

# WFP in Myanmar: Looking forward 2013 -2017

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**World Food Programme**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The overarching vision of WFP in Myanmar is to:

*Contribute to more equitable development across the country and support national reconciliation efforts, by reducing poverty, food insecurity and undernutrition and increasing resilience amongst the most vulnerable communities.*

In this sense, WFP has defined the following key objectives of its support in the country during the 2013-2017 period:

1. To reduce the prevalence undernutrition amongst the most vulnerable groups (children under the age of five years, and pregnant and lactating women) and provide support to other at-risk groups with specific needs (people living with HIV/AIDS and TB);
2. To improve access to quality education and early childhood development opportunities;
3. To improve household food security and create socio-economic opportunities for the most vulnerable groups, thereby supporting the establishment of peace dividends;
4. To prepare for and respond to recurrent natural disasters, in support of government response efforts; and
5. To promote knowledge sharing as a means of improving the sustainability of WFP's own responses and those of counterpart government and non-governmental actors.

As such, WFP engagement in Myanmar will be guided by five strategic pillars for action: (1) *Nutrition*; (2) *Education*; (3) *Safety Nets*; (4) *Disaster Preparedness and Response*; and (5) *Knowledge Sharing*.

This document is presented at a time of considerable change in the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (hereafter referred to as Myanmar). The current period of transition in both political and economic realms offers an opportunity to strengthen engagement, contribute to the policy agenda and support the government to realise national development objectives. Greater openness has already manifested in the adoption of a more decentralised market-oriented economy, the devolution of some socio-political decision-making to elected local governments at the state and regional level, and gains in the ongoing peace process with numerous armed groups.

The establishment of a government-led Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation initiative and convening of a Development Policy Options (DPO) conference in February 2012 have demonstrated a greater commitment to progress, and an unprecedented openness to collaboration with the international aid community. Healthcare and educational reforms have encouragingly been placed at the centre of the policy agenda for the coming years, with the DPO focusing on the need for improvement in these sectors as a means of accelerating more inclusive growth. The commitment has already been translated into a doubling of the budgets of relevant ministries for the next fiscal year.

Yet, while discernible developmental gains have been made at the national level in recent years, the pace of progress across the country has been considerably uneven. Persistently high levels of food insecurity and undernutrition are inextricably linked to the poorest performance in other socio-economic indicators and are concentrated in areas where the level of industrial investment is lowest, basic social services most scarce, and exposure to shock most regular. These include the country's remote border regions where conditions are often compounded by insecurity, and the Central Dry Zone. The trend suggests that more inclusive growth, making new socio-economic opportunities accessible to all, is required if the determinants of poverty and food insecurity are to be successfully confronted.

Thus far, however, the scale and complexity of developmental deficits across the country have been unmatched by the scope of national responses. Consistently low levels of Official Development

Assistance and the sustained imposition of sanctions by some states may continue to limit the financial and other capacities needed to effectively address the challenges at hand.

A broad range of comparative advantages ensure that WFP is well-placed to both capitalise on and contribute to the positive changes underway. Jointly defined with key stakeholders, these include: a historical presence in some of the country's most remote and isolated areas, affording WFP a broad base of indigenous knowledge in operational locations; an extensive network of cooperating partners, providing superior access across the country and permitting a rapid expansion of activities when new and previously unforeseen needs arise; a tradition of prioritising opportunities for complementarity with other development agencies; a positive record of collaboration with the new government, promising sustainable implementation and business continuity; proven technical competencies in a broad array of food and nutrition security issues and response modalities; and a unique and acknowledged ability to tackle these from both a humanitarian and more developmental perspective, as and when required.

Anchored in these strengths, "*WFP in Myanmar: looking forward 2013 -2017*" has been developed through a triangulation of the following: a determination of priority challenges to be addressed and locations in which they are most pronounced; an alignment of WFP comparative advantages with areas in which national capacities to deliver basic services require support; and an identification of opportunities for complementarity between WFP's own responses and those of its counterparts. Acknowledging the cross-cutting determinants of undernutrition and the constraints it places on sustainable development, WFP will seek to mainstream nutrition throughout its interventions and place the issue at the centre of the national agenda for action. In these ways, WFP will adopt a more congruent approach to future programming in Myanmar, defined by the strategic priorities identified herein and synchronous to other responses underway in the country. The overarching objective will be to maximise the qualitative impact of WFP support through the provision of an integrated package of assistance.

Key potential risks envisaged by WFP in the context of this strategy include: a halt of political reform processes and the potential events that could follow; limitations on donor support, compromising the timely receipt of adequate resources; ineffective partnership or coordination with development counterparts which would undermine integrated programming; insufficient commitment from the government to support and invest in relevant policies and related action; the continued incidence of unforeseen natural hazard which could prompt large-scale relief food needs and potentially interrupt the progress of other planned assistance; and a lack of sustainable recovery amongst the country's most vulnerable populations resulting in a reversal of developmental gains, potentially associated with any of the above.

A majority of the skills and technical competencies required to successfully implement this plan are already present within WFP Myanmar's human resourcing structure. Still, any additional expertise necessary to fully align the organisation with its strategic priorities will be engaged as and when required.

WFP will also pursue all opportunities to help shape national policy responses and build capacities, with a view to transitioning ownership of programmes when and where possible.

# 1 COUNTRY ANALYSIS

## 1.1 Political Environment

In recent decades, the significant potential for robust economic growth and steady developmental gains in Myanmar has been largely overshadowed by turbulence in the socio-political environment. As such, the prospects for lasting growth and a sustained downward trend in poverty in the coming years will be heavily dependent upon results of the political transition currently in process.

In November 2010, Myanmar held its first elections in twenty years, marking the fifth in a seven-step *Roadmap to a New Democratic State* initiated in 2003. A new civilian government was formed in March 2011, accompanied by the appointment of locally-elected representatives at the state and regional level, and a more conciliatory approach has been adopted towards opposition groups. Garnering the most attention has been the registration of the National League for Democracy (NLD) as an official political party, and their approved candidacy in upcoming by-elections scheduled for April 2012. Together with the establishment of peace deals with numerous armed groups and the release of political prisoners, this has marked a decisive shift in the overarching political environment and a demonstrated commitment to reform.

At the same time, engagement with international development actors in the country has increased. The establishment of a Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation initiative and convening of a Development Policy Options conference in February 2012, displayed not only a greater dedication to addressing important development issues in the country but also an unprecedented openness to collaboration. While challenges remain, it is hoped that this will prove an opportunity to expand the parameters of WFP support in Myanmar.

## 1.2 Economic and Development Context

With an estimated population of 58 million<sup>1</sup>, of which two-thirds reside in rural areas<sup>2</sup>, Myanmar is the largest country in South-East Asia and among the region's most ethnically-diverse. Categorized as one of the world's least-developed states, Myanmar ranks 149 out of 187 countries and territories assessed in the 2011 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report: with a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.483, significantly below the regional average of 0.671<sup>3</sup>.

Minimal impacts from the global financial crisis, declining inflation rates and a continuous trade surplus have permitted consistently moderate economic growth<sup>4</sup> in recent years. With a rich natural resource base, considerable agricultural potential and a strategic location between South and East Asia (with access to the fast-growing economies of India and China), there remains considerable potential for much higher growth levels. An ongoing demographic transition marked by consistent declines in the proportion of children below the age of 15 and an increase in the percentage of the population of working age (15-59 years) suggests that sound policies to foster job creation could make a significant contribution to per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and general economic growth in the future.

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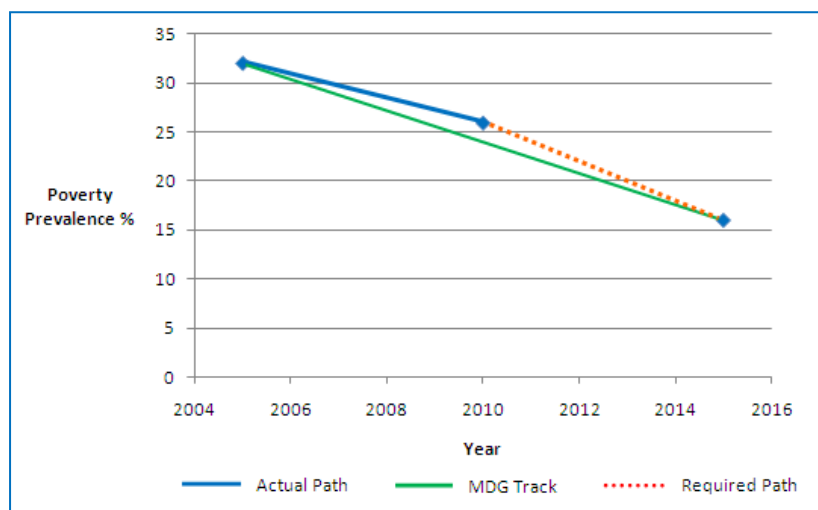
<sup>1</sup> Statistical Yearbook, Myanmar Central Statistics Office, 2009

<sup>2</sup> Thematic Analysis 2011: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Myanmar, United Nations Country Team in Myanmar, 2011

<sup>3</sup> Sustainability and Equity: A Better Future for All, Human Development Report 2011, UNDP, 2011

<sup>4</sup> Official statistics report an annual rate of more than 10 percent since 2000. The Asian Development Bank estimates a more moderate average of 3-5 percent per year (Asian Development Bank, Annual Report 2010)

Figure 1: Poverty Prevalence in Myanmar: Progress towards MDG1  
Source: IHLCA 2011



percent for 2015<sup>6</sup>, the country still needs to reduce current levels by a further 10 percent: implying even swifter progress than observed thus far.

Myanmar's education sector has also benefited from notable improvements in recent years. Official data places the national Net Enrolment Rate (NER) in primary schools at an encouraging 84.6 percent in 2010<sup>7</sup>, although levels are much lower in some areas such as the Rakhine State (71 percent<sup>8</sup>). Gender parity in enrolment has been achieved at the primary and secondary levels, and the primary school pupil to teacher ratio reduced from 30:1 to 25:1 between 2006 and 2010 alone<sup>9</sup>. Still, high levels of dropout remain a concern, particularly in primary education where the average survival rate to Grade 5 stands at only 77.6 percent<sup>10</sup> (although, greatly improved from the 24.4 percent recorded in 1990).

Nationwide, approximately two-thirds of household heads have achieved only primary education or less, a figure that has remained constant since 2005 and increases to 75 percent amongst rural communities<sup>11</sup>. Both socio-economic background and the educational attainment of children's mothers impact heavily on primary school completion. Just 48.8 percent of children whose mothers received only a primary-level education, and as few as 27.1 percent of those whose mothers received no education, complete their primary schooling<sup>12</sup>. Only 31.2 percent of 9 year-old children from the poorest families reach the last grade of primary school, in contrast to the 78.7 percent observed amongst the richest households<sup>13</sup>. The quality of education on offer is similarly inconsistent, and marked by considerable regional variation. While approximately 90 percent of the total population were found to be literate in 2010, levels in Rakhine and Shan were as low as 75 percent<sup>14</sup>. Interestingly, only 73.4 percent of women who completed their education at the primary

Although some progress has been made towards meeting the United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), an acceleration of improvement in numerous indicators is still required. The most recent joint UN-Government of Myanmar Integrated Household Living Conditions Assessment (IHLCA) placed the prevalence of poverty nationwide at 26 percent by 2010, a notable drop from the 32 percent recorded in 2005<sup>5</sup>. Still, if the MDG1 poverty target is set at 16

<sup>5</sup> Integrated Household Living Conditions Assessment in Myanmar (IHLCA), Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, SIDA, UNICEF and UNDP, June 2011

<sup>6</sup> While a 1990 baseline is ordinarily used, 2005 is the reference point for Myanmar given the unavailability of earlier data.

<sup>7</sup> Myanmar Ministry of Education, Education for All, Country Progress Report, October 2010

<sup>8</sup> IHLCA 2011

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>10</sup> Myanmar Ministry of Education, Education for All, Mid-Decade Assessment Report, 2007

<sup>11</sup> IHLCA 2011

<sup>12</sup> Myanmar Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2009-2010, Government of Myanmar and UNICEF, October 2011

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>14</sup> IHLCA 2011

level are literate, and only 69 percent of all young women in the poorest households are able to read and write (regardless of their level of education)<sup>15</sup>. Related to lower participation in education, the proportion of children actively engaged in labour is much higher amongst the poor (at an average 18 percent), underscoring the potentiality for an inter-generational transferral of poverty<sup>16</sup>.

Public spending in the health sector is extremely low compared to neighbouring countries, resulting in out-of-pocket payments amounting to more than 80 percent of total health spending. While average life expectancy in Myanmar has increased, nearly one-third of all pregnant women remain without access to ante-natal care and five percent of all pregnancies end in abortion (complications with which is a key cause of maternal mortality)<sup>17</sup>. The Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) is as high as 240 per 100,000 live births<sup>18</sup> and reducing it to 105 per 100,000 live births by 2015 in line with MDG5 targets will be a major challenge<sup>19</sup>. Similarly, while the nationwide Under Five Mortality Rate (U5MR) has reduced to an estimated 66 per 1,000 live births<sup>20</sup>, the MDG4 target of 38.5 by 2015 remains some way off.

The prevalence of HIV/AIDS among the general population is considered to have stabilised since 2000, though the country still has one of the highest levels in Asia (recorded at 0.6 percent in 2010<sup>21</sup>). Additional efforts are required to address significantly high rates amongst the most at-risk groups: injecting drug users (28 percent), men who have sex with men (11 percent) and female sex workers (11.4 percent)<sup>22</sup>. The younger cohorts in these groups appear particularly susceptible to infection.

The current development context in Myanmar is characterised by sub-national inequalities in the gains made thus far. A range of socio-economic indicators confirm that progress has been slowest in the country's border regions. Here, the constraint of physical remoteness is aggravated by disproportionately low levels of investment, inadequate income-generating opportunities, and poor access to basic social services. In the Kachin and Shan States in particular, persistent conflict and resultant population displacement have disrupted productive activities and further limited the availability of sustainable employment. While ceasefires have had a discernible impact on stabilising conditions in some areas thus far, it remains to be seen how lasting this might be. In the Shan State, many families have additionally been confronted with the challenge of transitioning from a reliance on opium production to generate enough income to meet basic food needs, to alternative income sources in compliance with poppy eradication measures.

### 1.3 Food Security and Undernutrition Analysis

With its significant agricultural potential, Myanmar is largely self-sufficient in basic food needs at the national level. The nationwide prevalence of food poverty<sup>23</sup> fell from 10 percent in 2005 to 5 percent in 2010<sup>24</sup>, suggesting some improvements in basic food consumption. Nonetheless, these data still place the number of 'food poor' in the country at close to 3 million, and the overall rate of decline at

<sup>15</sup> Government of Myanmar and UNICEF, 2011

<sup>16</sup> IHLCA 2011

<sup>17</sup> United Nations Strategic Framework 2012-2015, United Nations Country Team in Myanmar, 2012

<sup>18</sup> One-third of all deliveries are not attended by skilled health workers, and 76 percent of deliveries take place at home where close to 90 percent of maternal deaths occur.

<sup>19</sup> United Nations Strategic Framework 2012-2015, United Nations Country Team in Myanmar, 2012

<sup>20</sup> The State of the World's Children, UNICEF, 2012

<sup>21</sup> Thematic Analysis 2011: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Myanmar, United Nations Country Team in Myanmar, 2011

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that the 'food poverty' line represents a level of extreme hardship, denoting a level of income required to meet *minimum* caloric requirements and assuming that *all* income is spent on food.

<sup>24</sup> IHLCA 2011

the national level masks considerable disparities in progress between geographic areas and socio-economic groups.

### 1.3.1 Agriculture

The agricultural sector remains the mainstay of Myanmar's economy, employing 63 percent of the country's total labour force and accounting for almost 50 percent of GDP<sup>25</sup>, and is expected to remain a dominant driver of the economy for some time to come.

Rice is the country's staple crop, accounting for more than 90 percent of aggregate cereal production and approximately 43 percent of all land under cultivation<sup>26</sup>. Preliminary estimates from the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) put the 2011 annual aggregate paddy output at 30 million tons (the equivalent of 19 million tons of milled rice), including anticipated exports destined primarily for regional markets<sup>27</sup>.

The sector additionally benefits from considerable productive diversity. While not harvested at levels comparable to those of neighbouring countries, other important crops in Myanmar include: sugar cane, groundnuts, sesame, wheat, maize, millet, jute, cotton, beans, pulses and oil seeds, vegetables, rubber, toddy palm, tobacco and spices.

Despite the importance of the agricultural sector in Myanmar's economy, and hence its potential contribution in reducing poverty and food insecurity, considerable constraints continue to impede its development in many areas. These include: low levels of financial investment; poor physical infrastructure; inappropriate land policies; and limited access to markets and information. At the household level, production is adversely affected by income inadequacies, reflected in a lack of access to land, credit, and agricultural inputs.

### 1.3.2 Access to Adequate Food

Although a food-surplus country, access to available food is a key challenge to maintaining acceptable food consumption for Myanmar's poorest and most vulnerable. In turn, socio-economic constraints are the primary drivers of compromised access to food, and are most acutely felt amongst landless labourers, small-scale farmers, and other traditionally-vulnerable groups such as female-headed households.

A majority of Myanmar's poor are reliant on agriculture and agriculture-related casual labour as their primary income source. There is a clear association between poverty and agriculture, with 54 percent of poor households engaged in agricultural activities, in contrast to 49 percent of non-poor families<sup>28</sup>. At the same time, there has been an increase in reliance on casual labour amongst the poor, from 23 percent in 2005 to 28 percent in 2010<sup>29</sup>. This is related to the extent of landlessness, which affects an estimated 24 percent of the population for whom agriculture is the primary economic activity, rising to 34 percent among the poor<sup>30</sup>. The highest levels are observed in the Chin State, where WFP Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM) data suggests that up to 66 percent of households surveyed in December 2011 were without access to land<sup>31</sup>. Similarly, 50 percent of

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<sup>25</sup> LIFT Annual Report, 2011

<sup>26</sup> GIEWS Country Briefs: Myanmar, FAO, February 2012

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>28</sup> IHLCA 2011

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>31</sup> VAM Quarterly Food Security Analysis, WFP Myanmar, December 2011



farming families in Northern Shan reported cultivating less than 2 acres of land only<sup>32</sup>. The small size of landholdings is closely correlated to poverty levels, and the prevalence of landlessness has increased since 2005 particularly amongst the lowest wealth quintiles<sup>33</sup>. The importance of the agricultural sector, alongside the small size and stalled growth of the manufacturing industry, underscore the importance of rural-based agricultural development to any successful poverty reduction strategy.

Underemployment<sup>34</sup> is a pronounced phenomenon in Myanmar, affecting approximately 37 percent of the country's working population in 2010, up from the 34 percent recorded in 2005<sup>35</sup>. Furthermore, underemployment has a decisive seasonal variation (with the lowest levels unsurprisingly observed during agricultural harvest periods), suggesting the importance of diversifying income sources in order to improve economic access to adequate food throughout the year.

Owing to their higher marginal propensity to consume out of income, economic access to food amongst the poor is subject to considerable restriction as a result of income inadequacies. While the food share of consumption expenditure (including health expenditures) averages 68 percent nationally, it was as high as 73-74 percent for the poorest 30 percent of the population in 2010, having increased from levels observed in 2005<sup>36</sup>.

At the same time, the price of staple food items in local markets continues to be subject to regular and often significant inflation, which can further compromise access to food in the absence of commensurate increases in household income. The determinants of price fluctuations tend to vary by location. In northern parts of the Shan State, for example, poor road conditions during the rainy season and weak market integration are the primary cause. In Kachin, restrictions on market access as a result of ongoing conflict fuel inflation: reflected in a dramatic increase in the proportion of wage labour income required to purchase a basic food basket (from 35 percent to 90 percent) between the third and fourth quarters of 2011 in affected areas of the state<sup>37</sup>. While levels of purchasing power in the Northern Rakhine State remained largely stable throughout last year, close to 100 percent of wage labour income was required to purchase a basic food basket.

In Myanmar, the poor take considerable loans, the average size of which represents approximately 45 percent of the poverty line<sup>38</sup>. Furthermore, an estimated 14 percent of total consumption expenditure is covered by incurring debts<sup>39</sup>. Recalling the high food share of expenditures amongst the poorest households, these findings confirm that incomes derived from productive or employment activities are insufficient to cover household needs. Troublingly, the lowest access to credit facilities is also found in the poorest areas, including in the Chin and Shan States<sup>40</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>33</sup> IHLCA 2011

<sup>34</sup> Defined as the percentage of the population of working age who worked for less than 44 hours in the 7 days preceding an assessment

<sup>35</sup> IHLCA 2011

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>38</sup> IHLCA 2011

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*

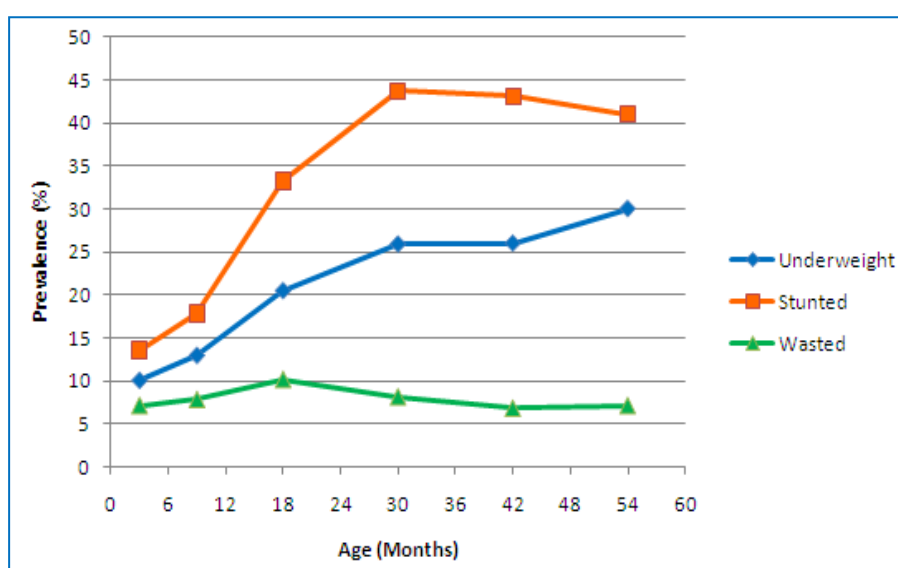
### 1.3.3 Undernutrition

With a nationwide prevalence of stunting among children under five at 35.1 percent<sup>41</sup>, indicative of a public health problem by international benchmarks, Myanmar is among 24 countries worldwide categorised as “high burden”<sup>42</sup>. Approximately 22.6 percent of all children under five are underweight, and 7.9 percent of children in the same age group are moderately or severely wasted<sup>43</sup>. Despite some modest improvements in recent years, Myanmar will not meet relevant MDG targets if progress continues at the same pace.

On average, the highest prevalence of underweight is found in children aged 54 months, the highest stunting rates in children aged 30 months, and the highest prevalence of wasting among those aged 18 months. This pattern is expected and is related to the age at which many children cease to be breastfed and are exposed to potential contamination through water, food, or other environmental factors.

**Figure 2: Percentage of Children under Five in Myanmar who are Undernourished**

Source: Government of Myanmar and UNICEF, 2011



More broadly, undernutrition is exacerbated where households are unable to generate sufficient incomes, and hence their access to adequate and nutritious food (in addition to basic services such as clean water, healthcare and education) is compromised. It is a vicious cycle, as adults affected by malnutrition in infancy and childhood earn on average 20 percent less than their healthier counterparts<sup>44</sup>.

In the past, developmental programming in Myanmar has tended to focus largely on agricultural productivity, access to sufficient food, and improvements in healthcare services, leaving nutrition as the “poor relation” of donor and government policies. Such an approach has resulted in the persistent absence of a systematic and sustainable commitment to identifying, treating and preventing undernutrition in the country.

<sup>41</sup> Government of Myanmar and UNICEF, 2011

<sup>42</sup> Tracking Progress on Child and Maternal Nutrition, UNICEF, 2009

<sup>43</sup> Government of Myanmar and UNICEF, 2011

<sup>44</sup> S. Grantham-McGregor, Y.B. Cheung, S. Cueto, P. Glewwe, L. Richter, B. Strupp, and the International Child Development Steering Group, ‘Developmental potential in the first 5 years for children in developing countries’, *The Lancet* Vol. 369, January 2007

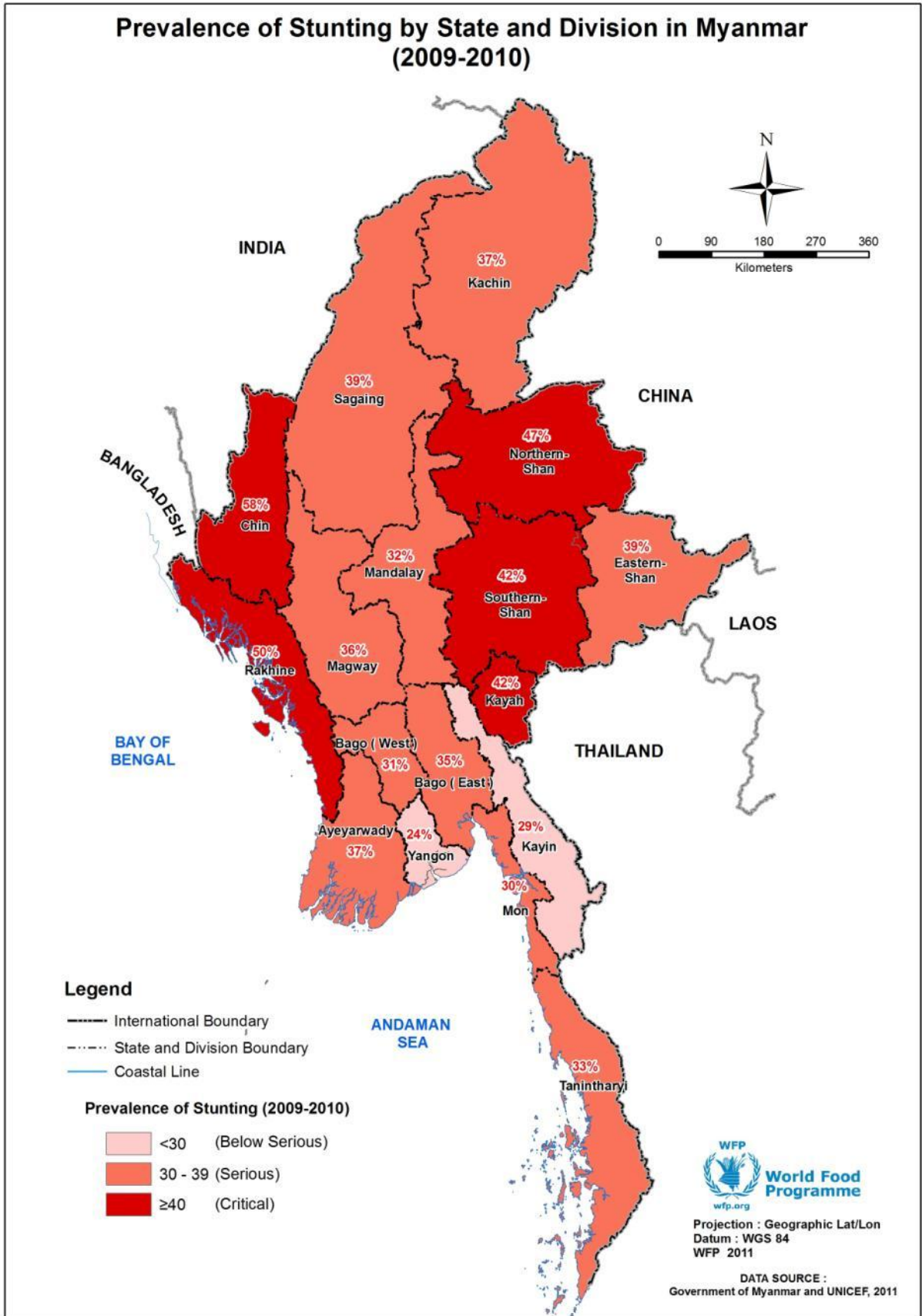


Figure 3: Prevalence of Stunting in Myanmar  
Source: Government of Myanmar and UNICEF, 2011

### 1.3.4 Economic, Socio-Political and Environmental Shocks

A range of economic, socio-political and environmental shocks continue to critically and abruptly compromise food security in many areas of the country. These influences are highly fluid, and can give rise to acute needs amongst affected populations, particularly where more chronic drivers of food insecurity are already prevalent. This necessitates both macroeconomic reforms to increase investment where it is needed most and a flexible set of response tools.

The impact of economic shocks (such as localised crop failures and food price hikes often linked to restricted market access) tend to be most pronounced during the traditional lean season, when available food stocks are already heavily exhausted leaving families necessarily more vulnerable to food insecurity. Evidence points to the use of distress coping mechanisms that are symptomatic of emergency-like conditions in affected areas<sup>45</sup>. In the Chin State and Magway Region, for example, 50 percent of communities surveyed by WFP in December 2011 reported the use of multiple crisis-related coping mechanisms in response to concerns over food sufficiency in the immediate-term. These included drastically limiting food intake amongst adults so as to allow children to consume more, and going entire days without eating<sup>46</sup>.

In recent years, localised conflict has displaced thousands of families within eastern parts of the country and into Thailand and China. Limited access to affected areas and a lack of systematic monitoring make it almost impossible to determine the precise scale of the problem, though anecdotal evidence suggests that up to 60,000 people are likely to have been newly-displaced as a result of ongoing fighting in Kachin since June 2011. Tentative estimates also indicate that more than 400,000 people may have been living in internal displacement camps in the south-east during 2010<sup>47</sup>. Estimates of the total number of IDPs throughout the country (including the 'stateless' and those who have been displaced for years and for whom durable solutions have not been reached) go up to several million<sup>48</sup>.

Against a backdrop of low investment and a lack of productive assets, it is likely that conflict-affected groups in Myanmar's border regions are experiencing particularly pronounced levels of poverty and food insecurity. The fluidity of population movements make agricultural and other employment activities either temporary or impossible, leaving affected families unable to produce, or secure enough income to purchase, adequate food. Evidence suggests that a majority of households residing in IDP camps in Kachin are entirely reliant on WFP assistance to meet all food needs, while the depletion of productive assets as a result of distress sales will complicate prospects for recovery in the future<sup>49</sup>.

Regular exposure to environmental hazard and vulnerability to the effects of climate change also exacerbate existing constraints on socio-economic development in Myanmar. Coastal regions are exposed to cyclones, tropical storms and tsunamis, while hilly areas further north suffer from periodic landslides often associated with environmental degradation. Rainfall-induced flooding is a recurring phenomenon across the country, with the risk of earthquakes similarly widespread<sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> VAM Quarterly Food Security Analysis, WFP Myanmar, December 2011

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>47</sup> Myanmar: Displacement continues in context of armed conflicts, International Displacement Monitoring Centre, July 2011

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>49</sup> VAM Quarterly Food Security Analysis, WFP Myanmar, December 2011

<sup>50</sup> With the exception of the Tanintharyi Region

Over the last decade, Myanmar has incurred the second heaviest financial and human losses<sup>51</sup> in the region (after Indonesia) as a result of natural disasters, and largely owing to damage inflicted on the agricultural sector in the country's "rice bowl" during the worst natural disaster in its recorded history. Hundreds of villages were swept away and more than 140,000 people perished across the Ayeyarwady Delta and neighbouring regions when Cyclone Nargis struck Myanmar's southern coast in 2008. Almost all fertile agricultural land was inundated with sea water and productive assets destroyed. Overnight, access to food and employment for more than 2.4 million people was severely compromised.

Since then, frequent small- to medium-scale disasters have included heavy flooding and subsequent landslides in the Northern Rakhine State in 2010, which displaced thousands of families from their homes. In October of the same year, Cyclone Giri affected almost a quarter of a million people in southern parts of the state. In October 2011, Tropical Storm Two hit the Magway Region (where poor farmers are particularly vulnerable to changes in weather patterns that have an impact on agricultural productivity), killing more than 100 people and affecting some 35,000. Given the frequency at which these disasters occur and the disproportionate impact they have on the poorest segments of society, increasing investment in risk reduction and preparedness measures will be essential to reducing communities' vulnerability to the effects of environmental shock.

### 1.3.5 The Geographic Dimensions of Food Insecurity and Undernutrition

Intrinsically linked to the influences outlined above, poverty, food insecurity and undernutrition remain largely rural trends in Myanmar, where satisfactory national averages hide significant geographic variations. Poverty levels in rural areas are significantly higher (at 29 percent) than in urban locations (an average 16 percent)<sup>52</sup>, leaving the contribution of rural poverty to total poverty at 84 percent<sup>53</sup>. Furthermore, inequalities between areas with the highest and lowest levels of poverty have widened. The average number of people in areas with the highest incidence of poverty was 2.75 times the number of those in areas with the lowest incidence in 2005; increasing to a ratio of 3.69 by 2010<sup>54</sup>.

Similarly, children residing in rural areas are more likely to be underweight and stunted than children in urban centres<sup>55</sup>. Approximately 24.2 percent of rural children are underweight and 38.4 percent are stunted, well above national averages. Under Five Mortality Rate (U5MR) data also indicate significant differences between rural and urban settings and among different regions of the country: the average rural U5MR is roughly twice that of urban areas<sup>56</sup>.

The prevalence of food poverty averages 5.6 percent in rural areas, more than double the 2.5 percent found in urban locations<sup>57</sup>. Progress in reducing food insecurity is also uneven. While national food poverty levels have halved since 2005, the rate of decline has been highest in urban settings and lowest in the country's remote border regions. These trends suggest the inadequacy of existing measures to reduce poverty and food insecurity in areas where the problems are most pronounced, and hence the need for more inclusive remedial policies.

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<sup>51</sup> Oxford Analytica 2011

<sup>52</sup> IHLCA 2011

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>54</sup> Thematic Analysis 2011: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Myanmar, United Nations Country Team in Myanmar, 2011

<sup>55</sup> Note that there is minimal rural-urban difference in the levels of wasting

<sup>56</sup> Government of Myanmar and UNICEF, 2011

<sup>57</sup> IHLCA 2011

There is also considerable variability in the prevalence of food poverty between individual states and regions, with the highest levels observed in the Chin State (at 25 percent), followed by Rakhine (10 percent) and Shan (9 percent)<sup>58</sup>: a ranking that parallels that for general poverty levels. More recent WFP Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM) data<sup>59</sup> additionally classify the Chin and Kachin states as “highly food insecure”, with marginally lower levels found in Shan and Rakhine. Importantly, these data were collected during the post-harvest period when food security levels may reasonably be expected to improve relative to other times of the year. Facing disproportionately challenging circumstances, including limited accessibility, poor infrastructure, and inadequate access to factors of production and basic social services, the pattern is unsurprising.

Similarly, children’s nutritional status is correlated to their socio-economic background, with higher percentages of undernourished children found in poorer wealth quintiles. In Myanmar, 42.8 percent of the country’s poorest children are either moderately or severely underweight, compared to a prevalence of 16 percent amongst the richest children<sup>60</sup>. Almost half of the poorest children are stunted, in contrast to only one in five of the richest<sup>61</sup>. The prevalence of underweight is highest in the Rakhine and Chin states, at 37.4 percent and 30.7 percent respectively, closely followed by northern Shan and Magway where an average one quarter of all children are underweight<sup>62</sup>. Levels of stunting are as high as 58 percent in Chin, and 49.9 percent in Rakhine.<sup>63</sup>

Despite the overall positive aggregate food availability situation, there are parts of the country where even this necessary condition for food security is tenuous. Regional demand and supply analyses suggest that food insecurity is rooted in inadequate availability in rice-deficit areas in the Central Dry Zone and other remote, hilly regions which also suffer from poor transport, marketing and storage infrastructures, risking localized breakdowns in the supply chain.

Low agricultural productivity is also a key driver of the relatively high incidence of food poverty found in the remote Chin State, where poor practices (such as shifting cultivation and slash-and-burn techniques) have provoked land degradation and reduced harvests. Chin is commonly recognised as the country’s poorest area, with as many as 73 percent of its 500,000 inhabitants living below the poverty line<sup>64</sup>. VAM data also confirm high levels of food insecurity in the Magway Region, where unfavourable climatic conditions and poor land quality compromise the adequate availability of food.

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>59</sup> VAM Quarterly Food Security Monitoring Bulletin, WFP Myanmar, December 2011

<sup>60</sup> Government of Myanmar and UNICEF, 2011

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>64</sup> UNDP Poverty Profile, 2009-2010

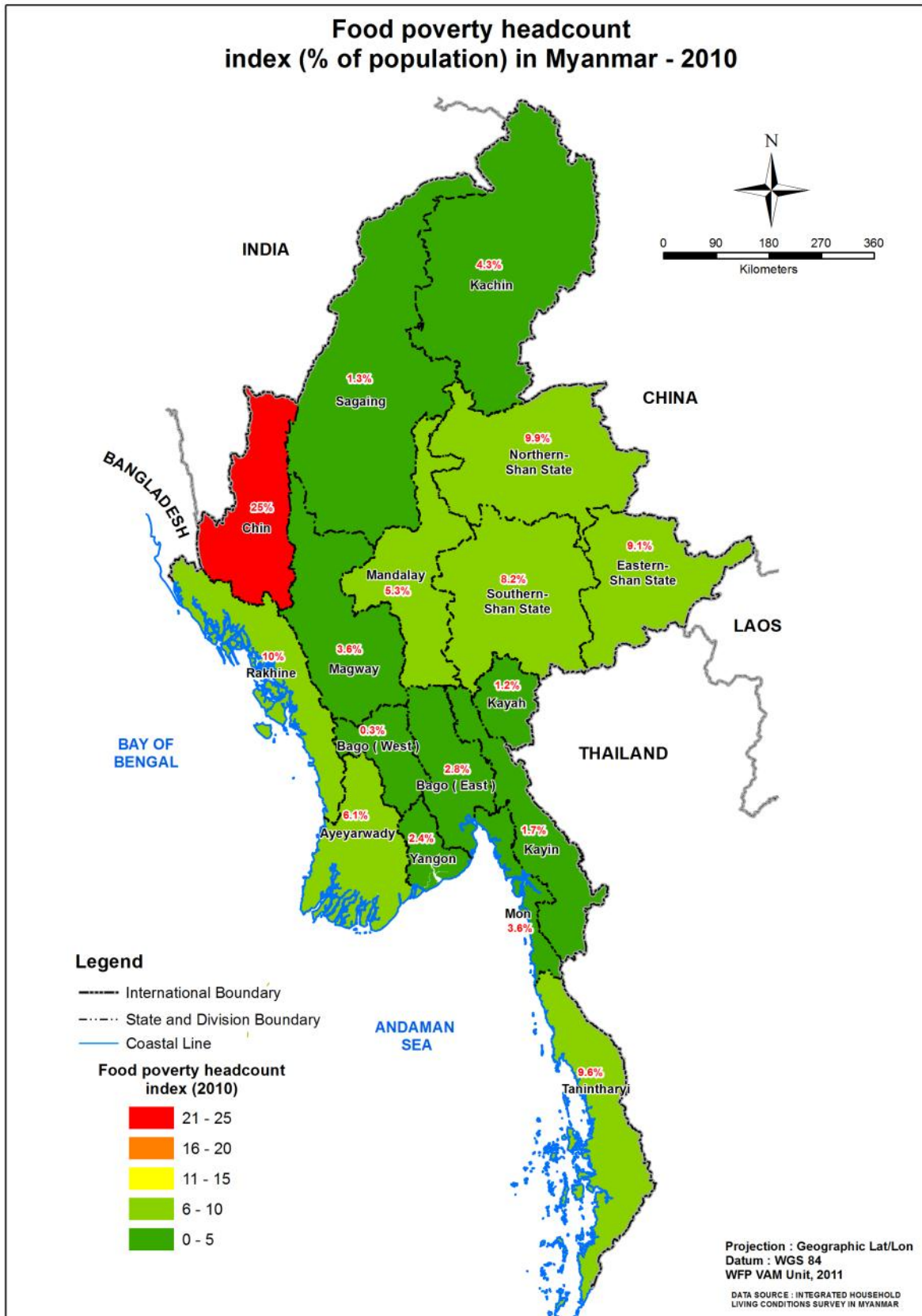


Figure 4: State/regional-Level Food Poverty Headcount  
 Source: IHLCA 2011

## 2 NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND FOOD INSECURITY RESPONSE

### 2.1 National Policy Framework and Response

The Government of Myanmar is working to fulfil its commitments to the MDGs, and improved dialogue with the international aid community already suggests that developmental priorities have been elevated on the political agenda. It is also clearly understood that reforms must focus on more than just immediate economic growth and include measures to foster national reconciliation in order to be sustainable.

Following the convening of a National-Level Workshop on Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation in May 2011, President U Thein Sein reaffirmed the new government's commitment to making developmental gains in priority areas at a meeting of the Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation Central Committee, and set the ambitious target of reducing the national poverty rate to 16 percent by 2015. These priority areas include: agricultural production; livestock and fisheries; rural productivity and cottage industries; micro-saving and credit enterprises; rural cooperatives; rural socio-economic development; rural energy; and environmental conservation.

Nevertheless, a National Policy on Food and Nutrition has yet to be finalised, and it remains unclear what priorities this will define or the specific responses it will pursue. Still, in-depth consultations held with representatives from nine ministries during the formulation of this document indicated a mounting commitment to expanding the space for dialogue on issues related to WFP's mandate in Myanmar and a strong appetite for support in the strategic priorities discussed herein.

The implementation of obligations under a range of international instruments to which Myanmar is a signatory, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), has been swifter. A Monitoring and Reporting Task Force on the issue of Children and Armed Conflict has been established, and a comprehensive Plan of Action is under preparation. Meanwhile, a joint UN-Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) Gender Theme Group and Women's Protection Technical Working Group have supported the government in developing a draft National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (2011 -2015) in line with the CEDAW.

Moreover, healthcare and educational reforms have been placed at the centre of the government's broader policy agenda for the coming years (encouragingly, with a particular emphasis on the country's border areas). The commitment was clearly articulated at the February 2012 Development Policy Options conference, which focused specifically on improvements in health and education as a means of accelerating more inclusive growth, and already translated into a doubling of the budgets of relevant ministries for the next fiscal year.

In the aftermath of costs incurred as a result of natural hazards in recent years, the government is also placing unprecedented emphasis on the need to further strengthen disaster risk reduction (DRR) efforts, including through the current preparation of a Myanmar Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction (MAPDRR).

President U Thein Sein himself has committed the new government to "promulgate all necessary policies and laws so that the fruits [of development] will go down to the grassroots level and the entire people enjoy better socio-economic status." WFP and its developmental counterparts in Myanmar have both an obligation and an opportunity to help translate this vision into a pro-poor agenda for equitable growth across the country.



## 2.2 Response of the UN and other Key Partners

The UN has been present in Myanmar since the country won independence in 1948, and is the largest provider of international development assistance (at an average annual value of US\$150 million). In 2012, 15 UN Agencies, Funds, Programmes and Offices are present in the country; each with its own specific mandate and programme of work, implemented in cooperation with the government including respective line ministries and relevant authorities at the state and regional levels.

A new UN Strategic Framework for Myanmar has identified a set of priorities to guide engagement and programming during the 2012-2015 period, based on key developmental challenges identified by the UN Country Team (UNCT), the government and other stakeholders. This intends to provide a coordinated framework for UN assistance in Myanmar, in line with reform processes and the commitments of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action.

In consultation with government counterparts, this Framework has identified the following four strategic priorities<sup>65</sup>:

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| Strategic Priority 1 | Encourage inclusive growth (both rural and urban), including agricultural development and an enhancement of employment opportunities <i>(contributing to MDG 1 and with implications on MDGs 2-7)</i> |
| Strategic Priority 2 | Increase equitable access to quality social services <i>(contributing to MDGs 2-6 and with implications on MDG 1)</i>   |
| Strategic Priority 3 | Reduce vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change <i>(contributing MDG 7)</i>  |
| Strategic Priority 4 | Promote good governance and strengthen democratic institutions and human rights <i>(foundation for progress on all MDGs, including MDG 8)</i>   |

Most recent statistics<sup>66</sup> show that Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Myanmar declined by some 30 percent between 2008 (during the humanitarian response to the effects of Cyclone Nargis) and 2009, despite an overall increase in ODA levels worldwide. With a score of 7.5 in 2009, Myanmar received the lowest ODA of all Least Developed Countries that year. Considering the score of 51.7 awarded to Cambodia (with a population three times smaller) and 68.7 for neighbouring Laos PDR, it is clear that the political agenda has been affecting ODA opportunities in Myanmar. Interestingly, the value of remittances far exceeds levels of ODA and foreign direct investment in the country<sup>67</sup>.

It is additionally noteworthy that even as the humanitarian component of ODA increased in 2008, core non-emergency funding has remained low, at an average US\$2.5 per capita according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Consistently limited investment in development has left food security fragile at best for many communities. In the absence of sufficient and more reliable funding opportunities, the sustainability of UN and other responses will be undermined, particularly when the urgency of unforeseen emergency needs may take precedence over other planned assistance.

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<sup>65</sup> United Nations Strategic Framework 2012-2015, United Nations Country Team in Myanmar, 2012

<sup>66</sup> OECD 2009

<sup>67</sup> Thematic Analysis 2011: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Myanmar, United Nations Country Team in Myanmar, 2011

Moreover, human development indicators in Myanmar would likely be significantly worse in the absence of civil society structures providing an informal social security system. Buddhist monasteries, for example, supply some level of education, shelter and food assistance for many poor communities, while traditional medicine practices go some way to filling gaps in the public healthcare system.

## 3 LESSONS LEARNED

### 3.1 Gaps in National Food Insecurity Responses

Despite the progress achieved to date in bringing Myanmar closer to its MDG targets, the scale and complexity of food and nutrition security challenges in the country remain unmatched by the scope of existing national responses. Both policy analysis and implementation capacities must be strengthened and dedicated to priority actions in order to improve abilities to deliver on the same.

The following specific gaps and challenges have been identified:

- The National Policy on Food and Nutrition should be finalised as a matter of priority, and adequately acknowledge appropriate food-based approaches to addressing undernutrition in the country. It would additionally benefit from greater technical support from relevant development partners in the country.
- The absence of national public safety net programmes ensures that, at present, the official social security system in Myanmar benefits a limited proportion of the population. While informal services have emerged in parallel to fill gaps, these are grossly inadequate. Poor safety net coverage leaves a significant proportion of the population extremely vulnerable to the effects of socio-economic or environmental shock, particularly where poverty and food security levels are already high. Persistent geographic disparities in the pace of development (most notably between the Delta and heartland regions and the border areas) require more robust measures to increase investment in inclusive and equitable social service delivery systems.
- At the same time, national responses to food insecurity and undernutrition should simultaneously and adequately address both acute needs (where protection from immediate hunger takes priority) and more developmental requirements in chronic situations.
- The increased importance placed on Disaster Risk Reduction efforts in the country should be translated into the rapid approval, adoption and implementation of the Myanmar Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction. Similarly, national forecasting and early warning systems should be strengthened, and appropriate community-based natural resource management activities placed at the centre of the agenda for action.
- The availability and quality of data related to developmental issues remains a key concern in Myanmar, and may undermine the reliability of analyses and subsequent policy recommendations.
- All challenges are compounded by funding constraints, and associated inadequacies in response capacity.

### 3.2 WFP Experience in Myanmar

Present in the country since 1994, WFP is a respected partner for the Government of Myanmar and well recognised for its long-standing contribution to saving lives during times of emergency, and helping to improve access to income-generating opportunities, education and nutritional support.

WFP's current Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation (PRRO) 200032 (*"Improving the Food Security, Nutrition Status and Livelihoods of Vulnerable Populations"*) uses a range of tools to address the needs of vulnerable and food-insecure groups in the Northern Rakhine, Chin, Kachin and Shan states, and parts of the Central Dry Zone.

Overall, the provision of relief assistance in areas where food security has been critically and abruptly compromised has proven effective in saving lives, stabilising food consumption levels and bridging the hunger gap during lean seasons in target locations.

Food-for-Work (FFW) and Food-for-Training (FFT) programmes provide considerable support to a large number of rural landless households who have little other means of improving their productivity or general food security. In the absence of a government-owned social safety net mechanism, WFP is providing the only stable resource transfer in many areas and activities have generally achieved demonstrable results. What is remarkable, in many cases, is the volume of additional and largely unforeseen positive impacts that these activities have yielded. The construction of dams in cooperation with FAO, for example, has not only helped to improve typical agricultural productivity but additionally enabled beneficiaries to grow winter crops, thereby simultaneously increasing and diversifying incomes.

Given the limited availability of quality healthcare services in Myanmar, WFP Mother-and-Child Health and Nutrition (MCHN) interventions have proven to effectively address nutrient gaps so that the specific needs of women and young children are met (specifically through the distribution of "Super Cereals"). Results have been best where WFP assistance is provided in complement to related essential services supplied by counterpart organisations. Still, while MCHN programmes are implemented efficiently and in accordance with WFP standards, the scale of interventions has perhaps been too limited thus far to generate significant improvements in nutritional indicators.

Food-for-Education (FFE) activities have not always reached intended groups, as the poorest segments of society in many areas cannot afford to send their children to school and thus miss out on the food transfer offered by WFP. Furthermore, in their current form, these activities have had little discernible impact on the quality of education. Nonetheless, there has been a decisive shift in attitudes towards education, with parents in target locations now eager to send their children to school and in many cases no longer needing a food incentive to do so.

### 3.3 WFP Lessons Learned

An analysis of lessons learned from WFP's experience in Myanmar has informed the development of this strategy, and includes acknowledgement of specific recommendations that emerged from a December 2011 mid-term review (MTR) of the operational portfolio currently under implementation. The following have been determined:

- WFP is currently operational where needs are greatest, as a result of both structural drivers of food insecurity and the more sporadic incidence of acute crisis.
- Increased and more productive engagement with the government has opened new avenues for WFP, not only in terms of securing greater access across the country but also the possibility to utilise a more diverse set of programmatic tools (such as cash and/or vouchers).
- At present, the amalgamation of WFP interventions in some areas is largely an "accumulation" of programme elements introduced during the implementation of previous operations. As a result, WFP's current PRRO 200032 represents more a legacy of the past than a broadly-informed, strategically-defined

and congruent approach to the issues of food security and undernutrition in Myanmar. The guiding principles identified in this document will help to re-focus WFP programming in the country hereafter, in accordance with national and other development priorities.

- WFP has a demonstrated commitment to maximising the qualitative impact of its assistance in Myanmar. Future engagement should therefore prioritise the provision of an integrated package of support where possible; overlaying multiple components of WFP programmes in target locations, and/or integrating activities with those of counterparts to maximise complementarity. Examples might include: the implementation of nutrition and educational support activities in locations targeted for UNICEF's perinatal care or Child Friendly School programmes; and correlating income-generation initiatives with efforts to address undernutrition, with a view to achieving more sustainable results.
- Alongside the changes currently taking place in Myanmar's political system, WFP should make further efforts to strengthen and diversify strategic partnerships with the government, UN counterparts and civil society actors in the country.
- WFP should re-visit some of the assumptions behind its previous operational portfolio in Myanmar. In the past, for example, schools were used only as a channel through which to provide families with a basic safety net transfer. However, as the December 2011 MTR of PRRO 200032 found strong evidence that attitudes to schooling had changed positively in areas where assistance had been sustained over numerous years, it was recommended that WFP re-examine operational objectives to proliferate proven areas of success. A number of unexpected positive outcomes generated through FFW activities should also be well-documented and efforts made to replicate the same elsewhere.

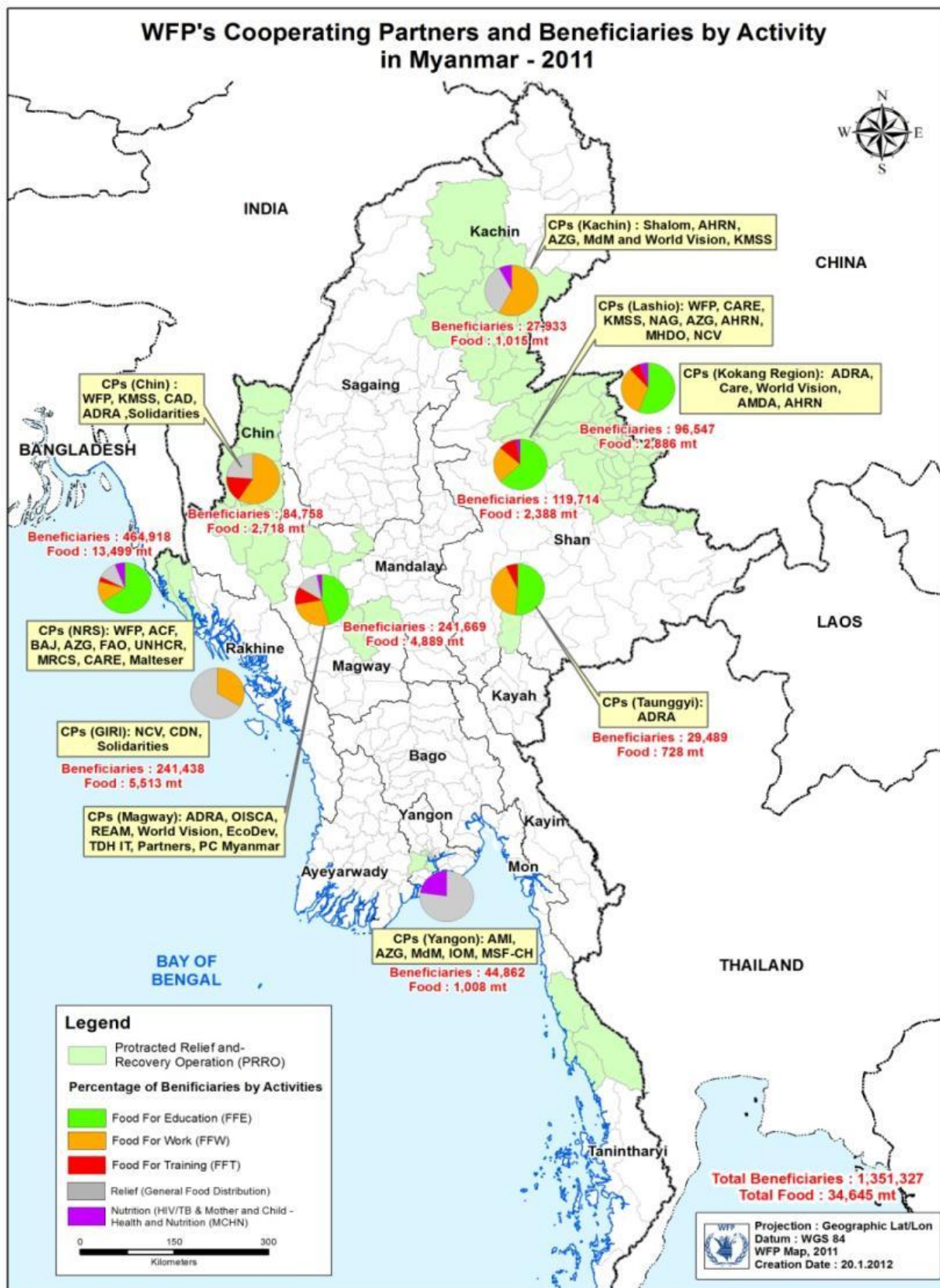


Figure 5: WFP Areas of Operation 2011

## 4 WFP IN MYANMAR: LOOKING FORWARD 2013-2017

### 4.1 Comparative Advantages

Derived from the analysis of lessons learned and the results of stakeholder consultations, identified comparative advantages of WFP in Myanmar include the following:

- More than 18 years of continuous presence in the most remote and isolated areas of the country, affording WFP a broad base of indigenous knowledge in operational locations.
- Similarly, WFP benefits from an extensive network of cooperating partners, providing superior access across the country and permitting a rapid expansion of activities when new and previously unforeseen needs arise.
- A tradition of prioritising opportunities for complementarity with other development agencies, as a means of maximising the effectiveness of interventions.
- A record of positive collaboration with the new government, promising sustainable implementation of programmes and business continuity.
- A unique and acknowledged ability to tackle food security and nutritional issues from both a humanitarian and more developmental perspective, as and when required in response to evolving circumstances.
- Proven technical competencies in a broad array of food and nutrition security issues and response modalities, in addition to food security analysis and vulnerability mapping.
- A strong history of local food procurement and targeted redistribution country-wide, additionally supporting national markets and food processing industries.

### 4.2 Vision and Strategic Priorities

The overarching vision of WFP in Myanmar is to:

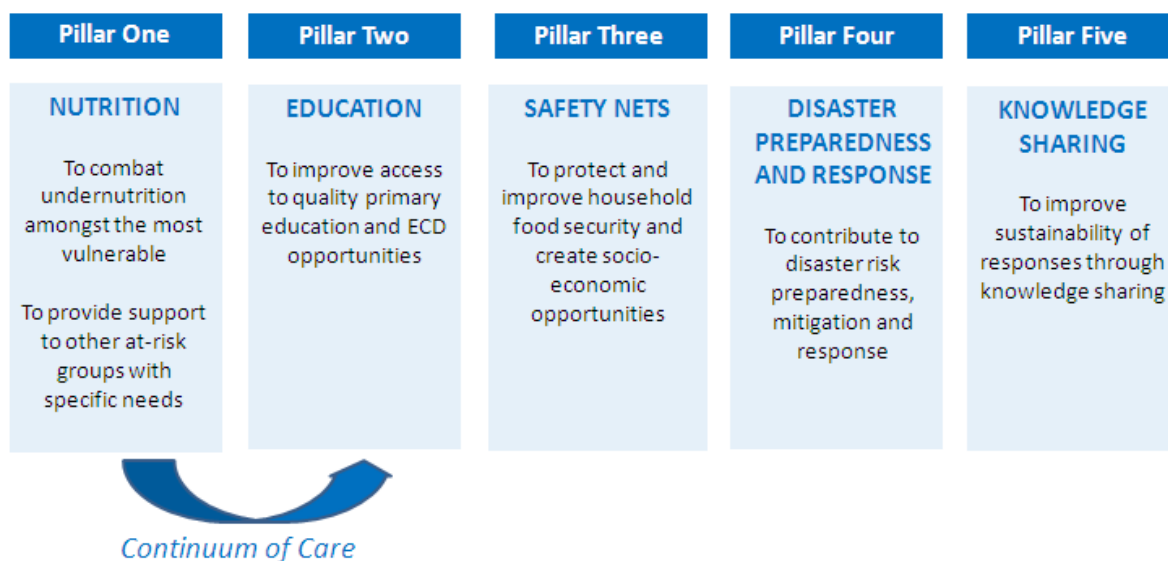
*Contribute to more equitable development across the country and support national reconciliation efforts, by reducing poverty, food insecurity and undernutrition and increasing resilience amongst the most vulnerable communities.*

In this sense, WFP Myanmar has defined the following key objectives of its support in the country during the 2013-2017 period:

1. To reduce the prevalence undernutrition amongst the most vulnerable groups (children under the age of five years, and pregnant and lactating women) and provide support to other at-risk groups with specific needs (people living with HIV/AIDS and TB);
2. To improve access to quality education and early childhood development opportunities;
3. To improve household food security and create socio-economic opportunities for the most vulnerable groups, thereby supporting the establishment of peace dividends;
4. To prepare for and respond to recurrent natural disasters, in support of government response efforts; and
5. To promote knowledge sharing as a means of improving the sustainability of WFP's own responses and those of counterpart government and non-governmental actors.

As such, WFP engagement in Myanmar will be guided by five strategic pillars for action: (1) *Nutrition*; (2) *Education*; (3) *Safety Nets*; (4) *Disaster Preparedness and Response*; and (5) *Knowledge Sharing*.

[Figure 6: WFP Myanmar Strategic Pillars 2013-2017](#)



In line with corporate programming principles, WFP assistance in Myanmar will:

- Contribute to national objectives and programmes, and foster national ownership of hunger solutions;
- Adhere to humanitarian principles, and be accountable, efficient and effective in all forms of engagement;
- Focus on preventive measures to address the root causes of food insecurity and undernutrition in the country, including through the integration of DRR objectives into programme design, while maintaining readiness to respond to acute food security crises;
- Use knowledge and innovation to catalyse the development of effective policies and approaches for reducing food insecurity and undernutrition;
- Ensure gender sensitivity and equality in all its efforts; and
- Promote strategic partnerships and coordination, and actively seek opportunities for joint programming.

### 4.3 Strategic Pillar One: NUTRITION

*Priority Objective: To reduce the prevalence undernutrition amongst children under the age of five years and pregnant and lactating women in areas with the highest prevalence rates, and provide support to other at-risk groups with specific needs (people living with HIV/AIDS and TB)*

Undernutrition can span generations and perpetuate itself in a vicious cycle. A malnourished mother is very likely to give birth to a malnourished child, who in turn is at higher risk of suffering irreversible, long-term consequences such as impaired physical and cognitive development. Evidence<sup>68</sup> shows that the “window of opportunity” for addressing child nutrition needs lasts from conception to 2 years of age. Beyond this, the opportunity for ‘catch-up’ growth is severely hampered.

WFP Myanmar will aim to reduce the prevalence of undernutrition through the implementation of a continuum of ante- and post-natal MCHN care, to address nutritional needs during the “first 1,000 days”. During the 2013-2017 period this will involve:

1. Providing fortified foods to pregnant and lactating women, as a means of maximising caloric and micronutrient intake during critical pre- and post-natal stages;
2. Providing supplementary and fortified foods to children aged 6-59 months, on both a preventive and curative basis in order to reduce the prevalence of malnutrition in prioritised areas; and

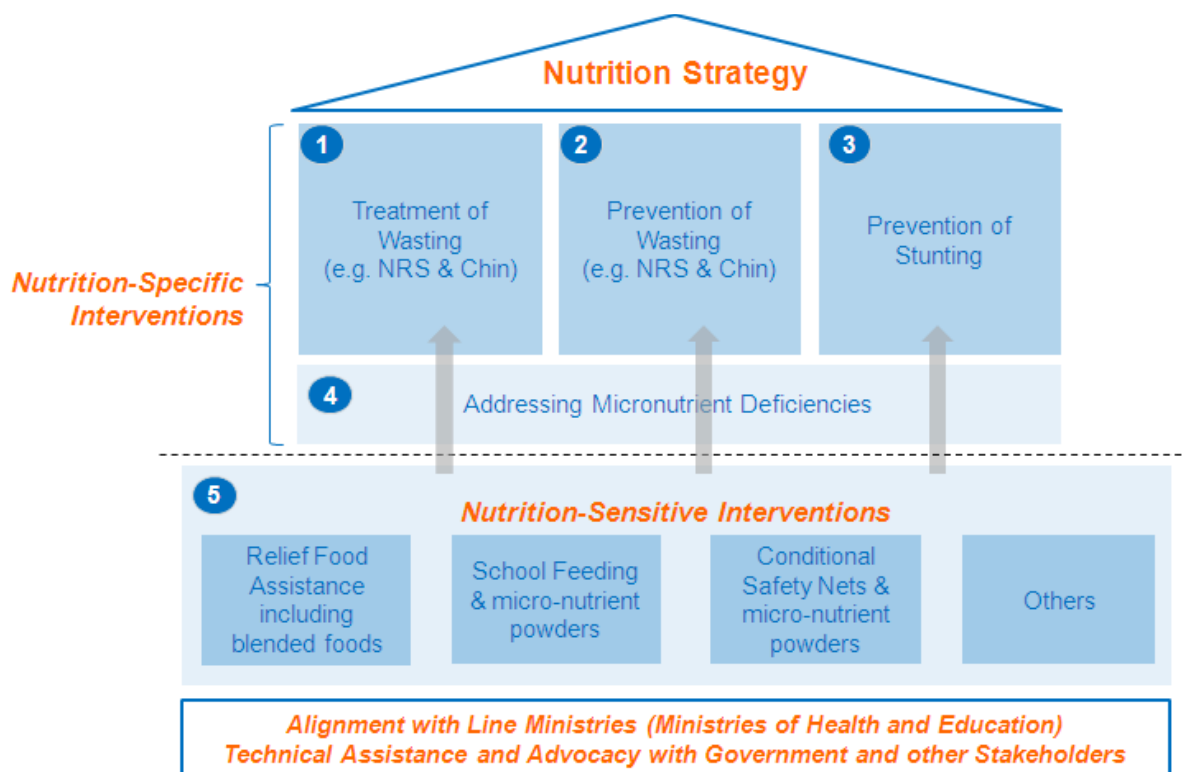
<sup>68</sup> See e.g. M.T. Ruel, P. Menon, J.P. Habicht, C. Loechi, G. Bergeron, G. Pelto, M. Arimond, J. Maluccio, L. Michaud, B. Hankebo, 2008, ‘Age-based preventive targeting of food assistance and behavior change communication for the reduction of childhood undernutrition in Haiti: A cluster randomized trial’, *The Lancet*, 371, pp 588-95

- Aligning these activities with a package of complementary interventions undertaken by counterparts (such as UNICEF, UNFPA, government institutions and NGOs), including: the promotion of breastfeeding; immunisation; micronutrient supplementation; de-worming; nutrition education; and growth monitoring.

The basic determinants of undernutrition are rooted in an inability to access not only sufficient nutritious foods but also a range of related basic social services. Acknowledging this reality, and during implementation of this plan, WFP will solidify recently-established strategic partnerships with Save the Children (SCF) and Action Contre la Faim (ACF) to support Myanmar in embracing the Scaling-Up Nutrition (SUN) Framework for Action. This will involve the pursuit of other direct operational partnerships and/or linkages as appropriate, including with the Ministry of Health, UNICEF and other specialized NGOs such as the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

In the first instance, SUN participants will commit to the implementation of a set of specific evidence-based nutrition interventions. WFP’s role in this regard is as outlined above. The second track of the SUN-advocated approach is to scale-up the implementation of indirect, nutrition-sensitive, coherent and multi-sectoral interventions to address the determinants of undernutrition and ensure long-lasting and real improvements through collective action. WFP interventions under all other strategic pillars presented in this document will adhere to this course of action.

Figure 7: A Translation of WFP’s Policy Framework for Nutrition in Myanmar



Nutrition activities will additionally include the provision of food for people living with HIV/AIDS on anti-retroviral therapy (ART) and TB patients on DOTS, to ensure adherence to treatment, while supporting community coping mechanisms through food supplements for HIV/AIDS-affected households. WFP and its partners will continue to promote the involvement of men and boys in HIV/AIDS prevention, mitigation, treatment and care measures.



## 4.4 Strategic Pillar Two: EDUCATION

*Priority Objective: To improve access to quality primary education and Early Childhood Development (ECD) opportunities*

The impacts of undernutrition in children go beyond the health implications of limited physical growth and weakened immunity, additionally impeding mental development. For every 10 percent increase in stunting, the proportion of children completing primary school falls by 8 percent<sup>69</sup>.

As part of a “continuum of care” package, WFP school feeding activities will continue the provision of nutritional transfers to children beyond the first 1,000 days. In complement to Pillar One activities, fortified foods will be distributed on-site to primary schoolchildren as a means of reducing micronutrient deficiencies (and thereby improving nutritional status and general health) and increasing learning potential. The provision of take-home food rations will also be considered.

At the same time, improved access to education is essential to bolstering income-generating potential, promoting social cohesion and inclusion, and encouraging the kind of appropriate health-seeking behaviour that can positively impact on general welfare. Educational development has already been placed at the top of the government’s policy agenda, and WFP will seek to synergise its own interventions with those hereafter undertaken by the Ministry of Education and UNICEF. The overarching objective will be not only to improve access to schooling but to *quality* education. In this regard, WFP will complement UNICEF Child Friendly School and ECD activities in jointly-prioritised locations characterised by the worst education indicators, through the distribution of fortified foods and the provision of take-home food rations. The latter will serve as an incentive for parents to send their children to school, thereby improving enrolment, attendance and retention where existing levels are lowest. WFP will additionally engage other partners as appropriate to provide teacher training and education supplies where possible.

## 4.5 Strategic Pillar Three: SAFETY NETS

*Priority Objective: To protect and improve household food security, create socio-economic opportunities for the most vulnerable, and contribute to national reconciliation through the provision of safety net support*

WFP will provide a food security safety net in areas with the highest observed prevalence of food insecurity, and in which other safety nets (including those provided by the government, development partners and/or civil society) are inadequate or absent. As such, target groups will include: the chronically food-insecure (such as physically and/or socio-economically isolated communities in the border regions, and other households with inadequate productive capacity); and communities affected by economic or socio-political shocks (such as displaced and/or returnee households, for whom assistance will support the resettlement process).

The safety net will consist of a food and/or cash transfer, depending on seasonality and local market conditions. This will be provided unconditionally in areas where the extent of food insecurity and overarching circumstances warrant a relief response, and conditionally in exchange for labour inputs into specific works schemes in other locations. The latter approach will simultaneously protect family food consumption, create temporary alternative employment opportunities for target groups,

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<sup>69</sup> S. Grantham-McGregor, Y.B. Cheung, S. Cueto, P. Glewwe, L. Richter, B. Strupp, and the International Child Development Steering Group, ‘Developmental potential in the first 5 years for children in developing countries’, *The Lancet* Vol. 369, January 2007

and build household or community assets. Specific activities will seek to diversify income source portfolios, improve natural resource management, and increase access to markets through the rehabilitation or construction of physical infrastructure. In appropriate areas, priority will be given to nutrition-sensitive initiatives such as the improvement of water management and sanitation infrastructure.

Complementarities will continue to be sought with programmes implemented by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in former poppy-cultivating areas. Specific activities will additionally be identified and prioritized in consultation with local government institutions and beneficiary communities, with a view to supporting existing national programmes where possible.

Foods will be fortified where possible to maximize the nutritional value of the transfer, and cash rations may be supplemented by the distribution of specialized micro-nutrient powders.

#### 4.6 Strategic Pillar Four: DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

*Priority Objective: To contribute to disaster risk preparedness, mitigation and response*

WFP will prepare for and respond to acute food security crises resulting from natural disaster as these occur. In such cases, unconditional relief food assistance will be provided to beneficiaries targeted on the basis of assessments, and in coordination with government and other partners.

Once acute needs have been met, WFP will further assess the need for more progressive recovery amongst disaster victims and potentially transition the same into conditional programmes, as necessary and appropriate. In order to increase communities' preparedness for and resilience to shocks, conditional food and/or cash transfer programmes undertaken in disaster-prone areas will be infused with both risk reduction and productivity enhancing objectives: building specific household and/or community assets that may help to withstand the impact of future disasters. Dependent upon the nature of the hazard, these will focus on: soil conservation, watershed management, sustainable farming practices such as land terracing, and measures to counter soil erosion (such as the construction of gullies and dykes, and the reinforcement of river embankments).

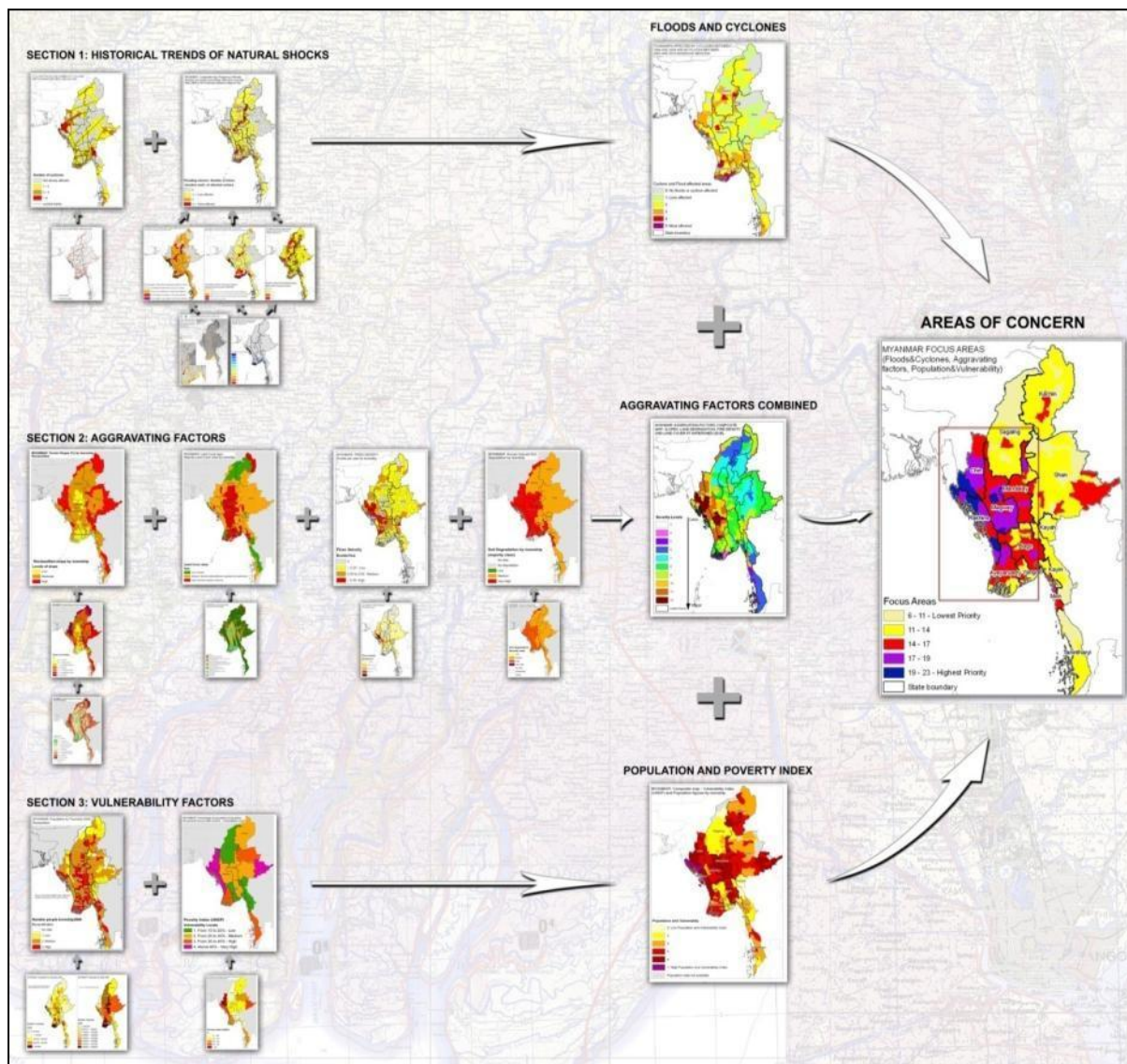


Figure 8: Priority Areas for Pillar 4  
Source: ITHACA 2011

The Government of Myanmar has well-established and effective institutional arrangements for responding in the event of disaster, in addition to systems and practices for disaster prevention and preparedness. WFP will work to strengthen strategic partnerships with relevant government bodies in this regard.

#### 4.7 Strategic Pillar Five: KNOWLEDGE SHARING

*Priority Objective: To improve the sustainability of responses to food insecurity and undernutrition through knowledge sharing*

Strengthening national capacities to assess and respond to food insecurity and undernutrition in the country will improve prospects for sustainability and handover. WFP will pursue all opportunities to help shape evolving national policies and build response capacities with a view to transitioning ownership of programmes when and where possible. Activities undertaken through Pillars 1-4 of this

document will be jointly developed and implemented with national and local government counterparts as appropriate.

At present, the availability and quality of data and information related to developmental issues in Myanmar remains a key challenge, and can undermine the reliability of analyses and subsequent policy recommendations. As such, WFP will additionally pursue all opportunities to share necessary knowledge and technical expertise, beginning with the following:

- The development and transfer of a functioning Vulnerability Assessment Mechanism and Food Security Monitoring System to the government;
- The establishment of partnerships with the Universities of Yangon and Yenzin; and
- The sharing and replication of regional best practices with government and other non-governmental counterparts.

## 4.8 Cross-Cutting Themes

*Life-Cycle Nutrition:* In line with corporate commitments to strengthening global responses to undernutrition, WFP Myanmar will focus (through the implementation of this strategy) on promoting food *and* nutrition security in the country. As such, nutrition will be mainstreamed through interventions pursued outside of Strategic Pillar One, as follows: (i) the supply of fortified commodities through safety net transfers where possible, and the creation of assets that will strengthen families' income-generating potential and thereby ability to maintain adequate consumption of nutritious foods. Furthermore, specific works schemes will prioritise activities that will positively impact on conditions necessary to promote adequate nutrition; (ii) expanded school feeding activities to include nutritional transfers to young children on-site; and (iii) increased monitoring of undernutrition and improved evaluation of WFP's interventions in this regard. Furthermore, WFP will continue to invest in the development of local food processing industries, with a view to mainstreaming fortification practices in the routine production of these facilities and thereby making more nutritious food items available to the general public.

*The Geography of Food Insecurity and Undernutrition:* A clear geographic overlap exists in Myanmar between the prevalence of food insecurity and levels of socio-economic investment. With the exception of some food-deficit areas where inadequate availability may be the key driver of food insecurity, high levels are most pronounced in the country's remote border regions. This nexus underpins the geographic focus of WFP's strategic direction. In supporting the provision of basic services in these areas, WFP will additionally seek to contribute to broader national reconciliation efforts.

*Natural Hazards:* In the context of recurrent natural disasters across the country, WFP Myanmar will: (i) imbue conditional safety net activities with DRR objectives as a means of reducing future risk exposure in particularly hazardous locations; (ii) contribute to the development of government and other national capacities to assess vulnerability in the aftermath of shock and monitor food security levels across the country; and (iii) retain the flexibility to respond to emergency needs resulting from disaster.

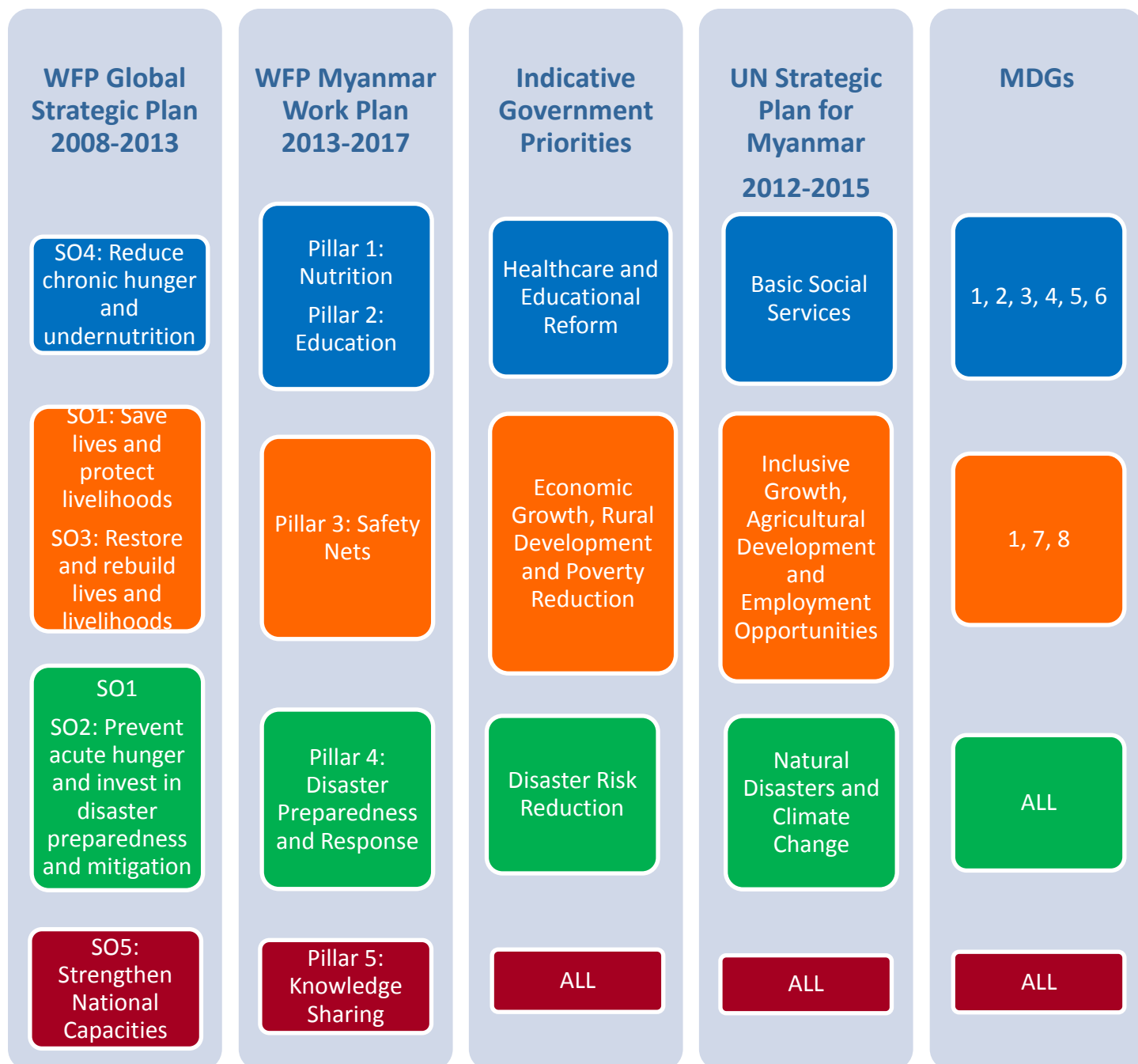
*An Integrated Package of Assistance:* WFP Myanmar will increasingly consolidate its own range of activities within individual target locations, and operate alongside complementary interventions of other development actors. This provision of a more integrated and comprehensive package of assistance to reduce the multiple determinants of food insecurity and undernutrition aims to maximize the impact and sustainability of programmes.

*Enhanced Strategic Partnerships:* To implement an integrated package of assistance and achieve the objectives of this strategy, WFP will seek to diversify and deepen partnerships with the government, other development partners, local communities and civil society elements.

## 4.9 Alignment with National and UN Priorities

In formulating this plan, WFP Myanmar has aligned its constituent pillars with national and UN developmental priorities for the country.

Figure 9: Alignment with National and United Nations Priorities



## 5 Programme Implications

It is anticipated that this strategy will be implemented through a single consolidated Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation that will simultaneously address all strategic priority areas defined herein and operationalise the relevant linkages. Scheduled to commence in January 2013, the precise scope and make-up of this operation will be defined during a forthcoming formulation mission. In the event of any sudden spike in the volume of needs to be addressed by WFP in Myanmar, this operation may be supplemented by other programming instruments as required.

### 5.1 Risks Related to Implementation

Consultative engagement with a wide range of stakeholders informed the formulation of this document, ensuring broad-based *de facto* endorsement and buy-in. These have included the following:

- Government of Myanmar: Ministry of Border Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Immigration, Ministry of Environment and Forestry, and Ministry of Home Affairs (General Administration Department)
- The United Nations Country Team in Myanmar, and UN partners with which WFP directly works (FAO, IOM, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UNHCR and UNICEF)
- Donors
- All 28 WFP international and national NGO Cooperating Partners: ACF, ADRA, AHRN, AMDA, AMI, AZG, BAJ, CARE, GRET, IRC, KMSS, Malteser, MDM, Merlin, Metta, MM, MRCS, MSF-CH, NAG, NCV, OISCA, PC Myanmar, REAM, SCF, Shalom Foundation, Solidarites International, TdH-It and World Vision

Nevertheless, potential key risks and respective mitigation actions envisaged by WFP in the context of implementing this strategy include:

- A halt of political reform processes and the potential events that could follow (such as political instability, the imposition of sanctions, and/or a withdrawal of donor support). Similarly, sustained restrictions on access could continue to limited freedom of movement for aid operators. *WFP will continue to strengthen partnerships with the new government, to maximise business continuity prospects.*
- Declining donor interest in Myanmar, in the context of the current progressive transition, pressure from the global financial crisis, or other influences could compromise the timely receipt of adequate resources. Similarly, uncontrolled economic reforms domestically could result in substantial inflation. *Robust resource mobilisation and advocacy activities will continue (with priority placed on the most critical needs) and include efforts to diversify WFP's donor portfolio for Myanmar.*
- Some uncertainties with regard to the respective roles and responsibilities of government institutions at the national and local levels during the current transition may complicate the establishment of effective partnerships with relevant counterparts. Furthermore, ineffective coordination with development counterparts would impede the provision of a fully "integrated package" of assistance. *WFP will prioritise the diversification and deepening of strategic partnerships and "coalition building" throughout all strategic pillars of engagement.*
- Commitment from the government to support and invest in relevant policies and related action, such as the SUN Framework, may be insufficient. *WFP will continue to engage rigorously in advocacy and policy discussion with government counterparts.*
- The difficult terrain in many parts of the country and hazardous weather conditions could interrupt WFP's supply chain, resulting in food not being able to reach where it is needed when it is needed. *WFP will continue to pre-position food stocks prior to the start of the monsoon season in problematic areas.*

- The continued incidence of unforeseen natural hazard could result in large-scale relief food needs and potentially interrupt the progress of other planned assistance. *WFP will participate in all contingency planning processes in coordination with counterparts, and build flexibility into operations to immediately and expeditiously accommodate any necessary scale-up.*
- A lack of sustainable recovery amongst the country's most vulnerable populations resulting in a reversal of developmental gains, and potentially associated with any of the above.

## 5.2 Skill Set and Profile required

Successful implementation of this strategy will require experience and technical competency in a range of areas, including: vulnerability and market analysis, support for income-generating activities including cash-based approaches, nutrition, education, logistics, procurement, capacity development and knowledge management, and emergency preparedness and response. Many of these competencies are already present within WFP Myanmar's existing human resourcing structure. Future efforts to augment existing skill-sets would, nonetheless, give priority attention to the following:

*Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping:* Available capacity in the Country Office is being reinforced (both in terms of staff and dedicated financial resources) using a three-year grant from the Livelihood and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT). This US\$1 million contribution has been programmed against a locally-generated WFP trust fund, and will be used to establish a country-wide food security monitoring system hosted within WFP. The information generated by the system will be made available to all interested stakeholders.

*Nutrition:* Staffing capacity is already being adjusted with the addition of one national programme officer based in Yangon, and benefits from the technical support of WFP's Regional Bureau.

*Safety Net Programmes:* The Country Office staffing capacity is already being strengthened with the addition of one dedicated national programme officer, and specialised staff have been deployed to large sub-offices.

*Cash- and Voucher-Based Programming:* While the required expertise in terms of programme design and implementation, financial management and risk control are already in place, these will continue to be reinforced by support from the Regional Bureau.

## 5.3 Handover

The timeline and extent of WFP handover strategies in Myanmar will be contingent upon the development of adequate national capacities and the implementation of inclusive pro-poor policies to appropriately respond to chronic and acute food insecurity and undernutrition in the country. All WFP response measures will strive to be sustainable in their impact, while Pillars 4 and 5 outlined herein will actively contribute to the development of national capacities with a view to handover where and when appropriate.