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NOTE 11

Building Resilience, Equity and Opportunity in Myanmar: The Role of Social Protection

Reaching the poor and vulnerable in Myanmar: Lessons from a social protection and poverty reduction perspective[1]

Several government and development partner programs employ different approaches to ensure the inclusion of poor and vulnerable areas and people in Myanmar's development. Building on this experience, this Note aims to identify feasible options to effectively reach these groups, as government programs expand. Depending on program-specific choices about geographic focus and individual/household eligibility, identifying poor and vulnerable areas and people in Myanmar can become more evidence-based, effective, and systematic, as better data become available and administrative systems develop. While targeting is currently done by individual programs, there can be important economies of scale in sharing and developing these systems in a coordinated manner so as to support multiple programs.

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1. Overview

Inclusive growth in Myanmar will require focused support to the poor and vulnerable to enable them to better manage the opportunities and risks arising from the growth process and ongoing reforms. Developing an effective mechanism is a complex and sometimes costly task, but one that can contribute to improving the quality and poverty impact of social protection programs and social services.

With increasing government investments in social service delivery and rural development there is now an increased focus on the poor and vulnerable. This is manifested in the introduction of programs to ease financial constraints in accessing health, nutrition, and education services and community-based programs to deliver local infrastructure to underdeveloped areas. In addition, although the system for inter-government fiscal transfers between the union and states and regions is still evolving, some transfers are starting to incorporate need-based criteria (see World Bank, 2015). For instance, in its first phase (2012-2014), the Poverty Reduction Fund (PRF) transferred an equal amount of MMK 1 billion as an unconditional block grant to regional and state governments. In 2014-2015, additional criteria related to poverty and conflict were introduced.[2]

In particular, achieving Myanmar's goals of 'education for all' and universal health coverage will require a combination of quality service provision and well-designed targeted programs to ensure equitable and affordable access to services. For example, the government is trying to increase the coverage and quality of public schools. At the same time, programs to increase enrollment and decrease dropouts have been introduced, including a primary school stipends program (for all primary school students) and a pilot stipends program for additional financial support to enable poor children.

There is considerable experience within Myanmar on how to prioritize specific geographic areas and, in many cases, specific groups. This Note reviews the various approaches currently used in Myanmar by government and non-government actors to prioritize poor and vulnerable areas and people (*see* Annex 1 for a brief description of selected programs). A companion Note summarizes the key considerations underlying these choices.[3] The aim is to draw lessons from this rich experience and identify feasible options for reaching the poor and vulnerable through large-scale national government programs.

2. Identifying poor and vulnerable areas

Both government and DP programs rely on geographic targeting to prioritize program and funding allocation. The criteria used have some commonalities but also notable differences. Some of the differences in approach are rooted in the nature of programs and benefits or services deliv-

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2. Rakhine and Kachin received MMK 15 billion, Shan MMK 4 billion, and Kayin MMK 2 billion; other states/regions continue to receive the original amount (MMK 1 billion). See Note on 'Institutional landscape for implementation and financing of social protection programs: Towards effective service delivery in Myanmar'.

3. *See* companion Note on 'Reaching the poor and vulnerable: Key considerations in designing targeting systems'.

ered, while others reflect the diversity of implementing agencies and challenges of coordinating approaches across programs.

Development partner (DP) programs have typically focused resources in specific geographic areas, as these emerged primarily as emergency and disaster responses. For instance, cash and/or food transfers have focused on areas affected by conflict and disasters, such as the Delta in the aftermath of Cyclones Nargis and Giri and the camps for internally displaced people (IDP) in Kachin. In addition, agreements between the government and DPs have limited the scope of interventions to predetermined boundaries, constraining scope for expansion and leading to some areas being underserved (Saha, 2011).[4]

In DP programs with a more development focus, priority areas are typically identified based on food and income insecurity and infrastructure needs. The two largest financiers of social assistance in Myanmar –the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT) - rely on pre-specified criteria, with some fine-tuning based on local context and cultural practices (*see* Annex 1).[5] LIFT-supported cash for work (CFW) programs select villages based on estimated local infrastructure needs (assessed as part of overall regional development as well as post-disaster recovery). WFP uses food security monitoring data for its cash and food for work (C/FFW) and school-feeding programs in the Border States and the Dry Zone. Villages are selected based on village profiles that include food security and livelihood data, as well as on consultations with village tract and village leaders. Several other DPs also conduct their own assessments to identify priority areas, based on their particular focus.[6] However, there are also cases of more opportunistic selection, particularly with some smaller organizations focusing their interventions in areas with existing active networks.

Government programs promoting people-centered community development focus on specific communities in rural areas. At the policy level, the Rural Development Strategic Framework (RDSF) identifies 28 priority districts (and priority townships within these districts) for comprehensive rural development. The selection is based on the share and number of poor people in the district,[7] combined with considerations of operational feasibility for setting up a township fund for rural development (DRD, 2014a). In principle, the RDSF priority districts are expected to form the basis for the interventions included under this framework. In practice, programs such as the Department of Rural Development's (DRD's) Mya Sein Yaung (MSY; also known as Evergreen Village Development Program) and the National Community Driven Development Project (NCDDP) incorporate considerations of program-specific objectives as well as political and operational feasibility.[8] For instance, the MSY identifies a longer list of 47 priority districts, with local authorities factoring in four criteria: feasibility to implement livestock farming, security, buy-in from villagers, and vil-

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4. There were some exceptions with greater flexibility, such as WFP's cash and food for work programs in border areas and the International Labour Organization's (ILO's) public employment program in Tanintharyi.

5. WFP and LIFT are among the largest financiers of social assistance in Myanmar, with total expenditure and coverage significantly higher than those of government (see Note on 'Inventory of social protection programs in Myanmar').

6. For example, World Vision conducts its own assessment, based on poverty-related indicators, agreement with government, accessibility, and security to determine its program areas every three years (World Vision Myanmar, 2014). SC has conducted cost of diet and household income assessments in its areas of operation.

7. The poverty data are estimates from the Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey (IHLCS), with likely large standard errors at the district and township levels.

8. The NCDDP aims to deliver key infrastructure and services. The MSY is a revolving fund to support livelihood and income generation activities. See Note on 'Social protection delivery through community-driven development platforms: International experience and key considerations for Myanmar' for details.

lage-level poverty.[9] The NCDDP predates the RDSF and selects priority townships based on socio-economic indicators that serve as proxies of poverty as well as level of infrastructure development.

Recently introduced government pilot programs that promote access to health and education also employ geographic targeting as a first step in the selection of program beneficiaries. Although there is little coordination across these programs in terms of design of the targeting tool or selection process, most use poverty criteria in combination with program-specific criteria of deprivation and operational feasibility. For instance, the Ministry of Education's (MOE's) pilot stipends program, launched in 2014, is operational in a selected number of poor townships (and selected schools) with low education performance.[10] In 2012, the Ministry of Health (MOH) introduced a pilot maternal and child health voucher scheme (MCHVS) in Bago region, focusing on townships with low access to health services. Besides these initiatives to address barriers to utilization, the government has also introduced initiatives to improve the supply of education and health services in disadvantaged areas (*see* Box 1).

Box 1: Targeted social service delivery in remote areas

In ensuring education for all and moving towards universal health coverage, the government is making additional efforts to support service delivery in disadvantaged and remote areas. For instance, the Ministry of Home Affairs identifies 90 townships in 10 states/regions as 'hardship townships'; government officials (including health and education workers) assigned to these townships receive additional hardship allowances. This is expected to incentivize skilled professionals to serve in these areas, contributing to better health and education services for the resident population. However, it is not clear what criteria, beyond accessibility, are used to identify these townships. Note that accessibility also seems unevenly applied, given that the list includes one township in Yangon (GoM, 2014).

Acknowledging data constraints, the pilot stipends program and NCDDP combine an evidence-based approach with local consultations to priority townships. In the first step, these programs compile available socioeconomic data for all townships from the Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU) database (*see* Section 4). This includes socioeconomic indicators that serve as proxies of poverty and other criteria that are relevant for the specific program objectives (such as infrastructure in the case of the NCDDP and enrollment in the case of stipends). The second step involves consultations with local authorities, ethnic groups, civil society groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and community-based organizations (CBOs) at the state/region level to identify the top five priority townships. During these consultations, participants review the rankings based on the socioeconomic data and apply additional considerations of operational feasibility (including capacity, peace and stability, accessibility) and equity (i.e. absence or limited other sources of external assistance).

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9.   There is a great deal of overlap: approximately 70 percent of MSY villages are in RDSF priority districts, with the remaining 30 percent located in other, non-priority districts (DRD, 2014a, 2014b).

10. Note that the Ministry of Education also has a national stipend program (2009/10 to date) that covers all 330 townships in the country, albeit at a small scale in terms of number of beneficiaries.

3. Identifying poor and vulnerable people

Several government and DP programs further refine eligibility at the household and/or individual level, using a range of different tools. As discussed in the companion Note on global experience,[11] the choice to provide benefits to specific individuals/households and the methods used to identify them are typically linked to overall program objectives, patterns of poverty, vulnerability and exclusion, social norms and gender dynamics, and political, fiscal and administrative feasibility. In Myanmar, the following types of social protection programs provide benefits targeted to households and individuals a) those designed to reduce barriers to utilization of health, nutrition, and education services and b) those that specifically address issues of food or income insecurity and poverty.

The first set of programs – that is, those designed to promote equitable access to social services – tend to focus on specific groups that lack the resources to participate or might otherwise be excluded. Both such government and DP programs rely on geographic targeting as a first step, and follow two distinct approaches in identifying individual beneficiaries.

DP programs tend to identify broad groups (i.e. categorical targeting) in the selected areas. For instance, the WFP school-feeding program provides school meals to all children in selected schools. SC's maternal and child health conditional cash transfer (CCT) includes all eligible women (pregnant women and mothers of children under 12 months) in targeted villages in Rakhine.[12]

In contrast, the two government pilot programs – stipends and the MCHVS –overlay categorical targeting with additional poverty and vulnerability criteria. The stipends program uses a simplified poverty scorecard with a set of indicators that are strongly correlated with poverty (*see* Box 2). The next step is community validation of the beneficiary lists, managed by the school committee. The MCHVS, on the other hand, prioritizes poor pregnant women who have not been attended by skilled professionals at delivery. Selection is on the basis of inclusion and exclusion criteria, using information on income, assets, and sources of support collected by the program implementers. Although village leaders attest poverty status, there does not appear to be broader community validation (MOH et al., 2014).

The differences in the two approaches reflect the trade-off between the number of people that can be covered in each community and the number of communities that can be covered, given a fixed budget and level of benefits. The rationale for categorical targeting in the DP programs was that incidence of poverty and malnutrition in selected villages was very high, making the administrative and social costs of targeting poor children within a school or poor women within a community unacceptably high. However, this meant focusing on a smaller number of schools or villages in order to cover all eligible children or women, respectively. Meanwhile, both the government programs –stipends and the MCHVS –are in the pilot phase, with the intention of scaling up nation-wide. Thus, these programs chose to cover only the poorest and most vulnerable children and women, but with the potential to expand to a larger number of areas. In the long run, as fiscal

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11. *See* Note on 'Reaching the poor and vulnerable: Key considerations in designing targeting systems'.

12. The WFP program selects villages with high levels of malnutrition and poverty and schools with low attendance and high dropout rates in the selected villages. The SC program selects villages based on food insecurity, accessibility, and poor feeding practices.

> ### Box 2: Reaching poor and vulnerable students in the stipends pilot program
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> MOE's stipends pilot program uses a three-stage process, combining the geographic targeting of townships and schools with individual-based assessment.
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> First, townships are ranked using socioeconomic indicators that serve as proxies of poverty and poor education performance (measured as low enrollment rates). Consultations with state and regional stakeholders are used to identify the top five priority townships. In the first year of implementation of the pilot program, accessibility was also considered to allow close monitoring.
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> Second, schools are selected based on measures of poverty and low education performance. In the first year, administrative data on dropout rates was used. However, concerns regarding data quality and reporting incentives led to a revised approach in the second year. Schools are now selected on the basis of a composite measure of 10 school and community indicators, such as share of students who have no uniform or uniform in bad condition, share of students who occasionally miss school, share of families that have only one family member working for the minimum or a low wage, etc. Township committees validate and finalize school selection and allocation of quota to each school.
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> Third, in selected schools, children in need of financial assistance to continue schooling are selected using a simplified and modified poverty score. Parents and teachers are required to fill out a two-page application form with indicators such as mother's educational level, ownership of car/motorbike/other assets, housing characteristics, breadwinner's job status, affordability of school appliances and uniform, and community-specific indicators. The poverty scorecard model was first developed for UNDP's livelihood and social cohesion program and is based on 2010 IHLCS household survey data (Schreiner, 2012). Then, school committees (that includes parents, village leaders, and school officials) check the initial ranking based on poverty score and finalize the student selection.
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> *Source: MOE, 2014 and 2015, SC, 2015*

space expands and data and implementation capacity constraints ease, these choices can be revisited. However, it is likely that political imperatives will encourage expansion to more areas covering at least all states and regions, not just those most in need. As a result, fiscal constraints will continue to reinforce this trade-off.[13]

The second set of social protection programs – that is, programs that address food insecurity and poverty -typically employ community-based targeting to identify those most in need of assistance. However, approaches vary in terms of the level of local discretion employed. For instance, in the wealth ranking approach in several LIFT-funded CFW and other social protection programs, communities have full discretion: they define what it means to be poor and group households accordingly. The community consultations in the WFP C/FFW and TatLan CFW program and unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) for labor-poor households follow a more guided approach, with communities grouping households as per predefined criteria but with some flexibility to adapt to local conditions. Still others, like the HelpAge International (HAI) older persons self-help group model, use an economic vulnerability survey to score households and validate the list of vulnerable households through community meetings (*see* Annex 1). In all these cases, intensive facilitation is required to mobilize community members for these discussions and mecha-

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13. If all Grade 1-11 students (8 million) were to be provided stipends at the current level of benefits, an estimated budget of MMK 500 billion would be required. The budget in 2014 was MMK 3 billion; even with the doubling to MMK 7 billion in 2015, the current outlay is only about 1.5 percent of the estimated total.

nisms are set up (e.g. quotas in committees) to overcome cultural barriers to women's participation in decision-making processes.

In the case of C/FFW programs, self-targeting is also used in some cases. In practice, the choice of targeting tool (i.e. poverty targeting through community consultations or self-targeting) often depends on whether the program's primary objective is to create local infrastructure for the entire community or to provide income support to poor and vulnerable households.

LIFT-supported CFW programs are part of an overall community development framework, and as such emphasize rapid creation of local infrastructure over employment generation for the poor. As a result, field assessments indicate that beneficiary households are not always selected using wealth ranking. Instead, individuals have often self-selected into the program (LIFT, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). This is in fact consistent with the global experience of such programs, with the program design (i.e. the work requirement and wage level) typically encouraging greater participation among the poor and discouraging the non-poor (Subbarao et al., 2013). However, when underemployment and vulnerability is high (as in Myanmar's Dry Zone and Delta), the program may not be able to accommodate the demand for employment on these projects and people may either be turned away or offered fewer days of work. This process may or may not be pro-poor depending on program implementation arrangements and local context.[14]

The WFP C/FFW programs, on the other hand, have the primary objective of addressing food insecurity and vulnerability and rely mostly on community-based targeting to identify program beneficiaries. However, these programs also allow individuals to self-select into the program in two cases. One, in some areas, this reflects the local cultural practice whereby the whole community feels a responsibility to contribute to building village infrastructure (see Section 4). Two, in areas where vulnerability is high, community-based selection (thereby ensuring participation by the poorest) is supplemented by self-targeting to allow the near-poor to participate and benefit from the program (WFP, 2013).

4. Currrent challenges and emerging opportunities

4.1 Better data to understand the patterns of poverty, vulnerability and exclusion

At present, the selection of priority areas and people is significantly constrained by the limited and poor quality data available. Data on spatial mapping of poverty, vulnerability, or other social indicators (such as gender disaggregated data on prevalence of school dropouts, malnutrition, etc.) are weak, and more recent household surveys are required to develop eligibility criteria at the household or individual level. Some organizations have conducted their own assessments in

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14. For instance, there is some evidence that, in order to speed up project completion, some communities have employed labor-displacing machines – reducing total employment generated – or paid higher wages to households with greater potential contribution to the rapid completion of infrastructure (e.g. households with ox-carts) but that may not necessarily be the poorest or most vulnerable (LIFT, 2013b). See also Note on 'The experience of public works programs in Myanmar'.

order to determine their program areas and design targeting tools,[15] but,with the two exceptions noted below, these tend to be quite small as there is little incentive to cover areas where the organizations cannot operate as per the agreements with government.

Two current initiatives provide important lessons for developing a national information base for more informed geographic targeting. First, MIMU provides a data depository that compiles nearly 200 indicators for all 330 townships. These include official administrative and household survey data in 12 sectors, including agriculture, climate, demography, economy, education, environment, health, information and communication, nutrition, protection, transportation, and gender.[16] Second, the Food Security Information Network (FSIN), which has 30 members (UN agencies, NGOs, and CBOs), conducts a standardized food security assessment in the townships in which they are active. Data on food security indicators and commodity prices are collected three times a year for 50 townships in six states/regions.[17] Although geographic coverage is low, the FSIN is an interesting example of a multi-agency collaboration to establish a coordinated food security monitoring system, with an emphasis on standardization and coordination in data collection, knowledge-sharing, and establishing links between central decision-makers and local expertise.

Data constraints in Myanmar are changing rapidly, providing opportunities to employ more rigorous tools for identifying poor areas and poor people. The government of Myanmar is making concerted efforts to strengthen its statistical capacity and the quality of its administrative data. New sources of information will become available soon with data from the 2014 Population Census and the most recent nationally representative household survey, the Myanmar Poverty and Living Conditions Survey (MPLCS), due to become available in late 2015. National food security assessments by the DRD are also currently underway, with support from WFP. These new data sources will provide highly disaggregated estimates of food insecurity, poverty, and other key indicators, at the state, district and township level.

These initiatives can provide the basis for a national information base, managed by government, that can serve multiple programs with respect to selection of priority areas. The disaggregated information from administrative statistics from MIMU and field monitoring data from the FSIN can be gradually updated as disaggregated information from the 2014 Population Census, household surveys, and food security assessments becomes available. In addition, by combining the census data with the household survey data using small area estimate techniques can generate poverty maps with disaggregated poverty data by 2016.

With the availability of more recent household survey data in coming months, rigorous poverty and vulnerability analysis can suggest which groups are most at risk in order to better inform categorical and poverty targeting. It can also improve the quality of the targeting tools. For instance, the current poverty scorecard developed by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) is relatively simple and the indicators (and associated weights) are derived from the 2010 Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey (IHLCS) data. As a result, there is scope to fine-tune and refine eligibility criteria with the forthcoming 2015 household survey.

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16. *See* http://www.themimu.info/

17. *See* http://www.fsinmyanmar.net/

4.2 Better understanding of perceptions of targeted support and considerations in conflict-affected areas

Communities that have received some external assistance are likely to be more familiar with the emphasis on the poor and vulnerable. In the Dry Zone and Delta, where communities are relatively homogenous (at least in terms of presence of internal migrants), where social trust is relatively high, and where there is some sustained exposure to external assistance, informal mechanisms for targeted support seem to be more acceptable and widespread. Many villages in LIFT project areas reported instances of community mobilization to provide assistance to community members who experienced serious illness or injury or faced other emergencies. There are also several examples of mechanisms to support the poor and vulnerable (especially old people) or promoting access to education and health for poor children, through either the monastery system or other village organizations in these regions (Enlightened Myanmar Research and World Bank, 2015; Thu and Griffiths, 2012).

External assistance also usually results in gender-sensitive program implementation structures at the village level that can facilitate collective action to support vulnerable groups. For instance, NGOs have supported several villages in the Delta to establish a rice bank for use in times of need. In ActionAid/Thadar Consortium villages, where there was an emphasis on capacity-building and awareness-raising, these rice bank committees introduced a system to donate one tin of rice on every withdrawal from the bank; this donated rice is passed on to persons with disabilities and older people (LIFT,2013a). Women, older people and direct beneficiaries of these schemes often belong to program committees where they can voice their needs.

The nature and duration of assistance can play a role in the acceptability of targeted support. For instance, the experience of the WFP C/FFW programs in the Border States and Dry Zone indicates that, while some communities are comfortable with targeting households for C/FFW programs, other communities feel all households need to contribute to building village infrastructure. This has implications for the choice of the targeting tool, as described in Section 3. Similarly, the experience of targeted food and cash support to IDPs in camps in Kachin suggests duration of support also plays a role. For instance, there are some cases where IDP camps offer profitable livelihood strategies (e.g. amber trading) and residents are arguably better off than many families in the host communities. Host communities then question the rationale of supporting IDPs for more than three years while they receive little extra support to cope with over-demand of available social services (WFP, 2014).

Conflict-affected areas where non-state actors (NSAs) are actively providing services can generate dynamics that influence the way identifying poor areas and poor people is perceived. Targeting areas where NSAs are active for government programs can generate tension unless programs explicitly promote cooperation between government and NSA structures. For instance programs in areas where ethnic grievances exist, such as Shan and Kayin, can exacerbate grievances if programs are perceived as an expansion of government control in the area rather than as an opportunity to build partnership between the state and local service providers (Jolliffe, 2014). Assets and services provided without NSA collaboration can be seen as less legitimate by communities and risk not being used. On the other hand, programs that promote equal access to services and that (indirectly) benefit ethnic minorities can be appropriate in areas where NSAs are active. For

instance, the Mon National Education (MNE) system has partnered with MoE to coordinate MNE and MoE systems, benefitting ethnic Mon secondary school graduates who have studied in Mon language (with Burmese as second language) and who can have official high-school diplomas.

4.3 Insights for developing targeting systems for large-scale government programs

Most programs in Myanmar have employed geographic targeting to focus resources in selected areas; many also select specific households and individuals using categorical targeting and/or poverty targeting. In scaling up government programs, these choices for beneficiary selection will need to take into account the trade-off between the number of people that can be covered in each community and the number of communities that can be covered, given a fixed budget and level of benefits.[18] A combination of geographic targeting and some form of household targeting will continue to be needed for government social protection programs.

In identifying the poor and vulnerable, most DP programs rely on community-based targeting, with varying levels of discretion. This experience provides some insights that are particularly relevant in the context of transition to large-scale government programs. In particular, while local information might correctly identify specific groups or households and individuals at the community level and lead to greater ownership and accountability, these methods are process- and resource-intensive. The following operational considerations for scaling-up emerge:[19]

- **Building on existing community structures.** As noted above, communities with relatively high social trust and some sustained exposure to external assistance are more likely to develop informal mechanisms for targeted support and to accept targeted government support. This can be strengthened by ongoing efforts to build the capacity of communities for collective action as well as of government officials in working with communities.[20]

- **Ensuring participatory and inclusive decision-making, particularly in the context of access to benefits.** Within communities, there is some evidence that some groups are more likely to be excluded from village social structures and basic services. These include, for example, in-migrants, people of different ethnicities, and others who may face stigma or exclusion such as divorced or separated women (Enlightened Myanmar Research and World Bank, 2015). This poses the need for careful facilitation by well-trained facilitators, as well as measures to mitigate the risk of elite capture and exclusion.[21] This also has implications for the definition of

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18. For instance, if all grade 1-11 students (8 million) were to be provided stipends at the current level of benefits, an estimated budget of MMK 500 billion would be required. The budget in 2014 was MMK 3 billion; even with the doubling to MMK 7 billion in 2015, the current outlay is only about 1.5 percent of this estimate.

19. See also del Ninno and Mills (2015) and Leite (2014) for the experience of community-based targeting in several African countries.

20. For instance, ActionAid has trained 700 youth leaders in selected villages in all states/regions (except Shan and Chin) in community mobilization and planning, with an emphasis on establishing linkages with local governments.

21. For instance, risk mitigation in LIFT's community-based development projects includes internal and external monitoring of activities; use of public forums and active encouragement of women's participation; and use of manuals, village development plans, and other public tools to reduce local discretion (LIFT, 2013b).

community structures responsible for identifying priority households and individuals. For greater transparency, the entire community, rather than a committee of selected individuals, should be involved. However, this is operationally challenging and costly (LIFT, 2013b; SC, 2013a).

- **Linking with government fiscal and administrative structures.** These methods capture relative rather than absolute poverty within communities, making comparability across space problematic. The use of predefined criteria addresses this issue to some extent. However, for government programs, this 'bottom-up' identification of the poor and vulnerable needs to be aligned with 'top-down' allocations of fiscal resources across communities and with government delivery systems.

Given the operational challenges in using community-based targeting at scale, large-scale government programs will likely need to explore alternative options that facilitate comparability across communities. This is possible by using standardized criteria and tools to assess household poverty status and generate an initial beneficiary list, followed by community validation. Though the local knowledge of communities continues to inform beneficiary selection, the role changes to supplementary validation of the primary household targeting method.

In this context, the experience of targeting poor and vulnerable people in the government's stipends and MCHVS pilot programs highlights the importance of good design and careful implementation, building on existing norms and community structures. The following findings emerge:

- **The poverty scorecard method used in the stipends program retains the central role of the community in validation, but introduces standardized criteria and process in order to facilitate comparisons over time and space, and addresses the challenge of scaling-up.** The pilot stipends program compiles an initial beneficiary list based on a simplified poverty scorecard, followed by community validation (with complete flexibility resting with the community to modify the initial list).[22] An assessment of this approach indicates that it works well in capturing poor students, relative to community-based targeting and household classification by village administration.[23] Stigma was not found to be present among parents of beneficiary children though some children felt uncomfortable receiving the stipend. The three methods generate similar results, but the poverty scorecard is more operationally feasible for large-scale programs, given that community ranking requires significant facilitation and the availability of household classification by village administration varies across villages (SC, 2015).[24]

- **In contrast, an evaluation of the MCHVS finds the targeting tool was difficult to implement, owing to issues with the design and implementation.** The inclusion and exclusion criteria (based on information on income, assets, and sources of support) were found to be difficult to apply in practice. Income in particular is prone to concerns of under reporting and measurement errors. Although the process was able to identify the poorest pregnant women and screen out the richest, identifying poor women in the middle of the income distribution was

22. The LIFT-funded HelpAge program follows a similar approach, but it uses the umbrella model based on the economic vulnerability survey instead of a poverty scorecard.

23. Village administrators are supposed to maintain a list of households grouped according to socioeconomic status, based on an assessment by village leaders, elites, and 10 household heads. This list is to be used to collect contributions from households for religious affairs. In practice, there is variation across villages, and not all villages compile such lists.

24. Poverty scorecards have been also used by UNDP programs in 330 villages, and their assessment is underway.

difficult. In terms of implementation processes, while the village leader attests to poverty status, there was no broader community validation. In urban areas in particular, there were perceptions of stigma about being considered poor and underutilization of vouchers as a result. These challenges suggest improvements in the design and implementation of the targeting tool could improve the credibility of the program. However, the question of stigma raises the question of whether poverty targeting is acceptable in such a program when malnutrition is widespread, particularly in remote areas (as in the pilot) (MOH et al., 2014).

5. Future directions

The experience documented here reflects pragmatic choices on whether or not to target the poor and vulnerable, and, if yes, how. These choices were made in the context of serious data and capacity constraints and driven, at least initially, by the need to provide emergency and humanitarian relief, and, increasingly, to promote inclusive development. Most social protection and community-driven development (CDD) programs tend to focus resources in selected areas, reflecting the regional diversity in the country. Several social protection programs also prioritize specific households and individuals, often combining two or more methods.

Depending on program choices about eligibility determination, identifying poor and vulnerable areas and people in Myanmar can gradually become more evidence-based, effective, and systematic, with a more harmonized approach across programs. Given current data and other constraints, a phased approach will be needed. In the short to medium term, a common platform for geographic targeting will need to be developed within the government. In the medium to long term, household targeting systems will need to be further strengthened, initially in the context of specific programs but gradually evolving into an integrated system for reaching the poor and vulnerable.[25]

5.1 Strengthening geographic targeting

In the short term, a national information base with subnational indicators can provide a platform for interactive maps to select priority areas for fiscal allocations and program funding. This could build on existing databases like MIMU and the FSIN, both of which are already being used to guide geographic targeting, and could be further supplemented as disaggregated data from the 2014 Population Census, new household surveys, and ongoing food security assessments become available.

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25. Experience from other low income countries also points to this gradual evolution of targeting systems, starting with simple geographic targeting using existing data, often combined with community-based targeting, and potential introduction of poverty score cards. As data constraints ease and social protection provision expands in Myanmar, it will be important to review and identify the most appropriate mix of targeting methods (Leite, 2014, Zapatero and Lopez, forthcoming).

In the medium term, a government agency would need to become the custodian of such a national information base and promote a harmonized approach to geographic targeting. Both MIMU and the FSIN provide good examples of making their databases publicly available for use by other programs and agencies. In particular, the FSIN is a product of focused efforts to coordinate and standardize data collection efforts across 30 partners and to build local capacities for data collection. However, both initiatives currently lie outside government systems. In many countries, it is a government agency (typically the planning ministry or the national statistical agency) that is the custodian for such a national information base and is responsible for developing protocols for information-sharing and identifying a set of poor and vulnerable areas. These provide the basis for geographic targeting by government programs, usually in combination with program-specific indicators (such as enrolment, malnutrition, infrastructure deficits, etc.). In the long term, it will be important for Myanmar to make this transition in order to facilitate a more harmonized approach for prioritizing areas most in need. However, the exclusive use of geographic targeting needs to be carefully assessed keeping in mind political and social factors, particularly in conflict-affected areas. Most social protection programs typically rely on a combination of methods, including geographic targeting in the first stage, combined with some form of household or individual targeting in a second stage.

5.2 Strengthening household targeting

In the short to medium term, systems for program beneficiary identification and management will likely remain program-specific. Myanmar is in the initial stages of a transition from DP- to government-led social protection delivery, at a time of considerable economic, social, and political transition. Institutional structures and delivery systems are not yet in place for beneficiary identification for large-scale programs. During this transition period, community knowledge will continue to be important. However, given the operational challenges in scaling up community-based targeting, large-scale government programs will likely need to explore alternative options that rely on standardized criteria and processes. The experience examined above suggests categorical targeting (i.e. identifying specific groups and covering all individuals within these groups) and/or poverty targeting (using predefined criteria as in the poverty scorecard) combined with community validation are feasible options.

Integrated household targeting systems typically take longer to set up, but there are important benefits in doing so. The number and scale of government programs and services in Myanmar are expected to continue to expand, with a continued emphasis on the poor and vulnerable. The introduction of different targeting tools to reach the same population can lead to unnecessary and costly duplication of efforts on the part of program implementers and potential confusion on the part of communities and potential beneficiaries. Global experience suggests a common household registry with basic demographic information (for categorical targeting), additional socioeconomic characteristics (for poverty targeting), and unique identifiers would help reduce administrative and social costs.[26]

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26. *See* companion Note on 'Reaching the poor and vulnerable: Key considerations in designing targeting systems'.

Two approaches to building a common household registry are possible. Some countries (e.g. Cambodia, Chile, Vietnam) first put in place a targeting system, with the stated intention of supporting multiple programs. Others (e.g. India, the Philippines) developed program-specific targeting systems, which, when found effective, were scaled up to verify eligibility for other programs. The latter seems more appropriate for Myanmar. Opportunities exist to build on the methods being used for the recent government social assistance pilot programs and gradually expanding to serve multiple programs.

The methods and procedures developed in the government's stipends program provide the most likely basis to develop into a more coordinated system for Myanmar. The poverty scorecard method is scalable for large scale government programs, and has also been used for beneficiary selection in the relatively large UNDP's community programs for several years. The program is also developing sub-systems of outreach and communication, beneficiary data collection, community validation, recertification, monitoring, and grievance redress within government systems. These will need to be gradually strengthened to address current gaps. For example, the current beneficiary selection processes are school-based. Therefore, by design, these exclude poor children who are outside of school system. In the long term, significant improvements in business processes and data management systems could potentially enable this initial platform to be further adapted to serve multiple government programs.

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Annex 1:

Examples of selected programs in Myanmar

Program (started in)	NCCDP (2010)	Pilot stipends program (2014)	School-feeding program (1996)	CCF, social protection, community programs funded under LIFT (2009)
Implemented by	DRD, Ministry of Livestock, Fisheries and Rural Development	MOE	WFP	Over 30 implementing partners, including consortiums*(oversight by UN Office for Project Services)
Budget (USD) (year)	80 (2012-2019)	19 (2014-2018)	15 (2014)	31 (2013)
Main objectives	To enable poor rural communities to benefit from improved access to and use of basic infrastructure and services through a people-centered approach	To keep children in school	To improve education outcomes and to address hunger	To improve the lives and prospects of poor and vulnerable people in rural Myanmar (each project has specific objectives)
Description	Provide block grant to village tract (MMK 30 million per village on average; planning to increase to MMK 38 million depending on size of population)	Provide monthly stipends to children (MMK 5,000-10,000 per month) with regular attendance (75-85%)	Provide 10 kg of rice per month (in severely food-insecure area, with regular attendance (90%)) or daily food snack (in less food-insecure areas)	58 projects including agriculture, livelihood, environment, social protection, capacity-building, microfinance programs
Target	Villages with limited access to and use of basic infrastructure and services	Poor children in Grades 5-11, at risk of dropping out of school	Children at risk of poverty and food insecurity	General: poor and vulnerable people in rural areas
Number of beneficiaries	2 million people (in 3,000 villages) (by 2015)	100,000 students (by 2015)	232,000 students (in 2013)	2.5 million people (0.5 million households) (cumulative since 2010)
Geographical targeting				
Coverage	15 townships, 1 from each state and region (to be expanded)	27 townships (2015) (to be expanded)	5 states/regions (Chin, Rakhine, Shan North and South, and Magwe)	107 townships in 12 states/regions
Criteria	Townships selected based on poverty as primary criteria. Additional criteria include absence of external funding and commitment by regional government. Exclude conflict area	Level 1:**township selected based on poverty and low education performance Level 2:***schools selected based on poverty and low education performance	Level 1: village selection based on low education and food insecurity Level 2: school selection based on low education performance (low attendance and high dropout rates) and food insecurity indicators (chronic food security and shocks)	Depending on the nature/objective of the program Example: Tat Lan (CFF combined with UCT) was rolled out in 4 townships in Rakhine, as emergency response to Cyclone Giri
Methodology	Township selection is based on consultation in each state/region, chaired by chief minister. Participants include a wide range of representation, and discuss priority ranking based on socioeconomic data	Township selection uses same methodology as CDD. School selection is based on school and community characteristics (as proxies for poverty and low education performance) and validation by township committee	Based on food security/shock indicators collected through the FSIN, which covers 50 townships through a joint efforts of 30 members	

Program (started in)	NCCDP (2010)	Pilot stipends program (2014)	School-feeding program (1996)	CCF, social protection, community programs funded under LIFT (2009)
Individual targeting				
Rational/ relevancy for individual targeting	No individual targeting, as grant goes to village tract for community development	Based on budget envelope of the program, each school is given a quota for stipends students, therefore they need to identify children who best meet the poverty criteria and in the greatest need	No individual targeting, given high concentration of the poor and malnutrition in identified areas therefore difficult and cost-ineffective to exclude non-poor. All students in the selected schools are entitled	Depending on the nature/objective of the program, while poverty is primary criterion: *Tat Lan* selects the poorest and most food-insecure households with vulnerable members and members who can provide labor for CFW *Social protection programs (by HAI)* select the poor and the elderly (categorical) for self-help group. Consortium (e.g. Action-Aid, Thadar Adra) selects poor households for social programs Rice bank prioritizes the poor with disabilities and the elderly
Criteria	N/A	Poverty. Children in need of financial assistance to continue schooling will be selected. Among equally poor children, priority to be given to those who are orphan, fatherless, motherless, and with more siblings	N/A	
Methodology	N/A	A simple application form is used to calculate poverty score (modified from poverty scorecard developed by UNDP) for each student. Then, school committees check the initial ranking based on poverty score and finalize the student selection	N/A	Predominantly conducted through conventional participatory community targeting. Some combine with vulnerability mapping and poverty indicators, with complete local discretion Tat Lan: pre-identified poverty indicators and community validation Social protection program: participatory poverty assessment Help Age: pre-identified criteria (using vulnerability model) and community validation

Notes:

*   *WHH-GRET, Radanar Ayar, Mangrove Service Network, ActionAid–Thadar Consortium, Proximity Designs, Proximity Finance, IRRI, UNDP, Pact, Mercy Corps, Ar Yone Oo, AVSI, LEAD, ADRA, Oxfam–NAG, SEDN, DPDO, EcoDev, HAI, MBCA, Myanmar Ceramics Society, IWMI, GRET, CARE, Cervi, GRET, Metta, SWISSAID, Tag, CDN (consortium of Dutch NGOs), Tat Lan Consortium (IRC and partners), and MERN.*

**   *For township selection of stipends program, accessibility was also considered in the first year to allow close monitoring.*

*** *School selection for the stipends program was revised in Year 2, based on lessons learned from Year 1. In the first year, schools were selected using administrative data on dropout rates. However, this raises concerns regarding data quality and reporting incentives. Therefore, the criteria were changed to select schools on the basis of a composite measure of 10 school and community indicators, such as share of students who have no uniform or uniform in bad condition, share of students who occasionally miss school, share of families that have only one family member working for the minimum or a low wage, etc. (MOE,2014).*

'Reaching the poor and vulnerable in Myanmar: Lessons from a social protection and poverty reduction perspective' is the eleventh note in the series Building Resilience, Equity and Opportunity in Myanmar: the Role of Social Protection. All notes are available at www.worldbank.org/myanmar.

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WORLD BANK GROUP

World Bank Office Yangon

57 Pyay Road, Corner of Shwe Hinthar Road,
6 1/2 Mile, Hlaing Township, Yangon
Republic of the Union of Myanmar. Tel: +95 1 654824
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