80 (of 159)
(UNDP 2017b; 2015 data)

Poverty Rate (below \$ 1.90 per day): 6.5% (World Bank 2017; 2015 data)

Adult literacy rate: 93.1% (UNDP 2017b; 2015 data)

Life expectancy at birth (male/female):
66 (64/68) (World Bank 2017a; 2015 data)

Child mortality rate (under 5, per 1000 live births):
50.0 (World Bank 2017a; 2015 data)

Net ODA received (% of GNI): 2.0% (World Bank 2017a; 2015 data)

Corruption Perception Index rank: 136 (of 176)
(Transparency International 2017; 2016 data)

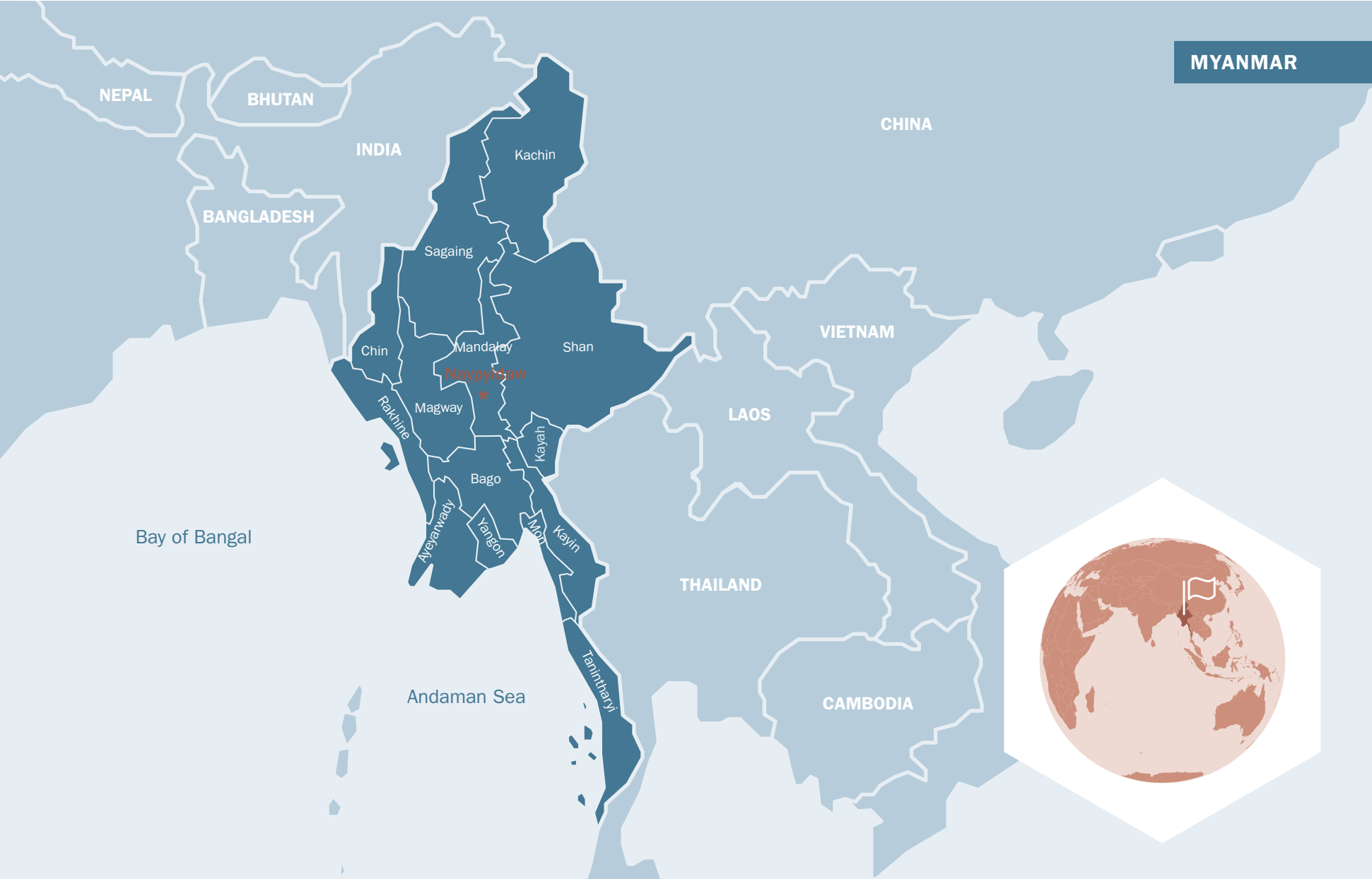
Internally Displaced Persons (new displacements in 2016 due to disasters): 509,000 (IDMC 2017; 2016 data)

Mean years of schooling: 4.7 (UNDP 2017b; 2015 data)

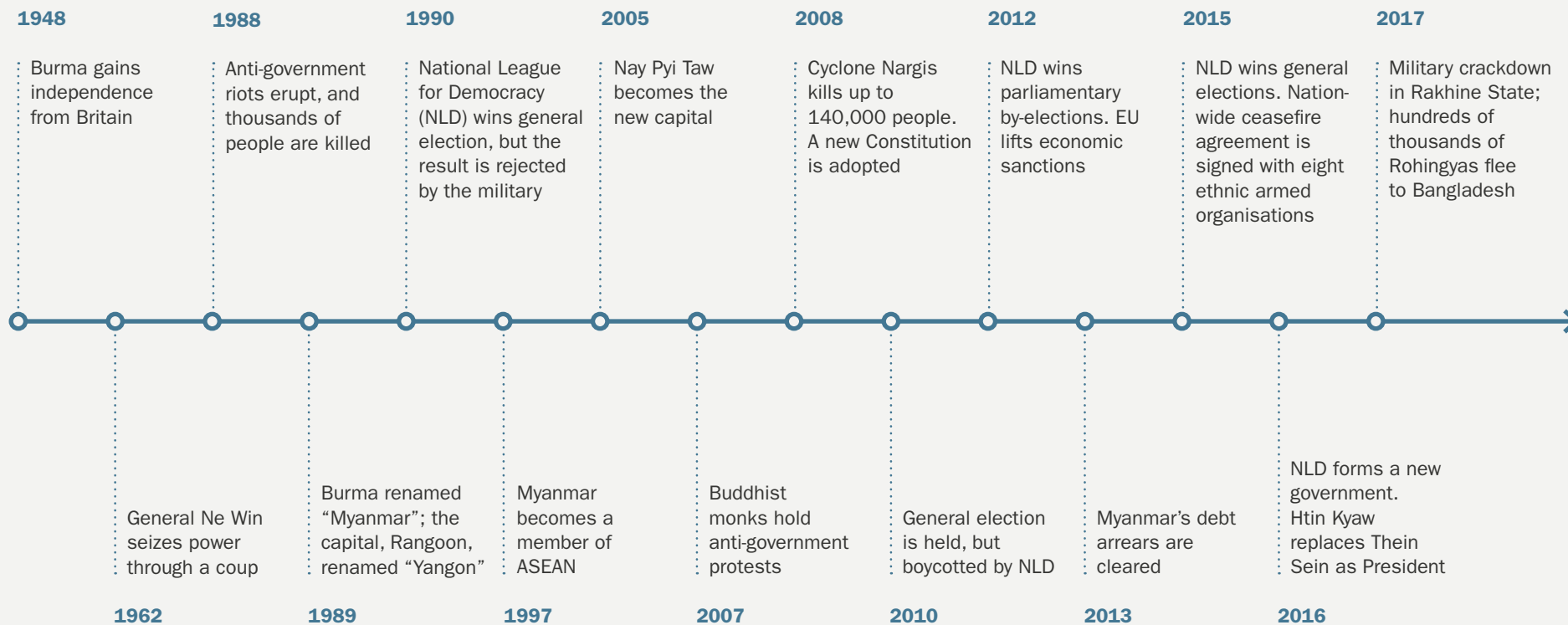
Gross National Income (GNI) per capita, PPP (current international \$): 5,070 (World Bank 2017a; 2015 data)



Family on a boat in an agricultural area. PHOTO: CURT CARNEMARK / SAMFOTO



TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS



1. Introduction

Recent reforms have broken Myanmar's isolation to the outside world and in few years made the country a major recipient of development assistance. This Country Evaluation Brief highlights some of the results and lessons learnt emerging from a growing but still relatively limited body of evaluations.



PHOTO: KEN OPPRANN

Myanmar is emerging from half a century of military rule, civil war and isolation from the international community. Since 2011, the country has embarked on a wide-ranging and challenging economic and political transition and a national peace process. These transitions are coinciding with the opening up of the country to the outside world, bringing vast amounts of foreign investment and international aid.

The challenges facing Myanmar are formidable. As one of the poorest and least developed countries in Asia, it suffers from significant deficits and disparities in infrastructure, social service delivery and environmental degradation. In addition, the human rights situation is again worsening with the recent increase in violence against the Rohingya minority, resulting in a mass exodus and condemnation by the international community.



Young vendor with his mobile street kitchen. PHOTO: KEN OPPRANN

2. Methodology

The assessment is based on 25 evaluations of major donor-funded programmes since 2010, which were identified through a rigorous search. To mitigate limitations of the sample's thematic coverage, the findings also draw on relevant global indices, surveys, policy papers, academic literature, and government strategies and plans.



Aerial view of Yangon. PHOTO: ESPEN RØST / BISTANDSAKTUELT

The evaluations reviewed for this Brief were identified through a systematic search of global development co-operation databases (e.g. the OECD/DAC Evaluation Resource Centre database) and report databases of individual multilateral and bilateral aid organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

A sample of 50 evaluations, subsequently narrowed down to 25, was arrived at with the help of certain selection criteria. The selection was made to ensure that: a) the main sectors and areas for development co-operation are covered; b) a good balance between different sources and channels of overseas development assistance (ODA) exists; c) the evaluations are of a high scientific quality.

A large majority of the evaluations in the final sample were published following the dramatic transformation of Myanmar, starting in 2011. Most of the evaluations are forward-looking and of a higher-level systematic (programme) nature, although a number of project evaluations are also included.

While the above-mentioned approach resulted in a balanced sample, the fact that the CEBs are, by definition, based on evaluations comprises a certain limitation, as the available reports do not always cover all crucial areas



PHOTO: KEN OPPRANN

of development co-operation and development challenges. It should be emphasised that large-scale development co-operation with Myanmar is very recent. Prior to 2012, due to economic sanctions imposed by the international community, ODA was heavily constrained in terms of volume and scope. Most development interventions are, therefore, in their early phases and remain to be evaluated.

Furthermore, although many donors and implementing agencies publish the evaluations of their programmes and projects, not all potentially interesting reports are in the public domain. Although an extensive search has been carried out, the number of evaluations identified, and from which the sample could be selected, has therefore been limited, with some sectors and areas possibly being under-represented. To mitigate these limitations, the



PHOTO: KEN OPPRANN

CEB – in addition to the 25 evaluations – also draws upon a range of global indices, surveys, policy papers, academic literature, and government strategies and plans.

3. Country context

Myanmar's political, economic and social transformation has contributed to advancing democracy, peace and growth but the change process is fraught with challenges that call for sustained commitment and strong leadership. The new government's failure to deal with the Rohingya crisis puts initial gains at risk.



By mid-november 2017, more than 615 000 Rohingya refugees had fled from Rakhine since August 25 2017, most trying to cross the border into Bangladesh. PHOTO: KM ASAD / ZUMA PRESS


The political transition taking place in Myanmar in recent years has contributed to advancing democracy and human rights. This development is unprecedented in the country's modern history. Following the adoption of a new Constitution in 2008, the first general election in 20 years was held in 2010. While the election was boycotted by the opposition, it opened the way for a new nominally civilian government, the release of political prisoners, expanded media freedoms, legislative reforms, and a more enabling environment for civil society organisations (CSOs). The real watershed was the 2015 election at which the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won enough parliamentary seats to form a government. However, the military is still guaranteed a quarter of the seats in Parliament, and retains control of key ministries.

The economic transition has included a shift from state-dominated socialism to a market economy. This process had already begun in the 1990s, but has accelerated as a result of economic reforms in recent years and the lifting of economic sanctions by the international community. Since 2012, economic growth has averaged 7 per cent per annum (ADB 2017). The key drivers have been the strong performance of the manufacturing, construction

and services sectors and, in particular, the export of natural gas. Agricultural productivity remains low, however, which is significant as this sector accounts for 29 per cent of GDP and generates more than half of the country's employment (World Bank 2017b).

Continued economic and political reforms are closely interlinked to, and dependent on, the country's ability to end armed conflicts in border areas. Decades of fighting between ethnic armed groups and the government has acted as a drag on development in already poor ethnic minority areas. It has also resulted in large numbers of casualties, human rights abuses, internally displaced people, as well as refugees. In recent years, a number of bilateral ceasefire agreements have been signed and, in 2015, a nationwide ceasefire agreement was concluded and a framework for political dialogue put in place. However, only eight of the 16 main ethnic armed groups have signed the agreement, and fighting continues to erupt in the north and east of the country. Recent peace talks have ended with an agreement on the "principle" of making Myanmar a federal state, but scepticism remains about the political will to see this process through (ISDP 2015).

The situation is compounded by racist and xenophobic undercurrents, which are mainly

Continued economic and political reforms are closely interlinked to, and dependent on, the country's ability to end armed conflicts in border areas. 

directed at the Muslim Rohingya minority in Rakhine state, on the country's western coast. Often referred to as the world's most persecuted people, the Rohingyas are denied citizenship and live under stringent restrictions. Following an insurgent attack on government forces in August 2017, the Myanmar government launched a "clearance operation" that has caused hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas to flee to Bangladesh and has left tens of thousands more displaced inside Rakhine (UN News Centre 2017).

Despite economic growth and development, Myanmar remains a Least Developed Country. As of 2010, absolute poverty was estimated to range between 26 per cent and 38 per cent (World Bank 2015:13). Most poor people, many of them smallholder farmers or agricultural labourers, live in rural areas and face multiple

challenges. These include limited access to land, capital, credit, technology, information, and basic social services. Myanmar has the lowest life expectancy and the second-highest rate of infant and child mortality among ASEAN countries. About one-third of the population has access to the electricity grid. However, mobile phone and internet penetration rates have increased significantly, to 60 per cent and 23 per cent respectively (World Bank 2017c).

As reflected by UNDP's Gender Inequality Index, gender equality in Myanmar is relatively high in a comparative perspective. The country is ranked 80 out of 159 countries on this composite indicator, which is significantly higher than most other countries in the medium human development category (UNDP 2017b: 216). At the same time, Myanmar's women continue to be under-represented in the labour market and political institutions (ADB 2016c: xviii & IPU 2017). Sexual and gender-based violence is a major concern, especially in conflict-affected areas.

Economic growth has come at the cost of increasing environmental degradation. Myanmar has abundant natural resources, including arable land, forests, minerals, natural gas, and freshwater and marine resources. These resources have come under increasing threat



Cyclon Nargis hit Myanmar in 2008. PHOTO: NERYL LEWIS / RRT

due to population growth, large-scale extraction, and infrastructure development. In addition, the country is highly disaster-prone, being exposed to a number of natural hazards that include cyclones, tsunamis, floods and landslides, drought and fire, and earthquakes. With climate change increasing the severity and frequency of some extreme weather events, the impact of future disasters is likely to be more intense.

Myanmar needs more accountable and inclusive state institutions to improve service delivery and ensure sustainable development. On the World Bank Worldwide Governance Indicators, the country finds itself in the lowest 10 percentile of countries with regard to voice and accountability, government effectiveness, and rule of law (World Bank 2014b). With a score of 28 out of a maximum 100, Myanmar ranks



When Shwe Kyin dam finished in 2009, people from seven villages were displaced. PHOTO: NORWEGIAN PEOPLE'S AID

136 out of 176 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (Transparency International 2017). The last few years have seen some initial steps towards reform of the civil service and capacity building of government and state agencies, but more systematic and long-term efforts are called for at all levels.

4. Donor engagement in Myanmar

ODA flows to Myanmar have increased significantly following the end of economic sanctions and the launch of the government's reform programme. The lion's share of funding is provided by bilateral government agencies, directed towards social infrastructure and services, and channelled through the public sector.



Students exchanging experiences at a jobs training event organised by the Norwegian Refugee Council. PHOTO: KEN OPPRANN

TRENDS IN ODA

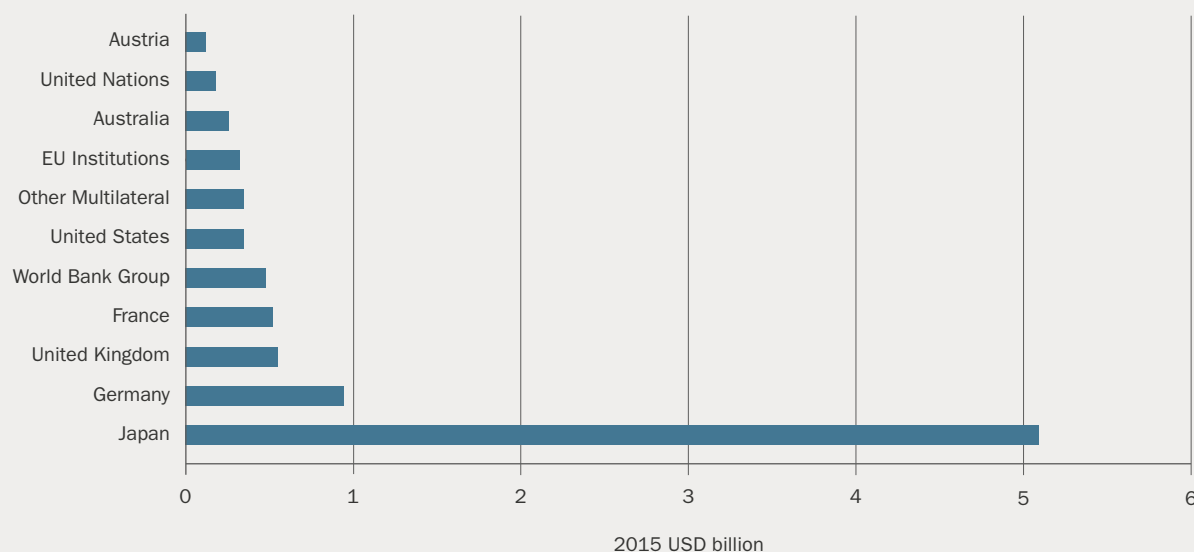
According to OECD/DAC data, gross ODA flows to Myanmar increased from USD 330 million in 2010 to USD 6,492 billion in 2013. Receipts have subsequently decreased to USD 1,853 billion in 2014 and USD 1,223 billion in 2015. The major peak in 2013 can be explained by debt relief. Myanmar's payment arrears to the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and bilateral creditors – estimated by the IMF to total USD 11 billion at the time – were cleared in a series of operations in early 2013 (Brookings 2013).

ODA is expected to continue to grow in the coming years. Together with countries such as Afghanistan and Bangladesh, Myanmar is likely to absorb most of the foreseen increases to Asia. Currently, Myanmar is the only ASEAN member state where ODA is increasing (UNDP 2016c).

SOURCES OF ODA

The chart shows the top 12 donors to Myanmar during the period 2011 to 2015. With gross disbursements of more than USD 5 billion (49 per cent of total) Japan has been the single largest donor. Some 83 per cent of total ODA was delivered by bilateral partners (governments). Multilateral ODA provided by financial institutions, the EU and the

FIGURE 1 // TOP 12 DONORS OF GROSS ODA, 2011-2015



SOURCE: OECD CRS AID ACTIVITY DATABASE DATA 2017

UN agencies accounted for the remaining 17 per cent. Norway was Myanmar's 15th biggest donor during the same period.

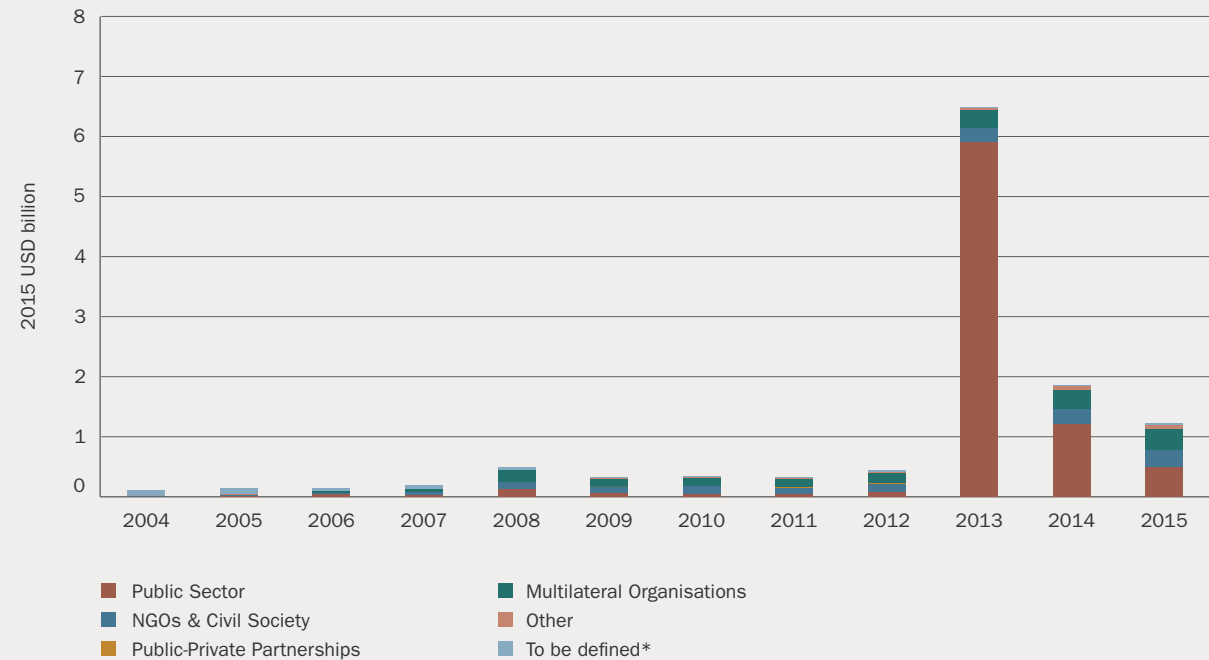
The high level of Japanese ODA is in part attributable to a bridge loan from the Japan Bank for International Co-operation, which was used by Myanmar to clear the debt arrears to the World Bank and ADB in 2013 (Brookings 2013).

There is a general lack of data on ODA and economic support from Myanmar's neighbours, including China, India and Thailand. China in particular has been heavily engaged in infrastructure and extractive industries.

CHANNELS OF ODA

There has been a significant change in the channels of ODA since 2011. From 2011 to 2012, multilateral organisations were the most common channel, followed by NGOs and civil society. With the end of the economic sanctions and the debt relief and loans provided in 2013, public sector (government and state agencies) became the main channel for support, and remained so in the years 2014-2015. Meanwhile, ODA through multilateral organisations and NGOs and civil society has increased steadily. ODA through NGOs and civil society has more than doubled, and ODA through multilateral organisations almost tripled since 2011. The presence of a number of multi-donor trust funds has contributed to this increase.

FIGURE 2 // TOTAL ODA BY CHANNEL, 2004-2015

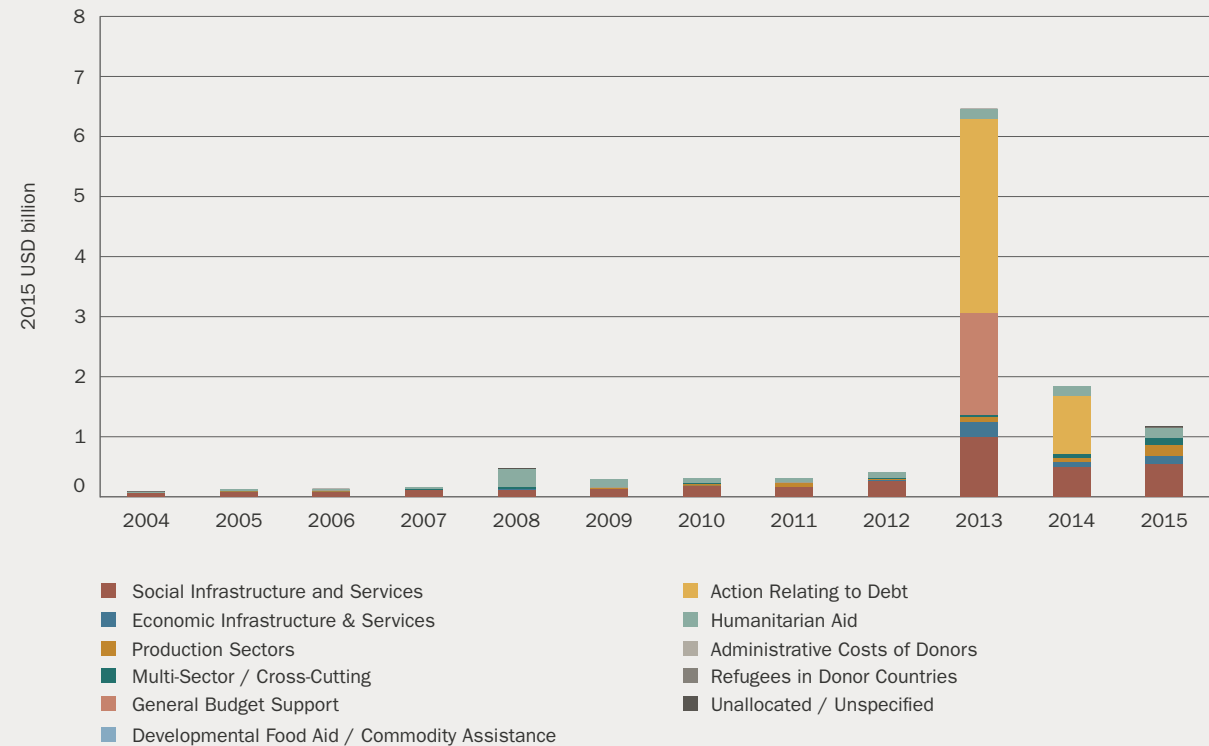


* The category "To be defined" is related to the fact that the OECD's mapping exercise to apply CRS categories retrospectively is still ongoing. Aid flows that have not been mapped yet are marked as "To be defined". In contrast, the category "Other" applies to aid flows that have already been mapped, but which could not be placed in another channel category. SOURCE: OECD CRS AID ACTIVITY DATABASE DATA 2017

MAJOR SECTORS

By far the largest share of ODA during the period 2011-2015 has gone to debt relief (41 per cent) and to the sector of social infrastructure and services (24 per cent). General budget support is the third largest sector. Within the sector of social infrastructure and services, the largest sub-sector is government and civil society, followed by health, and education. A further breakdown of the sub-sector of government and civil society shows that most of the ODA within this sub-sector has gone to three areas: public sector policy; conflict, peace and security; and democratic participation and civil society.

FIGURE 3 // TOTAL ODA BY SECTOR, 2004-2015



SOURCE: OECD CRS AID ACTIVITY DATABASE DATA 2017

5. Evaluations of aid

ODA has contributed to important progress on macro-economic reforms, education and health, environment and climate change, governance and human rights, and humanitarian relief. In many sectors, the broader impact and sustainability of development assistance is yet to be demonstrated.



A member of a self-reliance group in Aung Soe Moe sharing her experiences. PHOTO: NORWEGIAN PEOPLE'S AID

MACRO-ECONOMIC REFORMS

Myanmar has pursued wide-ranging macro-economic reforms facilitated by loans provided by international finance institutions. Since 2013, the macro-economic situation has improved significantly, but a deepening of reforms is needed to consolidate early gains achieved.

Based on the early economic and political reform efforts of the Government of Myanmar in 2011, Western countries eased economic sanctions imposed on the previous military regime. In January 2013, Myanmar cleared its arrears to international financing institutions, and secured a debt write-off by creditor countries grouped in the Paris Club. The arrears were cleared with budget support (loans) provided by the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Japan, and linked to the implementation of the government's economic reform priorities.

Evaluations indicate that Myanmar has made significant progress in implementing the agreed policy agendas and has completed almost all of the policy actions agreed with creditors. The focus of reforms has been on measures for improving macro-economic stability, public finance management, and the investment climate. Specific results include: the establishment of a more efficient foreign exchange rate market; a reduction of the fiscal

deficit; an increase in tax revenues; a major increase in the expenditures on education and health; annual credit growth to the domestic private sector; and the liberalisation of the foreign investment regime (World Bank 2014, ADB 2016a, JICA 2014).

In sum, Myanmar's macro-economic situation has improved significantly due to the adoption of market-oriented policy reforms, facilitated by the loans provided by the World Bank, ADB and Japan in 2013. The clearing of arrears and provision of financing has increased the country's ability to tap international sources of development finance, and government-led economic policy reform has improved investor confidence.

A recent review of ADB's Interim Country Partnership Strategy 2012-2014, covering loans, grants and technical assistance, suggests that further progress has been made in terms of promoting an enabling economic environment – including liberalising import and export regimes, streamlining business registration requirements, and regulating public debt. Infrastructure for access and connectivity has also been enhanced through reform of private sector investment in the power sector and for road development (ADB 2016b).

The government will need to further increase social sector spending and target this spending to poor and remote communities

The evaluations note that the changes brought about appear to be sustainable, given the continued reform commitment of the government. However, to ensure effective public resource allocation, the government will need to further increase social sector spending and target this spending to poor and remote communities. So far, much of the increase in expenditures on education and health has been allocated towards salary increases, which may not necessarily lead to better service delivery.

EDUCATION

Multi-donor programme funding has contributed to improving early childhood and basic education facilities, teaching skills, and learning processes. The wider impact in terms of improved access and quality, including the outreach to vulnerable populations, is limited and not captured by existing performance indicators.

The education sector of Myanmar has been seriously under-funded for decades and, as a result, uneven progress has been made towards education for all. Education reform is one of the key priorities of the Myanmar government. Apart from increasing spending in the sector, it has led to a Comprehensive Education Sector Review to better understand the current status of education, and to a recently-completed National Education Strategic Plan.

An increasing number of donors and organisations are supporting education in Myanmar through different channels. A major initiative is the Myanmar Quality Basic Education Programme (QBEP), which is supported by the Multi-Donor Education Fund. The programme follows on from a first phase of support to basic education, financed by the same donor partnership in 2007-2011. The Myanmar Education Consortium (MEC) is another high-profile donor-supported education programme. Implemented by Save the Children, this programme supports the work of NGOs to improve education access and quality, with a particular emphasis on early childhood care and development.

A 2014 mid-term review reports that the QBEP has had a visible impact on schools, early childhood development facilities, and

The education sector of Myanmar has been seriously under-funded for decades and, as a result, uneven progress has been made towards education for all.

non-formal education centres. In particular, the in-service training provided for teachers was seen as making a major contribution on attitudes, teaching and learning processes. In addition, the QBEP was lauded for influencing the direction of policy discussions in the context of the Comprehensive Education Sector Review (Government of Myanmar/Multi-Donor Education Fund/UNICEF 2014). The 2015 mid-term evaluation of the MEC similarly concluded that impressive results had been achieved in terms of the number of beneficiaries and services provided. MEC was also found to have responded well to opportunities that had emerged to support civil society engagement in policy discussions (Save the Children 2015).

At the same time, the evaluations indicated a significant scope for programme improvements.



Village school, Ayeyarwady delta, 2013. PHOTO: HANNA GUNAP

A common weakness was the lack of a clear and coherent vision and theory of change for what the programmes were trying to achieve, and the related lack of adequate performance indicators. The geographical coverage of the programmes was also questioned.

In the case of QBEP, many separate activities have been rolled out in different combinations in geographically dispersed locations, and it is not clear how they add up in terms of improved access and quality. In turn, the MEC projects have, for the most part, been located in easy-to-access central areas, rather than in the areas of greatest need on the periphery of the country. This may, inadvertently, be contributing to an increase, rather than reduction, in the inequity of provision of education services. Furthermore, evidence of sustainable change,

contribution to higher-level outcomes, learning of lessons is limited in both programmes. This may be due, in part, to the focus on immediate service delivery, and the dissonance, in some cases, between programme-inspired changes and existing government systems.

HEALTH

Pooled funding mechanisms and UN programmes have contributed to a declining prevalence of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, and have helped to strengthen reproductive health services in Myanmar. As with interventions in the education sector, better targeting and impact measurement was called for.

Similar to the education sector, the health sector of Myanmar has suffered decades of neglect. As a result, the health status of the population is still poor. Recently, there has been a marked increase in public spending on health and a reaffirmed commitment from the government to realising universal health coverage, including through the Myanmar National Health Plan 2017-2021.

The Three Diseases Fund (3DF) was the single largest programme for addressing HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria during the period 2007-2011. With a particular focus on people with limited or no access to public health



Attendees at health awareness classes where knowledge on various health-related topics as how to avoid communicable diseases and birth control is provided.

PHOTO: MALLIKA PANORAT / EU ECHO

services, the 3DF was set up as a multi-donor consortium and had a total budget of USD 138 million. Through the programme, some 22,000 people with HIV were provided with lifesaving anti-retroviral therapy, 180,000 were diagnosed with smear-positive tuberculosis, and 1.8 million diagnosed with and treated for malaria (The Three Diseases Fund 2012: 5). The 3DF was closed in 2012, but a new Three Millennium Development Goals Fund (3MDG) has been established, building on the 3DF's work and lessons learnt.

The second UNFPA Programme of Assistance to Myanmar, implemented during the same period as 3DF, was aimed at promoting the reproductive health status of women and men, including adolescents and youth, in selected project areas. The 2011 final evaluation shows



A midwife in Kutapalong camp for Rohingya refugees holding a newborn.

PHOTO: ANNA DUBUIS / DFID

that in the 132 townships covered by the programme, contraceptive prevalence rates increased, as did the proportion of births attended by skilled personnel. In addition, a decline in HIV prevalence was recorded. These results had been achieved through the provision of health, birth spacing and other reproductive health services brought about with UNFPA support (UNFPA 2011).

Acting as a bridge between the 3DF and 3MDG, the UN Joint Programme on Maternal, Newborn and Child Health 2012-2013 contributed to the development of evidence-based policies, strengthened existing co-ordination mechanisms, and addressed critical gaps, especially shortages of essential drugs and commodities. This included the procurement of vaccines for 700,000 children and 250,000

A common concern in the evaluations of health programmes is the ability and effectiveness of programmes to actually reach and engage those most in need.

women, malaria rapid tests to screen 150,000 patients, and drugs to treat 60,000 cases of malaria (Health Resource Facility 2014: iii). A common concern in the evaluations of health programmes is the ability and effectiveness of programmes to actually reach and engage those most in need. The 3DF was found to focus on health deficits rather than assets, thereby not utilising the skills, resilience and knowledge of community members to the full potential. UNFPA was similarly recommended to focus more on youth at risk and to improve outreach strategies.

Impact measurement was another, related problematic area highlighted in the evaluations. For instance, establishing the precise effect of UNFPA's support to adolescent reproductive

health, and the level of behavioural change, was not possible due to the absence of data. Similarly, data was missing to assess the extent to which the UN Joint Programme on Maternal, Newborn and Child Health had increased access to services. In the case of the 3DF, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) focused mostly on reporting for accountability purposes, with insufficient attention being paid to learning and using data for programme improvements.

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The evidence base on the effects of ODA on environmental protection and resilience to natural disasters and climate change is limited. Existing evaluations highlight contributions to policies and laws, but indicate that the implementation of these policies and laws will be a challenge, given government resource and capacity constraints.

So far, environment and climate change appear to constitute a relatively minor field in terms of development co-operation, and there is a very limited set of evaluations available. According to OECD/DAC data, total spending to environment protection amounted to a mere USD 31 million during the period 2011-2015.

One of the few evaluations that have been published in this area is the evaluation of the

Inle Lake Conservation and Rehabilitation Project, implemented from 2012 to 2015 by UNDP with the support of Norway. Inle Lake is suffering environmental degradation from the combined effects of unsustainable resource use, increasing population pressures, climate variability, and rapid tourism development. The 2015 final evaluation found that significant advances had been made in environmental governance related to the lake's conservation and rehabilitation. The project contributed to the designation of Inle Lake as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, and the creation of an Inle Lake Authority (UNDP 2015a).

Disaster risk reduction is a similarly relatively small area of development co-operation, but is expected to increase in importance. From 2013 to 2015, UNDP implemented a project to promote disaster resilient communities through strengthening disaster risk management institutions, systems and networks, and by mainstreaming disaster risk management into development planning in the country. As shown by the 2017 evaluation, the project contributed to the development of the Disaster Management Law and the Myanmar Action Plan for Disaster Reduction (UNDP 2017a).

The two projects were considered to be sustainable, given the focus on and

achievements in the area of policies, laws and institutions. At the same time, the actual implementation of these policies and laws will be a challenge because of the capacity and resource constraints faced by relevant government ministries and departments at regional and state level. The evaluation of the Inle Lake Conservation and Rehabilitation Project concludes that “much work remains to be done in coming years to create a functioning Lake Authority which is financially sustainable, can manage conservation activities, monitor change over time, and improve overall environmental conditions in the lake” (UNDP 2015a).

GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The political reform process has opened up the space for donors and international agencies to provide governance and human rights-related support to state institutions, civil society and the private sector. Existing evaluations suggest that more strategic interventions are required for this support to enhance accountability, transparency and effectiveness.

Support to State Institutions

State institutions, such as the Parliament, Attorney General and the Supreme Court, play a potentially central role in the democratisation process and the transition away from the

remnants of executive dominance and top-down directives. However, donor support to these institutions is still nascent, and has focused on relationship building, immediate needs, and activity implementation.

Evaluations of UNDP-supported projects with the Union Parliament, Attorney General and the Supreme Court indicate that the fluid political context has necessitated a flexible and supply-driven approach, and that the delivery of outputs has been low. The reports indicate that, while there is some evidence of change, it is difficult and probably too early to expect any real impact on institutions and beneficiaries. However, the support has contributed to the development of institutional strategic plans that could guide future capacity building and donor support (UNDP 2016a & UNDP 2016b).

A Swedish-funded project with the newly-created Myanmar National Human Rights Commission (MNHRC) was found to have contributed to increasing the understanding of human rights and the role of national human rights institutions among the MNHRC commissioners and staff members. Nevertheless, the project approaches and activities, which mainly focused on training, were not considered adequate to meeting organisational development needs, especially given the high staff turnover in recent



Farmers protesting over land grabs, demanding the government return seized fields and protect them from a surge in prosecutions over property land disputes. Mandalay July 12, 2017. PHOTO: AFP PHOTO / KWAY ZAY WIN

years (Sida 2014a). The donor community, deeply concerned about the situation of the Rohingya minority in the country, has elevated this issue on the policy dialogue agenda. Efforts towards this end have so far not been covered by any evaluations.

Civil society support and development

Myanmar civil society organisations (CSOs) have been increasing in numbers and have taken on a greater role in service delivery, awareness raising and policy advocacy. The sample of evaluations covers three CSO-managed programmes that explicitly seek to build civil society capacity in remote and vulnerable communities. The evaluations are generally positive and indicate that the strategy to support many “possibilities” for the

strengthening of civil society was appropriate, given the circumstance at the time. However, the wider impact of this support is localised and probably limited. The evaluations indicate that, with the advancing democratisation process, there is scope for expanding outreach, enhancing advocacy and policy influence, and developing more systematic approaches for strengthening the internal capacity and governance structures of CSOs (Sida 2014b, AusAID 2013 & Stefanus Alliance/Equality Myanmar 2015)

Private sector-focused interventions

The opening up of the economy and the suspension of economic sanctions has greatly improved business prospects in Myanmar. With the increase of international companies keen to invest in the country, the importance of protecting workers and promoting responsible business has been accentuated.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has implemented several projects in Myanmar in recent years, with the overall objective of setting labour standards, developing policies, and promoting decent work for all women and men. An evaluation of one of these projects highlights the contribution to the development of trade unions, the registration of a confederation of trade unions, and the establishment of social dialogue between

the government, trade unions and employers (ILO 2016).

Another initiative is the Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB), which was set up with international assistance to facilitate the application of internationally-recognised responsible business standards in the country. According to a 2015 mid-term review, the MCRB has succeeded in ensuring the integration of rights-specific language in legislation and regulations, and the adoption of good practices – such as grievance mechanisms and anti-corruption policies – by some companies (DIHR/IHRB 2015).

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Humanitarian assistance has been provided to local communities in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis in 2008, and to refugees in camps along the Thailand-Myanmar border, among other areas. The support has contributed to improved service delivery and greater community resilience in targeted locations. Recently, significant pledges of humanitarian assistance have been made by the international community to address the situation in Rakhine.

Among the natural disasters that have affected Myanmar in recent years, Cyclone Nargis was the most severe. CARE was one of the many

international and local organisations that responded to the communities' emergency and recovery needs after the cyclone. An evaluation commissioned five years after the event, in 2014, found that communities in the affected areas had increased their levels of resilience, and that CARE's support had made a significant contribution to this. CARE's work contributed to: saving lives in the emergency phase; steady recovery of livelihoods across phases; empowerment of women in local decision-making and at the household level; and greater self-sufficiency at the village level (CARE International 2014).

Humanitarian assistance has also been provided to refugees in border camps in Thailand, which host approximately 120,000 people. An evaluation of Australian support through five NGOs over the period 2013 to 2015 found that operations and service delivery (e.g. provision of food supplies, information, health and mental health support, water and sanitation, basic education) in the camps was mostly relevant and efficient. With the coming into power of a military government in Thailand in 2014, there is concern that refugees will be repatriated before adequate conditions for their integration in Myanmar society is in place (AusAID 2014).

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

There are significant shortcomings in terms of the integration of cross-cutting issues in development interventions, and the attention given to these issues in evaluations. Gender equality is the most commonly identified cross-cutting issue, but is often not addressed in a conscious and meaningful manner. Environment was not mainstreamed or in other ways treated as a cross-cutting issue in the development interventions covered by the evaluations.

Gender equality

Gender equality as a cross-cutting issue is assessed to a relatively limited extent in the evaluation sample. When gender equality is assessed, it is often in the context of interventions having gender equality or women's empowerment as a specific objective or priority. Gender equality also tends to get attention when women constitute the main beneficiaries of an intervention.

As evaluations show, the success of interventions in mainstreaming gender issues is mixed. Many are not based on sufficient gender analysis to ensure mainstreaming, while others seem to consider gender mainstreaming as being limited to ensuring women's participation in project activities. Very few interventions appear to have gender-sensitive indicators or



PHOTO: KEN OPPRANN

produce performance data disaggregated by gender in a consistent manner.

In general, the civil society organisations and programmes evaluated have been more gender-sensitive than the support to government and state institutions. The Breaking the Silence programme, implemented by Norwegian Church Aid in co-operation with four local organisations, is an example of an intervention solely dedicated to women's empowerment. The programme sought to build civil society capacity for the prevention of gender-based violence, provision of legal aid to victims of gender-based violence, and advocacy to advance the rights of women and reduce gender-based violence. The 2014 evaluation found that the programme was successful in changing attitudes, practices and, ultimately, breaking the silence on gender-based violence albeit with confined geographic areas



PHOTO: KEN OPPRANN

Gender equality is the most commonly identified cross-cutting issue, but is often not addressed in a conscious and meaningful manner.

and social spheres. A notable weakness of the programme was the lack of partner participation and ownership in programme design (Norwegian Church Aid 2014).

Conflict sensitivity

The political and social conflicts in Myanmar pose a significant risk to the reform process and the sustainability of ODA. There is an

increasing realisation in the donor community of the importance of integrating conflict-sensitive approaches in programming to ensure that interventions, as a minimum, do not cause harm. One of the best examples is the UNICEF Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy Programme, a global initiative to strengthen resilience, social cohesion and human security through education in conflict-affected countries. Within this initiative, a pilot project was launched in Mon State to address language as a driver of conflict. As shown by a 2016 evaluation, the pilot initiative contributed to increased trust and strengthened relationships between education sector stakeholders, improved collaboration on language policy, strengthened social cohesion, and increased awareness of the benefits of using children's mother tongue in education as a bridge to learning Burmese (UNICEF 2016).

Other interventions evaluated mainly address conflict resolution as an objective in itself, rather than as a cross-cutting issue. This is the case in the support to NGOs and CSOs working with local communities in ceasefire and border areas and with the refugee camps along the Thailand-Myanmar border. Bilateral and multilateral donors appear to have struggled with conflict sensitivity and, to some extent, have avoided working in ethnic minority areas, partly

because of difficulties of operating in these areas without treading on sensitive ground.

Anti-corruption

While Myanmar's ranking on Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index has improved in recent years, corruption continues to be endemic. However, steps have been taken to strengthen the legal and institutional framework on anti-corruption.

According to OECD/DAC data, donor funding of anti-corruption initiatives in Myanmar has been very limited so far. In the sample of evaluations reviewed, corruption is hardly mentioned, let alone addressed by the interventions covered. One exception is the Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business (MCRB), which, according to the 2015 review, has successfully co-operated with some companies on developing anti-corruption measures and setting up grievance mechanisms (DIHR/IHRB 2015).

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6. Lessons learnt

Initial lessons learnt emerging from evaluations underline the need to ensure flexibility in a changing and fluid context, to better target the poor and vulnerable, to build national capacity in a more systematic manner, and to enhance results-based management.



Boats in Ma Ya Gyan landing, Mandalay 2008. PHOTO: LEMAIRE STÉPHANE / HEMIS.FR

The nascent nature of development co-operation in Myanmar, and the consequent paucity of evaluation reports covering such efforts suggest that there is a need for caution in singling out lessons learnt. Nevertheless, the reports used in preparing this CEB highlight some good practices, areas for improvement, and gaps that could be covered by future evaluations.

STRENGTHS

Ensuring flexibility in a changing and fluid context

The development interventions evaluated have been implemented in a challenging aid environment, with strong government restrictions, armed conflicts, poor infrastructure, and, since 2011, a context of a dramatic and uncertain economic and political transition. In some cases, over-ambitious goals and approaches have been adopted that were not attuned to the pace of change and existing absorption capacity. In general, however, donors and implementing agencies have demonstrated flexible and responsive approaches that have enabled them to continually adjust (e.g. re-programme allocated funds between target areas) and seize opportunities as they emerged (e.g. expanding space for increased interaction with government, openings for supporting policy and legislative development).

Donors and implementing agencies have demonstrated flexible and responsive approaches that have enabled them to continually adjust

Using pooled funding to enhance development effectiveness

A significant share of ODA has been channelled through multilateral agencies, multi-donor trust funds and joint programmes – including, but not limited to, the education and health sectors. The evaluations indicate that pooled funds have been relatively successful in terms of outreach and impact, and have been able to leverage the contribution of individual donors in an efficient manner. There is reason to consider expanding the use of pooled funding mechanisms beyond social sectors to reduce risk, facilitate co-ordination, and lessen the administrative burden of donors and the government.

Strengthening partnership management and local ownership

Evaluations emphasise the value of broad stakeholder participation and local ownership

during all stages of development interventions, and provide some examples of successful approaches in this respect, especially among the support to and through CSOs. Interventions targeting government and state agencies tend to have a more narrow focus on one institution. To ensure the future relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of development interventions, a more inclusive, participatory, transparent and partnership-oriented approach is called for across the board.

WEAKNESSES

Targeting the poor and vulnerable

The lion's share of ODA to Myanmar has been directed towards basic service delivery, livelihood improvement and poverty reduction. At the same time, the poor and socially excluded – most of whom live in rural, remote and conflict-ridden areas – remain a significant percentage of the population. Evaluations indicate that, due to constraints resulting from the political and security context, development partners have struggled to reach out to the poorest and most vulnerable. In some cases, programmes have been redirected to more accessible and better-off areas.

Addressing capacity constraints in a systematic manner

The main obstacle to reform and institution building in Myanmar is weak government capacity. Shortage of qualified government staff, combined with structural and organisational weaknesses, has led to delays in the drafting of new policies, laws and regulations, and has limited the ODA management absorption capacity. Although the reform process is uncertain and necessitates a step-by-step approach, the appropriateness of current capacity building approaches can be questioned. Many interventions comprise of a range of one-off and supply-driven activities (e.g. workshops, training seminars, study tours) with limited impact beyond the individual level. Other interventions have focused squarely on direct service delivery and pay limited attention to strengthening the government's ability to do things itself.

Strengthening theories of change and results-based management

While the development interventions covered by the evaluations have generally been responsive, flexible and relevant to the context, a common weakness is the lack of attention to M&E and results-based management. Several of the programmes and projects do not have a clear, and shared, vision of what success will look

like and what is realistic within the overall time frame agreed on. Other problems highlighted in evaluations include inadequate logframes and indicators, the lack of data for measuring outcomes and impact, insufficient attention to learning and using data for programme improvement, and, generally, the low level of investment in M&E systems.

GAPS IN EVALUATIONS

- › Reflecting the fragmented nature of ODA in Myanmar, project evaluations are more numerous than other types of evaluations. There is a general need for more country-level, thematic evaluations and joint evaluations that could provide higher-level evidence and lessons learnt for policy and strategy development.
- › Certain sectors and areas appear under-represented in terms of evaluation coverage. There is a shortage of evaluations in the areas of environment and climate change, energy sector support, and private sector development.
- › The evaluations in the sample are generally of high quality (and were partly selected for this reason), but weaknesses can be found with respect to the lack of context analysis, assessment of intended and unintended effects, and the identification of factors contributing to success and failure.

- › Cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, conflict sensitivity and anti-corruption are rarely addressed by evaluations in a systematic and sufficiently comprehensive manner.
- › Improving the evaluation and accountability culture warrants more investment in M&E and capacity building of government and civil society partners in this respect. This is also an imperative of the international aid effectiveness agenda and the SDGs.

LOOKING AHEAD

Myanmar is undergoing a historic transition towards democracy, peace and stability, and to a market economy. With the 2015 elections and the national ceasefire agreement, there are good prospects for continued progress in all these areas. At the same time, the peace process remains fragile, the human rights situation remains problematic, economic growth is unevenly spread across the country, and vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change remains high. The situation is compounded by deficits in infrastructure, social service delivery, and overall government capacity.

Peace is a pre-condition for consolidating democracy, promoting development, and protecting human rights. With peace potentially returning to many border areas following the national ceasefire agreement, there

will be opportunities for increasing ODA to these areas. If hostilities end, development partners will gain better access to the poor and vulnerable, and will be able to respond to immediate needs for humanitarian assistance, basic infrastructure, and social services. A conflict-sensitive approach is called for in building local governance institutions, strengthening community resilience, and enhancing access to justice and viable employment.

The democratisation process in Myanmar is entering a second phase, signalling a need for more long-term and systematic capacity building. Strengthening public sector capacity and institutional structures is required to create a more accountable government administration for effective service delivery. This would have to be combined with more strategic support to key oversight institutions, such as the Parliament, the judiciary, and the Myanmar Human Rights Commission. The devolution of powers and resources to states and regions will also be important from a democratisation and peacebuilding perspective.

The range of assistance that donors can now support through civil society is much wider than it was only a few years ago. However, Myanmar CSOs are still generally weak in terms of organisational structure, and are poorly



A mother and her child in Kyon Da after reconstruction of their village after the 2008 cyclone Nargis. PHOTO: UN PHOTO/MARK GARTEN

resourced. This affects the implementation and outreach of their projects, and their ability to influence the wider change process. Dispersing multiple grants to a large number of organisations may not be the most appropriate approach, given the changing circumstances. A more focused approach aimed at building and sustaining capacity in selected organisations is likely to lead to a much stronger foundation for civil society and the growth of CSOs.

While the growth outlook is favourable, Myanmar remains vulnerable to the global economic environment. Mitigating the risk of external shocks warrants further macro-economic reforms, economic diversification, and the development of the financial sector. Economic growth also has to become more inclusive and sustainable. Apart from more effective service delivery, development interventions can help to improve agricultural

productivity, food security, rural infrastructure, as well as foster more climate-resilient local communities. Environmental concerns should be mainstreamed in sector analysis, planning, and programme design, particularly in infrastructure projects.

Private sector development is necessary to create jobs and reduce poverty. Development partners could support policy and regulatory reforms to create a more conducive business environment, enhance access to finance, and promote public-private partnerships. With the increase of international companies keen to invest in Myanmar, the importance of protecting workers and promoting responsible business standards has been accentuated.

Gender equality has not been sufficiently integrated in development interventions. Remedying this shortcoming would require more systematic gender analysis and incorporating a gender perspective in policy reviews, sector strategies and plans, and programmes and projects. This can be combined with dedicated support to strengthening the national gender machinery and enhancing women's political and economic empowerment. The collection, analysis, and use of sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics should also be a priority.

All in all, the evaluations have confirmed that the Myanmar transition process is not a linear process. Given the fact that power has for decades been concentrated in the military and a limited number of key groups of people, implementing reforms in a sustainable and democratic way will take time. To allow for systematic capacity building, sustained advocacy and comprehensive reform impact, interventions should be framed within longer-term development programmes linked to the implementation of national plans and the strategic plans of individual institutions and organisations. Such a longer-term approach should not preclude possibilities to identify opportunities for reform that are not too complex or institutionally demanding, and which can help build the commitment for change.

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Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank	ODA	Official Development Assistance
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations	OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency	PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
CRS	OECD Creditor Reporting System	QBEP	Quality Basic Education Programme
CSO	Civil Society Organisation	SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
DAC	Development Assistance Committee	UN	United Nations
DIHR	Danish Institute for Human Rights	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
EU	European Union	UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
GII	Gender Inequality Index	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
GNI	Gross National Income		
HDI	Human Development Index		
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre		
IHRB	Institute for Human Rights		
ILO	International Labour Organisation		
IMF	International Monetary Fund		
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union		
ISDP	Institute for Security & Development Policy		
JICA	Japan International Co-operation Agency		
MCRB	Myanmar Centre for Responsible Business		
MEC	Myanmar Education Consortium		
MNHRC	Myanmar National Human Rights Commission		
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation		
NLD	National League for Democracy		

Commissioned by

The Evaluation Department

Carried out by

Particip GmbH in consortium
with Menon Economics

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DECEMBER 2017

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This report is the product of its authors,
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interpretations, and conclusions presented
in this report do not necessarily reflect the
views of the Evaluation Department.

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December 2017
Photo: Espen Røst / Bistandsaktuelt
ISBN: 978-82-8369-043-9