



MIMU Sustainability Study

January 2015



Background

The MIMU Sustainability Study was conducted in January 2015 by Philippe Hamel, an international consultant recruited by the MIMU Advisory Board in a competitive process. The study has been supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

The Sustainability Study aimed to explore the various options to ensure the longer term sustainability and quality of the MIMU services and capacities in and for Myanmar, providing a detailed report of these options, risks and possible timeframes.

Summary of Findings

The context has strongly evolved since the MIMU was set up in 2007, and **the MIMU has to adapt to this new context** to continue providing to its clients useful, efficient and relevant information management services. It has notably been possible in the last 2 years for the MIMU to engage in some collaboration with the government of the Union of Myanmar and there are opportunities to develop these further.

The MIMU has a unique status (a service under the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Office, supported administratively by UNDP, and with the strategic guidance of an Advisory Board including a large constituency; UN agencies, INGOs, LNGOs, donors), perceived externally as rather confusing. It is providing a wide range of services (Information services, GIS and mapping, Data repository, Technical Assistance, Networking, Liaison and Advocacy).

The clients of the MIMU are decision-makers in the humanitarian and development sector, NGO staff as well as UN agencies, donors, embassies and Myanmar government staff. A key point to mention is that few among the MIMU clients use its full range of services. Clients are usually using several of the services offered but rarely all of them, and different clients often value the MIMU for different services. A restriction of the range of services offered would thus have a negative impact on MIMU clients.

The stakeholders who were interviewed for this study were unanimous in stating that the MIMU services should be continued, as these are “public goods”. Despite a growing number of actors in the information management sector, **the needs for information management services tend to increase** with the development of communication technologies and numerous on-going reforms and processes at government level (notably the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics) which will increase the volume of data in Myanmar.

In addition, a first Information Management Unit was set up recently within the MNPED in the FERD (AIMS, the Aid Information Management system), and provides an overview of the International Financial Assistance provided to Myanmar, using a Donor perspective. If this unit appears complementary to the MIMU (which provides a vision of assistance from an implementer perspective, among other services), it is

another example of the necessity to consider the future sustainability and future directions.

Overall it is crucial to recognize that **the Myanmar context is still very much evolving** and a number of key changes are to happen, notably the Parliamentary Elections, which may strongly influence the information management landscape, and the opportunities for the MIMU in relation with a sustainability plan. **It will only be when the next Government will be set up and running that the foundations on which to build a sustainability plan will appear clearly.**

The MIMU services are globally valued because of their:

- ✓ Independence,
- ✓ Relevance (including flexibility, adaptability) and range of services offered,
- ✓ Quality (which means notably the capacity to attract quality staff and to have the right leadership), reliability, efficiency, functionality
- ✓ Free-of-charge nature.

Based on this analysis of the MIMU business plan, and considering notably the nature and characteristics of the services provided, 18 potential options upon which a sustainability plan could be developed were identified, summarised in the table below.

<p>The MIMU phases into a government institution</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An existing Ministry Unit 2. A new government Unit 	<p>Options related with a para-public status</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. A semi-public institution 4. An academic institution
<p>A think-tank option (government-related or independent)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. The Myanmar Development Institute¹ option 6. An independent think-tank option 	<p>The MIMU becoming a Development Partner project</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. A donor project 8. A UN project
<p>The MIMU not changing its status</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. A mixed public -private model 10. A same but different MIMU ² 11. Nothing changes 	<p>Options related with a LNGO status</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. An LNGO Consortium project 13. A LNGO project 14. MIMU becomes a LNGO
<p>The MIMU becoming a project under INGOs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 15. An INGO project 16. An INGO Consortium project 	<p>The MIMU becoming a for profit institution</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. A consultancy company 18. A social enterprise

¹ The Myanmar Development Institute is an initiative from South Korea (KOICA) to support the establishment of a national institute for economic and social development in Nay Pyi Taw. The national-level Myanmar Development Institute (MDI) project will assist the evidence-based policy-making process through comprehensive research and advice and conduct related capacity-building to facilitate economic development. A Launching Forum for the MDI was held by KOICA in Nay Pyi Taw on December 2, 2014. KOICA will support financially up to 2019. How it will be managed or governed and what will be its exact institutional status is still unclear.

² This option would consist in the MIMU keeping its present institutional status, while engaging in new partnerships and exploring opportunities to extend the scope of activities and initiate some cost-recovery (considering the UNDP institutional limitations as well as donors' limitations).

Seven of these options appear less interesting for strengthening the sustainability of the MIMU, namely:

- Becoming an INGO or LNGO Consortium project, an independent think-tank option, a semi-public institution and a LNGO project (low feasibility);
- “Nothing changes” appears unlikely as the MIMU is an evolving unit and has to adapt to a changing environment;
- Becoming a Consultancy Company which is similar to the “social enterprise” but with more risks and less benefits.

It is important to state that no option appears clearly as “the solution” to ensure a better sustainability of the MIMU services. The different options are associated with a range of different benefits, a range of risks and would all have a different impact on the services currently offered.

Regarding these different options, a key issue is their ability to attract longer term funding while maintaining the intended purpose and the technical capacity of the MIMU. **Overall, all options related to government, public institution or academic institution provide higher perspective of attracting funding or resources, as notably public institutions can be funded through Government budget.** While this is true in the short to mid-term, the actual likelihood to be funded adequately through government budget is uncertain and would depend on numerous factors, notably of the ownership the government would develop for these services.

Other options that may attract more resources are related to the MIMU developing a private for-profit activity, through a mixed public / private model, or through a social enterprise model. While the actual ability to sustain a for-profit is uncertain, it should be highlighted that all **the constituents of the MIMU expressed support for a system of partial cost-recovery.**

The perception of these options by the different stakeholders is another key issue to take into account. There is a wide diversity of opinions regarding what could be the best sustainability options among the remaining 11 options. Each of these options was favoured or seen as an interesting viable option by one or more stakeholders. **There is a clear difference of perception regarding the government options, which is generally favoured by the Donors and UN agencies but not by LNGOs, INGOs or representatives of the private sector.** An academic institution option appears an interesting compromise between a government institution and a private one.

A large majority of stakeholders interviewed highlighted that conditions were not yet met to phase the MIMU into a government / public institution. The differences in how these options are perceived or favoured is underlined by the weighing of the risks attached to the options.

It is also important to note that **the MIMU services are likely to be affected with any sustainability option chosen. The impact would be different depending of the option chosen.** In particular, the options that are related to a government or semi-public institution would have a negative impact on the services offered by the MIMU.

Finally the timeframe attached to any of these options is generally long. Except for the options in which MIMU becomes an UN, INGO or donor project, **most of the options imply a sustainability plan of at least 3 years.** When considering the possibility

for the MIMU to phase into a government or academic institution, a minimum 5-year perspective (and probably up to 10 years) appears realistic.

Experience from other countries (Afghanistan, Sudan) has shown that strengthening sustainability through phasing into a local institution (a local NGO or a government unit) needs time and requires a strong leadership. The Sudanese example shows also that phasing the MIMU into a government institution is particularly challenging, dependent on external factors (such as government reshuffle) and requires a strong buy-in from the government.

Next steps

The recommendations as confirmed by the MIMU Advisory Board in May 2015 are as follows:

1. ***Confirm the most important principles and revisit the sustainability options*** through this lens and in recognition of the importance to different stakeholder groups. This will be an ongoing process until the best solution is found.
2. ***Strengthen information exchange with the Development Partners' Group, seeking to include the MIMU on DPG agenda periodically (eg every 6 months)***
3. Investigate possible development of a ***National Strategic Plan on Information Management***.
4. ***Further strengthen and formalize the relationship of MIMU with Government***.
5. ***Explore possibilities for some cost-recovery***. This will also depend on the specific sustainability option to be pursued.
6. ***Implement possibilities to safeguard the copyrights*** of MIMU products.
7. ***Continue to explore how MIMU can include new technological progress***, mobile-based services and continue to pro-actively propose new technology-based services.
8. ***Extend MIMU reach to new actors (to be taken forward through the new Communications Associate post and other proactive approaches)***.

This summary has been compiled from

- *MIMU Sustainability Study January 2015 – Executive Summary*
- *Minutes of the MIMU Advisory Board meeting, 07 May, 2015*