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# New Rules of the Game for Meeting Village Development Priorities in Myanmar

An Applied Political Economy Analysis of Local Governance  
in Villages of the Dry Zone and Kayah State

Pact Myanmar  
April 2018

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April 2018

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### **Contact:**

Aaron Leonard – Pact Deputy Director Governance and Civil Society

[Aleonard@pactworld.org](mailto:Aleonard@pactworld.org)

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

10HHL	10 household leader
100HHL	100 household leader
2012 Law	2012 Ward/Village Tract Administration Law
APEA	Applied Political Economy Analysis
CDD	community-driven development
CDF	Constituency Development Fund
CHDN	Civil Health and Development Network
CSO	civil society organization
DRD	Department of Rural Development
EAG	ethnic armed group
FGD	focus group discussion
FMB	Farmland Management Body
GAD	General Administration Department
GEN	Gender Equality Network
GOM	Government of Myanmar
ICT	information and communication technology
ID	identification
IDP	internally displaced person
KII	key informant interview
KNGY	Kayan New Generation Youth
KNLP	Kayan New Land Party
KNPP	Karenni National Progressive Party
KNSO	Karenni National Solidarity Organization
LRC	Land Reinvestigation Committee
MADB	Myanmar Agricultural Development Bank
MCH	mother and child health
MOHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MP	Member of Parliament
MSY	Mya Sein Yaung Fund
NCA	National Ceasefire Agreement
NCDDP	National Community Driven Development Project
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NLD	National League for Democracy
OSS	One Stop Shop
PEA	political economy analysis
SEG	School Endowment Group
TA	Township Administrator
TDSC	Township Development Support Committee
TPIC	Township Planning and Implementation Committee
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party
VA	Village Administrator
VDC	Village Development Committee
VDF	Village Development Fund
VERP	village elders and respected persons
vs.	versus
VTA	Village Tract Administrator
\$	United States dollar

## Executive Summary

Pact Myanmar's Shae Thot program has been working on integrated community development and governance in 2,700 villages across Central Myanmar and Kayah State since 2011. During this time, Myanmar has undergone significant legal, political, and social changes that provide the framework against which state and society interact. This is true in government-controlled areas in Central Myanmar and in mixed-controlled areas, such as Kayah State, where ethnic armed groups (EAGs) are fulfilling many of the roles of government institutions in parallel to state-controlled administrations. Local governance is at the crux of this relationship and will ultimately be the litmus test for Myanmar's ambitious reform efforts.

Seventy percent of Myanmar's inhabitants live in rural areas. With rural poverty rates twice as high as urban,<sup>1</sup> it is reasonable that large amounts of development assistance are delivered at the village level. Despite this, there is little publicly available information on how villages work. Most governance-related research in Myanmar is oriented top-down and rarely considers the village level. The only comprehensive, publicly available piece of village-focused research in Myanmar is already six years old<sup>2</sup>.

This Applied Political Economy Analysis (APEA) seeks to address this knowledge gap and support more informed development programming by increasing understanding of the village-level ecosystem, including how villages engage with one another and with higher level administrative structures and power brokers. This research addressed the core questions:

**What is the relationship between villages, village tracts, and townships as it relates to meeting village development priorities? What are the barriers and opportunities?**

The APEA employed a modified USAID APEA framework (see Annex B) to examine the core questions, with an attendant focus on the opportunities and barriers for women's involvement in local governance. In doing so, the analysis also considers whether and how Shae Thot programming supports communities and other actors to meet village development priorities. Understanding the dynamics of local governance, particularly at a time of transition, enables government, civil society, and development agencies to engage more fully in a relevant, targeted, timely, and effective manner with local communities and administrations/authorities who are at the core of local development processes.

This APEA builds on research conducted with communities, civil society, and local government actors in 42 villages between December 2016 and March 2017. The research team consulted more than 700 individuals and conducted in-depth research in 12 focus villages in the Dry Zone (Township 1 in Sagaing and Township 2 in Magwe) and in one Kayah township. Ten of these 12 villages participated in the Shae Thot program.

Overall, the APEA yielded 26 key findings related to local governance dynamics (Table A, starting on the next page). These trends provide a snapshot of these three townships as of March 2017 and are likely reflective beyond these specific locations.

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<sup>1</sup> UNDP, based on the 2014 census results

<sup>2</sup> Susanne Kempel and Myanmar Development Research. 2012. *Village Institutions and Leadership in Myanmar: A View from Below*. UNDP.

**Table A. Main APEA findings, per the USAID APEA framework**

<b>Foundational Factors</b>	
Deeply embedded structures that fundamentally shape the broad character of the state and political system. For example, geography, geostrategic position and neighborhood, natural and human resources, historical legacies, state formation, regional or sectarian divisions. Many have long-term origins and may be slow to change. However, it is worth asking whether they could change over time.	
1	Slowly the state-society relationship is shifting from abusive and/or absent to engaged and searching for new identity.
2	The General Administration Department (GAD) remains the primary manager of social service delivery and funding in the country.
3	The patriarchy remains strong in government-controlled areas.
4	Large barriers (logistic, resource, and cultural) remain to direct engagement between communities and township actors responsible for allocation of development funding and service delivery, especially in The Kayah township.
5	Perceptions of local administrators (e.g., Village Tract Administrators [VTAs]) vary significantly between locations. In the Kayah township, the VTA's power is considered somewhat limited and there are strong disincentives for assuming the position.
<b>Rules of the Game</b>	
Formal and informal institutions, rules, norms, and ideologies that influence the behaviors of different actors, relationships between them, and incentives and capacity for collective action.	
6	Tentative shift from an “abusive state” to a collaborative state. Communities have less fear, government actors are friendlier, and government actors solicit unofficial fees, though in some instances the public's behavior has not yet changed.
7	Positive changes in perception of how corruption/bribery is handled.
8	Decisions within villages are made by nominal consensus (or nominal assent of villagers), rather than collaborative planning.
9	Women tend to emerge in leadership positions if they have specific skills or have already proven they can do the job. They are more frequently accepted as leaders in the Kayah township research villages than in the Dry Zone research villages.
10	In the Dry Zone, the VTA profile is shifting. Communities now identify youth and political party affiliation as more important than seniority and acquiescence to government demands.
11	There is a shift in VTAs now considering the needs and preferences of sub-villages, not just those of the main tract village. This is more apparent in the Dry Zone than in The Kayah township.
<b>Here and now</b>	
Captures the current behavior of individuals and groups and their response to events (“games within the rules”). May provide short-term opportunities or impediments to change.	
12	Members of Parliament (MPs) are assuming roles of development partner, mediator, and accountability officer. This may create conflicts of interest or overburden MPs.
13	Despite positive changes in the receptivity of lower-level government officials to support requests from the public, the most effective way for villages to secure development support appears to be direct engagement with the most senior-level official possible.
14	Communities in all research townships identified Shae Thot Village Development Committees (VDCs) among the top three most influential groups. They are the most influential group in the interviewed The Kayah township communities.
15	There is one group in each village responsible for most interactions with outside actors. In the Dry Zone villages assessed, this is the VTA; in The Kayah township villages, it is religious groups.
16	VTAs are the primary formal channel for villages to convey needs and preferences to the township level to secure development assistance.



17	Assessed villages in The Kayah township generally prefer to handle disputes internally or with the assistance of EAGs, but not through officials from the Government of Myanmar (GOM). Research villages in the Dry Zone engage a variety of actors to resolve disputes.
18	There are significant differences across mixed-control villages in terms of how they interact with government and EAG actors.
19	Limited mobility reduces the opportunities available to women and disabled people to engage with township authorities.
20	There is growing interest in the direct election of local governance actors, rather than indirect democracy.
<b>Dynamics</b>	
The actors, networks, or socio-economic and political organizations and processes that provide an avenue for change. The other elements of dynamism, actual or potential, that may impact the issue/problem being studied.	
21	Dual reporting lines to National League for Democracy (NLD) and GAD structures may be emerging.
22	There is increasing appreciation and demand for transparency of decision-making and accountability for quality service provision, especially in Dry Zone communities.
23	Some communities report disenchantment with recently elected VTAs, who were chosen along party lines. This may create an opportunity to move beyond party identity in future elections.
24	Villages within the same village tract rarely engage with each other, other than for celebration and crisis response. However, some sub-villages are starting to realize that with the new VTA election process, collaborating during campaigning and election can result in a VTA who will be responsive to sub-village needs.
25	Land disputes are one of the most prevalent types of disputes across all townships. Returnees in Kayah are bringing this to the forefront. It is unclear in Kayah whether EAGs and GOM authorities acting separately or together will be able to resolve these issues.
26	The findings are mixed with respect to whether space for women's leadership is growing or shrinking in Kayah at the village level. In Dry Zone, women's leadership opportunities seem static or slightly expanding in some villages.

This APEA provides some insights for how development assistance can help support the continued growth of responsive, inclusive local governance in Myanmar that meets village development priorities. Key development programming recommendations are further detailed in Section 10.1.

1. Village-specific analysis should inform development programming and operations, especially in mixed-control areas.
2. Training in basic skills (e.g., motorbike driving and maintenance, using a smart phone) may help women take on more leadership roles that engage outside their home village.
3. Training in dispute-resolution skills for youth groups, including young women, in The Kayah township could improve their ability to engage with village leadership.
4. Empower citizens to engage specifically and strategically with service providers.
5. Train interested village-level leaders (youth and women) on campaign strategies for VTA elections.
6. Provide civic education around appropriate and inappropriate uses of political party branding.
7. Enable service providers to respond effectively and to facilitate engagement between communities and service providers.
8. Work with MPs to find opportunities for them to carry out legislative and oversight activities.
9. In conflict-affected areas, focus on supply and demand and on convergence of services (disputes resolution, health, education, land registration) that might be mutually supported by both EAGs and government actors.
10. In conflict affected areas, look beyond VTA/administrative or EAG structures as entry points to engaging with villages to understand development needs and priorities.



This APEA also highlighted a number of areas that merit further research, considering the changing local level governance dynamics in Myanmar. These are detailed further in Sections 10.3 and 10.4.

1. **Most valuable community development initiatives:** Which capacity development components of Shae Thot programming, especially within the range of support to VDCs, are most important to communities and should be replicated in other areas?
2. **Benefits of village affiliation with the dominant political party:** Does the political party identity of a village (majority of village population) influence the types, amount received, or most effective strategies for securing development assistance?
3. **Inclusive decision-making in communities:** Does promotion of women in community groups by NGOs or government policy result in more inclusive decision-making?
4. **Service selection in mixed control areas:** How do communities (or households) in mixed-control areas decide between EAG and GOM services?
5. **Development needs of returnees:** Do development priorities of IDP and refugee returnees differ from those in communities who have remained in their village of origin throughout conflict?
6. **The role of household “donations” in community development:** What role do forced donations of household resources (land, money, labor) play in complementing or substituting government resources for village development priorities?

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# Introduction

## Background

The current process of transition in Myanmar holds the potential to reframe the relationship between state and society. It could impact structures and processes that frame how citizens engage with each other, with their community, and with authorities. However, it is unclear whether this transition will be transformational, contribute to gradual change, or, at the local level, simply be absorbed into existing bureaucratic and societal structures and long-held ways of working.

Local governance is at the crux of this relationship between the state and local communities and will ultimately be the litmus test for Myanmar's reform efforts. Understanding the dynamics of local governance, particularly at a time of transition, enables government, civil society, and development agencies to engage more fully in a relevant, targeted, timely, and effective manner with local communities and local administrations/authorities that are at the core of local development processes. While recent studies have delved into state-, regional-, and township-level governance arrangements, research exploring how the majority of Myanmar's residents organize themselves and engage local authorities remains extremely limited.

## Study purpose

This study uses the Applied Political Economy Analysis (APEA) framework to enable a better understanding of the current state of local governance in Myanmar and make evidence-based recommendations on how international development assistance can contribute to improved local governance in the country. The study achieved this by answering the following core question:

**What is the relationship between villages, village tracts, and townships as it relates to meeting village development priorities? What are the barriers and opportunities?**

This study was commissioned by Pact Myanmar under the Shae Thot program funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

## Report structure

Section 1 provides an overview of the research methodology and APEA framework used. Section 2 gives a brief background on the Shae Thot program, and Section 3 articulates the foundational factors and administrative frameworks present in Myanmar. Sections 4–7 build on the APEA framework to investigate the village-level ecosystem, horizontal linkages between villages, vertical linkages between villages and tracts, and the relationship between villages and township-level government and above. Sections 8–10 look at political economy trends and issues, consider implications for development actors, and provide recommendations for future development programming. Sections 4–10 are based on primary data collected through the 2016–2017 field research period in the target Townships. External data or research used to support or contrast findings is cited as such.

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# 1. Methodology and APEA Framework

## 1.1. Background on Applied Political Economy Analysis

The study uses an APEA approach to understand communities' relationships and power dynamics. Political economy analysis (PEA) emerged in the 1990s as a tool to examine how power is intertwined with resource management and has become an increasingly popular tool in recent years to understand underlying power structures and dynamic change processes that influence scope for development.<sup>3</sup> In the context of this study, a PEA is based on a theory of change that focuses on locally driven change processes. "Political" is understood in broad terms, focusing on how power and norms are embedded, reproduced, and changed by local communities and local authorities.

This study incorporates a range of key issues that are at the core of a PEA (highlighted in Annex C). For methodological reasons and given the breadth of the research questions, the study uses an adaptable and flexible approach to the fixed structure of the main analytical categories set out in this study's APEA framework (outlined in Annex B). This framework is based on USAID's,<sup>4</sup> with some reference the political economy framework set out by the European Union.<sup>5</sup>

As part of this analysis, the study pays attention to the relationships and roles of Shae Thot-supported Village Development Committees (VDCs) with respect to other leadership structures within the community, including:

- Any other entities that may play significant roles for engagement, such as Members of Parliament (MPs), private sector, influential individuals or institutions based within or outside of the communities
- What/who/were/when women impact decision-making processes at the village, tract, and township levels

## 1.2. Implementing the research

### *Methodology*

The townships and communities that participated in this assessment were selected for a variety of reasons, including similarity to other Pact program areas in the Dry Zone and in conflict-affected regions in Southeastern Myanmar. This selection offered the best possible case for comparison. While direct township-to-township comparisons should be avoided, especially when considering heavily conflict-affected areas, the general trends identified through this research may be reflective of situations beyond the assessed townships. Still, it should be noted that study findings only reflect the situation in the three selected townships. Additional research would be needed to understand the validity of these results.

#### **Box 1. Methodology by the numbers**

More than 700 people consulted  
240 interviews/FGDs conducted  
12 focus villages examined in detail

- 2 control (65 villagers interviewed)
- 10 Shae Thot (215 villagers interviewed)

30 villages for context  
213 villagers interviewed  
3 townships analyzed  
31 township officials interviewed

The study is based on a qualitative approach, using focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews, (KIIs), and informal field observation. A team of 16 researchers were deployed in each of the three townships over a three-week period.<sup>6</sup> Each visit was preceded and followed by debriefs with the lead researcher. More than 700 persons were interviewed, including community members, local authorities, civil society organization (CSO) representatives, and Pact staff. Annex

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<sup>3</sup> USAID APEA Framework, available at

<https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2496/Applied%20PEA%20Field%20Guide%20and%20Framework%20Working%20Document%20041516.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> EU PEA framework: <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/political-economy/document/using-political-economy-analysis-improve-eu-development-effectivenessdraft-0>

<sup>6</sup> Weeks were not consecutive. Field research was conducted over a three-month period in all.

D details the specific groups interviewed, and Annex F contains maps of the three research townships, FGD villages, and focus villages.

## Sampling

Village sampling for in-depth field research was based on ensuring a representative sample as per the following criteria.

- The villages are logistically accessible within the time frame.
- The villages are situated in different village tracts.
- For the two Dry Zone townships, the Shae Thot program is implemented in three of the four villages; the fourth is a control village (non-Shae Thot). In the Kayah township, Shae Thot covered 100% of villages, so no control was possible.
- One of the four villages is the main village in the village tract (the village-tract village).
- Villages are dominated by different political parties and authority types (in The Kayah township).

**Table 1. Focus villages in the APEA study<sup>7,8</sup>**

DZ township 1	DZ township 2	Kayah township
Village 1 <i>control: tract village</i>	Village 1 <i>control: tract village</i>	Village 1 <i>Shae Thot: sub-village</i>
Village 2 <i>Shae Thot: sub-village</i>	Village 2 <i>Shae Thot: sub-village</i>	Village 2 <i>Shae Thot: sub-village</i>
Village 3 <i>Shae Thot: sub-village</i>	Village 3 <i>Shae Thot: tract-village/Village Tract Administrator (VTA) from another village</i>	Village 3 <i>Shae Thot: tract village</i>
Village 4 <i>Shae Thot: tract village</i>	Village 4 <i>Shae Thot: sub-village</i>	Village 4 <i>Shae Thot: tract village</i>

## Level of effort

The team of 16 researchers spent 7–8 days in each township. Two teams of six researchers each conducted in-depth field research in four villages per township. The teams spent 2.5–3 days in each village, operating in two sub-teams of three persons each. This allowed them to triangulate findings and deflect interference by dominant leaders (by conducting FDGs and KIIs simultaneously). In total, the research team conducted 240 FBDs and KIIs. One team of three people remained in the township center throughout this period to conduct interviews with Shae Thot staff, township government officials, and representatives from 10 additional Shae Thot villages. After each field phase, research teams returned to Yangon, they wrote detailed field reports and summarized preliminary findings in categories reflecting the original research questions. Analysis and writing took four months. Table 2 (two pages down) provides a breakdown of these processes and timelines.

## 1.3. Data analysis

The research team collected more than 500 pages of qualitative data during the research process. During FGDs, the research team noted group consensus and any strong outlier opinions, highlighting these with quotations. Quantitative insights were drawn through a two-step coding process. The lead researcher coded the data using a combination of “open coding,” which provides value by reflecting key concepts that are found in the participant data, while limiting the introduction of researcher perspective. Question topics that elicited a large variety of responses required additional processing. For these, the researcher consulted external resources and Shae

<sup>7</sup> Annex F contains maps of the three townships, with villages identified as “control,” “Shae Thot,” or “FGD participants.”

<sup>8</sup> A tract village is the primary village within a village tract. Traditionally this is the village where the VTA lives and has the largest population. A sub-village is a village that is part of a specific village tract, but is not the primary village.

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Thot staff to determine the meaning of results, as well as her own knowledge and perspective, and arrived at the final analysis tool.

Quantitative analysis draws from the maximum number of interviewees possible; charts have been correspondingly labelled. The researchers interviewed 280 women and men in the 12 focus villages and 213 in the township-level FGDs. In instances where only quantitative data from the 12 focus villages is noted, the reader should assume qualitative information from the township-level FGDs supports these trends, unless specifically noted. Quotations, tone, omitted information (a finding in itself), and anecdotes were used to round out the analysis.

## 1.4. Limitations

### *Personnel changes and delays*

The research team underwent significant personnel changes, including that of lead researcher, resulting in a 10-month gap between data collection and analysis/writing. While every effort was made to ensure continuity of knowledge, some insights likely were lost in this transition. Additionally, political and community-level dynamics may have changed during this time. This publication attempts to account for dynamics that may have changed over that period, while remaining focused on analyzing the data collected during the December 2016 to March 2017 research period.

### *Methodological limitations*

Lengthy interview guides meant that some topics could not be covered in depth. While most responses could be triangulated, some additional important information occasionally surfaced, but could not be verified. This was especially true for information on underlying power dynamics and norms, which are not always fully articulated in interviews, but become visible through analysis of the full data set, desk research, and other sources. As a result, underlying power dynamics and norms may not have been captured in full.

Obtaining full responses from marginalized and less-educated segments of the communities was an expected challenge for the researchers. The research team treated a lack of response or limited responses as findings in themselves, rather than invalid data.

Some questions elicited few responses from villagers, particularly about engagement with local administrations/authorities in Kayah State and for the role of VDCs regarding other decision-making bodies in villages. Women's role in decision-making was likewise a difficult topic; the following questions were integrated into the interview questions to further elicit responses.

- Where and when do women impact decision-making processes at village, tract, and township levels?
- Are women making decisions about issues that particularly affect women?
- Are women making decisions about issues that don't particularly affect women?
- Are women or their priorities considered in decision making?
- Do men and women benefit differently from the decisions made and the development activities prioritized/pursued?
- Who are the women involved in decision-making?

Researchers had to be particularly insistent and probe in creative ways to elicit responses on these issues. A focus on the *informal* ways in which women contribute to decision-making and/or are consulted during the decision-making process was found to be effective, but could have been probed further.

The relatively small village sample size for in-depth field research along with the difference in how intensively and/or recently the VDCs have been established and supported posed a challenge for uniform findings in relation to the VDCs' roles and relationships with other leadership structures. The small number of "control villages" (2) did not yield enough information to draw useful comparisons between Shae Thot and non-Shae Thot areas.

The very diverse nature of the state and strong variations between localities in Kayah state pose a challenge to identifying strong common trends. Language barriers also impeded data collection in one of the four in-depth villages. Moreover, in one mixed-control village in Kayah, the VTA insisted on being present for all interviews, likely biasing responses. These issues may have affected the representativeness of findings in The Kayah township overall. Nevertheless, the study provides insights into the current dynamics within and between communities and their relationship with the local authorities/administrations of government and ethnic armed groups.

**Table 2. Research approach**

Pre-Data Collection September to November 2016	Field Research December 2016 to March 2017			Analysis and Report Writing December 2017 to February 2018
	DZ township 1, Magwe Region	DZ township 2, Sagaing Region	Kayah township, Kayah State	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Detailed interview questionnaire co-designed between researchers and Pact</li><li>Training of field research staff on the data collection tool, APEA approach, and Shae Thot program</li><li>Training of field research staff on confidentiality and ethics, representation, sampling, logistics, and introducing the research project to the informants</li></ul>	75 KIIs/ FGDs, 241 interviewed	71 KIIs/ FGDs, 261 interviewed	72 KIIs/ FGDs, 194 interviewed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Coding of qualitative responses</li><li>Diagramming power, resource, and political relationships</li></ul>
	Village Level			
	Researchers spent 2.5–3 days per village.			
	4 focus villages; KIIs, and FGDs. 3/4 focus villages participated in the Shae Thot project; 1/4 villages did not (served as control).	4 focus villages; KIIs and FGDs. 3/4 focus villages participated in the Shae Thot project. 1/4 villages did not (served as control)	4 focus villages; KIIs and FGDs. 4/4 focus villages participated in the Shae Thot project. <i>(Shae Thot covered 100% of villages in The Kayah township)</i>	
	Township Level			
	Township-level workshop participants were selected from non-focus villages in an effort to reflect a general representation of all villages in the township.			
	Township-level workshops with 75 participants total; reps from 10 villages. Participants split into 4 FGDs: <i>Women, village leaders, men, and laborers</i>	Township-level workshops with 78 participants total; reps from 10 villages. Participants split into 3 FGDs: <i>women, village leaders, and laborers</i>	Township-level workshops with 60 participants total; reps from 10 villages. Participants split into 3 FGDs: <i>women, village leaders, and laborers</i>	
	Additional Levels			
15 KIIs and FGDs with key township officials and Shae Thot Staff	16 KIIs and FGDs with key township officials and Shae Thot staff	26 KIIs and FGDs with key township officials, CSO representatives, ethnic service providers, and Shae Thot staff		

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## 2. Context: Shae Thot Project and Research Focus Areas

Shae Thot is a \$70 million USAID-funded, 6.5-year integrated community development project working in 2,844 villages across 23 townships in the Central Dry Zone, Yangon, and Kayah State. With Pact as the consortium lead, four international partners and thirteen local partners<sup>9</sup> provide resources and technical assistance to increase community-based knowledge, ownership, and implementation of local development priorities. The project facilitates community participation to achieve sustainable solutions in the areas of maternal and child health; livelihoods and food security; and water, sanitation, and hygiene, in addition to strengthening community governance and civil society.

Shae Thot developed 1,360 VDCs over the life of project and trained 13,704 people on aspects of good governance. VDCs are democratically elected groups that work with formal village authorities and traditional leaders to identify, prioritize, and address a community's development needs. For many villagers, the VDC represented their first opportunity to actively participate in community governance and decision-making. VDCs engage local authorities, private donors, CSOs, neighboring communities, and villagers to build schools, roads, wells, and clinics; bring electricity; and start social welfare groups, among a variety of other achievements. This APEA seeks to better understand the role of the VDC regarding other local leadership bodies.

A majority of Shae Thot was implemented in the Central Dry Zone regions of Mandalay, Magwe, and Sagaing. The project was expanded into Southern Kayah in 2013 following the bilateral ceasefire agreement between the Government of Myanmar (GOM) and the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP). Pact and USAID were keenly interested in better understanding village dynamics in both these areas. Townships were selected for further study based on the active presence of Shae Thot VDC programming at the time of data collection and, for the Dry Zone, shared characteristics with other townships in the region. The Kayah township studied has a long history of violent conflict, forced migration, and mixed control, and thus serves as an important case for better understanding communities throughout Southeastern Myanmar. While the situation from one village to another in this area can vary drastically and The Kayah township exhibits several unique political, environmental, and economic characteristics, the area nevertheless provides an important contrast to central, predominantly Bamar and GOM-controlled villages that have largely been spared from conflict over the past 60 years.

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<sup>9</sup> International partners are: Cesvi, Marie Stopes International, Pact Global Microfinance Fund, and UN-Habitat. Local partners are: Alin Thit, Civil Health and Development Network, Community Development Association, Kainayar Rural Social Development Organization, Karenni Mobile Health Committee, Karuna Mission Social Solidarity, Kayan Women Organization, Mawdukalamae Social Development Association, Rural Development Agency, Social Vision Services, Swanyee Development Foundation, and Thirst-Aid.



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### 3. Foundational Factors and Formal Rules of the Game in Myanmar's Local Governance System

**Foundational factors** are deeply embedded structures that fundamentally shape the broad character of the state and the political system. Those included here relate to issues such as:

- The formation, legitimacy, and contested nature of the state
- The administration system of state and non-state actors
- Motivations and interests of principal actors of concern
- Socio-political features, such as ethnicity and loyalties, affecting local governance in Myanmar, including in areas of contested political authority

**Rules of the game** include existing legal frameworks, political competition, and formal institutions.

#### 3.1. A brief history: From colonial state to military state to multi-party democracy in less than 70 years

After decades of anti-colonial struggle, Myanmar gained independence in 1947. Soon thereafter, civil war engulfed most of the country, with ethnic armed groups (EAGs) contesting the legitimacy of the state, challenging the parliamentary system, and demanding self-rule. In response, the military took over control of the country in a coup in 1962 and remained in power until 2011. This period was dominated by a one-party, socialist-inspired, military-dominated regime from 1962 until 1988. Following a large popular uprising in 1988, the military ruled directly until it handed over power to a military-supported, reform-minded government in 2011 led by President U Thein Sein. The years of military rule were dominated by extensive repression of human rights, poverty, violence, displacement, and prolonged conflict throughout the country and was particularly acute in ethnic areas.

The period from 2011 until 2016 initiated a flurry of reforms. Many restrictions on freedom of expression and association were lifted, including overt censorship of print media. The government re-negotiated and/or entered into ceasefire agreements with most EAGs. Slowly, a pervasive, deeply rooted atmosphere of fear began to wane. In response to the reforms, most international sanctions on Myanmar were lifted.

Multi-party democracy was only re-introduced in Myanmar in 2010, after almost 50 years of absence. Political parties and citizens are only now learning appropriate ways of engagement.<sup>10</sup> In 2015, the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by long-term opposition figure Aung San Suu Kyi, overwhelmingly won the country's first free and fair elections since 1960. In the first half of 2016, the new parliament and government formally took over power. Political parties and political affiliations are expected to increasingly affect competition for political power at the local level, including the affiliation of different segments of local communities in Myanmar.

Contested state boundaries and resultant conflicts have deepened. In conflict-affected areas there exists a fear of government and armed actors, a strong sense of community-self-sufficiency, and a mix of social service provision.

The Myanmar state has been contested throughout its existence, not only the legitimacy of its leaders, but also the boundaries of its territory. Many ethnic minorities, which make up at least 30% of the population, have never considered themselves partially or fully belonging to the nation state dominated by the Burman ethnic group. Armed conflicts have continued since the 1950s—sometimes labeled the world's longest civil war—between the large Myanmar Army and myriad ethnic armed groups and

militias. These groups maintain varying degrees of legitimacy among the local populations they seek to represent. While some have explicit political goals focused on federalism, respect for ethnic rights, and natural resource-sharing, others focus more on seeking rent and exerting territorial

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<sup>10</sup> Susanne Kempel, Chan Myaw Aung Sun, and Aung Tun. 2015. *Myanmar Political Parties at a Time of Transition: Political party dynamics at the national and local level*.

control. In Kayah, ceasefire conditions have led the military to informally permit development and other outside actors access to EAGs, and militia groups have increasingly become new actors in the area.<sup>11</sup>

As a result, communities in contested areas, such as in Kayah State, experience life under “multiple ‘states’ or ‘state-like authorities’ that extract from citizens, both mediate and cause conflict, and provide some services for residents and commercial interests.”<sup>12</sup> Among such communities, a culture of fear and fending for themselves has emerged. While this response is stronger in conflict-affected areas, it is not limited to them. For decades, communities across Myanmar have experienced the state as abusive at worst and absent at best. However, the lack of stability, peace, and freedom of expression or association over more than half a century has also reduced opportunities for communities to engage and organize across village boundaries to influence decision-making of higher-level local authorities and or administrations.

In EAG-controlled areas, the larger EAGs maintain some level of administrative structures and administer their areas in a similar way to those administered by one-party states. The provision of social services forms a key part of the governance efforts of EAGs and their relationship with local ethnic communities.<sup>13</sup> Among the EAGs, Karen National Union, New Mon State Party, Kachin Independence Organization, and KNPP all operate primary health clinics and schools covering several hundred thousand people.

#### **Box 2. Service delivery by EAGs and EAG-affiliated organizations in Kayah State<sup>14</sup>**

The main Kayah State-based EAGs are the KNPP and Kayan New Land Party (KNLP), both of which have bilateral ceasefires with the GOM, but have not signed the National Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). At least six other armed groups are based in the area, most of which have splintered from the KNPP.

The KNPP's Karenni National Education Department provides more than 400 primary schools, about 30 middle schools, and more than 10 high schools in Kayah State, with about 1,500 teachers and around 50,000 students. Education services are also provided by Kayan New Generation Youth (KNGY), which maintains unofficial relations with the KNLP. In addition, some communities set up self-help schools by raising funds themselves. In comparison, the Ministry of Education provides education for around 55,000 students through a total of almost 400 schools.

Significant healthcare is provided by the Civil Health and Development Network (CHDN), which is a consortium of Kayah entities linked to the various EAGs (such as the KNPP, KNLP, Karenni National Peace and Development Party, Karenni National Solidarity Organization, Kayan New Generation, and the Karenni National People's Liberation Front) and, in some instances, shares resources such as personnel with the Government Health Services.<sup>15</sup> The network covers more than 220 health providers. Health and relief support is also provided by Karenni and Kayan Free Burma Rangers team and Backpack Health Worker Teams. Mobile health clinics, or “backpack services,” appear to be active (more than once per month) in most townships of Kayah State.

Additional Karenni organizations affiliated with the KNPP include:

- Karenni Social Welfare and Development Committee: Relief and community development support for internally displaced and other conflict-affected communities
- Karenni National Women's Organization: Support for women's and children's health, nursery school support, emergency assistance (especially for women), and care for elderly internally displaced persons (IDPs)
- KNGY: Provides a range of services to primarily Kayan populations, including basic community development and rights and political awareness training

<sup>11</sup> Kim Joliffe. 2015. *Ethnic Armed Conflict and Territorial Administration in Myanmar* (executive summary).

<sup>12</sup> Mary Callahan. 2010. Ethnicity and Democratization in Myanmar. *Asian Journal of Political Science* 18(2).

<sup>13</sup> Kim Joliffe. 2014. *Ethnic Conflict and Social Services in Myanmar's Contested Areas*. The Asia Foundation.

<sup>14</sup> This overview is based on the information contained in the report *Ethnic Conflict and Social Services in Myanmar's Contested Regions* by Kim Joliffe, 2014 (page 19), with additional and updated data provided by Myanmar MIMU's *Overview of the March 2017 3W KAYAH State*, the report *Kayah State: Socio-economic Analysis* by Nina Schuler for the European Union, and Shae Thot staff and partners in Loikaw township, Kayah State.

<sup>15</sup> Pact has worked with CHDN and other health providers.

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## 3.2. The present: The peace process and national ceasefire agreement

In 2012, President U Thein Sein reached out to the EAGs, resulting in 14 major EAGs, including the KNPP, signing bilateral ceasefire agreements with the government. Subsequently (since 2013), the government's strategy has moved from dealing with individual ethnic organizations to seeking a joint agreement with all EAGs to sign a NCA, to be followed by the formulation of a framework for political negotiation and finally a political dialogue. This process and the resulting 2015 NCA set out the future of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, including the status of ethnic areas within a federal democratic union.

Aung San Suu Kyi has largely continued this track, focusing on the NCA as the only way forward. Overall, NCA negotiations and inclusion of more signatories have proceeded slower than anticipated, mainly due to lack of trust on both sides. It should be recognized that these negotiations touch on some of the most fundamental issues related to Myanmar as a nation state and on how to accommodate conflicting visions of how the state should be constituted.

A key provision in the NCA of relevance to local governance is the “interim arrangements” outlined in Chapter 6, which stipulates that EAGs continue to be responsible in their relevant capacities for development and security in their respective areas during the ceasefire and political dialogue period. The parties (leaders of the executive branch, parliament, armed forces, and EAGs) will carry out and coordinate health, education, and socio-economic development programs; environmental conservation; efforts to preserve and promote ethnic culture, language, and literature; matters regarding peace, stability, and the maintenance of rule of law; receiving aid from donor agencies for regional development and capacity-building projects; and eradication of illicit drugs. In other words, the NCA specifically acknowledges the unofficial arrangements that preside in most areas of mixed and EAG control. This acknowledgement potentially provides new opportunities for development actors to work with EAGs, or to support collaborations between EAGs and GOM service providers in the same area.

## 3.3. The present: The 2008 constitution and current organizing framework

### *Organizing the union*

The 2008 constitution<sup>16</sup> is the primary legal framework for governance in Myanmar. In stark contrast to the military command that governed the country for almost 20 years, the constitution lays out a system of checks and balances between three branches of government: legislative, executive, and judicial. It also allows for increased decentralization and sets out the parameters for the legislative and executive powers allocated to the 14 states/regions, the six self-administered zones, and the union territory of Nay Pyi Taw.

Section 51 of the constitution further outlines the organizing structures of the country and the regions that comprise its territory, which are a critical framework for the operation of local governance and development in Myanmar.<sup>17</sup> From the lowest level up:

- Villages are organized into village tracts
- Village tracts are organized into townships
- Townships are organized into districts
- Districts are organized into regions or states<sup>18</sup>
- Regions, states, and union territories are organized as the Republic

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<sup>16</sup> Implemented since 2011

<sup>17</sup> Villages are grouped into village tracts in rural areas, and households are grouped into wards in urban areas. Grouped together, village tracts and wards form townships. Because this APEA focuses on village governance and development, the authors omitted wards from the narrative to avoid confusion.

<sup>18</sup> “States” is the term used for ethnic minority-dominated areas and “regions” for Bamar-majority areas.

Townships act as the main point of delivery of government services. Townships consist of an average of 41 village tracts or 215 villages. With villages comprising approximately 120 households or 600 people each, an average township administration is responsible for approximately 130,000 people.<sup>19</sup> Districts generally function as administrative and coordination units rather than direct public service providers. States/regions have elected parliaments (or Hluttaws) and established branch ministries, but these bodies have limited powers according to the 2008 constitution.

### **Legal frameworks for increased representation at the local level**

The constitution does not specify any elected government below the level of states/regions. However, as part of a series of good governance and decentralization measures passed under President Thein Sein, recent laws and policies emphasize a people-centered approach and bottom-up planning as key pillars of the government, specifically at the township and village tract administration levels. This included measures to increase legitimacy and representation of sub-national authorities.<sup>20,21</sup>

Of great importance was the passage of the 2012 Ward/Village Tract Administration Law (hereafter known as the 2012 Law), which provides the legal framework for this level of administration. This framework remains deeply rooted in historic developments of local administrative systems in central Myanmar, but can also be viewed as an important shift toward bottom-up democratization. The most significant provision of the 2012 Law was that the VTA would now be elected. This brought about a measure of local representation that previously did not exist. Under the prior 1907 Village Act, the village headman (VTA) was appointed on behalf of the central government and had almost absolute powers, such as investigation, search, and arrest, and civilians were forbidden from lodging any complaint against the headman or member of a village committee or rural policeman to a court.<sup>22</sup> As such, Myanmar's population is familiar with the state being more extractive (through taxes, forced agriculture, in-kind or demands for labor, money, or soldiers) than supportive.

An elected VTA represents a fundamental shift in representation and accountability at the local level.

Over the past six years, this representativeness has been increasing. Under the 2012 Law, the elections were indirect because they were done through a 10-household leader (10HHL), who casted 1 vote for every 10 households. A 2016 amendment expanded voter eligibility to include one adult per household. The GOM passed a third amendment to this law in January 2018, stating that the VTA's formal mandate remains focused on tasks related to maintaining law and order. Only two of the 33 provisions address the VTA's

role in development facilitation and coordination. The GOM has not yet implemented changes related to these new provisions.

There is still no specific legal framework for district and township administration, which is led by the General Administration Department (GAD), nor do any directly elected bodies exist at the township or district level.

Figure 1 (on the next page) highlights that in a typical structure, the VTA is at a critical intersection of political and administrative accountability. Administratively, the VTA is accountable upward to the Township Authority and other parts of the GAD. However, he also must be accountable

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, and Irrigation Department of Rural Development. 2017. *Township Rural Development Strategy and Programme, Myanmar: Guidelines*.

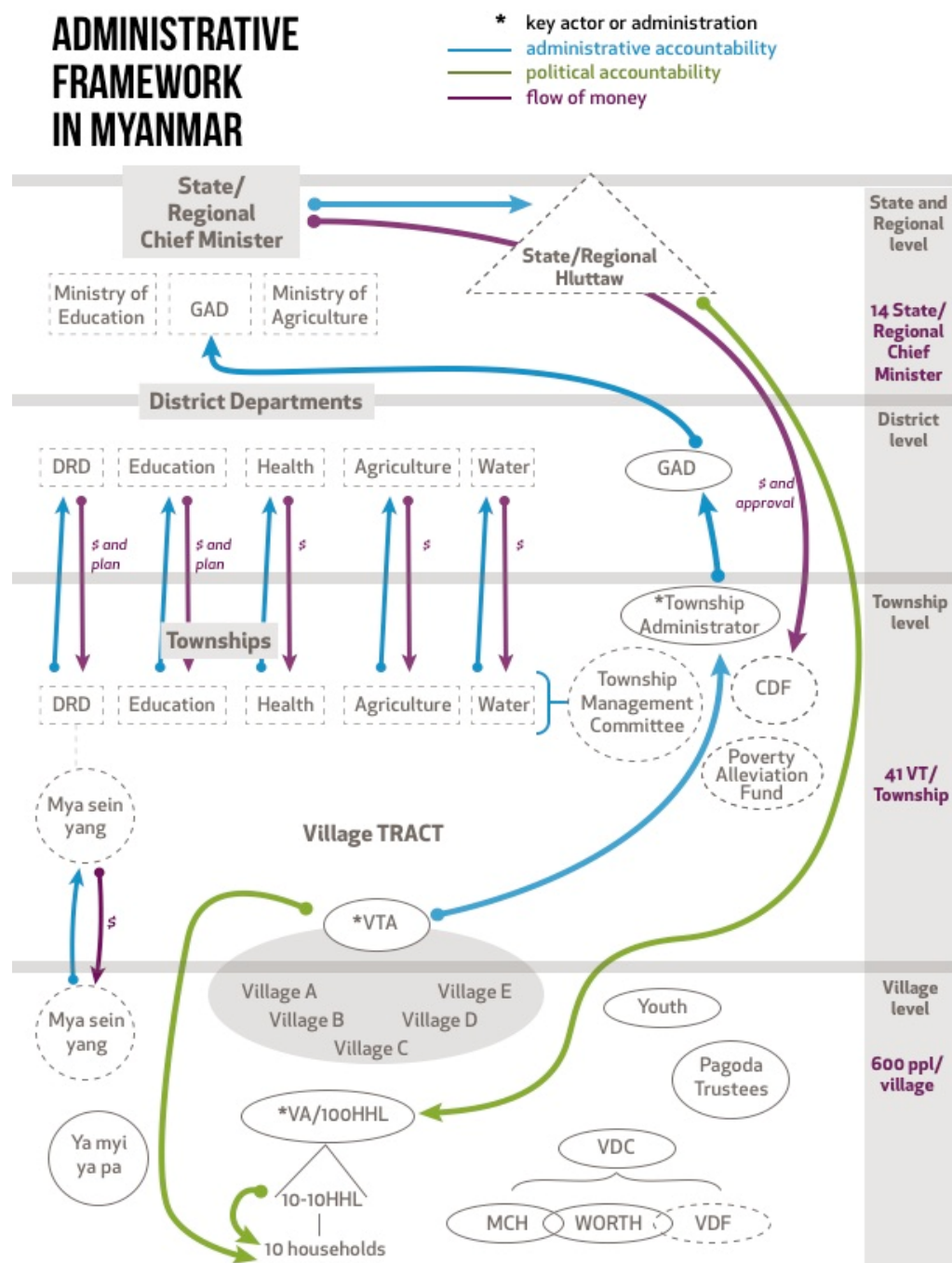
<sup>20</sup> Speech by President Thein Sein, 26 December 2012; GOM. 2013. *Framework for economic and social reforms, Policy priorities for 2012–2015 towards the long-term goals of the national comprehensive development plan*.

<sup>21</sup> Other reforms have been passed under this presidency. The 2013 State and Region Hluttaw Law (an amendment of the State Peace and Development Council 2010 Region and State Hluttaw Law) includes significant amendments, including an allowance for Hluttaw offices, the possibility of the public attending the Hluttaw sessions, and proposals for a Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and representative offices. State and Region Municipal Acts have been passed in all states/regions during the period 2012–2014, setting out the functioning of the Development Affairs (Municipal) Committees and associated Organizations, which are fully decentralized to the state/region levels.

<sup>22</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Myanmar. 2015a. *Mapping the State of Local Governance in Myanmar: Background and Methodology, Local Governance Mapping*.

downward to the constituency of his village tract. Figure 1 includes only GOM actors and public, not EAG actors, who are relevant only in some townships.

Figure 1. Illustrative local governance structures in Myanmar



### Localized decision-making

The Thein Sein government created several different initiatives that allocate limited funding to states/regions and townships. The implementation of these funds provides new opportunities for village tracts to submit proposals for funding, allowing communities a slightly larger voice than before in prioritizing local development needs. The primary funds are outlined in Table 3 (on the next page).

Alongside these new funding opportunities, the Thein Sein government also established four different committees at the township level (and two at the ward/village tract level): the Township



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Development Support Committee (TDSC), the Development (Municipal) Affairs Committee, the Farmland Management Body (FMB), and the Township Management Committee (TMC).<sup>23</sup> These were tasked with improving coordination between government departments at the local level and enhancing the participation of the local population in socio-economic development planning, including advising relevant local government departments on local development and poverty reduction.<sup>24</sup> The TDSC, which includes GAD staff, was also meant to provide a check on the power of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) by reviewing this fund's decisions. The TDSC expired with the election of the new government and was not renewed.

Overall, these measures, along with the increased freedom of expression, has allowed for some limited improvement in local governance. However, a full decentralization plan, a comprehensive framework for restructuring local administration or reform introducing a third tier of government in Myanmar did not take place. The new division of powers between the Union (national) and the state/region level has created a blurry distinction of administrative functions between the two levels. While elements of decentralization are unfolding in Myanmar and opening a new space for localized decision-making, government authority remains highly centralized. This issue is of key importance to the democratization process, the peace process and the political dialogue surrounding amendments to the constitution.

### ***The General Administration Department as the backbone of top-down control***

The GAD is the administrative backbone of the country and falls under the MOHA. This ministry is one of the most powerful union-level ministries and one of the three ministries that must be headed by the Commander in Chief of the Defense Forces per the 2008 constitution. The GAD is the civil service of Myanmar and has the most frequent interface with the public out of all government entities. This local administration system has been more strictly and fully enforced in areas where the state had full control and less in the periphery or in areas of EAG dominance. The leadership of each administrative level in Myanmar is part of the GAD (this includes the VTA, Township Administrator (TA), and State/Region Chief Ministers).

While Parliament and the Executive Branch set policy and budgets for the country, it is primarily up to the GAD staff to execute those priorities. During the Thein Sein government, the same party (the USDP) controlled the executive, administrative (GAD), and legislative arms of government. Since the 2015 elections, the NLD has controlled the executive branch of government, with the important exception of the Ministry of Home Affairs and its General Administration Department. The NLD also has a majority in Parliament. In other words, the country's civil service is no longer controlled politically or hierarchically by the elected party that controls the Executive Branch and Parliament. This has resulted in a much more diverse set of allegiances, along with potentially conflicting incentives between the policymaking and implementation parts of government than before.

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<sup>23</sup> The President Office. 2013. *Directive for the formation of township, Quarter (or) Village Tract Development Support Committee. Order # 27/2013.*

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

**Table 3. Local development funds**

In addition to the annual budgets provided by Naypyidaw to state/ regional line ministries, there are additional sources of special purpose development funding. These funds are important in that disbursement decisions are influenced or entirely within the control of local actors. The following table details these funds and in which of the study townships they are available.

Fund	Purpose	Decision-Making	Years Active	Size of Grants	Present in...
Constituency Development Fund (CDF)	Representatives from the two houses of the union legislature and regional/state Hluttaws provide funds to their constituencies, which are formed at the township level. Projects can be for school and health facility renovation, road improvement or bridges, water facilities, and electricity.	Village tracts can submit proposals. In practice, MPs may draft/submit proposals directly on behalf of villages they visit. These projects are vetted by township Development Implementation Bodies, which consist of all four Hluttaw representatives for the township and some government staff. The state government determines the budget allocation for each project and informs township GAD of its decisions.	2013 to present	Maximum 5 million kyat (\$3,750) per project	DZ Township 1, DZ township 2, Kayah Township
Mya Sein Yaung Fund (MSY)	MSY aims to reduce poverty in rural areas by creating job opportunities, food security, and improving resilience to disasters through a village-level revolving fund. MSY provides loans to villages to finance household businesses.	The Department of Rural Development (DRD) manages these funds, which come from the national budget. MSY village committees are responsible for administering the fund, including setting interest rates (0.5–1.5% per month).	2015 to present	30 million kyat per village (~\$22,500)	DZ Township 1, DZ township 2, Kayah Township
National Community Driven Development Project (NCDDP)	NCDDP supports communities in select townships through improved access to and use of basic infrastructure through a people-centered approach. Non-government schools and health centers are eligible for support, if identified by the community as a priority.	DRD implements this World Bank-funded project. DRD hires township assistants and community facilitators who are trained by DRD to support project planning and implementation.	2013 to present	Average \$33,000 per year block grant to participating village tracts (amount varies by population)	Kayah Township (began late 2016)
Poverty Reduction Fund	This presidential initiative addresses rural development and poverty through projects such as school and health facility renovation, road improvement or bridges, water facilities, and electricity.	Village tracts can submit proposals. The TDSCs previously played an important role in decision-making in this fund, with the GAD controlling the funds.	2012 to present	1 billion kyat (~\$75,000) to each state/region, 2–3 million kyat per project	unknown



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## Women's historically excluded roles

Myanmar administrative law does not directly address the role of women in elected, appointed, or civil service positions. However, in practice, the informal *rules of the game* have kept women's representation extremely low or, at some levels, absent. As a 2015 report by the Gender Equality Network (GEN) summarized, "There is, on the one hand, a failure to notice gender inequality. On the other hand, there is a tendency to justify gender-based differences with cultural and religious arguments and references."<sup>25</sup>

Since 2015, women have served in greater numbers in elected positions, but there has been little change in the gender balance of appointed positions. In the executive branch, where Ministers are appointed rather than elected, only four women have served as Ministers in nearly a century.<sup>26</sup> Three of those women have served since 2011, when the military handed over power to a quasi-civilian government. Only one woman, Aung San Suu Kyi, has been appointed as a Minister by the NLD government, but it did appoint two women as Chief Ministers, which are the executive of a state or region. Also, in 2016, the number of women's in parliament rose to 13%, up from less than 5% under the previous government. At the local administrative levels, women's representation is even more limited than at the state/region and national levels; all TAs in Myanmar are men.

This gender imbalance in public office may skew planning and budget expenditures toward men's priorities. In Myanmar, male and female local leaders emphasize different parts of their job; while female VTAs emphasize their role as problem-solvers and their responsibility for development, male VTAs are most focused on their responsibility for ensuring peace and security.<sup>27</sup> While the mere physical presence of women in governance bodies does not ensure representation of women's interests per se, it improves the likelihood. For example, randomized control trial research in India shows that the gender of government officials affects the types of public goods they provide; namely, leaders invest more in issues directly relevant to the needs of their own gender.<sup>28</sup>

In conflict-affected areas, gender dynamics have historically differed somewhat. More women have filled formal leadership positions in these areas with the support of, rather than despite, their male peers. Research suggests that this is not a new dynamic, but rather emerged during previous periods of active conflict, when leadership roles were perceived as too dangerous for men.

*The election of women was obviously born of necessity, as a direct result of the oppressive practices of the Burma Army, and had little to do with any conscious promotion of gender equality. However, there can be no doubt that the experience of having women leaders, in many cases for decades now, has had an impact on community perceptions of the role of women.*<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> GEN. 2015. *Raising the Curtain: Cultural Norms, Social Practices and Gender Equality in Myanmar*.

<sup>26</sup> San Yamin Aung. 2017, June 9. *Burma's Gender Gap: Only Four Women Ministers in Nearly a Century*. <https://www.irrawaddy.com/specials/women/burmas-gender-gap-four-women-ministers-nearly-century.html>

<sup>27</sup> UNDP 2015a

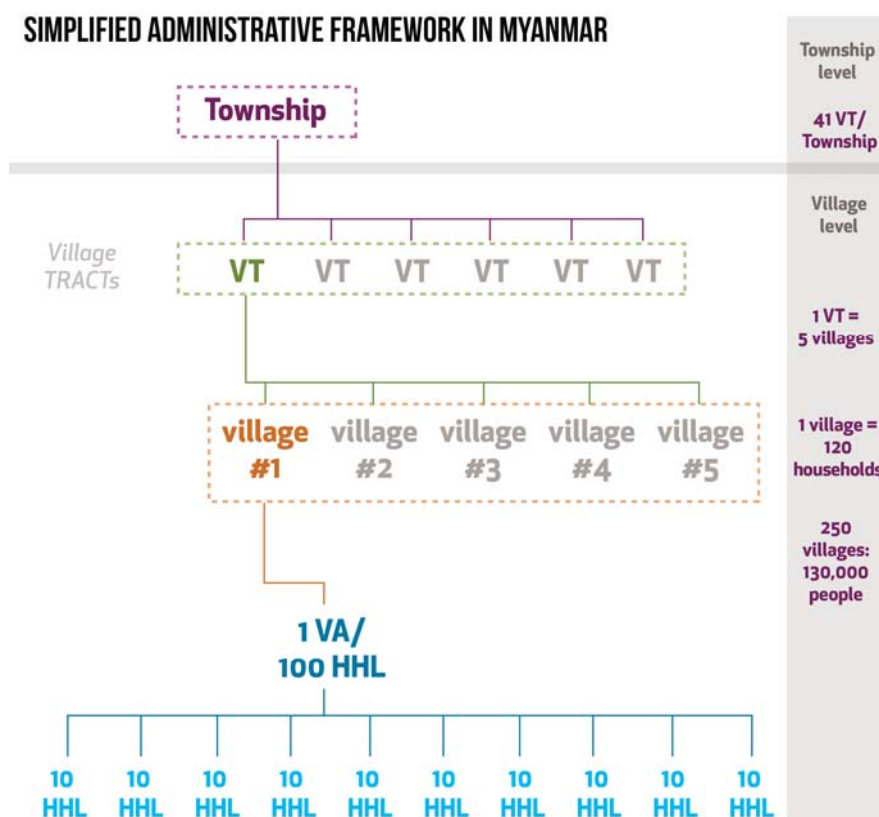
<sup>28</sup> Raghabendra Chattopadhyay and Esther Duflo. 2014. Women as Policy Makers: Evidence from a Randomized Experiment in India. *Econometrica*.

<sup>29</sup> Karen Women Organization. 2010. *Walking Amongst Sharp Knives*.

## 4. The Village-Level Ecosystem and Intra-Village Relationships

For most of Myanmar's population, the village is the primary community to which an individual belongs. Villages have complex internal ecosystems for decision-making, resiliency, and resolving disputes. Government administration reaches into the village level through the system of VTAs, Village Administrators (VAs) or 100 household leaders (100HHLs),<sup>30</sup> and 10HHLs. Villages are internally organized into groupings of 10 households who select a 10HHL. Each village also has a VA/100HHL who reports to the VTA. The VTA is also the VA in his<sup>31</sup> home village. In addition to these administrative roles, villages have informal leaders and community-led groups. Figure 2 displays how this village-level administration is set up.

Figure 2. Village-level administrative framework



At the village level, the *rules of the game* have shifted most notably through the 2012 Law (and its amendments), resulting in the potential for a broader range of possible administrative leaders and accountable representation. In Kayah, the 2012 and 2015 ceasefire agreements brought a second fundamental change in the *rules of the game* by improving the security situation.

Considering Myanmar's history of conflict and ethnic and religious differences, villages in the Dry Zone and in Kayah have diverged in their development. Most notably, community groups in Dry Zone villages have flourished in comparison to the Kayah township. Government actors are rarely called on to resolve village-level disputes in the Kayah focus township but are part of conflict resolution in Dry Zone. And, women have taken on different leadership roles in each area. Overall, foundational patriarchal factors have kept men at the forefront of leadership and decision-making in Dry Zone villages. Yet five years after the ceasefire, women's continued presence in leadership

<sup>30</sup> Though the 2016 Amendment to the Village Tract Administration Law names these leaders as "100 household leaders," they are commonly still referred to as "Village Administrators." Hence, this report uses the terms together.

<sup>31</sup> The VTA is referred to as "he" because the overwhelming majority of VTAs in Myanmar are men and all the current VTAs in the research villages are men.

roles in the Kayah focus township suggests that perhaps women will indeed remain in these positions even in more peaceful circumstances. These dynamics merit further observations, as previous research suggests that women in some Karenni communities are already retreating from leadership roles, as the improving security situation re-opens space for men to fill leadership roles interfacing with government.<sup>32</sup>

### Box 3. Key findings on the village ecosystem

- Village administration no longer exerts as much “hard power” over community members and instead relies more on persuasion and “soft power” approaches.
- Youth—either as individuals or groups—are filling new important roles as leaders, mediators, and in holding power structures accountable.
- The GAD structure has long been the personification of village-level control in Myanmar, and according to the communities in this research, it remains the most influential group in the Dry Zone.
- There is a high level of similarity across Dry Zone villages in terms of what types of local groups are present. There is much more diversity in the Kayah focus township.
- VDCs are among the top three most influential groups across all townships. They are the most influential in the Kayah focus township.
- “Accountant” is the most common leadership role for women across all townships.
- Research villages in the Kayah focus township report a preference to handle disputes internally or with the assistance of EAGs, but not with administrative officials. Dry Zone villages engage with a variety of actors to resolve disputes.
- Women more frequently hold administrative and other leadership positions in the Kayah focus township than in Dry Zone townships that were part of this research.
- Across all townships in this study, decision-making is primarily the role of a small group of mostly male individuals. Most decisions within the community are made by a small group consulting internally or with other select groups, such as youth, village leaders, village elders and respected persons (VERP), or occasionally 10HHLs, then informing the rest of the community in a mass meeting of the decision.

### Box 4. EAGs’ roles in the village ecosystem

In three of four Kayah focus villages, interviewees report that they must still pay a yearly tax to EAGs. Male-headed households must give 10,000 kyats and women-headed households give 5,000 kyats. Households that own shops, liquor shops, and motorbikes must 30,000–50,000 kyats. Villagers have been pushing back on this practice, with at least one village negotiating a 5% fee reduction per household.

Interviewees reported that the EAGs do not often engage in village development activities. One village indicated they receive occasional health care assistance from EAG affiliated health providers, and in another an EAG offered to build a school, though they declined the offer.

Interviews with township staff suggest this taxation practice is longer widespread. Instead, they reported that only lumber traders are taxed by the EAGs in the area and that EAGs may sometimes request money only in exchange for providing development support such as building schools or community halls.

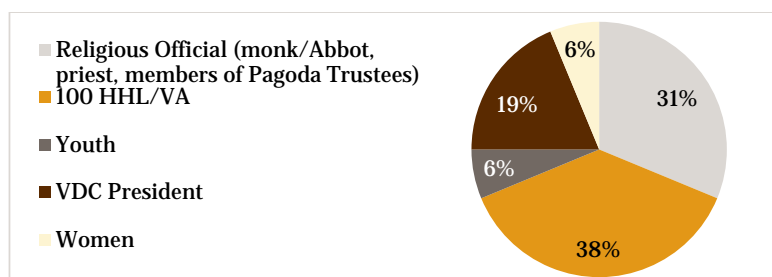
## 4.1. Village administrative leadership

APEA interviewees from Dry Zone and Kayah perceive village authorities and religious leaders to have the most influence over village affairs. Women and youth were determined to be least influential. The following sections detail the nature of these roles and the implications for communities.

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<sup>32</sup> Karen Human Rights Group. 2016. *Hidden Strengths, Hidden Struggles*.

Figure 3. Most influential leaders in a village<sup>33</sup>



### 100 household leaders/Village Administrators

The 2016 Amendment to the Village Tract Administration Law legally recognized the 100HHL/VA position, ensuring this position could be involved formally in village administration. The law outlines that the 100HHL shall be elected from the 10HHLs by the VERP supervisory board in consultation with the household representatives from that group of 100 households.

Selection as an administrative village leader is reported to be more a matter of acquiescence than competition. Across all villages in this study, only a few advantages to being a 100HHL were enumerated (religious merit, respect), though a number of disadvantages were discussed.

In Dry Zone villages, research uncovered articulations that one of the main reasons people want to be 100HHLs is to introduce financial transparency into their village. In three of the four focus villages, comments were made about how previous VAs were not transparent. One person who ran for VTA said, “The incentive to become a 100HH leader is to do village development activities. Also, because a former 100HH leader didn’t make financial clearances, I want to make them thoroughly.”

Chief amongst the disadvantages are that 100HHLs have less time to focus on their own livelihood, are not paid for the duties, and potentially have neighbors become angry with them.<sup>34</sup> Most villages believed that only people with stable incomes are able to participate in community governance. Generally, in villages nearer to the Kayah township Town (i.e., with more government control), the VA has changed recently, whereas in faraway villages the VA has remained the same. Township officials believe this may be due to the importance of knowing the Burmese language in navigating the bureaucracy, with fewer Burmese speakers residing in remote villages.

Women are limited in taking on 100HHL/VA leadership positions across all townships in the study. Villages in DZ township 1 cite a few reasons as to why, including that “women cannot ride motorbikes, so they have difficulties going to town for quarterly meetings,” and “women don’t know how to use mobile phones for people to call them with issues, or for the VTA to reach them, and they don’t have people helping them with the housework.” Said a female MSY committee member, age 38: “Only those who can administer/rule their families are elected to administer/rule the village. They can only administer/rule the village if they can administer/rule their families.” The fact that many women can and do ride motorbikes, know how to use mobile phones, and could manage additional work if needed suggests that the reasons for which women are not considered

<sup>33</sup> Data source: 12 focus villages, 280 people interviewed

<sup>34</sup> For further research on perceptions and disincentives of being VA leaders, see: Susanne Kempel. 2012. *Village Institutions and Leadership in Myanmar*. UNDP.

for leadership roles is more deeply rooted in cultural and social beliefs and norms about the role of women in Myanmar.

### 10 household leaders

10HHLs carry out low-level administrative tasks for the group of 10 households in their cluster. According to villages in this study, during the period of military government, the township GAD usually assigned 10HHLs directly. Consequently, most 10HHLs were men who had good connections to township authorities and were not necessarily representative of the needs or preferences of the cluster of 10 households they oversaw. Starting in 2010, the election of the 10HHLs shifted from the GAD to the cluster of 10 households. In most of these villages, new 10HHLs were selected for the first time in 2010. There was no consistent way in which 10HHL were selected across villages; in

some villages only the household head (usually a man) could vote or consent, in other villages a “household representative” (not necessarily the head) voted, and in some instances VERP appointed the 10HHLs. Some of this variety may be due to the phased approach of the 2012 Law and its amendments, with the original law outlining election of the 10HHLs by member household leaders and the third amendment (December 2016) introducing the idea of a “household representative.” In all instances, the Supervisory Board, composed of VERP, plays an oversight and approval role.

Duties of 10 HHL generally include providing food to workers, collecting village donations for activities determined by the VTA (e.g., student gathering festival), informing villagers of administration decisions, resolving neighbor disputes (see Section 4.5), and voting in the VTA election (see Section 6.4). Anecdotally, it appears that villagers see these duties as simply a role that someone needs to take on to facilitate village life and that it does not particularly matter who fulfills the role. For example, there were instances across all villages where a 10HHL became ill and his family member took over his responsibilities smoothly and without complaint from anyone in the village. Communities in Dry Zone townships believe that 10HHLs have fewer responsibilities than they did four or five years ago; with the abolishment of divisions,<sup>35</sup> 10HHLs no longer receive many instructions from outside their village borders and instead are primarily focused on internal village administration duties.

Nonetheless, the 10HHLs’ potential impact should not be minimized because they are often consulted on behalf of their house clusters by the VA and VTA (see Section 4.4) and are involved in resolving disputes (see Section 4.5). This is also the one administrative role that women across both Dry Zone and the Kayah township villages fill, albeit in small numbers. As one 50-year old woman from DZ township 1 said, “Administration duty is given to men but when it comes to execution, [but] women do the work just as much.”

As discussed in section 3, in mixed-control areas, women have been taking on leadership roles in both community development and administration for years. In the study area, only eleven 10HHLs are women (out of approximately 146 10HHLs in the focus villages<sup>36</sup>). Five of these are from the Kayah township, though the focus villages in the Kayah township include approximately one-eight

#### Box 5. Can providing stipends overcome disincentives to leadership?

In one The Kayah township village, the villagers pay the 100HHL/VA a salary. 100HHL also intends to give salaries to hard working 10HHLs from the money villagers provided for the administration team—1,000 kyats per month per household. Under the previous 100HHL, only the 100HHL received such a stipend.

The villagers report that they willingly contribute money because the leaders spend time away from their own livelihoods to fulfill their leadership duties. Another possible explanation for this tradition is that historically village leaders were singled out by both the Tatmadaw and EAGs for punishment. Although respondents did not cite the risk to personal welfare as a reason for further incentivizing the VA, the village where this case surfaced is under mixed control, meaning the VA must regularly navigate between government and EAG actors and interests.

<sup>35</sup> Prior to 2010, Myanmar’s regions were called divisions.

<sup>36</sup> Information about women 10HHLs from township-level focus group discussions is not included here because the research did not document how many households in each of the villages had representatives present.



the number of households as in the Dry Zone research area. In addition, the women leaders in Dry Zone report more difficulties in executing their responsibilities than the women 10HHLs in the Kayah township due to lack of respect from their community; women in Kayah reported none, whereas women in Dry Zone villages provided several examples of difficulty. As one woman 10HHL from Dry Zone shared:

*Being a woman and a 10HH leader, I face many difficulties while collecting money. Being a woman, I am not respected by others and so, I was not able to give collected money in time while the other 10HHLs could finish their duty. Being late in payment I was scolded by the VA during a meeting. There has been social tension between me and the VA since then, though later the VA apologized to me.*

A common refrain across Dry Zone villages, exemplified by a 40-year-old male 10HHL in DZ township 2, was, “Daw Aung San Su Kyi has become a leader because she is the daughter of General Aung San. Women can't become leaders here.” Conversely, in one village in Kayah where four of the 13 10HHLs are women, villagers say that they are starting to prefer women 10HHLs over men because the women speak well and are self-confident.

Female 10HHLs in Dry Zone are reported to also take on slightly different duties than their male counterparts. For example, they do not take part in village security the same way that men 10HHLs do; this issue was not discussed in Kayah, but further research is warranted given the difficult security dynamics in these villages.

#### **Box 6. Villagers have new tools for improving transparency in governance**

**One Stop Shops (OSSs):** These are government offices where different government departments are located under one roof to provide efficient, transparent, customer-friendly public services. Types of services provided, cost, and processing time are visibly posted to help increase public knowledge and transparency. At the time of research, an OSS existed in the Kayah township and another was being built in DZ township 1. However, villagers in the Kayah township reported that they still prefer to go directly to separate departments because it is faster than the OSS, which was unable to finalize services within a single day.

**Separation of accounting and decision-making:** In DZ township 1, villagers who were part of the leaders FGD reported: “In the past, administrators keep hold of the fund and never gave explanation for expenses. Now administrators assign other people for financial management and provide a financial report. This kind of practice is what the villagers wish to see.”

**Comment boxes placed in the village:** In at least one village a suggestion box per village provides an opportunity for anonymous feedback, complaints, and recommendations to village leadership. However, as one woman related, “Villagers do not put complaint letters and recommendation letters in the mailbox although mailboxes are placed in the village. People who have opposite opinions regarding the decisions made at the meetings dare not complain except gossiping among each other after the meeting.”

**Publicly announcing financial matters:** The most commonly reported approach is for committees and the VA or VTA to report financial matters (funds collected or spent) over the loudspeaker to all villagers or to conduct financial clearance (settling of accounts) in mass meetings in front of villagers. People report liking this approach and not trusting as much those groups or individuals who do not use it.

## **4.2. Community-led groups**

### **Types and functions of community-led groups**

On average, research villages in Kayah have fewer local institutions than the Dry Zone research villages (9 vs. 12). This may be related to the history of conflict in the area, which resulted in entire villages being displaced and re-constituted, or to limited access by outside actors such as NGOs.

There is much less consistency across villages in the Kayah township in terms of what types of community-led groups are present. On average, each Kayah village studied reports having nine groups, but they span a range of issues across water and sanitation, rural health care committees, youth religious groups, MSY, NCDDP, and the International Organization for Migration. Many of

these less-frequent groups appear to be NGO initiated. Conversely, there is a high level of agreement across the Dry Zone villages and townships about what type of local groups are present.

Table 4 (on the next page) breaks down the most frequent groups in Dry Zone and the Kayah township. Because the villages in this study were chosen because Pact programming is present (plus two villages in Dry Zone without Pact programming), Pact-initiated groups are also present, as shown in Table 5 (two pages down). See Annex G for a full breakdown of groups present in each village.

#### Box 7. Youth and accountability

In one village in DZ Township 2, youth groups provide an accountability check on the community leadership, monitoring the performances of VTAs, 10HHLs, and the VA. The group estimates the cost of every village activity and ask the VA for explanations when the cost exceeds the estimation. The group also successfully opposed the operation of loudspeakers during exam times. These youth are leaders of the community's social welfare group and are not afraid to speak up.

This research did not elicit much detail about what role VDCs play in coordinating opportunities for development funds. Only two villages identified *linking the village to funding sources* as an important role of the VDC. Further research is required to understand the reasons for this. See Box 8 for more on the fundraising role of VDCs.

Table 4. Most prevalent non-Pact village-led groups in each region, where at least 80% of focus villages have the group

Type of Group	Prevalence	Membership	Functions
Dry Zone Villages			
Administrative group	100%	Consists of a VA, Yat Mi Yat Pa (village elders), and 10HHLs.	Main tasks include working on community development and handling disputes.
School committee	100%	Reformed every year at the start of school. Composed of a chairperson, vice chairperson, treasurer, accountant, and 15 members.	Responsible for keeping the school grant provided by government and supervising its use. Asks for donations within the village for constructing school buildings and maintenance.
Youth group	90%	Members' ages range 26–56 years old. Women and men both participate in youth groups, though men more so than women.	These are customary groups formed to assist religious and social events in the village, though as discussed below, recently some have started taking on new roles.
Pagoda board of trustees	90%	Most are older men.	Takes the lead in contributing religious buildings (pagoda, Buddhist ordination hall, monastery building, wayside public resthouse). Collects donations from the village to maintain buildings and to support funerals for poor household members.
Fire brigade	90%	Affiliated with the township fire brigade.	Prevents and extinguishes village fires.
Social welfare group	80%	Each group has a different leadership structure. Some have men and women, and some have only men.	Takes on slightly different tasks in each village, but the overall purpose is to act as a leader in working for social and religious affairs within the village.
Kayah township Villages			



Type of Group	Prevalence	Membership	Functions
Youth group <sup>37</sup>	100%	Members' ages range 18–40 years old. Women and men both participate in youth groups, though men more than women.	These are customary groups formed to help religious and social events in the village, though as discussed below, recently some have started taking on new roles.
Church/prayer group	90%		Responsible for collecting and managing donations in church each week and using them for the benefit of the church members and broader community.
Administrative group	80%	Consist of a VA, Yat Mi Yat Pa (village elders), and 10HHLs. In one village, an “EAG Chairman” is listed as part of this group.	Main tasks include working on community development and handling disputes.
MSY committee	60%, but listed as very important in those villages that have it	Led by a chairperson, treasurer, and three accountants.	Manages 300 lakhs received from the government, distributes the funding to borrowers in the village, and sets the interest rate and rules. Gives loans to villagers once a year. Decides what to do with the interest collected, for the benefit of the community (e.g., buy a village car).

<sup>37</sup> VDCs sometimes have youth sub-committees, but those highlighted in the research were not identified as VDC affiliated, so are assumed to be independent.

Table 5. Pact-initiated community-led groups

Type of Group	Prevalence in Dry Zone	Prevalence in Kayah township	Membership	Functions
Village Development Committee (VDC)	75%	100%	Main committee consists of the chair, vice-chair, secretary, and treasurer. Members can be re-elected by the participation and agreement of the community and by using a democratic voting system. The number of people in the VDC should be an odd number and should consist of both genders (minimum target: male 60%, female 40%).	Formed to lead village development issues and to coordinate sub-committees to implement village development action plans. Sub-committees can consist of multiple sub-groups based on village development priorities in the village, such as water, agriculture and livestock, VDFs, and youth groups.
Village Development Fund (VDF)	75%	100%	Anyone who is interested in village development activities can join the VDF. Communities elect Fund Management Committees, composed of at least two fund managers and at least two female members, and the funds create organizational by-laws.	Engages communities in a committed partnership, creating ownership and a shared vision through a series of workshops and trainings. Community-wide workshops target at least 75% participation from households in each village to ensure the funds have a broad participant base. Begins with member fees and a one-time matching Pact grant and seed money for specific interventions provided during an official handover ceremony. The fund grows as interest is earned from disbursing loans to members or through annual fees.
Mother and Child Health (MCH) Groups (Mothers' Groups)	75%	100%	Networks of local mothers	Groups meet weekly to learn about and discuss MCH-related illnesses, hygiene, and nutrition. VDFs provide immediate access to financial resources for health emergencies, addressing a common barrier to vital MCH care services. Shae Thot's health system strengthening approach complements community-based action through supporting continuous medical education sessions for midwives, training of auxiliary midwives, and deploying mobile clinics to targeted villages on a regular basis to offer a range of maternal and child health services.

#### Box 8. VDCs as fundraisers

Pact's analysis of VDCs' role in obtaining funding for development projects suggests that they can secure large amounts of resources (financial, material, technical, and in-kind support) by leveraging relatively small amounts from the community. While these results are from a relatively small sample and require validation, an internal project review found that Shae Thot-supported VDCs in Kayah were able to leverage approximately \$2,000 worth of resources for every \$1 invested by the community; Dry Zone VDCs received an estimated \$500 in combined resources for every \$1 invested.

**Box 9. Volunteer group formation case study:  
The National Community Driven Development Project Support Committee**

One village in The Kayah township mentioned having an NCDDP group. Township DRD staff came to the village in early 2017 and held a meeting to explain the project. The 70 villagers who attended the meeting then chose leaders from among themselves through a majority voting system. There is one chairman, one accountant, two male and female advisors, two male and female procurement officers, two male and female supervisors, and two male and female regulators in the committee. Three males and three females were nominated for each position and the community voted for them.

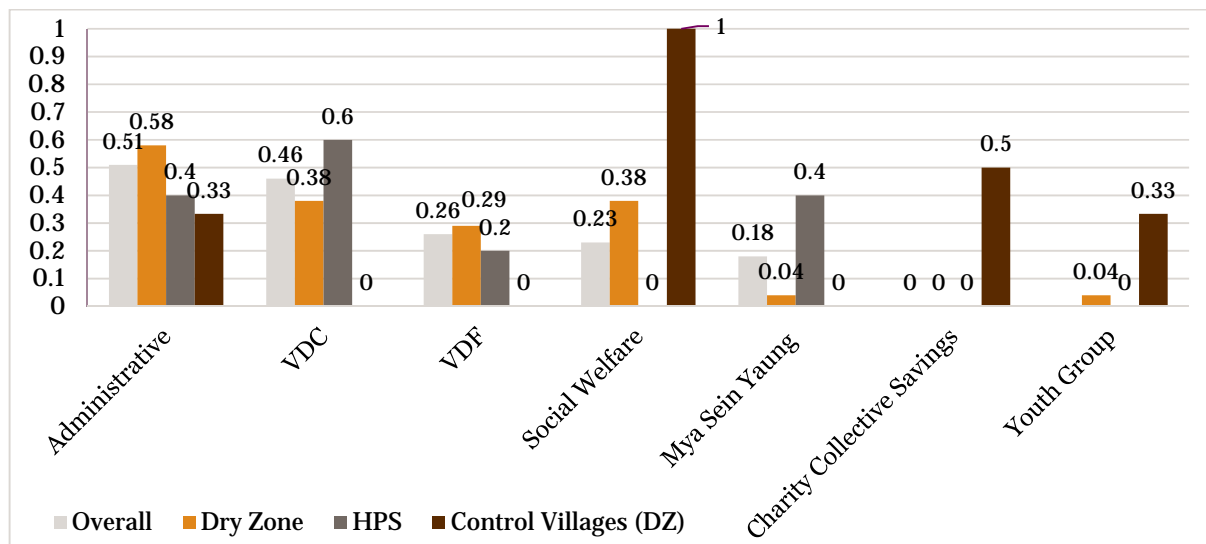
The village-level NCDDP committee's interaction with the VT level is discussed in Section 6.

*The most influential<sup>38</sup> community groups*

Research revealed that communities in the Kayah township identify the VDCs, MSY committees, and administrative bodies (VAs/100HHLs, 10HHLs, and VERP) as the most influential groups. In Dry Zone villages, the most influential groups are the administrative bodies, VDCs, and social welfare committees.

According to communities in the Kayah township, VDCs have surpassed all other actors in terms of influence (see Figure 4). Half of the villages in the Dry Zone thought the VDF is influential, but the VDC is not, and the other half of villages thought the opposite. This may be simply a result of villages tending to conflate the two committees as one. Only two villages (one in Dry Zone and one in the Kayah township) failed to mention the VDC and VDF as influential groups. In the Dry Zone case, the VDC activities had not yet begun at the time of research. In the Kayah township case, the EAG exerted the most influence, including through the presence of an EAG chairman and vice-chairman at the village level alongside the VA and GOM administrative officials. This village also appears to have a particularly strong churchgoers group, to which all other groups in the village report. This may just be random coincidence, or it could be that there are more powerful actors within this village than in others in the sample, so the VDC has not yet carved out a unique space for itself.

**Figure 4. Weighted scores for the most influential groups at the village level<sup>39</sup>**



In the Kayah township people value the VDC because it connects to loans and emergency health funds,<sup>40</sup> provides trainings, liaises with organizations outside of the village, leads other committees, actively participates in village activities, and empowers women. Dry Zone villages that

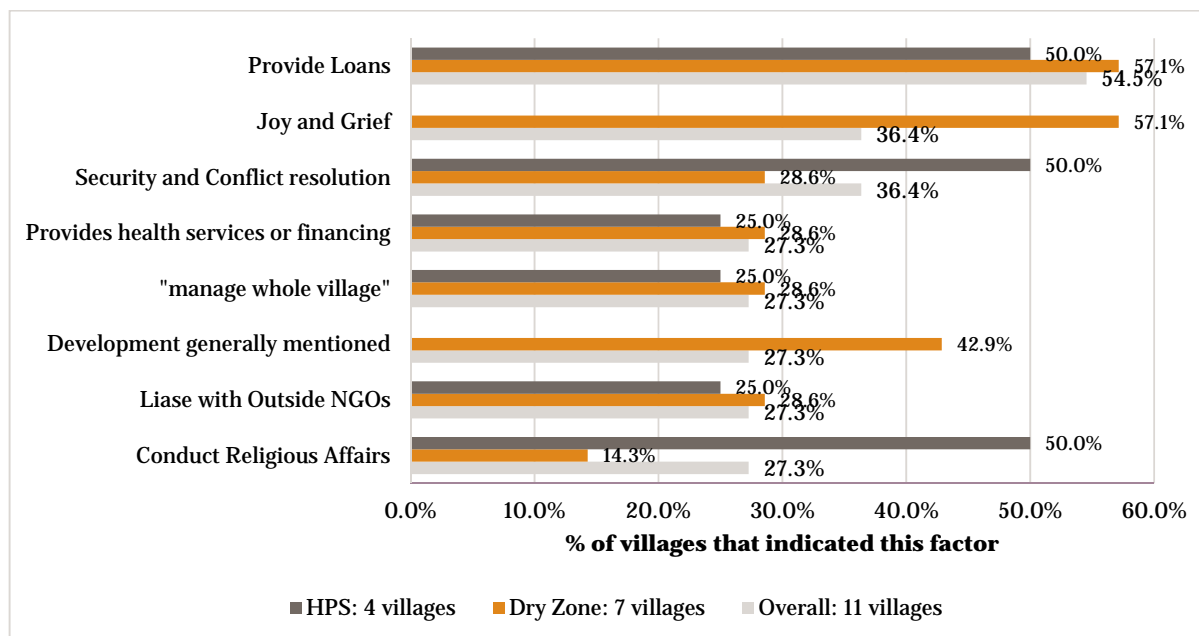
<sup>38</sup> "Influence" is defined in the methodology as a combination of how active and well-respected a group is.

<sup>39</sup> Data source: 12 focus villages (280 people interviewed)

<sup>40</sup> In actuality, VDCs do not provide or control any funds or loans; that is the role of the VDF. However, because villages reported these as VDC activities, they are reflected here as such.

see the VDC as influential gave fewer reasons than those in the Kayah township: VDCs help liaise with outside organizations and lead and manage the funds of other committees. In FGDs, women identified the most reasons (six) as to why VDCs are influential, leaders identified four reasons, and laborers gave two. This may indicate that women engage VDCs more often than laborers because they are more present in the village and, therefore, know more about the work of the VDCs (“development work” was the answer most frequently provided by labor FGDs).

**Figure 5. Reasons community groups (including "administrative ") are influential<sup>41</sup>**



### **International NGO and external actor influence on community-led groups**

A 2017 Asia Foundation report<sup>42</sup> noted that in some areas, such as Kayah, there are already many international NGOs establishing village-level committees and that fatigue is setting in. No direct evidence of NGO/project fatigue emerged in the research for this APEA, but neither was it explicitly addressed through the research questions. One Kayah township village mentioned that some community groups just form and reform based on what external actors recommend. For example, a village elder requested his MP to provide a vehicle for social welfare activities (akin to a rural ambulance). The MP indicated that if a youth group made the request, the car could be provided. In response, the village formed a youth group, resubmitted the request, and received the car. However, instead of disbanding, the youth group quickly assumed a new role, providing a dispute resolution function in the village. While this outcome may be beneficial, it is unclear upon what basis the MP suggested the youth group was required, and ad hoc “requirements” or suggestions for new or repurposed community groups may ultimately lead to fatigue and confusion.

International development programs are particularly fond of requiring community volunteer groups to support project activities. These groups must often adhere to specific requirements as to who participates, in what role, and how often. While these committees offer community members opportunities for learning and skills-building, they often represent a major time commitment for their members—time taken away from work, child care, or household responsibilities.

More than 40% of Dry Zone villages<sup>43</sup> suggested that community groups were important for “liaising with outside NGOs,” a possible reason being that community groups can negotiate the

<sup>41</sup> Data source: 11 focus villages; 1 village did not respond (221 people interviewed)

<sup>42</sup> The Asia Foundation. 2017. *Contested Areas of Myanmar*.

<sup>43</sup> Less than 30% in the Kayah township answered similarly.

terms of project support to leverage existing community groups rather than forming new ones. Further research is required to verify this.

### 4.3. Community group leaders

Interviewees report that in selecting group leadership, all village members are invited to a meeting and choose a leader (or leaders) by majority vote. Elected leaders must then be approved by the VA. In groups related to GOM initiatives or township departments (e.g., water management committee, electrification committee, irrigation committee, MSY committee), the VTA either approves or appoints the leaders. In groups initiated by NGOs, the group members tend to select the leaders, though VDC leaders are selected by different methods (see Box 10).

#### Box 10. Shae Thot VDC leadership selection

In DZ township 2, VDC members are selected by the community. The VDC members then select the VDC leadership positions. In DZ township 1 and in the Kayah township, all community members vote on each VDC leadership position.

Patrons for all VDCs are assigned by the community in consultation with VDC members. In all focus villages, the patron was either the VA or VTA, or there was no patron mentioned.

#### Women in group leadership roles

Most interviews reflected that women only take the role of voters. When women are suggested for group membership, it is usually for the position of treasurer or accountant. Dry Zone respondents indicated that the inclusion of women is usually in response to NGO encouragement and that treasurer and accountant are the types of positions for which they think women are best suited. Indeed, on average, women account for one of five positions in the VDC, usually treasurer. Men most often assume the roles of patron, chair, vice chair, and secretary. In Dry Zone villages, women are increasingly taking on the role of accountants in revolving fund committees. This research did not reveal a consistent pattern of whether women serve more frequently in VDC leadership in Dry Zone or Kayah township Villages.

Respondents noted several reasons as to why there are fewer women in leadership roles. These include perceived physical limitations (i.e. women cannot drive motorbikes), vulnerability (a perception that women traveling alone are susceptible to attack), cultural (women need to take care of the children and house), and attitudinal (women are not as tough as men). *A common refrain in the Dry Zone was, "Daw Aung San Su Kyi has become a leader because she is the daughter of General Aung San. Women can't become leaders here." (male, 40 years, 10HH leader, DZ township 2)*

While women's participation in leadership bodies is significantly lower than that of men, their participation may be increasing according to quotes from interviewees. As a female 10HHL in the Kayah township, 30 years old and a health group accountant, said, "Women didn't dare to speak up when the Pact project started in 2013, and now, we cannot even take a break [from participating]." "Although not 100%, we are involved in everything just like salt," said a 47-year-old mother leader in the Kayah township).

**Table 6. Women's leadership in village groups<sup>44</sup>**

Women are Leaders in...	Dry Zone Villages (n=8)	Kayah Villages (n=4)
Pact or NGO groups	25%	50%
Women-focused groups	25%	50%
Non-NGO and heterogeneous groups	25% (MSY)	50% (MSY and community-driven development [CDD])

#### Box 11. Qualities of women who are selected for leadership

<sup>44</sup> Data Source: 12 focus villages (280 people interviewed), % of villages that indicate at least one instance of a type of leader

**Women with advanced education (e.g., teachers, former teachers):** As an FGD of women in DZ township 2 summed up, “A man must have time to be a leader. A woman must have education to be a leader.” In one Kayah village, a former female teacher plays the role of MCH leader, VDC vice-chair, and MSY accountant. While education alone does not explain women’s leadership, anecdotally it seems to be a necessary condition for women to take on formal leadership roles.

**Women who have proven that they can do the job for which they are elected:** In the Dry Zone townships, the only women in the role of 10HHL are those who first stepped in to fulfil the duties of their husbands who could no longer carry out that role. Several villages also reported that a number of women attend meetings on behalf of their 10HHL husbands.

**Men do not want the role:** There is a general lack of interest in fulfilling administrative leadership roles, ranging from overt ambivalence to a strongly articulated desire to avoid them. In the Dry Zone, women who fill 10HHL roles often do so when their husbands or other men do not want to. In the Kayah township villages, these dynamics were less evident, and the research found instead that communities were generally supportive of women filling village-level leadership roles.

### Religious leaders

Religious authorities, such as monks, abbots, pastors, or members of pagoda trustee groups, were mentioned as important community leaders. They play a foundational role as the guiding moral force in villages. They help initiate different groups focused on vulnerable members of the community (e.g., orphans), donate and receive lots of money and goods, and play the role of treasurer within some youth groups, though this is termed “giving to the abbot for safe-keeping.” In Dry Zone villages, monks did not emerge as particularly present actors in village-level decision-making, but there were anecdotes that revealed their power as decisive actors or enforcers in difficult situations (see Box 12).

One focus village in the Kayah township under EAG control was unique in identifying three religious groups as the most important: the churchgoers group (all men), religious mother’s group, and youth group (all Christian men). The churchgoers group was responsible for resolving conflicts, and every other group in the village, including the administrative group and VDC, reported to it. Further details of this dynamic were not captured by this APEA, but warrant additional research.

#### Box 12. Monks: leaders of last resort

*“USDP Party came into the NLD dominated village for campaigning during election. However, the village monk didn’t allow the USDP member into the village, so they couldn’t get in.”*

– Leader FGD, DZ township

*“The most influential leader of the village is the monk who is 45 years old, the abbot of the village monastery. He passed grade one of Dhamma, and his words are effective. Problems which the 100HH leader cannot solve can be negotiated by the abbot (e.g., collecting water and electrification bill, forbidding youths from opening their exhaust pipes while driving motorbikes).”*

– Village FGD

## 4.4. Community decision-making practices

### Decision-making processes

Across all townships in this study, the research revealed that decision-making is primarily the role of a small group of mostly male individuals. On a spectrum of public participation measured as *informing – consulting – involving – collaborating*, most decisions within the community are made by a small group consulting internally or with other select groups, such as youth, village leader, VERPs, or occasionally 10HHLs, then informing the rest of the community in a mass meeting. This is especially true of decision-making on opportunities or events that arise outside of the community’s boundaries (e.g., when applying for development funds).

There are two main categories of village-development activities: those for which villagers need to contribute some of their own resources and those that are fully implemented by other parties (GOM, ethnic administration, NGO). Village leaders appear to be slightly more consultative when the issue under consideration will require inputs from community members (time, money, labor, land) or when the decision will result in winners and losers (e.g., the allocation of alluvial land each



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year). For decisions that require community contributions, over 70% in the Kayah township report having a more robust consultation process. In the Dry Zone, 50% of villages report this.

With the NLD's focus on democracy and transparency, this trend of decision-making may be changing. Communities interviewed feel that leaders now do a better job of informing the community about the decisions they make than they did under the previous government. However, most villages report that overall, decisions are generally made through a process like the one initially described. As one community member noted:

*When making important decisions, the 100HHLs, 10HHLs, and the youth leaders (all men) hold discussions and make decisions first. Then they inform the villagers either through the respective 10HHLs or through asking the village crier (e.g., regarding vaccination for children, building temporary school buildings, repairing the main road and the connective roads between villages).*

Actual practices will vary from village to village and often depend on individual leaders' preferences. One community reported that the VA only consults with the 10HHLs he has a good relationship with. In other villages, researchers found leadership allowing more debate than previously existed. As a 37-year-old private tuition teacher from DZ Township 1 explained, "If someone disagrees, negotiation takes place. In the past, disagreement had to be kept quiet."

### **Role of youth and elders in decision-making**

Youth<sup>45</sup> play an important role in all the research villages, but at the time of research, formal rules of the game limited their role in administrative leadership because the law provides that only the household head could become a 10HHL, 100HHL, or VA.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, the research villages articulated that they want youth to be involved in the administration because they are healthy, educated, and active persons and are essential to implementing community plans. This may explain why village leadership structures have found ways to incorporate youth in decision-making.

In the Kayah township, youth groups and village elders are consulted most by the village leader, whereas the village leaders do not report consulting at all with the VTA. In the Dry Zone, youth groups remain important, but more as stand-alone entities, rather than as part of consultation processes. The village leader consults them, but consults the VTA most, followed by 10HHLs, then finally youth and village elders. VDCs did not emerge as a heavily consulted group; however, further research needs to explore the reasons for this. It may be that as the village leader often plays the role of the VDC patron and is seen as "part of" rather than "consulting with" that group.

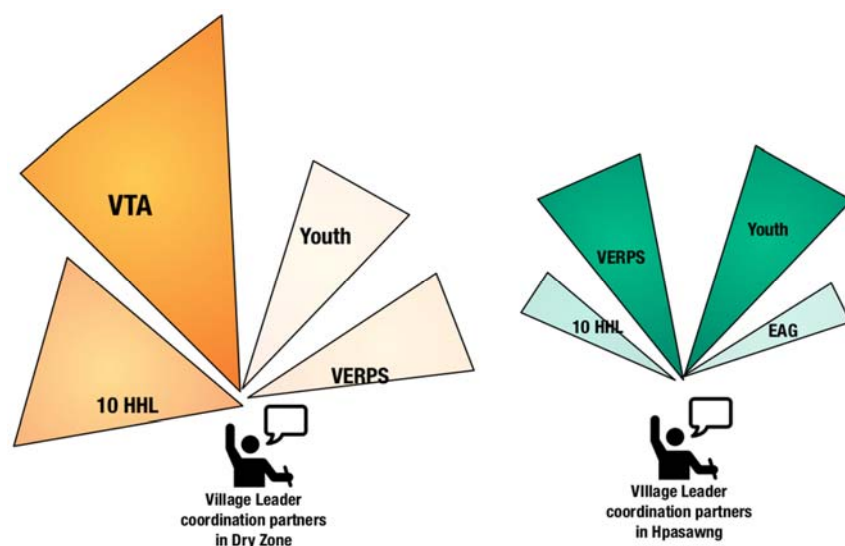
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<sup>45</sup> The age range of youth was defined differently in each township: in DZ Township 2 it was 26–33 years old, in DZ Township 1 36–56 years old, and in the Kayah township 18–40 years old.

<sup>46</sup> The 2016 amendment to the 2012 Law changed this by including a new definition of "household representative," which is any member of the family over 18 years of age.



Figure 6. Perceived degree of importance of groups with which the village leader coordinates<sup>47</sup>



### Excluded members of the community

There does not appear to be overt exclusion of marginalized groups, such as women or disabled persons, but rather a high amount of “self-exclusion,” particularly in the Dry Zone villages. With a few exceptions, interviewees reported that women may attend but do not actively participate in or discuss during the meetings. And as one respondent described, though women participate as members and leaders in youth groups, once women get married, they leave the group.<sup>48</sup> The general sentiment is, “We just follow what our leader says whether we concede or not”<sup>49</sup> or “We just follow what other people do.”<sup>50</sup> In four villages, respondents specifically mentioned that Shae Thot or other NGO trainings are empowering for women and have helped them gain more confidence and the necessary skills to share ideas and question proposals.

Data from interviews with communities suggests that the women in the Kayah villages are more active in community meetings than in Dry Zone villages: they attend meetings, ask questions, and propose ideas. In three of four Kayah villages, it was reported that women attend meetings more frequently than men; township officials also shared this finding. Despite this, it was also reported that when disagreements are raised in meetings, it is usually men who raise them. Data that would help explain these findings was inconclusive, and further research is needed.

### Enforcing community decisions

Different mechanisms exist to ensure community members follow through on leaders’ decisions, but all of them stem from some form of peer pressure. In Dry Zone, leaders’ decisions are often questioned when a specific person or household is asked to “donate” their land as part of a community development project and does not want to. These disagreements are usually resolved through peers convincing the affected individual to comply, rather than collaborating to find an alternative. This process of “forced donation,” mentioned in three of eight Dry Zone focus villages, effectively pays for public goods at the expense of individual households.

The line between “voluntary donations” and “required donations” for community and development projects is unclear in many Myanmar communities. A 2015 report by The Asia Foundation<sup>51</sup> found

<sup>47</sup> Data source: Representatives from 42 villages (493 people interviewed)

<sup>48</sup> It is unclear whether married women are not allowed, if husbands don’t want them to participate, or if family care duties prevent women from having the time to participate in this group after marriage.

<sup>49</sup> Poor FGD, DZ Township 1 FGD

<sup>50</sup> Women FGD, DZ Township 1 FGD

<sup>51</sup> The Asia Foundation. 2015a. *Municipal Governance in Myanmar: An Overview of Development Affairs Organizations*.

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that community's share of costs can range 25–75% of the total. Across all research townships, villagers mentioned frequent contributions of money, land, or labor to various initiatives.

There is a strong custom of donation in Bamar Buddhist culture. However, it is also possible for the state and other actors to intentionally or unintentionally take advantage of this and impose more of the resource burden of development on communities than is legally allowed. For example, the 1984 Land Acquisition Act, which is still the primary law in Myanmar governing land acquisition for public use, provides that the current user must be compensated by the government when public works (e.g., road building, electrification) requires land to be acquired. It was common practice under the military government for land to be confiscated through force, intimidation, or pressured “donation” for public works without appropriate compensation.<sup>52</sup>

Since 2012, when then-President Thein Sein announced that land that had been unfairly confiscated would be returned, numerous NGO and media campaigns have worked to educate people about their land rights. Further research is needed to investigate whether this continued practice of encouraged donation stems from local officials' or communities' lack of awareness about land acquisition procedures for public use or whether it stems from a disconnect between local community development priorities and higher-level authorities who can make land acquisition determinations under the Land Acquisition Act.

### **Box 13. Examples of forced donations and community pressure**

In one Kayah village, there was anecdotal evidence of an EAG contributing to this tension. According to the Village Township Authority, the EAG told villagers that they do not need to contribute anything (e.g., land, labor) in support of government-implemented projects, that the government will take full responsibility. As such, most of the villagers do not participate in development projects related to the government, and the VTA faces difficulties in keeping projects on schedule and ensuring the work is finished. There may be other reasons this village does not engage with government development projects, but no other reasons were articulated.

When a Dry Zone village held a meeting to expand the main village road, the street committee requested some land owners to donate part of their lands for expansion. Although most of the people agreed to donate their land, four were reluctant to do so. In response, their closest relatives and friends worked to convince them. As one man said, “Even if there are some people who disagree, decisions will not be forced on them; instead village leaders will convince and persuade them until they agree with the decisions.” This obviously calls into the question the integrity of many “donations,” as well as the ability of individuals outside power structures to affect leaders' decisions.

Another example of communal enforcement comes from Kayah, where villagers in one community formally request a leave of absence to the VA or church committee if they will miss a community engagement. The VA or church committee will issue a formal warning to those who request leave three times. To avoid this punishment, villagers who cannot fulfill “community duties” send their children instead. It is unclear from the research whether children are also sent to meetings in which their parents would contribute ideas or vote on decisions, or whether children are only sent to fulfill volunteer duties. In either case, what is clear is that the village has built-in enforcement mechanisms, namely, shame and peer pressure.

Most interviewees reflected that this is an acceptable way of making community decisions. Even though community members cited some instances of village leaders benefitting themselves through their decisions (see Box 14), the instance (or perception) of these types of actions seems to

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<sup>52</sup> For more on this, see: Share Mercy. 2015. *How the Government is Resolving Land Disputes*.

be minimal, and people report being happy with the increase in transparency already noted. Respondents generally believe their leaders are making good decisions for the wellbeing of the community and do not question them; in fact, many villagers reported that decision-making takes time, which they would prefer to spend on their own livelihood activities.

### **Decision-making and leadership within the VDCs**

Decision-making within VDCs in the research villages appears to follow a similar pattern as decisions made at the village level: the leadership of the group decides a course of action, presents it to the other committee members, and, barring no major disagreement, the group proceeds with that course of action. Importantly, some VDCs provide leadership opportunities for women. Because primarily leaders are involved in decision-making, these leadership opportunities provide women with a way to be involved in decision-making that is absent in many non-committee village-level decisions, especially in the Dry Zone villages.<sup>53</sup>

#### **Box 14. Land divisions benefit administration**

Alluvial lands refer to fertile, shifting land along riverbanks, which can only be cultivated seasonally. These lands are often an important source of income (and conflict) for villages that can access them.

According to one person interviewed, his village's economy depends entirely on alluvial land. In this village, there were 50 plots of alluvial land available for the year. 20 plots were rented to some of the village farmers. The 10HHLs next chose from the 30 open plots. The village administration group then distributed the remaining plots to their neighbors by lucky draw. In this case, the administration group decided in favor of their own benefits.

**Table 7. Women leaders in VDCs<sup>54</sup>**

Township	Number of VDCs	Number of Women Leaders
Kayah Township	4	6
DZ Township 2	3	5
DZ Township 1	2	1

## **4.5. Conflict and conflict resolution**

### **Types of conflict in the village and how they are resolved**

The majority of conflicts reported across all villages in this study fall into three categories: land disputes, familial conflict (inheritance, domestic violence), and petty conflict (including instances of drunkenness, robbery, and brawls between young men).

**Land disputes** fall into three groups: historical land grabs (conflict between a farmer and state actors like the military or a government ministry), trespassing (neighbors from the same or adjacent village encroaching on a household's land), and alluvial land distribution. It is extremely difficult and often impossible to make progress on resolving land conflicts at the village level because the state is the ultimate owner of all land in Myanmar and, as such, there are formalized structures for land management and dispute resolution that flow up through the GAD system. At the village level, the first step is to submit a complaint to the VA, who then submits it up through the FMB framework (Section 7). The other way to resolve land disputes, such as trespassing, is through legal court action, but this is prohibitively expensive<sup>55</sup> for most people and was not raised in this research.

**Familial conflict** (inheritance, domestic violence) are resolved primarily at the village level with the assistance of VERP (including the VA), neighbors, or, in Kayah, church groups. In one

<sup>53</sup> Further research could examine whether decision-making within women-led committees is more, less, or equally consultative as that of male-led committees.

<sup>54</sup> Data source: 10 Shae Thot villages (4 in the Kayah township, 6 in Dry Zone), from Pact reporting

<sup>55</sup> Approximately \$500 to submit a case to court.

instance, the customary practice includes paying a fee of 5,000 kyat to a village elder to serve as the mediator for two family members in conflict. The villagers believe that by paying this fee, the village elder will remain engaged in the mediation process until a satisfactory resolution is reached. In the Kayah township, the dominant EAG and a local CSO were cited as important actors in familial conflict resolution. Villagers believe female leaders from these organizations are better able than men to resolve domestic violence cases, reporting that if a female leader talks to the husband, he will accept what she says and will not attack the leader. However, if a male leader talks to him, it may lead to another layer of physical conflict. In Kayah, women also report making decisions to limit the sale of alcohol in their village (which they associate with domestic violence)<sup>56</sup> and set the amount of fine for punishment; it was not clear by what means the women in this village are able to exercise this authority.

**Petty conflicts** (drunkenness, minor motorbike accidents, minor assault) are the third type of conflicts reported. In 80% of the 12 focus villages interviewed, it was reported that the VA (or VTA if he was from that village) is responsible for finding a resolution or culturally appropriate punishment for offenses (e.g., mandating a donation of a certain amount to the pagoda or a neighboring family if they had been harmed or humiliated). In one village where the VA is weak, the village abbot is called on. This was the only instance of an abbot or Buddhist religious figure being identified as a conflict mediator/enforcer.

### **Conflict resolution actors**

Ninety percent of villages in Dry Zone and only one village (25%) in the Kayah township reported that interacting with the police, which suggests that people in this township view the police quite differently than those in Dry Zone. Villagers in the Dry Zone approach the police for assistance with dispute resolution, primarily in instances of serious crimes outside of the family (e.g., death from a motorbike crash between a villager and outsider, child rape, grand theft, arson). Villagers in the Kayah township instead turn to EAG actors for conflict resolution. Villagers interviewed did not cite fear of police as a reason for not turning to them for dispute resolution, though given the historical role of police and GAD actors as primarily security-focused, communities have refrained from turning to police for dispute resolution in the past and found other actors, whom they continue to rely on today.

In the Kayah township, village youth groups and EAGs play a prominent role in resolving disputes. In one focus village, a soldier of the local EAG brigade and village youths have formed “people’s militias” for village security. The village administration team and EAGs together solve conflicts (e.g., see Box 15). Cases that cannot be solved by the 100HHL are solved by EAGs. Villagers report that there is no difficulty in solving problems this way because the EAGs have existed for a long time and have a close relationship with locals. Villagers also report that EAGs are more efficient than the GOM in addressing village security issues.

Dry Zone villagers reported that the VTA often takes on a facilitator/linking role between them and other dispute resolution actors, rather than taking on a mediation or arbitration role himself (e.g., accompanying a villager to the township police station). In a few instances, such as in Box 15, conflicts were mediated by the VTA liaising with leaders from the nearby village to agree on compensation. The VTA was not reported to have a role in the conflict resolution cycle in only one Dry Zone village, where the VTA-to-village relationship is fraught along all dimensions (personal, development, conflict). In this village, community members approach township-level authorities directly as needed. Section 6 elaborates on the VTA-village relationship.

#### **Box 15. VTAs in Kayah sought out or avoided for conflict resolution**

**Sought out VTAs:** In the Kayah township, the only instance raised in the research of a VTA being involved in dispute resolution was when a couple wanted an official divorce. However, when the VTA

<sup>56</sup> Saferworld. 2018. *Gendered experiences of land confiscation in Myanmar: Insights from Eastern Bago Region and Kayin State*.

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informed the couple he did not have the power to grant a divorce and that only a township court could do so (and in Burmese), they decided to remain married.

**Avoided VTAs:** In January 2017, a village security group consisting of the people's militia, 10HHLs, and youth caught a motorbike thief while on a night patrol. The thief was transferred to the EAG authorities in control of the area. However, the thief was from a village under another EAG's control. The two EAGs worked together to resolve the case. For punishment, the thief was forced to repair a road for a week. The VTA and the police station were not informed of the incident.

Higher-level actors (i.e. above village level) are reported to most frequently be involved in land-related conflicts. This is most likely due to the state being the official owner of all land in Myanmar. Various levels of the GOM administrative system have responsibility for managing and resolving conflicts related to different types and uses of land. Many respondents stated that they have submitted their land cases to higher-level actors not because they thought that it would lead to their claims being addressed, but rather because it is the only venue available for land dispute resolution.<sup>57</sup> For historical land grab cases, claimants reported seeking assistance from a variety of actors, such as GAD, MPs, and EAGs. This approach is likely due to a lack of clarity on who has authority to resolve land grab cases and means that most claimants will send their case to anyone who they think might have influence over powerful actors.<sup>58</sup> The township FMB is also responsible for resolving disputes related to alluvial lands, which are an important source of income in DZ township 1.

#### **Box 16. Fostering reconciliation in DZ township 1**

For as long as villagers can remember, the northern and southern parts of DZ township 1 have not gotten along. As one villager shared, "It is almost like we are different villages." A rivalry between two monasteries initially caused the rift. In the past, because the village is separated into southern and northern parts, villagers usually selected the candidates from their part of the village during the election for village leaders. Due to opposition from one part of the village, there was a time when the entire village had to give up the opportunity to receive assistance for a rural health center to another village. Recognizing the consequences of divisive politics, now villagers elect the leaders who get along with both communities and are endorsed by both communities. The reason, villagers said, is that if an elected person is endorsed only by one part of the village, villagers from the other part will not be satisfied with his decisions and will oppose the activities.

A few years ago, young men from each side of the village decided to form a social services group to provide basic street cleaning and wedding services to the whole village and to try to bridge this divide. The group is now considered one of the three most influential groups in the village due to its combined trust-building and service delivery roles.

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<sup>57</sup> The judicial system is able to address some land-related disputes, especially inheritance or trespassing-related cases. However, bringing a civil suit in court costs roughly \$500, which is prohibitively expensive to most Myanmar citizens.

<sup>58</sup> See for more information: Namati. 2017. *Myanmar's Foray into Deliberative Democracy: Citizen Participation in Resolving Historical Land Grabs*.



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## 5. Horizontal Linkages between Villages

This study revealed that there appears to be little interaction between villages as units in any of the study townships. Across the 42 villages interviewed, only one instance emerged of two villages collectively influencing village-tract level politics and collaborating to effect change (Box 17).

As discussed in Section 4, villages function primarily as self-contained ecosystems, with formal relationships extending upward instead of outward (see Section 6 for greater detail). While neighboring villagers often engage one another socially, the *rules of the game* put many villages in opposition when it comes to GOM support because the largest village tends to win the VTA position (see Section 6) and the attendant access to power.

### Box 17. Ousting the VTA

Villages in one Dry Zone tract collaborated to elect a VTA from outside the traditional tract village. In this Village Tract, one village had always secured the VTA election/appointment because it has significantly more households than the three other villages. In the most recent election, these sub-villages cooperated to vote for a representative from one of the three smaller villages, and their collective candidate won. The villagers did not say why they decided to collaborate, reported that they think the VTA they elected is fair and treats all the sub-villages equally, rather than just prioritizing his own. Villagers from the traditional tract village are displeased with losing their favored status.

### 5.1. Cooperation

Most reported inter-village engagements stated as part of joint celebrations or other communal activities, such as during religious festivals, weddings, funerals, football games, or lending a car for village purposes. Most villagers could not answer questions about what, if any, groups exist at the village tract level that include representatives from across villages within that village tract. The types of positive interactions mentioned include:

- Participation in a shared loan organization, in one case through an Emerald Green Fund (in Kayah) and through a Pagoda Trustee Group in the Dry Zone
- Inter-village literature and culture group (Kayah)
- Election monitoring groups in most village tracts, comprised of respected persons from each village in a village tract who are responsible for overseeing the VTA elections. However, it was not revealed whether there are other ways in which this group offers a forum for collaboration between villages.
- School endowment committee: In DZ township 2, two villages reported participating in such a committee at the village tract level. The committee, consisting primarily of women, includes two teachers, two villagers from each village, and the VTA.

### 5.2. Inter-village conflict and conflict resolution

The only instance of inter-village conflict reported was regarding allocation of alluvial lands in DZ Township 2. Usually the village leaders try to negotiate the distribution of alluvial lands each year. When that is unsuccessful, the matter is passed up to the township Farmland Management Body, which is legally responsible for these decisions.



## 6. Vertical Linkages between Villages and Village Tract Actors

Historically, the defining foundational relationship between village, village tract, and township levels of government is the upward accountability from village tract to the military-run GAD, rather than downward accountability to citizens and communities (see Figure 2).

The formal *rules of the game* detailing this relationship changed with the 2012 Law. One of the most important changes was to remove the role of nominating VTA candidates from the township authorities. Various approaches to this nomination have been used in the past, but two key features have been that the VTA is selected by the township authorities and comes from the tract village, which is usually the most populous village in a tract. The 2012 Law upended this, making the villagers in a tract responsible for electing a VTA from among themselves.

The 2016 amendment further expanded space to allow one person per household to vote. In theory, the 2012 Law and 2016 amendment increased the VTA's representativeness and downward accountability, not just to his own village, but also to the sub-villages in his village tract, because they all have a voice in his election. Nevertheless, people traditionally vote for nominees from their own village, disadvantaging sub-villages.

"The reason for not contesting in the VTA election is that we are smaller in number. Even if we are smart, it's not possible [to win]."

— Leader, Farmer, 32

This change in law also seems to have had an impact on the number of women successfully winning the role of VTA. In the 2012 ward and VTA election, women won only 41 out of 16,785 seats (0.24% of total seats). The percentage of women VTAs was nearly twice as high in urban as rural areas, and Kayin State had the highest representation of women (2.39%); Ayeyarwady came in second with only 0.35% of VTA positions going to women.

While previous versions of the law did not prevent women from serving, they did state that only household leaders could become VTAs, and customarily this role is held by the man in a family. The 2016 amendment added the new definition of "household representative," effectively allowing any member of a household over the age of 18 to be selected as a 10HHL, from which the VTA is elected. In the 2016 ward and VTA election, the number of women VTAs doubled, with women winning 0.5% of the seats. About 31% of female W/VTAs were re-elected to their second term.<sup>59</sup>

Ultimately, the TA still vests formal authority over the VTA, both by appointing him (after verifying that the selected person meets the legally defined eligibility criteria)<sup>60</sup> and through retaining powers to unilaterally dismiss the VTA. The TA also appoints the VTA election oversight committee, consisting of five elders (*ya mi ya pha*) in each tract.

### Box 18. VTAs: Key findings from the research

- Some villagers are disenchanted with recently elected VTAs who were chosen along party lines.
- 50% of research villages would prefer a VTA election system that is like the general election of 2015, in which every registered adult can vote for the VTA, not just one representative per household. This would enable women and youth to more easily take part in elections.
- Villagers report that there are strong disincentives in the Kayah township to be a VTA. Only 25% of villages indicated there was some sort of competition for the VTA position, versus 100% of Dry Zone villages.
- 75% of research sub-villages report that their VTA considers their needs and preferences, not just those of the main tract village. This is a recent change.

<sup>59</sup> UNDP Myanmar. 2017, June 9. *Meet Village Tract Administrator Daw Naw Ta Bi Thar*.

<http://www.mm.undp.org/content/myanmar/en/home/presscenter/articles/2017/06/09/meet-village-tract-administrator-daw-naw-ta-bi-thar.html>; UNDP 2015b.

<sup>60</sup> Criteria outlined by the 2012 Law include: be a citizen, over the age of 25, fair education, consecutively residing in the relevant village tract for at least 10 years, respected by society, have dignity, and family members are persons of good morality, simple, and honest.

- In principle, all those interviewed agree that women can be VTAs, yet mobility requirements (i.e., ability to drive a motorbike, traveling alone by night) were often cited as limiting women and disabled people from taking the role.
- Research villages in Dry Zone highlight age (i.e., they want younger leaders) and political party identity as the two most important characteristics in selecting VTAs.

## 6.1. Village tract institutions and leadership

### *Village Tract Administrator*

Across all townships, the research identified the VTA as by far the most influential and important village tract-level actor. It is worth noting that the VTA plays a significantly more minor role in the Kayah township, but no alternative village tract-level actor played a more significant role.

The formal mandate of the VTA under the 2012 Law remains focused on tasks related to maintaining law and order (22 of 32 elements of his mandate focus on tasks related to peace and security, versus only one on facilitating rural development). However, with the change from appointment to election of VTAs, VTAs in the Dry Zone are now emerging in practice as representative intermediaries between the village tract and township. They inform community members of government priorities and development opportunities and convey community requests upward. Previous research<sup>61</sup> suggests that this transition is happening in other parts of Kayah State, but this APEA found limited evidence of the trend in the Kayah township (see Section 6.2).

As in previous manifestations, the current VTA retains a large amount of power. He is the village's primarily link to the administrative system for both community and individual needs, is responsible for channeling funding from township departments and Hluttaw funds, and chairs the FMB at a time of unprecedented land dispute cases. In some research villages, VTAs have also taken on new responsibilities beyond their required mandate, such as liaising with NGOs, accompanying villagers to township offices, and actively participating in village activities, like donation collection for local development and social initiatives.

### *Village Tract Authority clerk*

The Village Tract Authority clerk is the lowest-level appointed GAD official. He/she is appointed by the TA. A clerk's duties include documenting overnight guests in the village, reporting conflicts to the TA, and helping the VTA distribute information to villages. This position does not seem to play an important role in any of the research townships, except for DZ township 1, where the township GAD indicated that because villages in the area are dispersed, the clerk travels frequently between them on behalf of the VTA. For these villages, the main entry point to the administrative system is not their elected VTA, but rather an appointed clerk, which raises questions of government accountability. However, none of the focus villages mentioned the clerk as important. As a 37-year-old female farmer in DZ township 1 said, "I don't know what the clerk does. He never came here."

#### **Box 19. VTA clerks are also mostly men**

The VTA clerk for one Dry Zone village is the only instance in this research of a female clerk. She is 30 years old, married, and lives in the township center.

The VTA reported that he does not always call on her to fulfil her duties because it is difficult for her to travel all the way to the tract village. Most of the villagers do not know her because she rarely visits village tracts. The VTA would like to replace her with a male who lives in his village.

### *Other village tract institutions*

Overall, villagers in this study were generally not knowledgeable about any village tract-level institutions, other than the VTA and clerk. In a few villages, the following institutions were also mentioned: village tract FMB, Land Reinvestment Committees (LRCs), and school endowment groups (SEGs). The land bodies were not mentioned by the Kayah township respondents, which

<sup>61</sup> See for example: UNDP Myanmar. 2014. *The State of Local Governance: Trends in Kayah*.

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may indicate that villagers do not have access to these important conflict resolution bodies in these areas.<sup>62</sup>

### ***Farmland Management Bodies (not mentioned in Kayah)***

Founded in 2013, the FMBs extend from the national level down to the village tract level and are meant to handle small issues concerning land disputes between villagers. The VA passes complaints to the FMB, and claimants can appeal up to the district level, which has the final authority. The FMB has six members: the VTA, two *Yat Mi Yat Pa* (village elders), one township GAD office clerk, one farmer representative, and the township-level land record officer. When there is a bigger issue, such as land confiscation or a historical “land grab” case, a claimant and the VA will usually inform the village tract-level body and take the matter directly to a township-level body.

### ***Land Reinvestigation Committees (not mentioned in Kayah)***

One of the first acts of the NLD government was to establish another strand of land conflict committees, called the LRCs, headed by Vice-President Two and replicated down to the village tract level. These committees are mandated to examine cases of historical “land confiscations” or “land grabs” (for example, if the military, government ministry, or powerful business owner takes land without due process). These committees include the same actors as the FMBs, in addition to farmer representatives and occasionally an MP. When the committees were announced in May 2016, the process for choosing farmers representatives was unclear, and a variety of individuals have since filled that position.<sup>63</sup> None of the villages in this study reported that the committees were functioning yet, but had heard that they would be soon.

### ***School Endowment Groups (mentioned twice in DZ township 1)***

The VTA is the chairman and there are principals, teachers, and two members from each of the 12 villages involved in the group. The purpose of the group is to financially support high school students who must attend school in far-away villages after competing middle school in their own village. The SEG collects funds from the 12-member villages and lends out funds equally to all 12 villages, charging a 3% interest rate every four months. The funds can be used for infrastructure projects, such as building hostels and latrines, and for transportation costs of students. The SEG also rewards students who rank from first to ten places in middle and high school. The group has organized the construction of school buildings, boarding houses for students, teacher hostels, and school latrines.

### ***National Community Driven Development Project Support Committee***

One Kayah township village mentioned participating in the NCDDP, which has a village-level and village tract-level committee. At the village tract level, all sub-villages attended a meeting at the village tract and drew project plans according to the respective villages’ prioritization. After the project design was finished, the central committee was chosen from among committee members of each village committee via a voting system. A woman from a predominantly Kayah community received the most votes and became the central committee chair. She is 35 and the SEG accountant, and her husband is a major in the Border Force Guard. The member who received the second most votes was assigned treasurer, and the other two were assigned as central members. A bank account was opened, with these four central committee members as signatories. After selecting the central committee members, villages drew lots to decide which village would implement the project. The committee members are active and confident individuals with middle school-level educations.

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<sup>62</sup> Saferworld 2018

<sup>63</sup> Caitlin Pierce and Ye Yint Htun. 2017. *Myanmar’s Foray into Deliberative Democracy: Citizen Participation in Resolving Historical Land Grabs*. Namati.

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## 6.2. VTA incentives, disincentives, and characteristics: Dry Zone

Across all townships, villagers report greater disincentives than incentives to be (and therefore compete for the role of) VTA. However, all Dry Zone villages reported that there is still competition for the VTA role, whereas the situation is very different in the Kayah township.

### *Dry Zone incentives and disincentives*

The top reason individuals articulated for wanting to be VTA was to have authority and focus on development needs. Interviews highlighted that a low salary and the inability to focus on one's own livelihood are the main disincentives to becoming VTA in the Dry Zone, the time requirement being the primary disincentive. VTAs interviewed in this research reported that they now spend much more time traveling to the township and between villages than their predecessors. VTAs shared that they must travel to the township for a meeting with GAD and departments every 15 days and sometimes more frequently. They also seem to be taking on voluntary time commitments by accompanying villagers to township authorities to help them navigate various bureaucratic processes, such as getting ID cards or land registration.

### *Present characteristics of VTAs in Dry Zone*

#### **Box 20. Limits of the tract system**

The VTA is supposed to represent all members of all villages within his or her tract. He or she must also come from one of these villages and live there. This causes an inherent conflict of interest: the VTA's village tends to get preferred treatment by the VTA. The case of a three-village tract in the Dry Zone exemplifies this dilemma.

This village tract received 20 lakhs (about \$1,500) from the Township Administration for general development purposes. The VTA summoned the two 100HHLs to his village to discuss how the funds should be used. The VTA also asked all the 10HHLs from his village to join the meeting.

One of the 100HHLs suggested the funds should be given to the other sub-village (not the VTA's village) because the school needed repair. The leader of this village agreed. It was two against one. However, the VTA refused, stating that each person present should be allowed a vote. The VTA and the 10HHLs from his village all voted to use the funds for their community. The two sub-villages were overwhelmed. When the VTA asked them to confirm the result of the vote, they refused.

Although the villagers from the stilted villages felt the vote was unfair, they didn't feel they could complain because a "majority vote" had been taken. As one 63-year-old male farmer and village elder said, "Not even a single penny fell to our side."

The profile of individuals who become VTAs has shifted over time, with youth emerging as a key criterion in the Dry Zone village tracts studied. This research identified that when VTAs were appointed by township authorities, older people were chosen to lead the community (the average age for VTAs was 53, and some were in their late 60s and 70s); now in all three townships, they are in their 30s or 40s (the average age of a VTA is 47). Interviewees suggested that the GAD preferred appointing older men who were more likely to comply with orders.

Before 2012, VTAs had a much narrower scope of responsibility but more power than today. Now, for example, VTAs also must deal with NGOs. NGO staff operating in these communities also believe that the *rules of the game* have led to a shift in what communities value in their leaders. As the state has undergone a democratic transition, obedience is de-prioritized and younger people with innovative ideas for development now have the space to take on leadership duties. As a result, VTAs today feel they work harder than their predecessors. As one 39-year-old male VTA said, "Former village administrators were just doing their businesses, but I am working my backside off doing village activities during my administration."

Party affiliation is the other critical factor that communities consider when choosing today's VTAs. "You can't become a VTA in this village if you are not an NLD (member)," said one male VTA, 45

years old. In one village, three of ten 10HHLs are NLD supporters who voted for the current VTA (NLD, from another village), even though they wanted someone to win from their own village.

Moreover, people report voting in the most recent VTA election without considering the candidates' history of performance and instead mainly considering political party affiliation. In the 2016 elections, around the country most candidates were seen as close to political parties, particularly the NLD and/or publicly identifying themselves as being NLD.<sup>64</sup> This marks a shift from the late 2012/early 2013 elections, wherein political party affiliation was reported to play almost no role.<sup>65</sup> At that time, candidates carried out little election campaigning and political party involvement was very limited. The 2016 election may indicate that local elections are becoming increasingly politicized. See Box 21 for more on politicization in villages.

Once elected, VTAs downplay and even try to hide their party affiliation in some instances. As one young VTA related regarding trying to interact with other officials, "I took the VTA position because I wanted to beat the VTA from Thein Sein's party. Now I am the only peacock among lions and I can't make any moves to influence them. I dare not even say that I am a member of the NLD party." This may be due to the formal *rules of the game*, which outline that VTAs must not be involved in party affairs. It may also be an acknowledgement that most of the officials with whom a VTA must interact are part of the GAD/military structure, and being viewed as politically neutral may be a more effective approach.

#### **Box 21. Party allegiance as a barrier to collaboration**

In addition to the importance of political party identity in local elections, the research also uncovered anecdotes that political party identity can inhibit collaboration within the community. For example, in one village it was reported that people do not always contribute money if, for example, they are USDP and money is being collected for an NLD-promoted play.

The dynamic may change by the next election as communities experience that party affiliation does not dictate results or the quality of the elected official. As a 65-year-old male 10HHL said, "I voted seeing party background; if he competes next time, I would not vote for him again."

#### **Box 22. Mobility constraints and exclusion**

VTAs must spend much more time than previously traveling around the villages under his purview and to the township for meetings every two weeks. Pact staff estimated that village and township leaders each have approximately 100 meetings to attend every month, either formal meetings or meeting with individual members of the public who need recommendation letters, have questions, etc. This necessitates a degree of fitness and the ability to drive a motorbike, which has been cited as a constraint that keeps elders, women, and people with disabilities from being VTAs or even village leaders; some elders still retain influence in the administration of the community through their role as VERP, but there is no specific official role for women or people with disabilities.

Mobility constraints were also reported as limiting the opportunities for women to fill other roles that liaise between villages and township because villagers in the Dry Zone report that women do not know how to ride motorbikes (the same dynamic was not mentioned in Kayah). For example, a woman in one village was elected to be the head of the MSY committee, but she transferred her role to the man who received the third-most votes because she does not know how to ride a motorcycle and was going to have trouble frequently going to township level to engage with the DRD.

<sup>64</sup> Helene Maria Kyed, Annika Pohl Harrison, and Gerard McCarrhy. 2017. *Local Democracy in Myanmar: Reflections in ward and village tract elections in 2016*.

<sup>65</sup> The findings are supported by the references to the elections in a few media articles; UNDP 2015a; The World Bank and EMR. 2016. *Livelihoods & Social Change in Rural Myanmar: QSEM Series Round Five Report*. [http://www.lift-fund.org/publications/828/2016?title=QSEM&field\\_publication\\_type\\_tid=All](http://www.lift-fund.org/publications/828/2016?title=QSEM&field_publication_type_tid=All); Action Committee for Democracy Development. n.d. *Report on Public Opinion on Yard & Village Administrative Law*. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/249394043/Report-on-Public-Opinion-on-Yard-Village-Administrative-Law-Burmese-ACDD>; '88 Generation Open and Peace Society's report on local elections.



### **Who is excluded from being a VTA in Dry Zone village tracts**

Villages provided mixed responses about whether or not someone with a disability can fill the role of 10HHL or VTA. In most cases this stemmed from a belief that a handicapped person would not be able to effectively travel between the township and villages. But in at least one case, villagers indicated (incorrectly) that the law does not allow a disabled person to be VTA.

Research villages in the Dry Zone believe that both women and men can be VTA, if they have a sense of community service, a good attitude, and are intelligent, but also cite that women would likely have practical issues carrying out this task due to not knowing how to ride a motorbike. Many women interviewed also said they would not want to be such a prominent leader because it is traditionally a man's role. Despite this, there are three women VTAs in DZ township 1 (none from the focus villages), quite a high number given that the national total is 88.<sup>66</sup> A UNDP report (2015b) outlines the opportunities and barriers for women VTAs and highlights that in 2012 many people did not even know that women could be part of local government.

### **6.3. VTA incentives, disincentives, and characteristics: Kayah** ***Incentives and disincentives to be the Village Tract Authority in Kayah***

In Kayah, 75% of villages interviewed reported that there is no competition for the VTA role. A 10HHL from one village said of the VTA, "If he could give a bribe to quit, he would." It is reported in another village that the VTA's wife cried when he was re-elected VTA for a second term. In a third village, the 10HHLs refused to go to the VTA election for fear that one of them would be selected, so they did not vote in the election.

The financial disincentives (loss of time spent on livelihood) are most frequently cited. As a 42-year-old male youth leader explained, "Although ours is a big village, they don't win the VTA position since they don't want to. The salary of a VTA doesn't amount to transportation charges." Financial disincentives may be higher in Kayah, where many are employed as wage laborers in mines, versus the Dry Zone, where the agricultural underpinning of the economy provides people with a lower opportunity cost of taking time away from work. There is also an acknowledgement that the VTA must be able to skillfully interact with both the EAGs and the GAD, and most people interviewed in this research do not feel they have the skills or confidence to do so.

Violence against village leaders and the perception of security risks in dealing with the Myanmar military and ethnic armed groups was raised in only one of the Kayah township villages interviewed, despite there being documented evidence of these instances in the past.<sup>67</sup>

#### **Box 23. Secondary disincentives for VTAs**

Only one village in Kayah mentioned the history of violence and conflict with the Myanmar military as a disincentive for becoming a VTA. However, there remains a broader recognition that the military's power structures are very much intact, and this may be a disincentive for some to take on a role such as VTA, which would require frequent contact with the GAD. "The GAD has to be informed of every village matter," said a middle age male farmer and 10HHL. Said another Kayah respondent, "I'm still afraid of the Military. The military was involved in the first [land] case that I tried to solve. They still have power."

### ***Present characteristics of VTAs in Kayah***

In the Kayah township, it is more common than in the Dry Zone to re-elect the previous VTA. This may be due to less interest in being VTA, less interaction between the VTA and villagers, language skills, or remaining influence of non-democratic actors. For example, in KNSO areas in the Kayah

<sup>66</sup> UNDP Myanmar. 2017, June 16. *Meet Ward Administrator: Daw Mon Mon Khine*. <http://www.mm.undp.org/content/myanmar/en/home/presscenter/articles/2017/06/16/meet-ward-administrator-daw-mon-mon-khine.html>

<sup>67</sup> Research by Karen Human Rights Group and others has cited the high personal security risks that accompanied the job of VTA or village leader in mixed-control areas. See "Ceasefires, Governance and Development: The KNU in Times of Change"



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township, it is reported that the KNSO “recommends” to villagers who should be the VTA. The age range of VTAs in the Kayah township is also slightly higher than in Dry Zone (30–60 years old, compared with 30–45 years old), but interviews did not suggest a reason for why that is.

In the Kayah township, factors such as religion and an ability to speak Burmese are reported as most important. Political party affiliation was not mentioned as a factor in VTA selection. Religion is the strongest identifier in the Kayah township, and for some communities, it is more important than ethnicity. For example, in one ethnic Karenni community, a Burmese Christian person was elected VTA in part because he was Christian (as well as general disinterest in the job). In another village, where most of the population is Baptist, but the VTA is Catholic villagers reported a low level of respect for the VTA: he does not attend church or participate in religious matters with them.

### **Who is excluded from being VTA in Kayah village tracts**

The 2016 Amendment to the 2012 Law reduced the residency requirement for VTA candidates from 10 to five years of continued residence in the village tract. While this is an improvement over the 2012 Law, it does continue to exclude recently returned IDPs or refugees from the VTA position until after they have lived in their village of origin for at least five years. This was not mentioned in this study’s research, but is worth noting.

The focus villages in Kayah were of very different opinions as to whether certain groups of people could be VTA, once more highlighting the need for village-level analysis in conflict-affected areas. Fifty percent of focus villages indicated (weakly or very strongly) that women should not be VTA. The other fifty percent believed women should or can be VTA. Interviewees from one Kayah village said that it would be “inappropriate” for women to be VTA because the position must interact with military and EAG actors (why this made it inappropriate for women was not clarified). Conversely, another Kayah village said that it is appropriate for women to be VTA and recalled having a woman in the position in 2003. Another village mentioned that women could be leaders in development groups, but not as VTA because they have no formal work experience.

## **6.4. Comparison of VTA election/selection dynamics in Dry Zone and Kayah**

The 2016 VTA elections were implemented more uniformly in areas of strong government control (Dry Zone) and had more of an ad hoc nature in the Kayah township; one village in Kayah reported that EAGs indicated who they would like to be VTA and that person was “voted for” and won the election. However, in principle they all followed the guidelines outlined in the 2012 Law. The Township Authority in the Kayah township indicated he believes VTA elections are conducted differently in EAG-controlled villages, though research was not able to verify this. Annex E provides a diagram of the VTA election framework.

The dynamics of VTA election vs. selection appear tied to the high disincentives to being VTA in the Kayah township. Seventy five percent of interviewed villages reported there was no competition for VTA, whereas 100% of villages in the Dry Zone reported there was competition. As one VTA from DZ Township 2 stated, the “VTA election is like a King election,” reflecting just how much power the new VTA will have. Conversely, a township GAD official who oversaw the VTA elections in the Kayah township stated: “They voted with the intention of not becoming an Administrator,” meaning that no one wants to be VTA in these areas. There was not necessarily a perception that VTAs in the Kayah township have less power than VTAs in Dry Zone, but rather that the disincentives are extremely high.

This difference is also reflected in respondents’ feedback of how they would like to see the VTA elections conducted. In Dry Zone, 75% of focus villages would prefer a VTA election system that is like the general election of 2015, in which every registered adult can vote for the VTA, not just one representative per household. This would enable women and youth to more easily take part in elections. Other people also support an idea for an election in which all adults over 18 may be

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nominated or compete for VTA, even if they are not a 10HHL; this may provide a chance for more youth or women to win the post. Conversely, no village in Kayah preferred a general election model, with one village articulating a preference that each village be required to take the position of VTA in turn so that one village is not “always burdened with it.”

## 6.5. VTA engagement with village decision-making and priorities

The VTA remains the primary link between the state and the people, including for township departments who provide services to residents (see Section 7). However, a shift in the *rules of the game* has diminished the VTA’s almost-absolute power. Under the Thein Sein Administration, the township and higher-level actors interacted with the VTA more than the villagers and the VTAs decisions went unquestioned by either villagers or the township. While the general outline of interactions remains the same, now villagers report spending slightly more time interacting with township staff, either in the village or in their offices, and with MPs (see Section 7), reducing the absolute power that VTAs previously had as the only interlocutor between township and people.

The VTA plays a key role in identifying projects and overseeing implementation. VTAs are involved in two different categories of village development: activities that are self-funded/implemented by the village and activities that are funded by local development funds, such as the Constituency Development Fund.

Overall, VTA decision-making does not appear to have changed much over the past five years. Sixty-six percent of villages overall (63% of Dry Zone villages and 75% of Kayah villages) report that there have been no changes in decision-making. Four villages (three in the Dry Zone and one in Kayah) report that they prefer decision-making processes now, citing that previously the VTA made decisions on his own, but now consults with 10HHL and/or 100HHL/VA; seventy-five percent of these villages citing improvements are in sub-tract villages.

However, people’s perception of the consultation process generally seems directly related to their perception of the VTA. For people with good relationships with the VTA (e.g., he is from their village, they voted for him), they tend to report that there is sufficient or too much consultation; the villagers are mostly willing to follow whatever the VTA decides in these instances. In villages with a more fraught relationship, villagers do not believe that the consultation process is meaningful or sufficient. The most frequent complaint in these latter instances is a belief that the VTA should consult more fully with each village, instead of favoring his own village (see Section 6.6). Where the VTA is weak or not delivering to a specific village, people are now able to take matters into their own hands and find new routes through the broader governance systems (see Section 7).

For village development projects that might require donations (either land or money) from villagers, VTAs in the research villages tend to consult more broadly with Dry Zone villagers than in the past (either directly or through 10HHLs), but ultimately decide on their own. Most Dry Zone villages report that women are not involved in these consultation meetings, or that they attend but simply listen. Supply and demand for engagement with VTA processes and decision-making does not appear to match. In villages that

### Box 24. VTA-VDC interactions

It is not clear from the research how VTAs interact with VDCs. Anecdotal evidence suggests that VTA-VDC/VDF dynamics can be complicated and that while the VDC/VDF structures can offer an important counterweight to the powerful VTA role, disagreements can also potentially have negative consequences for the village in light of the variety of important roles the VTA plays in village and village-township activities.

In one Dry Zone village, community members shared that the Village Development Fund interest rate was set at 3%; some people felt that this was too high. By 2014, the VDF had a large pool of funds, so the VTA suggested to the VDC that the interest rate be reduced to 1%. The VDC did not follow the VTA’s suggestion, after which the VTA no longer cooperated with the VDC and generally reduced his involvement in village development activities, choosing instead to spend more time on his own livelihood activities.

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report invitations to engage directly in meetings with the VTA, villagers state that only the 10HHLs or other formal village leaders ultimately do so; though invited to participate, average villagers choose not to do so. As the VERP FGD explained, “The VTA uses a loudspeaker to invite villagers to the meeting. However, only members of the administration team go to the meeting and villagers don’t usually go to the meetings because they think it’s not their business. They only ask 10HHLs to go.”

For other development activities in Dry Zone villages, interviews revealed that VTAs cooperate with respected committee leaders and *Yat Mi Yat Pa* (for example, with a road committee for road maintenance and a school committee for school maintenance); the VTA does this to be informed of their goals and to help them implement the project if he is able. When consulted, villagers believe that it is okay to voice alternative views or opinions to the VTA, whereas previously the informal *rules of the game* did not allow such opposition. Some villagers in the Dry Zone said: “People thought this freedom of expression was due to the young age of the VTA, but the reality is that times have changed. Now, talks with the VTA have to be fact-based.”

For external funds (for example, an opportunity to receive funds from the CDF), research villages reported that the VTAs generally consult with the VA/100HHL only if the village needs to submit a proposal. In other cases, the VTA only presents an idea to the village leadership for their consent; the VTA does not discuss the project more broadly with villagers or allow opportunities to modify the proposals, though the VA/100HHL may. Sometimes the VTAs decide without consulting the village leadership. As one VA in DZ Township 2 related, “We don’t know when they calculate or when they submit, but we only know when it is granted.”

The VTA alone decides how to use funds granted directly by the township (instead of requested by the village). It is not clear from interviews whether it is the VTA or township/other higher authority that decides which village will receive funds in these instances. A few tract villages reported that the VTA, who belongs to their village, will hold meetings about village tract-level decisions in public with the 100HHLs and 10HHLs, where the rest of the villagers are invited to observe and listen. This suggests that transparency and community voice in tract villages may be increasing, but possibly to the disadvantage of sub-villages.

Though VTAs travel between villages, the research did not reveal whether or how that leads to increased exposure between villagers or any aggregation of village needs into a comprehensive development plan for the village tract.

## 6.6. Dynamics between the VTA and tract village compared to VTA and sub-villages

### *The VTA as a member of the tract village*

Historically, the appointed VTA was a member of the tract village, which is usually the most populated village in the village tract. This meant more influence in terms of resource allocations and decision making for the residents of the tract village than for those in sub-tract villages. As one elder man said: “We own our VTA if he is from our village.”

The election process put in place under the 2012 Law does not formally limit the VTA to coming from the tract village. However, in 90% of the focus villages surveyed for this APEA, the VTA was still elected from the tract village. In the Dry Zone, this may be due to the constituency numbers continuing to favor the tract village. But, in the Kayah township it is less clear why the tract village would continue to retain the VTA position, given the strongly articulated desire to avoid the role.

### *VTAs’ approach toward sub-villages*

Seventy five percent of the villages that report positive changes in VTA decision-making are sub-villages, or villages that the VTA serves, but does not come from. Though not statistically significant, this correlation may indicate that at least some VTAs are starting to do a better job of fulfilling their duties to all the villages under their responsibility, not just their home village. As

one member of the men's township FGD in DZ township 1 shared, "Former administrators didn't take sub- village desires into account in the past; that's changing now."

This increased attention to sub-villages may be due to a variety of factors, such as age (the average age of these VTAs is 41 years old, compared with an overall average age of 47 for current VTAs in sample villages and 53 years previously), the size of these villages relative to others in their village tract (perhaps from a constituency/election perspective they are important), or a change in a sense of duty and responsibilities now that VTAs are elected. None of the VTAs in this 75% of villages that report improved decision-making are NLD (two are neutral and two are from other political parties). Also, there is no correlation between perceptions of improved decision-making by VTAs and influence of VDCs or VDFs in villages. Further research would be needed to determine causal relationships.

Overall the dynamics between VTAs and research sub-villages have not improved in the Kayah township. Most villagers consulted in Kayah reported that the VTA only supports his own village or supports it more. Kayah communities report that he only visits their villages when a township-level project requires donations of labor or money. One youth leader at the township research workshop mentioned that he is not satisfied with his VTA's lack of engagement: "The VTA doesn't come to resolve fights in sub-villages but comes to sign land deals [because] he gets money for signing."

#### Box 25. Quotes from sub-villages on the relationship between the VTA and villagers

DZ township 1: "The relationship between the VTA and villagers has changed since the U Thein Sein government. Current VTAs don't show off their power to villagers. This VTA also treats every village equally. Therefore, there are more opportunities for village development."

DZ Township 2: "The Former VTA talked incisively, since he came from military, and he was not compatible with other people, especially in meetings. Villagers were afraid of dealing with him (although tip payments for recommendation letters disappeared during his administration). The current VTA has a good relationship with everyone and villagers like him. He also participates in religious matters."

Kayah: "During the military administration, the VTA usually made decisions by himself, without consulting the community, and dealt with villagers by using power and order. The VTA under U Thein Sein and since has communicated well with the village."

## 6.7. Transparency today

Transparency seems to be improving, as the informal *rules of the game* have started to create new expectations of equity and fairness in Myanmar's public conscience.<sup>68</sup> Villagers' expectations in this respect may also be increasing due to their increased direct access to other powerful actors (like MPs), which creates a broader array of options through which to meet individual or community needs.

During the Leaders FGD in DZ township 1, it was agreed that that sub-villages in a village tract have started to have negative feelings toward the VTA when he implements projects without taking into consideration all the villages in the village tract. In at least some village tracts it appears this expectation is prompting action.

One VTA said that the Township Authority is also trying to set a new tone for how the VTAs act. Upon their first meeting at the township after being elected, the TA said: "You have been selected to take orders from the public. You must do what they order you to. You are a servant. Please talk politely. Please write recommendation letters for the villagers, even if it is after midnight. Do not ask for money, but you can take it if they give it."

<sup>68</sup> See: UNDP. 2015c. *The State of Local Governance: Trends in Myanmar – A Synthesis of People's Perspectives Across all States and Regions*. Page 3 indicates that since being elected, VTAs start feeling more accountable to the people and stress their role in development and more explicitly meeting the needs of the people who elected them.

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A few Dry Zone villages also mentioned that VTAs have introduced transparency into financial accounting. In the past, VTAs kept hold of the funds and never gave explanations for expenses. Now, they assign other people for financial management and provide financial reports. It is not clear from the data collected who is assigned to what funds, but villagers are supportive of this shift in practice. Kayah villagers did not comment on these issues.

VTAs also play an important role in linking individual community members to township services (e.g., registration cards, loans; see Section 7.2). For an explanation of VTA involvement in dispute resolution, refer to Section 4.5.

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## 7. Opportunities and Barriers for Communities to Engage with Township- and Higher-Level Actors

Community-township engagement has changed significantly over the past few years. Since 2011, the GOM has pushed the country toward a more people-centered approach to development and governance, and the township is the organizing unit for implementing these changes. To fully do so will require a fundamental change of attitude, expectation, and behavior of both government officials and community members, as well as new skills and training for the public and officials to be able to engage meaningfully in government planning processes. This will be particularly true for including women's perspectives and priorities in the planning process; there is not a single female TA in any of the 330 townships in Myanmar. This role is the lowest level of appointed government administration in Myanmar and is responsible for numerous duties involving security, planning, coordination, and dispute resolution.

### Box 26. Key findings on engagement between communities and higher-level actors

- Despite positive changes in lower-level official-public interactions, the most effective way to secure development funds or services is to engage with the most senior-level official possible.
- MPs are actively involved in connecting villages to township-level development resources, constituency development funds.
- Township-community interactions have become more robust in the Dry Zone, but not in the Kayah township. In the Dry Zone, the public thinks that officials are respectful and communities demand accountability.
- VTAs are the primary formal channel for villages to convey needs and preferences to the township level. VTAs meet with TAs twice as frequently in the Dry Zone as in the Kayah township.
- Public demand for quality and accountable service delivery is increasing in Dry Zone townships, but TAs are not capacitated to respond effectively.
- Government officials believe civic education and training would help communities better engage with the township and articulate their needs.
- There are big differences across mixed-control villages and how they interact with government and EAG actors.
- In the Kayah township research villages, EAGs are important and preferred (to government) actors in dispute resolution.
- Large barriers remain in the township government-community interface, especially in the Kayah township villages, where communities report engaging on one-third as many issues as in Dry Zone villages.
- Women have especially limited opportunities to engage with township authorities.
- IDP return in Kayah is bringing land conflicts to the fore. It is unclear whether EAGs alone, government authorities alone, or only these groups acting in concert will be able to resolve them.
- Unofficial fees have decreased across all three townships.

### 7.1. Township-managed funds

Various streams of funding are transferred from township-level institutions to communities. The two principle types of funds transferred from the township are in the form of ministry-supported loan programs, such as MSY, and local development funds, which are managed by the Township Administration. Table 3 provides details of the most common funds.

Each of the three townships in this research receives multiple streams of funding through township-level actors. Table 8 outlines what funds the township receives, as reported by township officials to the research team. Interviews in township villages revealed that the Kayah township and DZ township 1 villages also participate in MSY funds, but township officials did not discuss these funds, so they are not listed in Table 8.



**Table 8. Amount of funds each township government reports receiving for the period December 2016 to March 2017<sup>69</sup>**

Township	Type of Fund	Amount (kyat)	Who Manages It
Kayah township	CDF	100 million	GAD: Villages submit lists of village needs to the GAD, and GAD staff also make assessment trips to the villages. GAD reports that it prioritizes its own findings from field visits when allocating funds.
	NCDDP	Unreported	
DZ Township 2	MSY	210 million	DRD
	Unclear for roads and water projects	668 million	Private company: Township government did not specify who in the township government is providing oversight.
	CDF	100 million	GAD: Each year the GAD receives about 100 proposals from villages, reviews them, and prioritizes around 60 to submit to the regional- and union-level Hluttaws. The MPs, TA, and TMC, then make the final decision on which proposals to fund.
DZ township 1	CDF	100 million	GAD: The TDSC used to manage it. Now it is managed by an “interim committee” that includes the VTA, village tract clerk, and two village representatives who were selected at a meeting.

From the community perspective, villagers most directly engage with MSY Funds and through that with DRD representatives. Other frequently listed connections are between the township Electricity Committee and Village Electricity Committee and between the Myanmar Agricultural Development Bank and villagers. Only two villages identified that they had received development funds (both for schools) from the township government. However, overall villagers do not seem to know what types of funds they receive or why, beyond the individual person with whom they interacted about those funds, which is most often the VTA.

Though knowledge about funds remains low, several villages did report that under the NLD government, they have appreciated an improvement in responsiveness and transparency in instances when decisions are made against the village’s requests.<sup>70</sup> Under the Thein Sein government, it used to be slow or impossible to get a response to proposals for village development. But, the leader FGD from DZ township 1 explains the current environment.

*As for now, if we submit a proposal for something and it cannot be approved, the response is given quickly with the reasons for refusal. For example, when a proposal for getting an electricity supply for the village was submitted, the authority replied that they had decided to prioritize electricity for villages two miles away from the township; that this village is not included in 2017–18 budget plan yet, and that they will consider this village for the next project cycle.*

## 7.2. Service delivery by township departments

### *Types of services provided*

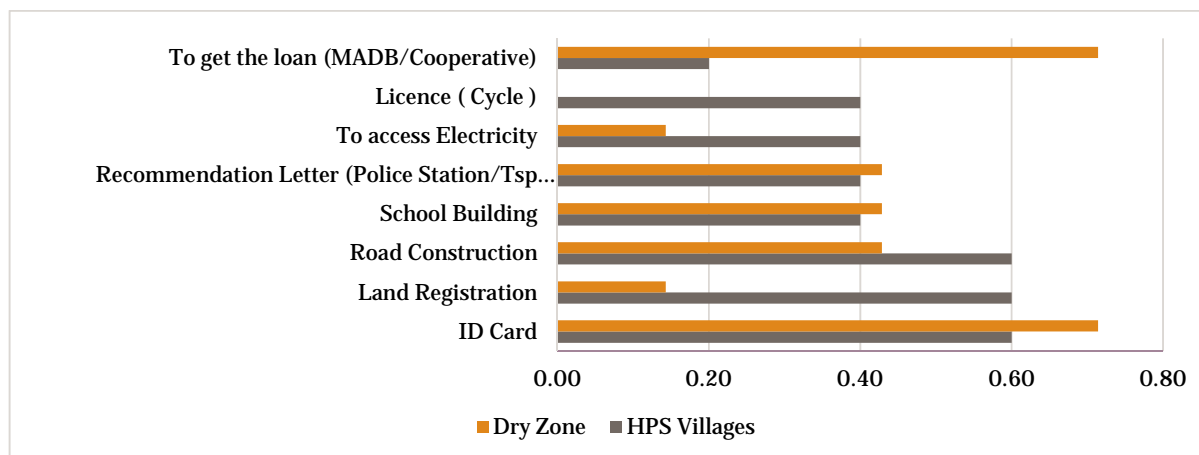
There are two different types of engagement between township authorities and communities: one for personal/individual household needs and one for community-level needs or services. On average, focus villages in the Dry Zone reported engaging individually or collectively on two to three times more issues than villages in the Kayah township. This may stem from a history of animosity among ethnicities in Kayah and from language barriers between Burmese-speaking officials and Karen-speaking community members.

<sup>69</sup> Data source: township officials in all three research townships (31 officials interviewed)

<sup>70</sup> All villages in DZ Township 1 had VTAs identified as either NLD or neutral. Across the whole sample of focus villages (12), only two were identified as USDP. As such, this APEA cannot draw any conclusions or analysis about political association and service delivery. Further research should consider these questions.

For the Kayah township villages, the most frequent types of interactions were for receiving ID cards, registering land, and to discuss road construction. Dry Zone villages also frequently engaged for ID cards and to receive Myanmar Agricultural Development Bank (MADB) loans. Figure 8 illustrates the eight most frequent interactions for both sets of villages.

**Figure 8. Most frequent township-villager interactions<sup>71</sup>**



Township-level departments also interact with community members through the provision of trainings. The most common trainings reported were by the Agriculture, Rural Development, and Health Departments. Most were initiated at the township level, but there is at least one instance of villagers requesting a training that the VTA then helped submit to the township, following which it was successfully delivered.

Individuals across all three townships find that the best approach for securing individual services (e.g., land registration, ID card) is to go with a village leader (VA or VERP) or the VTA to the township office. However, in Kayah villages, this approach was used less frequently because township officials usually come to the village to provide these services, rather than villagers needing to travel to the town, as they do in the Dry Zone.

### ***Service delivery as an indicator of political economy changes***

In addition to revealing the underlying needs and priorities of these villages, the topic of interactions may also reveal how underlying political economy factors have changed in recent years. For example, the prevalence of land registration in the Kayah township villages may be a result of the NCA making it possible for government surveyors to safely visit villages, which is an essential part of the land registration process. In Dry Zone villages, eligible land was likely registered over the past five years since the 2012 Farmland Law first made doing so possible. Residents are only able to receive MADB loans for registered land, so likewise a lower level of registration might explain the large difference in Dry Zone and Kayah villager interaction along that dimension.

Though not quantified in Figure 8, villages in the Dry Zone also reported that they would interact with township-level authorities for dispute resolution if their village or VTA were unable to resolve a dispute, whereas Kayah villagers reported that they do not engage with township authorities for dispute resolution.

Some villagers in the Kayah township reported that before the NCA, government officials accused members of their communities of being members of EAGs and so denied them ID cards and other services, even if they offered to pay large fees. These accusations, or fears of such accusations, may

<sup>71</sup> Data source: 42 villages (493 villagers interviewed); frequency weighted by number of research villages in Dry Zone and Kayah.

have prevented community members from approaching government officials for a variety of services until recently.<sup>72</sup>

**Box 27. Area for additional research: A parallel system of governance may be emerging**

In both Dry Zone townships included in this study, villagers reported a range of instances where their village needs “should be” or “are required to be reported to the NLD township office, in addition to the township GAD office. They cite this as a change from the previous government, in which they reported to GAD and USDP. No such dynamics were commented on in the Kayah township.

One village described how an MP visited the village last year and asked about village needs. The village requested road repairs. The MP told the villagers to make this request to the township NLD office and the township GAD.

Pact staff interviewed in December 2017 believe that this is a misunderstanding and that no reporting is required (or necessarily helpful) for a village to receive development funds. Additional research would be required to confirm or deny these findings.

### 7.3. Incorporating community voice into township planning and decision-making

Over the past few years, TA and GAD responsibilities have expanded and now include the promotion of social and economic development through management of township affairs, oversight of implementation for development projects, and coordinating with other parts of government.<sup>73</sup> The Thein Sein government established TDSCs and Village Tract Development Support Committees as a mechanism that, in theory, was meant to identify community needs through a collaborative process with villagers.<sup>74</sup> However, since the end of the Thein Sein government, these committees have not been renewed, and the Village Development Planning and Township Planning and Implementation Committees (TPICs) have been promoted as the new bodies to connect community-level needs identification with the township level.<sup>75</sup> TPIC was not mentioned in any government official, CSO, or community interviews during this research; this may be due to timing (research took place eight months into the new government) or it may indicate that TPICs,<sup>76</sup> even if they existed, were not functioning as intended.

#### *GAD and department consultations with communities*

According to interviews with communities and government officials, consultation between TAs and villages remains weak. Township officials in all three townships assert that they only engage with communities when the community is assigned a government project. When meetings do occur, they usually include only the relevant township official and the 100HHL/VA. Villagers echo these statements and add that when township officials have come to “assess” needs, they just take pictures and do not engage in a consultative process with the community members. Moreover, a few villages believe that sometimes the township officials only consult with the village’s VTA and not with any direct representatives of their village.

Township officials in the Kayah township confirmed that they almost exclusively interact with VTAs to assess community needs and not with communities directly; VTAs meet with township officials once per month, but VAs are only invited to quarterly meetings on an ad hoc basis.

<sup>72</sup> Saferworld 2018

<sup>73</sup> The Asia Foundation. 2014. *Administering the State in Myanmar*.

<sup>74</sup> The Asia Foundation. 2015b. *Local Development Funds in Myanmar*. See Annex 2 for a diagram of typical needs identification process in Myanmar.

<sup>75</sup> TPICs are beginning to form to coordinate and facilitate budgeting and planning across the township. This new body may take on some of the functions of the previous TDSCs and could be an opportunity for development engagement. See: DRD. 2017. *Township Rural Development Strategy and Programme, Myanmar: Guidelines*. <http://www.vdp.drdmyanmar.org/sites/default/files/Guidelines-TRDSP-10Aug17-v4.pdf>.

<sup>76</sup> The TPIC is primarily responsible for coordinating and facilitating development planning and budgeting at the township scale. Where the TPIC is not fully functional, the TMC, which was set up earlier, will continue to carry out this function. GAD is the chair of both the TPIC and the TMC.

According to the Kayah township VTAs, the TA runs the meeting, asking each VTA to present the issues and updates of his township, including development proposals. The TA asks questions and offers a space for follow-up from the VTAs, though generally the perception is that follow-up is discouraged. VTAs operate independently of each other. The clerk used to check in weekly with the Township Authority for any instructions for the VTA, but now he is just the note taker. In the Dry Zone, VTA-township interactions seem to follow a similar pattern, but with VTAs meeting at the township level twice as frequently as in the Kayah township (i.e., every 15 days).

The DRD in the Kayah township and DZ township 1 both provided a slightly different articulation of the situation. These departments reported that having village buy-in to projects is more important now and that they need to solicit opinions of villagers while designing projects. It is important, they say, to make sure that the projects assigned to villages are feasible and that they can be completed without force. While achieving results may take time, researchers perceived that department officials were sincere in trying to encourage communities to speak up about their needs and wishes. As a female GAD Deputy Head relayed, “The more we can go into the field, the more knowledge we get. Some villagers know more than us. We get experience about how to help them understand us. The people [in the village] who know how to communicate are those from higher positions.”

### **MPs as important links between communities and planning processes**

Despite this limited engagement with township officials across both the Kayah township and Dry Zone villages, communities have found effective, alternative routes to get their development needs heard, primarily through interactions with Members of Parliament.

While MPs can accept proposals from community members, then are supposed to submit them to the “proposal pool” at the township level, the 0.63 correlation between *MP engagement* and *fund delivery to a specific village* suggests that MPs have influence over the allocation process. This presents a potential conflict of interest in terms of their role as legislators (see Box 28 for further details). It is not possible to verify from this research whether benefits would have been delivered without this higher-level interaction, but there is certainly a strong perception in communities that it is the most effective way to secure development resources.

The challenge to having MPs be go-to resources for funding and conflict resolution is that those are both services which are most accountably performed by actors who are not seeking re-election in the future. Re-election can incentivize MPs or other elected officials to make decisions based on constituency numbers or power, rather than equity or justice.<sup>77</sup>

Township officials in the Kayah township noted that since the ceasefire, access to villages has improved and MPs have been visiting much more frequently than before but did not comment further on whether they saw this is a positive or negative development.

#### **Box 28. MP overburden and conflict of interest**

Currently MPs are asked for all types of services. In addition to their legislative duties, they are called on by the public to address bribery issues, to resolve land grab claims (both informally and formally as part of Land Grab Reinvestigation Committees), and for development funds for specific needs like a road or a school. This wide range of duties potentially overburdens MPs and risks their ability to deliver.

Additionally, involvement in fund allocation and land dispute resolution (which for most households in Myanmar comprises their largest asset), introduces the risk of serious conflict of interest. Examples from other countries<sup>78</sup> show that when MPs become involved in development activities, the public starts to judge them on their ability to bring money to the community, rather than legislative actions.

In Myanmar, evidence has been emerging in Land Grab Reinvestigation Committees that MP involvement in the multi-stakeholder committees opens them up to party politics. Before deciding on some cases, the

<sup>77</sup> The Asia Foundation 2015

<sup>78</sup> The Asia Foundation 2015

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MPs consult with their party office as to what decision is in the best political interest of the party.<sup>79</sup> Anecdotes from The Asia Foundation's 2015 report also highlight that MPs choose to support funding requests for villages with large constituencies.

## 7.4. Promoting peace, order, and security through dispute resolution

Township Authorities are primarily responsible for leading the GAD in promoting peace and security and maintaining law and order, alongside assisting development and improving livelihoods. Township officials in all three townships also reported that they are involved with VTAs and VAs when they need help resolving complicated disputes, mainly land grab cases or neighborhood/family land disputes (see Section 4.5). Some civil society groups also shared that they have seen EAGs increasingly involved in trying to resolve land disputes, as IDPs have been returning since the ceasefire and found their land to be occupied by new households or under control of one armed group, business, or GOM actor.

In the Kayah township focus villages, there was also a strongly held view that EAGs are an important and preferred actor in dispute resolution, compared with government actors (see more in Section 4.5). Villages in the Kayah township are particularly reluctant to approach township-level officials to assist in conflict resolution. This may be due to a combination of language barriers, the difficulty and cost of traveling to the township, and historical factors related to conflict with the GOM.

## 7.5. Public demand for quality services and accountable governance

While service delivery itself may not yet be changing in practice, it appears that the public is beginning to exhibit expectations of quality and accountable service delivery from township actors, at least in the Dry Zone townships of this study. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the public now has much more space and confidence to voice complaints than before, but the township government has not yet been sufficiently empowered through resources or other tools to respond. An increase in public complaints suggests a fundamental shift in the *rules of the game*; people think they are now allowed to complain and that complaining might yield results.

For example, in DZ Township 2, the Education Department reported that over the past few years the number of parental complaints against teachers for poor performance, such as absenteeism, has increased dramatically, but the township Education Department does not have the authority to discipline teachers. As a result, villagers further complain that the government is not accountable and needs to be responsive to them. The Health Department in DZ Township 2 also shared that some villagers have started “acting cold” toward its staff (i.e., not receiving them with tea or snacks) when they go for vaccination campaigns or trainings because they are not able to provide medicines other than vaccinations for free, whereas NGOs operating in the villages provide free care.

The experience of the Department of Immigration and Population in DZ township 1 highlights an important change in dynamics: both government actors and the public are currently learning new expectations of service provision and engagement. Department officials are frustrated that villagers do not understand or listen to guidance on what documents are necessary to bring when they come to apply for a new ID, and the villagers get frustrated in turn that the officials will not process their applications. As one 53-year-old Department staff member said: “They think we are causing them trouble without realizing our rules and regulations. If we lose patience, they say we are rude. It is said that there is freedom of expression in our time. More complaints are arising during the current President’s Administration.” Some members of the public now approach the TA

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<sup>79</sup> Pierce and Htun 2017



for routine matters on the weekends, during his personal free time; he is not happy about this, but told researchers that he feels that the new government culture forces him to accept this.

Previous research in other townships of Kayah demonstrated a high public perception of government responsibility (VTA, GOM, or Township Administration) for addressing the main problems in a village tract.<sup>80</sup> While not a specific question in this APEA research, in Kayah, stakeholders identified a range of government and non-government actors, and did not seem to feel strongly that government actors had any particular responsibilities; it was the one township where neither government nor community stakeholders articulated either expectations or unmet expectations.

#### Box 29. EAGs as parallel service providers and authority figures

This research identified that villages in mixed control areas have quite different experiences engaging with EAGs. Three of four villages in the Kayah township report paying fees to the Ethnic Administration. However, CSO staff who live and work in other areas of the Kayah township report that this is no longer the practice. Two villages in the study area reported that they occasionally receive health services supported by the EAG but did not specify whether they prefer to use EAG or government-provided health care. Civil society groups working in the Kayah township find that in mixed areas, communities prefer to go to the Ethnic Service Provider (ESP) for health treatment but will go to the government center if it is staffed and the ESP center is not. This preference may be related to quality of care, allegiance, cultural differences, or a history of going to EAG services; prior to 2014, government clinics were poorly supplied. Conversely, civil society groups have noticed that since the ceasefire, villages in mixed control areas are increasingly approaching the government for development assistance, which they did not previously do.

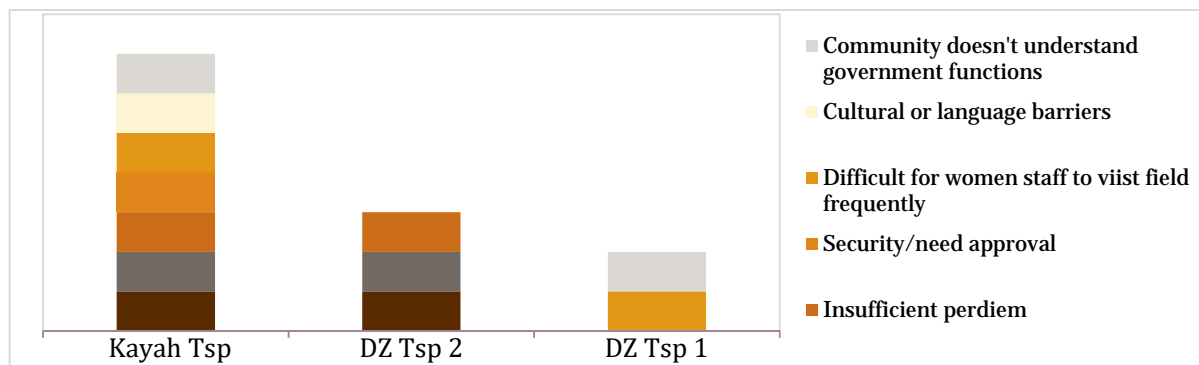
It is unclear from this study what, if any, needs identification exists between EAG actors and communities. One village mentioned that while its relationship with government authorities has not changed since the ceasefire, its relationship with EAG actors has improved, but did not specify in what ways.

Village-specific assessments should be conducted by development organizations operating in mixed control areas. In these areas, the township-level appears to be too large a unit of analysis for effective programming decisions.

## 7.6. Incentives, barriers, and approaches for communities to connect with township resources

Unlike the VTA, the TA comes from an outside area and is deployed on a rotational basis for a short period. Incentives for upward rather than downward accountability remain strong for TAs under the current system. That is unlikely to change, unless TAs become an elected position or citizen feedback becomes a priority for assessing township performance.

Figure 9. Barriers to township-community engagement: Government perspective<sup>81</sup>



<sup>80</sup> The State of Local Governance: Kayah. UNDP 2015

<sup>81</sup> Data Source: interviews with 31 officials across all focus townships



Nevertheless, communities in the Dry Zone report that the tone of engagement with authorities has much improved. As one 40-year-old male farmer said, “We were afraid of even the (township office) cleaner before.” One respondent from DZ Township 2 reported: “The former township administrator said, ‘I would hit you so hard that your left cheek would reach to your right cheek’...In the past, government officers were transferred from the military and sounded so military. Since 2015, Township Administrators have their own educations and their own standards.” Notably, most villages in the Dry Zone feel that when they engage with township officials, the officials are much friendlier than before and have more patience. Villagers believe some of this is due to an understanding that under the current government, the public can report to Daw Aung San Su Kyi on an official Facebook page when they are treated badly or experience corruption.<sup>82</sup> Conversely, the Kayah township communities report that there has been little if any change: “Before they shouted, now they frown, and still they do not smile.”

Many barriers remain in township-community engagement, especially in the Kayah township. Communities primarily noted barriers that interfere with individual- rather than community-level services: long waits in offices, not being able to focus on their livelihoods due to step-by-step procedures, and for women or disabled individuals not knowing how to drive a motorbike to reach the offices. Women mostly interact with township officials who come to their village, though officials rarely visit. For communities in the Kayah township, there is the added barrier of language for community members who do not speak Burmese. The most common barriers mentioned for township-village interactions were “bad roads” or “no barriers.” When taken together with the observation that township officials infrequently visit villages, the latter suggests that communities simply do not have the expectation of this type of engagement; from their perspective, no barriers are preventing the interaction, interactions are merely uncommon.

The township officials identified numerous barriers and specific examples of barriers, which suggests they think they should be engaging more than they are with the villages, but cannot. GAD officials in the Kayah township emphasized that they believe interactions could be improved through education of villagers about government roles and through empowering villagers, so they are more confident to assess and ask for their village needs.

**Box 30. Township officials face a variety of unique barriers to providing services in The Kayah township**

**Access/security:** The Electrification Department faces challenges with EAGs. Department staff become vulnerable when driving the large electrician trucks past EAG roads. So, the department usually gains permission from the EAGs first.

**Cultural:** In some villages in the area, placing posts in the ground is a way of celebrating Nat and Animist beliefs. Villagers do not like to see electricity posts put in the ground in the same way, leading to frustration

### **Effects of internal changes in some departments**

The primary department that engages the most with villages is the DRD, through the MSY revolving fund program, NCDDP, and direct provision of trainings and rural development works. However, officials report that the department is primarily staffed by young people who are inexperienced or by women, who, according to the officials, are unable to spend time in villages due to not knowing how to ride motorbikes. In one village, the DRD staff only connects with the MSY village committee by phone once per month and goes to the village only once every three months, even though she is supposed to go in person, because she cannot drive a motorbike.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Researchers found no evidence of this on Daw Suu’s Facebook page.

<sup>83</sup> The role of information and communication technology (ICT) was not a focus of this research, nor was it frequently mentioned. However, further research or programming could test whether changing women’s use of ICT and using ICT to reduce frequent in-person meetings for local officials might enable more women’s involvement in local government. A 2017 report by IREX highlighted that in Myanmar men are 30% more likely to own their own phone than women and many of the barriers and opportunities to closing this gap. To access the report, see: Sheila Scott, Swathi Balasubramanina, and Amber Ehrke. 2017. *Ending the Gender Digital Divide in Myanmar: A Problem-Driven Political Economy Assessment*. IREX.

The increased presence of women staff should not be a negative. Indeed, only 11% of gazetted (executive, managerial) staff in the GAD are women. Having more women in direct service provision and decision-making roles has important impacts on prioritizing development. However, departments need to invest in appropriate training for staff to overcome specific barriers to effective community engagement.

In DZ township 1, just as space is opening between the government and the public to discuss ideas, space is also opening within the government to do so. A change in leadership means that technical staff now have more opportunities to influence strategy and decision-making so that it responds to local needs. One official from the Department of Agriculture gave the example that during the Thein Sein government, the Agriculture Minister was a military official and all the staff had to listen to his orders, even if they knew that certain crops he promoted were not suitable in this specific geography. Now there is a new Minister who listens to advice and alternative view points from the staff to make services more responsive to local context.

### **Effective approaches to accessing township officials and services**

Over time, communities have found creative work-arounds to Myanmar's strict bureaucratic system. Many of those same approaches and strategies continue to be used today, depending on whether the interaction is for the benefit of an individual or for the whole community. In addition to interactions with MPs, as outlined earlier in this section, communities employ the following strategies.

**Table 9. Most effective ways to engage township authorities: Community perspective**

Personal Needs	Community Development Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal relationships with staff</li> <li>• Skills/knowledge of how to navigate bureaucracy</li> <li>• Be accompanied by a VA or VTA</li> <li>• Bribes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Projects in line with township budget plan</li> <li>• Use personal network to go above/around township authorities</li> <li>• Proposal has specific rationale for why it is needed<sup>84</sup></li> </ul> <p><i>(No bribes reported; no inflated receipts reported)</i></p>

### **Bribery**

Also called “unofficial fees,” bribery is a sensitive topic about which it is difficult to collect accurate data, making the details difficult to analyze with certainty. As such, Table 10 is only indicative. However, what is clear from these interviews is that the *rules of the game* have begun to change with respect to corruption and, in turn, so has the behavior of government actors.

**Table 10. Average unofficial fees reported in Myanmar Kyat<sup>85</sup>**

Service/Department	In Past 5 Years	Since 2015	Average % Change
National Registration Card (Department of Immigration)	13,250	9,500	-28%
Loan (MADB)	750	600	-20%
Other (electricity)		40,000	-
Recommendation letter (police)	937.50	800	-15%
Fees to put on a play	70,000	35,000	-28%

Numerous respondents in this study reported hearing that upon forming a government in 2016, the NLD announced that corruption would no longer be tolerated and that bribe-seeking behavior by officials is a punishable and reportable offense. As one community reported, “Under the U Thein Sein Administration, taking over 3 lakhs was regarded as embezzlement. During this

<sup>84</sup> According to a VA interview, DZ Township 2.

<sup>85</sup> Data Source: Interviews with 492 villagers from 31 villages (non-response from one Kayah village and DZ township 1 FGD)

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President's term, the GAD announced that taking over 30,000 kyats is regarded as embezzlement and can be reported."

In each township, villagers report that there has been a decrease in the need to pay unofficial fees for at least some personal services (see Table 10), and only one village reported unofficial fees remaining part of village-level activities.<sup>86</sup> One village in DZ Township 2 reported that before 2012, the village was "forced" to make a monthly payment to the township; this has been decreasing since 2012 and changed dramatically after the 2015 election. Before the Thein Sein government, township staff needed to be fed and given beer and money for fuel during their visits to villages; now government staff bring their own lunch box and the village just helps with small things, like drinking water. Two villages report no change in the unofficial fees. Where change was reported, villagers indicated a decrease of 50–100% reduction in the amounts paid for specific services.

A few villages report that even though township officials no longer demand tea money, the villagers still pay some because it is their custom. But, the villagers report that they can just pay what they want or that it is for special services, such as having the government official fill out relevant forms for an illiterate villager or expedited processing times. Others report that "administrative fees" are now charged (e.g., the cost of paper or copying a form), but that tea money is no longer requested.

Perhaps most notably, villagers report that when they choose not to pay unofficial fees, they are not denied services, though sometimes the processing of their requests can take longer than for those who do pay; it is unclear if they just do not receive expedited services but do receive their documents within the official number of days listed or whether it takes longer than it legally ought to. Primarily, they note that the official is less friendly to them when they do not pay a fee.

### ***Personal contacts***

A variety of examples emerged throughout this assessment about villagers (usually a village leader) using personal connections outside of the village to secure development services for the community. For example, one village wanted to receive the MSY Fund. A 100HHL from the village visited his nephew who is a Central Investigation Officer in a neighboring village, and his nephew said that he would help the village get MSY funds. The 100HHL came back to his village, consulted with the VDC, took the necessary documents, and went back to his nephew's village to meet one of the MSY authorities, which his nephew facilitated. The 100HHL submitted the documents and was told that the case would be considered. In June 2016, when a national MP visited, the 100HHL re-submitted the proposal; that month the village was granted a MSY fund.

The more senior the personal contact is in the government, the better. In seven of 10 villages in which communities directly engaged with higher-level authorities (state/region-level Ministers, MPs, or national military leaders) to submit funding or development-assistance requests, they report subsequently receiving the funds or project requested.

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<sup>86</sup> One village reported paying unofficial fees to a variety of actors (e.g., police, hospital) to put on plays as part of community festivals. While not a part of community development, the plays and festival are part of community cohesion. The village reported that it is still necessary to pay fees to some officials, but that the amount has decreased by approximately 50%.

## 8. Emergent and Future Local Governance Perspectives

### 8.1. Key political economy trends based on field findings

Foundational Factors	
Deeply embedded structures that fundamentally shape the broad character of the state and political system. For example, geography, geostrategic position and neighborhood, natural and human resources, historical legacies, state formation, regional or sectarian divisions. Many have long-term origins and may be slow to change. However, it is worth asking whether they could change over time.	
1	Slowly the state-society relationship is shifting from abusive and/or absent to engaged and searching for new identity.
2	The General Administration Department (GAD) remains the primary manager of social service delivery and funding in the country.
3	The patriarchy remains strong in government-controlled areas.
4	Large barriers (logistic, resource, and cultural) remain to direct engagement between communities and township actors responsible for allocation of development funding and service delivery, especially in the Kayah township.
5	Perceptions of local administrators (e.g., Village Tract Administrators [VTAs]) vary significantly between locations. In the Kayah township, the VTA's power is considered somewhat limited and there are strong disincentives for assuming the position.
Rules of the Game	
Formal and informal institutions, rules, norms, and ideologies that influence the behaviors of different actors, relationships between them, and incentives and capacity for collective action.	
6	Tentative shift from an "abusive state" to a collaborative state. Communities have less fear, government actors are friendlier, and government actors solicit fewer unofficial fees, though in some instances the public's behavior has not yet changed.
7	Positive changes in perception of how corruption/bribery is handled.
8	Decisions within villages are made by nominal consensus (or nominal assent of villagers), rather than collaborative planning.
9	Women tend to emerge in leadership positions if they have specific skills or have already proven they can do the job. They are more frequently accepted as leaders in the Kayah township research villages than in the Dry Zone research villages.
10	In the Dry Zone, the VTA profile is shifting. Communities now identify youth and political party affiliation as more important than seniority and acquiescence to government demands.
11	There is a shift in VTAs now considering the needs and preferences of sub-villages, not just those of the main tract village. This is more apparent in the Dry Zone than in the Kayah township.
Here and now	
Captures the current behavior of individuals and groups and their response to events ("games within the rules"). May provide short-term opportunities or impediments to change.	
12	Members of Parliament (MPs) are assuming roles of development partner, mediator, and accountability officer. This may create conflicts of interest or overburden MPs.
13	Despite positive changes in the receptivity of lower-level government officials to support requests from the public, the most effective way for villages to secure development support appears to be direct engagement with the most senior-level official possible.
14	Communities in all research townships identified Shae Thot Village Development Committees (VDCs) among the top three most influential groups. They are the most influential group in the interviewed the Kayah township communities.
15	There is one group in each village responsible for most interactions with outside actors. In the Dry Zone villages assessed, this is the VTA; in the Kayah township villages, it is religious groups.

16	VTAs are the primary formal channel for villages to convey needs and preferences to the township level to secure development assistance.
17	Assessed villages in the Kayah township generally prefer to handle disputes internally or with the assistance of EAGs, but not through officials from the Government of Myanmar (GOM). Research villages in the Dry Zone engage a variety of actors to resolve disputes.
18	There are significant differences across mixed-control villages in terms of how they interact with government and EAG actors.
19	Limited mobility reduces the opportunities available to women and disabled people to engage with township authorities.
20	There is growing interest in the direct election of local governance actors, rather than indirect democracy.
<b>Dynamics</b>	
The actors, networks, or socio-economic and political organizations and processes that provide an avenue for change. The other elements of dynamism, actual or potential, that may impact the issue/problem being studied.	
21	Dual reporting lines to National League for Democracy (NLD) and GAD structures may be emerging.
22	There is increasing appreciation and demand for transparency of decision-making and accountability for quality service provision, especially in Dry Zone communities.
23	Some communities report disenchantment with recently elected VTAs, who were chosen along party lines. This may create an opportunity to move beyond party identity in future elections.
24	Villages within the same village tract rarely engage with each other, other than for celebration and crisis response. However, some sub-villages are starting to realize that with the new VTA election process, collaborating during campaigning and election can result in a VTA who will be responsive to sub-village needs.
25	Land disputes are one of the most prevalent types of disputes across all townships. Returnees in Kayah are bringing this to the forefront. It is unclear in Kayah whether EAGs and GOM authorities acting separately or together will be able to resolve these issues.
26	The findings are mixed with respect to whether space for women's leadership is growing or shrinking in Kayah at the village level. In Dry Zone, women's leadership opportunities seem static or slightly expanding in some villages.

## 8.2. Structural issues and future scenarios

Category	Description
<b>Government-Controlled Areas</b>	
Township level	The administrative structure is highly likely to follow along its current trajectory, with townships remaining the lowest level of public service delivery under the new government. No major reforms have been approved at the township level, although township council formation and elections have reappeared in the discourse. If the latter comes to pass, it may help increase township leadership accountability, though there may also be a period of replicated dynamics that have been seen at the village tract level, such as favoring large constituencies with development funds depending on how the elections are structured, political party allegiances indicating leader selection, and structural or self-imposed exclusion of women. TPICs did not emerge in this research, but may become an important tool for direct village engagement with government planning and resource allocation processes if they are able to be genuinely representative and not simply incorporate the views of elite as "citizen representatives."
Village tract level	A third amendment was passed to the 2012 Law in December 2016 that includes some important revisions. At the time of research, this amendment had not yet had much time to take effect, so while it is mentioned in the previous sections of this report, it is worth keeping in mind as part of future scenarios. Of note, the amendment further outlines the role of the 100HHLs (to advise and assist the VTA on security and administration) and 10HHLs (to participate in security and administration under VTA leadership). The amendment also allows



Category	Description
	a “household representative” (individual over the age of 18) to participate on behalf of the household in the VTA election. This allows a shift towards younger people (including women) having more voice in the election process, though cultural changes will still play a role in keeping the household head (usually male) as the household representative.
Village level	It is unclear what the impact of dissatisfaction with the first tranche of elected representatives along party lines may be. It may create an opportunity for new leadership to emerge or platforms to extend beyond party lines of democracy and development vs. security (broadly speaking). Conversely, it may lead to a cooling-off period from the recent surge in citizen-engagement with MPs, township authorities, and other authority actors who were previously out of reach. As 46-year-old male farmer and former VTA said: “We met the Prospective Member of Parliament whether we wanted to meet her or not when she was canvassing for votes. Now she does not come anymore. Is this the behavior of an MP?”
<b>Conflict-Affected Areas</b>	
Interim measures	In conflict-affected areas, a focus on implementing the “interim measures” should be closely monitored. In some areas of mixed control or strong EAG influence in government-controlled areas, dual mandates have resulted in neither party properly implementing services, justice, or being accountable to the community. <sup>87</sup> A few examples of this were alluded to in interviews for this report.
Increase in CDD projects	A recent report by The Asia Foundation (2017) highlighted that at the local level aid can mitigate or aggravate violence and tensions through granting authority over populations, providing access to resources, and consolidating or expanding control over territory. NGOs will continue playing an important role in implementing projects, such as the World Bank CDD project. The Asia Foundation research suggests that NGO implementation of the NCDDP can help it be “neutral” rather than government-supported; however, in the one instance in which NCDDP was mentioned in this APEA research, it was identified by community members as a “government” project. It will be important for development partners to pay attention to these perceptions because they can increase operational risk for NGOs and potentially create divisions within communities. Community control of funds is best from a conflict perspective. Finally, development during ceasefire agreements can bring out factions within an EAG; development partners will need to continually monitor these dynamics over the life cycle of any project.
Refugee and IDP return	If the security situation continues to improve in the Kayah township and other conflict-affected villages, there will likely be an uptick in the return of refugees and IDPs. <sup>88</sup> This will have implications for many dimensions of local governance and development across village, village tract, and township levels. Returnees may have different development concerns than residents who have remained in or relocated to returnees’ village of origin, potentially creating community-level conflicts or confusion for development actors (government, EAGs, NGOs). Related land conflicts and competing claims have already emerged as an issue. Land security is a key basis for most of the population in these areas <sup>89</sup> and a crucial component of broader peace negotiations. There are not yet robust policies or legal or non-judicial mechanisms in place to resolve these disputes in ways that are agreeable to government, EAG, and community members.

<sup>87</sup> Saferworld 2018

<sup>88</sup> UNHCR. 2017, October. *Return Assessments, Kayah State*.

<sup>89</sup> Approximately 70% of Myanmar’s population depends on land-based livelihoods.



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## 9. Conclusion: Implications for Development Assistance

Development partners continue to face a complex set of actors, dynamics, and rules in trying to support local governance and local-ownership of development in Myanmar. Some of the primary barriers that development partners will face include:

- the increasing number of and demand on community volunteer groups formed or encouraged to support development projects with oftentimes overlapping roles and responsibilities. This is exacerbated by the limited number of individuals who can contribute as community volunteers and leaders, due to capacity and availability.
- potential for volunteer burnout amongst community members, particularly in projects with participation quotas like NCDDP
- the strong disincentives and low appetite that individuals living in conflict-affected communities have towards leadership roles
- continued lack of incentives for township administrators and other township level staff to engage more proactively and be responsive to community members
- complex power dynamics, including deep-rooted beliefs of appropriate roles for men and women in decision making
- lack of clarity on the balance of power between political parties, GAD, and powerful individual actors
- constantly shifting landscape as old actors (e.g., township authorities, VTAs) take on new responsibilities and learn new rules of the game and as new actors (MPs) learn how to do their job responsibly for the first time

Across Myanmar, citizen demand for government accountability and performance, public voice, and confidence to challenge authority figures has emerged and grown since 2011. Dissatisfaction with government performance after two years of NLD-led government and disenchantment with local officials who were elected along party lines, may provide a new opportunity for development actors to encourage new community members, including traditionally marginalized groups, to become leaders. When space has been opened, like in NGO-supported committees, women have started successfully taking on leadership roles, setting a potential precedent for also taking on leadership roles in public governance.

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## 10. Recommendations for Development Actors

### 10.1. Programming recommendations related to the core question

1. Village-specific analysis should inform development programming and operations, especially in mixed-control areas. Though the village tracts and township are the organizing administrative framework of local governance in Myanmar, big differences remain between villages within the same village tract in mixed controlled areas.
2. Training in basic skills (e.g., motorbike driving and maintenance, using a smart phone) may help women take on more leadership roles that engage outside their home village. Not being able to ride a motorbike was frequently cited, especially in Dry Zone villages, as a limiting factor to women taking on leadership roles.
3. Development actors should seize upon the likely uptick of MP-influenced funding prior to the next election cycle and ensure that villages have the skills necessary for inclusive project prioritization and fund management, as listed below, thereby empowering citizens to engage specifically and strategically with service providers.
  - Rights and civic education: which actors are responsible for what
  - Combined financing management/accounting with planning and prioritization skills trainings, especially for women and members of youth groups: women have already been identified by their communities as well-suited to the role of accountant; trainings focused on this position can be used as an entry point to expand leadership opportunities
  - Presentation of issues and public speaking
  - Work to build the confidence and skills of new leaders in conflict-affected areas to engage with government and EAG actors
4. Train interested village-level leaders (youth and women) on campaign strategies for VTA elections, including party platforms and possibilities to work together as sub-villages to elect the VTA of their choice. This could help foster more inter-village linkages and broader development planning.
5. Enable service providers to respond effectively to and facilitate engagement between communities and service providers, particularly by:
  - Supporting skills development, especially for new government staff (in DRD it is mostly women), to ensure that they can effectively do their job and implement community-centered development
  - Working with township departments to identify how they can be responsive to issues like teacher absenteeism and construction delays, even when they do not have direct authority over some of the specifics of the issues
  - Facilitating participatory planning and budgeting
  - Imparting skills to conduct meaningful consultations with excluded groups, especially for new government staff
  - Implementing accountability and participation tools, like interface meetings, citizen scorecards, and benchmarking, after analyzing what tools that have already been tested in Myanmar have worked more and less well
6. In conflict-affected areas, focus on supply and demand and on convergence of services (disputes resolution, health, education, land registration) that might be mutually supported by both EAGs and government actors.
7. In conflict-affected areas, look beyond VTA/administrative or EAG structures as entry points to engaging with villages. Ultimate buy-in by both these groups may be necessary, but other actors, such as religious groups, may be the first actor that needs to be consulted.
8. In Dry Zone villages, explore a mentorship program between VTAs/VAs and women who show an interest in leadership.

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## 10.2. Other programming recommendations

1. In the Kayah township, train youth groups, including young women, on dispute-resolution skills. This can include soft skills, such as training in mediation, and basic legal knowledge pertaining to the main types of disputes in focus villages (e.g., land laws, women rights/domestic violence law).
2. Work with MPs to find opportunities for them to carry out legislative and oversight activities, rather than focusing on the details of resolving disputes or distributing CDFs.
3. Provide civic education around appropriate and inappropriate uses of political party branding. This may help ensure that party politics do not interfere with non-political community cohesion and development objectives.

## 10.3. Areas for further research related to the core question

This APEA highlighted several dynamics about local-level governance in Myanmar, any one of which could benefit from further focused research. A few areas, as follows, are of immediate importance to development actors considering emerging trends.

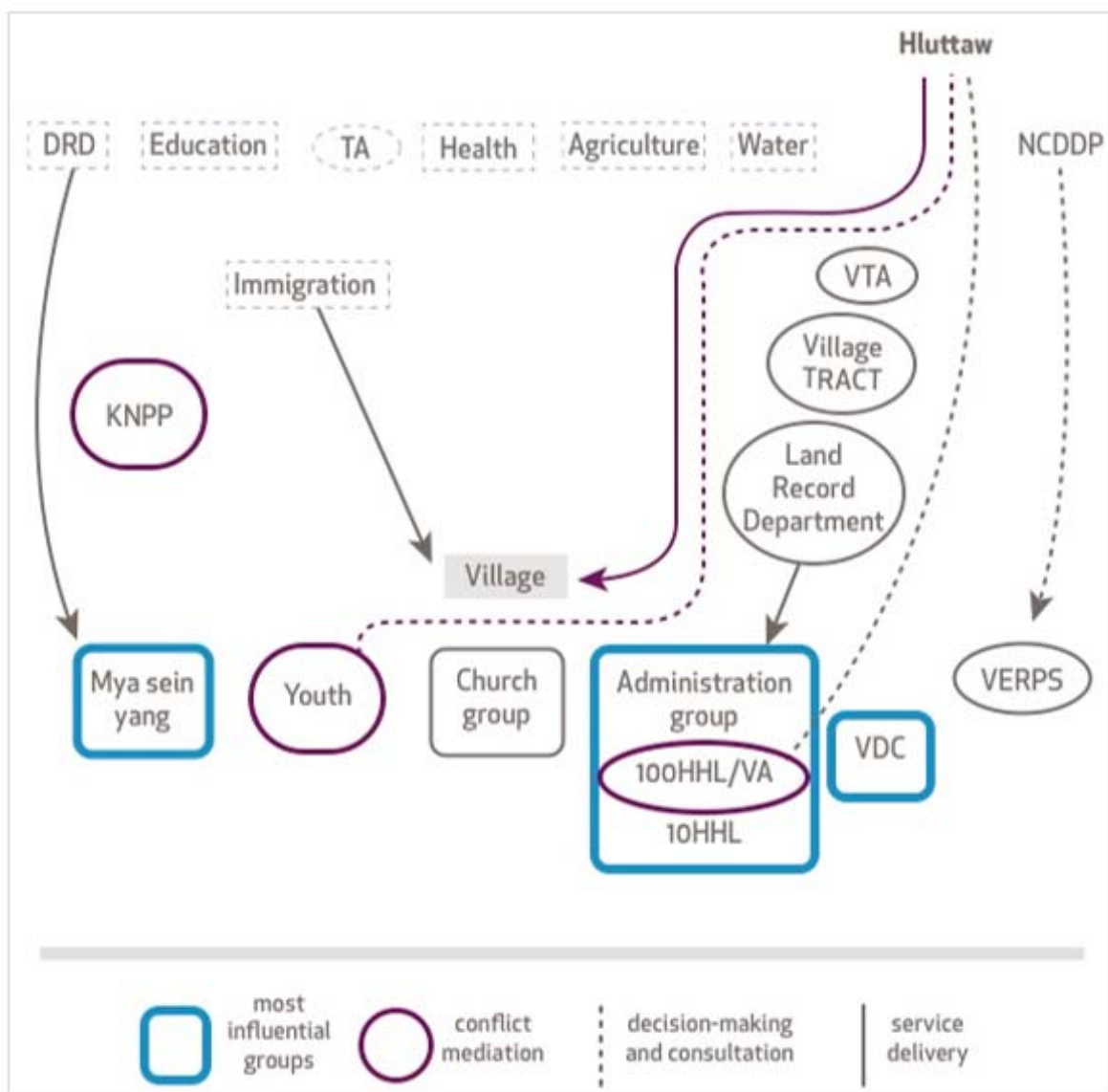
1. Does promotion of women leaders in community groups by NGOs or government policy result in more inclusive decision-making? Is decision-making within women-led committees more, less, or equally consultative as that of male-led committees? What spillover effects exist outside of these groups into broader community consultation processes?
2. Does a village's political party identity (majority of village population) influence the types, amount, or most effective strategies for securing development assistance? Are villages that support the USDP more effective in securing assistance from GAD? Do villages that support the NLD need to work through MPs rather than the GAD to secure assistance?
3. How do communities (or households) in mixed-control areas decide between service provision by EAGs or government actors? Which factors are most important: quality, cost, accessibility, language spoken, religion of the provider, ethnicity of the provider, personal desire, or community pressure to support a certain "side" for political or historic reasons?
4. What role do forced donations of household resources (land, money, labor) play in complementing or substituting government resources for village development priorities?

## 10.4. Other topics for further research and analysis

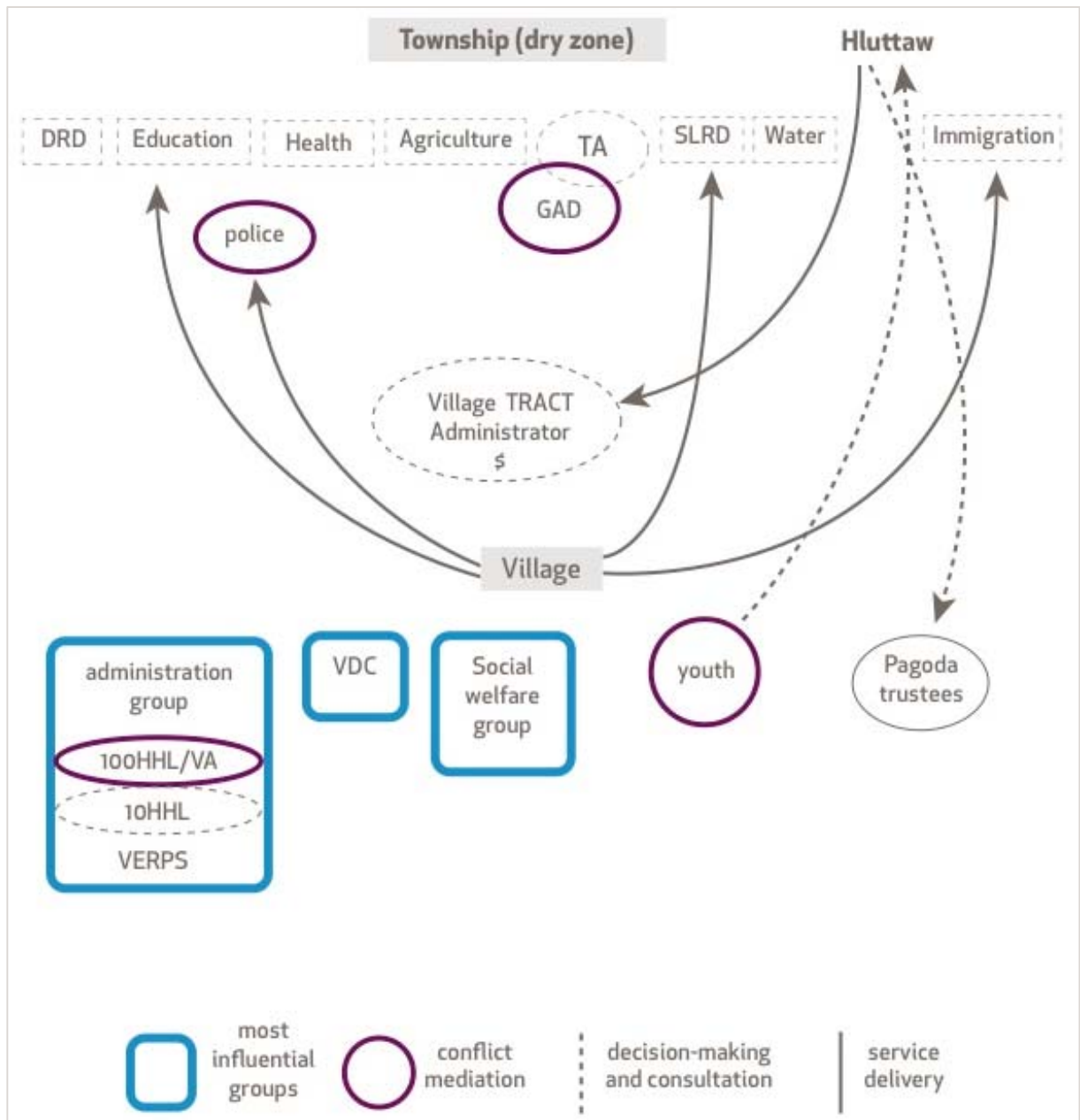
1. Which non-financial components of USAID-funded integrated development programming, especially VDCs, are most important to communities and should be replicated in other areas?
2. Do IDP and refugee returnees' priorities differ from those of communities who have remained in their village of origin throughout conflict? What opportunities exist for returnee perspectives and priorities to be incorporated into local decision-making? What barriers exist to having their priorities supported?
3. What options exist as part of interim arrangements to address land-related disputes?

## Annex A: Stakeholder and Services/Fund Diagram of Each Township and Village

Representative village: Kayah Focus Township



## Representative village: Dry Zone



## Annex B: Adapted APEA Framework

Main Analytical Categories	Issue Level	Key Factors to Consider
<b>1. Foundational Factors</b> Deeply embedded structures that fundamentally shape the broad character of the state and political system. For example, geography, geostrategic position and neighborhood, natural and human resources, historical legacies, state formation, regional or sectarian divisions. Many have long-term origins and may be slow to change. However, it is worth asking whether they could change over time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How are deep-seated foundational factors affecting the issue or problem under study?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Which national or sector-level foundational factors affect this issue/problem, and how? Can they be addressed, and how?</li> <li>Which key socio-economic structures and constraints to economic growth impact this problem? How does the capacity to generate economic surpluses and “unearned” revenues affect the issue?</li> <li>Is the state unified and does it have authority over its population and territory? How does state formation impact this issue?</li> <li>Who are the main actors of concern, and what motivates them? What is their relationship? What actions do they take regarding the issue? What interest(s) do they have? Who benefits from reform or lack of reform, and how?</li> <li>Which socio-political features affect the issue, and how? E.g., loyalties, clientelist networks, ethnic or sectarian cohorts, party affiliations, regional identities, gender ties.</li> <li>Who benefits from rents or diversions of resources? How and why?</li> <li>Who and which interests oppose change(s), and why? How empowered are they, and how do they wield their influence?</li> </ul>
<b>2. Rules of the Game</b> Formal and informal institutions, rules, norms, and ideologies that influence the behaviors of different actors, relationships between them, and incentives and capacity for collective action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the problem’s constitutional, legal, and regulatory framework?</li> <li>Are there any important gaps not covered by legislation?</li> <li>What are the intended and unintended consequences of legislation, if implemented?</li> <li>What informal rules and belief systems (including tradition) affect behavior?</li> <li>What are their roots? How do they influence and impact the problem?</li> <li>What is the distribution of power between key actors?</li> <li>What is the economic distribution of wealth and the dependency of various economic actors on each other and with power elites?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How is the issue/problem nested in sector and national legal frameworks, and do any narrower formal (“parchment”) laws and rules specifically address this issue? Do the formal legal frameworks reflect international norms?</li> <li>Are the laws and regulations properly enforced? Are human/financial resources made available to ensure their proper implementation?</li> <li>Which gaps in legislation or regulations exist, and how do they affect this issue?</li> <li>Which beliefs, traditions, cultural norms, and other informal institutions affect this issue, and how? To what extent are institutions rules-based or personalized? Where do these originate? Why and how do they remain influential?</li> <li>Which actors personify and enforce the formal rules, and which the informal norms? Are they competitive or collaborative about addressing this issue?</li> <li>Are there behaviors around the issue that are based in party politics or political competition, patronage relations, criminality or corruption, rent-seeking, nepotism, social exclusion, or some sort of political arrangement?</li> <li>Do norms or logics emerging from economic practices (e.g., trade, ownership, investment, loans, taxation) affecting this problem? In what ways does economic distribution of wealth and the dependency of various economic actors on each other and with power elites play a role?</li> <li>Is there evidence of collective action (collaborative and coordinated behavior by multiple stakeholders aimed at achieving a goal) around this issue? Why/not?</li> </ul>



Main Analytical Categories	Issue Level	Key Factors to Consider
<b>3. Here and Now</b> Captures the current behavior of individuals and groups and their response to events (“games within the rules”). May provide short-term opportunities or impediments to change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who are the current main stakeholders, and what are their various interests in this issue?</li> <li>What influence do they have, and what characterizes their actions?</li> <li>Who benefits from the status quo, and how?</li> <li>Which actors are likely to support or oppose reform?</li> <li>Does the issue have a high profile in national or local politics, and why? Is it affected by political competition?</li> <li>How does the government view and react to the issue?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Which recent events and key trends are having an impact on the problem? How and why?</li> <li>Which actors are central to the issue/problem now? What interests do they represent? How do they derive their authority? How did they obtain or retain power?</li> <li>In what social communication networks is the issue embedded?</li> <li>How do the key actors use their influence? What influence do they have (to do what)? Are they accountable to anyone/group?</li> <li>Which national- or sector-level actors take an interest in the issue? How do those interests manifest? What influence have the actors, how do they behave, and what is their goal?</li> <li>Do politicians influence the issue? If yes, how and why? What is their interest? How do they or their followers benefit?</li> <li>Are major economic actors taking an interest? Who are they, and why? What is their involvement and their goals?</li> <li>Are civic actors involved (e.g., religious leaders, chiefs, NGOs)? If yes, how and why?</li> <li>Has the problem become a partisan political issue? Is it a campaign issue? How does that affect its resolution?</li> <li>What is government’s involvement with the issue? Is it promoting reform or not? How and why?</li> <li>Are donors or other foreigners involved? How and why? What influence have they to drive change?</li> </ul>
<b>4. Dynamics</b> The actors, networks, or socio-economic and political organizations and processes that provide an avenue for change. The other elements of dynamism, actual or potential, that may impact the issue/problem being studied.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From which source might change logically emerge?</li> <li>How is the nature, composition, and strength of interest groups changing over time?</li> <li>How can the influence of groups be expected to change in future and respond to events (e.g. upcoming elections, possible policy initiatives)?</li> <li>Are there any recent or current events that impact on the country’s political economy generally or more specifically on the position or interests of particular stakeholders?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the relationship between and the influence of these pro- and anti-reform groups changing? If yes, how and why?</li> <li>Are there likely future opportunities for reform? Why? Timing, actors, and openings?</li> <li>Can outsiders contribute to changes with regard to this problem? How? What limits outsiders’ influence?</li> <li>What entry points for change are likely to open up (e.g., additional funding, civil society activism, more responsive government, legal reform, policy changes, better-trained civil servants)? How and why?</li> <li>What is the potential of collective action among stakeholders?</li> <li>Is there a credible commitment for reform by the authorities?</li> <li>Where do uncertainty about fixing the problem and complexity surrounding the issue come from, and how can they be addressed to reduce risk?</li> </ul>
<b>5. Implications for Development Assistance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the implications of the analysis for strategy, programming, policy dialogue, and risk assessment?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the lessons learned from previous assistance?</li> <li>What is the scope to support more constructive state-society bargaining and collective action?</li> <li>What programmatic strategies are likely to be most effective and why?</li> <li>Which ones should be prioritized given the PEA, the context, and the resources available?</li> </ul>

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## Annex C: Research Questions

The core question the study answered was:

**What is the relationship between villages, village tracts and townships as it relates to meeting village development priorities? What are the barriers and opportunities?**

With specific reference to the core question and with a view to the field research, the following research questions were developed.

1. What are the relevant background structures and foundational factors?
2. What are the institutions, relationships, and leadership structures at village level?
3. What are the linkages between villages (horizontal)?
4. What are the linkages between village level and village tract level (vertical)?
5. What are the opportunities and barriers for communities to engage with the township level?
6. What are the structural issues and future scenarios?
7. What are the recommendations for programming?

As part of the above analysis, the study paid attention to:

- The relationships and roles of Shae Thot-supported VDCs with respect to other leadership structures within the community
- Any other entities that may play significant roles for engagement (e.g., MPs, private sector, influential individuals, institutions based within or outside of the communities)
- What/who/were/when women impact decision-making processes at the village, tract, and township levels

## Annex D: Demographics of Research Respondents

Table D1. Focus village interviews (12 villages, 9 Shae Thot and 3 control)

Type of Interview	DZ township 1					DZ township 2					Kayah Township					Grand Total
	V1	V2	V3	V4	Total	V1	V2	V3	V4	Total	V1	V2	V3	V4	Total	
FGD	4	4	4	5	17	4	4	4	4	16	4	3	3	4	14	47
KII	7	7	6	6	26	10	7	7	8	32	6	6	6	6	24	82
Informal	3	2	4	5	14	0	0	3	0	3	3	0	3	0	6	23
Male	12	17	16	21	66	19	15	21	19	74	17	11	17	13	58	198
Female	18	15	21	24	78	16	13	18	15	62	16	10	13	10	49	189

Focus village interviews and FGDs included men, women, youth, farmers, landless households, 10HHLs, village elders, VDC members, teachers, and VTAs or VAs. A similar mix of villagers participated in the township-level workshop FGDs.

Table D2. Township-level workshops (10 villages represented per township, total 30 villages)

Group Interviewed	Township 1			Township 2			Township 3		
	#FGDs /KII	Male	Female	#FGDs /KII	Male	Female	#FGDs /KII	Male	Female
Villagers	12	49	45	30	29	27	8	33	27
Government	8	11	6	4	3	10	7	6	1
Pact staff	8	13	9	11	12	5	8	10	10
CSOs	-	-	-	-	-	-	11	-	-
Total	28	73	60	45	44	27	34	49	38

Government key informants included township administrators, GAD staff, and staff from departments such as DRD, Health, Education, and Electricity.

Pact interviews included team leaders of signature Shae Thot programming, such as MCH committees and VDCs; townships monitors; and finance officers.

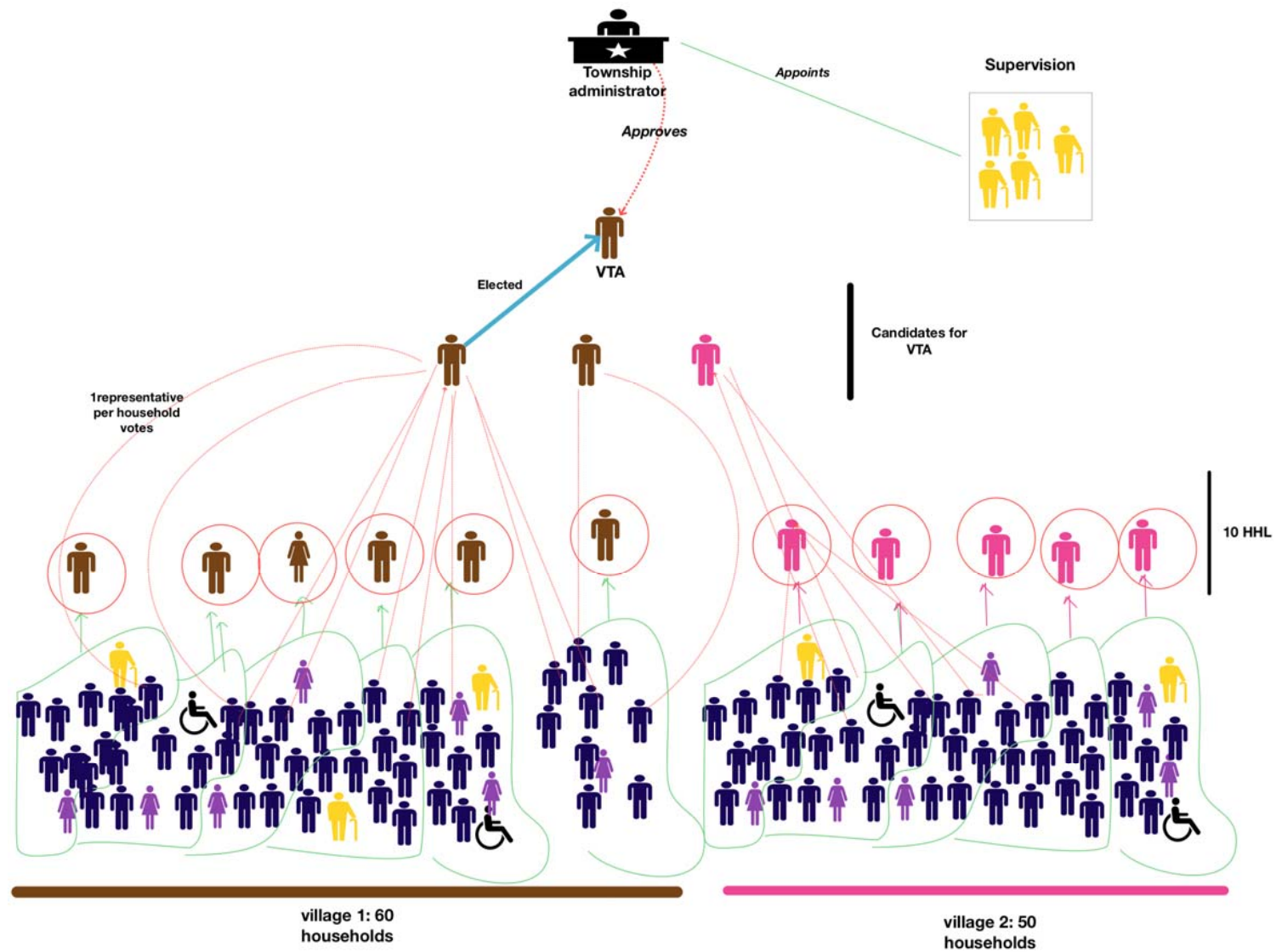
An additional FGD was held with CSO representatives working in the Kayah township and other nearby areas in Kayah.

Participants of Township FGDs were not disaggregated in the data collection phase.

Table D3. Breakdown of interviews by governance level

Level	# FGDs	# KIIs	# Informal (Other)	Total FGDs/KIIs	Male	Female	Total People
Villages	47	82	23	152	198	189	539
Townships				89	182	127	398
<b>Total</b>				<b>241</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>316</b>	<b>937</b>

## Annex E: Framework for VTA Elections



## Annex G: Groups in Each Village

Group Type	Incidence Rate
Administrative Group	92%
Youth Group	92%
School Committee	83%
Maternal Child Health (MCH) Committee	75%
Village Development Committee (VDC)	75%
Village Development Fund (VDF)	75%
Board of Trustees	67%
Fire Brigade	58%
Social Welfare Group	58%
Yogi Group (practitioners of religious meditation)	42%
Electricity Committee	33%
Emerald Green Committee/ Mya Sein Yaung	25%
Religious group (Prayers Group)	25%
Rural Health Care Committee	25%
Water and Environmental Maintenance Committee	25%
WORTH Women's Savings Group (Pact)	25%
Cesvi Group	17%
Church Committee	17%
Nursery School Committee	17%
Religious group (cleaning within the Temple area)	17%
Renewable Energy Committee (Pact)	17%
UN Habitat Group	17%
Women Group (helping Thar-Yay-Nar-Yay)	17%
World Vision CBO	17%
Charity Collective Saving Group	8%

Group Type (continued)	Incidence Rate
Church Women Group	8%
Church Youth Group	8%
Coffin Carrying Group (Funeral Service)	8%
Community Driven Development Group (CDDG)	8%
Cooking Group	8%
Digging Group (Funeral Service)	8%
Generator Maintenance Committee	8%
International Organization for Migration Group (IOM)	8%
Irrigation Committee	8%
Ma Ba Tha	8%
Red Cross Group	8%
Road Committee	8%
Water Committee	8%
Water Pump and Motor Maintenance Committee	8%

*Indicates 39 group types. Results from 12 focus villages.*





