

INFORMING AND ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

**Improving local governance &
empowering communities
in Kayin State and Tanintharyi Region**

Brief Paper



This handbook is the result of Another Development's project working in Kayin State and Tanintharyi Region, to assist government staff, MPs and CSOs in addressing their self-identified capacity needs and issues.

The handbook is based on the findings of workshops that we delivered in Kayin and Tanintharyi, in which government staff, MPs and CSOs came together to share ideas and identify their needs, as well as issues they were facing.



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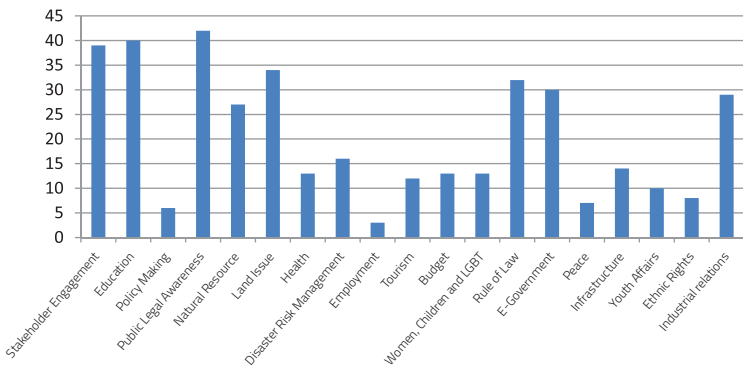
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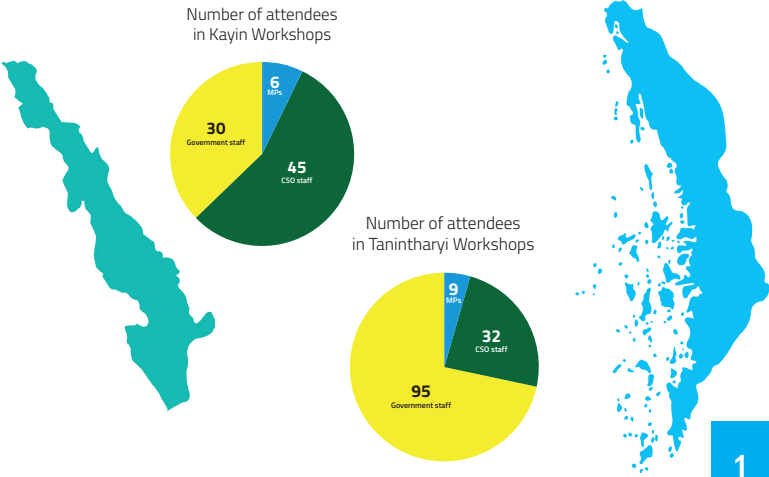
AD conducted workshops in Kayin State and Tanintharyi Region with government staff, MPs and CSOs. The workshops aimed to explore the capacity needs and issues being faced by the participants.

WORKSHOP FINDINGS

Identified Issues in Format Forms



Issues identified in five workshops in Tanintharyi Region and Kayin State



After analyzing the findings, it was apparent that two common and cross-cutting themes persisted throughout the workshops. These themes were 1) Communicating to the public and 2) Public participation in government.

THEME 1 – COMMUNICATING TO THE PUBLIC

It is widely accepted that communication in its central role generates good principles of governance.

Benefits of Communication

- Services and policies meet people's needs
- Provides a platform for people to speak out on what they think and need
- Citizens are able to monitor the government to hold them to account

Adverse effects of lack of communication

- Causes less political will
- Resistance or opposition by different interest groups or stakeholders
- Hostile public opinions (such as through protests and riots)

THEME 2 – PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT

Public participation is viewed as an essential component of a successful democracy.

Benefits of Public Participation

- Makes government decisions more responsive to public needs
- Builds trust
- Improves public knowledge on important issues

Adverse effects of lack of Public Participation

- Public opposition, suspicions, protests
- Public fear of policies/projects with socio-economic impacts that might negatively affect them

More public participation - Increasing impact on the decision

1	2	3	4	5
INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	Obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decision.	Work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public issues and concerns are consistently understood and considered.	Partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	Place final decision-making in the hands of the public.

Five Levels of Public Participation (Source : IAP2)



Access to information in Tanintharyi Region

In Tanintharyi, similar to many parts of Myanmar, access to information remains a challenge.

Village Tract Administrators (VTAs) and 10

Household leaders play an important role in the dissemination of information which comes from the General Administration Department (GAD).

What is working

Information sharing through VTAs and 10 Household leaders is somewhat satisfactory

Access to information may have improved recently as a result of efforts to strengthen public participation in budget planning

What isn't working

Information about the process of planning and budgeting, functions and roles of the GAD is reported to be inadequate, with low circulation amongst communities

Public participation in Tanintharyi Region

In urban areas, public participation can be observed in township municipalities – known as Development Affairs Organizations (DAOs) - through the Township Development Affairs Committee (TDAC).

What is working

VTAs act as a bridge between the public and the GAD for interaction and participation in local projects

Community members represented in DAOs through TDAC improves engagement with the public, promotes higher public participation and better ensures that needs are met

Public participation may have improved somewhat as a result of the 2019-2020 budget planning process

What isn't working

Local people feeling that their involvement in decision making about local projects is limited

There is no mechanism for regular public meetings and most urban residents have rarely engaged with the TDAC

Access to information in Kayin State

Similar to Tanintharyi Region, access to information is still a challenge in Kayin State.

The flow of information in Kayin State is mainly through 10/100 Household Heads.



What is working

Traditional information channels such as village elders, respected people, friends, family and VTAs are the most accessible. Radio and television play a role for VTAs in receiving information about new laws

Access may have improved recently due to government departments conducting more meetings with communities, and increased information channels for public access through MPs, CSOs and NGOs, and online media

What isn't working

Information provision is not effective at times as people have limited knowledge of the current affairs at the township level. May be because of the traditional one-way channel – from Township administration to Village administration, then to community members – without information flowing in the other direction

Public participation in Kayin State

In Kayin State, a direct form of public participation in government decision making can be seen in development projects funded by Local Development Funds (LDFs).

What is working

LDFs promote bottom-up community participation in project planning and decision making

Project identification and implementation process goes through community-initiated groups which are primarily formed for village development affairs

UNDP research from 2014 suggested that public participation in development projects was improving

What isn't working

Inadequate representation of all community members

Consultations being focused on "informing"

Lack of interest from community members to participate in meetings

Women's participation found to be very low in planning meetings and consultations

Case studies

Projects that have been effective in addressing public communication and understanding:

Providing Access to Justice and Legal Awareness, Timor-Leste – a project to increase understanding of human rights and to strengthen the rule of law and democratic culture in Timor-Leste

Improving Budget Transparency in Bandung, Indonesia – a project to empower civil society and government staff to hold government accountable, and remove the budget information imbalance between government decision-makers and the public

I-Governance in Naga City, Philippines – a project to produce a more accountable and responsive government and encourage city officials to develop more innovative approaches in city management

Fire and Flood Awareness Campaign, South Africa – a project to raise awareness of flood and fire prevention in communities that were vulnerable and had low levels of literacy and access to information

From the aforementioned case studies, common elements of initiatives addressing public understanding of laws and government information include:

- using multiple communication channels as a means to increase public awareness including radio, print media (magazines, handbook and flyers), web-sites, creative performance, and SMS
- promoting government's responsiveness and

accountability by allowing public feedback and complaints via communication channels

- empowering community participation through community dialogues, village workshops, and training-of-trainers for community representatives, and
- encouraging stakeholder collaboration between implementers, and between implementers and the community.

Case studies

Projects that have been effective in addressing public participation in government:

Land Tenure and Peace-building, Madagascar – a project to build the capacity of land services staff, increasing the population's use of government land services, and improve the quality of the services through participatory community evaluations

Porto Alegre Participatory Budget, Brazil – a project to empower citizens, including the poorest and most marginalized groups, to be able to take part in the decision making process for budget allocation, so it would reflect their needs

Women's land rights in a changing climate, Niger – a project to tackle the emerging trend of excluding women from agricultural land in Southern Niger

Citizen Participation through Community Forums, Macedonia – a project to empower citizen participants to contribute to decision-making

The above case studies included common elements for addressing public participation issues which are:

- improving access to public participation through workshops, regional meetings, community gatherings, forums and assembly, and social dialogue meetings
- building stakeholders' capacity using training-of-trainers for community members, public awareness campaigns, and training for government staff
- raising public awareness via information centers, broadcasts, debates, posters, leaflets, and training, and
- improving collaboration amongst government, civil society, community leaders and members, local authorities, journalists, and religious figures.

WAY FORWARD

The handbook provides a variety of initiatives and tools which should provide inspiration to our project stakeholders to:

- adapt projects like these for their local contexts,
- integrate their own ideas and resources, and
- address the issues they raised in the workshops.

Ideas for addressing public communication and participation:

Lack of preparation, public awareness and access to information were identified in the workshop findings as significant challenges with regard to the floods. The case study of the Fire and Flood Awareness Campaign in South Africa provides a practical example that government, MPs and/or CSOs may be able to adapt and use to raise awareness of floods and disasters.

Given the majority of Kayin and Tanintharyi populations live in rural areas, tools such as community meetings, print media and radio appear to be the most applicable to reach a dispersed rural public, but this does not necessarily mean that the other tools could not be applied.

Facebook is dominant, used by both governments and the public. Both regions also have their own websites which include government information. There may be benefit in amending the current websites with more information on simplified laws and rules, a directory of officials with their contact details and availability, statistics on finances and details of the annual budget, and available services and how to use them.

In Kayin and Tanintharyi, monks and other religious leaders are influential in many villages. Taking the experience from the case studies, it could also be beneficial to incorporate monks or religious leaders in land and other issues to disseminate information, to mobilize community members, and to raise public awareness.

Challenges:

Financial and human capital are persistent challenges. This could be overcome initially with dedicated government investment to pilot such projects. Alternatively, collaboration may be a more realistic route. Financial challenges can be overcome through collaboration between government, MPs, CSOs, and at times INGOs.

Delivering these kinds of projects requires a high level of collaboration between stakeholders. It may be that strategic trust building amongst stakeholders is required prior to any project creation and delivery. While stakeholder engagement in both Kayin and Tanintharyi would be challenging, the actual process of delivering the projects stands to create positive relationships amongst stakeholders, and further opportunities for cooperation.

Next Steps:

The passion and enthusiasm displayed by participants in the workshops to make change, share ideas, challenge and collaborate, was very encouraging.

The existing capital – be it human, social, institutional, or infrastructure – shows great potential for improvement in public communication, understanding, and participation, in Kayin and Tanintharyi.

We call on MPs, government staff and CSOs working in Kayin and Tanintharyi, to adapt, develop, pilot and deliver projects like those in this handbook, to bring positive change to their communities.

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