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Enhancing Community-Led Development in Kayah State



Pact Myanmar
May 2019



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Governance



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Abbreviations and Acronyms

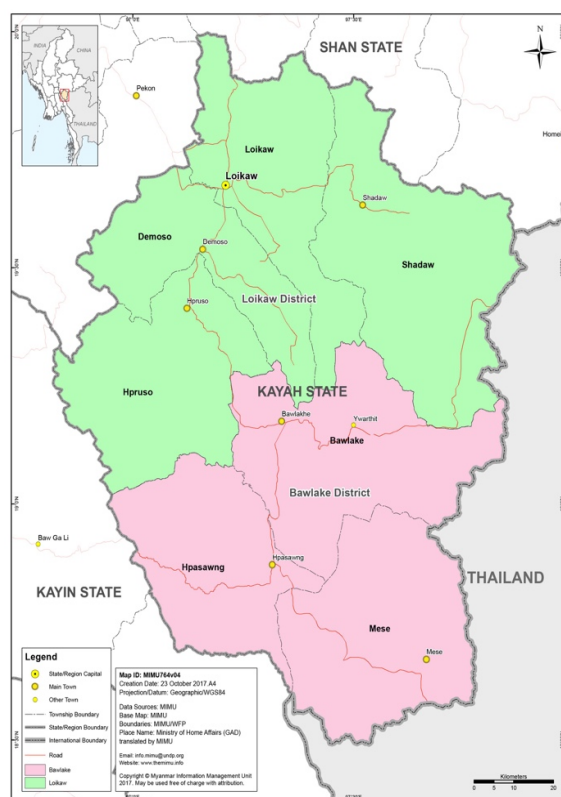
ACE	Advancing Community Empowerment
CBO	community-based organization
CGG	Centre for Good Governance
CLD	community-led development
CSO	civil society organization
EAO	ethnic armed organization
FGD	focus group discussion
GBV	gender-based violence
INGO	international non-governmental organization
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KII	key informant interview
KNPP	Karenni National Progressive Party
LDN	Local Development Network
NCDDP	National Community Driven Development Project
NGO	non-governmental organization
PTA	parent-teacher associations
SCI	Save the Children International
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VA	Village Administrator
VDC	Village Development Committee
VDF	Village Development Fund
VTA	Village Tract Administrator
WASH	water, sanitation and hygiene
WORTH	women's economic empowerment
3MDG	Three Millennium Development Goal Fund

Executive Summary

Community-led development (CLD) is designed to bring development assistance directly to rural communities, providing the public with a role in decisions that affect their immediate environment, well-being, and livelihoods. It can also help develop capacities and systems that provide a reliable foundation for decentralization reforms.

Kayah State, the smallest state in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, experienced a dramatic increase in development funding after a bilateral ceasefire in 2012 between the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) and the Myanmar military (*Tatmadaw*). International development

Figure 1. Kayah State districts and townships (Source: The MIMU 2017)



assistance has increased more than eight-fold since then, with more than USD \$99 per capita going to support the Kayah people.¹ This assistance has included several large-scale initiatives by government and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) employing CLD approaches.

The rush of assistance has resulted in multiple actors operating in the same townships and villages at the same time, sometimes even offering similar types of support. New volunteer groups are being formed at a rapid pace, requiring community members to contribute various combinations of time, money, materials, land, and labor. New groups are adding to and often overlapping with existing formal and informal community structures present in communities. This general lack of coherence, community volunteerism and group formation has resulted in reported incidences of volunteer burn-out and community fatigue and are likely to have contributed to KNPP-led closures to development actors operating in different regions of Kayah State in 2017 and 2018.²

This study seeks to document the formal, informal, traditional, and project-linked structures that exist in communities and provide recommendations to improve community-level development programming in Kayah State.

Key recommendations

- Agree on common guiding principles for engaging with communities in rural communities in Kayah State. Potential principles include:
 - Establish limits for volunteer participation (i.e., don't accept volunteers who already hold significant roles in three or more community groups).

¹ International development assistance in Kayah in March 2019 was USD \$99 per capita (total of USD \$28,390,000) compared to a mere \$6 per capita at end of 2012. Myanmar Management Information Unit. https://www.themimu.info/states_regions/kayah

² KNPP closed access of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to the Lobaekho village tract reportedly due to villager complaints of incomplete infrastructure, too many NGOs entering the village, and NGO-led projects that were not requested by the community. KNPP closed access to all communities under its control in response to an altercation with the Tatmadaw, although rumors suggested the closing was also linked to dissatisfaction with the level of infrastructure being developed with the support of community volunteers.

- Incorporate healthy volunteer recognition programs (e.g., public awards ceremonies, plaques or certificates, exposure visits, newsletters) and community-funded compensation schemes. Extend recognition to family members and partners of volunteers.
- Acknowledge and coordinate with local leadership when structuring new volunteer groups.
- Minimize the funding of per-diems or allowances for volunteer labor.
- Hire directly from the communities where activities are being implemented.
- Set participation quotas for young people, women, and minority groups within communities.
- Seek to include people with disabilities in volunteer roles.
- Invest in revolving funds to support post-project continuity or revitalize or top-up existing funds where available before making new ones.
- Incorporate trust building activities in highly diverse communities to improve social cohesion; do this *before* implementing larger scale CLD activities like road construction.
- Promote transparency *within* the community by encouraging more and regular communication of group leaders with community members about group activities.
- Create opportunities for group leaders to meaningfully connect with local authorities and civil society leaders.

Introduction

CLD can be an effective means to ensure that development assistance reaches directly to rural communities and responds to their needs. It can also help develop capacities and systems that provide a reliable foundation for decentralization reforms. In Kayah State, several large-scale initiatives by government and INGOs have employed CLD approaches. These programs share similarities in terms of promoting participatory planning, committee or group formation, social accountability or grievance mechanisms, and project maintenance at the community level. These projects tend to work directly with village and village tracts and focus on developing public assets (e.g., roads, water sources, etc.), as well as livelihood support and social protection.

The largest projects of this nature in Kayah State are the National Community Driven Development Project (NCDDP) that supports small scale infrastructure in all seven townships; the *Mya Sein Yaung* (or Emerald Green) project that is a government-provided revolving fund for livelihoods promotion operated at the community level; the Village Development Plan project, another government initiative supporting small-scale infrastructure development in communities; the USAID-funded *Shae Thot* and Advancing Community Empowerment (ACE) projects that support health, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), livelihoods and small-scale infrastructure; the PROSPER project that supported small-scale infrastructure; and the Action Aid township planning project that supported development planning at the community level.



Participants in Htee Poe Ka Loh village identifying groups composition.

The rapid increase of these types of projects in Kayah State has resulted in significant programmatic overlap, with multiple actors operating concurrently in the same locations. The emphases on volunteerism and other means of community contribution has led some communities to opt out of projects due to lack of availability and volunteer fatigue, among other reasons. These new groups are adding to and can even compete with existing formal and informal community structures, leading to confusion or even conflict.

In January 2019, Pact engaged 104 men and 106 women from eleven villages in Bawlakhe, Demoso and Hpasawng townships to document the formal and informal groups within their communities and to better understand the ways and reasons they were formed, who was involved, and how they contributed to community development. Villages were selected based on past Pact presence and where other major CLD projects were known to have implemented, with a priority of areas with programmatic overlap. The study surfaced numerous findings which are summarized in this report along with recommendations for future CLD initiatives in Kayah State and other areas of Myanmar.

Approach and Methodology

The information and data were collected through a variety of different methods including pre-assessment desk review of development projects and programs in Kayah State, interactive workshops with the community members many of whom were involved in CLD groups and activities, key informant interviews (KIIs) with village authorities and 'super leaders and volunteers',³ focus group discussions (FGD) with women, and committee members of certain projects. Workshops and interviews took place in the participating communities or nearby community halls and included the mapping of formal and informal village institutions and civic and social groups, including the purpose, structure, leadership roles and responsibilities, membership demographics, structure, formation, durability, external support, and the duration of support received.

The field survey was undertaken over six days from January 16 to January 22, 2019. The villages covered had overlaps of three or more project activities by different development organizations, including community-based organizations (CBOs), NGOs, and INGOs.

The assessment team consisted of a lead researcher and four team members with deep connections to the communities who could speak local languages and dialects.

The survey was conducted in eleven villages across Hpasawng, Bawlakhe and Demoso townships in Kayah State. Table 1 provides a list of villages and breakdown of participants.



Assessment team members cross-checking information with participants.

Table 1. List of villages and respondents

No.	Village Name	Total # of participants	# of males	# of females	Total # of groups	# of endogenous groups	# of exogenous groups
Demoso Township							
1	Htee Po Ka Loh	21	11	10	20	6	14
2	Daw Law Khu	30	16	14	15	5	10
3	Pa Dan Kho	17	13	4	17	7	10
4	Tay Gay Kho	16	11	5	15	6	9
Bawlakhe Township							
5	Mai Htan	15	7	8	15	7	8
6	Wan Chae	12	9	3	18	7	11
7	Ye Ni Pauk	10	6	4	19	9	10
Hpasawng Township							
8	Nant Kit	22	16	6	23	11	13
9	Par Pu	25	5	20	16	7	9
10	Su See	23	7	16	16	9	7
11	Taung Paw	19	3	16	17	7	10
	TOTAL	210	104	106	192	81	111

³ We use this term for the community members who are involved in variety of different roles and are highly committed to village development

The study sought evidence in line with the following hypotheses:

- **Hypothesis 1 [Incorporation and Collaboration]:** If the CLD project model incorporates or collaborates with existing endogenous bodies,⁴ then it will have a greater chance of success and post-project sustainability.
- **Hypothesis 2 [Saturation Point]:** If a certain number of CLD projects are operating concurrently in a given community, then the likelihood of project success and sustainability decreases.
- **Hypothesis 3 [Inclusion]:** If a CLD project involves different members from the community including traditionally disadvantaged people in the project design and implementation, the chance of success and post-project sustainability increases.

Study Limitations

Limited geographical coverage: The study was designed as a rapid undertaking, consisting of only 11 villages. Therefore, the findings may not accurately represent the whole of Kayah State or even the selected townships.

Participation: The field team included Myanmar, Kayan and Kayah speakers to guide facilitation. However, some workshop participants' primary language differed (e.g., Karen and Shan), limiting involvement and requiring additional time for translation. In addition, while the assessment process included non-verbal means of communication, the format was new to participants and required more explanation than anticipated. The three-hour self-imposed time frame for activities also limited the amount of information that was possible to gather in some communities.

Access restrictions: Increasing travel restrictions for NGO and INGO staff in Kayah State, especially of expatriates meant the assessment team was understaffed.

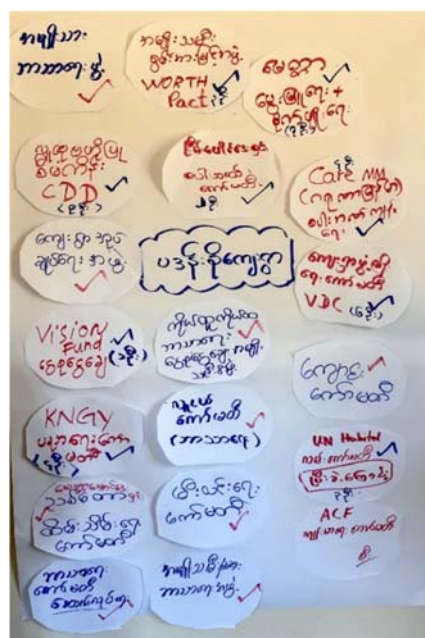
⁴ Endogenous groups refer to existing structures that were in place prior to the arrival of projects with the objective of meeting socio-economic needs of the community such as ten and 100 household heads, village elders' groups, youth groups, etc. or that were developed through the influence of a CLD project and now operate independently of the project. In contrast, exogenous groups are governance structures that are set up for and with continuous support by a CLD project. Details on these and other terms used in this report can be found in the Key Terms section.

Findings

A total of 210 individuals (106 women and 104 men) from 11 villages in three townships participated in the interactive assessment workshops. Most participants had some involvement with village development activities; some did not belong to any formal or informal community groups. The diversity of participation offered the team with a wide variety of perceptions of village development activities and actors.

Group types, composition and demographics

- Participants identified 192 exogenous and endogenous community groups in the eleven villages. This constitutes an average of 18 groups per village (ten endogenous and eight exogenous groups).
- 59 unique group types exist across the assessed villages (six exogenous and 23 endogenous groups).
- On average, ten people are included in each group with a gender ratio of men to women of 56:44.
- The ratio of men to women is 70:30 in group leadership roles; this ratio widens to 88:12 in the ten and 100 household leadership groups. There were more prominent women ten and 100 household leaders in Hpasawng than in the other townships where villages were assessed.
- Village Tract Administrators (VTAs) and religious leaders have limited representation in the CLD groups.
- Group membership tends to be predominantly the best educated in the communities; 69% of group members obtained secondary level education and above. Individuals who identified themselves as illiterate barely register in group membership.
- A large majority of respondents who were members of community groups identified themselves as either full- or part-time (temporarily) employed.⁵ Most group members that were mothers identified as unemployed or dependents.
- 58% of group members are adults (ages 35-59). Youth (ages 16-34) and elderly (over 65) barely registered in the assessment with only 3% reported.
- 78% of group members were from the majority ethnicity and 87% from the majority religion in their villages.



Groups identified by assessment participants.

⁵ The participants defined full-time employment as regularly growing crops, working as day laborers with work most days of the week, or running small businesses at home. Part-timers only grow some seasonal crops or are day laborers with irregular work during the week.



CLD group membership demographic information was collected through an interactive activity.

- Group members are overwhelmingly literate in both their native language and Myanmar (83%), which contrasts with the general population in the communities visited. One elderly female respondent told the assessment team that she did not know why she was attending the workshop or what it was about, only that, “I am here because my village leader told me to come.” This suggests that language ability and literacy may limit participation to a subset of members.
- Disabled people are rarely if ever included in community groups; zero instances were identified during data collection). This is despite 5.8% of the Kayah State population indicating some type of disability in the 2014 census and the state’s ranking of fifth in terms of disability prevalence in Myanmar.⁶

Most common group types

Government administrative bodies such as ten and 100 household leader groups and large projects such as NCDDP working committees were present in all 11 assessed villages. Pact-supported Village Development Committees (VDCs) and women’s economic empowerment (WORTH) groups and the Mya Sein Yaung revolving fund management committees were second most prevalent, present in nine of the villages. Other groups such as religious men’s groups, venerable and elderly persons groups (*yat mi yat pha*), Village Development Funds (VDF) and village school committees were present in 50% of villages. In some villages, respondents were aware of groups in the community, but did not know details about their functions or membership.

Benefits of community-led development groups

In addition to the obvious benefits incumbent with many CLD initiatives, such as new infrastructure, respondents highlighted numerous additional benefits of participating in CLD groups. These included:

- **Increased awareness** on issues such as hygiene and health care, child rights, gender equality, and human trafficking.
- **Increased capacity** through skills building, training, and practice on topics related to technical support (e.g., health, education, and livelihoods) and common CLD processes (e.g., community mobilization, record keeping, financial management, and leadership).
- **Expanded networks and enhanced relationships** with township officials, civil society actors, and other local authorities. Due to CLD projects, the community members are now able to work in teams more effectively and closely.
- **Increased agency and confidence** to speak up and deal with power holders. Villagers become more willing and able to question authorities and decision makers than before CLD projects began. For example, the leader of one of the CLD groups described how he now feels confident to talk to both the government authorities and ethnic armed organizations (EAOs). Another highlighted his experiences participating in discussions in state-level forums.

⁶ Myanmar Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population. 2014. *The 2014 Population and Housing Census*.

Challenges: volunteerism, fatigue, leadership, and diversity

Community members highlighted frequent challenges of having multiple groups operating simultaneously in their communities, including:

- **Overreliance on a few**
 - Super volunteers (involved in three or more groups) appeared in every community visited. 38% of workshop participants hold two or more roles in village development activities, with considerable overlap of roles and responsibilities.
 - CLD group membership pulls from a limited pool. For example, in one community, six people reported to be doing all the heavy lifting and; in others, participants believed only 30% of the community population is involved. A common theme coming out of FGDs and interviews was that CLD group leaders and members feel that they need to expand participation in their villages.
 - Commonly cited factors limiting participation include mobility, amount of free time, education, language, literacy, and ‘gravitas’ or respect.
- **Over-commitment**
 - A large majority of group members are over-committed, stressed and exhausted from taking on many responsibilities on behalf of the community.
 - The burden of frequent time away from family and household tasks takes a toll on the families of group members. Many reported family problems, even potential divorce. Women leaders face harsher challenges and criticisms from their families, husbands and wider society who accuse them of being “out there having fun and not taking care of the family,” resulting in frustration, burnout and vacating their positions.
- **Good and bad leaders.** Ineffective and non-transparent leaders reduce trust in groups and dissuade volunteerism. Communities can also over-rely on effective leaders, always nominating the same individual(s) for new CLD projects. Attempts at expanding leadership beyond the traditionally elected may also backfire sometimes, with women leaders being taken less seriously than men and leaders of lower economic means being unduly influenced by wealthier community members.
- **High diversity may contribute to low social cohesion.** Communities assessed with high socio-economic and religious diversity tended to demonstrate lower social cohesion. This was also the case for communities that were more recently established as villages. In these cases, it was more difficult for villagers to reach consensus on development decisions or to do so within project timeframes. This impacted CLD project delivery and hence CLD groups were less likely to be perceived as successful.

“We need to let young people work together with us.”
~ Assessment participant and super volunteer

Sustainability Factors

The study revealed several factors that may contribute to the relative success of CLD initiatives, especially those aiming to continue after the cessation of external financial and technical support.

Respect for community integrity

- **Acknowledge local leaders.** Local leaders are key to constructive engagement with communities. Consult with village elders and respected persons before starting project activities and update them regularly on project status. When appropriate, traditional leaders should be involved as patrons or in ceremonial roles that acknowledge their status and expose them to new ideas or ways of working.
- **Coordinate with existing groups,** but don't just add more responsibilities to the same group. Consider coaching or mentoring arrangements between old and new group leaders. Existing groups can help to clarify expectations of the new project, identify potential areas of overlap with existing projects, support more rapid needs assessment and prioritization exercises, and mobilize volunteers.
- **Build flexibility into project timelines.** Timelines and schedules for development activities need to be flexible and adapted to community availability and needs. Consult the community in advance of workshops on the timing of activities to avoid harvest times and major festivals. Also consider when people have time in their week to spare for activities. Respondents largely preferred evening meetings and activities of a maximum duration of three hours (with two hours preferable) to ensure they could focus their attention.
- **Avoid participation incentives.** There is also an increasing trend in villages of 'donor dependent volunteerism' where some individuals are no longer interested in volunteering for normal village development activities unless they are offered per diem or some incentives for participation. Respondents expressed disappointment in this trend and are having difficulty recruiting volunteers for traditional communal tasks.
- **Hire local.** Hire men and women from the communities where the project will be implemented and who know both the context and can speak the dominant language(s). Hiring from local communities helps build trust as well as increases the likelihood of gaining local leaders' approval and community participation.
- **Avoid box-ticking.** If group leaders are unavailable or have inadequate time to prepare, postpone the activity. Avoid plowing ahead and delivering for the sake of meeting targets alone. Community members can tell the difference.

*"Do it for the community, not just to complete the activity."
~ Village leader*

Build trust. Continuously.

People living in the areas assessed tend to be mistrustful of outsiders. New ideas and ways of working are likewise suspect. To succeed, CLD initiatives need to build trust with local leaders and community members before launching into major program activities. Trust building activities should be built into project timelines and accompanied with guidelines and training for project staff.

Acknowledge service

Publicly recognize volunteers for their contributions, such as through awards ceremonies, local media stories, certificates of achievement, badges or pins denoting a leadership role in a CLD group, bulletins posted in community spaces, exposure visits, and distributing pamphlets profiling individuals or groups to surrounding communities. Such forms of acknowledgement can not only raise the

motivation of the volunteers but also inspire new volunteers. Some villages employed community-determined compensation schemes paid through revolving funds.

Institute or reinforce revolving funds

In villages where revolving funds were incorporated into the project design, CLD groups are more likely to remain active after external funding ceased. Revolving funds provide a continuous source of project funding, even if at smaller amounts than those provided by donors. Common applications include seed funding for CLD priorities (used to demonstrate commitment to local authorities or individual donors for a new road, for example, or to create a new, dedicated fund for the development priority) and volunteer leadership stipends or honorariums. One village was still operating a fund initially set up more than ten years ago by Care Myanmar and UN Habitat. Other villages were still operating VDFs started under Pact's Shae Thot project, which ceased operations in 2017.

Leadership

- Community group leaders interviewed suggested limiting volunteer leaders to participation in a maximum of three groups. CLD designs could easily incorporate this recommendation into project guidelines. Expecting individuals to self-limit participation runs contrary to cultural norms. Once someone is nominated or 'voted' by the community for a role, he or she is essentially forced to comply so as not to contradict group sentiment.⁷ Quotas for new group leaders or limits on super-volunteerism would make room for second-line leadership, especially younger youth (those aged 25 and under) who barely showed up in assessment results and would benefit from skills building opportunities.
- Many respondents knew of a community group but were unable to explain its purpose. More and regular communication by leaders to community members about group activities would likely encourage greater participation and support longer-term group viability.
- There is a critical need for training second-line leaders. Currently, roles are on a voluntary basis and many leading roles are held by only a small number of committed individuals. There are some educated people in the village, but they are only willing to do salaried roles. Some villages urged development organizations not to use existing committees and groups for new work, they suggest hybrid models that combine some old committee leaders with new leaders to manage new CLD activities.

Project components for success

The most praised project by respondents had three components for success: provision of technical support including on how to engage with local authorities, a regular source of funding, and networking with relevant government departments and area CSOs. Livelihoods programs, especially those focused on vocational training such as sewing or soap making, must be accompanied by a market access plan. Technical know-how should include product packaging or other means of adding value to products.

Findings and analysis on Hypothesis 1: Incorporation and Collaboration

Rural communities in Myanmar largely operate as semi-autonomous, self-administered enclaves following rules and norms shaped by local power holders (i.e., government, military, EAO, and religious institutions) as well as traditional practices. By following community norms and working within existing community systems, CLD projects are more likely to garner support of power holders and the participation of community members – items critical to CLD-project success and

⁷ The notion of 'personal authoritarianism' is strong in Myanmar culture, with communal harmony believed to be more important than individual rights.

sustainability. This is true even if the CLD project seeks to change community practices or systems over time, for example, by including more women in decision making. Hence, the first hypothesis is, **‘If the CLD project model incorporates or collaborates with existing endogenous bodies, then it will have a greater chance of success and post-project sustainability.’**

Assessment findings seem to support this hypothesis, emphasizing the importance of engaging village leadership prior to beginning project activities, connecting to village coordination groups when they exist, and linking to revolving funds. However, the assessment method employed only captured perceptions of success. A quantitative evaluation would likely need to be undertaken to fully prove or disprove this hypothesis.

In addition to these findings, there was a clear need for better coordination among the INGOs, NGOs and CSOs operating CLD models in Kayah communities. Moreover, these groups need to do a better job of recognizing and engaging with existing community structures including those groups set up by previous CLD projects that have now become community owned.

- Most of the exogenous groups assessed cooperated with the village administrator and/or 100 household head for permission to work in the village, then subsequently engaged the village elders.
- If CLD project staff approach and consult with the village leaders (i.e., village authority, village elders, religious leaders and other influential persons) then the project is more likely to succeed and be sustained beyond the life of the grant. If the village authority is not available, a village elder leader acts as deputy and has the authority to grant access. In some villages, the VDC leaders were perceived to be more influential.
- Working with village development groups or committees that hold coordinating roles appear to improve overall CLD accountability by facilitating oversight of different group activities. These groups tend to have a close relationship with VTAs and 100 household heads)
- The existence of working revolving funds that generate income that can be used to meet community defined development priorities also seemed to impact the overall perception of CLD success.



Group discussion for each CLD group.

Findings and analysis on Hypothesis 2: Saturation Point

There are a limited number of suitable and available individuals in any given community who can lead CLD activities. Volunteers must have adequate time, education/ability, social standing/charisma to attract votes and mobilize volunteers, affluence to afford time away from work, and mobility to spend extended periods of time away from home. Therefore, a given community can only manage a certain number of CLD projects. Hence, the second hypothesis is, **‘If a certain number of CLD projects are operating concurrently in a given community, then the likelihood of project success and sustainability decreases.’**

Findings from the villages strongly supported this hypothesis, with a few important caveats:

- 38% of respondents reported holding two or more roles in CLD groups with often overlapping roles and responsibilities. In some communities, six people make up all CLD groups; in others, only 30% of community members are involved in CLD groups. Factors in this shortage of human resources, include:

- There was a low level of education in many of the assessed villages. Additionally, motivation among youth and more educated individuals is low; therefore, the small number of volunteers are burdened by all the tasks.
 - Most surveyed individuals who played some role in village development work reported facing family challenges. For example, some faced frustration from their family as they had to commit a lot of time and energy to the committee activities, which detracted from their family and child care responsibilities.
 - In some villages, language is a key barrier to participation. 83% of participants speak both Burmese and a native language. Those who do not speak Burmese and who may not belong to the majority ethnic group tend to sit at the back during community meetings. They rarely participate. The assessment team held one-on-one interviews with those individuals and found that they had low levels of understanding about the workshop but were told by a village leader to join.
 - Bamar ethnic individuals tend to be more affluent, educated and influential in their communities. As such, they are more often voted as CLD group leaders, even if they might have other barriers to entry like a physical disability. In contrast, most ethnic minority villagers are less confident to lead and be involved in community-level development activities.
- The 'cup is full' in some villages, but not yet full in others. If CLD projects coordinate with existing groups, then there is a perception that the project can be managed by the community.
 - Even when the 'cup is full', communities are willing to accept CLD projects that can deliver high-priority development assistance, such as infrastructure. The ability of a community in this situation to effectively manage these projects is questionable, however.
 - The determination of group success was based on perception. A more rigorous, quantitative evaluation is required to assess actual project success and sustainability.



Super volunteers in Taung Paw village,
Hpasawng Township.

Findings and analysis on Hypothesis 3: Inclusion

Project success is a measurement of objective achievement and community members' satisfaction with project outputs. Community satisfaction is more likely if the project responds to actual rather than perceived needs. Including representatives from across the community in project design increases the appropriateness of the good or service produced and therefore is more likely to satisfy community members' needs. Hence, the third hypothesis is, **'If a CLD project includes different members from the community including traditionally disadvantaged people in the project design and implementation, the chance of success and post-project sustainability increases.'**

Assessment findings were insufficient to draw a conclusion on the issue of inclusion and project success and sustainability. However, the assessment did uncover interesting findings relating to the participation of traditionally marginalized groups:

- Gender inclusion was high with a ratio of men to women participating in CLD groups of 56:44, while youth and elderly participation was low at only 3%. The assessment found zero instances of people with disabilities participating in volunteer community groups.

- Most projects placed a strong emphasis on gender balance in CLD groups. For example, NCDDP achieved a gender balance in committee members and many women participating in FGDs reported an increase in confidence due to their participation in the NCDDP committees. They felt encouraged and inspired that new women VTAs emerged from the women empowerment trainings delivered by NCDDP in other regions. One woman from a Mya Sein Yaung revolving fund management committee reported that she had spoken at the state level representing community fish farmers. However, additional research by Pact has shown that even in seemingly gender-balanced village groups, men tend to hold decision-making roles more than women, with women taking on secretarial or financial management positions instead of chairperson.
- In Kayah State, leadership roles are considered a burden rather than an opportunity and hence volunteer leadership positions are difficult to fill. This may be why in some cases women hold prominent leadership roles instead of men (i.e., they are encouraged to take them after men decline). Yet for most CLD projects to succeed, volunteer leaders need to be mobile, influential, and independently wealthy enough to compensate for time lost to volunteerism. While these characteristics are rarely made explicit, they exist implicitly and limit the participation of more disadvantaged community members.
- There needs to be a more nuanced approach to women empowerment in small communities. Many CLD groups focusing on inclusion only consider the role of women, sometimes to great detriment. While women benefit from the training, confidence building, and associated skills of group membership, the exclusion of male partners and lack of information sharing about the project can lead to assumptions, misunderstandings, and feelings of neglect, which can trigger verbal and physical abuse.
- Women's-only community groups account for a disproportionate percentage of the female group member totals, which likely skews data analysis and paints an unrealistic picture of overall community group participation. In other words, there are a few groups that are for women only, such as Pact's WORTH groups, but the rest of the 18 groups are largely dominated by men.
- The interviewees suggested that organizations and projects should strive to support the training of second-line leaders and to encourage more youth participation. At the same time, many elders do not trust younger people to make decisions on behalf of the community, preferring to entrust adults (over 35) with such responsibilities. Cultural norms including a strong deference to elders also may limit youth participation in CLD groups. Quotas may be able to help address this, together with awareness raising and mentoring between older and younger group leaders.
- There is a critical need for training second-line leaders to compensate for the small number of committed individuals holding many voluntary positions. Some villages suggested hybrid models that combine some old committee leaders with new leaders to manage new CLD activities.
- There is a language barrier to the participation of ethnic minority community members who do not speak Burmese. CLD projects need to hire staff who can speak local languages and dialects and translate project materials in advance.
- The assessment found that poverty and social status also play a significant role in power dynamics at the community level. Even if a poor person is elected as a Village Administrator (VA) by the community, they can be easily influenced by others with social status especially if the VA is from a minority group.



Women FGD facilitated by the assessment team.

Conclusion

Overall, the assessment confirmed or supported Pact's hypotheses and earlier findings on CLD effectiveness and sustainability. While many development activities are implemented with good intentions, they can do harm in communities. INGOs, NGOs and CSOs need to be aware of unintended consequences and improve basic understanding of village structures and power relationships. The recommendations in this report support programming that is more sensitive to realities on the ground in communities in Kayah state and that promotes more participation, inclusion, transparency, and sustainability in CLD groups. While the respondents reported critical issues based on their communities' involvement in CLD projects, they expressed gratitude for the projects and groups formed, and development organizations' continued efforts to improve the situation in their villages. However, it is incumbent on donors and project implementers alike to ensure that development activities are designed and delivered in a way that reflect local realities and build from what is working.

Recommendations

- Apply guidelines for engaging rural communities in Kayah State. Potential guidelines include:
 - Establish limits for volunteer participation (i.e., don't accept volunteers who already hold significant roles in three or more community groups).
 - Incorporate healthy volunteer recognition programs (e.g., public awards ceremonies, plaques or certificates, exposure visits, newsletters) and community-funded compensation schemes. Extend recognition to family members and partners of volunteers.
 - Acknowledge and coordinate with local leadership when structuring new volunteer groups.
 - Minimize the funding of per-diems or allowances for volunteer labor.
 - Hire directly from the communities where activities are being implemented.
 - Set participation quotas for young people, women, and minority groups within communities.
 - Seek to include people with disabilities in volunteer roles.
- Invest in revolving funds to support post-project continuity or revitalize or top-up existing funds where available before making new ones.
- Incorporate trust building activities in highly diverse communities to improve social cohesion; do this *before* implementing larger scale CLD activities like road construction.
- Promote transparency *within* the community by encouraging more and regular communication of group leaders with community members about group activities.
- Create opportunities for group leaders to meaningfully connect with local authorities and civil society leaders.

Key Terms

Accessibility refers to the design of products, devices, services, or environments for people with disabilities to give access to all – irrespective of whether they are disabled. Implicit in this is the notion of reasonable accommodation that is the necessary and appropriate modification or adjustment (not imposing a disproportionate or undue burden) to ensure that people with disabilities can enjoy or exercise their rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with others.

Accountability means using power responsibly. It means listening (and responding) to the voices of people and keeping one's commitments to others, regardless of ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, background, gender, age, disability, HIV status, migrant status, or political affiliation. Accountability also means building empowered, informed and capable communities.

Agency is the ability to make decisions and act upon them in order to achieve a desired outcome, free from violence, retribution, or fear.

Authority is primarily used throughout this report to refer to the Government of the Union of Myanmar.

Community is a group of individuals living in in the same place; also, where intended project beneficiaries are located.

Community-led development (CLD) projects are a set of structured activities in which the community plays a fundamental role in the delivery of project activities. Activities are oriented towards a stated objective that is of public benefit: a good, service, or both. CLD projects rely on community groups (formed of volunteers or compensated individuals) who inform project activity plans, receive training needed to execute the activity, and mobilize other community members (typically as volunteers and/or as financial contributors) to implement the activity. These projects can be sector specific or agnostic – and have been used to implement general development, health, small-scale infrastructure, savings groups, and livelihoods (mainly agricultural) work in Kayah. CLD projects seek to provide a public good and/or service meant to benefit the full community.

CLD project success is the degree to which a project was successful. This determination is based on:

- 1) Whether the stated project objectives were achieved, e.g., target to build 10 latrines, and 10 latrines are built; and,
- 2) The degree to which the project was seen to be of value by project stakeholders within the community.

CLD post-project sustainability is the continued operation of a project support group (like a VDC) for one year or more after the end of project funding, monitoring, and support.

Empowerment implies that men and women have the power and ability to control their own lives, pursue their own goals, and choose opportunities. It also enables disempowered and disadvantaged individuals to achieve their potential and exercise their autonomy and agency. While empowerment must come from within, institutions and social norms often create conditions that either facilitate or undermine possibilities for empowerment. Empowerment is both a process and an outcome. It includes building skills, self-confidence, and resources to increase self-reliance and agency.

Ethnicity stems from belonging to a social group that has the same ancestral origins and shares a common and distinctive culture, religion, and language.

Equitable access is when there is fairness in an individual's or group's ability to participate in the project.

Equitable benefit is when there is fairness in how individuals or groups are affected by a project activity or intervention, including in the distribution of goods and services.

Group type: Endogenous groups refer to existing structures that were in place prior to the arrival of projects with the objective of meeting socio-economic needs of the community or that have been developed through the influence of a CLD project and now operate independently of project support (i.e., no longer receive funding, training, etc.). Examples of endogenous groups may include:

- Venerable and elderly persons groups (*yat mi yat pha*)
- 10 and 100 household heads and VTAs
- Literature and cultural associations (*sa yin*)
- Religious groups, including Sunday schools, and youth, women, and men sub-committees
- Youth groups (*lu pyo a pyo* groups)
- Mothers Groups
- *Social Welfare Groups* (*tha yae nar yae*)
- Farmers Groups
- Women's savings groups
- Auxiliary firefighters
- Land dispute committees (reviewing claims of confiscated farmland and other land issues)
- CLD-project groups that are effectively 'absorbed' by the community and functioning independently of project support, e.g., Shae Thot supported VDCs.

Group type: Exogenous groups are governance structures that are set up for and with continuous support by the CLD project. *Note, if a group is no longer receiving external support and still active according to the community, then it is considered endogenous.* Examples of exogenous groups may include:

- LDN-supported village committees
- Village Health Committees formed by Pact, Three Millennium Development Goal Fund (3MDG), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Save the Children International (SCI), etc.
- Mya Sein Yaung revolving fund management committees
- NCDDP project support committees
- ACE VDCs
- Action Aid Fellows and leadership groups
- VDFs
- WORTH groups
- Parent-teacher associations (PTAs)

Governing authorities are decision making bodies that have authority over a given geographic area and/ or service sector in which a community exists or where a development project implements. These may include government ministries, departments, officials and Non-State Actors (e.g., the health department of an EAO) associated with or otherwise affected by the project.

Social exclusion is a process by which certain groups are systematically disadvantaged because they are discriminated against based on their ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, background, gender, age, disability, HIV status, migrant status, or political affiliation.

Social inclusion is a process and approach through which efforts are made to ensure equal opportunities regardless of background or identity, including policies, approaches, and special measures that increase participation in decision-making and leadership as well as access to information, services, resources, and assets.

Stakeholders are people, groups or entities that have an influence on, or are influenced by an organization's decisions and actions.

Traditionally disadvantaged population is any group in a community that experiences lower access to services or decision making than the general population making them more vulnerable. This may include women, girls, the elderly, ethnic and religious minorities, disabled people, migrants, drug users, displaced people, the chronically ill, and people in remote areas. Traditionally disadvantaged people are more likely to rely on locally delivered goods and services as they are less likely to be able to access assets that are further away, which requires mobility, money, language skills, etc.).

